

**Sermon Series: Getting a Family to Function
Facing Change
May 19/20, 2007
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How well do you think you deal with change? Sometimes, we are simply not well equipped to deal with change. I received the following e-mail that highlights how tough change can be.

"My Aunt died this past January. Citi-Bank billed her for annual fees in February, and then added late fees and interest on the monthly charge...the balance had been \$0.00... now was somewhere around \$60.00

I placed the following phone call to Citi-Bank: "I am calling to tell you that my aunt died in January."

CitiBank: "The account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply."

"Maybe, you should turn it over to collections"

CitiBank: "Since it is 2 months past due, it already has been."

"So, what will they do when they find out she is dead?"

CitiBank: "Either report her account to the frauds division, or report her to the credit bureau maybe both!"

I asked, "Do you think God will be mad at her?"

CitiBank: "Excuse me?"

"Did you just get what I was telling you.... the part about her being dead?"

CitiBank: "Sir, you'll have to speak to my supervisor!" (Supervisor gets on the phone)

"I'm calling to tell you my aunt died in January."

CitiBank: "I am sorry, the account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply."

I ask, "Do you mean you want to collect from her estate?"

CitiBank: "Umm, Are you her lawyer?"

"No, I'm her great nephew." Then I gave the lawyer information.

CitiBank: "Could you fax us a certificate of death?"

"Sure." And I give them the fax number.

In a later conversation after they get the fax. The representative from CitiBank says, "Our system just isn't setup for death"

"Oh..."

CitiBank: "I don't know what more I can do to help..."

"Well... if you figure it out, great! If not, you could just keep billing her...I suppose...I don't really think she will care."

CitiBank: "Well...the late fees and charges do still apply."

"Would you like her new billing address?"

CitiBank: "That might help."

I tell them, "It is Odessa Memorial Cemetery, Hwy 129 cemetery plot number 468."

CitiBank: "Sir, that's a cemetery!"

"Why yes it is, what do you do with dead people on your planet?"

I love that story. Change is not easy. The change not only causes problems for Citibank, but when it touches us and our families it can cause problems for us too. Do you remember a time of change in your life? Have you walked through a time of change recently? If you did, how did you do?

Today, we are continuing our sermon series on **Getting a Family to Function**, and one of the most important challenges most families have to face, at some point, is change. Change is never easy.

Change upsets the balance of family. I am convinced though that there is a right way and a wrong way to face change. The wrong way just barges ahead without taking into account there may be wins and losses in each change. It barges ahead by only focusing on the wins, without acknowledging the losses that is simply not helpful. Because it leads to people feeling disempowered.

Another way facing change is not helpful is when we only focus on ourselves and our issues. When we stay stuck in our own ways, it closes us off to new possibilities.

In our scripture for today we see Jesus coming face to face with change. He has gone away to different region to catch a break. He is hoping to just be in secret. He is hoping to relax.

While there, he gets discovered and a desperate woman came to him and asked him, "Can you please heal my daughter?" His response is surprising to us, who grew up with the notion of Jesus being meek and mild and nice. He says, "No. I am not going to help you. First, I am going to help out my own people, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and give it to the dogs."

In this passage, we see what some have called Jesus' own prejudice. We see his own unwillingness to change. We see his unwillingness to help. And if the story ended here, it would be sad. Because it would remind us that change is something to be avoided.

However, change is occurring all around us. Change is touching families almost daily. And we need to find our way through change so that it can help our families survive, even thrive. As I was thinking about this sermon, I found myself reflecting on the change that I have helped my own family move through. I realized that we have faced the change of job relocations (which often also mean school relocations). We have faced the changes caused by dealing with mental health issues and the changes they bring to family. We have dealt with death. We have welcomed children into the family. We have seen children go off to school. We have seen children graduate from high school and College and move on from there. We have lived through changes, such as one parent working more than another and everyone having to adjust to a new reality. We have lived through the change of divorce. We have lived through the change of remarriage and all of the adjustments caused by that. Change happens.

How can we do it in a way that is helpful? I believe that if we can follow Jesus' example in this story, we can learn something. What ultimately got Jesus to make a change, is that he listened to this woman tell her story. She said, "Yes, Lord, it isn't fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. But even the children have enough compassion for the dogs, that they will give them scraps from the table."

Jesus listened. And he remained open to new possibilities. So much so that he was finally able to see her need, and realize that it was something he could help. And his understanding of what God called him to do was enlarged to include this woman in need and her child in need.

If we are going to make it through family change, we do it best if we can listen and remain open to new possibilities as well.

It may mean that we take time to even listen to our own feelings as parents. You can take time to prepare for meeting with your own family about upcoming changes by just thinking for a minute about how you feel in those changes.

You see, if you take time to listen to your own feelings, it allows you to hear the feelings of the others in your family. Being honest about the feelings, allows everyone to make it through the changes.

When we can help our family face changes, with openness and honesty, it allows people to feel as if they are actually heard. It allows people to feel as if they are active participants in family. That actually teaches our children how to face change as they grow up themselves.

Helping our families, helping each other move through change really well, ultimately reflects on our faith in God. How we live, shows who we belong to. It shows that we are willing to trust God, even when the future is different from how we have experienced the past.

Living through change is stressful. But it forces us to ask once again, am I willing to trust God with even this change?

Early one summer, city workers in Hamilton, Ontario, were trimming limbs from trees along the streets. In one tree marked for cutting they found a nest of baby robins. The workers decided not to touch the limb until the young birds had flown away.

Later, when the nest was abandoned, they examined it and discovered in the bottom a little scrap of paper. The robins had used it along with the dried twigs to build their nest. On the paper where these words: "We trust in the Lord our God."

Now I don't know if the robins really did trust God. But I know we can. I know that God is willing to protect us and care for us. I know that God is willing to lead us and help us to grow. I know that God is there to help us through whatever changes we may face.

May we learn to let God lead us and our families well.

Amen