

I AM A NEW CREATION

(2 Corinthians 5.17)

Introduction

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth, he talks about people who become Christians as new creations.

There are no physical changes in their body but their whole life changes. The way they think, the way they act, in what they say and do. The old lifestyle has gone a new lifestyle begins. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come"! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our talk from this verse this morning can be broken into three parts:

- A New Creation
- The Old has Gone
- The New has Come

A New Creation

I will begin by defining the word create, from the Oxford English Dictionary: Create - "To bring into existence, give rise to; to make by one's actions". Creation is the act of creating. The words that stand out here for me are, "to bring into existence, to make". However, the understanding, or meaning of the words in Scripture is slightly different to the meaning of the words in English.

In Psalm 51, King David, after committing great sins before God, says: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Here the Hebrew word for create is *Bara*, which suggests only God can do this.

In our 2 Corinthians 5:17 verse the Greek word for creation is *ktisis*, which suggests a new creature. I think we can accept the English, Hebrew and

Greek definitions. To bring into existence, to make, only God can do this and we become new creatures, new people, a new person.

We can use the word creation to suggest we are the engineers:

- To create a space for oneself
- To create a beautiful piece of art
- To create a timetable and so on

But only God can make us a new creation in Christ, a Christian. In Psalm 51, David knew only God could solve his problems and get him out of the trouble he was in. He had broken half of the Ten Commandments, some punishable with death. In his most penitent state, he came to God. "Create", make me a clean, pure heart, get rid of this sin ridden heart.

To the Jewish people, the heart was the source of all life, not the thing that pumps blood round the body, but the very spirit of a being. People of Israel loved with their heart: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart ..." Deuteronomy 6:5.

People of Israel made decisions with their heart; "A wise man's heart guides his mouth ..." Proverbs 16:23.

People of Israel kept God's word in their hearts: "I have hidden your word in my heart ..." Psalm 119: 11.

We can go on looking at many references in Scripture referring to the heart and how important the heart was to the people of Israel. David had to get right with God, his heart had to be pure and clean. And today, the same applies to us. God cannot accept the things in our heart that are wrong, that are stopping us from being a new creation in Jesus.

The Old Has Gone

Recently, I said goodbye to a lawnmower I have had for ten years. It had a cable with a joint in it, having been run over during an exuberant bit of mowing (we've all done it). It had a twisted blade, having hit a stone, and worst of all, it did not cut the grass properly. The handle was twisted,

which made it hard to navigate and occasionally, gave out a noise like the Hound of the Baskervilles. Apart from these (and other minor) problems, it was a reasonably good servant. Earlier this year in late February, I got the mower out to get it ready for its first spring cut. Switched on, nothing! Not even the usual groaning sound it made when in operation. I could have stripped it to bits, hoping I would find the problem, and replace the faulty parts. Gill said, "No, definitely time for a new one." So I bought a new one and it's great, with many features the old one did not have. (The old one has gone courtesy of Stockton Council).

Our Christian lives are like that lawnmower at times. We know, with the physical side of our lives, things start to go wrong as we get older, that's just part of the ageing process. However, sometimes in our Christian and spiritual lives we are carrying things we should have got rid of many years ago. Habits or idiosyncrasies that are not conducive to living a full Christian life. In Ephesians 4:22. Paul says: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires..." Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7. "Don't you know that a little yeast works through a whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are."

Under Jewish Law, yeast, which is a leavening agent, was not permitted in bread to be used at the Passover, or other festivals. It was also not allowed in bread offerings placed on the altar. Nowhere in Scripture does yeast represent good.

In Matthew 16:5, Jesus said, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Jesus later went on to tell his disciples, that yeast represented the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. A small amount can grow till it becomes the controlling agent in a person's life.

Are there things in our life that are not right for a disciple of Jesus? Things that may have started in a small way but, like yeast, have become something of a controlling agent.

The New has Come

We all like something new, whether it's a house, car, TV or just new clothes, there is some excitement and anticipation in the purchasing and ownership of something new. When looking through the Scriptures, to find when the word new first occurred, I was quite surprised. Nowhere in the book of Genesis, with all the events which happened, is the word new mentioned.

Looking at the second book of the Bible, Exodus, in the very first chapter, verse six, we read: "Then a new king, who did not know Joseph, came to power in Egypt". In this context something new was not a good thing for the children of Israel, who had lived a stable life from the time of Joseph for the following 350 years (approx). This new king was to change their lives irrevocably.

New is not always a time of excitement or something to look forward to. Something new may also mean change, sometimes not always a positive change. A new life in Christ, inevitably will mean change for reasons we have looked at. Disposing with old ways and old things is necessary if we mean to follow Jesus. The older we get, the more difficult it is to change things, we become set in our ways.

The children of Israel had refused to change, had become set in their ways and they ended up in Babylon in captivity. God promised them if they changed their ways and repented, he would restore them to their own land. God further promised them: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;" Ezekiel 36:26.

It's interesting, some 400 years before this, David had said those similar words to God, which we looked at earlier: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. God forgave David and his whole emphasis on life changed. He looked the same David physically, but had a renewed spirit for life.

Only God can do this for us, only He can give us a new life to start afresh. Not reconditioned, like I wanted my old mower to be, new bits but the

same old mower. But renewed, as in recreate (*hadash*), start afresh. Like David, there are no physical changes, but on the inside we are brand new people.

Brian mentioned in his introduction, that today was to be young Evalyn's baptism. I know how much she was looking forward to being baptised in front of her church family. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. I am delighted how Evalyn and indeed all the children have made progress in their understanding of who Jesus is and what he means to so many people in our church. Evalyn has made that step of commitment, and we will meet sometime later to see her baptised.

Ending

So in this Easter Season, a season of resurrection and new life, let us dedicate or rededicate our lives to Jesus. Get rid of the things that are not conducive to serving him. Then let us share our experiences with the world, a much different world.

I will finish with that wonderful piece of Scripture from Acts, when an angel released the apostles from jail and said to them; "Go, stand in the Temple Courts and tell the people of the full message of new life." Acts 5:20.