

Enduring Change

Several recent studies show that people generally don't like change. And it's not just that they fear change, although they undoubtedly do. It's also that they genuinely believe (often on an unconscious level) that when we've been doing something a particular way for some time, it **must** be a good or even the **only** way to do things - but none of us believe that, right! And furthermore, the longer we've been doing it that way, the better it is!

So, change isn't simply about embracing something unknown – it's about giving up something *old* (and therefore good) for something *new* (and therefore not so good). People have a very reliable and tangible preference for things that have been around longer, because unconsciously some of us believe that longevity equals goodness. And sometimes this is true, particularly when a product or way of doing things has stood the test of time, but longevity and tradition aren't always accurate predictors of goodness and the reality is that things do change.ⁱ

Our world is changing, our church is changing, and our lives are changing. Sometimes we welcome changes if they suit our purposes, but there are times when change brings loss or the fear of loss. We could each tell stories about those days. We have stories about the death of a loved one, the dreaded diagnosis, and in my case, the story of divorce. There are stories about the day we realize the life we were living was not the life we wanted, the day someone confronts us about our addictions or self-destructive behavior. We also have stories of dreams and hopes that never came true.

These are the days when the temples of our life and world fall. Things are not the way they used to be. And it is not just our individual temples that fall. In our world, it sure seems like fear division and violence are on the upswing. Temples are falling everywhere.

We all have things we worship. Some have been given to us, others we have collected or created for ourselves. Our idols are sometimes people, places, values and beliefs, institutions, dreams. We cling to the things we believe hold our lives together – the things that give meaning and identity – the things that provide security and stability. Until they fail us.

In today's gospel, the writer tells us, "Some were speaking about the temple." They admired its beautiful stones. 1st century historian, Josephus, records that Herod used so much gold to cover the outside walls that anyone who gazed at them in bright sunlight risked becoming blind. No wonder

Jesus' followers were dazzled by the brilliance of the building. This temple is what held the community together, giving identity and meaning. It was the center of Jewish life. But Jesus isn't impressed. He responds to their admiration with a chilling prediction: "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left up on another; all will be thrown down." But Jesus is not speaking only of the physical temple in Jerusalem. He is speaking of every idol that we worship, even the ones you and I have.

So, what do we do when our idols fall short?

Change sometimes has a way of pushing us into the future. Some of us will begin looking for signs about the future. We might begin to tell ourselves stories about what will happen. – asking questions like, What do I do? How do I get through this? If we are not careful, we will begin living in the future we have created in our heads. This is not what Jesus is calling us to do. When Jesus describes things that will take place, he is not asking us to speculate about the future. He offers us signs that call us to be faithful in the present.ⁱⁱ

We might feel like giving up and walking away in despair believing that all is lost, and our situation is hopeless. We may become angry, resentful and begin looking for quick fixes. Jesus cautions us against allowing our lives to be controlled or determined by fear. Jesus calls us to be present and faithful in the circumstances we find ourselves, no matter how difficult our circumstances might be. This is no easy task and can be extremely daunting. But it is there in our anguish that we often find God.

The place of fallen temples is where God speaks through the prophet Isaiah declaring, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;" "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people: no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress." Isaiah's words encourage us to focus on God's capacity to create rather than on our human capacities. It is difficult for us to understand the mystery by which God's creates, but perhaps we can try to imagine a world where all of creation lives in peace, love and harmony. Many of Isaiah's words focus on new life for communities. His words are certainly Good News for people steeped in regret or loss, for the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, and the homeless. But individuals can also find personal hope and solace in the words of this passage.

The promise is that God is always working out a new heaven and a new earth from the seeds of the present one. God is saying that when you are lost, I can find you - when you are least, I can raise you up – when you are broken, I will heal you.ⁱⁱⁱ

The promises of newness and joy we find in the poetry of Isaiah are fulfilled through our endurance. Jesus calls us to avoid hasty, knee-jerk reactions. The great challenge of the Gospel is to be courageous, calm and faithful - to remain fully present, no matter how uncomfortable life may be. But when we do, we find that God has always been with us – with us in the changes and chances of life – in the pain, loss and disappointment; and especially when those things we hold dear fail us.

Endurance, perseverance and stability are the ways in which we offer the fallen stones of our lives to God. Stone by stone God rebuilds our lives and the world. And it is then that we will have new stories to tell. When this happens, we can bless others by telling them these new stories to give them hope when their lives crumble. We can tell the story of the day when our lives fell apart, and the greater story of how we discovered God with us in the ruins. It is then that we can tell a story of God recreating life out of loss and desolation- stories of God rejoicing and delighting in God's people. We can become part of what God is doing – part of the New Jerusalem. And, we might find that the old way is not necessarily always the better way.

Imagine a new world – a world where, when we find ourselves lost, downtrodden or broken, we can take comfort in God's promise to always seek and find us – to lift us up – to bring us to wholeness and the joyful abundant life God wants for us.

ⁱ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-we-dont-like-change_b_1072702

ⁱⁱ <https://interruptingthesilence.com/archives/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/2013/11/proper-28c-ordinary-33c-pentecost-26.html>