

May 7 – Christ Brings New Life –
Colossians 1:9-14

Through Jesus Christ, we have new life. That's the meaning of Easter. So, what is different in the way you have been living your life these past three weeks since we celebrated Jesus' resurrection? Or would you have to admit you pretty much have continued to live the way you always have; you have continued to do what you've always done?

Jesus Christ offers us new birth, new life, new hope. In 1 Peter 1:3-4, we read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable." New birth --- Living hope for this lifetime – Imperishable inheritance for eternity.

Paul, writing in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, emphasizes newness: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone, the new is here."

This morning we read in Colossians 1:12-14 we are to give thanks to God who has rescued us and transferred us to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Consider briefly, "transferring us to the kingdom of God's beloved Son." In biblical times, the entire conquered population would be taken out of their home city and removed, taken away, to the conquering nation – those in Jerusalem were taken to Babylon, for example.

In Jesus Christ, God has rescued us from the power of darkness (death, sin) and transferred us into the kingdom of God's beloved Son—we have a new place to live, a new home, In Christ, we have redemption, our debt has been paid; our sins—what we have done wrong, intentionally or unintentionally-- are forgiven; we have been freed of consequences of sin.

Side note: We will be looking at Book of Ruth—redemption-- on Tuesday

We have new life, a new hope, and a new home!

Dallas Willard, a Christian author and speaker reminds us: **1**

"The gospel is less about how to get into the Kingdom of Heaven after you die, and more about how to live in the Kingdom of Heaven before you die."

Our new home has been established right here! Today! (or we could say, 3 weeks ago, at Easter!)

If we have a new home, the Kingdom of Heaven right here, right now, how does that change the way we decide to live each day?

What do we have to give up, let go of

Well, we probably will have to start by letting go of something, giving up something.

We will have to leave behind whatever is worn out, broken, not useful. We will need to leave behind those attitudes—what we think, the way we think—and those actions that keep us from God, AND that keep us from other people

We will have to leave behind our *Childish Ways*

Each Friday during the school year, I have the privilege of being with 3 granddaughters. Two are five years old; one is an infant. The infant is the easy one. I also have the reminder of how childish we adults can be and that when we do behave childishly and selfishly, we hurt ourselves more than anyone else.

My granddaughter Emerson has a habit of screaming and hitting when she doesn't get what she wants in the time she wants it. Ten days ago, that's how she acted when she didn't get to see the movie Bambi. No amount of explanation convinced her I simply didn't know how to use the technology at their home. This last Friday the problem was about a toy, "It's my toy; I don't have to share it." That situation quickly escalated from throwing the toy, to screaming, to hitting me with her pillow, to trying to hit me with her hand. She spent quite a lot of time, by herself, in the basement that morning.

IF Emerson had chosen to share the toy, she could have saved herself from time out in the basement and had more time to play (and she could have spared me some frustration!)

Paul reminds us in Ephesians **4: 14** so that we are no longer to be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. We are to grow up into Christ. **2**

We must leave behind our childish ways of getting angry when we don't get our way, of "making a scene" when someone disagrees with our political position or our interpretation of scripture. We must leave behind our childish ways.

We also must leave behind our **Selfish ways**

Peter writing in 1 Peter 2:1-3 tells us,

"Get rid of malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander

Long for pure, spiritual milk to grow into salvation

IF you have tasted that the Lord is good" (emphasis mine)

If, indeed, we believe that God loves us so much God sent Jesus to live among us, to die on the cross and be raised from the dead for us, If, indeed, we have tasted that the Lord is good, we must get rid of, leave behind our selfish ways. We use malice and slander to attack those with whom we disagree—because we're right and they're wrong. We act with guile and insincerity to get what we want, regardless of how it hurts others.

Paul, writing in Galatians 5:19-21, also provides a list of what we must give up: (it's a long list!)

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, **21** envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Again, jealousy, strife, outbursts of anger, disputes, envy: all are expressions of our selfish ways. Like Emerson, like the commercial on television: "It's mine and I want it now!"

When we accept new life in Christ, we must decide to live according to God's ways.

How do we live in the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth?

Colossians 1:9-14 describes what new life looks like, new life—living with God in charge, not ourselves. Paul writes he is praying for those at the church in Colossae

He is praying they will discern God's will. We, too, must learn to listen to God. We must learn to listen for what God is instructing me/us/you to do and to be. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we

pray "Thy (God's) will be done" NOT "Thy will be changed to my will!"

Paul tells us in these verses in Colossians we are to bear fruit in every good work—people are to see God in us. We are to increase in fuller knowledge of God—we need to keep studying and reading and praying. What we think we learned as children, what we may have learned from someone whose own understanding was limited, may not be God's way.

