

“More Than A Human Point Of View”

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Rev. Dr. Dale Skinner

Back in my late teens and through my twenties, I spent many years working in professional and major junior hockey. During that time, I got a perspective on the game of hockey that was multi-faceted, up close and personal. I met many wonderful and interesting people, including many pro-hockey scouts. One of the things I noticed early on about these scouts is that when it came to watching the game, they didn't like to sit close to the ice. When my curiosity got the better of me, I asked one why this was the case. The answer was quite simple, when it came to watching the game, the scouts preferred to be higher up, sometimes at the top of the stands if there was no room in the press box because of the perspective it gave them. They weren't interested so much in the up close, sights and sounds of the game. By removing themselves from some of those distractions, they were allowed to see the game from a different point of view. They could watch the play develop out of a team's own end, have a better sense of how teams would set up, what certain players tendencies were. It wasn't a fan's point of view, or a player's point of view, or how I saw the game from my point of view. They knew the game from a different point of view.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul is also interested in our point of view. Not when it comes to hockey, but as it relates to life itself. As far as Paul is concerned, when it comes to being a Christian, we are meant to have a different view altogether. In fact, as Paul says in verse 16, near the beginning of the text that Jamie read for us today, “we regard no one from a human point of view.” More specifically Paul is referring to the point of view that the members of the Church in Corinth were to have as a result of what God had done for them in Christ. Their view no longer from the standpoint of this world, it was to be from perspective of the Spirit of God in Christ.

What does this mean exactly? To have the point of view of the eternal Christ as opposed to a human point of view?

Well, I believe it helps if we take a more literal translation of this text out of the original Greek. You see, a more literal translation of this text would be to say something along the lines like we “no longer have a point of view “according to the flesh.” In other words, it has to do with getting beyond what we can see. Beyond the physical to instead discern, to perceive, to have a point of view that goes beyond what we can see. It’s connected to something Paul says back in Chapter 4 of this letter when he says, “for what we see is temporary...but what we cannot see is eternal.”

In other words, Paul wants the ones who are reading this letter to see Christ and to see each other from the point of view of the eternal spirit...instead of from a point of view that is immediate and temporary.

You know, it makes a great deal of difference in life when one can see things from the point of view of the eternal...from the point of view of God. Not that we can see all that God sees...but we can, by the Spirit, catch at least a glimpse. Like the way Paul put it in his first letter to the Corinthians when he said “for now we see in a mirror dimly.”

To know the eternal can actually move you beyond your immediate needs and concerns to appreciate and consider things you may never have given much thought to before. Seeing things from the point of view of the eternal can and should change your life. I have come to believe that having a perspective of the eternal is not something that most of us are very mindful of as we go about living our day to day lives. In fact, I would suggest that for most of us our point of view is rather limited. We can focus on holding on to what we have. After all, most of us tend only to consider things that are of immediate importance and concern to ourselves. Our point of view tends to be one of self-preservation. I mean think about it, most of us can only see things from, “my point of view” or as it relates to me.

That’s just one of the limitations that we have as human beings. For those of us who can see, we see with our own eyes, we process with our own brains, we tend to see things “our way.” We cannot always see and sometimes have difficulty seeing what others see. It’s like the story of these two young guys who were standing at the bus stop one morning waiting to go to work. As they were standing there, they watched a truck drive past loaded up with rolls of sod. The one said to the other, “When I win the lottery, that’s what I’m going to do?” “What’s that?”

Own a landscaping company?” said his friend. To which the first replied, “No. I’m going to send my lawn out to be cut!”

Yes...we don’t always see what others see. In fact, we tend only to see only what we want to see. I think that is one of the reasons why Donald Trump has become so popular amongst voters in the United States. In him many people hear what they want to hear and see what they want to see. Trump is actually a very good example of what it means to work out of that more limited or a “human point of view.” You see, Trump, he just says everything and anything that appeals to a multitude of human points of view. He even says things that seem to contradict other things that he has said, yet this just does not seem to matter to people. Why? Because once somebody hears what they want to hear, as long as they hear something they agree with, that’s enough. That’s all that matters.

I have a friend who likes to say “when you throw enough spaghetti against the wall, sooner or later some of it is going to stick.” Well, so it is for Mr. Trump and his supporters he has said enough to appeal to the human point of view of a number of people. And that is the only point of view that matters to them. But working within this limited, often personal view, can oversimplify what are sometimes very complex realities. It can lead to hostility and instability because it is so short sighted...rooted in what are mostly personal challenges and differences.

This was actually one of the challenges that Paul was dealing with as he sought to be in relationship with the members of the church in Corinth and as he sought for them to live in relationship with each other. There were some in the community who were operating with their own human point of view while remaining hostile to others. They had yet to appreciate the “point of view” that God had given them in Christ.

