

When I enter Chrissy's office there's often something different. Something changed. New soft chairs for a chat. New chairs at the table, new table. Well, not really new; little used somewhere else in church. So, she brings it into her office, gives it new purpose. Then there's her desk—L-shaped, shelves, credenza. That's new to our building—from Pine Island when they moved. Black with light wood, much better than an old worn, huge, heavy, drawers-that-don't-slide-well behemoth when she arrived! She loves it! She sits behind it radiating joy when we talk. Speaking of radiating, there's the lights—floor lamps, desk lamp, huge light bulb shaped fun accent. All so she can begin the day or set the mood with a softer radiance than harsh fluorescent tubes. For a while it seemed unceasing, a sort of challenge. Can I see any little decorative change when I go in this time?! Change. Chrissy seems much better at it, in her office, at least, than me.

I envy her. After nearly ten years, same color walls. Same furniture arrangement. Same overhead lights. All continuity. Well, the plant grew some leaves. Walls have a few new frames. Biggest change? Books piling one by one now horizontal—so packed, now stacking above the shelves. During sabbatical last summer, I thought I'd sneak in to cull them. Never did. Some might be easy to lose. Others are from Lew Briner and Ken Barley, former pastors here. I cherish the connection. Maybe I'm avoiding a hoarder's misery. Still, there's Chrissy next door, catalyzing renovation envy. No HGTV shows for this task. I consulted Maureen and Shawn. Lots of good ideas. And I've made a change! File cabinets behind my desk over

about a foot to center on the arching window!! My desk isn't a style I'd choose. But it's a big, sturdy surface. Whatever the aesthetic, it works. And it's Dave McShane's when he came as minister over 50 years ago. All that continuity, history ... functional frugality.

How do we face change? We get a new computer. Or we fire up a familiar friend to find a software update makes it act like a total stranger. Yeah, I've heard your misery! We spend weeks figuring out which tab to click, how to find our files, what new dumbfounding function did we accidentally clumsy-finger type. Just give me my old familiar screen and keys! Even if we turned it on, went and brewed coffee, made breakfast, came back five minutes later to see a boot-up circle still spinning.

Change. We graduate. We start a new job. We move to a new home. We get married, move in, and learn to tolerate and navigate how our beloved does the laundry or dishes, cooks or cleans, or doesn't quite. A new annoying stoplight goes in. Our frustrating phone stops working. A new politician gets elected. Friends, we know life is never static. Change is inherent to being human.

Some don't seem so good. Bodies ache and don't work the way they used to. Kids grow up. Relationships end. Friends move away. Someone beloved dies. Our planet heats up, weather gets more extreme. Our social fabric frays. Partisan conflicts escalate. We do something a new way here at church—we sing a new song or paint a new color.

Some changes we desire. New medical devices and treatments help faltering bodies. Kids grow up. We meet someone new. We get a different job. We reject bias, abuse, and prejudice in society. Equity becomes a priority. Concern about and action on our climate get attention. We do something a new way here at church—we sing a new song now beloved and welcome new friends.

Change can be challenging and uplifting. Change can be frightful or hopeful. Needed. Dreaded. Change can bring radiance of new life; or a shadow of conflict and loss. Truth is, we all live in a balance, a dance between continuity and change. Maybe we prefer one over another. Still ever some combination. You see, playful office comparisons don't tell the whole story. Chrissy appreciates tradition, history, continuity in life as it's been, as much as it could be. Good friends. Favorite places. Fond memories. Many already among us. And though, I'm teased for eating the same breakfast or wearing clothes so long they go out and come back into vogue again. I like change, too. How every day here is different. New insights from our conversations. New adventures, many with you, how changes of scenery physically transform landscapes of mind and vistas of heart.

All of us balance, dance. We might ask: right now what change do we desire? What change do we require though we resist or don't even know it? Real question of living faith is: the more things change, what stays the same? What do we count on? If going to pieces, what keeps us together? If soaring to giddy new heights, what keeps us grounded? A moral compass to guide us. Source of vision or inspiration to center us.

