

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev, Jason S. Glombicki
May 1, 2016

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average person will have ten different jobs before the age of forty.¹ That is a lot of job transitions. A job change is an enormous life shift, but it's not the only transition in life. Most of us have made the transition from high school to college. Some of us have become parents, lost someone we've loved, or gone through a divorce. Many of us have changed neighborhoods or gone through a breakup. As we get older we typically transition from having a large circle of friends to a few intimate friends, and most mature adults eventually transition from the working world into retirement. Generally speaking, transitions are difficult. After a transition we sometimes flounder around in an awkward emotional space between what is gone and the "new normal" to come. It's a challenge to navigate this grey zone of change.

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-many-jobs-average-person-have-his-her-lifetime-scott-marker>

Today's readings also involve transitions. In Acts, we heard of Paul's lengthy travel to Macedonia. There he spoke with some women in the city, which was out of character for a Pharisee from Jerusalem. Yet, from that group of women Lydia became Paul's first baptized believer in Europe. This was an important transition from the social norms of the patriarchal society of the Roman Empire. Then in Revelation, we heard of a New Jerusalem without a temple, since God is dwelling among us. Once again we are on the cusp of change between one reality and another. So too in John, Jesus himself is in a liminal space as he prepared to depart from his disciples. We saw Jesus speak to the disciples before his arrest where he tells them of his departure. In that moment, the disciples found themselves like young birds pushed from the nest into a world without a leader. They were pushed into a sudden transition.²

² Sundays and Seasons reflections and resources for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 2016.

However Jesus did not just spring the news on them and disappear. Jesus left the disciples with peace. This peace, though, is a new type of peace. The peace that Jesus leaves with these disciples isn't simply the end of conflict. That's not to say that the end of violence isn't a good thing. Many of us regularly pray for peace on our streets, we yearn for peaceful political debates, and we beg for global peace. David Lose argues that Jesus' peace is more than the absence of something negative. For example, when someone reports feeling "at peace" he or she is reporting more than an absence of conflict but instead testifies to a sense of wholeness in one's very being. It's a sense of harmony with those persons and things around us. Peace indicates a sense of contentment, a sense of fulfillment, a sense that one is basking in God's pleasure. In this way peace *can* occur in hardship, struggle, conflict, and disruption. After all, we heard that Jesus gave his peace right before he was betrayed, arrested, and executed.³

That's because Christ's peace is a way of being and not a moment in life. As one theologian put it: the peace that Jesus gives is a "rootedness in God," it's less about sweet calm feelings and is more about a balance that finds inner reliance on God. Such reliance knows God to be a rock that enables us to place our trust in God. Being rooted in God doesn't make pain, suffering, dread, anger, and other powerful feelings and states of mind go away. But it does offer a new perspective, a higher vantage point that can enable us to remember that even the fiercest suffering and most atrocious injustice is never the final word.⁴ Christ's peace is an outlook on life. Christ's peace is living in assurance and trust.

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/04/easter-6-c-peace-the-world-cannot-give/>

⁴ <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Two-Types-Carl-McColman-08-07-2012?offset=1&max=1>

The peace that Christ offers reminds us that we're not alone. We're reminded that the Holy Spirit brings the same teachings of Jesus. In the rest of the Christian Scriptures we'll hear that the Holy Spirit reminded those disciples to love another in the midst of the disagreements of the early church. The Holy Spirit taught them what fully including all people looks like in that moment when a woman named Lydia was baptized, and again when outsiders, like the Gentiles, became fully included. The Holy Spirit made clear to those disciples that God built a home on this earth to make clear that God is with us. We are reminded that although we do not physically see Jesus we *do* see the signs of his resurrection, we do live in his spirit, and we do continue to embody the essence of his ministry. The Holy Spirit reminds us that God is not only found in places of worship, God is also found in Ubers and "L"s, apartments and houses, skyscrapers and pedways. The peace Jesus gave to the disciples and gives to us reminds us that we're not alone. We're reminded that God is present in us, that God is present in other people, and that all of creation proclaims God's goodness.

Like any noble belief we don't just stop with these words and ideas, instead we put it into practice. Each Sunday we enact these principles when we pass the peace during service. Sure, a lot of times this feels like a liturgical intermission. It's a moment when the hymns and spoken word take pause so we can move around and shake hands, give a kiss of peace, pass a high five, or engage in a profound bow towards one another. Passing the peace, however, is so much more than the seventh inning stretch. All of these gestures are ways that we enact our prayers and proclamation. This enactment is why we pass the peace following the prayers. "The peace functions as kind of a seal on our prayers, a sign that we are serious about our praying. It is as if we were saying, with our gesture: 'O God, help the world with the very peace and mutual forgiveness we are trying to show here.'" The peace is that moment to set aside our differences and reach out to someone that we might have hurt. The peace is that moment when we recognize that we are each filled with the presence of God, and so we enact the words of Christ and we become the gifts of Christ to the world.⁵

⁵ Brugh, Lorraine S. and Lathrop, Gordon W. *The Sunday Assembly*. "Word: Peace." P. 172-174.

Sometimes it's hard to understand how being with one another can be a gift from Christ. A non-liturgical example of this can be found in support groups, especially bereavement groups. When group members sit in a room and share the difficulty of losing a loved one, or share that they feel worthless after losing a job, or when those who are marginalized gather to share in the hardship, these are moments where we're reminded that our God is with us through another. One powerful aspect from these groups is the reminder that we're not alone in our thoughts and feelings.

In that same way we gather here each week to be that support - we check in with one another during fellowship time to celebrate, to mourn, to yearn, and to advocate together. In our small groups like Spiritus, Meet Ups, and building group we can foster a place to be a support to one another in love.

Friends, life is full of transitions. Today our readings remind us that in transition God calls us toward peace. God brings us peace in the knowledge that we're not alone. God brings us a vision that despite all that terrorizes and brings fear, love is stronger. As we pass the peace today take a moment to remember these gifts. Remember God's presence in the eyes of those you greet. Then take a moment to thankfully receive that peace with the knowledge that you're not alone. Peace be with you, my friends. Amen.