

Today is the 4th and last in our series on re-calculating when life throws you a curve. Today we step into the realm of transitions. And we start with the recognition that the very things we wish we could hold onto and keep safe from transition were originally produced by changes. And many of those changes looked just as daunting as any in the present do. No matter how comfortable and necessary the status quo looks today, it was once new, untried, risky and uncomfortable. Change is not only the path forward - it is also the path we have already trodden behind us.

And the refusal to change - putting our foot down and staking our claim to the way things are will not guarantee that whatever we care about will stay the same. It only assures that whatever we care about has been deprived of the very thing it needs in order to survive. Careers, dreams, relationships, - if they do not change, they will be deprived of the very thing they need to flourish and grow. We know these things. Yet, in spite of knowing how necessary change is, we naturally resist it.

So - let's delve into change today. Transition. Now I can already feel your heart beat rising. *So - settle it down, sit back and breathe in the "Now" all around you. Be refreshed by the moving of the Spirit in and around us today.*

It was Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* who said: *Dear, dear - how queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed or the night?*

The truth is that most people don't resist change. What we resist is transition. Transition and change are often used synonymously, yet they are different. As someone said, we aren't afraid of change -- rather we are afraid of the loss that changes brings. William Bridges is a transitions expert. He has written several books on the topic including *Transitions, Managing Transitions and the Way of Transition*. I commend these to you. Bridges says that change involves a situational shift. Change is losing your job. Transition is embracing the new situation and allowing something new to emerge. Moving to a new house is a change. Having it become your home is the transition. Having a new child is the change. Incorporating new routines and responding to a new personality is the transition. Losing a loved one is a change. Learning to live as a single person again is the transition.

William Bridges had been writing and lecturing in the field for many years when his wife of 35 years discovered a lump in her breast and for the next two years they rode the roller coaster ride of hope and disappointment. After her death, he didn't do any speaking on the subject. He lacked the energy and welcomed the rest. After a few months, he found that he missed the structure that his work gave him and the people - and the feeling of being productive.

After 3 months of sitting around, he tried a few small projects. Yet he had a new problem. All that he had written and spoken about transition suddenly seemed unreal. And he wondered - "how could I have ever passed myself off as an expert on transition?" He felt that his words had totally failed to match the depth of his experience. Self doubt crept in and he decided to stop speaking or writing on the subject for a while. How could anyone believe that he was an expert in transition considering the shame he felt from having talked so long about something that he now doubted he knew anything about.

And then it hit him - that these very feelings were actually an expression of his experience of transition. When we resist transition - we may resist one of more of the three phases of transition: letting go of the old -- the in between state -- and a new beginning. We resist transition not because we can't accept change but because we can't accept letting go of that part of ourselves that we have to give up when and because the situation has changed. Or because we are in limbo - the neutral zone - waiting longer than we would like to get on with things. Or because we are uncertain about a new beginning and can find ourselves tethered to memories of past transitions which may have been painful.

There are situational changes. And there are also developmental changes. Developmental change and the transitions they entail come along when chapters of our life are over and another one is waiting in the wings to make its entrance. An older sister leaned over the crib of her baby sister and whispered "*Baby help me remember what God is like -- I am beginning to forget...*" Change is part of what it means to grow. Yet, it is the nature of transition that we can't imagine a new chapter at first. The fact is that letting go of one chapter in your life initiates the transition that concludes by beginning another chapter. So it is not about rejecting or denying or denouncing your old life -- it is just letting go of it. No matter how much you would like to continue or retrieve or fix it -- it is time to let it go.

Paul in Philippians 3:13-14 said: "*one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize*

*of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Discipleship involves all three -- forgetting what lies behind, (letting go) pressing on toward the goal (embracing life in the neutral zone for all it has to teach and allow) and experiencing a new call in Christ (stepping into a what it means to be a Christ follower in my life today).

A number of us have experienced changes in our personal lives in the last few years. What we are saying is that this process of letting go, being in the neutral zone and embracing unfolding of something new. Leo Tolstoy wrote: *I know that most people have trouble accepting even the simplest truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity their conclusions to their colleagues, and which they have proudly taught others and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives.*"

In other words no matter how much we would like to hold on or go back to the way our lives were, our patterns, the way we related to people and they related to us, our attitudes and thoughts, change announces that it is time to let go of what we are holding onto. It is time to leave the relation you have to what you are doing. Yet without them the world seems strange and unsettling, even fearful. No wonder we want to hold onto them! Until we let go of them, however, we are held in their enchantment - until one day we are jolted and wake up - or we stay in the enchantment - unreal - state. Sometimes these jolts break our hearts. The promise is that we will become stronger where the breaks occur as we continue to allow them to teach us.

The relationship of the people around Jesus was one of change leading to letting go - a neutral zone -- and then leading to choosing to follow him. It could be described as the trial and crucifixion (letting go of old assumptions) -- Easter Saturday (the neutral zone) and the resurrection (the embracing of a new beginning). The people in his day experienced his very presence as a change. His words and his actions were continual invitations to let go of attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and limitations that they had grown up with and which proscribed their lives. And to wander in the wilderness of not knowing exactly what and how to think and act. Questions that had been answered by the tradition were called back into question. Roads that looked promising suddenly veered in another direction.

And there were times - like the one we heard read today when Jesus fed the multitude, that their response was to want to make him king. That was their automatic response to the change that he brought - to his miracles and healings.

Yet he resisted. He pulled back and would not let them put him on that pedestal. Why not? Isn't he king? Yes - but a different kind of king. A mercy king. A compassion king. A king of truth and authenticity and honesty. A king of forgiveness and healing. His realm was much broader and all encompassing than any earthly king. To allow himself to be crowned by the crowd would have been to allow the people to bypass what he offered them. And the only way to the new life he offered was through letting go and taking some time in the neutral zone. The people then as today want to rush from what is existing to a new beginning. We are in a hurry. It is for us to focus on the neutral zone. to ask what we are to learn and to listen. To allow something new to emerge. Out of the silence and the stillness of prayer and waiting. Jesus is inviting us to let go of the trapeze and be in the space before grabbing onto the next bar. We each need to let go - trust - and then grab on with all we have. Allow the transition to run its course in us. So that then we are prepared to follow him where he leads us.

So Jesus kingship is not so much standing up and saying he is king. It is rather about recognizing who he is. Letting go and being in the wilderness of the neutral zone is about training our eyes to see who is really before us. What emerges may be the One who we understand to be the king of our lives. The One whose purpose becomes our purpose and whose dream becomes our dream. The One whose way leads to life. Abundant life. Forgiven and restored life. JOY overflowing.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, the Christ figure is a lion - not accidentally the king of the jungle. At the end of the series, Aslan observes: *All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page, now at last they were beginning Chapter 1 of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.*"

Or as the last verse of the Gospel of John puts it: *But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

These are witnesses to Christ who we call king. The question is - who is Christ to you and what difference does your understanding of him make in your life?

