

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity on Sunday  
January 27th 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale  
“Coping with Change – Generous and Honest before God”**

Coping with Change! This is surely a fundamental, chronic challenge for the human disposition... for you and me! Before construction began in this church, I spent some time praying to God and talking with others about ways in which the change could be made easier... imagine my surprise to hear from some parishioners that they rather like some aspects of the way it is (in fact, I have heard it said, “It will be difficult to change!”). How quickly status quo becomes accepted... how quickly change becomes unwelcome!

Coping with Change! This is surely a fundamental, chronic challenge for the human disposition... for you and me! There is a coffee shop, not too far from here, which I really enjoy (perhaps love rather too much... the pastries are good!). A few days ago I visited the place and began to feel quite displaced, discomforted... why? All the people serving were new... I did not recognize them nor they me! How quickly status quo becomes accepted... how quickly change becomes unwelcome!

Sermons this Epiphany are looking at the theme “Coping with Change”. I have no doubt that those wise men approaching, entering, leaving the manger scene were radically and magnificently changed... Matthew says it all when he tells us, “They left a different way, a different manner, a different people”. And I have no doubt that these wise men have something to share with us... how to cope with change in a healthy, holy way. We have seen already that the wise men were open to God (above all else), they knew the importance of, the value of, being still (reflective) upon God (staying awhile where Jesus was staying) and today... we observe their generosity and their honesty before God!

In fact, I’m not sure whether “coping with change” is the best phrase to use... it seems to suggest somewhat doom laden and worrisome... perhaps in community with each other, with God, we can be far more bold and speak rather of “embracing change”.

Generosity enables us to cope with change! Those wise men were surely nothing if not generous. They clearly gave of their lives and

their livelihood as they picked up, left and followed the star. They clearly gave of their substance as they presented precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh... and in being generous so they were able to gloriously cope with change.

You see... if we have a meanness, constriction of heart and mind we will tend to hold onto whatever we have. We fear that if we let go of what we have, we will be left with nothing for surely others (even God) are mean like us, lack generosity like us! As those wise men discovered the lavish generosity of God... so they were moved to generosity... and thus could cope, more than cope, with any change.

Walking by the sea shore a traveling preacher charges four men to leave their work, their home, their families; this traveling preacher calls these four men to radical change... they who once worked to catch fish, now will labour "to catch people"... quite a change, yes?

But notice how they cope with these sweeping, far-reaching changes... Simon, Andrew, James and John give themselves to Jesus and then "anything is possible", no change need be feared!

Perhaps here we find a barometer to which we can refer, to discover the health of our soul, the closeness of our walk with the Lord. Are we finding any and all change difficult... this will indicate we are far from the Lord and need do something about it; is change viewed by us as positive, carrying opportunities for growth... then we know "it is well with our soul".

Friends, we need ask God to help us be generous people... in word, in thought, in deed, in love. With this any change can be embraced and can, in time, do us good... without this, even the broken shoelace in the morning will darken the rest of the day!

And, honesty enables us to cope with change! I think this Christmas, more than any other, I was struck by what the wise men had to confront, to face, to accept. Almost at one and the same time their hearts and minds are open to, they see, the presence of pure love, of radiant grace, of alluring goodness and then... they are faced with the evil, the mean, the wicked, the cruel as Herod rants and rages and orders mass infanticide! But without the honest

review of reality... they would not have left “a different way”, they surely would not have coped with change.

As St. Paul writes to his beloved church at Corinth, he makes them face some very unpalatable, uncomfortable truths about themselves... they are marked by division, factionalism, party spirit and in all of this they risk losing the great goodness and great glory of the Gospel. But there is also another truth, another reality, which Paul makes them face... they are indeed “brothers and sisters in Christ”!

But as they face the truth (and Paul surely, as it were, takes their faces and directs them to the truth!) so they can cope with change, the change that is necessary for them to be healthy and whole!

In about ten days Lent begins... this should be a time in which we are honest about ourselves (perhaps both as individuals and as a community) but we need not do this alone for that would likely be a frightening, paralyzing experience... for God who loves us so much, is close by us... helping, supporting, empowering us to change!

The alcoholic in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous will often hear this simple, yet so profound, adage... “Change you must, or drink you will”. Change you must or... drink you will, suffer you will, die you will. From time to time, each of us confronts that which, if left unchanged, will do us harm, will prevent us from becoming the person whom God longs for us to be... “change we must, or drink, suffer, die, shrivel up we will”.

Oh friends let us (with God and in community) embrace generosity and welcome honesty so that we can more than... cope with change! AMEN