

Times are Changin'
UUF

Rev. Walter LeFlore
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I've made an important discovery: things change. As much as we might like things to be known, understood and predictable, things do change.

I guess, that's nothing new. The same has probably been said by every generation. Yet, it seems, something strikingly different is going on, things seem to be changing.

It's not just that days are getting shorter and it'll soon be dark by 4:30. Or the fact that maple leaves are still on the trees in December.

It seems a significant unfolding is taking place.

I know I can see it in my own life. When I planned my sabbatical, I envisioned resting, then doing a number of things that needed doing around the house, visiting family and friends; I planned to write and do some deep thinking.

As it turned out I did a lot of resting, much more than I knew I needed. I discovered three or four deeper levels of rest and relaxation than I knew existed .

As I reflected on the amount of rest I seemed to need, I realized that resting for the sake of resting is not the same as resting in preparation of work. Resting with the objective of readying for more work impedes our ability to rest, it allows stuff to build up, layer after layer. We can become blind to the fact that our ultimate focus is on doing more work, not truly resting.

We know this about the body and it's ability to fight pathogens and it's ability to heal. If the body is tired or mal-nourished, it's ability to fight disease is lessened. Stress also plays a significant role in our body's ability to defend itself and heal.

Goodness knows, this year, and even years leading up to it have been...shall we say... a bit abnormal. There has been much to cause us stress; lots to react to.

This year, alone, there have been 2 major floods, a major freeze, seven severe storms, three tropical cyclones, a major drought and an outbreak of wildfires. This year may set records for massive natural disasters in the US.

Hurricane Harvey was the most powerful hurricane to hit Texas in 50 years. Hurricane Irma, a category 5, was the most powerful to hit the US and Caribbean in a decade. It was followed by Maria, another category 5 with 175m/hr maximum sustained winds, the tenth most intense storm on record. It dropped some 38" of rain.... I'm ashamed by how little has been done to repair the damage and devastation in Puerto Rico.

There's also been an earthquake in Mexico. Monsoon flooding in Bangladesh killed upward of 1200 people, affecting some 40 million; a mudslide in Columbia and flooding in Sierra Leone leaving 2000 people homeless.

These may or may not be tied to global climate change. But that's a lot for personal and national bank accounts to deal with. The impact on lives and families is beyond our ability to quantify.

Those are what we call natural disasters. There's another list of man-made events that have impacted our lives. Certainly we can't ignore what's been going on in our nation's capital. Nor can we not be affected by the fear and loss of life at the hands of those with high powered rifles. And of late, there have been a flood of accusations of sexual harassment and worse; igniting a nation-wide campaign of women announcing "Me Too", confessing it happened to me too.

I want to stop here and have us all take a deep breath. I don't intend to be morose. My intent is to merely name what is and what has been.

If it all feels heavy, that's because it is. And we all have to make a decision about how we'll deal with such things... and a lot more that surrounds us during these times we live in. I want to **strongly** encourage us not to despair. More importantly I want to beg us not to disengage.

Instead, I call you, me and us, to invoke, what I've come to believe is a very helpful concept: Radical Acceptance. During these times in particular, I think it's essential that we be able to engage the truth of what is with dignity, personal integrity, resolve and love.

For me, that requires that we minimize our judgmental reactions. I doubt it's possible to eliminate reacting, but lessening negative assessments seems the rational thing to do...it maximizes our options. It creates a fuller palette from which to paint our lives...rather than have others and events dictate our experience of life.

As Tevye implies in his song, Traditions have and always will be questioned and challenged. Perhaps that's exactly as it should be. Just as we are told we should review our investments and clean out our closets now and again...it is good that we should be intentional in deciding which traditions we want to hang on to and which should be discarded.

I want to hang on to some fundamental democratic norms that seem to be under direct attack these days. The right to vote seems essential if we are to maintain a democratic governmental system. Making it easier, rather than harder, for citizens to vote seems not only common sense, but essential.

I have no interest in changing the traditional way our officials are elected. It used to be, we the voters, chose who represented us. We've moved dangerously close to a process whereby the currently elected get to decide who will be allowed to vote for them.... "with surgical precision", according to the courts.

I want desperately, to hang on to a quaint notion, the meaning of the words President Abraham Lincoln spoke during the Gettysburg Address... "a government of the people, by the people and for the people". We are rapidly becoming a government of the elite, by corporations, and for the few.

Now on the other hand....and there is always another hand... some of our traditions are in need of change, some are sorely outdated, others are vile, and must be named and replaced.

SO...“gather 'round people, Wherever you roam, And admit that the waters Around you have grown... you better start swimmin', Or you'll sink like a stone. For the times they are a-changin'.”

We've seen tremendous change to some of our historical, national traditions. Gays and lesbians can now reap the benefits of marriage and the right to adopt children. We need to find a way to provide the same freedoms and legal status to the transgendered and the gender queer among us.

We've had a black man, at least a bi-racial black man, elected President of the United States. We've not yet been able to define a woman as sufficiently competent to be President. That's a tradition that has created a ceiling that must be broken if we are to truly be led by the best of us.

We've recently been offered the opportunity to see more clearly than anytime since reconstruction and Jim Crow the manifestations of systemic racism. We're finally moving past defining racism as a trait associated only with individuals.

We've been offered the opportunity to view racism as a systemic pathogen, a cancer to our democracy, and antithetical to human decency. We're being shown that racism and other isms are a by-product of a system that privileges whiteness and maleness.

The question remains however, will we recognize that the waters are so turbulent and deep they'll drown us unless we change?

Similarly, and I suspect the timing is not a coincidence, we are being provided the opportunity to see the degree to which, women and girls are and have been, kept from being full and equal participants in who we are as a people.

As a student of human nature, trained in the social sciences, I've been stunned by how quickly the dam seems to have broken to reveal the degree of sexual exploitation of women in the workforce.

The mechanisms that have held this exploitation in place are being revealed day by day. The threat of termination and loss of a career, non-disclosure agreements which hide much from the public eye. Out-right shaming and the tendency to disbelieve those with less power and visibility. Men, as the constant, in positions of authority that set the rules and make such determinations is a potent insurance policy against disclosure.

The willingness and ability to see what is, dispassionately is what will be required to help us navigate the waters we find ourselves in. As we were told by Margaret Wheatley during the chalice lighting, “the capacities and skills we most need—patience, compassion, discernment, effectiveness, courage—are available to us if we can see the world honestly and not flee from its harshness.”

This community of ours can be not only a buffer from the raw winds of what is, we can also be an incubator of patience, compassion, discernment, effectiveness and courage.

May we offer such a wonderful gift to each other during this holiday season, and may we feel obligated to hold one-another accountable to fulfilling the role we each play in our collective unfolding. And may we each be willing to accept what is and do what is uniquely ours to do.

For the times, they are a-changin'. The times demand it.

Amen and Ashee