

Here we are, people of Messiah; It's a big day. It is a day we've been looking forward to, joyfully anticipating even, because it marks a big step on a journey this congregation has been walking for a long time. Being received by our Episcopalian siblings in Christ next week marks the start of yet another step as we join them in fellowship and use of their building.

These are not small steps for a congregation. Indeed they are moments in the history of this church, moments that will be remembered by those who come after us about the path this community walked on the winding road to where God was calling us next. It is that call and that "destination" that fills this day with joy.

But even with joy as we look ahead, even in anticipation of stepping over the threshold of that completed building, we need to stop and see the threshold at which we stand today. This threshold is well worn, uneven, and steep. It has been well loved. It's the place where the warmth of God's invitation has been revealed by the warmth of this room and this congregation. We stand today at the threshold of this building, about to say goodbye.

My question, standing at this threshold is this: What is it that we are leaving behind when we leave this place today? Think about that for a moment. I think that when a congregation leaves a building behind **what is left are a multitude of moments**. Not just any moments though, but moments that come to define our lives as Christians. And not only our lives of course but the lives of those who've come before us. I think of the baptisms and the first communions celebrated within these walls. I think about the weddings, the confirmations, and the funerals. These are life passages, occasions of great importance, blessings of God that define the contours of our shared lives in Christ.

But they are not the only moments that are left behind. Moments in the quiet of our own lives when we've been met by Christ - in the bread and wine, at the font, in a reading, a hymn, a phrase in the liturgy that "made contact," even a friendly greeting when it mattered. All such moments, big and small, have filled this building to the brim, and they remain here, remembered, a part of this place.

Do you feel the grief involved in our leaving today? I was touched by that grief reading our Psalm. The verses assigned for today bless, regard and describe the Lord and all God's benefits. It is a Psalm of Praise. But at one point this week, I kept reading after verse 8. These descriptions go all the way to verse 14 where it takes a turn and regards humans. "As for mortals, their days are like the grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; [but] when the wind passes over it, it is gone, and its place shall know it no more."

It's painful to think that all those things that make this place so meaningful to us - indeed, all those moments that have revealed to us God's great love - might (in the end) seem to count for nothing. As the grass and the flowers fade, so will all these moments, and this place might know them no more.

Our faith, though, says differently. Our faith tells us that such moments are not discarded, for these are the moments in which our faith has been forged, and the story of who we are as people of faith has been told. These encounters with God in Christ, the momentary touch of freedom from all that ails us, even the simple act of showing up at this place on Sunday mornings - **we have been shaped and filled in this place, even as it holds-in-its-walls the moments that have shaped us.** So while saying goodbye understandably brings us to grief, does it not also bring us to gratitude? They come alongside each other today, at our leaving.

And what of fear - do you feel that today too? For having here been molded, strengthened, fed and nurtured in the love of God, we are stepping out and leaving it, never to return. What will happen to us in the absence of this place that holds our stories, our memories, even something of our very identity? Will this community be shaken without such a place to hold us steady in that identity? Without this place that holds so much of us, and holds us together, will we be able to “stand straight” in the faith Jesus has given us here?

These are not easy questions - even asking them is destabilizing, unsettling. They throw doubt on our future, and uncertainty on the path we have walked. Our concern might be growing as we stand here on this threshold, the only solid ground some of us have ever known - solid ground we are leaving behind. What do we need in order to leave here, confident that we can get through this interim time ahead?

“Yet once more.” This is the phrase the author of Hebrews zeros in on. To them it indicates the removal of what is shaken or shakable, “so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”

Our confidence might be shaking today. Our fear of the future, our doubt of the path we’ve traveled and are traveling. But there is cause for hope as we step beyond these thresholds, hope beyond this place, hope beyond fear of losing what we’ve found and received here. And that hope is in the God Isaiah describes for us today. “The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong.”

It is God who is steadfast, who is faithful, who is the unshakable ground supporting us and bearing all the moments that fill this place and make us who we are. For our God is like a spring of water, says Isaiah, whose waters never fail. Our God is the builder of ancient ruins, the unshakable foundation of many generations. Our God repairs the breach, closes the gap, is ever faithful, ever sure, ever present, and ever our strength in the face of uncertainty. For this unshakable God goes with us into all the Unknown beyond this threshold, keeping us secure in who we’ve become within these walls - baptized and beloved members of the body of Christ, marked with the cross of Christ forever.

So today, standing on this threshold may this God (may Jesus), set you free from what ails you - whether sadness and grief, fear, or uncertainty. May this God in Christ declare your freedom, touch you with hands of grace and mercy, and lift your head, that you might stand straight in the time ahead, secure in what God in this place has done for you and made of us. For we have solid footing not because of this or any building, but because of God - the faithful foundation of us all.

AMEN