

2 Corinthians 5:14-16

People can be a **problem**. You know who **they** are. They are the ones who make your life **miserable**. Without them life would be a lot **smoother**. They are the people who **complain** and **argue**. They are the ones who don't **hold up** their end of the project. They are the **bullies**. They are the ones who **keep you** from getting your tasks done. What started out as a promising life is challenged by breakdowns in **marriage**, disrespectful behavior in **kids**, an uncaring **boss**, and troublesome **neighbors**. Last week's sermon focused on, "Enjoying God's Work." Sometimes it seems like we would **enjoy** our work for Christ **better** if only we were **away** from all those people **distracting** us or dragging us **down**. But have you considered the possibility that **they** may **be** your task for Christ? Sometimes we can get so busy with our **tasks** that we push right past **another** part of our calling - the **people** God has place into our lives.

Today we want to look at that important aspect of our calling. The 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians is **packed** with thoughts about **Christ**. The better we know **Him**, the more obvious our **calling** becomes. The Apostle Paul who wrote this letter had to deal with people who saw him as **crazy** and **foolish** - out of his **mind**. They couldn't understand what drove him to **do** the things he was doing, especially since they knew about his troubled **past**, and his difficult **struggles**. But, Paul didn't **care** what others **thought** or **said** about him. He had finally **grasped** his **purpose** in life. God wants us to have that understanding too, as we focus on, "**Living For Christ In Our Relationships**."

Paul appreciated the life he had been given, because he had seen the **other** side of the coin. Earlier in life Paul had been a **vindictive** person. He felt that his **task** was to be the **judge** and **jury** over others. He thought his **calling** was to get **rid** of the people who threatened **his** way of life - those **Christians**. Just think about what it would be like if **God** acted that way toward **us**. He would have **crushed** Paul, and He would have **eliminated** all those who **burden** Him with their **sins** and **troubles**, and **hatred** and **abuse**. He would have **destroyed** those who messed up His perfect world. He would have rejected the **whole lot** of us for our disrespectful behavior toward Him.

But God doesn't do that because He **cares**. God is **love** - and He deals with us in **love** in spite of what **we** have done. God **loved** Paul. After knocking him off his horse He convicted him of blindly working **against** God - of **persecuting**

Christ and His followers. You and I are often just as **self-centered** and **self-absorbed** as Paul was. We are driven by **our** cause - **our** wants - **our** desires - thinking that these things are what makes our life **meaningful**, when in reality they put us on the same road to **hell** that Paul had been on.

Then Jesus unfolded His great **plan** for Paul - a plan to turn his life **around** - a plan to **rescue** him from his self-destruction - a plan that **Jesus Himself** would be his **Savior** from sin, death, and Satan. What a **change** that made in Paul. Suddenly, this former **opponent** of Jesus couldn't learn **enough** about him. "*I want to know **more**,*" were his words. God does that for **us** too. He comes to us with His **power** in His **Word**, to lead us to **repentance**, and to lift us up to heights we could never have **imagined** before.

Christ's love for us is a love that **transforms** us. Our text says, "*For **Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.***" Jesus died and rose again to free us from the **prison** of sin and guilt. But it wasn't so we could live like the rest of the **world** - satisfying the **cravings** and **lusts** that drive us. Christ's love **compels** us to **leave behind** that sinful way of life, because through the death of **Jesus**, we **died** to that **selfish** way of life. Our text says, "*(Jesus) died for all, that those who live should **no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.***" Paul's life couldn't be about **himself** anymore. It had to be about **Jesus**. It couldn't be about what **Paul** wanted. It had to be about what **Jesus** wanted.

Everything had **changed** for Paul. He wrote, "*From now on we regard **no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.***" It was Christ's love that had changed him. It **compelled** him - it **overwhelmed** him - it **captured** his whole being, and **absorbed** him in **Christ**. People looked **different** to him now. Paul no longer saw differences in their political or economic status. Ages and ethnic origins didn't matter either. Instead, this former **murderer** now had a passion to share Jesus' **love** with everyone God put in front of him. **Everybody** was important to **him** because everybody was important to **Jesus**. They were the ones for whom Christ **died** and **rose**. They are the ones God wants to come to a knowledge of the **truth**. And, they are the ones God put into **Paul's life**, so he could honor **God** as he served **them**.

