

Made New: Part 1
“New” Series Week 2
April 23, 2017
2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Welcome/Intro/Vision

Last week on Easter Sunday we kicked off a brand new series of messages appropriately entitled NEW!

If you weren't here last week, let me get you up to speed

For many of us at various points in our lives, something NEW came along and changed our lives for the better:

a new job, a new relationship, some new opportunity was a turning point for something great that happened in our lives

New has potential to bring new energy, new opportunities, new hopes and dreams

But the problem is that new in this word has a very short shelf-life. New in this world has a very predictable pattern that just about everything follows from cars to houses to bodies and jobs:

New to familiar to old to broken to gone

And all of us have scars from living in this world—a world where relationships break down, promises break down, bodies break down, disappointments and frustrations sometimes feel like they're at every turn

This week I was thinking that this whole cycle was somehow described in some high school physics class that I've intentionally blocked out of my memory like women block out labor pains

But I decided to go brave my scarred memories of high school physics by looking for some information on the source of all information, Youtube, and I found this on entropy—anyone remember that word? Here's a crash course on it—take a look:

[RUN VIDEO HERE!]

This afternoon, find your old high school physics professor on Facebook and tell them entropy came in handy!

Some key quotes from this nerdy science video and entropy:

“The universe tends towards disorder.” Just like your desk and your kids bedrooms!

Here's what he said that's the punchline and here's what we're talking about with this whole series:

“Processes that don't increase the disorder of the universe require work to be done in opposition to the disorder and are in fact often impossible to achieve.”

And the miracle of Easter that we celebrated last week was that God has done this seemingly impossible work in opposition to the spiritual and physical disorder in our world

Jesus was crucified, dead and buried, GONE, where everything dead-ends in this world. And God raised him from the dead and he'll never die again

God does an end-around writes an entirely NEW story versus entropy that goes upstream, where New never gets old, never breaks down, never ends—a limitless supply of NEW energy

where NEW is the first AND LAST word over everything and everyone who is willing to enter into it

One way to describe what it means to be a Christian is to follow Jesus into this path and to be joined with him in moving in the opposite direction of everything else in this world

To follow him in becoming new ourselves and to share in his mission of making everything here in this world new

And last week Easter Sunday we talked about it this way: ***Easter is God's on-ramp for you to an immediate, forever, unbreakable new.***

But it's not just available on Easter Sunday, it's available every single day, now, today.

And so we're spending these next 5 weeks or so talking about how do we live this out what does it mean to take this on-ramp and live into this NEW life, into this NEW reconciled relationship with God?

Bible/no Bible/screen: 2 Corinthians 5:14

We've got a number of people here who have never really read the Bible before so if you're totally new to the Bible, let me help you out

Much of the New Testament is a compilation of various letters that were written to new churches full of people who are brand-new to faith.

Some of them are facing tremendous opposition and persecution

Some of them are having conflicts or disagreements over some theology or some practice or some relational, so they're getting instructions or helps or mediation.

The letter we're going to read from today is Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, and if you were the kid who got in trouble at school all the time, you'd love the Corinthians—they were famously difficult for Paul!

They question his authority and his teachings and his credentials, they poke at him for how ugly he is, how opinionated he is, how quiet and meek he is, it goes on and on.

And today we're going to pick up in the middle of the letter where Paul is having to defend himself from the haters

Because haters gotta hate, hate, hate and Paul's trying to not only shake it off but help them to understand what's motivating his work and his life of faith so that they might engage with him on this same journey

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Okay, so Paul is in the middle of defending himself to the haters. And it's interesting and important to see how he goes about doing that.

How many of you have ever had to defend yourself or some work that you've done to some haters? It does some funky things to you, doesn't it?

A number of years ago I was working with college students and had to make a decision in our organization that wasn't very popular

And people were criticizing me behind my back and saying all kinds of things about me

I felt pretty compelled to do what I could to defending my own name and my reputation from the haters!

That resonate with you and your own situations?

Paul here is having to fight back his own haters and do you know what he's compelled by?

Christ's love. Christ's love compels us he says.

