

4th Sunday after Pentecost Fathers' Day June 16th

"New Creation!"

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

We heard in our Old Testament reading from Ezekiel 17:

²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."

The power of God to make possible what is impossible for man. Remember the staff of Aaron? Numbers 17:6-8 when the chiefs of the tribes of Israel were arguing over who would be in charge of the sacrifices:

Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs. ⁷ And Moses deposited the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony. ⁸ On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.

Then, in our Gospel reading from Mark 5 we heard:

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Again, God routinely does what seems impossible or inexplicable. We understand a lot now, about plant germination and growth.

But we still can't explain or replicate the "breath of life" in God's created universe. It remains the unseen mystery we take by faith.

Finally, in our Epistle reading from 2 Corinthians 5 we heard:

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, (he is a) new creation! The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. `

I am going to focus on verse 17 in particular.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. This verse is a confirmation verse. It's one of those verses that a lot of people know by heart. But what's interesting is that in Greek the verse reads, "If anyone is in Christ, new creation!" It does not say, he is a new creation. I think this is important because if anyone is in Christ, it's not just that he's new. Everything is new! The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come! When God grants you faith in Jesus Christ, it's not just you who are changed, everything has changed. All of creation is changed in Christ!

For Paul, when the Holy Spirit changed his heart, when he became "in Christ", the whole world is different. He's no longer afraid of persecution. He is no longer afraid of any obstacles placed in front of him: hunger, pain, beatings, imprisonment, even death. It's not that he is foolish, or reckless, or thoughtless, nor does he think he is greater than all this. It is that he knows that "He who is in him, Christ Jesus, is greater than He who is in the world (1 John 4:4)! ¹

So how are we, how do we become, "in Christ?" This is important lest we try to put ourselves back in control, in other words try to save ourselves.

Our salvation is God's work. Luther's Small Catechism, 3rd article of the Apostles' Creed, explanation:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit calls me by the Gospel, enlightens me with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps me in the true faith.

Luther said,

It is exceedingly Godless foolhardiness that where God has humiliated Himself in order to become recognizable, man seeks to find another way by following the counsel of his own natural capacity.²

Jesus Himself said,

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Paul says that everyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old creation, however, we know still clings to them. That is what we see with these mortal eyes of ours. We see our sins and our failings. If we act on that, we are living by our sight and not by faith. But Paul now, by the work of the Spirit, sees with other eyes, the eyes of faith. He sees that the person before him, the fellow believer, is a new creation. That means he, Paul, sees someone else, someone for whom Jesus has died, someone who is redeemed and perfected in Christ. He sees the living and spiritual being who is being transformed not by an act of the will or by some program of reform, but by God. Paul treats that new person, not the old. That is the starting point for all relationship with Paul.

John 3:16 does not say that God so loved the right-thinking parts of the world that He gave his only Son. God loved the world, the whole of it. That is good because it means He loves you and me for we are part of that world and we did not deserve his love. But what is challenging to us is that He loved those parts of the world which we do not like. He loves them just as much as He loves you and me.

Paul today tells us that this love of God controls us too. It determines the way we see the other person, no longer as either enemy or ally but first and foremost as someone for whom Jesus died and to whom Jesus gives life.

Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to believe that he really sees **them** that way. It has been a hard road getting there. But Paul himself is a great illustration of this. In Acts 18 there is an account of the Jewish synagogue trying to have Paul arrested and tried by the Roman governor, Gallio. Their charge is creating a public insurrection. The Romans would have taken it seriously. They regularly executed people for that. In fact, this is the charge they brought against Jesus in Jerusalem. This time, however, it doesn't work. When the case is dismissed, the members of the synagogue turn on the synagogue leader, a man by the name of Sosthenes. It had probably been his idea to bring Paul before the Roman judge. Were they embarrassed or just mad that this scheme did not work? Who knows! Forced out of the courtroom, they turned on Sosthenes and beat him in the street.

What happens next is not recorded, but it might have gone like this. As the mob disperses Sosthenes is lying in the dust, bloody, bruised, and humiliated. A man's shadow falls over him. He hears a voice saying, "Come on, Sosthenes, let's get you home and clean you up." He looks up and it is Paul, the very man he was just trying to kill through the Roman legal system. Paul extends his hand, helps Sosthenes up, and takes him home.

Why do I imagine this to be so? Well, if we look at the opening verse of I Corinthians chapter 1, it says:

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,"

Did you catch that? Sosthenes is the co-author of the book of I Corinthians! Paul calls him a brother. Something happened between Acts 18 and the writing of I Corinthians. What happened? I think it was exactly what Paul is expressing here. Christ's redemptive love for Paul has given him eyes to see even those who hate him, who tried to kill him, with love and grace. Paul sees no enemies or allies, only people for whom Jesus has died. They are a new creation in Christ. And it changes the whole world. New creation!³

What now? We look at the world and we look at ourselves and we say, “What new creation?” I say to you, brothers and sisters, it is accomplished! It just has not been brought before your eyes. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). We are like the Jews listening to Peter at Pentecost who were saying, “What then shall we do?” And Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:37-38).

What shall we do? We can only receive. Hold out our hands, beggars that we are! Like the adulterous woman at Jesus feet whom Jesus told, “your faith has saved you (Luke 7:50)!” It’s not what we do, it’s who we are in Christ. Be in Christ.

How do we be “in Christ?” It is the identity He gives to us in 3 ways:

- Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ. Receive His Word!
- Be children of the Heavenly Father by being Baptized. That is who you are!
- Be receiving the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, given and shed for you, through the Lord’s Supper!⁴

And every time you feel unworthy, afraid, ashamed, or alone, don’t hide from the Lord’s gifts. Turn around and receive. The Lord is pursuing you to save you, because you are His child!

May the Word of God enter your ears carrying with it the Holy Spirit into your hearts creating the faith that receives the salvation already accomplished for you through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Amen!

1 Concordia Journal: Spring 2024, 83-84

2 Fruit for the Soul, Ngien, Fortress Press, 2015. Pg. 137

3 [New Sermon Notes - Sunday Sermon A Resource for Preachers \(sunday-sermon.com\)](https://www.sunday-sermon.com) Proper 6 Series B-1

4 www.AoRHope.org Go and Be Reconciled, What Does This Mean? 2016