**Coronado Community Church**

“No Matter How It Is Now”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

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Last week a friend and I were talking together about how life is, how it can be great but also really difficult at times. I recalled that early on in ministry I thought I might be a pretty fair counselor because I enjoyed listening to people tell the stories of their lives… the happy parts and the difficult parts. But after a few years in the ministry, and lots of difficult stories, I was less eager to dive into the depths of people’s lives, because there is a lot of pain there. Everyone carries has it. Some share it more readily than others, but everyone has it.

After 20 years I had a significant collection of counseling experiences where great pain was shared. There were losses through death, internal family problems of estrangement, abuse, divorce, loss of health, loss of job and income, addiction to alcohol and drugs and everything that goes with that, isolation and loneliness, mental health problems… the list goes on.

 There is a consistent pattern in all of the difficulties. No matter how intense, or how depressing, or how hopeless, or how painful, or how impossible to escape… there is this principle which is true in all situations. It is this… *No matter how it is for you right now… it is going to change.*

Change in life is one of God’s primary operating principles. It can be good, it can be bad, but you can count on it - by God - things will not stay like they are… things will change.

Let’s break this down…

Think of the smallest things… molecules and atoms are what I learned about so many years ago. Now we know about quarks, leptons, and neutrinos. What do we know about them? They are always in motion… always moving.

Now think of the biggest things… the planets, stars, galaxies. What do we know about them? They are always moving.

Everything from the smallest particles known to us to the largest objects known to us is moving. Never still. Never stays the same.

What can we learn from that? Movement… change… is a basic operating principle of the universe… which also means that this dynamic is absolutely true for your life.

*things will not stay like they are… things will change*

If you are dealing with pain or difficulty or challenge that you think is beyond your ability to cope, stick around…it’s going to change. You can’t say how, you can’t say when, but I can stand here before God and you and promise that whatever the dynamics are of your life right now, things will change.

One of Karen and my favorite things to do is walk on the beach. Anyone else like that? We call it *sand therapy.* The best walks are by the water’s edge when there aren’t as many people around as there are now, but almost anytime is good.

We especially like walking at low tide when there is a vast expanse of hard packed, wet sand. The waves have reached their end and there is the slow movement of the water, in and out… it shimmers in reflected sunlight. Beautiful.

Yet in that same place, at another time, will come huge crashing storm surf and it will be dangerous if not deadly, to be standing in the same spot.

But either way … whether there are little ripples of shimmering water or huge crashing storm surf (and everything in between) … the waves never stop… they just keep coming. And that’s how change is in life, we may enjoy it, or not notice it, or get pounded by the weight of it; probably all of the above at one time or another… it just keeps coming.

Change is not always welcome in our lives. I’m not going to argue for it or against it. It’s a principle of God… of the Creation… of the Universe. It just is.

However… the good news is that we have choices about change. Whether it is sought and welcome or it is unsought and unwelcome, we have choice in how we deal with it.

Our scripture passage concerns life and change and choice, too. It is found in the Book of Deuteronomy, it represents the words of Moses spoken to the Hebrew people as they were about to enter the Promised Land.

Those people had been slaves in Egypt and they were glad for the change that liberated them from the bondage they had endured. But there were new challenges. They had to leave their homes. They had to travel. It was desert… it was hot… they didn’t have much food or water. It looked so desperate that at one point the people said *let’s go back… at least in Egypt we knew what to expect.*

Many times we choose the misery of problems we know to the uncertainty that comes with change.

The concern expressed by those ancient people, was for their future well-being. They thought they were stuck where they were… that things weren’t going to change. They wanted to go back to Egypt where there were meals and a roof over their heads. But things always change.

We have choices to make in life – lots of choices. The guiding principle, the divine principle, the positive flow of the universe, is to choose life.

In the case of those ancient Hebrews, choosing life meant prosperity in the Promised Land … they didn’t have it in that moment… but it came.

Those ancient Israelites, and all of us, arrive at crossroads in the journeys of our lives.

