



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

When couples have their first baby; a whole new chapter opens up in their lives. In fact, as many of you might remember, absolutely nothing remained the same. I think most of us who have had children can relate to this. Babies change the whole dynamic of a family. Not only are there new responsibilities but also everywhere you go, you now see things with new eyes.

I also remember the day when my last child left home for college. Frank went from our little town to the big city of Minneapolis. Not only did Rodney and I have a huge change as empty nesters, but Frank had an even bigger change, living in a new space, with a new roommate, on a campus that had more people than in the little town he was raised in.

The United States has been called a melting pot of many different people, from different countries, nationalities, and religions. Just imagine for a minute coming to the US as an immigrant as tens of thousands of people have done over the course of our country's history. They had to learn a new language; one that does not have a lot of rules and contains mostly idioms. Then there are new laws to abide by. Many new things to deal with and overcome for sure.

So, what do you think would happen if the new parents tried to live their old lifestyle BC, before children? What would happen if the college student lived quietly and unaware as if still in their parent's home? What would happen to the empty nesters if they sat around waiting for the children to come home? What would happen if you moved to America and still spoke only Croatian, Italian, or Japanese and obeyed only the laws of your old country?

Well, in all cases I think that you would be in trouble. The old ways do not work when your situation changes and that is what Paul implies, that the people in Corinth are doing in the letter to the Corinthians. They are called to be Christians, but they love as those who do not yet know Christ. They are still looking at other people and at Christ from a worldly point of view. Paul says, "No, A Christian is a 'new creation', the old has gone, the new has come!"

As new creations in Christ, as servants of God, we are dying physically like the rest of the world, yet we live on. We are beaten and yet not killed and sometimes we are sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing everything.”

This is how radical it is when Christ has become our Savior. We are given the privilege to see life as it truly is. Money has no real meaning or lasting value. Fame and good looks are a flash in the pan. Where you live and where you come from mean nothing. All that matters is loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Idealistic you say. Well, our world certainly would agree. It is contrary to how we are conditioned to think. The way the world thinks and perhaps the way we used to think BC, before Christ is erroneous. Because we are different, simply because of Jesus and Jesus alone. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

There was a tournament for women at a prestigious Chicago suburban golf club. The turnout was so big that the women had to use the men’s locker room as well as the women’s. So, on the day of the big event, the men’s locker room was off-limits to men. But eight-year-old Joey did not see the sign saying that. When he walked innocently into the men’s locker room, he was greeted with shrieks as the women grabbed for cover. “What’s the matter,” little Joey asked, “haven’t you ever seen a little boy before?”

And so, Paul asks the Corinthians in our Scripture lesson for this evening. What is the matter? Haven’t you ever seen a real Christian before? Well, the fact that we are all here tonight on Ash Wednesday in itself, sets us apart. The fact that we are here at all puts us at the foot of the Cross, at the total mercy of our loving God.

This is where we die to self and live for God!

This is where we are crucified with Christ and rise with Him!

This is where our life becomes hidden in God!

This is where we joyfully and victoriously proclaim, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!” Galatians 2:20

This changes everything and gives people the power to face things and do things they would not otherwise even dream of doing. This whole new way of life comes to us not because of logic, or fear of judgment, but because of love. For God so loved the world, he sent his son to die for us.

Today begins the 40 days of Lent. Lent is a time to fast from certain things and to feast on others. It might have been your tradition growing up that gave you the idea that you should give up something for Lent. Anybody remember or still do that??? My feeling is that there is a lot of things in this world that we all should give up, but I think more importantly, I think that there are things, positive things that God would like us to do instead of or along with not eating chocolate cake for 40 days. Too many people in our society, are living ungodly lives, quarreling with one another, and looking out only for number one. Our Gospel reading in Matthew tells us how Jesus warned about practicing your piety before others. He warns us not to be hypocrites when giving, fasting and praying, but rather to do them in secret.

The kind of fast that is pleasing to God is one that focuses on giving up, not necessarily food and drink, but rather selfishness, hatred, and greed. So, think long and hard before they give up

something for lent. Can't make it too difficult or I will not be able to do it. And then what do we do, we go out and every chance we get, we publicize it. Oh no thanks; I gave up chocolate cake for lent. Denying ourselves a luxury may be good for the soul and maybe the waistline, but I think that you need to replace that behavior with something positive.

The Lord spoke through Isaiah, "is not the kind of fasting I have chosen, to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cord of the yoke, to set the oppressed free." That certainly sounds more like the actions of a Christian, doesn't it?

We need to engage in a lifestyle where we fast from judging others and feast on Christ dwelling in us. Here are some ideas if you have not made your Lenten resolutions yet:

Fast from discontentment and feast on gratitude.

Fast from anger and feast on patience.

Fast from pessimism and feast on optimism.

Fast from worry and feast on trusting God.

Fast from complaining and feast on appreciation.

Fast from worry and feast on trusting God. (That one belongs to me!)

Fast from bitterness and feast on forgiveness.

Fast from self-absorption and feast on compassion for others.

Fast from discouragement and feast on hope.

Fast from thoughts that destroy and feast on promises that inspire!

Yes, we have been formed from the dust, which suggests not only our humble beginnings but our startling new potential. God breathed life into the soil and created humankind. And He said it was very good. At our baptism, we are claimed as God's child, where the Holy Spirit comes to make God real for us each and every day. When we say the words of one of our creeds, we confess our faith. And when we allow the Spirit to dwell in us, we are able to feel God's love. All these things lead us to the point where Christ lives in us, and we are then a new creation.

God led Jesus to the cross for us. Jesus' resurrection brings the offer of forgiveness, and abundant and eternal life to all who will accept it. And when we accept those promises, we become a new creation, a creation made by God himself.

What response will you make to that gracious offer of love from God? Remember, God comes to us over and over again and will never leave you if you just ask him. He reaches out for each one of us. And God is calling us to fast from our old ways and then feast on the new life He has given us through his Son Jesus Christ.

So, this lent let us pray this psalm.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit." **AMEN**