

“Changing Your Mind”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, September 27, 2020

Matthew 21: 23-32

A father has two sons. He asks the first to go work in the vineyard. The son says, “No I’m not going” but later changes his mind and goes. The second son says, “Yes, I’ll go” but doesn’t. Who did the father’s will? The first one - who changed his mind.

There are different degrees to the concept of ‘changing your mind’. You’ve all been there, when at the last minute, you change your order – ‘I’ve changed my mind. I’ll have the pumpkin pie and not the cherry.’ But if your change of mind involves any thing more consequential, you will find that our culture does not treat mind-changers courteously. To not appear to be resolute in one’s decisions can be seen as a character flaw and certainly not a strength. There are consequences to changing your mind. Think of the political arena – if a political leader were to say that they were changing their mind, the opposition would have a field day. Making the right decision the first time is a sign of strength, power, leadership. For in our fast-paced society, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of room around discernment, or even time to mull over a decision. And there is precious little permission to change your mind. People want answers immediately, and answers that will stick. To change one’s mind is counter-cultural.

You will have examples that come to mind, but for me the first that came was the 1936 decision by King Edward to renounce the throne for the woman he loved, Wallis Simpson. That change of mind – from duty to love – has been both condemned and celebrated over the decades as historians hash and rehash the story of it all. Edward’s change of mind held considerable more consequence than the changing of my mind over my choice of pie.

To change your mind can find you pitted against the status quo. To change your mind can be one of the hardest things you will do because it’s hard to change something that you’ve believed in all your life. Sometimes changing your mind can feel herculean – like moving a mountain – because the mindset you are changing has been with you a very long time. For example, marriage is supposed to last, but divorce represents a very harsh change of mind, with old patterns left in shreds and new patterns slow to form.

Jesus says, ‘And even after you saw it, you did not change your minds.’ He is speaking to the chief priests and elders about John the Baptist, who had been in their midst, but who they chose not to see. Jesus is standing in the midst of our culture that rarely promotes the changing of one’s mind, and says, “And even after you saw it, you did not change your minds.”

We’ve been reading about unclean water in indigenous communities in Ontario for how long now? Here is a February 2020 update on the government’s progress to lift long-term drinking water advisories: “In January 2020, one long-term drinking water advisory was lifted, one short-term advisory was lifted and one drinking water advisory became long-term. Lac Seul First Nation (Ontario) lifted a long-term drinking water advisory from the Kejick Bay water treatment plant on January 7, 2020. The drinking water advisory, in effect since February 2003, was lifted after the completion of a new water treatment plant in the community.” A *seventeen* year long wait by this community for safe drinking water. At the end of this government press

release were these words: “Working in collaboration with First Nations, the Government of Canada has committed to ending all long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves by March 2021.”¹ Will it happen? I hope so.

There is the Anishnaabe community in northwest Ontario – the people of Grassy Narrows. For decades they have suffered from mercury poisoning found in their food and water. As a report says, “Between 1962 and 1970, a paper plant in Dryden, Ont., dumped 10 tonnes of mercury, a potent neurotoxin, in the Wabigoon River, upstream from Grassy Narrows. The mercury contaminated the fish and poisoned the people who ate the fish. They developed tremors, loss of muscle co-ordination, slurred speech and tunnel vision. In recent years, Toronto Star investigations and scientists have shown that fish near Grassy Narrows remain the most contaminated in the province; that there is mercury-contaminated soil and river sediment at or near the site of the old mill; and the provincial government knew in the 1990s that mercury was visible in soil under that site and never told anyone in Grassy Narrows ... Premier Ford made changes this summer to the Environmental Assessment Act, which now excludes logging. Grassy Narrows First Nation leader Joseph Fobister fears the community will take yet another hit from mercury poisoning.”² Because the earth is exposed by the logging, the winds will blow the mercury laden soil into the river and into their drinking water source.

We’ve been reading about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls for how long? Ramona Wilson was one of the murdered indigenous women, whose name is on a list of unsolved cases, a list that continues to grow. In 2019, her mother “Matilda Wilson, stood beside the highway of tears in BC. It was the twenty-fifth time she had done so since her daughter was found murdered a few hundred metres away from where she stood. It was the twenty-fifth time she had addressed a group of supporters with tears in her eyes and resolve in her voice. Trucks roared by on the highway and wind rustled in the aspens overhead.”³ *It was the twenty fifth time.*

This past week, lawyers launched a \$600 million class action lawsuit against the Federal Government and the RCMP on behalf of 60 families of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The hearings in Regina began this week. The lawsuit alleges “systemic racism in the way the RCMP handled the deaths and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls.” The lawyer representing the plaintiffs said, “The government of Canada has not gone forward with anything regarding the wrongs, and it's for the judicial branch of government to take charge and to force a resolution.”⁴

When Jesus asks us a question, it leads to transformation, where his way becomes our way, where his mind becomes our mind. What Jesus wants us to notice is that *we don't change our minds, even when we've seen it.* For when Jesus says to the chief priests and elders, ‘Even after you saw it, you did not change your mind’, we fall right into place behind the chief priests and elders.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2020/02/january-2020-monthly-progress-update-on-drinking-water-advisories-on-public-systems-on-reserves.html>. Accessed Sept 26 2020.

² <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/07/10/the-end-of-environmental-assessments-for-clear-cut-logging-has-grassy-narrows-first-nation-fearing-more-mercury-poisoning.html>. Accessed September 26, 2020.

³ Jessica McDiarmid, *Highway of Tears*, 292-293.

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/federal-court-mmiwg-class-action-1.5738278>
CBC News · Posted: Sep 24, 2020 8:26 PM CT | Last Updated: September 25. Accessed September 25, 2020.

It's Orange Shirt Day. A little girl went to residential school wearing a new beautiful orange shirt. She was told to take it off. One little girl, along with thousands of other young indigenous children who experienced similar humiliation, who suffered the same demoralizing, demeaning action – had their sense of self, identity, culture, hopefulness erased. We are wearing our orange shirts – but Jesus asks for more than a ‘that was a nice service pastor, that was a nice sermon pastor, I like your orange shirt pastor’ response. How long are we going to going to see these things and not change our minds about decisive action to right a wrong? How long are we going to sit and think we’re doing enough by listening to the same stories over and over? Except they’re not stories, they’re real lives and real consequences and real deaths. How long are we going to sit and do nothing?

A father has two sons.

He asks the first to go work in the vineyard.

The son says, “No I’m not going”

but later changes his mind and goes.

The second son says, “Yes, I’ll go” but doesn’t.

Who did the father’s will?

The one who changed his mind.

And got up.

And went out.

And starting working.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was **blind** but now I **see**.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.