

*Based on Isaiah 6:1-8, selected verses. The Call of Isaiah.*

Over the past couple of weeks several of you have asked how I am doing with *all the transitions going on at SPC*.

Truth be told, I have to laugh at the irony of the question. It seems, in hindsight, my very arrival as your pastor has brought nothing but transition!

There was the arrival itself four and a half years ago, and the jolt of a new way of being in ministry after decades of stability. Followed almost immediately by a global pandemic and a new way of being church after a century of stability. Followed by the retirement of three beloved members of our staff: Administrative Assistant Kathy Reid and Director of Spiritual Formation and Campus Ministry Ethel Hornbeck and Choir Director Georgiann Toole. Youth Shepherd - turned Campus Minister Morgan Wisniewski left to have a baby. Interim Choir Director Steve Grives came and went.

Debbie Romano, who stepped up heroically during the pandemic, uncovered a call of her own that had lain dormant for decades and is now flying the coop in order to prepare for pastoral ministry. And now Helen and John Burns, who have been fixtures at SPC for decades, have finally determined - at the ripe young age of 96 - that it really is time to retire. So we send them off with a party and our love and our heartbreak over yet another transition.

So I guess I want to turn the question around: *SPC, how are YOU doing with all that transition!?!*

It has been a ride, has it not? A treacherous one at times, but not without its moments of bliss. In fact, from a purely objective perspective, all of these transitions have brought an abundance of blessings, many of which are just beginning to unfold in their fullness.

Pastor and people are firmly established in a pattern of worship and service and community that in many ways is just getting started. The worst of the pandemic is receding from the front of our minds while the many lessons we learned through that time remain. New Administrative Assistant Lynn Dampman is now firmly established in her role and basically running the show while doing her best to keep yours truly on track. Children and Youth Coordinator Christa Joyce is forming young souls with a spirit of grace and courage while inspiring those of us with slightly older souls to reclaim our love of learning to live. Accompanist Sam Jannotta has become the most beloved church musician on the planet. Tech Support Guru Mark Nutwell has become equally beloved as our smooth operator behind the scenes. We even have hope for a potentially awesome new choir director waiting in the wings, fingers crossed, prayers ascending.

New Deacon Moderator Jen Jones has stepped up to the plate, on fire for the role, with a vision for revising and expanding the ministry. A team of people who pray now offers their gifts, sharing more broadly that source of spiritual support. Mica Martin, home sick today with bronchitis, begins her role as Worship Committee Chairperson next week. And so it goes on. The call of God continues.

This ongoing, perpetual, communal call of God we see unfolding here at SPC through our own many transitions is mirrored in many ways through the call of God unfolding in our Lesson from Isaiah. Here is the prophet, already in service to the community, caught up in a moment of vision that leads him even deeper into a sense of purpose. Isaiah is having that mountaintop moment we all say we want. A direct message from the living God with specific instructions on what to do next. And then ... talk about transition! The call of the prophet begins in a time of royal prosperity, progresses through external and internal threat to that prosperity, suffers through conquest, destruction and exile, finds a way to *comfort, comfort now my people* in the midst of utter devastation and ruin, and then leads them back home to repair and rebuild and restore.

In fact, if we look closely, the call of Isaiah, expressed through a gripping Sixty Six chapters documented in the entire book, actually lasts some 250 years, some of the most dramatic ups and downs of biblical history. No, the original prophet Isaiah did not live 250 years. It turns out he, too, passed the torch, just like we are, from one generation to the next. A close study of the Book of Isaiah reveals at least three identifiably different prophets, all of whom prophesied under the name of *Isaiah*, all of whom now blend into one identity through these ancient words of Scripture. 250 years of one call through many people through many transitions.

250 years of Isaiah. 281 years (and counting!) of Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church. Do we think we might have a parallel here?

I would go so far as to suggest the many internal transitions we are living through at SPC have been preparing us collectively to navigate even more radical external transitions, some of which have already begun, many of which are only just unfolding.

We are in a massive generational transition, as Baby Boomers really do retire and emerging generations step up to take the lead. We are in a massive political transition as our nation barrels toward a presidential election rematch just about nobody wants, with dire consequences forecast no matter which party wins. We are in a massive climate transition as our planet barrels toward and beyond warming thresholds with catastrophic consequences. Now more than ever, we need leaders like Isaiah - like the several Isaiahs! - to challenge the comfortable and to comfort the challenged, and call us all to greater faithfulness, no matter our circumstances.

In the moment, yes, of course, all of these transitions - internal and external - seem all-consuming and even insurmountable. But with a view from eternity, from the perspective of the Spirit, you and I are simply living out our calling, one pastor and people at a time, one moment in history at a time, trusting God to give us the heart and the wisdom and even the exact words to share with one another, that we may truly learn to love God and our neighbor and ourselves more faithfully.

*How am I doing with all of the transitions at SPC?* you ask. *How are YOU doing with all of the transitions at SPC?* I ask in return. If the results so far are any indication, we are doing, by faith, just fine. Because we are together receiving all over again the Word of Hope revealed in our Lesson: when God asks *Whom shall I send?* the resounding cry of the faithful becomes *Here am I. Send me!*