



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Today marks the beginning of our walk-through Holy Week. For many people, it is a week that is paradoxical and very confusing. We move from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem with shouts of joy and cheers of "Hosanna". What a parade it was, but then Maundy Thursday arrives, and Jesus' tells his disciples that He will no longer be journeying around the countryside with them and that this is His last Supper. Jesus instructs his disciples to use this meal in remembrance of Him. The next day dawns. It is Friday, or as we know it now Good Friday. What is so good about this day is unknown to many. Saturday sees all the disciples leaving the scene, except two. Judas had betrayed Jesus and was gone after being exposed as a traitor at the dinner the night before. As we know, he was the one who would betray Jesus. John, son of Salome, whose story we heard two Wednesdays ago, went and sat at the foot of the cross with his mother as Jesus died.

What a rollercoaster of emotions that were felt by those living then and even today as this story is read. Jesus goes from being exalted and praised as the Messiah, during a parade when he entered Jerusalem to die on the cross like a common criminal. Talk about riches to rags. What a change for all who knew Jesus then and now. No wonder there was confusion. Why did God let this happen to his Son? How can things change so quickly in just a few days, days called Holy Week? Even that name seems odd considering what has happened to Jesus.

Well, I am here to tell you that change is inevitable. It is a part of life, but not usually to the extreme of this story of Jesus' crucifixion. I have always looked forward to change if change is for the better. Change is how we learn things. Our bodies and minds change as we age. And boy oh boy do we all know that.

You don't have to raise your hands; I will see it in your faces. . . . Did you know that hair is temporary? Or how about eyesight? That is one of the first signs of change, one that the aging process brings us. Our arms are too short as we try to read the newspaper. New glasses are needed, and cataracts are removed. If you are like me, you have glasses for driving, glasses for reading, and a pair in between, watching TV. Pairs of reading glasses are all over the house.

Another change is that many of us used to be able to eat a greasy hamburger with fries and not worry about our weight or health. Today, I for one need only to look at a piece of apple pie to gain a few pounds. But apples are good for you, right?

And then how about those arthritic fingers and hip joints? New hips and knees are pretty common today. I am quite an open book about what changes have gone on as I age. Thursday was burning of nerves in my knee, so it won't hurt so much when I walk. So far, I think it worked pretty well.

Turn on the tv and you can change your appearance in a few minutes but getting rid of those bags under your eyes with a special cream. Numerous ointments to get rid of age spots or grandma called them liver spots. Or how about skin tags? Women get hot flashes and men take blue pills. All these things that change are signs of getting older. They all remind us that life is temporary and that change is inevitable. There is nothing permanent about our life here on this earth or the world around us. Something is always changing whether it is a doctor's diagnosis or the stock market or the weather!!!

Have you ever heard of people lining up outside of Apple stores to buy the next version of the iPhone? Well, young people seem to handle change better. In fact, they expect change on a regular basis, they look forward to the latest, greatest iPad. Yet, I think that sometimes this quest is to replace a deeper need for security or permanence when faced with things like their own mortality. At our age we are greatly aware that we can be here one day and gone tomorrow. If I complain about some ache or pain, I can always count on Rodney saying, "Just wait until you get as old as I am". And once in a while I want to say that to the younger generations too!

With age comes the realization that the more things change the more they stay the same. Have you ever heard that one. Well, the one thing, the most important thing is that God never changes. This Lent we have been looking at God's covenants with the Israelites and with us. Over and over again, God's people disappoint God and break the rules, they sin. But God never changes. He always keeps his promises. God loves us no matter what.

I could spend the rest of this sermon talking about change as we grow older. But most of us here have experienced many of them. The older we are the more wisdom we gain and the more we have paid for the white or no hair we have. I like to tell people that I paid for every wrinkle, every grey hair, I have with my years of experience.

I also remember telling my mother that I was never going to talk like she talked to her friends about all the ailments and pains she had. It was the hot topic of conversation when the bridge club got together in our home. I was never ever going to talk about that stuff with my friends. Wow, did I blow that one. I am quite the open book, from my breast cancer to thumb surgery, to detached retina, you know it all.

