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All Things New

How are you with change? Some of us resist it like the plague, convinced that novelty is ruinous. Author Jeff Jernigan tells the story of the governor of New York's stubborn resistance to change in 1829. A library of documents from the era preserved a letter that the governor wrote to then President Andrew Jackson begging him to halt the spread of "a new form of transportation known as railroads." The governor claimed that railroad expansion would cause widespread unemployment among those who worked on the canal boat system. And he closed his letter to President Jackson with this argument: "As you may well know, Mr. President, railroad carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of fifteen miles per hour by engines which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock, and frightening women and children. The Almighty never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed."

Sadly for the governor of New York, history has found his argument about the excessive dangers of railroads and high-speed travel baseless. Happily for the nation, progress was not halted because of this man's reluctance to change.

We were struck, when hearing this governor's arguments against change, by his final statement to President Jackson. The governor argued that he knew God's intentions for us, and they did not include railway travel. But how could the governor know such a thing? Indeed, how can any of us evaluate our actions or those of others against God's intention for our lives?

Still today, we hear people argue that God wants or intends this or that. (We've made these arguments ourselves, from time to time!) But how could we know? Must we wait for history to prove us wrong or right?

Certainty about God's intentions is something people of faith are constantly seeking, and rarely finding. Yet the search for how we might please God and live in concert with God's plans and desires is a time-honored act of faith. Do you have some notion about God's intent for your life? And does it focus upon constancy or upon change? How have you come to this realization about God's plan for you?

Well, perhaps there will be as many answers to that question as there are people. Maybe discernment about how we should live as faithful people is something that unfolds differently in every life, as experience teaches us to see God's hand and God's ways at work in our midst.

One certainty alone seems to exist: change is a given in every life. We can meet it reluctantly or thoughtfully, with dread or with hope and anticipation. But meet it we must. In fact, it may be that we will encounter God most readily right there – in the midst of change. After all, we recall the stirring words that claim God's involvement in such transformation: "Behold, I make all things new!"