

EVERYTHING CHANGES AND ENDS

There was an electrician who went around offering his services to change light bulbs at the local church to LED lighting. He then went to each of the churches and asked how many people does it take to change a light bulb. He went to the United Church and they said in the UCC it takes 20 people to change a light bulb because before we change any of the light bulbs we will need to strike several committees to do a review on the pros and cons of the new light bulbs. He went to the Roman Catholics and they said...none we have a new pope and we don't want new light bulbs we will stick with candles and be more environmentally friendly than all the others. He went to the Anglican church and asked how many people does it take to change a light bulb and they said, 5 people.

One to change the light bulb and several others to stand around to reminisce about how much they loved the old light bulb.

If we are honest, most of us are more like the Anglicans, most of us don't like change, but one of the givens of our reality is that "everything changes and ends", our lives are in a constant state of flux.

Throughout the season of Lent we are going to be exploring what David Ricoh in his book refers to as the five givens in life, that is The Five Things We Cannot Change. And we are going to learn how to face the five givens as Jesus faced them.

Our first given or first truth or reality that we humans find difficult to deal with is that "everything changes and ends". We humans don't like that given very much. We like to live with the illusion that everything in this life is permanent and that everything is going to stay the same. We tend to resist change and find it difficult to deal with change and we suffer great pains with all of our many endings and good-byes. And yet from the moment we took our first breath we have been in a process of change. From the moment we emerged from the protection of our mother's warm womb into the light, to the loss of our first tooth, changing from classroom to classroom adjusting to changing teachers in school, through the confusing movement through puberty and entering adulthood, getting a date, losing a date, beginning of friendships and ending

of friendships, getting our first job, leaving and getting a new job, every time we have packed and unpacked from a trip, every time we have had to pack and unpack from a move to a new house or a new community, every time a child came into our life and our routine was turned upside down, and then every time a child grew up and left home, every time we stand in the mirror and notice another new roll or a wrinkle we bemoan the tides of aging and change, every time we have stood at a graveside we have grieved change. Life is full of changes and endings and sometimes we are excited about the change because we have been the instigators of the change and sometimes, with the unwelcome changes, we fight and resist them whether they are changes in our family or changes at work or changes in our church or changes in our own bodies or in our own lives.

But Aldous Huxley reminds us that nothing is permanent. He says that in the statement "I am" there are 2 errors...the "I" suggests that we are separate but that is an illusion, there is no such thing as a separate "I". We are interconnected with every living thing. And secondly the "am" suggests there is permanence when everything is in reality impermanent, always in a state of flux and change.

William Bridges in his book Transition reminds us that how we dealt with our very first change and ending in our life is how we tend to deal with all the changes and endings that come after them. So the question Bridges asks is: when did your childhood end? Perhaps your childhood was ended by a parent's illness, or their drinking, or someone's death in a family, or through the divorce of your parents, or an act of abuse, or the devastation of a first love's break up? There are many events that can end a childhood. And how did you cope with that change and ending? Did you fight it, resign yourself to it, become self-destructive in it, or find ways to roll with it and grow with it and learn from it?

In our story this morning as told by Mark, the first gospel written about 60 AD, 30 years after Jesus' death, we hear about Jesus' baptism and journey into the wilderness to undergo testing. In a moment Jesus' life as he knew it is turned upside down. We don't know very much about Jesus life up until his baptism but we can guess that if his

life was fairly typical for a young Jewish man in first century Palestine he would have apprenticed under his father and followed in his father's trade as a carpenter. Until the day he hears rumours about a wild man from the Essene community preaching about repentance and the need to turn away from your sins and to prepare for the good news that the kingdom of God is coming to overturn the kingdom of Rome. And Jesus along with many others goes out to hear this preacher named John the baptizer to hear what he has to say and becomes one of his students and followers. And as he listens to the teachings of John he is moved to become baptized by him and as he comes out of the river to wash away his sins he hears a voice from heaven say to him, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. And Mark tells us that immediately after Jesus' baptism he is led into the wilderness to be tested for 40 days. Jesus life as he knew it ended and changed in an instant. We are told that in the 40 day desert experience he underwent severe testing by Satan. Now the word Satan translates literally as "adversary" and when you break down the Latin of the word, adversary literally means "towards truth". So Satan or an adversary, anything or anyone that goes up against you or opposes you is in some way pushing you towards your inner truth. Jesus discovers in that deserting testing, what he is really made of, it is a time of strengthening his integrity and character, that is what testing's, what challenges, what difficulties do for us, they push us toward the truth of our character. Jesus' life as an ordinary carpenter ends to emerge from that experience as the world's most well-known spiritual messenger. And the first news that Jesus hears when he comes out of the desert is that his teacher John the Baptist has been arrested by the Roman government. He no longer has a teacher; he must become the teacher and create a new community of followers. Jesus experiences the given, that everything changes and ends, and it can do so most unexpectedly. So how do we cope with the many changes and all the endings that happen in our own lives? We can usually handle the ones that we are in control of, it's the ones that we feel are happening to us, outside of us that frighten and disturb us, maybe even make us angry. So how do we face changes and endings?

