

Changes are on the way. Michigan is starting to reopen for business this week. The riots, looting and violence going on in our country is destructive and dangerous. Whatever happened to do not steal and treat your neighbor as you want to be treated yourself? I don't think any of us know what the changes will be from these things, but we do know that there will be changes. We know that we will be challenged to conform to the new standards. It may be one thing to wear a face mask inside public buildings. It is another thing if these changes call on us to compromise our Christian faith or values. If that happens, we must obey God not the authorities.

There is one thing positive we can hope for in a time of change. We have the opportunity with the Holy Spirit's help to transform our lives. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”* (Romans 12:2) The goal of this transformation is that we become more like Christ and that we represent Christ in our world.

The changes we have been facing during the Corona Virus Crisis and over the past two weeks of the demonstrations and rioting can lead to loneliness, doubts and fears. People are looking for and need something to them find hope and purpose. This time of change is an opportunity for us to introduce people to the God who promises *“Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you.”* (Isaiah 41:10) We may have to change the way we get the message out, but we cannot compromise on the message of hope, on God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God's Word and Spirit have the power to change people and their lives. We see that in the events that took place on the first Pentecost. Acts tells us that there were Jewish people who had been scattered around Europe, Africa and the Middle East who were in Jerusalem for the Passover.

Take a look at the map and see the different places they came from. There were *“Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs.”* (Acts 2:9-11) people were either Jewish or converts to Judaism who lived in the Roman Empire.

The 3,000 people who were baptized that day and became followers of Jesus Christ came from these places. Acts tells us that they were devoted, totally committed to their new faith. They were “all in!” and were starting a brand new life. They came from different places with different languages and cultures, but were united in Christ.

So what kind of changes did they make? They were committed to the teachings of the Apostles. The Disciples were still in Jerusalem at this time. So the people spent time with the Disciples

learning about Jesus. They wanted to grow in faith so that their faith could mature and they would be able to share their faith when they returned home.

Have we taken advantage of the time away from school, work and so many other things that fill our days to spend more time in God's Word? You may have been away from the church, but did you invite the Lord into your homes. Did you take advantage of the extra time to read God's Word and learn how to do a better job of walking with Him in faith?

They were also committed to spending time together. I think one of the toughest parts of the "Stay At Home" orders were that Christians could not spend time together. Worship services on the internet and Bible Classes on Zoom are helpful. But they can't take the place of the support and encouragement Christians get by being together. We need each other. Christians are better together than we are apart from each other. Hopefully opening up the state again will give Christians more opportunities to be together, to grow in faith and to serve others.

The new Christians were also committed to prayer. Have you gotten frustrated with the way things are in our nation right now and stopped praying? Or have you renewed your commitment to talking with God regularly in prayer? We are told to bring all of our cares and concerns to God because He cares for us. Prayer is simply talking with God. It is opening our hearts and lives to Him. Prayer is turning to the Lord for help and strength to face the challenges of life. Prayer is asking the Holy Spirit to guide us to do God's will. Prayer is giving praise to God. Did you thank and praise God for the new life this spring has brought to Michigan, the beautiful flowers and the green trees? Did you thank God for watching over you and your family during the pandemic?

Those early Christians were open and receptive to each other. Some of these people came from nations that had been historic enemies of each other. But they were one in Christ. What can we learn from them? Are we open and welcoming of people who aren't like us? Do they have to look like us, dress like us, talk like us and worship God like us before they can become part of our community? It shouldn't be that way. Our cultural, racial or social differences should never prevent anyone from being welcomed in the faith family.

There is one more thing about those early Christians we need to note. They were generous. Acts tells us, "*They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*" (vs. 45) Former strangers were helping each other. Christians should be generous people.

If we want to make changes today without compromising the Christian faith we should follow those first Christians whose lives were changed by Christ. Recommit yourself to the study of God's Word, spend time with other Christians, talking with God, welcome others, and be generous. When people meet grateful, generous, God glorifying Christians; they will like them, be drawn to them and God's family will grow. Isn't that the most important change we want to see in our changing world? Amen.