

## **Some Things Never Change**

**Isaiah 9:1-4; I Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23; Psalm 27: 1, 4-9 1-27-08**

I am sure there are times when we all think that there are some things and some people in this world that never change. Sometimes we feel this way because we desperately want someone to change in the ways they act and react to us but that never seems to happen. Or, we might dream on a larger scale that our country or world or government will change to serve everyone better. But as much as we might claim we would like change in others or in the larger world, we are the first to resist any alteration to the way things are. It is just too easy and comfortable to remain in our same old patterns of living and moving and having our beings to want to become any different. This is just human nature.

Obviously this is a problem with institutions as well as with humans. Paul discovered this when he dealt with the church at Corinth.

Corinth was a busy, bustling city, a center of commerce with all the problems that make up a diverse culture. There were temples and altars to many different gods and goddesses throughout the city. The old ways held fast when this new group of people following the new way of Christ appeared on the scene. Paul is believed to have personally planted this church and he had strong ties to it. He understood the struggles the people involved with that little church would face. Temptation was on every hand and it was a very difficult thing to move against the tide of the established life there. There were many external pressures on this small group of people to conform to some other way than the way Paul had taught them to follow.

But the external pressures were not all there were. Within this small body of Christ there often was turmoil. This, as we all know, is not an oddity for churches. I like to think that people always try to act for the betterment of the entire body of Christ in which they work. I like to think that they have the welfare of the church and the other members in mind when thoughts and elbows start to fly as well as judgments about one another. Yes, I have gotten to my age being rather naïve and it still serves me well. I have great faith in the power people have when they discover a common cause and decide to pull together. Amazing things can be accomplished when this happens. This always seems to be a fragile union, however, and we need constant reminders of what it is that lies before us to keep us moving forward. We cannot lose sight of the mission we have to help spread the kingdom of God.

In Corinth, as well as in any other place where strong personalities gather, there was quite a bit of bickering going on as to who had the inside track on their faith, which of them was better. There was boasting going on about, of all things, which group had been had been baptized by whom and which group should be more highly regarded in the structure of the church.

I can imagine Paul sitting in Ephesus shaking his head over the reports he had received about the events in that tiny church and deciding he needed to intervene in the form of a letter. So, he did. Not just with one letter but with a possible total of four for this one struggling church. I am sure by the fourth letter he was mumbling to him self,

“Some things never change.” No matter how he told them that the way they handled and regarded one another was not the way of Christ, they just didn’t get it.

Very few have seemed to “get it” down through the centuries. From the prophetic voices which proclaimed that a new way of life was coming in the form of a messiah, a savior, to those who were closest to Jesus, to us. We just don’t get it all the time. We have flashes of insight and flashes of promise. But, overall we do not understand what needs to be done. We do not manage to integrate the way, the truth and the life into our lives. This does not mean we are bad people. We just are a little lazy and find it truly difficult to wake up to a new day and a new way of doing things. The old familiar ways seem to serve us better.

The understanding of this saddened and disappointed Paul, as it does all pastors. But, we know that all the sermons in the world and all the letters cannot make people wake up and discover the way they are supposed to live as Christians. We know that it depends on the Spirit of God entering the heart of each person and touching and moving him or her in the direction in which Christ calls.

In my mind, this is a version of a second coming. First, we hear the stories of Jesus and learn them. We know what he preached about love, forgiveness, patience, kindness and inclusiveness. We know this in our minds. Then, when we know this in our hearts, life and the way we view it and the people around us change. Until this “heart change” takes place there can be no steady forward movement.

Jesus worked to change the hearts of people. Paul understood the basic necessity of a change in heart. He had one himself—a change that moved him from persecuting Christians to becoming one of Christ’s most ardent followers.

Deep down, we understand this, too. Don’t we? We are just afraid if we truly live from our hearts we will be vulnerable to others. Our fear keeps us from the love we will encounter if we dare to share the love we have. We keep our defenses in place and lose much of the true treasure of life. We do not want to be hurt. We do battle with others and fend them off or dance away when they get a little too close. Doing this, we end up working against each other and keeping the message of Christ safely at bay. How terribly sad this is.

Imagine where we might be as individuals, as a community and as a world if we decided to set aside the walls we have built to separate us and discovered the common causes that unite us. Imagine what might happen if, instead of saying, “Some things never change,” we realize that the “things” that must change are our selves if we are ever to be the people God desires us to be.

-- Amen