



* "YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE WHO YOU ARE"

Biblical Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor
Old Mission United Methodist Church*

(* denotes frame change on screens)

*Today is Father's Day - it is. And we give thanks for fathers and grandfathers. So today and today only – here's your sign, **"Dad's root beer served here!"** **Let's thank them!** *It also was Vacation Bible School last week – *195 kids and 110 adults had the time of our lives. ***Let's celebrate a wonderfully successful VBS!**

*So I'm really glad to see that many of those same volunteers are here today! **I'm glad to be here too!** Of course none of us are *entirely* recovered! But it was great!

We need these reminders that there is **good** in the world. Especially this week! By noon last Sunday, like all of you, I had heard about the shootings in Orlando. I zone out from the news on Sundays, so the first I knew about it was when Dana asked for prayers during worship. By lunchtime, the news and social media was buzzing with expressions of grief, anger, and differing opinions about who to blame, and political rhetoric from all sides. **Have mercy on us, O Lord!**

*49 victims died. All 49 of them were once children, like ours and the community's at VBS. All 49 were some father's and mother's son or daughter. 53 others were wounded. *Our hearts go out to their families, their friends and partners, and community. Like many, we are praying and doing what we can. *

It is so important for Christians to remember **whose** we are, and **how** we are called to live. *As we have been teaching our children this week, my prayer to God has been that he will, **"Awaken us with your Light... your Love... and new Life, so we can live like you."* I hope you'll pray that prayer too. The world needs us.

How we see this tragedy, is largely determined by how we see people. And especially as Christians, we should see all, **all**, human beings as of sacred worth in the eyes of God. Paul is clear about that in 2 Corinthians 5:16 when he says, ***"...from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."***¹

But, as I read that opening verse of our text for today, I found myself debating with the text. I know it's an unusual thing for a preacher to admit, a disagreement with the Bible, but I might as well be honest about it. I read, ***"We regard no one from a worldly point of view."*** And I thought, ***"Oh yes we do! – All the time!"***

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:16. *New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by Biblica. Used by permission.

*We decide that someone who is different in race, or language, or lifestyle, or income, background, choices made, or gender is a *"less than precious"* child of God.

And our judgments and biases not only hurt them, but hurt us. They keep us back from living and sharing the love of God with all people. Not all behaviors or actions are acceptable to God, but all people are! **No one is less than a child of God. Ever.**

So, open your Bibles and let's look again at verse sixteen, continuing on to the remainder of the verse. ***"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."***²

He is clear that knowing Jesus changes our point of view, **or it should.** *We once thought of Christ from a merely human point of view, as a good teacher, for example, or one source of wisdom among many. But he is so much more! **He is the Son of God, Savior of the World, Lord of Life, the author of new creation.**

And 2 Corinthians 5:17 makes that plain. It is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. It says: ***"Anyone in Christ is a new creation: the old has passed away; and all things have become new!"***³ All things can become new in Christ.

We count on that promise! Is there anyone here who has lived so perfectly that you do not need to be forgiven, for the past to be the past, to get a "do over," or even an *"extreme makeover"* from the love and grace of God? Not me!

I shudder to think of what our lives would be like if we had to wear the labels and badges of our worst fallings all our lives. Loser, sinner, alcoholic, failure, fired, arrogant, prejudiced, rude, indifferent. But God has forgiven us and set us free.

And listen to verses 19 and 20. Because we are forgiven, because God reconciled us, and healed our broken relationship through Jesus Christ:

"God entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ."⁴ ***"God offers his invitation through us: 'In Christ, be reconciled to God.'"***⁵

Hear his message! Not condemnation, but reconciliation. Not blame, but blessing. Not harsh judgment, but mercy, and an honest love that accepts us, sins and all. Not guilt but grace! It is entirely the message of Romans 8:1.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."⁶

² 2 Corinthians 5:16, New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © 1989, National Council of the Churches, USA. All rights reserved.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:17, paraphrased by the author from several English language versions.

⁴ Ibid. 2 Corinthians 5:19b-20, paraphrased.

⁵ Ibid. 2 Corinthians 5:20, paraphrased.

⁶ Op. Cit. Romans 8:1. *New International Version*®.

We live in divisive times. Plenty of politicians, pundits, and pastors have weighed in on the Orlando shooting, trying to win points for their side of an argument or issue, or to blame someone. *** But Jesus didn't approach people that way.**

To the first disciples, he simply said **"follow me."* To those in pain, he said, **"come unto me, and I will give you rest."* He did not turn away from the sinner, but said, **"neither do I condemn you."* He didn't turn away from Peter, who denied him, or Paul, who called himself *"chief of the sinners."* He loved them all.

**Wherever we are on our spiritual journey... whatever hurt our anger or pain or guilt or fear or anxiety or lack of forgiveness we hold in our hearts... He loves you.*

And this is God's message for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 from our text puts it this way: **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*⁷

There is a lot packed into that verse. It called *"imputed righteousness."* When things aren't right in our relationship with God, He puts them right if we let him.

**"Anyone in Christ is a new creation!"* The good news of the Gospel is that what we cannot do for ourselves, God does in us! And in this world that needs it.

**I don't know what is happening in your spiritual life. I wouldn't presume to. But I know this. There is a God who has always loved you. And this same God, whatever you may have done or failed to do has loved you so much that he gave his only Son that you could know eternal and abundant life. And so this world could look more like what he designed it to be.*

And if you will join me, I'd like to pray for you, pray for us all, today. *

⁷ Op Cit. 2 Corinthians 5:21, New Revised Standard Version.