Because we're convinced that Christ died on a cross to forgive us our sins and three days later rose from the grave, that event in history demonstrates God's immeasurable love for us

And God did this for us so that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Christ who died for us

So we've decided to no longer live for ourselves, we're not living to have a great name or fighting to defend ourselves or our own reputation, not for our own pleasure or career aspirations or even our friends and family

Christ's Love compels us

Do this for me, let's take this verse and have you fill in your own blank here: ***"For _____ compels me to do the things that I do."***

Paul would write ***"Christ's love"*** in that blank. A couple of years ago in that situation I might have written ***"my name/reputation"***

But do you know what happens when instead of Christ's love compelling you, it's your own name and reputation that's compelling you to do what you do?

You become very proud and very self-righteous. You don't have a whole lot of patience for all the haters who refuse to celebrate how perfectly awesome you are

And in the end, it's nearly impossible do what Jesus commanded us to do which is to love our neighbor, EVEN our enemies.

You might write "**helping others**" –that's what's compelling me!

But just this past week I was talking with someone about what do you do when you're serving someone who doesn't voice their appreciation in appropriate ways? Ever happen to you? It's called parenting!

If you're doing the work for others who don't appropriately appreciate being helped, then it's really easy to get self-righteous and annoyed and eventually you just stop helping them!

And if you're honest, suddenly you realize you don't really enjoy helping others at all, you're compelled by being recognized for helping others

Throughout our lives, any number of things that compel us to action:

reputation, honor, safety and comfort, fame
our basic appetites for **sex, pleasure, money, status, security,**
our **bosses** will compel us or our desires to **please our parents**; sometimes our **love for our families or country or our church** community will compel us towards some sort of action
we can be **guilt-motivated** or **obligation or duty**

And the problem is when any of those other things in this blank, when those things are the central compelling energy for our lives, they're too small and too unreliable--those things repeatedly let us down

That's why we find ourselves sort of cycling through them at different times

all of these things seem to fail us occasionally or they simply stop being compelling to us for whatever reason

Because none of them have the power to do what we talked about at the very beginning: to take this whole scheme of how the world works and run it upstream so that New is the first and last word over everything

When Paul says that Christ's love is what compels him, he's saying that he's building his whole life around this eternal, never stopping, never giving up NEW life, this new energy, this perfect love

And he proves it by putting up with and even loving the Corinthians who are constantly provoking and poking at him

And so the first question for you and me, this morning, is **what's compelling us?**

What's been driving your actions this week, the conversations you're having, how you're responding to your kids, your spouse, your neighbors, your co-workers?

And maybe it's worth it for us to ask a) how's it working for us? And even if it's working for us okay right now, the question of is it big enough, is it powerful enough to carry us through our whole lives—or is it actually pretty temporary, pretty shaky, likely to be discarded in a week or a month or a year

And more importantly, b) how does it compare with something that is powerful and wonderful enough to reverse the slide from new to gone and to introduce an eternal new?

Now all of this has very practical and specific outworkings in our lives, which Paul goes on to explain:

¹⁶ So [because of what God did in Christ, because we're now living our lives for Christ and with his love compelling us—because of all of that] from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Well, in case you missed it this past fall, there was an election that happened. Might not have heard about it, was pretty quiet and didn't get much media attention

In the aftermath of the election this past fall, we suddenly had new categories to put people in: those who voted for him and those who voted for her

And these became very convenient categories that allowed us to dismiss whole swaths of people—ignored/written off because of how they voted

And this whole propensity to categorize and then dismiss people, that's not a new thing, is it? That's been with us from the beginning: based on politics or race or ethnicity or socio-economic status

The term worldly for Paul means evaluating or critiquing or understanding people strictly along the lines of the things of this world that we typically use to put people in convenient boxes that we often use to dismiss or judge them

He says "Because of Christ, we're not doing that any more!"

Instead, Paul says, we're going to look at everyone through a new lens, Christ's love compels us to see everyone that we meet as one for whom Christ died

and if God loves that person enough to die for them, then I'm going to see them FIRST as that kind of a person:

You know what kind of a person it was who voted differently than you did? The kind of person whom God loves and for whom he put on flesh and died, that's what kind of person they are.

And the other things are still there: how that person voted, their race or culture, their socio-economic status, all that stuff is still there

But that's not going to limit how willing I am to love and serve them because Christ's love compels me to love, no matter who you voted for, how you look, or where you're from

And Paul knows from experience that relating to people from a worldly perspective can really mess you up because that's what he used to do
he once even saw Christ in this way and it turned out to be totally wrong

If you don't know Paul's story, he hated Jesus, hated Christians: built his whole life on doing whatever he could to destroy the early Christian movement

From a worldly point of view, they were trouble-makers and disrupters and were a threat to the established religious powers and institutions of his day that he cherished and was a part of

And from a worldly point of view, he was totally right.

