

Text: Ephesians 4:17-24

Title: “Walking as New Humans... or at Least In Process...”

(Series: Navigating an Alternative Reading of Reality)

Over the past weeks, as I have grappled with the text in preparation to preach it, I have felt how offensive it can feel to a savvy, sophisticated city like Vancouver. Then we experienced what we did Wednesday night.

This is a dense text. It does not flow as easily as other texts in Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

So, before diving in, let me lift up what I think is Paul’s major burden. The Apostle of Jesus Christ is wanting us to walk as new humans. He wants us to live as the new humans we are becoming in relationship with Jesus Christ, the One True Human. “Lay aside the old... put on the new.”

In this dense text, Paul is continuing the exhortation he began at the turning point in his letter, at the half-way mark, at chapter 4, verse 1: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” “Worthy.” Not in the sense of “measuring up”; but in the sense of “fitting in.” Paul is calling us to live in a way that is congruent with, that is suitable to, the alternative reality brought into being through life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

“So this I say.” It is literally, “This say therefore.” The second “therefore” is a series of “therefores” in the second half of his letter. “And affirm together with the Lord.” Not just giving us his own personal advice, but speaking with the authority of the Lord Himself. “This I say therefore...that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk...”

Why put it that way? The letter is written to Gentiles: Chapter 2, verse 11 – “Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh...” Why then say, “Walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk?” Because here Paul is using the word “Gentiles” not to refer to non-Jews, but to all people who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ. “Gentiles” here mean those not yet brought into the alternative reality shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ; those not yet grabbed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. “Walk no longer as those not yet walking in the new reality centered in and filled with Jesus Christ.” Rather walk in the new reality as new humans alive in the new reality.

Imagine a room. A restaurant. An office. A library. This sanctuary. When you move into a room you soon discover that there is a way of living, a way of being, inherent to the room. What you cannot experience in other rooms you can in this room. And what you did in other rooms you cannot do in this room. It would be hard to play a round of golf in this room, in this sanctuary. You could get hurt trying to play tennis. It would be out of place... “unworthy” ... to throw frisbees. This room, this sanctuary, calls for different behaviors, because it evokes different attitudes, because it invites us into a different reality.

Or imagine moving into a new home, as Sharon and I have recently done. One has to learn a new way of living. Oh, we bring with us the same fundamental values which shaped our living in our old home. But in the new home things are arranged differently. In our case, since we downsized by 50%, we have gotten rid of a lot of things we once thought we needed. The new home is calling for some new, different values. We are learning to live in a way that is congruent with the new space into which the Lord has called us.

Or imagine moving into a new city, as many in this room have done, some willingly, some reluctantly. Every city has a particular “ethos”. No two cities are exactly alike. Every city takes on its own unique “personality.” And, for the most part, most people in a city live “worthy” of the city; they “fit into” the “ethos” of the city. Which is why most Vancouverites find what happened in our city last Wednesday so disgusting, so repugnant. Which is why we want to tell the rest of the world: “What you saw on TV and Youtube is not the real Vancouver.” We do not celebrate violence here. At least, not gratuitous violence. We are not anarchists here. Oh sure, some of our citizens fail to pay taxes. And many people downtown cross the streets after the red hand starts blinking. And many have illegal grow-ops. But we are not a bunch of violent anarchists. The behavior we witnessed last Wednesday night is not “worthy” of Vancouver; it does not fit the reality we call “Vancouver.”

Or imagine moving to a new country, with a whole new culture. As Sharon and I did, when we lived in Manila, the Philippines. In order to function in a new culture, one is forced to learn to live in all kinds of different ways! In Manila, different ways of relating: not confronting a person directly, but going through a third party. Not touching your face while speaking to another; it suggests you are hiding something. In Manila, learning to walk different – literally so. Those who have taken a walk with me know that I walk fast; I just keep moving. Not in Manila! If I walk in Manila the way I walk in Vancouver, I would be soaking with sweat within the first block! In Manila one has to learn – in order to survive – “the Manila stride”: slow, smooth, easy steps; graciously moving through the humidity.

Living in a different country, in a different “reality,” requires a different mind-set, assuming different values and behaviors.

And that is what Paul is getting at in this dense text before us today.

His letter is written in two halves. Chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. In chapter 1-3 Paul opens up for us the new room, the new home, the new city, the new country, brought into being by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. A new reality invading all other realities. A new reality encompassing all other realities. A new room encompassing all other rooms. A new society encompassing and transforming all other societies.

