



Running Into Change

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It was clear the other day as I left a house of unwrapped presents and Christmas lights that the New Year was at the gates waiting to be let in. An Indian summer touch glanced us with torrid winds; the world swirled with dead leaves from the canopy of Ohio Oak trees, the dreadfully recent cool dripped from their brown frosted edges as they floated down around me like parachutes from grey heavens. Flocking herds of southbound travelers were calling out a heated cadence overhead; maybe a family argument over directions, and the notes seemed to bounce down toward me through the tree tops. The breeze caught in the folds of my breaker, edging, like tiny fingers poking me in the chest, resisting my advance down the greenway toward the park with a strange rhythm that brought my soul to the edges of my breath, and thoughts of recent ice and snow to the bridges of my ears. It was as if God himself had exhaled heartily on our Ohio town to warm it for transitory moments before the calendar put its inevitable foot down returning the necessity of heated rooms, fireplaces, and my Under Armor cold gear. As I turned the corner, miles into my daily run, taking in the beauty all around me, I thanked God for my commitment and love of running outdoors. I realized this relatively new found discipline had allowed me to do something I would rarely have taken the time to do otherwise with all the noise and busyness of modern life; it had brought me face to face with the processes of God's nature. I had witnessed firsthand the world's daily march toward change. From summer to fall, and fall to winter, it had all finally settled into one beautiful scene, this one quiet revelation from the Almighty on my holiday jog: Change is reality in God's creation.

Let's face it, we talk about change, but we don't handle change really well, and when we speak of change it isn't frequently that we can do it with our whole hearts, without the voices of cynicism falling down around us like the dead leaves on Ohio running trails. The Hebrew writers of the Proverbs certainly studied nature, recognized the immediacy of change, and encouraged it with open arms (see also Bob Dylan's version of the Proverb). But our faith is one built entirely on the promises of change. In fact, it is founded in the idea that change has already been resoundingly delivered. Ironic that the recent Presidential campaign offered us a political idea that should undoubtedly be the most resplendent cornerstone of our own message to the world - the promise of change - something we long to believe in the truest parts of our soul can actually transpire. It was apparent in the depth of those moments on my jog, that God's creation is unmistakably articulating the immediacy of change in all of its vibrancy and color. Our Messiah closed the deal on change when He emerged from the tomb. At the risk of sounding too much like Thoreau or the Hebrew mystics, maybe nature's rhythm is one of God's clearest messages to His people? Change is the actuality of life with God.

This time of the year offers us the opportunity to embrace change, to allow the death of what needs to pass away in our own lives, allow the dawn of new creation, new creativity, new energy, and new life for our journey. As my own discipline of daily jogging has revealed to me, change is not just a constant of nature but a necessity of faith. The point isn't just buying a pair of New Balances and hitting the jogging trails (although it is a delightful way to drop those extra pounds), but rather to genuinely embrace the revolution in my heart. The voices of disparagement and skepticism will say that I can't quit this or can't accomplish that, that I will never recover from a transgression or misstep. But when Jesus rose from the dead he guaranteed that transformation would be completed in me, a promise woven so securely into the very DNA of Creation that even nature must model its truth in the grand symphonies of its seasons.

My New Year's resolution for 2009 will begin with trusting God's power to change me for the better - no matter the circumstances. I let go of my cynicism under the canvas of painted beauty on my December jog. God's resolution for lasting change was decided in explicit fashion long ago on a tree... and authentic change will be brought to completion as sure as the winter weather is coming back to me in Ohio.

