

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
3 Jan 2016
key Verse: Isaiah 54:2

“The Spirit Awakens”
“How to Prepare for Big Changes Ahead”

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a wonderful New Year celebration. And it's my wish that this new year will not only be happy but will also be a blessed one for each you. Now, as you can see, the title of this message is “The Spirit Awakens: How to Prepare for Big Changes Ahead”. Obviously, that's a take from “Star Wars: The Force Awakens”. My wife and I saw the movie a few days before New Year. It was the last full show, actually, before the last full show, and the theater was packed. No wonder it has earned over a billion dollars in its first two weeks of showing. I remember when the first movie in the series was shown in the Philippines. It was sometime in the middle of 1977. I was only 15. I watched it with my cousins because Anabel was just one year old back then. And I became an instant fan of the Star Wars saga. In the first place, I'm a Sci-Fi enthusiast. I like futuristic movies.

As I was growing up, however, especially when I became a Christian, I knew that although I like Star Wars, I had to beware of the “Force”. You see, the Force that the characters in the film refer to is a kind of power that they draw upon in order to make them powerful. The characters even say “May the Force be with you”, which of course, is a copy of “May the Lord be with you”. Except that the Force is not a personal God but it is, according to Obi-Wan Kenobi, who is a Jedi master in the movie, “an energy field created by all living things that surrounds and penetrates living beings and binds the galaxy together.” Sounds like pantheism,

doesn't it? But, you don't have to slam the whole movie just because of that. The movie has some redeeming values like friendship, standing for the truth, and good winning over evil. Mind you, the apostle Paul himself quoted from pagan authors in order to relate to his audience. So, take what is good and discard what is bad. Discernment is the key. If you're a parent, you can make your children become aware of this by explaining what the Force really is or is not.

Anyway, going back to our title "The Spirit Awakens", what do I mean by this? This is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, who is always active and awake. It is a reference to our own spirits, the spirit within us that is able to communicate with the Spirit of God. You see, when someone becomes a Christian, the spirit within that person is made alive by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that we were all dead in our trespasses or sins and it was the power of God the Holy Spirit that made us alive in the spirit. This morning, are you alive and awake and enthusiastic? Then, why don't you sing that song? Just kidding. But I do hope you're alive and awake this morning. However, there are some of us who may feel less than enthusiastic about life. Why? Because of circumstances or things that had happened or are happening to them personally. Let me encourage you. God says in Isaiah 43:19, "*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*"

If you are feeling down today or your mind is occupied with negative thoughts, remember that God is still in the business of creation. Jesus says that his father is still working till this day. He is doing a new thing! In fact, he will make the impossible possible. He says he will make a way and will irrigate the dry land.

As a church, what does it mean for us? It means to expect God to do great things in our midst this year. I believe some big changes are in store for us. What are those? I don't know. Only God knows. But what I do know is that we need to prepare and get ready for whatever the Lord has in store for us. But I have great

expectations. I expect to see some more new people in church. That means I expect each of you inviting a friend or relative in church, Amen? I expect some more people giving their lives to Jesus. That means I expect each of you to become more involved in witnessing and discipling, Amen?

I expect the church to move to a facility that we can call our own. That means I expect each of you to increase your giving so we can purchase a building, Amen? (I thought no one would say Amen/where's the Amen?)

Seriously, I'm very positive this year because I believe in a God who is powerful and faithful. I'm excited about the new things that God will do in the months ahead. And I hope that you all will continue to support me and the rest of the church leadership as we serve you this year.

The church is now 19 years old. In November, we'll be celebrating our 20th year. We'll be leaving behind our adolescent years and entering adulthood, so to speak. As you know, being an adult means becoming more mature, more responsible, and more confident. Confidently beautiful with a heart. There are so many challenges in life. This morning, I'd like us to get ready for those challenges. This morning, I'd like to share with you how to prepare for the big changes and challenges ahead.

Preparation begins on the individual level. If you're a Christian, you're a member of the body of Christ which is the church. The church can only function as well as each member is functioning properly in concert with all the other members. The Bible says, *"He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."* (Ephesians 4:16 NLT) What the verse is saying is that when each of us is growing and maturing individually, then the whole church will grow and become healthy as a result. For the next several months then, expect a series of messages that will help you to grow and mature as

a Christian. We'll talk about the basics and also look at some heavy and deep stuff that the Bible teaches.

So, how do we prepare for the big changes ahead? By mining some wonderful gems found in Isaiah 54:2. Let's read this together: "*Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.*"

The first thing we glean from this passage so we can prepare for the future is to

1. Enlarge Our Thinking

In other words, think big! I believe that's the idea of the phrase, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide". Why do we need to enlarge our thinking? Let me illustrate it with the story of two fishermen who went out fishing on a lake. The first guy catches two fish, small fish, put it in the boat, catches another fish, looks at it, sees it's a big fish, and throws it back into the lake. Then, he catches a few more small fish, and again puts them in the boat, and catches another really big fish, maybe it's the same one he threw earlier, looks at it and throws it back into the lake. By this time the other guy says to him, "I don't understand. How come you keep the small fish, but the big fish you throw it back into the lake." And the other guy says, "Very simple. My frying pan is too small to hold the big fish".

