

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

II Cor. 5:16-17

¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from the human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

(New English Bible Translation)

With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so no longer.

Today is Father's Day! Happy Father's day to everyone who is a father to someone. I must take liberty to give tribute to one of my heroes. This person has been one of my #1 cheerleaders my entire life, my Father, Thomas Marley! Stand up, Daddy! My dad is a country boy from Columbus County, his majors and concentrations in life have been his pursuit of God, family, farming and being a good neighbor. He may not be famous; however, he is beloved by the people who know him. He may not be rich; however, as he has focused on God, family and neighbor, he has born much fruit. Daddy, thank you for the many ways that you have loved, encouraged and inspired me and our family. As I stand here today, I thank you and Mommy for allowing me to stand upon your shoulders. Mommy, wave your hand.

Family is an interesting institution. Traditionally, it starts with two individuals who covenant before God to be ONE, socially, physically and financially. During this merger process, two people leave aspects of who they were as individuals for the sake of living a unified, fruitful life with the other person. Given this, it may be fitting that in the process both persons change their names. Because both persons are becoming new in relation to their spouse or soul mate. Throughout history around the world when two people are joined together, they begin to bear collective fruit, particularly children and the official family unit is formed. While this is the western traditional way that families are formed, we are all keenly aware that are many ways that a family unit can be configured. Ultimately, families are beautiful, complex, painful and amazing.

As previously mentioned, family relationships (be it immediate or global) can be a challenge. In most cases in the post-modern world, the only persons who have chosen one another within the family structures are spouses/partners. Otherwise, everyone else enters the family system involuntarily. Most members of a family do not choose one another; however, they are expected to love one another, journey through life together, live in harmony and bring honor to the family. They are expected to do this with people they did not choose. The blessing and irony in our immediate families is that we bear many similarities, yet we are so different. These differences have to be negotiated over a lifetime.

Looking at our II Cor. text, Paul and the church at Corinth were right in the thick of a family conflict when Paul penned the prose in the letter to the Corinthians (I am equating family with the church). The members of the Corinthian church had been called together to be a part of the Divine family; however, many of the parishioners never in a million years would have chosen to journey with one another. While it was painful and messy, maybe the Church at Corinth was modeling for us what it really meant to be church. Maybe our churches at least in America are way to homogenous. Maybe being church in our context also means journeying with a community of faith who is utterly different from us and whom we would have never chosen. It's just a thought

The Corinthian church consisted of members with various orientations from the Spiritualists, to the Judaizers, to the Gnostics. So when controversy struck which seemed often, tempers would flare and homogenous alliances would strengthen. In the midst of one conflict, they even attempted to remove Paul from his position of leadership. Everyone had their arguments formulated, each point of view was carefully crafted. Amidst this ongoing mayhem, Paul points out that it is a higher power that motivates him in this ministry to the Church. It is the love of Christ that urges him on. That love is his life source. It reminds him of the big picture that Christ died and was resurrected for all of us. A higher power motivates Paul to be in fellowship with the Corinthian Community.

My interpretation is that Paul then extends an invitation for the Corinthian family to lay aside old hurts, negative feelings from the past, to lay aside personal agendas, to die to their old way of thinking, to die to their old way of life, to die to some of those destructive habits and attitudes that were played out in their families of origin. Paul is inviting the Divine family to be transformed; however, this change requires that they release their "old baggage". At the same time, they are invited to let go of their issues and isms, they are to also extend grace to their fellow brothers and sisters. These are key elements of their successful transformation.

Paul says, "From now on, no longer regard one another from the human point of view or according to the flesh." Now, there have been many interpretations of this text; however, I take it to mean that from the perspective of the Corinthians, they were not to judge one another according to worldly standards. It didn't matter if a person had been a Jew. It did not matter if a person had received the gift of speaking in tongues. It did not matter if a person had been a Greek scholar. It did not matter if a person was a gentile, male, female, a slave or a slave-owner. As members of this family, they needed to let go of their prejudices and not judge or penalize one another for being different. God had created each one of them in the first place, and there was a special purpose for everyone of them in God's heart. From God's perspective, regardless of where persons came from, I quote Samuel Proctor, "everybody was God's Somebody.

To offer a contemporary perspective, within our society we often regard one another based on one's profitability, based on who one's parents were and what one's parents did, based one's immigration status, based on the type of education one received. This is our perspective. However, here is another perspective, God's perspective, found in our

Old Testament text for today, I Samuel. As the new king of Israel is being anointed, Yahweh says to Samuel, "Do not look on one's outward appearance on the height of their stature,...for the Lord does not see as mortals see. (God has another point of view)...humans look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart. We are looking for glamour and grandeur. While God sees these things, the Lord is also looking at the least and the last.

Those whom we would underestimate or disqualify are those whom God chooses to utilize. We serve the God of Easter the God who resurrects people and situations who have been left for dead from the human point of view. God loves everyone in the Corinthian family, God loves all of us in the Duke University family, even though we continue to be divided around many things. God loves the entire world, even though some of us have allowed our politics, our agendas, our human point of view to limit our constructive involvement in Global humanitarian concerns.

Paul tells the Corinthian church and he is telling us to no longer regard one another from the human point of view. From the human perspective, while it might make no sense to follow a Jewish man, from the middle east (Nazareth to be exact), the son of a carpenter, who associated with rif-raf (I am talking about sinners), then managed to get killed by being hung on a tree, Paul offers us another perspective. This same Jesus not only hung on the cross but after his death he was planted in a tomb and to everyone's surprise, he emerged from the tomb with new life in his hands, he was raised with our adoption papers in his hands consummating our place in the Divine family.

We have been invited to embrace our heritage in the family of Christ. We are now free to die to our old agendas. And yes, over time we can literally see ourselves changing. We can see ourselves becoming a little newer and appearing more like a family. If anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation, we are born into the family of God, upheld by the love of Christ, laying aside our old ways of life, embracing a new reality in Christ as we embrace one another in grace and journey painfully and joyfully (mostly joyfully) together as a family. Amen.