

***Pour into our hearts – a meditation on change***  
**Easter 6B, John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98**  
**Grace Church Newton**  
**May 5, 2024**

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*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I'm feeling change these days. I'm feeling change. And it's feeling sort of heavy. A bit much. If one or two things change at the same time, it can often feel inviting. More exciting. "What might come next?" we might wonder with enthusiasm? But we are in the middle of a lot of change.

- There's our usual, expected seasonal change. The school year is drawing to a close. The church year is moving toward summer – a different pace, a time of rest and preparation for the program year that will come following Labor Day.
- As a diocese – as we discussed just this morning in Grace Discussion Group – we are saying goodbye to our bishop, Bishop Alan, and this very week we will meet the candidates to become our new bishop. We don't know all of them. We don't know how *any* of them would be as a bishop. This time in history is an important inflection point for the future of our diocese, and the decision feels weighty.
- And, as we celebrated just last week, we here at Grace are in a time of change. I am new to you. You are new to me. We are still coming to know each other, and we will be for a while.

So I'm feeling change these days. Images from scripture help remind us, that if new things are to come into being, old things must pass away. We all know these images.

I think of the perfume jar that must be shattered in order to anoint Jesus with oil. I think of the seeds that must die in order for new life to emerge from them. I think of the very physical reality that, in order to walk on water – as the Gospel of Matthew tells the story with Jesus and Peter – you first have to step out of the boat.<sup>1</sup> In order to get to the promised land, you have to leave Egypt... All images of the old – perhaps the comfortable, the treasured – passing away for new things to come into being.

I am drawn to ponder this topic today – well, because this is one aspect of where I [at least] find myself these days. But I was also drawn to reflect on change when I read today's collect:

“O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which *exceed all* that we can desire...”

There is such strong yearning in this prayer! A yearning for something that sometimes comes along. Often just for a moment. The words of this collect try to convey the indescribable being of God always present, always ready to enter our awareness in a way that is beyond words – beyond all that we can know to ask for – in a way that is experienced in our whole bodies.

There are two things that seem to be true about this kind of experience of God. These experiences can help us better navigate the changes and challenges we face. When we experience God's love poured into our hearts – even momentarily – we grow in kindness and compassion and understanding. It can put daily struggles in a

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<sup>1</sup> Debie Thomas, Diomass Clergy Conference, April 29-30, 2024, Devens, Mass.

bigger perspective. As the Spirit did on that day of Pentecost in the book of Acts – we'll get to that reading in two weeks, but in today's reading (which happens just after Pentecost) we see the Spirit *still* acting. "While Peter was still speaking," we read, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." And the crowd noticed that the Spirit "had been poured out even on the Gentiles." *All* were included in God's outpouring of power and love, Jew and Gentile alike. *All* were invited into the body of Christ through baptism. People of all tongues, of all languages, of different faiths, were part of God's outpouring of power and love. And when that experience happens to us – in tiny doses sometimes – we are changed.

These God-filled moments that are still available to us here and now can give us the courage and the open-hearts to face big transitions. That's the first thing I think is true about this kind of experience of God's being.

I also wonder – and this is the second thing that I think may be true about this kind of experience of God – might the moments of transition – these times of change – might the moments of transition *themselves* make us more available, open us up *so that we might* experience God's abundance in this way.

Yesterday I had the privilege of standing by some of our young people as *they* marked a transition. Three Grace young people – Linnea, Will, and Julian – were confirmed alongside close to fifty others at All Saints Parish in Belmont. There is something...expanding...about these moments. We have this sense at baptisms, at marriages, at graduations, at funerals, and at confirmations. Times of passage. Yesterday we watched a handing down of our faith from generation to generation. We saw the continuation of our faith in material, bodily form. As we lay hands on the person, as the bishop prays, the presence of God is real. And our hearts grow.

So these fleeting, spirit-filled moments of God's presence...they can give us the wisdom to help us pass through times of transition. **And** times of transition can help soften us, open us up to these very moments. There is something Holy and Sacred about this relationship. It tells us something about the nature of God.

Friends, change is the state of the world. We all know this. Sometimes it feels more intense than others. We may be living through one of those moments. I wonder if instead of fearing change, avoiding change, reacting against change, we might be able to see it as a sacred invitation. As a moment in which we are invited to open ourselves up to God's presence. As a time to pray with yearning, "Pour into *our* hearts [O God] such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire."

May these be Holy times. Amen.