

## **"The New Creation"**

**Luke 10: 1-6, 17, Galatians 6: 1-15**

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**The House of Hope Presbyterian Church**

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Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, came to a time early on in developing his company when he had to bring on a new key manager. A Vice President to help him guide this very new organization. This was back before he had made one dime from Facebook. But he saw the potential that was before him.

He interviewed an established executive from Google, who was making a huge salary in her current position. But Zuckerberg thought she was the person who could help him develop his very new company. He said they did not start out the interview talking about organizational analysis, position description, or division of duties, much less about job security or benefits. The first thing they did, was to spend hours talking about the mission and the core values that would guide them. If you get the core values right, everything else will follow.

That is what Paul is facing in the early Church. The Church in the city of Galatia is taking the easy way out. Trying to make the new church look like a clone of the religious group that started it. It would end up meaning that the church will stand for nothing new. It would be narrowly defined by the world as it was.

That is such a fascinating question to put to the Christian Church. Who are we? What are we trying to do? What do we hope to accomplish? What are the core values that need to guide us? Our core values matter. Our values need to be large enough, important enough, and strong enough to guide us, and continually renew and inspire powerful vision.

Marcus Borg talks about theological umbrellas. Broad concepts that cover a wide range of human experience. One of the umbrella metaphors that has guided the church comes from the Greek word, "katalasso." Katalasso is often translated as "reconciliation," implying forgiveness.

It is clear that the sense of forgiveness has been a core value for Christians since the beginning. Jesus on the cross, as he is being crucified, says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Forgiveness implies the idea that sin breaks the world apart. God brings the broken pieces back together. Bringing together again. Such forgiveness can only happen by self-sacrificial love.

The image that sticks in my mind the Japanese art of kint-su-gi -- when a piece of pottery is broken, instead of being thrown away, or repaired in such a way as to hide the cracks, instead it is repaired

with a seam of gold. This method of repair does not hide its unique history. It celebrates the brokenness that has been repaired. The repaired piece is even more beautiful than the original.

Reconciliation can mean forgiveness. God's love is the gold that brings a broken world together again.

But what if the pieces are so broken they cannot be brought together again? What if they have been crushed to dust? Some relationships have been crushed and can't be put together again.

In addition, sometimes, for many of the experiences that are going on in our lives, talking about forgiveness does not make sense. The answer does not fit the problem.

It is in these situations that this special word offers another vision. Katalasso has more than one meaning, one that I experience to be a much larger umbrella concept. Katalasso's second meaning is: to become other; to become something new. Jesus puts it, being born again.

Paul focused on this alternative metaphor, to become new, when he talks about the new creation. That is the central metaphor of Paul's vision of the work of the church. Kata-lasso: to become something new. To change. What matters is not the old ways and rituals, which end up separating us from the world, like a set of team jerseys which imply, "this is our team, and you do not belong."

No, for Paul it is a vision of a unifying power in the world: the Holy Spirit which brings a new creation. What matters is a new creation. That is the gift that Jesus Christ brings to us. A new creation.

Paul writes about his vision of the church: a people whose new creation values recognize neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. What does that mean?

It does not matter if you are Jew or Greek:  
in a world where narrow nationalism  
provides a ready rationale for fascism, war and oppression,  
there is another way: a way of unity. The new creation.

It does not matter if you are slave or free:  
in other words, your socio-economic status does not define you,  
so we are set free to discover  
a new freedom to share. And the world is made new.

It does not matter if you are male or female:  
in other words, your sexuality is not a barrier  
to a life lived in the fullness of God's grace.  
No cause for sexism, no boundaries born of difference;  
All are welcome, all belong in the new creation.

None of the old boundaries of thinking are a barrier to us any longer. What matters is what Christ brings: a new creation that ranges from the intensely personal to the relational to the overtly social:

In the freedom of the grace of Jesus Christ, a new creation stands before us:

a new self –it's yours for the asking;  
new relationships -- they can happen;  
new politics – they are on the way;  
a new way of seeing -- just open your eyes;  
a new way of relating -- barrier breaking love is ours;  
a new life -- a new birth is ours again and again;  
a new world -- we can have it.

