

Show Us the New Creation

I suspect that if I were to ask us if we know Jesus Christ as our Savior and have assurance that we belong to Him and that we are on our way to heaven when we die that I would get a variety of answers. Some of us may be able to say without hesitation, "Yes, we know Him, we know we belong to Him, and we know that we belong to Him for all eternity." "Praise the Lord!" Others among us may not be so certain. In fact, I suspect many would respond more like this: "we hope so." Still others may want to say, "Well, we're doing the best we can." Some others may say, "we don't have any confidence about these things whatsoever; and, frankly, we're very afraid to die." Yet other persons may ask, "How can anyone know for sure?"

It seems to me, though, that the problem may not be with our responses to the question so much as it is with the question itself. The question is too abstract and theoretical; it's too hard to get a handle on. A really honest answer might be, well it depends on which day you ask me. Our moods change. Our faith wavers. Sometimes we feel more certain of these things than others. Sometimes doubts arise. A family spat, a moral slip, or some other circumstantial stress may weaken our assurance. Fear may blind side us. The great events on which we hang our spiritual hats, our response to an altar call, our baptism, our experience of answered prayer, or of sensing the Lord's voice, may fade in our memories. Our experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit ebbs and flows. We need times of refilling because, as D. L. Moody once put it, "I leak."

I think there is a better and more relevant question. The question is this, "Which story are you living out and where did it come from?" Our Scripture we read in II Corinthians 5:17 says (I like how it is worded in the KJV): "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." In other words, the best way for anyone to know if she or he is in fact in Christ is that there is the evidence of a radically changed life script. We were living one story line but now we are living another one. At one time we were living the story told us by our parents, living to please them or to satisfy their wishes. At another time we were living the

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story told us by some facet of our culture. We were trying to be "cool" as teenagers, party animals as college students, good soldiers in the military, or pursuing the "American Dream," to have a steady job, a mortgage and two children. At some other point we may have been living the story of a successful athlete, the perfect mother and homemaker, businessperson, or the story line of a pastor with a growing church. The bottom line is this: Whose story is it anyway? Are we living some facet of the world's story, our own story, or have we entered the story of Jesus Christ? There are lots of possibilities here.

I remember one time when I was in the sixth grade that I got into trouble for fighting on the playground. One of my male classmates was harassing some of my female classmates, and I took it upon myself to fight on behalf of the girls. I didn't know it at the time, but as I look back on it now I recognize the story. My favorite cartoon character was Mighty Mouse, who sang as he flew in to rescue the damsel in distress: "Here I come to save the day!" I was attempting to live out his story.

In John 3, Nicodemus the Pharisee, came to Jesus looking for the answer to life's most important question, how can one enter the kingdom of God? Jesus told him he needed to be born again. The old story Nicodemus was trying to live out was not working for him. He knew something was wrong, but Nicodemus didn't know how deep the problem went. He didn't need just a little bit of help to tweak his story; He needed to be born again in his religious understanding and enter God's story as revealed in Jesus Christ. In Galatians 6:15, Paul says, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation." Another way to say the same thing would be to say "Neither being a Jew nor being a Gentile means anything; what counts is the new creation, living in God's story as brought to light in Christ. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul says further, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

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Whose story are we living out? Who or what is writing the script we are following? If we have truly given our lives to Jesus Christ there can only be one answer for us; we are intentionally living in His story. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And, in Philippians 1:21 he says, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

But what does this look like in practice? I was given two excellent examples of this on Wednesday. Wednesday afternoon I visited with Denny Wisor at the Valley View home. Denny is suffering from the debilitating effects of a malignant brain cancer and requires skilled nursing care 24-7. Of course, Denny would prefer being in his own home and he would prefer not having to fight cancer, but his attitude is positively amazing. One of my roles in Pastoral care is to give people the opportunity to grieve out loud. God has given me the ability to listen and a gift of mercy to be a compassionate presence for people who need to get things off their chests, but when I gave Denny permission in that direction all he wanted to do was to tell me how God has used his illness to bring his family closer together, and how well the people at Valley View are treating him. Denny believes God has allowed his sufferings for a purpose and that that purpose is good. I went in to encourage Denny, and Denny encouraged me! When I left Denny's room and started back down the hall on my way out of the home, I felt spiritually uplifted and inspired. I felt like saying to people, "If you want to know what a Christian is supposed to look like, go see Denny in room 119." Denny Wisor has only known Christ for a relatively short time, but He knows Christ very well. His attitude toward his sufferings is very Christ-like, Who once prayed, "Father, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but Yours be done." Denny Wisor is living his life in the story of Jesus Christ, **and that makes all the difference.**

The other example that came to me, came to me Wednesday evening in our Men's promise keeper's group. As some of you know Bob Thompson has two jobs. He still

sells auto parts for NAPA but he also moonlights at Walmart. He works in maintenance, which includes cleaning the restrooms. The other day when Bob was working at Walmart he noticed a woman waiting outside the men's restroom with a rather distressed look on her face. Bob picked up on the expression on her face and asked if there was anything he could do to help her. She explained that her handicapped husband had been in the restroom for a long time and she was worried about him. She asked Bob to check on his wellbeing. As it turned out Bob ended up serving as personal assistant to a total stranger. He gave him what he needed to finish caring for himself and then helped the man get some of his clothes back on. When Bob was stooping to help the man with his socks, Bob remembered how Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. At that point Bob was no longer living his own story but found himself reliving the story of Jesus Christ.

Something happened here two weeks ago that also illustrates what I am talking about this morning. We had not one but two spontaneous baptisms. Having heard the message I preached and having seen Kristopher Dill being baptized, Jandora Patterson and Sandy Bovard both presented themselves for baptism. The fact that they had no dry clothes to put on afterwards or even their own towels to dry with didn't stop them from doing what they felt the Holy Spirit calling them to do. Concern for make-up and hairdos didn't matter. What anyone else might think or say of them didn't matter. They weren't living their own stories any longer. They presented themselves to be baptized just as they were, desiring only to be a part of the story of Jesus Christ.

I stand in awe of what God is doing among us in these days and I have one prayer concerning it: "More Lord, Lord give us more of the same!"

On Pentecost Sunday I talked some about how the Holy Spirit was given to bring glory to Jesus Christ. Last Sunday I talked about how Jesus shows us the Father. There is something else Jesus shows us that we very much need to see. There are many titles given to Jesus Christ in the Bible but two of the prominent ones are "Son of God," and "Son

of Man." "Son of God" tells us that Jesus came to show us God, to reveal the nature of his Father, to help us get the story straight about God's character. "Son of Man," tells us that Jesus came to show us what it means to be truly human. We look at Jesus to behold the face of God. We also look at Jesus to see who we are supposed to be as human beings.

What Jesus shows us is a man in love with God and with his fellowmen. What Jesus shows us is a man led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows us a healer and a deliverer, a man with compassion for people and passion for the word of God. What Jesus shows us is a man standing up for the poor and the oppressed and a man standing against those who were self-righteous and cruel. Clearly the story that Jesus lived was God's story. for Jesus says in John 5:30, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." Jesus calls and invites us to leave our own stories and to be embedded in His story. It is by living in His story that our lives find their true meaning and true fulfillment. It is by living in His story that we come to know ourselves as the children of God. It is by living in His story that we come to know God and come to know that we have eternal life. What is your story? Whose story are you living? Whose story do others see when they look into your life?

An important addition to this message is that we can't and aren't expected to do this on our own. Living within the story of Jesus Christ is by the invitation and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We can see how we are supposed to be by looking at the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We can strengthen our openness to His story through prayer and prayerful meditation on His word in His presence. We can encourage each other in the community of the Family of God, but we need God to energize the whole package with His Holy Spirit. So we say, "Come Holy Spirit." "Remove us from the dominance of all our lesser stories and help us to find our true selves in the story of Jesus Christ. Help us to choose to live in His story above every other.

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Sermon for June 26, 2011

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II Corinthians 5:11-21

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