

New Creations

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[0 : 00] I want to pick up on a theme that we were developing last Sunday. We begin by asking the question, why are we here? What is being Glendale Presbyterian Church finally all about?

If we were to put up a sign outside that said, we exist to, what would it say? We exist to do what? What should this sign say?

What is the bottom line of the business we are into as the church? Why are we here? We have to keep asking this question because it is so easy for us to lose our way.

Last Sunday, we let the chairman of the board tell us again what business we're in. According to Jesus, we are in the disciple-making business.

We are not in the business of making big churches. We are in the business of making big people. Jesus is into making disciples, and He calls us to join Him in this very grand work.

[1 : 13] Now, what we need to recognize is that every human being is a disciple. Every human being is a disciple of someone or of some ideology.

The question is never, will I be a disciple? The question is always, whose disciple will I be? All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, says the risen Jesus.

Go, make disciples of me, of all the nations. We are in the follower-making business. Every person is a follower of someone.

Every leader is a follower of someone. The question is never, will I follow? The question is always, who will I follow? If not Jesus, who? We are in the follower of Jesus-making business.

Everything we do in the church has to be measured against this bottom line. How does it make disciples? How does this event help make disciples?

[2 : 27] How does this program help make disciples? How does the existence of this group help make disciples? Not just converts, and not just good Christian citizens, but disciples.

People who are, in fact, Monday through Saturday, getting up and following Jesus in His new way of life. Now, what does a disciple of Jesus look like?

What does following Him look like Monday through Saturday? I know what a disciple of Madonna looks like. I know what a disciple of Bart Simpson looks like.

I know what a disciple of Rush Limbaugh looks like. I know what a disciple of Howard Stern looks like. What does a disciple of Jesus look like?

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Last week, we answered that question by posing another question. The question, what is Jesus up to in His disciples?

[3 : 40] That changes it, by the way, away from legalism and horrific effort to grace. What is Jesus doing in His disciples?

What is He doing in those who actually get up and get behind Him and walk down the road with Him? Last Sunday, I suggested that He is doing a seven-fold work.

One, He is drawing us to Himself. Two, and thus to His Father. Three, He is breathing His life, His Holy Spirit into us.

Four, conforming us into His character. Five, He is teaching us to see all of reality. Ourselves, the world, and God from His perspective.

Six, so that we will feel for us and for the world what He feels for us and for the world. And seventh, so that we will want to join Him in His ministry in the world.

[4 : 41] He is drawing us to Himself and thus to His Father. He is breathing His life into us, forming His character in us. He is teaching us to see all of reality from His perspective.

He is helping us feel for the world what He feels so that we will want to join Him in ministry. Today, I want to come at this now from another angle.

What is Jesus up to in His disciples? Our text today is 2 Corinthians 5, 17. A verse I'm sure you know by heart, or many of you know by heart.

And I would like to read it in its larger context. 1 Corinthians 5, verse 11 through 21. If you are able, will you stand for the reading of the Word? Hear God's Word.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade everyone, but we are made manifest to God. And I hope that we are made manifest also in your conscience. We are not again commending ourselves to you, but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.

[5 : 53] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. And if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us. Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.

And he died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore, from now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, we do not know him thus any longer. Therefore, if any man or woman be in Christ, he or she is a new creature. The old things have passed away.

Behold, new things have come. Now, all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

And he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

[6 : 57] He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Whoa. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired the Apostle Paul to write these words down long ago now.

And I pray that in your mercy and grace, you will take these words off the page and cause them to come alive in our minds and hearts and wills as never before. For I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated. Okay, you're saying shh.

What you need, Jay? Oh, Tim. Okay. Can we ignore? I'll go on. All right. The Apostle Paul, who is the former rabbi Saul of Tarsus, is a disciple of Jesus par excellence.

He is the great disciple. And Paul's favorite term for disciples is the prepositional phrase, in Christ. In Christ.

[8 : 17] It's Paul's way of emphasizing just how deep this relationship is between the master and the disciple. It is deeper than believing in Christ.

It is deeper than committed to Christ. It is even deeper than following Christ. You cannot go further or deeper than in. In Christ.

In Christ. In Christ locates us not in a philosophy of life, not in a system of doctrine, not even in a grand movement.

The phrase, in Christ, locates us in a person. In Christ. Paul uses this term some 97 times.

Because it is for him the ultimate way of expressing what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In Christ. In him and he in us.

[9 : 15] Now, in this second letter that Paul writes to the first century disciples in Corinth, he makes a staggering claim about those who are in Christ.

Second Corinthians 5:17. If anyone is in Christ Jesus, he or she is a new creature.

