

What Hope is there for Change #6 **Change changes everything**

Can you guess which of my three children gave me this drawing – 13, 9, or my 3 yr. old. Correct. Earlier this week my 3 year old Lorenzo gave me this drawing. I could hear Rosalie and Lorenzo working on this masterpiece, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Picasso, or our own Tim G. I must admit when he presented it to me I was a little surprised when he identified which one was me.....not so much because the head is oval or I have no torso at all. More so because my arms is sticking in my head – I wasn't sure what type of statement he was saying.

I'll be honest, I wasn't quite sure what to do as Lorenzo looked at me with his big eyes saying "Papi, do you like my picture?" However I could feel the eyes of wife upon me....the "stare" from across the room came from my lovely wife and w/o a word I could her telling me said "Leonard your child is only 3 this drawing is incredible and age appropriate so you better gush over the drawing....now!" Yes I did "gush".

But what my wife didn't know was that the day before at Lorenzo's daycare I had picked up a flyer that outlined the age appropriate developmental milestones or developmental benchmarks for a child from 2 months up to age 5 should be engaged in.

Those of you with little children may or may not be aware of these developmental steps that medical/social science compiled and have determined that there some uniform markers that our natural outgrowths of a healthy child's natural development as the grow up and mature. I found this to be fascinating. I realize that for many of you this isn't news....in fact my wife routinely reminds me as my opening story attest that in the midst of my own parental conflict with the children "***Leonard, what Lorenzo (Carmela, Marcela) is doing is age appropriate (be it not listening, talking back, sucking their lip, not answering me the first..okay enough) – however Leonard your response isn't age appropriate!***" (But that conversation is for another sermon). My wife is correct that there are specific developmental appropriate behaviors that you and I can look for in our children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, church kids, etc. Interested?

Early childhood milestone map

- **3-4 months:** A baby watches faces w/ interest, begins to smile
- **7 months:** A baby explores hands and mouth; finds objects, uses voices to express joy and displeasure
- **12 months:** A toddler enjoys games like "I am going to get you", responds to "no", mama and dada, imitates others
- **2 years:** A toddler points to pictures and objects, recognizes different people, follows instructions (*potty training begins or ends for some*)
- **3 years:** A toddler wide range of emotions, builds stuff, (I, you, me), motor skills begin to develop
- **4 years:** A child cooperates w/ children, names colors and may count, speaks in sentences, tells stories
- **5 years:** A child likes to sing, is able to distinguish between pretend and real life, can count 10 or more objects, 4 colors, and speaks in complete sentences.

I would note that temper tantrums, and similar "acting out" and the like will continue well into young adult hood!

Anyone from a child psychologist, daycare provider, and a babysitter, to a parent or just a “passerby” can look at Lorenzo or one of other children and by how they are interacting with other children around them, how they are speaking or not speaking or perhaps their physical stature - height and weight, we can roughly estimate their age. And if we fail to accurately gauge a child’s age based on the criteria that is normally associated with the “norm” the natural question to ask is what has delayed their otherwise natural childhood development, their maturity or perhaps the other question could be what has accelerated their natural childhood development and maturity. The premise in natural childhood development is that under ordinary conditions – change will happen in a baby. A baby will change and grow and assume characteristics of growing toddler, child, adolescent, etc. If a child doesn’t – it presents to those of us who are concerned for the child development into teen agers, young adults and eventually adulthood – so that they can take of us mind....it presents a red flag of sorts that proper change isn’t happening. As a result some kind of intervention –medical, exercises, diet, genealogical, etc....that a ***change*** has to happen, a dramatic shift needs to begin...right? What about our own spiritual markers of change in our lives?

11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man/woman/adult, I put childish ways behind me.....have you?

Have we collectively as people belonging to God truly become a community who have collectively put childish ways behind us?

This morning I have a rather simple message for each of us to consider from our ongoing sermon series on the topic of change.

Central Theme: That lasting change occurs in our nation, in our cities/communities or congregationally – real change, transformational change begins with each of us individually in our relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen?

Yes we have seen Change in the White House. Yes we have seen Change in our city as the murder rate decreased in 2008. Yes we are experiencing change as we transition into a larger worship space and expanding community programs. Yet the fact remains if we are going to participate in this environment of change ***“allowing thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*** we as people must be receiving by God’s grace a greater measure of love, joy, peace, hope, compassion, _____. The question for each of us to ponder this morning is How are you changing and maturing as people of faith? How do you know as indicated in the great love chapter of I cor 13....that you are growing up, what are your spiritual markers in our lives?

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Central Theme: real change, real transformational change begins with each of us individually. What childish ways do you, do we have to put behind us this day?

In our reading this morning we find a people that were struggling to put both individually and corporately their “childish ways behind them.” These are rather challenging words delivered

by the Apostle Paul – I would not have wanted to read this letter to the church unless I was behind a wall or something. Before I get to the shortcomings of the church in Rome – let me share a little history of the church in Rome.

