

3-27-22 Fourth Sunday In Lent

Sermon- Let Us Be Reconciled!

Scripture- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, CTW: Psalm 32

Hymns- 460, 461, 243

Theme: We are being called to see the world through new eyes, but in order to do that, we need to allow ourselves to be transformed by Christ. Once we witness His power firsthand, only then are we truly able to go out as ambassadors for Him.

I. Seeing Through New Eyes

I read about a person who had trouble with his eyes all his life. When it got so bad that he had to hold things right up to his face in order to see anything, he finally decided to do something about it...get Laser surgery. He shared his experience this way:

“The most mundane things took on new clarity and definition and I looked at the world with a level of wonder I had never before experienced. I could see!

And with that new sense of vision, came a **new sense of appreciation for the things I had taken for granted before.** I had new eyes and they changed the way I experienced and interacted with the world.”

A. That is the call to see the world, to see other people, through new eyes that Paul brings to the church at Corinth in our passage this morning. For anyone who has read 1-2 Corinthians, you likely have figured out that this particular congregation had its share of divisions and problems.

The city of Corinth was an eclectic city, but it was also deeply divided. Rich and poor did not associate in public, and the rich of the city controlled the markets, local elections, and even the law courts.

Judges were not elected by popular vote or appointed by disinterested parties, instead they either paid for their position or their position was paid for by rich patrons who expected favorable outcomes in lawsuits.

On top of all this, there was a small Jewish community which (for the most part) avoided mingling with the predominantly pagan cultural elite.

And the small church there, consisting of about 40-60 people, reflected all those divisions in its own make-up. The letters Paul wrote to the church suggest that it was in rough shape.

Members were suing each other in corrupt law courts, Jews were refusing to eat with pagans, rich members were getting drunk at the meals they shared, while the poor went hungry, and people would only associate with and sit next to others of their particular theological faction.

Paul had his work cut out for him!

B. So, in verses 16 and 17, Paul calls on the church at Corinth to remember back to that moment they first believed. What happened inside of them? Or at least, what should have happened?

It is the excitement and revelation of their moment of conversion that Paul is calling on the church at Corinth to remember for themselves.

When they first came to belief in Christ, God's grace didn't just "cover" their sin. He didn't just hide it from view, leaving them the same underneath. He **began something completely new** in them. He made them completely new!

And as completely transformed creatures, He gave them new eyes with which to see each other, the World, and even Christ Himself.

Think about it, when seen through human eyes, by human standards, Jesus must look like a failure. This is no doubt how Paul saw Him before his own miraculous encounter.

It's only by seeing through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to see Jesus for who He really is; the Savior of the World who not only redeems but restores and transforms His Creation.

C. Only the Creator of the World has the power to re-create us. Paul makes this clear in **v. 18**, when he says, **"All this is from God..."** A person born blind doesn't really know what it is like to be able to see, until He finally experiences it for Himself.

But being blinded by our own sin, our reason and ability to truly perceive the World and God's work in it is corrupted.

Only something outside ourselves could restore it, because if we try by ourselves, the corrupted lenses through which we perceive our own deficiencies cause whatever "solutions" we try to only make things worse.

II. The Gift Of Transformation And Reconciliation

A. God's gift of healing grace is completely free and is the only thing which can make us whole. But God doesn't only restore our ability to accurately perceive the World, and He doesn't only forgive our sins, as tremendous a gift as that already is!

He also restores us to right relationship with Him and adopts us as sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ in the family of God.

That's the true beauty of the Gospel. It would have been more than enough for Him to just forgive us. But He wanted something more than that...

He wanted a real relationship with us.

Think about how amazing that is? How many judges do you know that, after dropping the charges against a defendant, then want to go hang out with him?

But that's exactly what our Judge does.

B. This is because God's justice and His mercy are both components of His love. We often mistakenly think justice and mercy are somehow opposed to each other, or that they contradict one another. But that's what separates God's justice from human justice.

He judges, because He loves the victims of injustice as much as He loves the perpetrators, and so must be Just in order to express His love. But because He also loves the perpetrators of injustice as much as its victims, He is merciful.

