

Sermon **Inner Renewal and Outer Transformation**  
2 Corinthians 4:6-10 & 4:16 - 5:5  
St John's United Reformed Church      Easter 3 2015  
Julian Templeton

**The Apostle Paul believes that the resurrection of Jesus has changed everything.** Some of you may recall that in my sermon on Easter Day I spoke about the risen Jesus as an instance of the new creation. Jesus has made available a new kind of energy. It is God's energy, the energy of the Kingdom of Heaven and Eternal Life. It is the energy that heals, restores, liberates, reconciles. And through the Holy Spirit this energy comes to us as grace, forgiveness, generosity, confidence and peace.

It is a spiritual energy that runs in the opposite direction to another energy: the energy of sin. Paul calls sin 'the flesh', by which he means the creation that resists God. John calls sin 'the world', by which he means the people and powers and systems that oppose God. Sin is characterised by selfishness, resentment, fear, and violence: sin is a deadly energy.

The energy of God and the energy of sin are two energies running in opposite directions. In the resurrection of Jesus and sending of the Spirit God has revealed that his energy is more powerful than the energy of sin and death and will ultimately prevail. But until Jesus comes in glory God leaves all people the choice as to which energy they use. The energy of sin is readily available to any of us, including Christians. Whenever we opt for selfishness rather than generosity we draw upon what is ultimately deadly energy.

Paul writes of the divinely appointed means of renewal that helps us to resist sin's energy and instead tap into God's energy:

Wherever we go we carry in our bodies the death of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus will be revealed in our bodies.      4:10

When Paul writes of Christians carrying the death of Jesus in their bodies, he is speaking of what the Church calls **Mortification**. Mortification is putting to death that which deadens, spoils, ruins, and wrecks. Mortification is, for example, the disciplining of wayward desires and impulses that pull us this way and that and throw us off balance. Mortification is the process of recognising temptation and deliberately resisting it. Mortification is the honest reflection upon one's sins, and bringing those sins to the cross of Christ in repentance in order to 'kill' the power that sin has over us. So Paul writes:

Regard yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in union with Christ Jesus.      Rom 6:11

We are promised that when we put to death that which deadens we will come alive to that which is life giving. This is **vivification**. It is the experience of becoming more and more responsive to God and to all that is good.

Whenever we pray, whenever we forgive, whenever we say 'sorry' for hurt we have caused, whenever we dare to hope, we are responding to God's life-giving energy. Indeed, whenever we do anything in cooperation with God's grace, we are drawing upon God's life-giving energy. It is because of this

renewing energy at work in those who trust Jesus that TF Torrance states, counter-intuitively,

...the Church gets younger and younger<sup>1</sup>

He is not talking here about increasing numbers of young people or of children in the Church, he is talking about that when the renewing energy of Christ has its effect, the Church does in a sense become more vital in attitude, in thinking, and in feeling. There is a vitality that the Church has as a gift from God that makes it more alive to God and more alive to others. There is an empathy and compassion and awareness of others that Christians show which makes them much more alive than those who are self-obsessed and selfish, and such renewed attitudes are not dependent on age. Indeed, my observation is that that saints—by which I mean ordinary Christians who have over many years daily died to self and come alive to God—are often very lively in attitude and outlook. The saints often find humour in situations that seem rather depressing, situations such as illness or frailty and the limitations that illness or frailty often bring. I think that what accounts for such levity and vitality in attitude is the phenomenon of which Paul writes:

Even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside,  
the person we are on the inside is being renewed  
every day. 4:16

**Our bodies are breaking down.** As we get older, our bodies don't repair themselves as well as they used to. Bodily deterioration, the loss of physical resilience, loss of energy, and impaired memory are the common features of ageing. We should also not underestimate the effect that the loss of a

spouse or family or friends or by death can have upon one's health and wellbeing. These are the natural features of growing older because we are biological organisms with a limited life. Like everything else in our universe, our bodies eventually run down and die. Yet the Apostle Paul writes of a renewal that flows in the opposite direction to this 'running-down': **...the person we are on the inside is being renewed every day.**

The saints, ordinary Christians, learn every day to call upon God for help. And God, who is ever faithful and responsive to our requests, gives us the help we need: he gives us his grace. The grace that God gives us is Christ's resurrection energy. God's grace is the spiritual and inward strength that enables us to endure the outward deterioration that ageing brings. And God's grace does this because it flows in the opposite direction of entropy and decay. God's grace, when we open ourselves do it every day, brings the vitality of becoming more and more alive to God, of becoming more loving, more aware of others, more willing to stand up for what is right and just.

The Apostle Paul believes that the work of grace does not end with biological death. Rather, grace—which is God's perfecting work—finds its fulfilment in an ultimate act of transformation. He writes that **we who are being renewed will exchange our earthly "tent" for a 'building from God'** a 'spiritual body' that will be our permanent dwelling in eternity with God. 2 Cor 5:1-5 (1 Cor 15:44)

It is striking to imagine that the body we now have is only an *earthly tent* compared with the *building* that God will give us in eternity. Paul writes very honestly about his own feelings regarding the transition from one state to the other. He doesn't want the old body to be stripped off; he wants the

---

<sup>1</sup> TF Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 100

new body to be put on over it (5:4). Paul seems to want to avoid dying and death and go straight to the life of the age to come. In this, at least, Paul speaks for most of us who, if at all possible, would like to avoid dying and death! Yet the complete transformation for which Paul yearns cannot avoid the terminus of biological death. Although both Paul and we fear it, we have in Jesus one who has experienced the reality of death yet has been raised by God to the reality of transformed life. Jesus is both Paul's and our source of hope that biological death will not end in annihilation:

The truth is this: Christ was raised to life, the firstfruits of the harvest of the dead...as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be brought to life. I Cor. 15:20, 22

Our bodies are the God-given instruments through which we serve God and glorify God. The Apostle Paul believes that when our earthly bodies have rendered and completed their service, God will transform them into heavenly bodies through which we will glorify and enjoy God in the new heaven and new earth. None of us—not Paul, not me—can speak with any certainty about the nature of this new existence. Here we 'walk by faith, not by sight.' Yet we have indications in the Scriptures as to what this existence might be when God transforms the universe into the new heaven and new earth.

Jesus's resurrected existence was a 'spiritual materiality'. The various resurrection accounts emphasise that the risen Jesus had a body; yet that body seemed to be able to transcend some of the physical constraints imposed upon physical bodies. It was, in some sense, a spiritual or glorified body drawing upon God's new-creation energy. It raises the possibility that although all life as we know it is carbon based, the life of the New Creation may not be carbon based but spirit based.

In the *Revelation to John* we are promised that because in the New Jerusalem 'God will dwell with his people' there will be 'no more death or mourning or pain.' (Rev. 21:3-4)

Paul believes that although "...at present we see through a glass darkly, one day we shall see face to face...[and]... then we will know even as we are fully known" and that "three things last for ever: faith, hope, and love." (1 Cor. 13:12, 13)

Let us put our faith in the risen Jesus and live by his spiritual resurrection energy that comes to us as God's grace. Because it is God's grace, let us dare to hope that this energy will bear us through death to the transformed existence of the New Creation. And because God's grace is an expression of his love, let us express this energy each day in responsive love.

Thanks be to God.