Then in chapters 4-6... through many exhortations... Paul helps us navigate the new reality. We miss Paul’s intention if we turn his many exhortations in chapter 4-6 into new rules and regulations by which we must now abide. We miss the point if we read Paul’s exhortations in chapters 4-6 in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust. Through his many exhortations he is simply describing the way of being inherent to the new reality.

“Therefore walk.” Walk worthy. Again, not a matter of measuring up, but a matter of fitting in.

“Therefore walk in unity.” One Body, one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all. And “walk toward maturity.” In this new reality Jesus is giving gifts to the one Body, to His people, to make it possible to live in the unity of the Trinity, and to help us grow up into Jesus Christ. Especially to grow up into His knowledge and His faith. To grow up to know as He knows, and believe as He believes.

And then... “walk no longer as the Gentiles do...” Leave behind the way of life you knew before you came to know Jesus Christ. And learn to live the new way inherent to the room, the house, the city, the culture, the world where Jesus Christ is Head.

Notice the phrase right in the middle of the dense text: “learn Christ.” It is the key to living in the reality encompassing all reality. Ephesians 4, verse 20: “But you did not learn Christ in this way.” At the center of the reality encompassing all reality is Christ. And we live in this reality encompassing all reality by “learning Christ.”

Where did Paul get this phrase? From Jesus Himself! “Come to me,” He says, “all who are weary and have over-burdened yourselves, and I will rest you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...” The key to living congruent with the new reality shaped by and centered in Christ is to “learn Christ.”

An interesting way to put it, is it not? “Learn Christ.” We speak of “learning piano,” or “learning physics,” or “learning hockey.” But “learn a person”? Would anyone ever say “learn Roberto Luongo,” or “learn Tim Thomas”? Well, as a matter of fact, yes. “Learn *from* Tim Thomas.” But more, “*learn* Tim Thomas.” If you want to be a good goalie, “learn from Tim Thomas”; but better yet, “learn Tim Thomas.” Learn why he is able to keep his eye on the puck the way he does. Learn how he can adjust his body in so many different ways to stop the puck. If you will, “get *inside* Tim Thomas and learn what makes him tick.”

“Learn Christ.” Get close to Christ. Get inside Christ. Learn what makes Christ tick.

Thus Paul can say, “You heard Him,” – verse 21. Not just “heard of Him”; but you *heard* Him. You got close enough to Him to *hear* Him, to hear Him open His heart and mind to you. “You were taught in Him”, says Paul – verse 21. In relationship with Him you were taught. By Christ! Through those gifted to teach Him. Through His words recorded for us in the Gospels.

“Just as the truth is in Jesus,” says Paul – again, verse 21. The Truth. The word Paul uses means more than true as over against false. The word means genuine, authentic, “the real deal.” In Jesus we discover the genuine, the authentic, the real deal.

“Learn Christ.” He knows what makes creation tick. He knows what makes the world tick; what makes chemistry tick, what makes economies tick, what makes super conductors tick. He knows what makes humanity tick: psychologically, intellectually, sexually. And he knows what makes *God* tick!! Learn Him. The truth about everything and everyone *is in Him!*

Then in this dense text, Paul summarizes what he assumes the Ephesians learned as they learned Christ. Verse 22: "... that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self (literally "the old man", "the old human"), which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self (literally "the new man", "the new human"), which in the likeness of god has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." When we learn Jesus Christ we are taught to "lay aside", "be renewed", and "put on." He teaches us to lay aside the old human we were before we met Him. He teaches us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, so we operated from a very different mind-set. And He teaches us to put on the new human we are coming since meeting Him, the new human who like its Creator is holy and who knows how to make relationships work.

Lay aside the old, put in the new. If you will, change clothes. Makes sense, does it not? Different "spaces" – rooms, cities, cultures – call for different sets of clothing. We have been called into a new world encompassing all other worlds. Lay aside the old human you were, put on the new human you are becoming. Paul also speaks this way in his letter to the Colossians (3:8, 9, 12). And in his letter to the Romans: "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (13:11-14a). When we "learn Christ" we learn to lay aside all that is not in sync with Him and His desires; and we learn to put on all that *is* in sync with Him and His agenda for the world. We have been called into a new reality. It only makes sense that we change clothes. It only makes sense that we *want* to change clothes.

Now, here is the major emphasis of Paul's dense text. It all happens through the renewing of our minds. "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Notice in verse 22 that between the "lay aside the old human" and the "put on the new human" there is the "be renewed by the spirit of your mind." The changing of clothes happens through the renewing of the spirit of our minds. I think Paul's phrase, "the spirit of your mind," means "what makes your mind tick." Be renewed in Christ makes your mind tick. "Learn Christ" so that your mind ticks as His mind ticks.