Jesus was a threat to those in power, he was a challenge to the establishment, he was looking to re-order the spiritual and religious life of not just the Jews but all people

And so Paul in his self-righteous zeal was doing everything he could to stop it—but then he had an encounter with Jesus which changed everything

And now he realizes that viewing people strictly from a worldly point of view is what sent him down the wrong track

I want you to think of someone in your life who's really difficult for you. Could be someone at work, a family member, a sibling, a neighbor, someone on your HOA board, another kid at school, whatever

And from a worldly point of view, you've got every reason to hate them in your heart and to wish nothing but ill-will upon them

To hope that all their dreams get thwarted and all their plans come to ruins and all their crops fail miserably and all their sports teams seasons end in dismal heartache and failure

But what if this morning Jesus is inviting you to look at that person not FIRST from a worldly point of view but from Christ's love FIRST?

What if you could see that person FIRST as someone who was beloved enough by God that he put on flesh and gave his life to forgive them, to ransom them back from sin and death?

How might Christ's love compel you to view & relate to even difficult people in a life-giving way?

What if you could see them FIRST as someone made in God's image, and what if Christ's love might compel you to treat that person not with contempt and derision but with love and respect

And those things that they've done wrong haven't gone away, those annoyances and difficulties are still very real

and sometimes there are unhealthy people **who require very firm boundaries**, very strong "no's" to how they manipulate or bully or exploit or self-promote or try to control everything

But when Christ's love is compelling us to see people first as people made in God's image for whom Christ died

then we can put firm boundaries in place in faith, hope, and love instead of spite, aggression or self-righteousness

We can relate to healthy or unhealthy people, people we naturally like or naturally don't like, people who we really enjoy and people who annoy us—we can relate to all types of people from a healthy-life giving place when Christ's love is compelling us

The question is how—how do we do this? How do we get here?

Paul is calling us to live in this way, but it's not just a command given in the Scriptures without the resources from God to deliver on this command

God's not just saying: "Now go do this really, really hard thing" of seeing everyone in a completely new light without doing something *inside* of us first

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

If anyone is IN Christ, is willing to give Christ authority over their lives, is willing to join their lives up with his

If anyone is engaged in a life of following Jesus, declaring him to be the Lord over their lives, they are immediately made new—that immediate, forever, unbreakable new creation starts right away

If you are in Christ today, if you are following Christ, if you have given yourself over to Christ, no matter how imperfect you are, no matter what it feels like, no matter what else is happening in your life

YOU are a new creation. New. Forever new. Unbreakable new. The old you stuck in the old trajectory, that you is gone.

The new is here that shares in Christ's immediate, forever, unbreakable new. A new spirit, a new energy, a new life, a new perspective, eternally new resources of heaven are now available to you because you have hooked your lives into Christ's life

That sounds kind of good, maybe, but what's God going to do to me?

And what we find if we look at the stories of people in the Bible as well as throughout history is that there's two elements involved in it: *Continuity and Dis-continuity*.

There are things that are the same about who we were before we met Christ and knew Christ, and then there are ways it looks radically different

I just told you the story of Paul—Paul, before he met Christ was a zealous, ambitious, lead-the-charge, take-no-prisoners, passionate guy as he's trying to destroy the church

And then he meets Jesus and you know what? He's still passionate, zealous, ambitious guy, but now those gifts and energies are completely re-directed around Christ instead of serving himself his own agendas

He goes places that no other Jesus-follower has gone before. He has feisty debates with the critics, he leads the charge!

See, those gifts of passion and zeal and leadership, those were all God's gifts to begin with. And Paul had taken those God-given gifts and mis-used them in service of something else

And so when Paul meets Jesus, he becomes this new creation! And his whole life is totally re-oriented around Christ's love and Christ's mission to one day make EVERYTHING NEW!

And now those gifts of personality and passion which were God's gifts to begin with are put to use for the purposes which God intended in the first place—to participate in being a life-giving presence in the world

It's the same Paul, but a more alive, more real version—the Paul God had in mind when he was first created, because Paul's been made new.