That's what people found in Jesus. We've been in the season of Epiphany. Starting with Jesus' birth when Holy Love in him gets unveiled; the way of Sacred Grace he leads revealed. For weeks in worship we riffed on images of light. Now, today, one last time, we share his bright radiance of transfiguration. It's a turning point, as Matthew tells the story. Jesus changes direction, starting his final pilgrim journey to Jerusalem, as we follow in weeks of Lent ahead. Atop that mountain his disciples receive one more powerful epiphany. They see him in a new light—embodying symbolically all he's been doing: healing, teaching, eating with outcasts, forgiving. That is, transforming people with the radiance of God's presence, the glow of hope,

the luminosity of love, beaming grace and peace into every dark corner of suffering, loneliness, confusion, fear. They love that moment. They don't want to leave it. Let's settle here a while. They don't want it to change. I get it. Do you?

In the Holy Land a year ago, I saw in a new light the promise of what happened on that mountain. Check out the bulletin picture. Here's the point of view, the epiphany. We're standing on the cliff where people drove Jesus after he started teaching in the synagogue, claiming to fulfill God's power and purposes. Some were offended. Angry. Aiming to push him over to die in the valley of Armageddon below. The Valley of Armageddon ... where for millennia all trade or conquest passed between desert to the east and the Mediterranean Sea. Bloody battles raged soaking the soil with death, grief, fear, anger, hate, so much life-blood lost. Right there, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus rises above it all. He radiates God's presence and power stronger than any other. Power to bring new life, stronger than death. Power to transform with Love stronger than all hate, anger, and fear. Power inspiring others like us to keep living that purpose.

Matthew tells us Jesus just warned of his death to come. This mountain top moment foreshadows Easter morning. Maybe a bit like resurrection I felt there. Spirit moving. As if Jesus was with us there. Radiating in me, among us, as I envision it now. Alive. Real. Giving hope, courage, strength amid all the uncertainties, anxieties, changes we inevitably, unceasingly face. You see, friends, Matthew tells all about how Jesus changes real people in need. Even more, he changes how others saw, connected, accepted, related with them. He changes how people like us imagine and live God's way in our world. "You've heard it said ... but I say to you."

A little aside ... while my family was down in Alabama last week, we went to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery. Legacy, that is, of slavery, lynching, Jim Crow white supremacy. And on a rainy day, my son and I went to see the movie *1917*.

Imagine the theater all men—picture your stereotype of Alabama men and conversation. Imagine it. Because you see, I admit that I have assumptions, bias that surely isn't entirely fair—what I imagine about Alabama from northern perspective and experience. What's also true is that we also saw *Little Women* ... a movie if nothing else, about living in love. Which many good people in Alabama also came to watch, wiping tears. Can I see that is Alabama—people in Alabama—as much as my biased stereotype reinforced by a movie which I also watched?

We share moments of transfiguration, epiphanies, as Stephanie Paulsell says. Centered in holy love, we receive illumination, revelation, vision for new opportunities. Limited perceptions or biased assumptions get enlarged. Fearfully guarded boundaries get more permeable. We open to new possibilities that we and the world might change. We seek ways to hold onto that hope we glimpse, that vision we receive.¹

That's what Jesus offers in his Sermon on the Mount. He's starting his journey with the disciples, connecting their living faith with the witness of those gone before, like Moses, Elijah, the Hebrew Law. He stresses he comes not to abolish all they've learned, rather to fulfill it. To apply the Spirit, to make the intended point relevant and practical. He channels continuity of God's grace, purposes, peace amid uncertainties faced in their time and place. And he catalyzes change which often challenged. Like it or not, that's who he is. How he lived. What he does among us still. A wondrous sight, a vision fair of radiant Holy Love? Many people liked what they heard in Jesus. Maybe they felt not so useful, and he found them and gave them new purpose. Many liked Jesus. But others ... well, he ends up on a cross.

“You've heard it said ... but I say to you.” Jesus reframes a series of moral issues and social relations. Now he gets to loving enemies not only friends, confronting abuse in non-violent ways that claim one's own integrity and capacity, and

rehumanizes relations. It's not naïve advice perpetuating victims. Quite the opposite. Not old pie-in-the-sky ideals impractical for today's realities. Still relevant inasmuch as we sense the impulses and see governmental policies bent on vengeance, abuse, and know need for the power of forgiveness, generosity. This change isn't easy, comfortable stuff. It's countercultural—then and now. I'd love to talk about it all further.

