



Being the Church: New Creation

TEXT
2 Corinthians 5:16–17

August 23, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view; we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Friends, we started this sermon series, “Being the Church,” looking at ways the Apostle Paul describes the struggling, very real group of Christians there in the city of Corinth. In Chapter 3, Paul calls them letters of Christ because the gospel is written on their hearts. In Chapter 4, he says they have treasure in clay jars because Christ dwells in them. Now in Chapter 5, we have another image. Paul says to these Christians, these people who are doing their best to follow Jesus of Nazareth, that they are new creations.

I love the Corinthian church because they were so honest and so real and passionate. They were fighting and arguing over so many things. They were fighting and arguing because they were so different, and they viewed the world so differently. It happened across the whole empire. The first converts to Christianity

were people from all walks of life, all regions, all ethnicities, all classes. So there in Corinth, one of the famous crossroads cities between Asia and Europe, the Christian community included rich and poor, craftspeople and merchants, women and men, young and old, Jews and Gentiles, even slaves and their slave owners. And the radical thing, the incredible thing is Paul was telling them to stop seeing one another from only a human point of view.

He says that early on, he viewed Jesus from a human point of view. He saw Jesus as a rebel and a troublemaker. That is why he sought to persecute and kill him and all who followed him. But now, because of God, he no longer sees Jesus that way. He sees him as the savior of the world who sacrificed his life for the whole world.

Then Paul says to this community of believers, so you should stop seeing each other from your human point of view. Stop seeing people as Republicans and Democrats, as Never Trumpers and Forever Trumpers, as Jayhawks and Wildcats and Tigers because you are all trying to follow Jesus; and if anyone is trying to follow Jesus, they are a new creation, everything old

has passed away; see everything, everything has become new!

We believe that. We believe that by the grace of God, we can be made new. It may seem odd to you, but a few moments ago, when Pastor Hallie led us in our corporate confession of sin and assurance of pardon, we experienced that change, that turn. We cling to the promise of 1 John 1:9 that when we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God makes us new. You may not have felt any different, but that is more than OK because it is not up to you. And while I do ask personally for God’s forgiveness, I love that we do that together because sin is not only or always personal; it is communal. What happens when we confess our sins and are told we are forgiven? We are being made clean by the grace of God.

If anyone is in Christ, we are a new creation. It is supposed to change how we see one another — even how we see ourselves.

It was in my third year of teaching middle school in Seattle. It was the first day of the school year, third period, meaning my third class of the day: new students; new year; clean classroom. I was calling the roster, trying to memorize names, when

I looked up and, out of the corner of my eye, saw a big kid haul off and hit the back of the girl in front of him. I was shocked. She turned around and started hitting him back, and he stood up and, before he could hit her again, I said, “You! Out in the hallway. Right now!”

And he looked at me and pointed to her and said, “She started it!”

And I said, “I said out in the hallway right now!” He went out to the hall. I could see him through the window on my door. I asked the girl if she was OK. She said, “Yes.” I finished calling the roll, set the class to work on an assignment and stepped into the hall.

So my practice is that if you act out in my classroom so that I have to disturb the class and send you out, on the off chance that you just want attention, I am going to make it as uncomfortable as possible. So I put my nose about three inches from his and, glaring at him, I asked, “What is your name?”

And he said quietly, “Scott.”

And in my head, I thought immediately, “Of course it is.” I do not know what the deal is, but by my third year of teaching, every single Scott that I had as a student was a difficult student. So much so that by then, I had said to the Lord, “If you call me to be married by your grace and to have a son, I cannot name him Scott because I know he will be a problem child.” I know. It is a little irrational, but I will tell you that my experience was reinforced even when I was teaching in seminary. And all right.

I will say that since coming to Village to be one of your pastors, I have met some Scotts who are somewhat redeeming the name, but not totally. You know who you are.

Sure enough, Scott continued to be a problem. And it was not just in my class. I talked with other teachers and, more often than not, Scott would end up in the hallway or after school in detention. One particularly rough day, he was in my classroom after school for detention. It was just the two of us. I was at the back of the classroom at my desk grading papers, and he was at the front facing away from me finishing his assignment. He finished it and came walking back and tossed it on my desk in front of me. On the corner of my desk was my Bible because I was working on a Bible study I was going to lead.

Scott saw it and said, “Hey, Mr. Nish (that’s what he called me), you go to church?”

“Yes, Scott,” I replied. “I do.”

His face lit up, “Hey, cool. I do too! I’m Lutheran! What are you?” And I thought, “Oh no! He is in Christ! He is a new creation! Dang it!” The Spirit was saying to me, “Therefore you cannot regard Scott from a human point of view. He is a new creation — just like you are a new creation. The old has passed away. See, everything has become new. Every day, Scott is a new creation.”

That moment changed me. It changed how I viewed Scott. Oh, we still had rough days. But in early spring, when I met his Mom for the first time at a parent teacher conference, she said she

was looking forward to meeting me because Scott told her I was his favorite teacher. She explained to me that in all his years of schooling, Scott had never had a favorite teacher. I wanted to talk about why she unfortunately named him “Scott.”

You are letters of Christ. You are treasure in clay jars. You are a new creation. It is not that we forget everything that has passed because not everything old was bad. But it is true that we do not let the pain and struggles and sins of our past define us because in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. In Jesus Christ, we are made new creations.

I am not sure if you remember, but on Sunday, February 2, nearly seven months ago, there was a football game in Miami. Remember that? It is called the Super Bowl, and it was a great game. You know this. The commercials for the Super Bowl are some of the most expensive seconds in all of advertising. This Super Bowl was no different. And following the game, there is all this data collected about the commercials. This one was the most remembered, according to Ad Week. I want you to watch it with me.

[Super Bowl Google commercial about Loretta]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xSxXiHwMrg&t=17s>

There is a reason that was the most remembered commercial of the Super Bowl. It is because it is about life and death and ultimately about love. It is not that everything in our past is bad. We need to remember the beautiful and life-giving memories of our

past, but just as we must not wallow in the pain and sinfulness of our past, we cannot dwell there either because we are God's new creation every day. In the commercial, it ends with "Remember Loretta said, 'Don't miss me too much and get out of the dang house.'"

Being church. We are letters of Christ. We are treasures in clay jars. We are new creations. By the grace of God. For the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.