

TEXT: Hebrews 13:8-9a

THEME: CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, BUT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.”

Dear Christian friends and especially my Trinity church family:

“Change is inevitable,” said British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in the 1880s. “Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.” I added that last part, but I’m sure I heard it somewhere. Change is inevitable and change is constant.

For example, in our 133 year history, Trinity Lutheran Church has had 15 pastors, and God willing, will have a 16th soon. Each of those shepherds has had a different personality, a different style of preaching and teaching, a different approach to leadership. But each has loved the Lord, his Word, and his people here at Trinity, and has strived to serve to the best of his ability. So, after every change in shepherds, the flock here at Trinity has continued to survive and thrive by God’s blessing.

Change is inevitable. Over the past 17 years, there have been some noteworthy changes here at Trinity. Here at our main campus, we started using the projector and screen for worship. We knew it would help our visitors more easily follow the order of service and that our older members would appreciate the larger letters on the screen. In fact, one of the sons of Frieda Szczesniak asked if we would be using the screen for her funeral last week. When I replied that we didn’t usually use it for funerals, he said he was glad he asked and would be sure to bring his glasses. The demographic group we hadn’t thought of was the young mothers and fathers, who no longer have to try to juggle a baby on the lap along with a bulletin and hymnal. And I’ve appreciated the ability to add visuals to the spoken word as our Savior often did as he pointed to objects around him while teaching. Trinity helped establish BALM—Bay Area Lutheran Ministries—to coordinate and foster greater cooperation in Gospel ministry among our area WELS churches. The nursery and offices were beautified and updated. The ugly peeling kitchen walls were tiled and the badly peeling walls in the classroom hallway were repaired and repainted. A new sound system was installed. For our 125th anniversary, new landscaping was installed and the parking lot was redone. For our 130th anniversary, new flooring was installed and the pews were reupholstered while we worshiped in the gym.

Change is inevitable. We acquired the south campus, extensively renovated the building, and then dedicated it for Christian education. Our early childhood ministry grew to the point that we needed a director for preschool and a director for childcare. It continues to grow and we need more workers. Infant care was established and is flourishing. We purchased the vacant bank building and property and turned it into our fenced-in soccer field. We added a new boiler and air conditioning. Teachers accepted calls or retired from the teaching ministry, and God blessed us with a full staff of

wonderful teachers who continue to provide an excellent Christ-centered education for our students, as has been the case for 132 years here at Trinity.

Change is inevitable. Our north campus was an empty building after the school was moved to our south campus. But it didn't remain that way for long. After extensive remodeling, the Amazing Grace Bookstore, now the Amazing Grace Christian Resource Center, was established. What a blessing it has been and remains, for our congregation, neighboring churches, and community! It provides an opportunity for more of our Trinity church family members to use their God-given time and talents.

Yes, CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, BUT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE. Faithful shepherds have come and gone here at Trinity, but what they taught and believed remains eternally the same. Their Savior is our Savior and will be our children's Savior and their children's Savior. Jesus is always the believer's contemporary. What he did for believers in the past, he will do for us. What he does for us, he will do for those who follow us. How do I know? Because **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** Note his full name—"Jesus" which means Savior and refers to the fact that God came in the flesh to save us, and "Christ" to refer to his great office of our Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus Christ and all that he offers, Jesus Christ and all that he promises, **"is the same yesterday and today and forever."** Believers of any century, past, present, or future, have but one foundation for their faith and goal for their life, "Jesus Christ."

The writer follows that beautiful, comforting truth with a stern warning: **"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings."** We aren't told specifically what **"strange teachings"** were threatening the Hebrews but the context implies a return to the familiar rituals of Judaism. That probably isn't so much of a temptation for us, but sometimes our traditions and the traditions of the church can be elevated to the status of God's Word. That dare not be! Don't let anyone add to God's Word, no matter how much it appeals to your sinful self-righteousness. Don't let anyone subtract from God's Word. That can be a temptation as churches all around us allow women pastors and members continuing to live in sins such as cohabitation without marriage and homosexuality. And do not merely listen to God's Word. That's dead orthodoxy—being right but taking no action, not living your faith, not being light and salt in our society. As James tells us: **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).**

Yes, CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, BUT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE. Forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life come only from Christ's redeeming work and God's sanctifying grace. That does not change. It is only through the Gospel that our saving faith is strengthened. That does not change. So, as I close my ministry, my fulltime service to our Savior and to you, my prayer for you, dear friends, is the same prayer Jesus Christ prayed for us believers: **"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).** Thank you for a blessed 17 years. Amen.