

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

¹⁶ From 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!

Today's sermon is the third in a month long series, based upon the one verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17: **So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**

In the first sermon of the series, the change was described in BIG, dramatic terms, "In the year King Uzziah died ..." began the telling. And God was pictured as high and lifted up, filling the whole temple. And it was a powerful and awesome experience – one that no one present could ignore.

Last week's scripture showed us a different way that God intervenes in our lives: the quiet and gentle rain that comes almost unnoticed, but which grows, sustains, and changes us into "**a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new**" kind of person.

This week's scripture focuses on what is perhaps the most important, and maybe least recognized, way in which the inbreaking of God's Kingdom – the new birth in Jesus Christ – makes us into a new creation.

Let me introduce you to someone that many of you know – his name is Mike Nunley. He's Mona's son, and Belu's other half. (Belu is unable to be with us today, because she is tending to a cousin in India, who is suffering from cancer.) To many folks, he is known as DOCTOR Mike Nunley. Mike is an ophthalmologist here in Charleston.

My first year in seminary – a few years back – I noticed a bothersome little thing, in my second semester. I was seeing two of everything. Side by side. I called my optometrist at home, who diagnosed over the phone that it could be one of several things, including a few terminal conditions, or, perhaps, high blood pressure. After getting off the phone with him, I took my blood pressure; it was indeed high. I found out a day later that it had only been high on that day, after hearing all his possible diagnoses. My blood pressure normally is quite fine.

Not to belabor the point, I saw about nineteen specialists over the next five to six years – each one doing some new kind of test. I didn't know there were that many subspecialties to ophthalmology. In the end, the diagnosis was a nonspecific viral infection of the number 6 optic nerve. Result: double vision. Cure: don't ever let anyone talk you into brain surgery to fix it. End of story.

I now go to Dr. Nunley for my eyes. He has me in these funny looking glasses (see how on the outside of the otherwise normal lens, it looks like the bottom of a coke bottle.) They're called [prism lenses](#). They keep me from seeing two of everything.

So, when I come into the sanctuary before worship and it doesn't seem like there are very many people here, I can take off my glasses and the house is full – twice as many people. When I put them back on, to read the words of the Hymn of Praise, the congregation shrinks. (Luckily, by the end of the first hymn, there are about as many folks in the pews with my glasses on as there were before the hymn began, with my glasses off.)

It's a wonderful thing that Dr. Nunley does for me – this gift of sight. If you've never been denied the gift, you probably take it for granted. But, it is a wonderful gift.

Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth that if anyone is in Christ, that person is new – and one of the ways in which they are re-created by Jesus, is in that same way – IN THEIR SIGHT.

Two ways are pointed out in the scripture:

(1) We have a NEW SIGHT, with Jesus. It's called **FAITH SIGHT**.

This FAITH SIGHT gift from Jesus allows us to see things that ARE THERE, but not yet visible.

When we experience something in life that seems like bad news, and later on look back on it, and see where God's Hand was in it – I call it REARVIEW MIRROR VISION -- we say, "Ah! God was in this after all, even when I didn't see it at the time."

It's kind of like Barney Olmstead:

BARNEY OLMSTEAD was good at what he did in his business. In his profession, Barney was what they call a "CLOSER." Others with whom he worked were good at finding customers, or in setting up deals. Although Barney had about average skills in these areas, he really excelled in CLOSING THE DEAL.

No one ever seemed to notice how terribly average Barney was in all other aspects of his business. No one noticed because he was so EXCELLENT in CLOSING THE DEALS. He didn't have to be all that good in finding, or in setting up deals, because IN EVERY SINGLE BUSINESS TRANSACTION he entered into, he ALWAYS CLOSED.

In fact, Barney's colleagues in business were quite content (no, were "happy") to invite him into great deals they found and set up,

because they knew they could rely upon Barney to bring to completion what they started.

Barney was not only GOOD at closing deals, but he also MADE IT LOOK EASY.

What was his SECRET? Nothing spectacular – it's just that he SAW IT HAPPENING.

He EXPECTED IT. He never expected to experience anything else but TO CLOSE THE DEAL, and life tended to play out for him in the business world according to how he saw it happening.

