

Sunday June 6, 2021
Sermon Series: Holy Transitions Part 1
Scriptural Lesson: 1 Samuel 8: 4-20
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are beginning with a new sermon series entitled Holy Transitions.

- So let me first start off with what may be obvious to some of you by now who knows my preaching style and sermon planning process; to highlight that **these sermon series** are designed to build upon one another.
- The sermon series are formulated in a way where the hope is to put us in the right mental, spiritual, intellectual and emotional headspace and heart space; to get us to think introspectively about our lives on both an individual and collective level; **so that we might** begin to align ourselves with God's

kingdom vision; **so that we might begin to equip** ourselves with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to do the work of Jesus; **to love mercy; to walk humbly and stay in love with God;** and most importantly to spread this infectious and unconditional love to all; to let the world know that We all matter; because God says we matter...Amen;

- And the reason why we matter so much to the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is because we are created in her infinite image (Genesis 1: 26-27);
- So just like our family matters to us; our children, our mothers, fathers, grandparents and more;
- We matter to the Triune God, simply because we are God's family.

- **So the preaching/teaching goal here at First UMC of Lincoln Nebraska is to name this truth; that we are all created in God's image;**
- **To name this truth;** that we all are here to do God's work of fulfilling thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven;
- **To name this truth;** that there are some roadblocks that are blocking this Holy Kingdom vision that I have just named as being **a reality for all people;**
- There are roadblocks of racism, oppression, marginalization and more; that have kept a lot of us from experiencing the world as God would have wanted us to;
- So how we begin to achieve the mission of building disciples of Jesus Christ in my eyes, is through empowering others of who and whose they are;
- It is by letting the world know; that we are all part of the spiritual lineage and family of God's infinite and unconditional love.

- Which also involves us doing the tough work of dismantling these roadblocks that are hindering our growth as a kingdom; as a people.
- **It involves us** calling out the issues that are stunting our growth as God's children and implementing systems of reform, care, repair and reconciliation; to help reset the world to become a more equitable, loving and harmonious environment for everyone.
- **Now some might suggest that what I am naming and proclaiming is impossible;**
- For it does seem that some of these oppressive systems are perfectly happy with the status quo and will go at all lengths to keep things as the status quo....
- However, as I continue to navigate the role of the Church and the role of her disciples, I have come to terms that we must not give up on this moral vision of peace, justice and love for all;
- For I am convinced that evil and hate **is banking on** love to tire out;

- **Evil and hate is relying on love** to become overwhelmed...
- But I believe that God's Word is true...
- That with God all things are possible;
- And just as Christ's Resurrection prevailed against death;
- Theologically this informs me; that love can and will prevail over hate.
- **So this is where my heart and headspace is in, as we are entering into this sermon series of Holy Transition.**
- With the thought that as we all bravely shared and bore our stories and experiences that needed Holy Repair (which was the last sermon series);
- Now perhaps we are ready to dive into this idea of Holy Transition a little better.
- Because as I segue more directly into our scriptural text this morning and this sermon series; let me just name that I know for a fact that **transitions are difficult for most people; if not everyone.**

- For the definition of transition; just to ensure that you and I are on the same page; is *the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.*
- And so what makes transitions so difficult for most of us, is that tiny little word embedded in this definition that I have just shared; I'm talking about the word **change.**
- **Change** is not easy for almost anyone.....
- For it was a **change** for First UMC when I came almost 2 years ago,
- There has been a **change** in our worship teams, staffing, congregants and the changes keep coming;
- For Covid itself, forced a lot of us into **immediate change**; where we had to quickly adapt to a new way of doing church and being the church;
- And now, we are experiencing another **major layer of change** with Matt our beloved youth Minister moving on and then getting Alicia Opoku and Susie Cook and our new associate Pastor Caity....

