

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 31, 2019
2 Corinthians 5:16-21
"A New View"

Pastor Robert Harmon of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Pueblo West, Colorado has veterans stand up and be recognized on Veteran's Day at the end of the Divine Service. In the pastor's first year in that congregation, he noticed an old veteran who had remained seated, staring at the floor. "Why aren't you standing?" the pastor asked the old soldier. "I can't stand up today," the man replied, "because during the war I fought on the other side." The company of standing soldiers urged "Klaus" to rise, and then they all gave him a rousing round of applause, not because he had fought in the German infantry in World War II, but because they recognized that in Jesus we are a new creation, reconciled through the cross of Christ. These men who previously viewed each other as enemies through gun sights to be killed now no longer view each other according to the flesh. As our text for today says, we have a whole new view, for God reconciles us to Himself and makes us reconcilers.

Our sinful nature however still moves us to view other people according to the flesh. It has us looking at others as competitors or as stepping stones to further our own ambitions. For example, I know for my own part that when I am driving, particularly when I am driving on the interstate especially when that interstate is in a big city it's almost like competing for pole position in a great race. Everyone else is my competitor and I must pass them to win the race. In other circumstances, people often view their coworkers as stepping stones. "I want that promotion," a man thinks, "to get it I need to make myself look like the best candidate and make the others as undesirable as I possibly can.

Or maybe we can get at this by thinking about how we value the people we see on our television. Who is it that you trust? To whom do you look for your information and from whom do you receive instruction on TV? That is the one you value more than others. Now why? Why do you value that person? Is it because they are beautiful, easy on the eyes as it were? Is it because they tell you what you want to hear? What is it that makes you value this person or that one from all the others out there? Our sinful nature drives us to view other people according to the flesh. What can they give me? Who brings me more pleasure?

Now the far greater danger is that we allow that sinful drive to view people only according to the fleshly part to apply even to Jesus. This is the way our culture views our Lord. "The baby Jesus? Oh, yes, I love the baby Jesus. I go to church every Christmas to adore the babe in the manger. It is just so cute and peaceful."

"Um, you do know that Jesus grew up, right?"

"Well, of course I know He grew up. He became a great teacher who told people that they should love one another as they love themselves. You know I think this world would be such a better place if you Christians would just do what Jesus tells you to do."

“Oh, you mean, like Christians should tell others that there is only one way to the Father and that is through Jesus who proclaimed Himself to be the way, the truth, and the life.”

“Well, no, that would not be loving. That would make people feel uncomfortable. Christians need to just love everyone as they are.”

“So, you’re saying that Christians need to be like Jesus and just love everyone no matter what they are doing or believing.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Christians should do what Jesus did.”

“So, like Jesus overturning tables in the temple or Jesus calling the Pharisees a “brood of vipers.”

“No, no that’s not the Jesus I like to think about. We should just think of Jesus as the great teacher who espouses love for everyone and condemning no one for anything.”

“But that’s not the real Jesus.”

“That’s my Jesus.”

“Oh, now I see.”

Do you? Can you see the danger of allowing the sinful drive of viewing people according to the flesh to dominate how we think about our Lord? The danger is not just from those who are Christmas and Easter Christians. The same viewpoint creeps in and operates amongst us as well. Sometimes even we lose the divine perspective.

We want our pastor to tell us whatever makes us feel good about ourselves. We want our teachers of God’s Word to massage the message so that it is more acceptable to the culture at large, after all, that will bring more people into the church, won’t it? We want our leaders to blunt the hard edge of our Lord and His Word to make it more palatable to a society that insists that everything is acceptable except declaring that something is actually sinful.

Do you doubt it? Have you ever questioned God’s Word regarding the role of women in the Church? Why can’t they serve as pastors? The headship of man seems so old and out of fashion. Surely God has changed His mind on that one, right? Or what about the marriage of committed homosexuals? It is legal now and we are told that we are supposed recognize the authority of God’s left-hand kingdom of the state. So we should just get on board right? I mean it’s really hard to stand against the tide of popular opinion and God does say, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). Or what about your friends or family? I mean it’s really hard to invite them to church on a Sunday and then to have to tell them that they are not free to commune with the rest of us. It just seems so mean, so unloving. They are good people after

all so why can't we just let everyone come and not make such a big deal out of our theological differences?

You see? The sinful desire to see everything from our limited fleshly perspective affects every single one of us, you, me, he, she, we.

That's one part of the Word of God. But as Christians there is also another part...the part that Paul is speaking to in our text. You are a new creation in Christ. What this means, among other things, is that we have a new perspective from which we look at people and events and the world and even ourselves.

So now we view Jesus Christ not as we wish Him to be according to our sinful fleshly nature but as He reveals Himself in His Word. We see Him as He is: namely, as the only-begotten Son of God who became flesh in order that He might sacrifice Himself as the payment for our sin to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity. So we see Jesus as Paul describes Him here: "All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself...that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:18a, 19a). Jesus in His conception, birth, life, death and resurrection is God's work at restoring His creation to its state of perfection. So it is only in Jesus as He really is that we find forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and resurrection into a remade creature. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus is in other words the lynchpin. Everything turns on Jesus as He really is.

And since Jesus is God in human flesh we do well to pay attention, close attention, to His Word. We allow the Word to say what it says and we don't now attempt to massage the message or change the meaning in accordance with our fleshly desires. Rather we allow ourselves to be shaped by the Word of God. We order our thinking according to it. To what end?

Now we view other people through the divine perspective, namely, we see every person as one who is worthy to be reconciled to God the Father by means of the life, death, and resurrection of the only begotten Son of God. Paul says it this way: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). The world. That means every child (born and unborn), every teenager (obedient and rebellious), every young adult (conservative and liberal), every man and woman (employed and retired) every person regardless of sex, mental capacity, net worth are beloved of God and have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

You see what this means? We no longer see other people as our competitors or obstacles but as fellow sinners who together with us have been reconciled to God in so far as God is concerned. And now this means that you have a purpose, a place in God's message of reconciliation. This is exactly what Paul is getting at today. "God gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18b). "In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

So God changes our view of our fellow man and uses us who have been remade and given a new view in order to make the appeal to our fellow human beings. Hear how Paul says it, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). This is the message that makes all the difference, you see? God for His part is reconciled to the whole world. Jesus' death on the cross has taken all sin away from humanity. "For our sake He (God) made Him to be sin who knew no sin (Jesus), so that in Him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

All that remains is that this gift, this gracious gift, be given to individual human beings. That happens through the message of reconciliation which God has entrusted to you and to me and to all people who have received the gift of forgiveness and have been made new through faith. Paul shows us how as he writes to the Corinthians: "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20b).

It's not that the person being implored has to do anything. He simply receives the gracious gift of reconciliation. God is already reconciled to the world through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Think about it this way: There are two friends who have had a falling out. One friend took money from the other friend. For a time their relationship was broken. Then one day the friend who had been wronged says: "You know our friendship is worth more to me than the little bit of money that came between us. Can we just move on?" For his part he is reconciled to the one who had sinned against him. All that remains is for the sinner to receive the gift of reconciliation and the relationship can be restored and the two can go on as friends.

Your sins have been removed and paid for by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Father is reconciled to you. There is now nothing that keeps the two of you apart. Simply receive the gift of God's reconciliation. How? By receiving and believing His Word: "You are forgiven for all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen"