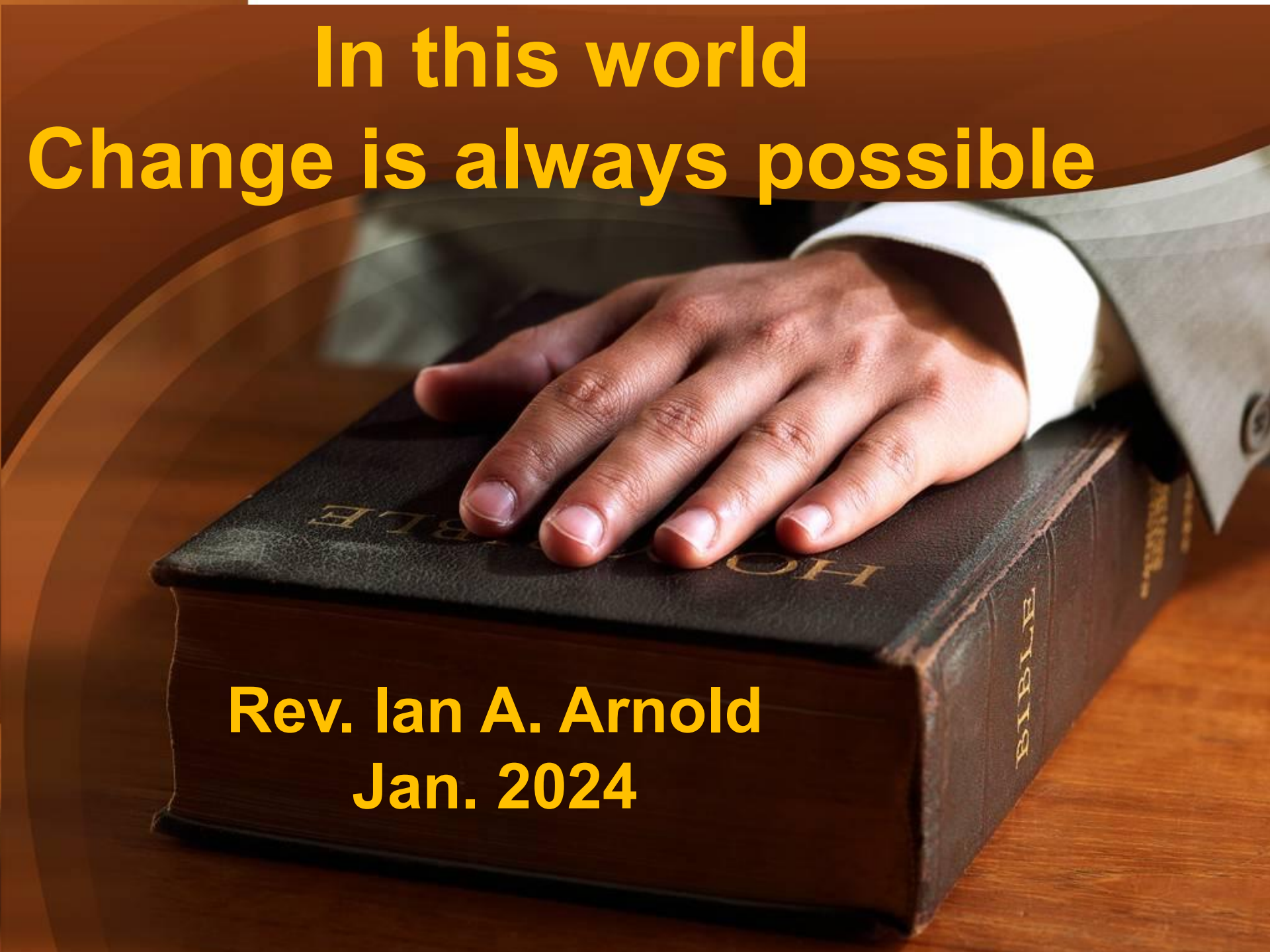
In this world
Change is always possible



Rev. Ian A. Arnold
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Genesis 8:12

So Noah waited another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him any more.”

New beginnings

When, three or so weeks ago, I was turning over in my mind this topic of “Change”, a very compelling, a very riveting, a very memorable and a very reassuring statement in the Teachings – or Heavenly Doctrines – of our Church came to mind. It reads:

“Every smallest fraction of a person’s life entails a chain of consequences extending into eternity. Indeed every one is like a new beginning to those that follow; and so every single moment of the life of the person’s understanding and of their will is a new beginning.” (Arcana Caelestia 3854)

This is mind blowing. It is a wonderful

Even more than that, each moment, as it unfolds, can be – if we want it to be – a new beginning.

