

A Place to Belong
"Making Room for Renewal"
Trinity UMC
April 24th, 2016

SCRIPTURE READING
(The Message)

Selection from Acts 8: 26-31,34-35

Elaine

Later God's angel spoke to Philip: "At noon today I want you to walk over to that desolate road that goes from Jerusalem down to Gaza." He got up and went. He met an Ethiopian eunuch coming down the road. The eunuch had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was returning to Ethiopia, where he was minister in charge of all the finances of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was riding in a chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹⁻³⁰ The Spirit told Philip, "Climb into the chariot." Running up alongside, Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah and asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

³¹⁻³³ He answered, "How can I without some help?" and invited Philip into the chariot with him.

³⁴⁻³⁵ The eunuch said, "Tell me, who is the prophet talking about: himself or some other?" Philip grabbed his chance. Using this passage as his text, he preached Jesus to him.

*READING OF THE GOSPEL

John 15: 1-8

Roberta

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. ² He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. ⁶ If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

Prayer

Earlier this week, on Theology Tuesday Facebook post I asked the question- **Where are you being called to make room?** Do you need to make room for others, room for fun, room for parenting, or room for conversation? I did not get any answers to the question and perhaps it is a question that you must reflect upon and answer alone rather than in social media. I have been thinking a lot about making room this week.

Yesterday at the women's rising strong retreat, for our final activity of our day together we pasted green and brown leaves on a tree—the tree is in the fellowship hall. The green leaves represented things in our lives that we wished to cultivate- Jennifer suggested five different areas to make room for as rising strong women.

- Cultivating authenticity,
- cultivating self-compassion,
- cultivating gratitude and joy,
- cultivating faith through trusting God,
- Cultivating stillness and quietness.

After we wrote on the green leaves we then wrote on the brownish/ orange leaves and wrote what we need to 'let go of' so that authenticity, self-compassion, faith and trust in God, etc could more fully grow in our lives.

In order to cultivate faith and trust in God in my life, I let go of my need for certainty and control.

In order to cultivate gratitude and joy—I let go of my habit of comparing myself to others and give thanks to God for the gifts that I have been given.

In order to cultivate stillness and quietness- let go of beginning my day with coffee and Facebook so that I can begin my day with centering prayer.

Making room in our lives requires that we let go of other things.

I have discovered over and over in the life of faith, there is a shedding a 'letting' go, a 'making room' for something that has been strangled to blossom and grow. When we fill our lives with so much 'stuff' both literally and metaphorically, it is much more difficult to make room for a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of surprise, a sense of the Holy living amongst us.

I noticed several things about making room in the story from Acts that Elaine read. The story is about Philip and an Ethiopian Eunuch.

At the beginning of the story—Philip makes room to listen to God's instruction—a very specific instruction that we may call 'crazy' today. Yet Philip listened and responded to what he heard. He made room for mystery; he made room for a big surprise, he made room for an encounter with a stranger

One thing I noticed though is that Philip waited until he was invited before he entered into the space of the stranger. He ran alongside the chariot and asked questions but he did not jump in until he was invited.

The Ethiopian also made room in this story—he made room for questions—he did not understand what he was reading but he kept reading and studying. He made room for an encounter with a stranger- he was the one who made the invitation. He invited Philip into his space- into the chariot. In the Message paraphrase, after being invited in, Philip—took his chance and shared the good news of Jesus Christ.

Both Philip and the Ethiopian were transformed as they made room for each other. Later in the story—Philip again made room for a new tradition—the Ethiopian after reading and listening to Philip as he 'grabbed his chance' to share the good news

of the Christ—asked to be baptized. This was going against culture, this was going against tradition, yet Philip made room for a new expression of faith.

Where are you being called to make room in your life of faith?

As many of you know, I am making room for renewal in my life of faith. I am in my sixth year of ministry at Trinity. I am grateful to be pastor of a people who actively discern where and how God is calling them. There is a proud history at Trinity of being a blessing to the neighborhood—the church began when River Road was being transformed from farms and orchards to a neighborhood of houses, schools and businesses.

We have worked hard at Trinity over the past several years in visioning ourselves to be a place to be a blessing for a community and a world that is changing.

At the beginning of our consultation process, we were shown a bridge that was made to connect people but as the bridge was being built, the river channel shifted and rather than being a place of connection, the bridge was a monument.

