

A New Creation – Heart by Heart

John 20:19-23

2 Corinthians 5:1-6, 16-20a

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¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

2 Corinthians 5:1-6, 16-20a

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off^[a] we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;^[b] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,^[c] 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! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^[d] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ

More and more in this life, I’m finding myself craving a different sort of Messiah than we received in Jesus of Nazareth. Scripture says that the old is gone and the new has come. We are a new creation in Jesus Christ! And yet, I struggle with the same issues, day after day.

I wanted everything to be set right. I wanted my struggle with temptation and sin to be no more. I wanted evil and sin to stop, for good. I want to feel all shiny and new, and not struggle with the same issues, I had yesterday.

But that is not the Messiah we get. We do not get the Savior we want. But perhaps we have gotten the Savior we need.

The kind of Savior I want grabs hold of the whole world & forces everyone's hand. The kind of Messiah many of Jesus' followers wished him to be was the same – the kind who would shake the Roman government's grasp off Israel and claim his rightful place as King of the land. We want a Savior to do all the things we cannot do. We want a Savior to control and make things right, right before our eyes – now and forever.

And this is so not what we get in Jesus of Nazareth.

This Messiah knew his place. This Messiah knew he was the Son of God and yet still allowed himself to be crucified, for all to see.

This Messiah could stop storms, heal diseases, and raise the dead, with his mere words, and yet he did *not* rescue himself from the pain and suffering. He did *not* heal all people, everywhere for all times,...with a word. He did *not* stop all storms for all times. He has *not* stopped our loved ones from dying.

This Messiah does things in the most opposite way than what we want.

This Messiah shows power in death on the cross.

This Messiah shows leadership in servanthood, washing the dirty feet of his followers.

This Messiah does not pick the cream of the crop to be on his team, but he chooses folks who were largely simple and uneducated to carry his light and life to the world.

This Messiah is *not* what I crave.

This Messiah does *not* stop all my suffering and pain.

This Messiah does not *rescue me* from sin and evil, at least not in the way and timing that I want.

And so what does it mean that the old is finished and gone, the new has come?

In some ways, the old way still seems to rule and carry on. The rich get richer. The poor get poorer... Still people are oppressed. Still those most vulnerable are preyed upon. Our struggles with sin, persist...

But at the same time, everything is different.

While before my sins were a death sentence, now I have the hope of forgiveness and belonging.

While before I was caught in cycles of sin and death, now I can receive the life-giving love and forgiveness of my Maker and choose to live by the Spirit of God, more and more.

While before knowledge and understanding was only for the elite and educated few, now God's Spirit is being Poured out on rich and poor, young and old, man, woman, and child.

While at the surface, everything seems the same.

Just below the surface, in the depths everything is changing.

God's love, God's Spirit, God's forgiveness is changing the deepest parts of human ourselves.

Jesus' life and ultimate sacrifice are doing what no human can do: heal the human heart.

So while I want God to deal with all these **symptoms**.

Christ, in God's wisdom, is dealing with **the root** of the problem, *the heart of the matter*.

And as with most lasting change, the results come **over time**, as people *participate in* the life-giving work of God in their lives and in this world. And just as patients will make their own choices about whether to follow their doctor's advice and counsel or not, so we are continually making choices as to whether or not to join in with what our God is doing. *The more we seek and listen and follow our Savior's lead, the more healing and life we usher into the world.* The more we seek, listen to, and follow after our own purposes and preferences and interests, the more we can grow deaf and dumb to the Spirit of God. For **seeking after, listening to, and following after** God are all *active muscles of faith* we are called to engage. When we do not use those muscles of faith, they atrophy. And if, in their place, we are listening to the voices of

everyone around us and even our own hearts, to the exclusion of our Lord, we can become masters of following in the ways of humanity and the world, but complete amateurs at following in God's ways.

Becoming a disciple of Christ is more than mere lip service.

It always has been.

It is not about believing all the right things.

It is not even about ascribing to a certain set of beliefs.

Being a disciple of God means to turn toward Christ, positioning our whole selves in relation to Christ. It means spending time in the presence of Christ. It means quieting our hearts and minds, our hopes and fears. It means surrendering control and trusting God to guide us better than we could guide ourselves.

Discipleship is an active choice, day by day, moment by moment.

Discipleship is carried out by actively using our muscles of faith, and choosing to seek, listen, and follow.

Discipleship is *not* life insurance. In fact, our leader allowed himself to be killed in one of the most cruel and painful ways.

Discipleship is *not* a way to get ahead in the world; Jesus' commitment to speaking the truth and walking in love made him enemies in high places.

Discipleship is not easy. It is not popular, even in our Christian-friendly culture; because really we value autonomy and individuality; thus, surrendering our will to God's bigger work is actually not very bold or sexy.

Discipleship is **a giving over** of our lives to the One who has given his life to breath true life into our dry bones,

It is a giving over of our lives to the One who has given his life to shine light into our darkest depths,

It is a giving over of our lives to the One who is making whole, all that has been broken.

Despite how much our culture seems friendly to Christianity, there are marked differences in them. No culture, no company, no business will adopt Christ's model in full. It is a model of self-sacrifice. It is a model of servanthood. It is a model of power through perceived weakness.

Christ goes against all we are taught.

But what I can witness to, in my short years, and imperfect life of faith, is that God is faithful. Our God knows what we need. When God speaks, it is water in the desert, life to dusty dry bones, hope from the depths of despair. When we tune into God's presence, when we actively remember God's love poured out, when we give thanks for all the blessings and gifts in our lives, we can find ourselves standing on holy ground, **on solid ground**, before the Maker of the Universe!

It is no small thing to be a tool in the hands of our God.

It is no small thing to be wholly known and wholly loved by the God of the Universe!

It is no small thing to be called a friend of God, Child, Beloved.

Friends, do not be discouraged by the winds that blow.

Do not lose heart by the same old stories of sin and oppression and injustice.

Do not think that all is lost and these stories are only stories...

For in fact, our God is *on the move*.

Our God is on the loose.

Poured out in hearts and minds,...

Forgiveness poured out for the whole world!...

Light and love and life are on the move, *inviting hearts and healing us from the inside out*, so that **our whole lives become radiators of God's love**,...

And God's love is never lost or wasted. God's love was poured out on us all in the life and death and resurrection of our loving Savior. Love is never wasted.

So let us *be* disciples.

Let us *exercise* our muscles of faith, **seeking and listening and following**.

Let us *join in* the amazing work of God, living, moving, radiating heart to heart.

And **may we find ourselves** smack in the middle of God's powerful working in our lives, our culture, and the world,

Truly *living* as **disciples** of Christ, ambassadors of God's love!

May it be in us.