

## **New Directions**

### **3. Expect Resistance**

Luke 4:21-31

When Christ was baptized by John, his life radically changed directions. He left behind his life as a carpenter to dedicate himself to the mission for which he had been sent. But what, exactly, was that mission? Immediately after his baptism, he went into the wilderness to face the temptations and to gain a clearer understanding about what he was called to do. By the end of those forty days, it was clear to him that he had been sent to lead the world in a new direction, to lead people from a world in which valued power most of all into a world in which service is valued most highly.

Shortly afterward, Jesus went back to Nazareth, his home town. He got up in the synagogue, before the people who had watched him grow up and who had loved and supported him, and he announced, "God has sent me to change things and to change them now." The people said, "Oh, that's nice." And then they tried to throw him off a cliff.

We are talking about new directions. In this new year, is God calling you to move in a different direction? Is God calling you to do something new or different to make life better for people? Is God calling you to make some changes? If so, be prepared to be thrown over a cliff.

People resist change. They resist making changes. They resist others making changes. If you change, they will have to adjust to the changes you are making, and they don't like to make changes. So, they don't want you to change either.

My daughter went off to college and came back a vegetarian. That's a change she made. But, let me tell you, when she's home it changes the way we all eat. Every meal, my wife and, more especially, my mother-in-law are in a panic. How do you prepare a meal without meat? They had never prepared a meal without meat. They had to make some changes. And, if they didn't love my daughter so much, they would probably be pretty irritated about it.

When I was chair of the Conference Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, I heard a presentation by the wife of a recovering alcoholic. She talked about what a struggle it was for her to adjust to her husband's changes. She had prayed for him to change. But when he was a practicing alcoholic, she was in charge of making all the decisions in the family. All he cared about was alcohol. Now that he

was in recovery, she discovered that he had opinions about things and wanted to have a say in the family decisions. She said that at time she gets angry with him and finds herself longing for the good old days when he was still drinking.

So, get ready. If God is calling you in a new direction in your life, and you say, yes, get ready. Some people aren't going to like it. They will do everything they can to keep you from making changes. And if they can't stop you, they will get mad and try to throw you over a cliff. Why? Because the changes you are making are inconvenient to them, and they are angry about your being so inconsiderate.

I do it. When Glenn told me that he felt called by God to leave Chapelwood and go to East Texas to pastor a church, you know what I did? I tried to talk him out of it. I told him he would probably end up in a little church with fewer members than his Sunday School class. He said, "I know that, but God has called me to do it." I said, "The people in Chapelwood are a lot friendlier than the people in some of those little East Texas churches." He said, "That may be so, but God has called me to do it." Well, at this point I was getting kind of irritated. "God told me to do this, God told me to do that." What about me? Doesn't he understand how much trouble it's going to be to get people to do the things he's doing? I mean, how inconsiderate can you be? I haven't thrown him over a cliff yet, but I have thought about pushing him into Oyster Creek.

You see, Glenn is moving in a new direction. And because he is moving in a new direction, all of us will have to change directions. That's all right. We have faith that God has called Glenn to move in a different direction because God wants Chapelwood to move in different directions. We trust God will use these changes to help us find new and even better ways of doing what God wants Chapelwood to do.

But most people don't think that way. For most, change is irritating, and even frightening. They just know that things are as good as they can be, and any changes will make things worse. So, don't be surprised when they try to throw you off a cliff when you try to make changes.

Jesus told us they would. He said, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12)

The prophets are the people who are inspired by God to see the changes that we need to make and who have the courage to speak up. They always suffer for it. Then the changes are made, and people recognize they were right. Then they are honored to high heaven, even though they may not still be around to enjoy it.

Someone once asked me if I could name a modern prophet. Yes, I can. We celebrated his birthday last week. Martin Luther King was a prophet of God. He saw changes that had to be made to make life better, not just for black people, but for all of us. Racism is an evil that not diminishes life for those who are discriminated against, it also poisons the soul of the racist. Martin Luther King stood up to say, "We need to make some changes, and we need to make them now."

I was a teenager during the civil rights movement. I remember my parents saying, "He's right. We do need to change. But he's going about it all wrong. He's pushing too hard. He needs to give us more time." Sure, we needed more time to change. After all, it had only been a hundred years since the end of the Civil War. Sure, we needed another hundred years or so. Then we would be ready to change.

Dr. King said, "No, we can't wait any longer. We need to make some changes now." And what were the changes we needed to make? He said, "We need to all treat one another with dignity and respect and love." That's all he was asking for. He just called for change. And they threw him off a cliff.

That's just the way it is. If you are going to stand up for change, get ready for it. It will happen.

Make sure that it is a change that really needs to be made. When I was a younger pastor, I got all full of righteous indignation about something. I don't remember what it was. But at the time I thought it was important. And I started agitating to make some changes. One of the older, wiser pastors took me aside and gave me this word of advice. He said, "Choose your crosses wisely." In other words, some things are worth getting crucified over, and some are not.

So, if you are considering making a change, consider the cost. Ask yourself, "Is this really God's will? Will this change really make life better for others? Are you trying to change something that is really wrong? Or are you trying to make a change just because it suits you better?"

Some of the biggest battles are fought over the silliest things. I learned a long time ago that, as a pastor, I never, ever want to be involved in choosing new carpet for the sanctuary. That's going to be a battle. Somebody will get crucified. And God could care less about the color of the carpet in the sanctuary. Some changes aren't worth the trouble.

But when you see people being hurt by the status quo, when you see people suffering because of the way things are, when you can see a better way, you have to take a stand. You will make some people angry. Certainly. You may even get thrown over a cliff. But if you do, rejoice and be glad. You will have a great reward waiting for

you in heaven. And eventually people will recognize that you were right. If you have the courage to make changes that Christ is leading us to make, you will have the joy of knowing that you have made people's lives better. There really is no greater reward than that. There is no greater joy. That's worth going to a cross for.

Is God calling you in a new direction this year? Is God calling you to make changes which will make people's lives better? It will not be easy to make those changes. It will be struggle. The old physics law says that bodies moving in a straight direction will continue moving in that direction, unless you apply energy to move them in a different direction. The only way to make them change directions is to work at it. If you are going in a new direction, you will have to work at it.

And don't expect a whole lot of support while you're doing it. If you are lucky, some of the people in your life will have enough faith not to be threatened by change, and they will support you. Give thanks to God for those people. They are truly gifts from God. All the others will be trying to throw you over a cliff to stop you from making those changes.

That's okay. You can do it. If it's God's will, don't let anything or anyone stop you. Go where Christ is leading you today. It may be a bumpy ride. But it will be well worth it.

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