

Easter II, April 28, 2019. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA. Nigel Taber-Hamilton  
Acts 5:27-32, Revelation 1:4-8, Luke 24:13-35

A card. On the front, a map of Whidbey. Inside, a note: "Dear friends, As a member of the family of St. Augustine's, I look forward to your arrival to the beautiful northwest; more especially to Whidbey Island.....Have a safe trip, Love and Prayers..." It's marked September 27, 2000, Clinton WA, and signed by Barbara Moss (of late memory). If you want to see the card it'll be in Campbell Hall.

And what did it really say? Family. Safe Trip. Love and Prayers. As we began, so we end: a family, wishing each other a safe journey, with love and prayers.

Here's another way to complete a circle. The opening of the first sermon I preached here, on October 8, 2000. A new rector has arrived, and two long-time parishioners – Frances & Ernest – were discussing the moment. One was looking forward to the coming of the new rector, but the other wasn't so sure he wanted things to change too much. So they decided the best way to find out what the new rector was like as to invite her to go fishing with them. That would be very revealing, they thought. On the first Sunday the invitation was made and accepted. As soon as they got out of Church Ernest started to grouse. "She'll probably want us to bait her hook. She'll probably talk too much and we won't catch a thing. Frances told him to relax, that it would be fine. The next morning they found themselves out on the Sound, fishing. They'd been sitting out there for about 45 minutes when the rector said, "You know, it's just a little chilly out here. I think I'll need to go back to the truck and get my coat." Ernest gave Frances an I-told-you-so kind of look, rolled his eyes, and said, "Oh all right," and he reached for the oars. "No, no - that's ok," the rector said – "I'll just be right back." And she stepped over the side of the boat and walked across the water to the shore. Frances' eyebrows went up three notches, and smiled just a tiny smile and said to Ernest "So - what do you think of that?" "Well," Ernest said haughtily, "all our other priests could swim!"

Are you planning on being disappointed, or excited about the future?! Are you open to newness, or locked away, deaf and dumb to all but non-existent halcyon days of yore? It *is* a choice.

I wonder about those two figures on the Emmaus Road – could they be Frances and Ernest? Or could they both be 'Ernest's'? After all, unlike the core disciples, they'd already thrown in the towel; they'd made their judgment about outcomes, and they weren't hanging around, seeking a new future despite what seemed to have happened. No, they were on their way to their old homes, even though word had come to them that the journey wasn't over, that the hope for the new 'home' Jesus proclaimed still lived, that the future still held possibilities beyond their imagination....because that's really what was missing from them: imagination.

We all carry our past experiences with us on the journeys of life; how we choose to interpret their meaning has a huge influence on our destination. How you and I choose to interpret this day will have a huge impact on our destinations. How big is your imagination?

This part of our journey has reached dividing. It's not one that takes us in completely different

directions, more parallel ones – rather like two cars driving south on I-5, and one takes the express lanes, and the other stays on the mainline; each can see the other, even if there's some separation, and occasionally some blank places, with the possibility of the two paths merging in the future...or maybe not. Who can tell?

Our destination remains the same. In religious language, it's the New Jerusalem; our paths will now be slightly different.

I will be here on the island for as long as Rachel is at Trinity, Everett. That could be 11 years; or 5 years; or six months. There's no way to know. I'll be around. Please don't think that you can't talk with me if you see me in Payless, or on the ferry, or anywhere else in this very small community! You just won't see me here, in this place, on a Sunday, for a few years.

That means that this is a challenging moment for me, and, I'm guessing, for some, or most, or maybe even all of you. It's a moment when institutional structures collide with what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ.

I fully understand the rationale behind the process now in place here, and I'll do my best to honor it; yet for me personally it's hard to be outside of a place – no, not a place; a community, a family – it's hard to be on the outside and not be able fully to share in this community's life, after being a part of it for so long. For me and for you, that means finding new ways to be 'community' – and isn't that also a part of the flow of the common human journey – remaking community, again and again? I believe it is.

One of you asked me if I have any advice for you. No (just kidding!) – of course!

- Keep on caring for one another; treasure and support each other, and especially your staff Molly and David, and Rob, and Tricia – and your volunteers who have offered themselves in so many different ways. Love one another as Christ loved us.
- Keep on preferencing opportunities for fellowship – like this one.
- Keep on making Sundays continual opportunities for welcome and community, both in here and next door.
- Keep on growing into the fullest meaning of being a baptized person in a community of the baptized – re-read 1 Corinthians, and especially chapter 12: 4-28, and Galatians 3:27-28
- Keep on worshiping in the ways we have come to understand are reflective of our common baptismal identity, using the materials given to us.
- Keep on allowing this building to be used by non-profit and community organizations for free.
- Keep on raising money and giving it away.

I could go on, but I won't!

What will I miss? This - being here each Sunday- sharing in common worship, breaking bread together ( with the emphasis on the "together "). But the "this" in "this Sunday" is without meaning with the "us" – it's not the things, but you, and the things done with you, that I'll miss.

Actually that question should be both future and present tense; not only what will I miss – all of you – but what have I been missing. Throughout the last nineteen years there's been an increasing number of people who I miss: from Bill Hunter – my first funeral in 2001 – to Lyn DeShong – my last funeral yesterday, and every person over whose funeral I've presided, I miss them. It's the so very final parting that's the hardest.

Close behind, those folk who have moved away – even if they occasionally come back!

In the end it's always about the people!

What will make me feel better? If you keep on being faithful – to God, to each other, to your baptismal vows, to the moral and ethical principles that underpin our faith. And, of course, that you'll stay in touch!

So go with God, and remember, live into the imagination of Christ for a new community of the loving and the loved, and “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” (Julian of Norwich), for the God “who loves us and delights in us,” the God who “will make all things well,” the God who created us to live fully the life we have been given is with us always – that God is always with us. We just have to open our eyes and our hearts to recognize that!