St. Mark’s Parish Retreat

Camp Mitchell

April 21, 2018

Teri Daily

**The Spirituality of Transition**

Today I’d like to spend time with you talking about this moment in the life of St. Mark’s, what you can learn from it, and how it might strengthen your own spirituality and that of the parish.

Every moment in our life gives us new opportunities to learn more about God, and to become the person God created us to be. St. Mark’s is in the midst of a fairly major transition in the life of your parish. It’s fitting that we are talking about this, and that you are preparing for this, during the season of Easter – because another name for transition or transformation is…resurrection.

Current 🡪 Future

letting go + welcoming the new = transformation

What are we having to let go of? Anger, fear, some ways of doing things, Hannah, the past (or at least our idolatry of it).

What are we needing to welcome? Change, mystery/unknown, Joshua/Jenna/Jude/Ruby, a whole family, new roles, a new identity in some ways.

Like any transition, this one can generate all sorts of emotions, and it can also give us opportunities to strengthen our spiritual life by giving us opportunities to focus on certain spiritual practices.

Spiritual practices are activities or ways of deepening our relationship with God. They shape our spiritual life and our attitudes; they enable us to recognize the sacred all around us. Although some spiritual practices require setting aside time and being intentional about space, most happen in the midst of daily life. Life has a way of putting in front of us the things we need to grow and become the people God calls us to be.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat are a couple who have been writing about the spiritual life for five decades, and they currently devote themselves to their website, Spirituality & Practice. They have developed what they call a spiritual alphabet – 37 modes of spirituality, or 37 spiritual practices that help us connect with God in our everyday lives.

Let’s look at what some of these practices are…

The Wheel of Spiritual Practices



As we go through this day, we will look at how the process of transition in general, and the one that St. Mark’s is currently undergoing in particular, gives us the opportunity to put certain spiritual practices to work in our daily life. Transitions, like so many events in our lives, give us the chance to *practice* being more like God and, therefore, give us the chance to *become* more like God – as well as to become more fully the unique person God created us to be.

Process of Transformation

1. **Letting Go**

Let’s talk about in general, and then we can talk about in St. Mark’s transition in particular…

We’ll talk about “letting go” in the morning, and “welcoming the new” in the afternoon.

What are your own experiences of letting go? Positive? Negative? What did you do well can what do you wish had gone differently?

Quotes about Letting Go

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

--Jesus, in John 12:24-25

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look\* into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,\* “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

--John 20:11-18

Death and resurrection are central to the gospel and the very heart of the Paschal mystery.

It is the natural rhythm of life—the cold ground of winter gives way to the jonquils of spring, a wildfire increases the biodiversity of a region, a grown child leaves home to begin his or her own family. New life always demands that something pass away, that we let go. But whether this break with our present is by choice or through circumstances over which we have no control, whether it is an individual endeavor or a collective one, our faith teaches us that we always fall into the same place—the loving arms of God.

--Teri Daily

…”Do not store up treasures on earth,” [Jesus] teaches; do not strive or be afraid—“for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). All will come of its own accord in good time and with abundant fullness, so long as one does not attempt to hoard or cling.

It is a path he himself walked to the very end. In the garden of Gethsemane, with his betrayers and accusers massing at the gates, he struggled and anguished but remained true to his course. Do not hoard, do not cling—even to life itself. Let it go, let it be—“Not my will but yours be done, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Thus he came and thus he went, giving himself fully into life and death, losing himself, squandering himself, “gambling away every gift God bestows.” It was not love stored up but love utterly poured out that opened the gates to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Over and over, Jesus lays this path before us. There is nothing to be renounced or resisted. Everything can be embraced, but the catch is to cling to nothing. You let it go. You go through life like a knife goes through a done cake, picking up nothing, clinging to nothing, sticking to nothing. And grounded in that fundamental chastity of your being, you can then throw yourself out, being able to give it all back, even giving back life itself. That’s the kenotic path in a nutshell. Very, very simple. It only costs everything.

--Cynthia Bourgeault, in *The Wisdom Jesus.*

**First Lesson**, by Phillip Booth

Lie back, daughter, let your head

be tipped back in the cup of my hand.

