

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
on Sunday February 3rd 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale
“Coping with Change – Together With God”**

There are two words which strike fear and consternation, despair and discouragement, in the hearts and minds of any property owner who is engaged in construction or re-building... the two words... CHANGE ORDER.

As soon as those two words appear (CHANGE ORDER) the property owner feels that he/she is moving into uncharted waters where costs will spiral, schedules will lengthen and tempers will become frayed... not surprisingly this often happens in buildings some 150 years old or older!

In his book “Construction Change Orders: Impact, Avoidance, and Documentation” James O’Brien writes, “In a perfect world there would be no change orders... newsflash... there is no perfect construction world”. Here is a book which, even secondhand, is costing \$190!!! I guess it must be necessary, I guess it must be good!

Over the past few weeks, in this season of Epiphany, we have been thinking about Change... that change is inevitable for the essence of all growth is a willingness to make changes; we have been thinking about how we can move from resisting and fearing change, to coping with change to, and with God this is possible, embracing change!

Mr. O’Brien’s book supposedly helps its readers deal with the unwanted reality of change orders; how, at best, to avoid change orders; how, at least, to mitigate their impact.

God’s book, the Bible, helps its readers to accept, to welcome, to embrace change and thus to grow... to discover what for us it means to become “more like Jesus”.

A parishioner this week told me that he comes to church, to worship, to pray, in order to change... “Why else” he quizzically asked, “would anyone go to church?”. Good question... good, good, good question!

The wise men experienced radical change... leaving their home, leaving their plans, leaving their attitudes... no wonder Matthew tell us, in an apparently throw-away line, they returned to their home "by a different way" (Matthew 2:12), in a different manner, with a different attitude.

And these wise men teach us how to embrace change... "they are open to God" (above all else they look for Him to enter their world and their lives), "they are still before God" (they know what it is to stop, to pause, to reflect) and, last week, "they are generous and honest in God" (being generous they have no need to hold tightly, frantically, onto what they have, being honest they realize the need for change). And today we see they are "together with God".

Those men were wise because they knew a truth which sadly seems so difficult for us to grasp, to follow, to accept... they need one another! Together they planned, together they left, together they traveled, together they worshipped, together they left... a different way, a different people!

Friends we cannot, should not, need not... go it alone. When Jesus calls us, he always calls us in community... sometimes we may find this annoying, frustrating but this is how it is... In community the addict is enabled to face change and to be changed; in community the Christian is enabled to face change and to be changed... and it is all by the goodness, glory and power of God!

Consider today's reading from Exodus (24:12-18). A fundamental, basic, sweeping, total change is about to take place for the people of God... they are to receive from God, through Moses, commandments which will protect them from harm and lead them to holiness. How does Moses cope with, embrace this change... well, he surely spends time with God (he cannot go it alone) but he also is wise enough to know he needs community and so he takes with him the young Joshua! The people can no longer expect immediate access to Moses... they are too many, the tasks are too great... who will be the new leader? Wrong question... who will be the new leaders... not one, but two... Aaron and Hur ("Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them"! The change for them was possible for they faced it, embraced it... together!

Consider today's reading from Peter's Second Epistle (1: 16–21). Peter reminds his readers that when he came with the Gospel, when he came to make known "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" this was no Lone Ranger activity... "we did not follow myths... we made known to you... we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty and we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed". All of the most shattering, radical, comprehensive changes that took place as the Gospel was proclaimed were made possible... as men and women lived and shared the Gospel were prepared even to die for the Gospel, in community!

And, consider today's Gospel from Matthew (17: 1–9). Preparing for this profound, intense change... preparing him for his final days, Jesus approaches the Mount of Transfiguration but note... with his special friends... Peter, James and John (probably his most beloved disciple). I do not know whether it is amusing, ironic or both... that we see Jesus who enjoyed, was supported by, the community of the disciples (Jesus – the Son of God) and still we feel that we can go it alone, we really do not need others! Oh why is this? How can this be? Unless, somehow, it be some devilish, wretched plan to keep us from walking the path where this life... and grace... and hope... and change!

The season of Epiphany links Christmas with Lent... it is the season that speaks of change as the cosmic glory of Christmas (God entering into the world, the Word becoming flesh), the glory of Christmas reaches out and touches every aspect of life, of our lives, like some flowing tide changing every grain of sand over which it passes... so that, by Lent, we are ready to change!

Christian, I urge you, I implore you, to seek, to accept, to embrace change this Lent... but do it in community!

Friends, I know that we often fear and resist change... and the reasons are many. But I believe the word for us today from God, is the word that Jesus spoke to his disciples as they were about to leave the mountain changed and sent to a changing world... Matthew 17, verse 7... "The disciples were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid'... then together, with Jesus, they left... ready for change.

AMEN

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