

Ch – Ch – Ch – Ch - Changes

Introduction


Good morning. We have been given a wonderful weekend weather-wise. Sadly for some of us tomorrow marks the unofficial end of summer – and this sermon marks the end of a long time here without senior pastoral leadership in the pulpit. But next week that will end with Sean beginning his first Sermon series here at the Barn – with the theme – Celebration. Next week he'll be talking about Celebrating Who God Is? That is exciting. Sean we are looking forward to this series – Notice that I didn't use the word "expecting."

As I mentioned last week, we are entering into a time of major change – a change in Senior leadership and a change in our relationship with our denomination. And these external changes can produce tension within us.

Change can be scary and unsettling. Even though change is a very natural part of life – its still scary. It happens all the time – yet its still unsettling. In our culture it has been said that the one constant is change. Changes in technology, communications, moral standards – the information age explosions all demonstrate that fact.

And even though we in the church know that there is another Constant at work in this world, all this change is unsettling. And there wells up inside us a resistance to change. Mark Twain has said "[That] the only person who likes change is a wet baby."

But since change is a constant in our lives – we need to learn how to deal with it.

I want to play an audio clip from a David Bowie song from the 70's (for those of you in High School, that was right after radio was invented). 

Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes
(turn and face the strain)
Ch-ch-changes
Don't want to be a richer man
Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes
(turn and face the strain)
Ch-ch-changes
Just gonna have to be a different man
Time may change me
But I can't trace time

David Bowie, in his typical creative way is giving us insight and some good practical advice. Yes we the church can learn things from our pop culture.

- Changes can make stutter – ch –ch – ch – ch changes – it creates fear in us
- That we have to do something in response to change. He tells us that we need to turn and face it – face the strain the challenges that life is throwing at us –
- He tells us that, in the face of these changes – we are going to have to become a different man.
- He recognizes the forces of aging (Time may change me) – but that we cannot let time control us.

Why this is so important to us

- to turn to face the strain
- to become a different man or woman in the face of change?
- to not accept passively the changes that time brings about –
- to change in the face of change.

The apostle Paul tells us that there are two options for us – both individually – and as a church (Romans 12:2)

- Change passively by being conformed to the culture/our set ways
- Allow God to transform us –real true inner change

I have said this before – but I will say it again – there is within me – not just a dislike of external change – but there are things inside me that make me deeply resistant to inner change – Even change I want – I want to be a different man – but there is something that prevents me from changing. I am sure that you also experience this.

Let's see what our Scripture today has to say to address these questions – Let's pray.

Scripture Jeremiah 48:11-12

11 "Moab has been at ease since his youth;
He has also been undisturbed, like wine on its dregs,
And he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,
Nor has he gone into exile.
Therefore he retains his flavor,
And his aroma has not changed.

Background on Moab

Let me give some brief background on Moab. The people of Moab were descendants of Lot – who was Abraham's nephew. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people and Lot, through an incestuous relationship with his older daughter, was the father of the Moabites.

These people lived just east of the Dead Sea and were a constant thorn in the side of the Israelites – both by constantly attacking their border towns – but also through inter-marriage and enticing Israel to follow them in their idol worship and child sacrifice.

Yet in spite of their continued disobedience to God and the fact that they were outsiders, there is a constant scarlet thread of God's grace that runs through the scripture of God's love and care for Moab. We see that in the promises of restoration that God makes towards Moab as a nation. And we see it in the lives of specific Moabites – like Ruth – who God graciously allowed to be part of the lineage of David and of Jesus. That should give us real hope. If you're here today and feel like an outsider – or if your history with God is checkered – Know that with God there are no outsiders – and that there is no hole we find ourselves in so deep that God is not deeper still.

God's Indictments Against Moab

But in our passage today God is bringing 4 indictments upon Moab. And these indictments are not what we would expect. We would expect God to indict them for their idol worship or for their killing of their babies. But look in our passage what God indicts them for:

He has been at ease since his youth and he is undisturbed.

