

Being made new

January 25, 2009

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting humanity’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5: 17-20).

God is always in the business of renewal and creation. Not self help and retread. Do you know about retreads? For those of you who don’t, they are an inexpensive and somewhat temporary way to lengthen a tire’s life. You take an old tire and take off the old tread and glue on a new tread onto the old tire sidewall. How good a glue and how well it adheres often determines the amount of wear you get on a pair of retreads. But you sometimes see the whole tread of tires that have come off on the freeway...which is usually from a retread.

God is not in the retread business...where he takes the old and slaps on something new on top of the old sidewalls, hoping the glue holds up and the whole thing holds together under the stress and pressure of the road and modern driving conditions. No. Jesus said that you did not put new wine into old wineskins...because the new wine, when it ferments would

expand too quickly and burst the old wineskins and both wine and wineskins would be lost.

God is in the business of making all things new.

When we think about the old, what comes to mind? What kinds of things hold us back or weight us down? Our sinfulness, our selfishness, our childish nature...you may remember the book that was popular a decade or two ago "Everything I needed to know I learned in Kindergarten"...but many learned the wrong lessons in Kindergarten and have yet to let them go...lessons like ME FIRST!!! the ever popular MINE, MINE, MINE!!! And the ever popular NO, with the emphatic stomp of the foot and/or the shake of the head and hair! No, No, NO.

Add to these the He said and She said gossip of Grade School that often continues around many offices and I wonder what many really left behind from grade school.

The old referred to in this beautiful and hopeful passage is our sinful selves. It is our weaknesses, our heavy hearts, our deep hurts that we have carried for so long. It is our wounded souls that we won't let any near enough to touch, much less bind up or heal. Perhaps it was the time a family member or close friend made fun of us and cut us to the quick. Or it was a broken heart, or when we were rejected by someone who mattered SO much to us, or when we were very lost and alone and afraid and did something we are very ashamed of now or regret to this day....we carry the guilt and shame with us even now and can't seem to let go of it.

Maybe we are burdened in some other way. Our journey has been long, and we are tired. We lack joy in our lives and we seek inspiration and hope...oh how we need hope...

But wait...a light shines in the darkness. Hope burns across the night sky. Love comes in the form of a cross that touches down to the foundations of the world and reaches up to the very heights of heaven...and it's members are wide enough to include anyone and everyone, yes everyone!

He had come, this God incarnate, this Messiah Jesus, to be among us, to reconcile us to himself. He is the one who has come, and he is the one who is doing the reconciling.

We are not reconciling ourselves to him. It is not by our actions, by our wills, by our minds and intellects and understandings, or by our wills that this is done. God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. Reconciling us to himself.

We are lost in our pain, in our need and in our limitations. We can't hardly help ourselves, how could we be expected to make our way to God? Think of all the different kinds of self help books and diet and exercise systems there are out there?

This is diet and exercise advertizing season...January...because of New Year's resolutions, these companies strike while the iron is hot so to speak, so we see commercial after commercial for a host of different diet products and companies, each claiming to be the best and to work wonders. We also see a variety of exercise products from bow flex to ab-rollers to push-up bars to an exercise ball that looks suspiciously like the large 99cent balls you can buy at Walgreens!

All these products and services may work and they may not...but but the key is that they depend upon you doing the work and for the most part people are unwilling or unable to do that work...if they could, they would not be in the position they find themselves in in the first place.

God does not say to us, here I am, make yourself perfect, climb the ladder of holiness....here is a system of study, pray and holiness that you can work your way into heaven with...NO. God comes to us in Jesus Christ. And in Christ, God reconciles us to Him. God does it.

God does not even say, meet me half way, get your stuff in order clean up your life some...throw away some of our junk and I will come and meet you.

No. God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Anyone who is in Christ is a new Creation. The old has gone, the new has come, all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

As the Bible say, it is by Grace..the love of God moves God to come all the way into our world, all the way to where we are...all the way to me and to you. All we need do is open our lives, our minds and hearts to God and invite him in.

When he comes into our lives, he makes us new from the inside out. He creates in us a clean heart, a new heart.

What does this look like? Of course, there are some similarities, and some things are unique to each individual. Some of it is similar: we all know ourselves to be loved in Christ...to be forgiven, to be set free from our past...set free from sin and any of its power or penalty. We all know ourselves to belong...to belong to God as his beloved child, and to belong to all Christians as brothers and sisters. We all know we are called to service...to follow Jesus as his disciple...we have a purpose, a place.

We all know that we are not alone, that he is always with us, and that is joy is with us, and that this joy has the capacity to fill us at

all times, even in hard times. Now we grow in these things, so we are not perfect and we can't be expected to be perfect. And that is ok. That is part of being in Christ too...the freedom we have knowing that we are loved and secure in him and that we are forever His and he will never desert us or forsake us regardless of how bad we screw things up! Whew! Boy is that a relief!

God is always making us new. Sometimes it takes awhile. A lifetime really. And it takes time for these internal changes to be visible on the outside. We can help these internal changes by fanning the flames of the fire...by taking our faith seriously. By study, prayer, worship and service.

Giving God permission to change you. Sometimes we desperately want to change the inside, but we are afraid to change the outside because we are afraid of what people will think or say. They might think I am some sort of Jesus freak! A Religious Fanatic. Remember, it is a long way from being secure in your faith and up front & open about it and being a fanatic! You don't have to make that jump! And I discovered that some folks thought I was a weirdo already...but that may have just been me...

And one last thing. God loves you enough to come and live and die so you might be made alive, really alive inside. This is good news, great news, good enough to share. Others are really, desperately in need of this news too. I am not suggesting stopping people on the street, but if you are open, you will be surprised when openings come up. If we hide the truth, if we keep it to ourselves, it is as if we have found the chocolate ice cream and no sit-up and lose 40 pound diet and not tell anyone.

It is as if we have found the watch tv and do not sweating on the machines 4 hours a day and become buff workout routine and kept it to ourselves.

It is as if you have found how to save your marriage, to save your soul, to find the center of the universe in the center of your life and begin anew the great journey of lie and truly live happy...and tell no one...

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