

Open to Change



Change can be something we embrace or something we dread. As we grow up, changes regularly affect our lives as we learn about our world, go to new places and develop relationships with others. We may have times of boredom when we long for new events to engage us. On the other hand, when our physical bodies start to wear out, and mentally and emotionally we no longer have the energy and skills we once had, we may try to avoid change, fearful of what it might demand of us.

Looking at the photo above, we might say that we do not want the door of our familiar comfortable life to be opened, and to be forced to go out into unknown places or to let others come in and have to cope with the resulting changes. However, changes continually occur and we must face those we might enjoy and those we would prefer to reject.

Changes in our lives can take place anywhere and at any time. They may be something small such as our day's plan being briefly changed to help a neighbour collect grain for her calves, or be a major upheaval such as permanently moving to a new home because of ill health, age, floods or fire. Whether changes are small or big, we can be encouraged as Christians to remember that whatever confronts us, God is with us, and even *within* us. God

is not observing us from a distance but is close, sharing our lives.

Sometimes when we are wrestling with what seems a difficult problem, we can choose to replace our natural desire to turn in on ourselves, with perhaps smiling at a person we do not know as we pass them in the street. It is a small action of respect and love, but it might change another person's day and our own, especially if they respond by smiling back at us. We may also be unexpectedly asked for advice by someone we meet. If we focus on helping them, on reflection we may realise we have ourselves been helped.

Of course changes, even good ones, do not always lead to feelings of joy or peace for everyone. In Luke 13:10-14, Jesus is described as teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, when a woman crippled for 18 years appeared. Although not asked, Jesus called her to him and healed her. She could have complained at such an unexpected action that would alter her life in so many ways, but she immediately began to praise God. Others present were not so pleased, in fact the leader of the synagogue told the crowd, including the woman, that it was wrong to come to be healed on the Sabbath. Jesus did not agree, and soon the crowd rejoiced with the woman.

Another person whose life was changed by Jesus was Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who wanted to see Jesus as he travelled through Jericho. In Luke 19:1-10, we are told that Zacchaeus was short in stature, so he climbed a sycamore tree for a better view. It was an odd action for a rich man who was regarded as a sinner because of his behaviour and life as a tax collector. When Jesus came to the tree he looked up, and told Zacchaeus to come down because he was going to stay at his house that day. This was not a request by Jesus, just a statement. Zacchaeus was open enough to respond by welcoming Jesus to his home. Then he went further, pledging to give away half his possessions to the poor, and repay fourfold those he had defrauded.

When facing significant changes, perhaps as a result of the death of a loved one, it can again be helpful to remind ourselves that God is always with us, compassionately listening to us and comforting us. It may also be a time when we need to make an effort to look around and find others who require love and care. We can listen to them, stand beside them and share in their suffering.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he not only communed with God but, as

Luke 23:42-43 tells us, he promised companionship to a man dying beside him. In John 19:26-27, Jesus also noticed the presence of his mother with 'the disciple whom he loved'. Knowing how his death would distress and change both their lives, Jesus directed them to care for one another.

We are all called in various ways to be followers of Jesus, and in Matthew 16:24-25 Jesus explains that this will involve denying ourselves and taking up our cross. But also, if we lose our life in this painful way, we shall find it. What does this mean for us? To lose our life can be to put aside what we want for ourselves and to focus on the well-being of others, not just people, but also animals and nature. We may end up by not achieving what we wanted, but surprisingly, we may have grown in our love for God and others in ways that were strangely satisfying and fulfilling for all.

I suggest that each day, we have an opportunity to be open to change ourselves and/or the lives of others, by cooperating with God's desire to change us. It is not always easy or painless to change, but it can be an expression of obeying Jesus' command to his followers in John 13:34, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

*Sister Helen CSC
September 2023*