

Sermons 2008

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Chapter 1. Celebrating Change

READ - *Nehemiah 12:27-43 (NIV)*

TEXT - *And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. (Nehemiah 12:43 NIV)*

THEME - Change, although hard, is good, and we celebrate it!

Introduction

Our text this morning is just a jumping off point. It speaks of a time of tremendous accomplishment (the wall was complete), and of joyous celebration - celebration so grand that it could be heard from afar off!

As I prepared for today's service, I picked up a pad of paper and started writing down things that we have to celebrate here today. I came up with a long list, containing words like:

Health
Wealth
Freedom / Our Country
Family and Friends

Then I tried to get a little more spiritual about it and I wrote down things like the Mercy of God (He hath not dealt with us after our sins), and the Grace of God (By grace are ye saved... O to grace how great a debtor), and the Love of Christ (...loved with an everlasting love), and the Peace that passeth understanding (even when times are hard, or when we don't understand what He's doing)

But then I thought, what are we REALLY celebrating on this day? Why did we call this Celebration Sunday? What is the focal point of our thankfulness today? And one word kept coming to mind - CHANGE.

And so, let us celebrate CHANGE, today.

For those who like to know where we're going, let me say that we have 3 points to our study this morning:

1. We celebrate change, because change is NORMAL.
2. We celebrate change, even though change is HARD.
3. We celebrate change, because change is EXCITING.

We celebrate change, because change is normal.

You know, if you look back over the history of this little church, CHANGE has been a constant - a NORMAL part of life in this congregation.

HISTORICAL NOTES -

In 1812, Deacon William Churchill moved to Randolph.

In 1819, Churchill and several others started a baptist church in Randolph.

On July 20, 1828, Churchill led in reorganizing the Baptist Church into the Disciples Church.

In 1830, the first meeting house was started, and it was completed in 1832.

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In 1845, the church became known as a "comeouter" church, declaring that they were "Not to fellowship with slaveholders or apologists." (This caused a major split.)

In 1860, the current church building was erected in the center of Randolph, and has been used ever since.

Throughout its history, the church has been a baptist church, a disciples church, a "comeouter" church, an independent Christian church, a Disciples of Christ church, and now an independent non-denominational Bible church.

The name of the church has changed at least 5 times. It has been called:

Randolph Baptist Church
Disciples Church
Randolph Christian Church
Randolph Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Friendship Bible Church

Certainly, our recent changes are nothing out of the ordinary for this little church. Change is vital... change is necessary... change is NORMAL.

QUOTE (Alistair Begg) - "Everything that is alive changes."

ILLUS - Children who do not change - sad.

ILLUS - My bonsai collection, which used to change a lot, but now changes not at all! Because it's all DEAD.

If you are alive - you are changing. If this church is alive, it must continually change.

A lot of things have changed around here in the last year:

New name
New family / friends
New hopefulness / optimism

And we celebrate it today, because change is NORMAL.

We celebrate change, even though change is hard.

Now, some people truly embrace change. But there are many people who really really hate it.

5 Kinds of Attitudes About Change

1. Early innovators (2.6%), run with new ideas
2. Early adaptors (13.4%), influenced by (1) but not initiators
3. Slow Majority (34%), the herd-followers
4. Reluctant Majority (34%), kicking and screaming
5. Antagonistic (16%), they will never change

Howard Hendricks, in The Monday Morning Mission

Notice that the vast majority of people in that list are basically averse to change. They don't want to CELEBRATE it... they want to AVOID IT!

ILLUS - A [2006] medical study reveals just how difficult change is for people. Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypasses a year in America. These people are told after their bypasses that they must change their lifestyle. The heart bypass is a temporary fix. They must change their diet. They must quit smoking and drinking. They must exercise and reduce stress.

In essence, the doctors say, "Change or die."

You would think that a near-death experience would forever grab the attention of the patients. You would think they would vote for change. You would think the argument for change is so compelling that the patients would make the appropriate lifestyle alterations. Sadly that is not the case.

Ninety percent of the heart patients do not change. They remain the same, living the status quo. Study after study indicates that two years after heart surgery, the patients have not altered their behavior. Instead of making changes for life, they choose death.

