Can You Change?

John 5:39

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There is that pathetic verse you remember in the famous poem by Robert Frost of "Two Roads" where he says, "Both roads that morning equally lay in leaves, no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept to the first for another day, but knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back".

It seems that that is Satanic, doesn't it? I mean it's true, but it's Satanic. So many of our lives drift along in that way. You might almost say, drain away in that way. "Oh, I kept to the first for another day, but knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back". And it's a shame that not only older people here but some of us who are younger, can get ourselves into that spot where we say, "Oh I've chosen this way and it's led to that way and it's led to that way and I really can't go back now." And it's the same truth that comes through in Auden's pessimism, "in headaches and in worry, vaguely life leaks away."

"In headaches and in worry vaguely life leaks away. And time will have his fancy tomorrow and today." Loved ones, that is a Satanic lie. That is Satanic untruth. The meaning of every springtime is the same. It's what Hopkins said, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." When you see the daffodils come up and the tulips come up, you realize there's something on this earth that is eternally renewing and fresh and resurrecting. It's the same in your life and mine. It's never too late to change.

You'll never go far down along a certain path that you can't decide today, "I'll change", and the reason is that each one of

you is actually part of the Son of the God who made our world. Each one of you was made by Him. There's not one of you here this morning that wasn't made personally by Jesus. That's what the best book we have that tells us about what is beyond the world. It says, "all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything (or anyone) made that was made." (John 1:3) Every one of you was made by Jesus.

Every one of you has something of Jesus within you. The literal translation of John 1:3 in the Greek is "That, which was made, was previously life in Him, you've been made." You were originally life in Jesus. You were part of Jesus' life. You were a spark of his Spirit that has been given your body and your personality. You are part of Him. And there's another way you are part of Him. This dear book says, when He died, you died too, and everything that has been a failure in your life was destroyed in His death. That's an eternal, a great eternal event that can be brought down into time and space at any time by anyone of us here.

Just as lightening fires from one cloud to another and can be brought down to earth by a lightening rod, so you and I are able to bring down into time and space- into our life - the eternal change that took place in Christ. You bring it down by simply one thing - faith. The moment anyone of you says, "I will be done with this, I am determined in God's name, I am determined I will be done with this", at that moment, all the power of that eternal destruction and remaking of you which God carried out in Jesus comes down into your life.

Do you realize that's why even non-Christians, people who don't believe in God, are strangely able to make mighty changes in their lives? Have you noticed that? I mean there are some people who don't believe in God at all, can turn away from hideous situations in their life and can change completely. You

see it is because they too were put into Christ and were changed and the whole dynamic of that eternal event is released into their lives the moment they determine it.

Now, I agree with you, they don't give glory to Jesus and in that way they do not come alive in His Spirit but they are able to make use of the power of that event. So it is for every one of us. You're able this very morning to say, "Lord God, I am not going to touch that stuff again. Lord, I am not going to touch that habit again. Lord I am going to get out of this meaningless, directionless, purposeless life that I have and I am going to accept what You said in Your word that I am part of Your son, that you did put me here for a purpose, and now Lord, I am going to find that purpose and You can use me for yourself."

Loved ones you can do that, you can do that this morning. Simply because Christ died for all of us and all of us died. If anyone is in Christ and that means all of us, all of us died. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation and you can be new this day. So I would plead especially with those who are kind of worn down. You get worn down, don't you? You get worn down after a while. Either you get worn down outwardly or you get worn down secretly in your heart, but you get worn down.

You just begin to get to the point where you think "Oh, nothing is going to change very much, I am just going to drain on the way I am draining and dwindle out at the end". Elliot said, "Not with a bang but a whimper". And that's the way it's going to go. Loved ones, get up. Get up! God, our Father put you into His Son and He destroyed all that hopelessness in you. He destroyed all that weakness in you and He raised you up in His Son and He made you new and He is able to give you the power of that event here in your own life but you do have to do one thing. You do have to move towards that in faith. You have to believe it and you have to make a move with your will towards it.

If you get a car with very good power steering, it is so easy. But the wheels only turn if you put the pressure of your finger on the spokes of the steering wheel. You do have to do that. But none of us here are in any doubt about whether it's our strength that actually turns the wheel. It's not. It's the power steering that turns the wheels. But you do have to put at least your little finger on the spokes of the steering wheel, that's what God says to you this morning.