You see within the Corinthian church, there were ones who were being referred to as super-apostles. It may sound like a strange term I know. Maybe it would be better if we referred to them as individuals who thought of themselves as being rather exceptional...and there were others in the community who thought they were pretty exceptional too. There was a problem with this exceptional status though. This status caused these individuals to see others according to their point of view to the extent that the views of the super-apostles became the only views that mattered. They became the judges within the community for moral standards, of deciding

right and wrong and rendering judgments upon others. These exceptional individuals, although they may have been bright, outspoken and even right sometimes...they were still living from a human point of view...from their limited view...according to how they perceived the world around them. It was disrupting the peace within the community.

This is why Paul is seeking to bring in another point of view. Not his own view that was according to the flesh...Paul knew well that he possessed such a view. Instead, Paul wants the Corinthians to have a more transcendent and spiritual view of things. Not to see only what they would want to see, but allow what God had done in Christ to initiate within and around them a different perspective. One that is eternal. Paul knows that there is a tension at work in this. That the point of view of the eternal is always one that is at odds with our own way of seeing the world. Yet this view that God gives us in Christ frees us from our own limited vision to instead share a vision. This is the ministry of reconciliation that Paul speaks of when he says, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

It is God's work in Christ, reconciling God's self to the world and in that reconciling work, we are also reconciled to one another. Instead of being separated from one another by our own human points of view, we have an extended view...an external view...an overview...a different view. We are given a view that we might become, as Paul puts it, the righteousness of God. That we might be seen and see ourselves in the eyes of a God who holds us and cares for us beyond the way we care with a human point of view. Our lives are reconciled to this view. It is a spiritual point of view...the view of the eternal...the whole. It's the view we can miss when we're so close to the action of day to day life. You know, instead of winning the seats at the game that move fans from the nosebleeds into the seats down closer where the action is...it's as if we've been given tickets that move us up a few levels in order to see a life and a world that can play out differently before our eyes.

I appreciated encountering this point of view the other night when some of us attended the special Shabbat service at the Solel synagogue. As Rabbi Audrey Pollack introduced the Shabbat service to us, she explained that the Shabbat service is one that focuses on cosmic time rather than physical place. In other words, the Shabbat does not focus on things that are physical, which are the things that make up most of our lives...the temporal and the temporary.

This is the focus of most of our lives as we live day to day from a human point of view as we encounter the physical world to meet our material and physical demands.

Taking the time for Shabbat, for Sabbath, is to reconnect with God by being conscious of time, by being aware of the eternal in the midst of the temporal and the physical. Eternity and eternal life is not just some future moment...it is what we are in the midst of. The Sabbath is a time of reconciliation with God. It is a time for rest, a time to move oneself away from the constant demands that our immediate point of view can often place on us and allow in that time of rest, of peace. A time to contemplate how God seeks to care not just for us, but for all peoples. Thus when everyone gathered for the Sabbath service, the greeting was "Shabbat Shalom." Which is Hebrew for have the peace the Sabbath brings.

You see, to move from the temporal to the eternal, is to move from the particular to the universal. We move from a particular time and place, to the large and limitless God of the universe. From something that is me and only me...to something that is far, far, greater than me. The Sabbath is a gift from God, given to God's people in order to reconnect, recreate and relate in a whole new way.

And as Christians we see Christ as the same kind of gift from God that seeks to do this very same thing. The letter to the Hebrews (4:9) alludes to this when it says that anyone who enters God's rest will find rest...or peace. That Christ becomes the Sabbath for us...the one through whom we encounter recreation and reconciliation and the rest that is the peace of God. The one who elevates us out of our human point of view to begin a new creation. This is the Christ that Paul is describing in his letter to the Corinthians. Some theologians refer to this as the Cosmic Christ. The Christ whose work is not once and for all, but is an eternal work of reconciliation, a constant calling of the spirit to individuals in their own lives, in particular times and places to move them into a relationship with the eternal and the divine. Eternity is God's concern for us. It is what God is working at by the Spirit to give us that we might know it as a gift in our lives every day.

You see when we live from a human point of view...we will live as if our days are numbered, our individual needs are primary and it's all up to us. It's difficult to find our peace of mind and a restful soul. When we live with a view of the eternal...our view of the game changes.

We see that no single human point of view can satisfy the same human need that exists in all for forgiveness...for grace...for love...for reconciliation...for eternity. Eternity is the gift of the eternal one who sees our same need for this gift and holds this gift of wholeness for each of us.

I love the way Glenn Thompson, a missionary in the Philippines once put it as he pondered life from the many points of view he encountered during his ministry. He wrote:

“To realize the value of one year, ask a student who has failed his exam.

To realize the value of one month, ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of one week, ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of one day, ask a daily wage laborer who has six kids to feed.

To realize the value of eternity, seek Christ and all His riches.”

Thompson, through his life and work, understands that so often our value of life is limited by our temporal view, our more immediate needs and the concerns of day to day life. It's not that these needs don't matter or bear any weight or significance on our lives and this world in which we live...it's just that in the midst of it all, we need more than that human point of view to save us from our present moment.

We need the point of view of one that is for all and holds the same beautiful hope for all - the hope for peace of mind and rest for our souls -which is the hope of eternity.

Thanks be to God.