

To See the New
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
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¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. 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. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

“You look just like your father.” I remember the first time I heard these words. I was about fourteen and it surprised me. Because I had not imagined that I carried the image of my father. But people who knew me and knew him could see the growing likeness. And so from the age of 14 on I heard with increased frequency that refrain, “You look just like your father.” I really got sick of hearing this.

Now I love my dad. But you understand – before I could speak announcing my uniqueness in the world the image of my father was placed in front of me. And now the younger of my two wonderful daughters faces the same dilemma. She looks just like her father. When people remind her of this, I can see the growing irritation in her eyes. Before she speaks announcing her uniqueness in the world, there am I, my image in front of her.

Looking like your father or your mother is not necessarily a bad thing, but the danger is that people will not hear your voice, because of our parents’ voices, not see your face because of their faces, and not rightly interpret your actions because of their actions. It is an ancient truth that all of us are born on well worn paths, born into plays being performed, and into stories already being told.

Some of us live our lives pressing against those well worn paths.

There has always been something admirable about the rebellious – those people who refuse to live according to the low or high expectations of family, of kin or clan, or of particular communities, those who resist social convention. But there is also something honorable about those who follow the rules, those who conform – those who do the expected thing, and who reconcile themselves to the plays that must be performed, and the story lines that must be followed.

The Apostle Paul was neither one of these: not the rebel, or the conformist. From the moment he believed in Jesus the Christ his life turned away from these two well worn paths. Jesus brought something new. It was as though Jesus stood right in the middle of all paths in life and said stop. Go no further. You need not follow this road.

In theological language what Jesus did was to take the power of death and turn it against itself. He seized from death its power to bring things to an end and returned that power to its proper home, inside his own life. Jesus brings things to an end. Sisters and brothers this is the good news we desperately need, although we fight against it.

It is a particular struggle of human being and especially Christians to want a God who will go our way. We want to enlist Jesus to join us on our life path. “You, Jesus, come with me.” The greatest obstacle to our Christian life is most often Jesus. If he would just take his allotted place in our personal or professional life-projects, then that would be perfect.

But it is the gift of God is that Jesus brings to an end not our lives but our life-projects. He knows that we must be saved from our life-projects. We must be freed from that unmerciful calculus: If I play by the rules, if I obey, and obey some more, if I stay in between the lines, then my world should be ordered in the right way.

That unmerciful calculus once we draw it into our lives turns us into people willing to use all our powers to force people to comply with our way of imagining a rightly ordered life. We will withhold love and

unleash shame and draw into our hands the power of violence in order to enact the calculus of conformity.

Yet some of us must be pulled not from this unmerciful calculus, but from the fires of our own memories, of parents who have failed, of Christians who have presented to us diseased faith filled with lies, hypocrisies, and scorching betrayals. Others of us with patience exhausted by the injustices of this world wait for a few good matches to set the whole thing ablaze.

Some of us have found that space opposite the conformists. “We will not say, we will not sound, we will not look like them.” And the only Jesus we want if we want him at all is the Jesus that will join us in this space and stand shoulder to shoulder with us against them.

But the gift of God to us is not a space to hide, nor a different path of escape, but a new life, a new creation. There standing right in the middle of our life-paths is a God whose first word to us is not conform nor rebel, but *see* this new life.

This new life draws us deeply inside God’s love and teaches us to stop, to wait, to look up and see the one who crucified on the cross every fear of failure, every obsession with success, every cultural story, every family plan or path that demands our allegiance, our obedience, and our life-loyalty.

You cannot know, you cannot see this new life unless you wait, unless you listen, carefully, patiently listen. If you listen, you will hear Jesus speaking. He is speaking differently to all of us, but whatever he is saying to us will turn our attention toward people not as tools for our life-projects, or obstacles that must be overcome, but as destinations for our journey, as the places where God’s love known in Jesus Christ must be offered.

This is not a good time for life-projects. But as we watch the shaking of the foundations of so many institutions, this might be a time, maybe the first time we are ready to actually see what is in front of us, a God who

will lead us, directing us away from our fears and obsessions, a resurrected savior who has begun the new creation.