

We are on the brink of change.

In so many ways,
We are
On the brink of change.

Tomorrow night, many of us will join with billions all over the world to watch the calendar turn over to 1/1/02.

Tonight, we will say our last goodnights in a sanctuary where we have worshipped for over two decades.

And just five days ago, we celebrated the birth of a child who would challenge the way people related to God and to each other. Jesus asked us to go beyond the basics of interpretation of law, and instead called us to a higher law of love and communion not only with God, but with each other.

Pastor Rich talked about this last week, the compassion that Joseph had for Mary meeting the simple legalistic righteousness of the day.

It's a scary thought.

There's a certain safety in having a list of yes and no answers to questions in your life. There's a certain comfort in having someone else set the boundaries. And if we had Jesus here right now, we might be tempted to ask how we should live our lives.

Please rise in the spirit and hear these words from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 22 verses 34 through 40:

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus as a test:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus said to him,

“You shall love the Sovereign your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul
and with all your mind.”

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This is the Gospel of Hope

Jesus gives us, as the two greatest commandments, “Love God” and “Love each other”, and tells us that all of the law and all the prophets are based on these two simple but frighteningly broad principles. In short, Jesus tells us the time has come for us to be responsible for our own choices. We can’t say “well, if it were up to *me*, I’d do this for you, but the *law* says...” Jesus points out that the law, first and foremost, is to love God and each other.

It’s time to grow a little, take a little more responsibility for who we are.

I remember a time like that. I'm going to date myself here, but it was June of 1976 and I was graduating from 8th grade. Don't go doing the math now, you can work on that later.

I came into the James Hammond/Agnes McDonald schools in the second grade, so I had spent seven years in these schools. I knew the other students, the teachers, the buildings, the schedule... I had a certain level of comfort.

Here is the 1976 yearbook for the schools. There are eight grades plus a kindergarten in here, all the students, teachers, and activities.

Let me list the activities:

Safety Patrol (remember the orange belts on kids who helped you cross the street?)

Chorus

Student Council

Boys basketball

Girls volleyball

Cheerleading

Band

Science fair

Dances.

And then, in June, we were saying goodbye to all that. I couldn't help crying a little; it was a real loss to me. I had a LOT of memories there, and it sure didn't help that our graduation song was the Theme from Mahogany.

Not only did I have tears over what I was leaving behind, I had fears about where I was going. It was a new school, with the students I knew and others I had yet to meet. And I now had to choose what classes I'd take and when. I was being asked to grow up a little, take care of myself a little more, make some intelligent choices.

There was also the excitement of new opportunities: not only in meeting new friends and choosing classes, but also in after school activities. Let me show you my 1977 High School yearbook:

There are only four years in here, and here are just SOME of the activities:

Basketball

Football

Cheerleading

Goldies

Track

Baseball

Volleyball

Swimming

Debate

Speech

Drama

Readers Theater

Chess

Mathletes

Newspaper

Year Book

Student Council

Science Club

National Honor Society

Students Active in Education

Committee for Better Communication

Leo Club

Girls' Club

Choir

Varsity Singers

Band

Orchestra

String Ensemble

Bowling

Science Fiction Club

Language Club

NIYA

Reflections Magazine

Richards Dance Review

I really want to talk a little about “Richards Dance Review”. Andrew Brownlee, a student, realized that we were in the age of Disco and we needed a school dance review. There was no national organization, no competition, and no direction from some instructor to create the group; he just saw the opportunity to create an activity that the students could share. It lasted at least the four years I was at Richards.

And so 1976 was a time of change in my life:
a time of loss of a well-known educational home,
and a time of gain in a new home where I had more opportunity and responsibility.

Tonight, we will leave this spiritual home. It is a time of loss and a time to mourn that loss.

Next Sunday, we will enter our new home in Brookfield. It is a time of gain and a time to rejoice in that gain.

We will be in a new place. We will be meeting new people. As we add new times for worship, we will have to choose when we will attend.

And we will have the opportunity and the responsibility to think beyond the basics of getting to church every Sunday. We will have opportunities to be involved in activities and ministries outside of worship. And some of us, like my friend Andrew Brownlee, will be called to bring forth new ideas on how we can be together.

We’ve already had a call for a renewed choir. I’ve heard talk of getting musicians together for a band. Another person is working on building up the intercessory prayer team. All through this congregation, I see signs of people looking beyond the basics to new ways of being church, of being a witness to each other and the rest of the world.

So shed a tear as we leave. And tomorrow night, as you’re looking over your list of New Year’s resolutions, think about how to bring joy to the future.

And congratulations, Holy Covenant class of 2001.

Amen.