We are not, therefore, locked into our past.

We are not bound to respond to life; to situations; to people; to challenges; to disappointments; to problems, as we have done in the past.

However convinced we may be of things regretfully said and done in the past; burdened with guilt, perhaps filled with remorse, as we can be, every moment offers the opportunity for a new beginning: every moment brings with it the possibility of change.

We need to firmly hold on to this: we need to believe it to be so: and not allow ourselves to be persuaded otherwise.

And, as we all know, it is not just a matter of what others around us might say or imply. There is a good chance we have all heard voices within ourselves mocking our efforts to change and scoffing at the very hope that it is possible.

we have tried to change, but failed

we have tried to break old, destructive, habits and have got nowhere

in the wake of some undeserved hurt we have caused someone we have resolved change but didn't carry through with it.

And so those voices tell us, 'And so I will never be!'

But this is not the truth of the mater.

As the Lord has revealed through the Writings,

"Everybody is capable of being perfected, and consequently of receiving the gift of the Lord's mercy, insofar as the deeds he actually performs in life will allow, and in a manner consistent with the hereditary evil implanted within him from pare

The God of new beginnings

There are many statements and things we learn about the Lord as we grow older, read more, listen, reflect and think about things, which “fill out” our picture of Him and this is one, that He is the God of new beginnings.

He is the father in the parable of the prodigal son who so warmly welcomed back his wayward son and did everything needed to make possible a new beginning for him.

In His monitoring of our lives, moment by moment as it is, **the Lord is continuously watching out for opportunities to instigate change and so a new beginning**. He made it clear in what He so memorably said to Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews who came to him one night, that fundamental change as to our priorities and inclinations is essential. "You must be born again", He declared. (John 3:7). And, in another place, *"Unless you are converted"* (which simply means 'turn around' or 'turn in a new direction') "*and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:3).

What is reassuring is that 'turning around does not have to be something I hope you find this wonderfully reassuring, as I do, that "If any one, by fighting against evils because they are sins, acquires for themselves something of spiritual life, <u>even though very little</u>, they

Time for change

When it comes to change, and new beginnings, there is no one time in the year which, in the Lord's eyes, is more auspicious for it than any other. He is both yearning and working for it, to kick start it, and have it get under way at any time.

Having said that, He will pick up on – and run with – times, seasons and occasions as they arise in the world and in connection with the customs of our culture – such as New Year, traditionally the time to resolve change –if that's when our resolutions are made.

The reality is that the Lord is delighted and only too willing to capitalize on *any* opportunity that holds the hope of leading to change.

It may be, therefore, that we shouldn't trivialize New Year resolutions or only make shallow ones. This can be the Lord's opportunity, if we want it to be, and ours, to enter into a partnership with Him such as can lead to real

Change and pain

Deep down and significant change; change that is, which moves our regeneration forward; carries with it challenges and, often enough an element of pain.

And the reason it does so is because the things we identify as needing to be changed are things that give us a level of pleasure or delight.

We have all met the person who has an opinion on everything; dominates conversation; doesn't listen; and must have the last word. This is what gives that person pleasure and delight.
He or she delights to think they are so well informed, whether with regard to sport, politics, or the economy. Clearly, becoming involved in the process of change is going to be painful for that person. To curb their tongue; to listen and to concede that others may know better.

Thinking about this, it is no wonder the Lord warned of our need to "lose" our life to save it. (Luke 9:24). It is as

Not overnight

Do we wonder then that such fundamental re-orientating of our lives; that such change; cannot but be a gradual process?

"Little by little" is what the Lord spoke about to the ancient people of Israel in their quest to eventually enter the Promised Land. It was all about warning them that it was not going to be anywhere near as early or as quick as they hoped or imagined. They couldn't have coped with it - and nor could we. Yet, for all that He wanted them to believe in the possibility, slow as it would be to get there. And this is for sure that He wants us to believe in that possibility as well.

Noah and the lead up to emerging from the ark

There is a famous saying, known to most of you, I'm sure, that "a picture is worth a thousand words". It is why there are so many unforgettable "pictures" here in our Bibles: and here we have one of them.

The picture is of Noah, more or less imprisoned with his family and countless animals in that stuffy, oppressive, dark ark for what can only have seemed an interminable time: and then, at last, and some seven months after it had come to rest, he was able to break out and break free from it; to put his feet on dry ground and there to enjoy a new beginning. There you have it - from the old to the new. And the implication is

The time in between

But this is important.

The whole thing of coming out of and leaving behind the ark was a slow process. It was all about one step at a time.

