

Easter IV (RCL) Year C
April 25, 2010

St. Margaret's
Annapolis

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen.

Change is in the air!

- It's spring, with all its unpredictable ups and downs; hot for a week; cool, damp, and rainy for another.
- It's the season of Easter, and just when we'd gotten used to the Lenten liturgy, now there are changes for Easter.
- The readings seem different somehow. There's no confession. We're standing instead of kneeling for the Great Thanksgiving...
- And we're singing just about everything imaginable. They've even the Twenty-third Psalm!
- We've said goodbye to a beloved former rector as she prepares to depart for Los Angeles to be ordained a bishop.
- And there will be more changes to come.

We all know the old saying: The only things that don't change are death and taxes. And I'm not so sure about the taxes part!

Yes, change is in the air.

In fact, because of the eruption of the Icelandic volcano, predictions have changed. It's likely that we're in for a very mild summer, even here in North America.

And the readings are different – you're not imaging it. Instead of the normal pattern of an Old Testament reading, one from the letters of Paul we call Epistles, followed by the Gospel... now we're hearing a reading from the Book of Acts, then one from Revelation of all things. At least the gospel reading is still there.

Acts and Revelation are simply the readings assigned by the lectionary for these seven weeks of Easter. It's really the only time we hear much from those parts of scripture. We'll get back to the normal pattern after Pentecost. And we'll also get back to having the confession

But wait! That rendering of the Twenty-third Psalm we just did isn't the same as the way we learned it in Sunday School. In fact, if you read it from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, "yea though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death" now reads "even though I walk through the darkest valley." That's right! Even the business of translating scripture isn't fixed.

Change is hard, and the hardest changes are the ones that involve hello and goodbye. At least when Mary Glasspool was the Canon to the Bishops up there in Baltimore, she was still living here in Annapolis; still around. LA is a long way away.

And although my sense of the parish is that you aren't particularly anxious, we're all aware that there is more change to come.

There was a time in human history when change was hard to come by. Men and women were born into fixed roles and fixed places in the social structure, and there was no recourse. For thousands of years, those things went unchanged.

I don't need to review history here. All of us took history in high school. All of us know the basics. Human history has changed. And with it, our personal histories have taken on a different quality.

My grandmother was born in 1898. It was still the age of the horse and buggy. In her lifetime, imagine what changes she witnessed! Two world wars, and countless other so-called conflicts. The automobile, the radio, telephone, TV. Airplanes, then jets. The moon landing. Imagine!

My grandmother has been gone now for twenty years, but in that short, short time, the pace of change has done nothing but speed up. They say that the computer power we have in a smart phone is greater than what NASA had for the Apollo program. Technology alone has changed all our lives, for better or worse.

Of course, there are undeniably wonderful changes that have saved countless lives: antibiotics, transplants, treatments for things that routinely meant certain death. Health care, nutrition, scientific research, agriculture – and while these things are not universally disbursed yet, the future holds promise.

I'll try not to belabor the point, but I can't overlook changes in the church. Fifty years ago, men wore suits and women wore hats and gloves to church. Fifty years ago, women couldn't serve on vestries or be delegates to diocesan conventions, let alone General Convention. Little girls couldn't be acolytes, and women who believed themselves called to the priesthood were told that they were deluded.

Today, having been founded in 1692, St. Margaret's Church has known (by my count) the ministries of five ordained women as deacons and priests. And now, Mary Glasspool goes to LA with her life-partner, Becky, while Stewart and Doug, James and Richard are beloved and respected here.

Change is in the air.

Having spent almost three pages (and ten minutes) illustrating the issue of change, I ask the question that lives in each of us one way or another:

WHAT CAN WE COUNT ON?

What can we trust will be the same today and tomorrow? What can we pass on to our children and our children's children that they can hold on to?

We already know the answer. You already know the answer.

GOD IS WHAT WE CAN COUNT ON.

God is what we can trust to be the same today and tomorrow; to be with us always and in every way. We can pass that on to our children and our children's children.

And it precisely this changelessness of God that not only enables us to endure other changes of all sorts, but empowers us to *be* changed.

Back when the latest world crisis was in Biafra, the American Red Cross was gathering supplies, medicine, clothing and the like... all to be taken there for the relief of the suffering. Inside one of the boxes that showed up at the collecting depot one day was a letter. It said, "We have recently been converted and because of our conversion we want to try to help. We won't ever need these again. Can you use them for something?"

Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets. The sheet were cut into strips and eventually used to bandage the wounds of black persons in Africa.

Who of us, even if we decry change, dread change, lament change... is not in need of the transformative, healing, restorative change that only God can generate in us?

So let us give thanks that change is in the air. Can you feel it?

Even so, we can lean confidently on the steadfastness of God, the changelessness of God, and expect the rest to be in God's hands.

Amen.

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