

Sabbath: Becoming New Creations  
Mark 4:26-34 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-20  
This is the Word of the Lord

Thank you...Thank you for your great engagement this past week. Last Sunday I informed you that I want to get to know you and engage with you during my Summer Sabbatical time with you – and lo and behold you believed me. I received multiple invitations to the Sojourner Sunday School class right after early worship last week and by email since. I received multiple invitations to one of the Salt Groups that meets in homes. I received emails sharing important spiritual and personal experiences in your lives. I enjoyed connecting with a delightful disciple from here at a really good meat and 3 diner in Pendleton. And I enjoyed a great conversation with another disciple at the All In Coffee Shop here in Clemson. Imagine that, a coffee shop named “All In” here in Clemson, SC – I wonder how that could happen! What a delightful place.

So thank you for reaching out to me and I look forward to knowing you more as our time together unfolds.

There’s one more observation I want to make by way of introduction this morning. Though your lead pastor is away on Sabbatical, and though we are well into Summertime now, you carry on being church. I’ve been in 2 staff meetings and 4 ministry team meetings to date and am looking forward to the first Session meeting this Tuesday evening and I can tell

you that you are continuing onward, being church. It’s a delightful and encouraging experience to see a church being the church. Very encouraging. So let’s keep calm and disciple on.

Now to our scriptures for today. We are focusing in on the 2 Corinthians passage, while the lectionary paired a fascinating parable of Jesus from Mark 4 together with it which we will return to in a few moments. Here again 2 Cor 5:17:

**“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new!”**

Exclamation point on the end of this statement by Brother Paul. How could we not be encouraged by such a hopeful statement?

Let’s break this statement down some. “So if anyone is in Christ.” This phrase, “In Christ” was Paul’s favorite way of describing this Christian experience. We are in Christ, first of all when we have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God because of the sacrificial love of Jesus displayed most clearly on the cross. This is God’s gift of salvation to us. But then, we live in response to this gift by centering our lives in Jesus, by organizing our lives around Jesus. The book of Acts, after the 4 gospels, called those early Christ-followers People of the Way...they are the ones living in the Way of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul all throughout his letters to the churches is recommending and urging people to be “In Christ,” to center themselves in Christ. And, I would join him this morning to make two statements about being in Christ.

**First, living in the Way of Jesus is beautiful.**

This is a way of life that celebrates all things good. This is a way of life built on that New Commandment of Jesus from John 13 – “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this you will know you are my disciples.”

How do we know we are living in the way of Jesus?

Not by our thorough systematic theology, not by our religious practice, not by anything else but love. This is how we know we are disciples – when we are loving each other and our world. Loving God, loving others, loving self...this is what it means to live in the Way of Jesus and it add such beauty and goodness to this world. Mary Oliver asks in her poem “On A Summer’s Day”, “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Well, followers of Jesus are betting on love. Living in the Way of Jesus is beautiful.

**The second statement about this way of life organized around Jesus Christ:**

**Living in the Way of Jesus is this world’s best hope!**

Do you think there’s enough angst in our culture and in our communities now? Do you see enough fear and anxiety in our

culture? Does it seem like people are losing touch with each other and forgetting how to be in community together? Does it seem like our institutions and our organizations are struggling to remain coherent and relevant in this quickly changing environment? We could go on describing the challenges which come when 7 billion human beings crowd onto a planet with limited resources, each trying to make their way in the world.

In this context, in this world, living in the way of Jesus is this world’s best hope. Jesus believed the way he lived and what he modeled and what he taught opened a better, more hopeful door for humankind.

Here are some examples of what I’m describing. Jesus taught us to treat other people the way we want to be treated. Jesus told stories about people who went out of their way to help others in their time of need (You might remember the Good Samaritan and the woman at the well). Jesus taught us to do even more...to love those who don’t agree with us or are on the other side of the aisle. Even more, Jesus calls us to love those who consider themselves our enemies. Jesus taught his disciples that when the Roman soldiers forced them to carry their possessions for one mile, to cheerfully volunteer for a second mile. This is what it looks like to live in the Way of Jesus – not leveraging power and gaining the upper hand – but living servant lives, lives based on love.

