



KEEP THE MISSION GOING

May 31, 2026

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Christ. Through. Us.

One week from today, 230 people (including our own Mike Heil) will be arriving in Tempe, Arizona for the Arizona-California District Convention. Every two years, representatives from 115 West Coast congregations gather to plan the broader ministry for our district. This year the theme is the same as that of the 10-year vision of our national church body: Christ Through Us, each word of which is significant: Christ. Through. Us.

When you hear that three-word theme, where do your eyes gravitate? Perhaps this condemns me, showing how self-centered I can be. My eyes – especially when talking about a vision for ministry -- gravitate to the end: us. We think, ‘Who’s going to do this? Who’s it going to impact?’ Or even back up a step, ‘Who are we?’ Over the last month, I have had to answer that question over a dozen times. I sat at Martin Luther College, where these students are from, and numerous people asked about our congregation. What would you say? Who is “Us”? Then I traveled to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and met our future pastor. In a brief conversation I had to try to explain who we are as a congregation. Again, what would you say? Who is “Us”? This week, five of us met with Frame Architect so they could better understand who we are as they start designing our future facilities. So we put this 12-page document together that hopefully summarizes the last seven years of conversations and the next twenty years of dreams. But we need and want your feedback on this document. Is this “Us”? Take the survey to help define “Us.”

But let’s go beyond a church body, or a congregation. No matter who you are, “us” is an important word. A few years ago, there was a TV series called, *This Is Us*. How would you answer that as you sit here today? Who are you? Who is “us”? In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul has much to say about that little pronoun. And he says it such a personal way. Some say, “We learn more from this letter about the great Apostle’s personality and temperament than we do from all his other writings put together.”¹ And if there is a section of this letter that defines “us,” it’s the one before us today, culminating with the passage that serves as the basis for God’s Great Exchange, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Did you hear that? Instead of being sin, we become the righteousness of God! Or a little bit earlier, “*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*”

Sometimes we get so familiarized with our status before God that it loses its luster. Don’t do that! Let this sink in. If our status changes in other aspects of life, we make a big deal of it. Scroll through social media and what do you see? Look, someone got engaged. Their status has changed. Look someone graduated. Their status has changed. Look, someone is pregnant. Their status is changed. More than being able to check spouse, graduate, or parent, how much more does it mean to be able to check, “Reconciled.” In Christ, your relationship with God is good. In Christ, you are no longer sinner but saint.

That blows our mind. Because I know what I’ve done. And you know what you’ve done. Go ahead... tally your sins of today in your mind. Or tally your sins of yesterday. Or last week or when you were a teenager. Doesn’t take long to run out of fingers to count. But God doesn’t count people’s sins against them. As mind-blowing as that is, it becomes even more mind-blowing when you consider what he asks us to do. Having been reconciled, “*He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*” Christ **through** us.

Knowing I’d be gone for two weeks in May, I just kind of had these words percolating in my mind for month because I knew time would be short to write this sermon. It was amazing how many times these words dripped into my thoughts as I found myself in certain conversations, one of which was running into to an old co-worker from the factory I worked at while in school. We made store fixtures. Go into Kohl’s and you see display racks, the cash register stands, the fitting room mirrors – we made those. I was in the shipping department. We would stack eight fitting-room mirrors on a pallet, each worth about a \$1000. And every summer, someone would take the corner with the forklift a little too fast, and those mirrors would topple over and shatter. \$8000 gone, just like that. We also had \$25,000 fixtures for high-end stores that we would have to stack six high in the warehouse. Now, if someone just carelessly shattered \$8000 of mirrors, do you think our boss would say, “Hey, while I clean this up, why don’t you go stack those \$25,000 fixtures? Or would he say, “I’ve got a new potential customer coming in for a big meeting. Can you go to the board room and represent me and land the contract?” Obviously, no.

¹ Meyer, Joh. P. *Ministers of Christ*, page ix.

But in an even greater way, consider what God asks us to do. So many times, we are careless with our words and actions. We shatter God's law, and in so doing we shatter our lives and the lives around us. And yet, what did God do? He sent his Son to clean up the mess. And what does he do today? He asks us to represent him. To be his ambassadors. In other words, he doesn't just change who we are – sin to righteousness, old to new. He also changes what we do. Christ **through** us.

Think about that this week. For the next six days, we have over 480 ambassador hours God is putting before us. 60 soccer families x 2 hours/day x 4 days. Soccer camp helpers, when you're coaching that kid, it may be *through* you, that the little, clingy, snot-nosed 6-year-old sees Jesus. Members, as you roam the sidelines or serve a piece of watermelon and a hot dog at the picnic and a parent asks you about our church, it is *through* you they might see Jesus. If you can't help with camp, it doesn't mean you won't have opportunities. When you're at the board room at work and there is tension in the air, how you conduct yourself, Christ can make his appeal *through* you. What a privilege!

And yes, that can be extremely intimidating. 'I have to represent God? I'm not fit for that.' Or what about the mindshift that it requires to represent God, *"regard no one from a worldly point of view."* We're constantly judging people. They're fat. They're rich. They're mean. They're nice. Or any other scale we want to employ. Christ *through* us means we see everyone – and I mean everyone -- as a blood-bought soul. Someone for whom Christ died. He died for *all*.

Because I don't always look at people that way, or I forget that, how comforting to know that "he died for all," also means he died for me. He died for the way I fail to look at others the way he looks at them. He died for the way I live for me instead of for him. He died my sins, all of them. And he died for your sins. Why? Drumroll: because he loves us. You can't just breeze past that truth without considering its impact. When one teenager says to another, "I love you," the relationship blossoms to a new level. You get butterflies in your stomach, sweaty palms, and goosebumps. When someone loves you, it changes the way you act. Christ's love, Christ's sacrificial love, is so strong that it, changes the way we act. As Paul writes here, "It compels us." It grabs us in such a way that we can't help to live for him. We can't help but to be his ambassadors. For all the times we overemphasize the "US" and who we are, or the "THROUGH" and what we do, the most important word of this logo and theme is the biggest, "CHRIST." Christ and his love.

A few months ago, Mary and I were at a conference where a pastor was retiring. After roasting him a bit, things turned more serious as the emcee said, "No matter what was going on, you would stand up and point us to Jesus." That quickly has become my prayer. As you go about your personal ministry or we carry out our joint ministry, I pray you know it's not about US, i.e., who we want to be as congregation or individually, who our pastor is or isn't, our likes/dislikes, our histories, etc. As we talk about our visions, ministry plans, youth service opportunities, and soccer outreach, I pray you know, Christian service isn't primarily about THROUGH – it's not about what we do. Rather, I pray, that you walk away knowing that our ministry – whether it's our collective public ministry or your private ministry -- is always primarily about one thing: Christ. There's a reason CHRIST is prominent in the logo. When it comes to Christ Through Us, each word is significant. Us - we are changed. Through – God uses us. But it's still about Christ. Who we are and what we do only matters because of who he is and what he's done. Christ Through Us is only possible because of Christ for Us. Christ's love compels us to live for him. Amen.