



transformed living

Sermon 1 of 4: New Creation

Date: April 7, 2013

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21

Background:

Recalling:

- our motto text (Romans 12:2 from the New Living Translation) and
 - the Resurrection of Jesus, which demonstrates why Christianity is good news
- our new teaching series is designed to help to grow as disciples of Christ into the fullness of God's love and purposes for us.

We begin by considering how through faith in the crucified and risen Christ, we are a new creation and the difference that this makes to how we live.

Ice-breaker:

In 2 minutes, how many television programmes and about transformation (of some kind) can you name? (e.g. Changing Rooms; DIY SOS; Ten Years Younger; Spiderman)

Why do you think we're interested in transformation?

Study:

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 5:13-14

1. Read verse 17. What do you think Paul means when he writes "*...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new is come*" ? What does this mean in practice for followers of Jesus?
2. Discuss what it looks/feels like to be a "new creation" in Christ?
3. Read verses 18-20. One word is used four times in these four verses. The word is "*reconciliation*".

If we think about our world, reconciliation can be difficult and 'costly' (e.g. Northern Ireland) but it brings about a transforming difference. Think back to Christ's death and resurrection – all because of God's love for us. Remember also, the power of God that

Jesus revealed in His ministry and crucially, the power of God that raised Christ from the dead. Nothing is beyond God and those who are in Christ through faith.

- a) What do you understand by the word "*reconciliation*" in the context of these four verses?
 - b) In your opinion, what are the implications of the wonderful fact that through faith in Christ, we have been reconciled to God and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit? What are the blessings and the privileges/responsibilities of being reconciled to God and therefore a new creation?
4. Through faith in Christ, all believers receive new life in Christ and therefore become a "new creation". But the work of making Christians completely "new" in Christ (i.e. having the same character as Christ) is ongoing (see 2 Corinthians 3:17-18) and will only be completed when we are with Christ in heaven. Theologians use the word "sanctification" to describe the progressive transformation of believers.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul teaches that spiritual transformation is natural and a commandment. What's more, the writer of Hebrews teaches that spiritual growth must be a priority for Christians (Hebrews 5:13-14).

How are we to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in the work of transformation within and through us?

5. Read verse 20. Who is an "*ambassador*" and what is their role? How then are we to be "*ambassadors*" for Christ (i.e. for the kingdom of God).

Conclusion:

Take some time to thank God for His love and being reconciled to Him and for the blessings of being in His family.

Give some time to reflecting, sharing and praying how you may need to cooperate more fully with the Holy Spirit to grow into the fullness of God's love for you.

Close with a time of prayer.



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Sermon 2 of 4: New Mind & New Motivation

Date: April 14, 2013

Reading: Ephesians 4: 17-25

Background:

As we continue our consideration of how we are to continually grow as disciples of Christ, we turn to think about the role of our mind.

As preparation, it is helpful to read the preceding chapters of Ephesians particularly Chapter 2, 3:14-20 and 4:1-16. This will set the context for our study and application.

Ice-breaker:

"If you put your mind to it, you will can do it" is a familiar expression. Share examples of how you have found this to be true.

Study:

Read Ephesians 4: 1-16

4. Read verses 14-16. The church in Ephesus was growing. The society was secular and the Christians were under attack. People were trying to dilute and change the Christian faith, introducing heresies.

Looking back to verse 13, in verses 14-16, Paul urges his fellow believers to make every effort to grow in their Christian understanding. One way in which they will grow is through serving Christ in the ministry of the church (verse 12a). We all have a vital role to play in the body of Christ.

- a) What do you think about this teaching?
- b) How are you sharing in the ministry of St. John's?

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

In the preceding verses, Paul has described "*unity*" (which derives from a common understanding about Christ and faith in Him as Saviour) and "*maturity*" as the twin goals for the church which God has brought into existence through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He now goes to teach that purity is essential to all

who belong to Christ and to explain how purity in Christ is worked out in the life of a believer. In short, how a "new creation" in Christ will live.

5. As a new creation in Christ, what do you understand "*purity*" to mean?
6. Read verses 22-24. Paul's teaching is clear and direct. In verse 23, Paul emphasizes the importance of "*our mind*" to help us to grow fully into the new creation that we are through our faith in Christ. (Remember our motto verse?)

How can we feed our minds with what is wholesome and pleasing to God?
(Not only what to avoid but what we need to feed into our minds.)

7. Read verse 25-31. Thinking of your own life, consider together the practical application of this teaching.
 - Agree 3 actions that you will take this week to help you to walk more closely with Christ and grow as a "*new creation*" so that you may increasingly "*stand firm*" and grow into the "*..whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*"
8. Read verse 32. "*Kindness and compassion*" are the opposite of negative qualities of verse 31. Through Christ, we have been forgiven and are a new creation in God's family. Hallmarks of being a new creation are kindness, compassion and the willingness to forgive others.

