

September 13, 2026

Marion Weekly Update

Sermon "He's Everywhere" 2 Corinthians 13:5-10, Matthew 25:41-45

I'm going to ask a question that I think most Christians would answer alike even if there are different things meant by the response. "Is Jesus everywhere?"

I think most would answer yes. Some might do so because of our belief that Jesus is divine and we trust that the Spirit of God is everywhere. Therefore so is Jesus. Others might say "yes" because of a more companionship notion. We often say that even if we are physically by ourselves, we're never alone because Jesus is always with us.

Both are spiritually oriented responses. What we are talking about though is something much more imminently practical. It is very Matthew 25. Jesus is everywhere because every person we meet is Jesus.

I don't think this is taken enough from this scripture yet it's central. Every person in need is Jesus. If every Christian in our nation took this to heart and responded accordingly there would be incredible change. Most of the problems we have would shrink significantly because our attitudes, words, actions, and choices towards one another would take on a new perspective.

The world pushes us away from this. It encourages us to see one another less as people and more as objects. Certainly not as Jesus. People become nameless, faceless, representing an idea or issue, or cast into assumptions or stereotypes. The result is we have permission to not see them as having needs, that their needs can be dismissed, or that they don't deserve our help to meet their needs for many reasons.

In the end when people become objects it's much easier to hurt them because objects don't have feelings, or the kind of value that a person does. Certainly not the value of Jesus.

Another issue is that because of "end times" fascination, many Christians spend their time looking up rather than looking out. They get so taken with Jesus' return that focus is placed on having a personal faith and belief that is "correct" while looking to the clouds for Jesus' return that they forget to look out and see the need around them. Jesus said to anticipate His return, but scripture over and over reinforces that faith is most honestly lived out when we are in community with one another and serving God by loving one another.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a beautiful compliment to "love thy neighbor". Who is my neighbor? Everyone.

The truth is that anyone who has spent their life looking up has gone to the next world without seeing Jesus' return and likely missed opportunities to shine His light to people in need around them. They have likely missed seeing Him in a neighbor because they were looking in the wrong place.

We don't have to wait for Jesus to come back. He is already here. In every person. Every need. Every relationship.

He uses the example of “the least of these”. Why? It’s easy to be kind to those who have plenty and even help us out ourselves. They are the answer to our prayer. They give us something to aspire to. They are giving to not asking from us. It’s easy to see some version of Jesus in them. The hungry, thirsty, stranger, sick, and prisoner are different. They are asking from us. They require us to sacrifice of ourselves. Our resources. Our time. Our energy. Our patience. Our pride. Our kindness. Our grace. They need from us. Sadly many of those who need from us are the ones that we are trained to see as “less than” or “objects”.

If everyone who is in need is Jesus, that is everyone because everyone has a need. No matter how many resources, how much power or status or influence we have, all of us have needs. They may not be evident but they do exist. Sometimes the first thing needed from me is patience or forgiveness. Before I can see the need I need to let go of my own agitation if I’m upset, frustrated, hurt, or angry.

Then I can see clearly to hopefully sort out what I can do to speak healing into brokenness. This is so important. While we are called to see Jesus in everyone, of course everyone isn’t perfect like Jesus. I suggest that most of the bad things we do are the result of brokenness inside us. To see an offender as a target for vengeance, negligence, or pettiness misses the point. If I punish for the sake of punishment I break them further. What Christ calls us to is to be agents of healing.

Jesus is everywhere.

Going back to Matthew 25. Every word, action or choice I make to put my weight behind something that: takes food out of someone’s mouth, interferes with basic quality of life like being able to get care when they are sick, pushes away someone simply because I don’t know them, condemns someone for a mistake, or in any way demeans or diminishes someone I am doing that to Jesus.

On the other hand anything I do that cares for others, uplifts, assures, and offers means of healing and grace I do to Jesus. Literally every day we have the opportunity over and over again to look at Christ, love Him through what we do, and know that God is saying “well done good and faithful servant”.

Something tells me that if every person of faith had this clearly in focus all day every day things would change greatly. But it takes humility. It takes effort. It means shaking off those things we have been taught that give permission to ignore the needs of others or to dismiss them as unworthy or undeserving.

