

Text: II Corinthians 5: 16-21
Title: Creation Reframed
Date: 03.14.10
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There has been a recent flurry of books written by non-Christians traversing Christian sub-cultures. The authors are atheists or the religiously curious and they anonymously find a place in churches or Christian colleges and then write what they observe. The books are sort of cross cultural travel journals. The titles are intriguing ~ and long:

“My Jesus Year: A Rabbi’s Son Wanders the Bible Belt in Search of His Own Faith,”
“In the Land of Believers: An Outsiders Extraordinary Journey into the Heart of the Evangelical Church,” “I Sold My Soul on E-Bay: Viewing Faith through an Atheist’s Eyes,” or, “The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner’s Semester at the Holiest University in America.”

You get the idea....

One of these authors was recently asked about what she learned. She said:

The biggest surprise for me was the individual reflectiveness of church members. I think I'd had this stereotype of evangelicals as blisteringly arrogant dogmatists. But I observed instead humility and a kind of obsessive self-reflection, enacted through prayer. They call it listening to God's voice, but it seemed to me like a constant internal pat-down of conscience, which really resulted in care with choices, and a movingly ample capacity for selflessness and generosity. I learned a lot by their example.

No great conversion, no dramatic turnabout, but she saw thing differently. She saw people and not cartoon characters. Through listening to, living with, and learning from evangelicals her picture changed ~ it was re-framed.

Have you ever had anything like that?

Through a relationship,
through an experience,
through a book or a movie,
through travel,
through a recent trip to Israel....
you saw things differently,
your view of reality was changed,
your vision was reframed?

There is a practice in therapy called “reframing.” The therapist doesn’t provide answers or tools and techniques for change, but instead asks questions in such a way that the frame of the story changes.

The meaning that any event in life has depends upon the frame in which we perceive it. So, if you can change the frame the meaning changes; and if the meaning changes our responses or behaviors can also change. Reframing is probably more art than technique,

more grace than law, more imagination than skill, but as the frame is changed the picture is different.

Have you ever had anything like that?

In our text this morning Paul is writing about creation being reframed. The frame changes ~ meaning changes, behavior changes, spirituality changes.... A Lenten spirituality is a reframing of reality.

Now, part of Paul's story is a dramatic conversion. He was bowled over and blinded on the road to Damascus. Metaphorically speaking when his vision was restored he saw things in a new frame – everything was different because of his encounter with Christ.

So, when Paul is writing to the church in Corinth he writes with a certain abandon. The words and sentence structures can barely contain the overwhelming joy and radical reconfiguring of reality that he now knows. His language is big and abrupt and dramatic.....

Things don't always jibe between languages, so not unlike therapy the translation of scripture is often more art than technique. And, Paul's language in our text this morning is expressive and pushing at the seams. So, different translations offer different ways of interpreting the passage. For example, the NIV translates II Corinthians 5: 17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

But, other translations actually follow the Greek text closer. The new TNIV ~ that we have the pews ~ reads:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come....

An even more literal translation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ – new creation!

Or,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ – there is a whole new world.

Do you hear the difference? One translation highlights the change of the individual, and the others celebrate a change to the creation and how we see creation.

Now, I am not trying to skirt the notion that individuals can be dramatically changed ~ as that is helpful, so be it. But, it is also helpful (and biblical) to acknowledge that Paul might also be proclaiming that everything is different than what it seems, that creation itself is changed, that creation is reframed....

It is sort of like that "For Eyes" commercial where the tired old guy asks his wife, "Honey, can we go home, now?" And, his wife puts her glasses on and sees some hunky buff younger man asking, "Can we go home, now?" In Christ ~ creation is reframed. Everything is different.

To use the language we've been working with in exploring a Lenten spirituality ~ We are all dead in sin. (Ash Wednesday). But, while we were still dead, God called, God made us alive in Christ! (Lent One). Therefore, we know a deep longing for the coming of *shalom*: when heaven comes to earth, the kingdom comes in fullness, and the dwelling of God is people (Lent Two). And, our journey toward *shalom* is full of dangers, toils, and snares, but we are given strength for the journey. Don't be afraid, we will endure for God's strength is greater than any weakness (Lent Three).

Well, this morning, as all of that is true, then the way that we see creation is changed. It is reframed..... Where death once had the last word ~ now life speaks last.

Where judgment was once the way of the world ~ now mercy holds sway.

Where damnation was waiting in the wings ~ now forgiveness is center stage.

Where once you were enslaved ~ now you are free.

Where fear was in the cards ~ now love trumps all.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this text ~ this new creation ~ this way:

The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

How? You ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

In this new creation we're reconciled ~ made right ~ with God. It doesn't hang in the balance; it is a done deal. In this new creation *shalom* has arrived. We may only catch a whiff, we may only see a spark, and we may only hear a whisper.... but the fragrance, the light, and the chorus of *shalom* is the defining reality of creation. One day it will overwhelm and fill up every sense and every square inch of creation, so don't look at yourself or at others through those old lens. Creation is reframed.

I got an e-mail from a friend and student ~ funny, gifted, engaging, colorful. You couldn't miss him when he was in the room. You smiled more when he was around. He wrote while in college hard at work trying to figure out who he was, and what his life was about, and where he was headed. He grew up in the church and a Christian home, but he was writing about how the practice of religion didn't speak to his spirit. He was writing about being "spiritual but not religious." In his words:

All of this religiousness is wearing on me. I know how I feel, and I know that there is a God, and when I'm laying awake at night, me and God.... we chill. I ask for help and

when good things happen, I thank him. That's pretty much where it stops. Bible verses, praise songs, chapel... most of that means nothing to me. It is like an extra-ness that is kind of like pointless to me.

His voice is a common one. The frame of life is clear and trusted ~ it is what the individual knows and experiences. Spirituality is what works. Religion doesn't work, for all sorts of reasons: boring, wordy, blah, blah, blah, bad preaching, judgmental, hypocritical,....

You know the litany. So, spirituality is what speaks to the self. We connect with God through what the self sees. And, that is not to suggest that God isn't present and active when we "chill," but it is to recognize that the vision is sort of myopic.

Dear friends, what if part of a Lenten spirituality is the daily work of picking up the lens of religion: scripture, community, sacrament, devotional practice, prayer? What if part of a Lenten spirituality is picking up the lens of religion in order that we might see creation rightly, reframed, and not simply as we see things. John Calvin puts it this way:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even they will recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly: so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness clearly shows us the true God.

In order to see clearly, in order to see creation as it truly is ~ don't we need the spectacles of scripture, don't we need the practice of reading and listening in devotion, or round the family table, or in the gathering of community, or in the classrooms of Daystar, or Roseland, or Southwest, or Chicago Christian High School, or Illiana, or Elim, or Trinity, or Timothy, or Calvin, or....

All of this is a reframing project. Not that we make it happen or that we paint the picture, but that we need to keep putting on the spectacles that we might see creation rightly.

N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, summarizes it like this:

Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection. Made for joy, we settle for pleasure. Made for justice, we clamor for vengeance. Made for relationship, we insist on our own way. Made for beauty, we are satisfied with sentiment. But new creation has already begun. The sun has begun to rise. Christians are called to leave behind, in the tomb of Jesus Christ, all that belongs to the brokenness and incompleteness of the present world. It is time, in the power of the Spirit, to take up our proper role, our fully human role, as agents, heralds, and stewards of the new day that is dawning. That, quite simply, is what it means to be a Christian: to follow Jesus Christ in the new world, God's new world, which he has thrown open before us.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.
Amen.