Gently, and I will hold you. Spread

your arms wide, lie out on the stream

and look high at the gulls. A dead-

man’s float is face down. You will dive

and swim soon enough where this tidewater

ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe

me, when you tire on the long thrash

to your island, lie up, and survive.

As you float now, where I held you

and let go, remember when fear

cramps your heart what I told you:

lie gently and wide to the light-year

stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

What are the spiritual practices associated with letting go well?

Current 🡪 Future

 letting go + welcoming the new = transformation

forgiveness

being present

gratitude

attention

listening

faith (in the sense of “trust”)

compassion

Attention/Being Present

In a sense, these practices are inextricably linked. They are both ultimately about being in the present moment – letting go of the past *and* the future – so that we can fully notice our life as it is here and now, which is the only moment we are really given. Being present is about both space and time, here and now.

Awareness is the basic practice which makes all the other spiritual practices possible.

As we go through transitions, there are many things that we need to be present and attentive to – our emotions (paying attention to feelings of grief, anger, fear), others and their feelings (so we can be able to show compassion), our surroundings (what needs to change in this respect as we change in other respects).

*Being in a hurry. Getting to the next thing without fully entering the thing in front of me. I cannot think of a single advantage I have ever gained from being in a hurry. But a thousand broken and missed things, tens of thousands, lie in the wake of all the rushing…. Through all that haste I thought I was making up time. I turns out I was throwing it away.[[1]](#footnote-1) -Mark Buchanan*

Who are the people with whom you share your space but who often go unnoticed? The cashier, the person walking past, the children who play noisily in your neighborhood? Are there people in your church space that often go unnoticed for you? Think about them during this transition.

*Take a few moments and share this with the person sitting next to you.*

Take a moment to pay attention to your feelings about the coming transition. Be honest with yourself and embrace all that you find within yourself.

Forgiveness

As you are honest about your feelings, you may become aware of the need for forgiveness. Forgiveness is about letting go of the past, the hurts, the disappointments, the resentment, the anger.

What definition of forgiveness do you find helpful?

* Marjorie Suchocki: “to will the well-being of another”
* “to give up hoping that the past can be different”
* “to let go of the pain in a memory”
* “to give up your right to retribution, revenge, or debt”

Although there are a variety of definitions of forgiveness, research has suggested they all have 3 common components:

1. Gaining a more balanced view of the offender and the event
2. Decreasing negative feelings towards the offender and potentially increasing compassion
3. Giving up the right to [punish](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/punishment) the offender further or to demand restitution

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-addiction-connection/201409/the-psychology-forgiveness>

*We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.*

--Martin Luther King, Jr

Forgiveness frees up the energy we spend on anger, resentment, and hurts and allows us to use that energy to move forward, to create a different future.

We learn from all our experiences, even (maybe especially) those that cause us pain. Think of a hurt you have found it difficult to forgive. Can you identify what you have learned from the situation and how you have grown? Can you be grateful for what the experience taught you?

*Take a few minutes to discuss this with one another.*

Are there things which need to be forgiven in your life at St. Mark’s? If so, what can help move beyond those?

Do you have things associated with church for which you need to forgive yourself?

From the Brussats’ *Spiritual Rx* (93):

“Sharon Salzberg reports that Buddhist teacher V. Pandita says at the closing ceremony of his retreats: ‘If I have hurt or harmed you in any way, either intentionally or unintentionally, I ask your forgiveness. And if you have hurt me in any way, intentionally or unintentionally, I forgive you.’”

Can we say this at the end of certain stages of a community’s/church’s life?

Gratitude

Acknowledging gratitude for, or honoring, something or someone who has been instrumental in your journey up to now may be an important part of letting go of the past and of the present to create room for the future.

*Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.*

--Melody Beattie

*If the only prayer you ever said was thank you, it would be enough.*

--Meister Eckhart (14th century theologian, mystic, and Dominican)

*Gratefulness is the inner gesture of giving meaning to our life by receiving life as a gift.*

--David Stendl-Rast

Has consumerism led to a decrease in gratitude? Greed, envy, and jealousy are obstacles to gratitude. Does our consumeristic society breed these things?

