



Round Hill Community Church

Sermon: July 12, 2009

Riding the Waves, Lynne Kramer

Psalm 30

The older I get, the less I like change. I like driving the same car year after year because I know how to open the windows and which side the gas tank is on. I like wearing the same clothes all the time (something I'm known for) because I know before I get dressed in the morning that they'll fit. I always park in the same spot at the mall so I can find my car, and I always park in the same garage when I go to the theater – again, so I can find my car.

For the longest time, I declined invitations to play golf at unfamiliar golf courses because I was afraid I couldn't find my way around the course, let alone find the ladies' locker room. No matter where I'm going, I always allow enough time to get lost. And it goes without saying that I'm a technological nightmare. I can't change the ink cartridge in the printer, I don't know how to underline on the computer, and if you leave me a message on my cell phone, I will never ever hear it.

As you might imagine, vacations for me have lost their luster, too. Even before I begin to pack, I can think of a hundred reasons why staying home would be a lot more fun. In fact, it's only when I'm scheduled to leave on vacation that I have an irresistible urge to visit the Bruce Museum instead, or have an irrepressible need to clean my closets. Call it a control issue, call it dull and predictable, but anything that's different, whether sheets, streets, or supermarkets, is disorienting to me.

I admit that I have been to Nantucket. What I remember most about it is sitting huddled beneath a large striped umbrella in sand engulfed in glistening, bubbling foam from the waves that erupted from the ocean, and watching nervously as the menacing surf repeatedly swept my son off his boogie board and spit him out on the shore. Not my idea of fun.

Fifty years ago, Anne Morrow Lindbergh spent a few weeks' vacation on a beach near the ocean. She was trying to understand changes in her life... trying to locate the significance of her life, and to locate her place in the world. Her search culminated in her classic book, *Gift from the Sea*.

"We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, and of relationships," Lindbergh writes. "We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity and in freedom. It is the freedom that comes from choosing to remain open to life itself, whatever it may bring:

joys, sorrows, triumphs, failures, suffering, comfort, and certainly, always, change.”

Many of us are approaching that time of life when everything begins to change. We begin to lose our eyesight, our hearing, our waistlines, our hair, and our memory. Hips, knees and feet all seem to go in unison. Our energy, our determination, our ambition, and maybe even our dreams of success are diminished. Sadly, we also suffer the loss of grandparents, then parents, then spouses and other loved ones.

Life is changing, and so are we. Those people and activities we cherished are not always available anymore. Nor are we exactly the way we liked to think of ourselves: attractive, athletic, adventurous, quick-witted, or even resilient. It becomes hard to imagine what the future holds.

In her book, *Necessary Losses*, Judith Viorst describes a variety of ways in which people deal with life's changes. There are, for instance, the change-resisters who fiercely refuse to adapt, and there are the youth-seekers who want to go backwards and do it all over again, usually with enhanced bodies and younger partners. There are the psychosomatic sufferers, whose psychic distress and dependency take the form of physical ailments, and the self-improvers who avoid middle age by engaging in outer, rather than inner, development.

Emotional responses to life's changes run the gamut from disappointment, boredom, envy, or guilt, to depression, despair, and self-destructiveness. Robert Peck, a social scientist, notes that those with body preoccupation are likely to despair over the changes, whereas those with body transcendence may suffer some disappointment over what they've lost, but they may also appreciate what they still have.

Ultimately, experts say that the best way to compensate for significant changes in our lives is through “ego transcendence” which is the capacity to feel other people's joy and sorrow, to connect to the future through people and ideas that transcend the limits of time and place, and to leave a piece of ourselves for the next generation.

In today's scripture lesson, the psalmist has seen the events of his life turn on a dime. For him, sickness is more than a physical problem; it is also a spiritual one and is seen as a sign of divine displeasure and estrangement.

Before catastrophe hit, he was complacent to the point of being smug. But he, like all of us, moved without warning from the sunlight to the shadows. Psalm 30 is an individual song of praise for God's rescue from a death that reached into life...an illness that caused pain, anxiety, despair... a disease that weakened the soul. But when the psalmist is restored to wholeness, he thanks God, saying, “You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me in joy.” He realizes that through his suffering, he has come to know and worship God.

In his book entitled *The Divine Milieu*, French philosopher Teilhard de Chardin has written that “all around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers.”

Sometimes God speaks to us most clearly through His absence and through our sense of emptiness and incompleteness. Sometimes an event occurs – an event of exquisite beauty, or incredible generosity, or exhilarating joy – through which we come to appreciate the divine love within and around us. But always, the mystery of God is made known to those who make time for life-transforming discoveries...to those who aren't too busy to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch it. And yes, to those who are open to change.

C. S. Lewis has said that “we are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like a naïve child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a day at the beach.”

One of the organizing principles of our physical universe is chaos. It is integral to quantum physics, and it is integral to life. Creation myths around the world speak of a primordial Chaos from which all else emerged. Life springs from chaos, is formed, and then transformed. Chaos is life as it is, not as we would like it to be. It upsets our expectations and moves us forward. Chaos requires change.

Miriam Therese Winter, a professor at Hartford Seminary, has studied quantum physics and spirituality. She finds that, “We are only beginning to understand that from the moment of our conception we are constantly changing, and everything around us is changing along with us. What is alive is always changing. Eventually we will realize that we have been given the wherewithal to thrive in this milieu, for we were not designed to be stoic but to be flexible while in flux.

“And while most traditions tend to reinforce resistance to change, the universe itself continues to push us forward into a more dynamic and comprehensive approach to life.... When a full-blown crisis occurs, we think that, suddenly, everything has changed. Actually, everything around us and everything within us has been changing all along. What is slow to change is the fact that we remain unaware of this.” (Paradoxology, p. 155) According to quantum theory, at the very heart of all matter are particles and waves. A particle has substance and location, but a wave has momentum and movement. Both exist in the fundamental elements of all matter, and both are necessary.

At the end of her vacation, Anne Morrow Lindbergh concluded that, “Perhaps this is the most important thing for me to take back from beach living: simply the memory that each cycle of the wave is valid. One must accept the security of ebb and flow. The sea recedes and returns eternally.”

No one can say with any certainty what form eternal life takes after death. But what we do know of eternal life exists in those moments when we feel one with nature and with each other. Moments spent standing under the enormity of the night sky, or sleeping next to someone you love, or sitting under a striped umbrella in sand engulfed in glistening, bubbling foam from the waves that erupt from the ocean, and watching nervously as your son has the time of his life.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, You do not live among the sure and the secure or in the stagnant center. Give us the courage to search for You in those unfamiliar places where we feel most vulnerable and are most in need of your loving kindness. Amen.