



Today

March/April 2026

refresh, refocus, renew

**THE START OF
SOMETHING**

BIG!

ALSO: 'GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS'

Dear Friends:

For many Christians, the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” is a favorite. This hymn proclaims one of the bedrock themes of the Bible: God’s enduring faithfulness to his promises for all people. In March, Jul Medenblik traces the theme of God’s great faithfulness throughout the Bible. Beginning in Genesis, we see God’s plan emerging to bless all nations through his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. And as we see God’s plan of redemption unfolding and widening throughout the Old and New Testaments, we discern many surprising ways in which God truly is faithful. As we grow in understanding God’s faithfulness, may we also grow in our desire to be faithful in loving God and serving others.



On Easter in the first week of April, Christians will celebrate with joy the amazing resurrection of Jesus, who died to save us and then rose to life again. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus graciously gives us new birth and a new beginning. Dave Den Haan helps us to explore what this means as we consider that living “in Christ,” through the power of God’s Holy Spirit, makes us new creations who strive each day to live with gratitude and faithfulness. And as Christ makes us new, he invites us to join in God’s big project of redeeming and renewing his world.

As you enjoy these meditations, may you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”
Jul Medenblik



**“The Start of
Something BIG!”**
Dave Den Haan

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**ReFrame
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april

The Start of Something BIG!

Dave Den Haan

Easter, which we will celebrate on Sunday, April 5, wasn't merely a one-day miracle of resurrection, as wonderful as that was. It was the start of newness in the broken universe—a newness that comes to expression in every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul's favorite way of talking about such people is to say that they are "in Christ" (see our month's theme verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17). Each use of the phrase "in Christ" points back to Jesus' resurrection and ahead to the new creation, in which God is making all things new.

Dave Den Haan is an ordained minister who works for Thrive, the Christian Reformed Church in North America agency that equips and encourages congregations. His main focus is to serve churches experiencing conflict and challenge. Before working with Thrive, Dave served as a pastor to two congregations, one in Minnesota and one in Michigan. He and his wife, Connie, have three married children and two grandchildren.

WAIT . . . WHAT!?!

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." —John 3:3

In today's text Jesus' words baffled and amazed Nicodemus the Pharisee:

- To experience fully what God is doing, you must be born again.
- This rebirth, like your first birth, is a miracle accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- The Spirit leads you to believe in the power of Jesus, God's Son, to save the world from sin and to give you new life forever with God.

Huh!?! Nicodemus was confused.

This was not the first time Jesus' words jolted a religious leader. Jesus began doing that at the age of 12 (see Luke 2:41-47).

Now, what kinds of surprises do these words of Jesus bring to us today?

For people who sense that being a Christian is only about

themselves and Jesus, the global scope of Jesus' words can be breathtaking. For people who assume that Christian faith can be a nice addition to their self-directed life, the idea of rebirth into a totally new life is a jarring challenge. What's more, no conversation with Jesus is just a conversation.

Open yourself to the wonder of Jesus' words to Nicodemus. It's good practice for experiencing the wonder and power of the events in Jesus' life that we will remember this week on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Resurrection Sunday—when the rebirth of creation itself was launched.

Dear God, make us open to your surprises that we find in the Bible and that we will encounter this week. In Christ we pray. Amen.

AN OLD STORY BECOMES A NEW STORY

“Take it; this is my body.” . . . and . . . “This is my blood of the covenant . . . poured out for many.” —Mark 14:22-24

The Jews of Jesus’ day often told stories from their history. And every year at this time they told the ancient story that is referred to in today’s text: the story of the Passover.

The original events of that story are found in Exodus 12, where we read of the slaughter of unblemished lambs and the deliverance of God’s people from slavery in Egypt. A key detail is that God’s people had to spread the blood of lambs on the doorframes of their houses so that the plague of death would *pass over* their homes while it went through the land of Egypt, taking the life of every firstborn male. After this plague went through the land, the Pharaoh of Egypt set the Israelites free.

Nearly 1,500 years later, Jesus and his disciples celebrated that ancient rescue. They ate lamb’s meat and unleavened bread, shared a cup of wine,

and recalled the Passover story. But this time Jesus pointed to the bread and the wine in the memorial meal and said, “This is my body,” and, “This is my blood.”

The very next day Jesus would become the ultimate Passover Lamb, sacrificing his own perfect life to pay for our sin. He would die brutally by crucifixion, rescuing all who would believe in him as the Son of God, the Savior. And ever since that day, people have begun new journeys with God into eternal life.

Today we remember that meal. Tomorrow we remember that death.

Lord Jesus, fill us with faith in you, that we may grow in gratitude and live for you, sharing your story with all who need to hear it. Amen.

DARKNESS, FOR NOW

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining.
—Luke 23:44-45

What do you think of when you hear the word “darkness”?