[Go over to the Vessel]

The image that Jeremiah paints is from wine making. In those days after the grapes were crushed [A large clear vessel is placed on the altar with sediment at the bottom - stir the jars and reveal the sediment – let the sediment settle during the rest of the sermon] the wine was placed in large jars – vessels – and then allowed to sit for a period of time to allow the dregs to settle out. The dregs are just the sediment from the grapes. And when the sediment was settled out, the wine was poured into another container – leaving behind the dregs – the pieces of grape skin and seeds.

So God is speaking to Moab and brings an indictment against them that they are at ease, undisturbed, they haven't been poured from vessel to vessel. In other words – God's indictment against Moab is that they haven't changed.

Is Change Possible?

What's So Wrong with being “at ease” and “undisturbed?”

This is odd. What's wrong with being at “ease” and “undisturbed” Isn't being at ease and undisturbed part of the wine making process when it allows the wine to settle? Isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace who comes to bring us times of peace.

Yes – but for a season. It's not God's intent for us to stay there. C.S. Lewis has said that God will refresh us on the journey with times of ease – pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for our home.

Moab's problem wasn't that they were at ease – it was that they have been at ease too long.

Why is “not going into exile” so wrong?

Another odd thing about God's indictment - How can God bring about an indictment against Moab for not going into exile. That's sounds like something that just happened to Moab.

We have to understand the context here. At the time of Jeremiah – the nation of Babylon (modern day Iraq) led by their king Nebuchadnezzar was attaching all of the surrounding nations. He was conquering them and taking the people of these nations back to Babylon to serve as slaves. A pretty frightful situation.

Jeremiah had spoken God's word to Israel and to the surrounding nation to go into exile willingly rather than either escaping or fighting.

I want you to Imagine hearing God's word to give in to the invader – to leave the land that God gave you – to leave behind the temple – where the very presence of God resided – and go and be a slave in a pagan nation. NOOOO!

Both Israel and Moab resisted. Resisted the change that God had for them.

God's Prescription for Change

How about us? Are we so set in our ways – so at ease – so undisturbed – so satisfied with where we are, that we will refuse to go where God – through our circumstances - is taking us. There comes times in our lives, when either through circumstances or God's word or a combination, when God is calling us to be poured from one vessel to another – to leave our old flavor and aroma behind and go to the new place God is calling us.

It's been said that "Too often we try to use God to change our circumstances, while he is using our circumstances to change us." God is in the business of changing us. God is looking for / wanting change in his people. Any body who doesn't believe that hasn't heard Jesus words that the Father was us to perfect - to be just like Jesus. To be holy as he is holy.

Well, if you've looked around, for that to happen – we need radical and transformational change.

1. Recognize that God is in the Business of Changing Us

The fact that God is in the business of changing us is one of those truths in tension. It seems to contradict the truth that "God loves just as we are." These are two apparently contradictory truths – that are both true at the same time yet seem to contradict each other. Leighton Ford puts it this way.

God loves us the way we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way.

External circumstances are one of God's primary instruments of bringing about internal change in us. Even through changes that seem like complete tragedies – going into exile – God wants to use the pouring into new vessels as a means for transforming us from one image to another new and better image.

Dallas Willard – says that it is a dirty little secret of the church that even though we have different beliefs from the world, we are no different from the world in our actions. We the church have not allowed God to truly transform us. It happens here and there in individuals – but not in the large.

Yesterday at the memorial service for Vi, her son Chris moved all of us when he told about how Vi, 80 years old and dying of cancer was still changing. She was still allowing her Lord to transform her. So it can be done.

But we put up walls that prevent us from changing. Our scripture today give us three truths that will help us moves towards real demonstrative internal change

This first is to recognize that God is in the business of changing us – all of us.

