

What does it mean to be made new?

Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

Romans 1.20

Spring is in the air as I write. We wake to a world which is being renewed, made new every morning, recreated by the Spirit which once hovered over the waters, filled with the breath of life as were the plants and creatures in the first garden at the beginning of time. Every day the world wakes up to find itself remade: dew lies beaded on the grass, chaffinches sing their descending scales in the hedgerows, daisies unfurl their petals, swifts begin to scream through the skies in search of the first flight of insects. Life is in the air, there to be breathed in, absorbed, and wondered at. Soon it will be summer, and a new generation of creatures will fill the earth and skies. Eagles will soar in the highlands, and song thrushes will fledge from the amber traffic light nests of the suburbs. Fox cubs will scavenge in dustbins, and mayflies rise up in clouds over stream and lake. And everywhere, the newness of life will intrude on the inevitable reality of a world in decay, a world that is groaning, a world that is waiting.

The pages of the Bible are green with metaphors and similes from nature – literally green in my case, because I colour them in wherever I find them. And Jesus himself often taught about life in the Spirit by drawing on the life of the created world in illustration and parable. When he did so it was always more than a picture, always more than the simple use of the familiar and concrete to explain the abstract reality of the way things are – for as C.H. Dodd once remarked, it arises from a conviction that there is no mere analogy, but an inward affinity, between the natural order and the spiritual order.¹

The natural world, then, is a reflection of spiritual reality. This should not surprise us.

Alison Morgan writes



The Word that spoke life in the beginning is the same Word who speaks life now. The Spirit who hovered over the waters when the world was born is the same Spirit who brings new birth to our spirits today. Life physical and life spiritual are rooted in the same God, the God who himself is life. And so it is that in the visible renewal of the world around us, we find the key to the spiritual renewal which is to take place within us.

Opening our hearts to God

What is essential is a sense of need, a deep humility, and a radical openness to meet and receive from the living God. This is where all renewal must begin and end.

*William Abraham*²

What then is our part? For it seems when we look back at times in human history which have been characterised by renewal, by a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit into people's hearts and minds, that we do have a part to play. If reform is a human initiative, and revival a divine one, it seems that renewal lies somewhere in between, as an event which depends upon God but which comes when we are most receptive, most ready to acknowledge our need, and most willing to open ourselves to his Spirit. We

are made new when we open our hearts to God – like the baby bird thrusting upwards for food, like petals opening themselves to the life-bearing intervention of the summer bee. Sometimes renewal has meant many people receiving the same thing – the rush of wind and fire which overwhelmed the first disciples at Pentecost, the fresh anointing with the gifts of the Spirit which has overtaken so many people in our own lifetimes. At other times it has been very personal, and yet to a pattern which is as recognisable as the pattern of the seasons – Mother Julian who learnt that love was the Lord's meaning, John Wesley who felt his heart 'strangely warmed' and went on to become one of the greatest channels of spiritual renewal the world has ever known. For both, as for many in our own times, this moment of renewal came after many years of ministry; for often we do not recognise our need, and often we do not

New every morning...
A new heart and a new spirit...
A new creation...
This new life...
Inwardly we are being renewed day by day
Renewed in knowledge...
Renewed in his love...

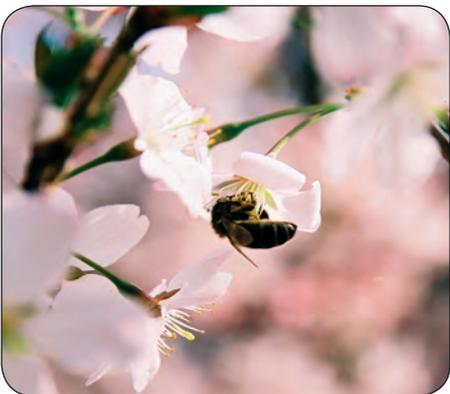
persist in the prayers of repentance and faith or of intercession which have been the gateways for the Holy Spirit throughout human history.

