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Ephesians 4:1-12

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Change is inevitable. Change is hard. Nobody likes change.

I'm sure that most of you have seen those stress assessments where you evaluate the stress factors in your life by ticking off various life situations: Change in marital status, check; change in employment status, check; recent birth or death of family member, check. The more checks you have, the higher your stress factor. Change is hard. It's hard on the body, it's hard on the psyche, it's hard on the heart.

Here we stand at a time of transition. The familiar, comfortable, past is gone, and before us is a long and winding road with an uncharted future ahead. Did I mention that change is hard?

This time of transition is important. It's a time for us to take an honest look at ourselves. It is a time to look at the places where we have fallen short of God's call for us, and a time to inventory the gifts that we have and the gifts we are to one another and to our community. It is a time when we will be still and listen with fresh ears what God is calling us to do now.

Historically, the Church, that is the larger church, with a capital "C," has been through transitions many times before. If we look back through our Biblical history, we see God's people in transition in many ways. In fact, almost every significant act in history began with God calling God's people to leave the comfortable and familiar and to go to some unknown future, trusting that the God who claimed them is the same God who will guide them.

If we go all the way back to the Book of Exodus, we see the people of God in transition. The Hebrews left Egypt willingly, and boldly and with great expectations of a new life in God, freed from slavery. You know the story, though, God's people had not gotten very far before they begged to go back. The unknown was so terrifying that were willing to give up their own freedom in order to have a life that was stable and familiar. The Hebrews spent the entire 40 years in the wilderness griping and complaining and rebelling against God because change was so difficult for them. And yet, those 40 years in the desert were defining for God's people. Even now, Jews continue to look back and to point to that time, as the time when they discovered what

it means to be a people of God. That time in transition is treasured for the relationship that was formed between God and God's people.

When the Hebrews took possession of the Promise Land, they entered into a new time of transition. No longer were they nomads in the desert, completely dependent on God and one another for every aspect of survival; now they were able to put down roots, grow crops, establish themselves. No longer were they living in the desert where the only God was the God of Abraham. In the new land there was a different church on every corner. Not only were there Baptist and Methodist and Lutheran and Episcopalians, but also Baha'i, and Shinto, and Muslim and Buddhist, and Hindu. Now they had "options" when it came to choosing a god and how they would worship. Furthermore, with the death of Moses, God's people also had a new leader in Joshua. Among all of these changes, Joshua called for God's people to make a choice. Joshua gave them all a free slate and said, "Choose now whom you will serve." If it is one of these others, that is your choice, but if it is the God who freed you for Egypt, then make not only a choice, but also a commitment, choose now whom you will serve, and if you choose the God of Abraham serve God with all of your heart, you mind, your soul and your strength.

After the nation Israel has risen and fallen, when the people were in exile, they faced a new transition. How could they worship God in a strange land? God's people had their identity in the strength and power of their nation, and their worship was centered about the temple in Jerusalem. Separated from their home, separated from one another, they did not know who they were or how to worship. In fact, they were not even sure that God was still with them. All that was safe and familiar was once again gone. As a broken nation, God's people did not have strong leaders on whom they could depend to lead them safely back to God. Instead, they found encouragement in surprising places, like in the slave girl, who not only had the conviction of her faith in God, but also the courage to share that faith with her mistress, the wife of Naamen, the highly decorated soldier of the conquering army whose only weakness was his leprosy. Through that brave child, not only were the Israelites reminded of God's strength and presence, but God's power was also proclaimed to the nations because of the faith of that small girl.

Fast forward to the New Testament, all the way to the end of the gospels, after the resurrection to the time when Jesus had ascended back into the heavens, and the disciples are told wait for the advocate that Christ will send. At this time of transition, there is no rebellion; there is no choice to be made, no mourning the loss of power and status. At this transition, the disciples recognized that God was doing a new thing, and moreover, that God would use them to accomplish God's purposes. And so the model of transition we see in the New Testament is still different from anything we have seen thus far. In the first chapter of Acts, we find the disciples huddled in an upper room, but they were not hiding in fear, rather, they were gathered in prayer. The disciples,

like all the others before them were facing a new transition in their life with God and one another. The disciples, like all the others before them were facing a strange and unknown future, but this time God's people gathered in prayer. The disciples had followed Jesus, expecting that he would be the one to bring a new reality into their lives and their world, but what they discovered was the Jesus had called them to that task, and so they prayed. They waited and listened for the "what next" from God. And when God spoke the what next, the disciples and their lives were forever changed. God lit them on fire and through them set the world ablaze.

I wonder what God will do in us during this time of transition? I wonder who we will be in this time of uncertainty. I pray that this time will be a time of discovering new gifts, and time of discovering who God is in our life together and where God is calling us to be. I pray that this will be a time of renewed commitment, a time when we discover new courage and strength, and surprising new leadership, a time when we will offer ourselves as vessels through which God can work in Woodhaven and in the world.

We may not like change, but we can trust that God is at work within us. The road may be uncharted territory for us, but our navigator is a familiar and trusted guide. The God that has led us to this point is the same God that will lead us into our new reality. Thanks be to God. Amen.