

February 27, 2022

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

"Freedom to Change"

When my children were growing up I, on occasion, sang the refrain from what I consider to be the best song from the musical "Bye Bye Birdie" just within their earshot. I thought it was hilarious, but they were not impressed. It was a missed opportunity for them because the song was obviously sung tongue in cheek. But somehow – hearing these words put my kids in an enormously defensive position: "*Kids! You can talk and talk till your face is blue! Kids! But they still just do what they want to do! Why can't they be like we were, perfect in every way? What's the matter with kids today?*"

Perhaps it isn't facially obvious that this is parody instead of meaningful assertion. But it sure feels like it to me. As far back as Socrates in ancient Greece we have the despair of the older generation in the face of the new on record.

It seems the issue isn't really the generation gap – but the repetitive nature of human experience. "The more things change, the more _____." (They stay the same.) It is a terrifying truth that life is change and human beings hate change. We have to do better. And Paul wants us to.

Paul wrestles in our text this morning with the nature of change in his life. Change which took him from being a Rabbi to an apostle of Jesus Christ. And as an Apostle, Paul never seemed to outrun those who wanted to make Jesus less than God among us. This text is less a religious studies dissertation – and more an exploration of the life of faith.

The heart of the matter is connection to God – and our *habits, self-defeating patterns of behavior and desire for everything to be simple* get in the way. Paul's argument turns on that marvelous phrase, "***Where the spirit of the Lord is – Freedom.***" We need *to get free of that which clogs up our connection to God: habits, self-defeating patterns of behavior and simplification.*

It is crucial for us to recognize that this isn't us suddenly getting smart and figuring out how to get God on our side. The challenge is all ours, but the solution is all God's. In fact, the solution is God's very self.

In Christ we see God's glory. And as we look at that glory, we are changed. Changed from those who believe that real power in this world comes from political influence or military might. And in our time, perhaps fame, wealth, and social position. *These are the things which act as veils over our hearts, minds, and souls.* And the only way to remove that veil is to stare into the face of Christ.

We know there is a difference between life experience and time passed. *So let's not bide our time.* Let's understand that *the purpose of life isn't to get by but to grow into the image of Christ.*

The warning siren in this passage is *hardened minds*. Minds which simply repeat the same human mistakes generation after generation and don't allow themselves to be transformed by the presence and purposes of God. We can miss this warning if we decide it is only, "*Those people over there* who have lost their way and are in need of transformation." We have a lot of that in our time, don't we? Paul says we all need transformation and God is gracious enough to provide it in Jesus.

It can begin to sound a bit self-serving – *we stare at the glory of God and are transformed!* Yeah, for us! And it is a miracle when God molds us more and more into the image of Christ. But God's mercy doesn't stop there – God's mercy also *calls us to ministry.* We are transformed by *God to do something* – and in the doing we don't lose heart because it was God's idea. Life together in Christian community can be hard. But God is faithful...and building our life together is God's call.

Perhaps you have sung of this process. "*Changed from glory into glory – till in heaven we take our place. Till we cast our crowns before thee – lost in wonder, love and praise.*" This is the wonder of what God can do with the likes of us: Ordinary change averse humans who learn to *be inspired* by the glory of God – *transformed by the glory of God and live – for the glory of God.*

What's the matter with kids today? Nothing more than is wrong with the rest of us. And by the grace of God – none of us are beyond the help a little "*holy change*" *can't handle.*