

Sermon Series – Threats to Wholeness – October 8, 2017

“Uncomfortable Change”

Good morning Church – today is the final message in our series on “Threats to Wholeness”. The past two Sundays, Ps. Steve has been speaking on **“Spiritual Attack”**, and today we conclude this series with the topic **“Uncomfortable Change”**.

While uncomfortable change does not necessarily fall under the category of spiritual attack, it can sometimes be that, and it most certainly can be a threat to wholeness, and affects everyone of us, with ever increasing regularity, if not constantly today.

Let me begin by asking you the question...

- What makes change uncomfortable? And why is it that we struggle with change so much?

- Can anyone tell us what makes change so difficult?

I think you will agree with me that **one of the biggest issues related to uncomfortable change is** coping with the uncertainty that it brings, and dealing with the unknowns that surround change.

Over the course of the past few weeks, and during this series on “Threats to Wholeness”, we have been rocked by a number of shocking calamities and disasters, whether they be man-made or natural:

- Hurricane Maria that hit Puerto Rico causing massive widespread devastation.
- Continued escalation in the potentially catastrophic situation with North Korea.
- And then just days ago the horrific slaughter of so many innocent lives attending a concert in Las Vegas.

These have dominated the headlines in the media on a global scale, and there are many more. It is difficult for us to fully consider what it must be like to be situated close or near to North Korea right now. Places like South Korea, Southern China, Japan, and Guam. These are situations where people are seeking to try to understand these recent catastrophic events, and the impact, or potential impact, of uncomfortable, and perhaps unbearable change, and the resulting fear that comes from that uncertainty and the unknowns.

There is also the terror that is instilled in people because they don't know where the next natural disaster will be. Where the next missile will be aimed at? Will it be nuclear armed or not? Or where the next massacre will take place?

Many concertgoers are asking the question, which one will be next?

Then on a much more localized, and smaller scale, consider what has dominated our media and conversations:

The still unanswered question as to who will govern our country, even though the election was over two weeks ago?

Much closer to home, as a church community, we are now facing the realities of uncomfortable change with the church building renovations commencing. I am sure you have all noticed the construction fencing that has been erected on the property.

This is certainly nothing like what people in other parts of the world are dealing with, but none-the-less, uncomfortable change. Why is this so? Again I think part of the answer lies in the reality that despite the best planning and preparations

we cannot control all of the outcomes, and there are uncertainties and unknowns that we will encounter as this change happens.

Consider for a moment what uncomfortable change means for you personally...

We actually have **people in our service this morning** who are wonderful examples to us of how we must adjust to uncomfortable change. I am talking about our folk who would normally be at the 9am Classic service in the Chapel, but because of the renovations that have started in the Jubilee Hall, and the old church building, they are joining with us here for our contemporary services.

They had a choice. They could have chosen **not** to come to church while the renovations are going on, but they did not. They chose to come and join us here for the contemporary services, even though they like, and prefer, the more classical style of worship service.

I want to acknowledge and commend them this morning. Let's express our appreciation and welcome them warmly to our service this morning. I also want to encourage you to take this special opportunity while we have them joining us for the next couple of weeks to meet them and chat with them after the service.

Interestingly, many of them fall into the older or senior category. We have much to learn from our older, more mature people in our church community, for they have acquired a great deal of wisdom through life experiences, and journeys of faith, that span many, many, decades.

This reminds me of a very interesting survey that was conducted more than a decade ago, but I am sure the results would be similar even if done today. There was only one common denominator in the more than 10,000 people that were surveyed; and there was only one question that was asked! All the people surveyed were, or had to be, over 95! And the only question asked was:

If you had the opportunity to live your life over again, what would you do differently? It is a really intriguing question, and one worthy of asking some of our own people in our church community that have lived a lot longer than you or I have.

Let me leave that with you as a challenge to ask that question and then listen carefully to their answers.

Can I ask: Do we have any people here this morning who are over 95? What about 90? Or 80? Seize the opportunity to discover some wonderful wisdom from our more senior people in our church community.

So back to the survey, and the question that was asked...

If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?

Three answers came up consistently:

1. I would have taken more risks
2. I would have given more time and money to meaningful causes
3. I would have spent more quality time with family and friends

Never once did the more than 10,000 people surveyed give this answer:

I would have worked harder to earn more money!

Now, let's see if the answers from those people, all over 95, have any relevance to the passage of scripture we will look at in a minute. But before we do let me ask you this...

What has been the hardest thing you have had to face or deal with in your life? Why was that?

[Let me share a personal story from our own experience...]

Many times the hardest things we have to deal with relate to “change” and the “unknown”.

Many of you have had to face unknowns, uncertainties, and confront major change.

There are some of you who right now are dealing with uncertainties and the unknown. They could be:

- The challenges of coming to a new country, and all that that involves such as learning a new language.
- Preparing for a major exam but not knowing what exactly you will be tested on.
- Awaiting the results of medical tests.
- Between jobs and unsure about what the future will look like.
- We could make a very long list.

