

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17 and Mark 4:26-34

Many of you know that I am an avid NASCAR fan. Actually, next week on my vacation I will be traveling with my siblings to New Hampshire Motor Speedway to see the races in person. In case there is anyone here who is not familiar with NASCAR, it is the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing. And if you are not familiar with NASCAR you may be thinking dirt oval tracks and beat up old cars that go around 90 miles an hour. That's not NASCAR. NASCAR has paved tracks and pristine cars, at least at the beginning of each race.

The track we will be visiting can seat over 100,000 people, and thousands will be watching the race from the comfort of their homes. This is an amazing transformation from a sport that supposedly began when southern bootleggers in modified and souped-up cars would outrun liquor regulators during prohibition. That sounds a lot more exciting than watching cars go around and around an oval track, however, there are more fans than you can imagine rooting for their favorite driver at tracks all over the country. What's the appeal?

For starters, the roar of the engines and the speed at which the cars travel... just under 200 mph, and unfortunately, the wrecks that happen at that speed. There have been some severe injuries, even deaths, however most times the drivers climb out of their cars unhurt. Since 2002, following the fatal crash of Dale Earnhardt, NASCAR has mandated safety improvements to the race cars so that a driver is not likely to be killed behind the wheel. Machines that once were extremely dangerous are now very safe, they can travel at high speeds, crash at those extreme speeds, and still allow the driver to be safe; the cars have been transformed.

Unlike the change that transformed the race cars from something very dangerous to something fairly safe, lets consider turning on a light in a dark room. Does the light change the placement of anything in the room? No. Does it move the stool that is in your pathway? No. All it does is allow you to see. The room has not changed because the light was turned on. But it has been transformed. It is visible. It can be seen and known, and a person can walk through the room without danger.

That's how grace works. Unlike the race car which has been physically changed, like illuminating a room, grace changes nothing but transforms everything.

In the reading from 2nd Corinthians Paul talks about the kind of transformation that takes place in us when we receive grace through Jesus Christ, even though the way he phrases it makes it more confusing than clear. What he is saying is that we used to walk "in the body" but now that

Jesus has come into our lives we walk in the Spirit. We are transformed human beings. We used to relate to people from “a human point of view” but now we relate to them, or “regard” them, in Paul’s words, from a spiritual point of view. God’s grace transforms us by transforming how we relate to each other.

We are still the broken, estranged, flawed human beings we always were, but now we’re transformed. We see each other differently; we relate to each other by grace. It’s like we used to be walking in a dark room but now we have turned on the light and can see the obstacles that may cause us to stumble and fall. Before the light is turned on, we related to the room as one who walks in darkness, now that the light is on both the room, and we are transformed. We can walk as one who sees clearly. Before we accepted Jesus and received God’s grace, we related to people who walked in darkness. But now that grace has been given to us as a gift from God as God comes to us in Jesus, we are transformed and can relate to others as one who walks in the light of grace. We no longer see people as we imagine them, but as they really are. We can see their hurt and pain. We can see their love and their worries. We can see them as children of God, subject to God’s grace if they choose to accept it. We are transformed by grace, and, as we are transformed they are transformed as well. “So if anyone is in Christ,” says Paul, to sum it all up, “there is a new creation: Everything old has passed away. Look, new things have come into being!”

The gospel writer, Mark, chooses a simpler and clearer metaphor to show how God’s grace works— that of seeds. In the first parable of today’s gospel text, he illustrates the fact of how transformative grace works is a mystery. Like a seed, it works because it works.

The farmer plants the seeds, goes home, goes to bed, gets up, goes back to work and, in a few days, the seed is transformed into a seedling or sprout, which is, in turn, transformed into a plant, which is, in turn, transformed into fruit and then, back into a seed. We’re not going to refuse to eat a tomato until we understand all the hows and whys of its growth and maturation. We don’t need to know all the ins and outs of photosynthesis to enjoy the tomato. We just benefit from the plant because it grows.

According to Mark, God’s grace is like that. We don’t have to understand it to benefit from it, we only need to accept it by faith. We don’t need much faith to be transformed by God’s grace, just a tiny bit will do. Faith the size of a mustard seed can transform us and the whole world around us. Only grace can bring about the transformations that will bring peace. Grace is transformative. It changes nothing but transforms everything.

All glory be to God.