

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

NEW YEAR, 2006

When Gary was sitting in a Tacoma, Washington elementary school, he loved to doodle and draw. He envied his closest friend who could draw cool tanks and airplanes, but Gary seemed to specialize in animals - especially dinosaurs, whales and giraffes. But he never seriously considered taking art lessons or being an artist. When he graduated from high school, Gary enrolled at Washington State University stating his major to be communication. His goal was get a job writing copy for advertising. *My goal in life was to save the world from inane advertising*, he once told interviewer Al Young.

Like many college graduates, Gary didn't find a job in his field after he received his diploma. So he got a job in a music store. And once again, when customers weren't around and business was dead, Gary began to doodle. One day, several years after he had graduated from college, Gary decided to submit several of his cartoons to a local magazine called *Pacific Search*. When they bought them, Gary was both thrilled and encouraged. He began to draw more cartoons and by 1979 had his own cartoon in the weekly paper, *Summer News Review*. Gary received a whole \$3 every week for his cartoon. The Seattle Times also picked up his drawings for \$15 a cartoon, calling it *Nature's Way*.

It wasn't too long before Gary decided that he was at a turning point in his life. If he were to pursue his love of drawing cartoons, he was going to have to get more papers to carry them. Otherwise, he was going to have to get on with some other career. So Gary drove down to San Francisco and visited the

Chronicle. After a week of waiting to be seen, and then turning in his portfolio, Gary returned back home to Washington with dampened spirits. A few days after he had settled back at home, he picked up his mail and discovered 2 letters. The 1st letter crushed his spirit further as he read that the Seattle Times had decided to drop his cartoons – *they were too controversial*, they wrote. He had already made up his mind on the spot to quit cartooning as he was opening that second letter. He just couldn't take all of this rejection. But to his surprise, the 2nd letter informed him of the San Francisco Chronicle's decision to print Gary's cartoon. They wanted to change the name, and they would not only print it in their paper but already had 19 other papers who would print it as well. Just as quickly as he had given up his dream, Gary was now encouraged to go forward full speed.

When Gary Larson retired several years ago, his cartoons were in about 2,000 papers, translated into 17 languages. And the new name stuck. His cartoons are still controversial. Many papers say that when they take a cartoon poll, Gary's work often is voted both the best liked and the least liked cartoon at the same time - people seem to either love it or hate it. But we probably never would be able to read Gary Larson's cartoons had it not been for that day in his life when he almost quit but then decided to go forward with Something Old - the same basic ideas and cartoon characters - and Something New - a new direction, new papers, and a new name, *The Far Side*.

In anybody's life, there must be a delicate balance maintained between the old and the new if there is to be success. When all of the old is disregarded in

an indiscriminate manner, stability and continuity is lost. But if there isn't anything new, life becomes stagnant and routine without any growth or development.

It is at this time of year, when we are ending an old year and looking forward to a new year, that we often think seriously about this balance in our own personal lives. Many people make New Year's resolutions - to develop in some intellectual area, to change usage of time, to throw off some bad habit, to lose some weight, to recommit to life relationships - and these resolutions reflect our desire to change in some positive way. Resolutions show a desire to learn from past mistakes and weaknesses and to change and grow in certain areas of life. So it is most appropriate on this final Sunday of 2006, to think of Something Old and Something New.

But it is also important for us to think of this balance as a church for we are just about ready to enter our sesquicentennial anniversary year. In March of 2007, this church will celebrate its 150th birthday. Now the significance of this is great. For while there are only 2 churches in Rockford that claim a birthday just a few years older than RBC, it is my understanding that as a standing church, ours is the oldest in this entire valley. Just about a year after the "The Baptist Church and Society of Lamphanville" (for that's what his community was called back then) was formed, a church building was begun. In fact, the frame was raised in December of this next year. That church was erected on this very property – the first church building in this entire valley. And from that day until this day, a church has stood as a lighthouse for God's truth on this

property. Just think of the influence that this has been for the past 150 years. Just think of all the other churches that are now in this area spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ following the lead of this pioneer movement. There is a great heritage that we have here at RBC and we will be learning more and more about this as we progress through this next year. But no person or church can live in the past. A person has to learn lessons from his experiences and then make adjustments and changes or resolutions as we often call them at this time of year if he is to continue to grow and develop. And if a church is to continue to influence and impact a community, that church as well must continue to adjust with a continuously changing world. The old brings stability and a wonderful heritage. The new can bring a freshness and excitement. Something old and something new in balance is needed both in our personal lives and the life of our church as well.

