

***Giving Thanks For Change***

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Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Jo Kneezel]

**Romans 10: 8b** “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. **11** The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. **13** For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

[Voice of Tim Kneezel]

Good morning everyone my name is Tim and I am going to be reading a couple selections from the Deuteronomy passage of the, uh, of this week's lectionary. So, uh, chapter 26 verses one through 3 and 9 to 10. “When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, **2** you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. **3** You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.” “**9** and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. **10** So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.” You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God.”

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Well good morning once again. I want to start by asking you a little self evaluation question. Don't worry I'm not going to ask you to answer it out loud but I'll ask you to answer it for yourself. Which is this question: "When was the last time you changed your mind about something?" [crowd laughs, Pastor Scott laughs] I hear chuckles which I suspect are spouses chuckling actually. [crowd laughs, Pastor Scott laughs] Did I get that one right? When's the last time you changed your mind about something?[pause] As it-can you think of it like, because it was breakfast? Or,um, is it are you having to go way back in history?

Show of hands how many people like to change their minds or change their mind easily? OK! No shame in that. And how many of you are like "Nope not changing anything"? OK. How many of you don't raise your hands when somebody says: "Show of hands"? Always, always, always a few. I'm with you though, by the way.

So here's the last time I changed my mind about something. As you,uh, most of you know. Um, I am taking a sabbatical this summer and so my family and I are going to be doing a lot of traveling. And the first,um, overseas trip that we are taking is just actually Tracy and me. My wife and I are going to Spain and we are going to hike on a pilgrimage trail in Spain called the Camino de Santiago. Uh, which is the Way of St James. And,uh, Santiago, uh, Cathedral is in the town of Santiago. And that is where Saint James' remains are kept, the relics.

And it's a pilgrimage that Christians have made for centuries and there's a bunch of different ways to get there. But if you do it properly and do the whole trail it takes you about 40 days to do this track. Now I can't leave my kids alone for 40 days. [laughs] Much as they might like me to do that, I can't. So Tracey and I are going for seven days. And my original plan was, OK, to start at Santiago on the map and go back seven days from there and that's your starting point. Because I want to hike for the seven days that we have and I want to get to the cathedral and, uh, get the little stamp in my booklet. And say that I was a true pilgrim. I made the pilgrimage to Santiago and I got to the cathedral. And I, I, I did the thing.

Uh, Tracey was,uh, very gently, but persistently, trying to get me to change,uh, the location that we would spend on this 40 day—40 day trek. She was saying, "Why don't we do it over here? Why don't we do it in this other town? Why don't we start here and finish here? And, and we won't get to Santiago, but you know..." And,um, I was like, "No! I am going to go to Santiago because it's a pilgrimage. And that's where the pilgrimage ends. And they give you a stamp in your book." [crowd laughs] Because that's the type of person I am.

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

Uh, but eventually Tracey in her great wisdom won me over to her plan. Which is: let's not do the very end of the pilgrimage trail because, let's be honest with ourselves, we're not actually doing the whole pilgrimage. And as it turns out the last 100 to 150 kilometers of this trail are the—some of the most boring scenically on the whole trail. So Tracey said, “Let's do seven days in the *prettiest* part of the country. And wouldn't you know it, she was right. [crowd laughs, Scott laughs] Don't tell her I said that. [crowd laughs]

Um, I changed my mind about that but it took a lot of—probably took a lot more effort than it should have—for something that's so obvious. To make a decision that way. I don't know about you, um, I'm one of those people who does not like to change my mind-until I do. And then I will.

So, I love this story that we heard read just before I came up, um, from the Book of Deuteronomy. Uh, for those of you who don't know, the book of Deuteronomy is a book—it's basically a long sermon. Way longer than the one I'm going to give. Don't worry!

Um, and it's a—Moses speaking to the people just before they go into the Promised Land. Now, they've—You might know this story even if you only know it from the Disney movie—that they were in captivity in Egypt and Moses led them out. And they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. And then finally they came to the land that they were to receive. The land promised to their ancestor Abraham and they were about to go in. But Moses knew he could not go in. He'd already been told by God that because of an act of disobedience that he committed while they were wandering, he was not going to be allowed to lead them into the Promised Land. Only up to the edge of it.