All things have passed away. Behold, new things have come. In Christ, we are new creations. Say the words with me.

New creations. Again, new creations. When you and I respond to Jesus' call to follow him down the road, something happens to us.

Something more than a change in direction. Something more than a change in perception or attitude. Something radical happens. Something objectively radical happens.

[10 : 15] Even if we are not aware of it at the time. In fact, most people are not aware of it at the time. When it happens. Something very radical happens. Something so radical that the Apostle Paul has to use the bold phrase, new creations.

There is a new creation. Not just an improvement on the old. Not just the result of some evolutionary urge within the old.

But a new creative act of the Almighty God. In Christ, new creation. Let the words take your breath away.

You see, in history, there are three great creative moments on the part of God. Three great creative acts of God.

The first is, when out of nothingness, God brings forth the universe. The second is, when out of the void of Mary's womb and the void of Jerusalem's tomb, God brings forth the God-man.

[11 : 23] And the third is, when out of the death of our sinfulness, God brings forth a disciple of Jesus Christ. Three great creative acts.

The universe. The God-man. And the disciples of the God-man. The old to which Paul is referring here, that passes away, is not the old which God created originally.

The old to which Paul refers is that which sin brought into being. The sin of the first humans ruined the first creation, right?

And the sin of the first humans brought into being something that was not intended to be. And something which can only be called old.

Because it continually decays and rots and moves toward death. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, argues that sin not only causes a deterioration of the human condition.

[12 : 31] Sin results in a loss of status of a species. The loss of status of a species. Then he goes on to say this.

This condition was transmitted by heredity to all later generations, for it was not simply what biologists call an acquired variation. It was the emergence of a new kind of man.

A new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence. Say that again. That's what Paul is referring to by old creation. And we know the old creation very well.

A new species, never made by God, sinned itself into existence. And the chief mark of this new species is rebellion.

Rebellion against God. At the core, Emil Bruner says that every human heart is in the permanent condition of revolution. Rebellion against God. Trying to make it on our own.

[13 : 34] Trying to build the world on our own. Trying to be our own God, resulting in confusion and fear and anxiety and guilt and shame and violence and alienation and emptiness and the inevitability of death.

But God, says Paul, but God. God did something in Jesus Christ that changes all of that. God was in Christ, says Paul, reconciling the world to himself.

God has intervened in the world in Christ to bring about his new species to replace the one that sinned into existence. He who knew no sin became sin.

Oh, that's an amazing statement we could spend the whole day on. He who knew no sin became sin that we through him might become the righteousness of God. That is, that we might become all that God intended us to be.

When you and I say to Jesus Christ, I want to be your disciple, something happens. Something very, very radical happens.

[14 : 40] We become new creations. We become new creations. You can't just sit there when I say that. You got to say something.

Sorry. You can't, we can't. Goodness. I just told you the most wonderful thing you could ever know. God made the world.

God made the God man. And God called into being new creations. Thank you. God made the world. God made the world. God made the world. God made the world. God made the world. God made the world.

God made the world. Sorry. Oh my. My. That's why Paul then says, Therefore, from now on, we do not recognize anyone according to the flesh.

Paul's saying that he no longer looks out at humanity and his brothers and sisters in Christ through the old humanity lenses.

[15 : 49] Instead, he says in verse 14, The love of Christ controls us. Paul is so gripped by what God has done for us in Christ that he can only see things now through the lenses of the love of Christ.

If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. Not just an improvement on the old.

Not just the result of an evolutionary urge within the old. But a product of the creative act of God. Yes, we are still living in the old.

Amen. I mean, we know all about that. And the old is still living in us. But there is something new. Yes, the creation is, as the theologians say, already, not yet.

Not yet. Totally redeemed. Not yet. Freed from the power and presence of sin. But there is already and already.

[16:53] So the question becomes, what is already new about being in Christ? What is already new? Or more forcefully, what is objectively true about you and me today if we're in Christ?

You notice I said objectively true. You don't have to feel what I'm going to develop. It's true anyway if you're in Christ. What I'm going to do now is break all the rules with regard to preaching.

So, what else is new? And I'm going to give you a list with very brief comment of a number of essential things that are true about me right now in Christ.

Now, some of the essential things, some means 18. And what I want you to do is to think of this list of 18 things as one grand illustration of the newness in Christ.

This is going to be a quick overview of how good it is to be in Christ. Where I got motivated by this was the other night watching C-SPAN. There was an interview with Harry Wu.

[18:00] You know the name Harry Wu? They were interviewing him at Georgetown University. He had shared about what's going on in China. People kept pressing him and asking him questions. The question time came to an end. They all applauded.

