

START OVER AS CHANGED PEOPLE!

My wife and I had an unusual experience last weekend. We did the strangest thing! We went to this place called a restaurant, and we ate dinner IN there! These people called waiters actually asked what we wanted to have for dinner, then brought it to our table. We didn't have to set the table or do the dishes after!

Yes, it feels a little strange doing things again we once did often and without a thought. These last 2 ½ months of staying home have kept us all away from so many places and people. Has it been hard on you? Its affected us all in many different ways.

When Sue and I went out to eat, there wasn't any buzz or excitement in the air. there weren't many people there and it was quiet. It was a different experience. It wasn't the same.

Summer is here. We've looked forward to getting out and enjoying the weather. Yet, this won't be a usual summer. We know it will be different than any other summer, but we don't yet fully know in what ways it will be different.

Restaurants and businesses are opening up. But will things go back to the way it was pre-pandemic? Its doubtful. We are going through a major event that will bring some lasting changes.

Not all changes are bad. What good things have happened because of this pandemic? I've seen families going on walks together. I've seen people getting out of the house away from electronic gizmos and enjoying simple things – like trying out roller skates, and talking to neighbors. I've gotten to know my neighbors a whole lot more.

So here's a question for you to think about: What good things have you learned during these past 2 ½ months, that you want to keep doing after the State opens back up? What lessons have you learned, what habits have you started that you don't want to forget? There's been a lot of death and suffering in this pandemic, for sure! And there have been blessings mixed in. So, instead of going back to your life as it was before the pandemic hit, how will your life be

better than it was? How will you start anew? Will you cook at home more? Play more games with family members? Make more time to help neighbors? Read more books? Instead of going back to life before the pandemic hit, how can you start anew?

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We heard the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, how they proclaimed Jesus in every known language in the world and that was a miracle. They never studied those languages before. We heard the account of 3,000 new believers being baptized on that first day.

Yet Pentecost was more than just a strange and mysterious event long ago. It was God starting anew. Jesus was gone into heaven. And on Pentecost we see that God was NOT going back to the way life was pre-crucifixion, or pre-3 years of following Jesus as disciple. God was changing the future, improving the future, starting over, upping His game! That's what God did on Pentecost long ago. He created a new changed people.

And here's the question for you to consider today: Is it time for you and me to do the same? Is it time for us, who say we are followers of Jesus Christ, to start over in a new way? Is it time for a Pentecost-like change for us who trust Christ as Forgiver and Leader of our lives, and who look forward to heaven forever with Him – is it time for us to be made new today? To become like the people God planned for His people to be on the first Pentecost?

God has always had a mission to save all people. Since Adam and Eve first turned from God, He set in motion His search and rescue plan for all people, including you and me. For thousands and thousands of years God worked bring about a payment for all sin of all time through sacrificing His innocent, sinless Son. For millennia He shaped and formed a people for Himself. On Pentecost God started anew. He introduced His mission to save and love people version 2.0

These amazing changes God started on Pentecost:
Jesus' earthly leadership → Apostles' leadership

Disciples Hiding	→	Disciples boldly Proclaiming
No Spirit empowering	→	Holy Spirit indwelling all believers
God's people only ethnic Jewish	→	God's people of all races, languages, & social classes
Jerusalem	→	World
Judaism of rules	→	Christianity of freedom in grace
Law trying to earn standing with God	→	Gospel rejoicing in stand with God given by grace
Synagogues	→	Churches

This pandemic will change people. Never the same. God did the same. Started over. God's same loving desire to save all people, but in a new, wonderful way. And we today, are to be part of God's new, improved people.

The power of the Holy Spirit came, and created a new people. What was that people of God like?

GOD'S IDEA OF THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF CHURCH:

1. **A Model of CHRIST – CENTEREDNESS.** The heart of the church was the message about Jesus! That He was is the Messiah foretold long ago. He suffered, died, was buried, proclaimed His victory first to the devil and demons in hell, then His body rose from the grave. And this is not fiction, but truth. There are many witnesses.

³¹*[King David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.* ³²*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.* Acts 2: 31-36

- See, we all Sin! You do. You need to have the barrier of sin that stands between you and God the Father removed. None

of us can do this on our own. But the Father, in love, gave His Son, Jesus, who did just that.

- THIS is what God's people today – us, His Church – are to be about. Christ centeredness. What holds us together is not that we sing the same songs out of the same hymn book, not our friendships, not pitching in together to meet the church budget, not the next greatest pot-luck supper, not remembering Grandma Schwartz who for 70 years sat every Sunday in the 6th pew from the back, 3rd spot from the left aisle window.
- It's CHRIST CENTEREDNESS. It's all about Jesus. That He came down to earth for us all – lived, died to pay for all sins with His life, rose again to guarantee forgiveness, and is coming again.
- THIS one, Peter proclaimed to the crowd on Pentecost, - Jesus - who was "Crucified is Lord & Christ." He is the master, the leader of our lives. He is the ruler of all the universe, all time and eternity to come. IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS! Are you? Are we?

