

May 5, 2019  
Sermon "Change"  
Rev. Mark Moline

Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James, John and two others out on the Sea of Galilee in a fishing boat. What a strange little group of men and how much they had changed in the previous three years since they had first met Jesus.

How long has it been since you were first introduced to Jesus and (more importantly) how much have you changed? There was still a lot in the lives of those seven men, we read of in today's Gospel, much that still needed to be changed, and with the coming of Pentecost they would indeed change.

They had been through a lot together, and only one of their closest circle had refused to change, only one had truly slipped back into his old Judas self, his old thoughts, and his old ways. The others may have experienced short-lived lapses, but still, they ultimately followed Christ.

Change does not come easy for most of us. Change does not come easy, and yet here we are as members of this parish caught up in a period of challenging transition. And, all along, we have known that the parish will not change unless we change as individuals. We also know that our relationship with Christ and with one-another should change us with or without a new Rector Search. As Paul wrote in his second letter to the church at Corinth, "therefore, if any person "be" in Christ, he or she is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold all things are new."

We have only to look at this morning's first reading to see that --- when it came to personal change, Paul knew what he was writing about. This morning we have the story of Paul's own wild and radical conversion – He became a changed man. Same person, new name - new creation. In that same reading we also learn of a disciple named Ananias. In a vision, the Lord told Ananias to go to Paul and help him recover his sight. But Ananias was afraid because he knew, just as those who had been acquainted with Judas knew, and just as you know, - some folks adamantly refuse to change.

Change is not usually comfortable. We often resist it; and if that change is God's will, in resisting the change – we resist God. Some refuse to allow God to change them. They exercise their God-given free will and they reject the opportunity to grow in Christ. Some refuse to change; but others merely drag their feet. I think there is a great difference between outright rejection of change, and slow belabored acceptance of it. Let's not get hung up this morning on some sort of guilt trip over how little we've personally changed. How begrudgingly we accept and even embrace change. I said change is not always comfortable – change can even be painful at times.

Not everyone experiences Paul's type of radical conversion. Some do, but I think that some are more like me than they are like St. Paul. My personal faith journey has seemed like a lifetime of

three steps forward – two back. God gets the credit for the ultimate and eventual progress. But still, change seems to take forever.

I've said it before; God doesn't clone Christians – there are no two of us exactly alike. Unless we flatly refuse, through faith /// we will change and become new in Christ. Just how we do that, and our timing may differ from one believer to the next.

Don't become discouraged about your own rate of personal progress. Put that seemingly ominous need to change in God's hands – and then embrace the God who is love. In so doing you will embrace the change. Some reject God and refuse to be changed. Other accept God and yet -- the change seems so slow. Ananias knew this and was afraid of Paul. In that vision the Lord reassured him by telling him to Go, "for he (that is PAUL) is an instrument whom I have chosen."

God, change us all into your instruments of peace. We often pray that prayer attributed to St. Francis: "Lord make us instruments of your peace." That's just asking for change. Methodist poet and inspirational author and educator William Arthur Ward wrote, "The pessimist complains about the wind, the Optimist expects it to change. The realist adjusts the sails."

For ten months now a small group of realists, serving on the vestry and/or on the "New Rector Search Committee" have been busy adjusting the sails for the changes that are about to occur at Redeemer. We do appreciate their time, talent, persistence, hard work and willingness to change.

We know that very soon now we all must go to work implementing the many changes that face this parish. We also know that this is best done by first adjusting the sails of our own personal spiritual journeys.

For it is in loving our God and our neighbor that we are changed, - and it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and become a new creation in Christ. Indeed Lord, make us instruments of your peace even if that includes becoming instruments of change in accord with your will.