

“When Change Arrives”

Psalm 32; Acts 10:1-16

August 4, 2024

Introduction

- I want to begin with a story of change for the better.
- Now, if you'd known me just ten years ago, you'd have been looking at a guy who hated tomatoes.
 - o That's right – I didn't like the things.
 - o Would order burgers to come without them, the whole nine yards.
- But then, something happened.
 - o I was working at a church with a lot of home gardeners.
 - o Then, one of those home gardeners planted a huge amount of tomatoes.
 - Soon, I was receiving near-daily allotments of these tomatoes.
- Which I hated but took home, figuring Natalie might eat them.
 - o She didn't.
- Then, the day came where I needed lunch.
 - o Lo and behold, there wasn't much in the fridge but some iceberg lettuce and some bacon.
 - Looking up above the refrigerator, I spotted some bread.
 - I realized I had all the makings of a BLT.
- The BLT
 - o Was so good, I kept eating them for lunch until I ran out of bacon and lettuce.
 - I'd heard about mater sandwiches but I'd never ventured there.
 - I ate one – it was a revelation.
 - o Ate so many that summer, I ended up getting a canker sore.
- That's an example of change for the better, right?
 - o But it's a change.
- HOW do we feel about change?

Change

- As we all know, the one overriding trait of change is its inevitability.
 - o Change comes to us sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but it's always there if we're looking for it.
- The problem for many of us is that our capacity to handle change as we grow older diminishes a bit.
 - o Cognitive inertia sets in and it becomes harder and harder to learn.
 - Not impossible, just much, much more difficult.
 - Trying to learn to play the piano was really hard.

Turn to Scripture

- Today's lesson is all about change, a major one that we shouldn't overlook.
- In Judaism, from which Christianity was birthed, there were lots of laws and cultural taboos about being with Gentiles.
 - o Gentiles were considered to be HIGHLY unclean.
 - o Interacting with one would require ritual cleansings under the wrong circumstances.
 - This wasn't just a dislike or a disregard, this was a detestation of the Gentile.
 - And for good reason, right?
 - o The Gentiles were also the oppressors at the time in the form of the Romans.
- And lo and behold, at the beginning of the chapter, one of those Gentile oppressors has a vision.
 - o He's to send for Peter.
- Who is Corneilus?
 - o Well, Cornelius is a Centurion.
 - Middle manager, really, like a sergeant.

- In charge of somewhere between 200 and 300 men.
- He's also a God-fearer.
 - This was a category known to the Jews, it was someone who'd become enamored of God and sought to follow His ways, even though technically an outsider.
 - We know Cornelius is a good man as the text tells us that he was providing for widows and orphans and prayed multiple times, daily.
- So, a vision comes to this Gentile man saying, essentially, go and fetch Peter from a particular place.

Peter

- Well, the man he's sent to get is a man named, Peter.
- We know Peter, he's the most fully fleshed out Apostle in the Gospels.
 - We know his heart; his abilities and we know his weaknesses and foibles.
 - Namely, rejecting Jesus three times as he was awaiting trial.
- Peter, too, has a vision, although his is HIGHLY DISRUPTIVE.
- All his life, Peter as a faithful Jew, has sought to distance himself from Gentiles.
 - Now, through this vision, Peter is shown powerfully, that GOD IS CHANGING THE RULES.
 - With Peter's vision, God makes it abundantly clear that Gentiles are part of the plan when it comes to God's Kingdom.
 - Why is that?
 - Genesis 22:18 – *"Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me."*
- But even though this expansion of God's blessings was fated to come, Peter finds himself on the other side of the equation.
 - In his vision, Peter is told to eat unclean animals to which he replies, *"Surely not, Lord!"* Peter replied. *"I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."*
 - The voice spoke to him a second time, *"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."*
 - God changes things on Peter.
 - Now look, this is a very good change for US.
 - Unless you were born Jewish, Jesus is your way into God's family.
 - But it's a change, and it's a change we recognize that Peter is actually going to struggle with.
 - Despite doing the right thing here, there are times where he drifts, only to be called back to this awareness by Paul himself.
- Peter manages the change but not without some difficulty.
 - So, it got me to thinking about change.
 - I'm getting older, I definitely don't like it.
 - I remember once when Yahoo changed their home screen, I had a mini-meltdown promising never to use their site again.
 - That didn't work out so well, but it was an earnest reaction to change.

When Change Arrives

- One of the things that we all know will happen is that changes come.
- But how do we handle them in a Godly fashion?
- The first step is PRAYER.
- When change arrives, especially life-changes, the first step is as you might expect it, to seek out the Lord in prayer.
 - **Psalm 102:25-27:** *"Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out*

like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end."

- **Hebrews 13:8:** *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*
 - This is the most important thing to keep in mind.
 - Although the immediate circumstances of our life can and will change in an ongoing fashion, the one who loves and keeps us DOES NOT.
 - That means His LOVE IS CONSTANT.
 - His GRACE IS CONSTANT.
 - You are always loved, always forgiven of your transgressions through Jesus Christ.
- When change arrives, if you first focus on your relationship with God through prayer, things will be better.
- Pastor Gayle
 - Worked with her at RHCC.
 - She was diagnosed with cancer in her late 30s.
 - She was terrified, began waking up in fear at 3am every night.
 - Began reading the Bible, mainly to go to sleep.
 - Changed her for the better.
 - She managed the change and took on more change for herself, becoming a Pastor.

Trust

- The prayer is designed to get you to the next step in successfully navigating change.
- The prayer is meant to bring you to a place of trust.
 - You must trust that, no matter what the change is, that God is with you in it and is working alongside to get you through it.
- No matter what kind of change is forced upon you, if you realize a number of things, it can work to your advantage.
 - First, consider this verse of Scripture.
 - **Jeremiah 29:11** offers reassurance: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*
- It could be that the change is moving you towards a better place.
 - I'll never forget working at the Pewter Rose.
 - I was originally working at the Lamplighter but it closed.
 - My job at the PR was tough.
 - Saturday night into Sunday morning brunch.
 - I was miserable.
 - But I was in a good place, faith wise and I was just trusting the Lord.
 - The change stunk but I was dealing with it well.
 - Lo and behold, that's when I got an offer to teach which led to me becoming a preacher.
 - I just trusted that things would work out and, thanks be to God, they did.
 - Notice how more of your stories go like that over time!!!
 - That even the worst things sometimes turn out to be the beginning of something more wonderful than you could ever imagine.
 - Not all change is like that but perhaps more than you're willing to concede?

Other People

- When change comes, this is a great opportunity to employ your network of friends and associates.
 - Not in a bad or annoying way, but, as they say, a friend in need is a friend, in deed.

- Sometimes, when change comes, we're going to find that we NEED other people.
 - o I remember once asking one of our women that was going to doctors all the time how she was managing.
 - She told me she was laughing through it all.
 - Her friend was taking her to the appointments and they were having fun during and after then.
 - o **Galatians 6:2:** *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ."*
- Patti's Story
 - o Diagnosed with MS, this was a former ER nurse who found her purpose in life challenged.
 - She came to me, crying over what was going on.
 - Over time, she began to see new avenues to touch and help people in nursing even with MS.
 - She's now engaged in healing work with people of faith with MS.