

"HANDLING CHANGE"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
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INTRODUCTION

Posted in rather large letters on a poster in the hallway of a building that I was in recently were these words: "Change Is Progress". Now I've lived long enough to know that that is not always the case and I find myself in disagreement with whoever put up that poster. I think of progress as improvement, but all change is not improvement. And many people fight change no matter what their view. They're apt to say,

"Things are OK as they are....we've done it this way for the last (you fill in the number) years! Why change it now?"

CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

Sometimes we change things here in the Church. For instance I know that some of you are having trouble with the new hymnal and I confess I'm having trouble with it, too. Like you, I like the "amens" on the hymns. A good "amen" has always helped us bring our praises to the full. So we're going back to singing the "amens" again... for a while. Change is not easy for some of us. But parenthetically I might add that some of the criticisms of the new hymnal are just about the same criticisms I heard back in the mid-sixties from people who were here then when we had our last hymnal change. But eventually we adapt and come along.

Now we're changing the Church florist and the floral arrangements on the altar will look a bit different. We've changed the height of the candlesticks on the altar by about four inches and some prefer the taller candlesticks. And it's quite likely that in days to come we'll be changing some other things in and around the Church. Some of these will be understood and easily accepted while others will jolt us a bit. I don't know how it is with you but I find it difficult to know just who's right when considering changes.

And it's a bit of a challenge to us to look at whether or not we fight something because we have carefully considered the alternatives...the advantages and disadvantages...and have chosen to make or not to make the change, or if our decision is based on the idea of maintaining the status quo or which side of the bed we got up on. But remember that line from that hymn we grew up with about the "old time" religion...."It was good enough for Paul and Silas and it's good enough for me."

RESISTING CHANGE

Let me share with you some accounts of people who fought change. According to the Dearborn Independent those who resisted change cut the first telegraph wires, tore up the first railroad tracks, smashed the first sewing machines and ran out of the State of Pennsylvania the first man who tried to sell hard coal.

In 1832, the people down in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, refused the use of a school house for the discussion of the desirability of a railroad for that locality because the School Board felt that,

"Railroads are impossible and a great infidelity. If God had intended that his intelligent creatures should travel at the frightful speed of 17 miles an hour by steam, He would have clearly foretold it in the Holy Prophets. Such things as railroads are devices of the Satan to lead immortal

souls down to Hell."

In 1867 the following news item appeared in the Chicago Federation News, a leading Chicago newspaper.

"Joshua Coppersmith has been arrested in New York for attempting to extort funds from ignorant and superstitious people by exhibiting a device which will, he claimed, convey the human voice any distance over metallic wires, so that it will be heard by listeners at the other end. Well-informed people know it is impossible and of no practical value. The authorities who apprehended this criminal are to be congratulated.

And in 1816 an influential German paper condemned gas lighting for theological, medical, moral, political and economic reasons. Theological - as blasphemous, since only God divided the light from the darkness. Medical - people would be encouraged to stay out late at night and catch cold. Political - street lighting would frighten horses and embolden thieves. Economic - gas is a waste of the peoples' money.

JESUS CHRIST / AN AGENT OF CHANGE

Change as always been difficult for some of us. We smile at the little card on the desk that says, "Let's Compromise - And Say I'm Right!"

But it was Jesus of Nazareth who was the greatest change agent of all times. We stand aghast even today at some of the teachings of Jesus. For example, Jesus said that one race of people was as good as another. Some Christians are still having trouble with that one. Remember that we're Christians today because Jesus proposed the teachings of God to the Gentiles and Paul did it. He went.

And it was Jesus who was willing to sit with sinners. If I, as your minister, were to be seen in a bar talking with someone about his soul or in the home of a lady of questionable reputation, some of your tongues would begin to wag, more than they do. Jesus, however, was a friend of sinners.

It was Jesus who had the nerve to say that a neighbor did not always mean someone who lives next door to you. He established an entirely new set of principles for that consideration, drew a larger circle to take in people.

And He was a bit of a rabble rouser, too. More than once He upset the applecart of the status-quo. He disagreed with the legal system of His day and what was worse, He even suggested that the priests weren't really worth very much. Here he was going from preaching to meddling.

Why He even changed the concept of what it was to be a leader. A man said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go". Jesus said to Him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head". Hardly the concept of what the head of a large and worthwhile organization of that day or this day could expect.

