

**New St. James Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, January 21, 2018**  
**The Rev. Dr. David Thompson**  
**The Change Tsunami**

Text:

“Once more I will shake the earth but also the heaven... so what cannot be shaken can remain.”  
(Hebrews)

Before I went to California I was not to sure what a tsunami was.

But one day on the North Coast, in Anchor Bay, I met a fisherman who had experienced one.

He had been out fishing intending to come into Anchor bay when he saw it. It was a massive wave. He pointed his boat’s prow towards it and soon began to ride up this mountain of water. The wave on the top had not broken but he soon found his boat accelerating at full speed towards the shore. He floored the throttle in his sturdy boat and did what he could to resist the flow. Eventually he landed on the beach up against the cliff. He was lucky to be alive and his boat only had minor damage. If he had not taken resolute action he would have been lost with his crew and his boat...

Thomas Friedman argues in his book Thank-You for Being Late that we are experiencing an unprecedented level and speed of change. The massive acceleration in computing power, the release of the Iphone and Facebook and Twitter and other social media affect everything we do. World population is out of control and still increasing. The fate of nations can rest on an Tweet. Technology, the market, globalization and climate change are all accelerating at once at an alarming pace. All of us are aware of this on some level because it affects all of us.

Last week we shut down Sears, a company which had been around since 1953. It failed to adapt to on line marketing, even although initially it had an advantage with its catalogue marketing. The giant Amazon, basically ate it, putting many people out of work.

Most of us are aware of the loss of things like the loss of newspapers which have been displaced by folks getting their news via the Internet.

Movie theatres are threatened by Netflix and that has affected Hollywood film production. It is so easy to stream a favorite movie in the comfort of home rather than a movie theatre. Also, low budget movies appear and the strangle hold of Hollywood is over. The post office and mail delivery are much changed. Once they were an ongoing miracle of individual attention and mail to every door. No more!

Video stores are now antique relics that people have to fight to save. There was a recent battle in Stratford to save one such store. But you just know it will go, unless something is done to ride the tsunami.

Kindle has dented book sales or shut the small bookstores and even larger operations down. So much is now on line. Our children are totally connected to each other for better or for worse on Instagram, twitter, Facebook and video chat lines. The world is very different than it was just a few years ago because the pace of change is accelerating exponentially. Now email is used less and less in favor of staying connected live on video...

Moore's law, originally formed around microchip manufacture, said that technological capacity of micro chips would double every 2 years or so. So, the eight elements of transistors on a chip turned in two years into 16, which in two years turned into 30 and then to sixty. The original prediction of ten years moved from 60 elements to 60, 000 or a thousand-fold extrapolation over the ten years. Moore's law has just kept on coming true for the cell phone, self driving cars, the Ipad, the Apple watch.

And things got faster and smaller too. A computer that used to take up a tennis court in size was reduced to something that could fit under a television with even greater computing power, something a child could reasonably expect to find under a Christmas tree to play video games with. This instead of a multi million dollar expense only a government or major corporation could afford or access.

Here are some points made everyday in the news feeds:

- Lives are changed when people connect. Life is changed when everything is connected. (Qualcomm motto)
- Today there are more connected mobile devices than there are people on the planet because many people have two.
- Half the world still has no cell phone, no tablet or no smart phone, but that number decreases every day exponentially
- Migrants often have nothing but a cell phone when they are picked up on the Mediterranean but they know what is going on and what President Trump said that day.
- 20 years ago, you had to be a government to access the power of Cloud computing. Today all you need is a visa card.

Is this something we have seen before?

No. Definitely no! This is the *Age of Acceleration* sometimes called the second renaissance.

Every man-made system that modern society has built on, is being reshaped and made available to every individual on the planet. These changes can be positive or incredibly negative and adapting to them is both a necessity and an art. Our choice is to ride the tsunami or be drowned in the backwash.

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In the Scriptures there are two responses to change that we need to note: The need for **preparation** and the need for **counting the cost** of inaction or action in the face of change.

The story of Noah is about how to prepare for a massive change; this time in climate and habitat. Deep adaptive change was needed.

It was counterintuitive. Noah build a huge ship on dry land to the amusement of his critics.

But Noah prepared well and survived, even surfing the waves that devastated his world.

