

"Lasting Change"

Text: Romans 12:1-8

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, finish the sentence: "Change is _____?" The most popular answer, by far, is "good." *Change is good.* It's a testament to something; I'm not quite sure what. Maybe humanity's natural optimism – we just *assume* that change will be for the better. Or maybe our natural arrogance – we also believe we *deserve* to have things change always and only for the better. Yet pretty much every bad thing that has ever happened would constitute "change," and lots of bad stuff has happened. Change came when Eve ate from the forbidden tree, and when the Children of Israel began worshipping the idols of Canaan. No good came from those changes. In more modern times, change was ushered on December 7, 1941 and on September 11, 2001. Again, not a lot of good came from those changes.

Yet the human race continually yearns for change, no matter how good things are or how well the current system is working. Our country grew to be the envy of the entire planet, so let's change it to something that has universally failed wherever it has been tried. One man–one woman unions produce stable family groups and form the bedrock of every prosperous society, so let's change all that and see what happens. Discipline in the home produces well-adjusted children and model future citizens, so let's remove that discipline and just see what that change brings. You get the picture. Not all change is good. In fact that's part of the change cycle, isn't it? Adopting *harmful* changes guarantees that we will keep playing around with the system, supposing that someday we will get it just right. And even if we do, we'll undoubtedly just change it again, expecting always something better.

The basic problem is, of course, sin. Mankind broke God's perfect creation. One of the inevitable results is that *nothing* on earth will ever again be perfect; nothing will ever again be "just right." Even when something is as good as sinful man can ever get it, human beings carry this natural assumption that even *that* can always be improved.

In a sense that is true, but not in the way the godless imagine. Human beings are not born good and perfect – ruined only over time by other human beings. God's Word tells us that human beings are born thoroughly sinful in every imaginable way. Change is therefore required – *required* – if we are to escape the consequences of our natural sinfulness. Our text for

this morning speaks of that necessary change. That text is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Twelfth Chapter:

^{ESV} **Romans 12:1-8** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ ¶ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

These are God's Words. Remind yourself each time you hear or read words from the Bible that these are *God's* words. Since God himself has told us, "**Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it!**" so also as we hear and study these words of our God we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

I'm not sure I've ever heard of someone running for public office who did not do so on the basis of "change." Even those already in power (those who have already been running things) campaign on the basis of change: "*Elect me and I will change things for the better.*" They know that human beings always want and expect better, and they tend to vote accordingly. We somehow never seem to learn that candidates almost never deliver on their promises to make things better – although they always seem to tell us that they do. Even the little bit of good change that they might bring never seems to last. It just seems to disappear in the next round of change.

So how do we balance all of this, especially when we shift our focus to spiritual concerns? How do we rightly identify exactly what needs to be changed and what does not? How do we *keep* those positive changes and abandon what is bad? There are many things, for example, that I

hope and pray never change here at St. Paul. I pray that your confidence in Jesus Christ as your only Savior only and ever grows stronger. *Stronger*, not different – not "change." You have always demonstrated a loving concern for those called to serve you – change is not needed there. You have consistently demonstrated a devotion to the financial support of the gospel ministry in this area and synodically. You glorify your Lord by taking excellent care of this house of worship and the surrounding grounds. And the list goes on. We always want to strengthen such God-pleasing resolve, but that's not the same as "change."

Our text talks about a necessary change that had to take place in every human being. For starters, we had to be changed from our natural condition as children of evil to children of God. We had to be converted, and there change was both profound and necessary. The word "*conversion*" has as its basic meaning a complete change of direction - a 180 degree turn. Instead of being headed for hell, the soul that is converted is headed for heaven. That is the basic meaning of conversion, but we need to explore this a bit more to do justice to all that begins or changes at the conversion of an unbeliever.

