

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Clay Jars: Old News”**

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**2 Corinthians 5:11-17**

November 3, 2024

We continue in Paul’s words reflecting on the ministry and mission of God’s people in the church, called by Christ, empowered by the Spirit, as we go through the letter of 2 Corinthians in this series “Clay Jars.” If you’ve been with us, you’ll remember that Paul has shared a lot about the manner in which those who follow Christ are called to go out and bear this message of good news, this new covenant—that is, like common clay jars bearing invaluable treasure.

Today, Paul turns to the impact that has upon how a follower of Christ sees the world. Before we go to the passage, I wanted to note a new memory verse for the month that we would encourage everyone to adopt as a simple spiritual discipline. On the back cover, there’s one verse that we invite everyone to commit to memory in November, and I’d ask you to join me now just in saying it together:

Friends, this is the lens through which we are called to see the world, and Paul tells us why. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people, but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.*

*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 no longer know him in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!*

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Renewing God, we praise you for this word, this promise of a new creation within us and around us. We pray that by your Word you would guide our hearts to embrace your will for each of us and to step forward in your love, embracing and extending that promise and hope to others. Renew

us by your Word, and for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours.  
Amen.

In the Fall of 1994, if memory serves, I was in fourth grade, and two big things happened. First, my teeth were starting to go this way and that, so I got braces. Second, my teachers started noticing I was squinting at the chalkboard, and a vision test confirmed that yes, I needed glasses.

These both happened within something like a couple of months of each other, so yeah that was a big change and a bit of whiplash. Let me tell you, I was the coolest kid in school, braces and glasses added on within sixty days.

I remember, though, the first time I walked outside after getting my first pair of eyeglasses. I shared with my mom, “It’s like all the leaves on the trees have an outline around them.” I couldn’t see that before, because it was all blurry. But now, everything looked different. Everything was clearer and newer. The colors were brighter and more distinct. Light and shadow were sharper. Faces more defined. Over and over again, after seeing even the things that I had seen everyday, I’d think, “I didn’t know it looked like that.” Everything looked different.

What Paul is describing here in 2 Corinthians is something like a new pair of eyeglasses. They make everything look different, even things you had seen everyday, make you say, “I didn’t know it looked like that.”

Stemming from last week, as Paul described the powerful, daily work of renewal God is doing through the Spirit within our very nature, the letter turns from that promise of what God is doing within you to, well, what difference that makes in how you, as one renewed in Christ, then in turn goes out and sees the world.

Starting in v. 14, “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And 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. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.”

In other words, because of the love of Christ, because of the impact his grace, his sacrificial, self-giving love has upon you, upon me, upon each of us as individuals, it’s as if we realize, “Hey, something’s different about me. Something’s new, something’s brighter. I am not who I once was, in the best of ways.” And it’s powerful. We witness the transformative power of the love of Christ.

But it doesn’t stop there. Because we start to look around, and we don’t see things “from a human point of view,” as Paul puts it. Literally that phrase is “according to the flesh,” but it’s referring to the prior, outer, temporary, mortal nature that Paul had touched on last week. You don’t see things that way anymore.

Instead, it's as if you've got new eyeglasses on for the first time, and everything has an outline around it; colors are sharper; and even things that you had seen every day, make you say, "I didn't know it looked like that."

Then Paul hits it home, saying, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

And everything looks different as a result. Because what's happening is you're realizing that the very change that you have witnessed within yourself, Paul's saying, is what could be happening for someone else too. You may not know exactly when, how, or who, but you recognize the potential.

It'd be as if every morning, if you do a morning coffee run, and it's usually the same barista each day. You see them at the counter or at the drive thru. You recognize each other and maybe there's some kind of greeting that acknowledges, hey, I see you here every day, but otherwise it's a pretty straightforward exchange. But now, because you realize what God is doing within you, it makes you think, "Wait a minute, if God's doing this in me, could he be doing this in them?" And now, all of a sudden, that barista isn't just someone you see each day and have a pleasant, if neutral, exchange of greetings. You recognize them as someone for whom Christ died. You see them as someone in whom God could be working a new creation.

Changes how you see things. And not just baristas and neutral, pleasant exchanges. It starts to challenge how you view people that you don't consider so neutrally.

It's no secret that high on many folks' radar this week is the upcoming election on Tuesday. And despite whatever positive points one could make about representative government and the engaged act of voting, and there are good points one can make about it, for sure, I think it is fair to say that in this kind of season, especially when there's a presidential election rolled into it every four years, it doesn't tend to bring out the best sides of people.

As a result, we can be prone to wear different kinds of lenses, those that warp our view of another human being not as someone with an opposing political view or vision for policies and programs, but as a villain surely bent on destroying all that you love and cherish about your life and community.

There's a lot surely that can be said about what faithful engagement in the public sphere looks like for a follower of Christ, more than we have time for today. But what about this season, this election season, would look different for you if you saw that candidate, that voter, that person with opposing views first and foremost as someone for whom Christ died and as someone in whom God may be working a new creation?

Changes a lot, I should think.

Changes the hope we have for ourselves and for others. Changes how we might hear the names of those who have passed into glory, as those for whom that hope has been fulfilled. Changes how we consider the purpose of even following Jesus and bearing this treasure in clay jars, this work and ministry of being a church. Changes it from, Oh how are we going to get increasingly more people around and coming to this program or that program, into, “Wow, how might we play a small part in the renewing work of a new creation that God is doing within someone, within a community, within a city.”

Changes how we consider how we take part in that work, in that ministry. Changes from, “Oh, yeah, the church, it’s a good cause, so I’ll support it a little bit,” into “If I truly believe what I say I believe, this is the most important thing happening, more than an election, more than a game, more than whatever it is I might have in mind, if I truly believe what I say I believe about Christ, about God, about myself, about the renewing work that God has done and is doing, and doing through the church, then this has a claim, a joyous claim upon every facet of my life.”

Years ago, I remember talking with my old pastor. I was discerning my own call into ministry and was asking him what it was like—we had a bunch of talks like this. But I remember one time, in sharing about the realities of it, he answered, “Jay, at times, yes, you’re going to see some of the worst sides of people.” And that makes sense, when you think about it. You get a group of people together who all say, “We are broken, wretched sinners” and then put them to work together, what could possibly go wrong? But then he told me, “But Jay, you’re going to see the very best sides of people too.”

And the invitation, not just to me, but to each and every one of us, is to see it all through the lenses, those kingdom, covenant, gospel lenses in which everything is something being made new, and everyone is someone in whom that newness has a home.

I hope you’ll see it too.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.