

[**First Day Jitters Book**] The first day of school is one of my favorite days of the year; a new outfit, butterflies in my stomach about meeting my new students and oh the smell of brand new school supplies. It is a new beginning, full of endless possibilities! Every year on the first day, I have my students sit on my classroom big carpet on their pocket squares and listen to the book The First Day Jitters. The story starts with Mr. Hartwell trying to get Sarah Jane out of bed, get dressed and come down for breakfast. She complains her head hurts, she doesn't like her new school and she doesn't know anyone. With lots of prodding Mr. Hartwell gets her in the car and to school. She is greeted by the principal that has been waiting to show her to her new classroom. Everyone is crowding the halls and rushing to their classes with Sarah Jane! The principal asks the students to be quiet in the classroom and the last page reads, "Class, I would like you to meet your new teacher....Mrs. Sarah Jane Hartwell." My students are blown away by the ending; they think the whole book is about a new student like themselves. It is the perfect book for the first day of school especially for these future teacher students to see that teachers get nervous or the jitters just like them!

NO ONE likes change. Everyone likes the familiar-even if the familiar isn't all that great! Everyone at some part of their life have had to make changes or choices; these might from starting a new job to as simple as what to have for lunch. With a new relationship, joining a new team or moving we know there is uncertainty & unknown. Sometimes this can be uncomfortable, we don't want to work hard for change. We are comfortable in our own clothes, homes, situations, jobs or relationships.

[**God is present in change**] New experiences and change are hard and scary, but God is working & the other side of change is BETTER. God is with you every step of the way; even when it feels like He is not. That is the time for me when I know I need Him the most! We all WANT to hear or might hear "The future is good so you don't have to worry." But the reality is we have no idea what the future holds or how a situation is going to turn out. So the good news is grounded in God's character. Because God is GOOD, because God is TRUSTWORTHY, because God is FAITHFUL, we can be confident in the face of change.

This is the season of Epiphany - in the Church year, it follows Christmas. If Christmas is about celebrating that God has come into the world, Epiphany asks, "So what?" It's about those big questions - who is this God? Who did this God come for? So during Epiphany this year, we're asking those big questions.

Our series is called the "Prophets and Poets Mixtape". Remember those mixtapes you used to make? You carefully ordered the songs, putting hours into crafting the perfect album to communicate how you felt to that special someone or during a certain time in your life.

In this series, we're listening to God's prophets as they tell us who God is. But we're also listening to a soundtrack - the Psalms, which are Israel's songbook. When we read the song alongside the prophet, we learn better the character and identity of this God who has come into the world.

So today, as we think about change, we need to think about where God is in change. Throughout Israel's long history, they saw a lot of change. From slavery to freedom. From desert to promised land. From tribes to nation. From good kings to bad kings and back again. From nation to conquered. Israel knew the anxiety we feel about our leaders, about the future of the nation. They asked big questions about the economy, about national security, about the fate of their children. They felt the same anxieties we do.

[Scripture Slide 1] So let's begin with the song. Turn with me to Psalm 27. If you grabbed a Bible out of the back, you can find Psalm 27 on page XXX. The Psalms were the songs Israel sang when they gathered for worship. These were the songs that shaped their anxieties, and taught them how to hope.

Follow along with me in Psalm 27:1, 4-9

The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid?

The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?

4 ...The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most— is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come; he will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock. Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me. At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and praising the Lord with music. Hear me as I pray, O Lord, Be merciful and answer me!

My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."

Do not turn your back on me. Do not reject your servant in anger. You have always been my helper. Don't leave me now; don't abandon me, O God of my salvation! -- Psalm 27:1, 4-9

This song is an affirmation of God's faithfulness. You can hear the singer's anxiety - she's begging God not to turn his back on her, not to reject her. But she is confident that God will come through because she knows God's character. God is the one who conceals in times of trouble, who hides us from our enemies, who is our fortress and salvation and light.

The song is a song of trust. We can trust that God's character is good. That God is faithful. That God is trustworthy.

