

2 Cor 5 : 17 'Enabling all to meet Jesus as we demonstrate his new life'

Are you someone who likes something new? Are you excited to have a new bit of technology such as a phone or a tablet? Do you look forward to having a new book, or maybe clothes or, to go big, a new house? Are you excited by all of the challenges and changes required of you in a new job? Being excited by newness is something we tend to associate with those of younger years as it is assumed the younger you are, the more ready you are to face new possibilities, or a new lifestyle. But facing newness is something we all need to learn to embrace because constant change is a face of life. The title of this sermon is the second of what we mean by 'Enabling all to meet Jesus' in our Church Members' Covenant. This whole section says new is good as the leopard can change his spots and each one of us can become a different person. This is why conversion language matters, it describes something which happens at a unique moment in our lives, but it is also something which happens to us throughout our lives.

I became a Christian in 1980 because I saw the difference Jesus made in the lives of others, and this was something I wanted for myself. Part of the joy of growing older in Jesus is that I have learned more and more what this new in Jesus really is. I continue to be inspired by this new and I know the Spirit continues to prompt me to wade deeper and deeper into this new too. When Saul became Paul there was an explosion of new within him but this new was more than perhaps, we usually imagine. This new was something which Saul the Pharisee had always prayed for. For all his life he had yearned and hungered for God to bring in this promised new because God delights in new things and the new promised day. But for Saul this new came in a way he had never imagined possible. He had never thought that this new would come about by the Servant dying upon a cross and being raised to new life three days later. But when he discovered that this was how God's newness would come, he embraced it with all that he had and lived it with all his heart, his mind, his soul and his strength.

When Paul speaks of new creation he has in mind four elements:

The first is that new creation describes our knowing and experience of being forgiven. Paul knew and wrote about his having been cleansed, restored, healed, liberated, loved and reconciled to God because of Jesus' death on the cross and his being resurrected. To know we are forgiven by God is not to be reduced to being something we only know in our heads, it is to be something we know in our hearts and in our souls too which fills us with joy, with peace and that our identity is rooted in being his child.

Secondly, new creation means that we have been given a new heart. No longer is our heart described as being made of stone where we are indifferent, hard and calloused to Jesus. Instead, we now have a heart which is made of flesh and so we can love, be compassionate, be kind, know empathy, show goodness, be gentle to others, be patient with each other, be faithful and forgive those who are part of this church and also all who we may know, work with, play with or eat with.

Thirdly, new creation means that truth is now something which is deeply personal to us because it is now written on our hearts. This means that we are in the process of learning to think in a new way, we have a passion to faithfully obey Jesus and we desire to know Jesus and the unsearchable riches of his love for us and all creation.

Fourthly, and finally, new creation speaks of the Holy Spirit delighting to live in us. Since his Spirit dwells in us, God delights to draw near to each and every one of us. As those in whom his Spirit dwells we are at last on the path to being truly human which will be completed when we ourselves have been resurrected and clothed in our new bodies. As those in whom his Spirit dwells we are enabled to love God with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our soul and to love our neighbour as ourselves and thus fulfil all that the Law pointed to.

There is an obvious first question I want to ask us all and it is, do you believe this yourself? Do you believe Jesus can make you new? Do you know that you are ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven? You can know right now that this is true by confessing to Jesus that you are broken, polluted, rebellious and sinful because you have gone your own way, but you can ask Jesus, because he died on the cross and was raised to life for you, to make you new in the four ways described above.

There is an equally obvious second question and it is, are you living it? Do people see Jesus' new creation in you in such a way that they want to know this for themselves? This is Jesus' heart for each one of us. That we choose to follow, to imitate and to be like him that we may know more and more the astonishing breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love for each and every one of us.

The song says 'I am a new creation' as this is what Jesus does in our lives. May we all live in this new way that others will want to know this newness for themselves.