

It's commencement time – time for graduations, time for our younger kids to transition from one grade to the next, time for summer break and vacation and thinking about next steps. It's time to let go of what was and look forward to what will be. Grace and Emily preached beautiful sermons last week about this transition in their lives ~ about how we have the opportunity to look back and recognize the progress we've made in our spiritual lives, and pray for those who have carried us and formed us and prayed for us along the journey we've made so far ~ recognizing that the journey (as yet) is incomplete.

This is the case for the disciples. Change is coming. Jesus will be leaving. His work is to continue.

One of the big changes I can look back on and pinpoint in my parenting was when my child finally trusted that when I left I would return, just like I said I would. This kid had a particularly bad case of separation anxiety for what seemed like forever. Every morning for over 2 years, I would leave the pre-school to the sound of tears after the teacher had to physically pry my child off of me. That was hard.

When I was trying to leave after one particularly frazzling morning, I attempted to use 4 year old logic: I got down to eye level and said, "But if I don't leave, I can't come back. And that's the best part ~ the coming back. Because then we get to be together again."

Something shifted. All the sudden, my child seemed to agree that yes, coming back was the best part, and yes, that Mama had to leave in order to make that happen. From that moment on, my departure was no longer traumatic, but rather an unfortunate necessity in order for there to be an eventual reunion. (Thank you, Jesus!) Out the door I went, without any wailing or gnashing of teeth ... and perhaps a slight skip in my step.

I can't say that it this was an original argument. It's basically what Jesus says in his Farewell Discourse. "It is to your advantage that I go away," Jesus tells his disciples, "for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." And, Jesus implies, that will be the best part. Because then his followers get to be the Body of Christ, in partnership with God through the power of the Spirit, to do the work of building God's Kingdom.

It's a bit ironic, but Jesus' leave-taking was the disciples' commencement. They are no longer students in the Jesus Academy, but now apostles and charter members of God's

one holy catholic and apostolic Church. They are to be the Body of Christ in the world, healing in *Jesus* ' name, preaching and teaching in *Jesus* ' name, feeding the hungry in body and soul in *Jesus* ' name. They are to love the world as *Jesus* loved the world, by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would send to remain with them.

In reference to our emergence from the pandemic, someone recently cautioned a group of church leaders by saying, "Don't waste the wilderness."¹ Of course, I'm immediately reminded of the Hebrew people as they finally entered the land of Canaan after 40 years of wandering the wilderness ... having learned the hard way to rely on the providence of God. I'm reminded of Jesus after his baptism as he spent 40 days in the wilderness turning again and again from distraction and temptation to focus on who God created him to be. That time in the wilderness was important and formational. The wilderness ought not be wasted. There is truth and beauty and purpose and meaning to be found in wilderness.

As I've thought about what Grace and Emily asked us to consider last Sunday, about (1) looking back and reflecting on our growth and (2) being a mosaic of those individuals who have impacted us, which has reinforced my decision to be intentional about carrying the lessons I've learned in the wilderness of 2020 with me going forward. I have learned a lot about myself the last 15 months ~ what's important to me, what is vital for my emotional and spiritual sustenance, what distractions keep me from paying attention to what's important, and how to recognize the difference between wants and needs.

I don't want to take giving my parents a hug for granted again. I want to keep my leisurely routine of sipping coffee while watching the sunrise, snuggling up for longer story time with my son at night before bed, enjoying calmer afternoons and more intentional face-to-face time with my teenage daughters. I've read some really good books, taken a lot of naps, and managed to keep alive every one of my houseplants. There is less junk food in the pantry, and I've logged a lot of miles on our hikes and outdoor adventures. These are some of the most significant blessings of my pandemic wilderness, which I will work hard to hold on to as I establish my 'new normal'.

Ezekiel prophesied during the time of the exile, when the Hebrew people had been forced out of their homeland. His message married the concepts of re-creation to resurrection.² As the end of the exile approached, he tells us that the Spirit of God brought him to a

¹ Bp. Waldo mentioned this at a clergy zoom ... I think giving credit to The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers as she met (virtually) with the House of Bishops sometime in the early spring of 2021.

² Psalmist echoes this concept: "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground."²

valley of dry bones, and he was commanded to tell the bones that God's breath would enter them and bring them to new life. The life that these bones would come to know would be drastically different than the life they had already lived. This new life would be in right relationship with God ~ now they would know the Lord and recognize God's activity in their lives in new ways. "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live," says the Lord. "You will know that I have spoken and I will act."

Jesus echoes this sentiment when he tells the disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to come among them and remain with them to guide them into all truth. Just as the Spirit led the Hebrew people and Jesus back out of the wilderness, the question for us remains: are we open to being guided where the Spirit is taking *us*?

We get to have a say in how we allow our lives to be re-created and resurrected in 2021. Will we embrace what we've learned in our pandemic wilderness, or will we conform ourselves back into patterns of behavior that haven't grown or evolved? Are we open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the possibility of what might lie ahead, or do we settle for what is familiar and 'normal'?

Today is Pentecost. One could argue that it's the Church's commencement ceremony. "The Resurrection people are now called to become Pentecost people. The disciples' community expands beyond their original circle to birth new communities, and (we know 2000 years later) the life of the Spirit will breathe through all of them. Resurrection people discover that life transforms death; Pentecost people live in the authority of that new life to partner with God (through the power of the Holy Spirit) to realize the vision of God's beloved community. Resurrection people see the glory; Pentecost people engage in the work. God's people are called to both."³

³ The Rev. Cheryl Lindsay