A tough question now – how true is this of us?

Remember that God offers us His help to grow in all areas of our life with Him so that we will attain to His fullness. But we must want to be transformed by Christ into the measure of His fullness. The role of our mind is crucial. Is our mind fully surrendered to Christ?

Conclusion:

Give some time to reflect, share and pray together as we seek to live lives that are fully surrendered to Christ.



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*Faith In
Action*

Sermon 3 of 4: New Thinking, Speaking & Living

Date: April 21, 2013

Reading: Ephesians 4: 25-32

Background:

As we continue our consideration of how we are to continually grow as disciples of Christ, we continue to consider practical application of what it is to be a new creation in Christ. To be followers of Jesus who are living lives that are transformed by Christ.

Building on from the last two weeks, we now consider 5 distinctives of a Christian that Paul lists in our reading. As a new creation in Christ, with a mind that has been renewed, Paul teaches how will be evident in our thinking, speaking and living.

Ice-breaker:

What are "hallmarks"? Where do you find them and what is their purpose? (e.g. wedding ring)

What do you think are the hallmarks of a Christian?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Read Ephesians 4: 25-32

9. Read verse 25. Instinctively, we know that lying is wrong. Lying was the first sin recorded in the Bible and is prohibited by the 9th Commandment. Given this, look again at this verse. What reason does Paul give to tell Christians why we are always to be people who tell the truth?
10. In your opinion, is it ever right to lie?
11. Read verse 26. Did you notice that Paul doesn't say don't be angry. Anger is an emotion. We're human and so we have emotions. When is anger permissible?
12. Read verses 26-27. What advice does Paul give as to how to deal with anger and why? Do you agree?

13. Read verse 28. At first reading, it can be all too easy to skip over this verse. Did you notice that this verse has three commands? What are they? Do you agree with them?
14. The fourth hallmark of a Christian, a new creation in Christ, whose mind has been renewed is how we speak. Read verses 29-30. A) What does "grieving the Holy Spirit mean? B) What do you think about this teaching? How can you embrace this teaching?
15. Read verses 31-32. Paul concludes by sharing the final hallmarks of a new creation in Christ. We are to be people of kindness (grace) and forgiveness because in God's grace, we have been forgiven and given new life in Christ. Consider your own walk with God. What can make it difficult to live in the fullness of this instruction? How can we seek God's help to change?

Conclusion:

Give some time to reflect, share and pray together as we seek to live lives that are fully surrendered to Christ.

Helpful Hints:

1. The reason that Paul gives for telling the truth is interesting.

"Therefore, each of you must out off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body." (Ephesians 4:25)

A foundational Christian truth is that in Christ, we become part of His body. A second foundational truth is revealed in verse 23, and as our motto verse for the year (Romans 12:2) is that followers of Jesus are also people whose mind has been renewed to see life as God sees life, from His perspective.

So putting these two truths together, Paul tells us that the way God sees it is that when we lie to someone I'm not just hurting them, I'm hurting myself. The truth is, since we're all members of one body if I lie to them and don't help them to grow and change, I'm keeping the body of Christ from growing. Paul wants us to see the bigger picture.

One of the reasons we lie in life is to get what we want. But I think the reason most believers lie is because they don't want to hurt somebody, they don't want to get in a conflict situation. But as Ephesians 4:15 teaches, a hallmark of Christianity is the ability to "*speak the truth in love*" so "*we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*"

What's more, as our minds are increasingly transformed by Christ, our desire to lie and our reluctance to speak the truth in love will diminish.

3. Anger is an emotion. We're human and so we have emotions. There is a place and a purpose for anger. But we need to be wise and careful. As we learn from Christ and read in scripture, righteous indignation is permissible if it prompts us to restore people into a loving, healing relationship with God. For example, issues on injustice.

4. But we are to be careful that we don't, consciously or unconsciously, allow anger to be sinful. The Bible says that the way we can do this is to ensure that we deal with that anger, that emotion, immediately. *"Don't let the sun go down."*

We are to recognize and resolve your anger before the end of the day. Why? Because otherwise there is the danger that it can turn into bitterness, then to wrath and you live with it for a long, long time. Relationships will be spoilt. There will be disunity and a lack of peace in our relationships. The body of Christ, the kingdom of God, will be hurt.

And Paul also reminds us that we are to be aware of the Devil. We live in a spiritual battle. Satan is committed to undermining the kingdom of God. A common tactic of Satan, for he is laughingly predictable, is to attack our Achilles heel - our character flaws, to bring about a greater evil (i.e. divisions against other Christians) to undermine the church and the spread of the kingdom of God.

Note the importance of Confession and the Peace in communion to ensure that we people who are of peace (shalom).

