

**Keeping God With Us**  
**May 5, 2013**  
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Transitioning from the old, into the new...

We do it all of the time, don't we?

Even if things stay relatively the same---

---live in the same house, married to the same person, eating the same meals---

... We still transition and change with New clothes. New paint. New furniture.

New technology. New hair styles. New injuries. New healing.

New illness. New lifestyles. New diets. And on and on...

Looking around at our sanctuary right now...

... same place... but it took a lot of transition---

---a lot of fresh work and new things to be sitting where we are, right now, didn't it?

As our lives \*seem\* to stay sort of continuous in their patterns,  
they still change subtly all of the time.

Even in stability there's a constant flux of motion, isn't there?

On top of all of that, we have the more drastic transitions...

Those moments that change our lives in the big ways.

... Moving from place to place. New house. New job. New friends. New places.

...Changes in relationships---Marriage, or divorce...

New faces. New hangouts.

...The loss of a loved one. New ways of being in the world.

New expectations. Learning to live in new patterns in each day.

It's no new revelation that we each exist in a constant state of flux.

We live in a constant state of renewal---Of death. Of rebirth. Of transformation.

All energy.... All living things... constantly dance  
through these motions of change and reformation.

Each of us to be used and reused all of the time, toward new purposes.

We know this, but sometimes we're better at handling than others, right?

No matter how drastic or small the changes are, we get a little antsy about it, don't we?

Sometimes we feel like things are just changing too fast.

'I wanted to get used to what I had, before I move onto something else.'

Sometimes the change is too big, and we kind of lose sight of who we are.

...Standing stunned in all of the newness, we feel a little disoriented.

...And we so often, in these moments of transition...

---of transformation--- we feel a mourning. A loss.

A sorrow, for no longer having what was...

And we *cling*, don't we?

Like a gale force wind just swept us off our feet, we hold as tight as we can to the past,

Trying our best to stay put, where we were, even when everything in the life around us,

Is working to move us someplace else.

We've all been there before.

Ever find yourself caught up, listening to the same song over and over again?

Something that reminds you of a moment that's gone, that you just wish you had back,

And you sort of recreate it in your mind---in your memory---

--as the song plays again and again.

We do it a lot after the loss of romantic relationships---

---and often after the loss of a loved one.

At least I know I do. I'm actually really bad with this.

I think I'd be almost immune to that form of torture

where they play the same song over and over again until you start going mad.

Keeping our eyes set on certain pictures.

Religiously holding onto old routines that have no real use... no real place in the present...

... We cling in a lot of ways.

We've touched on some of these ideas before, together,

But our lectionary theme and scriptures (kind of ironically) call us to go back,

and touch into these thoughts again, deep down inside,

And consider the ways we do this, as people,

And the ways we're urged and called as God's people,

to respond in our relationship with God's Spirit,

---the Spirit of Life---

---to this nervousness, and hesitation we feel toward

stepping forward from where we were in the past,

And moving willingly with God, into the unknown moments coming.

One of our suggested readings for today, we didn't go over in our liturgy,

so I'll read it here...

...but both this one, and our reading from John, set us down in that moment of change,

And bring thoughts of reassurance from God, for us to meditate on,

And keep with us, as we struggle to adapt and keep our feet moving forward.

From Revelation, Ch 21, verses 1-5:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." 5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

From our reading earlier, John Chapter 14, verses 25-28:

Jesus answered him, 25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father...

Both of these readings drop us into moments of transition.

Moments of the old passing away into something new---

---Something not yet experienced.

Something uncertain... and even frightening.

And both leave us with hope,

and a sense of comfort in knowing that though everything might change around us,

The one thing that will always remain the same is the fact of God staying.

God being here, with us, wherever we stand, in whatever moment we see with our eyes.

As God makes all things new, but always, from the beginning to the end,

and onto the new beginning,

Living, and thriving, and breathing in our souls as we go.

The one thing we see stay the same in both of these passages about change,

Is this idea of God being *with* us---

---This idea, that as we move from the past into the future,

and the old passes away, we move always with God.

And I want to touch into this reading from John more deeply,

Because this simple thought is one centered on the message of Christ--

---Emmanuel... a name, which itself *means*, "God with Us."

In this Easter season we're celebrating now,

We're in this spot in the gospels, after Jesus died,

after Jesus came back, and is just about to go again,

while the disciples are still sitting stunned---

---Clinging to the past. Dwelling over what happened.

Feeling defeated. Feeling destroyed.

Not knowing who they are, or where they're going,

as everything they new before has turned into something different.

Something frightening.

...Something new.

What happens here? In these words from John?

Jesus tells them about the big changes coming.

