

Text: II Corinthians 5:17

Theme: Living as the New Among the Old

March 6, 2016

How many of you have ever been the new student, the new employee, or the new member of a congregation? How does it feel to be new? How do others typically view those who are new? Although new sounds far better than old, Paul reminds us that it's difficult to live as a new creation when we are surrounded by an old, anti-Christian world. As we look at Paul's words, we focus our thoughts on Living as the New Among the Old.

I. By virtue of the work of Christ, we have become a new creation. A. Even so, we are surrounded by the old. 1. Unlike the new, the old live for themselves. It's the recurring theme of our world today. We call it "independence, self-sufficiency, or a lengthy list of other things. Yet whatever we call it, it's still out there. "Look out for yourself. Don't worry about the other guy. Keep your focus on your goals, your dreams. Do it your way. Go your own way." It's all so familiar that, at times, we are drawn in by all the clamor and perceived glory. We may be the new, but, sometimes, we fall into the pit of the old while attempting to follow God's path to the finish line.

2. Unlike the new, the old carry a chip on their shoulder. Ever known one of those people? Because our world isn't part of the new, it doesn't know how to forgive, doesn't want to forgive, and prefers to carry the proverbial chip on their shoulder. The second son in our Gospel carried a chip on his shoulder. When he should have been celebrating, he was arguing his case with his father who had forgiven him and his wayward brother multiple times. In our weak moments, we fall prey to the chip syndrome, to refusing to forgive, to holding a grudge. It isn't part of our nature as God's chosen people, yet, we must humbly confess that we, too, have fallen short.

B. Surrounded by the old, how did we become a new creation? 1. We became a new creation by the grace of God. When you were a child, how many times did you break your parents' heart? Could any of us claim that it occurred less than ten times, less than 100 times? If you had messed up only once from age 0 to 18, would you have deserved to be forgiven by your parents? In the spiritual realm, we are the messed up, the blunder makers, the heart breakers. We have broken our Father's heart even more than the prodigal son. Yet, because of grace, our Father has done the unthinkable. Grace is the only explanation for our title, "New Creation."

2. We became a new creation by Christ's work of reconciliation. What word do you find within the word "Reconciliation?" Reconcile, which means what? That God has fixed what we should have fixed, that He has mended fences we could never mend. Through the cross, through the unfair, unjust, undeserving crucifixion, Jesus reconciled us, created a new relationship between us and our loving Father, a relationship we could not, would not create, a relationship that turned our lives upside down, that moved us from old to new. Christ and Christ alone - that's the process by which we became what we never deserved - His new creation.

C. Since we are His new creation, how do we impact the old world in which we live? 1. We impact our world by acknowledging that we are His ambassadors. Paul writes, "We are therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us." Did you notice that last statement - "as though God were

making His appeal through us”? God could do it Himself. He could do a better job Himself. But much to our surprise, God has said, “I know you don’t deserve it, but I have chosen you to be My mouthpiece, My megaphone to your community. I am depending on you to accomplish My great work!” God depending on us - what a humbling honor and privilege God has given as we acknowledge that we are His ambassadors.

2. We impact our world by daily fighting our battle between the old and the new. I don’t recall the cartoon, but the devil is standing on one shoulder telling the character what to do and there’s an angel standing on the other shoulder doing the same thing. Although a bit inaccurate, it gives us an adequate picture of our daily challenge. In our Catechism, we learn that there’s an ongoing battle within between the old and new man. To impact our world, we take up that battle every morning; we stand with our feet firmly planted, lay every situation before our God as we say, “Help me fight today so that I may be a proper example for each person I encounter in this day!”

3. We impact our world by demonstrating forgiveness. What’s the focal point of the parable of the prodigal son? Forgiveness. In the account, we have the perfect example, the “this is how you do it” example as the father overlooks the past and simply forgives. Take that imagery one step further. Out of love, God, the Father, put His Son on the cross to make the payment, to forgive us so that we could forgive others. We change our corner of the world each time we demonstrate the Father’s love by overlooking the past and extended the handshake that says, “Done. Forgiven. I will not allow this event to negatively affect our relationship from this moment forward.”

4. We impact our world by celebrating when the lost is found. Remember the great rejoicing that occurred when the lost sheep was found? That was a smelly lamb, a foolish lamb, a lamb worth a few dollars. When one who was numbered among the old becomes part of that new creation, it’s time for a celebration; it’s time for us to celebrate with such fanfare that the world around us realizes the value of one person who enters into a relationship with Christ. Someone else may lay the groundwork, but however it occurs, our celebration shows the world that every person matters and that reality impacts our community more than we will ever realize.

5. We impact our world by providing an irresistible example. How many of you need your chocolate fix every week or even every day? Like that chocolate fix, our God says, “Be like chocolate to those in your community. Demonstrate what it’s like to be My child. Show them the joys, the strengthen found to carry you through your challenges, the hope that’s irresistible.” As we provide that irresistible example, others want to be part of what now looks so irresistible. You may never realize the lives you impact. Yet when you choose to provide that irresistible example, it’s your loving Father who will say of you, “Well, done good and faithful servant. Well done!”

6. New student, new employee, new member - it’s different to be new. Yet when we remember what the old are missing, we will stand; we will move; we will be the new who, by the grace of God, are changing lives among the old. Amen.