

Text: John 16:12-22

How is Your New Creation?

It's now the fifth Sunday of the seven Sundays of Easter, and that cry of resurrection joy seems to be wearing down a bit. So many other things on our minds – rising gas now up in the city almost three dollars a gallon, the poor economy continues with our county having one of the highest if not the highest unemployment rate in the state, an oil spill that continues spewing black tar over the Gulf of Mexico threatening the fish and wildlife and the jobs of thousands more, congress is debating how to prevent future disasters on Wall street and we see the executives denying that it was caused by their excessive greed at the expense of integrity and morality. Not to mention all the personal tragedies and drama in your own lives. There are so many distractions and diversions today and we probably forget to continue to rejoice at the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This morning we might just find it helpful to return again to the resurrection like we look at another facet of that diamond shining with the light of Christ. The facet that shines through our texts is NEW CREATION. “Behold, I am making everything new,” says the crucified, risen, ascended, and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ. Everything is new in His death and resurrection. Jesus Christ has made us the new creation. Today is the day of Jesus' resurrection. Sunday, is the first day of the week because of his rising. This is the first day of a new creative week. This is not the Old Testament Sabbath but the old order of things has already passed away in the death of Jesus. The new order has already risen in Jesus' resurrection.

It's quite remarkable if we think about it. We live in the time in-between, in these last days, with one foot in the old creation and one foot already planted in the new. My favorite verse in the Bible is 2Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” Have you really considered that we are a new creation in Christ? In our human nature, the old man, we are a sinner, sinful from birth, sinful from the moment we were conceived, dead in sin, and dying every step of the way. But in Christ, we are a new creature - redeemed, raised up, renewed, on the way to being resurrected.

I think it's important to realize that being resurrected is not the same as being rehabilitated. God doesn't do rehab. He doesn't repair, He restores. He kills and makes alive; He brings us to death through his death on the cross and He raises us from the dead. Death and resurrection are how Jesus makes all things new. That which is dead, is already risen in the resurrection of Jesus. And if it rises in Jesus, it has been made new again. Death and resurrection is the overarching theme of the Bible, from Genesis to the Revelation. In Genesis, death is the choice of man wanting to be like God, and God uses the pain of death as the mechanism of life - in the amplified pain of childbirth, in the sweat of labor for daily bread. Dust you are and to dust you return. We say it over every grave at every funeral: Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And yet through that same death - the wages of our sin - God works life in Jesus, the Lamb whose death destroys death, whose death embraces a dying world in its death, whose resurrection literally means life from the dead.

We see the old order of things passing away right before us, right under our noses. We see the death of the environment, the limits of our excessive consumption. We're

beginning to see that gas and electricity and oil are not without limits. We see in our selves and those around us, the death of the old order of things. Tears and pain and suffering and sorrow. "Now you will grieve and weep," Jesus told His disciples. In His death and in their own they see death at work, and we see it too all around us and in each one of us. We see the breaking down of our bodies and minds the increase in disease and cancer that is like our own bodies turned against us. We forget where we put the keys, where we set the glasses. There is sudden illness, unexpected death.

We think we can save things. Save the planet, save our nation, save our way of life. Save ourselves. We think that salvation is in our hands and that rehabilitation of the old is the answer. We think all we need from God is a pattern and a little push, and we can turn death around. We can beat the odds, with a little help from above. We think that our problems are fixable (with God's help, of course), then the dice will roll favorably for us. We are habitual rehabbers, fixer-uppers. We see ourselves, our lives, as a kind of "work in progress" - God at work making us better. We would like God to just put us through rehab, put on a bandage and our problems will end.

We think that if we're really clever and become religious we can also make gains. Like striking bargains with God we think we can gain the upper hand over our trials. We think we can cut deals with the forces of nature. We offer sacrifices of time and energy in the hopes of beating the odds. We mobilize, we organize, we agonize. We search for the right combination of piety that will "work" - the prayer that will unleash the power of God to solve our particular problem. Perhaps there's a program that will help me with my problems. We enlist the church in our crusade, and we get frustrated when the church won't endorse our program. The church isn't here to help you duck death or deny it, but to see you through it, and to give you hope to look it in the eye so that in Christ alone we can overcome it.

