



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# All Things New

*A Christian Worldview: Seventh of Seven in a Series*

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*And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).*

All will be well.

That’s the way the Christian story ends, and it’s the promise that sustains us along the way. All will be well in the end, because God will make all things new.

God makes each of us new as individuals, if we’re willing to let God work on us. As St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

One of the things we need most in this life is the hope that we can begin again. We need to believe that no matter what has happened in the past—whatever we’ve done that we’re ashamed of, however we’ve made a mess of things, whatever anyone else has done to us—we can start over and be made new.

There was a prayer making its way around the Internet some years ago. It said, “Dear Lord, so far today I’ve done all right. I have not gossiped, haven’t lost my temper, haven’t been greedy, grumpy, selfish or overindulgent. I’m really glad about that. But in a few minutes, God, I’m going to get out of bed, and from then on I’m going to need a lot more help.”

One reason time is divided into days and weeks and years is to give us as many chances as we need to begin again. “The sun’ll come out tomorrow,” Little Orphan Annie

sings, and that's what gives her hope. "Wait till next year!" sports fans say, and eventually their dreams come true—even for the Cubs, if not yet for the Pirates. Some of us pray every Sunday, "Lord, help me get through another week," and somehow, by the grace of God, we do.

The Bible promises, and Christian experience confirms, that behind this life there is a God who is willing and able to make us new.

I've known of a young, unmarried woman who had a child and gave him up for adoption, and carried a burden of guilt about that for 30 years. Then one day she got a phone call, and a young man's voice said, "I think you might be my mother." Now what could have been a terrible crisis became, through prayer and counseling, an occasion for redemption and renewal.

I've known more than one older man whose life was falling apart and his addiction to alcohol brought him to the edge of despair. Then he cried out to God and prayed with a pastor, and a year later, with the help of a 12-step program, he found new life and rediscovered joy, and his family began to heal again.

Time after time in church, I've seen people lay down their guilt, or give up compulsions, or heal the wounds of abuse, or find the comfort and strength they need to work through their grief. What's behind all of this is the discovery of God's grace and forgiveness, and the power of God to make all things new.

God is at work to make every one of us new, if we let God do that. And God is at work to renew the church as well.

There's been a lot of talk in recent years about the decline of the church. Many churches have lost members since the high water mark of the 1960s, and there are people who imagine that the church will die out one day if something doesn't happen to turn things around.

But the truth is that some churches are declining while others continue to grow and thrive. What's the difference? The dying churches are those that, somewhere along the way, turned into comfortable clubs of like-minded people, more concerned about meeting their own needs than reaching out to the world around them. The vital churches are the ones that look for ways to care for other people in the name of Jesus, and to be on the side of God's redemption in the world.

We live in a world that's hungry for meaning and purpose, beyond the mad, soul-killing rush of materialism. People long for genuine community as an antidote to isolation and the ugly hostility of faction and race and tribe. There's a yearning for moral integrity in this climate of cynicism and the corruption that comes from unbridled self-interest. We live in a world that's hungry for the gospel, even if the world doesn't quite know what it's hungry for. And churches that offer the Bread of Life for hungry hearts, and learn to live in love as the body of Christ, never need to worry about winding down.

It's inconceivable that a church could die if it offered people the very thing they long to find. "God was in Christ

reconciling the world to himself,” Paul says, “and now we are ambassadors for Christ, since God makes his appeal through us.” The “us” Paul has in mind is every one of us who claim to follow Jesus, every member of the Christian church.

God is at work to renew the church because the church is one of God’s instruments for making all things new. And God is also at work to renew the whole world.

We know that God is interested in other things besides religion, and Christ is bigger than Christianity. Genesis tells us God made the whole world, and Revelation promises that God will make all things new one day—a new heaven and a new earth. From the very first book of the Bible to the last, God’s concern is for every dimension of this world. As the prophet Isaiah says, God commands us “to loose the bonds of injustice ... to let the oppressed go free ... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house ....”

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Not just us. Not just people like us, but the whole world: all its people and all its structures and all its institutions. A couple hundred years ago, whole countries claimed that slavery was the natural order of things, and some even said it was God’s will. A few decades ago communism seemed firmly entrenched in Eastern Europe, and apartheid in South Africa, and lots of people thought those things might never change, and certainly not any time soon. But now we’ve all lived to see them change.

The Bible says God cares for the whole world, and God is working to redeem social evils as well as individual sins. The book of Revelation, for all its mysterious imagery, clearly says that God will not be defeated. We don't know when or how, exactly, but the same God who made the world will also redeem the world one day. In that day, God will put an end to mourning and crying and pain, for the former things will have passed away, and God will declare triumphantly, "See, I make all things new!"

I often hear people talk about their faith in humanity. Someone will do some awful thing, or the headlines will carry some horrible story, and I'll hear people say that they're losing faith in humanity. Then, conversely, somebody else will do some act of kindness or generosity, and people will say that their faith in humanity is restored.

I find all that to be rather curious from a Christian perspective. As a longtime observer of history and human nature, it seems to me that humanity is far too leaky a bucket to carry much of our faith. When I teach college students, or read some secular writers, I'm struck by the way so many of them cling to their faith in human beings, for the simple reason that they have nothing else to believe in. But we Christians put our faith not in fickle, fallen humanity but in the God who redeems humankind and who alone is powerful enough to make all things new. Can humanity save us from our sins, or make us a new creation, or bring eternal life when this life is done? Only God can do those things.

The promise of the Bible, and a foundation of our faith, is that God is working in us, and through us, and around us to make all things new. There will be all sorts of



challenges along the way, bad times as well as good times. Some days will be all sunshine, and some days will feel like darkness; and occasionally our fears and apprehensions might even eclipse our vision of God. But God is still there, just as the sun is still there when we cannot see it, and we must learn to trust the truth, especially when our vision fails and we're unable to see its light for a while.

In the meantime, we're called to be the church, ambassadors for Christ, agents of God's reconciliation. We are to share the good news that God loves every single human being, and wants him or her to become a new creation. We're to show the world that God wants to heal the wounds of injustice as surely as God heals individual hearts, and God is at work in us to do all these things. The church is to be a community that not only proclaims the word for the world to hear, but lives the word for the world to see.

And what could be better than that? I can't imagine anything more exciting, or any place more worthy of a life's dedication, than a community whose purpose is to worship and serve, and tell the world about, the God who makes all things new.



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