Keep in mind that He even includes criminals in prison. This tells us that accountability still needs to exist. In a world of brokenness sometimes people need to be taken aside for a time to protect themselves and others from their bad acting. The question is whether we make excuses to just punish and hole them up out of vindictiveness or make active calls for them to have their brokenness healed. We have two ways to look at this. Do people get out of jail and recommit crimes because they are irredeemable? Or do they recommit because jail has either broken them further or not helped them heal the brokenness that made the crime seem like a good idea in the first place?

This leads us to a second place Jesus resides. It's not just "out there". It's also inside of us. Corinthians reminds us that Jesus is "in" us. We are reminded that the Holy Spirit makes a home within us. This is why our bodies are called "temples".

Paul makes a vague reference to a "test". What he is talking about is reflecting on our lives and faith. Is the Spirit of Christ in us? How we respond to the world around us tells the tale. How we see Jesus in those we cross paths with and impact with our lives and choices speaks to Christ within us. Or at least how much we let that Spirit shine.

Marianne Williamson has an interesting analogy for this. She links Genesis with 1 John. We are made in the image of God. Some see this in our actual physical image but many others also see it as being made in the image of God's character. 1 John reveals that character and nature as "love".

In other words we are made in the image of love.

Her illustration is that we are born with that nature and heart of light and love. That's innate. Life on the other hand has other ideas. We are taught by people and circumstances to not follow that nature. The image is that life builds layers around our hearts that block that nature. The light of our love diminishes as life closes in.

In Christ, however, as we learn His example and try to follow Him the point is to slowly chip away at those layers around our hearts. We are letting what's already inside of us shine brighter and brighter. Our love is more and more revealed.

How do we do this? What can motivate us? Seeing Jesus in everyone. How much greater accountability is there? Every impact I make. Every insult or compliment. Put down or uplift. Generosity or stinginess. Kindness or cruelty. Every person I stand alongside or pit myself against. All of it is towards Him.

Seeing Christ in everyone drives us to connect with the Christ within. Connecting with the Christ within helps us see Christ in everyone and everything. It's a self-perpetuating cycle. I'm not saying this is easy. Just like we are called to help heal the brokenness in others we too have our own brokenness we are working through. So let me give us some permission. At the very least much of the agitation, frustrating, and anger we feel is the result of those things that have layered around our hearts and pit us against one another.

We need to give ourselves permission to cut those things loose. Sometimes the attitudes that blind us to the Jesus in others are taught by family, friends, or other loved ones. Sometimes they are part of our identity and help us fit in with a group of people that we value. Yet somewhere we know that we are fighting against Jesus by carrying those attitudes with us and living into them in word and deed.

No matter where they come from we can drop them. We can reject them. You and I can reject an idea without rejecting the person who taught that idea to us. Remember, no matter how misguided everyone is Jesus is in front of us.

When we hold those two things in tension, loving someone who has encouraged something aside from faithfulness while we stop embracing what they taught us, we set an example for others to follow. More and more we are part of the solution, bringing a sense of the Kingdom of God to bear in the world.

This week I offer a challenge. Look for Jesus actively in everyone we meet. When we find ourselves angry or agitated ask how we'd deal with that if the person in front of us were literally Jesus Christ. Talk to God when it gets tough to keep that Christ focus front and center. Let go of that angst and aggravation and exchange it for a sense of compassion and grace that leads to honest effort to make someone's day better. That intentionally sees brokenness. And when someone is that light of Jesus that we need in a moment let gratitude reign in our hearts. See how that changes things. My money is on it not only changing the circumstances around us, but changing us as well.

BIBLE STUDY 2 Timothy 2

The second chapter of 2 Timothy moves into the more directly instructive sense of the letter. Chapter 1 was introduction and greeting. The stage is set that what is of utmost importance is that the genuine gospel be preserved and taught without alteration. This carries through chapter 2.

Timothy is to pass along the gospel to trusted and reliable others who can also then transmit that same gospel. This is significant as it signals a shift in their understanding of Jesus' return. In Paul's early ministry it was clear the belief was Jesus coming back in his own lifetime. This indicates a realization that he was wrong. Jesus wasn't coming back in his lifetime which means something for caring for the gospel message.

