

Our Old Testament reading<sup>1</sup> this morning kicked off the idea that God is in the business of making things new.

In our New Testament lesson<sup>2</sup>, Paul carries that theme forward.

The image that Paul uses for embracing this “newness” is to put on a “new” garment.

What is interesting is that Paul’s idea of something new is not to buy a brand new item of clothing, but rather to put on a garment that hasn’t been worn for a while.

We are being invited to go into our closets and dust off the one garment that has been designed just for us, but that we discarded along the way, in favor something else.

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So, what is this one special garment?

I would suggest that this garment is our deepest identity and our truest self..

Paul tells that our identity comes from the God who lovingly created each one of us.

We are God’s beloved children.

We find our identity in the God who knows us by name, and who faithfully loves us regardless of our imperfections.

God created us for life together with God, rooted in Christ and lived out in the Spirit.

Our identity is in God. It is our true self.

I remember a time of storms in my own life when nothing seemed to be going well. Everything seemed to be crumbling. I didn’t seem to be managing any very successfully. But in the middle of the storm, I found my footing . . . I found it when I remembered that I am God’s child. It was an anchor to me. If everything else fell away, I would still belong to God. My renewed identity in God was my safe place in the storm.

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So, if there is such a thing as a true self, then what is meant by our false selves?

We come into the world as our true selves.

But we quickly learn that it is hard to stay that way.

You see, we get bumped and bruised, and even beaten up by our broken world and the imperfect people in it. The song of our culture can drown out the divine melody of our belovedness to God.

Instead of messages that speak to our divine value, we receive messages that say we are not valuable unless we prove our worth, that we are not enough, and that we are defined by what we do, what we have, and what others think of us

These messages can be delivered subtly or brutally.

These messages can be transmitted by billboards or by those we love.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 43:18-21

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:17-19 (The Message); 20-32 (NRSVUE)

Messages like . . . we are not attractive enough, we are not smart enough, we are not successful enough, we are not good enough, we are not tough enough, and the list could go on.

These messages of our deficiencies come in different forms . . . being the last one picked on a team, watching a teacher favor another student, vying for some attention from our parents when they are exhausted with nothing to give, when we hear that others are invited and we aren’t, when abuse or addiction are experienced up close, when an A-minus is a bad grade, when no one has time to hear that we are feeling alone or afraid or rejected, and again, the list can go on.

Over time, the wounds begin to accumulate along with the shame and the lies that we are not enough.

So, what do most of us do in the face of this messaging?

Most of us try to protect ourselves from more wounds.

The protective system that we deploy is called the false self.

It is called false because it replaces what is true.

Paul Ramsey described the false self as an “anxious self-centeredness”<sup>3</sup> that “flows from our anxiety about not having enough or not being good enough”<sup>4</sup> or being worried about what other people say and think about us.

The false self initiates a new operating system of self-protection and self-promotion.

Under the false self, we work hard to be perfect so we can’t be criticized.

We work hard to achieve so we have value.

We work hard to control things so we are not at the whims of others.

We work hard to hide what seems unattractive to others so we won’t be shamed.

We work hard to hide any weaknesses so we won’t be vulnerable to others.

In order to manage this new way of living, the false self pushes God from the center of the universe and “make[s] ourselves, in a thousand different ways, the center of the universe.”<sup>5</sup>

We try to become God and we turn in on ourselves.

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“Everyone struggles with the tension between the two selves.”<sup>6</sup>

The false self is so seamless with our culture that it is hard to even recognize it.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Anderson, “An Old and Surprisingly Helpful Definition of Sin,”

<https://www.spiritualityhealth.com/articles/2020/09/17/an-old-and-surprisingly-helpful-definition-of-sin>

<sup>5</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Things Unseen Podcast*, “Turned In on Ourselves,”

<https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/turned-in-on-ourselves>

<sup>6</sup> Alice Fryling, *The Disciplemaker*, “The False Self and the True Self,”

<https://www.navpress.com/sites/thedisciplemaker/2021/11/the-false-self-and-the-true-self/>

“Rooted in Christ: God’s New Way - Letting Go of the Old”

Mary Henderson Bowman

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Psychologist David Benner writes that “the false self is like the air we breathe. We have become so accustomed to its presence that we are no longer aware of it.”<sup>7</sup>

At some point in time, we begin to see the false self or perhaps we feel it, The false self is a demanding task master and exacts a price for its operating system. It can feel like a prison or a hamster wheel that we do not know how to get off. It can feel like a desert of pressure, separation, and distrust.

So how do we notice the false self?

We notice it when we get defensive, prickly, or judgmental. These are signs that the false self feels under attack.

We notice it in our compulsions. Our compulsions tell us what we value most, what matters most

So what do we do when we notice and would like to be renewed?

We turn to God who is in the business of making things new.

We turn to God who loves us beyond our imaginings — even when we have operated out of our false selves and tried to usurp God’s role in our lives.

Just like the Old Testament reading, we ask God to make a new road in the desert that the false self has created of separateness, of falsity, and of distrust.

When we make a commitment of letting go of something old and reaching for something new . . . we are inherently choosing transformation.

We commit to spending time with God in the transformation.

We chose the garment we were given long ago by the One who wants our best.

As our first music reminds us, we trust that “we are safe in God’s hands, as all creation is made new.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ask quoted by Alice Fryling, *The Disciplemaker*, “The False Self and the True Self,”

<https://www.navpress.com/sites/thedisciplemaker/2021/11/the-false-self-and-the-true-self/>

<sup>8</sup>“ O God, You Search Me” | Bernadette Farrell