

Last Sunday we kicked off a series of messages on the theme *A More Christlike Christianity*. The initial message focused on what I'd hope to always be a primary goal of St. Paul's; that is, to be *A More Christlike Church*. Today our focus is *A More Christlike Worldview*. Because this series is inviting us to consider where and how we might raise the bar to become more Christlike, I have suggested that throughout this series, we adopt a practice, or posture, of "getting comfortable with being uncomfortable."

But why? Why might we need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable? To offer just one reason, because I think our tendency is to miss and even gloss over, those things about Christ Jesus that make us uncomfortable, even at the risk that we'll be unrecognizable by Him when it counts. As noted last Sunday, Jesus' words in Mt. 7:21-23, indicate this is a real possibility: "Not everyone who says to be 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Heavenly Father. On that day many will say to me 'Lord, Lord,' did we not [do many impressive deeds of power in your name]? Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...'" Above all else, I want to be recognized by the one I call Lord. And I do not want this just for me personally. I want this for all of us!

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So, I want to begin with a visual analogy to illustrate how we can miss what is 'right in front of our noses' (so to speak). And if you have my mobile number, get ready to text me the number of passes you see the team in white make in this 1-minute video. (Podcast tip...) I'll give you a hint, it will be 10, 11, 13, or 15. [Video].

Since I've shown this to other groups, I know that 1 or 2 out of 150 people will actually have seen the moonwalking bear the first time, but I also know that some of you suspect the moonwalking bear was not really there the first time. So replay the sermon later and you will see that the bear was indeed there the first time.

This is what many of us do as we read the Bible, or when we look at the Good News of Jesus; we miss what's right there in black and white! So when a pastor (or anyone) suggests something that sounds unconventional, or maybe even contradicts what we've come to think of as essential to our faith or worldview, our reaction is to push back and say: "that's not what's really there."

All a preacher can do is invite you to look again because, in all honesty, that's how we may avoid joining 'the many' who are on what Jesus describes in

Mt. 7:13 as 'the easy road that leads to destruction.' (And again, 'the many' will include those who immodestly think they've got a firm grip on sound Christian doctrine.)

Our reading today is 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, read by: Addi Nesbitt, Jack Schiaffino, Sean Wilbur, and Cadence Palmer.

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Some, if not all of you, may be familiar with the term "Christian Worldview." The concept refers to a framework of ideas and beliefs through which a Christian individual, or group, sees the world and interacts with it. The tagline on one website, *The Christian Worldview*, is "Think Biblically. Live Accordingly." From the way the phrase is typically used, it implies two things: that there is one hegemonic, or singular, Christian (or Biblical) worldview and that any deviation is therefore non- or even anti-Christian.

Those who say they adhere to a Christian Worldview typically believe there is *The* Christian perspective on social or cultural 'hot button' issues. For obvious reasons, Jesus himself never directly addressed many of the modern issues that polarize our country, so people will often appeal to the OT, rather than to Jesus' words in the Gospels, in support of their "Christian Worldview."

Another thing I notice is how a "Christian Worldview" conveniently aligns with certain political agendas. For example, a very prominent Baptist pastor recently claimed, "If you have any association with any version of historic Christianity or any link at all, then you're going to be more Republican than Democrat on the political spectrum." In contrast, another non-denominational preacher recently wrote the opposite, that any pastor with a Christian worldview: "must work to emancipate Jesus from the Republican Party." (Uncomfortable yet?)

Both claim theirs to be the proper Christian Worldview, and you've probably decided which is correct based on your current political leaning. Indeed, long term studies reveal that the majority of people in the US tend to have their political views shape and define their faith perspective, rather than the other way around: *having their faith inform their political viewpoint*. That means a Christian worldview is often a partisan political worldview wrapped up in a few verses of Scripture.

