

"Beginnings"

Gen. 1:1-5 & John 1:1-9

Absecon Presbyterian Church

7/4/21

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Take a deep breath - things are different. I know it is hard to breathe right now. You were not ready to say goodbye to Pastor Drew and Claire and the kids. One person said to me "let's move her parents to New Jersey" because you wanted him to stay. I have appreciated his ministry.

Yet, we believe in call - God called to a new ministry. It is a time of grief and I will not pretend that there is a magic scripture or prayer to take that away. You are a great congregation - this is no fun. It might be independence day for our country not one we wanted in our church. - sigh

Ok - breathe - we breathe in the love of the Holy Spirit and breathe out fear and anxiety.

I love living in New Jersey because of the changing of the seasons. Fall is my favorite. I like watching the cycle and to be sure like some parts of the year more than others - but it reminds us that life is filled with changes. It is summer at the shore - a time so many love.

Again you have a transition before you. I see the eye rolls and hear the groans now. We have to look for a new pastor again! What do we have to do with a mission study and more. Some of this we will address at the town hall meeting.

Some transitions are not so easy - a mid-life crisis, the leaving of a beloved pastor, people moving away, or death. These events take our breath away and can take hope away as well. They can challenge our beliefs and even our faith.

Transitions in life are not always easy. They leave us with more questions than answers. Can I do this? What will happen next? What will I do? What will happen to our church? Will someone else love us and care about us? Where do we get guidance about moving through transitions in life?

The way forward is full of possibilities. We use the word Hope. When we hear about faith, hope and love - faith is rooted in past, hope in the future and love is here and now. This will be small steps that will push us forward.

I love the promise in Jeremiah 29:11 - "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future hope." It is when we do not see small hopes that life becomes so difficult - it all we want is a new pastor now rather than a year or more down the road we will start to feel helpless and hopeless - it will be in taking life one step at a time, one sermon at a time, one session meeting at a time, one event at a time, one visit to the homebound, one class, one vision team meeting and the chapter starts to take form and flesh and we may understand that great message of Jesus.

Jesus promised that the disciples would not be abandoned. He promised that the Holy Spirit would be sent for encouragement, for enlightenment, to be with them. That is what it means to live a life of faith in the Spirit.

Scripture speaks to where we are - last week we heard of Jesus calming a storm after everyone was freaking out saying "we're drowning." Jesus makes a statement "have you no faith?" Then we think, we do have faith. You have had losses of wonderful congregation family members and that threatens to take our breath away and we are reminded to breathe.

Janet read Genesis 1 for us - In the beginning - we heard - there was chaos in Hebrew - look what God can do out of chaos on the first day - God created light and saw that it was good.

The same is seen in the Gospel of John saying that nothing came into being without Jesus and that in him was life and the life was the light of all people. Light will overcome the darkness and the darkness will not overwhelm it.

It is a reminder that after every night there is a new day that God continues to walk with us even if we are kicking and screaming that we do not want to go.

Take a breath.

Think what we are saying - if our hope is only in ourselves we are in trouble. Not only is the Holy Spirit with us but we are part of a connectional system that allows others to pray for us so when we do not know what to pray for God will be with us and we will be there for you as well.

We are called to be people of transcendent hope. This is our ultimate hope of hopes. It is still there even when some of the small hopes not fulfilled. It is still there when small hopes fulfilled and ask, "Isn't there more?" In all our transitions, it is the one thing that is constant.

The ultimate hope is in Hebrews 11:1 - this is not just the faith chapter, but the hope chapter. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

Hope is the object of our faith - we can't have hope without faith, and vice versa. Faith is like the sail, and hope is the wind. Without our hope in Jesus, all our little hopes become meaningless

These are not empty promises. This is not a pep talk. It is sharing the reality of our faith and hope. This will not be easy - but it can be challenging and exciting if you are open - does it mean that grief is over? No way - but it does mean that we have to constantly put everything into perspective, and again take a deep breath, realize you are not alone, look again through the lenses of faith with hope and the way forward may be a little clearer.

Why did you come to worship today with Pastor Drew gone? It is because you love God and love one another. You cling to our God and to faith and know so many will be praying for you.

This meal we share together is a reminder that the Lord is with us and we are with one another.

We have faith. The future is full of possibilities. Never lose sight of the greatest hope of all - Jesus. God has promised never to leave you or forsake you - and neither will we.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.