

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**September 7 & 8, 2013**  
**John Crosby**  
**REVIVE: Everything Changes**  
**John 9**

We had a great summer going through the Proverbs, asking how can we live life *other wise*? How can we be wise in a way that's different from what we learned in school? But now it's school time again, and we want to focus on something that will carry us through the whole autumn. The idea that came to me last spring was that frequently we need to be renewed. We need to be made over, renovated, because we get stuck somewhere. The world keeps going and we try harder but we're stuck, and so the word *renew* came to me. Then I thought, well, what does that mean?

Here among us, I think to be renewed means to be **revived**, to be made alive again in Christ. And then when you are revived, you **regroup**. You gather around with others who share what you are learning in life. That's where we are going to be for three weeks. We are going to talk about life as a community as we regroup. Then I believe we are renewed when we actually do something, when we **regenerate**. We become different people out there because of what happens in here. We gain new meaning in our lives. By then it will be Thanksgiving, and we get to Advent. I would like to prepare for Christmas this year by talking about how we can **rejoice**. Revive, regroup, regenerate, and rejoice, no matter what the circumstances are.

It all starts with this idea that somehow the Jesus story you have heard for fifty years can be made new. It can come alive in your hearts maybe in the same way that you get unstuck. When I was thinking about renew, I was also thinking about renovate or makeover or restore, and images came to my mind of what that process might look like. There are a couple of examples that are going to go up on the screen behind us. *[Video shown.]* This is what renovation looks like. Sometimes it happens in human beings and is dramatic. Other times, renovation or a makeover refers to an old house that is so done over, it is almost torn down and started over again. You can hardly recognize what was there before from what is there now. It was renewed, made new. Or sometimes we see somebody and we go, "Is that who I think it is?" And it is but it's not. They've been made over in dramatic, dramatic ways. Isn't that wild what can happen?

What words came to your mind when you saw the video about what renewal looks like? What are the values behind what they are saying about renewal? Somebody just shout one out. Vanity. What else? Fresh. What else? Younger. Okay. I'm seeing a trend here. What about the process? Slow or fast? Fast. Good. What else? Hard or easy? Hard *and* easy for some. What else? Is it simple or complicated? Complicated. Absolutely. Is it meager or is the end result impressive? Impressive, almost hard to believe. That's what the world teaches us about makeovers, about being renewed. That's what you're supposed to feel like. "I have to

experience that. God knows I need it, but can I do that?"

I guess I want to start with the idea that being renewed is different from that. That is a makeover. Those are changes on the outside. What God has in mind is something different, something better and much, much deeper. Instead of changing from the outside, God wants to work from the inside out and revive the heart, bring back life to the heart. Jody Phenow did a fabulous job retelling the story that we find in John 9 of revival, renewal or makeover. She gave you the G version, appropriate for kids, but there is more. Listen to this story about Jesus.

**1** As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

In their world, when something was wrong, somebody did something wrong.

**3** "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming . . . .

the battle between dark and light. Night is coming

when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." **6** Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **7** "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

That's what we read. But there's more to it.

**8** His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" **9** Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." **10** "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked. **11** He replied, "The man they call Jesus . . . .

Remember, the formerly blind man hasn't seen Him.

"The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." **12** "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. **13** They brought to the Pharisees . . . .

to the church

. . . the man who had been blind. **14** Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. **15** Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." **16** Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. **17** Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." **18** They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's

parents. **19** "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" **20** "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. **21** But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." **22** His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23** That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

His parents said this because they were afraid. They were more afraid of the Jewish leaders than they were in love with what happened to their son because the leaders had already said that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

**24** A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God and tell the truth," they said.

Later Jesus is going to say, "I am the way and the truth and the life." The Pharisees said to the man who had been blind,

"We know this man is a sinner." **25** He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" **26** Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

"I went and washed my face and now I can see."

**27** He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" **28** Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple!

Everybody has to make a pick in the end. Everybody follows somebody. Everybody is a disciple of somebody. The Pharisees said,

We are disciples of Moses! **29** We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." **30** The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. **32** Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." **34** To this they replied, . . . .

and this is where your Bible wimps out. It says,

"You were steeped in sin at birth; . . . .

Back to, it must be somebody's fault. What they are really saying is, "You are a bastard. You were born in sin. You were born in evil. That's why you were blind."

. . . how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. **35** Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, . . . .

Jesus searches for people that nobody else sees. Jesus found him and

he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" **36** "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

For the first time, you see. "That's purple." That's what they are all excited about. "That's a girl. Wow!" "That's my mom." But now you have sight for something worthwhile.

**37** Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." **38** Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Then Jesus ends this little story by saying,

**39** . . . "For judgment I have come into this world, . . . .

to bring judgment, not to make happy things but to make very clear what will happen

. . . so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." **40** Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" **41** Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, guilt remains.

The judgment is on you! Now *that* is a makeover. Renewal from the inside out. Not just renovation, but changing a life, and what makes it happen is Jesus. At the core of renewal, at the core of this church, is Jesus!