Change is that difficult. The majority of the heart patients choose not to change. They act as if they would rather die. (Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (B & H Publishing Group, 2006), p. 229; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California)

Change is HARD! So hard that some would rather go through life accomplishing nothing than face the difficulty of change.

Solomon explained this thought process for us:

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox. (Proverbs 14:4)

Change is like those oxen. We can avoid it, and things will stay nice and quiet and clean... never messing with our routines. But nothing will happen. Randolph will stay lost. Our neighbors and friends and loved ones won't hear about Christ. Or... we can embrace change when it's called for, and put up with the steaming piles that result, knowing that it's a small price to pay for winning souls for Christ.

Yes - change is HARD. But we are going to choose to change... and we're going to choose to celebrate change, in spite of it being hard, because we know the results are worth it! We're never going to stop evaluating what we do here, and changing those things that can be done better. Change is HARD, but change is NORMAL, and we're going to keep on seeing it through.

We celebrate change, because change is EXCITING!

Some people fear the unknown - but for others, the unknown is something EXCITING!

JOKE - A man from the back mountains of Tennessee found himself one day in a large city, for the first time standing outside an elevator. He watched as an old, haggard woman hobbled on, and the doors closed. A few minutes later the doors opened and a young, attractive woman marched smartly off. The father hollered to his youngest son, "Billy, go get yer mother." (Source unknown)

Be honest - even if you are a person who hates change, would you really want things to never change?

ILLUS - My wife is a wonderful cook, and I would rather eat her food than any other on earth. But she has always had this problem of preparing enough for 20 people. And so the first night it's delicious. The second night there are leftovers, and they are great. The third night, the leftovers aren't quite so good, and after that they are just plain disgusting! Who wants to eat the same thing every night?

ILLUS - Manna. Same meal every day forever!!! That was not a picture of heaven, but of this life.

I wouldn't want to be in heaven FOREVER if things never changed, would you?

But thankfully, continuous change is one of the really cool things we have to look forward to in heaven.

I am come that they might have life... more abundantly...

Not just eternal QUANTITY but also eternal QUALITY - better and better every day for ever!

ILLUS - Imagine that you lived in a home where every corridor led to something new and exciting. Never a dull moment - always something that you haven't seen before awaits! That's what heaven will be like.

SONG - If it keeps gettin' better and better O Lord, I don't know what I'm gonna do. (BUT IT WILL KEEP GETTIN' BETTER AND BETTER!)

Now one of the reasons some people struggle with change is that in this life, change is often negative... we are continuously winding down.

ILLUS - Film of me playing softball in the field behind this church - 20 years old, prime of life - home run, running the bases - high-fiving the team at home plate. THINGS HAVE CHANGED. I'd probably throw out both shoulders and an elbow if I even tried to SWING a bat now. I guarantee a coronary before I reached second base, and probably an embarrassing display of gastric eruption if I even made it to home plate!

But in heaven - no winding down - only winding up! We won't get old, we'll be forever young! No sickness (now THERE'S a change we can embrace)... no pain (glory!)... no DEATH... We will have a body like Christ's body!

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (Philippians 3:21)

Jesus could pass through walls... he could fly (he ascended into heaven in Acts 1)... he could disappear from one place and reappear in another...

Such change we should ALL be able to celebrate!

Conclusion

We can celebrate change this morning, because it's NORMAL. We can celebrate it even though it is sometimes HARD. We can celebrate it because it is just plain EXCITING!

I hope you'll join me in celebrating CHANGE this Thanksgiving season.

In any crowd such as this one, someone may be thinking, "I could USE some change in my life! I'm not happy with my life. Something needs to change!"

Well, there is one particular change which is really important - so important that the Bible says it is the deciding factor as to whether or not you'll go to heaven when you die.

It's the change from being lost to being saved... from being dead in sins to being alive in Christ... from being unforgiven to being forever forgiven... from being a child of the devil to being a child of God... from being one with whom God is angry every day to being one whom Jesus called a friend.

It is a change so important that the Bible says without it you will never enter heaven - without it you will spend eternity in hell. Without this change, you are lost and undone.

The Bible describes that change like this:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Has that change occurred in your life?

If not, it can happen for you today... this very morning... and then you'll have something to celebrate!

Invitation

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