

JULY 7, 2024 FPCPH Pastor Roxie Davis; SERMON: Passing the Baton;

SCRIPTURE: Acts Chapter 1: 1-11 COMMUNION;

INTRODUCTION—PREACHING SERIES

We are into a new Preaching Series for the Month of July—different than what was originally planned. The Preaching Theme for July is Change—Transitions—are the Constant in our lives.” How we handle change shows how comfortable we are in trusting God in all things, and being able to move forward, respecting his purposes and plans for our lives.

HUMILITY AND PRIDE

We can handle Change—with Humility, relying not on our wisdom but on God’s wisdom OR We can handle Change—with Pride which usually means that we think we are self-sufficient and have the answers to our circumstances... Not really consulting with God in prayer, and accepting come what may. I like what my middle daughter Christina often says: “It is, what it is.”—not being afraid of what is happening now and what lies ahead. “It is what it is.” Change is a Daily Occurrence. Change is Constant. And sometimes it is uncomfortable. Change brings on Transitions—which may prove to be a way that God calls us into a “new day.”

SERIOUS STUFF

This past week, we celebrated our Freedom, remembering the Second Continental Congress which unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, It announced the colonies separation from Great Britain. More simply put (I think I have told this story to You before), my daughter Tabitha who is married to a Brit, Adam, needed to answer the question of her two young sons, years ago, as to why the U.S. celebrates July 4th. To make it simple for their young minds, Tabitha said, “That’s when my country (the USA) beat up your Dad’s country, Great Britain and we won our freedom.” OK a bit simplistic. But we all know the Declaration of Independence heralded in—lots of Change. There were lots of entities and institutions which would have to Transition from one way of doing government to another. It wasn’t easy but it was meaningful and today we are the benefactors of the freedom they fought so hard to achieve, and to carve out from that “change” the United States of America. Huge Changes. Lots of Transition. It required perseverance, humility but it brought our freedom, for which we **must** be grateful. Those men and women, in those early days, were bold and brave to move into the change—trusting that God would be with them. And God was! That is why we celebrate the 4th of July.

JESUS LEAVES THE DISCIPLES

Now let us go to our Scripture for today. Certainly a time of Change and Transition. Was it easy? No. Was it worthwhile? Yes. Are we the benefactors of that change? Absolutely. In our Scripture for today, we hear of Jesus leaving the disciples—Again!!

CRUCIFIXION

Remember—Jesus dies on the cross. The disciples go through the immense grief of that cruel act of crucifixion. They do not know the significance of it—It being a sign of God's love for His people; The forgiveness of all our sins, Jesus, dying, taking on all our sins—taking on our punishment for what we have done against God.

In the Crucifixion, everything in the disciples' lives Change. Jesus is no more. Jesus, their leader, their rabbi, their presumed Messiah is dead on a cross.

RESURRECTION

It is after 3 days in the grave that **Jesus is raised to life, by the power of God.** According to the Gospels, he appears to Mary Magdalene, Then to Peter and John, Then to all the Disciples, even to Thomas—"come lately, with his doubts." And according to I Corinthians 15: 5-8, He appears to over 500 people, who were together all in one place. It is in the Book of Acts where we see Jesus with His disciples on the day of His Ascension. As it said in our Scripture for today, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples, speaking to them about the Kingdom of God, teaching them about the changes that would occur, especially the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that some of the disciples thought that Jesus was back for good—He would again be with them and lead them. Not so. They were in for another Change—Another Transition in their lives as Jesus' disciples. During those precious 40 days with the Risen Lord, Jesus advises the disciples to go into Jerusalem and wait for the power they would receive through the Holy Spirit, so that they can be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Basically the disciples know very little about the Holy Spirit—the One who was going to take over for Jesus on earth, in the ministry and in the hearts of those early disciples. It is like me telling many of you—My job is done as your interim—transitional pastor. Your next called pastor will take care of you and will minister alongside you. Some of you may not believe me or like what I say... Because you know very little about the next pastor. In change—in transitions—no matter where the change is happening—personally—communally—nationally—globally--**Getting through the change is all about trust—it is about humility before God--Trusting that ultimately God knows what God is doing.**

DISCIPLES—CHANGE—TRANSITION

When Jesus is lifted up to heaven in the **Ascension, Change comes**, heralding in a **Time of Transition—Jesus transferring the Holy Spirit, to be within the Disciples, the Whole Work and Word of God in them**, The Holy Spirit within them will spread the Word about Jesus, to the ends of the earth. **Quite the Transfer of Power.**

STARRING INTO THE HEAVENS

But when Jesus is taken up to heaven, it seems to me that some of the disciples are **paralyzed—panicked**, thinking, **He's Gone—Again—This Time for Good. The Disciples are stuck in the past—They don't want to accept the inevitable Change of Jesus, not being physically with them. They stand there, gazing up towards the heavens. But two messengers from God (angels) come to them**, saying: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand **looking up towards heaven?**" This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." **Jesus** (their Rabbi, Teacher—Son of God) is **physically gone from earth**. They—and we, relying on the Holy Spirit, will move towards God, in the midst of change—in the times of transition—and in the transfer of heavenly power.

JESUS' COMING AGAIN

As you all know, Jesus' "coming again" has not occurred yet—We are still waiting—God relied on those early disciples to tell others about Jesus; God is now relying on us to continue to tell people about Jesus—until the end comes. God is telling all of us—Don't waste your time—gazing into the sky—Remaining in the past—Resisting the change that is coming—**Embrace the Holy Spirit, sent by God**. The Holy Spirit will lead us through the change—Transitioning us into new adventures—**Helping us to pass the Baton. Passing the Baton—Both my girls-Tabitha and Christina—were into running track in high school. I loved seeing them run—Tabitha—a short distant runner. Christina became a Marathon runner. She has run 25 marathons in different countries all over the world. However, I don't think I ever told my girls but the track event that I really liked the most was the relay—the "passing of the baton" because it took teamwork—and I believe that is what the church is all about.**

Doing our part and passing on to others--The ministry of Jesus Christ. Passing the Baton is what life is all about. Passing it to the next generation! **But when you pass the Baton, Change happens—You are not the one running anymore—someone else is running. You are trusting that they will carry the baton to the next person and thus, over the finish line.**

BIBLE FULL OF THE BATON PASS

Throughout the Bible the Baton of the Gospel Is passed along, from one person to another. It changes hands—it changes hearts. **We will see this in the weeks to come.** John the Baptist introduces Jesus to the people and then he is gone. Jesus ascends to heaven and Relying on the Holy Spirit, Peter and the other disciples become the mouthpiece for God. The Apostle Paul is commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles and then his life ends in a Roman prison. The baton is passed to the churches he planted. **Change is uncomfortable—But it is inevitable. It is constant.** God knows that—He gives us the Holy Spirit which will help us to trust God as the world changes; As transitions happen in our personal and church life; God's baton gets passed. **It is all in God's hands.** Just trust Him to lead you—to lead us—through the changes that occur and will occur every day of our lives.