

8-27 Summer's Ending; Now What?
Proverbs 3:1-6; Philippians 4:6-7

Whew! I'm glad that's over! Don't get me wrong; it was a great wedding (or great graduation reception, or great family reunion, or...) But I'm exhausted; I don't have energy to do another thing today!

There is a rhythm to life. We can work hard, focus intently for a period of time. But then we need time to relax. Several years ago, I was teaching about information overload in a communication class. One of the students seemed to be especially attentive that day. After class, Jan approached me to say a light had gone on for her as she listened. She and her husband owned the graphic arts company in our small town. Jan told me that they had observed a rhythm at the company that they found very frustrating. Employees could work really hard for two to three years; the company was especially productive during those years. And then....that fourth year, it seemed nothing was done quickly. Everything took 2-3 times longer to accomplish. And nothing was done well or efficiently. That day, Jan came to the conclusion the staff and company had hit work overload and needed some down time to regenerate, to re-energize.

I have a friend who has served in some important leadership positions with American Baptists. She described herself one time having two speeds: fast and off. Either she was working "full-speed ahead" or she was completely "off." "Slow and steady" wasn't part of her vocabulary.. I can understand how she operates. But once I'm in the "off" position, the challenge is how do I get back to "fast." How do I answer the question, "What's next?" We're talking about transition.

Summer's ending and it's time for school.

Some school districts already have begun classes, welcoming their students for 2017-2018—three of my grandchildren started school last week—or districts have scheduled their

teachers to report to begin preparation for the coming school year. By the Tuesday after Labor Day, all Michigan public schools will be back in session. We are making the transition from summer schedules to more-structured routines, often too full for the hours we have each day.

Even if we don't have children or grandchildren, we are reminded of the change in seasons. Summer becomes autumn—there is a different feeling in the air. Garden production of summer vegetables and fruits slows down and root crops and fall fruits ripen for harvest. We begin watching reports of where to find the peak color of the autumn and when that will occur (predicted this year between September 17 and October 1!). Tourists in TC become fewer and fewer.

Summer's ending, although some are still trying to cram in the last vacations before starting fall activities. Summer's ending, even our church calendar, like so many other churches' calendars, begins to fill up with fall activities. We are in transition.

Transitions can be scary; they can be times of uncertainty. We're letting go of what has been, the familiar. We aren't sure yet of what is to come.

Just this past week, much of the US experienced a total solar eclipse. What would it be like to experience the transition from full sunshine to full darkness and then back to full sunshine? From its beginning, in Oregon for the continental US, to its ending, last aired live on television or radio from a ship a couple hundred miles off the east coast, the path of the total eclipse lasted about 3 hours.

Leading up to Monday, there were those predicting the end of world; some were predicting the second coming of Christ. Uncertainty: what would this transition from sun to total darkness be like? Times of uncertainty can be scary for some people.

Transitions give us opportunity to reflect: "The time went so quickly!" we say. We ask, "Where have we been, what have we done? What did we do well? What could we do better?"

Transitions are both happy times and sad times; something has been lost and something has been gained

◇ Transitions mark endings

- We might grieve—we say good by to a loved one; our children get old enough to start school, and some parents cry “They (the kids) are growing up so fast!”
- We might celebrate—graduations mark the end of high school or of college
Some parents might even be saying, “Yes! Summer’s ending, the kids will be back in school!!!”

◇ Transitions mark beginnings –

- Yes! The kids are back in school!!
- Nick is beginning a welding technology program of study at Ferris St. Univ.
- You get a new job—what you’ve always wanted to do
- And yet, there is that uncertainty: “What will the next step be like? I’m not sure I’m ready for the next step...”

We need times to be very busy AND we need times to do nothing. There is a rhythm to our lives. There are beginnings and there are endings.

By this point, you’re probably totally confused! Why is Pastor taking so much time talking about transitions?! Because this is where I am right now—in that in-between time. Beginning next week, I’ll be making my weekly trip to the Portland/Okemos area to care for granddaughter Sutton—her older sisters will be in full-day kindergarten this year. As I write in the September newsletter, this used to be the time of year I returned to teaching fall semester classes. When I worked in Nebraska, this was the time of year we shifted from summer youth camps to adult retreats throughout the fall. My own life has been characterized by transition at the end of August each year. And even here at FBC, last week we completed a series of six sermons on spiritual practices. The question becomes: what’s next? As a church, where have we been in the past 8 months? In the past 19 months? Where is God taking us next?

