

Sermon – February 10, 2024

Opening Prayer:

God, you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we are going,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Please be seated.

Good morning!

It's wonderful to be back with you all. It feels like I've been on the road forever. As some of you know, I spent most of the past week in Bremerton at our annual diocesan Clergy Conference—so I've just swapped one suitcase for another.

Our theme this year was *Transitions*, a timely topic as our diocese prepares for the election of a new bishop. Over the coming months, we'll experience changes—some outside our control—that will impact how we live and serve together.

Change happens to us; transition is how we respond.

Will we resist it? Engage it? Bury our heads and hope it goes away? Transition is our emotional and spiritual journey through change.

Bishop Melissa, our interim bishop, shared a helpful model for understanding transition in three stages:

1. **Endings**
2. **New beginnings**
3. **The neutral zone**—that uncomfortable in-between.

We're familiar with endings: retirements, relocations, the loss of loved ones or routines. Even joyful occasions—graduation, becoming a parent—bring endings. You leave behind something known, comfortable.

Eventually, we arrive at new beginnings—new jobs, friendships, relationships. But in between, there's the neutral zone. A strange liminal space where what was is gone, but what's next isn't clear yet.

Bishop Melissa spent time with us on the neutral zone, because that's where we are as a diocese. She compared it to freefall—that moment after jumping from a plane but before the parachute opens. Some people love that feeling of floating and openness. I am *not* one of them.

I've experienced a lot of change in my life. And I know this about myself: I try to get through the neutral zone as fast as possible. But in doing so, I often miss something vital: the opportunity to let God work in me, guide me, shape me. I rush to safety without sitting in the uncertainty—without listening.

As a diocese, and perhaps as individuals, we are in this freefall. We've said goodbye to Bishop Greg. And one day, we will welcome a new bishop—new gifts, new energy, and yes, new challenges and foibles (because we all have them!). But for now, we're in the "in-between."

Many of us are also in this neutral zone in our personal lives—dealing with births, deaths, career shifts, new relationships. We may resist change—clinging tightly to the familiar. Or we may rush forward—starting new projects, chasing any form of clarity to escape the discomfort of uncertainty.

But we are not the first to walk this path.

Today's Old Testament reading tells of a profound transition in the life of God's people: the departure of Elijah and the passing of the mantle to Elisha.

Elijah was a spiritual giant—bold, fearless, and deeply connected to God. He stood up to kings and called down fire from heaven. Elisha, his student, had big shoes to fill.

As Elijah prepared to leave, he told Elisha to stay behind—three times. And three times, Elisha refused. He was not ready to let go. He followed Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, and finally to the Jordan. People around them said, "You know he's leaving, right?" Elisha's response? "Yes, I know. Be quiet." I imagine it sounded more like, "I know, I know! Stop reminding me!"

Eventually, Elijah asked, "What can I do for you before I'm taken from you?" And Elisha asked for a double share of Elijah's spirit—his deep connection to God. Elijah replied, "You have asked a hard thing. But if you keep your eyes open—if you see me as I go—you will receive it."

And Elisha did. He saw. He grieved. He tore his clothes. But he let go. And in letting go, he opened himself to God's leading and received what he needed to step into the future.

So, what about us?

As we live through transitions—whether as a church or in our own lives—how will we navigate them?

Will we hold on tightly to the past?

Will we rush toward the future, grabbing the first option just to avoid discomfort?

Or can we pause in the in-between—

can we sit in the neutral zone, feel the pain of loss, stay open to possibility, and trust God's guidance?

Can we keep our eyes open, even in the freefall, and wait for the Spirit to land on us?

Amen.