

Sermon - February 12, 2017 - Epiphany 6

Changed For Growth

1 Corinthians 3:1–9

Introduction:

Dear Friends in Christ

It is said that boys stop growing somewhere between the ages of 20 to 22 and girls at the age of 15 to 16. But as growth takes place, changes are seen, sometimes gradual, sometimes fast changes, depending on the health of the person. But changes are part of the natural growth process, they are a must.



In the same way we grow spiritually. From birth at our baptism to becoming mature Christians growing in the likeness of Christ, but in order to grow, changes must occur. Change is evidence that we are growing spiritually. But for a change to take place Christ has to work in our lives. He is the only one who can change

us. That's what the apostle Paul explains in his epistle reading this morning.

I. **We've been changed!**

The congregation in Corinth was planted by the apostle Paul during his second missionary journey (AD 49–51). Then Apollos, a gifted and eloquent teacher from Alexandria, followed Paul, and when he arrived in Corinth "...he greatly helped those who through grace had believed" (Acts 18:27). Perhaps that was the reason why now the congregation at Corinth was divided. Could be that it was because of preaching styles? Apollos was a very gifted speaker but Paul himself wasn't, in fact he gives a hint that his own preaching was seen by some to be unimpressive, however both were good friends and coworkers, and most importantly have been changed by Christ just as every Christian in Corinth had been.

In fact, all of us here this morning, have been changed too. If you have been baptized, then you have been changed. You have been brought from death into life in Christ. If your faith is in Christ alone, you have been changed, you have been born again! We have been raised from the death that original sin has produce, the sin of Adam and Eve's disobedience. The sin we were born with!—yes, as much as we behold an adorable little baby and think wow, so much innocence... on the outside that might be, but inside that adorable baby is a spitting, spiting hater, enemy of God, because of what we call original sin. The sin we are born with because of Adam and Eve.

But when a soul becomes a believer in Christ Jesus, when a soul is regenerated in the waters of baptism, a new person is created inside who begins to love God, who begins to trust God above all things, and who begins to grow in the likeness of Christ, and from there begins to grow in the likeness of Christ.

But as that growth takes place changes need to happen. The apostle Paul for example, experienced big changes, first was his former way of life. He was a man of the Law, religious law that is, and because of that he even persecuted the church, but now he is a proclaimer and planter of the Christian faith, the truth, and the life.

Another was his view of circumcision. Circumcision was what made him to be what he was, a Jew. But now, circumcision was not an issue, but Christ was, for he now was a changed man. His life, his traditions, his way of thinking all changed and focused on Christ alone, as we heard last Sunday.

There had been a change in the Corinthians too. They had heard and believed the Gospel that changes people, that's why Paul was able to address them as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2).

Likewise, we have been changed by the Good News of the Gospel, posed for growth. Or are we, because really we still need lots of changes to make, in our personal lives. I know I still need to change lots. But I confess, the reality is that, in certain areas of my life, I'm not a big fan of change. I know which side of the bed a sleep on, we tried once or twice switching place with my wife, it didn't work. I'm sure many of us fear change, don't we, for really we are people of flesh and people of flesh are people of habit!

We need to be changed!

II. But we need change to grow (v 1).

Just like the people in Corinth, change was still needed, It looked like they were still babies. "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready." Paul writes them.

Change was needed so there could be growth: from mother's milk to solid food, from people of the flesh to people of the Spirit. What they were doing and saying showed that they were still infants in the faith, and that means still being in the flesh.

And, being in the flesh means doing things our way not God's way. In the church at Corinth there sinful rivalries—factions for Paul or Apollos, members against one another, though Paul and Apollos themselves weren't divided at all, but the congregation was.

Instead of that division, each Corinthian—and each now-living Christian—should say, "I belong to God the Father through his Son by the Spirit's working!" And we should also boldly and gladly say, "I belong to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ." Instead of proudly boast against my weaker brothers and sisters.

At Corinth their reasoning divided them, of which Martin Luther writes "This clever wisdom and reason can well serve to make nothing but mad saints and wild Christians" (AE 35:382).

