

**Uncomfortable Faith: Uncomfortable Holiness**  
**1 Peter 1:13-15**  
**St. Mark's & St. James UCC ~ August 16, 2020**  
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Chris Wiman wrote, “Faith in God, is, finally, faith in change.”

In this sermon series *Uncomfortable Faith*, we haven't been talking about change per say – as in changing the style of worship, or changing the time of worship, or changing the structure of the church and the need of faith in such massive undertakings.

And although we have seen many changes this year resulting in some of those very changes – the heart of this sermon series has more to do with how faith in Christ leads us to change in here [heart].

And when our heart begins to change we begin to see changes in our behaviors or actions; our interactions and reactions with people or situations. And when those changes in our behaviors or actions begin to happen with regularity our character changes. And when our character changes we begin to have more positive – Christlike influence on the people around us for the sake of transforming the world.

Think for a moment of those whom Jesus had that direct impact on and the changes that took place.

Matthew was a tax collector: successful by all accounts. There was a lot of money to be made in his line of work; and he had every likelihood of becoming wealthier than he already was.

Matthew's heart was in the making of money – even at the expense of his own people. For tax collectors were notoriously dishonest and the taxes extravagant and as far as the Jews were concerned, tax collectors were traitors to their people and their God.

Matthew – heart was in the making of money;

Actions were in the dishonesty of collecting unfair taxes from fellow Jews;

Character was that of a betrayer – he betrayed his own people; his heritage; and his God, in order to become a success.

One morning, Matthew is at his table, collecting his taxes, and Jesus walks by – stops and looks at him. Rather than seeing a cheating, conniving Scrooge he sees a saint in the making and calls Matthew to follow him.

And Matthew got up and did just that. Picture Matthew looking around at his business, his security, the familiar surroundings of his success. And then looking at Jesus of Nazareth – and he got up and followed him.

Similar stories can be told for Zacchaeus, or the woman at the well, or the adulterous woman, Nicodemus the Pharisee, the Roman Centurion, the Apostle Paul and so on...

hearts touched and changed;

resulting in new behaviors

and our very character being shaped and molded like clay in the hands of the Master Potter

And each going on to share a Word of God, extend an invitation to know or meet Christ; to pray with one another; or to missions and ministry in serving in Christ's name.

In a word, our life becomes more holy. Now, I don't mean a holier-than-thou holy. Nor do I mean a holy cow! kind of holy. I mean the dedication, devotion or consecration to God or the service of God – holy. This can be uncomfortable.

When we embrace holiness and we be noticeably different in the way we live in the world, we can't help but to feel uncomfortable especially at first.

My friend Eric Nelson, we had him on our prayer list a while back with coronavirus from which he almost died, is from my home church. We entered seminary at the same time and were ordained about 2 years apart.

He shared a story of the first church youth trip he went on, many years ago. A church youth trip is a time when the youth learn more about themselves and their relationship with Jesus and it can be an incredibly moving, memorable time.

Eric's was memorable – in a different way. The youth and the youth leaders that went were not making good choices... There was smoking and drinking and kissing... and it was not the holy event it was supposed to be.

Eric finally had enough – he stood up when everyone was gathered around the bonfire and told everyone something to the effect, “We are here to learn about Jesus. We are here to learn how to be better Christians. To grow deeper in our faith and this is not that. You should be ashamed of yourselves. We are better than this.” And he went to his cabin and went to bed.

I can't imagine that was easy for him to say.

Which is easier: my life is a bit messed up; I keep making mistakes; ahhh, everyone is doing it, I'm just one of the group – one of the crowd – one of the guys...

Or... I am striving to be holy. I am trying to live a holy life.

No thank you, no! I want to be holy in Christ.

It's hard to say those words or anything like them because on the one hand, when we say I'm trying to live a holy life there is an implicit or explicit understanding that we are sinful and in need of repentance.

Sin, repentance and holiness – that'll shut a conversation down pretty quickly...



For some the idea that Christians are called to *“be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matt 5:48) is naïve, but harmless as long as you keep those ideas to yourself. People don't like it when Christian morals are pushed upon them, uninvited. It's ok to have those Christian morals – just don't impose them upon me.

But along with holiness comes grace. And the history of God's relationship with his people and his desire for obedient living is that in terms of holy living,

we cannot do enough good

We cannot be good enough

We cannot do enough good deeds

To earn the blessings of perfect holy living in Christ.

So where does that leave us? If we can't earn that holy living, what's the use?

God's faithfulness in fulfilling his portion of the promise is grace. A grace that never fades; is never taken away in anger or petty righteousness. God's grace is always there for us.

*Salvation is by grace, through faith and not by our own deeds or works (Eph 2:8-9)* Yet, Jesus called his disciples to a higher standard – he raised the bar of holy living in areas like that of divorce, and including anger with the prohibition of murder, or the prohibition of adultery to include lust.

He raised the bar because he wanted his disciples to be noticeably different – a light in the dark. Holy living is different from that of the rest of the world.

When Jesus used imagery like salt and light, he wanted it well known that his followers would be different. Salt was used for flavoring and as a preservative – it brought something different and valuable to what it was added to.

Light chased darkness away.

It made the path easier to see; it was a guide for people to know their way.

And this is the other hand: for Christians there is discomfort in being different.

But we are called to be different not for difference sake itself. But for the sake of the world – for the saving of lives and the transformation of the world. And as Christians ~ we can be assured that we cannot give the world what we do not have.

Christian life is a life of change: it is always growing and always pursuing that right relationship with God. If we are not compelled by the shaping power of the Holy Spirit to change us from who we are to who we are meant to be, then we will not be the disciple, nor the church Jesus wants us to be.

We must believe in change. While our world is much more comfortable with a “*this is just who I am*” answer our pursuit of holy living will not abide that for ourselves or for the growth of Christ’s church.

Yes, we will fall down sometimes. Yes, we will make wrong choices and yes we will sometimes give into sin. But we must never settle for the “this is just who I am answer” because this is not who we are.

Your true self is what you are by creation, which Christ came to redeem and save and call. And our false self is that which he came to destroy. His death on the cross and resurrection three days later did just that.

This is our hope for change. Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection gives power to our faith. Holiness, our holy living, would be a terrifying thought if we had to do it all on our own. But, we don’t.

Christ lived and died for us.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to walk with us in a new way.

And God’s grace which will never go away is with us always.