

God Has A Surprise For You...Change of Plans!

Matthew 1:18-25
December 9, 2018
2nd Sunday of Advent

Does your life always go along as you planned?

Of course not.

Life has a way of bringing to us a change of plans!

Some change of plans can be troubling.

Some change of plans can be surprisingly good.

My family and I experienced one of those surprisingly good change of plans on a vacation trip we took in 1997. The trip was to visit Loreen's cousin, Cindy. This would be a trip to Long Island where Loreen grew up. We also ventured into the big city to experience Time Square, the Statue of Liberty and even a picnic in a parking garage...change of plans.

Part of this vacation adventure was to camp at a campground where Loreen and her folks use to vacation at each summer, Lake Dunmore in Vermont. We arrived to a packed out campground. Loreen had planned this over a year in advance. We are told our campsite number. It took us out to an open area next to a dumpster!!! Oh no! Not the dumpster campsite. There was nothing left. We asked for our money back and we made a change of plans.

I noticed we were not too far from Niagra Falls. Change of plans! Loreen was the only one in our family who had ever been to Niagra Falls. We called ahead and got a campsite and enjoyed the majestic power and experience of Niagra Falls. What a surprisingly good change of plans...from a dumpster campsite to the amazing beauty of Niagra Falls...that was a change of plans we still talk about with a smile of joy on our faces.

Change of plans surprise us!

From the time we are born, life is in a constant state of change. Life happens! Surprises occur...change of plans is the result. It may not be a vacation change of plans but what about...

One day you are filling out the paperwork for your new job, the next thing you know you are filing unemployment. Surprise! There's been a change of plans!

One day you have brown hair. Then one day you look in the mirror and sees shades of gray creeping in and mixing with the brown. Surprise There's been a change of plans!

One day your son or daughter is curled up in your lap begging you to read them a story. Then the next thing you know they are standing next to you begging for the car keys. Surprise! There's been a change of plans.

One minute your spouse is whispering in your ear, "You are the love of my life!" The next thing you know she is yelling at you, "I don't want you in my life!" Surprise! There's been a change of plans!

One minute you are full of energy with a spring in your step. The next thing you know you are taking 5 Advil just to get you out of bed. Surprise! There's been a change of plans!

How do you handle the surprises in life?
The good, the bad or the ugly?

Today we read about a young man who was surprised by a major change in his life. How he handled it is a guide on how we are to approach the surprises God has for us that bring about a change in plans.

The man was Joseph!

One day he is getting excited about his upcoming wedding day with Mary. The year long preparation of engagement has gone just as he has planned. As a carpenter he was use to prior proper planning in all his projects. One day he is walking with a smile and spring in his step. Then the next day Mary brings him surprising and shocking news!

There has been a change of plans! She informs Joseph that she is pregnant and he is not the daddy! Joseph received that change of plans called, "YOU'RE WHAT?!?" The engagement period among the Jews in that time period was as serious as being married. When Joseph was given the surprising change of plan news he legally had two choices... divorce her or have her killed by stoning.

But then we hear the character reference about Joseph...he was a righteous man. He sought to do what was right in the right way. His plan was to quietly divorce her to avoid public disgrace and shame on Mary.

That night Joseph experienced another surprise! God spoke to him in a dream God had a change of plans. Joseph would not divorce her but he would marry her. God explained the surprise of Mary's being pregnant with the Messiah! What is so amazing is that God had planned this hundreds of years earlier when he spoke this plan through the prophet Isaiah: ***"Watch for this---a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Emmanuel (Hebrew for 'God is with us.')*"** Isaiah 7:4 MSG.

Joseph woke up from the surprising dream and followed God's change of plans. How could Joseph have handled such a change of plans in his life?

Joseph was a good man. He was a man with strong beliefs. He sought to do what was right in life. He was a humble man with a noble heart to do God's will in his life.

He had A QUIET CONFIDENCE!

