

Made New: Part 2
“New” Series Week 3
April 30, 2017
2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Welcome/Intro/Vision

If you're just joining us we've been saying over the past couple of weeks that for many of us at various points in our lives, something NEW came along and changed our lives for the better:

a new job, a new relationship, some new opportunity was a turning point for something great that happened in our lives

New has potential to bring new energy, new opportunities, new hopes and dreams

But the problem is that new in this word has a very short shelf-life. New in this world has a very predictable pattern that just about everything follows from cars to houses to bodies and jobs:

New to familiar to old to broken to gone

And all of us have scars from living in this world—a world where relationships break down, promises break down, bodies break down, disappointments and frustrations sometimes feel like they're at every turn

And what the Scriptures claim that God has done in Jesus is take this whole progression and run it backwards, done a complete end-around on the laws of physics

On Easter Sunday, Jesus who WAS dead and gone is raised from that dead and gone by God his heavenly Father

And he's been raised from the dead in order to establish a New New that will never grow old, never fall apart, never decay or be gone ever again

And what it means to become a Christian is to enter into this NEW NEW thing that God has done in Jesus

where we trust him with our lives and we follow him, and in doing so, we're made new right along with him

Today we're going to answer the question ***what do you do. when you. don't feel. terribly new?***

Because some days I wake up and I'm ready to go, really feel like God's at work in my life and giving me the energy I need to tackle life

AND THEN THERE ARE OTHER DAYS, and you probably have no idea what I'm talking about, but there are other days when I'm not feeling so terribly new

Sometimes that's due to external challenges and problems that just feel like they're beating me down! Did you ever feel like a plastic bag drifting through wind, wanting to start again?

OR sometimes I did something that messed it up. I made a mistake at work or at home that caused pain or damage or embarrassed me or that I had to do some serious work to fix or make right

or maybe even something that I CAN'T fix, I CAN'T make right, and there's this pit in my stomach that I can't go back and un-do what I did, I can't un-say what I said or un-email what I emailed.

And suddenly I don't feel so terribly new. I feel like the same old person who makes mistakes. Sometimes the same mistakes over and over again.

what do you do. when you. don't feel. terribly new?

We're going to go back to the same passage we looked at last week and pick right up where we left off

because the writer Paul is developing this whole idea that we're made new and what that looks like for us

So if you've got a Bible you can turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5, if you don't have a Bible it'll be on the screen behind me.

Let's start with what we read last week, as Paul, who helped start this church in the city of Corinth

is now writing this letter in part to defend himself against the people in this church who are questioning his authority and his teachings

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

So we talked about all of this last week, covering way too much ground for one message, if you weren't here you can go back and listen to that one

And then he comes to this point in the letter where he makes this dramatic statement about what it means to be a Christian:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

This blanket statement of new-ness: the new has come the old is gone, the new is here!

But what do you do when you don't feel particularly new?

On June 27th, 1998, was the day that marked the best earthly decision of my life: I married Kelly Goldsmith.

We were all of 24 years old, so of course we had everything figured out and knew exactly what we were getting into!

And on that day, a whole bunch of stuff changed!

her name changed, our addresses changed, our status with the government changed
we were in a NEW stage of our relationship: we went from single to married

But as it turned out, *being* married and living that out was more complicated than signing a document

Coming into our marriage there were a couple of key threats that hung over our marriage that I brought with me

There was stuff from my old life that if I carried it over into our new life it could seriously do damage to this new status that we'd just embraced

One of those old loves was the love of the crowd. As an extrovert, I love crowds. I love getting to meet and know new people—some of you are like me and totally get it, others of you are looking at me like I'm an alien

So Kelly and I would go to a gathering while we were dating and my mindset was: "Yay! People! Let me go see who's here!"

And occasionally I'd just leave her behind to go and work the crowd, unintentionally but functionally communicating to her that I loved the crowd more than her

And so in the weeks leading up to the wedding, as we talked about the reception, I made a promise to her: we were going to enjoy all the wonderful people at our reception together

I wasn't going to leave her behind to go and see how many people I could possibly talk to

And that's what we did. And it was wonderful.

I legally and officially entered into this NEW thing when I got married on June 27th, 1998, about 1:45 in the afternoon.