- So this is a lot of **change** folks;
- A lot of it is very exciting but let's be honest...it can be very unsettling for some; this idea of **so much change**...especially for those who have been here at First for longer than 2 years;
- Some may even feel like First Church is unrecognizable...
- And I need to say as your Spiritual Leader; **being the main catalyst of this change**; makes me feel bittersweet on the inside...
- For the bitter for me; is that I truly do not like witnessing people struggle through transitions; heck I do not like witnessing myself struggle through transitions...
- Because it is not typically a clean, linear process... going through transitions;
- There are normally lots of ups and downs that comes with our emotions when transitions occur....
- Making the process to get to a place of comfort quite unsettling, shaky, and discombobulating...

- **But where the sweet comes in for me, is embedded in the lesson that I am gleaning from our scripture this morning;**
- Because there are a couple of verses that were not mentioned in our reading today that I think are pertinent to highlight; so that we might have a fuller picture of what is going on..
- So in 1 Samuel 8 beginning at verse 1, because our reading started at verse 4 says; *When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders.[a]*
2 *The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. 3* *But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.*
- So why this part of the story is significant is because basically, Samuel judged Israel with uprightness.
- As a fearless prophet he declared the will of the Lord, and as a faithful priest he worshiped the Lord before the altar.

- So Samuel was a model leader.
- However, his decision to include his sons in judging Israel was unsatisfactory because of their misconduct (v. 3).
- From the narrative it seems that this precipitating development is what may have caused the elders of the various tribes to gather together to make this request of Samuel; the misconduct of his sons.
- This development may have been the proverbial “last straw,” for them..which is understandable in my book....
- **For as I step outside of this story for a moment...I** will suggest that the people had the right idea from my perspective initially....that if Samuel’s sons were not following in his righteous footsteps and leadership; **then a change was needed.**
- For what they were complaining about is equivalent to the church losing a beloved, long time, effective pastor; only to be replaced with a new pastor who just simply isn’t a good fit;

- This is why the appointment process within the Methodist Church that is examined yearly, can be very stressful; **for both the congregants and the appointed pastors.**
- Because the truth of the matter; we don't know if it will be a good fit for either the pastor or the congregation; until we discover that it is not!
- This is why I as your spiritual leader; never takes my leadership of this church for granted;
- I have learned that leading people can be a very rewarding, but temperamental process.
- Furthermore, it statistically takes about three years to determine if the current church leadership is a good fit "enough" for the Church....
- This is because the rule of thumb I am learning to embrace, but it is very stressful to embrace, is that if you are a good fit for at least 80 percent of your constituents/congregation members; then you are well on your way.

- **This is why** I tend to lead collaboratively; at the same time being strong enough to make tough decisions when I need to...
- **This is also why** if you remember that picture I showed that Terri Storer shared with our worship team months ago about the disciples on the boat; I tend to focus on those who are still choosing to stay on the boat; even though I am aware and still saddened by those 20 percent or so who choose not to stay on the boat.
- But this is what comes with these types of transitions in leadership....
- Furthermore, this is a long of my saying that I get the people's frustrations....I really do!
- Samuel's sons were not a good fit for them....
- However, the lesson to be learned from this story is that a plan **to metaphorically throw out the baby with the bath water**; is not the way to go either....
- For the solution from the people was to have a king that would rule over them in a manner that would not

be too much better than what Samuel's sons had to offer.

- For Samuel in his wisdom and leadership experience, knew that a king of what they were suggesting, would in a sense be oppressive.
- Our text informs us that verse 11 has Samuel informing them that the king they were suggesting *would take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; 12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. 15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. 16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the*

best of your cattle[b] and donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. 18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

- Not only this; but the main issue with the people’s request was that they abandoned the ultimate king that they already had in God; for something that was more concrete and tangible.
- You see; since Israel felt insecure with the uncertainty of what God had in store for them, they did what we naturally tend to do as a people.
- They looked at the people around them and they said, “What we really need... is what they’ve got. Look at those Amalekites! Look at those Ammonites! They don’t have these judges.
- ‘They’ve got a modern form of government. They’ve got kings! Kings get things done. Kings make it

happen. Kings rule! Real leadership, that's what we need, Samuel. Give us a king, Samuel!"

