

Sunday, November 18, 2018

I Samuel 1:4-20

Hebrews 11:11-16

Mark 13: 1-8

Committing to Christ in Changing Times

To begin, I'd like you to watch this short video. It is from Britain's Got Talent and shows quick change artists. Jeki and Ellie.

Wouldn't it be great to get up in the morning and get changed from your pajamas to your daywear that quickly? Or even at night when getting ready for bed. I find that a lot of time is taken each day for these two tasks but these artists make it seem so easy as they change their clothes so quickly. Changes—may be easy in some ways, but often change as we understand them have growing pains!

In our reading from I Samuel, Elkanah a faithful man has two wives Penninah and Hannah. Unable to conceive, Hannah just wants to bring about change in her life by being a mother to a child belonging to her husband Elkanah Elkanah's other wife, Penninah had children and because Hannah did not have any, Penninah often provoked her and upset her. Having two wives at that time was acceptable practise in order to sustain family line. So Hannah pleads to God in an emotional tearful cry and bitter prayer. Eli the priest hear her praying and thought she was drunk. But she wasn't drunk but was pouring out her soul to the Lord, pleading for a child, pleading for change in her life and to improve her relationship with her husband and the other wife.. She and Elkanah loved each other as he often gave her two portions of meat to build up her strength but she just did not get pregnant. After her emotional prayer, God did bless her and in time she did conceive and gave birth to Samuel naming him this because "she asked the Lord for him." And Hannah did fulfil her promise to present him to the Lord to serve his people. Change—Hannah needed a child in her life and sought this change as a way of fulfilling her life.

How often do we seek change or is it that change seems to find us?

The UCC is going through governance structural change and there are many more questions than answers about the regional structure and how we as a community of faith will be in relationship with it. Changes in how we see ourselves as a church will occur and so as a community of faith we too need to look ourselves and see how we might change our ministry and focus on outreach and inviting others to experience Christ in new ways.

Change is all around us—for you are not the same person as you were yesterday- you're one day older and wiser. And no doubt as you looked in the mirror this morning, you certainly do not appear the

same as you did a year ago or even 10 years ago! Sometimes we might even wonder who that person in the mirror really is! Only our pets really know us for who we are--- the ones who feed and care for them. But they too change as the years go by and they grow older!

Change is all around us but what is most important is how we grasp the changes. It is one hundred years ago, since World War I ended, but what has occurred in these years has had a profound impact on what we consider standard and normal today. Prosthetics, infection control, Kleenex tissues, and even minor surgical practises were improved since the Great War. Even in these last 10 years the psychological impact of PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is still being experimented upon and understood. This was once called shell shock and those who had it were to just change back to who they were before witnessing the horrors of war. But as we know, this is not the case! Changes are all around us, and are inevitable, but how you respond to those changes is what we are considering today.

Hannah wanted her life changed. She cried, she ate extra meat, she was provoked and angered, and what did she do? She didn't feel sorry for herself, no. She prayed to God; she pleaded to God, she even made a deal with God—you give me a son, he'll serve you later on. She just wanted to serve God this way—as a beloved wife and a mother.

When we see change happening around us how do we respond? With anger, bitterness, resentment, or even hate? Do we embrace the change—most often the answer is no. But when circumstances are dire of course we want something better and improved soon.

People facing crises- like war, famine, storms, damaging winds know that in order to be safe, decisions for change have to be made—leaving a country, seeking shelter, looking for safe havens all are changes. But when we consider these in our lives—do we just go with the flow, or do we ask God for guidance and strength in those tough moments?

In our reading from Mark 13 Jesus and his disciples are leaving the temple when they remark about the building itself and how amazing its structure really was. They have a sense of awe at what people were able to make by building the temple. No doubt you've done this when travelling and seeing the sights of amazing skyscrapers or architectural wonders, or even amazing landscape tie-ins with houses. You might even wonder how was this built or even possible? Jesus probably was amazed at these buildings as well. He was a carpenter by trade and probably thought that the woodwork inside the temple was outstanding for the time period—after all they did not have any power tools to assist in the workmanship.

But Jesus was different because he looked at the buildings and marvelled at them and yet stated that at a time to come, not one stone of these buildings will be left as you see them now. There

will come a time of destruction and change for everything has a limited lifespan. And we know this is true unless care and upkeep of historic buildings is done- rooves and foundations will crumble. But if you recall Jesus also pointed out the gift of the poor widow to the temple as being valuable because she gave all she had. So what is it that we are to see and experience?

Jesus is stating that when buildings and relationships change; when all seems to be lost, there is something new that is emerging. Through the pains of childbirth—babies are born and the pain is soon forgotten. Through the aftermath of war, lessons are learned around human behaviour as a whole. And even after disasters, such as windstorms, tsunamis, fires, and droughts, preventative measures are put in place in case of a similar event re-occurring or how people respond to these events may be changed.. Change leads to newness of life. Loss leads to new normal and while nothing lasts forever, something new is always emerging.

When we commit to Jesus- we can count on him to be with us each step of our life's journey. In those moments when we want to celebrate and praise God for his many blessings or when we want to get angry or be filled with self-pity and want to blame God. We can count on Jesus—he's been there, done that and is willing to help us through it all. By faith Abraham and Sarah lived in a foreign land with the hope of a child, yet there were many years they did not have any children. But in time things changed. When all things were ready, God enabled the birth of Isaac to bless them.

But what about us? Quick changes are often something amazing to watch. But to keep up with the changes of creation and how we relate to them calls us to hold on to something or Someone who is constant. As Christians, we hold on to Jesus who is the same yesterday today and forever. We hold on to Jesus who enables us to look to the past and see the world as it once was filled with possibility and to look to the future with this same potential of dreams, thinking big and even preparing ourselves and others for the future and what it might have in store.

After all it was once thought impossible to scale the highest mountain, to walk on the moon, to communicate while in the street or moving in a vehicle at top speeds. Yet all of these humans have accomplished. What we need to do is prepare for the next changes. Yes there will be birth pains but something new will emerge. Just like our church- our families- our schools our education systems and even and especially us as individuals.

We sing of God's breath giving us life, but we must be reminded that even as the seasons change, there will be rebirth. There will be something new emerging. And in all of this, we have to have hope. For this is what is foundational to our faith. Jesus will guide us, no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in. We just need to believe. We need to have faith and we need to commit to Christ in

these changing times because he is the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus will guide us into our changes in life, and he encourages us and supports us as we live with the hope that one day we will be with him for all of eternity.

Committing to Christ today enables us to face the challenges and changes of tomorrow. This we believe because by faith one day we will be called to our heavenly home. So we need not be afraid but to have hope in Jesus. For he is the Saviour and our hope for all our tomorrows.

PRAYER

God we know that things are changing all around us and we are often challenged to keep up. Yet we also that we are able to be in relationship with Jesus and when we do we have nothing to fear. For he will guide us and give us the strength and courage we need to face everything. Enable us O God to commit to Christ as we face the changes and challenges of these times in order that he may guide us and direct us to where we hope to be—in heaven for all of eternity with you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.