David Ricoh in his book encourages us to accept and even welcome and embrace changes and endings as opportunities for spiritual growth and wisdom like Jesus did, like the Buddha did, like all spiritually awakening people do. Ricoh is a therapist who reminds us that while everything changes and ends, this is the way that the whole universe itself unfolds...stars are always being born and stars are always dying, the tides are always moving in and tides are always moving out, species are coming and going, seasons are always changing and in flux, weather patterns are unpredictable and nature is in a constant state of flux, new growth and possibilities, endings and new beginnings – nothing in the world is in a state of permanence, molecules are in a constant state of flux and so we need to flow with the movement not fight it.

Ricoh reminds us that it used to be the teaching that in the event of an earthquake, the advice was that we were to sit in a doorway and brace our backs against the door and hold up our arms in a position of tension against the doorframe, now he says the experts recommend rolling up in a ball and going with the flow of the quake. Ricoh says that is probably the best advice for dealing with changes and endings, preparing ourselves on one hand, but going with the flow on the other. In fact he gives us the beautiful image of dealing with changes and endings with the image of holding out 2 hands --- (Hold out your two hands) --in one hand we hold and honour the predicament of what it is we are experiencing and feeling all the fear of that loss of control. In the other hand we hold our power, our capacity to handle whatever it is, trusting in the goodness of our Creator to get us through, we hold our resilience. It is in the holding of these opposites that we find our serenity and courage in the midst of changes and endings.

Lorraine Thompson just passed away on Friday after living with ALS for 6 long years. Lorraine was someone who was able to take the predicament of her life in one hand and live with the power and resilience of enduring her new circumstances with the other. She was an amazing woman who was able to find serenity and courage in her devastating situation. And now she is finally set free from her body into the world of spirit.

Learning to cope and flow with changes and endings are woven into our lives, into our very DNA. The person I was yesterday physically no longer exists, the cells in my cornea today are completely different from the cells in my cornea yesterday, my eyes are completely new. And our eyes do that without fanfare, they do it without us even being aware of it. Every cell in our body is constantly changing over to make us altogether a whole new person. So we know how to do this, we know how to undergo change, we do it every day all the time, we go with the flow, we were made to adapt, to be resilient. As David Richo reminds us: Although everything changes and ends, things renew themselves and move through cycles that further evolution.

There was a woman I met who was dying of cancer. As she was coming closer to death she was growing more and more anxious. So I told her about a woman I knew that was a medium and perhaps she could help her to trust the world that she was going to, so Ella came with me to visit this woman who was now unable to leave her bed. And we prayed and asked for guidance and who showed up to help the woman was a great aunt who had passed and through Ella she gave a message to this woman. Her aunt told her not to be afraid, that when it came time for her to pass, for her just to let go and she would discover that she would emerge from her body as if she was a beautiful butterfly unfurling her wings and emerging out of a cocoon, that her spirit would unfurl and she would feel amazing and her energy would be so renewed and freed from her body like it was an all too heavy coat that was weighing her down. And she would be so relieved and feel so free to be out of her body that she would wonder why she chose to cling to her body so tightly and not let go sooner. The woman was so happy to know that her aunt would be there to help her make the transition and that she would feel light and free.

Everything in our lives changes and ends, and that's ok, because Jesus reminds us that in the midst of facing our darkest fears and we feel as though we are wandering in the wilderness places and everything is changing and ending, we can be assured that like Jesus, we too are God's beloved. YOU, and YOU and YOU, each one of you are God's

beloved with whom God is well pleased. And we can trust that whatever God makes endures forever. And so it is. Amen.