

SERMON

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Genesis 12:1-4a, Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, John 3:1-17

Back when I was in very early grade school,

- I considered myself good in sports.
- I was even captain of one of our grade school's softball teams.

One day my parents signed me up to play in

- what was something like Little League
- in the small town of Taylorville, IL, where we lived.

But for some reason or another,

- there were lots of much older kids playing
- in the group where I was sent to be evaluated,

I came up to bat,

- but I had never before experienced the
- speed of the fast-ball pitches
- that started coming my way.
- I barely saw the ball
- before I heard the pop
- from the catcher's mitt
- and heard the umpire calling "Strike"....

My experience did not encourage me

- toward an athletic career.

We all can experience something similar

- as we try to keep up with the changes
- happening in our world.
- Things are changing at fastball speed....

Now Artificial Intelligence has zoomed into the center of the picture,

- much like a race car at Daytona,
- promising even more speedy life-altering changes.

Where does our Christian faith fit into all the change?

Jesus Christ is **the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

- Our Savior and Lord is unaffected by the change
- that we may at times find
- so frustrating and threatening.

But at the core of scriptural Christian teaching

- are surprising resources to cope with CHANGE....

Consider the story of Abram,

- or Abraham as he would later be known
- after a name CHANGE.

His story is at the very beginning of salvation history

- as it is recorded in the Bible for us.

And what is God's first word to Abram? "Change!"

- "Be willing now, at age 75, to leave your home

- in a very prosperous city,

- a center of commerce.

- Take all your possessions with you

- and go to a land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation even though you are childless now.

- I will bless you and make your name great.

- Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Talk about rapid change! And what was Abram's response?

"So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken to him."

No argument recorded.

- No deal making.

- No foot dragging.

- Abram trusted and obeyed the Word of the Lord

- and CHANGED EVERYTHING for himself

- and then for the whole world.

God went with Abraham into the changes.

Or think about the changes

- God's Old Testament people Israel underwent
- leaving behind a life of slavery in Egypt,
- then traveling in a wilderness
- where God led them by
- a pillar of cloud by day,
- and a pillar of fire at night.

God also gave them manna from heaven by food

- and provided miraculous water from a rock too,--

Then those people entered

another completely different kind of life

- as they entered the promised land.

In the book of Joshua is this passage:

- "**The manna ceased** on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; **they ate the crops of the land** of Canaan that year." - Joshua 5:12

They were now no longer slaves or nomads,

- but farmers,
- homesteaders,
- and city dwellers.

God was still with them.

In fact, the entire Old Testament,

- is about how God's people underwent all kinds of changes,
- some catastrophic,
- due to many of those changes being brought on by their sins--
- and yet God did not forsake them.

Instead, in and through all the confusing changes

- God was working out salvation for all the world...
- including us.

OUR God is the God of Abraham—

- the God who is not frightened by or overwhelmed by change,
- but who, by the ministry of the Son,
- has set about to make a whole NEW--
- COMPLETELY CHANGED-- creation,
- beginning with those who believe in Jesus
- and are baptized into Him.

Already there and now is a new creation.

Paul writes,

“If anyone is in Christ, he IS a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new HAS COME.” - 2 Corinthians 5:17

- God is more than able to USE change
- for His own saving purposes.

So when rapid, basic, maybe even undesirable changes do come,

- those who live with such faith
- DO NOT HAVE TO FEAR CHANGE.

In the words of the Psalmist,

“My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth....”

And,

“The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.”

And those words traditionally used as a blessing at every Baptism:

“The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth FOREVERMORE.”

“FOREVERMORE.”.... NOT “FOR A TIME” OR “TEMPORARILY”.

To see the kingdom of God,

- NICODEMUS is to be **dramatically changed**—
- be born again from above—
- born of water and the Spirit.

In his Small Catechism

- Dr. Martin Luther teaches what Baptism means with these words.
- It means that...

“the Old Adam in us—our sinful selves—should by DAILY contrition and repentance BE DROWNED AND DIE—so that a **NEW person** should **DAILY** emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Talk about changes!

- Being born again and again and again—that's changing!.....
- as we live out the power of our Baptism.....
- by taking our sins to God
- and letting Him wash them away,

Those living out their Baptisms

- will be DELIBERATELY making daily changes--
- not just be on the receiving end of changes--
- but themselves making changes to become more and more Christ-like,
- to grow and grow into the full stature of Christ
- as we read in Ephesians.....

It can be difficult.

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It is not easy to change--

- Sometimes it's not clear where the change is leading
- but it's necessary if we are to become what God intends us to be.

We could even say that

- the Christian life is at its core about changing.

And the God who does not change

- who is our SOLID, UNchangeable refuge and rock foundation
- is the God who **moves with us** through the changes!

We like to sing what is called

“The Battle Hymn of the Reformation”

- which is based on Psalm 46
- where God is pictured as a solid rock-like refuge--
- a MIGHTY FORTRESS.

I have always like the psalm verses which puts both ideas together--

- God with us as a big imposing fortress to protect us,
- and also as the God who goes before us
- as we travel through a changing landscape.

Psalm 31:1-3 does that:

“In you, O Lord, I seek refuge....

“Be a rock of refuge for me,
A strong fortress to save me.

“You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name’s sake lead me and guide me.” (Psalm 31:1-3)

A fortress on the move!

“A MOVING Fortress Is Our God.”

And what will be there in the future--

- past the dark clouds of
- confusion, uncertainty, anxieties, discomfort
- and the unknowable?

St. John was given a glimpse.

“Then I saw a NEW heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the NEW Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God,
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
FOR THE FIRST THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY.’

No more reason for tears or ANY anxiety. None at all! What a change that will be!

Saint John continues,

“And the one who was seated on the throne said,
‘See, I am making ALL THINGS NEW.’
Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’
Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.’”

(Revelation

21:1-6)

TOTAL CHANGE IN EVERYTHING

Yet through that total change salvation in its fullness comes to us—

- when ALL the old things have passed away.

So for Christians--

- for you and me--

- there are resources beyond human measure to cope with change.

For Christians,

- it's Abram's story all over again,

- for us to live as a NEW story each day of our lives.

“Don't be afraid, Abram. Don't be afraid, Nicodemus. Don't be afraid, Judy and John.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”....

(John 3:16-17)

That loving God is involved

- in making the biggest changes Himself--

- even overcoming death itself

- death that SEEMS SO FINAL AND UNCHANGEABLE--

- along with every scary sin that brought it upon the world.

In spite of all the HORRIBLE changes

- which suffering and crucifixion brought upon our Savior's body,

- He lives again,

- Victor over even the most horrible changes that ever were.

As to what YOU can control,

- in this rapidly changing world:

- Don't let all the confusing change
- turn you into an "uptight" grumpy, unloving
- "stuck in your ways" personality.

Instead, willingly make the changes GOD asks of you

- as you daily live out your Baptism.

As to those things that are changing which seem beyond you,

- do your best-- be positive and caring toward others,
- many of whom will be struggling too.

Do your best with a happy, forward-looking heart

- that He would give you through His Word--
- getting ready NOW for the day to come when EVERYTHING will be new-
- the way God wants them to be.....
- when Christ will be All in All-- FOREVER.

And that peace of God which far surpasses our human understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus for life EVERLASTING.
Amen.