



As you gathered with friends and family over the Christmas holiday, it is very likely that you looked at old pictures and marveled at how much everyone had changed. I'm going to show you two pictures this morning on the screen. The first is a picture of my four siblings and I on Easter Sunday many years ago, in 1969. Taken next to my grandparents house, you might be able to pick me out of the lineup. The next picture was taken at my mom's house last July, when four of us were able to gather together. My, how we've changed!

Change comes whether or not we welcome it, or even notice it. The changes to our appearance, brought about by the natural ageing process, is barely discernable on a daily basis. I might have mostly grey hair now, but I can't recall when most of it changed colors.

Christmas tends to make people reflective, and to think about all the change that has come to their lives. Those who sit down and write their annual letter to their family and friends will reflect on the good and bad. I hope you've had more good than bad in the past year. Some may wish they could have another year like this, while others hope they never have another year like 2015. Most of us have some of both, some good and some bad. Some things we would like to change and some things we would like to keep the same.

Change comes to life, and from one Christmas to another we can measure the change that comes; the gains and losses, the highs and lows, the blessings and the struggles.

This morning we complete our short series of message based on the theme *Fear Not! Today's message is The Baby Means Change!*

Hear the words of Scripture from Matthew 2:1-12 –

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." "

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

*Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

1. We fear change, but we also yearn for it.

We often talk about our distaste for change. Churches are often bastions of resistance to change – the seven last words of a church are *we've never done it that way before*. And that's okay, because the truth is, churches ought to be on the vanguard of resisting some changes. Obviously, some change is good, but not all change is either healthy or positive. The way that our world is wired together is good in many ways, but if you can't afford to be a part of that wired world you are going to be left behind, and it is one of the charges to the church to remind the powers that be that it's tragic to leave people behind in the forward march of progress and advancement.

But what's interesting about change is that, while we express our distaste for change, we also yearn for it. We talk about how much we dislike a job or vocation and express our desire for a change. We talk about our unhappiness with relationships and how we wish they would change. We talk about our unhappiness with ourselves and how we wish we could change. We talk about our finances and how we wish our financial life could change. In a few days some will begin that process of making New Year's resolutions, which is, most of the time, an exercise in futility. But we want to change.

Scripture reminds us that change is a healthy part of life for the people of God – Romans 12:2 says *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

How might God be bringing change in your life in the days, weeks, and months ahead? How might we be resisting the change the God is bringing to our lives? How might we help others with the needed changes God is bringing to their lives?

2. We fear the unknown.

After graduating from college I entered seminary but decided to take a break after one semester. At the end of the school year Tanya went to Dothan, Alabama, where her family had moved during her last year of college. We weren't engaged at the time but had talked about getting married, so I decided I should move as well. I had a job offer come to me on a Friday, but I had to be at work on Monday morning. When you're young, it's an adventure to decide to move, and then actually move, over the course of a weekend. I managed to move and began my new job on Monday morning. At lunch, I was sitting outside when it suddenly occurred to me – *what in the world have I done?* Aside from Tanya and her family, I didn't know anybody, and I was far from my own home. Suddenly, the unknown that I had entered seemed very intimidating.

I think it's the unknown that we fear when we talk about change. The fear of the unknown is extremely powerful in our lives, and sometimes will cause us to stay in unhealthy and hurtful situation. Anyone who works in a helping profession is familiar with the saying *the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know*. People will prefer the known to the unknown, even if the known is harmful to them. We learn to survive in what is known and, even though it might be the devil to us, it is better than the devil that we don't know.

But God is always calling us and leading us into the unknown. The Bible is full of stories of God leading people into the unknown. Abraham, for instance, was told very little about the journey from his homeland to the land God would show to him. I wonder how long he stood there, looking around his home, before taking the first step on his journey. Peter, Andrew, James, and John weren't told much more than *follow me and I will make you fishers of men*. They probably wondered what it meant to be *fishers of men*, and I imagine there was some uncertainty as they dropped their nets and followed Jesus. I wonder if Matthew compared his profitable ledger in his tax office before he followed Jesus.

Stepping out into the unknown is difficult, but one of the lessons of faith is that, if you wait until you have all the answers and are prepared for every contingency, you'll never take the first step. Don't be afraid to take that step.

3. We fear the complications of change.

Change can have complications, which is another reason why we fear change. It is not always simple to change our lives and our narrative. It might mean that relationships must change and that our circumstances must change. If we want change to truly come to our lives, we must be prepared for the fact that some complications might come as well.

One of the things I sometimes tell people in conversations about life and change is what I call the difference between a lens and a narrative. A lens is the way we see the world around, the way we see others, and the way we see ourselves. It is a way of viewing all things that comes to us as a result of our environment, our influences, our upbringing and other factors. It is something that comes to us naturally, and without us even being aware of how it influences us. A narrative, however, is different. A narrative is something we can change; it is the ability to change our lens see others, the world, and ourselves in a different way. Our lens may cause us to be unable to believe in our own self-worth, but a narrative allows us to see that we are a valued child of God.

Jesus gave a new narrative to Zaccheus, to the Samaritan woman at the well, and to the woman taken in adultery. Zaccheus was no longer one who took advantage of people through his work as a tax-collector, but one who was generous. The Samaritan woman was no longer a woman known for her various husbands but as one accepted by Jesus. Jesus, through the power of change, can give every person a new narrative.

This is one of the great promises of Scripture – change is coming, and it is change that comes by God’s doing and it is change that will be for our betterment. The impatience of our culture can easily rub off on us, and cause us to question why God doesn’t bring change to our lives in a way that is more suitable to our schedule, but make no mistake – change is coming.

My faith, like my appearance, has changed a good deal over the years. Change may be very incremental and slow, but change does come. It’s hard to see the change that comes with the passage of time. Some of what I believed is now gone and replaced with other beliefs. Some interpretations are gone and new ones are in their place. Some things are less certain, some are more certain. But I believe more deeply, and some of that is due to people who don’t believe.

It is faith that has changed me, and for that I am very grateful. I’m not the person I was in that old picture. I was young in that old picture; in the new picture, I’m old. More changes will come, but my faith will always be a constant.