Children often think of darkness as scary, and when they grow up most of them still prefer the light. From Genesis to Revelation, darkness is whatever space, time, or reality is separate from God. Before creation there was darkness “over the surface of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). In the last days, as described in Revelation, darkness is one of the signs of separation from God.

When Jesus hung on the cross, darkness came over the land in the middle of the day, when the sun should have been at its brightest. God had abandoned his Son, who was taking on himself all of the corruption and ugliness of the world’s sin and God’s awful judgment on it. As God separated himself from his beloved Son, darkness descended and Jesus died.

Luke’s account of that day notes another amazing occurrence as well. The curtain in the temple, which had long symbolized the separation of the holy God from his unholy people, was torn in two, miraculously, from top to bottom. Our sin-generated separation from God was coming to an end. That was good! But it took an awful darkness to make that happen.

Light was conquering darkness. God and his people would be together again. A new creation was forming!

O Christ, thank you for making yourself unworthy of God’s presence so that we, who truly are unworthy, can be counted worthy to live with him. What a gift we receive in you! Amen.

WAITING WHILE GOD PREPARES

There was a man named Joseph . . . and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. —Luke 23:50-51

There seems to be a lot of waiting in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah waited for a promised child (Genesis 12-18). The Israelites waited for many years to be freed from slavery (Exodus 1-12). Simeon, Anna, and others waited for the Messiah to come (Luke 2:25-38).

The Hebrews had many words and phrases for “wait,” just as some Indigenous languages spoken in northern Canada have many ways to describe snow. Snow is a large part of life there. Waiting, it turns out, is a large part of life for God’s people.

As we read in our text, Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for the kingdom of God. But here, surprisingly, he was taking the dead body of Jesus down from a cross. Joseph had thought Jesus was bringing in God’s kingdom, but now he was dead. If Joseph could bring himself to pick up the work of waiting

again, it would likely have been a defeated, hopeless sort of waiting.

Think of the women there as well. They probably assumed that Jesus’ work and teaching had come to nothing, that there was just a body to bury.

But as Joseph laid Jesus’ body in a tomb and the women prepared spices for Jesus’ burial, God was preparing something new that would change hopeless waiting into joy and peace.

We know that you ended the waiting, Father. But before we go there and rejoice, let us taste the waiting and recognize something familiar in it—our own experiences of longing and waiting. Thank you that, in Christ, we do not wait without hope. Amen.

SURPRISE!

“He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you. . . .”
—Luke 24:6

I remember walking up to the Grand Canyon in Arizona for the very first time. I thought I knew what to expect since I had heard so much about the Grand Canyon. But then I stepped out of the national park trolley, walked over to the edge of the canyon, and leaned up against the safety railing. The vastness, the colors, and the distance to the river below took my breath away! I realized that while I had heard about the Grand Canyon, I had not really understood what “Grand Canyon” actually meant.

Similarly, the disciples and the women who had followed Jesus had heard him talk about rising from the dead on the third day, but they had not understood what he had actually meant. So when they saw the empty tomb after the crucifixion, and when they eventually saw Jesus alive again, he took

their breath away! Here was the living Jesus, walking and talking, eating food, and holding his damaged hands out for them to see.

Today the church remembers that breathtaking surprise: Jesus’ resurrection. We talk about it as, among other things, the beginning of a new creation, with Jesus being the firstborn from among the dead. It’s enough to take our breath away—the miracle itself, and then all of the many other miracles that it set in motion.

Dear God, today we read and remember the truth about Jesus’ miraculous return to life. Help us to understand it also as a launch of your new creation, and to know the hope and joy that it brings. Amen.

NEW EYES

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”
—John 20:15

In Isaiah 35 God gives his people a vision of a fully restored creation. His glory will appear, and a desert will turn into a lush, blossoming garden. A “Way of Holiness” will stretch through it—a roadway for God’s people to travel into his presence. In the singing crowd of God’s people on that road, the lame are leaping, the mute tongue shouts with joy, the deaf can hear clearly, and the blind are able to see.

Could those details about people’s senses and disabilities relate also to understanding and seeing the Lord in a new way—especially when the Lord gives us new life through his resurrection? I think so. When we encounter God, when we meet Jesus in an unexpected way, our eyes and ears of faith can see and hear in ways we haven’t experienced before.

Notice that on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, although Mary can see and hear, her eyes are opened in a new way as Jesus speaks her name. She receives a clear, personal visit from Jesus that helps her understand what God is up to. Mary is able to see the living Jesus, and it’s like a desert blooming.

When the resurrected Christ comes again, all of God’s people will be given complete sight. In the meantime, we see portions and glimpses of what God is up to—enough to have faith, hope, and love. Thank you, God!

Dear Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear so that we may have faith in you and serve as you call us to. May we see your glory and share about all you are doing to bring renewal. Amen.

