

Moving Forward in Hope and Promise

New England Synod Worship for Summer 2020

Dialogue Sermon

by Sara Anderson and Kim Bergstrand, Associates to the Bishop

Scriptures: Exodus 13:17-22; 40:36-38 & Luke 24:13-27

Sara: These are such rich, deep texts, as I listened to them and considered them, I felt more connected than I typically do to the angst of the disciples just after Jesus' crucifixion, full of questions: what do we do now? How do we go forward? What comes next? It certainly feels like a wilderness journey

Kim: Yes-It seems as though we've been navigating around mountains of anxiety, frustration, fear, grief and loss- not knowing what the next day will bring. It's disorienting! But as we heard in the reading today, even in those times of wilderness travel, God was leading with fire and cloud, steady through the days and nights. They even went a 'round about way' through the wilderness so they could move forward instead of being tempted to go back to what they knew, moving in hope and healing along that longer route to promise.

Sara: It's a massive shift to a new way of living faithfully, they left so much behind..

Kim: But not everything, they carried Joseph's bones and a promise with them! I wonder what kind of bones we carry...What is weighing on us? What is giving us strength?

Sara: I've been thinking about how we carry the bones of the January church, the church where we gathered in person, shared bread and wine, sang boldly closer than six feet apart, were settled in the comfort of Sunday traditions and wondered how to invite more people in.

I think we carry those bones- bones of a church who met in buildings that faithfully held our sacred space but sometimes was our only holy space- a church we can't, maybe even shouldn't return back to-but one whose hope and promise, whose heart and mission, we can carry with us into the next thing with faithfulness . And, while God takes 'notice' of the church we are becoming.

Kim: And, there's so much to notice about what God's people are doing as the church today. Vibrant new ways of connecting, growing, engaging... We are an online presence-folks we that we never thought in a million years would adapt to this new technology, are not only using it but are embracing it! Shepherding groups are providing prayers, fellowship and support - strengthening and building relationships within the worshipping community. Hundreds of new people are tuning-in to our worship services and joining bible study

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groups- some that may have never dared set foot in a church before. Congregations are expanding feeding ministries, developing sewing ministries to produce PPE and engaging in outreach services to vulnerable communities in partnership with Lutheran Disaster Response and ELCA Domestic Hunger. The Church has indeed left the building! The Spirit is leading us forward in healing and hope even if it's hard for us to notice sometimes amidst our grief, questions, and weary hearts

Sara: it's so true, there ARE so many good things happening and still: I don't know about you but these days I'd like a blueprint for that leading. No more round about ways—just give me a map and tell me where to go, what to do, all these decisions, all this change, all this adapting and flexibility--- it's exhausting and hard!

Kim: But Sara, if we were at Forward, you'd probably be jumping up and down reminding us that...

Sara: *(yelling)* We ARE RESURRECTION PEOPLE. It's true, that promise reminds us that we don't carry those bones of the January church in grief alone, or stand at the tomb, or walk the Emmaus road with only grief as a companion. Not in the hope of simply surviving or going back to what was... we carry those bones instead believing that all things are being made new.

Kim: And that makes all the difference. We can connect to the uncertainty the disciples felt walking that Emmaus road before Jesus was revealed--- but we can also ask questions as resurrection people- trusting that God will be revealed to us in all that is being made new. Jesus asked a powerful question along the way: What are you discussing as you walk along?

Sara: **And their answers revealed what was in their hearts!** Worry certainly. Grief yes. But **also** their love and faithfulness. Jesus liked to ask more questions than give answers. In the Gospels, Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 137 but only answers 3! We're going to invite anyone watching to be part of a synod movement (that we'll tell you more about at the end of worship), and join in the holy practice of asking questions too.

Kim: Asking questions of our own selves, of our neighbors, of participants in worship, of our family- can be a beautiful spiritual discipline. Listening, really listening, to the answers is what truly moves us.

Sara: It's so true, when we have asked just a few questions of our congregations, who are seeking to define what motivates their ministry, (or discover their 'Why') so many of the

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answers moved me. When you listen to the responses, you can learn what lives in their hearts.

Kim: AND, we can also see that we are a church on the move. A church becoming. A church on the way.

Sara: moving even as we travel through the wilderness, moving while we carry the bones of the January church, accompanied by grief but also by promise, commitment and faithfulness.

Kim: It's an exciting time to **BE** the church today. In sharing our stories and our expressions of faith we are never alone. As we move forward, God in Christ walks along side of us and by the Spirit leads us in healing and hope.

AMEN