

Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21  
Title: Point of View  
Date: 06.17.18  
Roger Allen Nelson

John Mayer, a quirky guitar-slinger/songwriter, has a couplet buried in a song that's on repeat in my brain. The song is "Stop This Train." The couplet is at the end of this verse:

*So scared of getting older I'm only good at being young  
So I play the numbers game to find a way to say that life has just begun  
Had a talk with my old man, said, "Help me understand"  
He said, "Turn sixty-eight you'll renegotiate"*

Turn sixty-eight, you'll renegotiate.

That's the couplet. I change it to "Turn fifty-eight..."

Because things look different at fifty-eight than they did at twenty-eight or thirty-eight. Our perspective changes. What we value, what we worry about, what think about ourselves, our lives, our neighbors, our God... changes. Our point of view changes and we renegotiate.

I'm reminded of Mark Twain who said,

*When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.*

Happy Father's Day.

An earnest evangelical youth pastor called. Hoping to feel closer to Jesus he had recently traveled to Israel. But while he was there he visited the West Bank, listened to Palestinians, saw the settlements, went through the check points, and looked behind the wall. He saw the boot of the Israeli state pressed on the throat of the Palestinians. He didn't know what to do. The church he serves wanted to hear about walking where Jesus walked; he wanted to talk about what he now knew to be true. When we slip on the sandals of another we see things differently. Our point of view changes and we renegotiate.

Dear friends, through aging, through reading, through travel, through education, through cross cultural friendships, through listening, and through "mission trips" our point of view changes.

It takes a certain openness and willingness. It takes effort. But to live fully, or wholly, is to see things from different points of view. Pity the one who sees only from his perspective.

Paul writes that his point of view has changed.

Paul writes that our point of view might change.

Consider....

Part of Paul's story is a dramatic conversion. He was bowled over and blinded on the road to Damascus. Metaphorically speaking when his vision was restored he saw things from a new point of view. He saw Jesus, who we had been persecuting, in a new light. He saw the relationship between God and humanity in a new light. Listen again to this little turn of phrase in our text:

*So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer.*

In Greek it reads that we regarded Jesus and one another *kata sarx*, which means "according to the flesh," or from a "fleshy" point of view. In other words, Paul once regarded Jesus as no more and no less than any other flesh-and-blood human being wandering this planet. But then Paul encountered Jesus and he had to renegotiate everything.

*From now on we regard no one according to the flesh...*

Paul suggests a sort of parallel between seeing Jesus differently and seeing everyone else differently. He's not suggesting that we are divine (like Jesus) but there is  
a new light,  
a new perspective,  
a new point of view.

Now. Some theologians will argue that *flesh* here means that which is diametrically opposed to God's Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh are hostile to God and live in a manner that displeases God. To live according to the flesh leads to death. As that is helpful, so be it....

But, what if we thought about it this way?

We are all common, cracked, jars of clay.  
We are all broken.  
We all have issues.  
We all have fatal flaws.  
We are all human....

And yet, we are reconciled to God through Christ. We are made right with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And, that's a done deal. (Thanks be to God.)  
And, God has poured out his Spirit. So that, not only do we bear the image of God, but we also carry in our bodies the Spirit of God. In these jars of clay, we bear great treasure....

I know that we're supposed to see other people in different categories. I know that we're supposed to see others as lost, or damned, or worldly, or the fleshy enemies of God. But, what if our beginning point is no longer from that point of view? What if we saw others as common, cracked, jars of clay, who already belong to God in Christ, who are already reconciled by what God has done in Christ?

They may not know it.  
They may not recognize it.  
They may deny it, fight it, ignore it, besmirch it, and be too cool for it.  
But that doesn't change the reality.

*So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer.*

New York Times columnist, David Brooks, wrote this week about moving beyond seeing one another in little more than demographic, political, economic, ethnic, or religious categories. In a world rent asunder by tribalism he writes:

*Despite what the achievement culture teaches, dignity does not depend on what you do, how successful you are or whether your school calls you gifted. Infinite worth is inherent in being human. Every human encounter is a meeting of equals. Doing community service isn't about saving the poor; it's a meeting of absolute equals as both seek to change and grow.*

That's not a bad beginning point.

It calls for us to see one another as unique and complex, with stories of depth and dignity. It calls for us to value the inherent worth of each person rather than discard and disregard based on superficial categories. That's not a bad beginning point....

But, Paul's beginning point is that in Christ there is a new creation  
where love trumps fear,  
where forgiveness supplants judgment,  
where reconciliation is the will and work of God,  
where death no longer has the last word.

And, this new creation doesn't hang in the balance. We may only catch a whiff, we may only see a spark, and we may only hear a whisper.... but ultimately this new creation will overwhelm and fill up every square inch. So, don't look at yourself or others from an old point of view. Look from the point of the new creation....

Too much?  
Too idealistic?  
Too airy-fairy and not rooted in the real world?  
Too much privileged pious claptrap?

I hope not....

We walk our dog four times a day. There's plenty of time to think and meet the neighbors. On my block there are black folks, white folks, those retired and those newly married, gay couples and straight couples, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and nones (as in none, zero, nada, no religious identity.) There are multiple generations under one roof and single women rattling around in big houses; there are wealthy professionals and people barely hanging on; there are houses full of

life and houses that are boarded up and empty and owned by the bank. You get the idea. My block is a slice of contemporary American life.

How then should I view my neighbors?

From what point of view should I see them? Are they the objects of mission? Are they a threat? Are they the damned? Am I connected to them, or responsible for them in any way? How should I view my neighbors?

I don't have easy answers. But, I believe that the beginning point is through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The beginning point is a new creation. And therefore, they are first and foremost the beloved of God.

On June 8, 1941 C.S. Lewis offered a sermon at the University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin at Oxford. Entitled "The Weight of Glory" it took as its starting point II Corinthians 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It was spoken while Great Britain was in the throes of World War II and being blitzed by Nazi bombers.

Toward the end of the sermon Lewis asks, given the weight of glory, how then should we view our neighbors. He says this:

*There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. That does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love.... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.*

Dear friends, we are reconciled to God in Christ. Even in these common, cracked, clay jars we carry great treasure. Therefore, let us not regard anyone from a fleshy point of view, but let our beginning point be the new creation. As we are ambassadors of reconciliation let us love and serve God, let us love and serve neighbor.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.  
Amen.