

## **Ambassadors Yesterday and Today**

By Jane Yoder-Short

For Heritage Sunday, October 29, 2006

**Call to Worship** – based on 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**Leader:**    **We gather as Ambassadors for Christ.**

People:    God through Christ reconciles us.

**Leader:**    **Once we stood apart from God.**

People:    God through Christ reconciles us.

**Leader:**    **Once hostility distorted our vision.**

People:    But now we see a new creation.

**Leader:**    **Once envy and bitterness blinded us.**

People:    But now we see a new creation.

**Leader:**    **Ambassadors for God have gone before us.**

People:    They help us see the new creation.

**Leader:**    **Ambassadors for God give us courage.**

People:    They help us act with boldness.

**Leader:**    **Once we saw with human understanding**

People:    But now we see as ambassadors for a new creation.

**Leader:**    **We gather as ambassadors for Christ's New Creation.**

**All:**        To worship the God who is bringing reconciliation.

**Songs:**    *In Christ there is no East or West* -Hymnal, A Worship Book 306  
*I'm pressing on the upward way-* Sing the Journey 96  
*The love of God* - Sing the Journey -44  
*We are people of God's peace* Hymnal, A Worship Book 407  
*Heart with loving heart united* --Hymnal, A Worship Book 420

**Old Testament Reading:** Exodus 1:15-21

The Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, were early conscious objectors. They refused to follow Pharaoh's edict to kill the Hebrew babies. They feared God. They were ambassadors for God's way of life.

**New Testament Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**Sermon Idea:** What is reconciliation? Consider the job of being an ambassador for God's reconciliation project. An ambassador lives in a foreign nation. He/She represents his or her homeland. As Christians we represent God's homeland, the New Creation, the nation where reconciliation is the expected norm.

**Readers Theater:** An optional reader's theater is found at the end. If you do not use the reader's theater option, you may want to include one or more of its stories in the sermon.

**Children's Time:** Dr. Seuss, *Sneetches*, (New York: Random House, 1961.)  
God loves us all whether we have stars on our bellies or not. God wants us to get along with different people. Sometimes we see a different group and we think they are better than we are (town kids vs. country kids, kids with cool clothes vs. ordinary dressers, kids from one ethnic group vs. another, etc.). God wants us to treat each other with kindness.

**Benediction:**

**Go now as God's Ambassadors of Reconciliation!**

**Showing love and forgiveness in a divided and messy world.**

**Reader's Theater - Ambassadors Through the Ages**

- Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.
- Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.
- Reader 1: Shiphrah and Puah heard God call to love indiscriminately.
- Reader 2: As God's ambassadors, they saw the world differently than Pharaoh.
- Reader 1: Shiphrah and Puah lived in a time when God's people were slaves in Egypt.
- Reader 2: It was a time when taskmasters were ruthless.
- Reader 3: It is surprising. Even though they are slaves, the Hebrew people are growing in numbers and strength.
- Reader 4: Pharaoh is worried. Is he expecting an uprising?
- Reader 3: Haven't you heard? Pharaoh thought he had solved the Israelite problem. Just last week he issued an imperial order to Shiphrah and

Puah, the Hebrew midwives. He commanded them to kill all the boy babies at birth.

Reader 4: It's just like a world leader -- solve a political threat by trying some form of ethnic genocide.

Reader 3: But Shiphrah and Puah fear God. They have been disobeying Pharaoh's edict.

Reader 4: Don't they fear Pharaoh? He holds the power -- or does he?

Reader 3: Look! He has called them into his royal throne room.

Reader 4: Shiphrah and Puah are trembling!

All Readers: Foolish midwives! Foolish midwives! Foolish!

Reader 3: Listen! Pharaoh is shouting at them.

Readers 1: "Why have you allowed the Hebrew baby boys to live?"

Readers 1&2: "Hebrew woman are fast. We don't get there in time."

Reader 4: They expect Pharaoh to believe that?

Reader 3: They are working for God. Not Pharaoh.

Reader 4: Is that what it means to be God's ambassador?

Reader 3: God's ambassadors see new possibilities. They see Hebrew baby boys as valuable as Egyptians babies.

Reader 4: God's ambassadors are foolish.

Reader 1: Shiphrah and Puah heard God's call.

Reader 2: The ways of Pharaohs pass away but God's love continues.  
(Pause)

Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.

Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.

Reader 1: It is around 400 A.D. -- long before violent video games.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The story of Telemachus is found in Cornelia Lehn, *Peace be With You*, (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1980) 27.

