

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one whose faithfulness saves, Jesus who is the Lord, amen.

I'm not much into recycling... I know I should try to separate plastic from paper and compost all our actual garbage, but it feels like too much trouble and I just can't seem to get in the habit of separating out the various different kinds of trash. One thing I have repurposed or recycled is the Alpaca manure. We've mucked out the stalls and moved the alpaca poo to our garden and it makes wonderful fertilizer. I guess I do some repurposing. Nothing like the scale that is practiced by some of our large metropolitan zoos. I read a story this week about the Seattle Woodland Zoo. They operate an award-winning "Zoo Doo" program that each year takes the waste from the park's elephants, hippos, zebras, giraffes, gazelles, and other zoo creatures and transforms it into nearly a million pounds of compost to enhance gardens and lawns throughout the Seattle area. The transformed waste is so highly prized they can't keep up with demand. Not only does the repurposed animal waste — once sent to landfills — now provide a completely organic alternative to chemical fertilizers, but the zoo no longer has to pay more than \$60,000 a year for disposal. Instead, this unlikely product contributes upward of \$20,000 to the annual budget and has earned the organization recognition for environmental conservation. Now that's what I call creative repurposing... There's so many other examples I could sight, like how the

old bell bottom jeans I threw into the garbage back in the day now sell on eBay for anywhere from \$75 to over \$300! How about companies that turn our old worn-out tires into playground equipment and astro-turf for football and soccer fields, or plastic bottles into outdoor furniture. One company has creatively repurposed earthworm doo-doo into plant food. Did you know worms produce more than their body weight in doo-doo every day! So, this company right they dehydrates worm excrement and packages it for resale as plant food. You can buy it off the shelves at your local garden shop and even at WalMart. I know it's gross to talk about, but that company posted a \$15 million dollar profit... Repurposing is one way to help lessen the amount of garbage we send to landfills every day.

God's been doing this for years, most powerfully through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. You see, the Apostle Paul grew up believing he would be justified or made right with God, by doing what was correct according to the laws of the Bible. Paul was a champ at this. In this letter to the Church he founded in Galatia, he says he was more zealous than any of his peers when it comes to keeping the law and even persecuting this new sect called the Christians... When it came to being made right with God through works of the law, Paul was batting a thousand.

Now let's talk about God's repurposing program... Paul met Our Savior Jesus on the road to Damascus while on a trip, sanctioned by the Chief Priests of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, in order to arrest and persecute followers of Jesus

Christ. He was an enemy of Christians and assisted in the stoning of Stephen and probably many others. Yet, despite all these Jewish honors Paul wrote this to his Church in Philippi, "... whatever gains I had, I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:7-9). To recap, let's describe Saint Paul before his conversion... Circumcised Jew, Israelite, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew, Pharisee, blameless law-abider. It's all rubbish, says Paul. In fact, what he really says, using the Greek word skubala, is that it's total "excrement." Nothing but worm waste.

We don't have to be Jews by birth to understand what Paul is talking about. He was playing the game according to the rules he grew up with, but then he discovered God was creating a whole new ballgame. We run into the same trap when we focus on work, money, or sex-appeal, which our culture constantly encourages us to pursue. We work hard to acquire great jobs, accumulate lots of money and find attractive partners only to discover these enticing goals can get in the way of having a right relationship with God.

We tend to worry about things like drugs, drinking or pornography or whatever your favorite flavor of sin might be, but it's not all the bad and nasty things that are our biggest problems. The devil is way too crafty to show up in his red tights, long pointed tail, and pitchfork... He much more often shows up draped

in things we would consider good things, even blessings. Things like, working for career advancement, accumulating money, and seeking an attractive mate. These are all great and good goals. These are the goals most people pursue in 21st-century America, just as Paul chased the goal of being made right with God through works of the law in first-century Palestine. The trouble is these goals don't really make us happy or fulfilled because they are not God. If we pursue these things at the expense of having time for God, they become nothing more than false gods or idols.

Fortunately, God is in the business of creative repurposing, and he's playing a whole new ballgame through his Son, Jesus Christ. "A person is justified not by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ," writes Paul to the Galatians. "And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law". Everybody wanted to be "justified," that is, made right with God. What Paul discovered was the "works of the law" don't get the job done. When we rely on them to either make us right with God or when we rely on our money, job, or sex-appeal to supply our happiness, we're relying on not much more than worm waste and alpaca poo...

The faithfulness of Christ is what makes us right with God. Not works of the law. Not money. Not sex-appeal. Not success in our careers. Not anything

we can do, only a willingness to put our complete trust in Jesus Christ and his faithfulness can save. This is a transformation every bit as unexpected as the metamorphosis of used tires into athletic field astro-turf or playground equipment. It requires nothing short of dying to self and rising in Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ,” writes Paul, “and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (vv. 19-20).

When we’re crucified with Christ and reborn filled with the power and presence of Jesus himself, that’s God’s creative repurposing alive and working in the world today. So, what does it mean to be repurposed to “live by faith in the Son of God”? To understand what Paul is talking about, I need you to understand an ambiguity that lies at the heart of his description of the power of faith. The Greek words that are translated “I live by faith in the Son of God” should more accurately be translated “I live by the faith of the Son of God,” switching the emphasis from our faith to Christ’s faith. That makes a huge difference! Suddenly, we aren’t living by our own faith; we’re living by Christ’s faith. Our values and practices have been repurposed, with Jesus Christ’s own faithfulness moving in us and through us. The newly repurposed follower of Jesus Christ no longer places his or her own wants and desires first. They live not for themselves, but to be instruments of God, living for God’s purposes not our own.

Take a long, hard look at the cross. Find one and focus on it. The church is full of crosses. Lexie tells me she counted them and there's over 150 in this church. Some of you are wearing them around your neck. Wherever and whenever you see the cross, remember — it isn't just Christ's cross; it's your cross. "I have been crucified with Christ," says Paul, "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (vv. 19-20). Our old life has ended, and a new life has begun. When we are made right with God by Christ's self-giving faithfulness, we become completely different people — "a new creation," in which everything old has passed away, and everything has become new (2 Cor 5:17). Because we're now living by the faith of the Son of God, with Christ's own faithfulness moving in and through us, our good works are no longer done to earn God's love, but out of thanksgiving for all God has done for us. Not because we're such self-giving people, but because Christ is a self-giving Lord. We live by the faith of the Son of God whenever we reach out to the poor, feed the hungry, or send our quilts and personal care kits and school kits to underprivileged in countries near and far.

Jesus loved us and gave himself for us. Repurposed by the cross of Christ, we are now given the opportunity to live out our faith. May Christ be our life and our purpose. Repurposed for God, may we live for Christ alone. Amen.