And so, uh, like any good, uh, pastor or leader would do, he said, “OK, everybody, I've got one more thing to say to you.” [laughs] And then he did like a 40 chapter sermon. So he says, he's giving the people his last—he's giving them the the whole law again. *Deutero nomos*, that it means “second law”. That's what the book of Deuteronomy is.

And in this part of the law this part of the story Moses is telling the people how they should go about making a particular type of offering after they have gone into the land and begun to see the fruits of this fertile soil and begin to reap their first harvest. He tells them: “When you come into this land and start to reap this, this benefit; you should take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground and go to the dwelling place of the Lord's name, which would eventually become the temple, and present it to the priest. Now this offering is an act of celebration for the people. They're celebrating the new life that they've been given *and* it is an act of thanksgiving

## **2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change***

for all that the Lord has done for the people. And for this new stage of life that they are entering together.

But I got to thinking about this passage. And one of the ways you can very easily, even without any extra Bible knowledge, deepen your understanding of the scriptural text is to imagine the scene as if you were there participating in it.

And sometimes you can bring a friend with you. They don't have to be in the room. But you can say, "OK, with my friend who's least like me, let's imagine that we're both there. And how would we perceive this scene differently?" It will deepen your understanding of what's happening in the scriptures.

And as I began to imagine myself here in this, uh, on the cusp of the Promised Land, hearing this sermon from Moses, the great leader, who is not going to take us into the land. I started to think, "I bet that some of the people were not thankful at all. I bet that some of them were not in a celebratory mood for a few reasons. I mean some people just don't like change. Right? Right? Some of you don't like change. Some of you do. And if you get together, and especially if you marry each other, there's to be some challenges that you have to overcome.

But beyond that I think of what the people had gone through. They had experienced famine and drought and warfare and disobedience to God and the judgment of God. Their whole, the whole parental generation had already also been told they weren't going into the promised land. And so by definition this is a second generation group of pilgrims who were going in without their parents. Maybe without their children if the children had died too young. Maybe without a friend or another loved one.

And so I'm imagining them reaping this harvest and having this extremely conflicted and bittersweet experience. For the for time that they've ever known there's food that's abundant and ready for them and yet their imagining: "I could be harvesting this with my brother who's not here today. With my parents, with my child, with my best friend; because they were lost along the way."

So they wouldn't of been thinking that necessarily, naturally, about how thankful they were in that moment. Some of them surely were. But not all of them.

When you go into a new situation, even if it's a better situation, there's always challenges. And it's not always pleasant. Again some of you are naturally given to the idea of change and some of you are not.

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

My, um, my mom, about every, I'd say, 12 to 18 months would rearrange all the furniture in the living room. Or all the cupboards in the kitchen. The Tupperware was over there, guess what? Now it's over here. [laughter] And my dad [laughing] would come home from work and just be completely mystified—"Why did you do this? What is the point of it all?" And she'd say, "Well as you can see the couch is now over there." Right, he was not in for change but she was.

So, [laughing] as you're thinking about that and maybe doing the self talk about whether you're a change person or not, think about this: today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a period of 40 days, plus Sunday's, that lead us up to Easter. The time when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. And it's a time of preparation for Easter.

Traditionally in Lent, it's a season of repentance. Now, when you think of, of the word "repent", what's the first thing that comes to mind for you? Imagine if you will a big sign. And someone has written the word "repent" on it. That's the first word. What word comes next on the sign? [crowd offering words] "Soon"? "Or else?" Or "die"?

Right, so the concept of repentance for us is there's a lot of kind of guilt and shame baked into it. Isn't that right? Wouldn't you agree? And, yes, there are times in our life when we have to repent and, in other words, turn away from the sins that we've committed. From the ways that we've wronged or wounded people. The ways that we've participated in structures and systems that benefit us to the detriment of others. Those are all things that we need to repent of and change our ways.

But, during this season of Lent, I want to encourage us as Artisan Church to think about repentance a little bit differently. I *do* want repentance to be the major theme for us over these next six weeks. Which happens to be my last six or so weeks with you before I go on this sabbatica. So, I guess you could say I'm sort of having my Moses' moment, here, over these next six weeks. And maybe this will be my Deuteronomy for you.