Jesus, on the heels of His own death on the cross, reminds His disciples that grief and sorrow will mark their lives. In a little while, they won't see Him anymore. He will die and rise and disappear in a cloud that covers His glory. They too will die, some of them horrible deaths. The disciple has no free pass in this life, no exemption from the suffering of living in a dying world.

But there is an immense promise in the midst of dying. He sends the Holy Spirit out of His own death and resurrection. The Spirit that brooded creatively over the waters of creation in the beginning will blow across the face of a dying world, making all things new. Jesus said, "Unless one is born anew, born from above, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." Again, "unless one is born of water and Spirit, unless you become a new creation, recreated by the Holy Spirit creatively working through water, you cannot be saved." St. Paul said it this way: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." No amount of retooling and reworking can make us fit for life in the heavenly city. We must be re-born, re-created, re-birthed. Not simply changed or fixed up. How can you "fix" a natural born sinner? You can't. You may be able to civilize old Adam, teach him a few manners, keep his sins polite and respectable, but you can't make him fit for citizenship in the heavenly city God builds. Only death and resurrection in Jesus does that.

The old order of things is passing away; the new has already come in Jesus. When Jesus left the tomb open and empty that first Easter morning, something more happened than the resurrection of one man from the dead. It wasn't just the rising of

dead Jesus. It was the rising of the whole dead creation, the resurrection of a new humanity, a new heaven and a new earth. A new creation stepped forth out of the tomb on that first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the dead. Just as Jesus gathered all, including you and me, into the darkness of His death, so He's included all, including you and me, in His resurrection. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old has gone, the new has already come in Him.

Baptism is the doorway to the new creation. Baptism is our rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, the sacramental sign and the act of God making a new creation in Christ. You are dead in sin, but alive to God in Jesus. The sorrow of sin and death has already become joy and gladness in Jesus' resurrection. And by faith (not by sight, by faith) you can already know the gladness even in sadness.

Jesus used an image that's very appropriate for next Sunday, Mother's Day. He said our new creation is like a woman in the midst of labor pains of birth. When the baby is finally born, she forgets the pain for the joy that her child has been born. If she didn't forget the pain, there would never be second or third children. All of us first-borns would be only children, and many of us would never have been born, if our mother had remembered accurately the pain of childbirth.

St. Paul said that our present sufferings do not compare with the glory that will be revealed in us in Jesus. He said the whole creation, not just we human beings, but the entire cosmos including the plants and the animals, groans, as though it is in labor, awaiting the redemption of our bodies in the resurrection. Though animals and plants are sinless yet they suffer because of our sin. The whole created order suffers with the labor pains of the new creation, as death gives way to life. Yet, as Jesus reminds us, the sorrow is short, the joy is eternal; the grief is a moment, the gladness forever. "Now you will have grief, but you will see me again, on the day I appear in glory, and then you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy."

The miracles Jesus did were little signs of the new creation. He was making known and visible the hidden reality that in His own flesh, the new creation had come. And so the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and 180 gallons of water become wedding wine. The miracles were foretastes, appetizers, teasers, of the new creation that comes in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Even after Jesus' ascension in glory, the miracles continued in the early church. In the book of Acts we hear of many miracles continuing. The point of these miracles was to show that the crucified and risen Jesus was still at work, even though you couldn't see Him. He's still the creative and redemptive Word through his redeemed.

In our efforts as Jesus disciples he still heals. We are a new creation. Look around you. Is there someone nearby, a homeless family, an unemployed person, a hurting addict that might, no must need the help of Jesus to make it through this life to the life to come? We have been made new for a purpose, to share the joy we have in Christ with those less fortunate. We may need to reach deeply into our hearts to find a way to overcome our prejudice or our revulsion at human suffering. It may hurt us at times to do the miracle Jesus wants done through us. But just as your mother endured the pain of labor for the joy of giving birth to you, so we must endure the contractions of the new creation, for the joy of rebirth in the resurrection, a joy we experience even now by taking Jesus at His Word. He is making all things new - including you and those you may touch with His love.