
Passing from the Old to the New

A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Proper 6 – Year B

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 2
Corinthians 5:17

We are finally in the midst of summer! Summer is full of long days and recreational activities. If you look at the etymology of the word “recreation” you see that it means “re-creation.”

Yes, summer is a season of re-creation! We re-create and deepen relationships by grilling out, fishing, watching baseball games, hanging out at the pool, and best of all, spending time at the beach!

Summer is a season where we create memories. If you spent anytime procrastinating on Facebook this week, you saw a number of people in Atlanta creating (re-creating) memories at the Rolling Stones concert. All those great images people were posting remind us that summer is a time to re-create.

For me, summer is a season to play golf with my family and friends. I love the smell of the golf course in the summer time. I love the fact it is so hot I have to put on Hawaiian Tropic every three holes in order to keep from getting blistered by the sun. I even love playing golf late in the afternoon when the bugs are so bad you can hardly see to hit your tee shot.

I love nothing more than playing golf in the summer, but there is one thing that I do not love. It frustrates me and keeps me from feeling the re-creative joy of the season.

So, what is it that I do not love about golf in the summer? You are probably thinking it is the crowds that flock to the courses and slow down the pace of play. No, that’s not it!

You are probably thinking that my clubs are dated and that it is time to purchase one of those high speed Callaway or TaylorMade drivers. No, it is not the clubs; but, since I did mention a new driver, let me remind everyone that Father’s Day is just around the corner.

So, let me cut to the chase. I love playing golf, but I loathe my swing. Borrowing words from today’s epistle reading, it is time for my old swing to pass away because it is downright unreliable and scary.

Let me give you an example of why the old swing needs to pass away. Last year, I was on vacation playing golf with my father-in-law (a very good golfer), my sister (a Division I golfer), and my father (the man whose swing I inherited).

There the four of us were, at the beach, on the back nine of a great golf course, and my ball was sitting in the fairway about 180 yards from the green. I grabbed a 4 iron from my bag, set up to the ball, took a backswing and then everything started falling apart.

I made a huge swing and shanked the ball 30 yards to the left only to watch it fly directly toward (and make contact with) my father-in-law. Let me say, it is an awful feeling to hit someone with a golf ball, and it makes you sick at your stomach to watch the person you hit fall to the ground.

As I ran over to check on my father-in-law, he immediately got up off the ground. Watching him get up felt a little like Easter morning, and we all rejoiced to learn my golf ball hit him in a place where God puts a little extra padding.

Naturally, I was traumatized by the incident, but he was extremely forgiving and even made a joke or two about the Titleist logo being tattooed on his rear end.

It was no surprise that for my birthday (the next week), my wife, a woman who dearly loves her father, gave me a gift that I will never forget, a free golf lesson. When I took that golf lesson last summer it felt like a one-on-one with an Old Testament prophet. The message was clear: It was time for old to pass away...it was time for a new creation.

Well, this May when I and many other amateur golfers were making their way back to the courses for a new season, famous instructor David Ledbetter released his groundbreaking book, "The A Swing." I immediately purchased the book and was convinced it contained the blueprint for a new creation.

So, let me report what I have learned thus far: When you do something the same dysfunctional way for many years, no matter how bad you want change, no matter how great the blue print, it is not easy passing from the old to the new.

Creating a new swing meant literally changing everything; but, more than that, in order for the old to pass away and the new creation to stay, you have to visualize the swing in your mind and train your muscles to replicate the movement.

When St. Paul writes about being in Christ, about passing from the old to the new, in many ways he is asking the Christians in Corinth to learn a new swing. Paul is telling the Corinthians, a divided church in a secularized society, to internalize and embody the gospel in their lives. It has been a consistent theme throughout his writing.

In this season of weddings, we often hear a famous verse to the Corinthians where Paul describes this new way of living: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

It is no surprise that Christians throughout time have struggled moving from the old to the new. This struggle occurs because sin causes our lives to be out of sync with God.

Outside of the Bible, did you know the most widely read Christian book is a 15th century manual titled "The Imitation of Christ"?

The author, Thomas á Kempis, wrote the book to help Christians in their struggle to pass from the old to the new. Thomas á Kempis believed that new life occurs when we imitate Christ in our minds, in our hearts and in the movements of our lives...it has a way of leading us from the old to the new.

So this summer, enjoy the recreational time with your family and friends, but do not forget that this can be a season of re-creation when it comes to your relationship with God.

This summer, pray for re-creation. Pray that God will help you identify the things in your life that needs to pass away. Like today's parable of the mustard seed, pray that God opens your eyes to see that sometimes the smallest things (and changes) can lead to growth and new life.

Yes, living a Christian life can have all the frustrations and struggles of learning a new swing. However, as we see time and time again in Holy Scripture, the willingness to be open to God's grace...and the willingness to be responsive to God's grace...redeem the struggles we will face, because every day in Christ is one of new life and new creation. AMEN.