This quiet confidence didn't all of a sudden appear that day Mary gave him the surprising news. He had developed this quiet confidence through out his life.

When you and I face the surprises of life, the change of plans moments in life, that is not the time to create a quiet confidence. We prepare for those moments in life now. We seek this quiet confidence by seeking God's word to us each day. We read the bible to learn more and more of who God is, His character, promises and truths. We daily talk with God about life and all we are experiencing. We learn to trust in Him in the smaller surprises so when the big changes of life surprise us we can rely on that quiet confidence...a peace!

Prior proper planning prevents freaking out in the change of plans surprises of life!

PEACE...A QUIET CONFIDENCE... found in Emmanuel, Jesus, God with us!

We cannot isolate ourselves from change. We can nurture, learn and grown that peace in us through our relationship with Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He offers to us a peace that is deep in our spirits. It is a peace not dependent on what happens to us. It is a peace no matter the surprise of life.

It is a peace that passes all our understanding of the surprises in life and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7) It is not our peace we create. It is the peace of Christ Jesus. It is a peace that is not simply rational or emotional. It is a peace that engages our heart and our mind. It is a quiet confidence that even when we don't understand the surprise we trust God's plan to see us through it.

Surprises in life can change life. We are given a choice on how we react to the surprises in life...the change of plans of life. We can FREAK OUT loud in a lack of trust and fear.

Or...

IN QUIET CONFIDENCE we find peace trusting that God's plans are the best for us.

We place our quiet confidence in Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

(Hebrews 13:8)

How do you respond to the "surprise, change of plans" in life?

Let me share how I failed in a change of plans response last week.

I was working on this particular message when a lady called from a nearby church. We have known each other, and served on various district committees over the years. She called to see if our church was going to participate in their upcoming church anniversary. The participation was to donate \$100 for a table to sit at. I explained to her about CUMC and that we were not a church with disposable income. I went on to share with her about our outreach ministries and especially the low fund balance threatening our food pantry. She asked if maybe I wanted to buy two individual tickets. I declined! She thanked me and hung up.

Back to the sermon prep on "God has a surprise for you...A change of plans." An hour into it I am informed that this lady is at the office door wanting to see me. My choice response in my spirit was, "I told her NO! What nerve she has to come to the office and try to pressure me to give her some money!!!!" Of course I said this only to myself.

Long story short...this friend had been so moved by the food pantry story that she came to personally donate her own funds to our food pantry. With tears she shared how she was raised by her grandparents on a farm. Her grandmother never turned anyone away who was hungry. This compassion still moved her to help others feed the hungry.

She handed me the check for...you guessed it....\$100!

Practice what you are preparing to preach Ken! God surprised me that day with a change of plans.

A quiet confidence...a peace that passes all our understanding of why the changes happen to us...to keep our hearts and minds focused in on Jesus.

There is a saying, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans!"

I'm sure God had a good laugh that day when my friend came to visit me with surprising, change of plan news.

David the psalmist understood this when he wrote:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear though the earth should CHANGE,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea..."

Psalm 46:1-2 (RSV)

In the book of wisdom, Proverbs, we find in chapter 16 wise sayings that give us a true perspective of who is in charge of the surprises and change of plans in our lives:

"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps (his change of plans).

It is wise and good for us to make plans but it is also good for us to develop a quiet confidence that reminds us that no matter the surprise, the good news is that God is in the business of changing our plans to His plans which are something much better than my plans!

God has a surprise for you...a change of plans! You may find yourself camped by a dumpster. Change of plans! God has a surprise for you. A Niagra Falls campsite of power, beauty and awesome peace!

Dealing with a change of plans requires us to continue to work on a quiet confidence of peace in our hearts and minds.

God has a surprise for you...a change of plans!
What choice will you make?

Freak out loud in a self-centered lack of trust

OR

In quiet confidence of peace in your heart and mind trust God's change of plan for you?