

Sermon by Rev. Anthony Weisman, March 30, 2025
Galatians 2:19b-20
Finding The Strength To Change In Jesus

There will come a time in most of our lives when we'll know – when we'll know more deeply than we have maybe ever known anything – that *something has to change*. Maybe it will be somebody else who says to it us, somebody who is sobbing or shaking with rage – maybe it will be somebody else who says it to us: “I can't go on like this,” maybe it will be somebody else who can't take it anymore who speaks these words which force us to see and to accept what we have not yet come to see or to accept, that, indeed, *something has to change*. Or maybe we will finally have fallen as far as there is to fall and hit rock bottom and been broken, broken open, by the hard truth that *something has to change*. Maybe it will be a voice from deep within, maybe it will be we who finally say to ourselves, who finally admit to ourselves: “I can't go on like this. *Something has to change.*”

People talk about moments of crisis and decision that also feel like moments of awakening. People talk about moments that separate everything which came before from everything which came after in their lives. They talk about moments like this, about experiencing them in their marriage, about the anger or the resentment or the profound hurt or the exhaustion, about all of it coming to a head, and about knowing that it was time to either recommit or part ways.

People talk about moments like this, about experiencing them as they or as others they love get sick, get sick and don't get better, as they or as others they love age, as they or as others they love grow frail or diminished; they talk about the choices that must be faced and made, the choices that can't be put off any longer. People talk about knowing that *something has to change* in all kind of different circumstances. They need to quit their jobs. They need to quit drinking. They need to let something go. They need to let their kids be who they are. They need to let themselves be who they are.

There will come a time in most of our lives when we'll know – when we'll know more deeply than we have maybe ever known anything – that *something has to change*, that *we, we ourselves, have to change*. And one of the challenges, then, will be how to do it, how to actually do it. How do we – the ones who are so hurt or stubborn or unhappy or tired or scared or unsure – how do we stop being the way we are?

Most of us can't just not be addicted anymore or depressed anymore. Most of us can't just not feel despair anymore. (Telling someone to cheer up or look on the bright side is the one of best ways I know to make them sink lower.) Most of us can't just not do the things that drive our husbands or wives crazy anymore. If we could, we would. I mean, I would. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you – if you could – wouldn't you, of course, be the person your spouse asks and keeps asking you to be?

I don't believe in demon possession. At least, I always *think* I don't believe in demon possession – until Ben and I are in the middle of some disagreement, and even though I know I shouldn't do it, and have sworn a hundred times I won't do it, and even though nothing good has ever, ever come from my doing it, I just go right on ahead and rag on my mother-in-law anyway. (I have a

real gift, a particular genius, for making any difficult conversation that might ever happen in the Weisman home, especially if it touches upon my own shortcomings as a person or a partner, for making that into a referendum on her.)

All of which is to say: It isn't easy – at least not for me – to be the person other people want me to be and need me to be. It isn't easy to be the person *I* want me to be and need me to be. I am still not the man I want to be and pray to be. I don't know if I will ever be that man. But I do know that it would probably be crazy to expect the man I am now to up and remake himself. And that's the thing with all the "how-to," inspirational social media, "self-help" stuff for me. It's the self, it's *my* self that's the problem! I *can't* help myself. I try. I might make it a few weeks trying. But I've never come out on the other side of Lent or dry January or whatever and not felt a little like I was gasping for air.

When the Apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," he is saying, I think, that: When you come to the end of the road, *when you come to the end of yourself, you find the beginning of God*. When you are humbled, flattened, undone, destroyed, when something needs to change, when something needs to change in your family, in your marriage, in your life, but you truly do not have it in you to change it, when you can't fix things, when you can't fix them, *when you can't fix you*, and when you finally give up trying to: then, there is God.

I'll be honest enough to say that I don't know how to explain this. I don't know how this works. But it happens. Every day, it happens. It has happened to me. I never talk like this, right? Because it is so tender and so personal and so, almost the-crazy-kind-of-religious-person-sounding. But it has happened to me. I have found in God things that I have not been able to, have never been able to, find in myself. Maybe you'll know what I mean when I say: There have been times when I did not have strength – and then, somehow, I did.

It wasn't a triumph of the will. I didn't will myself to have strength. Strength was just there, where it wasn't before. It was in me, so, in that sense, it was mine, it was my strength, and I was strong. But the strength didn't come from me. I didn't summon it. Truth be told, I didn't – I couldn't even – pray for it.

It was not my strength. It was not mine. I was not strong. I was not the strong one. It was – to use the Apostle Paul's language: it was Christ, Christ in me. "*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" That comes as close as anything to describing the experiences I have had and so many others have had.

I live – we live – by the faith of the Son of God. Notice what the Apostle Paul doesn't say there. He does NOT say that we live by faith *in* the Son of God. He does NOT say that it is because *we* have faith *in* Christ that we will be able to come through whatever we have to come through. The whole point is that we *don't* have faith, *don't* have the faith we need, *don't* have the strength we need, *don't* have the hope we need, *don't* have the courage or the wisdom or *the whatever* we need. He says that we live by the faith *of* the Son of God. We live off it. We live off Christ's

faith, off Christ's own faith. In some mysterious way, his faith is made available to us and becomes our faith. His strength becomes our strength. His life becomes our life. On and on. Again, I don't know how to explain this. I don't know how this works. Every analogy I can think of falls short of the powerful, *powerful* thing it is to feel more than you ever knew you were capable of feeling: to feel something in you that isn't you. Is it like how our mothers or our fathers or our grandmothers or grandfathers, even after they die, how they live on "in" us? How they are still a part of us? Are always a part of us? The parts of them that are parts of us *are* us, but also *aren't* us, but also *are* us. I bet that makes no sense at all to anyone who has never experienced it -- and makes all the sense in the world to everyone who has.

Or is it like having a bone marrow transplant, or a heart transplant – is it like that? How a part of someone else is a part of you? How, in a way, they are you and you are them? Is it like that? Only, it's spiritual instead of surgical? It's a "transplant" of Christ's strength, Christ's compassion, Christ's faithfulness?

The Protestant Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were among the greatest interpreters of the Apostle Paul there have ever been, they called the strength or the hope or the peace or the clarity – they called all the good stuff we find our hearts are filled with when we know ourselves to be empty – they called it "alien righteousness." Alien, not in the sense of little green men, but in the sense of being alien to us, being not of us, being, in some sense, "outside" of us, even as it is "inside" of us.

In any event, however you imagine it, it is a miracle. It is always a miracle when a person can make the change that must be made, but which, by all accounts, and as they know better than anyone, it was not possible and should be possible for them to make. It is always a miracle when a person finds the strength they need, when they find peace, when they find comfort, when they find the way forward, when they find healing, when they find hope in Christ, not of themselves but in themselves.