

Sermon: May 16, 2021

“Waiting with Sorrow-filled Hearts”

We all know how hard it is to say goodbye regardless of the circumstances or no matter what the situation might be. If you are my age, we have a lot of experience. When I left St. Marks United Church of Christ in Baltimore City after 22 years, I had a sorrow-filled heart and so did my congregation. I was surprised that the most common response to hearing I was leaving St. Mark's was “I thought you were going to bury me, Rev.” I would look at my watch and say to them, I have a little time this afternoon if you're free.” Then we would laugh.

But on the day of my leave-taking my heart was filled with sorrow even though I was certain I was doing the right thing. I have pictures that show me serving communion with tears streaming down my face and the faces of those I had pastored for so many years. It is really hard to say goodbye.

If we say goodbye well however, we will be ready to say hello to the next new thing. Because I said goodbye to St. Mark's well, a few months later, when I accepted a call at St. Paul's. I found a new group of wonderful people who embraced me, and I was happy serving there for another 10 years.

A few weeks ago, when pastor Gerry invited us to share our joys and concerns during prayer time, I remember there was a great silence.

Finally, someone said,

“I'd like prayers for myself.” She continued. “Because I'm really going to miss you!”

A few other people spoke about having similar feelings, but most of us did not. The day of his leaving was a few weeks off. We were not ready yet. It is always hard to say goodbye.

When we called him to be our interim, we knew Pastor Gerry would be leaving, but it was still hard when the time came. He was here for three years and did a fabulous job leading worship, and Bible Study groups and discussions with a steady group of 10-12 every week. When we had to close Because of Covid 19, he and Pat took on this new and challenging learning curve and continued quality ministry by Zoom. He guided a committee to create a vision statement and worked with the search committee to help them head in the right direction to find a new and wonderful minister Pastor Jessica Townsley who will be here in June.

After church that day several weeks ago, I read scripture for today and I found the words of Jesus saying to his followers, “You did not ask me more questions because your hearts were filled with sorrow.” He was right. They were sad, uncertain, and fearful. Jesus was leaving and they would no longer have him with them. They would not be able to ask his advice. How would they ever be able to do the wonders that he did. The “things” that Jesus had told them is not included in this scripture lesson. At the beginning of chapter 16 vs 4a of John, Jesus tells them,

“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are

offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when that time comes, you will remember that I warned you about them.”

It seemed impossible to the disciples that these things would happen or more importantly, they could carry on without him. I think they also knew they could not go back to their old work and ways.

He promised them however, that when he left, they would not be abandoned. The Holy Spirit the advocate the comforter would come to guide them, and they trusted him.

Then he left and they waited not knowing exactly how that would happen or if whatever it was, would be enough. They did as they were told.

They waited in Jerusalem and they all stayed together. I've often wondered what they did. I imagine they prayed and shared stories about their ministry with Jesus. They probably worried and shared their concerns with each other and prayed some more. - we are just not told. They trusted that God was working while they waited. That is a story for next week.

I was surprised this week, when I realized my heart was changing from the sadness, I felt for the past several weeks and especially last week when we officially said goodbye to our faithful, caring, and gifted interim pastor. We had a great, service. We were reminded that as part of the UCC, we are not in this alone. It was a comfort to have. Bob and Esther Ziegler's leadership as representatives of the Catoctin Association Church and by Ministry commission.

They promised we would be held in prayer by them and the other churches in the Catoctin Association.

We participated in a service of release. This service is another way we say farewell to each other as we offer thanks for our time together and forgiveness for the places, we fell short. AND-

We did it all without cake, which truthfully, I think was a shame. There should always be cake!

We also did it without testimonials and hugs lots of hugs. But these are different times. I hope Pastor Gerry is enjoying brunch with friends something he hasn't been able to do for a while. And I hope he and Pat already have plans to visit all their children and grandchildren!

Today my heart is filled with hope and expectation for what God has yet to do with us in partnership with our new pastor, Jessica. We still have a few weeks to adjust and truly be ready and Next Sunday when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit empowering the disciples to be more than they ever dreamed, we will remember that same spirit is for us at Trinity United Church Christ, and we will be ready for a new beginning.

To help us, I have in my hand the top 10 list of things we should always say to a new pastor.

I think we are ready!

Amen

Top ten things you should always say to your new pastor.

10 How are you and the boys settling in? How is Donna doing?

9 Pastor do you think Westin and Isaac would want to sit with us until Children's Church? I can't imagine taking my children to work with me!

8 I am praying for you and your family and your ministry here. (Be sure to do it)

7 We appreciate the way you listen to our ideas and encourage our leadership.

6 Your sermons and teachings are helping us see how big God's love is for all people regardless of any we might want to exclude.

5 There were some things I didn't agree with at our meeting. Is there a time we could talk?

4 Thank you for _____ and be specific.

3 The Bible studies you lead are helpful in teaching us to take the Bible seriously. There are many in our community who insist on taking it literally and I never know what to say.

2 Good sermon today, Pastor. When you said, _____, it hit home for me.

And the number one thing you should say to your new pastor is.

1 We appreciate you reminding us that Christ is the head of this church, not any pastor and not any one of us.