

Sermon – “Transitioning Well”
Scripture – Psalm 133, John 20:19-31
Sunday, April 8, 2018
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Springfield, Illinois

Our first scripture reading on this Second Sunday of Easter is found in Psalm 133. This Psalm attributed to David celebrates the gift of community. Precious oil is the symbol of joy and dew is nature’s compensation for her failure to give rain. This symbolizes refreshment and quickening in a desolate place. As the disciples and friends of Jesus come together during the awkward time following his resurrection, this Psalm hints at the gift of community that will grow out of their struggle. This is the word of God.

1 How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained God’s blessing, life forevermore.

Our second scripture reading continues the events we read together last Sunday on Easter morning. Today we begin reading in John, chapter 20 verse 19 where we find the disciples in hiding, frightened and uncertain. Jesus makes two appearances...Thomas is only present on the second occasion. After Thomas sees the physical evidence, he responds with a phrase very familiar to the readers of John’s gospel. “My Lord and My God” was the faith statement of the Johannine community of believers. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The title of the sermon: “Transitioning Well”

The text: “A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said ‘Peace be with you.’” John 20:26

Let us pray. Our Lord and our God, come to us in times of change that we may transition well. Give us your peace and confidence in the midst of our awkwardness. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen

Life is full of change and so to be alive is to be moving in and out of transition. Whatever the reason, whether it is a time of loss or a time of opportunity, transitions are always a little awkward and frightening.

So much of good parenting is sustaining our children through the transitions which are a part of growing up. The toddler (or what is affectionately known as the Terrible Two) is transitioning from infancy to childhood. In this in-between time of uncertainty their most common response is the uncanny NO! Before long our well-adjusted child is entering adolescence, the next major transition according to human growth and development theory. This is another time of uncertainty, awkwardness and saying “no!”

Jen DeJong, Vice-President of Innovation for Ministry Architects, serves on the vibrant team of members who volunteer with Westminster’s youth. She recently published an article in Princeton Seminary’s Continuing Education magazine, *The Thread*, about the importance of transitioning well in youth ministry. During this year of transition within our youth ministry we are grateful for such a strong team of volunteers who affirm and sustain our youth in their time of transition!

The time between Easter morning and Pentecost was certainly a time of uncertainty and transition for the disciples. There are 40 days between the resurrection of their Lord and his ascension, according to Christian tradition. Ten days following the ascension, on Pentecost, the spirit gave birth to Christ’s church. In as much as Pentecost is a beginning for the disciples, Good Friday was the end of something very precious. They would never walk the streets of Galilee with Jesus again or watch him hold the little children in his arms. The comforting physical presence of their beloved friend and mentor would not again be a part of their experience.

Needless to say this time of transition was awkward for the disciples. More than awkward...these men and women were terrified, and we would have been also. Our tendency, with the disciples, when these feelings of awkwardness, or in this case, terror, creep in, is to want to run and hide until the transition time ends. And we would prefer the time of transition to be quick and painless.

And yet we are told that this time lasts forty days. Forty is a symbolic number in Scripture and it usually refers to a necessary time for completion. Forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land. Forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry and now another forty...before his return to the Father.

Why is this period of transition necessary? And why is it that you and I feel compelled to bypass the transitions in our lives, or feel guilty and embarrassed by them? Even though our head

acknowledges that unless we experience transitions we will not grow or move on, our gut resists them.

Over the years, we the church have not done justice in acknowledging our own awkward transitions. And so rather than allowing these disciples to have their awkwardness...rather than understanding why they were hiding behind closed doors, for fear on the evening of this first day, but also a week later still hiding...we read passages such as these and our first inclination is to criticize Thomas whom we have come to know as "Doubting Thomas."

Why do we seek to criticize Thomas for his uncompromising honesty and for the ease with which he acknowledges his own awkwardness and uncertainty? His uncanny, NO! And my friends, if we are criticizing Thomas, what sort of judgments and expectations are we putting on ourselves?

When we refuse to honor the times of transition in our own lives we often unwittingly prolong them by preventing our passage through them. We become stuck, afraid to move forward or ask questions for fear we might expose our awkwardness or we fill our days with so much activity we never sit long enough "the doors being shut" for our Lord to meet us in our time of need. When you and I find ourselves in the awkwardness of our own transitions whatever they may be, in the privacy of our own rooms, "the doors being shut" we can be strengthened by the like experience of the disciples.

Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you.' and when he said this he showed them his hands and his side.

When the disciples saw his hands and his side they remembered the cross, the ultimate time of transition in Jesus' own life. And it was in the context of the cross that Christ offered peace to his friends. He had no simple answers. He did not perform any spontaneous healings on himself or anyone else to demonstrate that he was God. He did not take away their awkwardness. Instead, he reminded them of the wounds that were a part of his transition, and, by so doing, he invited them to embrace their own before commissioning them to serve.

Therefore, if we remember anything about these two stories of the disciples in the upper room. "the doors being shut," let us not so much remember that Thomas doubted as we remember of what he asked to see and to touch.

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

And in our own times of transition, let us have the same uncompromising honesty with God as Thomas did. Only then will we discover for ourselves, what Jesus demonstrated in his life and death, that peace will be found in our own wounds of love. When we have the courage to grow through our own transitions...the times of loss, of giving up, of change, we can begin to move beyond ourselves, from behind closed doors, to reach out to others. We can transition well.

Jesus said to them. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Amen.