

Sermon Draft

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Sermon: “New Creation”

Great joy for those who are reconciled in Christ Jesus! Jesus is at work to reconcile the world, and there is great joy for those reconciled to God and one another by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Selfish living which is really living apart from God and others is not joyful living. By nature, we’re all living for ourselves. Paul says that being a Christian means **“the old has passed away”** (v 17), even that **“all have died”** (5:14). But we don’t want to “die.” This is the natural worldview that our culture fosters with advertising that promises we can always be young and beautiful, with thinking that says we can always be what we want to be, even with technology that isolates individuals from working together.

Paul says we should **“regard no one according to the flesh”** (v 16), but this is exactly what we’re doing not seeing all people as created in the Creator’s image. As a result, we don’t think about sharing the truths of the Gospel with others. There are many reluctant witnesses who do not see the charge of following Jesus to include sharing the faith with anyone.

In 1993, 89% of Christians who had shared their faith agreed this is a responsibility of every Christian. Today, just 64% say so a 25-point drop. (“Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” Barna Research, accessed April 28, 2021. This is all a denial of the reconciliation that Christ has secured for all creation on the cross. It is saying that I’m on my own, not joined together with God or other people. But there is no joy in that. See through the lie and look more closely at how lonely life is when we’re not connected to anybody else.

It was a family occasion one of those now-rare opportunities for Dad and Mom to have. Nothing planned, just dinner conversation, but once a question about parenting came up, they always had wisdom to share. Their children were parents now too and their spouses were with them here around the table while the next generation was out of earshot at their own “kids’ tables.”

“When you guys were young, we talked with you often about how other people might be feeling.”

“We talked about how you can forgive the class bully and invite the new kid at school over to play to feel welcome.”

“We talked a lot about how blessed our family is and how maybe some kids have it tougher at home, so we always want to be sensitive to that.”

The life reconciled in Christ back together with God and others is joyful living. In the cross of Jesus Christ, **“God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”** (v 19). We are back together with God because the sin that separated us from him has been removed when Jesus died on the cross. That makes us all new creations with a new life. We have died, and now we’re alive, brand new. God’s children are not refurbished or repaired. No, we are made completely and utterly new in Christ Jesus. In this new, reconciled life, there is great joy.

During Lent, this Sunday serves as a respite from the season’s penitential character. Even while we weep and mourn because of our many sins, God’s mercy is greater than our sin. **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”** (Isaiah 12:3), Isaiah sings joy in the midst of all that besieges the world.

In Christ, we are righteous and completely new already now and even more fully at his return. Even though in this life many things assail us because of sin, unbelief, the evil one, and death, we can be resolute in our joy because of Christ.

A great joy of this reconciled life is bringing others back together with God. God has now entrusted to us the message of reconciliation: ***“We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”*** (v 20).

As followers of Jesus Christ we are made new and are sent to proclaim the story, the message of reconciliation, to the world. Each one of us has a unique role in this ambassadorship. And being ambassadors of the reconciled life to others is one of our greatest joys as Christians. Speaking and living the Gospel is prompted by the Holy Spirit through his promises fulfilled in Baptism.

We who are reconciled to God and each other in Christ Jesus have great joy for all eternity. What greater joy can there be than seeing others share the same joy?

On January 28, 1986, people were opening their mouths and saying, “Today is the day!” as the space shuttle Challenger prepared for liftoff. Excitement was palpable around the launch because for the first time ever someone other than an astronaut would go into space. Some of you might recall what happened that day. Maybe you were one of the millions who watched it happen in real time.

Just seventy-three seconds into the flight, the shuttle exploded and left all seven crew members deceased. It was tragic. The investigation that followed revealed concerns and malfunctions with a specific O-ring that was designed to help seal segments of the rockets together.

It turns out, this rubber ring would stiffen and become brittle in colder temperatures. On the day of the launch, there were unusually low temperatures. So, the rocket launched, and as the fuel being burned inside the rocket continued to build up heat, it burned right through the now brittle ring, reaching an external fuel tank and causing an explosion.

It turns out some of the leadership of the manufacturing company chose to conceal the issue instead of speaking the truth. Several engineers raised their voices, but leadership kept their mouths shut and failed to pass on the message. We Christians are ambassadors of God to open our mouths and pass on an even more life and death message.

The delight over at the “kids’ table” was obvious. You could hear the banter, the squeals. The cousins loved being together. And back at the big table, they understood why. There’s real joy in living not just for yourself but also for others. Christ has done all the living and the dying for us, reconciling us to God and to each other for eternity, leaving to us the joy of living for others.

Amen