

McCabe United Methodist Church

May 20, 2018

Numbers 13:1-3, 27-28, 30-33, 14:1-9 &

Acts 2:1-12

“Oh, the Places We’ll Go”

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Good Morning Church!

We continue to work with some of Dr. Seuss’ books. In Dr. Seuss’ writings there are typically situations where life just gets messy for the characters. This morning, we’re thinking about ‘Oh the Places You’ll Go.’

‘Oh the Places You’ll Go’ is about a guy who is entering a new chapter in life, a next chapter. ‘Oh the places You’ll Go’ is about transitions in life, and transitions and change can bring all sorts of opportunities and challenges.

Followers of Jesus try to navigate these opportunities and challenges in faithful ways, and no matter what, through it all, we draw strength and hope knowing that the Holy Spirit is upon us and the Lord goes with us.

Let’s Pray:

Holy and Mighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

It was the day we now call Pentecost. The early believers were gathered together. They were waiting. They were in a time of transition. They’d been directed to stay in Jerusalem until they received further instructions.

What do you think?

Were they excited or maybe a little nervous?

Were they getting impatient or ready to charge ahead?

Maybe they were getting a little comfortable, thinking let’s just stay here. Let’s just keep things as they are.

And then, Acts 2 says: ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty wind. It filled the house. And what looked like flames or ‘tongues of fire’ appeared and settled on each of the believers, ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our Scripture says: They began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

It was breath taking, yet life-giving.

It was a new opportunity, yet it was messy.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were witnessing and engaging with people like they’d never done before.

The 7 People were amazed (saying). “How can this be?” The crowds around them thought they’d been drinking, yet it soon became clear that they hadn’t.

As we navigate the opportunities and the challenges life transitions present, we’re at our best when we allow what seems like the ‘flames’ and the ‘tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit to be upon us and lead us forward.

In Dr. Seuss’ ‘Oh the Places You’ll Go’ Dr. Seuss writes about those first steps in transition to the future. We’re in a season of transitions. Graduations are happening all around us. In our own family, we had a college graduation last weekend, and we have a high school graduation next weekend.

‘Oh the Places You’ll Go’ can be a popular graduation gift. It’s a book about navigating transitions in life. Dr. Seuss writes: Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away! You have brains. You have shoes. You can steer yourself in the direction you choose.

Life is full of transitions, isn’t it? Sometimes *WE* choose the new direction, AND sometimes *LIFE* chooses new directions for us.

Tod Boslinger, in *Canoeing the Mountains*, compares the journey of Lewis and Clark with the journey Christians and churches can take. Lewis and Clark traveled up the Missouri looking for that path that led to the Pacific Ocean. Their directive from Thomas Jefferson was to find the most direct WATER path from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. They expected a tough journey and they got it. They faced all kinds of conditions: rapids and waterfalls; grizzlies, snakes, and mosquitoes; cold, dark winter and hot, scorching summer. And then they were stuck. They could paddle as hard as they wanted, but it wouldn’t make any difference. They ran out of river and all they could see were mountains ahead. They needed to transition or quit. Their canoes weren’t working anymore so they adapted. You know how they responded. They put their boats aside and headed into the future.

The Believers were stuck when Jesus got arrested and nailed to the cross. They had to transition or quit. As they were trying to navigate their new future, the Holy Spirit came upon them and quitting was no longer an option. They refocused on Jesus. They transitioned and took their first steps into the future.

2,000 years ago the early believers transitioned to navigating life with the Spirit and their faith and lives continue to be impacted even today.

It makes me pause and wonder. I wonder how our faith and lives together will affect people 10 years from now, and 100 years from now, and even 1,000 years from now.

Transitions and navigating the course ahead. Some say the church can be slow to adapt and transition. Some say churches can have a hard time letting go of things that have run their course while wrestling with navigating new directions ahead.

Yet followers of Jesus are people of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the church and the Spirit of the Lord is upon you and me. This is the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead. This same Spirit lives in you and me, and is willing to lead us through the transitions of life.

