

**Home Another Way**  
**1.7.18**  
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**Texts: Isaiah 43: 1-5a, 18-19**  
**Matthew 2: 1-12**

In the academic world, professors are invited to give what's known as The Last Lecture. They are to imagine that they are dying and present their insights into life and what really matters. This concept became a reality for Randy Pausch, professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. After being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Pausch delivered his last lecture in September of 2007. His lecture was later turned into a book which became a best seller.

Borrowing on the concept of The Last Lecture, today I will share with you my five insights for faithful living, one for each year that we have shared ministry together. Not to worry, I am not dying (at least anytime soon that I know of), I'm simply going home by another way.

When Ben Starr, our Director of Music Ministry and I first talked about today's service, I questioned emphasizing Epiphany which is the Day in the Christian calendar when we remember that the Wise Ones went home by another way to avoid Herod. Ben's wise response put things in perspective when he said, "You know how you always ask me to sing that James Taylor song, Home by Another Way on Epiphany Sunday? Well, you are going home by another way."

So here are five guidelines for faithful living from your pastor who is going home by another way:

**1. Find the miracle in the tragedy.**

In November 2017, I preached a Sunday sermon entitled From Tragedies to Miracles. It focused on the miracles which we have witnessed together as a congregation. Those who were here that Sunday had an opportunity to write their answer to the following question:

*What miracles did God make out of our sanctuary ceiling/rafter tragedy?*

The answers were collected and included in church's December newsletter. Here is a sampling of some of those answers:

- God is faithful if we are faithful
- The miracles in our tragedy were that the church united in fixing the ceiling and that insurance company ended up awarding us a sizable amount on our denied claim. This is a sign that God's work at Trinity is not yet finished.
- I have been given the miracle of becoming connected with this congregation in which every person knows that they and their talents are needed to preserve an active community of faith.
- Trinity's congregation did not despair and give up hope. Instead everyone kept faith, joined together and made honest monetary pledges to help pay for the project. We also knew that somehow, with God's help, we would get through this and be stronger after wards.
- That the sanctuary will have a much needed "face lift" with NEW CARPETING!!

- Finding the right contractor for the job and Peter Allen's willingness to go over and beyond his job responsibilities.

These answers remind us that with God all things are possible.

Christians are resurrection people. They shine light in the darkness. Folks from other churches have certainly provided light for us as we dealt with the darkness of our overwhelming \$300,000 restoration project.

Members from St. Barts Roman Catholic Church in Manchester and St. Marks UCC in Syndersburg have contributed to our restoration efforts. My friend, Cathy Jacobs and her pastor Lesley Radius from St. John's Lutheran Church in Parkvale, MD have contributed to our project. In January 2018, Immanuel Lutheran Church has named Trinity as the recipient of their monthly mission offering.

A pastor often wonders if what he or she preaches has an impact on the congregation's personal life. I got my answer on December 21 when Belva LaMotte, one of our members shared at the Longest Night service. She referred to the November sermon about miracles from tragedies. Belva said that she was lighting her candle for the tragedy of losing one of her teenage granddaughters to suicide and she was also lighting a candle for the miracle of the addition of a great granddaughter, Leandra. Belva said, "Little Leandra is certainly our miracle. One cannot replace the other, but Leandra has made living much easier for our grieving family "

So, to you I say, please keep claiming the miracles in the life of this faith community and in your personal lives.

## **2. Be not afraid!**

Pope John Paul II said: I please with you! Never, ever give up on hope. Never doubt. Never tire. And never become discouraged. Be not afraid!

And Parker Palmer, spiritual author and Quaker, writes that all great religions boil down to one thing, "Be not afraid." Parker goes on to say, "This doesn't mean that we can't have fear because we all have fears aplenty. We just can't become our fear."

What does Parker mean when he says, "We can't become our fear?" What does it look like to not become our fears? It looks like us when we bravely pass through the rivers and fire with the understanding that God is with us in the difficult and challenging places of life.

Instead of allowing their fears to paralyze them, in today's Gospel story the three wise ones choose to go home by another way.

I encourage you to act in ways that are courageous. Be not afraid. Our world stands in need of brave people of faith who are willing to show Christ's compassion, forgiveness, and grace toward others.

