

“Jesus’ New Creations”

Season of Lent, Sunday, March 6, 2016

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Luke 15: 11b-32; 2 Cor. 5: 16-21

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took

place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always

with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Sermon

A New Creation

The Apostle Paul said:

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to [God] through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation..."

Jesus said in his Parable of the Prodigal Son:

"But when he came to himself..."

The late Clarence Jordan had a fascinating theory about where Jesus got the idea for the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

One day Jesus met a man, not a fictional character in a parable, but a real person who was lost and in hiding.

In both Mark 5: 1-20 and Luke 8:26-39, the story is told of how one day Jesus Christ was visiting at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

As he stepped out on land from his boat, there met him a man from the city who had demons. Cowering before Jesus was a Jew who was watching swine, the lowest and dirtiest job a Jew could have.

The man he met was stark raving mad, and Jesus healed him, casting the demons into the swine, who then rushed

*down the steep bank
into the lake and were drowned.
The herdsmen watching all this happen then fled,
and returned later with many townspeople.
To their surprise they found the Geresene demoniac sitting with
Jesus,
calm, clothed, and in his right mind.
He had come to himself.
He had come to Jesus.
Thanks be to God, Jesus helped him come to his senses,
Carl Jung would say that he had returned to his sense of Self.*

*As Jesus started to go back to Galilee,
the man tried to get in the boat with him.
Jesus told him,
"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for
you."
"Go home, and share what new things God has done for
you!"
"And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city
how much Jesus had done for him." --Luke 8:26-39
He went forth a new creation in Christ.
Both the former Gerasene Demoniac and Jesus Christ had an
experience of the holy.
As we behold, we are beheld.
The encounter moved Jesus.*

A New Creation

*Consider what happened afterward.
Imagine Jesus sitting in the boat on the return journey,
thinking about this Jew he had just helped,
a man of faith yet dead to the world, lost in his*

soul,

**living without healthy relationships,
and slowly losing his mind among
the swine.**

“But when he comes to himself...”

As Jesus tells the story he uses language that literally means “to repent.”

**But when he comes to himself -- when he repents of his actions --
when he turns away from sin and separation,
when he turns toward Jesus coming to him on the
shore,**

**he finds that God loves him, knows him,
cares for him.**

**He is healed and then goes home,
rejoicing along the way, hoping to reconcile with his
family.**

**As Jesus sits on the gently rocking boat sailing back to Galilee,
he thinks about the man’s family at home, how they
might react,**

**how they might feel, how they might think.
Jesus wonders if there is a father looking down the road each
morning and night,**

**hoping to catch a glimpse of a returning wayward child.
Jesus considers whether there is a sibling at home,
one who is diligently working in the fields,
upset at having to do twice as much work
and go to twice as many meetings and
functions**

**all because he was left behind by his
prodigal brother.**

**What if, as he sails back to Galilee,
Jesus allows a true story to take the shape of a parable.
A parable about the joy of a father,**

**the hope of a parent,
the grace of a forgiving Creator
who looks down the road each day,
filled with anticipation and worry,
hope and concern.**

The encounter moved the man who once was lost and then found.

Consider what happened soon afterward.

The end of the story is really a new beginning.

"...He went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." --Luke 8:26-39

The end of the story is really a new beginning.

Mike Yaconelli said in his book, The Door:

"The spiritual life is not so much progress as it is process.

It is not a continuous climb upward

as much as it is a continuous climb.

It is not the victories that matter

so much as the going on after the defeats.

The longer the erratic dance of faith goes on,

the less you care about what God is doing

and the more you want to know about God."

A New Creation

So, here is the question:

How do you know when you are a New Creation in Christ?

How do you know?

What does being a new look like, feel like, sound like, taste like, think like, act like?

What does a new creation in Christ believe, belong to, become?

How do you know when you have come to yourself, to God, to be?

