

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 30, 2019.

Today's lessons are about workplace transitions, especially the training that is involved. Outgoing person training incoming person. This transition is awkward when the outgoing person has been encouraged to leave to make room for the incoming person. Training one's replacement. The outgoing person is polite on the outside, but perhaps resentful on the inside.

The lesson from I Kings (**I Kings 19:15-16, 19-21**) features Elijah as the person leaving and Elisha as the arriving person. In this case, we are not sure if Elijah is resentful or grateful. All we know is that the Lord told Elijah to facilitate the transition. The position is prophet, representative of the Lord. Maybe Elijah was tired and asked the Lord to appoint a successor. Or maybe the Lord felt that Elijah was past his prime as a prophet and new prophet blood was needed. And maybe Elijah felt the same way. No problem. Both Elijah and Elisha accept that change is necessary.

The manner of transition is confusing. Elisha is a farmer. He is plowing his fields with a team of oxen, when Elijah comes by and throws a mantle over Elisha, as a symbol of succession. Elisha is intrigued by the possibility and runs after Elijah. Elijah, perhaps with a change of heart, tells Elisha to go home. "Go back again, for what have I done to you!" Elisha is still interested, though, so much so that he slaughters his oxen, thus freeing up his own time. Apparently this sacrifice impresses Elijah who signals to Elisha that it is okay to follow. At this point, not to replace Elijah, but to be his servant.

Psalms 16 puts a positive spin on this confusing transition between Elijah and Elisha. The theme of the psalm is trust in the Lord. This is true whether you're on the way out or the way in. The verse 11 of Psalm 16: "You, Lord, will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore."

St. Paul was familiar with transition issues. Most of the places he visited and corresponded with were wrestling with how best to continue sharing the Good News of Christ's resurrection. In this morning's passage from Galatians (**Galatians 5:1, 13-25**), Paul reminds his fellow believers not to get bogged down in disputes. He refers to these disputes as "works of the flesh," and he contrasts them with "the fruits of the spirit." "Jealousy" was a particularly troublesome issue as Paul sought to establish leaders in the various communities, which Paul knew he would be leaving. He had to designate. He had to appoint. He had to identify.

Jesus himself had to deal with transition issues (**Luke 9:51-62**). He wanted people to follow his lead, but, when they requested more time, Jesus grew impatient, even angry. "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." In short, "Get to work. I'm leaving. And I need people to take charge, to take up the banner, to continue the work that I have started."

Well, if you think that the transition from Jesus to the first generation of his believers was tricky, think about the subsequent leadership transitions. People had to navigate these transitions without the presence of Jesus. The issues were not between Jesus and disciples, but between disciples and disciples. It's amazing that the enterprise we know as the Church was launched and steadied.

The explanation for this continuity is the Holy Spirit. God wasn't about to let salvation slide. God wants the work of the Savior to continue. This continuity takes many forms, but none as important, as comprehensive, as lasting, as the transition protocols the Church has put in place. These protocols have never been easy to institute, but here we are, two thousand years later.

This morning's Collect describes Jesus as the cornerstone of a holy temple. Well, as critical as a cornerstone is to a structure, so are the other elements of the structure. We are part of those other elements. A bayside chapel contributing to the longevity of the Church of Christ? What a privilege. We are part of a magnificent enterprise. It's not a miracle. It's a result of hard work, of God continuing to be engaged in the calling of new leaders and new followers, and of these new leaders and followers sustaining the effort.

St. Paul listed for the Galatians examples of the works of the flesh and examples of the fruits of the Spirit. The struggle between these camps continues. These terms are familiar, thousands of years later. You and I wrestle with these issues, including how best to transition from one generation to another. Baptisms and confirmations and ordinations are not automatic. They are not required. They are exercises in freedom that bring joy to the Lord.

These deliberate attempts to carry the Good News to succeeding generations are fragile. From Luke's gospel: "As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" Jesus responds by reminding the speaker that talk is cheap. He didn't use those words, but the intent was the same. Transitions involve clear belief and hard work and confidence that, while Jesus might

be leaving, His Spirit will always be with us, not leaving, but leading. Thank God for that.

Many of your families have been at St. Christopher's from the get-go. You know what it took to get this chapel off the ground. There were negotiations and interviews. There were by-laws to write and officers to define and volunteers to recruit and assign and recognize. And there were other Island constituencies to consult. Starting a congregation from scratch is a challenge. But it happened. With just human effort? I don't think so. With human effort grounded in the Spirit? Yes. And the formula hasn't changed.

Well, if this formula works for entities, for institutions, for congregations, might it work for us as individuals? We sure hope so. That's why we pray, in this morning's Collect: "Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto thee." The "their" refers to "the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."

This family, this congregation, like all religious bodies, stands on the shoulders of others. And these shoulders are not just those who have gone before us. They are our shoulders. You and I are not just recipients of the Good News. We are conveyors of the Good News. We are spokespeople. We are both followers, disciples, and teachers, apostles.

This dual role, grounded in the Risen Christ, is not a burden. It's a joy. And it reminds me of one of the great privileges of parenthood and grandparenthood and big brotherhood and big sisterhood. And that privilege is hosting young children to sit on our shoulders so that the children can see what is going on, be it a parade or some other event or a famous person. In other words, to see things more clearly.

Well, someone lifted us so that we could see the Risen Christ more clearly. You and I gather so that we can do this for one another and for others. It is a good feeling to be lifted and it is a good feeling to lift. There is a transition here in roles: from being lifted to lifting. Not easy work necessarily, but great transitions always have challenges. But, in the case of sharing the Gospel, is there ever resentment? Yes, sometimes in receiving. But, in sharing? Only joy, we would hope. Described in our Collect this morning as "Joined together in unity of spirit." Amen.