

The Single Most Hopeful Scariest Word! Acts 1:1-9, 2:1-21

Portions adapted from PENTECOST CAN BE SUMMED UP IN ONE WORD... by Don Schultz

Name one word that basically describes every aspect of your life from birth to around age 20, yet becomes an increasingly fearful thought after the age of 65?

I would suggest that word would be: **CHANGE.**

At birth, change was all we knew; change made up every single day of our life. We were young, flexible, built to adapt, eager to grow. How amazing we were as a new born. Entering the world completely helpless, unable to do the simplest thing for ourselves, but by the age of two we had learned to walk, talk and have an attitude. We were rapidly growing.

Then came the school years, as teachers – according to our abilities – attempted to harness and direct our growth, our change in particular directions: academic, artistic, athletic, social. Change was still a regular part of our life and still mostly joyful.

But after the school years came a time of “settling down.” With luck we found a good spouse, a good job, a good home and we looked forward to many years of good life. Change came less often, and while some of it was less joyous, we could still adapt.

By the senior years, most of the new changes in our life - physical and social – became less welcome. The downward paths of our health and social connections are at best disturbing and if we are not careful to maintain a youthful flexibility of thought, change becomes something to be feared.

But if you think about it, CHANGE continues to define every part of our LIFE. Every day brings change, sometimes good sometimes not-so-good; but whether this change is welcomed or feared depends upon our attitude towards change.

Now here is a hopeful word: **GROWTH.** In our younger years, growth was synonymous with change; in fact growth caused most of the change in our early life. But throughout the entirety of our life, **GROWTH can still be defined as our physical or mental ability to adapt to change. Because either we adapt to the changes in our life or we die.** That is a profound truth for plants, animals, us humans, and yes even whole churches. Growth, adaptation to change, does not have to stop when we reach a certain point of maturity be it 65 or 175 years of age. Even though our bodies may have begun a slow reversal, our mental abilities can continue to grow right up to the point of physical death. Doctors assure us, barring any health complications, that we can continue to grow mentally, getting smarter, wiser, and more

knowledgeable as we age. We may think a bit slower, but that's because we have so much more information to sort through.

I once reminded one church member, who was complaining about all the changes in life, that growth is the only healthy response to change; in fact I said, "**if you are not growing then you are dying.**" For some reason that thought offended them. But it is an inescapable truth: if you are not still growing through the changes in your life, then you have begun to die; whether as an individual or as a church. I know which I would rather be doing in both circumstances.

Which brings us to the significance of today: Pentecost is a celebration of Change. Specifically, the promised change that occurs when Jesus comes into our lives. At **Christmas** we celebrate Jesus' entrance into our world. At **Easter** we celebrate Jesus' death, resurrection, so that we can enter his world. At **Pentecost**, we celebrate Jesus' entrance into our individual lives through the Spirit of God that He sent to live with and within us. As we say in our creed, *Jesus ascended into heaven, to be everywhere present* (and Jesus accomplishes part of that "everywhere" feat by living in every single one of his children). In theory, Jesus now has millions of hands to do His work, millions of hearts through which to continue sharing his compassion with our world. **That is if we are willing to accept and grow with the change that the Holy Spirit would bring into our lives .**

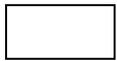
Because you see, God is all about change. If you have trusted Christ as your savior He has already changed you from spiritually dead to spiritually alive, from lost to now found, from not a people to God's own people. But God wants to continue that change as you grow up in your new life, *being transformed by the renewing of your mind*: which is just one way the Bible describes **spiritual growth**.

Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus that we must not remain as spiritual babies, tossed about by the waves of life, carried away by every religious fad, or by human cunning with their deceitful schemes, but we are to grow up into Christ, building one another up in our faith, as we get to know him better (Eph. 4:14-15).

The Apostle Peter wrote that God has given us everything we need to grow in life and godliness; and those things are

- His indwelling Holy Spirit,
- our growing knowledge of God's word,
- our disciplined skills of faith, self-control, godliness, mutual affection
- and a Christian family in which to grow and support one another.

Peter went on to say, that if we have stopped growing as a Christian, *if we lack these qualities in increasing nature*, then we have forgotten who we became in Christ (*1 Peter 1:3-9*).



Today is Pentecost Sunday, and as we take a look at what happened on that first Pentecost many years ago, we can see how dramatically the entrance of God's Spirit changed so many people's lives. And as we learn about those changes, we will also learn in what ways God is wants to be changing each one of us.

Just before his death, Jesus promised his disciples that two major changes would take place on Pentecost. Promised change number one was what happened to the disciples. If you are familiar with the Scriptures, you know that the disciples believed in Jesus as their Savior, but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things. They still didn't fully understand Jesus' mission, why he had come to earth. They were still wondering if Jesus would be an earthly king.

They were confused, and as a result, they were timid in their faith. They weren't confident about sharing the Gospel with others. How could they be, if they didn't fully understand it? But just before his death, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come into their lives to bring back to remembrance everything he had taught them.

But promised change number two was that the Holy Spirit would also be working in the lives of those whom the Disciples would be witnessing to, convicting the world of sin, God's judgment, and their need for righteousness (John 14:25-26, 16:7-15). So these Spirit filled witnesses would find a Spirit convicted audience ready to hear their message.

Then, after his resurrection, Jesus also added that his coming Spirit would give these confused, fearful disciples **the power** to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Imagine the change about to come into the lives of these people who may never have left Israel, now being told that they were headed to the ends of the earth.