So how are we like the people of Corinth? We are changed already by the Good News, right! But we still need to make lots of changes so we can grow spiritually.

Is there any jealous among us? Do we have any conflicts, any divisions? Don't we want our ways to be done? Sometimes, it is "us vrs them" "I'm right, but you aren't!" Our decision making is divided, and more, some of the things we are divided over are within reason, and that's a good thing, but what we don't realize is how much our divisions prevent others from hearing and seen the Gospel at work in our congregation, in our community, and in our lives. What about at home, at work and school? Because our spiritual growth must affect those areas too, its bound to happen. We must change or will end up like Martin Luther says: "mad saints and wild Christians" (AE 35:382).

And if we are behaving like that, then we agree with Paul that we are still babies in the faith, but unless we allow for God to keep changing us what we are doing will lead us to death, if fact already is.

Therefore we need to grow, and but in order for us to grow we must deal with our flesh! But hear now the Good News, and the Good news is that there is One whom became flesh for all people.

III. The Son of God made the change we need.

Christ, the unchanging God, is the One who became flesh for the forgiveness of our sins, and that forgiveness destroys all jealousy and strife. Christ is the one who died for all who are still living in the flesh so they can conquer it.

His work on the Cross of Calvary, his victory over the grave, give us life, new and never-ending, that is freely given to each and every one who trust solely, fully on Him, and him Crucified, resurrected and victorious.

And more: these gifts, of Jesus' cross and his open tomb are delivered to us in the simple water and strong Word of Holy Baptism and the Supper of our Lord's very body and blood, there is the greatest gift of faith given to each one of us.

This is the food that will keep us growing! Yes we might be babies now, but as we hold on to God's gifts of grace and receive God's growth that he gives there in, we will not remain babies, we will grow, and we will grow in the likeness of Christ.

But this is a gift from God, not our doing.

IV. And when God changes us, we grow (vv 5–6).

Babies have to grow! After the baby has some growth the next stops is kindergarten. That's the place where bigger babies, kinder, children, are planted, watered, and grow. Likewise God desires that each of us grows, God's word is planted in our hearts, and through the Word, and the means of grace we are watered, and given growth.

But in order for us to grow, God needs to change us. Change operated by his Word and the means of grace which also water our faith. And after we are watered by God's word and the sacrament we wait in patience for growth.

Now, here too, I confess, I had a hard time to change. And I'll tell you why. I'm convinced that what I'm telling you today, that God's word and the Sacraments do change us, but sometimes change is slow, I want faster changes, in all of us. And when I don't see that I ask what's wrong. Isn't God's word strong enough that we don't show any change? You would think that a student will respond quickly! Right? But I was wrong on this one. Now I know that it is the Holy Spirit, in his own time, that grants that growth not my efforts or the efforts of the student. All we do is learn and keep learning. It is all in God's time, and as we deal with our fleshly nature God will grants us growth!

But one thing is clear is that God is always about change. God is always about growth, and our work so to speak is to allow him to do his work in us, to change us, through Word and Sacrament. God continually plants his word in our hearts through worship, through our personal reading of his word, and Bible study. It's always planting and watering time.

The Epiphany season, this season we are in, is a time to consider and commit to Christ's mission for his Church—is always a time for God to give growth, and produce fruit.

And the Church faithfully sows the seed of Christ's Gospel and faithfully waters what is planted, that the harvest will be greater and greater.

For this truth must be affirmed and celebrated (v 7b): It is "only God who gives the growth." The changed Church—and the changed-in-Christ disciple—matures as God continues to give the growth.

Conclusion:

It is said that boys stop growing somewhere between the ages of 20 to 22 and girls at the age of 15 to 16. Not so in our spiritual life! We must keep growing!

We must allow God to change us, and as he changes us, we do continually seek God's guidance in the mission of the Church, we pray that he will show us how his Word calls us to change—not to change ourselves, but to be changed by the Gospel.

By God's grace, through the Spirit's work, you will see those changes in the way you deal with anger, with conflict, with lust, with marriage and divorce, and more, (Mt 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–37). As you seek his will, you will see his Word and the means of grace working in you!

For he is the one who makes the change.

In His name, amen.