Now, this is the point in the sermon where you anticipate that I will tell you how the time came when Barney had a serious setback in life, and he realized that he wasn't always able to succeed, and how he came to worship God instead of his confidence in how he could make things work out.

WRONG.

Instead, this is where I tell you that:

- Barney Olmstead is Ben Roethlisberger
- Barney Olmstead is Michael Phelps
- Barney Olmstead is Serena & Venus Williams
- Barney Olmstead is LeBron James
- Barney Olmstead is everyone who is successful in reaching their goal – because THEY SEE IT HAPPENING, AND BECAUSE THEY EXPECT IT.

For those who are re-born in Jesus Christ – it's also a gift they receive: **FAITH SIGHT**. In Jesus, they've experience this REAR VIEW VISION enough

times, and **paid attention enough, that they've come to expect it.** They've gotten to the point where they believe that ***ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSE*** – that they can see it before it happens – without even seeing HOW it work out that way.

And it is one of the most wonderful gifts Jesus gives to His disciples, who are willing to receive it

Who are willing to believe.

Who are willing to not look at life like Eeyore.

Who are, by faith, willing to suspend their disbelief and receive the vision that Jesus alone can give. It's a gift free to all WHO WILL PAY ATTENTION ALONG THE WAY.

Knowing that Mike Nunley was going to be able to allow me to see one, instead of two images, would have made all those years of specialists tests so much more bearable.

But with Jesus – I don't have to know HOW it will work out for good – I only have the vision to know that it WILL work out for good.

SECOND GIFT OF SIGHT FROM JESUS: **HOW WE SEE HIM.**

Do you remember the story of the walk to Emmaus – where Cleopas and the other disciple walked and talked with Jesus those seven miles from Jerusalem, talking about what happened to Jesus. Jesus “played dumb” like he did not know, and the other two were dumbfounded that he had not heard anything about it. Amazed, they said: ***“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does NOT KNOW the things that have taken place there in these days?”*** (Luke 24:18)

The great irony is that they are talking to the ONLY ONE Who really DOES know all about those things.

But they did not see that it was Jesus. Not in that moment.

They do later, and run all the way back to Jerusalem in the dark and danger of the night to share the good news.

Why don't we see Jesus?

- Because we take our eyes off Him?
- Because our vision is blocked by the keyhole through which we look at much of life? (What are your keyholes? Anxiety? Anger? Resentment? Fear? Revenge?)
- Because we are not looking for him? How many times did you see Jesus this morning, on your way to Church? Were you looking for him?

You know, Dr. Mike Nunley prescribed these wonderful glasses for me, which cure the double vision. But ... if I don't wear them

Or, if I take them off, and walk around without them for so long that I forget where I've laid them ...

The one who is born in Jesus is a new creation: they see Him everywhere – and they don't fail to look for Him. They know that there's nothing better to look for each day, each moment.

When you walk through the door into this sanctuary, from the Narthex, you pass a big wooden stand with a silver pitcher of water in it, and it calls out to you to WHAT? [REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM]

And when you remember your Baptism, you also remember WHO YOU ARE – beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold. Because – like

Jesus came to show us what the prototype is supposed to look like: you, like Jesus, are made in the very image of God.

Guess what? It's not just YOU.

That person who cut you off in the parking lot yesterday. ALSO MADE IN THE VERY IMAGE OF GOD. Did you see Jesus in that person?

That person wearing the other color uniform, and who bows down to worship God, calling Him by a different name. ALSO MADE IN THE VERY IMAGE OF GOD. Did you see Jesus in that person?

Jesus said in the Beatitudes: ***Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.***

It's just a vision kind of thing. Dr. Jesus is there to help you. When your heart is pure you see Jesus in each of these. When you start looking for Jesus in each of these, your heart gets more pure, and the vision becomes easier.

Pretty soon, its like those contact lenses that Dr. Nunley prescribes for people. You get used to the vision; it comes naturally.

I am thankful for my ophthalmologist for all the help he gives me.

And I'm thankful for Jesus' Whose gift of New Birth is grounded in having good sight.

I plan on keeping my appointments with both.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.