

Changing Seasons

June 13, 2021

2nd Corinthians 5: 6-10 and 14-17

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord — ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Mark 4: 26-29

²⁶ He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."



As we continue on in our "More Than Meets the Eye" series, we turn today from last week's message about seeing beyond our suffering to this week's message about the changing seasons in our life of faith. This week we continue with the ideas of seen versus unseen, of hope for today and hope for tomorrow, and of walking by faith and not by sight. As we do so, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Today's message is "Changing Seasons". This is certainly something we appreciate in a real and tangible way here in the Dakotas. It is something that I appreciate about my home state. Probably like most of you, there are things about each season that I don't always like, but in general I like having four seasons. Now in South Dakota they sometimes blend into one another as a cold winter can linger long into spring. And sometimes one season interrupts another. Every once in a while, for example, winter rears its ugly head as we get two feet of snow in mid-May or in mid-October. For me, I enjoy the warmth of the summer – even though some days are too hot and humid. And I enjoy the cold of winter – even though those double-digit negatives could stay in northern Canada. I also enjoy the swing seasons for their milder temperatures and the changes we see as plants and life emerge or as the colors change and many forms of life prepare for the winter months. Even though I enjoy all four seasons in general, there are times when I long for a change. For example, like maybe a few of you, I am grateful that it is only in the upper eighties this weekend. A similar longing happens each winter too. After I've shovelled and snow blown for hours and hours, I long for the green grass of summer.



When the two feet of snow just persists and does not melt for three weeks, I begin to dream of the day when the sun warms the earth and creation springs to life once again. This idea of new life is the heart of our first passage from 2nd Corinthians 5. Turn with me to this passage this morning as we begin to explore the idea of a new creation and of changing seasons in our journey of faith.



The changing of seasons that we anticipate, the thought of being made new, the longing for the eternal home that we were created for, the moment when all things become new – all of this culminates in verse seventeen. The entire passage builds to the moment of new creation. In this

verse we read, *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new"!* Just as the hope that we



spoke of last week speaks into our present reality as well as into the future hope of eternal life, so too does Paul speak to the now and the then in our first

passage for today. Of course, to get to the 'then', one must begin now. Just as in this picture, to become a butterfly then, the creation must begin as something else, as a caterpillar now. To become a new creation in



Christ, we all began somewhere. Where we are now is wonderful and awesome. But it can also be sad. If we are no different, if we are still where we were in faith when we first came to Christ, then that is sad. Along the same lines, if we think that we are already a butterfly, then that is equally sad. The journey of faith is a process. Just like this butterfly, we evolve over time.

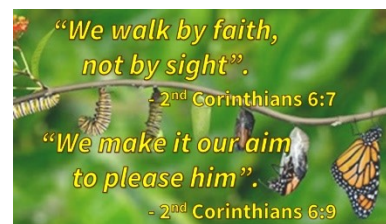
During each changing season in our journey of faith, we are moving closer to that day when all things become new. As we learn and grow deeper in Christ, we are becoming more and more beautiful in the eyes of God. In order to walk this journey of faith, we must remain connected to the vine, confident as we draw closer to the new creation.

As we begin in verse seven, Paul speaks of the confidence we have as we *"walk by faith, not by sight"*.



This is not always an easy thing to do. As we wrestled with last week, it can be challenging to see beyond our present realities, especially when we are suffering or experiencing a trial. We try and make sense of what we are going through in that season of our lives. When we see and feel things that do not align with our sense of God then we must lean into God even more, walking by faith and trust in him even when we do not see the way ahead. That is precisely why Paul wrote these words to the church – that we must walk by faith and not by sight. First, he knew that the challenging environment – trying to be the church in the cosmopolitan world of Corinth – would be discouraging. Second, Paul knew that the church was made up of imperfect people. Consequently, they did not always resemble what they were becoming. Just as we are ever on a journey of faith, so too were the folks that made up the church in Corinth. They too were somewhere along the line to becoming a butterfly. As God was at work in their heart and in their church some of it was not visible on the surface. God was at work in them, renewing them day by day, preparing them to face the world with new faith and courage. We too need to be reminded that God is ever at work in us, sometimes guiding us through the valley, sometimes journeying with us to the mountain top.

