

What Hope is there for Change #7

In the midst of Change, Our God remains the Same

As a 10, 11 year old child I had a few beliefs that upon being an adult today seem a little strange - but at the time I thought these beliefs were not only true but I might have threatened to fight you if you disagreed with me at that time. Some were rather silly now that I look back on them, but at the time they were logical according to my “10 yr old reasoning and imagination.” Here are a few:

- I believed that Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny were the same person and similar to a “Transporter or a Shapeshifter” they could “change” depending on the holiday or need.
- I believed that if I swallowed a watermelon seed that indeed a watermelon would grow in my stomach. In fact when I saw people with rather large belly’s I assumed they had made the mistake of not spitting out the seeds.
- I believed that when my Nana/grandmother said she would knock me to next week that she could do it.
- I firmly believed that the known world consisted of where I lived at 18th and Glenwood in North Philly, where I went to school Germantown and Leigh, and Connie Mack stadium area around the corner 22nd and Leigh – where we went food shopping from pretty much constituted most if not all of the known world. 1 mile at most.
- Lastly I believed that when I saw the sun that rose and fell in the sky, that when it rose in the morning or when it set in the evening that it meant that the sun was moving and therefore the earth or – at least 18th and Glenwood – was stationary.

Of all the beliefs that seemed real to me at age 10, the shift shaping Santa, the watermelon seed in the belly, the world being my 1 mi radius, and my Nana knocking me to next week and the sun revolving around the earth - can you guess which one I held onto well into my teenage years?

Let me tell you.

- I gave up on Santa Claus and the like when I saw my parents wrapping the gifts one year. And caught my father sliding his hand under my pillow to take my tooth. I kept it quiet from my parents but I kind of figured the rest of those guys are fake – Easter Bunny included.
- I gave up on the whole watermelon seed when I realized that I had swallowed enough watermelon seed in my short life to have a huge harvest of watermelons and it hadn’t happened yet. Also to my disappointment I found out that my older cousin who was pregnant didn’t give birth to a watermelon but a healthy baby cousin.
- Likewise, I reasoned after numerous attempts that my Nana couldn’t really knock me into “next week” – though admittedly it wasn’t from the lack of trying on her part.
- Also I realized that the world was bigger than North Philly when I finally went to the Zoo
- But for some reason it took me awhile to let go of my heartfelt belief that the sun in the sky that I saw rise and fall didn’t revolve around the earth. In my young mind the Sun changed at night, moved in and caused the heat waves in the summer and moved away from us in the winter causing the cold and snow. The reason for this was clear to me – that we, the earth was still, unmovable, the center of the universe and all else revolved around us. So when the weather changed – it was the Sun’s doing. That earth, or what I

understood as the world remained the same and it was the Sun that changed. **It never crossed my little mind that perhaps it was the earth along with other planets moving around the one stable sphere named the Sun....naw.** Thankfully my science teacher and a trip to Franklin Institute corrected my bad science. But just as important in our scripture lesson we read in **verse 17** that my understanding of the earth being unchangeable wasn't only bad science but it was also bad theology.

James 1:17 - "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

James the writer of this letter –which is known more for being a book focused on the works/deeds of Christians (for some such as Luther/Calvin amongst other theologians were concerned that the Book of James spent too much talking about “good works”). Yet in the early part of his letter, we read this morning that James the brother of Jesus seeks to communicate a clear theology that unlike my childhood theology of a stationary earth and a changing/revolving sun around us. James writes quite contrary - it is we, the earth and all its inhabitants that are changing, developing, retracting, living, dying and on and on, it is the earth that moves, change revolves around the unmovable, the unchangeable light – the Sun, the moon, the stars. That in the midst of our hardship, in the midst of our greatest joy, in the midst of our greatest victory or defeat... our God – Father, Son, Holy Ghost even more so than our Physical Sun in the sky that does not shift like the shadows or change like the wind. **Our God has, is and will be with us.** Similar to that which was created by God, the Sun, the moon, and the stars has, is and will be with us. The Sun has warmed us, has fed us, has tanned us some more than others, has given us life it reflection lights up sky the moon and the stars in the sky to guide us, help us in times of dismay – slavery/underground railroad, travelers from the east to find Jesus, ships navigation, etc. James makes it clear in Chapter 1, change will happen in this life – trails and temptations are going to happen.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trails of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance....Blessed is the man who preservers under trail, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” Vs. 2 & 12

But this is why James says in vs. 17 that every **“good and perfect gifts from above, and coming down” to us...and the giver of these “good and perfect gifts” does not change like shifting shadows.** This is significant for us to recognize that though we are created in the image of God – we are not God. Yes the writers of scripture who were inspired by the Spirit of God periodically place human emotion or human qualities on God as a way to “put handles around things.” Passages like Genesis 6:5-7, speaking about God being grieved in his heart, or others where God is described as angry. Such passages are quite refreshing to me as it helps me gain an understanding of the effect of sin or rejection on a loving and patient God. Our human passions and emotions are ascribed to God for the sake of our *finite understanding*, in the same way as bodily parts are ascribed to him – the hand of God, God is watching us...etc Such “human emotions” are what Paul says is but let us not forget:

I Cor 12:12 **Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.**

James the brother of Jesus, a leader in the church of Jerusalem who upon being guided by the Holy the Spirit wrote this letter to the early Church – specifically the Jewish Christian takes great detail to outline that being a Christian or part of this new community will require a healthy

understanding that in their life of service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that there will be storms – clouds will come, rain will come, storms will come in this life but just because you do not see the Sun in the sky doesn't mean that the Sun isn't present. Amen? The Sun is still present, still there, unchanged – however as the earth is moving it develops clouds from when water evaporates from rivers, ponds, oceans and lakes and it rises and expands. It is these water vapors that from the cloud cover- that blocks the sun, but it never eliminates the power of sun!

