

Stability Amidst Change

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Date: 28 June 2015

[0:00] Amen. The words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts.!

Once again, we find ourselves in a period of transition in this parish. I think it's appropriate that this occurs during Pentecost, because Pentecost was probably the time of greatest transition in the Christian world.

And Jesus had provided all kinds of teaching, instruction, parables, prophecy.

He even told about the Holy Spirit coming. But somehow, his followers never got it. They really were in total shock when he left, and it appeared that he wasn't going to come back anytime soon. They kept hoping he would. And so, it was their job then to go out and take his word into the world. That's got to have been a very traumatic experience for them.

[1:39] A scary time. This parish has been through many periods of transition. On the way in today, I counted the number of places that it's been located just in the last seven years.

Seven or eight years. I came up with seven. I counted the number of clergy that have ministered in this congregation, either on a fairly permanent basis or a temporary basis.

And I came up with five or six. Somehow, this parish, though, has continued not to survive, but to thrive.

So, I'd like to chat just a little bit with you this morning about the idea of transition. Two and a half weeks ago, we have a camp out on Skinny Atlas Lake.

Two and a half weeks ago, a huge storm came down the lake. I've never seen or experienced a stronger one. It was raining so hard, we couldn't even see beyond our windows.

[2:51] The wind was charging down the lake. Hail was falling. And then suddenly, it was gone. I wandered out of the cabin.

A couple hours later, walked up the hill. And to my amazement, I saw a tree that had fallen on the cottage next door to ours. It just about bisected the cabin.

This is a two-story house that had been built around 1890. And the family living there were descendants of the people who built it.

It was very well constructed. It was built by builders. But this tree was about four foot in diameter. And it came down off the hill and right onto the center part of the roof.

The family that's there had spent the last 30 years lovingly, with their own effort, no outside help, restoring this over-century-old building.

[4:00] And as I saw that, and they weren't home. They lived near Rochester. I just couldn't help but think how badly. I mean, I just felt terrible for them because I knew that the effort, I knew the effort they had put into this.

I've watched them over the years. And the two of them, they have no children, no other relatives. And they had lovingly worked on this cottage.

And to see this tree, now down in the center of it, just had to be devastating. Well, I got on my cell phone and let them know what had happened, took pictures for them and sent those.

And they were out the next day. And it's one of these situations where you've got a half-full glass and a half-empty glass. What are you going to do?

Are you going to just tear it down and start all over again? Tear it down and sell it? Sell the land? Valuable land? What are you going to do?

[5:00] And I felt that I was called to be an encourager and to help them see the half-full glass and to rebuild. Our son in Massachusetts heard about this and came the next day and donated four days of his labor.

He's a carpenter. He's a builder. He understands all of the mechanics, the structural issues. He came in and gave his time. Neighbors poured in, hauled off broken things, damaged items.

The tree guy came and worked for several days getting this tree off of the camp. But I saw through this event, I mean, this is a tremendous transition for this family, a huge change.

My heart really went out to them. But through that, they have drawn closer to Christ. We've had them staying with us. We've prayed at meals, something that they hadn't done except on special occasions in a long time.

And they have participated in that. And so I've seen through this transition in their lives some very positive things. We have a close friend in Schenectady where we lived for many years who just went into, just suddenly went into dementia in a 30-day period.

[6:35] Gone from being totally lucid to being totally non-lucid, whatever you call that. Terrible experience.

But again, family from all over the world has come in, been of support to her husband. And they are facing this terrible change in their lives.

And they are godly people. They served as missionaries in Liberia and Pakistan. Have ministered to other people.

But to have this type of devastation come into your own family and into your own life has got to be a tough thing. But again, people have pulled together. And some great blessings have come out of this.

She has been able, from her hospital bed where she doesn't even hardly know anybody, she has taken each of her children who have come and blessed them, given her blessing to them.

[7:36] Again, a very moving thing. But a major change for this family now. He's got to build a new life for himself. We have another friend, an old Army friend living in Virginia, who was suddenly diagnosed with pancreatic and liver cancer.