The marks of personal renewal

What does renewal look like in practice? Often we have a way of shrinking words and concepts, of using them so frequently that they lose the breadth of associations they had when first adopted, and become identified with only a part of what they first meant – like a jersey which has gone too many times through the washing machine. The word 'renewal' is often used



'We are made new when we open our hearts to God – like the baby bird thrusting upwards for food.'



'Life is in the air, there to be breathed in, absorbed, and wondered at.'



'Scripture teaches that renewal is something which God offers repeatedly and daily to his people'

to describe the sudden rediscovery of the gifts of the Spirit, and in particular the gift of tongues, for that is the way it came to a whole generation of people in our time. But 'renewal' just means 'being made new', and being made new will depend on the ways in which we have become worn. For some it will mean a healing of the barriers which separate us from God, barriers of accusation or rejection. For some it will mean knowing God's forgiveness or God's love in a new way. For some it will mean a new dimension in ministry. For all it means a continuous process of being filled daily with the Spirit, of allowing his power to flow through our prayers and his fruits to develop in our lives, of growing in the knowledge that we are loved and in our capacity to love others.

I have found it fascinating to do a Scriptural study on the words 'new' and 'renew'. Scripture teaches that renewal is something which God offers repeatedly and daily to his people, in different ways at different times, and that it is something we ourselves are to build into the pattern of our own response to him, through new offerings, new songs, new resolves. It teaches that renewal has many dimensions; and that authentic renewal is often not so much the invention of the new as the rediscovery of the old, of truths once grasped but now forgotten, of vigour once possessed but now lost. Above all it teaches that renewal is normal – as normal as the daily and yearly renewal of the earth itself, and marking the million stages of our growth into the likeness of Christ.⁴

How then do we ensure that we are open to everything the Lord wants to give us? Partly through the normal means of coming to him daily to confess our failures, state our needs, share our dreams. Partly through absorption of the word of life that is our inheritance in the Bible and which itself contains the power to create and

Where is renewal for you?

new life...
 new birth...
 new hope...
 a new self...
 a new heart, spirit, mind...
 renewed strength...
 new tongues...
 new mercies...
 new teaching...
 a new people...
 a new song...
 a new commandment...
 new gifts...
 a new heaven and a new earth
 good news...

recreate. And partly through not settling for less. I have friends who, having lost the teaspoons from the cutlery set they had received some years before as a wedding gift, decided to order some replacements of the same kind. The replacements came; but instead of making new their set, the teaspoons revealed that what had seemed as smart and shiny as always was suddenly shown to be old, dulled and imperceptibly tarnished. It's easy to lose your shine without even realising it.

And so let's not be afraid to recognise what it is that we need, to ask for what we want, and to pray for one another that we will receive it. My experience of such prayers is that they are always answered – though often not as soon as we would like, and usually not in the way we had anticipated.

It has been said that we cannot control the direction of the wind, but we can set our sails to catch it when it comes our way.⁵ And that's as good a response to the Holy Spirit as I know. 

End notes

- ¹ CH Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, London 1935, p.21.
- ² William J Abraham, *The Logic of Renewal*, Eerdmans 2003, p.20.
- ³ Ephesians 5.18, Ephesians 3.14-19.
- ⁴ 2 Cor 3.17-18.
- ⁵ Quoted by David Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, p.127.

Renewal in Scripture

Renewal is built into the rhythm of God's relationship with the created universe

Renewal is something which God offers repeatedly to human kind

Renewal is something which we are to build into the pattern of our response to God

Renewal has many dimensions
 Renewal is a work of the Holy Spirit

Renewal will have an eternal fulfilment

about the writer

The Revd Dr Alison Morgan is an Associate of ReSource. She is on staff of Holy Trinity, Leicester where she oversees the healing ministry. She is the author of a number of books including *The Wild Gospel*.