

All Things Change

Pasted on the mirror in the bathroom of our little vacation

Jamie Buckingham

late-comers like us to a seat.

cabin in the mountains of western North Carolina is a Latin phrase: *Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. "All things are changing, and we are changing with them."

My dad, who built the cabin many years ago, had taught Latin and English before going into business. Words, he felt, were designed by God to reveal truth. This was one of the truths he wanted his children to grasp.

The last time I was there the leaves had fallen from the trees. The mountains were bleak. Life had gone into hibernation. I opened the house, swept the brown leaves off the front porch, and put out the rocking chairs. It was for habit's sake, for winter was in the air and it was too cold to sit and rock. I walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. "All things are changing...indeed."

Now, we're entering a new year—a year which promises even greater changes. A London psychiatrist once asked: "Do you know why people get drunk on New Year's Eve?" The answer—which sounds quite British: "Because clocks are round." It's the bored who get drunk—and take drugs. The fact the hour hand has returned to midnight and the year is starting over is more than some can take. It's sameness—not change—which drives people to drink.

But self-imposed change, the kind which leads to growth, not decay....ah, that calls for a different strength.

I think of my dad, who, on his 80th birthday, decided to grow a mustache. "All my life," he told me, "I've wondered how I would look in a mustache. When I was a young man teaching Latin and English only the 'riff-raff' wore facial hair. Later, as a businessman in a small southern town, it was considered improper to have a mustache, beard or even sideburns. Besides, your mother said she could never kiss a man with a mustache. Now today I am 80. I'm going to grow a mustache."

I felt like shouting.

He wore it almost five years and shaved it off. "It just isn't me," he said.

Not all are as flexible. A few years ago Jackie and I visited the large denominational church I once pastored. It had been 10 years since we'd left town and that summer we arranged our vacation travel to be there on a Sunday morning. It was 11:05 a.m. when we pulled up in front of the big, red-brick church with the tall, white Georgian columns. We were five minutes late. As we climbed the front steps Jackie said, "Odd, everything seems the same."

And it was. We were greeted (warmly, I might add, even though our departure 10 years before had been something less than cordial) by the same ushers who had been ushers when I was there. The only difference was they were balding, greyer or fatter. But the same six men who used to hang out in the front vestibule during the worship service—going out on the front steps occasionally for a smoke—were still there; shaking hands, passing out bulletins and showing

Inside the sanctuary I paused briefly. Standing just inside the door behind the back pew I looked over the auditorium. There they were, all our old friends, sitting in the same pews they had occupied 10 years before.

Shirley Goodrich, the big woman with the bigger voice, and her little husband, Ed, who sat on the next to last row on the left hand side, were still there. They looked up, recognized us, and smiled warmly.

Jack and Rebecca Sims—Jack was the auditor at one of the cotton mills and also served as chairman of the deacons—were right where I had left them 10 years before. They sat in the middle section, three rows back, where Jack could audit everything that went on. Rebecca looked the same but Jack's hair was now silver white, perhaps an occupational hazard of being an auditor.

It was an eerie sensation—as though I had been carried back in time 10 years. The order of service the usher put in my hand was the same one I had designed when I first came as pastor—18 years before. I glanced up at the choir. Same robes. Same faces, with a few new ones sprinkled in.

There was a new pastor, of course, but his sermon that morning was the same kind these people had heard—and wanted to hear—for 60 years.

Omnia mutantur for sure—but in this case *nos et NON mutamur in illis*. All things are changing, but not us.

Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to new wine. Bubbling. Expanding. Demanding growth and change. The kind which can't be poured into an inflexible container without causing a split.

Does the Holy Spirit split churches? You bet! Unless the church is flexible it's in for big trouble when the Holy Spirit begins to move.

Recently one of the nation's best known evangelists was asked by his pastor to leave his denominational church and join a Charismatic body. The reason: the evangelist had been "filled with the Spirit." The church leaders were disturbed. "He's not the same as he used to be," the pastor said. "If he stays he'll cause a split in the church."

It's a sad condemnation—not on the evangelist, but on the church and its rutted leadership.

God is not only love—He is movement. To follow means change.

Yet God does not force growth and change. If his followers do not stay under the cloud, He simply waits until the shifting sands fill their wilderness fill their ruts at both ends forming graves—then He raises up a new generation who are flexible, expandable and able to hold the new wine. That's the way God is.

All things are changing, and the older I grow the more I resist it—opting for that which is safe and comfortable. Faith, though, is adventure in action. Given the alternatives, I choose to grow.



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