

Change abounds!

There's nothing constant in life but change itself!

Someone moved my cheese!

The winds of change!

The list of clichés such as these regarding change go on and on. We talk about change a lot, but often we're not prepared for it. We simply are too focused on our day to day lives that we don't see it coming and we get swept away by its overwhelming force.

"I didn't hear the train ... I didn't see the train" ...

The text message on my phone read "Are you guys going to be able to get home?". The message was from our daughter Ellen and I read it as the fog was gradually lifting from my sleepy head. It was 6am Egypt time, and given the seven-hour time differential, that meant Ellen was likely only a few hours into her bedtime. Virginia began to awake, so I re-read Ellen's message to her. We both sensed Ellen's concern but really didn't understand what she was worried about. "What's the deal? We are fine!", we exclaimed. There was no need to call or write Ellen back ... she's sound asleep. So, we got ready and went off to greet a new day.

The flight from Cairo to Frankfurt was uneventful. However, upon arrival in the USA, we found that O'Hare Airport in Chicago lived up to its reputation. It took Virginia and me four and one half hours to clear customs, all the while crammed into a serpentine line with 5,000 of our most intimate friends. So much for social distancing! We were finally given the green light and now considered to be suitable for re-entry into our home country, providing we promised to self-quarantine for fourteen days once we got home.

Given all of the chaos at O'Hare, we missed our connecting flight, as most people did. Fortunately, we caught a later flight and finally made it back to Des Moines.

Ellen, Barry, and Chase met us at the airport. They had our car there and waved to us from inside their vehicle. No hugs. No kisses. Things sure have changed! Des Moines was now a much different place than it was just two weeks ago.

What's the deal? We are fine ... I think.

In the Gospel reading for today, John shares with us the Farewell Discourse ... Jesus' final evening with his disciples. Jesus knows what is coming and he's trying to prepare his followers for some major changes. Things aren't going to be as they were. Soon, they won't see Jesus as they have in the past. They will soon be without the human form of their beloved friend, mentor, teacher, advocate, and Lord. Some of the disciples remained confused and couldn't understand where Jesus was going. What's the deal? Isn't everything okay?

Jesus told the disciples to simply follow his commandments and everything would indeed be okay. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Do these things and you will be fine. There may likely be worldly forces that may harm your physical being, but your place in heaven will be secured.

Jesus then promised the disciples a very special gift ... the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would serve as their Advocate ... their guide, counselor, and comforter. Though the disciples would no longer see the human Jesus, he would always be with them, for ***the Advocate dwells or abides in everyone who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments.***

The disciples would be forever united with Christ, and he with them.

Big changes are coming for the disciples, changes they may not fully understand, but through the promise of the Holy Spirit they will be fine.

Virginia and I enjoy watching the CBS morning news show each day. On Monday, May 11th (episode 94), they showed a story featuring four young children from across the nation. So to get a child's perspective, these kids were asked to prepare video diaries of how they are coping with the pandemic and to share their thoughts. I found this to be so enlightening.

Each child was doing their best to cope with the change in their young lives. They used their imaginations to keep themselves entertained and worked hard to do their schoolwork in a much different fashion than what they were accustomed. All missed their friends ... just like us, they missed their community. They worried about their friends and hoped they didn't become ill from the virus. They looked forward to things getting back to "normal", but each seemed suspicious that the "old normal" they knew will not reappear. It'll be a "new normal" ... whatever that is.

One young lady ... a third grader ... said it all. When asked how she would like to see all of this end, without hesitation she said she wants us to work to: 1) make sure such a pandemic never happens again, and 2) we are all nice to each other.

Wow! From the mouth of babes!

Maybe ... just maybe ... our post pandemic plan of action focuses on being globally prepared for the next one because there likely will be another one. We really need to revisit our priorities and prepare ourselves for future challenges.

Maybe too we focus not on finding someone to blame, but rather we work together to find answers and solutions. We'll need to recognize that many of us are afraid amidst all of the uncertainty. The world has changed and things just aren't as they were. We can address this fear with a caring and candid approach, and a can-do attitude.

And finally, here's a novel idea ... maybe ... just maybe ... we follow Jesus' commandments! If we love God and we love our neighbors as ourselves, we'll stand a good chance of being "nice to each other"!

You see, the Good News in all of this is this ... the same Spirit that Jesus promised to his disciples is promised to us! We too have an Advocate!

Love Jesus ... love your neighbors as yourself ... and we will be just fine!