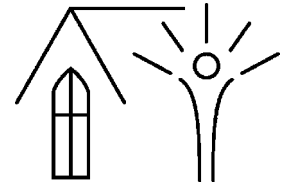




**ROSELLE**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

206 S. Rush Street  
Roselle, IL 60172  
(630) 529-1309  
www.RoselleUMC.org



*Our Mission Statement:*  
*“To Know Christ,  
To Grow in Christ,  
To Show Others Christ”*

December 3, 2006

## **Sermon: “When You and I Need to Change”**

Romans 8:18-28

Reverend Thomas Kim

Two boys were talking about the upcoming Christmas season and all of the toys they wanted to get. One boy said to the other boy, “You know, money cannot buy happiness. To be happy, you have to convert the money into toys.” What is Christmas about? Christmas is not about toys. Christmas is about God keeping His promise! God would change his plan and the world to send his only son to give us eternal life.

John the Baptist comes to us saying, “Repent.” Look within. Examine your life. See if there are changes you need to make.

Some people want to experience new life but they want to do it on their terms. They want to do it without making any real changes in their lives. “Next year I’m going to be a changed person!” Charlie Brown tells Lucy. “That’s a laugh, Charlie Brown!” she says. “I mean it!” he replies. “I’m going to be strong and firm!” “Forget it,” she says as she walks off. “You’ll always be wishy-washy!” “Why can’t I change just a little bit?” Charlie Brown asks himself. “I’ll be wishy one day,” he shouts, “and washy the next!”

That’s the degree of change many of us desire. Rather than wishy-washy we’ll just be wishy one day and washy the next. We want life to be better but we want it to happen without any significant action on our part.

However, not every change is good, nor pleasant. I had a chance this week to read a book entitled *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* by a mountain climber Aron Ralston. In the beautiful but desolate mountains of southeastern Utah, a twenty-seven year old mountain climber, Aron made a desperate decision. He was rock climbing one day when his right arm was trapped by a falling boulder, finally cut off his own hand in order to set himself free and walked several miles to safety and rescue. It was one of the most gripping news stories of 2003.

He describes this gripping story in his book and also writes about how his faith and his courage helped him get through this crisis.

He tells about the agony he went through for six days being trapped and finally figuring out the grisly way he could free himself. He says that what happened to him was an accident, a fluke, and that he got himself into this situation as he has in other risky situations including an avalanche that almost killed one of his fellow skiers. It is a sad thing to lose a limb – especially by one’s own choice – and he has had to cope with some changes in his life that he had not planned on. He has gone back to a life of adventure and climbing and still taking some risks but perhaps not in quite so dramatic a fashion as

before. And he says that even in this tragic change of cutting off his own hand, many good things come out of it.

Tom Brokaw, after an interview with Ralston said this: *“He would rather have fought this battle and won than never to have fought it at all.”* That is a bold statement and one that may be true for some painful changes in life but not for others.

The irony in the statement is that not all change is good. **Some changes you and I will face in life will be tragic and immensely painful and terribly unsettling.** They will cause our lives to go in an entirely different direction from what we had planned. They may cause us to go into a temporary tailspin and wonder where God is and how we can cope.

I can think of so many instances like this that I have seen as a pastor. In a small town, Thomson, a town with a population of just 550, a 14-year-old girl was killed by her boy friend. This was 11 years ago now. I remember accompanying her parents to the police station to see the remains of young Melissa. Her tragic death meant incredibly painful changes for her family, especially her younger sister and brother. It took a long time for her parents to work through all their deep sadness and anger and grief and there is a sense that people really never get over a loss like this – that losing a loved one, especially a daughter or son, always leaves a hole in our hearts. That is because we love each other and we have dreams and hopes for each other.

We don't have to look further than the last week of headlines to see other calamities and tragedies.

An accident. Do you believe that there are accidents or is everything that happens a result of a cosmic plan? Both those ideas are in the Bible. There are parts of the Bible that imply that God is behind whatever happens, that it is all part of a plan. That idea is not in the teachings of Jesus, but it is in other parts of the Bible. It is a common notion today and it showed up seven years ago after the Columbine High School tragedy when a religious song writer wrote a song he had composed about Columbine saying in that song that he just didn't understand God's plan sometimes – as though the murder of students and a teacher and wounding of others is part of what God wanted – part of God's plan! After the 9/11 terrorist attack, a noted religious leader commented on it as God's judgment, another term for God's will.

When a woman asked Aron why all this had happened to him he said, *“It is because of the choices I made. In other words I took some risks and got myself into this.”* God gives us freedom of choice. And God says, there are still some accidents in life. Jesus says about a collapsed tower. A person asked Jesus, “That tower that fell on those people in Siloam was that because they were sinful and deserved it or that God was sending it to them?” “NO,” Jesus says. In Jesus' teaching, there are accidents.

British theologian Leslie Weatherhead echoes that insight in his 60-year-old book on the will of God. Does God will disease and tragedy? Then Jesus, in his healing ministry would actually be fighting against God. And physicians who are working in research to make life better are also fighting against God.

But we tell people some terrible things when a tragedy has occurred – sometimes because we don't know what to say, or because we don't realize the impact of our statements. When I visited Mike McKee at St. Alexius last week, after a conversation about his surgery and procedures, he said, “I say myself rather ‘Why not me?’ than ‘Why me?’” It reminded me of Rabbi Kushner. He tells about this in his classic book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He tells of a woman who was told after a tragic death in her family that God did this to her because God knew she was strong enough to handle it and she said to herself, if I had been a little weaker would my loved one still be alive? Or the relative who said to a child whose mother had died that God needed his mother in heaven and the child thought, so I didn't need my mother enough? We can do some theoretical thinking about this until it happens close to home.

I talked with people who would say God caused an accident or tragedy for his will and plan, that I didn't believe that, and that the God I know is weeping with all of us when a tragic accident happens – as Jesus himself wept when his friend Lazarus died.

When tragic change, calamitous change happens, where is your faith, where is your rock, where is your strength? “*My help,*” the psalmist says, “*is in the Lord who made heaven and earth.*” My faith, another psalmist says, is in the God who is like a shepherd who walks with us, travels beside us even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death – not around, but through that valley. The same psalmist says, in Psalm 23, that because God is with us we can fear no evil. He does not say we will meet no evil, because we will.

Tim Hansel who is in pain the past thirty years from his climbing accident says, “*Our help is in the God who promises us four things in life.*” God promises us four things: *peace, power, purpose, and trouble.* Our faith and strength are in Christ who says; In this world you will have trouble! BUT be of good courage; don't give up, because I have overcome the world.

Our faith is in the God Paul tells us about in our scripture when he makes this audacious statement: *in all things God is able to work for good with those who love God* – in all things – even accidents and tragedies and losing a limb or losing a loved one. That is different from saying God causes all things but God is big enough to be at work in all things.

Do you believe that whatever painful and difficult changes will happen to you, that you and God can handle them together? Do you trust God to be with you to see you through even the darkest valley when you look to God and to the community of God – the church – to be a resource for help and strength?

The words of the prophet Isaiah are full of hope and promise: When you walk through deep waters (of change) I will not let them overwhelm you because I know you and love you. I have called you by name and you belong to me. This is God speaking to you and to me. And now God, the Incarnated, is coming to be with us!

*May the rough places in your life be made smooth.*

*May the valleys of despair be filled with comfort.*

*May the door to your heart be wide open.*

*May the glory of Immanuel be with you all your days.*