

# Happy New You

31 December 2006

Bible passage: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (*The Message*)

“Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with Christ gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons!”

**Sermon nugget:** As we prepare to start 2007, let’s see what innermost changes we might need to consider to create a “happy new you.”

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Tomorrow we flip the calendar to another new year, and I’m beginning to realize that what my parents always said is true—time flies! It hardly seems possible that we’ve begun the millennium, much less starting the last half of the first decade of the new millennium!

As time goes by, lots of things change. Someone sent me a listing of how things were in the year 1904, and we can readily see that things have changed. For instance, in 1904, the average life expectancy in the US was 47 years. Only 14% of the homes in the US had a bathtub, and only 8% had a telephone. There were only 8,000 cars in the US, and only 144 miles of paved roads. The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.

The average wage in the US was 22 cents an hour, and the average US worker made between \$200-\$400 per year. Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen, and coffee was fifteen cents a pound. Compare that to Starbucks prices! Another amazing statistic—there were only about 230 reported murders in the entire country.

In addition, things like crossword puzzles, canned beer and iced tea hadn’t been invented. There was no Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. Only 6% of Americans had graduated from high school. When we consider all the kinds of changes we’ve experienced in the last 102 years, it becomes even more mind-boggling to think about what might happen over the next 100 years.

It’s not just external conditions that have changed. Human beings have changed, as well. I clipped an article **out of the Star** a while back that had the sub-heading, “**Humans have changed so much in the past century that scientists are astounded.**” Researcher **Robert W. Fogel** of the University of Chicago, said that human beings in the industrialized world have undergone “**a form of evolution that is unique not only to humankind, but unique among the 7,000 or so generations of humans who have ever inhabited the earth.**” Well, at least you can say that we’re part of a history-making generation!

The article went on to say that the changes do not involve genes, but they are changes in the human form. A piece of the good news is that human bodies are not breaking down the way they did before; the onset of disabling diseases tends to occur 10-25 years later than a century ago. The human mind also seems to be improved, because earlier

self-care results in less dementia, less cardiovascular disease, and thus fewer mini strokes. In general, too, we’re living a lot longer. Today nearly ½ of those living to age 65 can expect to see age 85, whereas 100 years ago, only 13% of those age 65 could expect to do so.

However, the most amazing change has to do with the way we look. American men are nearly 3 inches taller today than a century ago, and they’re about 100 pounds heavier. While some of us aren’t exactly thrilled with those additional pounds, apparently, to at least some degree, they add to our life span and to our healthy living. Someone asked if old age for today’s Baby Boomers would be anything like the old age we think we know, and the answer was “no.”

Now so far, all those changes we’ve talked about are things that have happened outwardly that affect us inwardly. As we approach the New Year, I would guess that many of us are contemplating what changes we’d like to see in our lives. Some of them may be health and fitness related, but there may also be some of a more major nature, like a significant life shift, or a revision of who we are.

That’s what **our Bible passage** indicates is possible, and it’s not just possible at the beginning of a New Year, but because of our faith, it’s possible every single day. Our passage reads like this: “**Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with Christ gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons!**”

I think that has to do with seeing in a new way. Let me share an analogy to what I’m talking about. I am guessing that many of us drive to work or to school, even here to The Garden, and we have the accustomed route that we usually take. Today, on the way home, or tomorrow when driving to work, intentionally take a different route. When we do that, we may see parts of the city that we’ve not seen before, or we may notice things that would typically have gone unnoticed. On the next drive, take the normal route and apply the same way of looking that we apply to the new unfamiliar route. That’s what seeing with new eyes is all about—looking at what we’ve seen in the past with a new reference point, a new perspective.

Once our faith becomes more than words and takes hold in our hearts, we see the world around us differently, and we are new people. Then we begin to experience a new way of relating to one another and to God, Things that we never noticed before are now things of which we’re aware.

**William Sloane Coffin** wrote, “**A good time to change your mind is when to do so will widen your heart.**” The kind of change that faith brings causes us to widen our heart. It’s not about changing our preferences or routine behaviors, but it’s a deep change of our hearts and minds. It’s only when that kind of change begins to happen that our faith takes on legs and begins to walk and talk. The ways in which we might previously have been critical or judgmental

are eased, and our hearts are more forgiving and more loving. We're not so quick to reject or discard people, and more readily embrace and welcome all our brothers and sisters.

We're not as concerned with how it affects me, but rather work for the greater good for all. **Dorothy Allison** put it well when she wrote, "Change, when it comes, cracks everything open." Indeed it does, because what we're really talking about is a complete change of heart that shows itself inside and out.

However, I'm not trying to imply that changing is an easy thing to do; it's quite the contrary. Even though our heart may want to be different, those old habits are hard to break, and it may take a long time. We have to be patient, and keep at it, knowing full well that we're going to fall, but the important thing is that we get back up again. We may fail in a miserable fashion, but the promise of God is that we are forgiven, that each day is a chance for a new start and a fresh beginning. And we walk, step by step, day by day, building on the foundation of God's love to be the person we believe we're created to be.

I have a friend who's a pastor in Texas, and he's sort of a radical kind of guy, with a goatee that he braids—sometimes in one braid, sometimes in two and sometimes in three. I'd love to have him come preach here some Sunday, but I'm not sure he could do it in 45 minutes!

At any rate, he often talks about the life he lived before Jesus became a reality in his life. **Rudy Rasmus** is his name, and he's just written a book entitled *Touch*. In it, he tells how he started out. He wrote, "Never trust preachers and church folk." That statement was one of the lessons my Dad taught me, and I believed him. My only contact with church religious people revealed their poisonous blend of self righteousness and hypocrisy. I didn't mind making money off them, but I sure wasn't attracted to them in any way." He made a good living, but it came about in a less than positive way, so he had a lot of friends in what Garth Brooks would call "low places."

Rudy began to go with his wife and kids to church, not because he really wanted to—only that it was the "right thing to do." Then he joined a Bible study and began reading about the man Jesus. He read how Jesus related to people on the edge, people just like him. As he read more and learned more, Rudy was able to say, "I was desperate and empty. My life was headed in the wrong direction, and I knew it. I opened my heart to Jesus and began the most life-changing relationship ever known to man."

Rudy began a wonderful journey that continues to this day, and the remarkable thing about it is that his ministry now touches those on the edge, the kind of folk Jesus touched. Through God's love in his heart, he is living a different life and through him, that love is seeping into the hearts of all

those he encounters. That's the kind of deep change he has gone through.

And that's the kind of change, to one degree or another, we go through when we "get it," when we realize that God really does love us, that God forgives us when we mess up, that we get a chance at a fresh start, that God picks us up when we fall. When we let God in to change our hearts, we become a "new you."

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#### Closing:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we're ready for a happy new you, and a happy new year.

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