1. It is interesting to reflect on how much the Bible has to say on this subject. Solomon is readily accepted as one of the wisest people who ever walked this planet. But he found that however much life seemed to change, there were foundations that were really not that much different. He found that a continuous search for new things just for the sake of something new often resulted in a futile endeavor. He described the life that came as a result of such a search as meaningless. Listen to Solomon's description of life as found in Ecclesiastes chapter 1:1-9:

¹ The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ²

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless." ³ What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? ⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Now you might be thinking - how could the wisest man who ever lived make such a ridiculous statement, that there is nothing new under the sun? Of course there are new inventions and developments that are happening all of the time. And knowledge is increasing faster now than it ever has before. If Solomon could have seen an airplane drifting through clouds across the sky, if he could have sat down before the most recent computer, if he could have watched a program on a TV set, would he have dared to claim that there is nothing new under the sun.

Well, if we think this way I fear that we might miss the point that Solomon was making. You see, Solomon did not live in a stagnant day. Science was exploding in his day as fast as it had ever done before. And Solomon was right in the middle of this explosion. Listen to what 1 Kings 4:29-34 says about Solomon:

²⁹ God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of

understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ *Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.* ³¹ *He was wiser than any other man . . . and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.* ³² *He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.* ³³ *He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.* ³⁴ *Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.*

If there were ever a person who was on the cutting edge of scientific discovery, it was Solomon. So advanced was he that people came from all over the world just to hear him lecture on animal and plant life. No, it is obvious that Solomon is not talking about there not being any new discoveries in the world.

Rather, Solomon is looking deeper into the heart of himself and others and at the basic routine of life. He is not looking at life superficially, but rather is looking at the basic nature of human beings and life in general. For whether a man peeks through a crack in his neighbor's tent to look at a woman undressing or looks at a pornographic site on the internet, the basic sinful heart desires are still the same. And whether a woman cooks a meal for an hour over an open fire or nukes it in 60 seconds in a microwave, we still must eat regularly. And whether a person plows in a field under a hot sun all day or types before a computer in an air conditioned office, work still must be done in order to make

a living. The basic nature of human beings and the basic necessities of life have not changed for thousands of years. Great leaders had been born and died, empires had risen and fallen, but life still went on. The sun came up every morning and went down every evening. Atmospheric water continued its cycle from the seas to the clouds to the ground. Babies were born and their grandparents died. While our computers soon become out-of-date today, God's computer in this universe has run steadily for thousands of years and will still function consistently after we die as it always has since the day of creation.

We have a saying - *Time marches on*. There is nothing that we can do to alter that fact. However we choose to use our time, time never stands still for anyone. I like the way Austin Dobson put the truth in his brief poem. *Time goes, you say? Ah, no! Alas, time stays, we go*. We have other sayings that express similar sentiments. *However much things change, they still remain the same - what goes around, comes around*. These all are expressing similar thoughts that Solomon had when he wrote Ecclesiastes.

We can look to change the superficialities of life, but we will always be disappointed in the end if we think that we are altering the basic nature of life. It doesn't matter if a new computer comes out that can process faster than the previous one, it doesn't matter that a new style of clothing comes out that all the in people are wearing, it doesn't even matter if a cure for cancer would be found, basic human nature is not going to change. God's truth will remain the same as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow. People are still going to wrestle with the same types of temptations. And people are still going to have

a longing deep inside without a relationship with God. For changes in the circumstances around us really do not change our basic human nature. Some old things stay the same and cannot be altered. In some ways, it appears that there is nothing new under the sun as Solomon claimed some 3,000 years ago.

But there is a sense in which this Something Old brings stability and continuity to our lives as we look at it in a positive way. For there is no basic human need that we will face in this next year that has not been faced in the past successfully with the help of God.