I WISH I COULD SEE BETTER

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. —Luke 24:31

I often wish I could see better.

I wish I could see Jesus face-to-face.

I wish I could see God's will for a decision I have to make.

I wish I could see God's power so clearly that I have courage to do what is right even when the risks seem immense.

The two followers of Jesus in our text for today received the gift of seeing how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Jesus and his resurrection—and they even saw the resurrected Jesus himself! What an amazing day for them!

Ironically, just as they began to see that the person breaking the bread before them was actually the Lord himself, Jesus disappeared. So they had to continue to believe and act faithfully even when they didn't see Jesus face to face. It's a joy to see those two disciples respond by making a faith-

filled run back to Jerusalem to report to the other disciples what they had seen and heard.

Truth be told, Jesus invites all of us who don't see him to live in his presence anyway, as if he is with us, breaking the bread. He does promise, after all, that he is with us always (Matthew 28:20). And as we live in his presence, by the power of God's Spirit, we can testify to the reality of God's new creation in us, launched with Jesus' resurrection.

Without your Spirit, Lord, the news of the resurrection is just words. So pour out your Spirit on us, that we may understand the meaning of your resurrection and live with faith in you today and always. Amen.

JESUS' BREATH

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
—John 20:22

Dead people don't breathe. And they surely don't breathe life that flows into others!

Just a few days earlier, Jesus had "breathed his last" (Luke 23:46), and everyone around him had assumed that was the end of him. But here, in John 20, we read about Jesus coming back to life, early on Sunday morning, and in the evening of that day he was breathing the life of his Holy Spirit into his disciples.

Have you heard of the geyser "Old Faithful" in Yellowstone National Park (U.S.)? The water shoots 130 feet (40 meters) into the air! We can think of Jesus' breath too as something like a geyser, a geyser of life.

Have you seen pictures or watched videos of young bamboo plants in a tropical forest? In the searing heat they grow so fast that you can almost hear them stretch. As the

earth provides nutrients, the bamboo plant pushes out vegetation. In some ways like that, Jesus' breath pushes out life.

Have you been to a worship service that honors the Lord and God of the universe—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Followers of Jesus, striving to live for the Savior in a fallen, broken world, come to worship the King of creation and to share Jesus' breath with one another. He gives it, and they receive life. Renewal. Revival.

The resurrection of Jesus keeps echoing as he inspires God's people to share his love and bring hope everywhere in God's world.

Breathe on us, Lord Jesus.
Send us your Spirit. Enliven, awaken, and commission us, as you did with your disciples. Amen.

FAITH EYES

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! —2 Corinthians 5:17

When Jesus came back to life, the people who saw him required new eyes to see him clearly, truly.

Mary saw only a gardener until Jesus spoke her name (John 20:16). The two disciples from Emmaus saw only a clueless traveler until Jesus broke bread with them (Luke 24:30-31).

Later, Saul (Paul), a leading persecutor of Jesus' followers, had his eyes opened too. He was stopped by a blinding light from heaven, and he heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:3-6). Saul received eyes of faith so that he could see Jesus truly as the Lord and Savior.

In our text for today Paul, who became a missionary for Jesus, declares that we can see other people differently now too. Because of Jesus, we can see that all who are "in Christ" are a new creation. The rebirth of

every believer echoes the miracle of Christ's resurrection.

And there's more. When we see an "in Christ" person, a new creation, it's a sign that God is up to something bigger—a glorious remaking of his whole creation. This is what other texts have described as the coming of a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1)!

So when someone comes to faith in Christ, we see in that person a new creation. And this is a reminder of God's continuing project of making a new creation, launched by the miracle of Jesus' resurrection!

O God, give us eyes of faith to see your ongoing work of new creation as Paul did. May we see, rejoice, give you praise, and live in that confidence. Amen.

CHIP: A NEW CREATION

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! —2 Corinthians 5:17

Chip had become an old man, and when he returned to the small town where he had grown up, hardly anyone recognized him.

It wasn't because he looked so different. No, he'd been back to visit throughout the years. He had kept up with people he'd known in high school, and they were familiar with each other's aging appearance.

What was different about Chip was that his character had changed. He had always been a "clever devil," as some called him. He would come to town, hang out with the locals, wait for the right opportunity, and then say something political or religious or something else in a thorny way. Then he'd leave as people started bickering with one another. He seemed to enjoy stirring up disagreement.

But now Chip was different. He'd learned that cancer was

going to take his life soon. And he'd met Jesus through a local ministry in his neighborhood.

So he came back to town a changed man. Though he was old, he was new. He was kind. Generous. Apologetic. He called himself a friend of Jesus. Everyone talked about it. What an amazing change!

Chip was a new creation, even as his body was dying. He was "in Christ."

Chip was also an echo of Christ's resurrection, the beginning of God's big project of making a new creation where all who are "in Christ" can live with him forever!