[Scripture Slide 2] That informs how we read the prophet. Turn with me now to Isaiah 9. Isaiah prophesied during a time of great cultural anxiety. He served in the nation of Judah, for King Ahaz. Ahaz wasn't a great king - he was pretty weak, and during his reign, Judah was constantly under threat of attack from neighboring kingdoms.

Again and again, Isaiah reminds Ahaz to trust God - you can almost imagine him singing Psalm 27 over and over to Ahaz. Remember, God is faithful. REMEMBER, God is faithful! REMEMBER! God is FAITHFUL!

Isaiah began hoping that Ahaz' son would be more faithful than his father, and this prophecy is all about Hezekiah, Ahaz' son. So if you can imagine what it's like to be in the middle of a leadership transition that's causing a lot of anxiety in the nation, then you're probably in the sandals of those Judeans. Listen to Isaiah's words:

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder. For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian. -- Isaiah 9:1-4

Isaiah - and all Judah - hoped that Ahaz' son, Hezekiah, would be a better king. And while he was more faithful to God, he wasn't a particularly good king. He was just okay. Which is why this prophecy and so many others came to point to Jesus.

Israel realized that no human king could fulfill their hopes and dreams. No human king could truly keep them safe and prosperous. No human king, in fact, could give them what only God could give them.

We recognize now that the light Isaiah foresaw was the coming of Jesus - that's why we read this scripture leading up to Christmas. Jesus is the ultimate proof that God can be trusted. Because when we were all in darkness, God entered into that darkness. GOD changed - left the throne of Heaven to become a helpless baby. He became human, one of us, so that he could rescue us from darkness.

The song that is Psalms 27 ends like this: **"Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD."** -- Psalm 27:14

[Be brave!] Be brave. Be brave as we wait for God. We spent all of Advent learning how to wait - we wait by being God's people. Which means that, just like Jesus is light, WE are called to be light. When we trust God, we SHINE! Jesus tells us we are the light of the world and we are called to be faithful, to be the ones shining the brightest.

That's where our Prophet and our Poet connect: both tell us God is the light of the world. As God's people, God calls us to reflect that light into the world. To go into the dark and be the light. We don't just stay in the light where it is comfortable, we have to go back in the pit with the people in the darkness and show them the light. Take a risk, make time for people, and create space for people and comfort. Share your story, go first and let the Spirit lead you. We

have to go out and be the light of the Lord. We have to be the people that goes out away from the comfort of our friends and this church and be the people of God.

But what does it look like when change is good or being the light in other people's' lives? How do we do it when we don't have the faith or don't believe we hear the Spirit calling us?

[Family w/o Alex] A year ago I was asked to make a video for Catalyst about my Spiritual gift of teaching and getting the great charge of caring for teenagers. Through this video April Hoye, a member here at Catalyst saw something in my story, myself and my family that I never would have dreamed of doing. April places foreign exchange students with American host families. She approached my husband and me after the youth group talent show about hosting a foreign exchange student in our home. I believed I immediately told her no! She sent me Facebook messages asking if I was still interested and that we would be a great fit for a student. Every time I saw a notification from her my heart skipped a beat, but not in a good way! Casey and I talked about it and I told him my fears of bringing a complete stranger into our home and he told me his. Honestly, it was more my fears than his. Casey is always there to see the positive, to be the optimist when I am the forever pessimist. The teacher and planner in me made a mental list and every time April asked, my list and excuses got longer.

I had so much anxiety about bringing someone from a foreign country into my home. My yoke felt heavy. Where would they be from? How well would they speak English? Would they fit into our adventurous loud family? How would they get to and from school? Would they be clean or would I have to pick up after them? Would they follow our rules? Would they be respectful? Would they be kind to my own children? How much time, energy, space, and resources would this other child take away from my own children? I already have a young child that would be starting kindergarten in the fall and my stepdaughter was going to be a senior, not to mention I am around thousands of teenagers at my job on a daily basis. Why would I want to take one home with me each night? This was my biggest worry, my own children and what they would be missing out on! Casey and I told April no thank you that we were not interested at the time and we were honored she thought we would be a good family to host. She graciously said ok, but again a few weeks later I received another Facebook message: We have a young lady from Norway that needs a host family! I looked across the table at Casey and said. "We have to say yes! She is Norwegian and April said she is a doll!"