Hopefully, I won't die in the wilderness like he did [laughter] but if I do, look for me on the north coast of Spain. [crowd laughter] The most scenic portion of the Camino trail. [lots of crowd laughter]

But I want us to think more deeply and a little differently about repentance and in order to do that I need to ask you to allow me to go in to the Greek language just a little bit. The New Testament written in Greek and I'm going to give you one Greek word, maybe two. There's not going to be a quiz. I'll walk you through it. It's OK. The Greek word that we translate as 'repent'

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

is *metanoia*. *Metanoia*. *Meta* is a prefix in Greek. It means: “after” or “beyond.” And *noia* is a form of the word for “the mind.”

That's—that may not help you put it together just yet. So let me think of a different a different word, that's an English word that comes from Greek: metamorphosis. What is ‘metamorphosis’ [someone from crowd can be heard saying: “It’s a change.”] It's a change of what? A state or a or shape or form. *Morphis* means “form”. So when a caterpillar undergoes ‘metamorphosis’ it goes into the chrysalis and it comes out as a butterfly or a moth. Let's go with butterfly though. So, for a ‘metamorphosis’, it's like the shape that comes after. But we can just think of it as: “changing the shape.”

Right and so, for ‘repentance’, *metanoia*, it's the mind afterward. After what? Well, after a change. So very simply, and literally, the word ‘repentance’ means: to change one's mind.

Now that's a little different. That doesn't go on a sign, does it? Or maybe it should. Maybe we should think about repentance less as a wallowing in the guilt and shame of all the wrong that we've done. Because God knows we have all done it.

And instead, not because that is bad or wrong necessarily, but because this will give us a different way of focusing on things, think about changing our minds. Between now and Easter. What way will you change your mind between now and Easter? What do I have in mind? I have nothing specific in mind. It could be different for every single one of you in the room. But I want to encourage every one of you, including you visitors who may never come back here again. You're always welcome, but I know the reality. I want you to think about how you might need to change your mind over the next several weeks as well.

And by the way, that experience is not necessarily going to be more comfortable than the guilt and shame version of repentance that you might be more accustomed to during Lent. Because changing your mind can be a grueling and painful process. You might fight against it with everything you have. You might wish that you could go back to the ashes [little chuckle] of guilt and shame that you are used to at Lent. By the time we're done with this experiment over the next few weeks.

But here's the thing. Our life with God, our understanding of who God is, it changes over time. It evolves, as we grow. Just as the—the -the the waves of life carry us from one day to the next, we change. And our understanding of God changes as a consequence.

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

And that might be painful. It might be unsettling. But it's good and necessary and totally natural and normal. Sometimes I think we feel like we have to hold on to all those old things because if we let go of it ,we'll—what? I don't know. Because it's comfortable. Because it's known.

This Lent I want to encourage you, and myself, to embrace the changes that are happening around us. And the way that I want to encourage us to do that is by changing our minds. By *repenting*, by changing our minds. Or allowing them to change. So I'm going to give you a key verse that we're going to return to every week during Lent. And I'll put it on the screen or have our slide tech put it on the screen right now. This is **Romans 12:2** :***“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”***

You know, I’m not usually the cheesy one that says this. But, can we say that all together? Especially the second half from from “Be”. [everyone saying together] “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” OK, now that you know what we're doing, do it one more time. [everyone saying together] “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”By the way, do you know what the Greek word is in Romans 12 that we translate as “transform”? *Meta-morphosis*.

And so, if true repentance is a changing of our minds, a changing of our mindset. And if what happens in—when we allow God to change our minds—is a transformation. It's almost like saying our minds are kind of like the caterpillars right now. And we're looking ahead to Easter, when we hope that they will be butterflies. But between now and then there's a transformation that needs to happen. And that happens with repentance. That happens with allowing our minds to be changed.

By the way, do you know what actually happens in a chrysalis when the caterpillar transforms into a butterfly? I used to think it was like, the caterpillar goes in there, wraps a string around himself. And then like, gradually grows these wings. And you know, maybe stretches his tail out a little bit. No, no! What happens in the chrysalis is the caterpillar turns to complete mush. Complete mush. If you cut it open it would be like paste.

