

Lift Up Your Sails©

Ephesians 3:14-20, John 15:5-17

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Oh my. I stared at my computer screen for a very long time yesterday, trying to figure out how to start this final sermon. I've had in my mind the themes I wanted to use today for a while. But, it's hard to put into words the things I'm feeling about this day.

I announced my upcoming retirement last November and it seemed so far away. How could the time go so fast? How can it really be here now? I look at your faces and I see mixed feelings in you, just as I have mixed feelings too.

There are a handful of reasons why I'm looking forward to retirement. And there are around 75 reasons why I'm a little sad about it.

I won't name them all because I know you don't want to be here all day long. But one of the things I'm looking forward to in retirement is having more time to just be. To spend time with Fred and family. To sit on my balcony and think. Or not think. To cook more. To write (something other than sermons every week). No meetings. And probably – at this point in my life ... No pressure about what to do to grow the church. I think most pastor's put that pressure on themselves. It is constant and it is puzzling. It is a challenge and I always used to love a challenge. But not so much at this age.

I still care about growing the church, of course. But I am happy to hand that baton to someone else in the relay race of church life. I suspect, however, when I wake up on Wednesday, May 1st, no longer the pastor at Holly PC (or anywhere) I will probably still have that feeling of pressure within. I imagine it will take some time for that to leave me.

So, some of the 75 reasons why I'm sad about retiring have to do with the same things I just said I'm looking forward to. Sometimes I will miss the routine of writing a sermon every week. Fred and I have enjoyed the Mitford Series, written by Jan Karon, about an Episcopal priest named Father Tim. When he was preparing to retire, Father Tim said, *preaching every week is like having a baby on Sunday and finding out you're pregnant again on Monday.*

There is a tension in the love and weariness of it all. And I will miss it. Sometimes. I guess I can always just write a sermon for the heck of it. If I'm bored.

But I will tell you the other 74 or more reasons why I will be sad about retiring. I'm looking at most of those 74 reasons right now. All of you – my beloved people. You are the reason for the most joy I've had in ministry in these last eight years. You are the reason my sermons had any life to them. Your trust in me as your pastor in times of trouble or sickness or loss has been the most precious thing to me. Your support in my own times; your laughter with me; your desire to study and grow and work and serve in ministry together.

Your friendships.

You are the biggest reason my heart feels some sadness and hesitation.

And I know that you are feeling some of the sadness. I know you love me and would prefer that I stay for a while. I also know it isn't just about me in particular, but that you have deep concerns about the future of the church here at Holly Presbyterian. It takes time to go through the search for a pastor. Who will it be? How long it will it take? What about finances? What's going to happen?

And while I can't answer those questions, I do want to encourage you to remember who you are. With a pastor, or in between, you are the church. You are disciples of the one who has called you into being. You are all equipped to do ministry, led by the Holy Spirit.

Just this past Wednesday we finished the study on Simon Peter. The last one showed the difference in Peter after the Holy Spirit came upon him and the other disciples. Peter went from being a man who was striving to be faithful but who certainly fell at times – like when he denied knowing Jesus three times. He was so afraid of what would happen to him if they knew he was associated with Jesus.

But after Jesus' death, we are told in Acts 2 that the Holy Spirit came like a powerful rushing wind and suddenly Peter lost his timidness and became bold in preaching. And he truly became the rock whom the church was built on, just as Jesus said he would be.

Through Peter (and of course others too) people came to believe in the risen Christ; churches began in spite of great persecution. Peter would be beaten many times, and thrown into prison and ordered not to preach about Jesus being resurrected, but he could not be silent. The church grew and spread far and wide.

In the article written by Joan Gray, former moderator of our Presbyterian General Assembly, she talks about the sailboat church verses the rowboat church.

Think about being in a rowboat. It goes along fine as long as there are people in the boat with oars, rowing. They have to work in sync with one another, using their manpower to keep the boat moving in the right direction. And it goes along okay unless the people rowing get weary. You might shift around and let someone else row for a while. But the problem is that sometimes you run out of steam. Everybody gets tired and just wants to slow down. The rowboat doesn't get too far when that happens.

But then there is the sailboat. A sailboat still needs the people working together to sail. Some need to hoist up the sails. Someone needs to be there at the controls. But the power comes from the wind behind the sails, right? With a good wind, the boat moves along at a good clip and while the people in the boat work together, the sailboat doesn't depend on their energy and power.

See, the sailboat church does not depend on their own power to keep going. The sailboat church depends on the rushing winds of the Holy Spirit. Of course, people need to get in the boat and do their part to make it all work. But the boat moves by a power greater than the people. The Spirit of Christ is why the church exists; the Spirit will blow and take the church wherever the

Spirit wants it to go. The people trust in the winds to take them much farther than they can ever take themselves.

But it takes an adventuresome spirit to get out of the same old mold. It takes a willingness to just go with the wind – to adventure away from the safety of the same old thing. It takes trust to find joy in the unknown, believing there is something beyond what we can see right now.

I want to share this little clip with you from the movie Moana. Because of a curse on the Polynesian Island, Moana's father, who is the chief, wants everyone to just stay there – even though the sea is calling to his teenage daughter, Moana. There is something out there that she can't see but believes will save the island. She is torn between wanting to obey her father and go with the status quo, and getting in that boat and sailing off into the unknown. Finally, off she goes. Let's watch

Movie Clip – How Far I'll Go

Lift up your sails, my friends. Look ahead into the future with joyful adventure. Because with the winds of the Spirit at your sails you never know how far you will go. The Holy Spirit has your back; goes in front and beside and behind you all the way. You don't know the future. You don't know the plans God has for you. But believe me, God does have a perfect plan for you.

Now my prayer for you is what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.

Lift up your sails, dear Church and let his Spirit be your power. Just see how far you will go. Amen.