

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"On the Edge of the New Normal"

Based on Acts 1:6-11

Ever had that feeling when you are nearing the end of a great vacation and you know from your itinerary, that your time away is quickly drawing to a close, but you still try to eke out a few more memories, and stretch out those last few minutes or hours as if you were Einstein himself, changing the way time moves.

Or, more sadly, when you know deep within, that a relationship has come to an end, or even more sadly, that death approaches someone you care about, and yet, in your mind, you try to stretch out the time as long as you can, or longer perhaps than you should. Why? Because the uncertainty and emotion of what comes next, feels rather like falling off a cliff, and you wish to postpone it as long as possible.

If you are feeling a slight twisting deep within your belly, then you are in the right place. And I am sorry to have taken you to this place. But this is the place where

the disciples were, as they watched Jesus disappear from their sight, never to return again.

Truth be told, they had been on borrowed time for a while, trying to stretch out their moments with Jesus as long as possible. But deep within their hearts, they knew things could not continue as they were, and things could never go back to the way they had been. Too much water under the bridge.

- There had been Calvary and all its horror.
- There had been grief and its overwhelming sense of loss.
- There had been resurrection, with details that were fuzzy and unclear.
- There had been disbelief.

The disciples had lived these last few weeks with Jesus, thankful for the time, but knowing, things were going to change, again.

And then, He was gone.
And the air was silent.
And the disciples looked at one another.
And fear began to settle upon them.
What would they do now?

Where would they go?
Would they be in as much danger as Christ had been?
Would they slink home and pick up where they left off?
Would they "Take up their Cross" as the hymn says, and continue the work?
And that fear settled deeper within them.

Then we are told two men dressed in white appeared:
"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (v11)

"What are you standing around here for," the men began. "You look like a bunch of fools wandering around in circles looking up at the clouds. He's not gone. He's just not here anymore. But He's not gone. It's time for you to do His work. So get going, and get busy."

There are three important messages from the Men in White.

- 1) Christ has not left you.
- 2) He needs you to lead now.
- 3) Don't be afraid.

Two months ago we shut down our lives in a great panic, in *fear* of a virus that could take our health or our life. We were not happy about the situation, but we took seriously, the gravity of the approaching sickness, and with a deep breath, each and every one of us adjusted our lives and hunkered down into this strange time of waiting for release, as spring released itself around us. We have learned to manage in this in-between time.

Now, we are trying to make our way out of this holding pattern, as businesses and shops and programs begin to open their doors again, slowly. Here in British Columbia, we started what is called Phase 2, as we wait and see if the virus resurges, or continues to be subdued by our efforts. But as we begin to discuss what this 'new normal' might look at, in our community and here at Knox, in terms of our church activity, something strange is happening: fear is returning. This time, the fear is about things like:

- When is it safe to mix and mingle?
- Is it wise for me to go get groceries?
- I'm afraid to go back to church.
- I don't know what this 'new normal' is going to look like.

We changed our lives abruptly because of an urgent need to do so. It was difficult and unpleasant, but we did it. Maybe kicking and screaming all the while, but we did it. But changing back again, is going to be even harder. Moving back to normal, or moving forward into the 'new normal' can be just as scary, or even scarier than before. And some of us are becoming afraid again.

We know that coming back to life in this 'new normal' will mean more adjustments.

- We long for it.
- We wait impatiently for it.
- While at the same time, we are afraid of it.

Because sometimes, it's comforting to think that staying in this strange in-between place is less fearful than moving back into whatever this 'new normal' will look like. But hiding in the in-between is not life giving, it is suffocating. And Christ has things for you to do.

Do you feel like a disciple right now, looking up at the sky, longing for things to go back the way they were, even if that means lingering in this in-between time? Yet, knowing deep within that things can't go back to the way they were, and feeling very uncertain of what is to come next?

For you who listen.
Know this.

Christ has not left you.

He needs you to be a strong voice for Him, even if you are not feeling particularly strong right now.

And he whispers quietly but insistently:

Be not afraid.

I go before you always.

Come follow me,

and I will give you rest.

My friends, the coming weeks may seem almost as uncertain as the first few weeks we were apart. We keep hearing words like "soon," "wait," and "patience." And all I can say is, "Yes, soon, I hope, we will be together again. But in the mean time, we must be patient, and wait." And as things ease, and opportunities return, if you feel anxiety begin to wrap itself around your heart that is bursting to get out into the sunshine, be wise in the activities you chose, and the safety measure you use, but don't be afraid to begin to live again.

Be not afraid. I go before you always.

~Bob Dulford