- Reader 2: Hear the story of Telemachus, a monk and an ambassador for Christ's way of love and reconciliation.
- Reader 3: The Colosseum is full. I heard a political detainee is up against one of Emperor Honorius's slave.
- Reader 4: It's a good day for a gladiator match. The crowd seems ready for some blood.
- Reader 3: What is Telemachus doing here?
- Reader 4: Tele who?
- Reader 3: Telemachus, the monk. He has been telling Christians not to attend the games.
- Reader 4: Maybe he decided a little blood wasn't so bad.
- Reader 3: Look! The men are drawing their swords.
- Reader 4: The fight is on.
- All Readers: Blood! Blood! Blood!
- Reader 3: Telemachus is standing up. He looks pale.
- Reader 4: What is that man doing?
- Reader 3: Telemachus is running into the arena. See how he holds high the cross of Christ.
- Reader 4: He is a fool. He is throwing himself between the two combatants.
- Reader 3: Can you hear what he is saying?
- Reader 1&2: In the name of our Master stop fighting!
- Reader 3: There is so much yelling I can't think. Everyone is furious.
- Reader 4: I don't blame them. Telemachus has ruined the game.
- All Readers: Take him down! Down! Down with Telemachus!
- Reader 3: It's a stampede. Everyone is running to the center of the arena.

- Reader 4: This is better than the game - or is it?
- Reader 3: They have sticks and stones. I can't look.
- Reader 4: They are going to beat Telemachus to death! Stop!
- All Readers: Stop! Stop! Stop!
- Reader 3: I've never been in the Colosseum when it was this quiet.  
(Pause)
- Reader 4: What have we done?  
How could we think killing is entertaining?
- Reader 3: The game is over.
- Reader 1: Telemachus heard God's call.
- Reader 2: Gladiatorial games ceased have passed away - but God's love continues.  
(Pause)
- Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.
- Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.
- Reader 1: The year is 1596 -- Anabaptist Dirk Willems of Asperen, The Netherlands, sits in a palace that has been turned into a prison.<sup>2</sup>
- Reader 2: Many Anabaptists are being burned at the stake for refusing to baptize infants, believing instead that joining God's People was a choice made by a mature person.
- Reader 3: There, that is where they are holding Dirk Willems.
- Reader 4: Don't feel too sorry for him. He is guilty of being an Anabaptist heretic!
- Reader 3: Willems is no dummy. Look! He is letting himself out of a window with a rope made of knotted rags. He is escaping.
- Reader 4: The guard sees him. The chase is on.
- All Readers: Run Dirk! Get away! Go!
- Reader 3: Dirk reaches the frozen pond. Will the ice hold him?

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<sup>2</sup> The story of Dirk Willems is found in John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Intercourse, PA, Good Books, 1990) 36-37.

- Reader 4: Yes! He is so skinny thanks to skimpy prison rations. The ice is holding him.
- Reader 3: But the guard is in trouble. The ice is breaking.
- Reader 4: The guard is calling for help!
- Readers 1&2: Help me! Help! I'm drowning.
- Reader 4: Dirk, it's your chance to escape! Don't turn back!
- All Readers: Don't look back!
- Reader 3: Look! Dirk is turning around.
- Reader 4: He is a fool!
- Reader 3: Dirk is pulling the guard out of the icy water!
- Reader 4: What is that ungrateful guard doing?
- Reader 3: Dirk is being led back to captivity.
- Reader 4: Where is love and reconciliation?
- Reader 3: Dirk loved indiscriminately.
- Reader 1: Dirk was an ambassador for Christ's New Creation.
- | Reader 2: Dirk is later burned at the stack but God's way of love continues.  
(Pause)
- Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.
- Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.
- Reader 1: The year is 1918 -- long before smart bombs. WW1 is underway. The military needs men. Everyone is being drafted.
- Reader 2: The descendants of Dirk Willems face the call to be God's ambassadors in a new way. Will they join the army and fight the Germans?
- Reader 3: Look at all the tents on the outskirts of the military barracks in Camp Sherman, Chillicothe, Ohio. They been set up to house conscientious

objectors, the drafted men who refuse to participate in training for military combat.<sup>3</sup>

- Reader 4: You mean the CO's --those Yellowback cowards!
- Reader 3: I've heard most tents have no floors and few tents have heat.
- Reader 4: It is no life of luxury but it was their choice not to join those in the barracks.
- Reader 3: Look! There is Dan Stuckey. He is one of the young Mennonite conscientious objectors. Dan is firm in his belief that God calls him to love indiscriminately. He does not want to be part of the military. Dan is an ambassador for reconciliation.
- Reader 4: He is a coward! - Or is he?
- Readers 1&2: A coward! A coward! Yellowback!
- Reader 3: Look! The officer in charge is asking him to carry a rifle and walk guard duty. Dan is shaking his head no.
- Reader 4: Dan is in trouble.
- Reader 3: What is the officer saying?
- Reader 1& 2: "Well, you wouldn't refuse to carry a hoe, now would you? Would you? Would you?"
- Reader 3: Dan is taking the hoe! He is walking guard duty carrying a hoe.
- Reader 4: He looks ridiculous!
- All Readers: Hey silly Dan! Aim that hoe! Fire!
- Reader 3: Dan Stuckey just sees things differently. He sees the new creation where reconciliation rather than violence is the way to solve differences.
- Reader 4: Did carrying a hoe make a difference?
- Reader 1: The old way of forced military participation was passing away but God's love continues.