About 1900 years later, a brilliant author and academic named C.S. Lewis is an atheist or maybe agnostic

But he's got friends who are Christians and they challenge him to consider the claims of Jesus seriously

And as Lewis reads the writings of Paul and others, eventually he becomes convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and he becomes a Christ follower, this new creation

And when C.S. Lewis becomes this new creation, this guy who was a brilliant thinker and author and academic BEFORE he met Christ takes those same gifts of creativity and brilliance that God gave to him to begin with

and puts them to tremendous use in service to Jesus who makes all things new

He writes *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which is a brilliantly told allegory of the story of Jesus and faith--that whole series, if you haven't read it ever or in a while, dust those off and look for how gloriously faith gets woven into those delightful stories

He also writes many wonderful books for adults, one of them is called Mere Christianity which was probably the most compelling explanation and defense of the Christian faith in the 20th century

C.S. Lewis was a new creation, taking the original gifts given to him by God, and putting them to work in Christ's work of making all things new

A couple decades later, there's a scandal in America called Watergate. And president Nixon is arrested along with some of his top aides.

And one of those top aids is named Chuck Colson, and he's notorious for being Nixon's hatchet man

And as he's getting ready to go to jail, Colson realizes that he's spent his whole life slashing and burning his way to the top

And it's all been a waste, he's a disaster, everything he's built his life around is a disaster

A friend of his gives him C.S. Lewis's book Mere Christianity, and in reading that book, Colson becomes a Jesus-follower

And Colson goes to jail and spends all that free time getting as deeply and passionately into Christianity as he used to be as deep and passionate about politics

And as he comes out of jail, he's new. Totally and utterly re-oriented around Christ.

And what he does is takes all his political savvy, all his energy, all his ambition, and those gifts that he once used to steamroll people and serve merely himself and his agendas

And he goes to work reforming the prison system, establishing a ministry to prisoner's and their families, and doing what he can to be a part of Christ's work in this world to make all things new

Being made into a new creation has these elements of continuity and dis-continuity.

It's taking the same core gifts and passions and motivations that God wired you up to begin with

and letting Christ's love compel them, animate them, re-direct and re-orient them around his work and his passions of making all things new

Becoming that new creation is a constant work in process that we're going to talk more about next week

But for this morning, two wildly **Wildly Important Take-Home's**:

What do you think your new! looks like?

What would it look like to let Christ's love compel you into his new life-giving work this week?

First off, some of you aren't sure about Christ's love. That's something you're still grappling with, still trying to decide if you believe or trust, so glad that you're here

I want to again invite you to join me tonight, 5:30 as we kick off our Exploring Christianity class. We've got about 12 folks who have said they're in, thrilled about that, but we've got room for you and we've got childcare available for your kids

Details are in your bulletin, come tell me after the service if you're coming so I can make sure to have enough materials

If it's even possible that it's true that God has come to introduce this immediate, forever, unbreakable new into this world through Christ

If that's even just a remote possibility, then you owe it to yourself to at least explore it, at least consider it and give it it's due.

So come and join me tonight

And if you're already in Christ, if you've decided to let Christ's energy and his power animate you and give you new life

What do you think your "NEW!" in Christ would look like? What would be the same and what would be different?

What are the gifts, temperament, wiring he's given to you that you might offer back to him to be a part of new-making work in this world?

One of my favorite prayers with my kids before they go to bed is:

"God, thanks for the gifts you've given to us, we offer those gifts back to you and ask that you'd use them to

 bless many, many other people all around us, that you might be glorified
 and as we do that, that we might know your joy."

What do you think your NEW looks like?

What would it look like to let Christ's love compel you into his new life-giving work this week?

And What would it look like to deliberately live out of this new life this week?

Even if your circumstances right now are miserable, because the great thing about God's New energy and his new life is it's not contingent or dependent on our circumstances

This new energy comes from outside our situation to inject new life and new energy and to re-shape either US or the SITUATION or BOTH!

Who are the people that you need to ask God to give you a new perspective on?

 people that you've been looking at them from a worldly point of view and you're realizing that's always going to keep you from participating in Christ's new-making work.

What do you think your new! looks like?

What would it look like to let Christ's love compel you into his new life-giving work this week?

Pray about these two questions and look for opportunities to dig into them, and let's see how God shows up