

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid
 The Second Sunday after the Epiphany | Year C | John 2:1-11
 St. Alban's Church, Sinking Spring, PA
 January 20th 2019

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Life is change. We may not like to think that that's true, but we see it all the time. In every season of the year, the earth spins round the sun, and our weather changes. In every season of our lives, people come in and out of our acquaintance, we grow and adapt the way we live, and our everyday experiences change with us. Clothing, style, what's popular, what's not, technology, what's possible, what we're capable of, how we choose to treat one another -- all of these things are different given enough time. Perhaps one of the only true constants in our lives is change.

It may feel strange, then, that our God does not change. We see this from all over our tradition. In our scripture, the author of Hebrews attests that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Elsewhere, many have said that if you want to know what a church believes, look to what it sings. One of the better known hymns of our Anglican tradition is *Immortal, Invisible, God only wise* which tells the same story, that it is we who change, not God:

*To all life Thou givest, to both great and small;
 In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
 We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
 And wither and perish, but nought changeth thee.*

And then the prayer book -- every week we continue to acknowledge God's identity in the creed, that in who God is -- true God from true God, the one who is eternal -- there is consistency.

All this often has led many parts of the Church -- the Episcopal branch included -- to think that we, like God, can avoid the changes of this life, which has resulted in the Church typically being allergic to the idea of change. The thinking usually goes along the lines of "if God doesn't change, why should we?" But our tradition also knows better -- only God is God, of course -- but also because we are not a tradition that simply buries its proverbial head in the sand to avoid tough topics or looks for easy answers to deep questions. If the question is then "why must so much change occur in our lives for good or for bad?", we might do what Episcopalians have done for centuries and turn to our prayers -- not so that we'll find quick answers, but that we might find the beginning of understanding.

The particular prayer I'm thinking of came up at our Health Series lecture this past Thursday night as a few of us were chatting afterwards. After a lovely group breathing exercise, pretty much all of us were realizing how relaxed we had become, how *unconcerned* we had become. That kind of meditation is a natural partner to contemplative prayer, especially given the many worries and changes of our lives that tend to overwhelm us. So perhaps after some quiet moments of contemplation, of the many changes of our lives even over the scope of just one day, it might just be helpful to pray this prayer:

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness-

That God does not change is a sign of God's faithfulness -- we couldn't imagine believing in a God whose faithfulness changed, after all, or who gave up on us. And as for us, we will not always know why or even when changes occur in ourselves, but we will always know that it is God's eternal presence and God's unchanging self and love that we can rest

upon. We do know something about change, though -- because the truth of the Gospel and the truth of God's promise to his people is not only that change will occur but that it must occur.

Even if God doesn't change, there is a wealth of scripture and tradition that shows us that God is often an *agent of* change -- the God who turns the shadow of death into the morning, the God who creates and renews our hearts, the God who transforms our minds that we might know what is good, acceptable, and perfect. And of course, as we've heard in this morning's Gospel lesson from John, Jesus also knows a thing or two about making things change.

In our reading today, Jesus has moved on from his baptism and started his ministry, with the setting being a wedding in Cana of Galilee. There are not many other occasions in life that change us as much as a wedding can, and that Jesus' first miraculous sign -- a transformation of water into wine -- took place at a wedding was no mistake.

When two people are married, everything changes -- two lives somehow and miraculously combine into one while each of the two still retain the wonderful aspects and traits that make them each unique. The couple take on a great responsibility as well, certainly to one another but also in another way that often surprises them -- that being a sacramental responsibility, that they themselves are a sacrament of God, that their love for one another is an outward and visible sign of God's love for the whole world. They promise in their vows to become a sign of God's love, of the love that never changes, of the faithfulness that never wavers.

Maybe then it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus chose to reveal his glory here, at a wedding, at the ultimate moment of change for these two people and a celebration of God's unchanging love. John tells us this was Jesus' first sign -- there are seven altogether, the last of which being the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Each of the signs points onward, to what will happen later in Jesus' story, to the greatest act of change in all of history -- to the resurrection. And in doing so, God shows us just how much our lives really will change -- from temporal to eternal, from sorrow to joy, from death to life again.

For this is God's promise to us, God's promise that though the greatest change -- our resurrection life -- is yet to come, we have smaller signs of this change that have started even now. Jesus changing water into wine works the same way -- it's impressive enough, for sure, but it is only the start of what God can do. Because it is impossible after encountering God *not* to change. And if God can change water into wine, imagine what he has done and will continue to do for you.

God's unchanging promise of faithfulness changes those who believe in him, bringing us more into the selves God has created us to be. So how we act changes -- Jesus' disciples begin to see other people not as strangers but as *he* sees them, as a neighbor, as one deserving of our respect and attention, as God's own beloved. What we value changes -- because we follow Christ we know that the first will be last and the last will be first; our actions then go outward first, looking to the needs of others before looking to our own. And even how we live and die changes -- at burials we pray many prayers, but at the Eucharist we remember before God that "to your faithful people, life is changed, not ended." We are no longer under the same confines and restrictions of sin and death but made free by Christ Jesus -- if anyone is in Christ, says St. Paul, there is a new creation, and there cannot be new creation without change.

That we change is part of what it means to live as God's own people. As we continue to celebrate Christ's Epiphany, the great light that came into the world to change it forever for the good, may we ever remember God's unfailing and unchanging love for us that we may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory.

Amen.