There was this NEW thing that had just happened legally and technically and was very, very real, very concrete and had all kinds of ramifications for our lives for the rest of our lives

BUT I was becoming more and more married all that afternoon at the reception, as I made a few NEW DECISIONS that were aligning my life with who I now was as I was married to this wonderful woman

New was an event, it was also a process. It happened in an instant and it was going to happen over a long period of time

And I had decisions to make in that process if I wanted to experience all the great things that were available to me in that new life that I had just signed up for and committed myself to

And those decisions weren't just a random list of things that I had to do or couldn't do any more

They were decisions that I needed to make in order to live out and fully experience this new thing that I had entered into.

When was I finally fully married in my life?

Well, I was married on June 27th, 1998 at about 1:45 p.m, then I was more married that afternoon at the reception

And in the days and weeks that followed there were big decisions and little decisions all along to get more and more married

And I didn't make those decisions perfectly, sometimes I made decisions that undermined my marriage, sometimes unintentionally, and sometimes unfortunately in my stubbornness and pride I made decisions that went against becoming New instead of contributed towards the new

But the overall arc of the past almost 19 years is such that I'm more married now than I was when I was back on June 27, 1998

Because NEW is an event. But it's also a process.

Now imagine this: imagine if I had never made any deliberate decisions at any point after the wedding ceremony to line up with the fact that I'd entered into something new on that date

If we had never moved in together, if we never made decisions together, if I never talked with her, if I never considered her opinions as important or valuable, if I never read her emails, never answered her phone calls, refused to acknowledge her in public or private

Didn't do holidays together, didn't in any way cultivate our lives together

And what if I did that for days and weeks and months and maybe years. And then I came to you and said,

"this whole marriage thing, I just don't get it! I mean, I don't really feel all that married. People said it would change everything when I got married, but I think it's all a sham"

What would you say to me? That I just don't get it!

If you're a Christian here this morning, when were you made new?

You were made new when you first decided to follow Christ. Part of what's going on when we get baptized is this NEW BIRTH! We're being made new!

And every day offers new opportunities to become more and more new or to ignore that new status and pretend like we're still old.

Paul in 2 Corinthians is declaring that if anyone has trusted in Christ, put their faith in Christ, they have been made new.

And that new is not a mere technicality, it's a totally new name and new status in the cosmos

The Scriptures say that before we came to Christ, we were orphans, separated from the love of a perfect God

And once we are in Christ, we have been adopted, bought back, and brought into the family of God, a child of God, a son or a daughter of the most high God

But experiencing that reality, living into that reality, letting that new identity animate us and bring us new life, that requires some deliberate practices, some new steps of faith

Because just like I was bringing into my marriage some things that could have undermined my marriage

so we're all bringing in practices from our old way of life that could undermine our relationship with God that need to be put off and other things that need to be put on

We're going to spend more time talking about this in a few weeks, but for this morning, I want invite you to consider this first question of the day:

What do you think it means for you to embrace the event and the process of being made New?

Some of us here are still considering that initial event: do I want God to make me new?

Do I want to give that kind of power, that kind of control over to Jesus, and do I want to let him direct my steps and call the shots?

Totally great question, and as someone who has been doing what I can to let Jesus do that for my entire adult life, I would say "Yes, yes you do"

It's been utterly life-giving to me at every turn, even when it's been difficult or there have been challenges or there are times when God has done stuff in my life that I didn't understand or didn't like initially

But as we read earlier, Christ's love compelled him to lay his life down for me and for you and when I submit my life to that kind of perfect love and when let that kind of love inform how I live and what I'm doing, it changes everything for the better

Embracing that love and receiving that love was a one-time event and it's also a process.

And so for those of us who have already said our once and for all "YES!" to Christ's NEW, there are practices that we need to put in place to step into that life, to cultivate it, to help us to live into it

And maybe even stuff we need to get out of the way that's blocking our ability to fully experience and step into the New!

Old habits, unhealthy patterns of relating—jealousy, pride, pornography, entitlement, self-righteousness, addictions

all these things will get in the way or at least severely slow the process of us becoming this new man or woman God wants us to be, those things have got to go!

Other things are things that we need to do as my small group talked about this week, like the basics of making sure you're in shape, eating healthy, taking good care of your body

I read a little bit of the Bible and I journal my prayers most days of each week, in order to live into this NEW life Christ has offered to me

I've been in small groups almost continuously my entire adult life in order to have other people speaking God's new life into my life week in and week out—if you haven't found your way into a small group yet, talk to me after the service I'll be glad to help you out

I've got a dear friend that I have a bi-weekly phone call with—every other Thursday we talk on the phone for about an hour, participating in what God's doing to make us both new
everything is open for discussion: from our relationships with our wives and kids at home to our relationship with God to what we're looking at on the internet and everything in between

Before I was a church guy, I was at church, singing the songs and listening to the Scriptures being explained, because I needed to learn what it meant to have this New life at work in my life

There are any number of ways that you and I can enter into this New life, but it is a process and it's a process that we can participate in and be a part of.

