

# Sermon Text for June 25, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Ezra 3:8-13, Romans 7:1-6

## ***“Out with the old and in with the new”***

So how was your week? Here at first Presbyterian Church life goes on as normal. Let's see, this week we hired a Director of Children's Ministry. We helped to arrange meals for Melanie who has contracted Lyme's disease. We narrowed down the field for our Director of Youth and Young adult ministries, we set up a line item in our budget to help any seminary student coming through FPC \$500 a semester from here until eternity, your pastor became moderator of the session at La Iglesia di Toughkenamon which is a Spanish speaking congregation in mushroom country in Chester County. We are feeding 8 new members today at lunch, the senior high youth will be going to Jacksonville and you have a chance to help, we organized a preparatory meeting for Mission 2018 to Italy. Session set up a committee to look at the possibility of trading out the organ. We are preparing ourselves logistically and emotionally for this being Brett's last Sunday with us. Come and join us in Fellowship Hall for his send-off.

Besides that, it was just another quiet week here in Strasburg, PA. So much of what I described above is change. Change always catches us off guard especially if we consider ourselves as part of the old guard. Paul today in Romans is going to speak to the issue of what effect Christ's death has in our life and the necessary changes that must take place in our lives as we throw out the old self, the flesh as Paul calls it, and put on the new or the spirit, again as Paul calls it. Since change is a constant in our lives maybe getting a good handle on the changes that we ought to expect and embrace when we are in Christ will prepare us and teach us how to act and react to the changes that happen around us, often times without any control on our part.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

I've told you the story before of what happens New Year's Day in Italy, when they take seriously the out with the old and the in with the new. It can be dangerous if you are caught in the cross-fire.

Our Old Testament reading contains a scene of Scripture which is probably the most concrete example of the new coming in and the old being replaced. It starts by saying that the leaders "made a beginning". Did you see what was happening. It is really a great story. The temple had been destroyed during the exile and now they are returning

from exile and trying to start their life over again by building what to them was the most important building, the temple. This scene is the laying of the foundation of the new temple directly upon the foundation of the old temple. When you go to Jerusalem you can see the walls of the temple and of Jerusalem and you can see how one of the walls was obviously built later than another. This is the scene, the building of the foundation of the temple.

The whole community comes out to see this historic and important event in the life of the people of God. People praised God because the foundations of the house of the Lord was laid, but: many of the priests, Levites, heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations wept, and you could not distinguish between those weeping and grieving for the loss of the old, and those shouting for joy for the new that was in place. What a scene. Those who had spent the most time, energy, material resources to put the old temple up were overcome with emotion to see the new one go on, even though they knew it had to be done, they were still there present to be a part of the community, seeing this new chapter in their life.

When change comes and disrupts our life we know that it is inevitable so we try to fight it, in the end we end up trying to roll with it. But here in Ezra and also in our own lives when it touches the institution that we hold dear and cherish it makes us wail and moan, even if others within the same family are shouting for joy. Change in society unnerves us and makes us anxious, change in the church, especially if we feel that it is actually changing the very foundation of the church and creates a new type of church makes us defensive and maybe even hostile.

Paul begins speaking about the change that occurs in our life, the life transformation that takes place when Christ died on the cross and we received him as our personal savior and develop a relationship with him, by using the example of marriage. What a relevant topic for us today as any time you talk about marriage and families you are touching upon a topic that our society has lost its handle on and the church continues to be the main spokesperson for that topic. We need to understand that Paul is assuming a doctrine of marriage that today is foreign to us. Society has changed dramatically in respect to marriage from when Paul wrote. For Paul it is easy for him to say in verse two a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. That obviously is not the case today. There are no laws that require a woman to have to live with her

husband for the rest of her life. We believe in the sanctity of marriage, but we also recognize that God's presence can work in all situations and cannot be limited.

In Paul's day women were not allowed to initiate the divorce proceedings and papers and the only way they could be freed from a husband was if he died. Let's not get any ideas there. But it is true, if the husband woke up on the wrong side of the bed he could file and get a divorce. That is why Jesus' words on divorce, it should never happen except on grounds of adultery, are such a change from the way that his society saw divorce. Jesus was looking out for the woman and trying to protect her from being kicked out on the street. Paul is expressing a reality where women in that society had no legal recourse.

So, if the only way a change could effectively be made in the marital status of a woman was if the man, the husband dies, then for Paul it qualifies as an out with the old and in with the new analogy. This Scripture is really not about marriage and married life. Paul does not make a social comment on marriage, and neither am I, but rather in the next verses he says how our lives which are full of change are drastically changed by what Christ did upon the cross. In verse 4 he starts by saying in the same way, talking about the comparison of the woman in marriage, in the same way we were all formerly married to sin, but sin has now died, and we are free to belong to another husband, even Christ.

Verses 1-3 speaks of the need for someone to die in order to effect a change in our status, in our way of life, much like in Ezra the death of their society and culture in the exile required that a new way of life with a new temple be created, so verses 4-6 tell us guess what, that old man, the one who made you live in the flesh, the one who made you bear fruit that was rotten, he is gone, and now you are free to choose one who gives you life and as Jesus states in John 10:10: I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

We live in a time where there is a whole section of society which is looking to get back to the way things were, to try to reclaim a glory that we think this nation, and by extension this institution of the church, was better. It is a longing to bring the old back again. But if we look at it closely it really is a longing to reclaim the privileges which we once had, and when I say we I mean we, those of us in this room. And so we bemoan the fact that we are losing our way of life, having to be faced with people who speak different languages in our country, people who are getting jobs ahead of us, in our country, people who worship differently than us, in our country, people who are favored in certain

situations than those who think and act like us. We miss those days when we were in charge and people like us were making the decisions. I need to tell you, Jesus is the one who brought these changes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century just as Ezra and his people brought the changes to the temple.

Life in Christ is a new life, a new life that has very little in common with the old life. The new life is marked by a healthy relationship with the new companion, Jesus Christ. This relationship is marked with times of quiet solitude, times when we are able to spend quality moments. This is not a sermon on prayer but rather the need to be able to embrace the new in Christ, but I am convinced that the only way that we are going to be able to cope with the changes that are taking place in society around us is through constant contact with our creator. Those who have little time for prayer, usually have little time for relationships and intimacy. Those who have little time for prayer, usually have a harder time dealing with change and would much rather go back to something that they know which is not God's will, than something that is new.

Living for Christ is a change, it is something new that must produce as Paul states in verses 4 and 5 fruit for God and not fruit for death. Our actions and thoughts, our comments must be for Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is not a call to systematically get rid of the old. There is something about the old, the traditional, the institutional which is good and allows for intimacy with our Savior. Cathedral vs. pharmacy. This is a call to embrace the new life in Christ that allows us not to be afraid of what changes there might be in our life, but rather how we can face changes head on and live a life abundant with Christ by our side. Amen.