

**Calvary Episcopal Church**  
Ashland, Kentucky  
Sermon for February 26, 2012 ~ Lent 1B  
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

For a little over two years, Calvary Church has been passing through a season of transition, between the departure of one rector and the calling of another. For a variety of reasons, your time of transition has been a little longer than some. In the last several months, your nominating committee has been preparing for the final stages of this transition and soon will be receiving names of persons who will join in the process of discernment that will lead to the calling of your next rector.

Fr. Jeff Queen has skillfully shepherded you and addressed many of your needs. I have the privilege of being your temporary shepherd during this final stage. I am here because I am a transition specialist. This is a rare opportunity for you to remember where you have been, to clarify who you are at this point in history, to strengthen your leaders, to connect with the wider church, and, to prepare to commit to a new era of fruitful mission with your new rector. My primary mission is to guide you and encourage you as you do those things.

Transitions are often daunting. But the truth is, we all have experience with transitions. The longer we live, the wiser and less anxious most people are when faced with change. There are exceptions, of course. I recall the story of a reporter who was interviewing a man celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The reporter said, “Mr. Smith, you’ve lived a very long life. I’ll bet you’ve seen a lot of changes.” And the man replied, “I sure have sonny, and I’ve been against every one of them.”

Our faith is supposed to help us during times of transition. So, when the transition has to do with our faith, it takes on added dimensions. That’s why we will work so diligently during these months together to draw from the depths of our spiritual resources in this particular time of passage.

In truth, the story of our faith is the story of transition, change, and transformation. Even a brief encounter with the sacred texts that inform and shape us bears that out. In the beginning, we read of the transition from nothing to everything, from darkness to light, from innocence to disobedience. There is God’s call to Noah and his family and to Abraham and his descendants to leave what was and to make the transition to what is to be. There is Jacob whom God transforms into Israel through years of exile and soul-searching. There is Moses whom God calls to lead the children of Israel from captivity to freedom and all the incredible details of their resistance to that freedom and the changes it entails. There is Joshua who is saddled with the task of making a nation of these people. There are accounts of kings and prophets who worked with our ancestors in faith through times of transition, through victory, through suffering, through revolution and through restoration. And the New Testament is likewise filled with examples of transition. Central to the message of Jesus is the call to repent – *metanoiete* – turn, change, gain a new perspective and a new life, be transformed by God at work in your lives. Lent is a season during which the Church invites us to repentance and renewal – transformation of life. Change leads to transition, which then leads to transformation.

Today’s readings in particular are examples of how transition is the norm for the faith community. Noah and his family emerge after the entire world has been swept away in the great flood. As they face an uncertain future, God establishes an everlasting covenant with Noah, his descendants, and

every living creature on the earth and places a sign in the sky as a reminder of it. In today's epistle, St. Peter reminds us that the great flood prefigures our Baptism, which cleanses us inside and out as we live out our new life in Christ from one transition to another. The psalmist describes God's ongoing guidance as "the way" – a journey, one of our greatest metaphors for change. And, in the gospel for today we see Jesus driven by the Spirit from the transition marked by his Baptism in the Jordan River to the transition marked by his temptation in the wilderness before the transition to his public ministry.

Transition, change, transformation are the essence of life for the Children of God!

So, today, I invite you to engage with one another, with your bishop, with the wider Church, and with me as we take the next steps in the journey of transition. I'm not promising that the journey will always be easy. There will be changes that we don't understand or like. There will be new faces, different ideas, and unfamiliar procedures. Sometimes we will stumble and fall. Sometimes we will rise in triumph. We'll have to learn new languages. We'll have to listen more carefully and speak with greater thoughtfulness.

But it will be exciting for those who approach the journey with a spirit of adventure and trust in God and one another. And, most of all, Love Divine, living and active among us, will continue to mold and shape us into the new creatures God wants to have in this place in the future that lies before us. That will be our source of the courage, the hope, the creativity, and the patience that will be required. As we journey together, let us remember that it is not really about us. It is about God. It is not about our limited resources or our limited perspectives. It is about the abundant resources of our bountiful God and God's vision of a creation redeemed and restored. The God who has led us this far will continue to lead us so that God's reign will come and God's desires will be accomplished on earth as in heaven.

The lesson for us is, that the things we do in prayer and discernment for the sake of this congregation's future will in large part determine the future, so after the new rector is here we need to remember this time and the spiritual underpinnings it holds for us.

Like those we read about in the Hebrew Scriptures during their times of transition in the life of the People of God, like the twelve disciples trying to understand the transition from their former lives to the role of apostles, like the Apostles in the transition involving passing the mantle to the next generation of Church leaders, we turn to God, having grieved the departure of a pastor and friend, giving thanks for the good things that were accomplished under his leadership, still trying to adjust to a new set of norms as a church in a city that has in several senses been abandoned by the corporations that once seemed to be the source of its life, humbly acknowledging our need for divine resources to lead us through this time of uncertainty and into the future God has in mind, and asking for those things that will glorify God and build up this community of faith for the work that lies before you.

At each entrance to this church is a stoop, a little cup affixed to the doorframe. In the stoop is baptismal water. It is a sign to us of several things: as we enter, it reminds us of why we came back – to give thanks for our Baptism and the new life it has brought; as we worship, it reminds us of who and whose we are; and as we depart, it reminds us of the commission we have received to go into the world to share the good news, to baptize, and to make disciples. You may wish to simply look at the water, or touch it, or make the sign of the cross with it. But let it be for us a sign of our life in Christ.

At the reading of the Gospel and at the dismissal, we will open the red doors at the foot of the center aisle. Those red doors are a sign to those who pass by that a blessing awaits all who enter here, whoever they are and wherever they are on the journey of faith. And, I remind you that the doors open outwards, reminding us of the mission field at our doorstep into which we are sent at the end of each service. We are called out from the world in order to be nourished and fortified to be sent back out to be light, leaven, and salt as we continue the incarnate mission of Christ in our day.

Divine Wisdom dwelt in all its fullness in the One who is our Host today at the banquet we are about to share. Wisdom and grace at this table are as abundant as the waters of your rivers, as packed with energy as the fossil fuels beneath your soil, as strong as the steel from your forges, and as sweet as the grapes upon the vines in your vineyards! As we gather to receive this gift, we will be united as an authentic community of faith and nourished for the roles we are to play and the work we are to do in the days ahead. Then, we will be sent out to make a difference – THE difference God wants to be brought about specifically by God’s trusting people who are known as Calvary Church in Ashland, Kentucky, for the sake of the world for which our Savior Jesus Christ gave his life.