Too old for transplants. Too far down the road with all of this. But again, people have come from other places. Family has bonded together.

And it's been a time of blessing. And they are facing this in a positive way. Our parish in Texas. I'm dressed for it today.

Our parish in Texas suddenly had to relocate from the... We weren't in a chiropractor's office. But we were in something similar to that.

We suddenly got notice that they were going to convert the building to another use. And we had to find another home. This came very suddenly. And we couldn't afford to buy, find a place to buy.

[8:50] And so we cut a deal with a theater. And we're now meeting in a couple of, you know, these theaters that have 10 units in. Well, we're meeting in two of them.

We got the Sunday school in one. And we've got the parish in the other. It's a congregation about this size. But it's brought new challenges. New opportunities.

It has revitalized the parish. Just that move. Soon after that, our rector, the founding rector, announced he wanted to retire again.

He's 73 years old. He's retired once before. He wants to retire again. And so suddenly this parish is faced with having to conduct a call for a new rector, new clergy leadership.

The rector has been very hands-on. And so congregation has not been nearly as hands-on as you have been here. And so that means for them, for us, big changes.

[9:56] Setting up early in the morning. We've got to set up and take down every time you've been through that. Because the theater's got to be used for a theater the rest of the time. So the tables have got to come out from under the stage.

They've got to be set up. All of the altar has to be rolled in. All of the altar items are coming from the storage room. Big deal. And he and his wife have been doing this because nobody else had stepped up before to do it.

So that's a big change. Big change for them. Well, you've been through a lot of relocations. You've been through changes in clergy leadership. And you have thrived through this.

You've grown through this. You've been strengthened through this. It probably seems like, as Yogi Berra used to say, *deja vu* all over again.

For you to have made this move here and to now be faced with calling a new rector. Moving to this building has been a wonderful advance.

[11:03] I mean, I've seen this from Texas. I've seen it from afar. But got a chance to see the building before we left last fall. And the transformation here has been amazing.

And what the possibilities are upstairs are equally amazing. And I am confident that this parish is going to continue to grow through this.

Last summer at our retreat in August, Bishop Benna led us through a little exercise. And the changes that this parish has undergone over many years.

And took the time to identify at each step in this, with your help, the positive things that have happened.

The blessings. Also some of the conflict. Some of the sorrows. There have been thanksgivings.

There have been blessings. There have been tears.

[12:06] Through all of these changes. There have been healings. And there are still areas that probably need to be healed. That was a wonderful exercise to go through, I think.

Because it's demonstrated that through each step, the parish has been strengthened. It's grown. Each time you've moved, each new clergy leadership that's come in has built on the solid foundation that had been set here by those that have gone before.

Those are all good things. And I'm confident that that is going to continue here. That I see nothing but positives coming out of that.

And I hope that you share in that as well. Today's readings really describe to me what this parish is all about.

When I think of Church of the Holy Trinity, I think of some of the things that were identified specifically in this morning's readings. Generosity. This is a very generous, giving congregation.

[13:20] I don't mean just in physical things, financial things. The congregation here sees need. It does something about it.

It doesn't ignore needs. You're a generous lot here. You excel in faith, speech, knowledge.

The things that were pointed out by Paul in 2 Corinthians. Trust in God. The gospel spoke to healing specifically. This is a congregation that is focused and committed to the healing ministry.

And I encourage you to build on that in particular. But I see last week after the service, it was obvious that somebody was in need of healing.

And immediately, I saw a group of people laying hands on her, praying for her healing. That is a major strength in this congregation.

[14:31] I don't see any negatives. I think nothing but positive here. There's no half empty glass anywhere. This is a full glass here. Now, as man and government and society continue to tinker and innovate around us, we have those constant changes going on.

There are things that don't change. God's word doesn't change. God's truth doesn't change. And of that, we can be sure.

Praise the Lord. Amen.