God, we praise you for making us new in Christ and for making us a part of your new creation plan. Help us to live faithfully for you. Amen.

THINKING ABOUT SUNDAY WORSHIP

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! —2 Corinthians 5:17

Tomorrow is Sunday, and many Christians throughout the world will attend a worship service at their church. Others may meet in homes or other private places, especially if public worship is not allowed.

In North America, where I live, we are blessed to have many churches where the Word of God is preached and the good news of Jesus is central. These church communities help believers focus on loving the Lord and loving their neighbors in their everyday living.

If you are part of a church like that, you probably see friends and family members there each week, along with others who have been there to support you in tough times and to celebrate with you in happy times.

You may see clusters of older folks, middle-age parents, and teens interacting with each other. And you'll probably see

children running off steam in the hallways. There may also be a family group celebrating a baptism or an anniversary.

There will also be some people you might not agree with—say, over a ministry program or the kind of music used in worship—and you've learned that in God's family you can get along, despite such differences.

In all of this you will see a collection of new creations, people whose faith, sometimes strong and sometimes weak, marks them as "in Christ." And in them you will see that God is building a new creation, the remaking of his broken world.

Lord, all who are in your family are new creations in Christ. May we worship you together faithfully and see you at work, continually re-creating your world. Amen.

PETER'S NEW COMMISSION

Then [Jesus] said to [Peter], "Follow me!"

—John 21:19

Peter had made some hurtful mistakes. And our text for today shows how Jesus gently addressed them.

Before Jesus was arrested and crucified, Peter had promised never to disown or abandon Jesus. He had even said, "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37; see Mark 14:31). But then, soon after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus (Mark 14:66-72; John 18:15-27). He was afraid to be connected with Jesus.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus met with his disciples, including Peter, several times—and in our text for today he is with the disciples at the Sea of Galilee. Three times Jesus approaches Peter, the three-time denier, with this question: "Do you love me?" And each time Peter says yes. Then Jesus tells him, each time, to care for his sheep.

Just like that, Peter's denials are graciously forgiven, and Peter is powerfully recommissioned. Jesus even repeats to Peter what he had said to his disciples when he had first called them three years earlier: "Follow me!" (see Mark 1:17). It's as if Peter's denials had never happened.

Peter's restoration shows us that if anyone is in Christ, there is not only a new creation but also a new commission: to follow Jesus into whatever work he calls us to in our context, in our lives.

The old has gone. The new has come!

Lord Jesus, give us eyes to see what you are calling us into today, and guide us to obey. In your name, and in the hope of the new creation, Amen.

PETER, A NEW CREATION

Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. . . .
—Acts 2:14

Can God do anything good with me?

We might ask this question when we feel as if we are beyond God's help. We see our flaws and mistakes, and we wonder how God could even want to use us for his purposes.

In our text today we see Peter preaching to the crowds that are gathered in Jerusalem for the annual harvest celebration. This is the same Peter who, about 50 days earlier, had lied three times about Jesus, saying that he didn't know Jesus at all (Mark 14:66-72).

But now Peter was restored, since the resurrected Jesus had met with him at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:15-19). And in today's text we read that Peter and the other apostles were now filled with the Holy Spirit.

Peter became a new creation, and in this new state of being

"in Christ," Peter's life pointed to the remaking of all creation.

The merely brash Peter became the wise preacher Peter. Earlier he had not understood the prophets' message about the Messiah, but now he was clear and on point. At one time Peter's passion simply blurted. But now in his passion he could convict and invite!

God is in the business of healing people, pouring grace into them, and recommissioning them. This includes me and you. The Lord sees you, loves you, and has plans for you. Trust him.

Heavenly Father, continue your good work in us, remaking us for your glory and the blessing of the world. Help us to see what you are doing, and to serve you gladly, fully, and hopefully. Amen.

A FAMILY PICTURE

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship. . . .
—Acts 2:42

In our home we have a family picture on the wall above our fireplace. All of the smiling people in it are there because they were born into our family or they married into it.

In our text today from Acts 2, we find another family picture. It's a new kind of family, and it is just springing to life. The people here are devoted to Jesus, as taught by the apostles, and they are devoted to one another, forming a fellowship of Jesus' followers. They are a part of this new family not because they were born or married into it but because they have been reborn in Christ. They have been born again, brought to faith in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

That is what Jesus was talking about when he spoke with Nicodemus (John 3). Jesus said then that a person must be born again, moved to faith in the Lord by the Holy Spirit, in

order to see the kingdom of God. And in the family picture here in Acts 2 we see an early crowd of these born-again people, eating, sharing, and worshipping together.

Do you see yourself in that picture? Although you weren't there in Jerusalem at that time, you too are a part of that family if you believe in Jesus. As a believer, you have been born again by the Holy Spirit, and this family is your family. Like those believers, you are a new creation and a sign of God's continuing work to restore his whole creation!

