

McCabe United Methodist Church
Naked Gospel: New Creation (part 7)
II Corinthians 5:16-21 * John 14:15-17: February 18 & 19, 2012
Pastor Rick, Pastor

You might have heard this story before about an Army veteran named John Crabtree. It's a true story. John had been receiving benefits from the government. I guess he had been wounded in Vietnam and was on permanent disability. One day, for no apparent reason, he received an official notification from the government informing him of his own death. It's the first he had heard about it. Needless to say, this was quite a shock!

John wrote the government a letter explaining that he still alive and would like to continue receiving his benefits. The letter got lost somewhere. Surprise! He tried calling the government. Have you ever tried calling the government? That didn't work either. Finally, as a last resort, John contacted a local television station, which ran a human-interest story about his situation. During the interview, the reporter asked him, **“How do you feel about this whole ordeal?”**

John Crabtree smiled and said, **“Well, I feel a little frustrated. After all, have you ever tried to prove that you're alive?”**

This is a pretty good question for all of us. How would you prove you're alive? Would you count the number of breaths you take in a minute or how often your heart beats? Or, is there more to being alive than that?

As Christians . . . as followers of Jesus Christ . . . being alive should be easy to prove. Are we serving people? Are we helping others? Are we making a difference in our church or community? Are we in love with God and our neighbors? Our lives should show it.

This is the last message in a series Pastor Ray and I are preaching. Our series is based on Andrew Farley's book called *The Naked Gospel*. Today, we're going to get personal and take a look into your life and mine.

As Christians, we know the story about God and God's forgiveness. One day, God looked down and saw the chaos in our world. People were hurting people, people were lying and cheating each other, the hunger and violence, the greed and poverty, idols of every kind. God didn't like it . . . not one bit. And so God sent Jesus Christ into the world to do something for us that we couldn't do for ourselves. He took all of our sins and wiped them away by his death on the cross. We were forgiven. Not only forgiven, but we were given a free ticket to heaven.

This is wonderful news for us. It's no wonder it's called the *Good News*.

Sadly, for many people, the story stops right here. Jesus died. We're forgiven. End of story and it's back to life as usual. That's it! Our faith boils down to what Jesus did for us and it stops there.

But, there's more to the story. Our forgiveness is not the end. It's only the beginning. The whole point of forgiveness is that it clears the way for us to live life fully today. Right now.

And we have help. Listen again to the words of Jesus, **“for he . . . meaning the Spirit of Christ . . . lives with you and will be in you.”**

Did you hear that? Christ's Spirit lives within us. I don't know how it works, but I know we're not alone. The Spirit of Jesus lives in us and can transform us into a New Creation or New Person.

Someone once said, **“God loves us as we are, but loves us too much to leave us that way.”**

It's about transforming our lives. Jesus wants us to become a New Creation and we've been given his Spirit to help us.

Paul, in II Corinthians 3:18, put it like this: **“And all of us, are being transformed into the same image; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”**

-2 Cor 3:18 (NRSV)

The Spirit of Jesus is with us and will help us grow into the people God wants us to be.

A businessman was selling an old warehouse. The warehouse had been empty for years and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and thrown trash all over the place. One day, as he showed the property to a prospective buyer, he was careful to explain that he would replace the broken windows, fix up the outside and clean out the garbage.

"Forget about the repairs," the buyer said. **"If I buy this warehouse, I'm going to build something completely different. I've got big plans for it."**

Jesus has big plans for us. With Christ within us, he wants to make us into a new creation, but he needs our permission to get started. He's not going to start the process of rebuilding our lives without our consent. This is where we come in. It's the permission-giving part.

Paul said, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone,**

As a new creation, we take a deep look into our lives and invite Jesus to begin the transforming or changing process. We start to read the Bible. We pray. We love. We serve. We grow and grow closer and closer to the image of Jesus himself.

N.T. Wright, a New Testament scholar, once said, **“a lot of people know all about the Spirit of Christ living in them, but they don’t know why.”**

Wright goes on and answers his question by saying, **“the Holy Spirit came to empower us to be like Jesus in the world and to do the work of Jesus in the world. This is our purpose. This is what it means to live life fully.”**

It doesn’t matter how you’ve lived your life up to this point. What matters today is turning your life over to Jesus and doing your best to follow him and his ways. You have everything you need to make the transformation. Jesus is waiting to help you live your life fully.

Max Lucado tells the story about a group of people who were relaxing on a beach at a hotel in Scotland. The story takes place about a 100 years ago. They were being served tea by a waitress. One person was waving his arms in the air as he was talking and accidentally hit the serving tray the waitress was carrying. The teapot went flying and landed against a freshly painted wall. The manager of the hotel came out and surveyed the damage and said, **“The whole wall will have to be repainted.”**

“Maybe not,” a stranger said standing nearby. **“Can I try something,”** he asked the manager? The manager gave his permission.

The man took the bag he was carrying and pulled out pencils and brushes and paint. Gradually, something beautiful began to appear. It was a picture of a deer with a great rack of antlers. The man signed his name to the bottom of the picture and he left. His name was Sir Edwin Landseer. For those of you who don’t know, Landseer was a famous painter of wildlife during that time.

The point is this: with Christ’s Spirit within us, our lives can become masterpieces. He can take the broken, beat-up, and bent-out-of-shape pieces of our lives and make them into something beautiful.

Are you ready to be transformed? Are you ready to become a New Person thanks to the Spirit of Christ living in you?

Now, is the time to make your decision. Like last week, I’m going to ask Julie to play

through our last hymn. While she's playing, you are invited to come forward to stand or kneel at the altar and in your own way welcome the Spirit of Christ that already lives within you. Ask the Spirit of Christ to help you to become the New Person that's waiting to bloom and blossom in your life right now. Jesus said, if you acknowledge me before others, I'll acknowledge you before God in heaven. Come. Come forward.