- So both God and Samuel acquiesced and gave them their king;
- **A king that was not invested** in their personal welfare;
- **A king that was not invested** in their salvation;
- **A king that was not invested** in their personal and spiritual growth;
- And over the weeks to come; you and I will see these people pay for their resistance, in going through the transitions necessary for reform and repair and end up worst than they started.

- **Because you see, as I place this story in today's time; my takeaway is that God's plan tends to include a lot of transitions that are intentional in helping to develop us, equip us, prepare us and lead us to this metaphorical land flowing with milk and honey;**
- **However these transitions that arise in our pursuit of love and justice for all; often** require patience...
- These **transitions often** require a measure of faith, trust and commitment from us; if we wish to achieve our goal of justice and love for everyone.
- For I stopped by to suggest that these oppressive **systems did not appear over night;**
- So in the same respect, **we know that they cannot be repaired over night....**
- And so the valuable lesson that I am seeing from this story; is us being willing to trust the transitional process of God's plan.
- For the people of our story **was in a period of transition....**

- Samuel was getting too old and his sons were not cut from the same leadership cloth as their father....
- So the people were getting antsy and wanting to abandon God's mission altogether because things were not moving fast enough for them... (the baby with the bath approach I named earlier)
- They wanted to escape the transitional process that comes with doing God's work and take some shortcuts;
- And their shortcuts will prove to delay their progress that much further...
- Because as a slight side note, that is what shortcuts tend to do in life anyway...
- **They delay** our progress...
- **They prolong** our hardships.....
- Shortcuts tend to rob us from our spiritual and learning growth process and potential.
- And as a result, we miss out on the fullness of God's promises....

- But what I am learning as I get older and wiser is that patience is definitely a virtue
- Furthermore, I am willing to wait for what God has in store for me.....
- **Because when I look over my own life,**
- I have named this before but it is worth repeating; that there was a ten year period of my life; where I truly wondered if I was meant to have it all...
- **There was a period** where I was not sure if I could be a pastor and have love at the same time; beyond my motherly love for my children and the love they have for me...
- And **there were times** in that transitional period where I too was like the Israelites and tried to speed up my process.....
- **There were times** that I tried to take shortcuts in my journey; only to end up in the same spot...sometimes having to make up for ground that I already covered...

- And **so it wasn't** until I accepted that whatever God had in store for me would take a time of transition....
- **It wasn't** until I realized that I had to allow the transition of my life to play out fully...no shortcuts!
- That the full magnitude of my life purpose and call and even love prospect began to open up....
- Where 10 years later, I would be invited to serve first as an associate in Lincoln, meet my life mate and ministry partner; my husband Stephen— and eventually be appointed here at First UMC, where I am hoping we are all beginning to celebrate that **we are a good fit together!**
- But it took going through the necessary transitions of accepting that God's timing is not always my own timing...
- **To accept that God's ways** are not always my ways....
- But **the transitions have taught me** to understand that the best is truly yet to come....

- **The transitions have taught me** that most of the times they are necessary, so that I can get to the place of where I am supposed to be and be freed to be my best self and live my best life....
- So this is where I will end the first part of our conversation this morning; ending with the thought that **although transitions** are uncomfortable;
- **Although transitions** tend to last longer than most of would like them to....
- The homework for us to continue to wrestle with is this question;
- Where would we be in our lives if it were not for the transitions that we have experienced?
- Perhaps our own individual answers to this question may invite us to consider the transitions in our lives to be blessings in disguise; hence why they are holy.

Sunday June 6, 2021

Sermon Series: Holy Transitions Part 2

First Lesson: Psalm 138

Gospel Lesson: Mark 3: 20-35

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are continuing with part 2 of our sermon series that we have just begun entitled “Holy Transitions.”

- As I stated in the earlier service; that for those who knows me as a preacher/teacher of the Gospel; that the sermon series that the Holy Spirit has given me are designed to build on one another.
- Furthermore the two distinct sermons preached every Sunday morning are designed to build on one another as well;
- Where the earlier message focuses more on our individual lives and spiritual journey; so that we can take what we have examined and worked on to the

later service and apply our learnings to the collective Church as a whole...