By your grace, O God, we too are a part of your family. Help us to cherish this family and to invest in its life, as you do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A FORMERLY DISABLED NEW CREATION

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.
—Acts 3:8

Have you ever been allowed into a place that was off-limits? Think of a young sports player, hired by the team he or she has loved since childhood, walking into the team's pre-game meeting room for the first time. Or a worker on the floor who has been promoted to sit behind the manager's desk. Or a group of music fans who win backstage passes and get to meet their favorite band.

For the man in our text today, the temple courts were off-limits. He was not allowed to join with others to worship there. The religious leaders barred him from the temple because they said that his disability—not being able to walk—made him ritually unclean. And that meant he could not gather with God's people in the temple.

But then along came Peter and John. They did not have silver

or gold, but they had something far more valuable: a living connection to the resurrected Jesus. As they healed the man in Jesus' name, his legs started working. He was able to walk and jump. And at last he could praise God in the place that had been off-limits to him: the temple courts.

This man's healing was a sign that the resurrection of Jesus, which we celebrated earlier this month, had really happened. It was also a sign of God's continuing re-creation work to come.

O God, we want healing and new life in Jesus' name. We want Jesus! Thank you for all the ways in which his resurrection can bring renewal in our lives and in your world. Amen.

SEEING THE RESURRECTED JESUS

They were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.
—Acts 4:13

When the Jewish religious leaders in our text for today saw two ordinary, unschooled men, Peter and John, speaking courageously and with certainty about the Scriptures, they knew something had happened to them. Peter and John's words seemed to sparkle, and the religious leaders "took note that these men had been with Jesus."

These religious leaders were making the right connection, but they didn't reach the right conclusion—that the power of the resurrected Jesus was now living and active inside these two believers. The religious leaders also did not realize that the man who had been lame was now healed because the Lord's resurrection power had come into him too.

When you are in Christ, as Peter and John were, you don't become richer, prettier, or stronger, but you begin the

process of becoming a new creation. You also become a signpost, like a signal or pointer, to the ongoing work of God on his whole new creation. You are different from what you would have been without the Lord living in you. And as he becomes more fully formed in you, the people around you will more and more likely take note that you too have been with Jesus.

Father, we want to show others that we are becoming new creations in Christ. Do what is needed within us, building on what you have already done, so that it's clear that we have been with Jesus. Amen.

JOSEPH'S GENEROSITY

Joseph . . . sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. —Acts 4:36-37

When you see a person who has met Jesus and who is changing to live more and more like Jesus, you know that something new is going on. It means that Jesus is alive in them and that the resurrection has really happened!

We see some examples in our text for today. Just as we saw in Acts 2:41-47 (April 14), we see the early Christians united with one another, sharing with one another, and giving generously to support one another. Some even sold their land or houses and gave the money "to anyone who had need."

One example mentions Joseph, a Jewish man from Cyprus who is now a believer in Christ. His actions give a clear sign that his life has changed. He sold some property that he owned, and he gave the money to be used for building up the community of believers in Christ. Joseph's generosity

shows that the generous Lord Jesus is living in his heart. In this picture of Joseph we see a new creation, evidence of the resurrected Christ.

The life and power of the resurrected Jesus keep changing us still today. The living Jesus finds his way into human lives, takes up a transforming presence within them, and they become new creations. They also become signs that the Lord's big, new creation is coming to life.

Father, turn us broken people into signposts of Jesus' resurrection, proof that a new creation is on the way. Shatter all the ways in which we still reflect anything unrelated to Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

GOD'S CHOSEN INSTRUMENT

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.”
—Acts 9:15

Would you expect wine to come from a jug of motor oil? What if you cracked open an egg and found maple syrup inside? Or how about opening your suitcase and finding a bed of tulips in bloom? Not likely, right?

Similarly, you would not expect to hear about Saul saying or doing anything to promote the cause of Jesus. Saul had been persecuting Jesus' followers. He was the chief engineer of the religious leaders' project to snuff out the early church, and nothing was going to stop him.

But then Jesus did.

Jesus stopped Saul in his tracks one day with a blinding light on the road to Damascus. Jesus spoke to Saul, transformed him, and came to live in him—just as in all of the other believers. Saul became a new creation. He moved away from

death toward life, away from unbelief to belief, away from “breathing out murderous threats” to proclaiming Christ.

How might this kind of story come to life in you? What is developing in you, as the resurrected Christ becomes more fully formed in you?

You might not be a Saul, but if you believe in Jesus as the Savior, you are a new creation, just like Saul and so many others. And Christ aims to be visible through the life-changing work he is doing in you.

“Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus”—at work within us and within the people we love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

MORE OF GOD'S SURPRISING WORK

“Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”
—Acts 10:20

What happens when you hear God give you an instruction? You do what he says.

