

## With Hearts Wide Open 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:12

*Second Sunday after Pentecost/ June 2, 2024*

“For the love of Christ urges us on...” (2 Cor. 5:14). Forward. Never back. Christ is always out ahead of us. He goes before us. His love summons us, entices us, pulls us, and leads us ever deeper into something new. Didn’t he tell his disciples, “...after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee” (Mt. 26:32)? And didn’t the angel say to terrified women at the tomb, the first witnesses to resurrection, “Do not be afraid; ...he has been raised from the dead...he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him” (Mt. 28:5, 7). For the love of Christ urges us on.

Paul wants the church in Corinth to know: the love of Christ urges us on. This love, Christ’s love, is at work in us and in the world. It’s active, dynamic, moving. Christ’s love is doing something. And this “something” Paul describes as the “new creation.” And Paul wants the church in Corinth—and by extension, wants us—to open our hearts to it all, to feel it, share in it, participate in it. Paul opens his heart to the Corinthians, and he encourages them to “open wide [their] hearts also” (2 Cor. 6:12), hearts that are open, working together, open to the grace that is at work in us.

For “the love of Christ urges us on.” Forward. With hearts open wide, we discover that right now, we are caught up in the new thing that God is doing in us. Love is moving us. Moving us toward the future ahead of us—that’s where we meet Christ. When I walked the Camino across Spain on my last sabbatical, countless times I heard this word, “*Ultreia*.” People said it to me, I said it to myself, especially when I was tired, and I said it to others, *Ultreia!* An old Basque word, it means “Onward.” “Forward.” “Further.” “Keep going.” One more step, pilgrim, one more step. George Macleod (1895-1991), the founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, often said that a Christian is always leaning into the future. We lean into the future with confidence and hope because the love of Christ urges us on.

And because, as Paul knew, *personally*, all around us in the world and within us, right to the very core of our being, in the deepest depths of our psyches, there is a *new creation*—something has happened and is happening! I don’t fully understand it and don’t always feel it, but I know it’s true, know it’s there, and I have experienced it at key moments in my life. When I was in college, I read through the sermons of theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965), which had an enormous influence on me. It was while immersed in those sublime sermons that I first sensed the call to preach. It was Tillich’s sermon “The Shaking of the Foundations.”<sup>1</sup> My own religious experiences resonated with what he was pointing toward, and I knew that I had to be faithful to what I had discovered. In one sermon, I was struck by something he said, and I thought, “*This. This is it.*” These words continue to reverberate through my life: “We want only to communicate to you an experience we have had that here and there in the world and now and then in ourselves is a New Creation, usually hidden, but sometimes manifest, and certainly manifest in Jesus, who is called the Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

What is this new creation? It’s grace and joy and hope; it’s forgiveness and reconciliation, personal transformation, the transfiguration of reality; it’s justice and wholeness

and restoration; it's the font of new beginnings, it's new life where death once reigned—it's resurrection. It's everything in us and in the world that is bursting with new life in places of death and sorrow. It's renewal. It's sabbath. It's resting in the stillness of God's peace and joy. And it's real, and it's happening. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17). This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. "A new creation," Paul said to the Galatians, "is everything" (Gal 6:15)! And the new creation is not a static creation, but more like "a creating, a *creatio continua*, continually happening in each existential moment."<sup>3</sup>

Christ is making all things new! This new thing is genuinely new, unprecedented, unexpected, and unanticipated by either the past or the present. Thus, God is continually holding out an entirely different future for us, not by renegotiating our relationship with the past but by doing something entirely radically new. The love of Christ is establishing a new order, not taking us back to a glorified or imagined past but someplace new. Sure, friends, history is great, but it can't save us. *History is not redemptive*. The good news of the gospel is that one's history is never one's destiny—for there is a new creation.

And nostalgia is not that helpful in the Christian life either. We're not called to go back to Eden, to some glory day, for love urges us on into the new creation that God is bringing about—in you and me. Remember, God placed an angel with a flaming sword at the east end of Eden to make sure we never return. We can't go back (Genesis 3:24). For the new creation is changing the direction and meaning and purpose of our lives. And because it is grace it's transforming our lives, granting a new future that is not the product or result of the past. It is sheer gift, radically new and renewing.

The love of Christ is urging us into the new creation. The love of Christ is urging the church into the new creation. The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) once said, "The advocates of Christianity squander their energies in the mere preservation of what had come down to them, with no thought of building on their house and making it roomier."<sup>4</sup>

Can you imagine the church creating new rooms, becoming more spacious, expansive, something new? Not static, not a museum, not a historical preservation society, but continually participating in that new thing God is doing in the world, creating space for us to live into the new thing God is doing for the world through us. Formed and reformed and always reforming by the Word, energized by the Holy Spirit, we're sent out to bear witness to and live in the new creation.

"For the love of Christ urges us on..." Forward. Always out ahead of us. His love summons us. Entices us. Invites us. It's pulling us and leading us ever deeper into the new creation.

With hearts wide open, may we allow ourselves to feel and see and rejoice that we are part of that new creation. With open hearts, hearts awakened, hearts uplifted to God, hearts fed by the living presence of the Risen Christ, may we share in this meal, share in the life of the one who makes all things new. *Thanks be to God!*

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<sup>1</sup> Found in Paul Tillich's collection of sermons, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> From Tillich's sermon "The New Being," in the collection of sermons, *The New Being* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 18.

<sup>3</sup> David Congdon, *The God Who Saves: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cascade Books, 2016), 227

<sup>4</sup> C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 9, ii, par. 170.