



## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation – the old creation is gone*

### **Lent 4**

#### ***What does it mean to be “in Christ”?***

Verse seventeen begins – *therefore, if anyone...* The two highlighted words are of great importance. The first one, *therefore* reminds us that what follows is being built on what has just said so far in the letter, especially in the early part of the chapter **5:14-16**. There he reminds us how all believers have died with Christ, are joined with Him on the cross.

Thus, we (believers) no longer live for ourselves. While we live in the world, our perspective on the things that are real has changed. We see the world and our place in the world differently. He says this new perspective is “spiritual”. We see all things through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus who is the Christ.

By *dying with Christ* Paul means dying to sin, to the power sin can have over us as God’s creation. We died to sin and with Christ, we rose to a whole new life. Paul puts this beautifully when he writes in Romans – we *walk in newness of life* (6:4).

#### ***Being in Christ means walking in a newness of life***

The key word here is *walking*. ***If*** we are living in Christ, we have the grace of living as Christ would live, loving as Christ loves, going about our daily activities in imitation of the way Christ would carry out the same things. These are verbal in form – participles. We cannot be *in Christ* if we are not living, witnessing to the Christ-present-in-us. Having a knowledge of these truths is not enough. Knowing the creeds, participating in the liturgical and worship life of the Church is not enough. What is essential is our “being in the world” as Christ Jesus is in the world.

This is then seen by non-believers as a new way of living, a novel world view. It is a view often at odds with what is accepted as the social norms of the time. It is a life of contrast, and therefore Christians will always face struggles and even persecution on account of their *in Christ* perspective on all things.

#### ***This is something God does within us, to us – a free gift***

Paul understood the “old creation” to be something initiated by God. Human beings had nothing to say about the act and played no part in it. God created. So too here, with this new creation, we see God at work...**John 1:13**...(children) *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*. This all takes place through faith. Through faith in Jesus as the Christ, we have the right to become children of God. God chooses us to be His children because of the faithfulness of His Son.

In chapter 3, John spoke of the need to be *born from above*. This is exactly what Paul means by living *in Christ*. We live out our lives as though we were making our plans from alongside God on His heavenly throne. We see things differently and are able to perceive worldly realities differently. Our lens is the cross of Jesus and all that means for us, for the whole of humanity.

***We are weak and fragile human beings - in all things***

Accepting our fragility is one of the hardest callings in life. We are all too easily tempted to believe we are able to manage on our own, that we are self-made men and women. We love to jump into the tasks facing us, tackle the challenges that come with being alive and living in community. We all too readily believe we will not fail, that we are able to control what comes our way and what needs to be done. We do not readily appreciate how we need God in everything, we need the gift of being able to see through the darkness of the world and perceive instead its abundant light and grace.

Unless we can acknowledge this, we have no need of God. The divine becomes a part of our lives but not its foundation, its core. Life can run with occasional contacts with the Almighty, gathering in His presence on Sundays but not speaking to Him or listening to Him on other days. That is how we miss out on this newness of life, and do not find ourselves living in God's new creation in His Son.

This is easy to work out. Ask: how many times each week do I engage in a discussion with God (prayer)? How many times do I open my Bible and listen to what God is revealing to me through its sacred words? How often do I bring my day to an end with a prayer asking forgiveness for failures, prayers offering the days labours to God for a divine blessing and pray for a safe night and the gift of a new day in which we can serve God even further? Do I pause to ask God for a blessing on the food I eat? These are all easy to carry out but are profound in their impact on us.

If we are not doing all of these, the minimal level of Christian discipleship, then we do not have that newness of life Christ promises. We are not living *in Christ* and we will struggle to find Him in the world around us.

***Hence we have the fundamental demand of Jesus: Repent! Believe!***

Today's Gospel keeps the focus on God – which is why the reading is best called the Parable of the Loving Father, rather than the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is all about God's pursuit of the sinner. There is nothing God will leave undone in His desire to have us reconciled to Himself in loving mercy.

In the Parable, the father knew the sins of his son but sin was not enough for him to cut him off from life in the family. That life remained open to him. All he needed to do was to appreciate he had failed his father. He had to repent, turn back towards his father and his family home and he would be welcomed. The invitation was there for him. Turn around and search for a way home. Do the hard yards of walking home and then face up to and accept his guilt. His loving father had been on watch for the son, going out each day in the hope of seeing him. When he did see the boy, he did not wait but pulled up his robes and ran to him. That is what God wants to do for us. The next step is ours.