

A New Creation!

Pastor Karen Evenson

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2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (CEB)

16 So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. 17 So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

18 All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.

20 So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!" 21 God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God.

ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN

by Robert Fulghum

"All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sand pile at school.

These are the things I learned:

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.

- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Wash your hands before you eat.
- Flush.
- Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
- Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- Take a nap every afternoon.
- When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
- Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
- Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
- And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

Take any one of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world - had cookies and milk at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had as a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out in the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.”

Let us pray:

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our minds and hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you and you alone are our rock and redeemer. Amen.

Once again today, we find ourselves in the Lenten wilderness. We're several weeks in, and we're now in a place where we're starting to discover that we need to shed some of our old ways. We learned last week that we need to be fully committed—ready to turn ourselves entirely toward God and put our whole selves in.



This week, we're being reminded that we need to let go of the “old ways” sin and selfishness, greed and self-centeredness in order to make room for a whole new, resurrected life into which we are called to live. Sometimes, we can get so focused on the wilderness; we get focused on all we don't have—all of the drought, and it's so hard to let go. We get so focused on the desert, that we forget that God has readied us to be a new creation.



In this second letter to the people of Corinth, Paul asks his community—and us—to “be reconciled,” “trusting the ministry of reconciliation to us” as we work our way toward making all things new and for a new thing to grow. We need to get some things straight—and pay attention carefully, in order to notice that something new is sprouting! We need to tend to things carefully, in order for things to go well and those sprouts can really start to grow!

One of the first stories in the Bible places us in a garden, so I think it's fitting to continue that metaphor as we talk about what it means to be in relationship with God, to follow Jesus, and to be the church, which is intended to be a garden that produces rich fruit that will not only sustain life, but nurture it and help the world to be transformed by the fruit of God's love!

Some of us have been tending to gardens our entire lives—for the practical purpose of feeding a family, and making a living, so the metaphor is not lost on us. Some have tended gardens for beauty, some for taste, and likely all for quality of what is produced. Some do *not* have a green thumb, meaning every time you've tried to garden it hasn't gone so well, and still others have never gardened at all—for a whole variety of reasons.

So imagine, if you will, that what we are about in our lives in relation to God is tending to a *spiritual garden*. *What does that mean for us?*

First, let's be mindful of the soil. The soil is rich, and constant. Like the soil in the pot, we used earlier this morning, it's been laying in wait to be tilled and for seeds to be planted. We have come from somewhere that includes all those who have come before us—and as we consider how God might make us into a new creation, we need to first consider what has gone into making the soil so rich and ready for us! And then, we can till that rich soil and ready it for planting. Everything that has happened in your life to this point, has contributed to the richness of your soil. And the things to come, might include adding new soil that gets tilled into the mix.

As you get connected, or remain connected to Jesus, both in imitating his life and in allowing God to make of you a new creation, you are much like a

beautiful plant that will bear incredible fruit! And as together, we get connected to Jesus, and allow God to make of us a new creation at Faith, we are like an incredible garden that will produce a bountiful harvest!!



Recently, a friend connected me with a blog called "Milk and Honey Faith," by Natalie Venegas, and an article titled, "What Gardening Taught Me About Spiritual Growth." In it Natalie wrote:

"This past April, my Husband and I had the greatest idea and decided we would try our hand at gardening. So many people at work were bringing in fresh salads with chopped herbs and juicy tomatoes from their own gardens so I thought "hey, why not?". It just so happened that we had raised flower beds in our backyard that were just sitting there unused. So off we marched to our local nursery and bought all the makings for a little beginner's garden. We bought tomatoes, herbs, zucchini, and a few flowers for our front yard.

The first few days we poured love into that garden. Rich soil and plant food was purchased and matching gardening tools to boot. We even started discussed what we'd be planting next Spring and giggled expectantly about our first harvest!

Every morning and evening we tended to those baby plants. We fertilized them, watered them, and discussed what we'd do to protect them from the summer sun. Before long we saw the fruits of our labor, our tomato plants started to bud, the zucchini plants were spreading, and the herbs were thriving. She said, "We were in awe at the miracle of plant life and how God was making them grow. After a month or so we were able to pick a few tomatoes and use some of the herbs in our recipes. Mmmm... scrumptious! But then something happened"...she said, "Those poor baby plants were left alone exposed to the elements."

[Natalie said, "Here is the part where I tell you that we live in Las Vegas, NV and we have about four months of blazing summer heat that can reach temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Before long, daily watering of the garden turned into once every other day of watering. Pretty soon that turned into forgetting to water the garden altogether because it was just too hot to go outside.]

I remember one day I decided to make salsa and when I asked my husband to bring me some cilantro he brought me the whole bushel (roots, dirt, and all) because when he went to yank off what he needed, the tug uprooted the entire plant. The roots had withered and the plant had given up.