We can take the high road or the low road;

We can turn right or turn left;

We can live in the right place yet still not live in the right way;

We have choice about where we will go, what we will do, and how we will conduct ourselves.

Some of the choices are better for us than others.

Some choices lead to life.

Some choices lead to death.

That’s Deuteronomy. That’s God. That’s the Universe. You choose how you deal with change in your life… because something new is coming your way.

This calls for another telling of the story of **the Angel of the Archives**! It is a story I like to tell often, because the truth of it helps with our choices.

So… up in heaven in the throne room where the ‘old man’ (that’s what we affectionately call God) with his long white beard sits on his throne; Jesus is seated on his right side; there is a small chair on God’s left. And in it sits the angel of the archives.

Whenever a person is faced with a big choice in life, and prays for God to give them the answer, God turns to the angel of the archives.

The angel then scurries over to the nearby door and steps into a room that is tall and narrow. There are slots built into the walls that go 20 feet into the air, and in each of the slots is a set of blueprints. There is a ladder on wheels that the angel of the archives can push around the walls and climb up to reach into the right slot for the necessary set of blueprints, and then scurry down to open them up and find where, in the blueprint of life, the supplicant is and whether – according to the blueprints of their life - they are about to choose the right or the wrong decision…

*Except that it doesn’t exist.*

There is no throne room.

There are no blueprints for your life.

There is no angel of the archives.

I love this story.

You are free to choose. You can make good choices that are life enhancing, you can make not-so-good choices that (in Biblical terms) lead to death… they are *your* choices. God made you… free.

You are a spiritual being. That is your true nature. You are made in the image of God. If you nurture and cultivate your spirituality, (which is the most important part of who you are), your soul will thrive.

When you consciously choose connection with God there is nothing that is more meaningful or satisfying. God gives you life.

One more story…

When I was in my early 30’s I was the pastor of the First United Methodist Church of San Fernando. That church is old for southern California - the first protestant church built in the San Fernando Valley in 1875. Generations of families were attached to the church. Lots of connections. There were lots of weddings and funerals.

One time I was contacted by a family who wanted a funeral service for their 18 year old son, Steve. They were not church folks. There was some tie to the church back in the family someplace. Steve had tragically died in a diving accident south of Ensenada – a place called La Bufadora. I didn’t know much more than that.

The day before the service his best friend, Don, came to see me. We sat down in my office and it was clear that Don was not in good emotional shape. Tortured. He said *I need to tell you what really happened.*

The two buddies had gone to Mexico to party… which they did. They decided to go scuba diving and had rented equipment. Neither of them were certified divers. The had a big party night, got up the next day, very hung over, and figured the dive would refresh them. They went out off the cove there, down to about 80 feet. There was a lot of current and motion and Steve got sick… 80 feet below the surface. He vomited.

Don told me he saw what was happening and it freaked him out… he tried to help Steve but didn’t know what to do. He headed for the surface, and left his friend behind. Steve did not surface… he drowned.

Don said to me, *what should I do? I haven’t told his family what happened down there. Should I tell them?*

I had to respond with something and it wasn’t, *hmmm*…*let me think about this…*.

I thought about the grieving family… I had spoken with them. They weren’t asking questions or searching for answers. Telling them these details would not help their grief. They were about to bury their son.

I thought about Don, he was 18 years old and had a lot of life ahead, life that would carry this tragedy forward and life that could be a trainwreck for him and everyone around him. What redeeming thing could be said to him in that moment?

I told him he shouldn’t tell Steve’s family any more detail. It wouldn’t help them. But he did have to do this… beginning that day… he had to live his life for two people… for himself and for Steve… think of all of the good and all of the love that Steve could have contributed to the world – and you love and do good for the both of you for the rest of your life… and God will help you.

Right or wrong that’s what I told him. I never saw him again.

When you come to the impossible moments you get to choose. Sometimes you have all good choices and the only issue is which one do you want? Other times the surrounding issues are difficult and no clear choice is apparent.

But no matter how it is for you in that moment… how difficult or painful or impossible…

No matter how it is in that moment… things will change … look for God’s way forward.

Choose life.