

Sunday 7 June 2020
(Peace With Justice Sunday)

Ephesians 4:17-24

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord:

you must no longer live as Gentiles live,
in futility of your minds.

They are darkened in their understanding,
alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.

They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness,
greedy to practice every kind of impurity,

this is not the way you learned Christ!

For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus.

You were taught to put away your former life,

your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts,

and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

and to cloth yourselves with the new self,

created according to the likeness of Christ in true righteousness and holiness.

Let us pray:

We resist change, O God.

Change our hearts of stone.

Change our stubborn wills.

Change our limited understanding.

Change our selfish behavior,

Help us put away our former lives

and clothe us in a new self made in the image and likeness of Christ. Amen.

“We Must Change”

Change is difficult, but is very necessary. We have been in constant change since the moment of our conception. We change in size. I started out microscopic and now I am 5 foot 10 inches and as I continue to age I will start shrinking. At one time you would have had to use special instruments to determine my weight, I was so small, but then I ballooned to over to nearly 240 pounds. Since then I have tried to keep my weight much lower and healthier. But I have changed in more ways than just physically. Through the years I have changed emotionally, intellectually, politically, and spiritually. Change is an aspect of living and the promise of God is that changes will happen all through eternity as we go from glory unto glory.

Methodists have described these spiritual changes as moving on to perfection. To us Jesus was human perfection and is who we want to become more and more like. We want to have in us the mind that was in Christ. We want to think more like Christ. We want to be questioning like Christ. We want to be open to listen to the voice of God found in what others say. This is our goal, not to just following rules but to follow the living Christ. To become like him in every way

we can. The more we grow in our understanding of other people the more we become like Christ who meets other people where they are.

Jesus was not stuck in the past, like the pharisees and the teachers of the law. Jesus would say, “you have heard it said, but I say.” Jesus was always building upon the teachings of the past. Moving us closer to what God is dreaming for our lives. Jesus was always expanding the limits of human understanding. Jesus was an agent of life, so Jesus was an agent of change. So we must be careful not to make idols of the past, how others believed, nor what the saints said and did. Those are all nice, but upon this foundation, God wants us to continue the work of building the kingdom of God. Some of us spend our whole lives marveling at the craftsmanship of the foundations, but never get busy doing our part to begin the next step. Walls will not look anything like that wonderful foundation, and those who went before us and struggled so valiantly to provide us with a solid foundation, only dreamed of the possibility of the work that is before us. The changes we orchestrate are no less important, and hopefully our children will look at the framing we have accomplished with our lives and marvel at the skill we have used and at how exact our measurements were. Our changes will give way to the next generation of changes until God’s kingdom is fully come. We get in trouble when all we do is continue to do what those before us had done. If they built foundations, we build foundation and try to do it just like them. We may even work to tear down the framing others try to build, claiming that is not part of our tradition and against the teachings passed down to us. We forget that change is not only a good thing, but necessary for us to do what God needs us to do.

We do not want to remain in our “Gentile” ways, our old ways. God wants to continue to evolve into the image and likeness of Christ. “Gentile” ways are always our starting point, when we first start to work with God. From there God changes not only the ways we think, but the ways we act and our very dreams for our future. The goals of our old lives is not the same as the focus of a life in Christ. In the old world view we were the focus, but Christ was not focused on himself. Christ was not focused upon his own needs. Christ was focused on the needs of others. Jesus did not worry about his salvation but the salvation of others. Jesus did not worry about feeding his own hungers but feeding the hungers of others. The focus of Christ was never upon his own glory and reputation, but upon the honor, glory and praise of God. Jesus would not even allow others to call him good, but always reminded them that only God is good. Jesus did not want others to go and tell about what he did, but wanted to inspire others to tell about the greatness of God. This is how we are to be. It is not about us any longer it is all about God. It is no longer we who live but Christ living in us.

God wants to change our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Just as Jesus was compassionate, we are seeking to become more and more compassionate ourselves. When I was a child, I thought and acted like a child, but then when I grew up I put away my childishness. As we mature, we move from being mainly concerned about our own desires and needs, to learning to first provide for our needs, and then as an adult to provide for the needs of others. Am I my brother’s keeper? Yes I am. God always wants me to care, and to work hand in hand with God to meet the needs of the members of God’s family. Like any adult, God wants us to willingly sacrifice for the sake of our children. When they are hungry, God wants us to feed them, even if it means we have less to feed ourselves. God wants us to struggle to provide them with

education and opportunities that we might never have enjoyed ourselves. My son Gabriel went to Lebanon Valley College, and spent all the savings we had for his education within the first year. From then on he received a number of scholarships from people who invested in his education. If it were not for those who provided scholarship funds for other people's children, God's children, he would not be where he is today working in the Botany labs of the Smithsonian Institution. This is what God wants us to do. I remember the joy I always had during senior's week, when as pastor I could present scholarships to graduating senior who had been part of our UMYF, as we helped them further their education. That money was gathered from cookie and candy sales as members of the church made sure this would happen in their poor community. Growth in compassion helps us find ways of meeting need, providing transitional housing, providing opportunity to eat and fellowship, meeting emergency needs, being on Volunteer in mission teams offering a helping hand to those who experienced disaster in their lives. As we grow and change God opens our eyes to more and more ways to become the hands and feet of the living Christ.

