

Today's scripture lessons are both focused on moments in time when change is about to occur. All of us can look back on events in our life when our lives changed, when a corner was turned, when we knew something different was in the air. We know only too well that we can not plan these moments; the question is more how we grasp the change and move forward in our life.

Change can be frightening as well as exciting. The unknown holds both fear and challenges which can bring forth opportunities and learning we never imagined. Change can be sudden as in a loss of a partner or gradual as we realize something is different.

My 12 year old grandson who was with me this past week moves on to a new school which has the grade he is about to enter. He will be going from being the senior grade in his school to being the junior newcomer. He knows it will be different and has some fears about this though he pretends bravado as he approaches the opening of school.

I can well remember the day I was offered a transfer to come to Toronto to work. For 19 years I had been in Vancouver without heavy winter and had enjoyed the fact I could cut my grass as early as late February. Was any job worth wrenching oneself from friends and a comfortable lifestyle to move so far away and face winter? I recall my first day at work in Toronto. There was a sleet storm and I wanted to hit my head against a wall for my foolish decision to relocate.

What I did not know were the doors of possibilities which were about to open for learning, travelling the world and working in different areas of the globe. I fell in love with Ontario though not its winter. Without that step into the unknown, I would never have known any of you and would have missed my wonderful experiences in the County and Eastern Ontario.

Change; not easy, fearful often but it is the process required to open new doors. All of you could share stories of change which could bring tears to the eye and stories that tell of growth and opportunities for learning.

Our Old Testament reading introduces us to one of the most important change agents in the Bible, Moses. Let us remind ourselves of the events before Moses. The people of Israel were evolving out of the family and followers of Abraham and Sarah. These two pioneers felt called at an advanced age to leave their familiar home and begin the move to what they came to call the Promised Land. Abraham was convinced that there was but one God, rather than the multitude of gods worshipped all around him. Not only did he believe there was one powerful God, but he believed this God interacted in a vital and direct way with him and his people.

Isaac followed as the son of Abraham and Isaac. He in turn had two sons Esau and Jacob. Jacob eventually became the leader and fathered 12 sons, each of whom by tradition founded one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

One of these sons, son number eleven, named Joseph, had been sold off by his jealous brothers to slavers who took Joseph to Egypt. There in time he rose to become the senior advisor to pharaoh, pharaoh being the name of all the rulers of Egypt.

As there was a terrible famine in all the Middle East, Joseph now reconciled with his brothers, brought the tribes of Israel to Egypt and gave them land and food and they prospered there. This is where we enter into our reading about the birth of Moses.

After the original pharaoh for whom Joseph worked died, his successors in time became very worried about the large number of Hebrews who were in Egypt. They were growing faster in numbers than the local Egyptians. Senior advisors to the pharaoh warned pharaoh that the Israelites would soon take over Egypt unless he did something drastic. So pharaoh decreed that the Israelites would become slaves to the state. Thus the long enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt began. Just as an aside, our next hymn is on this subject and is called From the Slave Pens of the Delta.

The Egyptians continued to be dismayed as the Israelites still grew in numbers. Finally a new pharaoh decreed that for a certain period of time, all new born Israelite males were to be killed. The girls were to be spared.

Enter Moses. His mother gave birth in secret to her new born son. She hid him at home for three months but realized she could no longer do so and feared for her son's life. She devised a scheme to save him. She wove a basket, water proofed it and put the baby in it and set the basket by day among the reeds. She had her daughter Miriam hide near by to watch over the boy and keep him safe and presumably quiet.

Then the unexpected happened. The pharaoh's sister and her maids came down to the Nile to bathe and saw the basket in the reeds and fetched it. Amazed to see the baby and realizing he was a Hebrew baby, the princess decides to keep the child for herself. Miriam offers to get a nurse for the baby and the princess appoints the baby's mother to be his nurse. When he was weaned, the boy was brought to the palace and the princess raised him as her son. She named him Moses for, she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Talk about an improbable conclusion for a mom who wanted only to spare her son's life. We know what this event eventually led to do we not? Moses, raised as a prince, could not reconcile to the brutality he saw the Hebrews enduring all over Israel. As a young man, he once defended a slave and in the process killed a guard. He fled Egypt and started a new life elsewhere only to be challenged by God to return and lead the Hebrews to freedom and a new land. Moses never sought his role as a freedom fighter nor was he comfortable speaking to crowds or to the authorities. His role was to convince the Hebrews that change was possible, that slavery did not have to be all there was. He also had to convince the Egyptians that they would be better off with the Hebrews gone from Egypt. Try that argument on a pharaoh when the Hebrews were such valuable labourers! In her wildest dreams, Moses' mother could never imagine the unique and pivotal role her son was to play in the drama of Hebrew history and their relationship with God.