So they waited as instructed and they were together, praying, when the day Pentecost arrived; interestingly "Pentecost" was just a nickname that the Jews had given this particular holy-day because it came exactly 50 days after Passover. This festival was actually for celebrating the first-fruits of the Spring harvest. Only later did the disciples make the connection that they themselves were the first-fruits of God's new spiritual harvest coming to fruition through the work of Jesus. Suddenly with the sound of a rushing wind, and the appearance of fire, the Holy Spirit entered into each one of the 150 disciples who were in that room. Now filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak the praises of God in foreign languages they had never learned before.

The sheer commotion of these no longer fearful disciples spilling out into the streets joyously sharing the good news about Jesus with anyone who would listen, gathered a curious crowd including people from all over the Roman world who had come to town for the festival. Then Peter addressed the entire crowd, giving a powerful sermon on

how God had promised to pour out His Spirit on all people; young people seeing visions and old people dreaming dreams.

And with the Spirit also moving through that crowd as it empowered Peter's sermon, 3,000 people came to faith that very first day with thousands more to follow in the days to come. Pentecost brought about a change in both in the believers and non-believers lives that continues to have repercussions down to our day.

Do you see the changes that took place on Pentecost? Those disciples were definitely transformed!

- No longer were they confused! Now they understood God's plan of salvation completely.
- No longer were they timid. Now, they were confident, speaking publicly.
- Look at Peter – two months earlier he was so afraid that he swore he had never known Jesus. Now he was speaking to the crowd with confidence and understanding that he had never had before.

Then there was the second change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his Pentecost sermon, 3000 people came to faith and were baptized. We don't know much about these people. We do know that Jerusalem was packed with faithful Jewish pilgrims and God-fearing Gentiles from all over the Roman empire. 3000 of them who were not Christians, who did not believe in Jesus Christ, were changed that day. Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life – everything had changed. The Holy Spirit was the one who converted those 3000 people that day. Now they knew Jesus the Messiah as their Savior. And from that very first Pentecost they took the Holy Spirit and their newly empowered faith home with them to the ends of the Earth. Jesus' "you will receive power to witness to the ends of the earth" promise came into play that very first day and the Roman world began to change.

Pentecost can be summed up in one word: **change**. We see the change that took place in the disciples, and the change that took place in those 3000 people. Our world today again needs such change. There are so many people who do not believe in Jesus Christ. And there are so many Christians who are like those disciples before Pentecost – confused, weak, timid. We need the Holy Spirit to come to us again, and change and empower us again.

Our problem is, we don't think we need to be changed; or we may now even fear change. "*I may not be all right, but at least I am comfortable with the way I am,*" We say.

But let me ask you directly: are you a Christian?

Can you remember when you became a Christian, when you were born again? Perhaps you can't remember a specific day when you repented and asked Jesus to be your savior. Perhaps you just grew up in the faith... but you know you are trusting Jesus; you know that you are a Christian.

- Then, where is the power that Jesus promised for witness?
- How is the Holy Spirit now working in your life?
- In what ways are you changing, growing?

We need the Holy Spirit's power in our lives just as much those earliest disciples. And the world desperately needs the Holy Spirit once again convicting it of sin, God's judgment, and their need for righteousness. We and our world desperately needs another Pentecost event. But how can that happen?

Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?

Psalm 85:6

The answer for us, might be found in a third word: **REVIVAL** which literally means "to live again." Interestingly the word "revival" cannot be found in the New Testament but six times in the Old Testament it does appear among prayers offered to God to restore the heart of His wandering people: **Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?**

That is what we now so desperately need: revival, to be brought back to life. Like the people of the Old Testament, we seem to have gotten so used to God in our midst that we have forgotten who we are in Him. We have stopped hungering for growth, we feel no power.

So how might we again access the promised power of the Holy Spirit in our lives? We can't be born-again; which is when the Holy Spirit first came into our life. Everyone only gets two births: one physical and one spiritual. Since the Holy Spirit is the cause and seal of our spiritual birth, we don't need another. But we do need to be brought back to life, to hunger again for growth like newborn babes. We need revival.

Earlier I said, If we are not growing we are dying. Now let me rephrase that truth as a question: **If we are not yearning to grow, then are we just waiting to die?** Think about this for a moment. (pause).

How might we regain our desire to grow? How might we again feel the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives? I think the Old Testament prayers for revival and the pre-Pentecost prayers of the disciples give us our needed direction. We need to pray and ask God for revival. We need to humbly ask God to reawaken our desire for growth. And we need to keep praying until God answers our prayers.

Our church is coming up on its 175th anniversary and we are making all kinds of plans not just to celebrate and remember, but to also grow and attract new members to this family... We desperately need to grow and change in whatever way we need to once again share the gospel with our world. Because as a Church if we are not growing, we are dying.

We are making plans and we are also praying for revival, a few of us at least. But what about the rest of us... will you join us in praying. Will you begin again to yearn for spiritual growth and the power to be God's witness in your world?

On Pentecost, we wear red symbolizing the powerful descent of the Holy Spirit and the change it brought in the lives of the believers. But we need more than just a symbol for God's power, we desperately need the real thing once again. We need revival. Will you join me in praying for revival for yourself, for our church, for our community, for our world?

If you could sum up the hope of Pentecost in one word, that would be the power to change; to be transformed by the renewal of our minds so we can discern God's will for our lives and world. May the Holy Spirit continue to work in us, to change us, to once again fan into flame the fire that is in each one of us. Will you join me in praying for revival?