God wants us to put away our former ways of life. That is yesterday's life. Today God wants us to be better, more loving, more Christ like. Then God wants us to put that former life away and tomorrow become even more like Christ, to learn new things, ask new questions, continue to change how you think and believe. Everyday God want us to keep changing, continually growing more gracious and kind; acting with more kindness and acceptance; developing in our ability to forgive and to set people free to be themselves. God wants us to find a new life in Christ every single day of our eternal life.

God does not want us to be afraid of getting dirty, making mistakes, or failing. God's got us covered by his grace. God wants us to keep learning, exploring, and discovering something new, and then to become a new creation that is ever changing. God wants us to extend this same grace to others. God wants us to let others get dirty, make mistakes and fail, and then cover them with grace and encourage them along their journey of change, so they too may become more and more like Christ.

Change is scary and learning new things is a challenge and a real struggle, but it is the way that Christ has set before us. We cannot live as we once did, and neither can anyone else. Change is sacred. Questions and doubts are holy. It is the only way to clothe ourselves with a new self, the self God desires for us in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray:

God who delights in our development and growth into new creations,
help us embrace change and delight as you make all things new.

Give us hearts filled with expectation as the world changes all round us.

Make us ever attentive to you, as we leave the past behind and follow Christ out into the world.

Let us go boldly where no one has ever been before. Amen.

Today we will be trying something new *A Remembrance of Eucharist*.

I know that the Lord is still with you.
I long to hear you once again affirm that the Lord is also with me.
We still lift up our hearts.
Even apart we can lift them up before our Lord.
Even in the middle of this devastating pandemic we give thanks unto the Lord.
Even apart it is meet and right so to do.

How our hearts yearn to come before You together in Your sanctuary.
Our choir desires to sing Your praises
and to lead the congregation in hymns of praise.
We long for the day when we might once again pass Your peace,
greet one another with a holy kiss, and extend the right hand of fellowship with our neighbors.

Our time away from Your sanctuary feels like a great sacrifice,
sometimes it feels too great to bear, yet we offer it up to You as an act of holy worship.
Sanctify our separation, as we seek to end this plague upon our community.
Use this act of love and grace that we extend to each other for safety
may it be to You as a song of praise and gratitude for the community of souls we hold so dear.

In this silence, let us hear more clearly Your intimate voice.
In this solitude, let us feel the assurance that we are always held in Your strong embrace.
May we remember with gratitude our baptisms each time we wash our hands.
May we remember with thanksgiving Your breath of life, when we wear our masks.
May we celebrate our community with each telephone call we share and
may we rejoice to hear each other's voice.

During this pandemic Your praises have not been silenced. They are still heard on earth and in heaven as those around Your throne continually sing:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed are they that come in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Even while we are apart, we still remember that in the fullness of time You sent Jesus.
The fullness of time was not a peaceful sweet idyllic time.
The fullness of time was a time of danger, of exile, of grief and sorrow.
The fullness of time was filled with the unknown and a heart felt longing for a better day.
The fullness of time was filled with hope and a trust in Your great promises to be fulfilled in the life of a baby.
These promises took time to develop, but would mature, grow and become the savior of the world in due time.

We do not always understand what You are doing.
You try to wash our feet, but we feel unworthy.
You try to explain that the servant of all is the person we are to emulate.

You try to help us understand is that all we need to do is love.
But we still struggle to understand.

Even now during this time of social isolation, we remember
how during his last Passover celebration,
that Jesus took the matzah used to remind us all of those who are still struggling under
oppression.
We remember Christ's joyful prayer of thanksgiving.
We remember how Jesus broke the bread, and shared it to include everyone.
We remember it being said: "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you."
We remember how we have recalled Christ's acts and words every time we ate the bread of his
table.
And we are grateful.

Even now during this time of social isolation, we remember
how after his last Passover meal,
Jesus took the cup of wine, used to remember the hope we hold in our hearts for deliverance.
We remember Christ's joyful prayer of thanksgiving.
We remember how Jesus passed the cup and shared it to include everyone.
We remember it being said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of God's covenant,
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."
We have remembered how we have recalled Christ's acts and words every time we drank from
his cup.
And we are grateful.

It is important to remember, as important as this sacrament is, that what Christ has done is what
we remember. It is what Christ has done through his sacrifice that has not only changed our
lives but has redeemed the world. It is this holy mystery that makes all the difference even
during this separation: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Indelible Memory, Present Reality

Bless the congregation of Valley Forge United Methodist Church during this season of
separation.

Use our prayers to bring healing in the world.

Use our social distancing to bring healing to our community.

Use our cleanliness to bring healing to our lives and homes.

Be present with those who are battling this virus.

Forgive our impatience and show us how to be a blessing, just as You have continued to blessed
us,

in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now wherever you may be, let us join together as one congregation to pray as our Lord has
taught us saying:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.
Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Remember to share your prayer requests.
Remember to share your tithes and offerings as you are able.
Remember to call each other and support each other.
Remember Bible Study on Wednesday on Facebook.

Now may the God who encourages us to change
The ever new Father, Son and Holy Spirit
bring into your life new adventure
in the image of Christ. Amen.