

Second Sunday of Easter  
April 19, 2009  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church  
Grand Island, NY  
John 20:11-29

## “Transition”

by

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For three years he had circulated about the region. Masses of people had heard him preach and teach. Many had seen him heal. Yet for all the masses, there was an “inner circle” that came to know him most intimately. These were “the twelve” plus a number of men and women, among whom was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and others.

This “inner circle” had experienced him one on one. They had come to understand more deeply things about which he spoke. They had gleaned impressions about his character. Their perceptions of him, you might say, were “informed.”

Out of this three year experience they developed “expectations” of him and made “commitments” to him. But all of this had come to a jarring halt. Following a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, a contentious enter-change with temple activists, intense “summary” teachings to those who would listen, a final Passover dinner with his inner circle, arrest, trial and scourging, and, finally, death by crucifixion and burial in a tomb – after all of this there was silence in the land.

Then came the first day of the week. The “inner circle” had been through so much! Much too much had transpired in those final days. Some would say it represented the culmination of Jesus’ ministry. Now there was silence. Silence that signaled they were in for a “**transition.**”

**Transitions** for human beings suggest movement from the known toward the unknown. Movement from a known past and present toward an unknown future that has yet to be revealed. The transition for the “inner circle” meant movement from an “equipping” stage to a “being responsible” stage. It meant movement from a “preparation” stage to an “implementation” stage.

How do you think the “inner circle” would handle this period of transition?

The answer is what you would expect: They would handle this transition with a **range of emotions** just like you do when you face transitions in your life. Try to recall the range of emotions you felt when you faced important transitions in your life. Like when you...faced the loss of a spouse or loved one...faced a change of jobs and work place...faced going from active employment to a “retirement” mode...like when you changed schools or sport teams.

When we encounter **transitions**, we meet them with a range of emotions. It is a fact of life. It is perfectly normal.

Likewise the “inner circle,” when they faced the reality of **this** transition...when Jesus, whom they loved, had gone from active in their lives...to death on a cross...to an unknown future.

Their range of emotions is instructive.

According to the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John,

1. (Verses 11-18) Mary Magdalene experienced **confusion**.

Alone with herself...at the tomb which was open and empty...she could not imagine anything but “bad.” It was not in her capacity at the moment “to see” anything but the worst. Jesus was gone! Life was over for him! The end had arrived!

Consequently, when she was faced with an image of a man who seemed somewhat familiar, she assumed that it was a “gardener.” She could not imagine that it was Jesus.

And, yet, Jesus it was. In the **transition**, God had re-presented Jesus to her. God had re-presented Jesus to her because for God, this was only **a transition...not the end**.

2. (Verses 19-23) The “disciples” (ten of them) experienced **fear**.

Fear had seized them...justifiably so. They reasoned, if they could do it to Jesus, they could do it to them!

Life was tenuous at that moment in history. The worst had happened...they had killed Jesus. It could happen again...to them!

Fear was a natural reaction.

But what they had failed to realize was that this was only a **transition. It was not the end**. God would help them get through the fear. He would re-present Jesus...give him to stand in their midst...to interact with them in ways that would reassure them...like, let them touch him...hear him...speak to him...be filled with his spirit.

God showed them that this was **only a transition, it was not the end**. God would show them that they need not be overcome by fear.

3. (Verses 24-29) The disciple not with them that day, Thomas, experienced **doubt.**

When Thomas got word of the visit on that first day...a visitation both with Mary Magdalene at the tomb and with the disciples in the house where they were hiding..., Thomas reacted with: “No way!” (disbelief)...which gave way to “Maybe, but show me!”

For Thomas, it was a matter of standing back...folding his arms across his chest...and saying “We’ll see!” Thomas was skeptical. He adopted a “wait and see” posture.

To Thomas’ credit, when God re-presented Jesus to him...so he could see and touch him...so he could experience his presence once again...When God “showed him,” Thomas became a believer once again. (and a strong one at that).

Thomas came to believe that it was **only a transition, it was not the end.**

In the life of a Christian, there will be many **transitions** to face. But remember: **they are only transitions, they are not the end.**

St. Timothy is in the midst of a **transition.**

Only last week you said farewell to Pastor Mary Anne. For a hand full of you, you cannot imagine life at St. Timothy without her. You feel “it never will be the same.” Many of you can identify with these sisters and brothers who are feeling this way because you were in that place when Pastors Doug and Joanne Stewart left or when Pastor Scarafia left.

Some of St. Timothy...who love their church very much...may be feeling some fear. “Will this ‘transition’ undermine the gains of the past several years?” Uncertainty can breed fear.

Some of St. Timothy may be facing this “transition” having adopted a “wait and see attitude”...or worse: “Prove it to me! Show me that this can be a period of strengthening and movement toward a greater tomorrow for St. Timothy!”

What you need to remember is that **God is in this transition...that God will continue to re-present Jesus** to you. God will continue to re-present Jesus to you in ways that are fresh. God will re-present Jesus to you in ways that are different from all the rest in the past. In fact, God may re-present Jesus to some of you for the very first time!

What an amazingly important time this is! This is not the end; it is a time of birthing of the next generation St. Timothy. It is a **transition.**

In this transition, there are three “wild cards.” Call them “unknowns.” (God is not one of them.) The three wild cards are:

1. You
2. Me (or my equivalent)
3. The shape of “the next generation St. Timothy.”

Based upon what I know about churches across the country, I would have to say the biggest wild card is you, the congregation. I say that because you are most vulnerable to falling into “confusion” (inability to imagine what’s next), to being overcome by “fear,” which immobilizes and to opting for “doubt,” which can be self-fulfilling.

However, it does not have to be that way with you. In fact, I am optimistic about your potential, based upon the little I have seen and come to know over the past three weeks.

What I ask of you in this transition is three things:

1. Be kind and sensitive to one another (including to me).
2. Be deeply in prayer, seeking to see Jesus, seeking to discover his heart and to know his power... in your personal life and in this ministry of his, called St. Timothy.
3. Be open to God’s using you to bring about the next generation St. Timothy.

Join with me in prayer....

AMEN