Were Jesus to have come back, the apostles of that time would have been sufficient. The cosmic wrap up would happen with no need to keep things alive for following generations. Now that equation changes. They have to ensure that no matter how long it takes for the return, a pure and genuine gospel message is both preserved and passed along for as long as it takes. Analogies of soldiers, athletes and farmers all serve to reinforce a need to stay in the boundaries of Christian faith. If Timothy is to be effective he must make sure his life is congruent with the message he is teaching. Who is Timothy's commanding officer? It's Paul. Naturally we can all make a connection that God is our head. In this case however Paul is the one who taught Timothy. He is the mentor. As such it is Timothy's expectation and duty to "follow orders" and make sure that his mission is carried out to its fullest extent.

Verse 8 once again pushes something of a confession of faith. In chapter 1 we saw an emphasis on suffering. This chapter is no different. Paul suffers and it's worth it for those who will come to faith. And even if Paul is "in chains" that isn't preventing the gospel from being spread. Many of Paul's communications were from prison. Lock him up and his mission carries on through his writing and those he has charged with ministry.

A short poem or perhaps hymn is reassuring. Jesus is faithful in life, in reign, and yet also in respecting our rejections. In the end if we reject Him He will honor that in judgement. And regardless of our faith, He can be relied on to carry out His promises.

We can also take heart that "faithless" has more than one sensibility. In our actions we are either faithful to God or not(faithless). None of us are perfect. This means that while some

areas of our lives are wonderfully faithful, those areas where we struggle or are ignorant that we are sinning are faithless. We are all a complex mix of the two. Yet this isn't a rejection of Jesus. It's just our condition.

All the while even if we are inconstant, Jesus is consistent and steadfast.

The second half of the letter has a lot devoted to avoiding "stupid" and fruitless conversations. Getting in the weeds with unnecessary arguments just distracts us from focus on the center of our faith, the gospel. In our day people argue about baptisms, worship styles, what political party is "truly Christian", how one "has to" pray or read the Bible, and on and on.

The example in the letter is that two men specifically were spreading that the resurrection had already occurred. There was nothing remaining in that regard. This would mean that the Christians existing at that point had already been born to eternity. This was a nonsense argument in Timothy's time. Of course the resurrection hadn't yet occurred, not of the dead in Christ. We know this today and likely think the notion ridiculous. Then it was a real controversy apparently.

Paul warns to not get sucked into such pointless conversation.

The passage to "study" and "rightly divide/handle the word of truth" is important to see in this context. It is wedged in with avoiding pointless chatter that detracts from the gospel.

Many see "the word of truth" as the Bible. This can't be the case. Nothing in the New Testament was considered scripture at the time the letter was written. The Bible in the form we see it today wouldn't be shaped for centuries. The verse can't mean the Bible. So what does it mean?

The word of truth is what the writer has already been hammering on and warning not to deviate from. It is the true and pure gospel message. The one that Paul had given to Timothy.

The term "divide" more specifically means "to cut a clear path through rough terrain". This is what Timothy is being coached to do. Don't let the rough terrain of all the nonsense arguments get in the way but rather forge a clear path through it so that the gospel is plain to see and not confused.

As the chapter winds down there is a grand message of the hope of transformation. The image is household utensils. Some are special some are common. The special would be the Christian entrusted with the mission of spreading the gospel. The common is those who haven't come to faith yet. The message is that those common things can be transformed to be made special and for special use. This is all of humanity. All of us have the hope of being able to grow into more than we are at present into something greater.

The end of the chapter holds instruction that is desperately needed. Today our language and conversation has become very harsh and aggressive. It's modeled by the most influential voices in our country and even in some of the loudest voices in Christianity. Muslims are spoken to and about hatefully. The LGBT community is derided and mocked. In some traditions anything that doesn't line up with their narrow views is an "enemy" to be destroyed rather than people to be invited into the community of faith. I've literally heard pastors preach that Christians need to dig deep to find their "hate" again.

This isn't helping.

Here we see very Christlike advice. Don't be quarrelsome. Be gentle. Be kind. There seems an acknowledgement that the gospel may take time to be received. Patience is at a premium here. If we want to be heard we have to be humble. We don't attract with aggression and rudeness. We do it by building relationship and having interest in others. We impart respect and grace as we communicate. In that lies a much greater possibility of bringing someone who has been pushed away from Christ into relationship with Him and with us as His community of faith.