

Friends, Next week, Pastor Hank and his wife, Bobbi, will be on vacation. Devotions will resume in September. Thank you for reading!

Friday, August 21, 2020

Claim your place in the healing of the world.

- Pastor Hank French

So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" That's quite a statement for Paul to make. He is writing to a young church, one which he founded around the year 50, some 20 years after Jesus death, resurrection and ascension. Which is to say that he is writing to fairly new Christians, people who had heard him teaching the Gospel about Jesus, about who he was, about what he accomplished, and about what it meant for them.

They were convinced by Paul's teaching, they were baptized "into Christ," they found themselves "in Christ," that is in a relationship with Christ who was continuously present to the church through the Holy Spirit and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the sacrament of his presence. And everything changed for them—they were part of a new creation, part of a community of faith like nothing they had ever experienced before.

It is difficult for us to understand what it was like for them to enter a Christian community of faith. They lived in a world where violence, injustice, suspicion of the "other," exploitation and oppression of the powerless by the powerful were commonplace. That would be the "old creation," and it is pretty much all that they experienced every day—and then they became part of a Christian community of faith.

It was a community whose values they had not experienced before. In Paul's words, they were taught to "let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.... Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.... Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly.... Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:9-21). That's the community of faith and it is a new creation for those who enter it from the old creation.

The Roman emperor, Julian, no friend of Christians, once criticized Roman religion by stating that: "Atheism [by which he meant Christianity] has grown through the loving service rendered [even] to strangers.... It is a scandal that the godless Galileans [by which he meant Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."

Love was—and is—the mark of a Christian community of faith. They loved each other and then went outside their community of faith and provided "loving service" to those who were not in the community of faith. That is the "ministry of reconciliation" that has been given to us by God and

when we carry out that ministry, loving each other within the community of faith and loving those outside the community of faith, we are living within a new creation to which we invite others to live within as well. And that is to take our place in the healing of the world.

Prayer: Thank you holy God for the new creation within which we are a part of the healing of the world. Amen.