The Holy Spirit created a new People of God who are

2. A Model of REAL REPENTANCE.

- Do you see self as guilty of violating God's law? Offending God? Deserve to go to hell?
"³⁷Now when [the crowd] heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins," Acts 2: 37-38a
- Repentance is rare. These days immorality / sex on TV – everywhere!, Nobody, it seems, sins because everybody is right. The Bible is considered irrelevant to life today. And without unchangeable Bible truth, then no one believes they have lived contrary to God truth and sinned.
- Repentance 2 parts:

1. Sorrow: “I was wrong. I sinned. God has every right to be angry w/ me.”
2. Turn TO Christ = faith, receive forgiveness

Repentance involves baptism. God’s idea is a people committed to a

3. A Model of **SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE THROUGH BAPTISM.**

³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2: 39-41

- Baptism is for forgiveness of your sins
 - a. BE baptized if you haven’t
 - b. TAKE COMFORT in baptism
- In baptism, you are personally called by name into God’s family. God Himself invites, takes you by hand, ushers you into His house. Not an accident or stroke of fate.
- + in Baptism, the Holy Spirit – takes control of your life — NEW life, to LOVE – really love God and love other people.
- Are you a person of repentance and celebrating your Baptism? Are we these kind of people?

The power of H.S. came creating a people who are

4. A Model of **BOLD WITNESSING.**

Growing community: 11 > 120 > 3000+ ***And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*** Acts 2: 41

Us today – this is who we are to be. Boldly Witnessing.

We should have a diversity of backgrounds so we look like the community around us: yet, have UNITY of faith! (vs. 8 – 11) Do we have this zeal? Is this who we are today?

When we share Jesus, God will use what we say and Others brought to faith. Then we must grow.

Maybe you are planting your garden now. The young plants need water, sun, and nutrients. Without them, the plants will die. Is your faith alive? Are you feeding your faith?

God's people are to be

5. A Model of DEVOTION. The first believers are described in like this: *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* Acts 2:42

- **To God's WORD.** Is Bible study with other believers your priority? Is it ours as God's people?
- **To Christ-Centered FELLOWSHIP.** Christ-followers are Not loners. "Me & God alone" is not His plan. Fellowship is friendship + more. It's carrying each other's burdens in trouble, encouraging each other, celebrating no body.
- **To the SACRAMENTS and WORSHIP.** Devoted not = 1x/mo attenders.
 - What could you do on Sun am / Sat eve? (answer)
 - I can worship God in nature. Don't deny. Can tree give you Communion?
- **To PRAYER.**
PRIORITY – Earlier this year we emphasized that Prayer is the First Step in reaching our Community. Ask & Plead w/ God to go ahead, to lead us, to bring people to Himself.
DEVOTED!

One of miracles then, can & SHOULD still happen today – their care for each other:

6. A Model of CARING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together

and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, Acts 2: 44-46b

Miracle of care – we need that today – lonelier than ever!

- Grow into giving, sharing, caring people. So giving not just extras (zucchini) but essentials!

Witnessing, devoted to Word, fellowship, worship, prayer, giving – WHEW! Tired? Made them grouchy?

7. A Model of JOY.

they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people.

Acts 2: 46c-47a JOY, glad hearts

8. A Model of GOD – GIVEN GROWTH.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved Acts 2: 47b – the miracle God does

God's idea of church is not a thing / place / building / structure / institution

Biblical Acts 2 model is an exciting, dynamic BLESSING to you
Group of people (PEOPLE) – PEOPLE repentant, forgiven, empowered, sharing Christ, devoted, caring, gathering, growing, joy-filled!

Are YOU like the people God planned for His people to be on the first Pentecost? Are we?

Let's be honest. We over focus on flower shows, fashion shows, bake sales, car washes, lovely lunches, super suppers, big breakfasts. We over focus on money and budgets, buildings, décor, organization, doing things in the "right" way (way we've done it). And do you forget to focus on what church really is when stay away from worship, study, fellowship, prayer?

St Paul as a congregation, and I / YOU haven't lived as God created His new people to be!

Friends, this is Sin. This may be what we are accustomed to. This may be our history. Let's take an honest assessment of our life as God's People in light of His call.

And let's go back to the cross – the source of all forgiveness. Let's be made new again in His sin and guilt removing grace.

And let's ask God the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts and minds fully, without reservation. To take us over, and make of us God's people 2.0

Friends, by God's grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, your future and our Future can be different. The future must be different.

When my father-in-law came home from World War II, he just wanted to put the trauma of the war behind, and start a new life at home in peace. Soon a family came along, and a steady job, and God blessed in many ways. Life after World War 2 was much better than before or during the war.

I hope that when this covid19 pandemic ends, your life will be more blessed than before. I hope the trauma will be left behind, the blessings begun during this time will continue and be made fuller.

And I hope God, in His grace, also changes you, and all of us. That we live more fully in His ways, as His people, His church, carrying on His redemptive mission for this world. Amen.