The Lord showed (Natalie) something as (she) pondered over those abandoned plants. “This is what happens to us when we lose our focus, when we get distracted, when we neglect our time with the Lord. Our spirit needs to be watered and nurtured with the word of God. His Holy Spirit is the living water that quenches our spiritual thirst. Our spiritual lives can be likened to a plant. It has to be rooted in Him, it thrives in good soil, and it needs water to make it grow.”

Those poor baby plants were left alone exposed to the elements.

When she looked out (her) window, she discovered that what had once been a garden teeming with life and bearing fruit now looked like a cross between tumble weed and potpourri. It was completely dried up. Dried up because they had simply neglected to take care of them.

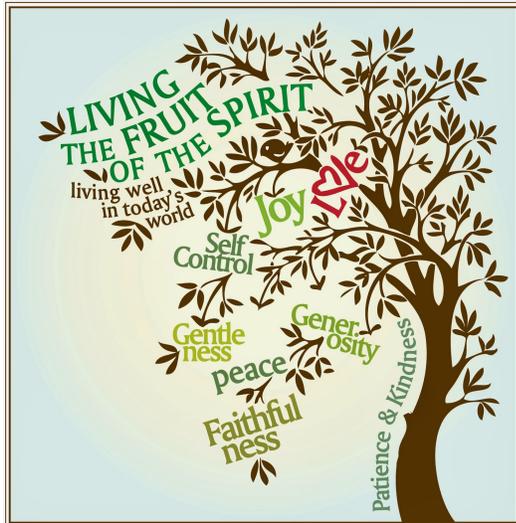
Natalie reminds us, when we don’t stay tapped into the Spirit...when we forget to pray, and push the Bible to the wayside, we are exposed to the elements of this world...and we become parched...or more familiarly to those of us living in the upper midwest—we become frozen.

Jesus talks about roots, growth, seeds, branches, water, soil, fruit...the list goes on and on throughout the Scriptures. Like gardens, our spiritual lives need tending.

God wants for us to lead fruitful lives that are continually transformed and have evidence of growth. Don’t let the busyness of life keep you from studying God’s word. Don’t be so distracted that you forget to tend to the garden—that you forget to pay attention to tend to growing in your relationship to God. Grow every day to become more like Jesus, living fully into being a loyal, faithful disciple! Stay connected to Jesus, and know that in doing so, you are prepared for transformation—you are prepared to be made into a new creation!

John 15:8 says, “When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to God.”

People of Faith, we are to “**bear much fruit!**”



Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that “the fruit of the *Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” These are the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

So, what are you trying to grow in your life? If you want to grow the fruits of the Spirit, then you need to *learn how to grow them!* We come to Faith, to worship, to learn, and to get the tools we need in order to tend our personal garden. We read from the Scriptures, we give our lives to prayer, we stay close to God, and we learn to live like Jesus. And when we do, we *will* bear fruit—in our lives, and the seeds of that fruit will spread to grow more fruit! If we don’t fertilize the garden of our lives with these things, we won’t grow. But, if we *do* fertilize our faith, our lives can be *transformed!*

And the same is true with Faith Church!

We say we are Faith Church, a place that is full of faith—full of God’s Spirit, so let’s be sure we have plenty to show for it! We say we are a faithful people, so let’s be sure we are tilling the soil—putting our whole selves in, and giving it everything we’ve got— so God can make of us a new creation!

If we’re trying to *grow*—and become a church filled with people who have come to Faith, who are being transformed and bearing fruit, we need to get some things straight:

Today's Scripture reminds us to be reconciled to one another; for, *"God reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them."*

Let's not spend any more time wondering whether we're ready—for if we're united in Christ, we are ready! Let's not wonder whether we have enough soil, or if the soil is good enough—for if we are bearing fruit in our lives, we know there will always be enough—more than enough for all who come!

Today's Message Challenge
2 Corinthians 5:16-21—A New Creation!

What am I doing, what do I need to do, or what do I need to do differently in order to be "in Christ" and allow God to make a new creation through me?

What do I need to "let go of" in order to make room for a new and resurrected life?

How can I help God's "new creation" at Faith to grow?

Our challenge today, is to decide what it is that we each are doing, need to do, or need to do differently in order to be "in Christ" and to allow God to make us into a new creation. Our challenge is to figure out that which we need to let go, or what we need to plant, in order to make room for a new and resurrected life.

So, let's not spend time trying to figure out how small a garden to plant, but rather put our whole selves into tilling the rich soil God has provided all around us and planting seeds with God-confidence, and see how big a garden God will grow in and through us knowing that as we read in Paul's letter to the people of Corinthians today, *"from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!"*

People of Faith, are you ready for a fresh start? Are we ready to put our whole selves in, and to unite completely with with the Messiah in order that God can make all things new? Are you ready to tell everyone what God is doing through you, and through us at Faith Church? Are you ready to be the church?!



If you are, get ready to be transformed! Get ready for those sprouts to start coming up through the soil and for God to grow some incredible plants in this garden! Keep planting seeds and tending to the garden and we do, get ready to say out loud, "Look new things have arrived!"

Amen? Amen!