

## THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

By Jeff Cook

*"The times they are a changin'."*

In 1964, Bob Dylan sang about something that was happening – the world people knew, was changing.

In 2012 the world is still changing. Some historians say the change has been occurring for 150 years, and counting. Some refer to this change as the Great Emergence: You can look almost anywhere in your life to catalogue the changes.

- Our phones no longer are attached to the wall of our home. We carry them with us...and we take photos with them!
- The amount of technical information doubles every nine months and 27 days
- By the age of 38 years most employed people will have had at 10 to 15 different jobs.
- The number of text messages sent on any day exceeds the population of the world.
- Over 247 billion emails are sent each day.
- The top 10 demanded jobs in 2010 did not even exist in 2004.
- Sunday is now a regular shopping day in North America.
- Nearly half of Canadians aged 15-29 years claim to have no religious identity.

Our technology is changing. Our access to information is changing. Our habits, lifestyles and attitudes are changing. Our relationship to church is changing.

People increasingly talk about being spiritual, but not religious. People seek a relationship with God outside of membership in a congregation or denominational church.

In "Post-Christendom: Church and Missions in a Strange New World", Stuart Murray describes some of the shifts the church has experienced in terms of its status in society:

- The Christian story and churches have moved from the center to the margins
- Christians no longer enjoy automatic privileges but find themselves as one community among many in a plural society
- Christians no longer exercise direct control over society, but can influence society only through faithful witness to the Christian story and faith
- The emphasis is now no longer on maintaining the status quo but on mission
- Churches must learn to operate once again as part of a movement, not mainly in institutional mode

So, what does this mean for Christian congregations today and in the future?

Nobody knows!!

The standard response of ‘God knows’ seems like the best answer these days.

God knows because God is up to something in and with the church.

God is always up to something, doing a new thing.

The Biblical story keeps reminding us that God is up to something. In the beginning, God started moving ‘stuff’ around into new relationships to make planets and stars and everything else.

Jesus, responding to God’s spirit, tells his friends to try something different and cast their nets on the other side of the boat.

Jesus challenged people to view life differently. For example, he said that if you wanted to gain the ‘everything’ of God you had to lose the ‘everything’ of life.

God does a new thing, as death is followed by resurrection. God is always up to something – something new; something which stretches our awareness of reality.

I trust that God is still up to something, something new, some new creation.

In this time of change, I think Christians find our attitudinal guide in Jesus. Jesus' most frequent exhortation to his disciples was "Do not fear. Don't be afraid."

That is easier to say than to live. We need to add another phrase.

"Do not be afraid....trust God."

Faith means trusting. Jesus trusted God, trusted that God's way of loving others and loving the world were THE way to love – love that forgives enemies, that welcomes everyone to your table, that offers healing, that refuses to seek revenge or violent means to so-called peaceful ends, that washes others' feet, that embraces the poor and destitute, that surrenders personal promotion for the sake of expressing God's grace.

In this time of change, I think the church is still called to 'fear not' and 'trust God'. It is not a matter of 'fixing' the church. It is a matter of being the church, of 'experimenting' with various expressions of worship. It is a matter of welcoming people regardless of age, sexual orientation, race, or economic status. It is a matter of figuring out how we connect with each other and how we nurture our sense of God not only by gathering in a sanctuary, but through social media. It is a matter of listening to the voices of those who are part of the church community and those who are not. It is a matter of exploring various practices of prayer and meditation.

The times they are a changin'. Fear not. Trust God.