In our conversation on change and hope we have focused on the fact that as we become more like Jesus, ***by the power of the Holy Spirit*** there will be a noticeable difference in our faith walk individually and corporately. The Apostle Paul in Romans 8 talks about the coming of the kingdom of God is like a “birth” of new life – talk about change! That as “thy will is being done on earth as it is in heaven” – in our hearts, our community, our cities, our nation and world, there will be noticeable change, a noticeable way of expressing the grace of God in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, self-control, etc. That a Kingdom theology will impact how we understand our relationships, our marriages, our job and vocation. All areas of our lives are daily and forever affected by being transformed by the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. No longer can we segment our lives as work, worship, family, play, etc. A change occurs. In Pastor Lynn and my sermons we have shared this understanding about change:

- **The Magi/Kings were seeking/hoping for a change in their world (view).** Why else would they seek the “Messiah”? Where did they go and whom did they seek for change? They sought out a child not a king, born in a forgotten place, to a defeated people soon to be victimized by generational cleansing! Yet this is where the “Spirit of God”, the Spirit of Change was, in acting change to our world. There is more – not only did the Magi seek change in a rather unusual way, place, etc. they by God's grace became “actors in the drama of change”
- The two walking with the resurrected Jesus on the **Road to Emmaus** we see clearly Jesus transforms and changes his two disciples from the “dangerous theology of retreat” to a theology that is centered on the resurrection power of Jesus. **The message is clear that in this life you can't walk with the resurrected Lord and not be changed.**
- **Ecc. 4:1-12 we read how there are seasons of “change”** – to be born and to die, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time weep a time to laugh, a time for war a time for peace.
- **That there are signpost or signs of both hope and change** – the church, baptism, communion, are all signs of the hope in change.
- **That change demands that God's will be done and not our own.** That if the Kingdom of God is coming in full measure it will entail us praying the **Lord's Prayer.**
- **Change means that we respond to the grace of God by putting “childish ways behind me.....we asked the question have you? Have we collectively as people belonging to God truly become a community who has collectively put childish ways behind us?**

But lest we forget that as broken people in a broken world our hope comes from the position and possibility that change will happen in us and in our community and the world – thy Kingdom Come..... That our changing nature, our world’s changing seasons with standing – Our God remains the same. Scripture is full with affirmations concerning the unchanging Triune God:

- **Malachi 3:6 - "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (In response to the lack of giving to God the first fruits – Will you rob God?)**
- **Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.**
- **To him who is able to keep you from failing and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen. Jude vs. 25**
- **Revelation 1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, (the beginning and the ending,) says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.**
(John the revelator writing to the 7 churches in the province of Asia)
“Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Rev. 22:12-14

Such passages serve as reminder so that we may worship God in spirit and in truth; they are also here for our comfort. Even when we feel the world seemingly has lost there “ever-loving-mind”. **You may ask**

- Why is this important to us that our God remains the same in the midst of change?

Perhaps it is because everywhere you look, things are changing and for many of us this quite unsettling. Look around, people seem to be in a hurry wherever they are going, or whatever they are doing – some of us here are already thinking about where we have to be at noon and wondering if Pastor Leonard will ever say “in conclusion”. If we are honest, what we want today, we wanted yesterday. We don't want to wait for anything – fast food, instant messaging/texting, emerging or should I say our continuing mounting national debt is a living testament of our nations inability to wait . Admittedly even as I am getting older, I find myself like that 10 yr old Leonard holding on to “bad science” I am “holding on” to a “bad theology” resistant to change:

- **Technology rapidly changes**, as soon I got a VHS player and it went to CD’s. As soon as we got a CD player it went DVD I still haven’t figured out how to get the “12:00” blinking light to stop on my CD player!
- **In the church – historically one of last places to change.** As a result many of us have been reluctant to change as well – we resist change. We resist change within the body when we refuse to extend the grace given by God to one another. We resist change by avoiding - new people (5 yrs), new ways to worship and experience the very presence of God; we resist new ways to communicate the Gospel message in the church and in the

larger community and world. We struggle over music, décor, while the world waits to hear our good news!

- **In our families we resist change.** Yet the fact remains as my wife looked at our beautiful 13 yr old and 9 yr old daughter our children change (Lorenzo wasn't in the room at the time). We resist the change occurring in our change, we resist the change in our communities as new type of neighbors move in.
- **In our world,** our economy change, our political leaders change, wars continue but they also change locations, and the so called "art of war" changes increasing in mayhem. We change as well – be it we were prodigal in our behavior and returning to the Father or be it complacent and we are walking on the Road to Emmaus – change is upon us.

If you are like me when as I was writing this list perhaps in your Spirit you felt a tinge of nostalgia for the infamous "good ol days" – though my premise is that the good 'ol days were never as good as they seemed nor were they good for everyone. The reason that it is important for everyone under the sound of my voice to know that our God doesn't change is that No matter how much people change, or the church changes, the economy changes or our children goes beyond what we want, take comfort and knowing that our GOD never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever, because He said so in His Word. I want you to know that the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, the God Joseph and Moses, the wondering children of Israel is the same God of Queen Esther, the Kings David and his Son, the God of the Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Jonah, Habakkuk, is the God of John the Baptist, Mary, the disciples, the Apostle Paul is the same God unchanged of my Nana who wanted to "knock me to next week", is the God of OCMC and our children born and unborn. Our God is here, right here, right now. There story is our story – there God is our God.

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