

## 5 Lent B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 119:9-16

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

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March 17, 2024

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus who changes us.

I'm going to invite you to stretch out your arms over your head and clasp your hands together. Bring them down in front of you and note which hand/finger is on top, right or left? Now, do it again, but intentionally put the other hand on top. It feels different and even uncomfortable doesn't it? That's because we're just not used to doing it that way.

Here's a picture based on Mark 11 or Matthew 21 from the story of Jesus entering the Temple and "flipping over" the tables of the money changers. He's got a whip in hand, tables are turned and people look rightly terrified. That's a pretty standard take on the passage, but a new interpretation has popped up on the internet that looks like this:



And when you came in today how many of you are sitting in the same spot you usually do? Have you ever had the experience of someone sitting in your spot? It sort of throws us off! Perhaps try a new spot next week!

These are just a few simple means to point out how we easily get "stuck" in our old ways and habits. Some of that is good, so that we don't have to think about and decide every single detail all the time. That would become overwhelming! But sometimes it's not good, because we lose our openness and can become rigid. And so, while we understand that God is a constant presence in our lives, constantly loving, constantly teaching, God is also constantly mixing things up, using new ideas, exploring new means of relationships, justice and love.

We read from Jeremiah that God was doing a new thing with the houses of Israel and Judah. It was to be a new covenant, which is to say a new promise. This new promise was one of relationship, a relationship that could not be broken or erased – and that's because this promise would be written on

peoples' hearts. That was great news for them, because they were trying to make a new start. I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about the ways God called people to change so long ago; suffice to say that God is always on the move which continues as we read John 12 where Jesus speaks to his impending death.

Jesus was well aware that his followers had gotten into a comfortable groove. It's not that that was a bad thing, but a comfortable groove does not leave a lot of space for the Spirit to work.

So, Jesus talks about a new thing that was going to happen. He says: *You're used to hanging out with me. You're used to seeing me heal blind people and lepers, challenging the Pharisees. You know that I can teach and can walk on water and even calm storms. You even have asked me to change water into wine again and again. You think you know me, but it's time for me to show you that all these things pale in comparison to what I am capable of. So, I'm going to do something different, like when a seed is buried in the dirt and is seemingly gone... you and I both know that it is not. What I'm going to do will be different than anything you've seen me do before.*

*If you love the old Jesus you've been hanging out with that's too bad, because I'm not going to do those same things anymore. I'm going to do something completely new and different. Are you with me? I hope so because there's no going back.*

There certainly was no going back after Jesus' death and resurrection. Not only did the lives of Jesus' followers change, but the whole world was set on a new trajectory.

The call of change remains apparent today. Across North America, the church is being reshaped by the Holy Spirit as we struggle trying to prop up the way we have done things for many, years. Yet, despite the immense efforts, in many cases buildings are in disrepair, volunteers becoming harder to find and if they're still here they are on the edge of burn out. Professional ministers are too expensive. Youth are disengaged. The integrity of Christianity is questioned in the wake of deep trauma for some. I know of more than one church that hopes to hang on long enough only so that its members still present may have a church home for their funeral. It's not even that this has all come about in the last year or so, but has been about for decades; now it has become something we cannot ignore.

It's not that we're doing anything wrong. It's just that it's difficult for us to understand and come alongside of what God is up to. Just when we think we have it figured out, God sets off in a new direction. So just as Jesus called his disciples to be ready for something new and different, so too Jesus calls us to be

ready. Phyllis Tickle in her book "The Great Emergence" suggests that it's time for the church to have a giant rummage sale to rid ourselves of the knickknacks and clutter that weigh us down from simply sharing and being God's good news. The question being put before us is something like, *are we ready to let go of our love for the church the way it is in favor of the church God is shaping us to be?*

This is what Jesus was talking about when he said "those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it." The "dying" seed in the ground is course an analogy to the need for our old ways to die in order to make room for the new. If you love your life, your church, your job the way it is today then you will lose it because it will not be the same thing tomorrow that it is today. If you love your children, your spouse, even yourself the way you are or they are today – then tomorrow you will lose them because tomorrow they will be someone different and so will you.

These questions are being asked at all levels of the church, but I believe any change, real change, will come from the grassroots, from people just like us. As we open ourselves to the possibilities with God, even when we're not sure exactly what it looks like, we live into resurrection. We become that seed bursting from the ground in new life.

So do whatever it is you need to do to begin to see and think in a new way. Whether it be sitting in a new place on Sunday or talking with someone you've never talked with before after worship. Maybe it's joining in the Traveling Lent service (1 more to go!) to meet new people, or exploring new partnerships with others. Perhaps it is honest and daring conversations about this congregation and our future.

And know that in it all, God is here among us always ready to usher in a new day. Amen.