But what if God tells you something, and it doesn't seem to make sense?

In Acts 10 we read about a strange dream Peter had, and then we see the larger picture God was pointing to when he sent Peter that dream. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, believed in God and gave generously to people in need. And God wanted Peter to tell Cornelius and his family about salvation in Jesus Christ. It's a sign that Christ and his gifts were intended not only for Jews but also for Gentiles (non-Jews), including Roman commanders!

God brought Cornelius's representatives to Peter soon after Peter received his strange dream. And to make things crystal clear, God told Peter to go with them, for God had

sent them. Peter learned that the men had come from a Roman centurion, a person he would not normally associate with, according to the Jewish law. But the point of God's strange command became clear as Cornelius and many other Gentiles came to faith in Jesus and were baptized (Acts 10:23-48).

What will you learn today if you obey God's command, even if it seems confusing or challenging? Watch carefully to see what God is doing. Take your time. It often takes us a while to see where God is building his new creation.

God, thank you for bringing your salvation in Christ to all peoples! Give us hearts to obey and eyes to see you at work—even through us—in unexpected ways. Amen.

ANOTHER SIGN SHOWING GOD AT WORK

The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." —Acts 13:2

When we see orange barrels on the roadway, that's usually a sign of work going on.

If we see a bag of flour, eggs, and measuring cups on the kitchen counter, that's also a sign that someone is at work.

A car with its hood up and some tools scattered on the ground tell us the same thing.

These are all signs that someone is busy.

We can see that in our text today too. The Antioch church heard a word from the Holy Spirit telling them to send two of their leaders, Saul and Barnabas, to serve as missionaries. That called for an act of radical obedience, generosity, and faith. Can you imagine your church sending its pastors on a mission to go where the Spirit was leading them?

The response of the Antioch church was a sign that God

was busy doing something beautiful in his broken world. God was transforming people into new creations, gathering them into new communities, and leading them into deep faithfulness. That, in turn, points to something even bigger: God's new creation!

Of course, that new creation isn't fully formed yet (we aren't either!). It won't be complete until Christ returns. In the meantime all who are in Christ continue to serve as signposts that God is busy with something big!

Lord, help us so that we no longer view anyone or anything from a worldly point of view. Give us kingdom eyes to see you at work behind the scenes. Amen.

A NEW CREATION NAMED TIMOTHY

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived. . . .
—Acts 16:1

In the United States, where I live, it is common for people to have parents and grandparents from different countries or ethnic backgrounds. A neighbor or coworker might have ancestors from India, Africa, and Europe, for example.

This wasn't as common in ancient times, and that is why the writer of Acts points out that Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. In his home community Timothy was unique in that way. Because of that, Timothy may have struggled to find a community in which he truly belonged. Was he Jewish? Was he Greek? Timothy became a believer in Christ, and the community of believers spoke well of him.

When Paul and his missionary companions came along, they invited Timothy to come with them. As they discipled Timothy, they likely made clear that

his faith, the faith given to him by God and by which he was "in Christ," made him part of a growing, deeply bonded, and truly beautiful community: the church. Timothy, like them, was a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), part of a growing gathering of new creations.

Today, if you meet other Christians, take note that together you are part of that growing gathering. Keep your eyes open for what lies behind the faces, the eyes. You'll be seeing new creations. With you, they are signposts of God's renewal in this world, pointing to his new creation.

Lord, help us to see all believers in Jesus as new creations, your handiwork, signposts of glorious things to come. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

LYDIA, ANOTHER NEW CREATION

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.
—Acts 16:14

I would love to have been there, watching Lydia turn into a new creation. As our story begins, she has no idea who Jesus is. She worships and prays to God, but she doesn't know Jesus, God's Son, the Savior. But as she listens to Paul's message about Jesus, the Lord opens her heart to believe in Christ. She is then baptized, along with her household, and she generously hosts Paul and his companions. What an amazing transformation!

This is what the Spirit of God loves to do—lead people to Jesus, ignite faith in them that Jesus' death has rescued this broken world from sin, help them to know that the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection are theirs too, and change them to become like Jesus. Sometimes God works in the heart of an adult like Lydia. Sometimes he starts with a child of Christian parents, like me. In every case,

it's the start of a process, a life-long journey of renewal in which we grow more and more like Christ.

Like Lydia, all who are "in Christ" are new creations, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17. They are being renewed and restored for full life with God. And, again, their transformation points to the colossal project God is working on, the renewal and restoration of his entire broken world. And when that is complete, his new creation will be fully here!

Father, you love to transform people. We love to see and hear about you doing that. Do it more and more. Keep the project going in each of us. We want to see more signposts of the new creation. Amen.

WHEW!

Timothy has . . . brought good news about your faith and love.
—1 Thessalonians 3:6

Paul was overjoyed! He had sent his disciple, Timothy, back to the city of Thessalonica to check on the church they had recently planted there. And Timothy had returned with amazing news!