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There are rhythms to our lives. There are beginnings; there are endings. There are transitions.

So the question is, “Even in times of transition, what is reliable? Do we have an unshakeable foundation to keep us grounded even in times of uncertainty?”

And for us, for Christians, the answer is “Yes!”

We read two scripture passages this morning. The first came from Proverbs 3:1-6

We are to trust in the Lord with all our heart: fully rely on God. Trust: believe God is the One described in scripture Trust: believe that God does provide; God does protect. Trust: believe God loves us; God loves you; God loves me.

- John 15:5-8 Jesus says: “I am the vine and you are the branches.” We live in an area with many vineyards. If we don’t know what a vine looks like, all we have to do is visit one of the vineyards. Jesus is the trunk of the vine, we are the shoots, the branches that grow out of the trunk. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. We don’t have to have all the answers. God’s promise to us is to teach us and guide us.

Psalm 32:8 The Lord says, “I will teach you the way you should go; I will instruct you and advise you.”

When we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, when we abide in Christ every moment of every day, the Lord will guide us to do what is right.

God is our unshakeable foundation.

And we read Philippians 4:6-7

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

We don’t have to worry or be anxious—even in times of uncertainty, even in times there isn’t enough: enough money, enough time, enough patience, enough information, enough 4

people to love us and support us

In those times, we are to ask God for what we need—giving thanks as we ask. We are to practice being thankful, before we know whether we're going to get the money, or the time, or the patience, or the information or the people to be supportive of us.

And the promise is not that by asking to win the lottery, we'll actually get a winning lottery ticket or that by asking for a new car we'll actually get a new car. The promise is that we will have God's peace in our lives. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." On a future Sunday, we'll be talking about peace as fruit of God's Spirit. For now, peace is calmness, acceptance of what we do receive, trusting it will be enough, in some way.

God is our unshakeable foundation.

In Athens, Paul saw that the Greeks had statues to all the gods they could think of. And just in case they had forgotten one, they had created a statue to the "unknown God." Paul explained to them that Jesus Christ was that unknown God. In Acts 17:28-29, Paul told them God is our unshakeable foundation: "For in (God) we live and move and have our being. For we are God's offspring..."

God is our unshakeable foundation. "Abide in me" Jesus invites us into relationship, a long-term relationship. God is not an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician)—the one we call only when we have an emergency. God is not Santa Claus—the one who is supposed to give us whatever we ask for. "Abide in me"—In God we live and move and have our being.

That's what we've spent the last six weeks talking about: our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. We've spent those six Sundays introducing spiritual practices by which we take time to experience God's presence. Stilling our minds, our lives and making room to abide in Christ.

As I spoke about spiritual practices over these six weeks, I intentionally used the word "practices" rather than "disciplines." Practice is something we do over and over again. "Practice" also has the connotation of not yet doing something perfectly. I'll have to **5**

admit that some days, my spiritual practices can be hit or miss, something I don't do perfectly. "Spiritual practices," in that way to me, makes sense to me. Yet "discipline" is probably the better word. By regularly being in relationship with God, being in relationship with God's creation, being in relationship with God's people, I lean less and less on my own understanding and become more and more the person God desires for me to be. Discipline—each day lived in God's presence.

Where does all of this take us?

Summer is coming to an end. What's next? In September we'll begin talking about the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith, self-control. Several activities resume: AB Women's Mission Group, Adult Sunday School, preparation for the October Craft Fair. We're talking of scheduling some additional activities. There will be many opportunities for you as part of God's family here at FBC. You may want to suggest a "what's next" you would like for us to offer.

AND there is one more answer to the question "What's next?"

In January, we will host a group participating in a spiritual formation opportunity called The Apprentice Program. Our organist, Jo Panter was one of the initial organizers of this program. More information will be distributed throughout this fall.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways, abide in Christ, and God will make your paths straight. God is our unshakeable foundation through endings and beginnings, through times of uncertainty and times of transition, even if or when we don't know exactly "what's next." We have God's promise, found in Joshua 1:9

Joshua 1:9 (GNTD)

Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident! Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go.