

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
November 11, 2012/Final Service

"Where Will We Go Next?"
(Isaiah 43:18-21;Philippians 3:12-4:1; Matthew 28:16-20)

The eleven did as Jesus told them to do...they went to the mountain in Galilee. When they encountered him on that mountain they worshiped him despite the fact that there were some who had doubts. He then gave them some marching orders....he once again told them to go somewhere. This time to they were to go to everywhere in order to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach. The command to go is what brought them disciples to meet Jesus on the mountain and now they are told to go in order to meet other people. There are some who wonder if it was a good idea for a group of disciples who didn't seem to have it altogether to go out and make new disciples. Why didn't Jesus have a better vetting process? However, in Jesus' eyes these disciples are capable of completing this task. This is good news for us as contemporary disciples because we hardly have it together. Jesus sees potential in us and invites us to follow him...to continue the ministry that he started.

The reason for today's service is because Christ has invited us to go to a new place. Christ has called me to go to a congregation of all ages that is doing some wonderful mission work, both locally and globally. However, it is a congregation that has been stuck for a while and needs to try new things so that they hopefully will have a vital future. In all honesty they need to do some of the community events like we have done here.

Christ also calls you to go somewhere differently. We have come along way over the past 8 years, but now Christ is calling St. John's to follow him in new places....in new ways. It is because of these callings...these invitations from Christ that I have decided to end my pastorate....to move forward with my ministry and to move out of God's way so that God can do a new thing with you....that new thing that we read in Isaiah.

The Lord is providing some hope for those in exile. They are advised to forget the former things and to look to the new thing that God is about to do in their midst....the new thing being an exodus from Babylon. As this congregation begins a time of transition you must be open to the new thing that God is doing in your midst! How can you do that?

--Do not remember the former things: The church must not hold on to the past...what it used to look like, but it must be willing to allow God to do new things...must be open to those new things...take some risks. The message in Isaiah is that the former things have been fulfilled, which means that the people should be able to look forward to the fulfillment of the new things that God promises.

--Be attentive to what God is saying to you: The church must be intentional about spiritual formation....how do we connect our faith to our daily lives? Today is known as Stewardship Sunday throughout the UCC and so we must always be mindful about how we connect stewardship with our spiritual lives.

--Faith in the hope that God promises: We must believe in the promise of the hope and joy that God gives to us. We must trust in a living God that is always doing a new thing in our midst!

We are at a point in the life of the church that we need a renewal....a conversion so to speak. I recently have been reading Darrell Guder's book *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Guder is the professor of Missional & Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He says that the congregation is the basic unit of Christian witness and therefore he sees the need for the congregation to constantly be re-shaped and re-formed or on a deeper level a conversion. Guder says this conversion of the church will happen as the congregation hears, responds to, and obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ in ever new and comprehensive ways. The call to be witnesses of the gospel Jesus Christ stays the same, but the way that we respond to that call...the way that we actually proclaim the gospel will change because of our own situation!

Paul urges the Philippians to imitate him in running toward the prize of a higher calling of God. That higher calling is contrasted to the earthly things that seem to occupy our time. We are urged to do the same thing! We must not let our minds be on earthly things....they must be turned to spiritual things. We can't look back...we must look forward....look to the goal that is ahead of us.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

God is doing a new thing.....we must all be open to this new thing! We must look at this time of transition as a time where God can do new things in our midst.

Jesus commanded the disciples to go....this means that their ministry is no longer limited. Therefore, our ministry is no longer limited! We are to go and follow Christ.

We must not live in the past....we can learn from our past and then keep running the race forward....look to the prize...the goals of the future!

As the basic witness of the Christian faith, St. John's must look to be re-formed....to have a conversion experience. We must continue to re-shape our calling as followers of Christ.....how can we be faithful disciples?

Where will we go next? We have no clue where will we be going next. What we do know is that Christ is calling us.....Christ is inviting us to follow him to the ends of the earth. We are to carry on the ministry that Christ started and we are to equip new disciples to carry on that ministry. There are no limits to our ministry! So go...make disciples of all people....don't stay up....don't be stagnant in your ministry.....go and follow Christ to all the world! Amen.