

In the film *The Passion of the Christ* as the beaten Jesus is taken to the Cross, he sees his mother at the very time he falls to the ground, looking straight at her he utters **'See, Mother, I make all things new!'**

What do you think of that! It doesn't look much like something being made new. Looks like the end of something - more like the old way, the corrupt way; the cruel way; the unjust way.

Fast forward to the day of Pentecost - Peter, the fearful one who possibly missed the journey to the cross; in our eyes maybe even the gutless one has undergone significant transformation. He's bold enough to stand up and speak to a similar if not the same crowd present in Jerusalem 7 weeks before. Like records in ACTS:

'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Fortunately Luke tells us what they did and the first Christian community is born. Great! Well it was until a disciple named Stephen got in the faces of the powerbrokers, those representing the old way. He's stoned to death (it was the first century after all –we're so much more sophisticated today - NOT). And it just happened that one of the witnesses, the guy running the coat stand was fire-breathing Saul. Not at all impressed by the things Stephen said, he didn't throw stones as far as we know, but he was an accessory to the fact, in fact he approved of what was done!

This man Saul is obsessed with destroying Christians and Christianity (quite contemporary in that sense), so much so that he leaves home to continue this work. But he doesn't even get to his first stop:

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

Whoops! Saul got that one wrong. But to his credit he does what Jesus says and as the saying goes, life was never the same again.

After he'd been through the mill with Jesus – floggings, beatings, stoning, robberies, shipwrecks – the lot, he learned some stuff. And he wrote some of his learning down.

2 Corinthians 5:1, 14-19

1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.....

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

It's the words **'Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!'** that I'd like to highlight from this passage.

In what sense did Paul understand that a person being **in Christ** is a **new creation**? For him it meant:

A new direction

A new life

A new obligation

A new hope

A new identity

A new centre

A new relational community

A new strength/power

Initially, for me, it was a purpose for my days and a reason for living, and then it was someone I could give my life to. How about you? What does being a new creation mean to you?

And there are possibly other expressions of the new creation you can think of. This is the New Testament fulfilment of what Ezekiel stated prophetically many centuries before would happen.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26

And of course Pentecost is the beginning of how this was to happen - a new heart, a new spirit; a new creation:

Today that describes us and our experience of God in Jesus. By receiving a new heart, a new spirit; by being made fully new in Jesus' Spirit we are made right with God and can be bold in our faith.

How does this work out in our days? Well for some it means:

A new ability to witness

- The Spirit reminds us of what Jesus has said when we need him to
- Through the power of the Spirit, we can be confident when we talk to others of different faiths or no faith about our journey and their journey
- Our role is to share the truth of the Good News of Jesus and pray for the Holy Spirit to continue to work in that person's life. The rest is up to the Spirit

A new understanding of the power of the Spirit

- The power of the Holy Spirit gives wisdom and guidance on how to share the Good News to the ends of the earth. By trusting in the power and missional character of the Spirit, we can engage with others about the Gospel.

A new awareness of spiritual opposition

- Even at Pentecost, there was opposition to the work of the Spirit (Acts 2:13); this is no different from the opposition we face today.
- **'If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.'** John 15:18. Tough time to be a Christian

A new desire to pray

Prayer is needed for:

- Hearts to be prepared to receive the Word
- Opportunities to speak into the lives of those who don't believe in Jesus
- New believers to stand bold in their faith
- Wisdom and words to speak for those who are working to extend the Kingdom of God

A new longing for and an experience of community

- Believers are welcomed into a new network of people. In countries where believers are outcast or persecuted for their faith, this is especially important. We need to take the time to integrate new believers into a community that will help them grow and deepen their faith.

A new desire to worship

- As the believers worshipped the Lord, He added to their number daily; their worship drew in others.

So today at the beginning of these four weeks you're invited to be involved in three ways:

Prayer

Opportunities to be informed and to pray - 7:30pm, 12:30pm, and 7:00pm (Monday to Friday) – someone will be here, you will be able to enter the bottom door off the car park

There will be suggestions as to what to pray for – we focus on the work of Transzend and only in the last week will we begin to focus on our mission here

Self-Denial

Giving up something that costs in some way

Going without something or going without something we enjoy

Giving up particular foods

Putting so much in a jar when we say something negative or that's not quite the truth – might have to have a pretty big jar

Declutter - may take place over a longer period of time

Purpose to give

Some amount over and above your normal giving.

A proportion of your income maybe

A faith promise

A bowl and information in your pigeonholes

We may not change the world over these next four weeks but who knows we may play a part in beginning something, sustaining something or breaking down strongholds.

As JFK said on 20 January 1961 as he enunciated his dream for the United States: **All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days; nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.**

Let us begin!