If just a few more of us lived a bit more this way, it would change everything. If just a small percentage of this world’s

population lived more in the Way of Jesus, everything would change. This is this world's best hope.

So how does this happen? Living in the Way of Jesus is beautiful and it's this world's best hope.

How do we participate and become these kinds of people?

Two ways:

One, receive the gift. This is one of those passages when grammatical tense makes a difference. Listen again to how this is stated: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new!" Paul describes this being in Christ as already in place. Paul says that when we are reconciled to God through Christ, then there is a new creation. This is part of the wonder of the gospel. When we are reconciled to Christ, God goes ahead and recreates us right then, not way down the road after a long grueling process. There is a new creation.

As we saw earlier, the lectionary gives us the gospel lesson today from Mark 4. This is one of those very brief parables of Jesus wherein he describes a farmer who appears very surprised by the growth in the seeds. Certainly the farmer has a role in cultivating the harvest, but the growth in the seed itself is beyond the farmer.

How this happens is mystery – pure gift from God.

Receive it, know it, allow the gift of God's love to sink deep down into your bones and know that we are loved. We are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

The second way we become people living in the way of Jesus is to lay aside the baggage.

Did you notice that line in our call to worship?

"We gather to celebrate and praise the Lord of creation and creativity. Our Lord invites us to leave our baggage at the door."

I have a friend named Tom who describes it this way. When someone is excessively worried or keeps going over and over a concern or is bothered by something in the world over which they have no control...Tom asks, "How long are you going to all that to rent space in your head?"

In other words, it's not something we can change by thinking about it. It's not something under our control. We can't change it by thinking about it over and over again. So why give away our joy to that something?

So, what is it for you? What rents space in your head? Yes, there are real concerns about which we need to take action. At the same time there are things happening in our world and to us all the time which we may not be able to change. Our choice then is if we will let those things steal our joy. I don't know what it is for you...it may be concern over world events. It may be a relationship gone sour wherein you've done everything you can to salvage it and yet it still wakes you up

in the middle of the night. It may be a health concern which you've addressed and done everything reasonable to do and yet you worry about it over and over. It may be that decision you made about your next life move and yet you are second and third and fourth guessing the wisdom of it. You are renting space in your head to worries about which you can do very little and this is stealing your joy.

That's baggage. That's excess weight we don't need. That's allowing circumstances to steal our joy. The scriptures say, **everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new!**" Let's leave our baggage at the door and avoid picking it up when we leave today.

When we do, when we live into this calling to live as new creations who have shed their baggage, beautiful things happen. Allow me to conclude this morning with one story.

Rev Don Harmon tells of an event that took place During the Nazi occupation and control of France during WWII. Off in the rural part of France the SS were looking for Jews in a small village where Jews were known to live. When they arrived there were no Jews to be found. They left and not long after that returned without notice hoping to find Jews but there were none. That was their last effort and they never returned to that village.

What was odd was that there had been Jews in that village before the war and there were also Jews there after the war.

A correspondent became curious and went to the village in search of a story. This is what was learned. In the village is a Lutheran Church. For years, even prior to the Nazi invasion, their beloved pastor would say to them every Sunday, **"Someday Jesus is going to ask you to do something very important."** When the people of the village learned the SS was coming for the Jews, they took all the Jews into their own homes and made them part of their Lutheran families. When the SS came, there were no Jews to be found The correspondent said; "that was dangerous, all of you could have been killed for such an act". **"Yes" was the reply, "but our pastor always told us that someday Jesus was going to ask us to do something very important and when that day came, we all knew exactly what to do."**

As we go today, As we scatter into our world, go in the awareness that you are a new creation. Go with God and look for the opportunity to wake up the rest of this world to God's goodness and grace and transformational power. Through the grace, power, and love of Jesus Christ our Lord, may it be so. Amen.