

*“Some things will change.  
Some things won’t.”*

**I**n the year 597 B.C., the Babylonians conquered and occupied Israel. In the aftermath of their victory, they sent thousands of Jews into exile. And included in that group was a man named Ezekiel.

Five years into the exile — and as we heard in our first reading — God called Ezekiel to be his prophet to those exiled Jews. Even though they were still clinging to the hope that God would somehow rescue them, and bring them home, and restore them to their former lives, Ezekiel was going to tell them something they didn’t particularly want to hear.

In essence, Ezekiel told them that their situation was the consequence of some rather bad choices they had made: that they had turned their backs on God; that they had forged political alliances with other nations; and that they had embraced the religious beliefs and practices of those other nations. And God’s message to them through Ezekiel was simple: “Change. If you want to get out of this mess, then you’ve got to change the behavior that got you into it in the first place.” Well, change they did, and return home they did, *but not until about 50 years had passed.*

So, why did it take so long? Probably, it’s because when a community — or a nation, or even a *denomination* — has been following certain beliefs and practices for a significant length of time, it can be *very hard* to hear someone say that it’s time to change those beliefs and practices, because change is difficult. And even if the *reason* for the change is a good one; even if the outcome of this change is clearly going to be a positive thing; changing is still a hard thing to do. Let me give you an example.

When our daughter Emily graduated from college in May, she began the process of finalizing her plans to move to Berkeley, California, where she would continue her studies. And even though Peggy and I fully understand that Emily is doing exactly what she needs to be doing — we understand that this is a good move for her, and a smart move — but I think we were still surprised at just how difficult that particular change has been for us.

But we learned from our experience of having Laura move to Austin, Texas, when she graduated college. And what we learned from that experience is the fact that, despite all of the things that *are* changing, a few things *haven't* changed: namely, our love for Emily, and Emily's love for us. In fact, what I think this experience has taught us is that, in the midst of things that should change, it's important to hold fast to those things that needn't change: things like love, respect, and hope.

In our reading from Mark's gospel (6:1-13), we heard a story that is repeated in Matthew's (13:54-58) and in Luke's gospel (4:16-30). In a nutshell, this is what happens: Jesus preaches for the first time at his hometown synagogue, and it doesn't go well. At first, they're all impressed: "Didn't he do well?!" But then they remember that this is the same Jesus whom they all watched growing up, and that's when things change: "And who are *you* to preach to *us*?"

Now, it's really not clear from *our* gospel reading why this change took place, but it's more than simply a case of familiarity breeding contempt. In fact, only Luke's gospel really helps us to understand what transpired.

Luke tells us that Jesus had offered this reading from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19).

Now, to be able to really appreciate what happens next, we need to understand that this passage from Isaiah had long been interpreted as a proclamation of God's promise to the people of Israel, *and* they inferred from it the belief that God cared only

for the *Jews* who were poor, and

for the *Jews* who were imprisoned, and

for the *Jews* who were blind, and

and for the *Jews* who were oppressed.

That is, that God cared only for *them*, for the Jews, and no one else. And so, when Jesus followed his reading from Isaiah with what's been described as the shortest sermon in the Bible — “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” — it sounded as if Jesus was merely confirming what they have long believed.

However, Luke tells us, when Jesus then proceeds to remind them how, many years before, God had sent one prophet to help a *non*-Jewish woman during a famine, and how God sent yet another prophet to help a *non*-Jewish man who was sick, it begins to dawn upon the congregation exactly what Jesus is really saying:

that he's challenging their long-held beliefs;

that he's challenging their interpretation of scripture;  
and

that he's challenging their very identity.

And that's why they turn on him. In Matthew's and Mark's versions of this story, Jesus is simply forced to leave town. But in Luke's version, they try to kill Jesus. His *neighbors*, his *friends*, try to *kill him* because he's had the audacity to suggest they change their beliefs and practices.

Change is *that* hard.

Now, lately, in both our country *and* in the Episcopal Church, some fairly significant changes have been taking place. From the Supreme Court's decision to strike down laws banning same-sex marriage, to the Episcopal Church's election of it's first black Presiding Bishop, and it's vote to fully embrace marriage equality, some significant changes have been taking place. And some of you may not be all that excited about what's been going on. However, I think it's important that we all remember that, even though some things are changing, there are a lot more things that aren't changing.

By and large, the vast majority of what makes the Episcopal Church in general, and St. Andrew's Church in particular, unique and endearing and attractive, will not change: The love you feel here will not change; The welcome you receive here will not change; and the acceptance you experience here will not change.

A few years ago, the Bishop of Kansas offered up a sermon in which he described what he thought were the strengths of the Episcopal Church. And he reminded us that:

The Episcopal Church believes that “men and women are fundamentally equal in the sight of God, and that women as well as men should be able to serve in every office in the Church.” That won’t change.

The Episcopal Church believes that “age, race, sexual orientation, or disability shouldn’t keep anyone from having a full and equal place in the House of God.” That won’t change, either.

The Episcopal Church believes in “the power of both the Word of God preached, and in the Presence of God as revealed through the sacraments.” That won’t change.

The Episcopal Church believes “that the glory of God can be revealed through beautiful architecture, beautiful music, beautiful liturgy, beautiful art, and beautiful literature.” That won’t change.

The Episcopal Church believes that “churches should be built around the worship of God, and not around the charisma of any one clergy person.” That won’t change.

The Episcopal Church believes that “frightening imperfect Christians with the fiery flames of hell, or with crushing, unrelenting guilt is not only un-biblical, but un-Christian. This is a church where the *grace* of God trumps the *wrath* of God, and this is a church where God’s love has the power to redeem any and every one.” That won’t change, either.

However, having described so many things that won’t change, I have to remind you that one of the hallmarks of the Episcopal Church is that *we do leave the door open* for the Spirit of God to lead us into an ever-new, and ever-changing, future. We always have.

There was a time when persons of color had no hope that they could participate in the life and ministries of the church. That's changed.

There was a time when divorced persons believed they could not be remarried within our Church and with God's blessing. That's changed.

There was a time when women could not participate in any meaningful way in the ministries or leadership of our Church. That's changed.

And yet, despite the changes that have taken place in our past, and despite the changes that will undoubtedly continue to take place in our future, we can still be confident. Because God's love for us all will not change. Our hope in Christ will not change. And by the grace of God, the fellowship we enjoy with one another will not change either.

And so, I hope that what you can take away from my remarks is this: although some things may be changing in our beloved Church, other things, and, I think, the more important things, will not change, nor, by the grace of God, will they ever.

Amen.



