

3.3.24 – Sermon

Deacon Patrick Meagher

John 2:13-22, 1 Cor 1:18-25, Exodus 20:1-17

I've got news for you... Change is hard, did you know this?

Even when we choose it, and we know it's for the better... it's still hard. All the more so when it's *unceremoniously* thrust upon us.

It's also harder to adapt to change the older we get. At least it is for me.

Lately, **technological** changes really expose my inability to adapt. I like to think I'm a **fully capable grown adult**, but every time *Microsoft Word* rearranges the buttons I feel like a kindergartener learning to read again.

It's frustrating.

And that's just a small change, bringing small difficulties. What about big, huge changes? A sudden death. A betrayal. A financial disaster. A relationship gone south.

These upheavals thrust us into a new landscape... **one painfully empty of the dreams on which we pinned our hope for the future.**

What do we put in that empty space? Change brings us to a place of grief... and grief is painful.

But thankfully we are not alone to manage the hard stuff of change.

Hopefully we have a community around us full of people at different stages of life, and who have **weathered changes** of all shapes and sizes. They show us the way forward... their **very existence** a **witness** to our own future beyond this tough time.

Churches are sure good for those relationships... I know by experience ours is **really** good for that.

We **also** have scriptural wisdom to guide us.

All three of our readings today emerge from moments of tremendous societal change.

The **ten commandments** come right off the mountain providing a blueprint for a new and ordered society for the Hebrew people. And it's much needed!

They've escaped Egypt after centuries of slavery. Ending generations of exploitation is certainly a **good change**, but it raised a lot of questions about **how to be** as a people in this new landscape of self-determination.

We heard Paul writing to the Corinthians... a couple of years after visiting and establishing a **brand new community** gathered around the **new and sometimes inscrutable** Gospel of Jesus.

The Apostle meets the Corinthians where they are in their Jewish and Greek experience, and draws a map forward for this new landscape of gospel thought ... where the **surrender of the cross, the weakness of God**, is stronger than what they know as human strength.

This is a big change of understanding for the Corinthians and still is for us.

And then Jesus **bursts** into Jerusalem, whip in hand, creating his own upheaval of change... amidst business as usual in the temple.

There are a few things about this engaging gospel passage not obvious at first.

First off, Jesus is not making an anti-commerce or anti-marketplace statement. He's making an **anti-mistreatment of human beings** statement.

People traveled *from all over* to Jerusalem's temple... **the heart of the Jewish faith...** for the purpose of **connecting** with God. But they needed the prescribed animals for the prescribed sacrifices.

They arrive tired, desperate, and with foreign currency needing to be exchanged... images of foreign deities on many coins were not allowed in Yahweh's temple.

These pilgrims were ripe for exploitation by the **profiteers** capitalizing on the **vulnerable need** to be right with God. And inflated prices and manipulative exchange rates were the norm.

That exploitation, **that abuse of the vulnerable**, is why the whip comes out. Commerce can take place with integrity, generosity, and even love.

It's **also** interesting to read this story considering that John's gospel, the latest of our four gospels, was written down about 70AD. This is the same 70AD when the Roman empire brutally put down a Jewish rebellion by killing thousands and destroying much of Jerusalem.... including **the very temple** where this story is set.

It's hard for us to imagine the grief and pain caused by losing the place containing the very presence of God, the foundation of what it meant to **exist**

as a people... but it sure adds resonance to Jesus words: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The destruction of the temple **was not a metaphor**. It was an all-too painful reality.

John’s account meets his contemporaries right in the new landscape full of grief and pain, offering hope... a path right back to God... and new way to exist... **through Jesus**.

In these scriptures, we’re witnessing **Love** evolve and expand right before our eyes... and it’s still expanding. Still moving into new territory. Still infusing new empty landscapes of grief with the hope to move forward.

It’s still changing things...

...still overturning and renewing the status quo of human society. Still challenging us to reform... to discover new facets of God’s mercy for us, so that we’re equipped to share the same with the world...

We’re called to **EXPECT** change, and embrace the inevitable **upheaval of God’s love**.

One example of Love’s expanding in our current era is the conversation around preferred pronouns and gender inclusivity.

This change is a good, but not without some **difficulty**. I know this because I keep fumbling my way through this new landscape like a kindergartner.

Just when I think I've learned the new language, reprogramming decades of what I've been taught, a newer pronoun emerges... or I cause **offense** at an unintended misuse. At least it can feel that way.

But we don't speak out for gender inclusion because it's a trendy political topic... anymore than Jesus **whipped the money changers** to score a political points...

We work for change despite the difficulties **because we are Christians**, and we believe in a **living Love**, an expanding notion of Justice that compels us to defend the **exploited** and the **vulnerable** among us.

To bring in those who've been ostracized. Who haven't had a place at the banquet table. To lift the **burden of conformity**, knowing God expresses God's image in all the shades, personalities, cultures, and yes, genders present in the human expression.

For many of us, in our very lifetimes we've seen this Love expansion at work in our own **ever-reforming Lutheran tradition**.

We've advocated for access to basic human rights for people of color.

We've seen full access to church leadership positions open up to the blessed gifts of women, all genders, and all sexual orientations,

We've seen access to matrimony affirmed for same-sex couples.

So many other ways we answered the gospel call to **CHANGE** so that we can love more and love better.

To **change** so that when we sing "All are Welcome" we're ever closer to making that a truthful reality.

As followers of the Gospel, we may strive to **expect** change... but still find it difficult to make the adjustments.

That's ok... *Kyrie Eleison.*

Even when it's for the best, saying goodbye to former ways of **thinking** and **being** is a painful process... full of grief. Full of loss.

Christe Eleison

Faced with the pain of change, we have the Apostle Paul's reminder that the **surrender** of the cross feels like foolishness, but it is the only path to **renew the world** and become a part of Love's great expansion.

Kyrie Eleison

I'll end with a prayer the community of Enfleshed, a great resource offering fresh takes on all things Jesus through a lens of gender inclusion.

Let us pray...

**From the community of Enfleshed,
found via podcasts and most
social media platforms.**

*Braid me into genealogies of
the most ordinary magic;
the everyday orientation
toward community and care.*

*Braid me into lineages
of truth-tellers and freedom seekers,
gentle healers and wise teachers.*

*Braid me into the long, slow,
labors of love – ancient and fraught
and alive; generations of dreamers
imagining the world anew.*

Amen

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