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<sup>3</sup> Information on Camp Sherman based on Meyer, Earnest, *Hey! Yellowbacks!* (Rahway, N.J: Quinn and Boden Company, 1930).

Thanks to Cara Ulrich (daughter of Philemon Frey who was at Camp Sherman) for her help with the Dan Stuckey story.

Reader 2: Dan and others like him helped shape a creative response to our nation's military requirement in WW1. They made it possible for people to serve in ways separate from the military.

(Pause)

Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.

Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.

Reader 1: It is 2001.

Reader 2: September 11<sup>th</sup> shapes our thinking.

Reader 3: Several weeks after the attacks long time Mennonite Missionary David W. Shenk is visiting churches in Kazakhstan. He is being interviewed on the local radio station.

Reader 4: The radio announcer asks the question that was on the minds of many.

Reader 1: "We believe that your country is not really concerned about the well-being of the poor nations. As a Christian what are your comments on that statement and the U.S.-led war on terrorism?"

Reader 3: How would you answer?

Readers 1&2: Answer! Answer!

Reader 4: We could tell them about America's generosity.

Reader 3: How generous are we?

Reader 4: We could tell them we have no choice in the war on terrorism if we want a world safe for our children.

All Readers: We have no choice.

Reader 3: Does your answer sound like that of an ambassador of reconciliation?

Reader 4: Turn up the radio. Let's hear Mr. Shenk's answer.

Reader 2: "Nations are inclined to act in self-interest. Thus nothing surprises me when nations go to war. But the way of the nations is not the kingdom of God that Jesus the Messiah has inaugurated."

Reader 4: Did he say America is not the kingdom of God?

- Reader 3: Shhh!
- Reader 2: "The core ethical commitment of the kingdom of God is to love, even the enemy, as Jesus loved. . . "
- Reader 4: Does enemy include terrorists?
- Reader 3: Listen!
- Reader 2: "I pray for my nation. . . . But my first loyalty is to the kingdom of God, and that kingdom is a total surprise, for it is a people from every tribe and nation and language who are reconciled and forgiven."
- Reader 4: Every tribe - every tribe?
- Reader 3: Yes! Every tribe. Shh!
- Reader 2: "How I wish I could meet Osama bin Laden and embrace him and tell him that I am an ambassador of the King who loves him. I would invite him to repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation."<sup>4</sup>
- Reader 4: Did he say he wants to meet Osama bin Laden?
- Reader 3: And invite him to repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- Reader 4: Shenk is unrealistic. He is a dreamer.
- All Readers: A dreamer! A dreamer!
- Reader 3: Shenk, like Paul, understands what it means to see things in a new way, no longer from the human point of view. Shenk is an ambassador for love that does not discriminate.
- (Pause)
- Reader 1: Listen to the voices of God's ambassadors ripple through the centuries.
- Reader 2: Hear their loyalty to God's New Creation.
- Reader 3: See indiscriminate love demonstrated--
- Reader 4: by the Shiphrahs and Puahs
- Reader 3: by the Telemahuses

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<sup>4</sup> Shenk, David W., *The Gospel and History of Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church: Exploring the Mission of Two Communities* (Waterloo, Ont., Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003) 233-234.

- Reader 4: by the Dirk Willemses
- Reader 3: by the Dan Stuckeys
- Reader 4: by the David Shenks
- Reader 3&4 by God's Ambassadors.
- Reader 1: Being an ambassador for God's project of reconciliation cuts across time and culture.
- Reader 2: Being an ambassador for God crosses national boundaries.
- Readers 1: We hear the call to be ambassadors for Christ.
- Reader 2: We see the new creation beginning.
- Reader 1: God has made the way of indiscriminate love visible.
- Readers 2: God continues to make the way of love and reconciliation visible.
- Readers 1&2: God has made and is making the way of love and reconciliation visible through us.
- All Readers: Through us the ripples of God's love continue, continue, continue.

Jane Yoder-Short  
Kalona, IA  
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