

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *“Forever the Same, but Always Changing”*

SERIES: *One-Off*

SCRIPTURES: *Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*

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Credit to the BibleProject

Good morning everyone, thank you joining us this morning. As we begin our message, I'd like to give you all a riddle.

What is forever the same, but always changing?

I'll give you a few seconds to try and guess to figure out the answer. Maybe you can discuss with those around you to try and come up with an answer, but go ahead and take a few seconds... **Brief Pause**

Okay, I heard some mumbling and whispering of guesses, but allow me to give you the answer I was looking for...

The Church!

What is forever the same, but always changing? The Church!

Now I understand that may sound a little bit strange, so allow me to show you what I mean.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Shaun told you about the “mysterious” 3rd floor above the auditorium foyer and how it's a pretty boring area that is just used for storage. Well, part of what is stored up there are loads of bins full of photo albums, scrapbooks, and documents containing decades of memories from past activities at Five Forks Church since it started back in 1898.

Take a look at this first set of photos. ***Photos from Mid 1900s – 1970s*** These would have been taken when folks were meeting in what we call The Chapel. You can see the classic, fuzzy looking photos, the classic church pews, folks dressed in suits and dresses, some of the women wearing head coverings. You see classic cars and a stone parking lot, which does not appear to have any parking lines. Perhaps the most fun part is that you see Pastor Ray with long hair and an awesome mustache! When are we bringing that back Pastor Ray?

As we keep moving towards the present day, we see things are starting to change a little bit. ***Photos from 1990s – 2000s*** The gym, café area, offices, and Youth basement area is being built. Sunday Morning services were held in the gym, where volunteers would set up and tear down those blue padded chairs every Sunday for the services. We see a children's VBS going on. But as you can see, the clothes people are wearing look a little bit different, the building is different, the music is different, even the people in attendance are different.

But now let's fast forward to the present. ***Photos from 2010 - Present*** Once again, we see some big changes. A new auditorium and Children's Wing is built. There's projectors and lights during the services. The clothing we wear is much different than over 20 years ago. The cars we drive are much different.

It's pretty amazing to look back and see all that has changed over the years... And yet... throughout all of these photos, there were several things that remained the same... **Our Savior, our Message, and our Purpose.**

As the author of Hebrews eloquently wrote in Chapter 13, Verse 8,

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Our Savior remained the same. The One we sang about, the One we preached about, the One we served and gathered in the name of... it has always been Jesus. And always will be. Yesterday, Today, and Forever.

But as you saw from those pictures... the way we go about doing that changes. Just over the course of several decades, it has changed drastically here at Five Forks!

And that's what we want to talk about this morning. Because here at Five Forks Church, our Savior, our Message, and our Purpose will forever be the same. But the way we go about doing it will constantly be changing, and that can be hard for us to process and figure out.

And so the questions we are going to be wrestling with today are...

- 1. Since the Church (with a capital "C") started back during the beginning parts of Acts, how has it changed and adapted to better spread the Good News of Jesus?**
- 2. What should our mentality be when it comes to change in the Church in the present day?**
- 3. How can we as the people of Five Forks incite positive change for the future generations?**

These are some tough questions, so let's start figuring out some answers. Taking a look at our first question.

I. The Always Changing Church

How has the Church changed and adapted since it first started in the book of Acts?

To answer that, we first need to get a good grasp of...

A. How the Church Started

If you have your Bible, please turn with me to Acts 2. It is here that we see the event that sparked the birth of the Church. That event is called **Pentecost**. It's actually something we acknowledge every year, always taking place on the 7th Sunday after Easter Sunday.

But let's just read a quick refresher as to what happened at Pentecost... Starting in Chapter 2, verse 1...

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire

that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had told them would happen the day of his Ascension. It was this incredible moment for them, but they were not the only ones! As Luke continues to explain in Acts, there were God-fearing Jews from every nation visiting Jerusalem. And in verse 6 it says,

6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

As everyone is stunned in amazement, unaware of what is happening, the Apostle Peter addresses the crowd and explains how this moment and Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies found in the book of Joel and in the Psalms. Peter concluded by saying,

36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

And thus, the Church was born. They began devoting themselves to the teaching of the Apostles that Jesus had appointed, they devoted themselves to fellowship with each other, eating meals together and praying together. They were quick to help and a brother or sister in need. And Chapter 2 concludes by saying how they were...

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This is amazing, right? We read this and we get excited. “Yes! This is what church is supposed to be!” It’s growing, the Holy Spirit is working, it’s awesome!

But sometimes... even if things appear to be going well, there is still a huge need for change. So let’s talk about that and move on to looking at...

B. How the Church Learned to Adapt

After seeing how the church started Acts 2, it’s important to note that it was only the 12 Apostles who were the ones leading this new Church. Just the 12 of them, and it started off well.

Look at the beginning of Acts 6, in verse 1,

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing,

Again, we read that, and it’s exciting! But... it doesn’t stop there.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews (That is the Jews who adopted parts of the Greek language and culture) among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So the Twelve get together to discuss and figure this out. And they determined that this is a problem that needs fixed, but none of them have the time to address this problem on their own.

So what they do is have the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews choose seven men among them whom they trust and, “are known to be full of Spirit and wisdom.” After doing that, Luke writes,

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

This is good change, right? They noticed an organizational issue with their leadership, and fixed it. This seemed pretty easy to do, there was no push back, just kind of a “common sense” type of change.

However, there is one other MAJOR change we read about in the book of Acts. One that would have been incredibly mind-altering and culture shifting for some of the Apostles and Early Church members. Let me explain to you what I mean...

The thing about the Apostles is that each of them were Jews. And back what we read earlier in Acts 2 verse 5, it was only “God Fearing Jews” who were a part of that initial crowd. In other words, it was mainly Jews who were a part of the Church and being invited into it as it was getting started.

That was the goal of the Apostles, the goal of the Church in the beginning...to convert Jewish people to join Christianity. At the start, they did not even consider reaching out to the Gentiles, that is, everyone who was not a Jew. Like us!

In fact, it took the Lord speaking to Peter in a vision in order for him to change his perspective on that. Listen to this from Acts 10, after Peter was told to go meet with Cornelius the Centurion, a Gentile.

27 While talking with him (That is, Cornelius), Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

A HUGE change! And this caused major issues for the Church at the start. In Acts 11 when Peter returned back to Jerusalem he was hit with a lot of criticism for going in to the house of “unclean and uncircumcised men”.

Later on in Acts 15 we read of a whole council meeting to discuss what rules Gentile Christians should follow that Jews follow. Again, MAJOR change!

Now the crazy thing about this is that all of these events we just talked about would have taken place within just a 15-20 year span of time.

During that short amount of time, the Apostles, the Church Leaders, and the Church as a whole learned the importance of needing to change their attitudes, their perspective, and even their practices.

Even when it was hard, mind breaking, culture shifting, they made the changes necessary to further their purpose.

And this pattern of change has continued to happen all through the roughly 2,000 year history of the Church.

From being persecuted and forced to meet in secret, to becoming the main religion of the Roman Empire... Reformations and New Denominations...

The Church is always changing.

This leads to the question for us today of...

II. How Should We Process Change?

This is very hard thing for us to do because we as humans don't really like change.

For example... About a year ago some of our High School Guys started meeting once a month at The Parlor House in Waynesboro. ***Picture of Sr. High Guys Breakfast*** Bright and early at 6:15 AM we gather together, pray together, and eat together before the school day starts.

It's one of my new favorite "traditions" we started, but one thing I have found interesting is that since we started, each of us tends to order the same thing. Every. Single. Time. It's gotten to the point where we don't even need to see the menu anymore!

I like the #4 breakfast with over easy eggs, bacon, and white toast. Dalton likes French toast with a side of regular toast to go with it. Mike gets the Super Breakfast that he never gets close to finishing. Tanyon gets gravy with his home fries. And pretty much everyone gets chocolate milk. Except Zach who likes to start his morning with a ice cold glass of Mountain Dew.

We are creatures of habit! And while that is good in some ways, it can also stop us from perhaps trying something else we might really enjoy. It can stop us from pursuing new ideas.

In the Church, avoiding change can hold us back from reaching more and more people, coming up with new ways of serving others, coming up with new ministry ideas.

And so the truth is... Change is a necessity. Even if it takes us out of our comfort zone of getting our typical #4 breakfast, we need to be willing to accept and pursue change. But what should that look like? What should our mindset be when it comes to change?

I have two thoughts on this. First, we must...

A. Never Lose Focus of The True Purpose

Growing up, I loved watching Super Hero cartoons and movies. My personal favorite being Spider-Man. As I would watch these cartoons and movies, I started to realize that a lot of the "bad guys" never started out as "bad".

For example, one of Spider-Man's biggest villains is known as "Doctor Octopus". It's a pretty hilarious name, but the sad part of his story is that before "Doctor Octopus" became a villain, he was a medical scientist who was looking to help

people who were paralyzed. ***Doc Ock before and after picture*** His goal and purpose was to help people!

But sadly, he started to get pulled in the wrong direction. Temptations of power and money pulled him away from what his true purpose was, and he ended up becoming a super villain.

Now of course, that's a made up comic book story, but the sad truth is that the Church has had moments like that in its history. Moments where the Church gave into temptations of money and power and lost its purpose.

That's why our goal today at Five Forks and the Christian Church as a whole is to never lose sight of our true purpose when looking to bring new change...but what is that true purpose?

Well, listen in to Jesus' words here in Matthew 22...

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

That's our purpose. To live out these two commandments. We want to love God and love Others. It's plain and simple.

Everything we do should be done in the name of these two commandments. We must not lose sight of this. We must not lose our true purpose.

That's the first thing we need to have on our minds as we look to make any type of change in the Church. The second thing we need to be aware of when it comes to our mindset of change is that we need to...

B. Understand the Reasoning Behind Change

When we look back to the Early Church in Acts, it was clear that many of the Apostles and Early Church members were not keen on the idea of major change,

such as including Gentiles into the Christian Church...and yet...they still allowed change to happen! Why is that?