To lose our life, as the Lord would have us do, so as to be able to be gifted with a new one, is a gradual thing. As our Doctrines have it, *"Regeneration, or the implantation of the life of heaven…continues right on to the final phase of a person's life in this world…and even thereafter continues forevermore*." (A.C.9334:3)

Stages that lead to a new beginning

We've been reminded that during the period, some seven months, after the ark came to rest, Noah wasn't idle. Far from it. He was all the time looking to the moment of release and to what he believed lay ahead.

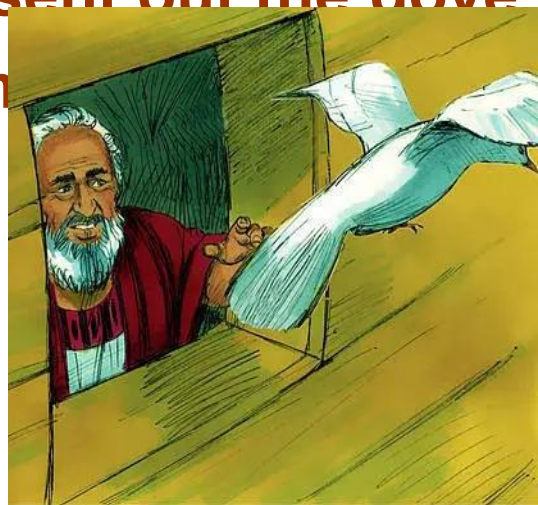
And there were a number of things he actually did, one thing after another, which highlight how it is with regard to change and the stages which lead to new beginnings.

When conditions at last made it possible Noah first of all sent out a raven which never returned to him.

He next sent out a dove which on its return he strenuously reached out for and – as it is said – “drew into the ark to himself.”

The second time he sent out the dove it returned with an olive leaf in its beak and there is no mention this time of Noah taking hold of it.

At last, and a third time, he sent out the dove and “it did not



As to their symbolic, or spiritual, meaning, birds are all about our thoughts, aspirations and motivations.

Our first thoughts, aspirations and motivations to change to become a more spiritual person, meaning to live more thoughtfully and considerately towards others, curbing and subordinating self; all have in fact a great deal of ourselves or of our proprium about them. This is what is meant by the raven.

The dove is different: it is a simpler, less artful, gentler bird, and being white or light coloured, carries the meaning of more spiritually advanced thoughts, aspirations and motivations. But early on there is still the element of self there as is pictured by Noah eagerly reaching out for

Leaving the ark

Natural life; life, that is, that life which essentially revolves around ourselves; life which is focused on my needs, my wants, my self-image, my problems, my disappointments, my success; my goals; my making an impression on others; is like being imprisoned in the ark. And so long as we are there we are buffeted about by currents and storms – by this desire and that desire; by this complaint and that complaint; by this discontentment and that discontentment; by this uncertainty and that uncertainty.

But the Lord is looking beyond this to change and a new beginning.

Perseverance and a quiet trust in the Lord are essential. There will be times when we are disappointed with our progress and will wonder if the changes we have set our heart on can ever be. There will be times, too, when we will become aware of self-interest – still active – even in the process that leads to change. But the Lord can easily handle that.

The teaching given is that,

"With anyone who s to be regenerated his initial affection for truth s largely impure, for it holds within it the desire to satisfy a purpose and an end that have himself in view, the world, glory in heaven, and similar things which regard himself and not the common good, the Lord's kingdom, still less the Lord Himself. Such affection inevitably comes first. Nevertheless the Lord purifies it gradually so that at length falsities and evils

The thing is we CAN be liberated from sin and from shame, from negative habits, attitudes, self-questioning, doubts about our worth and from envy and discontentment.

There is ALWAYS a new beginning if with our heart we want one and are willing to work with the Lord to bring it about.

"So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him any more."

AMEN

Readings:

Genesis Chapter 8: verses 1 to 19
Exodus Chapters 23: verses 20 to 30

Arcana Caelestia 9336

"'Little *by little I will drive them out from before* you' means a removal effected gradually according to order. This is clear from the meaning of 'little by little' as gradually, thus slowly; and from the meaning of 'driving out' – when it has reference to falsities and evils, meant by the nations of the land of Canaan – as a removal. The words 'gradually according to order' are used because everything with a person who is being regenerated is rearranged in accordance with heavenly order. For a person who has been regenerated is a miniature heaven, and therefore within that person order exists akin to that which obtains in heaven…To enable heaven to come into being in a person it is necessary for him to receive Divine Truth in the good he has from the Lord. This can be brought into effect only gradually, according to order, similar to that which governs the way the

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