

“New Life Revealed”  
Jeremiah 17:5-10  
Psalm 1  
1 Corinthians 15:12-20  
Luke 6:17-26

Our outward actions betray our inner thoughts, attitudes, and motives. In whom or what do you look for love, generosity, and inclusion? As Christians, we participate with God in the mission of salvation. And our ability to love, be generous, and inclusive is directly related to our experience of God saving us. W. Frank Harrington a former and beloved pastor of Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta retells the following story:

Norman Vincent Peale tells a story of the early days of his ministry. He was in Brooklyn, New York. One Christmas Eve he was out visiting some families, and he walked by a doorway. He noticed that on the door was the red ribbon of Christmas and a black wreath of mourning. While the people who lived there were not parishioners of his, he decided he would call on the family. So, he knocked on the door, and the father of the family came to the door. Dr. Peale introduced himself and was invited in. He sought to give condolences to the family, and he saw in the sitting room a small casket where a 6-year-old girl was lying in state. He expressed his sympathy to the father, and this father said, “Dr. Peale, it’s going to be all right, for she is with God, you know. “While they were talking, Dr. Peale could hear the mother of the family reading the Bible to two little boys of the family, and he heard her reading these words: “Because I live, you shall live also.” And “Christ’s love is for keeps, whatever comes.”<sup>1</sup>

We are wired to live in relationship with God and others.

The paralysis that sets in when we are asked to love, be generous, and inclusive in our relationships with others is best characterized by preoccupation with self and our wants, needs, and desires. To be preoccupied is “to dominate or engross the mind of

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<sup>1</sup>W. Frank Harrington, “The Love That Brought Him,” in *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 51, as found in [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com) on Wednesday, February 9, 2022.

something or someone to the exclusion of other thoughts.”<sup>2</sup> For example, you have just had a difficult discussion with someone. You also are a student in school, or an employee at work, or on the golf course, or at the bridge table. You immediately become focused on the difficult discussion and lose track of what the teacher is saying, what the work task list is demanding, what the distance from the hole is, and what card to play. Your preoccupation with the difficult discussion sent you into a world that made you unaware of the present moment.

To be preoccupied with God, however, is a good thing. In 1 Corinthians we glean this: Easter Sunday is connected to every Sunday that follows. Think of all the times we have been told we are worthless and there is no hope for us to be any different than we are. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead guarantees all future resurrections from “death patterns” of living, let alone our literal physical death to come. “...the connection between Jesus and us is so intimate, so deep, and so real that his resurrection guarantees our future hope...Because of Jesus, ‘the dead’ have hope.”<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah indicates we have the propensity to do both good and bad things; that our intentions, motives, and decisions are never pure or without blemish. We are both selfish and God centered. Our words and actions bear bad and good fruit. Yet, the more we rest in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the benefits in knowing and experiencing that God are real. God’s love, generosity, and inclusion for, to, and of us always wins. The inclination of our heart will lean more toward being loving, generous, and inclusive of others, regardless of our

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<sup>2</sup>*Concise Oxford Dictionary* Tenth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1129.

<sup>3</sup>Beth Felker Jones in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 248.

agreement or disagreement with the other. And Luke reminds us that people really do want to know Jesus. People wanted to hear Jesus teach. They wanted their diseases healed. And they wanted to be transformed by the Messiah to live God's intended destiny for them. And yet, there are blessings and woes that the Sermon on the Plain indicate are part of the Christian's experience.

Is it the case today that people want Jesus? Some do. Deep within, everyone does. Therein lies the opportunity for authentic relationships. Christians can be a blessing to those who seem to be marginalized from the love, generosity, and inclusion of God. And from others as well for that matter. How can you make progress in being set free from a worldview and lifestyle of self-centeredness to begin a life of authentically serving and loving others? Take responsibility for the things in your life that you find not loving, generous or inclusive. Avoid affixing blame. Develop an action plan to move forward.

Geneva Presbyterian Church is becoming internally stronger in the basic practice of loving God, loving others, and making disciples. Our external focus begs the question, who is our neighbor? And the answer is found in loving others and serving the "least of these." Who is your neighbor? How do you engage him or her? Start from a place of thinking the best of the other person and demonstrate trust and respect. Donald K. McKim writes, "Trust is faith. Trust is enacted faith... Faith is the trust that responds to Jesus' command: 'Follow me.' Faith is the trust to love others. Faith is the trust to continue living as God desires and as Jesus showed us."<sup>4</sup> Only God can overcome our

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<sup>4</sup>Donald K. McKim in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1*, 243.

devious and perverse thoughts, attitudes, and motives. Respond to God's love, generosity, and inclusion for you in Jesus Christ. Salvation will occur.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus' resurrection guarantees your future hope. Why? Blessings and woes are part and parcel with the journey of Christian discipleship. We need hope throughout the journey. Jesus' resurrection guarantees you hope through the blessings and woes of life. Believe in Jesus and hold tight to his resurrection guarantee. Only then will you be able to serve real people who live in a real world who have real needs. That my friends, is new life being revealed in you and others.

Yes, new life is revealed when you experience resurrection now and at the consummation of the new heaven and new earth. Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord, and the Transfiguration of Jesus remind us that Jesus Christ has come for everyone. We are God's agent, individually and as a community of faith, to manifest God's favor to everybody regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, economic bracket, political party affiliation, vaccinated or unvaccinated, and the religiously hurt, skeptical, and unbelieving in the world. Aspire to remember, tell, and live the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble. Amen.

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 13 February 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>5</sup>In preparation of this sermon, I have benefited from the thinking of Lee Daniel Hawk, Donald K. McKim, Rhodora E. Beaton, Mark Abbott, Beth Felker Jones, Wes Avram, and Robert F. Darden in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 239-241, 242-243, 244-245, 246-248, 249-249, 250-252, and 252-254.