

Along the Way January 24 Doing Right Things

*Come gather 'round people, wherever you roam
and admit that the waters around you have grown.
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you is worth savin', then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a-changin'.*

—Bob Dylan

The times they are a-changing! The old church adage asks the question of whether we are doing things right, the new generation is asking whether we are doing right things. A simple inversion of words makes a big difference in meaning. Doing things right is comforting because it is the known and familiar path. The church used to be very concerned about doing things right. For example, it used to mean wearing the right clothes to church, saying the right words, and doing things the way we have always done them. But being asked if we are doing right things is, by contrast, more troubling because we must stop and think about what we are doing and why. And whether it is truly the work that we are called to do as a church.

In the natural life of the church, when leaders are asked to make changes, they are rarely rewarded for the change that they might produce. People like to be comfortable and so leaders are more often rewarded for keeping things the same. It's a conundrum. We all know that in order to grow, we must change . . . but it's hard.

As a seminary student, I heard the admonition that ministers should “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” It's much easier to comfort the afflicted. Ministers don't like to change any more than anyone else. But clergy and church leaders are called to do the work of transformation and that involves change—and sometimes it feels like affliction rather than affection. It is not change for the sake of change but for a deeper connection to the divine.

In the words of Bob Dylan, in the sea of change, let's keep swimming!