I have made available a power, indeed I have already changed your whole life but I wait and the whole resources of heaven wait upon you saying, "I want that Lord, I commit myself to that." So I would encourage you, especially those of you who have never made any move towards Jesus at all. Those of you who have listened to this for weeks and months and have never actually taken the stand, "I am part of Jesus and my God has put me here to do something that only I can do. Lord I believe that. Lord Jesus I believe You're in me and I now give myself to You and You can do what You want with me." Loved ones, I would suggest that you do it. Open yourself to God.

It might be good to look at the means of grace. Many of us are dissatisfied with our own spiritual lives. We are vague about God's voice and can't get much strength from a sense of His presence. We find ourselves at odds with other Christian's views and attitudes and generally miss the joy of our salvation. Then on the next page the spiritual life has the same symptoms of disease and rules for health as a physical life.

Removing the symptoms of disease and following the rules of health opens the way for God to revive us with His spirit. It's not actually your breathing that keeps you alive. Isn't it the air? You could breathe like mad but if you're breathing coal gas, you could

die. It is not the breathing that does it. It's the air that you breathe. So, with this, it's the grace that you receive in.

It's not actually you coming to a prayer meeting or doing bible study, but it's the grace that you receive through that. The way to do this is to use the means of grace, which God has provided in the body of Christ. Examine yourself and act and then God will answer. Don't argue or philosophize or rationalize. Appropriate action enables God's grace to renew your life and that's what I suggest loved ones. Why I did this, was to show you there's something you can do about it.

Some of you will say, "Well, how do I exercise faith?" Oh well, it's easy, look at...
- #10 how many mornings in the week did you have a personal half-hour prayer and bible study? That's exercising faith.
- #11, did you invite anyone to fellowship lunch at Sunday morning service? In other words, did you think of anybody else after Sunday morning service?
- #12, did you witness to anyone?
- #13 did you experience any answer to prayer?
- #14 did God speak to you about anything?
- #15 did you send anyone a book or tract, did you make any venture to bring a friend or relative closer to God?

Well, that's it loved ones. Faith is action. Those actions themselves are useless. Those don't do a thing for you but they express your faith that God has chosen you to be His child and is intent on using you.

So loved ones, I would encourage you to take the opportunity that this beginning of a new year offers. Look briefly over your life especially during the quietness during communion when we distribute the bread and the wine. Just look at your life and see where it is going. Then see, you can change it today. The power

of Heaven waits upon you and waits upon you exercising the little finger of faith.

Now loved ones, over the years we have always used this first Sunday, just as I have outlined here. We renew our covenant with God and bring before our own hearts our commitment to the One who has made us. John Wesley wrote these words and I'd read them just before we make our own covenant.

"Dearly beloved, the Christian life to which we are called, is a life in Christ redeemed from sin by Him and through Him consecrated to God. Upon this life we have entered, having been admitted into that new covenant of which our Lord Jesus Christ is mediator and which He sealed with His own blood, that it might stand forever. On one side, the covenant is God's promise that He will fulfill in and through us all that He declared in Jesus Christ, who is the author and perfecter of our faith. His promise still stands. We are sure for we have known His goodness and proved His grace in our lives day by day. On the other side, we stand pledged to live no more unto ourselves but to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us and has called us to serve Him, that the purposes of His coming might be fulfilled".

From time to time we renew our vows of consecration especially when we gather at the table of the Lord. But on this day, we meet expressly as generations of our fathers have met that we may joyfully and solemnly renew the covenant, which bound them and binds us to God. That is in remembering the mercies of God and the hope of His calling, examine ourselves by the light of His spirit that we may see wherein we have failed or fallen short in faith and practice and considering all that this covenant means, may give ourselves anew to God.

Loved ones, though I'd encourage all of us to stand, I'd ask only those of us who are really serious about this to take upon our lips

these sacred words and this holy covenant. So let us stand together.

If you intend to give up the ownership of your own life and the governing of your own future and intend to put it into the hands of Him who really owns it anyway and intend to live the life that is pleasing to God and that is empowered by Son Jesus, I ask you to join with me then, in repeating this covenant.

"I am no longer my own but Thine. Put me to what Thy wilt, rank me with whom Thy wilt, put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exulted for Thee or brought low for Thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now oh glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thou art mine and I am thine, so be it and the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Let us be seated as we pray.