



## The Challenge of Change.

### Author/s

John Beckett

We're facing a challenge in the church. Simply stated, the challenge is this:

We serve an unchanging God in a rapidly changing context.

As part of our Accelerator program at Seed we consider the reality that in the current marketplace any organisation that wants to succeed must embed innovation and change into their structures and processes from a very early stage. Change and disruption are now key pillars of the way we do things in our society. Watch an introductory clip that captures this reality here.

What about the church? We're not exactly known as a bastion of innovation and disruption. Australian Professor of theology and sociology Charles Ringma pointed out about 40 years ago (before the innovation revolution was on the radar) that the church hasn't innovated in centuries. We continue to do things the way we have always done them. We may tinker around the edges, but our institutional models are essentially the same. We're big on ritual, so we do and say the same things over and over. We're a pretty conservative institution. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Should the church be innovating and changing?

On the positive side, an unchanging institution is seen as steady, not easily tossed around by trends. We know who we are and we know what we believe. We

stand on truth. Our God does not change so he is worthy of our trust. When you walk in the doors of a church you know what you are going to get – and that is comforting and assuring.

On the negative side, an unchanging institution is seen as out of touch, stuffy and irrelevant. We're unwilling to engage in dialogue and unwilling to learn. Our message is not connecting with the questions that people are asking. When you walk in the doors of a church you know what you are going to get – and that is boring and outdated.

I'm one who wants to say 'yes'! The church should embed change and innovation into our processes and structures. Why would we resist change when it is so deeply embedded in our gospel story?

You could argue that the church's core business is change. As we follow Jesus, as we seek to be channels for God's grace and seek to glorify him, we seek to help ourselves and others move from an old way of life that is associated with death, to a new way that is associated with life. Where there is brokenness, Jesus bring healing. Where there is guilt, Jesus brings forgiveness. I would argue that the cross and the resurrection are the most disruptive, world-changing acts in all of history.

Yet, as we embrace change, there are some valid concerns. Let me offer some



important caveats:

1) We need to check our motives – our desire for change cannot be driven by the fear of being different. The goal of our change must never be to conform to the ways of the world. Rather, we seek to align ourselves with the ways of Jesus, and invite others to also discover Jesus' ways.

2) We are appreciators of history – our faith is both apostolic (has a foundation in history) and catholic (spans space and time). We reject the arrogant notion that our way is always better than those who have gone before us. We stand on the shoulders of giants.

3) We are neither progressives nor conservatives – sometimes we say a firm 'no' to change. We fight to preserve things that are aligned with God's purposes. Yet we also fervently create and agitate for change where things are not aligned with God's purposes. We do not seek change for change's sake, we seek change for the sake of the world and the glory of God.

The contemporary marketplace tells us that change is the only constant. The question is not whether things will change, it is only what kind of change there will be. If that is our new reality, let's be leaders of change rather than consumers of change in our own lives, our churches, our communities and our cultures.

As we do that, let's remember that our

past, our story and our rituals are a vital tool in our change toolbox. They help shape our identity, giving us confidence for the task of seeking change in a world that will be resistant to those efforts. We remind ourselves of the wonder, the grace and the faithfulness of an unchanging God so that we can be conformed more and more into God's likeness, rather than being conformed to the ways of this world.