[Family w/ Alex] It was so easy that time to say yes. Why was it when I could give you a t chart a mile long why this just wouldn't work? It was the Spirit! Immediately, when I read she was Norwegian I had a connection-I am also part Norwegian and grew up with many of my family's traditions. God was speaking to me that day, He knew the child He was sending me before I did. He knew all of my reservations, all of my excuses and anxieties but He calmed them in that moment and every moment since. Having the responsibility of caring for a young adult and honor of showing someone from a foreign country is no small feat. Having Aleks in our home has changed us though! It has had a wonderful effect on my kids, on our relationship as husband and wife, as parents, on our family unit, our C group has welcomed her and taught her like their own child and by all that come in contact with Aleks or our story are forever changed. The fear that this would take away from my own children is the exact opposite. God has made

me realize that this young lady is a blessing, the time we spend together as a family and teaching her is invaluable to all involved. When I was reflecting back on the reasons why we didn't want to host an exchange student it was hard for me to remember the reasons now. We can't imagine this year without Aleks and all we have experienced and shared together.

[**God is present in change again**] We do not know our future, but with the Lord, His light we have to trust in Him there is a plan. Change, the future, new experiences, the unknown are hard and scary, but God is working & the other side of change is BETTER. God is with you every step of the way; even when it feels like He is not. Are you facing a change or wanting a change? Are you sitting here today anxious about a family member, a deadline, fear of the future? Do you fear due dates, finances, acceptance, sickness? Are you anxious about your children, your relationships, social situations, a decision that has to be made, how you are going to do _____ tomorrow? I could go on and on and no two people's anxieties, fears, struggles or stories are the same. But one thing that is the same with every person is this room is God is on our side! He is present with you every step of the way, in all your fears, in all your sorrows and all your triumphs!

Imagine what life would be like if we sang like the Israelites Psalms each day because we knew that God is faithful, He is good, He is trustworthy? How would your week be different if you weren't worried about what's next because you know God is with you?

Communion + Examen

[**Communion Slide**] We approach the Communion Table today to join in Jesus' death. He is where our ultimate assurance comes from because God entered into change with us and remained faithful even to death. If you want to know that God can be trusted wholly and completely, no matter how uncertain the future, look no further than this table.

Here, at this meal, Jesus offers us bread as his body, broken for us. He offers us wine as his blood, poured out to reaffirm God's commitment to us. We receive this meal as a people called to be faithful, and to be brave.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive this communion today. If you're willing to trust God, then you're welcome to come to the table today.

Before we come to the table, I'll lead us in a Prayer of Examen. These are four questions that ask you to reflect on your week. As I guide you through these questions, listen for the Spirit to speak to you, to invite you to respond to the message today.

Then I will pray, and as you are ready, you can approach the table.

1. When in the last week did I trust God to be present in the midst of my anxiety?
2. When did I let worry and anxiety consume me and order my steps?
3. When in the next week might I be tempted to give in to worry and anxiety?
4. How can I be brave and step faithfully in the way God is calling me this week?

God, our Father and giver of every good gift,

You command us to be brave, which is a difficult calling in our shifting, uncertain world. We live in a culture that looks to the future with much anxiety, and we confess we too often listen to the voices that tell us to play it safe or be afraid.

But we are your Church, the people you purchased with your own blood, the people you call a precious treasure, the people you insist will be a light to the world. We want to hear your voice above all others. We want to trust your promises above all others.

So today, we approach your table, the place where we receive your son's own body and blood. We ask these wafers and juice become a spiritual food that gives us ears to hear your Spirit's call. We ask for the courage to be your people, certain of your love and faithfulness in an uncertain world. Send us from here to be your light in a dark world, that those who encounter us may see your faithfulness as well.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son, Jesus.

Blessing/Assignment

We want to give you an assignment today to read Psalm 27 every day in the upcoming week. We want you to read it and reflect on your day; how will you be the people to shine the light of the Lord? Whom shall you fear with God on your side releasing your anxiety, fears and helping you make those changes?