Our world, our culture, our neighborhood has been and will continue to shift. This entire consultation process, entire visioning and re-visioning has been done to make sure that we are building a bridge that actually connects with each other and with God.

We have completed the prescriptions that were given to us during the consultation process. We have implementing a communication plan—making sure that we use all the channels to communicate with one another. A communication task force first studied and researched and then made a plan for communication. New bulletin boards were put up, a weekly email blast was initiated, Facebook Prayer requests as

well as phone prayer requests were strengthened. We have worked at creating a mechanism for connection- a task force met and prayed and discerned how there could be room for having fun at Trinity. The activity fair was born out of that and over the past year there have been plays and concerts, game nights, sewing clubs, hikes, visits to wineries, lunches and more that have provided space and room for deepening of relationships.

We have engaged in workshops over the past two years to clarify our vision and focus as we continue to move forward as a congregation. Rev. Beth Estock helped us dig deeper into all the information from the online 360 degree survey that the church completed. Our mission statement has not changed—our mission at Trinity UMC is to form disciples of Jesus Christ as we gather in love, grow in faith and go out in hope to transform the world. Our mission has been strengthened by clarifying a focus and vision for who we want to make room for—who we want to invite to experience the transforming relationship with Jesus the Christ.

The last consultation prescription has been to develop a plan to fully align our current and future missions on the vision. You will hear more about that at the town hall meeting after our celebration worship next Sunday. Thanks be to God for the courage, the risks, the perseverance, the vulnerability to engage in this lengthy process as a congregation to explore our founding principle to be blessing to our neighborhood.

We have challenges to face even as we take time to celebrate this milestone of completing the consultation prescriptions. We have a strong lay leadership team who will lead us into and through our next challenges.

Where are you being called to make room in your life of faith?

My friends, I am being called to make room for renewal in my faith walk.

Beginning in mid- May, I will be combining a month of my regular paid vacation with two months of unpaid renewal leave. Back in October of last year, I presented a proposal to the leadership team for this renewal-- *The demands of the local church are both exhilarating and challenging. Throughout the past 5 ½ years since I have been appointed to Trinity, we have worked hard together in visioning and getting more clarity about our health and vitality as a congregation... With the completion of the prescriptions this coming spring, this is a good time for me to step back for some time of spiritual growth and renewal.*

After a week of attending an international conference for Messy Church in England, I will begin my renewal leave on a small island off the western coast of Scotland. The Island of Iona is thought to be the birthplace of celtic Christianity- it is a 'thin place' in the Celtic tradition- a place where the nearness of divine presence is experienced. I will be staying in the abbey with people who live at Iona full time as well as visitors from over the world. During my week there, I will engage in worship twice each day and also do the chores I will be assigned.

It has been on my bucket list for quite some time to spend some time at the Iona Community. My goal is to re-connect with the timelessness of God's presence, to make room for prayer, to make room for re-connecting more fully with the 'vine' that John speaks about in John chapter 15.

The gospel reads that we are to remain in Christ the vine as Christ remains in the communal relationship with the trinity—Father—Son—Holy Spirit or Creator-Christ-Spirit.

As we abide in Christ, there are times to make room for pruning- for trimming off those parts of our lives that are hindering rather than allowing the growth of Christ. This renewal time, I will be making room for some trimming- some pruning.

I will return from England/Scotland in early June. I plan to engage in a daily time of study, prayer and hiking. I want to spend time exploring the various places of beauty that surround us here in Eugene. I want to share this experience with you and I will do so by creating a Facebook page where I will post pictures and some reflections of my renewal wanderings.

Where are you being called to make room in your life of faith?

In my absence this summer, Pastor Ryan will be increasing his hours. During May and June he will increase his $\frac{1}{4}$ time to $\frac{1}{2}$ time while he continues to complete the school year with his work at Willamalane after school program. Then in July and August, he will increase his hours to full time at Trinity. Ryan will be supported by a lay support team of Elaine Brown, Pat Rankin and Jan Peterson. He will also be supported by Rev. Gary Powell, a retired elder who currently attends Wesley UMC.

So my friends, you too will be invited to make room this summer- make room for the leadership of Ryan, make room for the leadership of our lay sisters and brothers, make room for the sustaining presence of Christ.

Where are you being called to make room in your life of faith?