

**“Being Made New,
Part 1 of 3”**

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Colossians 3:1-11

INTRO

The days are getting shorter. The mornings are a bit darker. The nights are getting cooler. The air conditioning isn't running quite so much in our cars and homes. School has already, or will be starting soon.

It won't be long before the green leaves will be turning to yellows, oranges, and reds and we will be saying goodbye to the Summer and hello to the Fall. We're not quite there yet, but we are beginning to see the signs.

This transition time is a routine and cyclical experience and doesn't surprise us, but sometimes we struggle to let go, because we enjoy parts of the season that is slipping away. Perhaps there are also certain aspects of the coming season that we don't look forward to quite so much.

This is the rhythm of life, not just the four seasons of nature.

Today and for the next two weeks we will be considering how we are

being made new in the transition seasons of life.

SERMON

Today we are honoring the life of Leta Renshaw. I am struck by how the scriptures and music and topic that were chosen for this service well before Chris and Leta passed away this week fit. That is not something that happens by chance. God has been orchestrating some things behind the scenes. I'm thankful it is not only up to me to do this job. It certainly is well beyond me.

I want to pick up where Janice left off earlier, the changing of seasons.

Sometimes we are challenged to accept how things change.

It's in the transition of seasons like we are now experiencing that we can see most clearly the rhythm of nature around us, and sometimes even the cyclic seasons of our lives

seasons of struggle
seasons of joy
seasons of learning
seasons of new adventures
seasons of raising kids
seasons of empty nest
seasons of saying goodbye to loved ones

What season is marking your life right now?

How we are being made new in this transition seasons of life as individuals, as families, and as a church community.

There are many examples in scripture that address the new life that God is bringing to us, or is renewing within us.

Today we will look at a letter that a man named Paul wrote to a community of new followers of Jesus in a city named Colossae, near where the country of Turkey is today.

Paul had traveled far and wide through that general area of Asia Minor, but had never visited Colossae. He had only heard about the people there. He knew that they were young in faith, but also that they were doing some good things because of their new life of faith in Jesus.

He was writing to encourage them to continue growing in their faith, and he used a number of examples to help them understand what this new life could look like.

Listen to a section of Colossians chapter three.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

Paul was encouraging the Colossians to let go of the old

ways that had them bound up. Then he encouraged them to embrace the new way of life into which Jesus was ushering them.

This encourages us to reflect on a few questions.

1. What old things are fading away in our lives?
2. In what ways are we being made new?

These questions remind me of Leta Renshaw, who passed away this week. God has now made her new, without COPD, or kidney and heart issues. Leta today could walk as far as she wants without a problem in her new body that God has given her.

We also are in process of being made new.

Let's now consider Leta's life.

Leta was born Leta Byrd on Jan 13, 1918 in Kentucky near the Tennessee border, and she died early Tuesday morning at 12:52 am August 20, 2019 at 101.5 years old. Leta will be missed.

She was preceded in death by both of her parents, her husband Eddie in 2004, and her son Barry, two years ago. She is survived by

her daughter Bonnie Sue with her husband Don Blackmore.

We honor Leta's life today as one of us, a beloved member of our church family, as we transition to a new season from Summer into Fall.

Her death reminds us that we all have a season of time here and we do with our season the best we know how before graciously handing the reigns to the next generation.

This is not always easy to do because we want to hold on to the past, but holding things lightly and honoring the seasons is necessary.

Leta was spunky, and if you knew her well enough you saw the rough edges of her personality that gave her character. She could get grumpy about certain things and upset about others, but she always hoped the best for God's church, no matter what kind of music was sung on Sunday or what changes were made to children's programs. I appreciated this about Leta.

She lived her early years across the border in TN without siblings, but went to school in Kentucky, then just prior to her senior year of high school she moved with her parents to California, just outside Fresno, where she could see the foothills of the mountains.

Although she was only there a year, she made some friends during her senior year at Sanger Union High School. After graduating high school she moved with her parents to Birmingham, Michigan where she anchored into the community and began attending worship and other events here at First Baptist Church Birmingham.

She met Eddie Albert Renshaw, about 12 years her senior, at a lodge gathering in the late 1930s and fell in love. Eddie didn't have much of a church background, so he joined her at First Baptist, where they got married on May 15, 1940 by Pastor Joseph O. Nelson.

Leta & Eddie celebrated 64 years together before Eddie passed away in 2004 with Pastor Wes Babian at his side. Now the two of them are reunited.

Leta worked at Shettler Drug Store and Kresge's on Woodward Ave. here in Birmingham.

Leta knew nine different senior pastors of this congregation spanning more than 80 years of time. I'm not sure, but that 80 years might be a record! She always talked about Pastor Emil Kontz as her favorite pastor.

She loved to attend not only worship services on Sundays, but Bible studies, dinners, Ladies

Lunches, and other events at the church. She shared with me a number of times how much she enjoyed Lance Luce and his masterful organ playing when he came to the church. She bought one of his CDs so she could listen to it at home.

She was happy to hear that Lance checked out the parlor organ before we gave it to the church in Inkster. She mentioned how happy she was about this again to me less than a week before she died.

Leta, of course loved to be outside and enjoyed walking around Baldwin House when she lived there. “Three times around the building — that was a mile,” she would always say.

After she went to the hospital and then to rehab before finding her way to American House, she was not able to get outside quite so much, but she would always ask,

“Is it nice outside?” when I visited.

During my last several visits, I was happy to tell her that “Yes, Leta, the sun is shining and it’s a beautiful day outside.”

“That’s good to know,” she would say.

Although she didn’t get out to experience it, she was happy to know that the sun was shining.

Anyone who has spent much time around Leta, knows that she had an affinity for cardinals. She had cardinal sweaters, cardinal pictures, cardinal coasters, cardinal hand towels, and cardinal figurines among other cardinal items.

Interestingly, in 1918, the year that Leta Byrd (that was her birth name) was born, the Northern Cardinal became protected by the Migratory Bird Act of 1918, and it was given a new scientific name, the *Richmondia cardinalis*.

One might surmise that the Northern Cardinal was given new life in the age of Leta Renshaw.

Some of Leta’s cardinals are here with us today on the communion table. I invite you to take one home with you if you’d like — to remember Leta.

Sharing stories of Leta

Prayer

Dear loving God, our Creator and Healer, we thank you today for our friend Leta and her 80 years with this congregation and her 101.5 years of life.

We thank you for her contribution to the fabric of this church community.

We thank you for the way Leta was an inspiration to many by staying active past the age of 100.

We also thank you for loving us throughout the seasons of life, seasons of birth and seasons of death, seasons of letting go and seasons of embracing the new.

As we say good bye to Leta, help us to embrace the new ways you are working in our lives.

Thank you for strengthening, sustaining, and comforting us.
Amen!