



Sixth Sunday After Epiphany

February 12, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: God Gives Us the Change We Need To Grow!

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.



You've heard the expression, *"The more things change, the more they stay the same."* It's pretty easy for us to get stuck in the same old comfortable groove we're used to living in. But in order for growth and maturity to occur change is necessary. Some changes are for the better; some are for the worse. Our world isn't a static environment in which everything stays the same day in and day out like it did in the Bill Murray comedy "Groundhog Day." Life is lived in stages: infant, toddler, preschooler, little kid, big kid, tween, teen, young adult, adult, middle-aged person, AARP card-carrying member and senior citizen. Change is inevitable—even expected. As people age, their diet changes too. Newborns subsist entirely on their mother's milk or nutrient-enriched formula; next comes mushy baby foods the consistency of apple sauce or pudding followed by diced-up grown-up food. Eventually most of us develop finely-tuned taste-buds that are able to discern the subtlest nuances of flavor in a wide variety of culinary delights.

Sometimes traumatic events or major life changes can leave people plateaued at a level they can't seem to move past without some intensive, loving intervention. That's what was happening to the spiritual growth and development of the members of the Christian congregation in Corinth. They'd stopped with the basic Bible teachings; they'd lost their zeal for digging into God's Word in order to mine the treasures God has hidden there; they'd grown dangerously complacent about their relationship with the Lord and were taking His blessings for granted. So the Apostle Paul felt compelled to lovingly intervene by way of his two letters to the members of the church he'd founded in Corinth while on his 2nd missionary trip. Inspired by God the Holy Spirit, St. Paul reminded his **"brothers and sisters"** that:

God Gives Us the Change We Need To Grow!

The Apostle Paul knew all about change. He'd undergone a massive spiritual makeover while on the road to the Syrian capital of Damascus. He was headed there with arrest warrants for followers of **"the Way"** (Acts 9:2) as Christians were known at the time. He went at the behest of the Jewish Ruling Council—aka the Sanhedrin—the governing body that had condemned Jesus to die for blasphemy. Paul's given name was Saul. He was from the city of Tarsus, now in SE Turkey. In Acts 8, we're told that **"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison"** (v. 3). But all of that changed for Saul when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, an event recorded in Acts chapter 9. There we read, **"As [Saul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do'"** (vv. 3-6).

Baptized at the hands of a Christian named Ananias, Saul the persecutor became God's **"chosen instrument to proclaim [His] name to the Gentiles and their kinds and to the people of Israel"** (vv. 15-16) as the Lord informed a reluctant Ananias, who was well aware of Saul's savage persecution of believers in and around the region.

Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Study 9 am)

7305 208th Ave NE, Redmond, WA 98053

(425) 868-9404 - www.lhlc.org, pastortodd@lhlc.org

Page 2 of 4



The Apostle Paul went on to establish Christian outposts for the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the Mediterranean world and was inspired by God's Spirit to pen the bulk of the Bible's New Testament. Any one of the things he suffered for the sake of Jesus and His gospel would've put the average Joe out of commission. But not Paul! He knew how much he'd received from God—the 2nd chance he'd been given—the dynamic plot twist that transformed him from a vicious persecutor of the fledgling church into its greatest architect and builder. That's what drove him on; that's what fired him up; that's what filled his heart with an unbridled zeal to share his joy in Jesus with as many people as possible. Later on in his 1st letter to the Corinthians he states: **"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings"** (9:22b-23). So while he *never* changed the content of his message, he *always* custom-tailored his presentation depending upon the spiritual background and the specific needs of his hearers.

So what did that mean for the Corinthians? Well for one thing, they'd undergone the same spiritual about-face that Paul had experienced in less dramatic fashion. They heard and believed the gospel that changes hearts and redirects lives. So Paul could address them in his opening remarks as **"those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people"** (1:2). Their spiritual transformation took place largely thru Paul's ministry and that of Apollos, as Paul reminded them. But Paul wasn't tooting his own horn, nor was he orchestrating a popularity contest with Apollos. He was instructing his readers that it should never, ever be about the pastors who lead the flock of believers they belong to. It should always, only and ever be about Jesus. With that in mind, Paul writes:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

So it is with you, and so it is with me. I may plant and water as I faithfully preach and teach God's saving truths. But I'm merely doing the work God has assigned me to do as His called servant. How you respond to me and to my work in God's behalf is largely up to you. For many of you, I'm not the only shepherd you've had. For some of you, I am. But that's not what matters. What matters is our relationship to Christ and—as a blessed byproduct of that bond with Him—our union in this family of believers, in which each one of us has equal status before God. **"You"** my brothers and sisters in Christ **"are God's field, God's building"** and not mine—any more than the Corinthians were Paul's or Apollos'. So where did that leave them? And where does that leave us? Well that all depends on us.

As for the Corinthians, their spiritual growth and development had stagnated. They hadn't advanced beyond the Bible's ABCs. So Paul took them to task for their complacency and worldliness.



He wrote, “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?” What about us? Are we “not mere human beings” when we act like the Corinthians, with “jealousy and quarreling” instead of like “brothers and sisters” in Christ who’ve been placed by Him into this congregation to serve as His ambassadors who hold out the word of truth and our mutual hope?

How do we grow beyond our divisions? How do we advance in our understanding of and gratitude for the blessings we share as members of Living Hope? Are we “people who live by the Spirit” or “people who are still worldly”? Are we ready for “solid food” or are we content to stay “mere infants in Christ”? To answer those questions, we need to answer one more: “How committed am I to growing spiritually so that I mature into a child of God who forgives as I’ve been forgiven—fully and freely, with no strings attached—and loves unconditionally as I’ve been loved by Jesus”? Start with a personal spiritual growth plan for 2017. Make it a goal to attend worship services more often. If you come once a month commit to twice a month. Take notes on the sermon and email me with your questions or observations. Bible class affords those opportunities organically and offers the added benefit of getting to know your fellow members at a deeper level as well. Home devotions with your family is also a wonderful way to grow in your faith.

Praise God that His Son made the change we needed so that we could be reconciled to God! The unchanging God took on our flesh and blood in order to live up to the standard of perfection God demands of us in His moral law. He took our sins and guilt upon Himself and died as our perfect Substitute, thus rendering the full payment to God to buy us back from an eternity of suffering in hell. He atoned for our jealousy, strife and discord too. From His cross He cried out victoriously, “It is finished!” before He died. Can we be certain that Jesus successfully completed His mission of earning our pardon before God’s throne? Absolutely! Because the Bible says that God “raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked . . . And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:20-23).

I’m God’s called “servant” who “plants and waters” just like Paul and Apollos. You are “God’s field, God’s building,” rising up like a phoenix from the ashes of this dying world. Let’s work together, rejoicing that “God” alone “makes things grow.” Amen.