

About Face
Preached by
Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even
United Church of Fayetteville
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For Reflection: *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Romans 15:3

Hebrew Scripture: *Psalms 33:13-22*

¹³The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind.

¹⁴From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth—

¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

¹⁷The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

¹⁸Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,

¹⁹to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield.

²¹Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

²²Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Epistle : *1 Corinthians 1.4-10*

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹⁰Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Meditation

About Face

Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even

Although “change” has been part of our conversation for a while, especially since Easter of this year, we have been talking about it a lot more. We have been reading about it; and acknowledging its challenges. We have a change work group. We have already made some changes—monthly education for young people, desserts in members’ homes, on-line sign ups and the accompanying smiles engendered by the ads attached to confirmation emails :-), new congregational members and friends; a youth elder for the first time in several years; I’ve designed a

few experimental ads; a new music director and the return of our choirs to in-person worship. Big and little, change is already upon us and we know there is more to come. Some will be more or less work than others and some will bring more or less joy.

I have been thinking about those things this month and where we have yet to go and what we have yet to do. As I was thinking about those things, I continued to get the 8-30 second videos my niece sends of her son. They used to arrive about once a week. He was 18 months old this weekend, so change and growth come more quickly and so have the videos. Especially since August, he has vastly increased his mobility. He's a deliberative little guy who assesses the territory and then makes his move.

I found myself rewatching a video that came in late August and again this week, as I honed the sermon.

It began with him being bent over and hands and feet (not knees). He took a little time adjusting his feet, finding out where his body was in space, and test shifting his balance. He rocked back on his heels and stood up. And laughed with sheer delight and pride at his success. He was so pleased he forgot the object of the exercise which was to join his mother on the deck. She reminded him and he started off. Four quick steps. What followed looked like an intentional attempt at a gymnastic forward roll—headfirst into a pile of toys. Before he had time to think about it, his mother said, "You got it." And he immediately rolled back to hands and feet, found out where his parts were, and checked his balance—(this is not a child who is going to whack you with his luggage on a plane)—and was up and running, laughing all the way.

You may be wondering what that has to do with what we do. As I watched I was reminded of the sheer joy we once felt at learning new things, doing hard things and changing and growing. We lose the wonder of saying "Wow! Look what I did—being pleased with ourselves and enjoying the moment for the simple happiness of being alive.

Too often, I suspect as we get older, changing and growing start to feel like drudgery or more work than we want to do. Some of us feel like we learned everything we ever needed to know in third grade Sunday school or confirmation, and are resentful of the need to do it again. Without doing much about providing for a next generation, we nonetheless think it will handle the techy stuff we don't want to learn and will keep us tuned in. If that has happened here, I'd be surprised because I have never known a congregation more committed to education. We are certainly sophisticated enough to know it doesn't all happen in a classroom.

To get us ready in a different way—a heart trip instead of a head trip—for what's ahead, I'd like you to do a little exercise with me.

As you are able, please stand up, turn around and face East Genesee Street. We are looking back in time as well as space. There are many lovely things back there, like those stunning Pentecost red windows in the doors. But there is less light and not a lot opportunity. God was with us then, of course, as God is with us now. But the living God does not linger in the past.

Now I'd like everyone to do an about face and look toward the chancel. We are looking ahead in time and space. There is more light. The play of light and shadow shows us the embracing arms of Christ. The God in Christ in whom we live and move and have our being is with us now and leading us and luring us into the future. Wherever we are going, whatever we are doing, our God is with us and will be with us in the days ahead.

You may sit down, but we are not finished our practice yet.

Very often when we read scripture, we note that it offers us guidance, or warnings, or raises question and challenges us. But all that was written was written for us as well in this time and place. Paul's words of encouragement were written for us as well as for the church in Corinth.

As I remind us of his encouragement, please repeat after me:

The grace of God that has been given to us in Christ Jesus,

In every way, we have been enriched in him,

in speech and knowledge of every kind

so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift.

He will also strengthen us to the end.

Our God is faithful;

by him we were called into the fellowship of his Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.

The days ahead will call us to assess where we are, test our balance, strengthen our muscles, learn new things, take a few tumbles and get up again. When my nephew decides he's ready to make his move, he is all in. Let us be all in, as well, trusting in the God who has given us all we need, learning and growing with joy and thanksgiving and pausing to enjoy ourselves because of what we have done and learned. That shared spirit will strengthen and grow us in other ways, because people are drawn to other people who are happy and joyful, comfortable with who they are and hopeful about who they may yet become.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Healing God: We are comforted by the knowledge that we are indeed your people. Yet it is a knowledge that needs daily and weekly refreshing from your word, from the signs and symbols of our faith, and from the connections with all those you have called to be your family in this place.

In the increasingly complicated and ever-changing days of our lives, we are glad for the simple pleasures of our days – smiles, kind words, snail mail and sunny skies. We take this moment to thank you, not only for these things, but that you have created us to enjoy them...

In the overlapping layers of responsibility for family, friends, church, community, and schools, and all the communities of need where we are a part, we often find ourselves lost and without focus, as we seek to care for those around us. In this moment, help us to find our center and you at its core...

This week, we especially remember those whose lives or livelihoods are being forever changed by dramatic weather events.:

Those on the Gulf Coast preparing for storm after storm, for those affected by flooding and other losses.

The people Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Russia as death, destruction, fear and the disarray of lives accelerates, impacting ever-widening circles of people.

Knowing that you are with us, gifting us and blessing us, soothing us and guiding us with your Spirit, we go forward in faith and trust. Help us to enjoy our days, and give us peace in the night, so that as your son's hands and feet and heart in the world, we might go on loving and healing as you have loved and healed us.

For we ask it in Christ's name, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.