

"Becoming a New Creation"

Scripture Passages: 1) Psalm 5:1-8
2) Luke 10:1-12, 17-20
3) Galatians 6:11-18

Review: The Gospel of Grace or the Gospel of Law that tension is the theme of Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia. The Gospel of Law is a dead end; it is the path to the unattainable goal of perfection. The Gospel of Grace sets us free to choose how we will live. Of course this path, while not a dead end, is filled with peril for we often choose to follow a path other than the path of discipleship, the path that leads to life.

As Paul points out God gives us our freedom hoping that we will choose to use our freedom to love sacrificially, to build accountable relationships, to live generously for the common good of all. Paul hopes that as Disciples of Christ we will use our freedom to live in ways that bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. As Paul brings his letter to a conclusion he suggests one more hope for how we will choose to use our freedom. Listen as Paul wraps up his words to the churches of Galatia. **Read Galatians 6:11-18.**

Becoming New: "It is not what you and I do—submit to circumcision, reject circumcision. It is what God is doing, and God is creating something totally new, a free life!" The NRSV says, "For neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!"

Paul's final word to the Galatians and us is to use our God given freedom to become new creations. That in a nutshell is truly what it means to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus, to seek God, to be open to the Spirit's leading, to experience resurrection. To be a disciple of Jesus is to freely give ourselves to becoming completely new.

I believe this is our calling as individuals and as a church. In our Presbyterian tradition we talk about this in terms of being reformed and always reforming. In other words we recognize the reality and the truth that we are always in process. We are always in the process of becoming.

The question for us is do we embrace that truth? Do we pursue that truth? Do we live with passion and enthusiasm for that truth?

Or do we resist that truth? Do we fight that truth? Do we ignore that truth? Do we deny that truth?

In your life and as a church how do we engage the truth that we are called to become new?

As Paul states here, what is essential is to be paying attention to what God is doing, both in us, and around us. We want to be following God, not ourselves. To follow God means giving ourselves to becoming new. Have we done that? Are we doing that? Will we do that?

God Sightings: Every day at VBS the crews of kids took a few moments to go around and share their God sightings. Through the week they began to get used to the idea that God is always at work. The question is, "Are we paying attention?" Are we attuned to the presence and work of God in us and around us? Take a moment and share with each other a God sighting from this week. (Pause)

Joining in What God is Doing: Becoming new is the process of awakening to what God is doing and then joining in. In our lives are we choosing to look for the work of God? In our lives are we choosing to join in what God is doing? How about as a church?

How Have We Experienced This: As you think about your life how have you given yourself to the process of becoming new?

This process is evident in dramatic ways, for instance, conversion experiences like Paul's, or when a person lets go of an addiction. When an alcoholic or a drug user becomes a recovering alcoholic or recovering drug user their life becomes completely new. This is true with any addiction: food, pornography, the internet, shopping, gambling, whatever. These are dramatic life changes.

But becoming new also happens in more subtle ways such as becoming less judgmental, or less sarcastic, or less critical, or more careful with our use of language. Becoming new happens as we live more joyfully, more passionately, more playfully, and more creatively. Becoming new happens as we choose to live more generously, using more and more of our resources to care for others, and to build up God's Kingdom. Becoming new happens as we choose to live in ways that use less of the world's resources. Becoming new can take on an infinite number of avenues. The question is never do I have room for becoming new, but rather, do I have openness to becoming new.

Barriers to Becoming New: This is one of the huge challenges of choosing to be a follower of Jesus, growing in our openness to becoming new creations. As you think about your own life journey, what trips you up or holds you back from giving yourself to the process of becoming new. What are the barriers for you?

Paul identifies one of the key barriers, he writes, "For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. Because of that Cross, I have been crucified in relation to the world, set free from the stifling atmospheres of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate."

One of the great barriers to becoming new is being set free from the stifling atmospheres of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate. So much of who we are is because we spend much of our life pleasing others: parents, spouses, bosses, teachers, friends, and people we want to impress. Our life becomes dictated by our interactions with others rather than by what God is doing, and what God is calling us to. The more we can awaken to this reality the more freedom we will have to follow God.

The Church is Stuck: This is also true for us as a church. As a church our job is to follow the ways of Jesus, our job is to find ways to point others to follow Jesus. Unfortunately we often get stifled by trying to please the loud voices, and the demanding voices, and the manipulative voices. We quickly use our freedom to follow someone other than God. The church should never get side tracked by personal preference, or individual desire. That is how churches become stuck losing sight of what they are to be about. You see together we are called to discern what God is doing and then join God in that work. That is our job. That is our calling. As a church we too should embrace the process of becoming a new creation.

Conclusion: God created us to be free. The question is how will we choose to use that freedom? Will we use our freedom to enter the life long journey of becoming new? I pray that individually and jointly we will embrace the gift of becoming new creations. Amen.