Now from this declaration of our being made new, Paul in his letter to the Corinthians takes an interesting turn to talk about ONE practice that he does that helps him to grow into his new life in Christ

Paul declares: ¹⁷ ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!***

And then he goes on: ¹⁸ ***All this is from God,***

And this is important: because living into this new life is a process and we have a role to play BUT it's crucial to see that what God has done is the hard part, the critical part, in making us new

If all the universe basically runs from new to familiar to old to broken to gone

And if what God has done in Jesus is run an end around, run this whole thing backwards so that now there's a NEW that never gets old, never falls apart, never fades or dies that we can be a part of

It's critical Paul says that we understand that all this is from God. And while we have a small role to play in experiencing this New life available and our being made new

God is the only one who has the power to do this!

God initiates grace, seals grace, and secures it for eternity, we just participate in it.

God is the one who has done the hard part, we receive that with joy and then we get to be a part of working it out in real-time in our lives

That's why we worship! That's why we sing! That's why we not only sing songs about God's salvation on Sunday mornings, that's why we organize our whole lives as worship around God's immediate, forever, unbreakable new!

Because God alone has the power to undo what was so broken about this world and he has done it—at great cost and sacrifice to himself,

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

So Paul has just finished declaring that God has gone through all this trouble to make us NEW, and then he's given us a NEW JOB to do, too

The job is to be Christ's ambassadors, to carry this message of reconciliation

See, one definition of sin is that *sin is simply broken relationship*.

We don't want God to be God, we want to be God, so we've broken our relationship with God and declared ourselves to be the gods in our own lives

And once we've broken relationship with God, all the other relationships in every direction start to break down as well.

Looking at the world, on how many levels do you see broken relationships? On how many levels are relationships breaking down?

Between nations, between ethnic groups, between the rich and the poor, between families and former friends, between spouses, between siblings

And even within ourselves, we have all these different voices in our heads that tell us to do stupid things that we know would destroy the things that matter to us, we don't even relate to ourselves rightly, do we?

Broken relationships: THE pandemic that ruins everything, it's corrupted and disrupted every single life in some way shape or form

To a world that is utterly riddled and groaning and weeping under the strain of broken relationships, Paul says *we get to bring GREAT, GREAT news:*

there is a reconciler with the power to bring God's immediate, forever, unbreakable new

there is a message of reconciliation that has the power to make everything that's broken whole again.

Isn't that delightfully, wonderfully, GREAT news? This morning, if you're feeling just blown over by broken relationships, broken bodies, broken marriages, broken friendships, broken job situations

Or just the pain of living in a broken world where people get mis-treated and judged and pushed around

Hear the good news this morning: Jesus has come to bring healing to broken relationships

It is what the whole earth groans for, what all of us groan for, whether we realize it or not.

And I want to propose to you that participating in this new job of being instruments of reconciliation is one of the wonderful ways that you and I might experience and know that being made New thing that we were just talking about

How do I actually experience this whole being made new thing? Go be an ambassador of this message, participate in God's work of reconciling a world full of broken relationships everywhere!

So back in August I stepped back and was looking at my calendar and my job a little bit and where and how I spend my time

And I realized that given my job as a pastor and given our church's make-up ethnically, I could in theory spend ALMOST all of my time with white Christians.

Our associate pastor Steve Tamayo is half Cuban, thank you for bringing that to our community, Steve and helping to save me from too many white people

And I also meet weekly with Michelle Stith who directs and coordinates all of our worship services, and she is half Puerto Rican, thanks for bringing that to our community, Michelle.

But I meet with other people all the time for coffee and lunch and breakfast

And given who's around here, I could very easily go for weeks where I all my meetings outside of staff meetings were with white people, whom I love—I love white people!

And white people who are Christians, whom I also love, I love white Christians, I happen to be one! I'm married to one!

But in order for me to do what Paul is talking about here, to participate in a ministry of reconciliation, I was going to have to change some things

So I decided back in the fall that I was going to try to meet with one non-Christian and one non-white person each week:

people from our church, people in the broader community, didn't matter: one person who wouldn't call themselves a Christ follower and one person who wouldn't call themselves white, that was my goal!