Harry Wu went off. And then Harry Wu came back. Georgetown University, all of these people who are mostly native-born American citizens. Harry Wu, almost not able to speak, gets to the mic and he says to the people, you have no idea what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America.

Most of us who live here don't. And I thought, that's exactly where the church is today. We don't know how good it is to be in Christ. Because if we knew how good it is to be in Christ, it would spill out in the city.

And it's not spilling. Why isn't it spilling? Because we don't know how good it is. So I'm going to help you know how good it is. Okay?

Now, I gave you a list. I gave... I did this the first service, too. I gave you a list in the bulletin. And I'm going to encourage you to write it down. Write down as I go along here for further reflection.

[19:17] Because I'm going to move fast. And my motive is simple. My motive is simple. I want you to know how good it is. All right?

Nope, you'll keep up with me. Don't worry. Okay. Okay. Number one. I am alive. I am alive in a qualitatively different way.

I am alive. Even if I don't feel it. I am alive in an indestructible life. John 6, 24.

John 6, 24. Jesus says, He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Out of death into life. Has passed. Even if I don't feel it. Even if I don't feel it. It's true. And even though I am going to go through the grave, the life that is in me will not die.

[20:25] The life that is in me cannot be destroyed. I am alive. Second. Why am I alive?

Because I am acquitted. Oh. I am acquitted. Court. You see, the court has already been held in my case. And in your case. Court has already been held in my case.

And the judge said to me, Darrell, how do you plead? And I said, guilty, your honor. I mean, the evidence against me is too much. I have to plead guilty. And then the judge hands down the decree.

And you know what the decree is in my case? You know what the decree is in my case? It says, full pardon. The text says, not counting their trespasses against them.

The text says, in Christ there is now no condemnation. Why? Because the judge has paid the debt. Jesus, the judge, has come from behind the bench.

[21:26] And he has walked out, stood beside me. And he has taken upon himself all the penalty of my sin. He has wiped it away. I am acquitted. Can you say that with me?

I didn't see everybody say it. I am acquitted. Full pardon. I can stop there.

It's good enough for the rest of the day. There's more. I am made right with the judge. The biblical term is justified.

And justified simply means to set something right. It's like setting the margins on a piece of paper. To make them right. In Christ, I am made right with the judge of the universe.

All the requirements for a relationship with the judge of the universe have been met by the judge. There's more.

[22 : 25] I am reconciled. I am reconciled to the living God. Everything that was in the way has been removed. Imagine this, brothers and sisters.

Everything that could have come between me and the living God has been removed. By God. Not by me. By God in Christ. And he has made me his friend now.

I'm reconciled. You'll forgive me for this energy, won't you? And you'll pray for me this afternoon. It's just so good, isn't it? Fifth. I'm adopted. I'm adopted. I have been, by the sovereign choice of the living God, been brought into the family of God.

You see, my older brother is the king of kings. And my father is the maker of heaven and earth. And I tell you, he's good. And the father loves me the way he loves the older brother.

[23 : 35] And the older brother is helping me love the father the way he loves him. I'm adopted. You can see, in moving from I am acquitted to I am adopted, we have moved towards greater and greater intimacy.

It's one thing to be acquitted and walk out of the courtroom. It's another thing to be brought into a relationship with the judge where he becomes my friend. It's another thing altogether for the judge to take me home to the family.

That's what he's done. There's more. Get this. Number six. I am engaged. I am engaged to Jesus Christ, the bridegroom.

I am a bride-to-be. I am being made into a lovely bride to enter into an eternal marriage. Talk about intimacy.

It gets better. Seven. I am indwelt. I am indwelt by a holy presence. That's why I'm alive. God has breathed the spirit of Jesus into me.

[24 : 44] My body, sinful and weak though it is, is now the residence of the creative and pure and powerful spirit of the living God. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul says?

Do you not know that? Temple. Oh my, oh my, oh my. The word for temple that Paul uses here is the word naos, N-A-O-S. And naos refers to the holy of holies that is in the temple.

Oh. My body. This body is now the holy place where the Holy One dwells in holiness.

This is sacred space. Thus, eighth, I'm being changed.

Moment by moment, day by day, especially as I keep the focus on Jesus Christ, the new creation. The holy presence is slowly having his holy way in me.

[25 : 47] One day I'm going to be like him. I'm not like him now. But one day I'm going to be. Even now, I am being metamorphosized. I'm being transformed because there is fire inside of me, consuming fire.

Fire that is going to consume everything that is unholy. Oh, that's good. I'm being changed. Can you say that with me? I'm being changed. I am being changed.