I came here from National Presbyterian Church, this hoity-toity cathedral in Washington, D.C. One of my friends followed me there and he became the senior pastor when he was still fairly young. He was out in the hallway and two women were behind him not seeing him, talking about the sermon. "What do you think?" "Well, he's okay I guess but it's Jesus this and Jesus that and Jesus the other thing. Doesn't the guy know anything except Jesus?" And he doesn't. He's only a double Ph.D. and now he's the president of Princeton Seminary. I'm so glad.

If you only buy one book this year, make it this one. It's by John Ortberg. It's his latest. It's called *Who Is This Man?* [*Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus.*] If you only read one book, read this one because in it, Ortberg says something like this.

Normally when somebody dies, their impact on the world immediately begins to recede. As I write this, our world marks the passing of digital innovator Steve Jobs. Someone wrote that 10 years ago, our world had Bob Hope, Johnny Cash, and Steve Jobs; now we have no Jobs, no Cash, and no Hope. But Jesus inverted the normal human trajectory, like he did so many others. Jesus' impact was greater a hundred years after his death than during His life; it was greater still after five hundred years; after a thousand years his legacy laid the foundation for much of Europe; after two thousand years he has more followers in more places than ever.

He won't stay dead! Do you want an example of that? Mental health professionals train emergency responders to check people in the case of a crisis to see whether they are mentally

okay. The term they use is are they oriented times three? Oriented times three is a very simple test. You ask somebody what their name is, if they know where they are, and “How old are you? When is your birthday?” Oriented times three. My name is John. I’m named after one of Jesus’ best friends. My middle name is Francis. I’m named after one of Jesus’ favorite followers. I live in a city right next to a city that was named after one of Jesus’ leaders, St. Paul. I was born 1,952 years after they claimed that Jesus was dead and buried. I am oriented times three. How about you? Ortberg goes on,

It is in Jesus’ Name that desperate people pray, grateful people worship, and angry people swear. From christenings to weddings to sick rooms to funerals, it is in Jesus’ Name that people are hatched, matched, patched, and dispatched.

He does it all. This story we just read shows that people respond to Jesus in all different kinds of ways, back then and now, and that their response makes all the difference. Some people come running to Jesus and their lives are changed. Other people go running away from Jesus and their lives are changed. Still other people chase after the followers of Jesus because not everyone is renewed. Not everyone gets new sight. I love this book but you cannot get to know Jesus through a book. You only get to know Jesus by *following* Jesus.

This fall some of you are starting CBS [Community Bible Study], BSF [Bible Study Fellowship], Beth Moore or one of the other great Bible studies in this church. But knowing about Jesus without following Jesus can actually get in the way if you think that by reading the instructions on the box, you have had the cereal. That was the problem with the Pharisees. They had the instructions but they wouldn’t eat. That’s the problem with religious people if we tame God to our answers. The answers become the important thing and not Jesus.

There was a missionary in Africa named Andrew Walls. He came back to the United States, saw a different world and said,

Where the faith has too much money and too much power for too long, it begins to spoil and Jesus moves on . . . . Jesus’ followers cause Him a lot more trouble than His enemies. Maybe that’s why He seems to move around a lot . . . .

Do you remember Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian? There is an old story about how Pope Innocent IV invited him to the Vatican to see the splendors of the Western World. The Vatican rises in this incredible monument and the pope is showing him the Sistine Chapel. He is showing him all the beauty, the art and the treasures, and he refers to the story of a lame beggar in the Book of Acts. He says, “The church no longer has to say, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’” That’s what Peter had said to the guy. The pope says, “We’re rich!” But Thomas says, “Yes, sir, but no longer is the church able to say, ‘In the Name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk.’” *That’s* what Jesus offers. Bob Goff talks about our penchant for confusing getting to know *about* Jesus with getting to *know* Jesus. He calls it *stalking* Jesus. Some of you stalk Jesus like creeping onto Facebook or Twitter. The people don’t know you are there, but you are finding out a lot. You can put a lot in your notebook but you don’t know the real thing. You just know *about* Jesus.

The story today is a great place to start. The man says, “I see. For the first time, I finally see.” Maybe it’s the first time for some of you to see who Jesus is supposed to be. Maybe for some of

you, it's been so long that it's turned into Sunday School. I believe *I see* is a great place to start but I don't want you to stop there. I prayed this week that you would be inspired not to see Jesus but to *follow* Jesus. I want you to be inspired! We respond to inspiration. I believe everybody wears an unseen sign on our chest that says, "Inspire me. Remind me that my life matters. Call me to be my best self again. Appeal to the noble and the honorable and the hard. Don't let me go down the path of least resistance no matter how old I am. Challenge me even today to make my life about something more than the acquisition of money or success or friends. Inspire me!"

