

Church of the Good Shepherd

Lexington, Kentucky

Sermon for October 3, 2010

Proper 22C

The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

The Church of the Good Shepherd is passing through a season of transition, between the departure of one rector and the calling of another. I am here because I am a transition specialist and have the privilege of walking with you during this journey of transition. 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 100th 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 when we have a 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 this year 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.

Today’s readings in particular are examples of how transition is the norm for the faith community. The poet of Lamentations speaks of the suffering of God’s people taken into exile and the Holy City that now seems so desolate and whose streets are so empty. Nothing is the same. The psalmist recalls the Babylonian captivity when the people asked, “how can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” Everything has changed. St. Paul, nearing the end of his life, seeks to prepare Timothy for the passing of the mantle of apostolic leadership. Things are changing, guard the treasure entrusted to you as you go through the transition. Jesus’ disciples, feeling inadequate for the change that is coming when Jesus leaves them to carry on his work, ask for more faith. “You aren’t using the faith you already have,” Jesus tells them. Even a tiny amount of faith can change everything.

Transition, change, transformation are the essence of Christian discipleship!

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, 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. 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 St. Paul in the transition involving passing the mantle to the next generation of Church leaders, we turn to God, grieving the departure of our pastor and friend, giving thanks for the good things that were accomplished under his leadership, 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.

I've asked the Altar Guild to place water in the Baptismal Font before each time we worship together. It will be a sign to us of several things: as we enter, it will remind us of why we came back – to give thanks for our Baptism and the new life it has brought; as we worship, it will remind us of who and whose we are; and as we depart, it will remind 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.

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 blades of bluegrass on the pastures of Kentucky and the grapes upon the vines in your vineyards! As we gather to receive this gift, we will be nourished for the roles we are to play and the work we are to do in the days ahead. Then, we will be sent into the mission field at our doorstep to make a difference – THE difference God wants us to make in Lexington, Kentucky, for the sake of the world.