Ninth, I'm freed. I am freed from the lordship of sin. Sin has no more legal claim on me.

It used to. It doesn't anymore. Now, I let sin have a claim on me. Goodness gracious. Anybody who knows me well enough knows that. But I am no longer obligated to sin.

I no longer owe it to sin to sin. The lordship of sin has been broken through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The mastery of sin is broken. In Christ, I am freed from that dominion.

[26 : 48] Holy presence make it so. Tenth, I am a slave. I've been freed to be a slave. No longer now a slave of sin, unless I choose to.

But a slave of God. I have surrendered the members of my body to the living God for his purposes. I keep pulling those members back. I keep surrendering them to sin. But I don't have to. I'm not obligated to do that.

I am now a slave of Jesus Christ. And I am therefore free for the first time. You see, there's a myth in our time. And the myth is unbridled freedom.

People are looking for unbridled freedom. Unbridled freedom does not exist. Unbridled freedom leads us into a pit where we become slaves of things that are beneath our dignity. In Christ, I've been freed from the slavery of that to be freed to be a slave of God and therefore to move into life. I am a slave of life. I'm not my own. I've been bought with a price. There's more. Eleven. I'm a member of the body of Christ.

[27 : 58] Whoa. I and you and millions of others make up the body of Christ in the world. Together, we are his hands and his feet, his eyes and his ears.

Christ has no other hands but our hands. No other feet but our feet. I am part of the body of Christ in the world. Twelve. I am gifted.

I am gifted. I'm a member of the body of Christ and I've been gifted to do a unique function within the body and in the world. The word that Paul actually uses is the word graced. I've been graced. Or literally, it's I've been charismatized. From which we get the word charismatic. I've been graced to function in some unique ways. I can't do everything.

You can't do everything. But we've been graced to do some special things. Some unique things. I am gifted. Can you say that of yourself today? Say it with me, please.

[28 : 56] I am gifted. Again, please. I am gifted. Which means that I am a gift. And so are you.

So are you. Thirteenth. Thirteenth. I am a priest. And so are you. Together we are what the Apostle Peter calls the royal priesthood.

Whoa. I mean, just think of this. I now have access into the throne of grace. And I now have the privilege to leave that throne of grace and go into the city dispensing grace.

These hands are the hands of a priest. This mouth is the mouth of a priest. Your hands are the hands of a priest. Your mouth is the mouth of a priest. What you touch, you give grace to.

What you speak, you give grace to. Greg, that's what happened to you the last two weeks. You discovered the glory of being in Christ and being a priest.

[30 : 00] Fred Weaver, a doctor in the church, called me the other night too. And Fred says to me, can I ask you a question? I said, sure. We were doing the blessing, you know. He says, I felt like a Roman Catholic priest.

And I said to him, you're probably saying, was that right or wrong? He says, yeah. I'm saying it was right. It's right. You have the privileges that Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers have with your hands and with your mouth.

Because you're in Christ. I'm going to come back to that in a couple weeks. 14th. I think I'm on 14th, aren't I? I'll hurry.

Get this. I'm drafted. I've been drafted into an army in a longstanding battle, the outcome of which has already been decided.

This battle raging between principalities and powers of evil on the one hand and the living God on the other hand. It's hardly a equal battle. I mean, the outcome of that is pretty certain, isn't it? Living God is going to win.

[31 : 08] And the decisive battle has been won by Jesus Christ on the cross. In the moment that he died, he won. And to be in Christ now is to be in that battle.

No one volunteered for this. No one in their right mind would. It just comes with the rest of the package. I am drafted. And the only choice I have is either to go AWOL or to report for duty and say, Here I am, sir.

Where do you want me in the battle? Brothers and sisters, can you think through the implications for the church's ministry in our time if we were to shift away from thinking of ourselves as volunteer recruits and thinking of ourselves as draftees?

None of us volunteered to be in Christ. We were drafted. And in Christ we're called into the battle. The only choice we have is either we're going to go AWOL or we're going to report for duty.

I personally believe that the word volunteer ought to be struck from Christian vocabulary. You didn't volunteer for this. You were called.

[32 : 30] You were drafted into this. And either we become good soldiers in this or we get beat up in the battle, for goodness sake, which is what's happening to a lot of people. Can you say it?

I am drafted. I am drafted. Reporting for duty, sir. Reporting for duty, sir.

Reporting for duty, sir. Reporting for duty. Are we on target? Fifteenth.

I am clued in on the mystery of history. This is what keeps me going in the battle. I've been clued in on the mystery of history.

I know where history is going. I know that nothing can get in the way of the living God and His redemptive purposes. I know that nothing can stand in the way of Him bringing all of history in line with Jesus Christ.