---His leaving, and how they might be afraid to step ahead on their own...

...But he tells them, too, in the same moment,

To feel trust---to feel peace---to not let their hearts be troubled---

---and to even *rejoice*, right?

...Why?

Because God is always here.

He talks about the Spirit of God... the "Advocate"...

the source of support, and love, and lifting...

...being with them always. And to trust in that. ...To feel a lot of comfort, for it.

Okay, so let's come back to that question we were talking about

being so important to ask ourselves before,

When thinking about our religion... our way of being spiritual...

...and these Christian words we hear again and again,

that sometimes lose their meaning because they've been spoken so often.

We're supposed to feel okay with change, because God is with us, always.

...But what does that even mean?

While we feel anxiety about life changing too fast. Even in the small ways.

While we feel torn apart at the loss of a loved one...

...While we struggle to find a balance with new faces, in new places...

How does knowing God is with us, help us?

How do we actually feel it?

And how does feeling God, and knowing God is with us, make anything feel okay?

There are a lot of answers to these questions. Some leaving us with more questions.

And because we each experience God just as uniquely as God's made us,

There's a lot of room for more meditation---more consideration.

But for me, it comes like this.

(And please bare with me while I wind it all back around)

Personally---as a pastor, and just as myself, in what I've experienced of God---

...I think, that when we dwell in the past... when we cling to what was...

And let ourselves get stuck in moments that are no longer here...

... What we're doing, is we're denying God the power to keep moving in our lives.

Sounds simple, but let's go a little deeper...

When we refuse the change in front of our eyes, what we do a lot of times,  
Is we dwell in our heads. In memory.  
And that's a very small space. Such a limited place.

I think, on one level, we get nervous about moving ahead into change---

---into the unknown---

Because, of course, we can't see ahead to know for sure  
if we'll be okay with what's coming as much as we loved what was.  
And we don't \*like\* uncertainty. Makes us feel vulnerable.

Makes us feel a loss of *control*.

So we pull back from the world. Back from the thriving life around us,  
and sink deep into the compartments of our own minds. Into memory.

Because those are the moments we can see.

Moments we can see with more certainty---even more clearly in our memory  
than we did while experiencing them.

They always talk about that 20/20 hindsight, right?

When our minds fall back into the past,

We see so much more of what happened than we did in the moment, don't we?

... Often better understanding people's motives, people's fears, people's feelings.

We can better understand where we were in those times, and why we acted the way we did.

To a certain extent, we sort of assume the role of a helpless God, dwelling in our past.

Able to look at it from an outside eye--able to see what should have been done.



Able to see more clearly what others should have done, than we could in the moment.

But we don't have the power to change it.

And that's a very closed-off place. It's a suffocating space.

It's a place that denies the reality that we are not God,

and leaves us isolated from the truth of the power of God all around us,

To consume us, and love us, and change us, and bring us,

always in care, wherever we'll go.

The benefit we receive in our souls when we remember God---

---When we remember God is with us....

... Comes from that moment when we finally break away from that place of clinging---

--when we finally break away that from suffocating space inside of ourselves...

And let that new life in as we breathe God deep,

feeling growth in our minds and in our hearts

by having the courage to let go of our false sense of control,

and being willing to move from the past, into the present and forward more, into the future,

having trust in God to move you where you'll go,

and fill all of those blank spaces ahead with something worth the living.

When we do this, we're alive again.

No longer stuck in the tomb inside our heads---

---we're returning to the living world... to our living God,

And coming into firmer balance with the life around us,

By returning our sense of the power to make new life, where it belongs.

We return the power to God, to move in our lives.

And as we read in John, that's a peaceful feeling. That's a feeling that makes us feel not so troubled.

That's a feeling that makes us rejoice.

The disciples experienced this joy in that moment they spent with Jesus;

And thank God they were filled with that courage to trust in God.

To stop clinging to what happened, and to move ahead,

Otherwise Jesus would have died---end of story. They would have been stuck in the tomb.

Thank God they were filled with the courage to *know* God was with them, and that God led the way,

No matter where they'd stand.

Because there was a lot of doing waiting ahead.

There was a lot of God's moving, coming to their lives.

Movements that changed this world forever, and helped people sense the presence, and love, and peace of God in their lives, for thousands of years to come.

So, as we move toward Pentecost---our celebration together

Of the ways God's Spirit guides our lives,

And brings us into love, and connection with each other...

When we feel all of these anxieties, fears, and pains,

over all of the changes coming constantly to our lives---the big and the small---

Let yourself breathe.

Let God move you.

And let's move into these new moments of new life, together,

Feeling the peace of knowing the power of God all around us as we go.

Amen.