Quoting from the book of Daniel, St. Matthew's gospel had Jesus lifting up an obscure prophesy that told of an abomination that would be set into the Jewish temple before the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed. Not one temple stone was to be left on another. The desecration would be possibly a statue to Zeus or another deity. This was to be a sign to Christians to get out of Jerusalem with great urgency. St. Luke on the same theme said that Jesus had said that when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies then the Christians should flee to the hills.

According to tradition, before Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, the Christians fled to a city called Pella. **They were warned. They heeded the warning and fled and survived.** Those who remained in the city died.

The future was often on the mind of Jesus. He had a parable about the 7 wise and 7 foolish virgins who had oil lamps for a wedding feast. 7 had extra oil. 7 figured they didn't need to prepare and they were shut out of the wedding feast when they went looking for extra oil, because the bridegroom had been delayed.

The second thing the Bible says to do about the future is **to calculate the cost of action or inaction.**

Jesus said: *Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'*  
<sup>31</sup> *"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.*

In June 2013 the Haynes report was published in the Presbyterian Record, (which as a magazine is itself now defunct.) The report was all about the rapid decline of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The report told us something we all know...that nationwide and locally our Presbyterian church is in decline. And we are not alone. As I speak the Anglican Church in Ingersoll is up for sale. The congregation now is too small to sustain the building so they are off elsewhere leaving their beautiful sanctuary behind. Some of you are aware of the Bishop Cronin memorial church here in London. Here from the Internet is the story: *One of London's most historic churches — shut down by declining membership — has been saved by one of London's most historic music halls.*

*In the process, another East London neighbourhood and the city itself will get a boost.*

*The 143-year-old Bishop Cronyn Memorial Anglican Church will be leased to Aeolian Hall for the next seven years, and may end up being bought for good.*

*"It is such a great fit. It is like a dream come true," said Clark Bryan, executive director and founder of the Aeolian.*

Now I am very happy for the director and founder of the Aeolian Hall, but rather sad for the members of Bishop Cronyn who have lost their place of worship.

Is there anything that can be done for New St. James that will turn this congregation from survive to thrive?

The answer is **Yes. Absolutely!** More about that next week!

On November 13, 1888, a man looked at the morning newspaper and to his surprise and horror, read his name in the obituary column. The newspapers had reported his death rather than the death of his brother Ludvig. His first response was shock. But the paper had printed his obit accurately and so he read all about himself as others saw him.

He was horrified! The obituary read, "Dynamite King Dies." And also "He was the merchant of death." This man was the inventor of dynamite and when he read the words "merchant of death," he asked himself a question, "Is this how I am going to be remembered?"

That very day he decided to change everything about himself.

He decided that this was not the way he wanted to be remembered.

So, he decided to make a major change. From that day on, he started working toward peace. His name was Alfred Nobel and he is remembered today by the great Nobel Prize for peace. What a stunningly positive change!

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On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2004 a tsunami hit Indonesia. Before the tsunami hit one survivor was out in a tourist boat and the tourists were all in the water around the boat.

Suddenly the captain ordered them all to get back into the boat immediately.

He was a very experienced captain and he knew from a radio report that a tsunami was coming, the massive one that hit Phuket.

The tourists had no idea what was going on and complained about the change of plans. They had paid for a trip to be in the water and now they were all forced to be on the boat and they were not happy.

The wise captain knew what to do. He sped the boat away towards the lea of two islands. The high part of the islands were facing the tsunami which was approaching like a massive wall towards the islands. He parked the boat on the leeward side and waited...

The tourist still complained as they waited there. They didn't see anything unusual as there were no sightlines. Just that the boat rose rather suddenly and then afterwards fell rather suddenly. Just a freak they thought...

But afterwards when they returned to port they saw devastation everywhere. Houses overturned, hotels destroyed; now a view of the mountain from the beach because the vegetation had all been swept away. 4,812 people were dead. 8,457 were injured and 4,409 were missing...

Then GRATITUDE came.

Gratitude for a very wise captain, who they had vilified, who had saved their lives...

Noah, Pella and the wise captain. What did they have in common?

They had counted the cost of inaction ahead of time.

Then they had prepared a survival strategy. Then when the change came they implemented the strategy.

They met the tsunami of change and rode it to safety and survived.

I hope to God that that may be the story of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and New St. James!