Moving to today's world; we have the daily presence in our life as Canadians of the American election process. What had appeared as a fairly traditional primary suddenly changed with two key events. First, it appeared that for the first time a woman just may win the primary and the run for President. To Hilary Clinton's surprise and the surprise of the American people, a young articulate black lawyer appeared on the scene and the rest is history. Will Barack Obama win the presidency? Time will tell but America has been changed by both his and Hilary's strong candidacies.

Even the wisest political pundits and soothsayers could not have predicted this scenario. Change; it comes when we least expect it and the world becomes a new place.

Have you been fascinated with the 2008 Olympic Games being hosted by China? Whatever one may think of the value of these costly and highly politicized events, they are an extraordinary reminder to us all of our common humanity. Athletes from all over the world not only compete for their personal best, but they rub shoulders, encourage and hug one another even when their countries are traditional enemies. The games are a vivid reminder that we are all humans with dreams, feelings, hopes and aspirations.

Who can not be humbled by the effort, determination and stamina of these athletes? We are reminded that all men and women are creations of God and we can only celebrate the unity seen among these avid competitors.

Most of us are old enough to remember the old China, that closed society rarely penetrated by the West. When Pierre Elliott Trudeau first visited China and when Richard Nixon bravely determined to open China to the world, everyone scoffed. Those of us who have travelled to China in the past can only be amazed by what we see today. While short on human rights and personal liberties, China has forged ahead in a short time to become the modern state it is today. Who could have predicted this during the Cold War?

Change hits us often from what we term left field. How did that sneak up on us we wonder? Why did I not see that coming?

Jesus in our Matthew reading was preparing his disciples for the big change to come. He was about to move with determination and purpose on to Jerusalem and the inevitable events that decision would lead to for him and for them. They were getting comfortable with Jesus' ministry. Why go to Jerusalem and upset the apple cart? This decision by Jesus to face Jerusalem would profoundly affect each of them in ways they could not imagine, events so dramatic that it would make them all known by name even 2000 years later.

Jesus was not only warning them about the changes to come, he was also saying that by now they should have the strength to face the events. You have been with me for nearly three years; time to leave the learner stage and move on to the ministry for which you are being prepared. You remember that he said to Peter that he was the rock upon which Jesus would build his church.

Scholars believe that what he was reminding Peter and the disciples were their key roles ahead. If the church was to happen, if people were to hear of God's grace through Jesus, then it was up to them. As young people today so often say: "no pressure!"

The disciples, as were the Hebrews in Moses' day, were not content with their lot in life and yet were also strangely comfortable within it. Why rock the boat? Why bring on more misery and pain? Are we not better to leave well enough alone? Maybe slavery is better than the uncertainty we will face as we cross the desert!

No, where you are is not where you need to be, both Moses and Jesus would say. No one has the luxury of stopping the clock or turning it back even though we dearly would love to do so. All of us here today would like to either stop the clock or turn it back for some reason or other but it is not possible is it? Jesus would also say that it would be to our detriment to do so. The results might not be as wonderful as we would think.

Jesus reminds us that God is always with us. To the skeptical and often fearful disciples, he urged confidence in what they can and could do if they trusted God and remembered what Jesus had said and done while they were present with him.

God has always dumbfounded men and women with his imagination and his planning. God created all and has kept an interest always in what his creation is up to now.

Change is not easy. It can be fearful and frightening at times. Look back Jesus would say to his followers and see what God has already accomplished in and through you. Do you not think that he will be with you as you venture into the future, whatever the future bring. For lo, Jesus said, I am with you always, even to the end of time.

So we come to the near end of the summer holiday period when things begin to gear up. Why should we not approach this with excitement and wonder? If God be with me, who can prevail against me?

Rev. Gary Magarrell