

Coram Deo (In the Presence of God)
Soli Deo Gloria,(to the glory of God alone)
Soli Deo Gratias, (by Grace alone)
Soli Scriptura (Scripture alone)
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi (Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world have
mercy on us)
Deo Volente (God willing)
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
by the Rev.Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“You Are a New Creation” Series 4

*Sermon Series: Who Do You Think You Are?
Finding Your True Identity in Christ.*

Ephesians 2:1-18

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUJpJyth3J4>

February 6, 2022

A guy was being tailgated by a stressed out person on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The person tailgating hit the roof, and the horn, screaming in frustration as he missed his chance to get through the intersection.

As he was still in mid-rant, he heard a tap on his window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered him to exit her car with his hands up. He took the driver to the police station where the driver was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. The driver was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'Choose Life' license plate, the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car".

The truth will make you free but first it will make you miserable.

I

As believers in Christ, we are not only - as we have heard over the last few weeks - children of God, Chosen, Adopted and precious in His sight, that you are beloved and you belong; that you are blessed and worthy in and of yourselves; but you are also a new creation. And as a new creation, Paul seeks to help us understand new **path**. Your old life is dead and

gone, even if there remains some remnants of it left. *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. ”*

*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see*

Yet, you might say, “How could that be a new creation when I still mess up, fail, do and say things I shouldn’t.” Paul goes on to say because *“You are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.”* God, is still working out His will in you.

Once you accept Christ, and understand that you are choosing Him -Who first chose you. We see from verse 1-3 Paul speaks about what we were--our past; and in verse 4-9 Paul shows us what we are in Christ--our present. He is saying, "here is what you were and what you would have become if you remained on this course in life.

The word "course" when used here in the passage, is translated from the word "aion", which means ages or period of time when a certain attitude prevailed. And what Paul’s says about this period of time before one makes their commitment to Christ, is that we were dead (v1), deceived (1v), disobedient (v2), depraved (v3), and doomed (3)

He was saying that the path to self-destruct is easily followed. We've seen it, and we see it all around us. We don't have to be convinced of the reality of self-destruction. We see it everywhere--people destroying themselves, their families and their lives.

Sow a thought, reap an act
Sow an act, reap a habit
Sow a habit, reap a character
Sow a character, reap a destiny

The doctrine of original sin, or the doctrine of the fall people have often struggled with. I had less of a struggle understanding it since having children. Have you ever notice that one of the first behaviors a child displays, is disobediences. Children have to be taught to obedience. After having children, I have never question the doctrine of the fall. Especially after teaching my children to talk.

We spend all this time teaching our children to talk. Then we spent the rest of our life, trying to shut them up. There is a strange power that a child has. They can make an intellectual giant become a babbling idiot. We look into a child's eyes and we begin saying, "ba ba ba ba, ma, ma mama, dada--And do you know what they first words are, not da da, or ma ma, but no no, no no--And what happens to us. Eventually, they stop babbling, but we don't. That’s when we begin. We begin to speak to them. What do they say? "No." They've refined it by age two and they get better as a teenager. And what do we do? We begin to babble. "Don't you say no to me, what do you mean saying no to me, no one says no to me.. I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.

I thought my father had a speech impediment – when I was young - as he could never complete a sentence. I realize know he was sensory himself so he didn’t want swear at me. And being a Warrant Officer in the Canadian Military that’s no easy feat. “Don’t you ever...tell me (blank blan)...no..you ungrateful....”

Original sin! The doctrine of the fall! Proved!!

None of us need to be taught to be disobedient. We know it, from the beginning. And unless we change directions, Paul says, we end up on a road to self-destruction.

"But" Paul says in verse 4. "...out of God's rich mercy..." out of his great love we are saved from self-destruction. He saves us from ourselves, our sin, and self-destruction. He not only saves us, He loves us (v4), He quickens us (v5), He exalts us (v6), He keeps us (7-9).

He does it. There is nothing we can do, that will do it. But that is not how we live. We live as though we can do it all ourselves. And we refuse the gift given. Yet, when we receive it, when we accept it. We discover a love that holds us, a Lord who gives life to us. We discover one who lifts us higher than we thought we could go.

II

As new creations we are shown by Paul our new path and **purpose**.

We no longer have to believe what others say about us. We believe what God says about us. For the truest thing about us is what God says about us, and that is that we are His children. He has given us life, freed us and fills us.

The word for "workmanship" comes from the Greek word, (poiema). From this word we get our English word poem. So this verse could be read like this. "For we are His poetry created in Christ Jesus." Your life and mine, are to be a work of art--a poem.

A poem is not just meant to be read, but received. A poem is meant to elevate the spirit, to move the soul, to touch the speaker. If it doesn't it is not worth much.

I think of the poem: "Thirty days has September, April, June and November, all the rest as 31 one except... I know it has rhythms--but so what who cares--it does give you information but it doesn't give you inspiration.

