

“CHANGES”

Psalm 27

Change is a part of life. In a real sense, change defines life. Every living thing is a changing thing. As human beings, we grow up, grow out, grow older, and hopefully grow wiser. The pictures in our high school yearbooks make our children laugh at all the changes in our appearance. “Dad, is that really you? You look so thin. You had so much hair. And is that a pimple on your nose?” And the very same high school pictures make us nostalgic at all the changes, as we compare the life that was with the life that is.

If I asked you to share the story of your life, you would likely do so by relating the changes in your life. “Well, let me see. I was born on [name the date]. I moved to [name the place]. I graduated from [name the school]. I worked at [name the company]. I got married. I had children. I became ill; then I recovered. I lost my old job; then I found a new one. I attended this church; then I attended that church. I went on a cruise. I retired. I celebrated my fiftieth wedding anniversary. I buried a dearly loved spouse.” Changes.

And change, even when anticipated and welcome, can be very frightening. Our routines, from eating the same cereal each morning to saying the same prayer each night, make us feel safer, more in control of our lives and world.

I attended Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary from 1968 to 1978. Those were such happy, carefree years: Basketball games, Louis the Lancer, Field Day, the Banquet, lilacs in Spring. On the eve of my graduation from the seminary, unable to sleep, I got up about 3:00 AM, dressed, and began to roam the campus, reliving memories and remembering friends.

I realized that night that I stood on the precipice of a momentous change. No more teenage pranks. No more college basketball games. I was about to enter the Public Ministry—something I had wanted to do since watching *The Greatest Story Ever Told* at the Ritz Theater in Winter Haven in 1962. Yet, when the time finally came to leave campus, I wanted to go and I wanted to stay. Staying was safe. Going meant risk.

This is how change always affects us. What will happen next? What will this change mean? Will I be better off or worse off, happier or sadder, a success or failure? We never stop asking these questions, because we never stop changing. The world around us never stops changing either. Changes in climate. Changes in resources. Changes in government. Changes in technology.

I can still remember my great Grandmother Fischer saying, “Mark, if man were meant to fly, he’d have wings.” I can still remember my mother saying, “Mark, can you teach me how to use my computer?” Sure, Mom, I’ll be happy to, for the twentieth time.” I can still remember my son Andrew saying—as recently as yesterday, “Dad, I’ve never seen anyone text that slow. Don’t you know how to use your cell phone?”

Our text for this morning is about change; more precisely, about overcoming the fear of change. How do we do this? **Through faith in our unchanging God.**

King David wrote Psalm 27. When writing a psalm, David occasionally referenced an event or circumstance—a change in his life—that prompted the psalm. For example, the title of Psalm 18 reads: **“For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”**

Likewise, the familiar words of Psalm 32, a confessional psalm, become more meaningful when we remember that David wrote them after committing adultery with Bathsheba and orchestrating the death of her husband Uriah—first refusing to admit his guilt; then suffering beneath its weight; groaning, crying, losing sleep and appetite, until he found joy and renewal in the Lord’s forgiveness. David meant every word when he wrote: **“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit there is no guile,”** Psalm 32:1-2.

However, Psalm 27 contains no such historical reference. Its title states simply, **“Of David.”** And yet, as we read this psalm, we can clearly see a drastic change in David’s life and circumstances. Verses 1-6 are literally brimming with confidence and joy. **“The LORD is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”**

Whether individual enemies or entire armies, David was absolutely confident of victory, and he said as much: **“Though an army should besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident,”** Psalm 27:3.

For David, the size of the problem did not matter—as is still true today; from little annoyances to the threat of Islamic terrorism; from an unreasonable boss to a struggling economy; from a mild headache to a serious illness. If I were to paraphrase these words of David using modern English, I might use an expression like “Bring it on. Give it your best shot. You still won’t defeat me with almighty God in my side”

Many of the psalms were set to music and recited or sung as part of the ancient temple worship service. Viewed musically, I would expect Psalm 27:1-6 to be played in a major key, with a confident, even majestic rhythm: **“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”** A John Philip Susa march. Powerful. Uplifting. Triumphant. Trumpets. Drums. Cymbals. Flourishes. Fireworks.

Suddenly, with verse 7, the music changes from powerful and triumphant to sorrowful and plaintive, played at a slow, dismal tempo and in a sad minor key. Notice the change in subject matter: **“I call,”** verse 7; **“answer me,”** verse 7; **“do not hide Your face,”** verse 9; **“do not turn Your servant away in anger,”** verse 9; **“do not reject me or forsake me,”** verse 9; **“false witnesses rise up against me,”** verse 12; **“I had fainted,”** verse 13.

How could David go from such triumph to uncertainty; from happiness to sadness; from **“The LORD is my light and my salvation”** to **“Do not reject or forsake me, O God my Savior;”** from **“I will sacrifice with shouts of joy”** to **“Hear my voice when I call”**—all within the space of a few verses?

This change is so abrupt that some Bible commentators believe David must have written Psalm 27 in two stages, with each stage separated by years. They note that verses 1-6 sound like the David who defeated Goliath, while verses 7-12 sound more like the David who was betrayed by his own son Absalom. Could David have written Psalm 27 in two stages? Perhaps.

But I think there is a far simpler explanation; **and that explanation is that life can change just that suddenly.** You could have come to church this morning in a jovial mood. You could have looked at the sermon theme for today in the bulletin and thought, “Changes? Huh? I’m not afraid of changes.” And yet, in the space of an eye-blink, a scent, a melody, an unexpected memory, could instantly change your mood from joy to sorrow.

