

NEW CREATION

2 Cor 5:17

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Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 09.14.2003

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them springing fresh from the word!

Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dewfall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning
Born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's re-creation of the new day!

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them springing fresh from the word!

Lyrics of the Scottish Gaelic hymn written by Eleanor Farjean (copyright 1957), but perhaps best known from the music of Cat Stevens (*Teaser and the Firecat*, 1971).

From beginning to end, the story of the Bible can rightly be called the story of God's "new creation." At the start we read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). At the finish we find, "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Rev 21:5). Throughout the pages of Scripture, prophets, poets, and preachers all express a firm and vibrant faith in the creative activity of the LORD God. The prayer of the penitent sinner is that God would "create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). The bold declaration of the prophet Isaiah is that the LORD, even now, is "making something new" (Isa 43:18-19), and both Isaiah and the apostle Peter speak of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13). It is the apostle Paul who penned these powerful words: "If anyone is

in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17).

This morning, I want us to focus on Paul’s words. Let’s read together from 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 14 through 21.

¹⁴For [it is] the love of Christ [that] urges [compels] us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a worldly [fleshly] point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a worldly [fleshly] point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins [trespasses] against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul’s perspective is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ triggered a new creation. It was as if the events of Gen 1 and 2 were reenacted. As he writes earlier in 2 Cor 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The voice of God once again pierced the darkness and called forth light. This time the light shines through the face of Jesus Christ. God’s redeeming and reconciling work in Christ is not the rebuilding or repairing of the old creation, but its replacement by a new creation. Praise God! Morning has broken!

This new creation, however, is not something that has only happened “out there” – “out there” in the cosmos. Listen again to Paul: “*If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.*” If we are “in Christ,” we are participants in this newly created order, where the old is gone and the new has come. To be “in Christ” means that the new creation God enacted in Christ is reenacted within us. The reordering of the cosmos that began in Christ now begins in us. That is the amazing grace of an awesome God! As Paul says, “all this is from God.”

Paul knows what he is talking about because this is precisely what happened to him. Saul who persecuted the church became Paul who preached Christ. By the amazing

grace of an awesome God, the old Saul was transformed into the new Paul: from apostate to apostle, from persecutor to preacher, from taking life from others to giving his own life, from seeing Christ from a worldly point of view to seeing Christ from a heavenly point of view. From Saul to Paul: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

It should come as no surprise that scholars do not agree on the exact meaning of Paul’s “new creation.” Is Paul speaking of a new cosmos, a new community, or a new individual? My answer, “Yes – all of the above.” While the emphasis may be on the individual as a new creation – which is why some translations prefer the expression “new creature” – the individual as a new creature finds his or her place and purpose in the new community – the church – which finds itself a part of God’s new creation. Since scholars like to sound scholarly, they speak of the eschatological and ecclesiological and anthropological dimensions of the new creation. Personally, I find Paul easier to understand! “Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” That sounds simple enough to me; however, what God has done, is doing, and will do through Christ is mind-boggling. The words of Paul are understandable; it is the work of God that is incredible and incomprehensible.

I want to summarize this new creation with three words: change, character, and church. First, *change*. If we are to be “in Christ,” we must be changed. Outside of Christ, we see things from a worldly point of view – a view that will ultimately perish with this world. We must be changed. Call it what you will, “sanctification,” “conversion,” “born again” – the result is the same: we must be changed. Notice that I have said “be changed” rather than simply “we need to change.” Why? Because we cannot do it ourselves. While we are not lacking in pride, we lack the power to change into the image of Jesus Christ. Like the penitent prayer of Ps 51, we cry out, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Like Paul, we must be blinded by the light so that we can see Christ for who and what He is. If you or I have come today hoping that God can just fix us up for another week, we have come in vain. God doesn’t want to repair you or me, He wants to completely remake us.

This brings us to the second word, *character*. By the presence and power of the Holy Spirit we possess the character of Jesus Christ. This is a life-long process as the Spirit

shapes us and molds us into the likeness of Christ. Paul stated it this way to the Christians in Galatia:

^{5:22}The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. . . . ²⁴those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Finally, the word *church*. If we are “in Christ” we are more than new creatures; we are also members of a new community. Although we come to Christ as individuals, we are changed into members of His body and that means we are members of His church. From the viewpoint of the big picture, we become new creatures within a new community within a new cosmos. Christ must be in us, transforming us into a new creature, *and* we must be in Christ, transferring us into a new community. God’s new creation not only changes us, it also changes all of our relationships. We now belong to a whole new world.

“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” In Christ, there is a new way of perceiving and proceeding; a new way of believing and behaving; a new way of looking and living.

Martin Luther once observed, “God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing God can make nothing out of him.”

Are you “in Christ”? Perhaps you look at your life and feel unworthy, thinking to yourself, “I have nothing to offer.” Wonderful! Simply wonderful! Humbly come before God and give Him your nothing! It is out of nothing that He does His best work! Nothing . . . now God can do something with that!