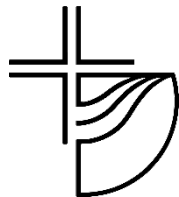


Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 11
Andy Hamilton



Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement.

To move us forward, **we will develop a culture** of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Focus Question

How is God calling us to reshape the underlying culture of our life together?

Scripture Text

2 Corinthians 5:16-6:10

Focus Statement

Regardless of the challenges facing us, we must be aligned with God through Jesus Christ. God has commissioned us as ambassadors of reconciliation for the world empowered by the Holy Spirit. Look, a new culture, a new way of seeing and living. This is only possible through God's grace, who has not counted our sin against us. Through this scripture, God calls us to turn around and embrace this ministry, enduring its cost with purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God. These are the identifying markers of this new creation.

Supplies

- Newsprint or whiteboard
- Markers
- Internet-connected device

The culture of a group, organization, or society is defined as its shared practices, attitudes, values, and goals. Browse the full [entry](#) in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary to learn more.

Media Suggestions

- **Art:** ["The Kingdom of God"](#) painting by Cody F. Miller; ["Psalm 85"](#) serigraph by John August Swanson
- **Book:** *2 Corinthians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary by V. George Shillington
- **Song:** [Us for Them](#), Gungor (YouTube)
- **Video:** ["Justice and the Gospel"](#) VergeNetwork (YouTube)

Reflecting on the Texts

Conflict creates crisis in a community that can leave scars lasting decades, even centuries. The trauma of such conflict often affects the perception of those involved or close to the crisis to such an extent as to become overwhelmed and lost. Even as we find ourselves in a context like this, both in the church and the wider society, it can be easy to lose our way. Fortunately, God has not abandoned us but provided a navigational app to find our way, and the default voice is that of Paul.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, he addressed a church that was fractured and struggling to recover. Opponents had questioned Paul's credibility and challenged his authority. This created division within the community. Paul wrote to them to address these issues. In 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10, Paul did so in three parts. First, he reminded them what God had done through the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul instructed them that this new creation involves looking at humanity differently to proclaim the message of reconciliation (5:16-19). Then he challenged them with urgency to return to the way of salvation (5:20-6: 2). And finally, he used himself as an example, demonstrating the virtues that distinctly mark this new culture.

To be clear, God has accomplished the work of reconciliation. And the Holy Spirit empowers the church in her ministry. All of this speaks to the new creation in which God is working—past, present, and future. There is a shape to this new creation with distinctive markers. Interestingly, these virtues are remarkably similar and overlap with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. Also of note is that where the NRSV translates "spirit of holiness," it could also be rendered "Holy Spirit." While the former may be preferred, it does not preclude connotations the latter may infer (Shillington, 145-146). Taken this way, Paul's emphasis on God's power underlies everything.

In a nutshell, Paul reminds the church that it is to see the world through new eyes. Not in the form of selfish judgmentalism that seeks power, privilege, and prestige. God has transformed everything. In Jesus' death, God accomplished the work of reconciling humanity to God's self. In his resurrection, God brought about a new creation. Even now, those who believe and respond to God's work of reconciliation receive new life. Just as God transformed Paul's life on the Damascus road, all humanity is given the opportunity to enter this new creation. The result is a changed perspective.

Only due to conflict in the church did people begin living and relating to each other in ways inconsistent with the reconciled new creation. So, Paul called them to repent and "be reconciled to God." The urgency in his writing is palpable, "Now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" (6:2b). Finally, Paul drew upon his own experience living amidst conflict to provide an example with clear markers for life in the new creation.

Today, Paul's words confront our reality, which leads to probing questions. He asks us to reflect upon our own brokenness. In his words, we hear the call to turn and return to God, to be reconciled. This call is the reminder of the promise of the new creation. It is more than a future. It is the promise of the present shaped and empowered by the love of Christ.

Gathering

Choose one of the following activities to introduce the theme of today's session.

