

**JEFF**

Because Jesus died for us, Paul says, in v. 16...

**“from now on we regard no one from a human point of view.”**

That phrase reminds me of a kid I knew  
in Jr. High School who always seemed angry.  
He was a big kid who seemed to have  
a chip on his shoulder, so for the most part,  
I stayed away from him.

But one day before school, I came around the corner  
and accidentally ran right into him, knocking his books out of his hand.  
He yelled something obscene and shoved me into a locker,  
and I shoved him back.

Thankfully, a teacher spotted us and broke it up, but I never spoke to him again...

Until he friended me on facebook a few years ago.  
I wasn't sure what to do, at first.  
Because why would I accept a friend  
request from some hot-head like him?

But after a day or two, I did.  
The reason I accepted his friend request  
is because people can change.  
**And everyone has a back-story.**

You, me, the person who cut you off in traffic and  
then made that hand gesture...  
People on every side of the nightly news headlines.  
**We all have a back-story.**

And in light of Jesus death for us on the cross,  
the Apostle Paul says,

“From now on, we regard no one from a worldly (or human) point of view.”

### PATTI

At first, that doesn't seem to make sense, does it?  
Because we ARE humans living in a broken world.  
That means among other things, that  
**our vision is myopic at best, and  
always tied to a particular perspective.**

We regard people from  
**OUR human point of view,**  
and maybe that of our friends.

This truth impacts the culture of our country,  
where we are losing the ability to communicate  
effectively apart from violence.

This doesn't excuse, but may partly explain  
the images we've seen on TV these past weeks.

But scripture offers us a way back.  
The Bible asks us to ZOOM out and see a bigger perspective.

It asks us to see what God sees and know what God knows --  
That all of us are broken by sin and  
each of us have a story that explains to some degree  
why we think and act the way we do.

Our back-stories create the lens through which  
we view other people and  
interpret information and form opinions.

“From now on, we regard no one from a human or worldly point of view,” Paul says.  
Martin Luther takes it further, with his

explanation of the 8th commandment.

Luther says not only should we  
NOT bear false witness against our neighbor,  
but we are to **put the best possible construction**  
on anything they do!

### **JEFF**

And the problem of course, is that you can't do that.  
Neither can I.

Apart from Christ it is IMPOSSIBLE.  
In our world, bearing false witness against others has  
become one way that we elevate and justify ourselves.

It's so easy to believe that we are good or right  
because "at least we're not like THEM" (whoever THEY are).

As Christians, we'll find it impossible to address the real  
hurts, prejudices, privileges and injustices around us,  
as long as we are defining ourselves over and against  
other people created in God's image.

### **PATTI**

For that we need Jesus.

***<sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
The old has gone, the new is here!***

Christianity is that NOT A RELIGION.  
IT'S NOT A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM that relies on our effort,  
**but a relationship with Jesus.**  
And Jesus changes everything!

Consider his first disciples!  
 Jesus' inner circle consisted of  
 insurrectionists, and tax collectors,  
 fishermen and prostitutes and Pharisees...

people who in any other circumstances would  
 never sit at the same table and break bread!

And what Jesus did then—  
 connecting the seemingly unconnectable:  
 he has the power to do now.

How? (I think you know).  
 THROUGH YOU! THROUGH US!  
 Because of Jesus, I am a child of God.

Because of Jesus, you are a child of God.  
 That makes us siblings.

### JEFF

Which means among other things,  
 something that I tell my children on a regular basis...  
*"You don't have to like me, but you do have to love me."*

When you're in Christ you don't love people because they're lovable.  
 You love people because it is Christ's nature to love.

He has restored in you and me the image of God  
 that was tarnished by the fall into sin.  
 So we love, because He first loved us.

### PATTI

In Christ, no matter where we grew up or what our back-story  
 may be, we are family, and our Father is working in each of us,  
 calling us to join him on his mission in our  
 neighborhoods and

communities, and in our  
nation.

To love, yes. To serve, certainly.

But more specifically,

**We have been given the ministry of reconciliation.**

Because of what God in Jesus did for us on the cross --  
**because our IDENTITY and VALUE does NOT depend**  
on what we earn,

whether in

**money** or

**goodness** or

**respect**—

we can risk being fools for Christ, and risk reaching out.

We can pray to see our neighbors as God sees them,

and for the courage to demonstrate His love in practical ways.

Our next-door neighbors are hands-down the best neighbors

we've ever had. And they happen to be African American.

And also disciples of Jesus.

Over this past weekend the smell of smoked meat came

wafting through an open window, and I realized

that Bill was barbecuing.

That evening there was a knock on our door,

and there were our neighbors,

holding an offering of brisket, pork, and mac-n-cheese.

Two hours later as we sat in our living room with them,

it became apparent that they needed to touch base with us.

In light of all that we were seeing on the evening news.

We spoke about things we have in common, like our adopted children.

Everyone has a back-story.  
 And when we dare to listen,  
 we can begin to see that our stories  
 really are inextricably intertwined.

So I want to challenge you to practice seeing  
 through the eyes of God this week.

1) When you see or read a news story, ask:  
 Where is God in this? What here would make Christ's heart sad?  
 Or, where here is Christ's spirit at work?

2) Find that same story, in a different news media source,  
 one that you normally wouldn't go to.  
 Listen to a different perspective on the very same event.

Ask the same questions.  
 And instead of perhaps being frustrated or even angry  
 about why that story was reported so differently,  
 I encourage you to get curious:

Why was the story reported in this way?  
 What is the backstory going on here?

3) Pray: For eyes to see the event as God does.  
 Pray, to let Christ help you find compassion, and courage.  
 What if we prayed the news this week in honest humility?  
 Not searching to confirm our own ideas/beliefs,  
 but to listen for Jesus.

**PRAYER:**

Father, your kingdom is already, but not yet.  
 We see signs of the new creation,  
 but it won't be complete until Jesus returns.

In the meantime, empower us to love through you,  
 to take the time to discover the backstories

of those who are not like us.

In the meantime of these days,  
empower us to live out our vocation as  
peacemakers and reconcilers.  
Use us by the power of your Spirit,  
to make things here (in Columbus and Grove City)  
more like they are in heaven.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.