

There is this cartoon that seems to fit today. This cartoon shows an egg breaking open and a bird standing wide-eyed looking at the world and shouting, "Wow! Paradigm Shift!!" A paradigm is basically a way of looking at the world- a model or pattern. For the bird in the cartoon, its "world" had previously been nothing more than the inside of an egg. Now, its confronted with something radically different- thus, its comment- "Wow! Paradigm Shift!!"

In some respects, we as a congregation, may be able to identify with that bird. Up until last week, the world of this congregation had the same pastor being present each Sunday morning with but a few exceptions. We relied on the fact that in an emergency, we had someone we could call. However, as with the bird- the way we look at our church world (our paradigm) has shifted.

So now what? It's not like we haven't been here before and I think it is critical to remember that not only have we survived a number of such paradigm shifts in the this church in the past, but we may even have thrived in doing it. While this shift we are collectively in right now feels like a major one, it is likely if we stop to think about it, we make a multitude of relatively minor changes each day- from planning eggs for breakfast only to find you are out of them, to planning a short walk only to find it is raining, to wanting to make a phone call and can't find the number.

However, the question- whether spoken or only a thought or a sense of uneasiness- is still- so now what? As Presbyterians, we do not have a Bishop who will come in and introduce us to our new pastor in a matter of weeks. It will first of all, be up to the Session with the assistance of the Presbytery and people like Jenn Lamb, who was with us last week, to determine future pastoral leadership. While we might have an interim or bridge pastor as they are sometimes called, it may take a bit of time before we call consistent pastoral leadership. In the meantime, everyone in this congregation needs to be involved in carrying on the tasks of being God's church- no matter if imagined small and inconsequential or large and overwhelming. All members will need to be part of the action and the conversation of what kind of leader will help us do God's work.

Reading the scripture from Exodus 3 this morning, we might be able to relate to Moses' uneasiness when he encounters God in the burning bush and is informed that he must go to the Israelite people and bring them out of the miserable living conditions in Egypt. Moses finds every excuse in the book..."They won't listen to me"..."They won't believe me"... If we were to read further in Exodus- on into Chapter 4- as God's conversation with Moses continues, Moses claims, "I have never been eloquent... I am slow of speech and tongue... find someone else." Even when God changes Moses' staff into a snake and his hand to a leprous hand, Moses still comes with excuses. God finally loses patience and brings brother, Aaron, on board, but still expects Moses to be responsible. I would guess probably at that moment, Moses thought, "So now what?? What have I gotten myself into?" Sound familiar? Moses found many reasons for not wanting to go where God was leading. God- even though short of patience- did not let Moses out of God's plan- just sent another pair of hands or another mouth, if you will. God had an answer for Moses' every, "So now what??"

In the days ahead, every time, the question, "so now what?" begins to be formed in our minds and in our lives, all things CAN come together with direction and strength. At those times when we are just sure we cannot possibly do what we are being asked -individually or collectively- what if we stepped back and saw that what is being asked just might be- AND likely is- a part of God's plan?

I was reminded of Pastor Steve's final letter to us- he felt one of our biggest strengths is caring for each other, checking in and praying for one another. He also left us with the advice to keep looking outward into the community- to keep reflecting God's light into the community. I believe he is right- the worst thing we can do is hunker down and wait for another pastor. God didn't let Moses off the hook no matter how many excuses he found. I believe the same is true for us. And just as with Moses, God will provide the abilities, strength and support we need, if only we focus on God's plan not our own.

In the months ahead, the Session will meet with Presbytery folks to talk about the possibilities for pastoral ministry in this church. Hard questions will need to be asked about what IS the ministry of this church- what is its unique place in the

community of Canby? As we get smaller in membership and the years creep up on all of us, we will need to honestly ask what kind of ministry is necessary for this church and in these times. Likely some of what we have done in the past will continue but only after carefully considering their value and the possibility of celebrating them and setting them aside for what the future needs. Once there is a clear picture- and with the help of Presbytery resources we will do that- then we can state honestly what kind of leadership is needed to help us accomplish the ministry God has in store for us. The prospect of seeking God's guidance and imagining possibilities can be exciting as long as our eyes and hearts are fixed on God's plan and not our own.

The ongoing programming and ministry needs to continue. Worship, Christian Education, homebound and sick need care, those experiencing death need comfort, new babies and possibly new members need to be welcomed. Mundane things such as bills need to be paid so continued- maybe even increased- giving will be necessary. The church building needs to be kept up.....the list goes on...if anyone in this congregation has a doubt that their presence, their hands and their prayers are not important- that doubt needs to be quickly and firmly changed.

How can we accomplish all this as well as the things we know we haven't even thought of? Or do we simply close the church doors because it is too much effort? Or do we stop coming to church because too much may be asked of us? Do we stop giving- financially as well as time- because we no longer believe in the value of this community? I hope you are thinking a resounding, "NO!" to these questions.

We didn't know what God had in store for us when we experienced over many years previous pastors being called to ministry elsewhere. But we only need to look around this building and its programs to see the many blessings that have happened. We didn't then and we don't now know what the next months will bring. Of one thing I am certain- it doesn't matter that we don't know the future as long as we are focused on being God's hands and face for our ministry in this congregation and community. That focus will be critical for the future. There will be a quick downward spiral if we allow ourselves to look inward focusing only on individual needs and wants.

God's words to Moses places before us the reminder that in spite of all the excuses we can find, God places before us all the skills and assistance we need for the new direction to which we are being called.

A five-year old boy was heard to say, "I'm going outdoors to play ball with God." When asked, "how do you play ball with God," he replied, "Oh, it's not hard at all. I just throw the ball up and God throws it back down to me!"

Oh, the trusting wisdom of our children. May we just throw our balls (our plans, concerns and struggles) up to God and know without a doubt that God will handle them according to God's plan. We also need to be prepared to catch the ball when it is thrown back to us. For a number of years, the Spirit candle has been lit for each worship service and sits on the communion table. May we look to it often as a reminder of God's continued presence among us. Amen

Karen Houtman 10/4/2020