

Transition - O'Connor
9th Sunday after Pentecost
Revd Anne Dudzinski
26 July 2015
John 6: 1-21

In this parish you are in transition, a time between your previous rector, Rebecca and whoever will be your new one.

Last November at Holy Covenant Jamison, we lost Susanna Pain and Nikolai Blaskow. Sarah Batchelard took the locum for 2 months and spoke about Transition based on the work of William Bridges. Then I took the locum for 2 months including Easter with part help from Vicky Cullen. Our new Rector is Paul Wallis. I did a sermon on transition tying it in with Jesus' disciples' experience. I have reworked it for you.

Most of this year our gospel readings are from St Mark. We had some weeks from St John after Easter and now we start some more weeks from John before returning to Mark again. I refer to what we have had from Mark mostly.

A Transition has 3 phases : The Ending, The Neutral Zone and the New Beginning.

This happens throughout our life eg end of school before Uni or a job, end of a marriage, parenthood, a move to a new district, the death of a family member, retirement and so on. It happens with both good and bad changes.

The Ending, phase 1, involves letting go and experiencing the loss. Loss gives feelings of grief. You have lost Rebecca's way of doing things, her gifts, and her and David's friendship. Soon you will have another change from experiencing Jeannette's way to Colin Dundon's. And then to your new priest. This letting go is not only for you as parishioners, but also for other issues in your life, such as letting go of say, a grudge, a dream, a disappointment, an unforgiveness. I do not mean forgetting good memories, but whatever is stopping you from moving on.

Phase 2, the Neutral Zone, is the time between the old and the new; a time of disorientation, uncertainty, and realignment. Who are we? Are we the same as before? It's OK to feel like this. Be aware that others are feeling grief and uncertainty.

You will emerge to a new sense of who you are, a new sense of purpose, direction and energy. Then Phase 3, the New Beginning has begun. Parishes often want a new rector as soon as possible. But that misses the important phase of the Neutral Zone. It readies you. It depends on God.

Now think what it was like for those first disciples who left their boats to follow Jesus. What a transition they were in! James and John left their father. They left the other members of their families to follow this man Jesus. At least they had a brother each to comfort them.

As they heard Jesus teaching and preaching in the Capernaum synagogue, they were astounded and perhaps they could tell that others were astounded too. These men, being fishermen, probably did not go into synagogues much – the weather dictated their work a lot. How uncomfortable they could have felt there but they would have known the Sabbath Law. On the Sabbath, Jesus heals an unhappy disturbed man, not quietly, Oh no, dramatically. He heals with a power over the unclean spirit and it obeys him. Imagine the adjustments these new disciples are making because of their new leader Jesus.

But they didn't have time to think about it. They immediately go into Simon and Andrew's house – a chance to say goodbye after all as you will do soon for Rebecca and David. Simon's mother-in-law has a fever. In those days a fever could be very dangerous even leading to death. This is a second healing on the Sabbath. Then she began to serve them. The word diakonein is the word to serve, from which comes the word for deacon. Andrea, Linda and Robyn serve both inside your congregation and outside it. Simon's mother-in-law is the first person to minister to Jesus.

Once the sun went down, that Sabbath was over. Crowds and crowds of the sick came. Jesus heals them, silencing the demons first. It would be exhausting work. Power going out of Jesus.

Jesus knew he needed time alone, to pray – time with God. He crept out in the dark to a deserted place.

The disciples were worried. Why isn't he here? He is needed here. Everyone wants him. Do you detect the uncertainty of their transition?

It would take time before they realized the value of prayer and would ask Jesus to teach them.

Jesus, in prayer, was learning the difference between what is urgent and what is important. We learn this in work and as parents. Your new minister will make his or her conclusions about all that happens here according to their abilities and yours.

What is urgent and what is important now?

Jesus, compassionate one, knew that healing was important and sometimes urgent, as with Jairus' daughter and the woman who touched him, but what was most important to Jesus was to proclaim God's message.

Mark 1: 15 'The Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the Good News'.

And so the disciples followed him to other towns and more towns – into their synagogues and outside, healing more people. The healings supported the message. Jesus was much more than the other miracle workers of his day, and there were other miracle workers.

And so the transition went on, past the realignment of the Neutral Zone, to when they had a new sense of identity and learnt from Jesus themselves to heal and teach. They learnt to understand about God and how different God's Kingdom is to what they had hoped would free their land from the Romans.

I think your Transition might be a bit easier, don't you?

Now though those fishermen left their old way of life, it was still useful to Jesus. It is amazing how God will make use of your past talents or experiences - some time.

They still crossed Lake Galilee, as we know from stories as today's walking on water, the great catch of fish, the great storm etc.

Something you have done before may again be useful to God through the parish.

Yes, calming the storm, feeding 5000 people and walking on water showed that Jesus had the power of God over creation. That was unbelievable and took a long time to accept. Fortunately the new rector will not be God!

The stages of transition are not simply 1 then 2 then 3. They overlap, as in any grief process.

Yet a good metaphor is a bridge for the Neutral Zone. Leaving behind there, you move in hope to ... there.

Or you are on a ferry as in this poem by Hermann Hesse.....

Carry on proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and bringing healing to others. If you don't realize you too are doing that - you are.

It's a two-way process. As we help, we are helped and we grow.

By proclaiming and witnessing, I don't mean seizing every moment to put in a loud religious word, but by living the faith and quietly, lovingly, speak of it at the appropriate moment. Who is this Jesus that still has such an effect on people today?

Leo Tolstoy wrote 'Remember then: there is only one time that is important - Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time we have power.'

Jesus supremely lived in the present time. I find it very hard to do. But make the most of this transition time, for soon it will be gone.

Let us encourage one another during this time. Being affirmed, being appreciated can 'make our day'.

The thing to value, perhaps most of all in this parish, is that you accept and welcome new people that might be different from you and that attitude cannot be faked and still be sensed as genuine.

Those early disciples had to learn this, as Jesus went on to choose a tax collector, a Zealot and others.

The other most important thing for you to do is prayer of course.

Our second reading from Ephesians is Paul's prayer for them. It has wonderful words for us too : 3: 16-17 I pray that God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit. And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith , as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 3:20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen

If you too are reaching out like Jesus and Paul or if not you individually, but you are joyfully supporting those who do here, by giving and encouragement, then surely God will take care of your future direction.