Do you think the Bible has anything to say about these very real challenges?

During my own study and reflection I have discovered that there is some very relevant and applicable scripture that can help us as we seek to respond to change in our lives and in dealing with the uncertainties in life. In the Old Testament we find, what has been described, [even by some renowned theologians], as a very confusing and rather obscure book. Do you know the one I am talking about?

Yes – The Book of Ecclesiastes – a book written by a wise old teacher, near the end of his life...

This book has even been described as “the black sheep of the Bible”, and “the book that was written while the Holy Spirit wasn’t looking”!

For a very long time I put it in the “too hard basket”, and did not go near it!

However, now I find it a fascinating reflection on life, and while some of it is still difficult to understand and somewhat dark, there are some wonderful truths and incredible insights there for us that are truly remarkable and relevant for us.

As you read the whole of Ecclesiastes it is very much like the weather of the past few weeks. The day can start off sunny with just a few clouds and then the dark clouds roll in and there is thunder and lightning, and heavy rain, sometimes even hail, and then the black clouds depart and the sun comes bursting through again. Let me take you to a place where the sun does come bursting through and warms us...

This wise old teacher is reflecting back on his life and is trying to answer the question... What has life taught me? What have I learned? More importantly, what have I learned about God?

If you have your Bibles, on your device, or in the pews, or on your chairs, turn with me to Eccl. Chapter 11:1-6. We will also have it projected for you. Let me read it to you...

Ecclesiastes: 11:1-6

What did you discover about this passage? If you are like me, on reading that first verse you are asking yourself... What on earth is the writer talking about?...

Verse 1. Cast your bread upon the waters... What is that all about?...

Another fascinating aspect of this passage is that 3 times in the first 6 verses he repeats a phrase.

Did you catch it?

It is the phrase “you do not know”. Repetition in scripture is to stress or emphasize an important point... Even at the end of his life this wise old teacher

says there is much I still do not know. BUT, even when I don't know I need to make a response. We need to exercise faith.

And so we find 3 action words, or verbs that should guide us when we find ourselves in situations when we just don't know.

These three key words are: Cast, Give, and Sow

Now allow me to give you my interpretation, based on my reading of the passage, and a number of commentaries on this passage and the book:

Cast – Be willing to take risks

Give – Be generous with what you have

Sow – Be diligent in all that you do

Would you allow me to speak to you with my “International Ministries” Pastor hat on for a moment?

- I believe we need to reflect the wider community we are apart of
- An integrated model of a multi-cultural community
- (We have been approached to start separate ethnic services)
- Celebrate diversity – Build Community (results of survey we did)
- Here is my concern... While we are making progress, we still struggle
- So why is this difficult? Is there a fear of change, uncomfortable change?
- My challenge to you, to me, to us is: Let's take some risks! Let's be generous with what we have! Let's be diligent in all that we do!

Now please also allow me to address our younger people for a moment...

Change affects us all – no one can escape it! As a younger generation, and the millennials, you are encountering change at a more rapid pace than I, and many of us have and will ever experience. You too, are facing unknowns, and uncertainties. Uncertainties like the results of exams, and assignments, whether I should do further study or seek employment? What university should I apply to?

What are the biggest challenges you face as they relate to change?

Uncomfortable Change?

Let me encourage you to take a risk and talk to some in our church community who are older, and ask them a question like... If you have the opportunity to live your life over again what would you do differently?

We have a choice when faced with uncertainty, change, and the unknown... We can freeze in fear, or we can move forward in faith.

Faith in God knowing He has a plan, a purpose for each of us that is the very best plan for our lives.

And that will mean:

- Taking risks
- Giving generously with what we have
- Working and serving diligently, being wise with the use of our time

Finally, let me leave you with a verse from the Book of Hebrews.

By contrast with the 3 “Do not knows” from the Book of Ecclesiastes, we find the writer of the Book of Hebrews, also a wise teacher, inspired by the Holy Spirit, encouraging us with the amazing truth and promise that offers us the ULTIMATE CONSTANT IN A WORLD FULL OF CHANGE...

Hebrews 13:8 reads: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”.

What a beautiful thought. Even in the midst of uncomfortable change, perhaps even unbearable change, when dealing with the major uncertainties, and a

myriad of unknowns, Jesus is our Constant, our Rock when the sea is swirling around us.

So as we all continue in this journey of faith, let's not freeze in fear, but move forward in faith, being willing to take risks, being generous with what we have, and being diligent in all that we do.

Because God is more concerned with our Character than our Comfort!

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your Word, and for the startling truths embedded in it. Thank you that it is as relevant today as it has always been. Thank you for this wise old teacher who while being very honest and transparent acknowledging that even at the end of his life there was still much he did not know, what he did know was that in the midst of change, uncertainty and facing the unknown, the best way to respond is by being willing to take risks, being generous with what we have, and being diligent in all that we do.

Father I pray for each one here that they too will grow in their understanding of the fullness of the knowledge of God, and your son Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever.