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What do pastors do when faced with unfamiliar situations, when they're unsure what to do, when they enter into unfamiliar territories in ministry? They talk with other pastors, of course, hearing their perspectives on what's going on, which is something I've been doing a lot of lately. Through the wonders of computer conferencing software, I've been able to talk with other Disciple pastors in Indiana and with pastors of various traditions in our county as we explore this new place we've found ourselves. We're all in uncharted territory, and we've realized we can learn from one another.

This week I spoke with Rev. Cossey from Greater Bethlehem, for today would have been the day our two churches gathered for combined a worship service, followed by a wonderful time of fellowship while eating a meal together. It's a tradition that's been going on for over 20 years, but this year we can't meet together, at least not now. We talked about how our congregations are using technology, shared a few ideas we've tried, and encouraged one

another. Even though we come from different churches, we are united as one in God's family.

In other conversations with pastors, some talk about the novel ways they try to reach to their members and even those who don't attend but now watch online. Some pastors have embraced the change and are adapting, while others proclaim, "You can keep the change. I'd rather go back to the way it was."

Change isn't always easy, and while some can adapt quickly to new ways of doing things, others would rather avoid the change, which seems to be the case with some religious leaders living in the city of Thessalonica 2000 years ago. The Book of Acts records a visit to this city by Paul and Silas who spoke in the community's place of worship for three weeks in a row. It was their custom to visit the local house of worship and tell people about Jesus, how he was the one promised to bring hope and new life to the world.

Being in a major city, the citizens of Thessalonica encountered many new ideas all the

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time, for the city was along the route of the Via Egnatia. This major road spanned almost 700 miles from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea, connecting Rome to Constantinople, going from sea to shining sea. Being on such a major road brought many new things into Thessalonica—from economic luxuries to the stories of Roman and Greek gods. Into this mix, Paul and Silas spoke about Jesus as the Messiah, as the one people had longing for, the One who was to overthrow the corrupt political powers and bring justice to those who had been neglected and mistreated. In other words, one who would upset the status quo.

When some religious leaders heard what these followers of Jesus were saying in their place of worship, they began searching for them, but instead they found Jason and some other believers. They dragged these believers to the city authorities and complained, “These people who have been turning the world upside down have now come here, and Jason welcomed them into his home. They’re going

against the emperor’s rules and saying that Jesus is a king.”

In other words, these leaders were saying, “You can keep the change. We don’t like new ideas. We want things to remain the same, just as we’ve always done them before.” Have you noticed that many times, it’s those in power who don’t want to give up their control or command, as was the case with the captain of a ship.

Observing a light across the water, the captain had his signalman instruct the other vessel to change her course ten degrees south.

The response was prompt: “Change your course ten degrees north.”

“I am a captain,” he responded testily. “Change your course ten degrees south.”

The reply: “I’m a seaman first class—change your course north.”

The captain was furious. “Change your course now. I’m on a battleship.”

“Change your course ten degrees north, sir—I’m in a lighthouse.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes we’re forced to change due to situations beyond our control, and just as the captain of the battleship realized, he had to change

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course. No matter how much authority he had, reality prompted him to change his course.

In a similar way, we've had to change our course in church. No matter how much we want to be in our sanctuary together, we just can't do that. Even when we're back together, our course will have been changed due to the coronavirus. Even such ordinary things will be different, like singing. A study in Germany has revealed that "singing is as dangerous as coughing for spreading the virus...for evidence shows that during singing, the virus drops appear to fly particularly far."<sup>2</sup> Some religious leaders have become angry over such limitations,<sup>3</sup> though for the safety of those attending, they may need to change their course.

As our state begins to slowly open, some churches may eagerly open up, while some will remain cautious. It's ok to wait.

Sometimes change is a good thing, though often we may need to look for the positive outcomes while we wait. It's hard to see anything positive in the midst of being in lockdown, isolated

from one another, restricted from being out in the world, but last week's Earth Day raised our awareness of how our planet is healing. Since we've been doing less traveling, less pollution is being emitted, and the air and water have become cleaner.

Leatherback sea turtles are among the many species enjoying the extra space [abandoned] by humans. Beaches in Thailand with a dearth of human tourists are now seeing the highest number of the rare reptiles' nests in two decades.

Elsewhere, the Himalayas are visible from parts of India for the first time in decades, other animals like kangaroos and goats have more freedom to roam, and life everywhere just seems to be breathing easier.<sup>4</sup>

For some parts of the Earth, our change of pace has had positive outcomes, but for others who have become unemployed, they struggle to find food for each meal. Those 55 people who came by Central Christian on the last Saturday of April expressed their gratitude for a sack meal that contained a hot breakfast sandwich, fruit, water, and other items. We may not be able to feed every hungry person in

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town, but for those who came by, they were glad to eat.

Sometimes change comes in small ways, like serving breakfast in a sack instead of a sit-down meal, but other times change comes in huge ways, like entering lockdown due to a tiny virus. We can resist it and complain, “Keep the change,” or we can adapt and still offer hope. During this crazy time that we’ve found ourselves, I invite you to look deep within yourself. Discover something new you can do that you normally don’t have time to do. Find safe

ways to reach out, for we’re not *socially* distanced, only *physically* distanced. It’s an opportunity to use our phones to call one another, remember how to write letters and use stamps, and try new technology to keep in touch. Rather than telling one another “Keep the change,” let’s embrace the change and continue to offer God’s grace in a world searching for hope, for God does still move among us, wherever we gather.

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell Streiker, *Nelson’s Big Book of Laughter*

<sup>2</sup> Kate Connolly, “Germany to set out rules for religious services including singing ban,” [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/germany-to-set-out-rules-for-religious-services-including-singing-ban](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/germany-to-set-out-rules-for-religious-services-including-singing-ban), April 29, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/29/anger-plans-ban-hymns-churches-set-reopen-germany/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/29/anger-plans-ban-hymns-churches-set-reopen-germany/), April 29, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Mack, “On Earth Day 2020, coronavirus shutdowns are a gift to the environment,” [www.cnet.com/news/on-earth-day-2020-coronavirus-shutdowns-are-a-gift-to-the-environment](http://www.cnet.com/news/on-earth-day-2020-coronavirus-shutdowns-are-a-gift-to-the-environment), April 22, 2020.