

## People Can Change

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

One of the greatest verses in Scripture is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 ... It says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: and everything old has passed away; open your eyes and see that everything about us has become new" ...

I think what St. Paul was telling us is that when the love of Christ becomes the center of our lives – our spirits are renewed and we're forever changed... We're changed from being self-centered and caring only for ourselves – and then transformed into people who not only bring love and light into the world – but we become people who love God with all that we have, say, and do...

and because we love God (we can then love the people around us)... and we can be changed...

Now I'd like to say that – that change occurs over night – or instantaneously (and that all of a sudden every Christian who says a prayer, or reads the Bible is going to become like Mother Theresa)– but experience has shown me that most people change through time very slowly... change happens one step at a time (and not always as quickly as some of us would like)...

But the Bible does promise us (that when the seed of God's love is planted in our hearts) that all people can change and become a new creation...

You know, there's a story I love to tell about a man named James Winburn... he wrote a short story about his life called, 'The Paper Weight' ... and in the telling of his story he shares how he spent so much of his life wanting to find love and acceptance from his father (and wanting his father to change)... but, unfortunately, his father's drinking and miserable attitude always prevented the type of relationship he was looking for...

And so going back to when he was 10 years old (during the Christmas of 1956) and a student in Miss Autrey's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class – he was told by his teacher that all fathers loved paper weights... and so his task, (like the task of every student in his class), was to find a smooth, round stone – paint it, cover it with glue and glitter – and then put a little piece of felt on the bottom...

So James thought long and hard about which color to paint his stone – and then thought that a dark green that matched his father's 1953 Hudson Hornet would make his father very happy...

and so carefully he worked on that rock and wanted more than anything else to give his father a present that would change his attitude and perhaps bring him a smile (something he rarely saw his father do)...

Well, James was too excited to wait until the morning and decided to give him the paper weight early on Christmas eve... his father taking his eyes off of the TV for a moment (and putting down his glass of gin) saw the present, pulled away each layer of tissue paper, looked up at James, and then with a funny expression on his face wondered, "'a rock?' ... that's very cute!.. thank you!"

His father patted his son on the head, and put the paper weight near his drink – where it sat for days, weeks, and months – until finally one day it vanished... James wasn't sure where it went but assumed in the garbage... but at least, James thought to himself, he didn't have to look at it any longer and be reminded of the embarrassment (and rejection) it brought him...

The rest of the story tells how things never really seemed to change much... his parents eventually divorced, his father's drinking continued, and there were even episodes when James got into arguments with his father (and began to resent the man that his father had become)...

And even though James spent his life believing in the Christian faith (and wanting to believe in the words of 2 Corinthians) – he failed to believe that his father would ever change (or become a new creation like St. Paul had described)... and through time became more and more distant from his father altogether...

You know, I think that's more in line with reality for some of us... because most of us know someone who seems hopeless... who's been miserable and lacking in love... who has hurt us...

and believing that certain people can change (or become a new creation as St. Paul saw it) can become a stumbling block in our faith... because it's not always so easy to believe in miracles – when time after time all we've ever witnessed were let downs, disappointments and setbacks...

but Jesus told his disciples that even the Kingdom of Heaven is found in that way... that it starts out with something small and insignificant (like a mustard seed – which is a very small seed) and by the Grace of God it becomes the greatest of all shrubs...

and I'd like to believe that every baptism I've ever done is like a seed planted (it might not seem like much at the time - but by the Grace of God - will eventually prove to be the most important event in that child's life)...

or the time that I spend with the confirmands (who are often confirmed and then not seen again for years) I'd like to believe that somehow the time we spent together was like planting a seed – and will one day bring forth a better understanding of God's love in their life (when they need to know that the most) – and ultimately bring them back to the Lord so that they can find peace – and share that peace that they find with others...

and every sermon I write – I know they're not all going to be winners (or speak to every person who comes to church) – but I always pray that in some way that each sermon might be like a little seed that might sit in the hearts of God's people (and bear fruit when necessary)...

And I've learned through the years that it's not always the big events in life that draw people to God – or allow them to change... but even in what appears to be the smallest of things (when done with the love of God in our hearts) can have a lasting effect on the people we meet – and it can help them become a new creation in Christ – just as we too have become a new creation by every seed that God has planted in us...

God can use even the smallest of things to change the hearts of His people...

That truth became evident to James Winburn when his father entered the last part of his life... for whatever reason his father stopped drinking, and seemingly out of nowhere he changed... he went from being a man who was loveless and became a man who wanted to show as much love as he could...

For the first time ever, James even started visiting his father, and had conversations with him that he had been looking for his whole life... and he remembered how after visiting his father one night (as his father was waving goodbye through the screen door) he noticed his father was crying... wondering what was wrong, James got out of the car and asked him– but his father told him everything was okay – he was just filled with so much emotion....

A few weeks later James learned the reason for his father’s tears... his father was sick and nothing could be done...

James Winburn closes with these thoughts, “I drove over to Dad’s house to clean out his belongings two days after he passed away... and toward the end of the job, at the very back of his closet, I pulled out a shoebox... it was strangely heavy in my hand... I opened the lid... and inside was a small object, wrapped in tissue...

Pulling the tissue away, layer by layer, I found an ungainly green rock, sprinkled with glitter... and somehow, holding that rock in my hands – and knowing that my father kept it all of those years because deep down he really loved me, the last of my resentment vanished”...

He goes on to say, “people can change... they can grow... I know because my dad did... and so did I... just like I had hoped a change would happen all those years ago... back then, I innocently hoped a little paperweight I had made in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade would change things between my dad and me... and now I see, by the Grace of God, that it had... it changed everything”...

St. Paul says that if anyone is in Christ they can become a new creation – and although the change might not occur immediately or overnight – every seed that

is planted in our hearts with the love of the Lord – will bring forth fruit in God's time...

Be blessed in knowing that with God all things are possible – changes can occur when you least expect them – and even in what appears to be small and insignificant at first, can become the greatest of all things when done with the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts...