

The Power to Change

One day the North Wind and the Sun argued about which one of them was the stronger. Suddenly, a lone traveler walked into view.

The Sun said: "I see a way to settle our dispute. Whoever can make that traveler take off his cloak will be declared the stronger. You begin."

The Sun went behind a cloud and gave the North Wind his chance. The North Wind began to blow as hard as he could upon the traveler. However, the harder he blew, the more closely the traveler clutched his cloak so that he could keep it around him. The Wind finally had to give up in despair.

"It's your turn," said the North Wind.

Then the Sun came out from behind the cloud and shone in all his glory. The traveler soon found it too hot to walk with his cloak on; so he took it off. The Sun was declared the winner.

This popular Aesop's fable illustrates the debate over this question: Which is superior in bringing about change, force or persuasion? The North Wind illustrates the weakness of brute force and harsh commands. In the same way that the cold wind drove the traveler to clutch his cloak, harsh words and force seem to compel most to hold on ever more tightly to their ways.

The Sun's light and heat stand for the power of persuasion. Wisdom expressed in sound logical arguments, melt resistance to change away. A people properly persuaded of the need for change, will happily and enthusiastically change their ways. The final verdict: persuasion triumphs over forced change.

This parable illustrates some very powerful truths, but it has its limitations. Like the North Wind, sometimes harsh words and actions alone can produce change. The man who works too much and lives on T-bone steaks, French fries and cigarettes will be told by his doctor and loved ones of the danger of his lifestyle. He will be given compelling evidence that his stress-filled life, his horrible diet and filthy tobacco habit will surely lead to a heart attack, stroke and his destruction. He will be given compelling evidence that if he changes now he can live a good life. Sometimes it takes a heart attack and a doctor's harsh prescription to produce a change of heart and mind, diet and lifestyle.

Persuasion does work. Good sound arguments do overcome our natural resistance to change. However, persuasion has severe limitations. Winning arguments may move a person in the heat of the moment to make a commitment to change some aspect of his/her life, and to begin to institute these changes. However, temptation, peer pressure and just plain human weakness can combine to dissolve that commitment and resolve to live a new life. Despite the most compelling arguments, even the most thoroughly convinced soul can drift back to his/her old ways.

In the final analysis, coercion (the North Wind) and persuasion (the Sun) play their part in life, yet, neither one works with precision all the time. The good news is that there is another source power to change. That power to change is the Word of God, the Holy Bible.

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) Jesus compared God's Word to a seed and peoples' minds to the soil of a field. When God's Word falls on our ears, and we take it in, like a seed falling in good soil, it germinates. The germinated seed produces roots. These roots take hold of us and sink deep within our minds. We become rooted in God's Word. The germinated seed produces a stalk and leaves. The stalk breaks through the soil and into the air. Sun and rain make a plant grow and flourish. Scripture compares God's Word to rain (Isaiah 55:10-11) and light (Psalm 119:105, 130). As we continue to hear God's Word, new thoughts and feelings about God are created. Faith, belief and trust in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit blossom and grow.

Just as a plant produces fruit, faith and trust in God can make us bear fruit. God's Word will reveal our sin. We will realize that we have behaved badly, have failed to love God with all our hearts and minds and our neighbors as ourselves. These words will cause us to despair, to fear life and death. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, that He suffered and died for our sins and rose from the dead will give us peace, hope and the joy of salvation. God Word will open our eyes, plant godly desires within us and give us the grace to act on those desires.

Very soon, farmers and gardeners across Canada will prepare the ground and plant the crops that will feed us and provide seed for the next year's crop. Your mind is a fertile field full of potential. God's most passionate desire is to sow His seeds in your mind and produce a harvest in you. The Gospel seed is sown at Grace every Sunday at 9:00 and 10:30 AM. Come and see what God can grow in you.

In Christ,

Pastor Ed Skutshek