Scripture tells us that God is the only one who does not change, even though He loves to see things change, especially us, you, and me. Change means growth and God knows we all need to grow. So, God makes good use of both the positive and negative changes in our lives to create opportunities for us to grow and mature, for us to become something more than we were just yesterday.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a colt, he was telling the people that he was not only a king, but that he was a king who came in peace and love. The irony is that in less than a week the crowds who cheered his peaceful kingly arrival turned into crowds that violently cried out for his

death. The change that Jesus brought was not the sort of change people had in mind. Jesus' ways were too new to them. Jesus' ideas about God were too progressive. Jesus' teachings about forgiving enemies and considering Samaritan neighbors and welcoming home sinners, were all just too much for those in power to stand. Jesus was upsetting the little bit of security and permanence that had been carved out for people who lived under Roman occupation.

And so those in power did what anyone would do when threatened, they conspired to get rid of the threat. They conspired among themselves to have Jesus crucified by the Romans. And it was a good plan. Jesus' enemies thought they could fix the problem once and for all. They thought they could take control of the situation and put a permanent end to this "ever-growing" Jesus' problem. Even some of Jesus' own followers thought his crucifixion would be the end of the story. That was that. It's over. But, of course, that was not to be the case. It would appear that, with God, even the most obvious and apparent endings are not permanent.

Sometimes what threatens us, what scares us the most, is exactly what we need to grow. If we never take any risks in life, we will end up leading a pretty boring life, but more than that, we will end up never growing into the people God wants us to become.

To embody faith is risky. To be all that God calls us to be is risky. To be able to believe in what cannot be seen, what cannot and will not ever be proven scientifically is to risk being labeled "backwards" or "superstitious" or "old fashioned" or just plain "kooky". And yet without faith, we become a part of the world around us, a world that is greatly threatened by the thought of death, so much so that it has created a myth to live by, a myth that says you and I can be perpetually young: a myth that says we can live forever if we just buy all the right beauty products, eat the right foods, and save up for all the right plastic surgeries.

But that is not the message that Jesus brought with him on the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus' message crushed that myth. Jesus' message threatens the idea that says that change is avoidable. Jesus came with the message that says not only is this life temporary, but that change is unavoidable. And change in this life is good and necessary and should be sought out as if we are looking for buried treasure.

And so it was. . . They could not follow this man, Jesus because that would mean. . . . change.

And so, they killed him. They nailed him to a cross and left him there to die. They got rid of the problem so they could get back to life on their own terms. But they forgot one big thing, an important truth. They forgot the truth that all life has been created on God's terms, not on theirs, not on ours, not on societies, not on the government's terms, but on God's terms alone.

And so, when the sky turned black and the sun turned blood red, only a few weary women stood nearby, looking up at Him, daring to believe, risking their lives in the face of irrefutable evidence, hoping against hope that this was not the end, and a change would occur. Something must happen to make the world understand, to make the world see who Jesus really is.

As Jesus lifeless body came down from the cross. They would follow as they took him to a borrowed tomb. They would be present as his body was laid to rest and a giant stone rolled in place permanently sealing the only way in and the only way out. Tears in their eyes, they would walk away still wanting to believe but feeling as though the world they had hoped for had just ended.

The world had moved from Palms to Passion in less than a week. The only innocent one that the world had ever known was dead and sealed in a tomb. His true identity recognized only by a guarding centurion and a few exhausted followers from a distance.

Life would never be the same for them again. They had no idea what the future held for them. It was a time of overwhelming grief, yet a small spark of hope still lingered within them. A big change was on the way, but they were not there yet, and neither are we.

The only way to Easter is to travel the journey from Palms to Passion. The only way we can truly come to faith in Jesus Christ is to travel through the darkness that is the death of God's only Son. The only way we can truly enjoy the grandeur of Easter is when we put to death our own gullibility and naïveté that tells us we are in charge, we are in control, we have the power to maintain things as they are, we can create permanence.

Easter is coming and there is nothing anyone can do to change that.

As you leave here today, I challenge you to spend the next week contemplating the everlasting permanent love of God. Thinking and praying about those areas of our lives that need to change, those parts of our lives that hold us back from believing more fully, those ways of being, that need to die so that the people God wants us to be might be resurrected to new life come Easter morn.
AMEN