I think that's what Jesus does because the word *inspiration* is connected to breath. To inspire is literally to give someone breath, breath that enters us from outside and makes us alive. Will you let Jesus get as close as your breath? Will you let Him spit mud into your eyes so you can really see even if it means you have to walk around awhile looking like an idiot? Will you let Jesus give you the courage to confess to Him, to forgive others in His Name, to follow Him even if there are great costs, even if people don't understand that finally you can see, even just a little?

That's what we want. We want to revive people and bring them back from the dead. How does that happen? I went to a leadership summit this summer. It was fabulous, and one of the speakers from Boston said, "You know, I have to fault pastors. I think they are fabulous at inspiring but terrible at offering plans. 'I'm all inspired. How do I do this?'" I didn't think that it was a very good talk. In the next couple of weeks, we are going to talk about how you can follow Jesus and be changed, but I think it has to start with figuring out where you are right now, oriented times three. Where are you and Jesus right now?

My wife Laura's friend, Heather Zempel, talks about three different phases in following Jesus. Three different orientations. Which one are you? Are you seeing or blind or blurred? She uses for example the apostle Peter, the one who saw Jesus make the blind man see. It started with Jesus walking by Peter one day. Jesus is with a bunch of His fishermen friends and says to Peter,

19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said . . . . [Matthew 4:19]

"Come on. Follow Me." Not *trust* Me. Not *believe* in Me. "*Follow Me.*" The first part of following Jesus is to come close enough so that you can see what's going on. It starts with "**Come and see.**" Like the blind man who couldn't see. Like the Pharisees who wouldn't see. Like the parents who were afraid to see. Like the crowds who couldn't understand what they were seeing. Jesus says, "Come, follow Me."

That's some of you. Some of you are here and you are checking it out. You are still not committed. I completely understand that. I am great with that. I think God is great with that. "Come and see." You don't have to make a commitment. You don't have to say things you don't believe. Jesus just says, "Come and see." This first stage of following Jesus, though, is different from following somebody on Twitter or Facebook. Following Jesus means, "Share the road with Me. Take Me with you where you go. Come with Me where *I go.*" When you start seeing the people in the road that nobody else sees, you are starting to *come and see.*

Peter does that, probably for a year. The crowds grow and swell and finally with all the huge attention forced on Him, Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "Who do they think that I am?"

Who do they say that I am?" "Some say You are one of the figures of old come back from the dead. Some say You are John the Baptist who was killed. Some think You are a prophet." Jesus turns to them and says, "What about you? Who do you think that I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." [Matthew 16:16]

After a year of *come and see*, Peter has come to the second stage which is "**Come and believe**." Peter says, "I believe that You are who You say You are. You are the unique Messiah, the rescuer of humanity. I believe." Jesus says to Peter, "God told you that." *Come and see* doesn't have to but can lead to *come and believe*. That's where belief starts to turn into faith because faith is about more than facts. It's about trust. "I believe, Jesus, that You are real and that You are God's path." Instead of following Jesus from a safe distance taking notes, Peter decides to come and follow Him close and start doing the things that Jesus does. Not just *come and see* but *come and believe*. "I believe."

And the next year is even better than the year before. Peter sees incredible things. He gets to do incredible things. He walks on water. He feeds 10,000 people. This is phenomenal! The power of God! But he is still only at the second stage of orientation. He comes and sees. He comes and believes. But then Jesus dies, the worst week of Jesus' life, it goes without saying. The worst week of Peter's life. Everything Peter believed is wrong and gone, but then he starts to hear that Jesus wasn't as dead as they thought. He is back.

In John, chapter 21, the up-from-the-dead Jesus comes back to Peter and doesn't say, "Come and see." He doesn't say, "Come and believe." Now He says, "Do you love me?"

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." [John 21:15]

Not "Are you going to work harder?" Not, "Are you going to run after me closer," but "Do you love me? Really, Peter, do you love me more than the rest of the stuff?" He asked Peter three times because Peter denied Him three times. "Do you love Me? Then feed My sheep." "Do you love Me? Then feed My flock." "Do you love Me? Then feed the ones that I love." "If you love Me, you will share My love. You will make your life about what My life was about regardless of the cost."

It is not about trying harder to be like Jesus. It is about getting closer to being loved by Jesus. "Come and see." "Come and believe." "**Come and love**. Come and be loved." Peter was oriented times three. He saw and he believed and he loved. That's what we are going to start with this fall. Are you a note taker? Great. Or a believer? Good. Or a lover? Better yet. The renovation continues. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You said that talking to You would be as easy as closing our eyes and turning around and there You would be, especially when two or three of us gather together. You helped the blind man see. You gave forgiveness to the wicked. We want to believe this morning that You are still in the hearing, remodeling, restoring, life-giving

business. That your reason for visiting Planet Earth was that we might be made new, and that we would start to live forever *right now* and rest in Your love, love that will not let us go. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, we give thanks. And all God's children said,

[All:] Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*