

Sermon 8-23-09¹
Ephesians 4:17-32
Being Renewed

For the last few weeks we've been looking at what it means to dwell with Jesus. Specifically, we've looked at the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit taking our lives, strengthening us for God's work in the world, and binding us in union with our living, reigning, active, and present Lord and Savior. Two weeks ago we looked at the presence of Jesus dwelling within us and how we are changed from the inside out; transformed into the disciples he is calling us and forming us to be. Last week we looked at how the presence of Jesus dwelling within us by the power of the Holy Spirit leads us in our maturity; not leaving us to deal with a weak and infant faith but strengthening and empowering us for growth and maturity in our walk of discipleship. We continue in that trend, looking at the power of Jesus dwelling within us, renewing us day-by-day in our walk of discipleship.

Now, it might be helpful after traveling through Ephesians for the last few weeks to remember where Paul has been taking us. Paul has basically said up until this point in his letter, "this is the glory of the gospel, this is what God has done for you out of the freedom of his love in and through Jesus Christ: God has delivered you from sin and perdition through the cross of Christ (not because you deserved it but out of the freedom of his love and grace, chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ), but more than that God has made these things his own in Jesus Christ. The glory of the gospel is the reality that we live and move and have our being in Jesus; that in union with him we are brought from death to life. In response to all that God does for us in, through, and as Jesus Christ, going so far as to dwell within us through the power of the Holy Spirit, changing us and leading us to spiritual maturity, this is how we are called and empowered to live."

Having said all that, Paul pretty much lays it out there for the Ephesians in terms of how they are to live in the world because of all God has done for them, saying: "And so I insist—and the Lord's with me

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on this—there is no going along with the secular crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. Because they don't want to have anything to do with the living God their lives are dulled, their senses hampered, and they don't know a thing about how the world really works. Because of the life they've embraced, they're desensitized from all the awful things around them and given themselves over to the addictions of their hearts and the secular culture." Paul paints a bleak picture to sum up his point, "this is not how you learned Christ. Not only did you hear preaching about him but he also taught you. You were taught to take off your old life, the life of the empty-headed, mindless crowd, and being renewed from the inside out, you yourselves were clothed with the new life; clothed with Christ Jesus himself by the power of the Holy Spirit." And from there, Paul offers a variety of examples that contrast the old life, the life of the empty-headed, mindless secular crowd, with the new life in Christ; a life that is God breathed, clothed in Jesus' strength, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And the root of this transformation, the change from inside out, involves being renewed on a daily basis.

Now, when Paul talks about "being renewed in the spirit of your minds" he's not making a comparison to taking a book back to the library so that it is renewed for another three weeks. Being renewed isn't like adding a fresh coat of paint to spruce things up. No! Being renewed is a deeper, more penetrating reality that comes from being joined to the reigning and resurrected life of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Being renewed is coming to know and recognize on a daily basis, not just some of the time but on a daily basis, that our lives are laid hold of by Jesus himself; that this Jesus –born of the virgin Mary without ceasing to be God, crucified and resurrected as God-for-us in the flesh of his humanity – this Jesus has such a passion for God's creation, for each one of us, that he joins us to his life, calling us to throw off the old ways of life – the ways of sin and destruction – and clothes us with his life, leading us to get in on his mission and ministry in the world. Being renewed by the power and presence of Jesus not only reorients and shapes how we look at the world, being renewed radically alters how we are called to live and love in the world.

The other day one of my colleagues in ministry told a wonderful story about her family's recent trip to Boston. Last Saturday they toured the Old North Church, so fondly remembered in stories of the American Revolution; amazed by how many hundreds of people toured the church and were interested in learning about it. The next day, Sunday, they decided to attend Old North Church for worship. The number of people in attendance astonished them. Can you guess how many were there? The number might surprise you: 20. Hundreds of people pour throughout Old North Church Monday through Saturday, looking for Paul Revere's pew and marking the historical significance of this church, yet on the Lord's Day, only 20 or so are gathered together to celebrate and rejoice in the work of the Lord; only 20 or so participate in the mission and ministry of God in that place. My colleague remarked that it was a sermon title waiting to happen: "the church as a museum."

Reflected in what's happening in the Old North Church is a symptom of one of the oldest and perennial struggles in the Christian life of discipleship that Paul picks up on: the lulling enticement of the secular world continually beckoning us to join in and participate; getting lost with the empty-headed, mindless crowd by forgetting the calling to which we've been called. The encroachment of secularism and our human inclination to turn everything into a "thing" or a "function" diminishes our faith lives and throws up a wall of resistance against the ministry and mission of the Lord our God revealed to our minds and hearts in, through, and as Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit renewing us from the inside out. Being renewed in the spirit of our minds is the breaking down of our resistances and being empowered by grace to more fully embrace the call our Lord and Savior has placed upon our lives.

When we looked at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 a couple weeks ago, one of the strongest elements of that prayer was that according to the riches of God's grace, we would be strengthened at the core of our being by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus himself would in our hearts. Being renewed in the spirit of our minds on a daily basis is the flesh and bones of Paul's prayer for the church; being renewed on a daily basis is looking upon the world while being attentive to our lives, all the while asking, "What is Jesus doing? How is he transforming me and shaping me for the glory of his mission and

ministry?” Being renewed isn’t something we do under our own steam or power, it’s living into our union with Jesus, flinging wide the doors of our lives that we might let him rearrange the furniture as we grow into mature discipleship.

Contrary to what many think, there is no such thing as being a Christian – being a disciple of Jesus – in name only. It just doesn’t happen. It doesn’t reflect the reality of Jesus living within us and it doesn’t reflect the glory of the gospel; the glory of all the Lord our God has done for us and our salvation by penetrating into the depths of our sin and humanity in, through, and as Jesus Christ, making it his own, and dealing with it on his cross and through his resurrection that we might have life abundantly. Being a disciple, being renewed by Jesus himself from the inside out through the power of the Holy Spirit, is living in a way that is distinctive from the rest of the world around us.

Empowered by the Spirit and asking what Jesus is doing in our lives and the life of the world, we’re called to put away lies and falsehood; speaking the truth in love to one another as well as those around us. We’re called, not spew evil and foment discord, but to bear witness to the mission and ministry of our Lord. Being renewed is living into our baptismal identities, sealed upon our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, putting away from our lives bitterness, wrath, anger, shouting, slander and malice by embracing what Jesus is doing and claiming for ourselves mutual respect, love, and forgiveness.

When Jesus is involved in our lives, the pot is always stirred, the Spirit is always moving, and the glory of the Lord God Almighty cannot be contained. Friends, look for what Jesus is doing in your life and in the world around; discern the ways you are being renewed by his presence and power. Look for those God-moments and opportunities that call for a distinctively Christian way of living. Not sure which way that is; it’s usually more awkward and challenging. And above all, put away all doubts that God isn’t working in your lives, put away all fears that Jesus isn’t up to something in your life or that you’ve failed him in some ways, put away the old life of mindless wandering to the panderings of secular culture. Be still and know that the Lord is in the midst of your very lives up to mischief and renewing you for the glory of his kingdom work; know that it is no longer you who live but Jesus himself who lives and dwells

within you – that the life you now live, you live by the faithfulness of the Son of God who is renewing you and leading you to a life that is distinctive from the encroachment of secularism. Praise, glory, and honor be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; now and unto ages of ages. Amen.