

## Ephesians 4:(20-21)22-24. 20<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost. 2.10.2016

### *Change for Life*

[<sup>20</sup> But that isn't what you learned about Christ. <sup>21</sup> Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,] <sup>22</sup> throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. <sup>23</sup> Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. <sup>24</sup> Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy.

There are occasions where the dress-code demands that we can't go, dressed as we like. The occasion demands that we dress-up, or there is no entrance. The story of Cinderella - which I am sure even our younger members still know - illustrates this well. For Cinderella to be able to go to the ball, she had to have a new gown with everything that went with it. For her there really was no big choice in the matter - it was quite plain. She just could not turn up there in her tatty old clothes.

In the end her change of clothes became a life-changing event in her life. I'm sure that she never considered returning again to her previous life after the prince came to claim her as his bride. There was no way that she would exchange her new clothes for the rags she had been forced to wear.

### *Change for Life*

- that is something that applies to us as well. Most of us have probably not had quite the same life-changing experience those people Paul was writing to had experienced. Mostly we were baptised as infants - we have belonged to the church for as long as we can remember. And yet we had a life-changing experience right there - at our baptism. We have become children of God - princes and princesses without having to be the only one whose foot fits into the slipper [not much chance for me if that had been the case].

God has given us new life - the question is: what do we do with it. Since the beginning, it has been clear that we often struggle to live as the people God has called us to be. Much too often we find exactly those things in our lives, of which Paul writes here that they should no longer feature in our

relationships and in the way we act. If we as Christians live the same as everyone else, we would be denying who we have become. That would have been a bit like Cinderella returning to live with her step-mother, wearing her rags once more, instead of living at the palace with all that meant.

Paul is writing here to members of the church - this is a letter meant for us to hear and to heed.

**Change is necessary!** It is not simply a matter of fashion, but for us as Christians wearing the 'old clothes' simply is out. Those old clothes are characterised by **lust and deception**.

Statistics show that (at least in the USA where such statistics are measured) there is no big difference between Christians and non-Christians in the visiting and viewing of pornographic sites on the internet. The same applies to marriages - there is no great difference in the divorce rate between Christians and others - in fact it may even be higher (which may be due to the fact that on average Christians are more likely to marry).

Does this matter? The **deception** is plain to see. We are told that, 'Everybody else does it' - so why should you as a Christian not also do it. Yet, since our Baptism, we are no longer part of 'everybody else'. We are royalty - not in some funny elitist kind of way, but we really are not part of the 'common herd' any more. God has returned us to the state in which he originally made mankind.

In the verses following those I have just read again, we hear of the many things which need to be changed: **So stop telling lies; quit stealing, Don't use foul or abusive language; do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live; Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour.** These things have no place in our lives any longer. And yet ... do they not pop up at the most unwanted times in our lives?!

Things need to change - we need to change - so that we may be the people God made us to be. This change needs to take place within us - not just by a few superficial changes, but by fundamentally being different in how we live,

in how we deal with people around us.

The big change that needs to take place in us, is to take ourselves out of the centre of our own attention and of what we think. The change in our lives needs to centre around putting God first, and then also putting the needs of the people around us just as high as our own!

That is probably where all attempts to 'reform' society fall short - because we are constantly encouraged to look to our own rights, and to do what we want. God does not enter into the equation - and as long as that does not happen there will be no change in the way we deal with people different to us, who all have their own ideals.

Basically we are selfish people - and precisely that has to change!

The good news is:

### **Change is possible!**

Not by us trying hard enough until we get it right, but because of the change God has brought about in our lives. We must not try to change our skin - we should put on the 'skin' God has prepared for us! **Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.** <sup>24</sup> **Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy.**

It is not just a matter of trying hard enough - some of us may accomplish quite a deal doing that. But in the end not one of us will achieve what we ought: to be people in God's likeness; to be the people God intends us to be!

We have been made new - we have been given a new identity, free of the compulsions which drive our 'old' identity. The power of Baptism lies in allowing the Holy Spirit to renew our thinking and attitudes. We are to allow him the space to work - and to work against the prevailing thinking and attitudes of the world we live in.

We just need to look at what happens, when the prevailing thinking and attitudes hold sway. When it's all about me, what is wrong with corruption - if I'm to have all I can hold on to, the others are just jealous if they can't also have that. When the attitude is have things the way you want them - does that not mean pushing those away who are troublesome to me right now. Do what

you like - even if that means using violence against women and children. This may not always manifest itself in bruises and broken bones, but also in broken spirit, and feelings of worthlessness, if we batter others with our words.

Things need to change - when Paul speaks of **Put[ting] on your new nature**, he encourages us to remember that, as we put on our clothes every morning, so too we should first put on this 'new skin' of ours, this new self we have been given - we have been **created to be like God – truly righteous and holy**

As we stand at the start of a new day, we are to actively put the hours that lie ahead into God's care. We are to look to God for his guidance and the strength we need as we approach the new day - with regard to our relations with the people we will have to deal with on that day - our fellow-workers, the people we employ, the people we will meet in our business dealings. We are to look to him in the challenges that lie ahead. And especially we are to look to him for our life in our family, and with our spouse.

Look to God for change - one day at a time! Don't occupy yourself with problems weeks and months ahead of time. Of course we ought to be aware of what the future holds, and what may lie ahead. Yet, change takes place one step at a time, one day at a time.

And please, we must not change the entire world, just ourselves! That change God has already carried out. Just think of this: perhaps it is just you and I who have to change to tip the balance! Perhaps it is just by us allowing God to work his change, by letting the Holy Spirit renew us in our thinking and attitude, that the much needed change in our society and in our world will happen!

Putting on our new 'clothes' day by day - so that we can truly live 'happily ever after'. That is not only the stuff of fairy tales - that is what God has in place for each one of us. After all, heaven really is the only place to live happily ever after.

<sup>25</sup> So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbours the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

<sup>26</sup> And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry,

<sup>27</sup> for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

<sup>28</sup> If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. <sup>29</sup> Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

<sup>30</sup> And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

<sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. [NLT]