God's Word tells us that many things become immediately available to the human being who has been converted that are not available to the unbeliever. The first privilege is that God will hear you whenever you communicate with him. This communication with God is of course called prayer, and the Bible tells us that true prayer is the sole possession of the believer. "**No one comes to the Father, but by (Jesus)**" we are told in John 14:6. At conversion we gain access to God the Father, the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of heaven and earth. The unbeliever, as we read in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, prays only "**with himself.**"

The *second* great benefit of conversion is that only after conversion can you do a truly good work. The unbeliever can perform many noble and socially beneficial good deeds, but that is all that they are - social acts of goodness. A truly good work, in the eyes of God and by his definition, can only be done out of love for the Savior you have come to know at your conversion. We read in Hebrews 11:6, "**Without faith it is impossible to please God...**"

The *third* great benefit is the knowledge and confidence that only those who have been converted play a role in God's arrangement of the events of this world. In other words, when you are converted, from that point on – and forever afterwards – you can have confidence that "**all things work together for good**" not just for *some* but for *you*, for *your* good. God has

promised you that he will make everything that happens work in some good, positive way toward your eternal benefit.

Finally, only the converted Child of God can truly love God and want to do his will. Before conversion all human beings are opposed to God - mortal enemies in open rebellion against our Creator. It is only after we are brought to faith that we can love God and even *want* to submit and live according to his will.

What all of this means is that at conversion we are we are truly and lastingly *changed* – "**transformed**" is the word our text used. We are changed from creatures that love only sin and evil, to children of God – sons and daughters who love what is good and decent.

This brings us to those key words found in this morning's text: **Conform** and **Transform**. Unfortunately at conversion we do not completely shed our sinful side - our old Adam or sinful flesh. That sinful side continually wars with the new man that is born in us at conversion. The old Adam, remember, is never converted, never changed. Conversion was the powerful working of God's Holy Spirit as he created something *new* in us. Our old Adam, unfortunately, was not affected by this. It even now rages against the new man in us, that part in the Christian that does not need change in that it seeks to live and walk always and only according to God's Holy Will. Our sinful nature now wants to keep us from ever doing what this new good side urges us to do. This war within us is seldom more intense than when we are faced with the questions about our life on this earth. We are supposed to be "**in the world, but not of the world.**" How exactly do we do that? Do we renovate the old, or start over new? The old Adam says, "*Keep the old and adapt – as little as possible.*" The new man says, "*Start new, your former life was pure garbage. It cannot be salvaged.*"

The new man is, of course, right, but that evil side in each of us can be very convincing. Since we are still sinful creatures who love sinful pleasure, it's hard sometimes not to cheer for the old Adam. We find ourselves wishing we could salvage some of the old ways. It doesn't work.

Our text spoke of "**transformation**" as opposed to "**conformation.**" The devil continually lobbies for *conformation*. He wants us to compromise us in such a way that we "**have a form of Godliness, but deny its power.**" (2 Timothy 3:5) He wants us to try to cling to and love everything that is of this world and just rearrange a few things here and there. His sales pitch is this: "*You can do both. You can love the world and love God all at the same time. You can devote yourself,*

your time, and your treasure to both! In fact you can still lust and covet and steal and hate, but now, instead of 'sin' you just call it 'Christian weakness' and convince yourself there is no other way."

You've all heard that "voice" for yourselves. It is the near constant force that makes you want to join in what the world believes is the best of both worlds. It is what makes us want to indulge our every desire – just like the godless – but to also want to be Christians and heirs of heaven. The problem is that most of what the world knows as fun, pleasure, and entertainment God calls *sin*. And God hates sin. He has plainly told us that we cannot love and live for sin and still love and live for him. Both are masters, and we cannot serve two masters.

Perhaps this is exactly what John had in mind when he said in 1 John 2:15: **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."** If we truly did not **"love the world, nor anything in this world"** then we would not hesitate to leave it all behind. Jesus also said, **"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."** It is only the death of Jesus, God's only Son, that can lead us to this point of dedication. It is only the heart made glad and sure by being born again in conversion that can want to give up what was once so precious to us, and to regard all that truly is evil as evil.

