

The New Has Come

Lent 4

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2 Cor. 5:16-21

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This season of Lent, we've been focusing on the fact that we are new creations in Christ Jesus. We're keeping our trust in this fact because we know that Satan and the powers that be want nothing more than to have us think we are still of our old ways of doing things. They want us to fall back into the old ruts of the Old Adam.

The call to this new life occurred when you were called by the Gospel; and part of this call is the physical and spiritual action of being baptized. As Paul wrote to the brothers and sisters in Rome, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Often this text is read when we go to view the body of a loved one or fellow brother or sister who has passed on before us. We can see why when we continue through this text from Romans: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."

These last words especially might have us think that Satan and our old sinful flesh are correct: that we don't need to live faithfully yet, or that we can't, because the new has not yet come. They want us to believe we can live it up here and now, and then enter the new at our death.

But in our Epistle text this morning, Paul wrote that this change *has* come a bit more explicitly. He wrote that "the new has come." As we focus on this section of his letter to the Corinthians, we'll see how there is no squirming around this truth, and how much of a blessing that is for us, and for those around us!

1

Verse

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "From now on...we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Do you have human enemies? Regard them as such no longer. For your anger toward your fellow man or woman, Jesus went to the cross; and for His sake, we no longer have enemies of the flesh. The only enemies we have now are the rulers and authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil. These forces would have you expend all your energy fighting your fellow humanity rather than see them as the enemy, or, even more, that you would spend so much time fighting that you would lose your focus on the cross of Calvary.

Through your baptism, your old has passed away; your new has come. Today. Not when you die. According to your baptismal right, you no longer regard your Savior Christ Jesus by means of the flesh. What does that mean? It means that you don't see Him as just some teacher or prophet, who many would ignore. No, Jesus Christ is your personal Savior. He has borne your personal sin and given *you* His gifts. But He is not just your Savior. He is the Savior of the world—even those you might have formerly considered enemies.

It doesn't matter if they did something as simple as cutting you off on the highway or stealing your pen while cashiering at Wal-Mart, or if they did something as serious as offend your name, beat you up, or steal from you. We regard all other people the same way: how Christ views them. How does Jesus view that person you consider your enemy? What did Jesus do for those we don't like? He died for them just as much as He died for you. None of us had any chance of saving ourselves, and Jesus reversed the outcome we *all* rightly deserved: eternity in hell without love of other people or of God Himself.

2
Verse

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

God sent His Son to save you, and the world. The deed has been done. “It is finished.” The old has passed away, the new has come. Today we have the joy and the privilege of sharing that message with everyone. But the old does not stay away so easily. It wants to creep back in. It slithers in like a snake, with any small hole presented to it.

Yes, we may start out wanting to tell everyone the Gospel, but then someone does something to offend us. They rebuke us or call us names. They insult our intelligence. They threaten our lives. Suddenly we are like Jonah. We want to tell everyone we like the good news; but those Ninevites, those enemies we don't want to tell. We don't want them to turn and believe.

Again, what does Jesus see when He looks at the Ninevites we have today? Does He see enemies, or lost sheep in need of a Shepherd? Does Jesus hold their trespasses against them any more than He does yours? Would you want Him to side with them if your positions were reversed?

Which of us is not the brother or sister of someone else? Which of us is not a mother or father of someone? Which of us is not an aunt or uncle to those in this community? Do you want your family members not to come to the truth? If you go back far enough, we're all connected. We have all descended equally from Adam and Eve, and likewise we have all descended in sin—that very sin which God laid on His Son for your sake.

3
Verse

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

That is what Lent is all about; and not just Lent, all of life in Christ. Where we do not always keep our focus on the cross, Jesus did. Where we too often make enemies from those just as lost as us, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Through His work, you have forgiveness from God the Father by means of Jesus' death and resurrection—and not just you, everyone does. The problem is that not everyone knows it.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” Your old goals and your old animosities have gone. “The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” With this new comes new goals and new relationships. You no longer live for yourself but use your gifts and talents in the service of

everyone else. Your family expands from your parents and children, aunts and uncles to everyone around you, especially your brothers and sisters in the church. With this new family comes new struggles, and new joys.

How much do you enjoy your birthday? Is that not God's gift of life to you? And you celebrate it, right? At least once a year, I would guess. How much more can you celebrate this new life in Christ? Everyday. That's what it is to remember your baptism: to remember and know that through Jesus' going to the cross for your sake, you are a new creature. Birth and baptism are both one-time events, but so long as you live, you still get to enjoy them. Birth in this life has an end, but in Christ Jesus, you, and everyone who comes to believe in Him, will have life everlasting, which starts today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.