

A NEW CREATION
Confirmation & Baptism
Croydon Minster
Sunday, June 14th 2015
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Many years ago now, as I began my work as the international affairs secretary at Lambeth Palace, I decided that I needed to improve my German. I knew the best way was to go and spend two weeks with a friend in Germany and with whom I was bound to speak only German. While I was with him, my friend Klaus and I made one particularly memorable journey. The two of us walked together through the Brandenburg Gate; the last time Klaus had done that was as a young man, an army cadet. He found it very moving as I did) that now he was walking through it with an Englishman. Later that day we visited the Berlin Wall which was beginning to be dismantled. We saw the memorial to Ida Siekmann, amongst others.

On 22nd August 1961, Ida Siekmann was the first person to die trying to escape from East Berlin by crossing the Berlin Wall. She jumped from a third floor apartment of Bernauer Strasse, in what was then *East Berlin*, and was killed in the process. She was one of a number who so died. Indeed others were killed by soldiers' bullets as they ran the gauntlet or even tried to swim the River Spree. You can still see the memorial to those who died. The wall had been built by East German authorities with the support of the Russians to prevent the constant leak of people to the west. The wall was an evil instrument and other similar barriers, like the one around Bethlehem in the Holy Land is seen in a similar light.

Leaping forward nearly fifty years - in November 1989 the wall came down – roads opened up between east and west. It was dramatic and remarkable, and it was the first clear impact of television, and also the first signs of social media as we now call it. Watching the western news channels and using early mobile telephones, a barrier that seemed immovable fell in an amazingly short time. Many of you here today, of course, will remember neither the building nor the disappearance of the wall. But you may have seen pictures of the wall around Bethlehem and Hebron. It is equally frightening and evil.

How did the wall in Berlin come down so quickly? Well I've mentioned the beginnings of social media and advancing technology and communication. Individuals and groups worked together to great effect. But, also the churches in East Germany played a very significant part. They were opened up for gatherings of those pressing for freedom. Huge assemblies of people came together in Leipzig, in Dresden and elsewhere in what was then East Germany. Christian people knew that part of their responsibility or vocation was to work for a proper freedom, for a just and open society. What was the result? Well, you could say – *a new creation*.

Now those three words are the climax of that first reading from St. Paul which we heard just now: 'So, if anyone is in Christ, *there is a new creation*: behold, everything old has passed away; see everything has become new.' It is a most marvellous vision, and it was what it felt like when the Berlin Wall fell, when Apartheid ended in South Africa, and when peace finally broke out in Northern Ireland. The world in those places was transformed.

Both our readings today strike a similar note. St. Mark's gospel has Jesus telling parables about how a tiny mustard seed grows into a tree, and then how grains of wheat sown in a field lead to a great harvest. Once again it heralds an amazing transformation. It is just such a transformation that we celebrate today in this baptism and confirmation. St. Paul says: 'If anyone is in Christ, *there is a new creation*.' Well that's precisely what is happening to

those of you who are being baptised and confirmed. You are coming into Christ. You are becoming part of his body.

When I baptise, I shall do my best to soak those who are being baptised! That's to remind us of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan. It's also to remind us of Jesus' dying and rising. I shall be 'sort of' drowning you. You will die and enter the tomb with Jesus. But, just as Jesus is raised, so you are raised with him. Now you are 'in Christ' – now you are part of a *new creation*. But that's not all. Both when you're baptised and when you're confirmed I shall anoint you with oil. You will be marked out like kings and queens. The word *Christ*, as in *Jesus Christ*, means 'anointed one', just as the Jewish word Messiah does too.

Finally I shall lay my hands on your head. Why do that? Well, in Jesus' baptism God comes down like a dove on Jesus' head to mark him out as his son. Now I can't manage, like a magician, to turn into a dove, so my hands will remind us of you being marked out, becoming part of Jesus' new creation.

Returning to the Berlin Wall, one of the amazing things about its collapse was that *individual* people *and great crowds* came across together. They faced, of course, a challenging future. What would they do now? So too, today you are confirmed *individually*, but as *part of God's Church*, his new creation. You too will face a challenge. What will you do? Now that you are 'in Christ', who is God calling you to be? Might it be to be a priest like me and Colin? Might it be a call to the religious life? Might it be a challenge in the life you're already living? But remember you will, along with all of us, be in Christ – and – 'when anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new.'

Amen

Readings

II Cor. 5. 6-10, 14-17

Mark. 4. 26-34