

## **Transitioning On – John 17 – May 13, 2018**

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Life is full of transitions. As creatures of habit, we humans prefer life when things are routine. We like consistency. Yet one of the great truths of life is – things change. While some transitions are unexpectedly abrupt, many changes are anticipated. How we go about facing change when it occurs will impact our ability to get through it smoothly. Some transitions in life are positive – like a marriage, or a new baby, a job promotion, or graduation from school. Some transitions aren't so positive – like a divorce, or a death of a loved one, a diagnosis of a serious illness, or losing a job. Some changes can have both positive and negative aspects. Whether good or bad or a mixture, change is inevitable. And just about any transition can be made easier if we prepare for it.

Recently, many of my friends have been posting photos on Facebook of graduations of their children or other family members. Seeing the photos of these smiling graduates in their caps and gowns, I cannot help but recall my own graduations. Memories of investing ourselves not only in a time and a place, but also in relationships. Excited to move on into the new adventures that life has in store for us, but sad to be saying goodbye to the people and places and routines that had become familiar.

It is always hard to say good-bye to the people who have a significant impact on our lives. Moving on can be a difficult transition. And for Jesus and his disciples, it was no different.

Over the past few weeks our scripture lessons from John's Gospel have come from what is traditionally called the Farewell Discourse of Jesus. From chapter 14 of John all the way through chapter 17 of this gospel we have the words of Jesus on the night of the Last Supper. This conversation occurred just a few short hours prior to his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Imagine what it must have been like for Jesus, knowing that his time of ministry with his disciples was coming to end. He needed to sit down with them and wrap up all the loose ends. Tie it all together for them, so they wouldn't be so lost after he was gone.

Granted he would have some more time with them following his resurrection, but that would be for only a short while. In fact, this past Thursday marks the day of Jesus' ascension into Heaven. Some forty days after his Easter Sunday return, Jesus made one final farewell to his followers and ascended into heaven. Before he left them,

Jesus had no worries. In his final teachings to his disciples, he had spelled it all out for them, giving them hope and assurance that everything would be all right.

There is an old legend that says: when Jesus ascended into heaven he was stopped by the angel Gabriel, who asked him, "Lord, what plans have you made for carrying on your ministry in the world? How will people learn about what you have done for them?" And Jesus replied to Gabriel, "I left that to Peter, James and John, to Mary and Martha, and to all the others. They are to tell their friends and then their friends will tell other friends until the whole world has heard the good news." Gabriel then asked him, "Well, what if Peter is too busy with his fishing and Martha so caught up in her housework and the others so preoccupied that they all forget to tell their friends? Don't you think you should make some other plans?" Jesus smiled at the distraught angel. "I have made no other plans," he said, "I am counting on my children to spread my name and my love."

And Jesus prepared his disciples for that task. Throughout his ministry and especially at the end, Jesus laid the foundation for the spread of his gospel. He not only instructed his followers but also gave them reassurance that they would not be orphaned or abandoned even though he would not be physically present with them. These chapters from John's gospel give us a portrait of some of the encouraging and hopeful words he gave them in anticipation of his departure.

This particular passage from chapter 17 catches Jesus in mid prayer. He is speaking with God, whom he calls Father and draws upon the intimate relationship that they share. Last week's passage spoke of their mutual abiding in one another and how, when we follow Christ's command to love one another, we too are brought into that relationship of love with God. And now Jesus prays for the disciples, asking for God to be present with them and guide them as they are sent out into the world to deliver the message of God's love.

Jesus understands that without him present with them, they will feel lost and afraid. They may struggle with what they have been taught by him, and how to live that out in the world, when the world doesn't always see things the way they now do. And so, in this prayer, he not only comforts them in the loss they are about to experience but asks for God to support them and strengthen them as they go out and share the message of the gospel.

The world is a complicated place – full of beauty and kindness, but also corrupted by selfishness and greed. Sometimes it's hard to discover what is true and good. Jesus knows that his message contradicts the many and varied messages that the world often embraces. For the disciple, trying to live in the face of these contradictions, it may seem easier to simply pull away from the world. To leave the world to its own destructive devices and instead, focus on the promises of eternity. How easy it would be to step away from any conflict, to not get involved, to avoid making a scene, and to live inside one's own protective shell. Let someone else worry about it. We have enough to worry about on our own.

But love of God doesn't stop with just us. God loves all people and wants all people to experience that love. Like we talked about last week, love is active in the world. Love requires for us to step out of our zones of comfort, stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves, get our hands dirty and take risks for others. But in this prayer, Jesus reminds us we don't have to rely on our own strength and that we are never alone.