# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Inside Out”**

**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**

**September 2, 2018**

The college football season is here. Yesterday WSU and Idaho played away, but next weekend they will both be at home. If you decide you want to go to one of the games in Pullman or Moscow, you will need to have a ticket. Then, you will go to the stadium, get in line, and show your ticket in order to be allowed in to enjoy the contest. This is the way things work in our world – outside in. You are on the outside and the only way you can get inside is by securing a ticket.

Unfortunately, there are many who think that outside in also applies to the Christian faith. You and I are on the outside and the only way we can get in, the only way we can have a relationship with God, is by earning our way in. God has given us his laws, he has revealed his will to us, and only those who keep his laws and follow his will are able to earn their ticket. But, the good news is that our faith is not outside in; it is inside out.

When Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples on the evening before he was crucified, he took the cup from the meal and said: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.” How is your sin and my sin kept from getting between us and God, kept from keeping us, so to speak, on the outside? Through the forgiveness that is ours in the death of Jesus. When Jesus died, he took sin upon himself – the Bible says he became sin. Now, for the critical question: how can I be forgiven? I can be forgiven by placing my trust in Jesus, by believing that what he did on the cross was done for me. Now, I am cleansed of sin from the inside out – not because of outside in good works, not because of outside in earning of forgiveness, but because of the inside out forgiveness of Jesus. Works based religion is outside in; faith based religion is inside out.

It is clear from the Bible that inside out is God’s intent. The well-known John 3:16 tells us that “God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Believe in Jesus – inside out. John 3:17 goes on to say that Jesus didn’t come into the world to condemn us but to save us. If outside in was God’s plan, then condemnation would have been Jesus’ message.

The Father and the Son are clearly involved in this inside out relationship that God offers every person. The Father sent – the Son came, and died, and rose – so that you and I may be saved. But, there is a third person within God, a third personality within the Trinity who plays a necessary role in our salvation, and that is the Holy Spirit. Our sermon series this next several weeks will focus on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person who believes, and to get us started I invite you to turn with me to 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

Jesus Christ, received by faith, lives in the believer by the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Spirit are of one mind and purpose, which is to initiate and continue an inside out relationship between ourselves and God. Without the Spirit, we would not have been able to know Jesus nor will we be able to become like Jesus. But, as Paul makes clear, when the Spirit is in us, he is changing us, transforming us into the glorious image of Jesus. And, as we are becoming more like Jesus, our lives reflect him and we are able to share him with the world. To know Christ – to become like Christ – to share Christ: this is the mission statement of our church and it is an inside out mission.

When Paul speaks of the freedom that he has experienced through the Spirit he is speaking from personal experience. In his old outside in religious life, he had constantly sought to achieve a standard. “Here is God’s law; now, do your very best to obey it.” And, every time he failed to obey it, he felt the guilt and self-condemnation of outside in thinking. In his own words, he became a slave to sin because he was unable to master it; he was unable in his own strength to overcome it. Now, however, in the Spirit, he has been set free from the power of sin. No longer is sin something that he needs to overcome; it has been overcome in Christ. Now what he needs to do is to present himself to God, admitting his sin, and God will do the rest. From the inside out God will cleanse Paul of his sin and he will go to work through the Holy Spirit to transform the old outside in Paul who tried to earn his way to heaven into a new inside out Paul who, knowing that heaven is already his, now makes himself available to God to minister through him. In the old days Paul tried to do his best on behalf of God; now God is doing his best through Paul. What a difference that is! That is the great truth Paul learned, and it is the great truth you and I need to learn and live every day.

Imagine a young man waking up one morning thinking about his dad, how much he means to him, how he loves him, and how aware he is of all that his dad does for him. His heart is so filled with gratitude that after breakfast he goes out and mows the lawn and washes his dad’s car. This is inside out living. This is love arising in a young man’s heart in gratitude for his father, carried out in acts of service

Now imagine another young man coming down to breakfast and just as he is about to leave and do his thing for the day, his father tells him that first he has to mow the lawn and wash the car. This is outside in living. The young man may perform his chores willingly or grudgingly, but I doubt it will be gratefully. In both scenarios the lawn is mowed and the car is washed, but which is the better way? Which is God’s way?

When we see God’s rules as making demands of us, they awake a sense of resistance in us. We dislike being told what to do. This is what outside in religion does: it kills love as the motivation for obedience. But if God has found his way into our hearts through his inside out love, through the inside out forgiveness of his Son, and by the inside out presence of his Holy Spirit who lives in us, we are being changed on the inside and our outward lives are reflecting God’s love to the world.

In a sense, we are taking on the characteristics of Jesus. As his life shines on us and into us through the Holy Spirit, we are being changed into his likeness. This growth of Christ within us is a process which goes on throughout our life. Little by little throughout our whole life as we yield to the will of God, he transforms our inner nature and causes his glory to shine into us and then through us.

This transformation takes place as we spend time with Christ, learn about him and worship him. There is no substitute in the inside out life of the Christian for spending daily time with Christ in prayer and with the Bible. We cannot become like him unless we learn about him, spending time in personal study and in study with fellow believers. And, like the young man waking up with his father on his mind, to worship Christ is to be mindful of all that he has done for us and expressing our gratitude to him in prayer and in ways of service, from the inside out.