- For the idea is that Church starts with ourselves...
- We are the Church.....Amen!
- So as I attempt to lay put this new sermon series *Holy Transitions*; my theological rationale is that now that we have done the tough work in our last sermon series; Holy Repair: a series that named the areas of repair that is needed in both our individual lives so that we can do the work of repair;
- Now you and I are able to now tackle the angst that I am imagining most of us feels with the idea of transitions.
- And so to repeat the definition of transition to ensure that we are all on the same page; *it is the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.*
- So the area that I am raising that I suspect is a challenge for most of us; if not all of us, is the little

word that is embedded in this definition of transition called **change**.

- Let's face it, in life there is seldom a time that a person can make a generalized statement and it be correct ; but even in my saying this; **I would bet that** I could make a generalized statement that declare that **no one likes change**; and almost everyone in this room; if not everyone.... would agree.
- **That change** is not something that we as humans often embrace.....
- **That change** is often seen as a viable threat to our day to day existence...
- Now even in my naming this, I realize that some transitions or changes in our lives, we do tend to appreciate a little more; although planning is still something to be considered;
- So transitions such as births, or graduations and new relationships and engagements are generally something that we accept with some measure of

gratitude and even hopeful anticipation and excitement.

- Other transitions however, can cause some level of discomfort; such as the death and dying process, divorce, loss of a pet (which my family is still working through); finding a new job and sometimes moving homes or states can cause us a large amount of stress.
- But this is where I will revisit the question that I raised in the conclusion of the earlier sermon on this subject.
- I asked the question, where would we be if it were not for some of the transitions that have occurred in our lives?
- Because as I examine my own life; I shuddered to think what would happen if I did not go through some of the transitions that I have...
- I know there is a strong chance that I would have never met my husband Stephen...

- There is a chance that I would not have had my daughters...
- There is a chance I would not have ever stepped foot in Lincoln, Nebraska; let alone be in front of you all right now....
- So it is with this train of thought that I concluded with the theological assertion that sometimes; often times; **transitions are necessary**; so that we can arrive fully to our purpose and call in life.
- Furthermore, I encourage you all in your own lives to think about the transitions that you have made over the years in your own life journey.
- I would imagine that your discoveries may be very similar to mine own; that if it were not for a lot of the transitions that we take; there could be some missed opportunities all around us!

- **However even in my naming this, I can also reasonably assess that if many of us had it our way, we would never change anything about our lives.**
- However, my life experience has informed me that often times; if you and I are not open to the change and transitions that come with living; then we become stagnant.
- Because again, as I look over my own life, it took certain transitions for me to be able to be where I am today.
- So again, the earlier sermon raised an important dialogue that I encourage you to look at when you have the time;
- I also encourage you to keep applying this process of thought to your own lives.
- Because I am working on this main idea and thought that dealing with transitions is skillset we must all learn if we wish to remain viable in our communities as a church.

- Being able to deal with transitions is what will strengthen us and equip us for whatever life has to throw our way!

- **Now looking more closely at our gospel today and bringing it more directly into our conversation; I am seeing another type of transition occur that will inform our work as the church as a whole.**
- So before revealing the transition that I am seeing for us as the collective church; allow me to unpack what is going on in our gospel.
- For how I am experiencing our gospel today; the one thing that is glaringly obvious in my eyes is that **Jesus is being labelled.**
- **The family labels him** mad while the scribes from Jerusalem **label Jesus as** demon-possessed.
- Now the setting is in a house, a place where much of Jesus' teaching is given.
- Jesus' family comes to restrain him.
- In good ancient Semitic tradition, the family assumes responsibility for the disciplining of a wayward or deviant son, even if he is already grown up.
- Moreover, this is done to protect the family's honor.

- All this means Jesus' teaching, deeds, and claims must have been quite shocking to his peers.
- The scene changes with v. 22, and some scribes from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzeboul.
- The meaning of this term is uncertain although "lord of the house" or "lord of the heavenly abode" seems most cogent.
- In any case, in so charging Jesus, the scribes tacitly agree, that Jesus' ministry has been characterized by extraordinarily authoritative exorcisms, since the alleged power behind his work is attributed to no less a figure than the prince of demons.
- So stepping outside of this text, a rather sobering reality has struck me as an orator and pursuer of the gospel.
- That what you and I are witnessing is a snapshot view of how some view and label the work that we are striving to do; which is a major transition that the church as a whole will need to work through.

