

I mentioned before in this series on the promises of God that God promises us purpose in life. And God does not make empty promises! God would not give you a purpose without also giving you the support to complete that purpose. Although *humanity*, as a whole, is given an *overarching purpose* of the care of God's good creation, each of us individually have a distinct part to play in that very broad mandate. Just as God's care for us is multifaceted, so is humanity's caretaking responsibility. No single one of us, nor even *group* of us, can do it all. It takes everyone.

We look, behave, and are gifted differently because it takes a whole world of believers working together to even achieve a pale reflection of God's care as we care for this universe and all that dwells therein. And our diversity is not merely part of God's plan for our stewardship of the earth. Through accepting and embracing the diversity of humanity, we come to understand more about our Creator, for each one of us is born in the image of God. At birth, the mark of the Creator is perhaps strongest, most easily recognized, for the world's influence on our growth and development before our birth is minimal.

When we are born, we are made individual, separated from our mother. And yet, God has wisely made human infants to be dependent upon those around them. Not all species are created in this way, but humans are. We cannot survive *infancy* without care and nurture. On the flip side, *parenthood* is an experience like no other – it changes so much about *who we are* and how our lives are structured. After all, once a child is born to us the focus of God's purpose for us is shifted greatly, as we enter a new learning phase in our life. Care of creation is still our purpose, but now our gaze shifts from caring for clearly external things to caring for a child that seems more an integral part of ourselves. We are redefined, our purpose made new within. This is often a moment of great joy for us, as well as the beginning of new demands that will shape who we are, who we understand ourselves to be. Therefore, it is also the beginning of *great stress and responsibility*, as the immensity of shaping this new life sinks in. However, we are not left alone with this responsibility. God is with us. If we follow God's path, then there exists a loving community of faith-filled believers God provides to support us as we grow into our new role.

In essence, WE are made new when we become newly-made parents, whether through birth, adoption, or the fostering of a child. This is an obvious instance of being made new, one with which many of you can relate. That is why I began here, as today I wish to point out that **God has also promised to make you new**. The beginning of parenthood is a time of new purpose, a time when everything changes, and yet the goodness of the change is such that we are more willing to accept it and make adjustments to our lifestyle instead of fighting against the change, especially since we usually have a few months of anticipation in which we prepare ourselves. Even so, most new parents would tell you that they had no idea just how MUCH everything would change for them with the coming of their new child!

The beautiful change of the entry of a new child into our lives can be an apt metaphor for our rebirth. After all, when we truly accept Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives – when we set our hearts on understanding what that means for us and accept changes that need to be made in how we define ourselves and how we see the world – we are reborn, in essence made new. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus in [John 3:3, 5 & 6](#), “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above... Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God

*without being **born of water and Spirit**. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* Our rebirth is not one of the body, but of our mind and soul, so that our desires and approach to life are gradually transformed to reflect the new Spirit residing within.

You may have noticed that Jesus spoke of being born of both WATER and Spirit. Remember that John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin and herald of the Messiah’s coming, was sent to prepare the way for acceptance of Christ. He did so not only by his preaching, but through baptism – by immersion in water to symbolize one’s desire to be washed clean of all that came before and be renewed in faith and dedication to God. Jesus later commanded, in [Matthew 28:19-20](#),

“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Baptism is one of our two sacraments within the Church – the washing of water commanded by Jesus for all who would follow him. When the desire is within us, we accept Christ as our Lord, accepting the salvation that comes only through him, and are baptized in the name of our God that reflects his Triune nature. In the waters of baptism, we are reborn. But, like a tiny baby, we need the support and nurturance of those around us to help us to *grow into an understanding of the world we are born into – God’s kingdom*. This will be a struggle, but one that is well worth the effort and all that we choose to give up so that we may follow our Lord and Savior, so it is much like becoming a parent. And we are not meant to struggle alone, but Jesus included in his command to baptize that we are to *“teach [those we baptize] to obey everything [Jesus has] commanded.”* Baptism is to be followed by teaching, by rearing in the following of the Way of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are called to support one another in our learning of what it means to follow God through the teachings of Christ. It takes a community to raise a child of God, and our Father has given us one in the Church.

The creation of a new community to worship him was essential for us to have the support we need to continue to grow through life and worship once we are reborn. God, who is omniscient (all-knowing), knew that followers of Christ would eventually be sent away from the synagogue, not allowed to associate their worship of Christ as God’s Messiah and Son with the Jewish faith, although Christianity originally grew as a sect within Judaism. The prepared people of God, the Israelites, were no less God’s children than Christ’s followers, but were (and are) at a different place in their beliefs about God than we are. So, although they are our sisters and brothers, God knew we could not count on them to continue to support us as one community throughout time.

