

Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit.

Jesus really knows how to recruit! "Follow me, and you'll be hated,
and never know where you're going to sleep!
And oh, leave everything you know and everyone you love behind.
Jesus does not sugar-coat the life of discipleship.
Once again he makes clear that family, job, possessions and comfort
all come second to the vocation of being his follower, his disciple.

Jesus asks a lot of his followers. But he does not ask us to be "good people."
He just asks us to be committed. Discipleship is not a matter of following rules;
it's a matter of letting the Spirit of God really live in us, take hold in us.
Many of us like rules better – they're something we can control. That's human
nature. And when we live by our human nature, we think we're in the driver's seat.

St. Paul thought he was in control. He was a Pharisee.

He studied the law of Moses and knew it backwards and forwards.
And he tried, tried, tried to live by those laws, even persecuting Jesus' followers.
Until he met Jesus on that road. He learned what he later wrote to the Galatians,
So I say, live by the Spirit.

When we live by the Spirit of God, the Spirit in us is in charge – not controlling
us like a remote-control car, but participating with our operating system.
In fact, it's like we get a new operating system.

This is what is going to happen to Carson and Levi this morning [to Caleb last week].

It happened to all of us who have been baptized.
That little bit of water we are going to pour on them is meant to signify enough
water to drown the old, natural self – and to birth a new creation.
Carson and Levi will receive a new operating system, a new identity today –
Carson plus Christ, Levi plus Christ – and this identity is eternal.
It is unlike anyone else's identity in the universe, because they are unique.

Now, why do these little guys need a new identity? The first one, the one we're
born with, is only our identity in this lifetime, and it goes through hard times.
The new one is our self forever, and it's a product of us + Jesus = new creation.
Just as in the womb, the seed of two humans come together to form a new life,
so in this womb, tomb, this font, new life is made of two persons, you and Jesus.

What does it mean to get a new identity in Christ?

I was at my computer one day, and I did a “Save As” function.

The word “Save” jumped out at me, and I was off and running.

“Save as” is something you do when you want to make a new document from an old one – maybe a lot of the content is the same, or the formatting, and you don’t want make a new one from scratch, so you open the first document, and you “Save As.” – You have to give it a new name, because the computer won’t recognize two documents with identical names (just as in God’s kingdom we are each completely unique ...)

And you have a new document, that might look almost the same as the old one.

But it’s not the old one – it’s new, with the same history as the old,

but it can be changed, revised, reformatted. A new creation.

Now, I don’t want to suggest any likeness between God and Microsoft...

but this does sort of give a new interpretation to, “In the beginning was Word...”

Just what did that Apple do to mess it all up?

Levi and Carson are being “saved as” today –

saved as a new creation, with an eternal identity.

In fact, they’re being “saved as” saints today, someone with God’s Spirit in them.

Did you know you were made a saint at your baptism?

Did you know you can make a saint just by adding water to a regular person?

Well, not quite – we bring some faith in Jesus, and God makes the saint.

The water and the oil are just symbols we can see, of what God is doing inside us.

What God is doing is rewriting us. This new document we are, this new saint

we are, is being revised by the Author of Life himself. But we get to write too –

I guess we’re in Google Docs; we both have access. God gives us the

privilege and responsibility of adding our own stories to His story.

Just as I become the product of Kate + Jesus, we both get to add text and pictures,

thoughts and feelings. I add mistakes, regrets. Jesus adds hopes, dreams.

So... is God’s forgiveness of us is like the “delete” function?

What about people who mark themselves “Read only?,” who permit no editing?

I don’t know. Block that metaphor! What I do know is that we are documents –

or maybe websites – we get to work on our whole lives in this world,

me + Jesus, both adding to it – until gradually there’s more of both of us,

our hopes and dreams put together, than me alone.

Okay, you might be thinking, isn't it too early to revise this little document we call Levi or Carson? Why not wait till he gets full of mistakes and regrets? But the church says, "Why wait?" Why not bring them into relationship with Christ in baptism right now, and bring them up from the reality of that relationship, let them get to know Jesus as they get to know her parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and siblings and cousins.

That's why we have godparents – so these little ones get to know Jesus. And godparents, you might have to spend a little more time and space getting to know Jesus yourself! Same for parents and grandparents – it's your job to create an environment of love and truth in which your children can grow spiritually.

Last week, I mentioned "The Road Less Traveled." In that book, Scott Peck wrote that the best definition of love is "to desire the spiritual growth of another," not to see them as something to supply your needs.

That's how we are to love Levi and Carson – to want them to grow up to be men of faith and spirituality? To nurture their spirit, men who pray as they breathe. That's the gift we can give our children at baptism – and it's the job of the whole congregation, a promise we make when say "We will!"

We have all been "saved as," my friends – saved as new creations. Sometimes we don't feel "new," sometimes our old staleness is too much with us. That's because we come with a switch. We can keep reverting to the old operating system if we want to, and ignore the new power we've been given. That's what Jesus was warning his new potential disciples not to do – don't look back to your old way of dealing. *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* *"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

That's what had happened to the church in Galatia – Paul had come to them and proclaimed the good news Christ's power to set them free. And they bought it! They heard and believed, they were baptized and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit and found more meaning and purpose in their lives – and then after Paul had moved on to preach elsewhere other people came from the church in Jerusalem and said, "No, no, no, no... it isn't that easy. It's not all about grace and freedom. You have to follow the law too. In fact, you have to be circumcised and eat kosher food and every little detail of Jewish law." And following the law puts us back in control of our salvation – we're in charge, not dependent on God anymore. We can call the shots.

So they started to revert to their old operating system, Windows 7 let's say. This whole letter to the Galatians is Paul's passionate attempt to pull them back to the Good News they had so wholeheartedly embraced.

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,
and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery....
You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.*

God has given us the freedom of choice – and sometimes we use our freedom to stay stuck in old patterns, old ways of thinking and being, old ways of interacting with people. The freedom we have can leave us profoundly un-free.

But when we make the choice – daily – to invite the Spirit of Christ living in us to be our guide, to transform our ways of thinking, ways of reacting, to give us the mind of Christ – what Paul calls “keeping in step with the Spirit – look out! All these wonderful fruits come along: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Not because we earned them, but as a consequence of letting the Spirit loose in us.

Living by the Spirit doesn't come naturally to anyone. It can be cultivated and developed in us. Scientists now know that our brains are very plastic – they can change, adapt, create neural pathways where they don't exist. So can our spirits. We can develop pathways of grace and love that weren't there. We put ourselves under the discipline of following Christ, led by the Spirit, and God will transform us, equip us in any way we are lacking. And as we do that, we are enabled to love our neighbor as ourselves, And whole communities can be transformed.

But we need to say yes. And we need to be willing to walk away from our old ways of thinking and reacting, switch to God's operating system. We are new creations, my brothers and sisters, “Saved As” for a purpose, to transform a hurting world into God's Kingdom of love.

New creation means change. Don't come here wanting to stay just as you were.

Don't come here not expecting change and transformation.

The way of the Kingdom of God always means growth, and transformation, And it's always moving forward on the road, not backward.

God has new life, a new song, new hope, new freedom in store for us.

When you “save as” a new document, you get a prompt asking if you want to save the changes. We always have a choice.

Just say “Yes,” and hit “Enter.” Amen!

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:1,13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.