

## Comings and Goings

I am honored to speak to you this morning. I was surprised and a bit intimidated when Pastor Jeong asked me to share one of our last conversations by turning it into today's message. I've never been able to tell him no, so here we are.

He and I were standing in this room talking about the journey we have been on together and how our paths were only diverging a little bit. We reminded each other that the only constant there seems to be in this world, is that of change. So here is what we talked about that evening, looking at the Easter decorations.

We are in the all midst of change. The world, our state, this city, and our denomination are all changing. The world is troubled with border disputes, climate change, refugees, extremists and some world leaders whose motives and methods are questionable. Our state is changing. We work together to balance infrastructure needs and education, care for the young and safety for the elderly. Our city is growing and building, and we worry about the traffic and who the new neighbors are going to be. Our denomination struggles to communicate differing opinions (as Methodists often do) on the interpretation of scripture and equality and sacred space for everyone. We pray for courage in the face of all these changes and we work to find balance and a way forward together in everything.

Our little church and its congregation are in the midst of comings and goings. These changes are a little closer to the heart.

Pastor Jeong and his family are going. He gave his last message to us last week. Over the past 7 years he has made us laugh and think, and

encouraged us to share our Christian journey together. He led us closer to God's good and everlasting grace. He has shown us new ways of seeing the world and our place in it.

Our new Pastor, Pastor Kim, is moving in and she will give her first greeting to us next week.

This change should not be a sad thing. We knew when Jeong and his sweet family came to us, that one day they would go. It is part of how our denomination is organized.

It goes all the way back to John Wesley. He wandered from place to place preaching, without a permanent assignment, an itinerant preacher. He managed to give somewhere in the neighborhood of 40,000 sermons to groups all over England and America. Wesley believed that having preachers change their locations frequently benefitted both the pastor and the congregations. Pastors could share their gifts with a new group of people. The Gospel could take on a freshness when delivered by a new voice. He believed that the organizational leaders (the ones we call Bishops now) would send pastors, rather than having them called or hired by individual congregations.

Wesley came to America, a strange and new land to plant new holy clubs, before Methodism was a denomination. Once the Methodists were here, with leadership and a beginning hierarchy, the agreement to go whenever a pastor was sent became part of the ordination process. Most of the first Methodist preachers would become circuit riders.

Circuit riders would travel vast areas often half a state or so, for 3 or 4 months and then move to another circuit. Nowadays the stay of a

pastor is a little longer than a few months thanks be to God. But the concept is the same. Pastors come, show us the ways to live our Christian journey and then are rotated onward in some 7, ten, or 18 years. We hope Jeong is happy and has a fruitful journey in Los Altos. We have great hopes for our new Pastor. That her leading of us will show us new lessons of joy, service, unity and love.

In the midst of all of this change – what helps steady us? Where do we go for constancy? The roots of Christian faith show us where to go. Methodists have a firm four cornered foundation on which to build: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience.

Our Christian traditions tell us to hang on. Change comes and we will settle into it for a while. Then change will come again.

And no matter what we think, The Protestant Reformation did not just jump out of Martin Luther's mind that October evening when he posted his questions on the church door. It had been coming for a long time. The idea of individuals taking responsibility for their own salvation and Christian journey took time and a lot of effort from people like Zwingle, Hus, Luther, Wycliffe, Tyndale and on down to Wesley. It continues today with leaders and writers sharing the possibilities of continuing growth as Christians. We come from a very long line of changers.

The Bible is full of stories about change, Both Old and New Testament. Even the Disciples had worries about what was happening. But in Matthew 28:20 Jesus tells them about training the next line of followers "And instruct them to keep everything whatever I have commanded you and behold I am with you every day, even unto the end of time".

A legend that dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE tells that the Apostles went to lots of different countries to spread the Good News. Legend states they drew lots to find out where they would go and prayed the Holy Spirit would guide them and that Christ would go with them as He had promised.

We have been through these changes before. Many of us have weathered the change of leadership our denomination gives us. We can do this.

There is a song we have sung here in church that tells us “on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” We look to the constant love and protection of our Creator to steady us.

We can stand firm on the cornerstone of Christ. His life, death and resurrection are where we find constant hope. We can cling to the knowledge as Kelly Love told me, that, “every human being is of sacred worth, and is thus entitled to a full and equal measure of God’s infinite, eternal love mercy and grace.” Or to quote Jeong, “ God loves us, and there is nothing we can do about it”. Hallelujah. Amen.