

## "To Live is to Change"

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Texts: Psalm 103: 1-14 and Matthew 4: 12-17

"Repent," Jesus says, "for the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near!"

Heard that one before? I'm sure you have, usually with some kind of threat that if you don't, then you aint going to heaven. Ahhhh! It's one of the most misused scripture in our whole Bible. You can relax a bit, for I'm not here to threaten you with hellfire and damnation. The word that we translate as "repent" actually means, "change your mind". Some would translate it as, "turn around". In Greek, the word is *metanoia*: *meta*, meaning "go beyond" and *noia*, meaning "your mind." That sounds easier and less threatening. We talk about change all the time, so if all I have to do is change my mind because the Kingdom is drawing near, well then, all is well!

Because changing your mind is easy, right? Sure it is.

Humans have this allusion that we are quite flexible and willing to

change. But the truth is, we are not much different than anyone else in the animal kingdom. We get stuck in our methods and patterns, and yes, ways of thinking. We often equate our "kingdoms" with the "kingdom of Heaven" and think that if people were just more like us, then all would be well. We don't say it that way, for that would be arrogant, but think about it. In fact, think about change and how much we really do it as individuals and as groups.

We're nearing the end of the election cycle in 2024. I think it is ironic that every election both sides talk about change. It doesn't matter if people are incumbents or challengers, Republican or Democrat, or any other moniker, they all talk about change. They scare with the other teams' changes, or they encourage you that their change is the right kind of change. They know that all of us are restless to some degree, given that our state of mind is not at peace. It is not at peace personally or collectively. Our minds are always going to things that we can fix, change, judge or rearrange. In fact, we're not in a good mind much of the time. We're an anxious bunch, and our elected leaders and others prey on that.

Meanwhile, we know that change is needed. Change is needed in our own lives, in our communities, in our nation, and even in our church. We know that if people refuse to change, then the world will only get worse. We know that if we don't change, our climate will continue to get worse. We know if we don't change, more and more people will fall into poverty, homelessness and become food insecure. We know that if we don't change, then our congregation will not be here 150 years from now. But what needs to change, when it needs to change, and how it needs to change is the hard part.

St. John Henry Newman said, "Here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." That's a very different philosophy than most of us have. Our national approach is to keep in cruise control. The way we do it is the way we do it, and any change is considered dangerous, heretical and new. But in the Gospel we're given a program of change and growth from the beginning. If we don't change, we end up the same at 70 as we were at 17 (Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditations*, January 1, 2024). We all know people like that, don't we? We may even be one of them. Such people aren't very fun to live with. They want to pick and win

fighters. Father Richard Rohr tells us that this is "a lot of what politics is today. The important thing is not the truth or what's good for the whole, but what's good for the small part of which I am a part."

It's easy to pick on politics, since it's so obvious, but what about other areas of our lives? What about our neighborhoods? What about our church? What about our civic groups, friendship groups and our families? Do we get caught up in the small part without regard for what is good for the whole? Do we get so selfish and self-righteous that we simply find another way to avoid change? The holidays are coming...careful of what changes you make. After all, the way I do Thanksgiving is straight out the same way the Pilgrims did it -- complete with using the oven to cook the right bird! See what I mean?

Psychologist Robert Wicks suggests that part of resilience is making a decision to remain open to ongoing growth and change:

Each of us has a range of resilience (the ability to meet, learn from, and not be crushed by the challenges and stresses of life)...Of even more import than the different resiliency ranges people have is their conscious decision to maximize the ways in which they can become as hardy as possible. They may not call this resilience, but it is their ability to be open to life's experiences, and so to learn.

Last week we talked about growing through adversity and that life throws things at us we can't often plan for. And guess what, those things change (there's that word again!) our plans. Change is as real as the sun coming up in the morning and it will happen no matter what. But wouldn't it be better if we made conscious choices to be open to change, to decide what our future is, and to name (as best we can) the direction in which we'd like to go?

In order to move forward in any community, we have to learn how to dialogue, how to forgive, and how to trust, and how to give people the benefit of the doubt. "In the United States," Father Rohr tells us, "our country has become very cynical about truth and love. We hear politicians take oaths to be fair and just leaders and we all know it doesn't mean anything. We expect everybody to be for the truth of their group and their "kingdoms". But Jesus tells us to change our minds and accept the "kingdom" of God, which is what's good for the whole. (*Daily Meditations*, January 1, 2024)"

Ask yourself, "What is the common good?" in each corner of your

life. When you do that, you are doing "kingdom" work. You have to get out of yourself -- to change -- to really accomplish that. That is tough work. Maybe it would just be easier to tell you to repent, for the kingdom has drawn near. Then, you could take a one time act, turn around, keep doing much of what you're doing, and pat yourself on the back.

Love work is harder than that. It moves beyond kingdoms to kin-dom, where everyone and everything is kin to you and to me. Huh...maybe that's why some have changed that word. It might not have anything to do with politics, but might have to do with asking the question, "who is kin to me?" The kin-dom of heaven has drawn near. Change your mind and with it your heart.

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.