



“BECOMING NEW”
SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5: 6-17
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
June 13, 2021
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

(Put up picture--½ picture and ½ MMS)

Mornings are new
Everyday
All the time

Some mornings call
Us outside ourselves
Into a world full of promise

Others are still
Laden with tons
Of reality checks and harsh reminders

This morning has both
Birds celebrating their victory
Over the predators of night

And a weighted blanket of fog
And the sorrowful solitary
Song of a mourning dove

All enveloping me
Telling me this day
Is both mine and

Some stranger I
Have never met
We will become intimates

Whether I want to
Know or be known
that way or not

God created a world
That is reborn each day
And that dies to itself again all at once

Jesus moved through
A birth canal
Pushed out by the grip of contractions

And he taught us
Again about
Becoming new

Spirit is the very
Thread of novelty
And inheritance

She stitches
And she mends
Hemming us in and expanding

Newness pricks
Connects, finds itself
In a world that both longs and
loathes for
her to reveal her truth.

[\(take picture down\)](#)

Becoming New is not a choice.

That's what Spirit made sure I remembered this morning, another morning in community with you, Grace Covenant. Another morning ripe for worship, for praise, for lament, for grief, for possibility and foreboding.

I tried to write my sermon yesterday, but so much occupied my mind. Spirit clarifies when she is ready.

First I had to walk. First I had to cry.

First I had to wrestle and wonder.

First I had to trust.

First I had to let go.

First I had to pray.

That's the way with all new things--we think we're ready, but we're kidding ourselves sometimes aren't we. We've packaged up new things with pretty wrapping paper and a bow--when actually gifts aren't always exciting or welcomed. But they are given to us none the less.

The thing is, this passage from 2 Corinthians is HARD.

People can quote that last line, but you don't hear people remembering a whole lot of the time what gets you to that last line.

Listen, just to the first four verses. And let's sit with them together. Picture that fog resting on you--with moisture that blankets your body. Let it soak it.

Listen for words and phrases that call out to you, that ask you to carry them with you.

No grasping, just receiving. Let them come to you.

5:6 So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord --

5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

5:8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

5:9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please God.

5:10 For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

What do you hear? What words wanted you to carry them? Can you share those in the chat?

Let the words show themselves. Let them come. (let people put the words in the chat)

(MMS read some of the words out)

You see what these words are describing to us--a both/and reality that our very cells embody. Our bodies are our home. This world is our home. And at the same time, we are longing for something we can't see.

That is the human condition. At home and a stranger all at once--we carry this difficult truth with us every step we take--every step is faith--not sight.

And there is clarity not in what we see, but in what our purpose is--no matter if we are settled or exiled, our purpose is to please God.

A power that created us and who knows us better than we know ourselves. And, that same creative and wise power is righteous and will call us to account for how we've lived this life.

So, this life is both fleeting and full of importance. We are never not both/and people--this is the skin we are in--provisional and providential, longing and responsible, confident and utterly dependent on God's love and grace.

Are you starting to feel the complexity of this whole being new thing?

Let's keep listening and receiving.

Remember to breathe--we all need oxygen to metabolize the life that moves through us in each moment.

Attending to your breath is biologically proven to support all of your body's systems--breath is life and breath is support. So I hope you will give yourself the gift of generous breath as we listen and receive.

Listen again for words that call out to you, that want you to carry them with you. You don't have to know why. Just notice and receive.

The next three verses:

5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

5:12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart.

5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

What do you hear? What calls to you? Can you share in the chat?

(MMS read some from the chat)

Can you hear the power of these three verses?

They are subtle and they are suggestive--if you listen closely they are also a strong statement of human capacity to know ourselves and to know truth.

That may not sound like a big deal to you all. But it actually really is a big deal.

Remember who Paul is talking to.

He's talking to us--the human race.

You remember us--the ones who he just described as strangers in our own skin, always longing for something we can't see, accountable to the one who brought us into existence and made us this way, always walking by faith--not by sight.

You remember the human race--us, the ones who can't seem to help but be delusional and violent and biased and limited. The ones who suffer and grieve and whose births always give way to deaths.

That's who Paul is talking to--you and me.

And he's telling us we have access to truth inside of us--in our consciences--the more we know ourselves and each other, Paul is saying, the more we know God.

And then Paul pretty much says, I am not telling you all this so you can get to know me--I am not trying to sell you on anything about me.

He's basically telling them he wants them to stand in their God infused authority--the freedom that living in this complicated truth gives us to see right through hypocrisy, to see right through the shiny package and the feigned integrity--and to be able to see someone's heart.

Now you can try and turn that into some kind of sappy Hallmark card kind of thing, but what Paul says right there is actually really heavy and hard.

He's telling us we have the capacity to be righteous--and I don't mean that in a derogatory way--I mean that in an important and kind of scary kind of way--truth has a way of telling us things we don't want to hear.

If we can see through hypocrisy and we know God will hold us to account, that means accountability is part of what makes us who we are made to be.

That means we can know what is right--what is righteous. We can know that and we can live toward that.

And Paul basically says--if we risk ourselves, if we put aside our own comfort, if we stretch beyond our own perspectives then we are in God's service. And then this curious phrase: "if we are in our right minds, it is for you."

I wonder what Paul is suggesting here?

Is it something like when I moderate myself, when I temper myself, when I appear untroubled and perfectly stable, I am doing that for you so you don't get scared off, so you will feel comfortable with me, so you will relax and not be reactive. A kind of church manners kind of thing--like we comport ourselves in socially acceptable ways so people will let us stick around long enough to tell them the truth.

I told you all this was hard. Remember this is all getting us to that last verse--the verse people like to quote about being new.

Hopefully you're getting the drift of this whole becoming new thing at this point--it's not a vacation, it's not a party with a bunch of presents, it's a new world--it's a new world, that means the old world is gone.

Being new is not a choice we get to make. Being new isn't like a Christmas list where we get everything we want.

Let's keep listening and receiving. Paul is about to tell us the most important part of newness. Spoiler alert--it's not what we were hoping for, but it's what we're getting anyway.

Let's listen one more time together for what calls to us, for what wants us to carry it with us.

5:14 For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

5:15 And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

5:16 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.

5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new

What calls to you in these four verses? Can you share it in the chat?

(MMS read the chat)

So to get to the new, we have to die, in fact lots of death has to happen--and we have to see the world completely differently than we've seen it, and we have to live for different reasons than we have lived.

That's how we get to become new--

That difficult road of befriending the stranger in ourselves, finding homeplace in a world where we are only temporary inhabitants, embracing our capacity for truth and accountability, knowing that those practices take us out of ourselves and may well take us out of comfortable relationships with others. That difficult road of dying to the things we cling to and the person we thought we needed to be.

Becoming new is painful, Grace Covenant. And the thing is, it is not a choice. It's what's always happening within us and around us. We are always in the process of dying and becoming new.

You and I can't escape that truth about us. In fact, it's when we fight it, it's when we deny it, that we cause harm--harm to ourselves, harm to our communities, harm to our relationships--including our relationship with God.

As we ease ourselves into this most recent iteration of becoming new--that means a lot of different things on this planet right now, may we find the courage to embrace newness for its possibilities, and the compassion to grieve what and who we have lost, and the faith to trust God with all of who we are and with all of who we are becoming.

Thanks be to God.

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