

Nothing Endures but Change

Matthew 4:17 and Hebrews 13:6-8

Long ago, a Greek Philosopher named Heraclites had a wise observation about life. He said "Nothing endures but change." And to illustrate his wisdom, he is known for saying: "Nothing endures but change - therefore, you can't step into the same river twice. For by the time you have stepped into the river and out of it and stepped back into the river, the water is not the same, your foot has changed the direction of the flow, it is no longer the same." Heraclites goes on to say that change is the essence of the universe.

A Philosopher named Alfred North Whitehead took this wisdom a step further, by saying "Not only have you changed the river, but each living person is always changing biologically each moment. SO you are not even the same person as when you first stepped in the river."

These writers say that nothing endures but change. When I think of that in today's terms, I have to say that it rings true. It is hard to think of an aspect of life that is just the same as it was in August 2019. We are all experiencing the effects of that. On a broader level, the next thing I think of is technology. It is a different world than even 5 years ago. Social media has come in to many aspects of our lives as well that was not the case 10 years ago or even 5. I heard we are trying to outlaw an app called Tik Tok before I even had the opportunity to know what it was.

Change affects all of us and our institutions, it even affects our church. A church consultant named Stan Ott said "Shifts in our culture's expectations, lifestyles and understanding of what is truth are changing how people perceive the church, and their receptivity to the gospel"

And another said, "We live in what some commentators call a permanent white-water society" where change is so rapid that we strain to even keep up with it let alone adapt to it.

I am remembering these quotes as we are going through a time of big change in our church, with our long time Pastor retiring, and looking towards the future to see what God has in store for us here at Saint Mark, all while we deal with the white water level of disruption that COVID has brought us. Think of the implications for our church during this Interim, or Transitional time.

If change both outside in our world and within the church are happening so rapidly, we know we would not expect to just continue doing everything the same way as 20 years ago, or even last year.

It is an African proverb, I learned from my friends at Silver Spring which says "If the rhythm of the drum beat changes, the dance step must adapt." There may be things we decide should not be different, or there may be things which need to adapt to our new circumstances, and to how we see the needs of our people and the community around us.

We have already been adapting to new circumstances since March with our virtual worship and meetings and many other things as well.

Thankfully the Bible has something to say about change and dealing with change. As we are dealing on a daily basis with all of this new reality, even while we go through a transition in our church, let me lift up three spiritual ideas, which I hope you will take to heart.

FIRST- when it comes to change, all change involves loss.

Even if change is great and awesome, it usually means letting go of something. Jesus met Peter and Andrew and James and John by the sea of Galilee. They were surrounded by the familiarity of the sea, and their boats and the fishing nets, and the daily routine - that was their comfort zone.

Now all of the sudden, Jesus says, "Follow me and let go of the thing that has been known. Say farewell to the familiar and let go of the known.

It's not easy to let go of the known and look toward the unknown. To leave our comfort zone to walk in to what is uncomfortable and insecure.

We find change difficult because there is always a loss involved. The other day, Caroline and I were lamenting the beautiful waterfront restaurants we used to love in Sarasota, even though we are so happy that we felt called to move to Maryland many years ago. Even a good change involves a loss.

Of course we all know that change involves loss when it is something difficult, a loved one dies, we move or change jobs perhaps. But even good change means letting of something.

Think of having children - my nephew and his wife had twins, and everyone was so excited what a joy it was, but my nephew was really struck by the loss of flexibility in their lives when the twins were very little. They had to temporarily give up some things - like sleep for instance.

In the church it's no different- transition time might mean letting go of something...we're already temporarily let go of a lot.

So, it's important for us as we go through this epic time of change in our world to just put a marker in that - all change involves loss.

SECOND - It is a spiritual principle that in the midst of change remember the same God who guided us in the past will faithfully walk with us one step at a time into the future.

The God of Abraham and Isaac and Paul will guide us into the future, but it's always just one step at a time. Maybe we can't see the end of the tunnel just yet. None of us know when things will get back to normal. Or if there will ever BE a normal. It is a running joke in my family for 30 years now, that when things seem a little crazy, we say, well, when things get back to normal everything will be fine. So far they never do.

So with that in mind, I find great reassurance when Jesus DOES NOT say to the disciples, put down your nets and good luck finding your own way from there

Rather he says, put down your nets and follow me. He doesn't give them a map and say "do the best you can". No, its "Follow me".

I want us to emphasize those two words in all that we do as a community of faith. But also to us as individuals going through this current crisis.

It is like he is saying, "I will model for you the essentials of life, I will guide you one step at a time."

Now, you or I, like Peter and Andrew and James and John would be filled with questions. "Where are we going? Where will we sleep? What will we eat, when will we see our families again, how long is this going to take?" and so on.

But Jesus doesn't put it all on them at once. It is revealed to them one day at a time. Notice his clever use of their jobs as a way to describe - follow me and

I will make you fishers of people. It was a familiar idea for them.

Often we ask, especially in times like these, how do I know the next thing God has in store for me? What is God's will for my life right now? One way to answer that is to look backwards and ask "How has God led me in the past?" What is it that I am doing today that might prepare me for tomorrow?"

An example of that is from Peter and his friends -they didn't know that fishing was preparing them for their discipleship. Fishing takes patience, perseverance, good timing. They were learning so many life lessons in preparation for the spiritual lessons that Jesus would teach them.

In a sense, I always feel like the Holy Spirit is preparing us right now for the thing we will be doing today, tomorrow and next year. But in order to stay close to this preparation, we stay close to the one who says "Follow Me".

So especially for our church, as we begin another phase in our transition time now, even as we lay down our nets, and go off to something new, we have to stay close to the word of God, close to following Jesus into the world, not wandering off on our own direction. In that way we can listen to where he would have us go.

THIRD. In a changing world, the one constant we can count on is that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and always. We can count on that.

That's the beautiful verse from Hebrews 13 which Tom shared for us - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever. Note that doesn't mean we are the same, or that the church is the same, but that the Lord is the same.

I wonder if we all have had time to reflect on just the changes that 2020 has brought. I am still trying to get my head around that. But sometimes the experience of change can come unexpectedly.

I had one very acute experience of change which came out of the blue for me. Back in 1992, we were fortunate to be invited to a one-year internship as Seminary students in the same church where I grew up - Southminster PC. Incredibly, the Senior Pastor was not living in the Manse, so the church let us use the second and third floors of this huge house to live in. And it was across the street from the church too.

So in August, the start of a new program year, we are moving stuff into this house, and I went to store some boxes in the huge basement. I went down there and there in a dark dusty corner was a large painted piece of plywood covered in cobwebs. I pulled it out and saw it was from the Boy Scout troop of the church. My troop. ON the board were the names of boys and their rank in troop 232. Then I saw my name on the board, and recognize so many other names.

It was an unexpected slice of history from way back in the 1960s..

Most of those guys long ago had moved away to far away places. Our great scoutmaster Mr. Putnam had passed away. Here I was so many years later, so much had changed.

What or who was I to count on?

For us today we don't have to go all the way back to 1992. We can just look at 2019. So much has changed.

With all this change, what do you count on? Is there a fixed point in a changing world? The question has been on the minds of countless generations before us.

God provides us an answer - Nothing endures but change,
BUT

When change overwhelms us a constant we can hang on to
is the one who is the same yesterday today and forever.
The one who has revealed himself in our Lord Jesus
Christ. If we abide in him and allow him to abide in us
in his everlasting arms, we will find peace, calm and a
constant and fixed point in a changing world.

When change overwhelms us, lean back on those
everlasting arms if the one who is Jesus the Christ.
Amen.