
Living with Change

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Last Sunday after the Epiphany – Year B**

This weekend I have run the broad spectrum of being a priest at The Cathedral of St. Philip.

Friday, I was in this space officiating a funeral for a long-time member. On Saturday, I was officiating the wedding for a young couple in this community. And today, I'm here baptizing and preaching at this baptism service. By the end of the morning, I will have completed most of *The Book of Common Prayer*. (I'm going to put that in the check column.) In all seriousness, it just shows how amazing this Cathedral is, and how important it is to so many different people.

So, as I was running around from a funeral, to a wedding, and now to a baptism, I kept thinking about this gospel passage, and the theme that came to mind is the theme of change. Jesus is transfigured and changing in today's gospel. As I ran to all those different events this weekend, I began to realize that life is learning how to live with change.

With that being said, I want to ask you a question: How do you deal with change? How do you deal with the good changes? How do you deal with the difficult changes? (I realize we are Episcopalian, so I will refrain from any change jokes.)

In today's gospel, change involves two things. Change involves loss and love.

As I step back and look at all that has happened in my life this weekend, I see loss and love amidst all the changes.

Friday's funeral was for a parishioner that decided to change, to leave Atlanta and retire down in South Georgia. Amidst those changes the deceased was unpacking their boxes didn't feel so well, so he went to the doctor and heard the news no one wants to hear—"You have cancer and you do not have much time to live."

The family experienced change that they weren't prepared for. Many of your families have heard that news and gone through a similar change. So, on Friday, as the family gathered in this space to celebrate this man's life, two themes emerged—loss and love. Loss: Every child who spoke mentioned the grief they were experiencing from the death of their father. Yet, each one of those children reflected on how much love was present in his life, and what a great husband, father, and colleague he had been. Loss and love.

Yesterday, I was officiating the wedding of a young couple. Their lives were about to change. Anybody who has been in a relationship knows exactly what it is like to be walking around one day, then suddenly someone enters your life and it is forever changed. At yesterday's wedding we celebrated the power of love, but with love comes loss.

Even love and marriage comes with loss. If you've ever been to a bachelor party or a bachelorette party, you know there's a lot of celebration, but if you start peeling the layers of the onion, you'll see what's really happening is loss. The friends are excited for their friend, but they're also mourning that life will be different. That person has a new love, and the friends are experiencing loss.

We are gathered this morning for these baptisms. You families understand something about change, because life has changed in your house. Whether it's a first child, a second child, or a third child, you are adjusting to the changes, trying to

figure out the new normal.

Some of the wise parents in this room have told me that parenting is about loss and love. You love this child so much, but as this child grows, you will have to let go and experience loss.

If we look at today's gospel passage, loss and love is what you will see. Notice, in that first line, it says "six days later" . . . so what happened six days earlier? Well, Jesus was in a conversation with his disciples and they told him that he was the Messiah. Jesus confirmed that he was the Messiah and said that the Messiah must suffer death and then rise again three days later (Mark 8:27-37). In essence, the Messiah will undergo loss and love.

The disciples, particularly Peter, say, "No, that can't happen. The Messiah is supposed to come in on a white horse and save the day. That can't be the case." Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan." In other words, you have to change your understanding of the Messiah. What I am going to do involves loss and love.

When Jesus transfigures before them on the mountain they get excited because it confirms everything they thought the Messiah was supposed to be. They say, let us build three monuments—one for Moses, the other for Elijah, and one for you. The voice from above says, "Listen to Jesus," and what Jesus says is, "I'm going toward Jerusalem. I'm going toward the cross and to the grave. It will be about loss and love."

This morning, we baptize these children into that death and resurrection. We baptize them into the death and resurrection of Christ. Today, they will be "changed from glory into glory," as our final hymn so eloquently says. These children will learn that the Christian life is about change.

One of Dean Candler's favorite quotes is from Cardinal John Henry Newman: "To live is to change and to live perfectly is to change often." The Christian life is about changing, and with change comes loss and love. We are to teach these children that the changes and chances of this life might take them to a place of loss, a place of darkness, and a place of despair. But, even in these places love is present. St. Paul writes, "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39.) Even when we are at our worst, in our darkest moments, nothing will be able to separate us from God's love. And as parents and a faith community, we should teach these children that nothing will be able to separate them from our love.

Likewise the changes and chances of this life may take them to a place where they experience great love, whether it's love for another person, or a love for a career a vocation; even in places where there is love, there is also loss. The Christian understanding of love looks like the cross, it involves loss, a self-giving and self-sacrificing love.

Most importantly, these children need to know through the changes and the chances of this life that God is Emmanuel, "God with us." Whether we are on the mountain tops of life or walking through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us.

In a few minutes, we will baptize these children and they "will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." No matter the changes, difficulty, loss, or love, these children (and all of us) are sealed and marked as Christ's own forever.