

September 18, 2011

Exodus 16:1-20

Isaiah 43:18-19

### “Change”

Life is full of change, isn't it?

Sometimes I feel this dramatically in the fall- I'm not sure why, except that as the days grow shorter and the light begins to change, I often feel a bit melancholy. I remember times of driving my kids to college, and how I'd reflect on the rapidity of their growth with a few tears on the way home. I'd watch the beauty of the red sunsets that grace this season, and wrestle with my tangled emotions.

As a child, however, I loved the changes that came with fall. By the end of August I was totally BORED, BORED, BORED. I feel quite sure my parents were ready for a change—they were SICK of hearing me complain, “I'm bored...”, as I moped around the house. “Back to school” was a magic incantation for all of us!

Many families here have just traversed the “back to school” change. School supplies were purchased, lunch boxes readied, and new shoes and clothing were selected with care.

The fall also brings changes to our church. Choir rehearsals, Confirmation Class, Sunday school, weekday studies, Wednesday night supper---- all of these started this past week.

During our joys and concerns each Sunday we lift life's changes and our feelings about them to God. A wedding, a birth, a clear scan with no evidence of tumor, an anniversary, a recovery from injury, a successful surgery--- we thank God and share our joy. And there are other changes every week- unwelcome changes: a diagnosis of serious illness, a loved one's death, young children left fatherless, natural disasters that claim lives, human conflict that claims lives. We turn to God in pain and grief.

Sometimes what begins as a joy, turns to concern, and what begins as a concern, turns to a joy. How does that unfold? Let's consider the situation of the ancient Hebrews presented in our text from Exodus.

At this point in the story Moses had successfully led his people out of Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh's armies were drowned as they pursued them. The people were filled with joy! But then they were thirsty and the water source held bitter, undrinkable water. The people were angry and complained to Moses. God miraculously freshened the water. The people were filled with joy!

Their travels continued through pleasant territory for a time. The people were filled with joy! Then they came into the wilderness of Sin. There was nothing to eat. The people were angry and complained to Moses. God provided poultry for them in the evening and bread from heaven every morning. The people were filled with joy!

Then God commanded that they gather only enough of the breadlike substance for ONE DAY, upon arising every morning. None was to be saved for the next day. The people were uncooperative and disobeyed this order. But the next day it was "foul" and "full of worms". At this point Moses was angry with the people!

So, what do we learn here?

- Human beings can get very upset and angry in situations of change.
- We have difficulty trusting that we have what we need, that we'll be all right, and reach our destination safely.
- We're never too sure our leaders know what they are doing.
- We want to hold on to things we think we might need, rather than trusting God to provide.

We consider the Hebrews and so easily think, "What was WRONG with those people? They had God doing things for them at every turn and all they did was complain, complain, complain; worry, worry, worry; grumble, grumble, grumble."

But if we stop just a minute to consider carefully, we have a bit more sympathy for the Hebrews. It's hard to trust God. We are all tempted to hold on to things we think we need, rather than trusting God to provide. This is especially true today for the nation's unemployed and underemployed. In my family we have three people looking for work. My oldest son, formerly a Blockbuster store manager, is drawing unemployment and worrying about paying his mortgage. My daughter-in-law is assured of work only until the

end of October; she and my son are worrying about paying their mortgage. My husband's company was purchased by Unilever, and since he is not willing to relocate to Connecticut, he will be considering, "What next?" when he is released from his job at the end of this month. But we are fortunate because we live in this church's parsonage, and we don't have to worry about paying a mortgage here in St. Charles!

Yet, in the midst of all change, God is at work. God loves us and will lead us. God will provide for our needs. God is a God of movement, of change. We are to understand our lives as a journey... We travel the road of life and faith... and God calls us forward... To stay on the move.

Consider God's words in Isaiah: ***I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.***

Life is full of change and change is difficult. But we MUST embrace it because CHANGE IS NECESSARY FOR GROWTH AND LIFE ITSELF. If our bodies stopped all changes, we would die. I considered titling this sermon "Change or DIE!!" but I thought that was a bit harsh.

But that is true. Life requires change. This is true for churches also. Statistics show that churches either grow or decline; they cannot HOLD STILL. (Like kids.... If we tried to freeze them at a particularly cute stage they would become grotesque, damaged.... They'd die. Various fantasy and sci-fi stories address this truth.)

In Exodus those who tried to assure a static food supply ended up with maggots and a bad smell!

Our church is moving toward some potential changes. We're thrilled to have received a grant enabling us to develop new ministries both within our congregation and extending out to the community. The focus will be on scientific inquiry as a legitimate way to explore God's creation. You will hear and read more about this soon.

The vision implementation groups are working towards establishing goals in several areas of ministry. They may recommend a variety of changes to the church.

The Board of Trustees has been building a wish list for bold changes that would permit our ministries to develop and grow stronger.

The Finance committee has developed a 2012 budget that is ambitious, but will provide the foundation for our church to do what God calls us to do, and to do it well. A capital campaign has been investigated that could address retiring all debt, boosting our Endowment, supporting Missions and staff needs as well as improving building and grounds of the church.

So, grab your walking sticks. Put on your hats. Zip up your jackets. Put an extra pair of gloves and socks in a couple pockets. Because the church is not a place—it's a MOVEMENT. It's not someplace you GO, but something you DO.

God calls us forward, to stay on the move. We none of us know exactly what to expect. We have never traveled the road that lies ahead of us before. As you leave today I ask you for three things:

- I ask for your **prayers**
- I ask for your **support and encouragement**
- And I ask for your **forgiveness**, for there may likely be some stumbling along this journey

Please provide all three for me, for all the staff, and for the laity who are giving their hearts, time and talents to our progress.

May we remember that change is necessary for growth and life itself. May we remember that in all the changes of life **GOD IS WITH US. GOD WILL LEAD US. GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR ALL OUR NEEDS.**

**AMEN!**