

Listen to Him!

How many times have you looked at your life and thought, *things have got to change*? And how many times have you looked at your life, at the people around you, and thought, *I hope this never changes*? Sometimes we can choose when change happens, but mostly change happens at a time and in a way we cannot control. Some people react to change positively, and some people react to change negatively. You may think that the reaction to change depends on what kind of change is happening, whether it is good change or bad. But we don't actually know whether any given change is one hundred percent good or one hundred percent bad until we see the outcome. Some bad changes can bring good things, and likewise some seemingly positive changes can have bad results. So the question is, how do you respond to change?

As many of you know, I moved last Sunday with great help from our strong congregation. I had to move because my landlord was going to sell his house. When he told me of his decision to sell his house, I thought that my role was to be understanding and cooperative. So I said to him, "that's understandable". But in reality, I was stressed out and panicking. My family had only lived in the house for a few months, just long enough to unpack all of our things. We had a newborn baby to look after, and the rental market in Ladysmith is not good. I was looking for another house to rent, but there were not many possibilities for us, and the beginning of the month is never a good time to look for a house. Far from being understanding, I was thinking, 'how could my landlord do this to me and to my family?' This was my fifth move in Canada, the twentieth move in my life. Moving has never been one of my favourite things, especially when it is against my will. This was an unwelcome change, and I was resisting it as hard as I could.

My landlord's realtor noticed my frustration and talked frankly with me about reacting positively to change. She told me her story as an example: her doctor told her that she had a serious, potentially fatal illness. When she heard the news, she didn't just wait for death to find her; she reacted positively. This woman enrolled in real estate classes, worked hard, focused on living her life fully, and

enjoying her work. Her life is busy and active and her disease has gone into remission. I learned something from her, and I learned something from moving to a different house. As it turned out, I found a house which is nicer and cheaper than the previous one. Now my wife and I think that we must be thankful to our previous landlord for inspiring us to move out and live in a better place.

Today's text begins, "Six days later...", so we know that something important has happened. The disciples have had shocking news, which changed all their ideas about their future with Christ. Six days earlier Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised from the dead. They might have wondered how this could happen to their friend and leader who had been doing amazing works, and what this would mean for those who left everything behind to follow Jesus. The disciples did not want anything bad to happen to Jesus or to their own lives.

Peter, always outspoken, began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!" Notice the difference between what Jesus was talking about and what Peter was concerned about. Even though Jesus foretold both his death and resurrection, Peter did not pay close attention to the promise of resurrection; he was primarily worried about Jesus' suffering and death.

I wonder if the disciples understood what Jesus was talking about. If they truly believed that he was going to be raised, they could have accepted his cross. We can see their fear of change. That's why even though Jesus foretold his death and resurrection three times, his followers were still shocked. Once again Jesus said to them, as they were gathering in Galilee, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him and on the third day he will be raised.' And the Bible says that they were greatly distressed. We are impressed with their courage to say "yes" when Jesus called the first disciples; "Follow me" and immediately they left their nets and followed him. Yet the following of Christ is not a once-in-a-lifetime event but a lifelong process of challenge and change.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, and today's text is about Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. As I was reflecting on the text, I realized that it is not just about Jesus' transformation, but about the followers' transformation as well, because I

think the key words of the passage occur when the voice from heaven says to the disciples “listen to Him!”

When Jesus was transfigured and filled with light , Peter said to him, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings there, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ Six days before, Peter was scolded by Jesus to set his mind on divine things, not on human things. Even on the mountain, he still did not fully understand what it means to be a disciple; he wanted to stay there with the Lord; to build a safe sanctuary away from the world, to hold that moment forever, saving Jesus and his followers from the heartache to come. By wishing for the glorious Christ alone, Peter was missing the other side of Christ who had to suffer and die in order for God’s plan to be fulfilled.

And then God says “listen to him”. Listen to Jesus, your friend, Jesus the Christ. By listening to him carefully, the disciples could allow Christ to be all that He was. By listening to him attentively they could let go of the Christ they wanted Him to be. By listening to him continuously, they could allow themselves to be changed. So, I think, listening is the alpha and omega for anyone who wants to follow Jesus Christ. Are you listening? Are you listening, especially in times of trouble? Are you listening even when God is telling you what you do not want to hear?

When the disciples heard the voice from heaven, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. On the mountain the disciples experienced both moments of glory and moments of fear, and I think both experiences went together with them throughout their lifetime. They must have learned that, just as there is no way they can shield themselves from the light of God, there is also no way to save themselves from suffering. But Jesus came and touched them, saying ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’ And that’s enough, because they know that they are not alone on their way to the uncertain future.

It’s the same for us, with our uncertain futures and imperfect understanding. Get up and do not be afraid, remembering with certainty God’s perfect love – unchanging through all change.