First, today, hear God urge us, like disciples on the mountain: don't be afraid of change. Face realities. Open to possibilities. Find the continuity of sacred hope amid it all. Friends, here's truth we can trust. Here's a promise we can count on to ground us, guide us, and keep us together. God made us in love. For love. Never separated from God's love. Rather set free to accept ourselves; to see the broken and beautiful world as it is; and to receive courage to pray, to bear witness, to keep working for God's new heaven on earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Jesus calls and empowers us to make Holy Love real for others. God is love. The Bible says it so many times. It's filled with stories of people living through change—Noah, Abraham and Sarah, the Exodus, all through the early church. And the great refrain of promise: I will be with you, loving you to the end. So, do not be afraid! Jesus shows that love and sends us to share it. Sometimes it's sentimental emotion, fond affection, easy generosity. And sometimes it's hard work of mercy, justice, sacrificial service, and maybe we resist it—like loving enemies, confronting abusers with grace. Sometimes it means we need to change our attitude, our intentions, our theology, words, actions. Because here's the reality. Imperfect as we are, we won't get closer to God, living more full of Holy Love and Peace unless we're open to change. And the world we want to change begins with you and me—being the change, giving our heart and lives ever more to love not anger, bitterness, hopelessness, hate.

Attend to this hope, this promise, this prophetic message, Peter urges his companions, like a lamp shining in the darkness. Friends, this church of Christ, this

very sanctuary embodies change. In that spirit, note that there's a light bulb way above in the ceiling that needs to be changed! Banners and decorations swap for the seasons. And bigger alterations—you may know that a wall used to exist right here separating ministers from the people ... taken down and made into our table. Pews taken out to extend the chancel, to create space for wheelchairs and a sound booth. Transforming the east transept into a flexible space for different types of prayer and worship. Moving our organ from the front loft to the back. Refurbishing all the chandeliers and windows and lights years ago. Surely there have been changes in the prophetic message from this pulpit—how we see the world, and seek God's way. Surely changes will continue ... there's that bulb up there! And what really matters in here more than walls and windows and pews and whatever's on the pillars is what's in our hearts, our voices, actions, and relationships. What gives us life. What binds us together. What inspires us to go out there and serve. God's love in the body of Jesus Christ—you and me.

Friends, I admit some changes I really don't like. Kids grow. Friends leave. Family die. May we trust the promise that the love we shared will continue and will be revealed in new epiphanies of memory and new people we meet.

Our bodies ache and don't work the same. May we trust Sacred Grace will continue to surround us in medical professionals and modern miracles, in loved ones who care and strangers who notice a need. And we'll even receive epiphanies about what's really a priority, with moments of deep joy never imagined possible.

We graduate. We start a new job. We move into a new place and start new routines. Maybe we join a new church. May we trust we'll find new friends, new purpose among new kin in Christ. And if we see a neighbor move in next door, or someone sitting in "our pew" trying to navigate this place like strange new computer

software—spinning circles in their eyes—be someone who continues the symbiotic cycles of welcome and care, from long before to long after the faces we see here.

Our planet heats. Partisan conflicts escalate. Where bias, abuse, and prejudice still exist; where equity still needs to be a priority, seek truth and speak truth in love as the Bible urges. Remembering, as Peter emphasizes, that's about far more than our own thoughts and interpretations. Whether we think we're with Trump or Pelosi, or we slip into temptation to criticize even demonize, as bloody battles rage through tweets and pundits, nurture the politics of love. Rehumanize with grace, don't dehumanize. It has to start inside our own minds and hearts. You have heard, Jesus said, love your neighbors and hate your enemies. But I say to you, love your enemies. Love your enemies.

We might ask today what change do we desire? Or what change do we require though we might resist or don't even know it? Dear friends, as the more things change, may even more God's love for us, channeling in us, radiating through us ever continue to stay the same.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ Stephanie Paulsell, "Faith Matters: Making a Habit Out of Epiphany," in *Christian Century*, January 27, 2020.