First, the background: Paul had spent only a short time in Thessalonica, establishing a community of Christ-followers, before an angry mob opposed to the gospel chased him off. Paul knew the deep challenges that the new Christians faced there in his absence, living in a culture that was deeply opposed to Christianity. He wouldn't have been surprised if everyone had gone back to their former ways of life in Judaism or Greek tradition.

But Timothy came back with a report that the new Christians in Thessalonica were standing firm despite the challenges. They remained full of faith in

Jesus. They even longed to see Paul again!

That doesn't happen by accident. The God who raised Jesus from the dead also brought these people to life in him, and he kept them there. You might say that every standing-firm, new Christian was an ongoing resurrection story, a new creation, proof that God was up to something big: the renewal of *all* creation.

If anyone is in Christ, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, there is a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come!

Lord, all of us who are new creations in Christ are glad to have your resurrection power at work in us. Thank you! The old is going away and the new is coming. Help us to see and rejoice. Amen.

A COMMUNITY OF NEW CREATIONS

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.
—Romans 16:1

“Don’t call it ‘just a list.’” That was the advice of preaching professor Fred Craddock as he spoke about Romans 16. This collection of Paul’s friends, with names that are unfamiliar to many of us today, is not merely a list. Every person here has a story revealing a miracle of God’s grace.

Take Phoebe, for example. Paul calls her a sister, and he commends her to his Roman readers as a diaconal servant from the church in Cenchreae, a harbor town near Corinth in Greece. Apparently she was a great help to many people in a town that saw lots of travelers come and go.

To use the language of this month’s theme, Phoebe was a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Having come to faith in Jesus as Savior, she was a woman who was “in Christ,” and the old Phoebe was disappearing while a new Phoebe

was coming to expression. By the work of the Holy Spirit in her, she was becoming more and more like Jesus, the greatest giver and helper of all. She was an ongoing reminder of resurrection life, pointing us all to God’s renewal of his whole world.

That is what new creations, like the ones named in Romans 16, do. They become a great help to many people because they are in Christ, the one Savior and the greatest helper of all.

Lord, thank you for adding us to the gathering that includes Phoebe and all other believers. Make us more like Jesus so that we may be a great help to the world, a sign of your new creation to come. Amen.

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, NEW CREATIONS

They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

—Romans 16:4

What level of risk are you comfortable with? Are you willing to invest your money in something that could make a great profit but could also make a significant loss? Or would you rather keep your money safe in a bank?

Priscilla and Aquila were two ministry colleagues of Paul, and we can find parts of their story in Acts 18. These two new creations, people who were united to Christ in faith and becoming more like Jesus, did risky things in the name of protecting Paul and providing for him in order to share the good news of Jesus more widely. They were risk-tolerant when it came to spreading the gospel. They understood that risks taken in the name of Jesus are not necessarily risky in the long term. That's because the future of all believers is secure in Christ.

Paul was grateful for these two new creations. The Gentile churches to whom Paul was able to minister, in part because of Priscilla and Aquila's faith-filled risk tolerance, were also grateful.

I am grateful too. God made new creations out of these former unbelievers, and as new creations they have shown us what it means to hold everything but God loosely.

Thank you, dear Father, for re-creating Priscilla and Aquila through the Spirit of Jesus and calling them to work alongside Paul, taking risks for the sake of spreading the gospel. Turn our hearts in that direction as you re-create us too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANDRONICUS AND JULIUS, NEW CREATIONS

Andronicus and Julius, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me . . . are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. —Romans 16:7

The text that has shaped our month's devotions (2 Corinthians 5:17) has an important, little phrase that shows up again here, in Romans 16:7: "in Christ."

This phrase is one of the apostle Paul's favorite descriptions of people who have come to believe in the Lord Jesus, are redeemed in him, and are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. They are "in Christ." Christ is their home, their resting place, their source of life.

Today it is more common to say that these people are Christians. Paul said that they are "in Christ."

Andronicus and Julius are new creations "in Christ," along with all of the other people Paul mentions in Romans 16. And, according to Paul, they were believers "in Christ" before Paul himself was. In

addition, their "in Christ" character led them to follow Christ into imprisonment alongside Paul. Their service for the Lord was so remarkable that Paul described them as "outstanding among the apostles."

How did these two people become "in Christ"? God drew them into faith in Jesus, the one and only Savior. God's love for them turned them into people who loved God. The Lord made them into new creations. And their transformation hints at something big: God's new creation!

Thank God with me if he has done that for you too!

Thank you, God, for your work in all who are "in Christ," from the early days of the church to the present. We are all your new creations! Amen.