He is both Just and Merciful toward us; because He loves us deeply, despite our open rebellion against Him. And since He loves us deeply, He wants more than justice or mercy, He wants relationship.

He wants to restore us to that state of relationship He had with Adam and Eve before the Fall, when He walked in the cool of the evening in the Garden with them.

But because we had cut ourselves off from Him, and blinded ourselves in our sin, we had no way to restore that relationship on our own.

The sin which corrupted our perception had to be removed for us to really understand God's great mercy and His desire for relationship.

That's why God in Christ had to take on flesh, to get His hand dirty, and grapple with the same bodily weaknesses, the same temptations, and the same struggles we face.

But instead of succumbing to them, He conquered them on our behalf. He wants us to be reconciled to Him! He wants to

embrace us as the sons and daughters we were always meant to be. He wants it so badly that He was willing to break into the Cosmos, upset the natural order of things, and re-create us again.

C. He took the death we deserve on Himself. V. 21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

I need to be clear here, that Jesus didn't actually sin. He wasn't guilty of anything. But it was only by living among us, facing and overcoming the challenges we face, that He was able to righteously stand in our place before the Judge; and so bring to complete fruition both God's justice and His mercy, transforming us and reconciling us to Him.

It reminds me of a show on the History Channel, called **Forged in Fire**, where blacksmiths from around the country compete to make weapons out of a variety of materials, often rusty old junk.

It's amazing to see a rusty leaf spring or old shovels and rakes, get reforged, hammered into shape, hardened in oil and water, and transformed into sharp, strong, useful instruments fit for battle.

In a similar way, God reforges us, hammers us into shape, pours the oil of the Spirit over us and renews us in the waters of Baptism, transforming us into sharp, strong, and useful instruments fit for His service.

III. Ambassadors Representing Christ To The World

A. But the whole point of this passage is that the fullness of the Gospel can't just be talked about and reasoned over.

Paul isn't appealing to the Corinthians' sense of reason. He isn't asking them to logically deduce God's characteristic love, justice, and mercy. In today's world, we can fall into this trap too!

The church at Corinth would NOT BE transformed by just thinking about Jesus or reading about Jesus. These are things that have to be experienced first-hand.

He is fully aware that some in the Corinthian Church haven't yet experienced God's grace for themselves.

Maybe they joined for the social support the church provides, or for the revolutionary idea of one organization where all classes are welcome, or maybe they intellectually assented to the Gospel, but they hadn't yet really learned to trust and embrace Jesus...

B. Does this theme sound familiar?

This is why Paul pleads with the Church to **embrace Christ fully. (Sounds like a good theme for Lent, doesn't it!)** Paul says Let His grace not just bring them to forgiveness but transform them completely into the likeness of Christ Himself, so that they can represent Him to the World.

Verse 20 says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

That's what ambassadors do, they represent the desires of the leader to outsiders.

The reason Paul can say he and his fellow workers are ambassadors for Christ, is because they have experienced His transforming power first-hand.

They are witnesses and the products of that Power, and so they feel compelled to "implore" the Church at Corinth, because God is imploring the Church through them.

In fact, the Greek words for "appeal" and "implore" also mean "beg." God is begging the Church to turn to Him and be forgiven, healed, and reconciled. Think about how amazing that is!

Imagine you have a mortgage through First National Bank, and you got a call from them saying they want to completely forgive the debt, no strings attached.

Now, assuming they are genuine and not a scam, who in their right mind would refuse?

How many of you would say, "Well... I know \$100,000 is a lot and all, but I think we're just going to have to pass on that offer."

That would be ridiculous!

C. But people do that to Jesus all the time. His offer is free. No strings attached. But many are just too skeptical, or too jaded, or too comfortable to take Him up on that offer.

As we prepare to witness Christ's sacrifice for all of us on the cross, we can't be one of those skeptical people.

Like the Apostle Paul, now I'm imploring all of you. Use this season of Lent as a reminder to take the atoning work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary seriously. We must own this as a central truth for our lives.

We must invest our very futures in it.

Don't sit back and wait for a better offer!

Take God's free gift! Be reconciled unto Him!

Embrace Him! He is ready and waiting to receive you as the son or daughter you were created to be.

Amen? Let Us pray...