- This idea that although you and I within the church may be bought in fully to the work that we are doing and striving to do; the sobering reality is that not everyone is going to be on board.
- Some people are not going to be onboard with the mission of spreading God's love to all and for empowering people with the knowledge of who and whose they are; simply because they may not believe in the God that we are striving to follow.
- There is a substantial segment of our population that identify as atheist or agnostic; even in our very own congregation; who appreciate aspects of the church; but all in all do not find it particularly necessary or helpful or even factual.
- There is another segment of our population, who have believed in the Church and all it stands for and has a connection with God or spirituality on some level; but because of the level of judgment, hypocrisy and emotional/physical violence that have occurred in the name of the Church, they have left the Church.

- Either way, there is a variety of reasons why people have left the church and as a result; what this gospel is revealing to me, **is the mental, spiritual and emotional transition** that it is going to take for the Church; to reset and address some of these labels we have received; as a result of some of our shortcomings that have been intentional and unintentional....
- You know Matthew 25 really brings the sobering truth to the Church as a whole; that **there are times** that we have not fed the hungry;
- **There are times** we have not clothed the naked;
- **There are times** we have imprisoned the captives;
- **There are times** that we allowed the thirsty to become dehydrated;
- **There are times** that the church has spewed out theology that is the antithesis of God's message of love and inclusion;
- **There are times** that we have treated others as if they are not a child of God;

- **There are times** that we have told people that they are not a child of God;
- Or that God does not love them or that God will never accept them....
- **So there are these labels;** that the Church will have to own; that will take a transition for people to be able remove;
- **There are some labels** that some people have of the Church because of how deeply seeded their church hurt really is;
- Making all of this and more **will be a sobering transition** that the Church will have to wrestle with...
- **This will be a sobering transition** that the Church will have to face head on;
- For Covid even exacerbated a problem that many of us all have been naming as a whole;
- That **the Church as a whole** is on trial for her misconduct;
- **The Church as a whole** is on trial for his abuse;

- **The Church as a whole**; is on trial for her misguided theology or should I say deceptive ideologies;
- The Church as a whole is on trial;
- This non profit entity is on trial and hanging on by a thread **as to whether** she can still be viable or not;
- **As to whether** the Church can remain relevant or not;
- **As to whether** the Church can be Resurrected into her full potential and glory.
- So this is going to be a major transition for us as a Church as a whole;
- **A major transition that will ask us** to revisit some of our tradition;
- **A major transition** that will require us to re-examine the Word of God and deconstruct some of our harmful theologies and ideologies;
- **A major transition** that will require us to look at our human experiences and name our truths and growing edges;

- **A major transition** that will invite us to reassess our reasons for why we do what we do and challenge us to make sure that our reasoning aligns with God's reason....that will challenge us to make sure that our ways reflect God's ways!
- This Wesleyan quadrilateral that I have named (since John Wesley is the founder of Methodism); **reason, experience, tradition and Word; with the Scriptures serving as our ultimate foundation;** is what is going to require a major transition for us;
- To re-examine;
- To reflect upon;
- To even deconstruct;
- So that we can ensure that the family of Christ is restored;
- So that we can ensure that the family of Christ remains intact.
- And the good news is that I believe in all of this sobering truth I have placed before us; the good news is that I believe it can be done.

- In fact I know that the Church can do better than she has done;
- And I am thankful for the theology of Grace that we do subscribe to...
- A theology that informs us that we all will fall short in our humanity;
- But we are able to be forgiven and have the assurance in our confessional pursuit of Christian perfection towards agape love and light; that we can be Resurrected from this human debacle we have gotten ourselves entangled in.
- Jesus teaches us that our confession, pardon and declaration of our faith can help us to restore the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven!
- We just have to be willing to do so.
- Let the Church say Amen