First and foremost, when we are a new creation

*folks feel and think and perceive and receive their
connectedness.*

*When we are a New Creation we know that we are connected,
reconciled, yoked, bonded, claimed and named,
beheld and belong to a Spirit
that is greater than we are
yet loves and cares deeply,
intimately, personally for us.*

*When we are a new creation
we know that we have been brought into the relationship
with God*

*that God has sought after
and is seeking after
from the very beginning.*

*At age 87, the philosopher George Herbert Planner
concluded a brief autobiographical statement with:*

*“As I see these things rising behind me
they do not seem of my doing.
Some greater power than I
has been using me as its glad instrument.”*

*Some greater power than we has been willing us into new
creations.*

*When we are a new creation
we find our meaning in who we are and whose we are
rather than in what we do.*

*Being a new creation
connects us with our being,
which then informs and inspires our doing and
sharing.*

*Occasionally I get to drive our church youth to an event or a
retreat.*

Whenever we stop for gas or a meal or arrive at our destination,

*I say to the whole company before they exit the van,
"Remember who you are and whose you are!"
Last week a 16 year old in the back row responded,
"Mr. James, don't you think we know that? You tell us that every
time!"*

When we are a new creation

we remember,

we are reminded deep inside,

we are in touch with who we are and

whose we are, every time.

A New Creation

When we are a new creation

*we might know because we have had a singular
experience*

*that is life altering, life awakening, life changing,
life deepening!*

*Some have emerged from terrible, tragic, traumatic experiences
and found that Christ had given to them*

*renewed hope and purpose, strength and wisdom,
a creativity and new gifts they had not
known before.*

*Some have emerged from the baptismal waters filled with new
joy,*

*or danced after a marriage ceremony with a new
appreciation for their spouse,*

*or strolled away from the Lord's Table
with an ever deeper resolve*

*to love, to serve, to forgive, to be
forgiven.*

When we are a new creation

*we might know because we make spiritual connections
on a daily basis,*

*feeling like we are a new creation every day
or several times a day, or a week or a
fortnight.*

*Some feel like the morning shower is a fresh start,
a cleansing both physically and spiritually.*

*Some feel like the reconciling communion
over coffee and prayer with a friend
is the birth of a new creation, a renewed
relationship.*

*If sin separates,
separates us from God and one another and our true
selves,
then God's love reconciles,
reconciles us to God and one another and
our true selves.*

A New Creation

*A gentleman approached a friend and confided that he was
drinking more than usual.*

*He confessed that when he got drunk
he had a tendency to go home from the pub
and take his frustrations out on his family and
break up the furniture.*

What should he do?

*His friend suggested that whenever he was tempted to pick up a
bottle,*

he consider picking up his Bible instead.

Seemed like odd advice to him,

but he was desperate so he gave it a go.

A few weeks later he was in the pub,

thumbing through the Psalms,

when a former drinking pal loudly asked him,

*“Hey, do you actually believe what you’re reading there?
Do you believe that Jesus turned water into wine?”
“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t know. I wasn’t there,” he said.
“But I do know that in my home Jesus has turned wine into
furniture.”*

A New Creation

Jesus said, “But when he came to himself...”

**The Apostle Paul said: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new
creation:**

*everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!
All this is from God, who reconciled us to [God] through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...”*

Psalm 51: 10 prays, “Put a new and right spirit within me.”

Psalm 51 was written by King David

**right after he committed a series of harmful acts
in the sight of God and the whole people of God.**

David begged for forgiveness;

he sought a new spirit and a new way;

**afterward he celebrated the restoration of his life
and relationships.**

**He prayed: “Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.”**

God will and does put a new and right spirit within us.

How will you and I know we are a New Creation?

**This is what happens when you allow a loving people to love
you,**

**when you allow a forgiving people to forgive you,
a healing and hospitable people to aid and
welcome you**

into the Great Banquet of God on earth as

it is in heaven.

As a New Creation we appreciate, we give thanks

that our past does not determine our future.

Praise God that our past does not determine our future!

***A poor decision or words spoken harshly and with haste
or something we have done or said***

***which we later look back with embarrassment or
regret***

***does not eternally set you outside God's
good graces.***

A call refused can be reconsidered.

***A wrong word or bad decision or a sin committed can be
forgiven.***

A broken relationship may be healed.

***A broken nation can be made whole and transformed with
redeeming grace.***

A prodigal sons return home,

***lost sheep are found, sinners are welcomed at the table,
and broken hearts are healed.***

A spirit, once lost, is found,

once dead, is alive again,

made into a new creation.

We know what that feels like, sounds like, tastes like,

and even looks like to be one of Jesus' new creations.

New creations like you.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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Go out in the neighborhood.

Empower people to love each other.

Help them listen for their call to be the people God created their souls to be.

Teach them by your actions about God's unconditional love for each and all.

And, lo, I will be with you until the end of the age.

— The Great Commission Based on Matthew 28

According to First Christian Church, Decatur, Georgia