*Discuss this with one another.*

What or whom do you need to give thanks for at this moment in the life of St. Marks’? Can this be a way of letting go of the past (and present)?

How to Say Goodbye to Hannah

1. Organize a farewell gathering.

--festive and happy time

--preferably not on the last day

--consider inviting people outside the congregation who may know the pastor through his or her work outside the church

--do not use the same planning team as the one who will welcome the new pastor

1. A gift.

--put thought and energy into the gift

--consider the pastor’s computer

--perhaps a framed picture of the church

--a scrapbook with notes of appreciation

1. A farewell worship moment.

--perhaps a litany with call and response acknowledging Hannah’s leadership, friendship, and spiritual guidance

--a musical offering appropriate to the occasion

--consider a laying on of hands

--consider both services

1. Put day-to-day administrative tasks into the hands of others for a while to give Hannah more time to focus on visitation and relationships.
2. Exit interview.

(Include current pastoral care needs.)

Adapted from: http://www.brightstarumc.org/clientimages/49952/transition/checklist-departing%20pastor.pdf

1. **Welcoming the New**

When have you welcomed a change, something new, into your life? What went well? What do you wish had gone differently?

Quotes about Welcoming the New

But now thus says the Lord,
   he who created you, O Jacob,
   he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
   I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
   and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
   and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
   the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

Do not remember the former things,
   or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
   now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
   and rivers in the desert.

--Isaiah 43:1-3a, 18-19

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’

--Revelation 21:1-5

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

--Leviticus 19:33-34

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

We think about the life of faith as being steadfast, as a life based on stability. And in many ways it is. But the gospel also has at its core a devotion to change. One of the vows that Benedictines take is the vow of *conversatio morum*, which is difficult to translate but can mean something along the lines of the vow of conversion of life, or moving forward. Thus, living a life of faith requires openness. It requires that we not make an idol of our current identity, which in our world today is so often defined by what we do. It requires that we find our deepest self not in our profession but in who we are as children of God. What **is** free to change, then, is the way in which we live our lives from that deepest self.

--Teri Daily

Brian McLaren, a pastor and leading figure in the emerging-church conversation, has suggested that we shift our image from a “bounded set” to a “centered set.” “Bounded sets” are those that are defined by a clear boundary at the edges. You are either in or out of the set. “Centered sets,” in contrast, have no clear boundary at the edge but are defined by each member’s relation to the center. McLaren suggests that we in the church most properly define ourselves not by the boundaries we create to define who is outside (as in a bounded set) but by our relation to Jesus as our center. The important question then becomes not “Are you in our out?” but “Are you moving toward or away from the center?”

This rethinking of what makes us “us” allows for a fuzzy border when it comes to “belonging” to the group, and it renders obsolete any simple in/out distinction. Of course, this means that we may have to live with a bit more fluidity in our identity. Without sharp boundaries we must be ready to let our identities morph over time, allowing the stranger to become friend and in so doing change in some ways how we see ourselves. As Christine Pohl notes, “boundary issues are always slightly ambiguous when we realize that God is already working in the life of every person who comes. Recognizing this opens each community to what God might be saying, what it can learn from the stranger/guest. It keeps the possibility alive that the boundaries could be redrawn.”

The identity issue is a hard one, because being hospitable means welcoming people into something, but if you have fuzzy boundaries, do you have a “something” to welcome people into? It seems to me that in order to avoid the dangers of being a community defined by exclusion, we have to be willing to have an identity that is always being discovered, negotiated, reinterpreted, and through Christ ever again received as gift.

--Scott Bader-Saye, in *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*

**Red Brocade**, by Naomi Shihab Nye

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he’s come from,
where he’s headed.
That way, he’ll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you’ll be
such good friends
you don’t care.

Let’s go back to that.
Rice? Pine Nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That’s the armor everyone put on
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

What are the spiritual practices associated with welcoming the new well?

Current 🡪 Future

 letting go + welcoming the new = transformation

 openness

 imagination

 wonder

 hospitality

 enthusiasm

 questing

 vision

hope

Openness

The practice of keeping an open mind to ideas, experiences, people, the world, the unknown, and God. It is the practice of making ourselves available to new possibilities without prejudging them. The practice of being optimistic and flexible and empathetic.

