

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Anticipating What Will Be

Epistle Lesson

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (NRSV)

¹⁶From 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 know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Bible/Sermon Focus

One time, before I performed a baptism, I got the all-too-familiar feeling of stage fright and anxiety. I was sitting next to a friend in worship who said to me, "Maybe that's not anxiety. Maybe it's excitement." I really liked their perspective. Reframing the feeling of uncertainty as a feeling of possibility can be an option for us in the midst of change, growth, and movement.

In this week's sermon we talked about some things that are coming around the bend for us at Manchester UMC. We are transitioning from one strategic plan to another, with our newer plan built from laity input. The process of creating and living into this plan is a Spirit-driven endeavor. We consider this process another way that Christ is making all things new.

Our scripture this week talks about how in understanding Christ not as human, not in the flesh, but as divine, we have a greater understanding of Him and of each other. If we can witness to the divinity of Christ, we can witness to the divinity of what God is doing in the world, and in each of us. We can see and experience God "making all things new." We can experience the world being reconciled to God and us being reconciled to each other.

We have to be a bit careful here. From Paul we often hear the idea that the "flesh" is evil and that the spirit/soul are good. This is a very common idea from his time period, rooted in Neoplatonism. In embracing the divine in Christ, and the divine around him, he is not losing care for the body or for the incarnational aspect of Jesus.

All Paul is trying to say is that when he lived a life without the divine, he only lived a bodily existence, and in that found himself hostile toward everyone, including God. But that when he began to see the divinity of Christ, he saw that divinity everywhere and began to experience relationships of hope, that removed hostility towards God AND neighbor. This transformation is so complete he describes it as a re-creation.

Right relationship with God in turn creates right relationship with people and creation, one that has space for embodiment and harmony and friendship. And Paul describes this experience as

an on-going one. We don't have one moment of witnessing to the divine and then that's it. No, we have an ongoing experience of watching and witnessing and being a part of God making all things new again, and again. Through our next strategic plan, we have the opportunity to witness and to participate in God's re-creation process at Manchester UMC.

Discussion Questions

1. Share what you learned about our upcoming Century 3 plan.
2. What are you most excited about in the Century 3 plan?
3. How do we remain focused on the possibility of the future without being overwhelmed by the uncertainty?
4. Where do you witness to the divine in our congregation?
5. Why do you think the Evangelism Team changed their name to Engagement Builders?

Prayer

God of the past, God of the future, God of the always right here, we thank you for a vision and a calling, led by your Spirit. Help us to hold each other close in the possibilities of what you can do through us a congregation. Fill us with the hope of your promise. Give us sight when we need, and keep us from stumbling. Bless our strategy teams and guide their work. In the name of your Son and by the power of your Spirit, we pray. Amen.

*What if we could live in the possibility of God's promise?
What would that look like?*