Our text puts it this way: **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."** It is only when we realize both our desperate condition before conversion and the certain hope that we *now* have, that we can want to do anything God-pleasing at all - including **"presenting our bodies as living sacrifices."** *Satan* wants us to **"conform to this world."** He will make it easier for us to do so by offering us a never-ending supply of sinful pleasures. The *world* wants us to conform, so it offers us the acceptance that we crave when we sinfully compromise. Our *sinful flesh* wants us to conform, so it formulates innumerable rationalizations daily as to how or why conforming is either acceptable or unavoidable.

But you now know better. You have been both converted and transformed. You now know your Savior, Jesus Christ, and you have been given faith to believe that that same Jesus Christ lived and died to pay the horrible price for all of your sins. You have been transformed, and you therefore, according to our text, are now able to **"discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."** You therefore have been blessed with the ability to be in the world but not of the world, as you treasure the suffering and death of Jesus Christ above all else.

The rest of our text just tells us to throw ourselves in completely, according to our own individual gifts, and to do what we do wholeheartedly and to the best of our ability – no matter our station or calling.

You have been changed by God himself, and that same God has promised that he will preserve that change in you – he will make that change last – through the power that is his Word. Make that Word then the centerpiece of every single day.

This world cannot be salvaged. Understand this well. But the precious souls that are in the world *can* be salvaged, rescued, changed. Do not therefore try to salvage what cannot be salvaged. Do not try to conform. **"Come out from them and be separate!" says the Lord.** Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 51:1-6** "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. ³ For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. ⁴ "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

^{ESV} **Matthew 16:13-20** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost – August 27, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 398 (Red Hymnal)

"Renew Me, O Eternal Light"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 51:1-6) Eyes blinded by unbelief will never be able to recognize that Old Testament readings focus not on the physical nation of Israel but on what Scripture refers to as the "Spiritual Israel." Israel today refers to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This knowledge opens the Christian to a whole new level of understanding in connection especially with the Old Testament scriptures. This truth is made clear especially in the final verses of this reading.

The Gospel Lesson: (Matthew 16:13-20) Jesus told us that He would build His Church on the confession of Peter: "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**" Jesus told Peter that he was blessed by God to have received this understanding and conviction, for it was given to him by God himself. Do you now also know Jesus to be the Christ? You too then have been blessed in the same way by God himself.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 400 (Red Hymnal)

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 12:1-8 (Printed on the back page)

"Lasting Change"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 311 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 660 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"I'm But a Stranger Here"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (32) Ave (40) July Mortgage Balance (\$39,197)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – St. Luke's of Lemmon has called Pastor Mark Weis. Pastor Michael Wilke is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Eric Libby has returned the call to teach 11/12 Religion at Immanuel of Mankato for the fall semester of 2017; the congregation has now called Pastor Douglas Libby to the same position, and he has accepted.

Two Fellowship Opportunities for Women – The *CLC Women's Retreat West* is scheduled for September 22-24, 2017 at Chadron State Park, Nebraska. For more information go to www.christianwomensretreat.weebly.com. The *CLC Southeastern Women's Retreat* is scheduled for November 10-12, 2017 in Savannah, Georgia. For more information contact Pastor Matthew Hanel at pastor@dallaslutheran.com, or 972-733-4535.

Schedule Change – We plan to return to our non-summer schedule on Sunday, September 10, with Sunday school and Bible Class at 9am. The first midweek Confirmation class is scheduled for September 6, and the first midweek Bible study is scheduled to begin on September 27. Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend out-of-town meetings on Sep. 13th & 20th.

Congratulations – Congratulations to Myles and Peggy (Schiermeister) Lewis, who were married on Friday. May the Lord bless them as they begin their one-flesh union as husband and wife.