2. We need to Allow God to put us in places where we are Disturbed/Unsettled

The second is that we need to allow ourselves to be disturbed – allow God to put ourselves in situations where we can be unsettled. There are times of settling and then there are times of to be unsettled – to be poured into a new vessel.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said "People wish to be settled – but only as far as [we] are unsettled is there any hope for [us]." We need to be unsettled in order to change.

I believe that when we get close to the heart of God – we will have our heart broken – we will become disturbed. Let me give you one example of how that happens. Several weeks ago a number of us went to the Leadership Conference and 1st Cathedral. During one of the sessions they played a video clip that was taken at around 11:30 at night on a street in India. It showed a little girl – maybe about 4 years old walking along the street with a small blanket and a pillow. It showed her carefully spreading out her blanket and then laying down on top of the blanket to go to sleep. And then what was so disturbing was to watch a man just walk by here. Undisturbed. Just walk by.

That was a disturbing image – and I know a number of us could not sleep well that night – we were undone.

We were disturbed but it is not enough for us to be disturbed – what are we going to do about it? Most of us who could not sleep after being disturbed – slept well the following night. Did we do anything about what we saw? Will we allow God's disturbances to work real change in us? Allow God to pour us into a new vessel? Will we embrace the new place God pours us – to leave behind our old fragrance and aroma – be transformed into that new shape. Will we hear God's word and then follow it – even if it means going places that seem to be totally foreign to us (for example – to go into exile)

It's not enough to be disturbed. Once we are disturbed, our fears and habits and inertia will keep us from being changed. If we get close to the heart of God – we will be disturbed – but he then requires us to take action.

I know that there is a real resistance in me to leave my settled place and become disturbed – my life has been pretty comfortable – it has been settled. And time after time, I know I am faced with a choice to move into an unsettling situation. I have heard God's word to go – and now I need to do it. But there is deep resistance. Twice this week God spoke to me about going into an unsettling situation – and the resistance was strong.

Our passage today closes with the consequences of not changing. God tells Moab in verse 12 that if he doesn't allow God to be the wine maker – to pour you from vessel to vessel – he will turn you over to one who is not interested in wine – the “tipper of vessels” and you will change – whether they like it or not.

Time of Confession and Reflection

I would like to move us into a time of confession and reflection. Moab was “at ease” and “undisturbed” during times that God was calling them to change. We have placed walls of protection to keep us undisturbed and at ease. We need to take times to confess that there are fears that we have of change that creates these walls – Let's take some time and reflect on how we have resisted those changes that God has brought into our lives.

[Silence]

Father I confess a deep seated resistance to change. I like being undisturbed. I like being at ease. Help me not to take those pleasant inns of rest and ease as places of permanence. Forgive us Father for not allowing us to be poured from vessel to vessel. Forgive us Father for not going those places that you have told us to go – where we are refusing because we are too comfortable.

Amen

I suspect that most of us find ourselves in one of two places – there are those of us for whom things are going pretty well now – at ease – I would like to pray a prayer of disturbance. This is a prayer written by Sir Francis Drake the English explorer from the 1600's. If you find yourself in that place today – pray along with me.

- Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.
- Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity
- Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."

Amen

And for those of us who are right now in the midst of turbulent external changes I would like to offer up a prayer of comfort and transformation.

Father – we find ourselves right now in a time of great turbulence. Comfort us during this time. Use these awful circumstances to change us from within. Lord we don't want to retain our flavor or aroma. We want these changes to have your effect on our inner life. Change us in this time O Lord. Prince of Peace – come to us in the midst of the storm. Amen

In preparing ourselves for communion, as a demonstration of what God has done this morning and what he is yet to do during our communion time, I want to pour this settle liquid into it's new vessel. Leaving behind the dregs of our old flavor and old aroma. Notice, that some of the old flavor is transferred – we aren't talking about perfection. Also notice that the new place is turbulent. Change comes with a significant cost.

[Pour the settled liquid from one vessel to the other] Father we do this in hope – that as we meet you in the bread and the wine – that this image of being poured from vessel to vessel with stick with us –and this time of communion will deeply change us.

Amen