Have you ever been told: “You have changed.” Sometimes that means a good compliment, other times a criticism.

I remember when I was young and getting serious in my faith journey, some of my friends noticed I was changing. I guess the way I talked and behaved gave me away. So, they would ask me about it, and I would simply say that God was changing me. Some were curious and asked me more about it, while others distanced themselves from me (you know, it could be contagious, why risk it!).

Not everyone liked the change that was happening to me (even though it was good for me), but those who appreciated it were happy for me.

Here is what I know about change: If you want to change for good, it needs to begin from the inside out. People try to change who they are by changing their exterior appearance, but that is not lasting change. Once you remove the items you are wearing, the make-up, and accessories and look in the mirror, you are back to the same person you were. And even if people have plastic surgery to change their appearance permanently, they are still the same person on the inside.

I am not implying that it is good or bad; it is just a fact. I do some of those things myself. For example, if I have an important meeting or interview, I wear a suit and a tie, and my best shoes, and it makes me feel good because it gives me confidence, but I am still the same cool Edgar you all know.

My point is that I did not become a disciple of Jesus because I changed the way I dress or my language, or anything else (all of which, for the most part, is a cultural thing anyways), but because I called on Jesus, opened myself wholly to him, followed him, and he gave me a new mind and heart.

Having said this, I have a question for you today: Have you changed for good? I am not talking about the kind of day-to-day appearance changes we do to ourselves, as I explained, but existential change, the kind that completely rewires us on the inside, giving us a new perspective about who we are, other people, and life as a whole.

As Methodists, we believe that once we acknowledge God’s grace in our lives and put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are regenerated and recreated into a new child of God. That is a good change for this life and the next one.

So, have you changed for good?

There is a story in the Bible that teaches us so much about good and lasting change in people’s lives: the story of Pentecost. And today, it happens to be Pentecost Sunday. (It is not like I planned for it. Right…)

Now, what is Pentecost Sunday, you may ask? The word “Pentecost” designates the 50th day after Passover (remember that Passover is when the Jews commemorate their liberation from the Egyptian oppression through the leadership of Moses, as told in the book of Exodus). Another name for Pentecost was “The Feast of Weeks.” It was so-called because it fell on the fiftieth day, after a week of weeks, seven weeks each having seven days after Passover.

Pentecost is a great holiday because we celebrate the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and disciples who were gathered in a room in Jerusalem—120 of them—and gave them a new life.

This is the Scripture that tells the story, Acts 2:1-8,

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?”

Acts 2:37-42,

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2, is the story of when the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled and changed everything.

As we may recall, before this happened, the apostles and disciples were hiding from the public for fear that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them. But everything changed on Pentecost Day when the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled, and all of them were filled with God’s presence and power.

The Bible describes this moment by saying that the room was filled with a sound like the roaring of a mighty wind, and what appeared to be divided tongues of fire rested upon every person’s head in that room. Each one of them was filled with the presence of God, and they began to speak in different languages giving witness to who Jesus was and did. (Remember last week’s message?)

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, these men and women were changed in an instant into courageous witnesses of God. All the hesitation that overwhelmed them was gone in a moment, and they were boldly living their lives to the fullest—not waiting on the sidelines anymore.

How did that happen? The Bible explains that at that time, there were devout Jews from every nation that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate The Feast of Weeks and they witnessed this supernatural event—each hearing the disciples speak in their own languages. Some, deeply perplexed, wanted to know and asked the apostles, “What does this mean?” Others made fun of the disciples declaring, “They have had too much wine.” Peter responded to them by saying, “These are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.”

At this point, Peter stood and preached the Scriptures that explained who Jesus was and the promise of God about God’s Spirit. And when they heard everything Peter had said, their hearts were moved to believe and asked Peter, “What should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

That day about three thousand persons were added to the faith of Jesus through the profession of faith and baptism. This was unprecedented and is considered the birth of the church. That is how it happened. The Holy Spirit changed them for good.

A particular example of this is the apostle Peter. Here, we see him not as a cowered disciple overwhelmed by guilt for denying Jesus and having no confidence in his capacity and skills but as a powerful and eloquent witness of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a crowd of the same people he once feared, yet he boldly declared the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter did not simply change his mind; Peter himself was changed. He was changed for good when the Spirit of God came to him.

I want what happened to Peter to happen to me too. I do not want to be afraid and hide from the world. I do not want to feel ashamed and hopeless because of my past or misguided faith or whatever else that may be keeping me in the shadows. Instead, I want to come to the light and become fulfilled the way God planned it for me: I want to be a good husband, dad, friend, neighbor, and human being. I do not want to feed the shadows in the world; I want to be a child of goodness that brings light to the world.

Here is the question you are probably asking right now: How do I welcome the Holy Spirit into my life? Remember what we read just a moment ago, when the people asked Peter, “What should we do?” And he said, “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” This means that the new life we find in God comes to us when we realize our need of God, become vulnerable to him, and call on Jesus. That is it.

Now, this calling on Jesus looks different for each person. Sometimes this call may be a scream of desperation like the people in this story, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). It may be like what one blinded and awe-struck soon-to-be apostle said when meeting Jesus himself, “Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5) It may be an almost inaudible prayer like that of the tax collector in the temple, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (Luke 18:13) It may be like the wailing of ten lepers who cry from a distance, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” (Luke 17:13) It may be like the cry of a blind beggar, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.” (Luke 18:38) It may be like the request of the dying thief on the cross, “Lord, remember me.” (Luke 23:42)

As you can see, the calling may sound different in each case, but they all had one thing in common: They called willingly, letting go of themselves and not holding back anything from God. Some had reached rock bottom; others were simply enlightened and finally got it.

If your calling sounds like: “Okay, Jesus, let’s do this thing but I can only commit this much to you…” Or, “Jesus, if you grant me this blessing, I promise I will…” That is a transaction, not a calling.

But, if your calling sounds like: “I am sorry, I was wrong, I need you…” Or, “Now I understand who you are and what you did, my life is yours, I am grateful and love you…” Or, “Please, save me…” Then, I am certain you will be changed for good.

The point I am making here is that you can call on Jesus anytime from wherever you are no matter your circumstances. You can say anything and explain yourself in your own words; just be vulnerable and honest.

I say this because often, people mistakenly assume that unless they say the same prayer and experience the same thing others did, it will not work or count. But that is a mistake because we all come from different places and lived experiences. And we all are unique. God does not create clones. You are meant to be only you and no one else. So, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, it comes to fulfill God’s calling on you.

Here is the good news and invitation today: If you call on Jesus, he will answer and give you the blessing of a new life. You will be free from the shadows, fear, and whatever shackles may be keeping you shut down. And that change is not temporary but will carry you and those around you for the rest of your life because when we call on Jesus’ name, we change for good.

So, call on Jesus and commit your life to his ways, and you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit to be and do good.