

Sermon 16th October 2022 – A New Me! (DC)

2 Corinthians 5 v 11-21 & Matthew 27 v 45-56

Preparing for this talk on the subject of 'A New Me' I have to admit that things didn't go the normal way I would expect. Generally, I always start by praying to God for help as I plan what is to be said, I then read the bible passages, read a number of commentaries on them by other people and then with a mass of conflicting ideas and thoughts I pray again for some guidance on what the key messages are that I should draw out. Then there is a perplexing wait until God gives me some prompt on an angle for the talk. Often that comes in the middle of the night whilst I'm half dreaming or have an over-active brain and can't sleep. Sometimes in good time or sometimes agonisingly close to Sunday morning.

This time I woke in the middle of the night three weeks ago, before I had even read the Bible passages; I had done no study and given it no great thought. I woke from a dream - or was it a nightmare even - that I was in front of a class of primary school children and being asked to answer the question 'Why should we pray'. Why pray?

Now, you have to understand that God and I have a bit of a relationship through dreams. It was through a dream that God turned me from an atheist to a believer in a deep personal spiritual experience – so I take dreams as one of the ways God can speak to me and I don't ignore them– there are other ways too of course, the word of the bible, wisdom and insights from fellow believers, experiencing creation around us, even miracles and answers to prayer, to name a few.

But I was convinced by that dream that the key point to this talk on 'A New Me' is to be found in the answer to the question 'Why Pray?'....and then I started my preparation.

We've just sung the song, 'I am a 'new creation', but what do we understand by this claim to personally be a new creation – to be a 'new me'? What happened to the old creation or old me and what makes the difference?

For those of us who have had a conversion experience, who can mark a time and day when we became Christians, then we can envisage, perhaps, a moment when something new began in our lives, a turning point, or being born again as the parlance goes.

But what of those, perhaps you, who have felt yourselves to be Christians throughout your lives, who have known nothing different? Are you no less a New Creation – even if you can't remember the old one?

There are, I would suggest a few key personal points we should take on board which lead to defining what we mean by being a new Creation or a new me.

Firstly, we should not underestimate the very words 'New Creation' from our passage. If we are a new creation, then we are not an improved or enhanced version of the old creation.

V 17 in 2 Corinthians 5. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is s a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!

We are something completely new and different. For those who don't remember an old self before knowing Christ it doesn't matter because the prime condition is 'if anyone is in Christ' and just remember that Paul was talking to a generation who by reason of time and communication would not previously have known of Christ, let alone known him.

You will notice that I said that being IN Christ we are new and 'different' and not 'better'. Some of the commentaries on this passage stress that by being in Christ we are almost by definition on an upwards path of ever-improving holiness, generosity, graciousness, wisdom and whatever virtue you care to select.

I'm not so sure about that. Firstly, I suspect we all know far too many people who are not 'In Christ' who are pretty decent and caring human beings. For them, Salvation is not about being rescued from a life of abject evil. The concept that Christians have a monopoly of virtue, of being 'better' is dodgy theology. Secondly, how many of us here can claim that there are never any times when we find walking with Christ blooming difficult. We get tempted, we get things wrong, prayers are not answered, at times we have doubts and the Christian life can look like a mountain to climb.

Secondly, let's face it, every week in our services we have times of confession for our shortcomings – and no doubt we individually say sorry to God quite a few times during the week.

But that is what brings us to the heart of what being in Christ, of being a New Creation – a new me - is all about.

As a new creation we are a work in progress and not the finished article.

It might be called Christ's Ministry of Reconciliation as in our reading, but it's the fundamental point of being 'In Christ' that our relationship with God is not defined by our failings and shortcomings. We do not have to beat ourselves up, which is not to say we should not feel remorse or try to do better next time. The centrality of this is in Christ dying for us and rising again, the Easter story – the heart of the Christian

faith of which we will sing later – but I'm not going to dwell on that now – but rather what leads on from it.

If we look at two other passages of scripture, they amplify on the new Creation and New me.

Galations 2 v20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

1 Peter 2v9 But you are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

To be in Christ and Christ to Be In Me means a personal relationship with God through Christ, a relationship reflected in how we try to live our lives, but also in praise of him who called us out as a chosen people from darkness into his wonderful light.

That relationship with God through Christ is the defining difference between those in Christ and those not in Christ, between the new me as a New Creation and the old. It is a relationship granted by God through the death and resurrection of Christ and not earned by us.

And that is where I come to my opening point about Prayer and the new Me.

The difference between those of faith and those with none is that the former pray. The faithful have a prayer relationship with God to instruct, encourage, condemn, correct, guide, to love - within the context of God's total goodness and not our own. As beings, we are more than just our human selves. We have a spiritual dimension with a God-based moral and ethical compass external to ourselves, together with, and we should never forget this, an empowerment to be his ambassadors that comes through the Holy Spirit. We are the new Creation.

No relationship can be created or continued without talking and listening to each other. Communication with God is centred on prayer – but for prayer we must be in his presence.

If God has given me a word for this sermon, then I believe it is this.

As new Creations, New Me's – Simply spend time with Almighty God in his presence in awe and enjoyment of his company.

Prayer is so much more than going to God with our shopping list of desires, ill health, bereavements or even thanksgivings. It's even more than just listening for guidance.

It's not even a function of time, short stab prayers in the heat of the moment, issue prayers, or long meditation sessions, prayers alone or with our fellow believers.

Have our prayers become too influenced by the characteristics of the world about us, so that we always are seeking action, getting things done, things driven by desire for successful outcomes? Striving for betterment?

There's an old song by Graham Kendrick we don't sing much now – and to be honest it always used to annoy me.

Opening with God saying, *'Let me have my way among, do not strive, do not strive', and ending with 'We'll let you have your way among us, we'll not strive, we'll not strive'.*

Why did it annoy me? Because I thought we should be striving and working hard to be more Christlike, there are things to be done.

I was wrong.

As New Creations, we are not the finished article but work in progress. We are God's chosen people, and first and foremost we should approach his throne and delight to be in his presence, for we are his. Then we will be directed, encouraged and equipped from God rather than our own desires and angles.

So, in prayer let us sometimes simply delight to be in the presence. Being with him without agenda, just enveloped by his presence. praying without a list, without talking or without expectation - Just to be in his company. Lost in Wonder, love and praise.

I had wanted to end this talk with that hymn, 'Love Divine', but Clive got to it first a couple of weeks ago, but the last verse sort of sums it up:

*Finish then Thy new creation: pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Or as our next hymn also puts it similarly:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, may life my all.*

Amen