

We live our lives surrounded by change. We see it everywhere. I see it in a new congregation to serve. You see it in a new pastor up front. We see it in the morning when we get up and look in the mirror. Young men see whiskers appearing, older men see hair on their tops of their heads leaving and graying. We hear about change in the news. With each new generation comes a new set of leaders, hopes, dreams, and, all too often, conflicts and wars. We are surrounded by change outside our windows as each season slowly breaks from the last one and gives into a new one. We're reminded of it every time our computer updates or our phones become outdated.

What do we make of this change? It's hard to say. It can be invigorating and exciting. It can bring about fresh opportunities and create hope. But I think it's safe to say that more often than not we find change frustrating and difficult. Despite all the marketing and hype that so often surrounds change, it can so easily undermine our security and takes away our hope. If it's any consolation, this isn't anything new. Change and its associated frustration, has been a part of our world ever since the fall into sin, way back in the Garden of Eden. And change was still every bit as much a part of the political landscape around the time that God's prophet Daniel lived as it is still today. Those changes could also be frustrating, overwhelming, and even frightening. But they didn't have to be hopeless. Today, join me as we look at those changes that God's people would witness and study where God directed them to turn. Listen and learn as we see where to find peace and security in a world torn apart by change.

Through Daniel, God's people got a sneak preview of upcoming changes that the world around them would weather. Some of you may recall from your Bible stories that King Nebuchadnezzar had experienced a dream so troubling that he could not sleep. He was so desperate to unlock the hidden meaning of this unique dream that he threatened to kill his astrologers if they couldn't help him. Only Daniel, the prophet of the Lord, with the Lord's help, was able to explain both the dream and what it meant. He explained that the king's dream featuring an enormous statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron with feet of iron and clay, represented four different kingdoms, each inferior to the other. In a certain sense, this statue was a preview of the future. The Babylonian kingdom would be followed by the Medo-Persian Empire, which would, in turn, be succeeded by the Greeks, and later the Romans. At its core, King Nebuchadnezzar's dream was about one nation crumbling and falling after another. It didn't matter whether they looked like gold or common clay, none of them would last forever.

Sometime later, the Lord delivered a very similar message to his prophet Daniel directly through a dream. Now this dream didn't feature a huge crumbling statue. This time terrifying creatures, four different beasts rose from the sea to appear before Daniel. One looked like a lion with eagle's wings. Another resembled a bear with three ribs in its mouth. There was also a leopard that had four bird wings and four heads. Finally, if all that wasn't enough, a terrifying and powerful beast with large iron teeth and ten horns appeared, trampling and devouring its victims. Again, through this unique dream the Lord was painting a picture of things to come. The winged lion represented the Babylonian Empire. This time the Medo-Persian Empire was pictured as a bear. The Greek Empire was portrayed as a four-headed, four-winged leopard. The multi-horned beast represented the Roman Empire. Each of these kingdoms rose to greatness. At the same time, even that greatness was only felt in a corner of the world

and for a portion of history. None of them, not one, experienced complete world domination. Not one of them would last forever.

Isn't that how things still are today? Even without these impressive dreams, don't you and I see the same things in our world? Daniel had the unique privilege of looking into the future. We can't do that. We can only look into the past but when we do, we see the very same thing repeating again and again, in different ways and at different times. Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall. Nations rise to glory and fade into the background. People are born and people die. Nothing lasts forever. Lasting world peace is only a dream in this world filled with sin and hate. Again, nothing seems to last forever.

That fact, difficult as it is, only becomes more painful when we keep trying to depend on the people and the things of this life for security. When we live for them, turn to them for security, try to find our future in the frail things of life we will be at best misdirected at worst, horribly let down and depressed. It just doesn't work. Even I, with my limited tool knowledge, understand that you can't make a hammer do what a screwdriver was meant to do. A drill and a level are not interchange tools. And yet, aren't we doing something every bit as ridiculous when we act like our security and strength comes from our political party? Isn't just as foolish to think that we can find real, lasting, meaningful purpose in this life by serving ourselves and chasing after what we want? When we ignore eternity and live just for this quickly-passing life, can we expect to really have hope? If this is how we approach life we will sound no different than the despondent Pilate that we heard about in our gospel for today. In verse 38, the one that immediately follows our gospel Pilate responds to Jesus' confession of kingship by bitterly asking, "What is truth?" How could he do any other? What other conclusion could anybody draw from a world where nothing lasts, nothing is dependable?

Really, that's all we see in our world except for one place. One place, specifically, one book reminds that not everything comes and goes and not everything lets people down: the Bible. After walking Daniel through the various kingdoms that would rise and fall, he switches gears and shows Daniel a court scene. In this court Daniel watches as one who was "like a son of man" comes with the clouds of heaven and approaches the Ancient of Days. He is given "dominion, honor, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will worship him. His dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed."

Look how different this scene is from the beasts that Daniel witnessed. Unlike the beasts, this one was a like a "Son of Man." Does that sound familiar? It might; "Son of Man" was a term that Jesus often used to describe himself and his work. Unlike the terrifying beasts that Jesus came as the lowliest of humans, not to frighten or overwhelm us, but to gain our confidence, to win us by his self-sacrificing love. Unlike the beasts that rose out of the sea, a symbol of chaos and evil, here he is pictured as coming out of heaven. And unlike the other kingdoms that only rules a particular are of the world for a specific period of time, his kingdom was absolutely unlimited. He rules all people, all places, for all time. Just watching him approach the Ancient of Days and be lead into his presence reflects the unique relationship that Jesus had his heavenly Father.

Through these Words and others in the Bible explaining this King, this King like no other, the Holy Spirit has done the impossible. He has worked faith in our hearts. Through him we say Jesus is Lord and mean it. We can study Daniel's vision and see our Savior in the Son of Man. We see God who was willing to suffer, die, and rise again for us. We see the one who rules all things including our hearts. Seeing things in this way, knowing that Jesus is our King is a blessing like no other. To say it changes everything is hardly an overstatement.

Of course, as Christians we face the same struggles as the world. We too experience letdowns. Let's face it, some days it may feel like we face even more frustrations than the world. After all, as Bible-believing Lutherans, we feel like such a small, insignificant minority, compared to the massive heathen empires around us. There are times we not only feel the attacks of the world but attacks also from fellow Christians who label us as intolerant, close-minded, uneducated, and unloving. But none of that matters as much as knowing who our King is. In him we have what nobody else does. We have security. Kingdoms can come and go. Life can seem to change faster than we can keep up, but Jesus' love for us remains constant. No matter what is happening around us he reigns and rules all things for us, his church. With this security comes purpose. We don't have to find a purpose on our own but we're given one as subjects in his kingdom. As his forgiven, redeemed children we now live to serve him and others. Instead of being about us it's about loving others. Even when things get really ugly, we always have the assurance that we will live forever in our Savior's eternal kingdom. There, with all the changes locked forever in the past, we'll fully experience the glory and, yes, the joy of our Savior's reign.

We are living in the last times. The end is coming. That means that things will be difficult. We have every reason to expect change like Daniel did. Things will not be perfect. But we know where to turn. I think Henry Lyte put it best in his famous hymn that many of you know so well, "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me!" May God grant us this confidence.