So, if we are politically conservative, we bring that frame into our reading of Scripture. And as we listen to Jesus, we pay attention to what confirms our ~~biases~~ (I mean, our point of view). Similarly, if we are

politically liberal, we bring that frame into our reading of Scripture. And as we listen to Jesus we notice things that confirm our biases (again, I meant, our point of view). In the end, this leads each side to lob proof texts and to hurl invective at ‘the other side’... which simply mimics the corrosive and hostile tone of discourse we can find on our preferred cable news station. (And so both sides simply ignore passages like Ephesians 4:31: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.”)

As we argue back and forth about which is the correct Christian Worldview, I wonder if we might actually be missing the moonwalking bear? We see what we’ve being told to look at, what we are comfortable seeing. But what if we miss or gloss over something else that’s right in front of our noses? This is why I think it’s a big mistake for people to say for example, that Jesus would be a progressive, or to argue that Jesus would be conservative. Jesus simply won’t be a prop or tool for any of our craven partisan agendas. (As one writer notes, if Jesus dislikes all the same people you do, you can be sure you have created Jesus in your own image! And does it not seem that a lot of people who claim Jesus as Lord despise the very people Jesus tells us to love based on our “Christian Worldview.”) The fact is that Jesus sometimes says things that sound progressive and sometimes says things that sound conservative.

So let me propose that for people of our faith tradition, Jesus himself is the frame that should influence our understanding of scripture, the world, politics, everything, and everyone! What we need is to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus! We need a *Christlike* Worldview; to see as Jesus sees.

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As Paul says in v. 16 of our reading, this means we no longer regard anyone (and I’d say, Paul means anything) from a human point of view. Because we are an entirely new creation in Christ, we see everyone and everything through freshly minted Christ-given eyes. Paul says this same thing in a different way in Philippians 2:5: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” It is only then that we can truly engage in the ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors of Christ.

I may’ve shared this before, but I’m reminded of a story from Shane Claiborne’s book, *The Irresistible Revolution*. Claiborne writes, “I have an old hippie friend who loves Jesus, and he’s always trying to get under my skin and stir up debate. One day, he said to me, ‘You know, Jesus never talked to a prostitute.’ I immediately went on the offensive: ‘Oh, sure he did,’

and I whipped out my sword of the Spirit and I got ready to spar. [I should say to those of you who weren’t raised Baptist, the sword of the Spirit is the Bible.] [My friend] just calmly looked me in the eye and said, ‘Listen, Jesus never talked to a prostitute because he did not see a prostitute. He saw a child of God he was madly in love with.’” (p. 256)

I think this captures Paul’s meaning, that ‘everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.’ In Greek, those words are actually in the perfect tense: “the old things became and continue to be new.” NT scholar Mark Hopper writes, “This transformation that alters our standards of judgment is nothing other than a new creation, a new order of existence. This relegates to the past the old things like class and prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions. The new creation overthrows our human judgements filled [as they are] with prejudice and bias.”

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As I worked on this message, I began to see that this was way too big a topic to tackle in one sermon, but let me offer a couple final thoughts. A “Christian Worldview” tends to assert that there is one correct stance on certain issues and so it divides people based upon which side they stand. There is nothing new in doing that! But in John 8, when the woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus, her accusers want him to take a Scriptural stand on the issue of her infidelity so that they can do what Scripture directs them to; hurl stones at her. But Jesus doesn’t argue what scripture says. He just stands with her. He stands by her side. That is what Jesus does for all of us in our sin and brokenness. He stands with us. And yet Christians want to use scripture in ways that Jesus does not?

As I survey the Gospels, Jesus is always saying and doing the most unusual and confounding things as he invites us to see God’s image in the face of everyone we encounter; Samaritans and sex workers, tax-collectors and lepers, the disabled and demon-possessed, prodigal sons and prodigal disciples. Indeed Jesus tells us -- he commands us -- to look into the eyes of those we do not even like for there we see the face of the One we love...

In 2014 I wrote and posted the following on Facebook: “To love those we previously hated, to pity those we previously scapegoated, to befriend those we previously feared... to quit listening to the voices that encourage hate, scapegoating, and fear of ‘the other.’ Salvation may be more than this, but it is certainly not less.”

Until we can do this, we have yet to attain a worldview that qualifies as Christlike. Amen.