And consider this, "Lord...let me go and bury my father". But Jesus answered, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the Gospel."

Another said,

"I will follow you, Lord...but first...let me say farewell to those at home...."

Now that sounds like a reasonable request, doesn't it. But this Jesus said,

"No one puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God".

That was a change from the normal; that is a change from the normal for us, too.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Aldersgate Class on Wednesday evenings has been examining the high demands of the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember, it was this Jesus who changed the philosophical sayings of the day to read like this,

"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you that weep, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy - for behold, your reward is great in heaven."

He said,

"Woe to the rich for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are now full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep".

It was this same Jesus who said,

"Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Offer the other cheek to Him who strikes you".

And yes, it was this King who wore not the crown and sceptre of the Kings of His day, but a crown of thorns and for a sceptre a bruised reed. For His throne, a cruel cross. He changed the idea of what a real King was like.

This Jesus became the leader of a new movement which would one day sweep the world. He did not become just another Jewish Rabbi or even a Rabboni - a master teacher, but the leader of the common people of His day.

This was the ruler who led His people by giving them an example by washing their feet...and not putting stones into their shoes.

He was baptized by John, though John thought this Son of God should have been baptizing Him. Jesus was first and foremost an agent of change. Not the kind of change involved in building great empires but the change involved in building great lives. Lives that have been truly changed to give glory to God and to His Son, Jesus.

WHERE DO WE FIT IN

Where are we in all of this? Where do we fit in? And how do we feel about those changes He would have us make - changes in our lives, in our church, in our city, in our country, in the world.

IV. OPEN HOUSE

- A. Note the word in the bulletin regarding the "open house" over at the parsonage next Sunday afternoon. 21 East 87th Street. 11 D.
- B. Just so that everybody doesn't show up at the same time...which might make it very crowded...we're suggesting that A - L people come around two, and that M - Z folks plan to come over after four.
- C. The Trustees feel that this is a fine conclusion to the Restoration Fund appeal of last Spring, Summer and Fall which made possible the parsonage renovation as well as the redecoration of the sanctuary. Gifts are still being received and those of you who gave so generously and enthusiastically will certainly enjoy the look around. All are invited, but especially...

V. OFFERING

- A. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God...

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, February 4, 1990

I. HOLY COMMUNION

- A. It has long been the custom of our Church...to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion....and we do like to announce for the benefit...that the Table of Our Lord is open to all....that one does not have to be a member...
- B. His Table is open to all...and we invite all of you to receive the Sacrament...trusting that the time for you may be an occasion of spiritual renewal...rededication....
- C. Procedure. The elements will be served to you in the pews. Upon receiving them, please hold them until all have been served...

II. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We welcome the visitors in the congregation...pleased you are here. Make yourself known to us...and be free in the sharing of your name. Fill out....or sign one of the Guest Books. Worship with us on other Sundays...work with us in the programs of service...
- B. We like to say "no strangers here...only friends who have not yet met..." "handshake will be the cementing of a long friendship" with you.
- C. We have been doing the "Lord's work" at this busy corner since 1837. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit....

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are listed for you in the bulletin....review them on your own. Pick up the February issue of the news sheet...by the door and downstairs. Thanks to Lucy.
- B. Yesterday's Rummage Sale was most successful. Proceeds totalled \$. Methodist Camp Service. John Risley Fund. Thanks to Dianne Keller, to Janet Ernst and to the many people who shared the day in making it possible.
- C. Note that volunteers are needed for the Saturday afternoon feeding program. Lining up people from now through Easter. 10 Saturdays. Be in touch with Jan Ernst if you are free to lend a hand.

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VI. DEATH

- A. I received word on Friday evening of the passing...the death of the Rev. Thomas Falshaw in Fort Lauderdale.
- B. Across the years, Thomas Falshaw preached here many times. He was 89 years of age...I had known him all my life...my father's closest and dearest friend...he became my step-father in 1966....the last time I saw Tom was back on July first when he performed the wedding service for Lynn and myself which many of you attended.
- C. Cancer which was discovered in December took his life... A Memorilal Service will be held two weeks from this afternoon in the United Methodist Church of Valhalla...which Tom built... and where he pastored for 18 years...north of White Plains.