In our opening verses Paul also touches on the idea that we long for something better, for the room prepared for us, *"away from the body and at home with the Lord"*. In the 'now' of this life, in this season of our journey of faith, Paul's words in verse nine call out to us. Here he writes, *"We make it our aim to please him"*. Knowing we long to be with Christ, Paul reminds the Corinthians and us today that what we do in the here and now matters. To go out and simply live as the world lives is the easy route. To be at home in the world is living a false faith. As the *"love of Christ urges us on"*, we strive to model that love out there in the world. Paul comments on the consequences of our choices in verse ten. Here he reminds us that *"all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil"*. Knowing that we will all one day stand before the judgment seat, it is our charge to live to please the Lord.



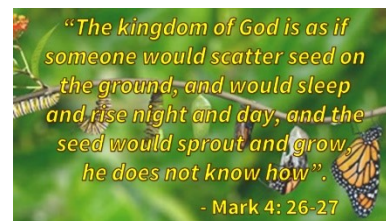
Paul unpacks this charge in verse fifteen. Paul shares these words: *"He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them"*. In his most difficult season of his life, Jesus walked by faith, journeying towards the crucifixion. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus underscore the cycles of life and death present in nature, in the human condition, and in the life of the community of faith. In making the intentional choice to live not for self but for Christ, we choose to identify with Jesus. Doing so allows us to take on his perspective, to walk by faith and not by sight. Instead of the normal feelings of despair and grief that can accompany death, the giving of oneself for another changes the way we think about sacrifice and service and death.

Just as the power of Jesus' resurrection brought about a new season in the life of the church, so too does our living for Christ and for the other bring new life not only to those we minister to, but to our very lives as well. This points us back to the key verse in this passage: *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* As we walk by faith, modeling Jesus' love to the world, we play a role in making all things new – both in the now and in the future.



Turning to our second passage this morning, to Mark 4, Jesus speaks of the changing seasons and of the harvest that is to come. Jesus opens our second passage for

today with these words: *"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how"*. Jesus is speaking of



the way that faith comes to root in a person, then comes to life, and finally grows in that person until they come to profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is a process that all Christians go through. This past week I was reminded of how this discipleship process works itself out in a real way at Grace. Seeing many of the students that were in our after-school programs walking through the doors on Monday evening to be a part of VBS, well, it warmed my heart. These little lives are the soil that we try and scatter seeds of faith into. Over the course of five months with them in our after-school programs, in some cases I could see their little faiths growing and stretching, in others I could see them beginning to wrestle a little bit with God in their lives. This process continued this week.

For some of our Explorers, this was my first connection with them. For all who joined us this past week, it was a blessing to get to see little faith seeds planted in these as well. In the opening assembly our Explorers learned about creation and Moses and the burning bush, about faith busting through a roof and about how God comes after the lost. These faith essentials were reinforced in the craft projects, science lessons, game activities, and story time teachings. At the end of each evening together, it was wonderful to hear their excitement over what they had learned each evening. Each Explorer was encouraged to arise and shine with love, trust, faith, and joy. It was such a special week. I am grateful to have been a part of scattering seed and walking in faith with our awesome team and these wonderful Explorers.

For those that plant seeds, Jesus reminds us that we "*do not know how*" these seeds sprout and grow. In nature, it is all by God's design. With us and our faith – whether young or old or anywhere in between – the planting and sprouting and growing is the work of the Spirit. Yes, as a church and as individuals, we are called to play our role, sharing our faith and teaching others about the love of Jesus Christ. And here we connect back into the passage from 2nd Corinthians 5.



From these little ones that blessed our week to those joining us this morning who are maybe searching to those who have walked with Jesus for some time, we are all on the same journey. Some of us are just trying to find where we fit into the kingdom of God. We are like this first caterpillar, searching for the place to latch on, to fit in. Others are someplace else on this branch that represents our transformation into the image of Jesus Christ.

We are each at one of these next five stages, each in our own changing season – some just beginning to connect to faith and others at some point of transformation along this line, somewhere along the journey to become that new creation in Christ. As we celebrate the joys of VBS today and we hear the call to step into those changing seasons that are ever a part of our journey of faith, may we continue together in this journey of faith, confident that God has an amazing work to do in and through each of us. We are thankful for the ongoing efforts of the Holy Spirit that is ever at work bringing each of us renewal and transformation. Thanks be to God for the seeds planted this week in each of us, young and old, and for the love of Christ that draws us ever closer to who we were each created to be in Christ. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Looking at the cover image, where are you right now? How can Grace help you to grow and transform to the next stage of faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Reflect on how the Spirit has been renewing and transforming you as a disciple of Christ in this season of life. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving!
- 3) *Study*. Read 2nd Corinthians 5: 18-21. How are you being called to be an ambassador for Christ, reconciling others to Jesus?