

From the Pastor's Desk

Real Change Comes from Inside-Out and That's What Lent Is All About!

My uncle had an old Ford Model T in his garage. The car didn't look like much, but he was still very proud of it. It sat for decades in someone's barn when he found it and it was love at first sight. He saw value where others saw junk. It took a lot of time and money for him to bring the old car back to life. That is how Jesus sees us. He doesn't see rust and worn paint. He doesn't see rotten gaskets and flat tires. He sees beautiful lines and wonderful possibilities.

Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:10-12

We are all aware that Jesus often associated with outcasts, but what we can easily overlook is that he ate with them. This is what really scandalized the religious officials of his day. At this time, eating with someone meant they were friends. It entailed acceptance and mutual esteem. It is important to notice this occurred BEFORE any conversion and Jesus' association with them did not require any change. That's why outcasts were so attracted to him. He accepted them as they were. From this unconditional love, change occurred from the inside of the person. Real change is an inside-out job.

One of my favorite movies is "As Good As It Gets" starring Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt. In the movie, Nicholson played a verbally abusive man who had a mental illness that hindered him making any friends. When he began to fall in love with Helen Hunt, his life started to change. When Hunt asked him to pay her a compliment, he said, "You make me want to be a better man." Something was changing within Nicholson's heart that resulted in him wanting to be a better man and his actions followed. Real change is an inside-out job.

Around 400 AD, Saint Augustine wrote these words:

You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more.

You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

From the Confessions of Saint Augustine

Augustine came to faith late in life, when his heart became enflamed with the love of Christ. Lent is a time of allowing Christ to stir the embers of our faith and blow the air of the Holy Spirit upon them so they burst back into flame again. We desire change from the inside-out and that's what Lent is all about!