"Be renewed." Present tense. Emphasizing continuous action. "Be continuously renewed." Why? Because there is a lot of renewing that needs to take place!

"Walk no longer as Gentiles do in the futility of their minds." Walk no longer as the old humanity does in the futility of the mind.

It is what we are up against as we seek to "lay aside" the old and "put on" the new. The futility of the mind. It is what we are up against as we seek to live as new humans in the new reality shaped by the Gospel. The futility of the mind.

What is Paul getting at? What does he want us to know? Or, more precisely, what is it that he believes Jesus teaches us? "The truth is in Jesus." What truth is Jesus wanting us to know as we seek to live as new humans?

He wants us to realize that the Fall has affected our minds. When the first humans, Adam and Eve, chose to go it alone, without God; when they chose to disobey God's one command to not try to be their own god, their disobedience affected the human mind. Clearly the Fall affects our bodies: we all die. And clearly the Fall affects the created order: it all decays. And clearly the Fall affects our relationships: we all experience some sort of alienation. What Paul wants us to realize; what He believes Jesus teaches us when we "learn Christ," is that the Fall also affects our brains. Our brains are not able to function as they were intended to function. "The futility of the mind."

Paul is not saying that the mind of the old humanity is dumb. Hardly! Look at what our minds can do!! By "futility of mind" Paul is meaning that the old-humanity-mind cannot by itself, on its own, arrive at the truth, at the genuine, at the authentic, at the "real deal."

Why? Because the old-humanity-mind begins its reasoning process from un-truth. The old humanity mind begins with the un-truth that there is no God. Or if the mind believes there is a God, it begins with its own imaging of God; which because the mind is finite will never correctly image the infinite God.

If we start with a faulty presupposition, our reasoning – however otherwise brilliant – will slowly, but surely, move from faulty along a trajectory toward futility. So Eugene Peterson in "The Message" paraphrases Paul in this way: "They have refused for so long to deal with God that they have lost touch not only with God but with reality itself."

I know that what Paul is telling us is offensive to the modern and postmodern mind. But then there is last Wednesday night.

Paul lays out the trajectory of futility. The downward spiral.

- "Being darkened in their understanding," says Paul. A frightening fact about the mind: exclude from our thinking the light of the world and our thinking can go dark; we no longer see clearly.
- "Excluded from the life of God..." says Paul. Leave the Living God out of the picture and we end up out of touch with life itself, grasping at anything that promises life.
- "Because of the ignorance that is in them," says Paul. Again, not meaning that our old humanity is stupid. It is just that when we leave a crucial factor out of the equation, how can we ever expect to understand ourselves and the world?
- "Because of the hardness of their hearts," says Paul. The willful choice is to ignore the heart of reality turns the heart hard to reality.
- "Becoming callous," says Paul, numb to Holy Reality.
- "Giving themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness," says Paul. As J.B. Phillips paraphrases Paul: "They have stuffed their consciences and then surrendered themselves to sensuality, practicing any form of impurity which lust can suggest."

The trajectory leading to the awful fact of life: "being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit," says Paul. "The lusts of deceit." Desires born out of un-truth, fueled by the deceiver himself, the father of lies.

Lay it all aside, says Paul. Jesus teaches us to lay it all aside. Un-truth, deceit, awakening desires that only lead to degradation and violence, lay it aside. Un-truth made appealing by the promises of pleasure “the spirits” of the fallen world make, leading to destructive behavior (paraphrasing Frank Thielman, 305).

Walk no longer as the old-humanity-mind does “in the futility of the mind.” Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

“Be renewed.” Passive. Meaning we cannot renew the mind!! The futile mind cannot renew itself. It has to be renewed from outside itself.

Which is what Jesus Christ the truth comes to do!!! He enters into our world ruined by the choices of the futility of the mind. And He heals the human mind. He takes hold of our minds, and rewires them, helping us think clearly.

Only He can heal the mind. Because only He really knows what makes us tick. Only He can straighten out all the twisted thinking. “The truth is in Jesus,” says Paul. The truth is Jesus. A He says, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” He takes us into the furnace of His holy truth, His holy love, and melts our hardened hearts, and remakes our minds to tick as His mind ticks. And we change clothes. And we begin to walk as new humans, becoming more and more like the only True Human who ever lived.