We are to be strengthened, that is to have strength and knowledge/wisdom, through Christ, to carry out God's will. We are to possess all fortitude and patience with joy

Fortitude, as it is used here, is patience that triumphs over adversity

It is patience in circumstances—nothing that happens to me will defeat me, in Christ

It is patience with people—I am to believe in people, have hope for people. No human can defeat my determination to love as God loves

We are strengthened with Joy – overflowing joy, a joy which is not dependent on circumstances. I can greet even strangers with a kind word, because God is at work in my life.

Just as Paul told us what we need to give up, leave behind, let go of, Paul also tells us what our new lives should be: living with the fruit of the Spirit.

Continuing in **Galatians, we read in Galatians 5:22-26**

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. **26** Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Paul's list begins with Love, but I want us to start with Peace

Peace is the absence of anxiety, a quiet calm even in the face of threat

Peace starts with *Inner peace* – I am God's; the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want

This past week, we have had two memorial services to celebrate the lives of Danny Bristol and Vadene Barshney. In both services we were reminded of God's care through reading and hearing Psalm 23— The Lord is my shepherd. The 23rd psalm is a psalm of inner peace.

Peace continues with peace between ourselves and others

In Romans 12:18, we read, “as far as it depends on you, live in peace.” We are to let go of strife and whatever prevents a peaceful relationship with others.

Several weeks ago, I heard a short song, simply titled “Peace Round.” It is a song of hope. At the time, I knew there would come a Sunday when we could sing this song. Today is that Sunday! “What a goodly thing, if the children of all men, could dwell together, in peace.” Those are the original words written by Jean Ritchie, from Appalachia. I have adapted two more verses: “What a goodly thing, if all people of this world, could dwell together in peace. What a goodly thing, if all children of the King can dwell together in peace.”

I don't know if you remember the strife that characterized South Africa for years and years. Black people were kept separate from white people: blacks lived in separate towns, were allowed only very restricted rights. Those who dared to challenge the laws of apartheid were beaten, imprisoned and, not infrequently, killed. When apartheid finally was brought to an end, fear loomed large. Would black people, finally acknowledged as equal, attack whites, seeking revenge? Wise leaders established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Over months, people who had suffered could share their stories of beatings, torture, family members being killed. They named the people who had been responsible for these acts. BUT, there was little vengeance: no acts of retribution: no eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. What most victims sought was not to impose similar suffering on their attackers, what they sought was admission of guilt and a plea for forgiveness. And they extended forgiveness. South Africa went from a divided country to a more peaceful country, not through violence but through people giving up malice, strife, envy, outbursts of anger, enmities, disputes, dissension. Life in South Africa isn't perfect; there still are significant challenges. But apartheid could have ended in a civil war; it didn't. It ended relatively in peace. **5**

As I've reflected on some of my Sunday messages, I recognize that often what I am saying can be taken as affirmation of what a person already believes about scripture and Christianity. In this congregation we have members with very different, perhaps even “opposing” understandings of scripture. So how do the messages I preach on Sunday morning move us toward “living in the Kingdom of Heaven before we die” in this congregation, as Dallas Willard exhorts us to live?

In the context of peace, think of a person in this congregation whose understandings of the Bible are different from yours. (If you are a visitor, or have only recently begun attending FBC, think of a person in your own church or family with whom you disagree strongly about faith, or how to live life.) I'd prefer we not think in political terms but focus on our understanding of scripture and of faith. For Christians, and perhaps people of other faith traditions, political positions frequently can come out of our understanding of who God is and our understanding of what scripture teaches us about being followers of Christ.

So think of a person in this congregation whose understandings of the Bible are different from yours. What does Matthew 5:43-48 tell us about loving our enemies? Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you. This teaching is about YOU and YOUR attitude/choices; it isn't about the other person you're thinking about! We don't get to say, “Well, if that person only believed the right way...” No, this is about you, what do YOU need to do to live in peace with that other person? Love your enemy, pray for the one who persecutes you.

Let's take a few moments to reflect, pray for the person with whom you disagree, pray for the guidance of God's Spirit as to whether you need to admit your malice, dissension and then ask forgiveness—from God, from the person or persons who have suffered your outbursts of anger, your words of gossip.

In the context of peace, what are you willing to do to fulfill Romans 12:18: in so far as it depends on you, live in peace.

It is our choice, our decision as to how we are to treat one another. There is a great beer commercial making the rounds of social media. Yes, it's a beer commercial but there is so much more. **6**

It is a challenge to live in peace, even with those with whom we disagree.

Describe Heineken beer commercial – even people who disagree about climate change, or feminism, or transgender identity can choose to listen to one another, to seek areas on which they can agree and choose to live in peace.

I'll close with Paul's words from Ephesians 4:15-16

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

(Show slide with billboard with this message:

That "Love your neighbor as yourself,"

I meant it.

--God