

Acts 1:6-14

John 17:1-11

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

“Your flock found a dwelling
in your goodness, O God.

You provided for the needy.” AMEN!

Jesus models for us prayer in this morning’s gospel.

Praying for himself and for his immediate followers,
the savior wraps up a long dialogue of
important teaching, and

we can only imagine what was going through
the minds of those closest to him.

For just before the prayer,
Jesus leveled with them about the time
having come and
they’ll soon be scattered and
leave Jesus alone.

Then he said, “I’m saying this to you so that you
may have peace.”

Now, following the long prayer, we are told that he
and his disciples will cross the Kidron Valley
and enter the garden.

The garden where Jesus was arrested. (Pause)

They probably didn't know it at the time
but Jesus not only modeled prayer, but
he also modeled an important teaching
about making space. (Pause)

I'll admit, I'm not always good about
making space in my life because I value
production and results.

You know how I love to check things off my todo list. :-)

Yet, Jesus teaches to make space. (Pause)

"Once there was a small church that decided
to renovate the old fellowship hall.

The building had been used for decades -
potlucks, youth gatherings, committee meetings -
but over time it had become cluttered.

Closets were packed with all sorts of items.

Broken chairs, old brochures, outdated
Sunday School curriculum, and boxes with
who-knows-what in them.

The space was still functional, but there
was a heavy and crowded spirit there.

One Saturday, a group from the church gathered
to begin a cleaning out project.

They worked cautiously at first.

“Should we keep this?”

“What if we need that someday?”

“This thing has a special memory.”

But as time passed something shifted.

They began to feel lighter as they began
to let go of the stuff more freely.

Things were carried out and dust was swept away.

Windows once covered to hide contents inside
were opened and light poured in
for the first time in years.

One of the congregation’s older members paused,
and looked around at the empty room and said,

“I didn’t realize how much space we’d lost.”

In the weeks that followed, the church
didn’t rush to fill the spaces.

For a while, they simply used it as it was -
open, uncluttered, a space filled with light.

An interesting thing happened,
people lingered longer, small groups formed

naturally and prayer felt less rushed.

There was a recognized sense of peace in the space
that hadn't been there before.

Eventually they brought some furniture back,
but only what was needed.

And the space became not only functional
but welcoming and alive.

The pastor reflected later on the experience and said,
"We thought we were making room for ministry.

But really we were making room for the Holy Spirit.

No wonder we felt so crowded
when every corner was filled.

Now the Holy Spirit is a recognized part of the space."
(Pause)

This story teaches a hard truth.

When we practice letting go of stuff we
can find worry and fear, but walking through
the worry and fear of letting go of the things
that don't serve us well
makes space for the God of life to enter.

God was always there, of course,

but without the noise, the distractions, and
the clutter we open room to see, hear
and touch the Spirit of Truth.

You might be thinking,
“Pastor, isn’t this something
to put on your todo list?” :-)

Maybe... but creating space is not
just about doing more, it’s really about
making ourselves open to encounter
what God is up to in our lives and
the lives of the community around us.

It’s a way of teaching us that
doing less has immense benefits.

One of them is that we can let go of the things
that know longer give us life.

Uncluttered space allows stillness to enter
and allows for quiet attention
to what’s most important. (Pause)

You see, like that old fellowship hall in the story,
our hearts can become so full, distracted,
and so noisy that we forget what
open space feels like,

but becoming uncluttered - we get to comprehend
what God showing all around us. (Pause)

In the reading from Acts today, we hear Jesus' final words to his followers (and us) before ascension.

And some of those final words were "You will be my witnesses."

Not witnesses that stand around looking up for Jesus, but witnesses who look out and around for Jesus.

Witnesses that pray together and create space for the power of the Holy Spirit to direct and restore.

Then, sometimes, we will discover we are faced with a decision between two good things.

To take them both on would mean that neither is done well.

A tree with too much fruit carries none of them well.

The bent branches limit the fruit, making them small and sour.

It is the same with us.

One who says "yes" to every good idea soon becomes overextended and exhausted.

This truth extends to the church, as well.

A church that is too busy,
a congregation that says “yes” to everything,
will soon find itself not alive because
what is saturated cannot be nourished.

(Pause)

Let me share the story of what the gardener knows.

It is gesture of thinning which reveals
the truth of choosing.

Ms. Halvorsen’s garden never looked crowded.

The carrots had quiet space between them.

The lettuce heads spread wide, and
even the tomato vines, though full,
seemed disciplined in growth -
each plant given room to breathe.

A young neighbor looked through the fence
and watched Ms. Halvorsen pull up
healthy green shoots and place them in a basket.

“You’re throwing those away?”
The boy said, “They look healthy.”

“They are healthy,” Ms. Halvorsen said.

“That’s why they have to go.”

The boy frowned, “I don’t understand.
Wouldn’t more plants mean more food?”

Ms. Halvorsen gave a knowing smile,
stood up and stretched.

Motioning she said, “Come over here, and I’ll show you.”

The boy came and stood close.

Ms. Halvorsen pointed to a cluster of young carrots,
with their feathery tops tangled together.

“If I leave them like this,
they’ll fight over everything -
water, soil, sunlight, space.

They’ll grow thin, twisted, and weak.
Never becoming what they were meant to be.

But if I thin them,” she said,
“the ones that remain will
grow deep and strong.

One good carrot is better than five stunted ones.”

And so it is with our lives.

We too are called to acknowledge

the fact of our finiteness.

Knowing this calling, we are able to take
the life-giving chance of choosing
what is essential.

AMEN!