- *Option 1*—Share a personal travel experience where something happened that changed the way you looked at the people around you. What was it that changed your perception?
- *Option 2*—Culture can be defined as the traditions, institutions, customs, and norms of a nation, society, or group of people. Using newsprint or a whiteboard and markers, make a list of your congregation's traditions, customs, and norms. From this list, how would you describe the culture of your congregation?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Invite participants to share in the reading of today's text using the Scripture Jam on page 56. You will need six readers. If you have a small group, have one or more readers double up.

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into the text using these questions.

- What does it mean to perceive from a "human point of view?" And what is the alternative?
- Paul speaks of a new creation. How would you describe it? How would you imagine its culture?
- What is the role of an ambassador? What does it mean to be ambassadors for Christ?
- In verses 6 and 7, Paul lists a series of virtues that are markers of the new creation. Reflect upon each of them and share what you think is significant (and any other responses you may have).
- What is the cost of being a part of this new creation?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

Reflect on today's text as you discuss the following.

- What wisdom does this passage provide for creating a culture that is aligned with Christ?
- How do you imagine the culture that God is leading us to develop?
- Using a cellphone or tablet, look up the art by Cody F. Miller and John August Swanson listed in Media Suggestions. How do these inform your envisioning? What can they contribute to your interpretation?
- Listen to the song and watch the video listed in Media Suggestions. What are your initial responses? Why did you respond in these ways?
- How do these inform a vision of culture moving forward?
- What would it require us to do to live in such a way? What would you have to give up or do differently to take this seriously?

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of these activities.

- *Option 1*—Revisit the list you created in Gathering and evaluate your congregation's culture in light of your study of today's passage. What three things could you do as a group of believers to move you toward a culture marked by reconciliation and an openness to new perspectives.
- *Option 2*—Divide your group into pairs or triads. Have each small group develop a short skit or message that illustrates what a new culture might look like in your congregation.

Sending

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 and remind participants of the urgency in Paul's voice as he calls for a response. "See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" How will you respond? Will you commit to these things moving forward?

Read the poem on page 57 in unison as a closing prayer.

Scripture Jam (2nd Cor. 5:16-6:10)

Reader 1	We regard no one . . .	Reader 1	So we're ambassadors.
Reader 2	No one?	Reader 2	We are?
Reader 3	No one.	Reader 3	No. We are.
Reader 4	From a human point of view.	Reader 4	Then what are we?
Reader 5	So, if anyone is in Christ . . .	Reader 5	The reconciled.
Reader 6	Anyone?	Reader 6	So be reconciled!
Reader 1	In Christ?	Reader 1	Don't wait.
Reader 2	Yes. If anyone is in Christ:	Reader 2	Do it now!
Reader 3	There is a New Creation!	Reader 3	What's the rush?
Reader 4	Look!	Reader 4	Now is the right time.
Reader 5	Everything is new?	Reader 5	The day of salvation is here.
Reader 6	What's new?	Reader 6	But?
Reader 1	Everything.	Reader 1	But what?
Reader 2	All of this is from God.	Reader 2	It's tough and it might hurt.
Reader 3	Christ . . .	Reader 3	And we're tired and hungry.
Reader 4	In him . . .	Reader 4	Just do it!
Reader 5	God was reconciling . . .	Reader 5	How?
Reader 6	Who?	Reader 6	Purity, knowledge.
Reader 1	The world.	Reader 1	Patience, kindness.
Reader 2	To whom?	Reader 2	Holiness of spirit, genuine love.
Reader 3	To God.	Reader 3	Truthful speech.
Reader 4	Entrusting us with the message of reconciliation.	Reader 4	And?
Reader 5	Who?	Reader 5	How.
Reader 6	Us.	Reader 6	The power of God.
		Reader 1	Regardless of the cost.

Go with Me in a New Exodus

O God of fire and freedom,
deliver me from my bondage
to what can be counted
and go with me in a new exodus
toward what counts,
but can only be measured
in bread shared
and swords become plowshares;
in bodies healed
and minds liberated;
in songs sung
and justice done;
in laughter in the night
and joy in the morning;
in love through all seasons
and great gladness of heart;
in all people coming together
and a kingdom coming in glory;
in your name being praised
and my becoming an alleluia,
through Jesus the Christ.

—Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*