I remember the first time I wore my clerical collar outside the church doors after becoming ordained. I had done a church service at the Springs of Mill Creek, and stopped off at the grocery store to pick-up a few groceries. I had totally forgotten that I was wearing my clerical collar when a person I knew stood in line beside me as we waited to have our groceries processed. I said hi, but she continued to stare at me, saying nothing. I finally asked her if everything was okay. She blurted out, “When did you become a priest? I had no idea you were studying to become a priest. I knew you were a church-going person, but, ‘wow’ a priest, how foreign is that.”

I briefly shared my journey with her in about 2 minutes, and we promised to catch-up at a later time, which we did do. I wonder if our story in Mark today is similar to my brief encounter with my friend in the grocery store? From the way the story is told in Mark, it seems like Jesus has not spent much time in Nazareth. On the Sabbath Jesus goes to the synagogue like any good Jew would do, and then begins teaching. It is while Jesus is teaching that the other men begin to question how Jesus became so wise, so learned, and now Jesus even heals. After all, Jesus was raised to be a carpenter. Who is this neighborhood boy they once knew?

Rather than be excited about the change in Jesus, the men take offense. How dare Jesus flaunt his authority with them. Their surprise, their doubt in the authority of Jesus, and their own lack of faith cause Jesus to retort with harsh words, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” For the people of Nazareth, they don’t trust in this ‘new’ Jesus, and we read that even the healing powers of Jesus are compromised.

What can we learn from this brief passage that speaks of change, doubt and faith? All of us know something about change. The main thing we know about change is this, “We rarely accept change without some resistance.” If you have thought or said these words, “We always do such and such this way,” then you, too, struggle with change, as I do.

So, I am a little surprised Jesus reacted so strongly with the men in a synagogue he had probably attended as a boy. It’s not that the people were different than when he was a child, the difference was, Jesus had changed. It’s similar to having a person return to St. Paul’s after being gone for several years, and then they try to tell the leadership how to grow or manage the church. Pushback is normal.

But, you see, it’s not about church attendance, or the change that probably does need to take place at St. Paul’s. The main issue is the inability to evolve with our own personal faith. Does your faith in Jesus breathe life into you; fill you with a sense of wonder and awe?” Can you allow your doubt to set you free to think outside the box of what you know right now? Brian McLaren says this about doubt, “Doubt need not be the death of faith. It can be, instead, the birth of a new kind of faith, a faith beyond beliefs, a faith that expresses itself in love, a deepening and expanding faith that can save your life and save the world.”

Doubt often stops change from taking place, yet, look at the life of Jesus and the disciples he prepared to tell his story, which turned the Jewish religion upside down in the 1st century. Jesus was a practicing Jew, but he said, “It’s not enough, I have come to break down certain laws which will breathe new life into all people.” “I have come that you might have abundant life.”

There is new life taking place in the diocese right now. Who could have predicted the wonderful changes taking place at Ascension Camp? Amy Jayne, a breath of fresh air for change, and the energy to make things happen has written grants to help support different parts of the Ascension ministry, not for Episcopalian campers only, but for the very people living in Cove. Who could have thought the Spirit would move in this way?

Who could have predicted that underneath the very Ascension camping grounds Bobby Fossek took care of on a weekly basis, he would become a wisdom-bearer on how to return a portion of the campground back to its native ecosystem? In a newspaper article Bobby said this, “reintroducing native bunch grasses such as Great Basin Wildrye, Blue Fescue, Bluebunch Wheatgrass, Tufted Hairgrass, and others are often overlooked in favor of trees and wildflowers, but they play vital roles in their ecosystems, providing food, habitat, soil stabilization, nutrient transference, and more. Change at Ascension, I surmise, was hard, but change created new energetic life to be expressed. I rather doubt anyone 10 years ago predicted this kind of change to the camp.

What is really taking place at Ascension Camp, healing? … healing of the land, healing of the hearts and minds of doing things to create new life. But this healing created tension and doubt in the beginning, but hidden in mystery was a word that can only be generated by trust, that of faith. The leaders began to trust a new vision. Paul said in Hebrews 11:1, “*The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see*.”

Jesus, in our story today, is actually showing us, in spite of his native town’s response to him, that doubt need not be the death of faith, instead, doubt can be the birth of a new kind of faith, a faith beyond written down beliefs, a faith that expresses itself in love, a deepening and expanding faith that can save your life and save the world.

Aging is no friend for experiencing a new kind of faith. As we age, and I include myself, we become fearful of change, where new ways of doing things feel strange, because we would rather lean back into a place that is familiar and comfortable. Jesus, who was amazed at his townsfolks unbelief, then goes onto say to his disciples, new life is not about staying comfortable, in fact, when you go out two by two and people refuse to listen and keep you in their homes, then just leave them. Allow them to stay stuck in their unbelief, because change will take place right before their eyes anyway!

The traditions of the Episcopal Church are designed for change. Our Book of Common Prayer is a living, breathing, and changing document, with an openness for modification. Why? Because Thomas Cranmer understood the mystery of faith, you cannot shackle or restrain the Holy Spirit from working God’s love in people and not expect the world to change around you. That’s the miracle or healing mystery of God’s love … love changes people from the inside out. Even in our weakness, according to Paul, God’s grace is sufficient.

Change. Doubt. Faith. These three words describe what Jesus encountered in Nazareth on a Sabbath Day in the local synagogue. Jesus left the town of Nazareth disappointed with people he had known from childhood, yet, in spite of his disappointment the author of Mark connects this second story of being sent out to clarify the new role for the disciples. They are to be sent out to listen, to connect, to heal. In other words, the disciples had to learn how to become a guest in someone’s else’s home, because that’s where faith would present itself. Can we as the church learn how to become guests also. Amen.