*That’s* what metamorphosis looks like. It's a mess! And it's not gradual sometimes. And you can't predict what's going to happen when. And you might just rather, just-“Could I just be a caterpillar? There's nothing wrong with a caterpillar. I was eating my leaves. I was happy. [laughter] I don't want to turn to mush.”

But here's the thing: caterpillars are fine but they don't spread beauty. By which I don't just mean that they're not as beautiful. That's a subjective thing. But the other thing that butterflies do is they pollinate flowers and they spread beauty everywhere they go. That's our calling as people of God. To become the beautiful beings that God designed us to be and to spread that

## 2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change*

beauty around the world by sharing the gospel and, and God's love with each person we come in contact to, and with.

But you can't get there without, without going through that, that middle state. That metamorphosis which may not be pleasant or beautiful at all. [long pause] So as we close I want you to think again about the Israelites being led into the Promised Land by a new leader. Not the one they were familiar with, somebody new. In a new place, in a new reality, in a new way of receiving their sustenance. Everything was new and different. It was—it was good, and a blessing, but it was hard and difficult. You might experience something similar over these next few weeks. But what they did was they gave thanks for that moment, even the ones who didn't want to, [laugh] were commanded to. And they did it. And you know how sometimes it works that if you, if you kind of make yourself act in a thankful way suddenly your spirit becomes a little more thankful? I think that's the way it works.

And so give thanks for this change as you undergo it during Lent. This change of mind. This transformation. This renewal. This new, terrifying, lovely, wild, unexpected and unknown life in the land of promise that God wants you to enter into. And remember throughout, the reassuring words from Psalm 91 that we've already heard twice today. And guess what? We'll hear one more time before we leave because I want you to hear it. [Psalm 91:1-2,9-12, NRSV] *“You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’ Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.”*

You see, even if it's hard, it will be better. Because I believe that we are about to be transformed into something even more beautiful. Let's pray together. [Pause] Gracious God, we are moved by these stories from your sacred scriptures. From the stories of the Israelites going from one state of life to the next. From the stories of the early Christians whose lives were turned upside down. From the stories in the tradition of the church, and of the whole world. Indeed, where we see your hand at work. Where we see you making not *new* things but *things* new. We pray you'd make us new. We pray that we would be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And we pray that you would give us courage and boldness and wisdom to know exactly what way you are calling each of us to repent. To change our mind. To deepen our understanding and our love. To be made into the beautiful thing that you want us to be, that you've prepared us to be, so that we can spread the beauty of your good news to all those we meet. We anticipate this, and trust in it, looking ahead to Easter as we make our way through Lent. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

## **2019-03-10 *Giving Thanks For Change***

Well. Our response to the Word at Artisan is always to come to the Communion Table. We have Communion every week and Artisan. And you should know that this is not The Table of Artisan Church it's The Table of Jesus Christ. Which is to say, all of you are invited by Him to partake if you wish. There is no pressure to partake but there is no requirement that you be a member of our church or any church. If you are seeking to follow Jesus in this place, on this day. If you are intent and anticipating that beauty springing forth in your life, I encourage you to come and receive. We practice this by dipping. We have regular bread on the outside and gluten free in the middle. There is both wine and juice. You can take one piece and dip it in one of the cups and eat it right at the table. May it be for you the real presence of Jesus the Savior. May it be the Body and Blood of Christ. May it be food for your souls. An act of unity with each other and a sign of the hope that we have.

If you'd like to receive prayer this morning in lieu of, or in addition to Communion, there's a member of our prayer team at the back corner of the room. They'd be happy to pray with you during this time as well. If you have kids, they're down there. You can get them. They can take communion. Or you can get them after you take communion. And the last thing I'll say, is that we have the waters of baptism here. And if you've been baptized and would like to remember your baptism by dipping your hand in the waters or holding your hand over it, you are welcome and encouraged to do so. As we continue to sing, let's worship God together in prayer, in song and in sacrament. Our table is open now. Come if you will.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](http://ArtisanChurch.com)