



At A Distance – Sunday June 21st – Pentecost 3

“Change Hurts/ The Jesus Sword”

I can clearly and distinctly remember my family's elders saying often, "I feel a change in the weather coming, my rheumatism is acting up". Or, "Snow's coming, my shoulder hurts, and that shoulder of mine is never wrong". I used to think that was a lot of Elder pseudo-wisdom until I found out differently as I became an Elder myself. I too, now, can predict the changes in the weather by the deep aching in my joints, telling me that indeed another change is in the wind. Here in Washington where the weather may change two or three times a day, my "Rheumatiz" as the Elders called it sometimes, always seems to be acting up. I have come to the painful realization that "change hurts."

Plain and simple: change hurts. We don't like it. We don't like anything about change. We say we do, often giving some beautiful lip service to it; but deep in our bones, our joints, our sinew, our minds, spirits and soul, we profoundly hate it when things change, and often we do whatever we can to avoid it.

As humans, we love equilibrium, steady-state conditions, predictability, smoothness, changelessness. I believe that we have some sort of genetic predisposition to sameness. Odd though, that it seems that nature is all about change, thrives on change, seeks change, randomness and entropy. Throughout the generations, with all the times we humans had to deal with change, you would think we would be better at it...that we would be more comfortable with it. But just like the weather changes now challenge our bodies, social and spiritual changes all around us have the capacity to challenge our souls to our very core.

Change hurts! Stretching hurts! Change is, by its very nature, disruptive and challenging. Incremental change is sometimes more tolerable for us, but swift and dramatic change always seems to be traumatic. It has always been so, and it seems the challenges of today's changes are no exception. From the 1st Century

words of our beloved Gospel today, to folksingers Peter, Paul and Mary's song in 1960, "These times, they are a changin'..."and that the changes will be divisive and traumatic.

Jesus said, ***“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”***

Radical words from a social revolutionary.

Jesus was and still is...a radical, a social and religious revolutionary. Calling into question all that was believed to be true during His time and ours. Rocking the status-quo. Shaking the steady state equilibrium of his society and ours to the core. The change that Jesus catalyzed was not gentle, or incremental or linear. It was demonstrative, turbulent and wrenching. Separating the Jewish society of His day, symbolically cleaving nation, community, clan, family and individuals with his sword of new ways of thinking and acting and living and loving. The Jesus Way caused disruption for the steady state society of the 1st Century Jews. Jesus challenged everything that was being heard in the synagogues and in the temple. Jesus' street teachings and learnings were rapidly challenging and changing the old ways of thinking and believing...and change hurts.

Societies, religions, nations, communities, clans, families and individuals do not readily or easily give up that which has sustained them, defined them, soothed them for generations. We fight change tooth and nail, door-to-door, life and death until we are faced with a new reality that finally we can no longer ignore, turn from or battle against. The Jesus Way of love and community, the ***“primitive Christianity”*** of Jesus is just such a radical view that churches and faith communities over time have fought almost to their spiritual death to ignore. Our so-called and self-defined Christian churches certainly did their best to ignore the Jesus Way when they embraced such dramatically "un-Jesus-like" ways as: The Doctrine of Discovery by which "Christian" pope declared infallibly that indigenous people were not even human and that it was right, good and holy to claim their lands for “civilization and the church.” That a seemingly Christian church could embrace slavery and segregation. That black and brown and red soldiers would stand and fight in 2 World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and then be welcomed home to the stark realities of segregated bathrooms and drinking fountains, restaurants and yes, churches. Christians that would stand against

women's rights when Jesus himself demonstrated the open and welcoming behaviors to grant leadership and dignity to his women disciples. The systematic and almost total annihilation of indigenous cultures by the "missionary schools," standing silent when we should be speaking. Ignoring the LGBTQ community's knocking at the door of our churches. Being so focused on our unborn children that we do not see the children we already have dying in our streets from abandonment, exploitation, hunger and greed and abuse. Change is hard!

But please remember this Saints...Jesus came to bring change. Jesus came and brought his sword as Matthew says today. But to do what? To hack and slash through society, culture and society rendering heartless collateral damage in his wake? Perhaps, but that is not the Jesus that I know.

The Jesus that I know, would use that sword of division more like a surgical scalpel. To gently, expertly, surgically and lovingly excise whatever spiritual tumors may have grown on Jesus' gift that he has given us. This beautiful spiritual "stem cell" of "Primitive Christianity."

A stem cell is an amazing biological entity. A cell with almost universal potential to develop into any other type of cell that is needed; to develop and adapt as necessary to sustain the body. Need more brain tissue? Stem cells can transform into brain. More skin needed? Stem cells are on the job almost magically transforming themselves into skin. Amazing omni-potential entities of change, these stem cells. But sometimes these stem cells get the message scrambled, get mixed up along the way, they can biochemically go awry, turning into tumors...fast growing cells that have no functionality; dermoid...sacks of cells out of place...teeth and hair and bone where something different and functional and healthy should be growing.

And so, Jesus gave us this stem cell of Primitive Christianity, containing the DNA encoded to read, "Love one another, as I have loved you." Sometimes the stem cell of primitive Christianity has grown well and as intended, creating and sustaining healthy spirit and healthy church. Other times, it has gone horribly wrong theologically, spiritually and institutionally. I believe the sword that Jesus brings us today is that healing sword, that accurate, precise and loving tool of surgery...to remove what is painful, debilitating, unhealthy, hurtful and hateful in ourselves and in our institutions. The Jesus Sword is a healing tool, not a weapon

of destruction. Yes, unfortunately Saints, change hurts. But once we have made these changes and Saints, they are different and many and varied for each of us, then we can move forward yet again...healthy and whole, to fulfill the many and varied and beautiful Vision Quests of our lives. To again walk in the Jesus Way...respecting and loving one another "As People." Amen/Aho

