

1

Has your mind ever changed? Maybe you changed your mind after you told everyone that you would make mashed potatoes and meatloaf for supper and everyone in the family was looking forward to eating the delicious meal. When everyone arrived at the table later that evening, they looked at the liver and onions and asked, “What happened to the meat loaf and mashed potatoes?” You replied, “I changed my mind.”

Sometimes changing our mind may not be appreciated by others, but at other times it may be a good thing, as when you get up in the morning, get dressed, and then walk out the door and discover that it’s much colder than you anticipated. Changing your mind about your apparel and changing your clothes could keep you warm.

Sometimes changing our minds can be a good thing to do, but in the story from Exodus God’s people changed their minds in a way that was not so helpful. They had followed Moses away from the Pharaoh, had witness the wondrous escape across the Red Sea, and had celebrated with the Passover meal. Moses had received the Ten Commandments from God instructing them how to live, and now Moses had

returned up the mountain for more conversation with God while leaving his brother Aaron in charge of the people. Moses was gone longer than they anticipated, so the crowd changed their minds. They became restless. Agitated. Nervous. They needed a leader, and so they asked Moses’ brother, Aaron, to create for them a golden bull, an object of power like other surrounding nations followed. They collected all the gold jewelry they had taken from the Egyptians before they left the Pharaoh, and Aaron melted them down and created a bull, where they gathered for worship and celebration.

Soon God noticed what was going on at the foot of the mountain, and God told Moses, “Hurry up and go down! *Your* people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, are ruining everything!” Did you notice that God said “*your* people” to Moses, no longer wanting to claim them?

Moses then tried to avoid responsibility by asking God, “Why are you so upset with *your* people, who you brought out of Egypt?” Neither Moses nor God wanted to claim them while they were misbehaving!

2

God and Moses both knew the people were *oreph qasheh*, a Hebrew phrase often translated as stiff-necked. *Oreph* refers to that portion at the back of the neck that often feels stress first. You know the place. When tense, the back of the neck begins to tighten up, pains radiating into the rest of the body.

Qasheh means “heavy,” “obstinate.” Ever been stubborn? You know you’re wrong, but you dig in your heels, tense up your neck, and feel the pain of separation from someone you love. The stiff neck becomes more intense. Pain killers may work for a while. A massage can provide temporary relief. But the only real cure is to change your mind, admit you’re wrong, and seek forgiveness.

Moses knew the people too well, that he might not be able to convince them to change their minds. Instead, he tried to change another mind: God’s mind.

“You know, God, if you destroy the people then the Egyptians will think you brought them all the way out here to the desert just to get rid of them. Is that the kind of impression you want to make? Remember the promise you made with Abraham and Sarah, that they will have many descendants as there are stars?

How can that happen if you destroy their decedents? Calm down, God. Change your mind.”

And God did.

Some may feel a bit squeamish about this idea of God’s mind being changed. If God knows everything, then how could someone change God’s mind? And yet, we cherish the notion of free will, that we can make our own choices—that God does not predetermine everything ahead of time. I wonder if God is like a parent that knows one’s child so well that she can predict what her child will do—but sometimes our children surprise us and make choices that we do not anticipate. God knew the people were stiff-necked, and yet, Moses encouraged God to give them another chance.

That’s the God we know through the life of Jesus Christ, one who offers us another chance through the power of grace and forgiveness. It’s something the world still needs to hear, for as the choir sang this morning, “The world is full of pain and suffering, hate is alive and well. Through the chaos people are asking, ‘Where is God?’”

3

Where is God? Right here. Working among you and me, just as the choir sang, “Work among your people as vessels of your will until the age of love and peace shall rise...your kingdom come, your will be done.”

But sometimes that seems so difficult to do, doesn't it? As politicians during the next few weeks will continue trying to convince us to vote for them, we may get discouraged that nothing seems to make a difference.

As violence continues to erupt in cities across the nation between those who are black and those who are white, we may get discouraged.

As terrorists continue to spread fear around the globe and even near to home, we may become frightened.

How can we make a difference? When will the world change?

It's tempting to give up, but I encourage us to change our minds. Strive to offer hope to the world. As one blogger wrote, “How can we live examined lives without being willing to change our minds when necessary? How can we really listen to what the people in our lives are telling us if we won't allow even the

possibility that those words will have impact? How can we live in a constantly changing world without allowing our minds to change along with everything else?”¹

One writer tells a story of his morning run and how he changed his mind:

Every Sunday morning I take a light jog around a park near my home. There's a lake located in one corner of the park. Each time I jog by this lake, I see the same elderly woman sitting at the water's edge with a small metal cage sitting beside her.

This past Sunday my curiosity got the best of me, so I stopped jogging and walked over to her. As I got closer, I realized that the metal cage was in fact a small trap. There were three turtles, unharmed, slowly walking around the base of the trap. She had a fourth turtle in her lap that she was carefully scrubbing with a spongy brush.

“Hello,” I said. “I see you here every Sunday morning. If you don't mind my nosiness, I'd love to know what you're doing with these turtles.”

She smiled. “I'm cleaning off their shells,” she replied. “Anything on a turtle's shell, like algae or

④

scum, reduces the turtle's ability to absorb heat and impedes its ability to swim. It can also corrode and weaken the shell over time."

"Wow! That's really nice of you!" I exclaimed.

She went on: "I spend a couple of hours each Sunday morning, relaxing by this lake and helping these little guys out. It's my own strange way of making a difference."

"But don't most freshwater turtles live their whole lives with algae and scum hanging from their shells?" I asked.

"Yep, sadly, they do," she replied.

I scratched my head. "Well then, don't you think your time could be better spent? I mean, I

think your efforts are kind and all, but there are fresh water turtles living in lakes all around the world. And 99% of these turtles don't have kind people like you to help them clean off their shells. So, no offense...but how exactly are your localized efforts here truly making a difference?"

The woman giggled aloud. She then looked down at the turtle in her lap, scrubbed off the last piece of algae from its shell, and said, "Sweetie, if this little guy could talk, he'd tell you I just made all the difference in the world."²

Change your mind. Offer hope. Make a difference.

¹ Amy Sundberg, "How Often Do You Change Your Mind?" October 25, 2012, <https://practicalfreespirit.com/2012/10/25/how-often-do-you-change-your-mind/>

² Marc Chernoff, "All the Difference in The World," www.marcandangel.com/2013/05/21/4-short-stories-change-the-way-you-think/