TRYPHENA, TRYPHOSA, AND PERSIS

Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. . . . [And] Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. —Romans 16:12

For the past few days we've looked through Paul's greetings to helpers, coworkers, and other saints here in Romans 16, highlighting just a few of them. These people are all "in Christ," and they are therefore new creations, as Paul puts it in our theme verse, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

In our text for today Paul highlights three women who are hard workers in the cause of Jesus Christ. Paul doesn't tell us anything about their work, just that they embraced it as part of their service for Jesus.

Maybe you know people like that. I do. In my work as a consultant for church leaders, I have often seen council chairpersons step into challenging conversations, meet with angry church members, and provide calm leadership in tense council meetings. Many of them have told me they never

would have thought they could manage situations like those when they were first called into office. But there they are, doing hard things, to the best of their ability, equipped with wisdom, humility, and persistence from God.

Let's thank God for these people, and for all of the other new creations we know whose lives and hard work are signs that they are "in Christ," pointing ahead to the new creation.

Lord, thank you for wise church leaders who are "in Christ" and whose work for the church reveals that you are living within them. By the power of your Spirit, strengthen them for calm times and challenging times. Amen.

RUFUS AND HIS MOTHER, NEW CREATIONS

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. —Romans 16:13

Today let's look at one more set of people whom Paul mentions in Romans 16: Rufus and his mother.

First, Rufus: Paul's comment about Rufus is that he is "chosen in the Lord." We're not sure why Paul says that about Rufus, because the phrase "chosen in the Lord" describes every believer in Jesus. Could there have been some doubt within the Christian community in Rome about Rufus's commitment to Christ? If so, Paul means to quell any sense of doubt by including Rufus here. In any case, Rufus is "in Christ."

Next, Rufus's mother is noted as being like a mother to Paul. In various ways, it seems, she revealed that she was "in Christ" through her care for Paul, a traveling missionary who rarely experienced the comforts of home. When people like Paul received hospi-

tal, care, and welcome while traveling, they remembered people like Rufus's mother.

Rufus's mother reminds me of Jesus, whose hospitality and welcome were beautifully consistent and authentic. Picture Jesus providing food for large crowds, for example (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-13). Picture him graciously calling Peter to serve again (John 21:15-19; April 12). Think about Jesus' Spirit living in the heart of Rufus's mother, a new creation whose care and kindness pointed to God's work in the new creation, leading her to become like Jesus.

Live in us too, Lord. We want to see Christ's resurrection at work in us. We want to see signs that we too are new creations. Give us that joy and peace, Lord. Amen.

AWAITING THE NEW CREATION

“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

—Revelation 6:10

Are you waiting for anything these days? Maybe a long-planned vacation or an important birthday? Or maybe you're waiting for healing after a surgery, or for a relationship to be restored.

In our text for today we see a gathering of waiting saints. This is part of the amazing sequence of visions God gave to the apostle John to write down as the book of Revelation. The saints in this passage have been killed for their faith in Jesus, and they want to know how long they will have to wait for justice, for the Lord's vengeance, and for the completion of God's kingdom to come.

It's a question that all of us who are “in Christ” ask in one form or another. When will our faith be made sight? When will God's remaking of creation, which began at Christ's

resurrection, be complete? When will suffering on this earth be over? When will joy become truly everlasting?

“Wait just a little longer” is the answer. No calendar date is provided, but the Lord promises that it will happen. All of us who are “in Christ” will be able to enjoy full life in God's new creation someday. In the meantime, we new creations, all of us who are “in Christ,” are held, loved, and kept for the arrival of that big new creation the Lord is working on.

Lord, we are eager for your kingdom to come in its fullness. But we will wait, and as we try to do that in faith, with trust in you and love for one another, help us to serve you faithfully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD'S BIG PROJECT

You are a chosen people . . . a holy nation, God's special possession. . . .
—1 Peter 2:9

While God is busy preparing the new creation, he is working on a special project. He is building a chosen people, a holy nation, the “special possession” that Peter talks about in our text for today.

Peter's labels for God's people are borrowed from the Old Testament. They were first used to describe ancient Israel, to signify their special status as God's chosen nation. Now those labels are given to the collection of all who are “in Christ,” people from every nation and language that God calls to himself, believers in Christ who are waiting for God's new creation.

All who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior are a part of that crowd, gathered from across the globe and throughout the ages. We whose lives are “in Christ” are living signposts of the great multitude that God is gathering, an im-

portant part of the coming new creation.

Look in the mirror today with this biblical lens: If you are a believer in Christ, you are gazing at a new creation—someone who is being made new in Christ. You are gazing at a living signpost of the big new creation that God is—even now—building. And you are somehow gazing into a global, timeless, and much-loved gathering—God's holy people. All of this is proof that the old has gone, and the new has come!

What a joyous gift, O God, to be “in Christ” and looking forward to life with you as part of your holy people in your new creation. We praise and honor you for making all things new, including us. Amen.

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