This is the story of the before and the after.
    The what was and the what is meant to be.
    The past and the eternal goodness of God’s presence.
For anyone who is in Christ is a new creation - the old life is gone and the new life has begun.

This is the story you - that we - wake up to every morning.
The story of our baptisms - the story runs through our lives even though the water upon our skin has run dry.
    The story that demands we remember that “when we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace - a new life in a new land!”

This is the story that trips many of us up.
    It seems too good, too beautiful for sinners like us.
    We sing it loudly for one another but it catches in our throats when we try to sing it into our own lives.
We’re caught with one foot still in the grave and one foot in the resurrection, our bodies stretched and aching from the tension.

A month after my friend Brian died, I went with his daughter Carlee to Montreat Youth Conference. She is the youngest of his three and like her father, has this perpetual glimmer in her eye that reveals she is always thinking, always one step ahead. It was late, as most nights are on a youth trip. Many had retreated to their rooms for giggling and pretend sleeping. Carlee gave me our signal, a little rub on the nose that meant “I need to process” - the communiqué we had made up for moments when it seemed the old life and this new, has cancer won/I want to trust Jesus/I miss my dad kind of life stretched her thin.

I sat next to her and she asked me, “Is this what you meant about baptism? Is my dad’s baptism now complete? It is, right? I think it is. I think he’s with Jesus.” I was speechless. All I could do was nod my head as tears filled my eyes and I understood for the first time what I’d been saying for years at the font. The old life is gone and the new life has begun. I watched Carlee move from the life that was to the life that was meant to be - a life that drew its breath from Easter morning and every new day after. A life lived in awe and wonder of the amazing grace she’d been been given. A life that responds to the
grace her father now knew fully and a grace that came in that moment when Carlee decided to move - as Paul puts it - to a new country. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time—remember, you’ve been raised from the dead!—into God’s way of doing things, Paul writes. Throw yourself wholeheartedly into this life of grace.

As I wrote this, I remembered Carlee’s middle name - which happens to be - not surprisingly - grace. I wonder - what would it look like for us to claim that name for ourselves, too? Child of God, made new by grace, living in freedom.

Being a child of God, made new by grace, is a daily invitation.

   An invitation to live into this gift we’ve been freely given and to put to rest the life that came before.

   An invitation to try and try and try again.

A boy in my sophomore Chemistry class - sophomore in high school because there was no way I would take Chemistry by choice ever again - a boy named John wrote the word “others” on his hand between his first finger and thumb. Every day, in black ink, staining his hand with each wash. I asked him why he wrote it, why every single day in the same spot. He said, “To remind me to not be selfish. To put that behind me.”

It’s a practice, a repetition, a building of endurance.

   It means we don’t let that which separates us - sin in whatever form that takes - “get a vote in the way we conduct your lives.

   It means we don’t give it the time of day.”

Instead, “we throw ourselves wholeheartedly and full-time—remember, we’ve been raised from the dead!—into God’s way of doing things.”

I heard a story a few months ago about a New York social worker named Julio Diaz. It was his habit to take the train after work each night, but instead of getting off near his Bronx home, he would always exit a stop early so he could grab a bite to eat at his favorite diner en route to his house. One night, as he worked his way through the station, a teenage boy held him up at knifepoint and demanded his wallet. Diaz didn’t resist, but simply handed his wallet over. As the boy walked away, Diaz said, “Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you’re going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm.”

The boy gave him a confused look. “Why are you doing this?” he asked.
Diaz replied: "If you're willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need
the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want to join me ... hey, you're
more than welcome."

Amazingly, the boy agreed. They went to the diner and ordered a meal. While they sat and ate, the
manager, some dishwashers, and all the servers stopped by their table to greet Diaz. They boy asked,
"Do you own this place? You know everyone here!"
"No," Diaz replied. "I just eat here a lot." The boy commented, "But you’re even nice to the
dishwasher."

"Well, haven't you been taught you should be nice to everybody?"

"Yea, but I didn't think people actually behaved that way," the teen said.

Diaz asked him what he wanted out of life. "He just had almost a sad face," Diaz says. The teen
couldn’t, or wouldn’t, come up with an answer.

When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen, "Look, I guess you're going to have to pay for this bill 'cause
you have my money and I can't pay for this. So if you give me my wallet back, I'll gladly treat you."

The teen "didn’t even think about it" and returned the wallet. Diaz says. "I gave him $20 ... I figure
maybe it’ll help him. I don’t know.”¹

After all, Paul writes, we're not living under that old tyranny any longer. We're living in the freedom of
God. May we be so bold as to be so free. Amen.

¹ https://www.npr.org/2008/03/28/89164759/a-victim-treats-his-mugger-right