

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia  
Sunday January 13th 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale  
“Coping with Change – Open to God”**

“The one constant is change”... and, friends, today we are clearly, definitively confronted with change!

Walls has been set up within our church – rather a reverse of the Joshua/Jericho story and how I long for the day (not too far away) when we will march around with trumpets and the “wall will come down”.

The altar (and perhaps preacher?) seem dangerously (perhaps impolitely and improperly?) near

And, breaking with primal laws of our denomination, some of us are sitting closer to others than we have ever sat before!

How will we cope with this change (albeit temporary)? How will we cope with the change we will find when once these walls are removed? In fact, how do we will cope with change generally... in a positive, healthy, Christian manner?

Last week, on Epiphany Sunday, we celebrated the fact that God chooses to reveal, unveil, manifest Himself to us! Last week, on Epiphany Sunday, the Wise Men eventually moved down the aisle of this church and reached the manger where the child was lying. Those men (possibly kings, possibly three) returned home, Matthew tell us, by a different route, in a different way, with a different attitude.

The wise men had to cope with change –

they changed the comfort and security of their home for the travail and danger of the road;

they changed their plan and instead of approaching the holy child with an academic disinterest and objectivity they found themselves overcome, overwhelmed with adoration and were unable to remain emotionally distant

and they had a change of heart for they returned to their homes in a different way.

How did these men cope with such phenomenal, fundamental changes? Well, one thing mattered to them above all else... the belief, the thought, that God would enter this world and would enter their lives.

Listen to these words from the book Alcoholics Anonymous (page 25): "The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous". The wise men also believed in this central fact and thus were enabled to cope with, live with, work with change.

Friends, if you or I do cannot also own this statement then we have so much more to receive from, learn from God... "The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous". With this central fact all is possible; without this central fact anything may become too much!

The prophet Isaiah (chapter 42) prepares God's people for change... "the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them". But before he ever speaks of these "new things" he reminds the people how God has entered into their lives and brings light, sight, freedom and purpose.

In the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 10) Peter prepares God's people for change... the Gospel is to be shared far, far, far beyond the walls of Jewish Christians... all the nations, all the Gentiles, are to hear the word and, please God, be saved. And Peter helps his hearers prepare for change as he reminds them of the many ways in which God has intervened, engaged with their lives and will ever continue so to do!

And, in Matthew chapter three, our outré friend, John Baptist, must accept an amazing change... he is asked, compelled, to baptize Jesus though it seems everything in him wishes to resist ("I need to be baptized by you," he says to Jesus, "and do you come to me?"). But almost immediately there is a radical intervention by God in the lives of his servants and thus John is enabled "to cope with change".

The wise men show me so clearly that to cope with change I must have, I must cultivate, one goal, one purpose... to be open to God and ready to see and receive him from moment to moment. With this in mind I can cope with change... all change be it external or internal, transient or permanent, radical or superficial.

I conclude with two verses from the famous hymn "Abide with Me" though I suspect the second verse is largely, if not totally unknown to most of you (as it was to me)...

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;  
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,  
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.  
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

This Lord wishes to enter into our lives and hearts today and with His presence, His companionship we can more than cope with change.

AMEN

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