Then I think of Stephen Spenders poem,

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light
Whose lovely ambition was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
Who never allowed gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit,
And who in their lives fought for life
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

A poem is not just meant to be read because it rhymes, but received because it inspires. A poem is meant to elevate the spirit, to move the soul, to touch the speaker. If it doesn't it is not worth much.

And so are we. We are meant for more than just to be seen, we are meant to be moved, and changed, and to move and change others by our presence. Each one of you is a work of art a poem in progress. As you read your life's work, is it a great work--one that elevates you and others with its beauty and harmony?

Elgar was one who wrote symphonies. One of his great works and perhaps most instructive, was his "enigma variations." This symphony had 13 variations on a theme. What

was interesting and instructive, was each variation what named for one of his 13 friends. He put their personalities on paper and played them. If he did the same with yours, would yours be a symphony, filling the room with passion and praise. Or would his be a song played on one string. Would yours be chopsticks or Chopin?

You see, that is what God has done. He is setting our lives to music. And what we do with it, determines if it will be chopsticks or Chopin. For you are His music, His poetry, His masterpiece, His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

III

As new creations we are shown by Paul our new path and purpose and also we see the **providence** of God. To understand the providence of God is to understand that God is over all and through all things. That He guides all things to their proper completion by His wisdom and for His will. To say this is to say that God can from the beginning so order things for us, that He can use both the good and the bad to fulfill His purpose and provide for our need.

Again in verse 10 we hear: "*For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God **prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them.*"

This is an amazing statement. It means that God has a plan for your life and mine; and that we should walk in His will and fulfill His plan. It means that we don't need to go aimlessly through this world without direction or purpose. It means that we can trust Him even in the hard times, that He is working our His will.

St. Teresa of Avila said it this way. "Everything is grace." Even falling in the mud. There is a story about this. St. Teresa was riding in a carriage, before committing her life to full devotion in service to God. While in the carriage, the horse bucked and she was thrown from the carriage into the mud. She immediately said to God, "Why would you do such a thing to a friend of yours." And she says God answered, "Why I do this to all my friends." Her quick and human response was, "Now, I know why you don't have many friends." The experience caused her to think about why God allows things to happen. Through this, she came to understand the everything is grace. That everything is apart of God's plan in making us His masterpiece, His workmanship, and preparing us for the work before us.

For most of us this is hard to understand. We don't understand how it is all put together. Kierkegaard once said, "life is lived forward but understood backward." For some of us, we begin to put the pieces together as we look back and see what God has done with them.

When we place the puzzle of our life into the hands of God, He begins to put the piece in there proper place. And a picture emerges.

IV

Paul tells us that we are a new creation and so we need to understand about new path purpose of God, the providence of God, and now he speaks of the **peace** with God. "*For he himself is our peace...*" He speaks of the real peace not the peace we spoke of early that is at peace with everything about us when we should really be at odds with, but peace with God for God Himself is our peace.

The Spanish mystic Unammuno, who seemed to understand life profoundly, said "May God deny you peace, that He may grant you glory." "May God deny you peace that He may grant you glory."

Today, we find so many people at peace with themselves, sin, and society when we - it seems -ought to be at odds with them. We often settle for a pseudo-peace that which numbs us, and deadens us in every way that matters. And when that pseudo-peace is disturbed we "blow our tops" and "loose our minds".

I knew a man who felt he had to please everyone all the time. He had to keep the peace no matter what. He spent all his time just running around putting out fires. The problem was he was a minister. He feared conflict. As a result he compromised the only Gospel he had and he devalued what was of ultimate value. As result his ministry became an exercise in public relations, rather than his proclaiming the reality of salvation.

Reinhold Niebuhr a renowned theologian, had a summer home in Massachusetts and sometimes preached at the local church there. One Sunday on his way to worship having stopped in a coffeeshop, he wrote a prayer on the back of an envelope and offered it during the service. When worship was over, a neighbor of his, a man called Robbins, asked for a copy of the prayer. Niebuhr gave it to him.

He is the prayer:

God, give us grace
To accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
the courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the wisdom to
distinguish the one from the other.

Did you know that Reinhold Niebuhr wrote the great serenity prayer--the prayer that hundreds of thousands of alcoholics, addicts, and fellow strugglers in life have used to find strength, and see clearer their life situation--and it was written on a back of an coffee stained envelope in a coffee shop before he went to pray it in Church one Sunday morning he was preaching.

It is a peace that is with God and comes from God, that recognizes that some things can't be changed, but some things can and must. It is a peace that is not at peace with ourselves or our situations, or sin or society. But rather it is a peace that gives us the power to put into practice what God has prepared for us to do.

Have you come to that point? Do you have the serenity and peace to accept the things you can not change, the courage to change the things you can? Do you have the wisdom to know the difference? If so, "May God deny you peace, that He may grant you glory." You think about that. Amen.