

“*Tikkun Olam*”

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March 31, 2019

Joshua 5:9-12

The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 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.

What if you could repair the world? What if *you* could mend the torn fabric of creation? If your actions could give hope to people around you? Could make the world a little kinder or more just? What if your words could cause people to recognize the preciousness of life, not just for themselves but for all creation?

Many of you will recall Malala who at the age of 11 began speaking in Pakistan for the right of girls and women to be educated. Closer to home, Canadian Craig Kielburger began working for the rights and freedom of child laborers after learning of the death of another 12-year-old who was martyred.¹

Repairing the world is our topic for today.

This Lenten season, we have been on a journey of the heart – embracing transformation and new possibilities. Today, the apostle Paul calls us again to proceed, but slowly and with care. We have work yet to do – in our own hearts and in the world.

Through these weeks of Lent we have counted the stars as we celebrated God’s promises. We’ve accepted God’s call to tables where all are fed and come away replete. Like threads binding together pieces of a patchwork quilt, today we begin connecting our journey with reconciliation and repair.

The Jewish people describe this concept of Repairing the World as *Tikkun Olam*. When the fabric of the world is torn, *tikkun olam* calls for us not only to mend what has been damaged but to make it better than it ever was.

Who remembers the Six Million Dollar Man? This 1970s TV show begins with astronaut Steve Austin seriously injured in a crash. During the opening credits, we hear a voice-over declare, “We can rebuild him. ... We can make him better than he was. Better, stronger, faster.”

Of course, that’s science fiction. Yet in that same period, I read about Karen Killilia who was born with cerebral palsy yet through the efforts of medical science learned to walk.

God intends for us to repair the world. This is actually God’s call on our lives, to live as if our actions can and will mend the rifts we or others have created.

There is a story that shows up in many ancient cultures. An angry God, disgusted with humanity, vows to end it all. There’s a boat and a *lot* of rain. Yet in the biblical version of the story, we find a surprise ending: “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood” (9:11). God repents – turns toward us – and God covenants, which is more than a promise, with the earth and every living thing, now and forever, to stick with us. We are, to use Paul’s words, a new creation.

Long before Jesus, God commits to accompany us through whatever good and bad may come. Commits to stand with us through any disease or disaster, every conflict or breakup that comes our way.

The fabric of the world is torn regularly, in large and small ways – from global climate change to broken relationships. One need only look around to see the countless cracks where God’s creation has gone wrong – even close to home. And while God will walk with us through all of this, God does not intend that things stay as they are. God compels us to repair the damage.

Those of you already working at this know that there are no easy fixes. Restoration is slow, hard work. Reconciling with others who don’t share our ways is tough. Where do we start?

Tikkun Olam is not about grand gestures. It’s about seemingly unimportant loving deeds and baby steps in solidarity. It’s small acts of kindness. It’s about Joe talking to Nessa from the time she was a toddler about accepting simply every person. And about Nessa living into that acceptance. It’s Agnes or Darrell always having a word of support when they see Jill. And Jill trusting through them that she can continue on. It’s about young Nathan telling a buddy how hard it was for him when he started at a new school.

It’s about every word or act each of you perform in kindness or caring or love. Letting yourself be changed by a mission trip and living differently afterward. Supporting someone so they can go. Talking quietly to a relative who just told a racist joke. Making bars for a family in grief. Pouring coffee for their friends. Extending smiles to people when they come to church or when you see them on the street. Using your day job as an opportunity to show kindness to people as you work. Listening when you’d rather talk but also talking when the Spirit says you need to.

Most of our caring or kind actions may seem to make no difference. Yet as we keep walking in God’s grace, the collective actions of all of us can make a world of difference. They begin to effect a new creation!

In our scripture lesson, Paul urges us to expand our vision. As we do this, we discover that when *anyone* is in Christ, there is a new creation. Anytime any person acts with love as their center, *everything* becomes new! Not just some things change, but everything. New.

It's easy to notice what's wrong, what needs to be fixed. We're good at finding imperfections – in ourselves and in the world. But what would happen if we set aside the limits we tend to put on people? What if we saw all human differences as possibilities? As opportunities?

This is what Jesus did. He saw past all the barriers and excuses that keep us separated from one another. He saw beyond the helplessness and the hopelessness as he poured himself out to the point that love is clearly seen in every word and action. Could it be that this is what God calls us to do? Could we learn to expand our vision so completely that our hearts also expand?

Through God's grace, yes! We can direct our attention to the threads that bind us together. Through our reconciliation efforts – with God's support – we can stitch together threads of a new creation, one that binds us ever closer to God.

Using the words from the ancient prophet Isaiah, Paul reminds us that the new creation is always in our midst – in every place and in every moment. Always being recreated. We truly are – as Paul writes and the gospel writer John later continues – co-creators with God. Creation continues through us as we live in God, through Christ.

We walk the wilderness journey, finding living water in the desert. We are resurrected with Christ. And now, saying that a new world is possible is not enough. For we are God's agents of change. We are God's workers for reconciliation. The ones to bring God's vision into reality.

We do this by showing special kindness to the woman in a hijab. We do this by letting the person of color ahead of us in line. And by supporting the ones who stand in protest at the street corner, or even joining them. We do this by praying for the people who voted differently than we had wished at last month's AC. And we do this by working to make certain that First Church doesn't simply tolerate differences in people but actively accepts and loves all persons in their difference.

This is reconciliation. And it requires us to let go of our old ways of seeing. We need to release the opinions and viewpoints that create obstacles, so that the fabric of humanity can be mended. We do this by allowing God to break us open and expose whatever keeps us captive to our old ways. By allowing ourselves to be led on a different path. This is our Lenten calling. Let God renew you. Let God work within you to effect a new creation.

God's vision of this new world becomes clearer whenever we make a concerted effort to live into it, whenever we go where love is calling us, wherever we mend or build what is in front of us.

This is the work of our lives and we do it one small act at a time.

ⁱ TheFamousPeople.com, July 17, 2017 and Wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Kielberger&ved ...