

“ CHANGE . . . its always happening“

Acts 11:1-18, Revelation 21:1-6 & John 13:31-35

May 19, 2019

Today is Sunday, May 19, yesterday was May 18. Who here today, is the same as you were yesterday?

I know I'm not. Yesterday the people you saw on the screen before the service **were having fun** at the garden party. We weeded, we swept and the occasional shrub got pruned and I know my muscles are not the same - some of them are still sore today.

All of us here today, all of us are not the same as we were yesterday. Your hair has grown a little longer, your fingernails are a smidge longer or maybe they are shorter because you trimmed them, and we all are one day older.

Change is inevitable. Some changes are small - like nails and hair growing - and take a long time; some are more drastic - like pruning a shrub or felling a tree, which is happening later this week.

Change - that's the topic of all three scriptures that Bob read earlier today - change.

So this is the warning that comes before the sermon. Ready or not here it comes, whether we are willing to be changed or not willing to be changed, it is **God's desire that we be changed.**

This new commandment to love is not a bolt out of the blue. It's not the first time God asked for something new.

There was a time when God changed the menu and told the faithful they could eat something new. Jesus and his disciples had inherited the centuries old dietary laws from their spiritual ancestors. These laws told them what they could eat and what they couldn't eat. Obedience to these kosher laws, set them apart from the rest of the world and reminded them they were God's chosen ones. Jesus' earliest followers affirmed their plans to continue with this prescribed way of eating until Peter, one of their leaders, heard the summons to change in a dream.

The story was told in Acts 11, and this was no ordinary dream. It was a life-changer. God met Peter in a dream and announced non-kosher food was now O.K. Nearly every contemporary effort to describe this dream understates the true magnitude of this change. Do you try to practice healthy living? Imagine hearing the voice of God in a dream telling you to smoke, drink alcohol excessively, and eat only fatty foods. Imagine the reaction of your friends when you told them your dream.

Why did God want Peter to set aside his kosher diet? The story of Jesus born, died, and risen to new life was only in the possession of those who ate kosher food, and this was not acceptable to God. There were others in the world; those of other races, other religions, those who ate other food who needed to hear the story of Jesus, and for that reason God told Peter and the others to set aside their dietary practices to meet and eat with the Gentiles, the non-kosher eaters.

Centuries of kosher eating disappeared because of Peter's dream, and all Peter could say in response to his friends' questions was, "Who was I that I could hinder God?" (Acts 11:17b) God told him to change not only his menu but also his outlook on those who were different.

God announced something new in the last book of the Bible the book of John's Revelation. God spoke to John in a vision during a time of intense Christian persecution. In the vision John saw a new heaven and a new earth and heard the voice of God saying, "I am making all things new."

John had every reason to be anxious and fearful. We would understand him if he dreamed about a restoration of the glorious past. When we are fearful, we find it easy to want to return to the "good old days," like the 1960's when there were 40 to 50 children in Sunday school and the stores were closed on Sundays. But the vision God gave John in order to grant him new courage and hope was that God will make all things new.

What's new? No death. No crying. No pain. God with us.

Imagine God making all things new. Imagine ourselves encouraged by such a scene where we welcome newness as God's gift. Imagine Jesus' followers embracing a new vision of what God is doing in today's world.

This vision was fully fleshed out in Jesus' new commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34). There was Peter's dream, John's vision, and Jesus' commandment. It's not that new because all the descendants of Abraham and Sarah knew the command from Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18).

Maybe Jesus' commandment to love was new in that he added his own twist: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34b). He had given them an example. He had embodied the words previously chiseled on a tablet. He showed them how to love.

God is behind dreams, visions, even new commandments in order to shake us out of our contentment and self-centeredness to help us embrace God's newness. So what newness is God calling us to? Try not to be too disappointed when I announce: "It's the same old newness that God has always desired."

Step out of your skepticism, your cynicism. Break new ground, and trust! Trust that God's way of grace, love, and forgiveness ultimately triumphs over hatred, greed, and competition.

Leave behind your despair and despondency over the ways of the world. Stop with all your gloom and doom. Remember the power of **hope**. Your mere yearning for a better day is but one step in the process of that better day entering into existence. **The powerful gift of God's presence was once the fulfillment of a promise, and that fulfilled promise proved God's faithfulness. That is the source of our hope.**

Repent, change, be made new. The prophets of old told individuals and nations to acknowledge their wrongdoing and their need to turn their lives around. That message will never be out of date. It's an old cry that needs to be heard in this new day. Don't get so stuck in your way of doing things, your perception of the world, and your views about others that you are immune to God's renewing power.

Our faithful God used dreams, visions, and a new commandment to capture the attention of those seeking to follow the way of Jesus. These followers were shaken to the core of their beliefs and transformed so that God's work could be brought to this world. Don't underestimate God's willingness to use those means to change, even you. Amen.