

Engaging Change

Change happens constantly. It doesn't check in with us for permission. From the weather, to relationships, to our health, to the world around us and the thoughts within us, change is a moving kaleidoscope altering the view moment by moment. One of humanities fondest illusions is that we can control change. We don't like the weather so we change locations. Still, it rains or is chilly or is blistering hot in the location we went to avoid that very thing. Media is filled with products promising to enhance our mood, our health, halt our aging and give us life we want. The only event that stops change is death. The final change in our earthly experience. Few people are really ready for that alternative to change so we are left contemplating how we engage change.

What do I mean "engage" change? Webster says engage can be, "to take part in or give attention to". I have discovered there are three primary ways we tend to engage change. One way is to put our head in the sand and pretend that change won't really happen or at least change won't affect me and I don't have to participate. We forget that once our head is down in the sand, we are unaware of what we have exposed the rest of our body to. A second way to engage change is to kick and scream in resistance and be drug forward by the seat of our pants, our hands clawing at the ground to keep us from changing. In toddlers we call that a tantrum; in adults we say they are reluctant to change. Both probably need a time out. A third way to engage change is to embrace whatever change is happening, eyes wide open, facing forward and breathing into whatever comes next. Facing forward allows us to have input into the direction and pace we advance through change. Which way seems the most responsible? Which way seems the most beneficial to us? Which way do we choose?

I think we were more connected to change in the past when life was a bit simpler and more integrated with natural processes. I'm using Robert Brumet's book, [Finding Yourself In Transition](#), for this sermon series. He makes the point that transition or change is a process. There are elements that unfold in a specific order. We understand that the order of the seasons is winter, spring, summer, and fall. In the past that meant different temperatures, different foods were available and the light from the sun increased and decreased. Today, whether it is 17 degrees outside or 100, we keep the temperature at 70. We get fruits and vegetables year-round, whether they are in season or not. Electricity provides light no matter when the sun rises or sets. Humanity wants to control the process.

In engaging change we must become “willing to trust the divine wisdom and order inherent within the process.” My mantra during the times of greatest change is “trust the process.” But where are we going? What will happen next? What if! Our ego driven, fear-based logic grasps for certainty. The final certainty is death. Brumet says, “Yet we fear death, and this very fear of death, the fear of change, is also our fear of life itself. To be fully alive, we must be willing to be changed, to surrender into the moment without resistance; we must be willing to ‘die daily’, even moment by moment. To resist these ‘deaths’ is to resist life. To live fully is to realize that death—any type of death—is but a harbinger of new life.” I wonder if the connection between death and new life was easier for us to perceive when death, the natural deaths that occur in nature, were a part of our everyday existence? With distance has come disconnection.

It is not possible to be unaffected by change. Burying our head in the sand does not make it possible for us to be unaffected by change. The events of September 11th, 2001 changed our lives, whether we knew someone killed or not. Whether we were even born yet or not. The events changed travel and airport security. It changed banking practices and the way our nation interacts in foreign policy. People around the globe felt the sadness and the weight of loss because of the intimacy of technology. It is not healthy to try to cut ourselves off from our innate oneness in hopes of protecting ourselves from the discomfort or pain in change. Brumet says, “To understand the nature of the transition process and to trust the divine order and wisdom inherent within it provide us with the opportunity to use transition as a time of accelerated growth and learning.” Heads up, eyes forward, we can enter into a time of spiritual growth and learning.

“OK,” the ego says cautiously, “I can have my head up but it is alert to danger and I will resist anything that seems unfamiliar.” Well, how helpful is **that** to spiritual growth and learning? By its very nature, change brings the unfamiliar and new into awareness. Brumet quotes the poet Kahlil Gibran, “Pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.” “The shell that encloses” is the barrier you have built that prevents your understanding from expanding. Brumet goes on to say, “Pain can show us where we may be resisting the breaking of the ‘old shell’ and inhibiting the emergence of the ‘larger reality’ for indeed, most of our pain arises from resistance. By understanding the dynamics of the transition process, we can learn how to minimize our pain and facilitate the birth of the new life.”

Notice Brumet doesn't say "eliminate our pain" but to minimize. And one way to reduce our pain is simply to reduce our resistance. One thing I've learned over the years is to question what exactly I am resisting. If I am resisting a specific change, did I have an expectation that condition would never change? Everything in our world is temporary. How really ridiculous is it to expect or believe that *anything* would **never** change? Notre Dame burned last year. We were not ready for **that!** Giant sequoia trees in California, two thousand years old, have fallen in the last couple years. How can that happen? We have unrealistic expectations for things not to change and we are outraged when our unrealistic expectations are disappointed.

Mostly we resist the *unfamiliar*. Why? Because we fear what we don't know. How many people really like surprises? I'm not talking about a chocolate on the pillow kind of surprise—which wouldn't actually work out that well for me because Raymond would eat it and it would make him sick and it would be another emergency vet bill. See how surprises can go? We will cling to the familiar until it is so uncomfortable, we are forced to move or we are thrown out or run over in our rut. Does it have to be that way?

Brumet talks about the dynamics of the change process. What exactly is that? He says there are three elements: Endings, the Void, and New Beginnings. There can be overlap and extended periods for each element but basically, that is the process. So this month, we are going to explore the dynamics for each of those elements. On March 22 we are going to pause and I'll answer questions about change or whatever else you need to talk about.

How many of you have a tendency to greet change by burying your head in the sand and pretending it's just not going to affect you? I know many people feel that not watching the news or reading the paper is self-care in an environment of negativity and yet I wonder how isolating yourself from what is happening really protects you? If your peace of mind is conditioned on not knowing what is going on in the world, what happens when those activities intrude into your life? If you vacate your seat at ULV until the change is over—well, you'll never really come back. At some point you have to choose to return and ride out the change tides because they will continue to happen!

How many of you greet the news of change by immediately saying, "Well I don't **want** that to happen!" Did that help? Did it stop the change? Raymond, my dog, barks at the washing machine. He doesn't like the noise of the agitator. Now eventually the machine cycles on to the next cycle and stops making the noise he objects to.

I guess Raymond thinks his barking made the washing machine stop making the noise so he keeps barking every time the washing machine runs. In reality, the process is the process and his barking makes no difference. It's like our resistance—it gives us something to do that we believe is productive but it doesn't really change the process. We don't bark so how does our resistance show up? Complaining. Taking sides and behaving as if change has winners and losers. Withdrawing from participation. Trying to force a step before it's ready to unfold. We are resisting the process.

The challenge for us as opposed to Raymond is—are we missing something getting caught up in the activity of resistance. If we could relax and trust the process, trust the wisdom unfolding, what might we learn about ourselves, about our spiritual community, about the process itself? Are we stronger, wiser and more patient than we believed? Is there a potential within us greater than anything we imagined, longing to be expressed if we could just let go of the tiny picture we hold onto? I feel those benefits are worth exploring. I would like us to move into this time of transition with our heads up, our eyes wide open and our hearts and minds receptive to a new understanding of the process of transition. And with each new step we affirm, "Trust the process!"

Join me next week as we begin with the first element: Endings. Like an Easter discussion that skips over Good Friday, we'd like a new beginning that avoided the Endings. Next week we'll talk about making peace with the process of Endings.