

2 Cor 5:17-21 (Genesis 13)

Hope Mennonite Church

January 24, 2021

Reconciliation Week #3

## Reconciliation and the Lesson of the Fence

### *Jenna and Tristan 1*

Congratulations to Jenna and Tristan! This couple, 27 years old, have just purchased their first house.

**After** moving in, they discover a **discrepancy** between the surveyor's report and their neighbor's **fence**. Specifically, the neighbor's fence encroaches 12 inches **over** what Jenna and Tristan understand to be their property line. Suddenly, the young couple with the new house have an **unexpected problem**.

Now imagine. What are some of the factors that will influence how they address the situation? Which factors are under their control and which are not? What does the couple, as well as their next-door neighbors stand to gain and lose? How do you see Jenna and Tristan beginning a conversation with their neighbors? And what are some of their possible courses of action? [ ]

### *Abram and Lot*

In our Scripture reading today, Abram, who is later called Abraham, has an **unexpected problem**. Both he and his nephew Lot have **abundant** livestock. So, they both need **large** amounts of pasture. And, as the passage says, the land simply cannot support both of them living close together. Abram has an **unexpected problem**—which is **not** just about **land**, is it? It's about **relationships**.

How does Abram address the problem? Well, first we notice what he **doesn't** do. As the older uncle, he has seniority over Lot. So, on that basis, he could easily insist on choosing the **location** and **amount** of land he wants; then Lot would get the **quantity** and **quality** of whatever land is **left**. Or, Abram could use **trickery** to gain an advantage. Right before our passage, Abram **tricks**

Pharaoh by saying his wife Sarah is really his sister. And **that** self-serving deception results in Abram getting a lot of his livestock ... **from Pharaoh!** Abram is not above scheming! Finally, it's also true that **God** had promised land to Abram, and so he could put **theological pressure** on Lot in order get his personal preference. Abram had a lot of options for addressing his problem ... **and** ... the upper hand **in all of them!**

**But** ... Abram doesn't pursue **any** of those courses of action. To the contrary, Abram **voluntarily** gives to Lot the **first** choice of land. Abram chooses **relationship over** personal **advantage**. And it works. This arrangement quells the strife between the herdsmen of the two patriarchs. Abram makes a choice to pursue the path of **reconciliation**.

... which is the path of **compromise**. Abram **voluntarily** gives up some power in the situation and increases the power of the other party. That's **compromise**. He gives up what might have been his preferred outcome. What we see is that Abram's **trust** in the larger promises and purposes **of God** allow him to pursue **the good but difficult compromise of reconciliation**.

### ***Second Corinthians 5:19***

The central Scripture for our theme this month has been **2 Corinthians 5**. And it's a text about **reconciliation** as **compromise**. Verse 19 describes God **voluntarily** giving up some of his power. God chooses in Christ to **not-charge** people's trespasses against them. God **volunteers** to **not** pursue against humankind **legitimate grievances**. And God chooses to **entrust to us** the mission of **reconciliation**; that is, **entrust us** imperfect human beings as partners in God's restorative work. And just as God **compromised** to settle things **with us**, so God calls on us to **compromise** in order to settle things **with others**.

### ***First Corinthians 6:7***

Let me also draw your attention to **1 Corinthians 6:7**. In this verse Paul speaks to the reality of **reconciliation** involving **compromise**. We don't know the **full** situation behind this text.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian Christians feel OK about “lawyering up” and taking each other to court. So, Paul has this to say: “To have lawsuits with one another **at all** is already a **defeat** for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” I don’t think Paul is being sarcastic here. I think he’s saying that, for followers of Jesus, when we are at odds with someone, the **best** thing **isn’t winning**, and the **worst** thing **isn’t losing**. Rather, the **worst** thing is the **breakdown** of community, and the **best** thing is the **restoration** of community. And creating the **best** thing means **not** getting everything we want. It means ... **compromise**.

**Not** getting everything we want can be a hard pill to swallow, especially if you feel that **you’re** the **wronged** party. **Not** getting everything we want can feel like **compromising** on **justice**.

And yet, it’s true: Even in the fairest of processes, **reconciliation costs everybody**. It does. **Nobody** gets everything they want. **Everybody** gives up something. **Mediators** strive for a solution that the parties **can live with**. **Reconciliation** is about **compromise** and **compromise** involves placing the restoration of **relationship above** getting our way. And that’s not easy.

### ***A Neighboring Church***

I know of a community not far from here. A conflict has become deeply entrenched. Relationships have been frayed. People have ***taken sides***. Parties have hurt each other. And it’s very difficult for each party to own their contribution to the problem when all they can focus on is the pain that **the other people** caused. Not only that, but the pain causes the parties to **plant their feet** and **not budge, so that** the other party doesn’t **win**. Now there **are** people of goodwill on both sides. Yet right now, the situation is a **stand-off**. It is. No one’s willing to give any ground. What do you think might bring some **hope** to this situation? [     ] Well, several school children wrote editorials for the local paper about, “What my community means to me.” That got a lot of attention and has now turned into a blog to which anyone can contribute. So, the ice has started to thaw, the planted feet have started to loosen. It’s a start.

In **Luke 12**, someone in the crowd says to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Jesus responds, “Friend, who made me your judge or arbitrator?” And then he says, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of **greed**. For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (**Luke 12:13-15**). In other words, Jesus says, “You’re ready to work at a **win-win** ... **after** you let go of your need to **win**.”

### ***Possible Compromises***

If we want to take concrete steps to improve a relationship, we will need to ask ourselves two honest questions: First, “What do **I** expect to **get** out of **reconciliation**?” and second, “What am I willing to **give up** in order to be **reconciled**?” ... Because ... **nobody** gets **everything** they want.

**Everyone** has to **compromise**.

Depending on the circumstances, **reconciliation** might include some of the following **compromises** (and all these involve **giving something up**):

- 1) Allowing for **other versions** of what happened to create the brokenness.
- 2) Taking a **harder** look at **our perceptions** and **our motivations** than at those of the other party.
- 3) Asking, “What can I do to reduce **the other’s** pain?”
- 4) Giving up the focus on determining who is **right**, or who is **more inconvenienced** or **hurt**.
- 5) Acknowledging that the “uncommon ground” is larger than the common ground, and **still** making the commitment to respect our common humanity **on** the uncommon ground.

### ***Jenna and Tristan 2***

So, remember Jenna and Tristan and their property-line problem? Well, it’s not over yet. They approached their neighbors, Paul and Amber, as diplomatically and honestly as they could. And **that** went well. The other couple was receptive. **But** ... when the neighbors did their own research, they discovered a **different** discrepancy about the property line.

The couples have decided to work together and hire an attorney to straighten everything out, but they have to save some money first. In the meantime, they took down one section of the fence. They propped it up on cider blocks and made a table between their yards. Now once a month they have dinner together on that table, with take-out from *On The Border*.

## ***Elements of Worship***

### ***Background Before Scripture Reading***

In **Genesis 12**, the LORD calls Abram (who is later called “Abraham”) to leave his home and go to the place that God will show him. And the LORD says, “I will bless you, and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” So, Abram goes, as the LORD told him. And his nephew Lot goes with him.

Then, in **Genesis 13**, we hear these words:

### ***Scripture Reading Genesis 13 (selected verses)***

Now Abram was very wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold. Lot too had abundant possessions, so that the land could not support both of them living together. And there was strife between Abram’s herders and Lot’s herders.

Therefore, Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and mine, for we are kindred. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you choose land to your left, I’ll go to the right; or, if you choose land to the right, I’ll go to the left.” And so, Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, while Abram settled in Canaan. Thus, they separated from each other.