

“Fixer Upper”

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 1, 2017

It seems to me that there’s something inside most of us that just loves a story of transformation. The “ugly duckling” becomes a beautiful swan. Cinderella becomes the belle of the ball. Many of you, I’m sure, are familiar with the popular HGTV show *Fixer Upper*. The show is about a couple in Waco, Chip and Joanna Gaines, who renovate and decorate houses for other people. If you’ve watched the show you know that many of the houses they end up renovating need lots of work. Some of the houses are simply out of date, but some of them have been treated poorly over the years. You can’t help but shake your head and say, “what were they thinking?” And then some of the houses have been neglected or even abandoned. Left to themselves without someone to maintain them, the houses are literally falling apart.

But then the Gaines arrive and begin their work. They repair the structure making it safe. They often move walls to make the home more functional. They make the home beautiful inside and out. Our lives are a bit like an old house. Some of us are out of date. Some of us have seen hard times. Left to ourselves we’re all falling apart. What we want more than anything is to be restored. *We* want to be fixed up, put back together, and made new. Maybe that’s why we make New Year’s resolutions every year. We resolve that we’re going to lose weight or start exercising or get organized or go to church every Sunday. Congratulations on keeping one of them all year so far.

But you know, we’re more like an old house than we realize. Many of the houses the Gaines renovate look just fine. But when they begin the work they discover problems hidden behind the walls or beneath the floor. One of the things we forget when we watch *Fixer Upper* is that none of the houses fix themselves. Like an old house, you and I are not able to fix what’s really wrong with us. We can’t fix our broken relationship with God.

The good news – and by the way, the word “gospel” means good news – the good news is that in Christ, God does for us what we can’t do for ourselves. Listen again to verse 17: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come.” In other words, if you are “in Christ,” which means that you trust in him as your Lord and Savior, then you are restored to what God planned. You are a new creation. Notice that it doesn’t say that you *might* be a new creation. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Jesus fixes what’s wrong with us – the stuff we can see and the stuff we try to keep hidden. Where there death now there’s life. Where there was judgment now there’s forgiveness. Where we were outside the Body of Christ, the Church, now we are inside. That’s the message of baptism which we celebrated a few minutes ago.

Baptism points to the reality that the old has passed away. It is a way for us as a church to declare that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Baptism is a visible sign that we are united with Christ. That means we get the benefits of being united with him. Verse 21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Baptism, then, is a bold statement that God has a claim on our life, that He expects certain things from us. As Paul says in verse 14, “the love of Christ *controls* us.”

The claim that God has on our lives is found in verse 15: “Christ died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Then in verses 18 and 19, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and *entrusting to us* the message of reconciliation.”

Notice all the plural pronouns in that passage. When Paul says “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” one of his main points is that our old individualistic, self-centered self has been replaced with a self-sacrificing, Christ-centered self that is part of a much larger whole. Baptism is not only a sign of God’s claim on our life, it’s a sign that we are part of the Body of Christ, which is the church.

That’s because he’s given us a job to do. In Reformed theology we say that God has elected us for service as well as salvation. In other words, God has chosen and redeemed us for a purpose. In verse 20 Paul says, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” Now that we are “restored” we are the representatives of Jesus here on earth. God has given us a message that He wants the world to hear, a message of reconciliation, and the best way to share that message is to demonstrate it. That’s how God has designed the church to work. It’s not about the bricks or the stained glass or the programs. The church is the place where people who have God’s message of reconciliation get together and help each other to live it and learn to share it.

One last thing about baptism. Because we understand that baptism is a visible sign of something that God is doing, we are only baptized once. We are confessing that we believe God is powerful enough that whenever in our life we were baptized that God’s work is effective forever. But we also believe that baptism takes place here in the community of believers where we make promises to care for one another. Every baptism is an opportunity for you and I to remember the promises God makes to us in baptism, the promise that we are His.

So today, and in the next few days, let me encourage you to reflect on what baptism means in your life. Every day think of ways to give up living for yourself and instead live for Christ, who for your sake died and was raised. Remember that you are an ambassador for Christ. As a follower of Jesus, people will view your words and your actions as being the words and actions of Christ. Most of all, let the love of Christ control you.

Amen.