

“The Unchanging Christ”

Revelation 1:4-8

Our life is full of it. People fear and work to avoid it. People leave the church they love because of it. Our president was elected by promising it.

Bookstores are crammed with guides on how to create it personally and manage it professionally. Sometimes it's the only constant in life and other times people desperately want it but can't seem to muster it.

What is it? CHANGE.

The longer we live, the more of it we see. I remember “faintly” playing the board game Monopoly as a child. Monopoly was built on obscure locations from Atlantic City. Without Monopoly, nobody outside of Jersey would know Marvin Gardens and Oriental Avenue. But because 750 million people around the world have played the game, Parker Brothers has now released a globalized World Edition. City streets have been replaced by actual cities, which were determined by web-site voters.

Boardwalk is replaced by Montreal, Illinois Ave. by London, and Water Works and Electric Co. by Solar and Wind Farms. Instead of dollars, players spend manos, a fictional currency based on the euro. And they no longer buy, sell, and collect rent with cash; they do it by registering electronic transactions on their calculator-like personal banking units.

Everything changes, even M&M's. M&M's have gone premium with new

flavors including almond, raspberry, mocha, mint, and triple chocolate. The Premiums come in an upscale, trendy box instead of that tired brown-paper wrapper.

Another changing classic is the Bible. Think about the medium by which we read the Bible. In the ancient world, scripture was memorized and passed on orally. Then Hebrews took papyrus technology from the Egyptians and wrote on scrolls. Later they wrote on sturdier parchment – dried animal skins. In the 15th century, the printing press revolutionized the world by getting Bibles into the hands of non-clergy for the first time.

Today we beam texts on to power point slides and people bring Bibles to church on their I-phone.

Think about all the ways technology has altered age-old interactions between people. We used to talk face to face. Then we created the telegraph and eventually saw a phone in every home. Now we carry our phones, ditch our land lines and drop text messages and e-mails to avoid those pesky, lengthy human interactions.

Change seems to be everywhere. Even the church I grew up in, once surrounded by farm land and farmers, just completed a \$2 million addition, hoping to attract and make room for the families living in the new houses where I once baled hay.

In the neighborhood surrounding Divinity change is happening. I'm

presiding at funerals for folks who have lived here since the 1950's when the homes were built. Younger families are moving in because the homes are affordable and well cared for. Change is in the air.

I listen to some of you who hope and pray for change. Still hopelessly single. Still in a stale marriage. Still exhausted parents with no rest on the horizon. Still in the same job with the same company in the same cube.

Others of you hope and pray for the change in your lives to slow down. Some have been changing jobs like underwear because of the economy. Some have new family issues every time our schedules clear enough for us to see each other. Some of us cycle through relationships like the flavor of the month.

So sometimes we need an anchor in the storm, and other times we need the wind to fill our sails. Which ever life situation we find ourselves in, today's text from Revelation should offer some hope. It plays on that which is unchanging – the Triune God.

The reality is that Revelation weirds out a lot of us. The imagery in the book of Revelation of Jesus Christ seems more like the work of a '70's concert poster artist on LSD than it does scripture. And many of us don't know what to think about Revelation because we've seen it taken captive by too many end-of-the-world preachers and street crazies.

But this week's text is a classic – well known and easy to understand. No dragons. Nothing with wings. No fire to interpret. It could easily be nestled

inside of one of Paul's letters somewhere.

It's good to remember the first century context in which John wrote. John was living in exile on the very small island of Patmos because he had dared to challenge the imperialism of the Roman Empire that persecuted Christians while pushing its own religion that claimed Caesar as God. John responds with descriptions of our Triune God.

In verses 4 and 8, the Father is the one "who is and who was and who is to come." Like the alpha and omega of the Greek Alphabet, he is before and after all else. Though the times are uncertain, our God is the beginning and the end and therefore a source of comfort. God is eternal. Unchanging. The same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

In verse 4, John refers to the seven spirits because the number seven is a symbol for completeness and perfection. The perfect Spirit sees all things, so the misery of John's audience then and now isn't going unnoticed.

The Father, the Spirit, and the Son. John describes Jesus in 3 important ways for a persecuted people:

1. In verse 5 a "faithful witness" who modeled perseverance and martyrdom.
2. In verse 5 the "firstborn of the dead" as a promise to those who would be raised with him.
3. In verse 5 the "ruler of the kings of the earth" - even Caesar.

Despite what the people's situation told them, this Jesus loved them, freed them, and made them into royalty instead of the ruled.

In revelation, John preaches an unchanging God who sees all and can redeem all. But what do we do with this God if our life is changing way too much – or if it isn't changing the way we need it to?

We can learn to trust God in four different ways.

First, trust the unchanging. The economy of the last year has proven that the job market, the housing market, and the stock market are no place for our faith and comfort. Because God is the same yesterday and tomorrow, God can serve as an anchor point to a chaotic life. His word and the lifestyle of servanthood he expects are a constant. Following God means we have a true foundation for the whole of our lives to be built on.

First, trust the unchanging. Second, trust in redemption. Christ the King established a throne in the middle of our filth when in verse 5, he “freed us from our sins by his blood.” The “us” was John's first century audience and the “us” is us today. Jesus redeems our mess today. Jesus forgives all our sins in redeeming us to go out and bring God to the people. You are redeemed when you share Christ's love and forgiveness with anyone and everyone this week.

First, trust the unchanging. Second, trust in redemption. Third, trust our history. Because God is unchanging, Christianity by definition is a historical faith. We learn how the saints before us lived in faith by reading about the beliefs and

experiences of Martin Luther, Sister Teresa, and others. Check out our Divinity Library for good historical books.

Trust the unchanging. Trust in redemption. Trust our history. And fourth, trust our theology. Sometimes we hesitate to believe that Jesus “loves us and freed us.” After all, look at our unemployment. Look at our chronic pain or our battle with disease. Look at our loneliness. Look at our bad decisions that hurt others around us. And yet our theology tells us that God loves and forgives us anyway. Despite what we do, what we leave undone, and what is done to us, our theology remains constant.

God loves us. God frees us from our sins. God makes us royalty on this Christ the King Sunday. God calls us to serve him through our serving one another. These remain unchanging realities even when our everyday experiences call them into question.

We live in a fad-driven culture. Our technology pushes change faster than we can learn the bells and whistles that showed up last month. Everything comes and goes. In that kind of changing world, we gather here to worship Christ, the unchanging King, “who was and who is and who is to come.”

“To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!”

#430 - Rejoice, For Christ is King