I'm not a fisherman but common sense tells me to cut that big fish in order for the frying pan to hold it. The point of the story is that the frying pan is how we hold our life and the fish would be opportunities. Some of us may have opportunities that we have thrown away in life because we look at our abilities, we look at our circumstances, we look at the challenges in our lives, and we are restricted by the frying pan of our lives and we say, "Well, you see, I can't do that, I can't deal with that, I don't have the uability, I'm not smart enough, I'm not

young enough, I'm not talented enough, I don't have enough support in my life, I don't have enough friends"...whatever it is, we're putting the blame on our frying pan that may be too small and so we're throwing away opportunities.

The solution, of course, is to get rid of that small frying pan and get a big pan. Think big. Enlarge your thinking.

Now, let's go back to the tent. That's the real subject of point #1, not the frying pan. During the time of Isaiah, who lived around the middle of the 8th century BC, most people lived in tents. Tents are economical and besides, people lived in tents because they were always on the move. That's an example of a Bedouin tent. That's what Isaiah had in mind. Some tents have curtains, some don't. The curtain is hung within the tent to serve as division between rooms. Thus, stretching the curtains wide means to add more rooms. Now, Isaiah 54:2 is a prophetic statement. You see, in verse 1, God is speaking to Israel who would be sent to exile in Babylon. There in Babylon, Israel would be like a barren woman. God would withhold his blessings from the nation because of the people's sins, but God tells her to rejoice because she would have a child or children once again. So, he tells her, "Enlarge the place of your tent. Add more canvass panels. Stretch your curtains. Add more divisions. Add more rooms. For your coming children". This is God's way of assuring Israel that he will prosper the nation, that he will give them increase in the future.

What does this have to do with us? Well, we may not be in exile, but the principle is the same. It applies to each of us. And the principle is – since God gives the increase, he presents opportunities for us to take advantage of so we can avail of the increase. What do we need to do?

Enlarge the place of our tent! Enlarge our territory! In short, think big! And that's what I thought would be a good theme to adopt this year, if you haven't

noticed yet in your bulletins. “Enlarging the Place of Our Tent”. It’s about getting ready for God’s blessings this year.

To think big is to change the way we think. It is to be more imaginative, more creative, more positive, and, I want to stress this, more confident in what God can do. Many people have wasted opportunities and, sadly, their own lives because they didn’t believe in what God could do. Their God is too small and so they think too small. A perfect example is the twelve spies that Moses sent out to survey the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. Out of this twelve, only two, Joshua and Caleb, wanted to proceed and conquer the land. And the rest of the spies? They imagined the people of Canaan to be giants. In fact, these ten scared spies thought they were just grasshoppers in the sight of these giants. They said, “*We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are...All the people we saw there are of great size...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.*” (Numbers 13:31-33) They used their imagination all right, but it was a negative imagination. The problem is they didn’t have faith in what God could do and that’s why their imagination was limited and even negative. And so they saw a depressing picture of defeat. In contrast, Joshua and Caleb believed in a God who could do the impossible. Caleb said, “*We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.*” (Number 13:30) He saw a picture of victory because he saw his God who could provide victory.

Jesus says in Matthew 19:26, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” And Paul says in Phil. 4:13, “*I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*” Folks, think big because our God is big! Amen?

Is there anything that’s holding you from accomplishing things for God? Are you afraid of stepping out from your comfort zone? Do you feel you’re not good enough or you’re not capable? Friend, God is not looking for your ability, he is

looking for your availability. Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Joseph, these are ordinary people who felt small. But they made themselves available to God and he worked mightily through them.

The second thing we can do to prepare for the big changes ahead is to

2. Extend Our Reach

God says, “*Lengthen your cords*” (v. 2b) or get more rope, get an extension. This is the only logical thing to do if you’re going to enlarge your tent. Widening your tent means tying it down with longer ropes to provide stability. Spiritually speaking, it means to extend your reach. You see, God did not save us to take us to heaven immediately. Heaven can wait. While here on earth, God wants to use us. He want us to serve others. Jesus provides the example. He says, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*”. (Matthew 20:28)

As I mentioned earlier, God would love to send more people in the church. Didn’t he say somewhere in the Bible that he “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*”? (1 Tim. 2:4 NASB). Do we have that desire as well? Do we want others to be saved as well? Then, we need to extend our reach. So, first, think big. Then, reach out! Actually, I’m glad we’re starting to do just that. A group of our men and women a few weeks back, led by Pastor Dave, Kuya Elvin, and Kuya Alex went to help an old lady who is the neighbor of Kuya Elvin. Together with several others like Ate Shirley, Ate Bebutte, Laura, Barry, Dale, Christine, Jonah, Ellison, Jim, and Kuya July, they did some yard and house work And the old lady, of course, was very happy about it all. So, now, you know who to contact if you need some yard work, OK?

