

And So Much More...
Acts 2:1-13; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

I wanted to say something important today about the passage of time. Today is Pentecost; in the story of this day God's Spirit crashes into human life, changing everything forever in a single moment. One instant of inspiration that started a whole new age in the human story of life with God. And then, in this same book we call *Scripture*, there is the soft, mesmerizing motion of that poem from Ecclesiastes that says 'there is a season for everything'. In my ears those words are gentle, a sway of reassurance that everything will happen in its own time. In the right time.

I think something might happen when we hold those two passages up next to each other in the reflection of our lives, and how life seems to work. How does God come to us? Are we changed by the things that crash into our routines, our consciousness; or more often by the gentle pull of a goodness that slowly and steadily draws us in? I still want to think about that. I think you should think about that.

But maybe not this morning. This morning I want to use this time to say thank you.

For twenty-five years I have gotten to do this work that has felt, not every day but most of the time, like the best job in the world. Ministry has given my life meaning and purpose. Church has been for me a space to grow and be thoughtful, a container big enough to hold everything I've had in me to pour out. On this day, which really is the last day I imagine myself standing in this pulpit or in any pulpit, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. I want to tell you this morning the things I have loved most about this work, and about this time with you.

I once read that what an introvert dislikes is not people, but small talk. I think that's true—at least for this introvert. Ministry saved me from small talk. It's the key that has let me into important conversations. You and I have talked in the hospital, and after the hospital, and when all you've had is a frightening diagnosis. We've talked about grief—your grief and mine. We've talked about your fear and your hopes—for your children, your spouse, your parents. Your faith. Your doubts. The decisions that were in front of you. The meaning of what just happened. It has been an incredible privilege to hear your stories. Thank you.

Thank you for letting me talk to you. Every Sunday you have showed up for another installment of this five-year conversation that preaching here has felt like to me. You've sat with me as I explored what I think God might be saying to us now. Processed with me the things I've been reading, what I see happening in the world.

In the years when I was an unhappy lawyer searching for what else I might do for a living, I thought for a while that I might like to be an op-ed columnist, someone who writes for the public and comments on the social condition. That's kind of what I have gotten to do as a preacher; only it's God's voice I am trying to convey rather than my own. So much better.

Every week for the past five years, when I read something new, I couldn't wait to share it with you. I was like a kid running home from school to tell his mom what new thing I learned. When I

discovered a new turn of phrase, or some new theological idea occurred to me and I wanted to test it, to see if it resonated for anyone else, you let me try it out on you.

It is a remarkable thing to be listened to, to be heard as if the words coming out of your mouth are important enough to stop for. Your listening has been an invitation to me to keep growing into my own humanity, week by week, year by year; like a piece of paper unfolding until the message written on the page comes into full view. You can do this for anyone; everyone needs to be heard. Thank you for doing it for me.

When I decided to leave the practice of law and go back to school, I had only the vaguest sense of calling. Even though I was an adult, my parents were once again my safety net. Their support gave me the courage to do something that might turn out to be wholly impractical, and to know that even if I failed, if *it* failed, I would not fall into the abyss. Since I've been ordained, the United Methodist Church has done the same thing for me. I have always known I could try other pursuits that felt like they were calling to me, and come back. Every time I've done that, the road has led me back to the Church. I'm grateful for that. I'd like to think of myself as someone who does not need safety nets. But truth is, I do. We all do, no matter how capable we think we are.

This church, this structure, this community you support in so many ways, has been a safety net too. You've made it possible for us to do so much interesting, out-on-the-edge work. I think about the experiments we've tried together, and the inspired, gifted people I've gotten to work with:

- A brave group of lay leaders who penned the words we have lived by: *connection, compassion, courage*.
- Pastor Sam at Front Porch,
- Carol in Art Changes Us,
- Pastor Jeremy as he launched the *Zoay* app,
- Pastor Jeong's new initiatives in Gen2Gen ministry,
- Brittany's ways of connecting children to their own inner spirit.
- Lee's energetic re-start of youth's ministry for a new generation of young people.
- Siteri's ministry on the Mountain View campus that's dedicated entirely to the holy work of neighboring.
- The expansion of Compassion Week into the bold vision it's always had, to be a whole-community outpouring of service.
- I've gotten to be part of (and more often just stand by and watch in awe) Dirk's creativity as we planned worship every week; and Carol's, as she turns this sanctuary into a work of art again and again.
- And so much more.

This place launched the Changemaker Initiative, which has been the biggest adventure of my professional life. This idea--that the Gospel could be re-imagined as an invitation to every person to join Jesus in the compassion-driven, creative work of changing the world--in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, our community--that idea has turned me upside down and shaken out onto the table everything I have ever learned about God, about church, about what it means to be fully human. Here, in this congregation, I found the gifted group of partners--Kim Jones, Karen Kehlet, Yvonne Murray--who now hold this vision and who will carry it on.

Thank you for your generosity and your courage that have given me, all of us, collaborators and partners. Thank you for *being* collaborators and partners. In this place, it has felt like we really are all in it together.

And while I have loved these innovations, this thinking of new ways to do church and to be church—what has mattered to me most is no different from what has driven pastors into ministry forever. It's the opportunity to be near you and see God moving inside of you. To watch from a close-up seat how you are being transformed into who you were meant to be, into the image of God. There is nothing that means more to me than when you have told me that in some small way, our conversations—either across a pulpit or one-on-one—have helped you see something you had not seen before.

I wrote down somewhere, years ago—and that probably means these were someone else's words first—'I want to live and speak so that people grow in curiosity about the God I love.' You have given me a place and a position where I could try to do that. Thank you.

Even longer ago than that, a line from an Indigo Girls song stamped itself on me. For all the things I cannot remember now, this sentence has never left me. It's a song to an ex-lover, and the line goes, *'There must be a thousand things you would die for; I can hardly think of two.'* I remembered it, I think, because it described me for a long time. I was curious about many things, convicted about not much. My life in ministry has changed that. It's not so much that I know what I would die for; but I know now what is worth living for.

First, that there is a lifetime of purpose and meaning in knowing, and in trying to understand and be part of, what it means to be loved entirely, by the God who treasures not just me or you, but every piece, every moment, every dusty abandoned corner of creation.

And the second is that our fullest humanity lies in giving yourself away for the sake of others, for love. That truth is strewn everywhere in the stories of Jesus, the ground of our tradition. I recently found it again in the words of a Mary Oliver poem called *What is the Greatest Gift?* The greatest gift is this, the poet says:

*That you have a life that I wonder about
more than I wonder about my own.
That you have a life—courteous, intelligent—
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own.
That you have a soul—your own, no one else's—
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own.
So that I find my soul clapping its hands for yours
more than my own.*

You have been a great gift to me. My soul is clapping its hands for yours.
It will be always.

Thank you for having me here these last five years, Los Altos United Methodist Church.
Thank you for letting me come among you and hang out in your pulpit.
Thank you for giving me a container and companions for living the life God was calling me to.
I hope I have given you my best. I know you have given me yours.

I love you.