

19th July, 2015.

Reading: Ephesians 2: 11 - 22

Mark 6: 30 - 34

Sermon: Embracing Change

The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 17: **If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.**

When we bring Christ into the equation of our lives, there is a change takes place. What we were is in the past. What we become is in the present. We are left in no doubt that there is a before and an after.

When Paul writes to the Church in Ephesus, he tells the folk there that in the past, as Gentiles, they were separate from Christ. They were without hope and without God in the world. That is a desperate situation to be in.

In contrast, through Christ, he says, we are reconciled to God. We have access to God, the Father. We have peace with God and we have hope because the promise made to the Jewish nation that God would be their God and they would be His people, that promise is extended to us through Christ, through His death and through His resurrection. God is our God and we are His people and through Christ, we are new creations. The old has gone and the new has come.

That is basically the gospel in a nutshell. It is that simple and yet we make it so hard for ourselves. Many of us cling to the old and we resist the new because the new involves change and many of us don't do change and yet we are told that the past is gone. As new creations, change

is part and parcel of the package. Being new creations is not something we can add on if we feel like it. It is the consequence, or more positively, it is the result of having Christ in our lives. Change is inevitable.

If the creation of the world had been dependent on us, there would probably have been no world. We would have looked out upon the deep and the darkness and decided that it had always been that way and we wouldn't have changed it.

Fortunately, however, the creation of the world wasn't dependent on us. It was dependent on God, no matter how it happened, and God is a creative God, an innovative God, whose character is unchanging but whose way of doing things changes to suit the needs of the world which He loves.

He was known to the Jews of Old Testament times simply as Jahweh. They couldn't name God or see God and live, or so they thought, but God was constantly reaching out to them through his people, through Moses, through the prophets, through His spoken Word and eventually through His written Word.

When that all failed to bring His people back to Him, He tried something different. He came Himself. He became like us. He changed and took on human form despite the pain and the anguish which lay ahead of Him and despite the treatment He received along the way from some within the Jewish faith. He himself became a new creation.

He did that for us and that needs to sink in to our hearts and minds before we will grasp the enormity of the

cost to God for us to be His people. If God hadn't been willing to take on flesh, we would still be grappling about in the dark. We would still be far off from God. We would still be without hope and without God in the world. Do we see that?

For us to become His children, for us to become God's children, God had to embrace change and pain. He had to leave the past behind and move forward to what was new to ensure that we became members of His household.

His household, however, is not built of bricks and mortar. The foundation, according to Paul, is the apostles and the prophets. The foundation is people. The cornerstone, the chief cornerstone, the stone which holds the whole structure together is Jesus Himself and we are the bricks. Paul says that we are **being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.**

If we could grasp that, life might be much easier for all of us. We are the Temple. God lives within us, not within our buildings. Bricks and mortar, I suspect, are not God's thing. People are. It is people He values. It is people He came to save, not buildings, and yet we get so caught up in buildings and we go mad when a building is threatened with closure. It is only bricks and mortar. It has a limited life span, no matter how much money we pour into it.

So often we are more interested in the buildings and in our so called heritage, so often we are more interested in preserving buildings than we are in reaching out to people and preserving them by helping them to become new creations, by bringing them into the household of

God. We are often more interested in preserving the old way than in helping people to become the bricks, if you like, people in whom God lives by His Spirit.

There is a John Bell chorus which says:

Behold, behold, I make all things new,
beginning with you and starting from today.

Behold, behold, I make all things new,
my promise is true, for I am Christ the King.

I make all things new. Jesus was one of the most revolutionary people this world has ever known but He came in peace and He reached out in love. He was crucified for it because He was a threat to the established order. He lived the changes He was making and He was hated by some. Fortunately, we have done away with crucifixion!

God moves with the times. He is alive and vibrant and He came that we might be free and yet we chain ourselves to the past. We resist any kind of change, not just in what is around us but in ourselves. We resist different people doing things. We resist different ways of doing things and yet God chose a different way to save us.

As Christians we are called to follow in the footsteps of Christ. We are called to follow in the footsteps of a peaceful revolutionary, one who healed on the sabbath and who upset the Jewish authorities because He dared to do things differently and because He said things which left people feeling threatened. Their positions of power were being challenged. Their way of thinking was being

challenged. Their way of being the people of God was being challenged and it led to the cross.

Love, for Jesus, was more important than rules. Compassion, for Jesus, was more important than law. Jesus acted differently, not for the sake of flouting the Jewish Law but because He wanted to reach out to people in need and He put them first.

In our reading from Mark's gospel, we see Jesus putting people first. Everyone was tired but when the crowds followed Him and his disciples to a place where they had hoped to get some rest, compassion kicked in. He looked at the people and saw them as sheep without a shepherd. They needed help. They needed a leader. They needed a shepherd and so He reached out and began teaching them so that He could help them to become new creations. He reached out so that He could lead them and bring them into the household of God. He reached out so that they might have hope and a secure future.

Behold, I am making all things new, beginning with you and starting from today.

Does any of this strike a chord with us in any way? Are we willing to be new creations? Are we willing to change and to embrace change as God did? Can we see that if we want Christ, we have no choice in the matter? We cannot have one without the other. Christ and change go hand in hand.

It is a real challenge but it is one which God Himself faced. He became a new creation for the sake of His people. What we are willing to do for the sake of His

people? Are we willing to reach out and be compassionate so that others will become part of the household of God? Are we willing to deal with change, as God did, to meet the needs of the people today?

Or are we going to chain ourselves to the past by our attitudes, by how we do things, by what we think and by how we are and by how we relate to God and others?

Are we willing to embrace change for Jesus' Sake and for the sake of His kingdom? I am tempted to say that the choice is ours but if we have Christ in our lives, we have no choice, just challenges as the old battles with the new for position.