**Living As a New Creation – St. Barnabas Sermon, June 24, 2018**

***2 Corinthians 5:14-21***

Paul begins the passage we’re dealing with today by letting us know that those of us for whom Christ died - should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them, and rose again. Unfortunately, we live in a society & culture today that doesn’t seem often to support, or hold up as a priority – living for someone other than oneself … especially the Lord. Fortunately, for many of us, and others in communities of faith like St. Barnabas, we have regular fellowship with those who **do** believe in the value Paul reminds us of here – and the fact that *living for Christ* should be the *number one priority* in our lives.

Some years ago, Jerry Falwell sent out lapel pins that read “Jesus First.” These were intended to remind us, and others, *who* the priority in our life was. Not that wearing a lapel pin would transform one’s character – but certainly a sign of witness – to ourselves, and to anyone who saw it.

Now, the danger in wearing such a sign of our faith, just like a cross, or the sign of a fish – is in having others observe us - when we don’t reflect and live out the witness that these words or symbols stand for.

I remember a brother-in-law of ours sharing his story about driving down the interstate one day, and having someone cut him off in traffic. Our brother-in-law was a believer (he’s gone on to be with the Lord now), and he had a “Jesus Loves You” bumper sticker on his work van. Well, he was ticked when this happened, and he made some “not so friendly” gestures to the guy who’d cut him off. The other guy rolled down his window, smiled, and said, “Remember, Jesus loves you!”

In verse 17, Paul goes on to tell us that “if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” You and I, and everyone who has embraced Jesus as Savior and Lord – we are **all** new creations – each and every one of us! Our orientation is no longer just carnal and earthly, but spiritual and eternal! At least, we should be in the process of moving in that direction. Rome wasn’t built in a day – but neither would it have *ever* been built - if the first row of bricks (or stones) hadn’t been laid!

The Enemy doesn’t want us to come to Christ in the first place. But once that happens, his next effort is to do everything he can to distract us, to discourage us, and to divert us from allowing the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to begin that process of making us the “new creations” we have the potential to become. **Sin** is still a reality you and I must deal with, as long as we’re in this world. And the Enemy of our souls has his agents on *every corner* to lead us in that direction, and *away* from God!

So, how do I go about living into that “new creation” I have the potential to be in Christ Jesus?

Sharing my faith: The *key* to sharing our faith with others is seeing people through the eyes of Jesus. Having a burden for those who don’t know him – a burden for the lost. Being willing to tell my story about the difference Jesus has made in my life. “Always being ready and willing to give a reason for the hope that is within me.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Seeing others through the eyes of Jesus isn’t always that easy, though, is it? The disciples themselves struggled with this. They saw mobs of nameless people – while Jesus saw “fields, white for harvest.” They saw a hungry multitude, whom they wanted to send away to fend for themselves – Jesus cared for them enough to feed them before they went on their way.

Seeing people through the eyes of Jesus involves several things: First, we need to consider Jesus’ love – love that was willing to lay down his life for each and every single person on this earth – while, all the time, realizing that many would *reject* his love. Jesus’ heart breaks over each soul who is lost – and ours should too.

We need to consider the human condition – “All of us have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.” Not *one* person alive is without a need for God’s eternal love, through His Son Jesus! And *no one* is beyond the reach of His love!

It’s easy to love some folks. We all have such people in our lives. Others are harder to love. We’ve all encountered such folks as these in our lives, as well. But guess what? Jesus didn’t just die for those we’re the most comfortable being around!

Paul was definitely a person who had those in his past who he considered “unlovable.” Especially Christians! As Saul of Tarsus, he pursued and persecuted all such persons as were considered “enemies of the Jewish faith.” But once he became a “new creation” in Christ – all that changed! And was replaced with a burden that **everyone** should know the love of God in Christ Jesus! From the least, to the greatest!

We must consider God’s plan. And His divine plan is that everyone, in every time and every place, should be reconciled to Him – to have his or her relationship restored – the *eternal* relationship God intended for everyone - in the first place.

And that “reconciliation” can *only* take place as one acknowledges Jesus as the Christ – the Son of the Living God – the One who died and rose again … for the *sole purpose* of that reconciliation!

So, what is our assignment here? Well, Paul says that you and I are “ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20) He has committed to us the message of “reconciliation.” And as “ambassadors,” you and I are called to represent Christ to the world in the most positive and powerful way possible! Not only what we say, but the way we live, the way we treat others – family, friends, neighbors, and strangers - should convey such a *powerful* message – that others can’t help but be drawn towards the Kingdom!

Our job is not to promote our own ideas or agendas, but to deliver the message of reconciliation to God, through Jesus Christ. Our job is not to try to make others “cookie cutter” copies of *ourselves!* We’re to leave the molding and shaping of others up to the Lord and His plans for their lives.

There are studies that reveal that a large percentage of folks view Christians as the most *judgmental* group in America. It may be that the problem is that we, at times, tend to put the “cart before the horse.” Instead of drawing people to Jesus through love and compassion, and then letting *Him* effect the *transformation* in their lives – we tend to attempt to impose Christian behaviors on people. I’m reminded here of the words of Christian comedian, Mike Warnke, who likened this to expecting someone to “clean up,” **before** they take a bath!

All we end up doing when we focus on forcing changes in behavior, as opposed to letting *Jesus* be in charge of changing lives, is to build anger and resentment – and I’m sure it comes as no surprise – that hearts are *rarely changed* when that happens.

Jesus didn’t take us out of this world the very moment we became his children – because he has an important assignment for us – one that can only be carried out as we remain here. And it requires us – it calls us – to be right in the middle of a dark and messy world, filled with temptation, sin, trial and challenge!

But the “good news” is that as we live into the fullness of being those “new creations” God has ordained that we should be, as we begin to see the world and those in it – through the eyes of Christ, and as we share who He is – with love and compassion – and let **Him** be in charge of changing lives – we can *truly* live as his “ambassadors” – and *effectively* partner with Him in furthering His Kingdom! **Amen!**