

A New Creation

So Paul's writing is not always the clearest. The sentences twist and weave. It's easy to get lost.

I spent a lot of time untangling this one. And I worked out a paraphrase that I think will be helpful.

Here is what Paul wrote:

“When I tell you what God wants, I am going to sound crazy. Because the love of Christ controls me. And because Christ died for us all, we died too. We don't evaluate things by human standards any more.

No. If you are with us, you are part of a new creation. The old things are gone. Look. New things have arrived.”

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The 1998 movie the Truman Show tells the story of a man whose entire life has been one long reality TV show.

In the movie, Truman Burbank's birth was filmed on TV. And as he grew older the studio constructed a larger and larger set around him, so that he would never know that he was on a TV show, such that he would never question that nature of his reality.

We meet Truman as an adult, living an idillic life on an Island named Seahaven. An island that is contained under an enormous dome, the worlds largest television set, so big it can be seen from space.

The island is a picture perfect image of the American suburban dream.

Every other person on the island is an actor. Working together to construct the world in which Truman lived. While his every move and moment is broadcast live to the world.

As the movie proceeds, Truman begins to awaken. He begins to suspect that the world in which he lives is not quite as it seems. He notices how much is done to control him, and how the whole world seems to conspire to keep him in Seahaven.

Finally, Truman's curiosity, courage, and hope, lead him to sail a small boat through a terrifying storm, until at least he reaches the outer edge of the domed studio.

The film ends as he finds a door, opens it, turns back toward Seahaven, takes a bow, and steps out into the real world.

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When I was in college, a New Testament professor screened this movie for our class on one of the first weeks of the semester.

This, he said, is very much like how the first Christians saw their lives and their world.

They had been living the same way, in the same place, all their life, and they assumed that the reality they saw, was all that there was.

And yet God persistently whispered to them that there was a bigger, fuller, life, waiting beyond the walls in which they lived. And Jesus was sent to show them the way, to lead them through the storm and out the door, into truth, into a new world.

The way of Jesus required that they leave the lives they had known behind, to become a part of something new. A new creation.

Paul says it quite starkly in this morning's reading.

"We have concluded this" he says. "Jesus died for the sake of all; therefore, we have all died. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived."

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Now this dramatic way of understanding themselves in relationship to the world was easily accessible to the earliest Christians, because in fact they were just a tiny group clinging together in a world that was hostile to them.

They were the weirdos, those Jesus people. The outcasts.

People often had to leave their families to become Christians. They lost their livelihoods and their community.

And so to become a part of the Church, really was to let your old life die. And to step out into something brand new.

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Our world today is a little less like that. Even if some of your friends might think it's a little weird that you go to church.

Even if most of my friends think it is *very* weird that I am a pastor.

Christianity is, nevertheless, the religion of the halls of power, in this country, and around much of the world. It is a religion whose adherents control a lot of wealth. And who make a lot of big discussions.

Our houses of worship are in nearly every town. Our holidays are recognized by the civil government of this nation.

It's about as far from Paul's world as we could get.

And so, his words sound odd to us.

Because none of us really had to die to the world in order to become a part of this church.

It might cost us something, but it doesn't cost us everything.

We do not have to take a bow, and step out of the whole world as we knew it, in order to walk through those doors into this world.

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Our situation is undeniably preferable. We are able to practice our religion freely without fear. The world, and the government, are not hostile to us. We are not the weirdos. We are not the outcasts.

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And yet in that, there is something we have lost.

Walter Bruggeman, a great theologian, recently said:

“There is a crisis in the US church because we are giving up on the faith and discipline of our Christian baptism and settling for a common, generic U.S. identity that is part patriotism, part consumerism, part violence, and part affluence.”

We got stuck in Seahaven.

When our religion became normal to the world. The world became normal to us. And we started accepting things as they are.

And I worry about that, a lot.

We could get lost in the world as it is. That we could be fooled into thinking that because there is already a church in the center of every town, we must already live in communities infused with the Christian values of love and justice.

We could grow numb to injustice because so long as the logic of the world calls it inevitable.

We could end up with leaders who shrug their shoulders and say “the law is the law.” Even when slavish adherence to that law is yielding nothing but suffering.

We could wake up one morning and hear that our very own sacred bible, is being cited to justify tearing children and parents apart.

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What Paul has to say to us, is very important for us to hear.

Even though Christians are no longer thrown to the Lions in the Colosseum. And even though there is a church in every town.

Paul's words to those earliest Christians, who were just a tiny little group of outcasts, are as important to us today as they were to them.

The words of scripture challenge us to become the part of a new creation.

Paul says:

“When I tell you what God wants, I am going to sound crazy. Because the love of Christ controls me. And because Christ died for us all, we died too. We don’t evaluate things by human standards any more.

No. If you are with us, you are part of a new creation. The old things are gone. Look. New things have arrived.”

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In large churches, and cathedrals, the center part of of the room, where the congregation sits, is called the Nave.

The word Nave, comes form the Latin word that means boat.

The idea was simple. Sitting in that pews meant we were all in a little boat together. Our little home sailing through a vast world.

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My friends, we have a choice. We can accept a generic identity. We can live in an old world. Where suffering is inevitable. Where nothing really ever changes. Where we are steered away from hope into the ruts of routine.

Or. We can get in our little boat.

Sail out in the terrifying storm.

We can accept the faith and discipline of our baptism, and let go of the old ways of living and being.

You can start to believe that the little nagging voice that tells you something is wrong, is the voice of the Holy Spirit, calling you into the new creation.

We can stop evaluating everything by the existing standards of the world, and start evaluating them through the lens of heaven.

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When you look at the world through the lens of heaven. There are no foreigners and citizens. Just people. And land. And resources enough if we share.

When you look at the world through the lens of heaven, we don't need to accept cruelty as the price of security.

When you look at the world through the lens of heaven, there is no such thing as other people's children. Just little ones whose lives are as much our responsibility as they are anyone else's.

I told you it would sound crazy.

But if we are to truly take on what it means to be Christians. It will mean beginning that journey into the uncertain water.

Putting to our stern the old familiar world. The one that we long accepted as the only way.

We will need to learn what it is to be governed by love.

We will need to find the courage to let the old ways die.

If we are in Christ, we are part of a new creation.

And some day soon, we will finally discover the limit of this old way.

Steadied by faith, together urging our little boat through the storm, we will reach the edge.

Find the door.

And step out, into a whole new world.

