



“FRIENDSHIFT”
SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 5:1-10
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
October 17, 2021
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Hebrews 5:1-10

5:1 Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

5:2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;

5:3 and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.

5:4 And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5:5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

5:6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

5:7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

5:8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

5:9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

5:10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Play “Change” Video (5 minutes)

She's been singing to America about change since the 1980s. Her songs provoke and soothe, stir and trouble, inspire and challenge.

For me, Tracy Chapman is a modern day prophet.

Picture of Tracy Chapman (split screen)

A needed muse for our collective discernment about how we can become a human family at last well with ourselves. Her songs could be compiled into a gospel of sorts--narrative, parable, image, mystery, and moral clarion call.

Tracy Chapman wrote the song "Change" in 2005.

Take picture of Tracy Chapman off

Do you remember what was happening in your life in 2005?

That's when John and I decided to move to Oakland CA after only 8 months in Tampa FL where he was coaching for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. We had a 6 month old baby and a four year old. My life was a blur. We were in the middle of our 4-cities-in-3-years moving frenzy. It was change on steroids.

Four hurricanes hit Tampa in our short time there--two requiring me to evacuate with the kids and animals.

Katrina hit New Orleans right after we got to Oakland. Another unveiling for white America of how racialized our country is--from environmental racism to anti-blackness. All those hurricanes, another window into the changing climate that makes catastrophic weather events more and more common.

2005 was when John turned to me and said, "I need to get out of here--I can't work for him anymore." The "him" was John Gruden. If you've been reading the news recently, you'll know why.

2005 is when I received another call to serve a church in CA--where John was coaching with the Raiders. It was an amazing church and it was a complicated church. There was great energy, and there was heartbreak.

And my daily life was poisoned by sexual harassment in the workplace that scratched open old wounds. And left me feeling exhausted and traumatized by white men all over again.

We had to make a change and leave Oakland.

What was happening for you in 2005?

Tracy Chapman says she wrote the song, "Change," to remind herself about her continuing need to change.

How do you remind yourself of your continuing need to change?

I used Chapman's song, "Change" as a prompt for the GCPC staff this summer when we gathered to generate a theme for this fall. And Holy Shift is what grew out of that prompt.

The song is really a long series of pointed questions.

What questions stand out for you in the song? Feel free to share what questions stand out for you in the chat.

(MMS read a few lyrics and maybe some chat aloud if I can)

Scroll lyrics on half of the screen

**If you knew that you would die today
Saw the face of God and love
Would you change?**

**If you knew that love can break your heart
When you're down so low you cannot fall
Would you change?**

**How bad, how good does it need to get?
How many losses? How much regret?
What chain reaction would cause an effect?**

**If you knew that you would be alone
Knowing right, being wrong
Would you change?**

**If you knew that you would find a truth
That brings up pain that can't be soothed
Would you change?**

**Are you so upright you can't be bent?
If it comes to blows
Are you so sure you won't be crawling?
If not for the good, why risk falling?**

**If everything you think you know
Makes your life unbearable
Would you change?**

**If you'd broken every rule and vow
And hard times come to bring you down
Would you change?**

**If you knew that you would die today
If you saw the face of God and love
Would you change?**

Chapman is provoking us to accept change by telling the truth about the reasons we try to resist change.

It's a powerful provocation--biblical even. Our resistance to change and our resistance to being honest about why we are afraid of change have moral and existential consequences.

The stakes are high, Grace Covenant.

The status quo is deadly. Stasis is death. Denial is disease and dysfunction. The attitude that we get to pick whether we change or not is delusional and destructive to ourselves and others.

The question is not will you change, it is how will you orient yourself to the change.

And what is it that moves your body, your heart, your spirit to embrace change?

This has been a week of climate action all around the world and in the United States. Indigenous people and collectives marched, danced, sat in, occupied, and provoked everyone from President Biden to the Department of the Interior to the whole human race.

Picture of People vs fossil fuels Climate Protectors split screen

There are ways you can take action this week.

Link in the chat <https://bit.ly/3vlpjID> Thanks to Susan Presson and the GCPC Earth Team, that document gives you a lot of different kinds of things to do from phone calls to leaders to letter writing to prayer to direct action.

The stakes get higher all the time. But somehow, white culture stays at some level of delusion all the time.

Take picture down of Climate Protectors

Maybe that's because the climate crisis is so huge, so overwhelming. Or maybe it's because we don't want to believe it is true. How bad will it have to get?

Glenn Albrecht is an Australian eco-philosopher and author of the book, "Earth Emotions." Thanks to Mary Berg for telling me about this book.

Picture of Earth Emotions Book Cover Split Screen

"Earth Emotions" invites us as a human family to notice and attend to how it feels to live on a planet that is changing because of human behavior.

