

Year B

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Once upon a time two brothers shared adjoining farms. For over forty years they worked side by side, sharing equipment and helping each other out whenever needed. Then one day a rift developed. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by months of angry silence.

One day the eldest brother, Peter, was out in his fields when a van pulled up. Out jumped

a man who approached Peter carrying a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days work" he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs I could do for you?"

"Well, yes I do," said Peter. "See that river down there, it's the border between my brother's farm and mine. My brother keeps it nice and deep to stop me from setting one foot on his beloved farm. Well I'll oblige him. I want you to take that timber over there by the barn and build me a new fence, a big tall one, so I don't have to look over at my brother and his farm no more."

The carpenter was glad to have the work, “No worries mate. I understand. Just point me to your post-hole digger and I’ll get the job done.”

So the carpenter set about working. Meanwhile Peter drove into town to the cattle auction. When he returned at sunset he was shocked to see what the carpenter had done. There was no fence. Instead the carpenter had built a bridge and walking across it was Peter’s younger brother. He held out his hand and spoke to his brother, “Peter after all I’ve done to you these past few weeks I

can't believe you'd still reach out to me. You're right. It's time to bury the hatchet."

The two brothers met at the middle of the bridge and embraced. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said Peter. "I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but I have more bridges to build."

Erich Remarque's book, *All Quiet on the Western Front* tells of an incredible encounter between two enemy soldiers during the First World War. During battle a German soldier took shelter in crater made

by artillery shells. Looking around he saw a man wounded, an enemy soldier. He was dying. The German soldier's heart went out to him. He gave him water from his canteen and listened as the dying man spoke of his wife and children. The German helped him find his wallet and take out pictures of his family to look at one last time.

In that encounter these two men ceased to be enemies. The German had seen the wounded soldier in a new way. Not as an enemy combatant but as a father, a husband, someone who loves and is loved. Someone just like him.

This is always the path of peace and reconciliation, learning to truly see the other and in them recognising someone just like yourself.

That was the purpose of the ambassadorial role of the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. He had founded the church and the relationship had gone all wrong. He had written them a letter after his first letter which we have in our Bibles, a letter now lost, which he called a letter of tears.¹ He was deeply hurt that the Corinthians had rejected him but he was not willing to walk

¹ 2:4; 7:8

away from the relationship. In fact, he saw it as his duty to keep on working for reconciliation because it was as a minister of reconciliation that he understood his call in Jesus Christ. It often comes as a real surprise to people who begin to regularly attend church for the first time that the issue of reconciliation still needs to be worked at. In fact the surprise can soon turn to disgust when he or she realises that no-one much cares about reconciliation and the new recruit votes with their feet and isn't seen again. Someone once said to me that behaviour tolerated in the church wouldn't

be, in the local pub. If that's true then it's a terrible indictment.

I get the feeling that this is the way it has always been and so we don't have to read very much of 2 Corinthians to get the point that there is poison already in a church that is only a few years old.

I read the following about how to turn a disagreement into a feud:

1. Be sure to develop and maintain a healthy fear of conflict, letting your own feelings build up so you are in an explosive frame of mind.

2. If you must state your concerns, be as vague and general as possible. Then the other person cannot do anything practical to change the situation.

3. Assume you know all the facts and you are totally right. The use of a clinching Bible verse is helpful. Speak prophetically for truth and justice; do most of the talking.

4. With a touch of defiance, announce your willingness to talk with anyone who wishes to discuss the problem with you. But do not take steps to initiate such conversation.

5. Latch tenaciously onto whatever evidence you can find that shows the other person is merely jealous of you.

6. Judge the motivation of the other party on any previous experience that showed failure or unkindness. Keep track of any angry words.

7. If the discussion should, alas, become serious, view the issue as a win/lose struggle. Avoid possible solutions and go for total victory and unconditional surrender. Don't get too many options on the table.

8. Pass the buck! If you are about to get cornered into a solution, indicate you are

without power to settle; you need your partner, spouse, bank, whatever.²

Humorous, if it weren't so serious. So, how did Paul tackle it? Well, he said, 'this is the time'. The word translated 'time' is the little Greek word, *kairos*. It is used specifically in the New Testament to refer to the appointed time of God's purpose. In Mark 1, Jesus announced; "the time, the *kairos*, is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand".³ At this time, in this age, there is no space for arguments over trivialities; for that is where

² Kraybill, Ron 1982 *Tell it to the Church* Lynn Buzzard: David C. Cook, p. 23.

³ Mark 1:15

most of our arguments are found, for now we live in the time of the coming of God's kingdom. It is not remotely important to God whether our church carpets are blue or green or a compromise aqua marine! We live in the appointed time of God's purpose and we should be concentrating on the implications of that and not disputes on temporal matters. Let us open our hearts widely as Paul encourages us. Let us look together to the glory of God.