

The Times, They Are A Changin'
LEXINGTON PRESBYTERIAN Church
Mark 2: 21-28 Isaiah 43: 16-21
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It was Friday afternoon, two weeks ago. I was alone in the church. The phone rang about 3:30. I didn't recognize the number. Sometimes I don't answer unless it gives the name of the caller. I answered the phone anyway. The man on the other end of the phone explained that he was stranded at the Lee Hi Truck Stop but he needed a place to stay for the night. "Could the church help?"

I knew the church could help because of RARA, we have access to motel rooms at a local motel when someone turns up stranded. It's usually just for one night, and that is exactly what this man needed. He explained later that he had not had a place to stay the night before, so he spent the whole night walking between the 7-11 and WalMart, all the while fearful that he would get arrested for loitering. And not sleeping at all. He also admitted that he had been in our local jail. But he insisted the police force was generous since they let him back into his impounded truck to collect his belongings. I tried to empathize with him about his prison stay but he only admitted that "it" was his own fault. He had gotten a ride to WalMart after he called me so I decided to pick him up there. We went into Walmart where he picked out a sub and a bottle of milk for his dinner (because he had finally gotten control of his blood sugar) and the church paid for it. Then I drove him to the motel on the other end of town, where he was given a room, paid for by RARA. And for that night, he had much more peace and less fear than he had the night before.

I related some of this story to the staff at our weekly Wednesday staff meeting. You might imagine their response. Most of it was on the lines of "You should not have done that" "One of these times it is not going to turn out as well for you" and "You don't know how to keep safe boundaries."

Well, Jesus didn't do well at keeping boundaries either.

In the gospel of Mark, we find Jesus and his disciples walking through a field of wheat on the Sabbath. They are hungry and taking some of the grain, they have breakfast. I suppose it would be like Grape nuts cereal – it certainly was whole grain. But word gets back to the Pharisees who are looking for any excuse to bring Jesus down. However Jesus counters their accusations with the story about King David eating the holy bread reserved for the high priest. Jesus spots early on that the Pharisees (and the most of us) start liking the rule more than the reason for the rule. Jesus said to the Pharisees "Sabbath was made for humans; not humans for the Sabbath." In other words, as Eugene Peterson in the Message phrases it, "The Sabbath was made to serve us, we weren't made to serve the Sabbath." The Sabbath rules were to "keep the Sabbath holy." Many came to interpret that no work could be done on the Sabbath. By reaching out and gathering a handful of grain to eat, the strict interpretation of that rule was that Jesus was "reaping grain" – certainly something that could be considered work on the Sabbath. And that was a sin.

Isaiah the prophet saw the people of Israel as they were living in Babylon; away from home, away from the Temple, away from the ways in which God had made for them in the Holy

Land. His words seem consistent with their very way of life: he says don't remember. Remembering is the cornerstone of Jewish belief. In fact we echo the thought as we observe the Lord's Supper – "Do this in remembrance of me." What Isaiah is saying is don't get so caught up in what happened in the past that you miss what God is doing with your present and your future. Isaiah saw that the Israelites had become so entrenched in their lives in Babylon that they had forgotten the hope that they had when they lived in Jerusalem and Judah; the hope that they had that they daily worshiped and praised the one true God, Yahweh. Isaiah is trying to prepare people for a "brand new way" to return to their former faithfulness.

Boundaries, rules, can get in the way of doing God's work. Boundaries can become barriers to seeing the direction of God's will. In my prophetic voice, I am asking you to not let the glory of the past of this congregation become a hindrance to the glory this congregation can give to God in the future. In the next year, or two or three or four, the professional and support staff of this church will be if not completely, vastly new. With new staff comes new visions, new avenues of exploring God's will for this church. "Do not hold onto things of old" but be open to the new ways in which God is moving in the life of this congregation. When Jesus said to Mary, as they stood in the garden outside the tomb, "Do not hold onto me," he knew his resurrection was to come; a new thing that changed every sinner's heart from that moment forward. Mary had to let Jesus go so that the world might know the mighty power of God at work in the world through the resurrection of Jesus.

We must be very circumspect about what we hold dear about this church and why we hold it dear. Is it because of the comfort for ourselves because we like, no love, "the way it has always been?" As we hold on things that comfort us, we must ask, "how does this honor God so that all may praise God" or am I just holding onto this for me? This is what I love about being Presbyterian. No one person gets to decide what honors God. We work in bodies of people – committees, small groups, classes, the Session. Yes, I know that that work is much harder and more frustrating when you work in a group, but truly the hard work of discerning God's will is how God moves us from stagnation to praise.

When God and Job finally talk, in the great "Where were you when I formed the world?" speech, God cautions Job to "gird his loins" for what he is about to experience. Although Job does not desert his God, it is very hard for him to recall the glory he felt as he sits in sackcloth and ashes when his life was completely perfect. So too I want you all to "gird your loins" for what is in the near future for this church. Change is coming – as fast as next month and I don't think it will stop there.

The Bible is a book about how God changes people, places and all the conditions that make up human relationships with God. It is a story with a checkered past. And no doubt there will be missteps along the way into our future. But regardless of whom we are, or what we do, God is the ever present constant in our lives.

God is about to do a new thing. My advice – Don't get in God's way.