

4 August 2019

Ecclesiastes 1; Colossians 3: 1-11; Luke 12: 13-21

Being Renewed

The Iona community has a beautiful response to Bible readings which goes like this:

For the word of God in Scripture,

for the word of God among us,

for the word of God within us, thanks be to God.

It seems especially appropriate today when our three readings link so closely together, from the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, from one of Paul's letters and from Luke's gospel. I hope you will have heard from each of them that

To chase after money, possessions and self-gratification is folly and death
whereas **to set out hearts on God and his kingdom is wisdom and life.**

You may expect me now to denounce immoral behaviour, preach against the dangers of wealth, exhort us all to live lives that are holy and unstained by the world.

But may I take that as read?

I have heard, and preached, many sermons which basically say- live a good life, steer clear of sin, keep out of trouble- and then you'll get to heaven in the end.

All of which is important and true, though what we look forward to is resurrection and new life in and with Christ, not a vague disembodied existence on a fluffy cloud up in the sky. But this ignores the good news in today's passage from Colossians, on which I want to focus this morning, and where Paul writes, in verse 10:

You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to its creator.

Back in June we read verses from Galatians where Paul also uses images of clothing, *As many of you as were baptised into Christ have **clothed yourselves with Christ***. We thought then about the idea of *being clothed with Christ*, linking it to the gospel story of Jesus healing a man possessed by demons. You may remember Sunday School giving us a vivid dramatization of this as Martin was wrapped in Christmas paper, on which the group had written all the qualities which make us more like Jesus.

In today's reading, Paul tells us that we have exchanged our old selves for our new selves- calling to mind the baptism practice of the early church when converts would remove their clothes to step in the water and be immersed, then as they came out of the water they would receive a new white robe to wear, putting on the new self, or new identity in Christ- being clothed with Christ.

The challenge for us, who may have been baptised as babies and confirmed as children or young teens, is that we may have lost that sense of our new selves, or who we really are. And is the biggest task for many of us to accept and live in the reality of what Christ has given us? To stop *trying harder* to live good lives, stop washing the stains or mending the tears of our old clothes, and start wearing our new clothes with joy?

Paul states as a fact:

*You **have stripped off** the old self with its practices and **have clothed yourselves** with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to its creator.*

This makes clear that, whilst we have put on our new clothing when we believed and trusted in Christ as our Saviour, it is also a process: our new selves *are being* renewed in knowledge according to our creator.

We are going to look at three key words here: **renewed**, **knowledge** and **creator**.

Renewed? Like a library book, an insurance policy, a club membership? Not exactly, although these do give the sense of continuity, of ongoing protection and belonging. For me there's also the residual guilt of always rushing to get my books back in time to avoid fines- does anyone else relate to that?

So it is important to note that being renewed is a passive present participle in Greek, it is *being done for us*, continually, just as the parts and functions of our physical bodies are renewed continuously to enable us to grow and thrive. Our new selves are being renewed- that can only be done by God's Spirit within us, our spiritual breath of life. We welcome and participate in this, but it's God's work, not ours. As we breathe in the Spirit and open our lives in prayer and worship, we will sense that renewal, and others may see it too.

And there's more – we are being renewed *in knowledge*. Knowledge may strike us as a largely intellectual matter: 'she's very knowledgeable' we say, when someone has lots of facts at their fingertips. Our society loves experts, who have amassed great knowledge about their specialist subjects, whether on Mastermind, the Antiques Road Show or the local IT repair centre! But 'knowledge' in the Bible is relational, it's about both knowing and being known, and growing in our true identity, so also the Holy Spirit, broadens

Beloved children of God, in Christ. And as that continues we will also learn and understand more about God and ourselves. In the first chapter of this epistle Paul prays for the Colossians to be able, through the Holy Spirit's help to

*Live a life worthy of the LORD and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God.***

And at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, well known for all it says about love, Paul writes about human life as a process, becoming our true, new selves until we meet God face to face:

now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.

So we have considered two of our three key words- **renewed, knowledge** and finally, **creator**. The new self is being *renewed in knowledge according to its creator*. In that phrase Paul takes us back to Genesis chapter 1, v 27:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

As we are renewed in knowledge, we are also restored to what we were created to be, people made in God's image. And our Creator is not just God the Father, author of life, but also God the Son, Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God who was there at creation. And our Creator is also the Holy Spirit, brooding over the waters as the world came into being, breathing life into Adam and Eve so that they became whole, spiritual people, not just skin and bones.

The Creator of our new selves is the Creator of all life, the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whose image we are made, and we are being renewed in knowledge in accordance with this. Alleluia!

Let us today, this week look for signs of God's work within us and among us. This renewal in knowledge may be evident

As we enjoy the beauty of the created world, all around us here in this setting. It may be as we take time in prayer and silence to deepen that relationship of love with God, being renewed in knowledge, insight, wisdom and discernment- that sense that we 'just know' what is right and true, because the Holy Spirit has shown us or spoken to us. It may be that the sense of ongoing renewal is clear as we look back over our years of faith in Christ and see how we have been guided, provided for, held in God's love.

We know, and we will say in the Creed in just a moment, that God's way of salvation was for his only Son to become a human being and live a real, physical, human life. Totally 'down to earth', Jesus shows us the image of God in humanity, as we were all created to be. In Christ, we are rescued and are being renewed, in body, mind and spirit, to live as our new selves, our best selves, both here and in the world to come when we share in the new heaven and earth with Christ our King, and when we will know fully, even as we are fully known.

Amen, may it be so, according to God's mighty power and grace.