Thus, Jesus called a core set of followers, his apostles and many early disciples, who would form the foundation of the Church, the community of believers in Jesus Christ. Essentially, God created the Church so that we would have family, brothers and sisters in Christ, to help us to grow into the new heart that is born into believers by the hand of God. God makes no distinction between his children by the old covenant and the new one in Jesus Christ, for as Paul states in Galatians 6:15, *“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything!”* He loves and claims children of both covenants equally.

And God has truly made your heart new – where the heart is understood to be the center of not only emotions like love and hate, but the place where new faith is born and grows. He did this as he promised through his prophet [Ezekiel](#), recorded in [36:22-27](#):

*"²² Therefore say to the house of Israel: Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ **A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you**, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ **I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.**"*

This foretelling of the birth of a new heart and new spirit has been made possible through Jesus Christ, whom God promised his followers, saying in [Jeremiah 31:31-33](#),

"³¹ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Today we will celebrate the second of our sacraments – eating the bread of heaven and drinking the cup of Christ – which has become known to us as "Communion." This sacrament is being celebrated across the world as this is World Communion Sunday. And this sacrament provides a path of renewal in dedication to following Christ. As Paul tells believers at Ephesus in [Ephesians 4:21-24](#), *"surely you have heard about [Christ] and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, ²² to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* In the willing taking of the elements, we are not only renewed inside, mind and spirit, but are to reflect such renewal outwardly, putting on Christ – showing outwardly the change and renewal taking place within.

For as Paul said in his letter to the [Colossians](#), in [3:8-11](#), we are to *"get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from [our] mouths."* He instructs, *"⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but **Christ is all and in all!**"* In our renewal, we are made a new creation, as the Spirit of Christ dwells in us – and so we cannot help but be made aware of areas of shortcomings in our reflection of the Father. And yet, this is not cause for shame, but a reminder to seek the strength we have also been promised through the Spirit to overcome them.

And again, in [Romans 12:1-2](#), Paul appeals to his readers, calling Christians *"to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] reasonable act of worship."* He further admonishes us, *"² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and*

acceptable and perfect.” Paul does not suggest anything to followers of Christ that God has not made possible for us, as Paul knew through his own revelatory life event, his turning to God through Christ. And so, he wrote to **Titus**, saying in **3:4-5** *“when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”* Paul, after God’s revelation, submitted himself for baptism and later taught believers to take the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, we use his teaching from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as our words of institution in celebrating Communion together. Paul knew that, in our Baptism not only are we born of water and the Spirit, but we are made ready for continued renewal through Communion.

It is in our rebirth and renewal through the Sacraments that the mark of our Creator becomes more visible once again, as it was in our physical birth. We come to better reflect God’s image in adulthood only gradually, as the world’s influence upon us decreases while the influence of God – through the presence of the indwelling Spirit – increases. As we live according to our purpose, our place in God’s kingdom on earth becomes clearer. Therefore, each day we can live a more embodied discipleship, made possible by the new heart and spirit born within. We can then live the truth of **2 Corinthians 5:17**, which says, *“if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!”* Our heart and spirit within (which seek after God) are *renewed again and again throughout our earthly lives* as we join in communion with Christ through the meal he instituted, a meal that *feeds the heart and soul* as it feeds the body. And in this meal, our communion with one another across the world is also made possible. As we partake of the elements, of the bread and *fruit of the vine* that make up only the physical substance of the meal, we are also filled with and renewed by the Spirit of Christ. This experience is shared together with all our brothers and sisters across time and space as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper on this World Communion Sunday.

So, as we partake of this meal, may you become newly aware not only of Christ’s presence through the Spirit, but of the body to which we are joined within our Savior. This body was created to support us in serving our purpose of enacting the will of God here on earth, not just to proclaim God’s message, baptizing new believers in the name of our Triune God. The Church, the body of Christ, was created so that all people could be raised within a loving community as children of the Living God, throughout their lifetime. And the sacraments of Baptism and the *Eucharist* (the act of *true thanksgiving*) are gifts God has given for the support of his new people, his children of the new covenant in Christ.

May you feel the support of God through Christ, through his body, the Church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as you grow into your new heart and spirit in this life and beyond. Amen.