05.05.21 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: "Change Or Decay?"

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:1-13

Reflection: Rev. George Vink

We don't know what Pastor Henry Lyte had in mind when as pastor/poet he wrote the words of "Abide With Me." We know it was after preaching his last sermon. We know he had a troubled family history. We know he endured poor health for much of his life, often seeking relief in the climate of France. We know he dealt with struggles in his congregation and members not seeing things the same way. We may conclude Pastor Lyte dealt with considerable change! And, reading his biography, it's clear he was not a "Letting Go" kind of pastor, risking leaps into deep, cold water. (*You'll have to listen to Pastor Doug's last Sunday's sermon intro for this reference.)*

The words of Pastor Lyte's most famous hymn, "Abide With Me," resonate a resignation, almost a conclusion of despair. He wrote phrases like, "the darkness deepens" and "when other helpers fail, and comforts flee…" The second stanza further reflects his misery, "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day, earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away." Then come the words I've struggled to appreciate: "Change and decay in all around I see." Are change and decay the same? Pastor Lyte goes on to pray, "O thou who changest not, abide with me." Or are they?

The "thou" here is the God Paul referenced as a potter in Romans 9:21. He's the God who is shaping and molding us to be more Christ-like, painful as being such may be. He's a God who expects changes. But those changes must be improvements, not just for the sake of change. The God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow is the God who does abide with us, stays with us, while moving us, molding us. Often enough when we least like it!

The team of Barnabas, Simon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul worked well and as a team blessed the Antioch church. However, God had a change in mind! A gifted, devoted, dedicated, and effective team was called to experience a change! Who decided this change? Was it Antioch's enthusiastic eager-for-new-ways, vision team? Was Paul just restless? No, not really. Change came caused by fasting and worship. It was the Holy Spirit who said, "Set Paul and Barnabas aside!" It was clearly God's call for a change and not the result of tensions or personality problems. Then, the obedience to God's leading called for fasting and prayer to complete it.

As Luke described the change from Antioch to Paphos, he added the bizarre account of Paul's dealing with Elymas, a sorcerer. Why? It seems a little like decay, doesn't it? It's not a change for the better. Yet, it illustrates Paul's direct way of dealing with charlatans, those who distort truth for selfish reasons. Calling someone a "child of the devil" does not indicate diplomatic restraint. It's direct confrontation, calling out selfishness for the sin it is. It might be a molding we could invite and encourage, when being rock-like, refusing needed change.

Pastor Lyte closed with, "Hold thou the cross before my closing eyes." We could change that just a little to, "Lord, hold the cross clearly in my vision." Having it there, we'd be more ready to "Take a deep breath!" and go where God is leading, changing us in doing so.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to walk with you the journey you have in mind. Help me to remove the obstacles tripping me up. Things like, "It's hard. It hurts. It's too different. I'm not ready" Endow me with a rich measure of your Holy Spirit

so that I will take the needed leap and do the needed different. I want to be obedient today, not some distant tomorrow. I meant it! Amen.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

Listen carefully and count the number of ways you're using the word "change" as well as in the language of people around you. Promise yourself to reflect as to what meaning of change they're referencing. Then, ask THE question: "Where/what do I need to change?" And, then as a church, ask "Where do we need to change?"

Songs for today:

Abide with Me

Change My Heart, O God