

“A Church for a Change”

Text: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11

Henry F. Lyte wrote in his now famous hymn, Abide with Me: “Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not abide with me!” (LSB 878 v. 4) These words written almost two centuries ago speak of the world that he knew and the one that we know today. In that way, not much has changed.

But then there are those changes that he spoke of and that you and I know today. People’s lives continue to change in the way they live. Technology is always changing....Face book....Twitter.....I Phones.....GPS, just to mention a few. Several years ago when my cell phone was about to die, the lady at the phone store suggested that I replace it. She asked me, “What would you like your phone to do?” I responded, “To make and receive calls!” Well, I’ve changed too, the phone I have now can do any number of things. Catching up in a changing world, the next one may do other things.

Being a Christian is about change too. St. Paul writes: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (II Corinthians 5:17) Today we celebrate what is often considered the birthday of the Christian Church-the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was unleashed on the disciples and the followers of Jesus and 3,000 people became believers on that day. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus promised this coming to his disciples. They would never be the same nor would the church or the world for that matter for it was the beginning of-

A CHURCH FOR A CHANGE

I. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

II. In our baptism the Holy Spirit has made us alive

I.

A. A new day would be coming for the disciples and Jesus speaks about it in our Gospel lesson: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” The Holy Spirit works through God’s word and brings people to faith through that word. Scripture points to Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. It is the vehicle or means that the Holy Spirit uses.

Through his coming that word would be spread in an even greater way and the disciples would be empowered to bring that word to the world of their day. Before he ascended into heaven, the disciples asked Jesus: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus responded: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:6-8)

There is quite a change in the disciples after Pentecost. They would no longer be timid, but rather bold spokesman who brought the gospel to the world even at the risk of their own death. This is the promise that Jesus lays before them in our text. It was a sad time for them as Jesus was leaving, but it was necessary for his plan for them to unfold. Jesus would need to finish his mission and he could only do this by dying, rising and ascending that this important mission of the Christian Church could continue. What was happening certainly raised questions in the mind of the disciples, but at Pentecost and after they would understand.

B. In verse 27 Jesus says, “And you also will bear witness, for you have been with since the beginning.” When Judas was replaced, this was one of the qualifications for his replacement. Matthias was chosen, partially because he had been with them from the beginning. (Acts 1:21)

The disciples could witness not only with the word, but also with their experience with Jesus. He had conducted a “seminary on the go” with them, so they could witness what they had seen him say and do. Years ago a lady approached me with this question: “How come the church isn’t like it used to be in the book of Acts?” I told that it was. Special signs accompanied the disciples in those days, but the same word and Holy Spirit who was active then, is active today as well and promises to be in the future.

This two pronged witnessing that Jesus speaks of to the disciples is yours today as well. Through the pages of Scripture you have seen your Savior. You can also tell what he has done in your life. Like the disciples you have been changed. As members of Trinity and the Holy Christian Church faith has been created in you. Because of that you too have been changed!

II.

A. In most of us, the Holy Spirit entered through our baptism. We see that in our baptism in the early service Sunday. We become God’s own children and the Holy Spirit lives within us. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews lists the great heroes of the faith in the Old Testament as examples to New Testament believers. In conclusion he says of them: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:39-40)

What those saints waited for, you know for sure because the Holy Spirit has made it clear to you as a baptized child of God who believes his word. As verses 8-

10 point out that word is at work in us and in our world of today. Sin, righteousness, and judgment are spoken of by Jesus and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He brings people to faith and keeps them there. Those who refuse to believe are judged already. God's righteousness is given feely to you and to me who believe in the Son of God our Savior Jesus Christ. God's word had changed us and as it works in our baptism we have been changed and made alive.

B. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bear witness and the disciples would as well. As God's changed people we have an influence on those around us. Jesus told the disciples that they would be witnesses. The same is true for us today as well. Jesus said in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

As God's children we have an effect on those who are around us. Maybe we don't think of that very often, but it isn't about us, but the Holy Spirit at work in us. Reading through the gospels who would have thought that Peter of all people would be used to convert 3,000 people on the first Pentecost? Where were the rest when Jesus went to the cross? Only St. John remained there in support of his Lord. Only Peter and John ran to the open tomb on that first Easter morning of the disciples. But they were changed men!

As we see their shortcomings we can certainly identify with them. We have failed in our witness to our Lord before others. The good news is in God's forgiveness and the same Holy Spirit that they had. They were tremendously changed and we are too. The church is about a change brought about in all of us that we can bring change to others around us for God grants it for Jesus' sake. Amen.