And there’s also Kuya Andrew with his indefatigable wife Rhoda and their industrious children, Jobelle and Josh, who are always ready to give out treats to buyers at Manila Oriental during special occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve. They were joined by my own family. All this is part of an effort

called servant evangelism. We've been doing this the past few years and some of you, including many of our youth, have been part of it. We distributed water bottles and gave out coins to people in the laundromat.

But we've done it on and off. I'd like us to do it more often and more regularly. I encourage you to become part of it. You can always contact Ian and Andrew if you're interested.

The tent is a simple and primitive form of shelter. Find a stick, or a pole with a little bit of canvas and some rope and you've got a place to sleep at night or a way to come in from the rain. But what happens when a family outgrows their tent? Get a little more rope, some more canvas and maybe another pole and you can easily make your dwelling larger. In the book of Isaiah, God called upon his people to act in faith and enlarge their tent, to get some more rope because he was going to bless them.

Enlarging our own tent, which I believe God commands us as well, is not just about making us more comfortable. It is about reaching our community—our neighbors, our families and friends with the message of God's love! We've got a lot of people that God wants us to include so let's be ready to include them in our church family.

Jesus, in fact, has made it clear—the church needs more rope! He says in Matt. 28:19, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations”*. In Luke 24:47, the gospel writer declares, *“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”* Then, in Acts 1:8, Jesus commands his disciples, *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

These scriptures are not just for missionaries who take the gospel to the ends of the world. It is for the local church as well. You and I are to take the gospel to our neighbors and lead them to Jesus. The mission field is not somewhere over

there. THE MISSION FIELD STARTS RIGHT OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOORS OF THE CHURCH.

As a church we need more rope, we need to think big and see what God sees. Our church will be a beacon of hope, a lighthouse guiding people into God's safe harbor of salvation. If we are going to let God transform our church, we begin to think big and in turn we start to reach out. Thirdly, we also must:

3. Deepen Our Roots

God says to the Israelites, "*strengthen your stakes*"(v. 2c) or as another version of the Bible says, "*drive your pegs deep*". (HCSB) Many of us here go camping and you build your tent and try to make it stable and firm. It's common knowledge that the deeper you drive the stake, the more stable the tent is.

In a spiritual sense then, strengthening our stakes is deepening the roots of our faith. In other words, it is an attempt to make stronger the foundation of our spiritual life. It is to dig in. We have to make sure that we are standing on solid ground. How do we do that?

By following the words of Jesus. He says in Matthew 7:24-27, "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*"

Jesus expects us, his followers, to follow his commands. He wants us to obey him. The question is, Are we fully obedient to all his commands or do we pick and choose? Do we pick only those that are convenient for us or easy to follow or will make us appear good before others?

Christians cannot be fence-sitters. Either you're all in for Christ or you're not. You see, God is looking for those whose hearts are fully devoted to him. And it is when we are full of God that God can begin to bless us and bless others through us. I remember the story about D. L. Moody, a famous evangelist in the late 19th century. A group of ministers in England thought of inviting him to conduct revival services in the city. So, they had a discussion. Some were opposed and some were not. Finally, one young minister who did not want to invite Moody stood up and said: "Why Moody? Does he have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit?" There was silence. Then an old, godly minister spoke up: "No, he does not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly of D.L. Moody."

I hope the Holy Spirit has a monopoly of each of us. If he does, then we can follow Jesus more closely, we can do God's work more effectively, and we can bring more glory to God.

For the Holy Spirit to have a hold of our lives, we can start with the basics. Like spending more time in reading God's Word. Jesus says, "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*" (Matthew 4:4 ESV). Also, always praying, not giving up. In Luke 18:1, we read "*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*" Also, fellowshiping with other Christians like coming to church or a home group. Jesus says, "*For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.*" (Matt. 18:20)

Folks, if we do these and others more, if we are obedient to the commands of Jesus, then our spiritual foundation will be stronger. We will not be swayed by the winds and turbulence in this unpredictable and chaotic world. We can stand firm in the face of the incessant attacks of the enemy against our faith. Many today are seeking to destroy the Christian faith but we know we can stand strong because we

stand on the Rock who is Jesus Christ, Amen? He alone is the hope of this strife-filled world.

God wants us to carry the name of Jesus and proclaim him to the world. Are we ready to do that? Are we prepared to meet the big changes and challenges ahead?

Think big! Reach out! Dig in! May these be our catchphrases this year. I hope I have awakened your spirit enough to join me as we enlarge the place of our tent. Amen?