[33 : 27] I know the mystery. Now, I don't always remember it. For goodness sake, I panic like everybody else. But in Christ, I know where it's going.

It's going to the foot of Jesus Christ. When I read the newspaper, when I watch the television then, I can do so knowing the mystery. I know where it's going. I know where it's going.

So do you. Sixteenth. I am an ambassador. Whoa. Come on. Self-image. I am an ambassador. I'm an ambassador of the great reconciliation that God has effected in Jesus Christ. I go into the world as an agent of that reconciliation then. Where I go is to be...

What's supposed to happen there is bringing about the reconciliation that the king, the reconciler, has already effected. Calling the old creation to be at peace with the creator. I am an ambassador of truth and hope and life.

[34 : 30] And so are you. During our years in Manila, I had many opportunities to meet with ambassadors from other parts of the world, other countries of the world. Go to parties or go to events and be introduced to these ambassadors.

And after I was introduced to them, I always wanted to say, but I never did. I didn't have the courage. But I always wanted to say, after meeting the ambassador from Austria or Japan or whatever, and I, sir, am an ambassador of the King of Kings.

And I'm at your service. I never said it, but I tried to live it in spirit. Wherever you go tomorrow, you are an ambassador of heaven.

17th. 17th. This is the only subject of one I put in the list today. 17th. I am homesick.

To be in Christ now is to be homesick for another world. Because in Christ, see, I've tasted what it's going to be. And every taste has made me more hungry and more thirsty.

[35 : 37] Funny how it works in Christ, isn't it? That the more you get satisfied in Christ, the more you long for. That's because this is no longer home. No place on earth is home anymore.

We are now citizens of another country. We are citizens of another city, not made with human hands. And we're homesick. I now live with this surprisingly satisfying homesickness.

That's why you hear me say, it doesn't have to be this way. I've seen what it's going to be like at home. It doesn't have to be this way. And one day it will not.

Then 18th. Finally for today anyway. I am held in other hands. I am held in other hands.

I am not my own anymore. I'm His. And Jesus Christ never loses anything of His. Heidelberg Confession.

[36 : 45] Question number one. What is your greatest comfort in life and in death? Answer. My greatest comfort in life and in death, in body and in soul, is that I do not belong to myself, but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

I am not mine anymore. I am His. And Jesus says, no one can snatch you out of my hands. Hang on to that. It doesn't matter what happens.

No one can take you out of His hands. It's impossible. Paul says, those whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to His Son.

Those whom He predestined, He called. Those whom He called, He justified. Those whom He justified, He glorified. From before the time I went through my mother's womb to the time that I will go through the grave, those hands attend me, and nothing can separate me from the love of those hands.

In Christ, we are a new creation. Old things have passed away. New things have come. I'm alive. I'm acquitted. I'm made right with the judge.

[37 : 56] I'm reconciled. I'm His friend. I'm adopted. I'm engaged. Oh, how sweet it is. I'm indwelt by a holy divine presence. I'm being changed. I am freed.

I'm a slave. It's glorious liberty. I'm a member of His body. I am gifted. I'm a priest. I'm drafted. I'm clued in on the mystery of history. I'm an ambassador. I'm homesick.

I'm held in other hands. That and more is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And that is the work of the church.

That's all it is. Inviting people to enter into the new reality. To be in Christ. And helping people understand this new reality.

And most importantly, helping people function in this new reality. Can I have all the members of the staff please stand? Paid and otherwise.

[38 : 56] Paid and drafted. Drafted and paid. Not paid. Drafted. Can I have all of the elders stand please?

On session and off session. All of you who have been ordained as elders. Please. Nothing bad is going to happen. Can I have all the deacons stand?

Now would you please just look around the congregation. Turn your bodies and look. Just look.

Please. Look. Look. Here's our job. Here's our job. As the leadership of this church.

Ask three questions. Are these people in Christ? Do they understand what it means to be in Christ? And are they functioning in Christ?

That's all we're about. Can you think of anything greater to be about?

[40 : 01] Than to help discover the richness of new creations in Jesus Christ. You can be seated. I had you write feverishly there.

But I wrote all this down on a card for you. And so Tim and Joanne, can you start passing those out? We're going to have enough? Yes. Maybe we can have some help from people here.

This is a card you can take. I don't have homesickness on here. It's the only one I didn't put on. Because that came to me yesterday when I was feeling it. There is a whole lot more. But this is something for you to take and either fold and put in your pocket.

Or put it on the dashboard. Or probably the rear view mirror. Anywhere to help you remember how good it is to be in Christ.