How does it feel to live on a planet where species are becoming extinct, ecosystems are collapsing, because of us, where things are drying up and drowning because of us, because of things like denial and greed, like racism and superiority, like pride and violence.

Take Earth Emotions picture down.

Abrecht creates a new lexicon of emotions to name how these things feel.

Solastalgia: A form of mental or existential distress caused by forced environmental change. Loss of home and loss of surroundings.

Terrafurie: The anger we feel knowing that we are past the tipping points and that extreme weather events are the new normal.

Toponesia: Forgetting our positive childhood grounding experiences with the places, plants, and animals we grew up with.

Ecophobia: A fear or hatred of ecological systems.

Albrecht calls us to notice and name these collective difficult emotions in hopes that we can reconnect to the life-blood of our emotional connection, our love, our biophilia, our “ecophilia” for this world. That naming the negative emotions can support our ability to reconnect to the positive emotions.

Soliphilia: Love of the interrelated whole.

Sumbiophilia: The love of living together.

If you knew that you would die today,
If you saw the face of God and love,
Would you change?

Can we heal our friendship with this planet?

The preacher who wrote the sermon that is the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament wants us to understand the magnitude of Jesus’ existence in our sphere, in our context, on this planet, in relationships with us.

This preacher has her own glossary of terms. He or she wanted that tired community to understand the capacity Jesus has to change how we live in the world, how we live together.

Metriopatheo: “gentle”, moderate emotion, restraint from anger. Not the same as sympathy. Gentle because of awareness of own weakness.

Melchizedek: Great High Priest of the people, and of God, for the people and for God. Mysterious. No mother, no father. No birthday, no date of death. Not of Levitical lineage. King and Priest. Imagine power that is both righteous and trustworthy.

Begotten: Appointment, not about parentage. Sonship idea rooted in ideologies about royalty, not biology.

Perfect: Consecrated. Ordained.

Obedient Sufferer: Breaks apart old adages that connect obedience to being spared of suffering, and that connect suffering to punishment.

Jesus' suffering with us, like us, is what consecrates his life for divine purpose, for priestly power.

Jesus changes our relationship to change because he is a model for how we move through change.

He is the fellow sufferer who understands.

He is the one who drops to his knees in the midst of turmoil with tearful, fervent and reverent prayer.

He deals with us gently when we are our own worst enemy, when our ignorance causes us to fall short.

Jesus is the "friendship" that God makes with humanity.

People have been shouting, singing, writing, weeping, dancing, painting, and preaching about the need for positive change in the world for generations.

Sometimes people try to remove themselves from a changing environment to convince themselves that they can escape the pain, the hard work of change.

But we can't outrun change, and we can't outrun grief.

All that we feel when change accelerates is valid and real.

There are ways to hold ALL of those feelings together in ways that strengthen us instead of harm us.

The problem is not the feelings. The problems come when destructive behaviors are the ways we release pressure, when we do harm to each other because of our unwillingness to face our emotions.

The same Jesus who is the fellow sufferer, the gentle high priest, the companion on the way, has been appropriated for horrible things. Jesus got stolen, kidnapped from the place he was calling us from--from the margins of a world hellbent on self-destruction.

Somehow Jesus got mistaken for a high priest with a stellar pedigree, an excluder, a power hoarder with a superiority complex. Someone who had all

the credentials and qualifications to gain entry into the fraternity of patriarchy and white supremacy.

The church stole Jesus from the world. He's been incarcerated for way too long--captive to the money changers he did not hesitate to disrupt and upset.

How good, how bad does it have to get?
How many losses? How much regret?
What chain reaction will cause an effect?

What's change going to look like with us--what's it going to be, Grace Covenant?

Jesus is breaking out of his captivity to the church and reminding us of who he really is--the great liberator of the people and of God.

Grace Covenant, Jesus is the carpenter, the architect showing us the way to build something new together. He is our friend--he is our companion on this difficult road of change.

He can sympathize with us in our weakness. He deals gently with the ignorant and wayward, with all of us who have internalized the lies that supremacy has taught us.

He knows what existential discomfort feels like. He knows what it feels like to see the world burning itself down. He knows the terrafurrie and the solastalgia.

He knows the pain that can't be soothed. He knows the quest to find the truth.

If together we can trust the friendship that God extends to us, will we trust the change that God is calling us to make, too?

The truth is, Grace Covenant, we are changing. And there are beautiful things unfolding right before our eyes with God's fingerprints all over them. The changes emerging and unfolding are here to heal us, they are here to set us free in this terrifying and awe-inspiring life we live together.

See the face of God and love, Grace Covenant, and embrace the change.

Thanks be to God.