

2 Corinthians 5:21-26

New Creation

Luke 15: 11b-32

March 30, 2025

“We no longer regard anyone from a human, or worldly point of view. We once regarded Christ in that way. We do so no longer.” How does one explain life, what it means to be alive, to be a human being? What *is* the human point of view?

It may be explained scientifically, in terms of the biology of things, DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). Or the chemistry with the elements; the ancient four; fire, air, water, land; or the more involved periodic chart of modernity, with 118 elements including carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, gold, silver, uranium, plutonium, lithium, and all the rest.

Or it may be explained in terms of physics or math with formulas like  $E=mc^2$ , or the Pythagorean theorem,  $a^2+b^2=c^2$ ,  $2\pi r$ , or countless others, which describe the shapes and movements of things. Or perhaps an economic description with supply and demand and transactions involving dollars and pounds and euros and yen. Life as an exchange.

Philosophy offers reason and interprets life in terms of what makes sense. Or history, with its account of the rise and fall of civilizations, the coming and going of peoples and regimes, the fighting of wars, the history of technology; offering the opportunity to climb into the minds of the people of the past, to think as they

thought, and to learn something about ourselves; the tragedy of the human condition; pride, greed, fear.

All of these and more attempt to explain reality and the human experience of life from a worldly point of view, and partly succeed. But even taken together they leave us asking for more.

The theme of the day, on this 4th Sunday of Lent, is reconciliation, primarily with God, but also with people. In more doctrinal terms, it is the Atonement. In a dictionary definition sort of way, it simply refers to the bringing together of that which has been separated, a re-union of the estranged.

The language is from Paul, in what is a most remarkable chapter in the 2nd Letter to the Corinthians. As a matter of fact, when one includes the 4th chapter, this broader passage should probably be rated along with Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13 and Philippians 2, as among the greatest from the letters of Paul. It gives us a powerful interpretation of our lives and of life, as well as many memorable lines, such as;

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

And, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not

crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that in our body the life of Jesus may also be revealed.”

He is speaking of himself, of course, and his companions, but the words also characterize the lives of the faithful everywhere and throughout the generations. He goes on at the end of the 4th chapter;

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

“We live by faith and not by sight.”

I could go on, but the texts of the day beckon us. The epistle speaks of reconciliation;

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come . . . We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

The gospel reading offers us in parable form, and from Jesus another way of putting the same set of convictions. It is, of course, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, one of the texts on the short list of those that

should be read periodically in the life of the church. We all know the story.

There was a man with two sons, the older and the younger. The younger pleaded to be given his inheritance and then went out and squandered it on excess and foolishness. The older brother stayed around and dutifully performed his duties, but with a chip on his shoulder. There was a reckoning at hand. Time would bring the younger brother home as foolishness and excess sometimes does. The father forgave and accepted him.

The older brother became jealous and complained that he had played by the rules and was never given the same level of acceptance that the undeserving baby brother received. For the one, there was a party; for the other a reprimand, both given in love.

The story is so beautiful that it would be hard to imagine that the listeners of Jesus would not have shed tears at the telling of it, at both the tragedy of the brother’s lives and the poignant grace of the father’s love. We are struck by the way the father runs out to greet the younger son even before he has heard the confession speech; he was dead, and now he is alive again; and the way he reprimands the elder, “all of it was always yours.”

It is difficult to hear this story only as a story, but as an allegory of the relationship between the divine and the human, between God and people, between ourselves and Jesus. God is the loving father. The inheritance is

life itself. The brothers, they represent different ways of sacrificing the gift.

It is one of unselfish love and endless concern, with the willingness to allow the freedom for the beloved to go away and return, to stand outside and refuse to join the celebration.

In the end the story is of the same reconciliation about which Paul has spoken in propositional ways; giving the definition to what Jesus illustrates. I am not sure which way of communicating it is more powerful.

Perhaps it depends on the tastes of the reader. Perhaps it depends on the context of their hearing. Sometimes we need to hear the truth spoken in the plainest terms possible and sometimes we need a story to bring home to us the truth of it; but either way we are reduced to a reverential silence in the face of divine splendor at its highest height.

With all the experiences the world is full of, all the hurt and rejection and pain and violence; the wonders, the beauty, and the pleasures, one might question if such reconciliations are possible.

It is remembered that for God, all things are possible. That is the gospel message we are called to proclaim. The explanation of scripture engages us beyond the science and math and economics and philosophy and history of things, beyond the tragedy of things.

Theology tells us in different terms about the way the world is put together, and about the meaning of our lives. It says the principle elements are grace and mercy, forgiveness and restoration, love and faith; and in the end an inexpressible joy. The message of the day is that God is God as depicted in the story, who loves us all.

Let us therefore be thankful, and appreciate the gift of which has blessed us; and in humility, as Paul has put it, consider others better than ourselves; seek to become more generous and kind and compassionate than we have been, and lead lives of the highest integrity and honor and, of course, love; and mercy; and lift up prayers never-ending for the peace and health of the world God has made, the New Creation God loves and redeems.

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