The opposite of being open is to be dogmatic or narrow-minded.

Prayer from William Penn: “O God, help us not to despise or oppose what we do not understand.” (*Spiritual Rx* 191)

Do you usually think you know how things are going to turn out? How flexible are you? Are you willing to try something new?

*Discuss with your neighbor.*

Openness makes hospitality possible.

Hospitality

Hospitality is the spiritual practice of welcoming a guest (expected or unexpected) with graciousness. We can extend hospitality to things, events, and meanings as well.

Radical hospitality – More than just being friendly; it’s about truly making space for the “other” to bring who they are to the relationship. It’s about using our creativity, our energy, our skills, and our warmth to make room for another.

*Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

--Henri Nouwen

It requires that we believe the world is a basically friendly place.

What excuses do we make for not being hospitable?

When have you been the recipient of radical hospitality?

*Share this with your neighbor.*

Parenting and being in any long-term relationship requires being hospitable to the stranger – the person becomes a stranger to us again and again. How is this true about our relationship with our church?

Enthusiasm

En = “in” and theos = “God”

According to the Brussats, people who practice enthusiasm have a special kind of energy and warmth; they let their passion for something, their curiosity, and their eagerness be known. It allows us to be fully engaged with life and with our communities. It counteracts boredom, apathy, and fatigue.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

--Romans 12:11

When do you feel filled with God? When do you feels most alive? Do you always feel free to express your enthusiasm? (*Spiritual Rx* 77)

Sometimes we lack enthusiasm because we believe nothing new can really take place.

*We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life… The problem is that we allow our past, which becomes longer and longer each year, to say to us: “You know it all; you have seen it all, be realistic; the future will be just another repeat of the past. Try to survive it as best you can.” There are many cunning foxes jumping on our shoulders and whispering in our ears the great lie: “There is nothing new under the sun…don’t let yourself be fooled.”*

--Henri Nouwen in *Here and Now*

What keeps you from being enthusiastic about life?

**What will it look like for St. Mark’s to welcome this new phase in its life?**

7 ways to welcome the new pastor:

1. Communicate excitement.
2. Get out the paintbrush.
3. Work on a transition plan.
4. Prepare a soft landing.
5. Plan for a welcome gathering.
6. Offer gifts with a purpose.
7. Lead with grace.

<https://www.seedbed.com/7-ways-to-welcome-your-new-pastor/>

How will you welcome the Kenyon family?

* Food and cold drinks on the day of move-in, along with other help if needed.
* Celebration the first Sunday
* Smaller groups over the next couple of months
* Gifts
* Congregation to wear nametags

**Parish Orientation & Information for Incoming Priest**

Church Documents

* Membership Directory with address, phone, and email information.
* List of Vestry Members and Church Officers
* Parochial Reports from last three years
* Stewardship reports from last three years
* 2018 Budget, 2017 End-of-Year Financial Reports
* Copy of last financial Audit

Pastoral Care Information

* List of parishioners with significant present pastoral care needs
* List of shut-ins and those with specific disabilities
* List of parishioners expecting a child or those with newborns
* List of parishioners who receive Eucharistic Visitation
* List of Eucharistic Visitors and others who provide pastoral care (sending cards, preparing meals, making visits) in the parish
* Current procedures for welcoming visitors and incorporating newcomers

Information for Conducting Church Business

* Detailed staff information (people, hours, job descriptions, etc.)
* Complete set of labeled keys, combinations, codes (for doors and alarms)
* Logins and passwords (for accounts and software subscriptions)
* Information about discretionary account and charge cards
* Church Calendar – with special emphasis on previously planned events
* A set of typical bulletins
* Recent church newsletters and congregational mailings
* A list of committees within the congregations, as well as the members belonging to each one
* A list of spiritual formation offerings
* List of organizations or churches with which St. Mark’s has a relationship

Helpful Neighborhood Information

* Post offices
* Food (Grocery stores, eat-in, take-out, convenience)
* Auto repair shops
* Medical assistance (emergency care, hospitals, doctors, dentists, vets, etc.)
* Trash, recycling and bulk days

**St. Mark’s Day School Information**

1. Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Your Sabbath* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007) 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* by Henri Nouwen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)