

Return to Me  
Coming Together  
Fourth Sunday of Lent 2019  
March 31, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (NRSV)**

<sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;<sup>[a]</sup> even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,<sup>[b]</sup>we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,<sup>[c]</sup> not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

For some reason, as we've moved into the second half this year's Lent, it feels like we are coming off the mountain of the transfiguration with Jesus and his inner circle disciples...we're heading, quickly, to Jerusalem.

We have embarked on a "journey of the heart" where we've been challenged to be transformed and confronted with possibilities...to "return to God with all our hearts."

We've talked about God's generosity...

...about Abram's (and Sarai's) example for us to imitate, not just to follow as God leads but to be comfortable asking God our tough questions.

...and last week we talked about the urgency of "right now" being the best time to repent and come closer to God.

This week's focus is "Coming Together" which seems like a good thing after repenting, doesn't it?

After repentance, there should be repair and getting it together.

Embracing our new life as believers in Jesus Christ is what our journey is all about. But, we still have work to do before we arrive in the garden on Easter morning

where there IS the empty tomb. And as much as I said earlier that it seems like we're rolling, quickly, we shouldn't be tempted to hurry things along.

As we listened to David read today's lectionary epistle, from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we're reminded that we still need to walk slowly and with great care.

Before we can get to the new creation of Easter, we have some repair work to do within our own hearts and in our world.

Over the years, I've been blessed to lay under some beautiful quilts that both my grandmothers made. Frankly, some of the beauty of those quilts is that they had years of wear and tear – and it showed. The test of time, the tugs of snuggling in on a cold night...you know the fraying I mean?

That's what our journey this Lent has been, too.

We've travelled through God's generous and fruitful fields; trudged in the wilderness, focused in on countless stars that number descendants and the promises of God both large and small.

It's all coming together like a patchwork quilt...and the binding, if you will, is to pull the journey all together with repair; coming together as we return to God with all our hearts.

There is a particular concept that our Jewish brothers and sisters use to describe how they're called to respond to a world that feels like it's coming apart at the seams.

I don't want to mutilate the Hebrew (Tikkun O-lam; listen to youtube video) but, in the simplest of terms, it means "to repair the world."

When the fabric of culture and society is torn, Tikkun Olam - "repairing the world" doesn't just call us to get in on the mending of what is broken, but to make it better than it was before it was damaged.

I think we can all agree that our culture, our denomination, our world are ALL broken. Yes? The news and internet posts report so much damage! And when it comes to repairing the world, there aren't any easy answers.

There is, however, the difficult and time-consuming **work** of repairing through reconciliation and restoration.

Experts (like psychologists and even engineers) would tell us that to repair damaged or broken people OR structures, we have to...

...get to their basic levels,

...see what and where the problem is,

...name that problem so that we can address the root of the breakdown...

...AND THEN begin rebuilding.

And, sadly, it's not difficult for many of us to look around us, and see all the different cracks where God's Creation is out of whack!

However, AND THANKFULLY, that Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam - "repairing the world" is not about grand gestures, but small acts of kindness,

...small steps made in faith,

...small displays of love and unity.

Do you remember the story about the man who observed a woman along the shore of the ocean? I used to have a charm bracelet to help ME remember it.

He thought she was dancing but as he got closer, he saw that she was reaching down into the sand, picking up starfish and gently tossing it back into the ocean.

He asked, "Why?"

"Well, the tide is going out and if I don't throw them back into the water, they'll die," the woman replied.

With doubt in his voice, 'cause he kinda thought she was a goof-ball, he said, "You realize, don't you that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish laying all along those miles. You can't possible make a difference."

She listened politely as she bent down again and picked up another starfish and tossed into the ocean...and turned back to the man with a smile and said, "I made a difference to that one!"

See, Dear Ones, some of us think we need to make a great big splash to make a difference.

Some of us even get disappointed if we don't SEE big results from our efforts.

BUT: every day, small actions – but actions that embodies compassion and kindness DO make an impact.

It might not be gi-normous or immediate, but as we keep loving and walking in grace, our actions, yours and yours and mine all together, ADD UP!

One “starfish” event at a time, our efforts DO make a new world, a new creation - if only we take the time and have eyes to see it.

Paul urged the believing community in Corinth to expand their vision, and see that “everything has become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This kind of seeing moves beyond what our eyes too plainly see.

We humans tend to focus (and point out) on what is broken, limited, or imperfect...and not just in the world, but we point it out about each other and ourselves.

What if, in our effort to build a new and better world, - starting by *returning to God with all our hearts, WHERE A GOOD WORLD BEGAN, and in doing so WE repair the world* - what if we did that...and began to see that all the limits we put on people and things are dismantled?

In our mid-week Bible study we had a question, this week, asking us to consider how *GOD LOOKS AT AND FEELS ABOUT US*. If we thought about how God sees us, could we see ourselves differently?

What if we started to see the world and each other through the eyes of Christ? Jesus saw human difference as an opportunity to break out of the mold and expand the reign of God on earth.

Jesus *always* pulled another chair up to the table...and Jesus' table didn't have a head or foot...and all were welcome.

He saw through all the barriers and he broke the boundaries to the point where even death lost its sting.

Jesus saw through brokenness and hopelessness and poured himself out to the point where love conquered all.

What if part of our Lenten discipline involved Tikkun Olam?  
And we learned to see with grace-healed eyes?

I believe that if we learn to expand our vision OUR HEARTS will widen too!

What if we focused on the threads of creation that bind us together...then begin to rebind that patchwork “quilt” with threads that will help bring God’s New Creation?

I believe we’d be bound together more closely to one another AND to God?

In today’s Scripture reading Paul paraphrases prophecy from Isaiah. Isaiah wrote “now says the Lord”: *“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I (the Lord says) am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert”* (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Paul elaborates the theme.

The new creation **is** always and everywhere in our midst.  
It’s always being created – get this: by US, through Christ!

We’re God’s vision!

We’re the ones who are resurrected with Christ...

...the ones who, while walking in the wilderness, have found THE Living Water in the desert!

Listen, Dear Ones! It’s no longer enough to just see that a new world is possible, ‘cause we’re supposed to be the agents of Tikkun Olam – repairing.  
We’re the ones who keep working to bring God’s vision into reality.

Paul proclaims, *“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.”*  
Anyone!

Are you in Christ? You're a new creation.

Is the person sitting next to you in Christ? Another new creation.

Part of the Lenten journey is that we've got to shed some of our old ways. Obviously, we need to let go of sin – in whatever form - to make room for this whole new, resurrected life into which we have been brought to live!

Paul asks the Corinthians AND US to “be reconciled,” TO let go of our old ways of seeing.

‘Cause the patchwork IS coming apart in spots...it's threadbare in others. We can't let it become “beyond” repair!

No doubt, some people are going to resist, some of US may resist the opportunity to see a new vision, a new way of living and being, because they're content to stay put.

But the good news is that Christ keeps calling us and pulling at us, drawing us together so that all Creation might be reconciled to God.

The good news is that when we see the frayed edges with the eyes of Christ, then we're ready to start the work of bringing things together.

And remember, the world won't ever get a glimpse of God's vision unless we share it and say “this is where the world is torn...this is where love is calling us to go to bind and build.

Toss a starfish, Dear Family of Faith, and let some healing begin and let US work to live into the fullness of God's new creation– one small act at a time.

Amen!