5. The 3 commands are:

- i. "Let the thief no longer steal."
- ii. "But rather let him labor, performing with his hands what is good."
- iii. let the aim of this work be that he may be able to give to those in need.

There is a progression here from an inferior to superior way of life.

First, you can steal in order to have. We know that stealing is prohibited by the 8th commandment. Stealing is part of the old self that we are to strip off (v. 22). Stealing is part of the corruption that comes from deceitful desires. Stealing comes from being deceived about what is truly desirable. When we come to Christ and our minds are transformed, we desire not the things of this world but the things of God.

Q) Are you aware that we can steal from God?

We read in Malachi 3:8:

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.
But you ask, How do we rob you."*

In tithes and offerings."

If we are choosing not to give of our first fruits (time, talents) and earnings to God, we are dishonoring God. We are withholding from God what is His.

Challenge: How is your giving to the kingdom of God? And are you giving willingly because your mind has been renewed?

Returning to Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4, did you notice why we are to work?

Working in order to have is perhaps the ideal in society—if you earned it you should have it. But it is NOT a Christian ideal. The most radical thing about this text is that we are commanded to do all our secular work with a view to meeting the needs of others. You can live to HAVE, either legally or illegally. Or you can become a Christian and live to give. This is a thrilling teaching! I think it has the potential of changing our whole life.

We are to work, to earn money, on order to provide for the needs of others – spiritual, physical and emotional. Challenging teaching.

6. Verses 29-30 *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

A) What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit in this verse?

The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God living within every believer. Every time we gossip, indulge in double-entendres, speak uncharitably, we hurt God. We really do!

B) This teaching from Paul gets to the heart of the issue for many of us. Jesus said, *"What's in the heart is what comes out of the mouth."* If you think, "I didn't really mean to say that," Jesus says, "No, you did. What's in the heart is what comes out of the mouth."

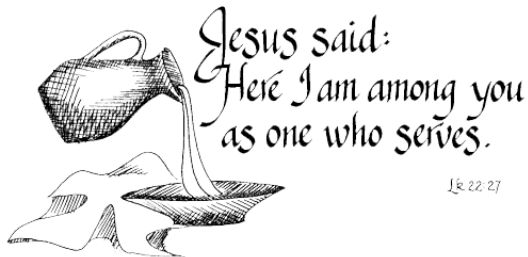
Challenge: We need to be aware of what we say and why we are saying it. There can be a fine between something being for pastoral purposes and it being a gossip. For example, "it would help to inform my prayers for X if you could share with me the problems that X is experiencing."

Christians are to be counter-cultural. And in our context, being wise and heavenly focused in our speaking must be a priority. And did you notice that Paul encourages us to speak to *"build others up according to their needs."*

Challenge: Invite you to look to compliment and encourage others this week. To speak and listen in love. Corresponding willingness to receive the truth spoken in love for good and the good of the kingdom.



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Sermon 4 of 4:

Date:
Reading:

Servant Living

April 28, 2013
Ephesians 4: 32- 5:2;
Matthew 20: 20-28

Background:

Through faith in the risen Christ, Christians are new creations in the family of God. The Holy Spirit works in and through every believer to progressively transform us into the nature and image of Christ and in so doing, to continue to build the kingdom of God.

We conclude our teaching series on what it is live a life that is transformed by Christ, by considering how we are living, as individuals and as a community, as a servant(s) of God.

Ice-breaker:

Have you ever bought an imitation of something? (e.g. fake designer bag)

Why do you think people are tempted to buy an imitation of the genuine article? What are the differences between the real thing and a copy?

Study:

Read Matthew 20:20-28

1. Why do you think the mother of the disciples, James and John, asked the favour of Jesus?
2. What did her question reveal about her understanding of Jesus and new life in the kingdom of God?
3. From what we have learnt in recent weeks, how would you describe the characteristics of a person who is living the transformed life in Christ?

4. Read verses 25-28. Jesus is the servant king, the suffering servant (Isaiah) who fully obeyed God the Father. What can/does make it difficult for us to live fully as servants of God as Jesus did and requires us to?
5. How can we address and overcome these challenges? (Note: the importance role of our mind in spiritual growth and Christian living.)

Read Ephesians 4:32-5:2

6. As we conclude our teaching series consider and share what the Holy Spirit has revealed to you "as a dearly beloved child" as a loving invitation for you to grow into the fullness of God's love for His glory.
7. What affirmations and changes have you discerned from the Holy Spirit in recent weeks? What steps are you taking to act on these promptings and live more deeply as His servant in the love of God.

Conclusion:

Give some to thanking the Lord for His continuing love, patient presence and work of ongoing transformation.

Pray for each other and for the church that we will continue to grow in spiritual maturity, unity and faithful and joyful service so that God's work of transformation will continue in and through us for His glory.