As I have worked through the apostle Paul’s dense text the past days, a story in *The Chronicles of Narnia* kept coming to mind. Narnia is another world, created out of the “being-renewed mind” of C.S. Lewis. In many ways, Narnia feels more real than the reality we think we know with our eyes and ears and hands. The lead character in *The Chronicles* is a lion, named Aslan. He is the Christ-figure of the stories. It is hard not to fall in love with Aslan!

The story that kept coming to mind is about Eustace Clarence Scrubb; a precocious and obnoxious young boy, who other children in the story, like Lucy and Edmund, find quite irritating. In fact, in the first line of the book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, is this: “There was boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb – and he almost deserved it.”

Eustace wanders off by himself, and stumbles upon a dragon’s cave. The cave is filled with piles of golden treasure. Lust is awakened, and he covers himself with gold jewelry. After some time he falls asleep on a pile of gold, with a gold bracelet on his arm. When he wakes up, he discovers to his horror that he has become a dragon! We become like that after which we lust.

One week later, he meets Edmund. We pick up the story as Eustace is sharing his “bestly” experience (pages 87-91):

“I won’t tell you how I became a – a dragon till I can tell the others and get it all over,” said Eustace. “By the way, I didn’t even know it *was* a dragon till I heard you all using the word when I turned up here the other morning. I want to tell you how I stopped being one.”

“Fire ahead,” said Edmund.

“Well, last night I was more miserable than ever. And that beastly arm-
ring was hurting like anything –“

“Is that all right now?”

Eustace laughed – a different laugh from any Edmund had heard him give before – and slipped the bracelet easily off his arm. “There it is,” he said, “and anyone who likes can have it as far as I’m concerned. Well, as I say, I was lying awake and wondering what on earth would become of me. And then – but, mind you, it may have been all a dream. I don’t know.”

“Go on,” said Edmund, with considerable patience.

“Well, anyway, I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly towards me. And one queer thing was that there was no moon last night, but there was moonlight where the lion was. So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn’t that kind of fear. I wasn’t afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of it – if you can understand. Well, it came closer up to me and looked straight into my eye. And I shut my eyes tight. But that wasn’t any good because it told me to follow it.”

“You mean it spoke?”

“I don’t know. Now that you mention it, I don’t think it did. But it told me all the same. And I knew I’d have to do what it told me, so I got up and followed it. And it led me a long way into the mountains. And there was always this moonlight over and round the lion wherever we went. So at last we came to the top of a mountain I’d never seen before and on the top of this mountain I’d never seen before and on the top of this mountain there was a garden – trees and fruit and everything. In the middle of it there was a well.

“I knew it was a well because you could see the water bubbling up from the bottom of it: but it was a lot bigger than most wells – like a very big, round bath with marble steps going down into it. The water was as clear as anything and I thought if I could get in there and bathe it would ease the pain in my leg. But the lion told me I must undress first. Mind you, I don’t know if he said any words out loud or not.

“I was just going to say that I couldn’t undress because I hadn’t any clothes on when I suddenly thought that dragons are snaky sort of things and snakes can cast their skins. Oh, of course, thought I, that’s what the lion means. So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper, and instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana. In a minute or two I just stepped out of it. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bathe.

“Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water I knew it had been no good.

“Then the lion said – but I don’t know if it spoke – You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty near desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

“The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know – if you’ve ever picked the scab of a sore place. It hurts like billy-oh but it *is* such fun to see it coming away,”

“I know exactly what you mean,” said Edmund.

“Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off – just as I thought I’d don it myself the other three times, only they hadn’t hurt – and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly looking than the others had been. And there I was as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me – I didn’t like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I’d no skin on – and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw way. I’d turned into a boy again. You’d think me simply phoney if I told you how I felt about my own arms. I know they’ve no muscle and are pretty mouldy compared with Caspian’s, but I was glad to see them.

“After a bit the lion took me out and dressed me –“

“Dressed you. With his paws?”

“Well, I don’t exactly remember that bit. But he did somehow or other: in new clothe – the same I’ve got on now, as a matter of fact. And then suddenly I was back here. Which is what makes me think it must have been a dream.”

“No. It wasn’t a dream,” said Edmund.

“Why not?”

“Well, there are the clothes, for one thing. And you have been – well, undragoned for another.”

“What do you think it was, then?” asked Eustace.

“I think you’ve seen Aslan,” said Edmund.

You have seen Jesus Christ. You have heard Jesus Christ. You have “learned” Jesus Christ. He is renewing your mind. Freeing you to lay aside the old human, and put on the new.

A few pages later, Lewis writes:

It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.