Well, if you ask me, it's because they were living out the final commandment that Jesus challenges us with... The Great Commission. Something I imagine many of us are familiar with.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

As the Early Church was looking to live this out, they quickly learned is that the way we go about making disciples of all nations, people, cultures, and ages... it's not a "one-size-fits-all" type of thing when it comes to reaching more and more people.

Paul was one of the first people to truly understand this, and he lived this out well... Listen to what he says in his letter to the Church in Corinth...

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the laws. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul was consistently changing how he went about sharing his message in order to reach more and more people. **He didn't change the Message.** He didn't change his purpose. **He simply changed the method.**

Although this may have not been Paul's personal preference to constantly be making these changes, it was the best thing he could have done to reach more and more people in the name of Jesus. To make disciples of all nations.

Five Forks Church, we need to be willing to pursue and accept change in order to create more disciples, but we need to be careful that we do so in a way that

doesn't lose sight of our true purpose. And so the question now is... who should we be looking to reach in when it comes to raising up these new disciples?

There are many answers to this question. It can be done through local community outreach, global outreach and missionary work like you were hear about next week when Mark and Maggie Roth come to share with us...

But this morning I'd like to encourage you to think about what change in the Church can look like when it comes to reaching the future generations.

As I looked back at those photos of the Children's VBS in the gym, I actually noticed a young, 4-year-old Brady in the background standing with some of you who would have been young adults helping out back then. ***Show Photo***

22 years ago, I don't think 4-year-old Brady thought he'd be standing on this stage getting the chance to preach and become one of your Pastors someday... But that happened because of your time, focus, and intentionality for reaching the upcoming generations. And for that I'm so grateful.

But that's a question we need to continue wrestling with...

III. How Can We Create Positive Change For Future Generations?

How can we continue in our part of sharing this incredible message of the Gospel to these upcoming generations?

It's fascinating to see all throughout Scripture this question being a major focus.

From the Old Testament to the New, there has always been a major focus on the "Future Generations" or "Next Generations".

Listen to these two verses from the Book of Psalms,

Psalm 145:4,

[One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.](#)

Or Psalm 102:18,

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord:

And then later on in the New Testament when the Apostle Paul wrote,

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

We consistently see this encouragement to share with future generations... but how should we do that? How can we help continue to share this beautiful message to future generations?

The first thing we should do is...

A. Get Involved!

Get involved in the lives of young people.

I can assure you that Pastor Chris and I would absolutely love to have you join our teams for the Children's Ministry and Student Ministries, but there are many other ways you can get involved in lives of young people. For example,

Look to help out that young mom who doesn't have the biggest support system. Maybe it's mentoring a new married couple.

It could be going to local sporting events, musicals, and concerts to support the young people in our community.

It's taking the time to get to know our young people and connecting with them. Listen to their stories, their interests, their struggles, their excitement.

And it's important to add that the goal of this is to not force them to become more like you, but simply for you to be there to support them.

And young people, it also means being willing to share your struggles rather than just bottling it up and thinking you can deal with it on your own. You have many people who have gone before you who want so desperately to help. Be willing to reach out and listen!

Again, we want to get involved in the lives of one another.

Second...

B. Pray Over Our Future Generations

We need to be praying for our young people DILIGENTLY.

I understand it may be difficult for you to get involved, you may not have the time to commit serving in our Children or Student Ministries or going to various events/activities. But something every single one of us can do is prioritize praying for our young people.

Every single day we should be down on our knees praying for them.

Listen to these staggering statistics...

According to the National Institutes of Health, nearly 1 in 3 of all adolescents between the ages of 13-18 will experience an anxiety disorder. These numbers have been rising steadily; between 2007 and 2012, anxiety disorders in children and teens went up 20%.

On top of this, the rate of hospital admissions for suicidal teenagers has doubled over the past decade. It breaks my heart to share this, but even in our own area of Franklin County there have been multiple teenage suicides in recent years. It is absolutely heartbreaking, and we need to be praying for our young people.

They may not openly show it or talk about it, but we are seeing a younger generation that is struggling mightily and we need to be praying day and night for our future generations. That's the second way we can help them.

Lastly, let me once again encourage you to...

C. Join us Tonight!

We've been talking about it for a while now, but I really hope we can see you tonight for the Worship Night led by our Students. ***Show Graphic*** We talk a lot about trying to be an intergenerational church, one that focuses on people of all ages, and this is one of our ways to do that!

Adults, come and be blessed by our students as they lead us in a time of worship. Even if it may not be your preferred style of music, or in a setting you're not accustomed to... I encourage you to look past that change as we support our students and live out our purpose. I'd love to see the Chapel Pews filled and packed full of people just like they were many years ago.

Students and Young People, just like in those pictures showed at the beginning of the message, the time of you being the young generation of the church will come and go. And as you grow up, you'll have to step up as the adults to begin leading the next generation. This is your time to start practicing that now!

Let us come together as we continue to worship our Savior. The One who forever remains the same that we will forever worship.

Let's pray.