Because if I was going to be about the work of reconciliation and if my job was to be an ambassador, then I needed to be intentional about it.

No real agenda, I wasn't showing up with some big scheme or plan or to beat people over the head with a Bible, I wasn't going to try to single-handedly shore up race relations in America: the work of reconciliation precedes the message of reconciliation

Healthy relationships create the context where we can talk about the bigger work of reconciliation

whether it's a reconciled relationship with God or talking about race relations in our country or in the church

I was just building relationships and seeing what God was already up to, assuming that God's a God who is all about reconciliation, I would meet him as I went along

And it was really fascinating to talk with all kinds of different people all fall long, especially during an election year! Got all kinds of different perspectives on the election from different folks

And I ended up in all kinds of spiritual and racial conversations I would have never had if I hadn't been prayerfully taking steps into people's lives

And some cool relationships developed with some African-American pastors in the community,

And a few people made some steps towards faith, started coming to church or a small group, very fun!

But you know who was being made new the most in those conversations? Me. I was being changed. I was being made New.

As I stepped into the job of being an ambassador, I was becoming more and more NEW in part because everywhere I went, God got there first.

It was like I was a kid coming alongside my good Father on bring-your-kid-to-work day.

I prayed, I sent some emails, I got coffee or lunch or breakfast, and discovered God was at work in all kinds of surprising ways

not every conversation was like shock and awe, but in small and in big ways, I kept meeting God and getting a bigger understanding of how God was working

And as I met with different people AND LISTENED to people who were coming from different places in their spiritual journeys and ethnic journeys, I was learning how to speak about faith and a life of faith in different ways

An ambassador is a liason between two parties. The job of the ambassador is to be super familiar with the policies and the positions of the people or country they represent
AND the job of the ambassador is to speak the language of the people where they are sent

An ambassador has to act as a diplomatic but clear translator, a communicator, about the positions or policies of their home country in ways that resonate and are understandable for the people where they're living and serving

And having all these conversations that had reconciliation at the core of them, that was making me new
helping me to develop in my fluency about faith and reconciliation and life with God both vertically with God and horizontally with other people, especially across racial and ethnic lines

So Paul declares that we're made new once we are reconciled to God through Christ
And then describes this particular way that this NEW life comes to us, and it's new job description that comes our way: to be ambassadors for Christ
to carry this message of reconciliation, to be and INSTRUMENT of reconciliation at all levels to a world that is continuously unraveling under the strain of broken relationships in every direction

We asked the question at the outset: what do you do when you don't feel terribly new?

As we close with our weekly "Wildly Important Take Home" question, suggest this?

What if experiencing New! for you requires being an ambassador for Christ's work of reconciliation?

What if the only way you're going to experience in real-time God's new life and new energy at work in you is if you find a way to get involved in his work of being an instrument and agent of reconciliation?

And there's all kinds of ways that this can look!!

Is anyone here concerned that there's not enough broken relationships around you? Anyone noticed a shortage of broken relationships?

Because there are no shortage of broken relationships, wherever we are, to be a Jesus-follower means to be made new as we are an instrument of reconciling those broken relationships

And at the same time, occasionally being an ambassador for Christ will lead you to go places very intentionally, like for me when I decided to be intentional about meeting with one non-white person and one non-Christian each week

for some of us it will mean taking a step outside your normal patterns to participate as Christ's ambassador in a different context.

Sometimes it'll mean getting on a plane to go meet a need somewhere in another country. Sometimes it'll mean adopting a kid who needs a family.

Sometimes it'll mean volunteering in your kids school or with a local non-profit

And yes, sometimes it's going to mean praying about and thinking about how to open a door to a spiritual conversation with someone who's not currently in a reconciled relationship with God

Inviting them to pray, inviting them to read a Bible, inviting them to church, maybe even inviting them to be reconciled to God in Christ once and for all and to enter into this New life that we're talking about

And we do that as an ambassador: knowing BOTH the incredible and immeasurable love and grace of God AND communicating that with great diplomacy and thoughtfulness, in a language that the people around us can hear and understand.

If you want to experience God's New in your life personally, one of the most concrete things you can do is to say

"Yes, I will be a part of God's reconciliation, making all things new project, wherever he might take me, whatever that looks like in my life."

My friends, hear this good news: the God who gave his only Son to reconcile all things and to make all things new forever and ever

Is not only eager to make you new, he's also eager to have you be a part of his work in making all things new

And as we do that, we're becoming the New creations that he is making us to be.

Pray

