

“A New Point of View”—2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We know we're not supposed to, but we do it anyhow. We look at people and make decisions about them and their character and, quite often, about whether they are worthy of God's salvation, based upon gender or ethnicity or appearance or whatever externals we want to pick, without really getting to know them. Based on their externals, we pre-judge them—it's our prejudice—and, more often than not, it's negative. Right now I'm reading a fascinating book about a woman who led a major French resistance network during World War II. Despite her air of authority and her success in leadership, there were some who were hesitant, and some who outright refused, to join that network because the leader was a woman, and there were some who joined the network who were convinced that her second-in-command—a man—was really in charge. Of course, she proved her doubters wrong.

Politicians all across the world are playing to prejudice in a wave of nationalism that's sweeping the globe. These politicians point to people who are not like them, people who don't belong to the dominant group, and say that they're not like us—they want to take away what we've got; they want to take over our country and re-make it; they're criminals who shouldn't be allowed in and, if they're already here, they need to be thrown out. These politicians all across the world invite us and incite us to prejudice and bigotry and sometimes even violence and genocide—the systematic elimination and eradication of an entire group of people.

The tragedy, of course, is that, by lumping people into ethnic or gender or other categories, we don't get to know them—we don't get to know their hopes and dreams and fears, the ways they can enrich our lives and the ways we can enrich theirs. By lumping people into categories, we don't see individuals—we

only see a group, and we judge everyone in that group by what we see or know or have been told (whether it's true or not) about them.

But the even bigger tragedy is that, because we see only groups, because we don't see people as individuals, we can't see them through the eyes of Jesus, and we can't engage them in the ministry of reconciliation.

Now, the old Paul—Paul before his dramatic conversion experience on the Damascus Road—could never have said, “[W]e regard no one from a human point of view.” The old Paul, as a very devout, very righteous Jew who took great pride in his pedigree, had his prejudices. He would have been prejudiced against Samaritans, the neighbors to the north of Judah—they were, in Jewish eyes, an impure race with a faulty religion. He would have been prejudiced against Gentiles—they were, in Jewish eyes, children of perdition, wicked and evil in their ways, worshiping a multitude of gods and not acknowledging the one true God of Israel; they were not even worthy of God's salvation. And Paul was obviously prejudiced against Christians—rather than learning what Christians believed and how they lived, he attacked them for proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and arrested and imprisoned them. Before the Damascus Road, Paul looked at everyone from a human point of view.

God literally had to knock Paul off his high horse to open his eyes to a new point of view. Paul had to experience for himself the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles before he could see people as Jesus saw them: not as groups, but as individuals, each one with his or her own needs and concerns, hopes and dreams and burdens and cares. But more importantly, from his new point of view, Paul could see each person as someone loved by God, someone God wanted to redeem from sin and spiritual death, someone whom God wanted to reconcile to himself.

That's our call—to see people from a new point of view, to see people as Jesus sees them, to see them as those God wants to reconcile to himself through the grace made real in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation—the ministry of sharing God's redeeming love with the lost and broken and hurting and dying people of this lost and broken and hurting and dying world. Jesus has given us the ministry of inviting people to know and experience what we already know and have experienced—that God is real; that God is at work; that God loves every person; that God wants each person to love him; and that, through Jesus, sins are forgiven, lives are changed, and people can live in obedience to God and in love and harmony with others. That's the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus has given to us.

Yet we can't really do this ministry of reconciliation until we change our point of view—or, to be more correct, until Jesus gives us a new point of view.

I love the story about the woman who looked out her window one day and said to her husband, “Would you look at that? Our neighbor is hanging out her laundry, and it’s so dirty and dingy. I’d be embarrassed to hang out clothes and linens that look like that!” This continued to happen for several weeks, until one morning the woman looked out her window, saw her neighbor hanging out her laundry, and said to her husband, “Would you look at that? Someone must have told her about how dirty and dingy her laundry looks. I’ll bet she got a new washer or detergent!” “No,” the husband said, “she didn’t.” “Well, how do you know?” the wife asked. “It’s simple,” the husband said. “There was nothing wrong with her laundry—I just cleaned our window.”

Our window on others—the way we view them—needs to be cleaned if we’re to engage in the ministry of reconciliation. We need a new point of view. But we can’t create it—we can’t make it happen. You see, we view people from the standpoint of our own selfishness and self-centeredness—we view them from the standpoint of our sin. We look at people in groups as inferior to us and unworthy of God’s love and our notice. We need someone to clean our window on the world.

That someone is God, who in his love has given his Son to pay the price for our sins and thus reconcile us to him. That someone is God, who in his love has given us his Holy Spirit to change us, to make us new, to grow us into the image of Jesus, to clean not just our window on the world but our entire lives and the way we live before God and with others.

Thus Paul says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” We don’t live in our old selfish, self-centered ways anymore—we live to love and serve God and others. We don’t look at others the way we used to—for now we have a new point of view, from which we see each individual as a person of worth and the object of God’s love. And because this is how we see people now—from this new point of view—we can offer them the hope and joy and peace and salvation that God wants each of us to have.

God’s point of view has never changed—he has always looked upon us as his children, wayward and wandering and defiant and disobedient though we be. God has always and will always love us—as I’ve said many times before, God loves us as much right now as he’s ever going to love us. God wants to bring us wayward and wandering and defiant and disobedient children home to him, so that we can be restored in relationship to him and to others—God wants us to be reconciled. And God wants to change us so that, in our obedience to him, we look at people from a new point of view—we look at people as he sees them: as those who need to know the redeeming, reconciling, saving, and transforming love of the Father made real in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to the ministry of

reconciliation—the ministry of sharing the Good News—as we look at others from a new point of view. Thanks be to God!