## **3. Repair the World.**

Tikkun Olam is a Jewish concept defined by acts of kindness performed to repair the world.

This congregation has been actively involved in repairing the world or at least our corner of it. Back in 2013, Cindy Wilhoite, a member who has since moved to Florida and I attended a seminar at Wesley Theological Seminary. It addressed churches partnering with existing community organizations.

About the same time, I learned from my friend, Susan Trivers about a project that her Reformed Jewish congregation in Reston, VA was doing with a local school. They were providing weekend food for children who could use a little help. Susan's sharing spurred our program of Foodbags for Backpacks for Manchester Elementary School.

- Robert Miller and I were blest to have Principal Martin Tierney welcome the idea with open arms.
- From there, we applied for a literacy grant to work in partnership with the school,
- And then because we wanted to have books available for the children of Manchester, we initiated the first Little Free Library in Manchester.
- Steve Miller, Manchester's town administrator offered to build the Little Free Library and a local resident stocks the library for us.
- And then in a partnership with my ministerial colleague, Pastor Charlie Marshall, Trinity and the Lutherans built a food Labyrinth for Ash Wednesday and donated all the food to the Tree of Friends food bank in Manchester and NESAP's foodbank in Hampstead.

Our world needs much repairing so I encourage you to stay committed to community. Remember those simple but profound words of Jesus to Peter, "Feed my sheep."

#### **4. Walk each other home.**

Ram Dass who is a co-founder of the Seva Foundation which is an international service organization, is attributed with saying: We're all just walking each other home.

We live in a society which does not always value participation in a faith community. And yet, the lack of community can negatively impact our body and spirit. So, I encourage you to stick with this community of faith. It is the place where you are known and loved. It is the place where you can make a meaningful contribution. It's a place where people will walk you home.

I encourage you to take care of one another in the days ahead. Never underestimate the power of a phone call, a note, a kind word, or a prayer. A few weeks ago, one of our members, Donna Alban pointed out that she noticed someone had not been at worship for two weeks and she was going to call them. This is an example of being present to each other and walking one another home.

#### **5. Give thanks with a grateful heart.**

For a Christian community of faith, gratefulness begins with thanking God for the gift of Jesus Christ. As one of my favorite hymns, Give Thanks by Don Moen goes:

Give thanks with a grateful heart  
 Give thanks to the Holy One  
 Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son

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And now let the weak say, "I am strong"  
 Let the poor say, "I am rich"  
 Because of what the Lord has done for us"

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God has been faithful to this congregation throughout the history of this church. This sanctuary was built during the Civil War by members who were on both sides of the issues which divided the North and South.

In addition to giving thanks to God, it is important to recognize the efforts of those who labor tirelessly for Trinity UCC. No one really knows the number of hours Robert Miller and Sue Myers dedicate to this congregation on a regular basis, but I can tell you it's a great many. You are a hard-working congregation. In the days ahead, thank one another for you are a remarkable group of people.

I am grateful for Dan and my friends and colleagues who are here today. You stood by me when I went to seminary and received my call to swerve as pastor of this church. And you understood when I just said no to Saturday night invitations because Sunday was a work day for me.

And I have much for which to thank this congregation:

1. You were willing to take a chance on this brand-new pastor.
2. You welcomed my beloved Dan, even when he wore a Steelers tie and socks on the Sunday you called me to be your pastor.
3. You were willing to try new approaches in worship including the use of our screen and special services such as the Good Friday Blues Service.
4. You invited me to accompany you in the transitions of life such as weddings and memorial services.
5. You genuinely cared for and prayed for one another.
6. You partnered with me so that our ministry was shared.
7. You demonstrated a constant commitment to community within and beyond our walls.
8. You faced the challenge of our restoration project with courage and a willingness to visit one another to ask for pledges.
9. You allowed me to work with our dedicated church staff without interference.
10. You got over the fact that I did not live in Carroll County and loved me anyway.

Trinity members and friends of Trinity, thank you for loving me enough to release me from my call as pastor of this church and blessing me as I go home by another way.

If you love one another as Christ has loved you, then you will know God's faithfulness regardless of the path you take home.

Amen.