



It's a New year

THE NEW SHOFAR

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal...2 Corinthians 4:16,18

Christ always means something New in our lives - it can be scary

One of my favourite readings is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians...*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the original things have come to an end; behold, all things have become new...2 Corinthians 5:17.* The Greek is written in such a way that the emphasis remains fixed on *a new creation*. Some translations use the phrase *he is a new creation* but Paul's vision is much more extensive. Yes, in Christ we are all new creations, but we are new creations within a whole new world. In Christ, all things are transformed. Paul is tapping into the apocalyptic expectations found across Jewish thinking. A good example of this theology can be found in the work *Joseph and Asenath* written somewhere between 100 BC and 100 AD...*Behold, from this day forth you shall be renewed and refashioned and revived and you shall eat the bread of life and drink the cup of immortality, and you shall be anointed with the oil of incorruptibility.*

This, for Paul, all come about through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Nothing remains unchanged. Nothing. *All of the old things* are transformed. Take on a newness unseen prior to Jesus. And, when he was writing this letter, Paul had in mind not just the people of Corinth. He was writing to all disciples of Christ, believers from every generation and time. When we live in Christ, we are invited to view the world and everyone, everything in it with new eyes, the eyes of faith and of hope.

But God is only warming up!

Isaiah well understood how there were no limits when it comes to God and we limit God to our own peril. The Hebrew people were in exile in Babylon, separated from their beloved Jerusalem by an unpassable desert. And yet, God led them to freedom by doing the impossible. He made a pathway through the wilderness... *I 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.* Of course they are unable to "see" this way in the wilderness or find refreshment in the rivers God is causing to flow there. They are locked away in former ways of thinking and acting. Those ways were comfortable, reassuring and they could not think of doing anything else. In fact, when prophets like Jeremiah went ahead and spoke of new directions, new ways and the possibility of a new covenant they threw him into an old well and left him to die!

Apparently, the God who pushed back the waters of the Red Sea and led the Hebrew people into the Promised land could not do new things and walk in new ways.

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Is 2022 going to be 2021 all over again?

By 2021 I really mean all of the years going back over a decade or more. These have been decades that have led the church to the condition it is in at the present. We have been in decline and appear to be continuing that decline in the time we have left to us. This does not mean we have been doing “wrong” things. It just means we have perhaps not been listening to God speaking to us from within the world. This is the same God who called Israel forth out of Egypt, out of Babylon and empowered them for their new pathways. As the world changed around God’s people, so too did the content of the divine call to believers ask for new things, for new ways. The fundamental truths do not change. Cannot change. Those areas in which change is being called forth are in those means and methods we use to proclaim the Truth to the world – our ministries, our liturgies, our language, our governance, our understanding of the world of the unbelievers. Everything we do normally.

We cannot afford to have another “2021” which means we need to listen to God calling us to new things. We can respond with confidence and a daring sense of trust and hope that the God who is calling us will empower us for what lies ahead. It can be scary and worrying as few of us likes to deal with different ways and differing perspectives. We are comfortable with what was and what is. But God is reassuring us of how He wants to be doing new things in our lives, wants to give us a fresh start with a new beginning. Not for ourselves alone but for the good of others – our families, friends, neighbours and the Covid repressed world around us.

But it all starts with me – I have to take the risks

In **Galatians 5** Paul sets out the pathway for the Church in Galatia... *the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’*¹⁵ *If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.* The newness of creation that is established by Christ Jesus is this new law of love, a love defined for us by Paul as being a gift of the Spirit. We can know if we are living in the Spirit because the signs of divine activity are evident in the way we live with one another...*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,*²³ *gentleness, and self-control.*

This is the only pastoral plan we need for the renewal of our parish community. If we cannot be transformed by the Spirit to be living with each other in the way of the Spirit of God, we have no way of convincing the world of the joys of the Kingdom of God. We have the “antidote” to the woes of the Covid world, but it only works when we apply it to our own lives first of all. It is either *love* **or** *give up* on Church.

Forget new year resolutions for more is asked of us. Whatever lies ahead we can take comfort in these words from Paul...**6** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* **7** *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (**Philippians 4:6-7**). This we do together.

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