

A Remodeling Project,

1 May 2005

Bible passage: **2 Corinthians 5:16-17** (*New Living Translation*)

"So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"

The theme for this morning really came from Stan Abell, and its origin came from the fact that he and his family were smack dab in the middle of a major remodeling job on their kitchen. He was commenting about how changing one thing in their kitchen led to much more than they had originally anticipated.

I could certainly identify with what he was saying. Five or six years ago, we had a spark pop out of our fireplace, and burn a hole in our carpet in our family room. Obviously, we had to get some new carpeting, but as we began looking at the various options, we started thinking about what else we might do while we were in the process of putting new carpet down. Before we knew it, we were into a full-scale project of a total re-do of the room—the lighting, the walls, the floor, the mantel, the bookcases, even new furniture. That one little spark started a chain reaction that resulted in a room with a very different look to it. Today it is a very different room to be in than it once was.

Given the fact that this is springtime, and remodeling projects may be a part of your life story right now, we thought this would be a timely topic for today. Now clearly, we're not here to do a "Home Improvement" segment. However, it seems to me that our lives are often very much like the remodeling of our family room. One little spark starts something, and eventually, many things change and are changed in our lives.

Certainly, there are many of us who know what it's like when our places of employment go through a re-structuring, reinventing who the company is and how it functions. Some of us have even been caught right in the middle of all the changes, and we've either adapted to the changes by changing, too, or we've decided to work in a different place.

Clearly change is inevitable. It's happening now, and it has always been so. In fact, I learned something new in reading Linda Greenlaw's book, *The Lobster Chronicles*. She is a lobster fisherwoman, and she begins her book talking about the change in societal attitudes toward Maine lobster. Evidently, prior to the 19th century, lobster was considered to be humble fare, and only the widows, orphans and servants ate it. There was even a law against serving prison inmates lobster more than once a week because it was considered cruel and unusual punishment! My, how things have changed in the lobster's world!

One of the most obvious changes you and I live with on a daily basis is the evolution of the computer and our Internet capabilities. In fact, there was an anonymous poem circulating on the Internet a while back that was entitled "Not So Long Ago." It really puts us in touch with some of the changes that the computer has brought to our lives. It goes in part like this:

An application was for employment
A program was a TV show
A cursor used profanity

A keyboard was a piano

"Log on" was adding wood to a fire
"Hard drive" was a long trip on the road
A mouse pad was where a mouse lived
And a backup happened to your commode.

Cut—you did with a pocket knife
Paste—you did with glue
A web was a spider's home
And a virus was the flu!

I'm sure you get the point that I'm trying to make—change is a given, and it's happening all around us, and rapidly!

Sometimes the changes we experience are external, like the use of the Internet and how it has revolutionized the way we live, shop, communicate and work. Those external changes have meant that most of us have had to adapt and change to function effectively in today's world. We often have to reinvent ourselves and our work on a weekly, or even daily, basis.

It's quite clear, however, that not all the changes we experience are external. Changing is a natural, normal part of being a living human being. If it weren't, we'd probably all still be confined to a crib, not talking, and drinking from a bottle! In a very real sense, you and I re-create ourselves almost every single day. Everything that happens around us and within us, every person we encounter—everything has a way of re-molding us in one way or another.

I really appreciate what Sue Monk-Kidd wrote in her book, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*. She said, "...We create change as we live out the experiences of our souls in the common acts of life." And indeed, we do. The act of daily living and interacting with others is in itself change, and that gets reproduced in our lives every single day.

Even the ordinary moments of life change us in one way or another, but sometimes there are extraordinary occurrences that radically transform our lives. That was the kind of experience the writer of today's Bible passage—Paul—experienced. He had been one of those who had persecuted the early Christians the most rigorously, and then he went through what is called his "Damascus Road experience," when he suddenly became a totally changed person. Instead of persecuting Christians, he became one of the leading spokespersons, and one of the earliest writers of the material we have about Jesus and the faith in the Bible. It's clear that the changes he underwent weren't just a passing thing, because they changed him and the direction of his life forever.

The part of his story that we have for today really demonstrates some of ways in which his life has changed. In our version, we read: "So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now!"

Just as we talked on Easter, God's love got a firm hold on him, and he could no longer live the way he had before. He had been judgmental and bigoted, but now he saw other people and life in a whole new way. This passage concludes with Paul's description of what happened to him and what happens to us when God's love becomes real in our lives. Paul writes, "What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"

It's clear that, for Paul, his whole life changed because of his experience of God's love. His life had been heading in one direction, and then it turned totally around. He wound up living a life

quite different from the one he had thought lay before him.

I would guess that some of us could share similar stories, although perhaps our change of life direction wasn't quite as dramatic or sudden as Paul's. That would be more typical of my own story, which many of you know. I can only say that the last thing I thought I would become was a minister! That wasn't even on the radar range when I was considering my life's work! And I know that Mike didn't expect to be a pastor's spouse! We were still in college when we married, and had a whole lot of growing up and growing into life ahead of us.

That same thing is true for all of us. Just look at the college degrees some people possess, and look at what they're doing with their work lives. Sometimes there seems to be absolutely no connection between the two. For instance, our daughter's degree is in anthropology, but she is a network engineer. Go figure!

Clearly, there are those kinds of obvious changes that accompany an inward change of heart, but there are also more profound changes that we experience. We no longer see others the way we once did; we tend to become more caring and more compassionate. We think differently about justice issues, and want to work for those who are not treated justly by society. We see those who are poor and homeless and hungry, and we want to do something to help.

When God's love permeates to the very core of our being, we become new people! We no longer view the world the way we once did. We see ourselves as connected to our brothers and sisters, wherever they may live, and however they live. What we believe about God and about one another changes as we draw closer to each other and to God. And it's not that we're forced to change, but that we genuinely *want* to be different people. We are not the same anymore; a new life has begun!

Brian McLaren is a pastor who has gone through some significant changes in terms of his faith, what he believes, and how he lives his faith. (You might want to jot on your calendars to come to St. Luke's to hear him when he speaks there on September 17.) In his book, *A New Kind of Christian*, he talks about reinterpreting the faith in light of the changes we undergo in our connection with God. This is what he has to say: "The lowest available risk that I see is the risk of journeying on in faith. You see, I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe Jesus meant it when he said the Spirit of God would be with us, guiding us, to the very end. So I believe that God will guide us through these winds and currents of change, no matter what storms come. In fact, I believe that God is the wind in our sails, leading us into the change." And so do I.

Closing:

James Redfield has written, "Life is really about a spiritual unfolding that is personal and enchanting..." I really believe that is true, so as we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we will open our hearts and minds spirits to God's overwhelming love, and be ready to see ourselves as one of God's remodeling projects.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.