What matters is the new creation. The words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, as they are translated in the Bible:

“If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation,  
the past is finished and gone;  
behold, the new has come.”  
“God was in Jesus, reconciling himself to the world,  
and giving us the ministry of reconciliation.”

In other words:

God was in Jesus, making himself new,  
and giving us the ministry of making the world new.

The Bible lifts up what only the Creator God can give: a new creation. What does faith have to offer? A new creation. A new life in every dimension. Our call is not just to try to put the old pieces back together again, the way it used to be. Our call is to work with God to make things new. A new beginning.

A whole new story.

The experience of God, known in Jesus, transforms us. That is the story of the cross. The cross was so horrible. Completely destructive. What hope is there? God gives the hope of resurrection: a new life, in the resurrection world.

For people who live in this new creation, there is no reason to treat children like animals, overcrowded together in cells, with inadequate food, water, bedding or medical care on the border.

Paul: In Christ, the old life is finished and gone. A new life has begun. It is up to us to live in it and let it spread. It is as if the door to a new world opens, and in walks Jesus, bearing the transforming love of that new world.

Showing it to us, empowering us with it, and giving it to us as a gift to be given away.

William Jennings Bryan once said, "Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved."

We see that God made a choice, God achieved the resurrection, and God has chosen us to take that new creation forward. God has chosen to give us a new beginning. God has chosen us to be part of the new creation.

Now it is up to us to choose to walk into that new creation. If we embrace that new creation, God transforms us out of the old self-centered existence into a new life.

Graham Green's classic novel, *The Tenth Man*, is set in a prison camp in WWII. In a town nearby, the French Resistance kills some Nazis. In response, the vindictive warden inside the prison decrees that every 10<sup>th</sup> man in the prison should be killed in revenge. It is up to the prisoners to decide who those 10<sup>th</sup> men will be.

The tenth man is Jean-Louis Chavel. Chavel has spent his whole life as a rich man, avoiding all unpleasantness. He has developed no real character. He begs for his life among the prisoners. He offers his mansion, his lands, and his fortune to anyone who will take his place on the gallows.

Another man steps forward and agrees, provided that Chavel makes out a will and give wealth to the other man's elderly mother and sister. He agrees.

Chavel survives the war, and is set free, but is now destitute. Eventually, he finds his way back to his former estate. He makes friends with the other man's sister, Therese. Without Therese knowing that Chavel is the man who traded his life for her brother's life, she takes him in as a boarder in the mansion.

Eventually, he hears her speak of the man who traded his life for her brother's life. Of how she hates him, of how she holds him in contempt as a coward. Therese describes each human life as an artist painting a picture. What makes up the picture is based on all the years of experience before the artist takes up the brush.

She says if you never learn the discipline, you cannot convey the message. If you never do the hard things, you never develop the character to take you through the hard times. She says: "That thing [that defining moment] happens to everyone once." She says, "All one's life one has to think: Today it may happen. And when it happens, you know what you have been all your life." (*The Tenth Man*, p. 89)

Chavel comes to deeply love Therese. Then one day a murderer ends up trapping Chavel and Therese in a room. The murderer has a gun with two bullets. But at the fateful moment, Jean-Louis makes himself a target for both bullets, and saves her life.

The first time the defining moment came, he was not ready. The second time, he was ready. "All one's life, one has to think: Today it may happen."

In this story, Chavel was not forgiven. He was not restored to his old life. He did not continue the wasted existence he had been living. He was not restored – he was transformed. A new creation.

That is the gift God gives us in the cross of Jesus Christ: the grace, the freedom of a new life, a new beginning, a new story, the hope for a new world.

Today it may happen. "When it happens, you know what you have been all your life." As Paul says, the only thing that matters is the new creation.

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Sources:

Graham Greene. *The Tenth Man*.

Marcus Borg. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. Harper Collins.

Laurence Welborn. Lecture on Paul's Meaning of Katalasso. McCormick Theological Seminary.

Richard B. Hayes. Galatians. The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. XI. Abingdon.