*Perhaps you will be transferred from your job this next year and have to move to a new city and community. Yes, this could be a traumatic event for your family. But 4,000 years ago God enabled a man named Abraham to move thousands of miles away from his homeland and blessed him for his obedience.

*Perhaps you are facing doubts and discouragement about your abilities and potential wondering if you can possibly be successful in life. Well, 3,500 years ago a man named Moses had those same doubts and with God's help he was able to become one of the most successful leaders in all of world history.

*Perhaps you are worried that you might lose a loved one this next year and are wondering how you would ever be able to cope with such a loss. Naomi and Ruth faced those same emotional struggles as they lost their husbands and sons, but God helped them through these most difficult times and brought great blessing into their lives.

*Perhaps you fear a financial reversal and wonder how you would handle a business failure. Job was the wealthiest man in his world when he lost

everything that he owned in one day. But God was still faithful and brought him through this trial successfully, blessing him 2 fold in the end.

*You see, the point is this. While a new year is dawning upon us, there is no new basic human need under the sun. There is nothing new that you will face this year that millions haven't faced before. And no one who has placed faith and trust in God has ever been disappointed. We need to remember this - for it brings the stability and security that we need in life.

2. But let's move on to a consideration of Something New. For while we need the stability of Something Old, we also need the excitement and change of Something New. It is great to be in the zone - but a grove can quickly become a rut. If we just continue in the same routines in our lives, we become stagnant, we lose the excitement in life that comes from growth and development.

While people universally recognize the need for positive change, I have found that most people fail to realize the true source of productive change. For the vast majority of people are under the delusion that positive change in their lives comes from a change in their life circumstances. If we could ask every American what he or she would like changed during this next year, most would respond by designating some circumstantial in their life. If I could only change my job situation, if I could only buy a larger house, if I could only get a new husband, if I could only change my physical appearance in some way, if I could only rid myself of this awful habit, if I could only win the lottery, then life would really be better for me. We know that the majority would answer in this way for most of the resolutions made reflect these concerns.

Now circumstances do affect the quality of our lives - nobody disputes that fact. And we certainly should change circumstances that we can for the better. But primary change comes from within not from without in our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

It is as the Holy Spirit of God changes our lives from within, making us a new creation in the Lord Jesus Christ, that real change comes into our lives. Old things pass away - all things become new. You see, the real need in our lives is for a new us. We may or may not be able to change circumstances in our lives, but if by the grace of God we have been given a new heart, a new mind, a new heavenly perspective, then we will be changed. And even if our circumstances remain unchanged, we will begin to look at them with a different perspective. So whereas there might not be anything new under the SUN, all things become new in the SON. When the Holy Spirit of God places us into the body of Christ, all things become new in our lives.

I recently heard London businessman Lindsay Clegg tell the story of a warehouse property he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash around the interior. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, Clegg took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage. "Forget about the repairs," the buyer said. "When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site.

This is a picture of what God wants to do in our lives. When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to spiritual truths and regenerates us from within, He doesn't want to just paint some rooms and replace some windows. He wants to completely rebuild us into the very image of Jesus Christ himself. That is where true change occurs - not with the altering of some superficial window dressing, but with a complete change of heart. That kind of change only God can bring into our lives. But that is the type of change that revolutionizes a life.

After God fills a person's life, habits change not because of resolutions but because personal tastes change; after God fills a person's life, work changes not necessarily because the job description is different but because there is a new attitude and work ethic that comes from within; after God fills a person's life, personal relationships change not because others around us have taken on new personalities but because we now have a new capacity to love them.

And God can change a church as well. He can take a building filled only with relics and memories from the past and turn it into a place where people's hearts are filled with the love of God and burdened for the work of God. God can change a home from a place of tension and strife to a place where peace and forgiveness reign. God can change a person from being bitter and resentful to being filled with joy and contentment. But that kind of change will not come simply with different surrounding circumstances. That kind of change will only come with a new heart, a new commitment, a new perspective - only Christ can make that kind of change.

Have you experienced a change inside in your life? Have you invited the

Lord Jesus Christ to come into your life and remake you from the inside out?