# Chat with the Children

- Clerical collar fun...
  - who wears one of these...?
  - what does it tell people...?
  - *(other people who wear "uniforms"...)*

- *Show plastic strips from which clerical collars cut...*

- Then move on to bits of white card, given to everyone
  - "bear with me on this..."
  - everyone is a minister, someone who is given then job by Jesus of passing on the message that God wants to be friends with people (2 Cor 5:19, "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation")

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# Introduction

- Reflect round trust:
  - Barack Obama, and the issue of whether folk trusted him as a military commander - and the change once Osama bib Laden had been killed
  - or the erosion of trust experienced through the end of Tony Blair's time as PM - Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, Hutton enquiry, spin doctors...
  - a leader's long-term prospects, and the effectiveness of a government, are dependent on trust
  - if his motives, his character are seriously called into question, will we trust him again?
  - if we move from believing that, whatever difficulties he is having in implementing the vision, we trust the general direction he wants to take the country....
  - if we move from that kind of trust to wondering whether he's just into staying in power, controlling the whole machinery of government for his own benefit, then he's in trouble.
- Trust, once removed, is difficult to re-establish

**Paul and the Corinthians**

- The broad context in which Paul's second recorded letter to Corinth falls is not so different from that:
  - we are unclear on the details, but Paul's authority as an apostle has been called into question
  - will the Corinthians trust him again?
  - will he continue to be able to disciple them, actively help and encourage them grow in their faith?
- And so a substantial part of the letter to the Corinthians is Paul's defence of his apostleship:
  - not merely out of big-headedness - (v.12) "We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again..."
  - but for the benefit of God's people in Corinth - (v.12) "so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart..."

# The Ministry of Reconciliation

- In the course of defending his apostleship, Paul inevitably touches on the core values, the priorities, the prompts that compel him to serve Christ in the way that he does.
  - and as such they illuminate for us those very values that motivate and direct the ministry that every one of us has;
  - whether the so called ordained ministry
  - or the regular ministry of faithful witness and of self-giving service to which we are all called
  - all ministry that Paul describes as the ministry of reconciliation

- Paul touches on at least four prompts in the course of the verses we read earlier:

## 1. Is Prompted by the Fear of the Lord (v.11)

- *(11) Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.*

- The first prompt is simple obedience.... obedience growing out of a deep honour, respect, awe, or - as Paul puts it - fear of the Lord.
  - Paul was in no doubt who was in charge, who was Lord!
- And that obedience prompted him to obey the Lord's command to "go and make disciples of all nations", to be the Lord's "chosen instrument to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15)

## 2. Is Compelled by the Love of the Lord (v.14)

- *(14) For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*

- Second prompt is a response to the love that Christ has shown to us:
  - Paul knows himself to be the worst of sinners, a persecutor of the Lord and his people
  - Paul knows the consequences of his sin, the separation from God, the terrible prospect of God's holy judgement...
  - but Paul also knows the love of Christ, the forgiveness that came as a result of Christ's death;
  - Paul knows that on the Cross Jesus became sin so that Paul might become the righteousness of God
- **Paul knew that the Lord loved him!**
- And his response of love prompted him to share that love with everyone he came across, planted in his heart that love for Jew and Gentile alike
  - prompted him to take up that ministry of reconciliation

## 3. Is Given to us as a Gift of the Lord (v.18)

- *(18) All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

- The third prompt Paul touches on here is to describe this ministry of reconciliation as a gift
- When something is a gift, using it can often have an added significance:
  - acting as a reminder of the person who gave the gift; (Australian rugby jumper - Uncle Charlie)
  - acting as a reminder of the care and concern and love they have for me; (lots of different things; many recently when we moved)
  - reflecting something of what the giver thinks is important, a tangible out-working of their values (commentaries; aunts; teenager)

- Paul knows that the ministry of reconciliation in which he is engaged is a gift from God:
  - whenever he engages with the gift, he is speaking of Jesus, the one who gave him that gift;
  - whenever he engages with the gift, he is reminding himself of the love that Jesus has for him as he rehearses once more all that Jesus has done;
  - and that ministry of reconciliation, drawing people to know God, reflects what Jesus thinks is important, His values and priorities!

## 4. Is our Role as Ambassadors of the Lord (v.20)

- *(20) We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

- The final prompt Paul touches on is that this ministry reflects who we are in Christ, and not just what we do
  - for we are Christ's ambassadors

- Being an ambassador, a representative of one's country or organisation, isn't always easy:
  - back in 2003 Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN Special Envoy to Iraq, was killed in a huge explosion at the UN HQ in Baghdad;
  - because of what he had done? Because he was good, or bad, at his job? No! Because he was the "Special Envoy", because of who he represented, because of what he embodied.
  - he stood in the place of the UN, representing all that the UN stood for - and was targetted as a result

- Even so we are Christ's ambassadors, made so by the Lord himself
  - as if God makes his through us!
- we can't get away change our status, can't "un-ambassador" ourselves;
  - that is who we now are in Christ!

## Ministers of Reconciliation

- So, we are ministers of reconciliation:
  - because we fear the Lord
  - because of the Lord's great love for us
  - because he has gifted this task to us
  - because that is our status - ambassadors

- But hang on, what is this ministry of reconciliation?
  - very simply, to bring people to the point of understanding and accepting the reconciliation with Himself that God offers us in Christ!
  - Paul says we should persuade (v.11), we should explain (v.19, a message needs explained, communicated), we should appeal (v.20), we should implore (v.20)
- And that is exactly what Paul was himself doing through the course of this passage!
- *(14) For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*
- *(15) And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*
- *(17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*
- *(19) that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*
- *(20) We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*
- *(21) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- Paul's explaining, his persuading, his appeal, his imploring spills out of him, prompted by his fear of the Lord, his love for the Lord, his gift from the Lord and his status as the Lord's ambassador.
  - may we too share Paul's priorities, whatever the form our "ministry of reconciliation" takes!