

“New Eyes”
Message by DD Adams
Providence United Methodist Church
Third Sunday After Pentecost
June 14, 2015

The epistle lesson for today is taken from the book of second Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 14 through 17. I'll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.

So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God. God bless our hearing today as we continue to learn from your word what your love looks like. Amen.

Without having received Christ into our hearts we couldn't love each other. It's God's love that empowers and moves us to love unconditionally—regardless of differences. The differences we have are not as pronounced in our minds, because we know one another personally. We have a history, but with others, it's easier to point fingers and judge. We may build walls around ourselves with those who are different. We can even judge using contrived levels of morality, and we can place ourselves higher than others. We may think of some as not the “typical” believer, and we can put labels on people. God teaches us the opposite—Christ

received everyone. So then our desire for inclusiveness should be overwhelming, because that's how God loves.

God, through the work of Christ, who died for all, shows no partiality or favoritism. He didn't die for a select few. When we see others and know them to be different from us, we should see them through new eyes. These new eyes have been given to us by the love of Christ These new eyes, they don't judge. They no longer see people who are different from them with a human standard or point of view. These new eyes, they don't compare or measure people with one another. These new eyes see the heart. They see others as one who Christ died for.

God's love is unconditional—it's not based on feelings. God's love is an act of the will, and other people are the object of that love. It flows to others from the love that God has placed in our heart. It controls us and reigns in us. As we practice this kind of love, it prevents us from responding in the opposite way of love, and we become perfected in love.

“Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action” (Our Wesleyan Heritage, <http://www.umc.org>). But how do we work toward Christian perfection? Bottom line is that we must practice it and act out the love of God in our interaction with each other and in our community. Practicing the love of God will always be tied with loving our neighbor. And who is our neighbor? Everyone!

The Apostle Paul in verse 14 and 15 said that “one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died.” Christ's death was in our place, on our behalf, and it was voluntary. No one is left out. No one is excluded. No one is outside of Christ's circle of love. There is no partiality.

And Christ died so that that “those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.” When we stop living for ourselves, we’re being controlled by God’s love. We give ourselves for others, and we die to what we want just as Christ died to what he wanted.

We die to the idea of how we might want to respond to someone who has offended us. We give up on revenge and giving back some “words” that will hurt even though we feel they gave us hurtful words. We let go. We give up our pride and ego. We yield and give way to that which causes us and others emotional pain. We do that because we’ve been raised with Christ. We have new eyes with which we see people. We’re learning and striving to be perfected in love.

The love of Christ never stops acting on our behalf. It never gives up or gives in. It sees us for who we will become. It sees in its mind and prays in its heart for our potential to blossom and grow and move toward perfection. It can’t be swayed or discouraged by one’s *appearance* of unworthiness, because we’re all unworthy, but because Christ died for all we’ve become worthy.

This unconditional love of God, it doesn’t refuse to be with us for any reason and never rejects us. Christ died for us and says we’re valuable. This love never excludes us or is turned off by our non-responsiveness or indifference. God says we have value. God’s love, it never grows weary of someone’s unseen sin. It’s not intimidated by something that’s wrong in our character.

God’s love, it prays for us and continues to embrace and call and move us toward him—in hope—that we’ll respond and love others the same as Christ loves us. This kind of love reaches down in the midst of our most awful sin and embraces us, because God sees value in us. We are wonderfully and fearfully made by our Designer.

How did you feel when God's love penetrated your soul and heart and you knew that Christ died for you and you alone? You were so thoroughly convinced that no one and nothing would ever come between you and Christ. You were firmly committed and unwavering in your heart that this love would never cool off. Do we still love Christ with that same unmatched and unrivaled affection as we once did?

Life can have this way of shifting our unrivaled devotion to Christ as life's circumstances swallow us up. Yet, God's love for us remains the same. We're the ones who have drifted and feel God is far away, and that can cause us to feel unworthy and not valued by God. No one is ever outside the circle of the love of Christ. Everyone is valued by God. And as part of the family of God *we should* value and welcome all people, without labels or judgment of any kind.

We're all beneficiaries of Christ's death and resurrection. And no matter how we feel God sees us through eyes of love. That will never change. Our response to others having been given these new eyes are the same as God's response. We welcome all people into our family. We no longer regard anyone from a human point of view. God's love is shaping and controlling us to become perfected in love. Let's work with Christ as his hands fashion and shape us to love the way God loves.

Let's pray. God of all, bless and shape each heart here. Teach us to love the way you love. Remove from us the need to categorize and label as different or to see others as outside our circle of acceptance. Help us eliminate barriers so we can love all people. Take away our wont to judge. Amen.