We also need to be **Living For Christ In Our Relationships**. What we do here at church as our collective work is very **important** - **so important** that it can't

stay here at church. It needs to touch the **world**. We come together here to get the **energy** and **encouragement** we need from God's Word, to carry out our calling in our day-to-day relationships. That will look **different** for each of you. God makes each of us **unique**, utterly **exceptional**, with tremendous **significance** in His plans. Like a potter forming **clay**, God shapes **you** - your personality, gifts, interests, likes, and experiences - for **His** purposes. We will find **fulfillment** when we show God's love in the relationships He has given to us, and we will be **miserable** when we try to be something we **aren't**. Think about those relationships. You may be a **father**, a husband, a factory foreman, a neighbor, and a PPC member. You may be a **mother**, a human resource director, a daughter, and a teacher in our Vacation Bible School. You may be a **child**, a student, a brother, a musician, and a friend. These are all relationships in which we **live** - not for ourselves - but for **Jesus** - the One who has made life **worthwhile** for us, **compelling** us by His love.

Whether you recognized it at the time or not, God used relationships like these to **help you** in the past - supplying you with love, and kindness, and support. They were the people God sent, to make sure you felt His love. Now He's sending **you**. Look into your **home** and ask, "Who **needs** me here?" Is it **Mom** who needs a hand with the groceries, or the dishes, or the laundry, or staying up late with a sick child? Is it **Dad** who feels **unappreciated** because things aren't going well at work, and who just needs you to give him a few words of **encouragement** to cheer him up? Is it one of the **children**, who is having trouble with homework, or who is confused about the dating process, or who can't find a part-time job? Jesus is calling **you** to **help**. These relationships are usually pretty **common** and **routine**, rather than grand and spectacular. But in case you think those relationships aren't very **important**, remember how God describes **His** relationship with **us**. He is our **Father**, and we are His **children**. And at **other** times, God compares His love for us to the love of a **mother** - emphasizing the high esteem He has for the calling of **motherhood**. And as Jesus describes His relationship to us, His Church, we are the **bride** and He is the **groom**. It's all about **relationships** - it's all about **family**.

And what about at **work** - what relationships does God place us into there? Again, look around and ask, "Who **needs** me here?" Is it the person who called you to fix their sink or to figure out their computer problem? Maybe it's your **co-worker** who is just learning the ropes? It might mean **slowing down** what **you** are doing, to **pay attention** to someone who needs a hand - to let **Christ** be seen through your actions toward them as you **listen**, as you **help**, as you share **Jesus**.

Our community and neighborhoods aren't any different. Who needs us **there**? Remember, we're not just talking about the people who live next door. The story of the Good Samaritan defines a **neighbor** as **anyone** who is in need. Our simple acts of compassion are a **big deal** to God. The face of **God** can be seen in the people in our lives with **needs** we are equipped to fulfill. Remember what Jesus will point to on the Last Day, as a indicator of our **faith in action**. Jesus will say, "*I was **hungry** and you gave me something to **eat**, I was **thirsty** and you gave me something to **drink**, I was a **stranger** and you **invited** me in, I needed **clothes** and you **clothed** me, I was **sick** and you **looked after** me, I was in **prison** and you came to **visit** me.*" It's the **simple** things we do in our **everyday relationships** which reflect the love God has shown to **us**. May we continue to serve **others** as we would serve **Jesus**.

Showing love isn't always **easy**. As soon as Adam and Eve let **selfishness** creep in, their **relationships** got all messed up. They **rebelled** against God and became **afraid** of Him. They also became **angry** and **frustrated** with each other, and **blamed** one another for their problems. That's not unusual for **us** either. Think of the **sleepless nights** you spent as a new parent, or the **difficult times** in child-rearing when you were on an emotional roller coaster. Even worshiping at **church** isn't always peace and harmony. Sometimes **arguments** over **secondary** things take our focus off the primary **unity** we share in the **Gospel**. On this side of heaven there is **no perfection**.

But Jesus has **removed** the curse, and has set us on the path to **heaven**. We don't have to be tangled up in the **selfishness**, **self-pity**, and all the **insecurities** that come from comparing ourselves with others. We are **free** to be motivated by the genuine love of **God** to serve our neighbor - to fulfill the **purpose** for which we were created - to be good for **something** and for **someone**, all because **God** was good to **us** when He sent His Son to **save** us.

The more we are **compelled** by **Christ's** love - captured in His **death** and raised up in His **resurrection** and **ascension** - the more we become little **Christ**s to the people of our world. Let that love of Christ draw you to put yourself **aside**, and to truly live for Christ. Reach out to people to share the Good News with them. Understand the glorious **purpose** God has for you at home, at school, at work, and in your neighborhood. Help others to **see** Christ **in** you, and to **experience** Christ **through** you. That is the **reason** we are here. Amen.