There was the man named Gideon in the Bible. In Judges Chapter 6 Gideon was faced with transition and change. Judges 6 says: The angel of God came to Gideon and said: Go. Go with the strength you have. Go conquer the lands around you and expand your territory.

The angel of the Lord said: I am sending you! Step into the future. It's time to transition into a new future.

But Gideon protested saying: But Lord. But Lord how can I go. I don't have what it takes. My clan is the weakest clan and I'm the least in my family. And we are reminded that God isn't looking for our excuses. God wasn't interested in hearing Gideon's excuses. God said Go. Trust me and know that I am always with you.

Like the early believers in transition on Pentecost, and like the unconfident, hesitant Gideon anxious about navigating a new road ahead, we have the Spirit of the Lord with us. And when the Spirit of the Lord takes hold we discover that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

We hear about the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and then going into the Promised Land. We keep in mind that the Israelites wandered for years. They faced all kinds of battles and challenges. The transition from the wilderness to the Promised Land wasn't a smooth, simple one. We hear about some of the final steps in this transition in our passage from Numbers this morning. It was time for this huge transition for the Israelites. Moses sent 12 explorers to scout out the Promised Land, to help figure out how to navigate the journey ahead.

10 of the advanced scouts came back saying: There's no way. It's impossible. We're not going there. I guess we're stuck right here. They put their energy into complaining and creating division. They made the case that they'd better stay put where they were. But two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, came back saying: this is a land flowing with milk and honey. God is with us. Let's make the transition. Let's figure out how to navigate this adventure ahead. Joshua and Caleb, through a series of ups and downs with their own people, preached: we can be stuck where we are or we can go forward knowing that the Lord is with us.

The Lord is with us...

Friends, there might be times we're not really sure if or how we should go forward, and times we don't know which way we should go. John Ortberg writes that it's then that it's important to:

- Surround yourself with people you trust,

- Surround yourself with people who have good judgment,
- And surround yourself with people who love you and who care about your well-being, because very often God speaks to us through these wise people around us whom we trust.

Very often God speaks wisdom to us through others. At the same time we must also be mindful that God can use us to be that person for someone else too.

Here at McCabe we have a variety of transitions taking place. We're taking steps as we move toward our future together. We trust, and we experience the Holy Spirit is upon us and the Lord is with us.

Transitions. For example, we're wrestling with this idea about the Open Door preschool. Together with Open Door we're wrestling with the possibility of Open Door moving to McCabe. There are so many variables intertwined in this discussion. There are multiple voices involved. Some advise: We must seize the opportunity. Others caution: No matter what, we have to care for the families and the children and the staff and McCabe. Others say: We can't and we shouldn't do it.

So we continue to navigate the road forward. We continue to try to be faithful to where God is leading us in these decisions. Every time in these discussions with Open Door that a door has closed in front of us, another one has opened to show us the next step forward. So we keep going, navigating the potential transition. We keep going with Open Door unless God allows a door to close without another one opening up to show us the next step forward. The Spirit is upon us. The Lord is with us.

We are evaluating and supporting existing ministries as we explore possible launches of new ministries. The challenge is that we must faithfully listen. We must faithfully listen for God's voice so we navigate through the transitions God has in store for us.

And through it all, even when God takes us out of our comfort zones, we remember Pentecost and the Caleb and Joshua Factor (Ortberg).

Pentecost: We draw strength and hope living with the Holy Spirit upon us. The Joshua and Caleb factor: We must listen and be faithful, knowing that the Lord is with us through it all.

The Holy Spirit is upon us. The Lord is with us. Together, oh the places we'll go.

Let's Pray:

O God, you not only lead us but you go with us too. You empower us with your Holy Spirit. We pray that you will continue to pour inspiration on your people and your church. We pray you will revive and empower us to lift up Jesus so all might hear and experience the hope and power of the resurrection. We pray in the name of the one who lived and ministered among the people, and who ultimately rose from the dead. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.