This very moment, I’m certain that most of you could name one incident, one phone call, one knock at the door, or one unexpected meeting with an employer, that changed your life forever. I could cite many examples and so could you. The woman who went to a doctor for a routine examination, and returned home with a diagnosis of terminal cancer. The couple who planned for their golden retirement, and watched their stock portfolio dissolve with a poor economy. The husband and wife who vowed “till death us do part,” but are now divorced and living alone. The employee who expected a commendation but received a termination notice.

Consider all the changes at St. Luke's through the years. Changes in location. Changes in membership. Changes in pastors. Growth and loss. Success and failure. Times of plenty and times of want. Births. Baptisms. Marriages. Funerals.

So yes, change is a part of life. Change is a part of our lives. And all of us know that our lives will continue to change in ways we cannot always anticipate or understand. Changes for the better and changes for the worse. Changes we cause ourselves and changes completely outside our control. And if we had to face these changes alone, we would have every reason to fear. But we aren't alone. This is the great theme of Psalm 27. Changes will come, but as Christians, we never face them alone. We are never at the mercy of our adversaries or adversities.

As we look at the progression of Psalm 27, we find David first confident and fearless; then concerned and uncertain; then content to wait for the LORD. What brought him back to his senses? What enabled him to push the fear of change aside and finish Psalm 27 with the invitation: **“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD?”**

The answer is stated no less than thirteen times in this psalm. The answer is the LORD. In a psalm rife with change, David uses the name “the LORD” thirteen times. Only in verse 10 does he call God by the name ELOHIM, the majestic Creator-God of Genesis 1:1, **“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.”**

What's the significance? God's names describe him. Old Testament names for God included ELOHIM; EL SHADDAI, meaning God Almighty; and YAVEH, the source of our English word JEHOVAH. YAVEH literally means “I AM.” When Moses asked God for His name to share with the Israelites, God replied, **“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you,’”** Exodus 3:14.

And to appreciate the significance of God's reply you must also understand Moses' prior objections and excuses. When Moses said, ‘I can't do the job you want me to do,’ God replied, ‘That doesn't matter, because I AM with you.’ When Moses said, ‘But I don't speak well,’ God replied, ‘That doesn't matter, because I AM with you.’ When Moses said, ‘But Pharaoh won't believe me,’ God replied, ‘That doesn't matter, because I AM with you.’

This is the first thing we must remember when we face changes in our lives: GOD, THE ETERNAL “I AM,” IS ALWAYS WITH US. “God, I don't know if I can do this new job.” What do you think the LORD is saying then and there? “Don't worry, because I AM with you.” “And God, I don't think I can make my marriage

work.” What do you think the LORD is saying then and there? “Don’t give up, because I AM with you.” “And God, I just got a bad report from my doctor, my employer, my stockbroker. I’m afraid.” What do you think the LORD is saying then and there? **“Don’t be frightened, because I AM with you.”**

So often, when changes occur in our lives—sickness, loss, unemployment, the death of a loved one, congregational problems, whatever the changes—we often think that God is not with us; worse, that God has deserted us. But His very name, “I AM,” tells us that He *is* with us. We have His word on it. As Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, **“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** As God Himself proclaimed in Hebrews 13: **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** Do we believe Him or not. We should. His Word is absolute truth. And Jesus Christ died on the cross to prove it.

David knew that God was with him. That is precisely why he proclaimed, **“The LORD is my light and salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”** David knew that God was still with him during the most difficult changes of his life. That is why he also proclaimed: **“Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me,”** Psalm 27:10. The LORD always will receive me. No matter what is happening in my life, no matter what the changes, the LORD will never say, “No, I don’t love you;” or “No, I won’t help you;” or “No, I won’t forgive you.”

But there’s more. This great name of the LORD, “I AM,” is not only the guarantee of His eternal presence but the **GUARANTEE OF HIS ETERNAL CHANGELESSNESS**. **“I the LORD do not change,”** Malachi 3:6. **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,”** Hebrews 13:8. Can you think of anything more comforting, more uplifting, and more inspiring than the promise of an UNCHANGING GOD in a constantly changing world? I can’t.

When changes confront us in life and we accuse God of turning against us, the very opposite is true. The LORD loves us in the good times and never stops loving us in the bad times. The LORD is never for us one day and against us the next. The LORD is never sleepy, irritable, moody, or uncaring. The Bible tells us He loves us with an everlasting love and enfolds us with everlasting grace. **“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever,”** Psalm 136:1. And there isn’t a day of our lives when God isn’t being good to us. This is what enables us to accept changes with praise and thanksgiving.

In Psalm 27:4, David says, **“One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the**

beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.” The Hebrew word translated as “beauty” really means “grace.”

And God’s grace is a beautiful thing for us to see; a grace so clearly revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom Paul wrote in Romans 8—words so reminiscent of Psalm 27: **“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”**

The grace and beauty of the Savior who willingly embraced the cross to redeem us from our sins. The grace and beauty of the Savior who invites all of us to come to Him for rest. The grace and beauty of the Savior who assures each of us today, as we partake of His holy Supper, though facing many changes and uncertainties in our lives: “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.”

So don’t fear change. The LORD is with you. Don’t fear change. The LORD is for you. Don’t fear change. the LORD will get you through it and make you stronger because of it.

As the hymnist has written:

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day.
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me.”