

October 1 & 2, 2022

Transitions: Jesus

John 14:15-18 and 16:1,12-15

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Our passage of scripture today flows out of Jesus' meeting with his disciples in the upper room. The setting is tense. Going into this scene, Jesus had already been saying some off the wall things about how he wouldn't be with his disciples for much longer. He kept giving them these cryptic sayings about being handed over to the authorities, tried, and put to his death--and then rising.

To make matters worse, the disciples had only to look around for evidence that things weren't going in the direction they thought they might. Jesus was provoking all the wrong people and doing nothing that appeared to be stemming the impending defeat of his fledgling movement. Now, the disciples, and the Jewish people weren't new to this. Some 160 would-be messiah figures had come and gone in the years leading up to Jesus. So, you can imagine that as Jesus begins to put a finer point on his leave-taking, these young men would have been quite fearful and anxious. So, what does Jesus tell them that we can hear with new ears today? Let's find out in John's gospel. Our reading comes from a few sections of John, drawing from chapters 14 and 16.

John 14:15-18 *If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.*

John 16:1 & 12-15 *I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith. There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.'*

I've got two touchstones for you today. The first is this: The Truth is in the Doing.

How many of you know a Marathon runner? How many of you know someone that does intermittent fasting? What about meditation? In each of these cases, the first conversation you have with them is some form of, "why would you do that?" The response is, "well, you just have to do it to understand." Clear as mud. But, it is true. And if you know, then you know.

In 2015 I was having a bit of a mid 30's crisis and so I started training for a marathon. Literally, I went from couch to training. Worst possible idea. What ensued was six months of pain, injury, and way more whining that the staff of Prince of Peace probably should have been subjected to. I just want to publicly apologize. I'm sorry.

So, naturally, like Forest Gump getting to the coast, I ran my first marathon, turned around and started training for the next one. At this point I was hundreds of miles in from where I began. Multiple pairs of shoes. And then one day while out on an 18-mile run through the rain in Eden Prairie, it hit me: I finally get it. By "it", I don't mean something that is easily put into words. It was more like a feeling of effortlessness and freedom. Like I wasn't running, but rolling. And I knew that if I wanted to that day, I could blow right through my training distance and keep running. That is what those runners are talking about when they talk about the runner's high.

Jesus' words to his disciples are, "if you love me, then obey my commandments." The result is that they are going to be let in on a truth that the world doesn't quite know because it doesn't regularly practice it. So, what commandment are we talking about? What is it that we need to do in order to learn? It's the greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself." You see, when we do that, again and again, just like running, the truth we need in order to work through these seasons of transition becomes clearer. At the heart of how to embrace this commandment is embracing a new way of seeing. Look at that last part, "as yourself." We are able to do the first two insofar as we are able to do the third. That is, love of God and others starts with our love for ourselves. That love for ourselves starts to

take off when we begin to see ourselves the way that God does: as child, as beloved child. As child worth it enough for God to lay aside all of God's power and privilege to become one of us. To die our death even.

Can you imagine seeing yourself in that way? Or does it sound as likely as enjoying training for a marathon? Well, the truth is in the doing. Lutherans have a simple practice for this work. We make the sign of the cross on our foreheads and say, "I am a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the Cross of Christ forever." It is a practice that encourages us, each time we do it, to live into it more deeply for ourselves.

It is in believing and living into it for ourselves that we begin to believe it for others and that belief is critical in seasons of change because of how those seasons trigger our insecurities. We feel afraid, not good enough, and anxious.

Well, this work of obeying the greatest commandment again and again, believing it for ourselves and others as a way of life short circuits that pattern and replaces it with love. Just like keeping with my marathon training replaced the initial curiosity and pain with deep knowing and capacity. The truth is in the doing.

The second touchstone is this: Give the Spirit some room.

Sometime, over a beverage of your choosing, you should ask Jeff how I responded when he said he was leaving. It may or may not be all the confirmation you need that I was in fact in a fraternity. Anyway, I was surprised. Not long after that I went home and began planning. It's who I am. I don't think week to week. I think year to year and for as much as a year seems like a long time to transition, a year in a lifetime of a congregation is a blink of an eye.

Part of my process of determining how to move forward led me to a call with a ministry peer of mine at one of our Vine partner congregations. For what its worth, Vine is a partnership of congregations that helps people find their way to ministry in their area. Well, I was telling my colleague about my plans for this transition and she said, "you know, there is no denying that you've thought this through. It's actually quite impressive. But, how much room have

you given God in these plans? What if you gave the Spirit some room?"

I thought about it for a minute and then I hung up on her.... I'm kidding. Sheesh. The truth shall set you free in my case!

Looking back at the upper room, more than one disciple questioned the plan. "How are we going to know where you're going?" Peter wanted to go with him and later even tried to cut off an ear of a centurion! In both cases they were afraid and seizing control of what felt like an out-of-control situation. They wanted certainty so that they could make a plan, but Jesus was giving them faith so he could make a way.

So it is with our transition. Believe me, this is Prince of Peace, a bazillion plans have been made. If this place is anything, it is intentional. You can't have Mark Slaughter and Jane Victorey on staff and not be. But we are also leaving a remainder, a space, and room for God's Spirit to lead, guide, and show the way forward.

What does THAT look like? Well, for me my mind is very connected to my body. That is to say, my body often tells me what my mind needs to know. So, I want to invite you into the simple practice of letting go of a little bit of control so that we might give the Spirit some room:

If you're able, please stand up. Hold your hands out in front of you and bring your attention to your palms. Visualize there all of your anxieties about this big season of transition at Prince of Peace, and certainly not everyone is as tuned into what is happening in this season, so you can add what is on your heart. In any case, visualize it there in your hands. Hold it. Feel the weight. Now, squeeze. Squeeze as hard as you can. Hold it. Now throw it in the air. Keep your hands up. Reach high, really let it go! Bring your arms down and have a seat. Now, do that again and again. Remember, the truth is in the doing?

I wrote this sermon back in the beginning of August—did I mention that this place plans ahead? The week before I wrote it, I took my two sons on a tour of my childhood that led all the way to the steps of my fraternity house. The deck we built had been replaced with manufactured wood. Thinking back to my class, we couldn't have pulled that off. The sorry looking sign on the side of the building had been

replaced by a beautiful new one. We didn't have that in the plans. The house has a cumulative GPA of 3.7--we certainly couldn't have done that. I mention all that because there was a moment that first year when I wasn't sure how we would get to the next and then there was time during my senior year when I wasn't sure who would step up and lead after I finished my time at Iowa Sigma.

You know what happened? Elections happened. Roles were filled and life went on. They let God have a little bit of room and did the work and found the truth in the doing. If a bunch of young guys in a fraternity can do it, maybe we can, too. Don't you think?