Background

The Church of Rome was somewhat unusual for the early church. It included both Jews and Gentiles. These two groups that had a long history of open and hostile animosity and thereby being intentional in separating – but the good news of the Gospel propelled them. Because of the saving and reconciling work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross and Resurrection we are no longer stranger but brothers and sisters in Christ, Jew, Gentile, Man, Woman, Black, Hispanic, Asian, White. The foundational message of the birth, life, and death and resurrection is that no one, no one can keep you and me from receiving the grace of God, the love of God. Amen. But. Say “but”. In the book of Romans specifically in the first 2 chapters of the letter the underlying question is **“What is our response to the Grace given to us by God?”** How is the Grace of God impacting how we are living our lives? How is the Grace of God impacting our relationships – marriage, parent, church, etc? How is the Grace of God affecting our life choices? For Paul, the understanding is clear that upon receiving the grace, the mercy, the love of God into our lives through Jesus Christ – THE CHANGE ABOVE ALL OTHER CHANGES - Will lead to a transformed life.

- **For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Romans 2:13**

Illustrations

Author **Henri Nouwen** rather straightforwardly says ***“Do you (we) really want to be converted? Are you willing to be transformed? Or do you keep clutching your old ways of life with one hand while with the other you beg people to help you change?”*** pg. 75 *“The Dance of Life”*

Paul give us an indication as to what maturity looks like:

27But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit – don’t have time to expound...spirit driven love)

The Apostle Paul in Chapter 2 of Romans is articulating what for some of you may not come as a surprise. He is saying for all the world to hear that there is hypocrisy within the church, specifically in the context of the community in Rome. How many of you are shocked by this pronouncement? For Paul his rather pointed words is directed at the Church in Rome because when they are gathered they say or act one way, but as soon as they leave the community intentionally live/act differently. Earlier in **chapter 1** Paul list a rather lengthy list of vices – sexual promiscuity, greed, evil, gossip, slanders, boasting/pride...”**God-haters”,etc. He says that**

“they invent ways of doing evil” & “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie”.

For many then and even today they failed to see how their open and public vices, these prodigal behaviors against one another were even more tragically against God. Paul in the chapters 1&2 indicates that it would be better to keep quiet against those living outside the church – because within the walls of the church community you’re not living any better. **In**

other words the grace of God that has been extended to them through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, though the Holy Spirit has positioned every Christian to respond with a life of faith, a life of hope a life of love – vertical and horizontal. Yet according to Romans 2 the church community to the grace of God extended to them was rejection of law, rejection of the truth. So much so the truth was exchanged for a lie. Have you ever believed a lie so long that it became a truth - **”Grasshoopers in our own eyes”**

The story of the rich young ruler had the opposite of the “Grasshooper complex”. I guess he had the “Rich Ruler Complex.” In the Gospel account we read how this young man confronted Jesus. And so we have an earnest young man, wealthy -- very wealthy, indeed -- and probably because of his wealth and earnestness about spiritual matters, a person entrusted with governance in the synagogue, a ruler, a respected person in the community. And in his fine robes, immaculately groomed, he is kneeling in the dirt of the roadside at the edge of town, with a burning question on his heart.

"A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' " (18:18)

Adultery. No. Murder. No. Stealing. No. Lying. No. Honored Parents. Yes.

21“All these I have kept since I was a boy.” He said

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Not in our own strength but by the Spirit says the Lord can we please God. Because of God’s grace extended to us though his Son Jesus Christ – what is our response to this grace?

- For the Israelites it was to believe the lie that we are to dwell in our misery, never believing that God could free us, redeem us, and expand their territory,
- For the Rich Man it was believing the lie of legalism that only understood faith as a vertical checklist failing to fully receive the Grace of God,
- For the Romans it was believing the lie that our vices are not detrimental to our continue spiritual maturity. For the Romans it was believing the lie that holiness is less than.....that the transformational power of the Sprit is for everyone else but you.
- What is the lie that you believe today – your marriage it is what it is. Your desire to finish your education – you’re not good enough. You grew up in the church or you were baptized or you took communion and that insulates...what you have done or where you work or you unemployed are the sum of who you are. IT IS A LIE

Far too often in our conversation of change, of hope we fail to wrestle with the question as to how am I responding to the grace of God – Leonard Dow, _____, how am I changing and becoming more like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. How are we as a body As I was preparing, I was struck by that far too often in our own faith walk the absence of markers of development in our walk. In other words, how do you know if you are “naturally developing” as a person of faith as naturally as a baby develops into a toddler, into child, youth, etc. So often we use words like change, transformed or more church words like converted, penitent or repent to describe our often “heartfelt” desire to:

- change our prodigal behavior,
- to change our lassie-faire attitude toward family and friends and faith,
- to change and open our hearts and minds to all the possibilities given to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- To change our communities, our world

“*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is near!” The word “repent” may be a little old-fashioned, but it simply means to change our attitudes, change our direction, change our ways. It means to turn away from the direction in which we have been going so far, and start out in a different direction. It means to aim our lives toward the things of God and spirit instead of toward the things of this world. What was Paul looking for in Rome, What was God seeking from the Children of Israel, what was Jesus speaking too in the Rich Young Ruler? The same that I sense are markers – even when we fall short:

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I began my message this morning with my sons artwork, I shared with you how both Rosalie and I gushed over it....amen. I want each of you to know that our God desires to gush over you this morning – gather you like “mother hen with chicks” and embrace you. Don’t believe the lies anymore.....

2 Corinthians 4

1Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.5For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ... 7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.