

Calvary Presbyterian Church
"Signs of Spring"
Matthew 28:16-20
Rev. Cindy Ehlke
April 22, 2018

My favorite season is spring. We can see signs of spring all around us. High winds, heavy rain, muddy driveways and tall grass begging to be mowed! But in the midst of that there are plants starting to bloom, birds returning and the frogs are croaking. For me, my favorite sign of spring is the bulbs that are pushing up in my planters and around the yard. I am particularly fond of daffodils and tulips. Did you know that bulbs contain 7 times the DNA of humans? So does that mean they are smarter? I cannot answer that one and maybe I don't want to know.

The word bulb describes plants that grow from an underground mass of food storage tissue. They contain a complete miniature plant inside that bulb. Once they get moisture and are in the soil and the right temperature, they push out roots from the bottom and then the stems form and push up from the top.

You may wonder what this has to do with us at Calvary. To move into this new season, we hope to experience growth and positive change. Take a look at the drawing on the last page of the bulletin, the notes page. If we consider the base of the bulb as our church DNA, that DNA would be our history and our tradition that will supply the base for moving up out of the soil and into a new flower. We will then push up beyond that base and look at doing new things. This will require being receptive to new ideas and to new kinds of discipleship. Based on last week's message it will also require a clear vision, unhampered by the cataracts of resistance to change. There are two Scripture passages that we have for today that indicate how to plan a move into our future. We will have to look to the challenge that Abram faced. It will also require us to take another look at the Great Commission that is our guide.

Consider the Call of Abram. God tells him to "Go from your country and from your father's house to the land that I will show you..." This was a huge thing for Abram to do. It meant leaving everything he knew, his home, his usual ways of doing things where he could take prosperity and sustenance for granted. Now he was to head out not knowing just where he was going. He would trade a stable life for a nomadic one and had to develop both trust in God and an attitude of obedience. The only thing that I can compare this to is to think about what we go through when we sell our homes and move to another location. This is particularly hard if it involves downsizing. Those of you who have done this know how hard it is to do. When that reality comes to me, I can tell you it will not be easy. The two words that come to mind are stuff and attachment.

When Calvary begins to push out into new ventures, we will be a bit like Abram. We may wish to "keep things just as they are." But, survival for mainline churches will depend upon an openness to reaching out beyond our comfort levels. We need to be cautious that we do not manage our faith to fit only our needs. It will require that we have our Gospel message take heart in the community. There are two items on our agenda that we are most likely to be doing this year. One is to find the appropriate venue for our manse and the downstairs apartments.

The session is just beginning the process of examining the best ways to make use of our now vacant properties. The second is to reach out to the public schools to see how we may be helpful to them. You cannot find young families and children if you do not go where they are: like schools and other places young families gather. To put in a faith perspective, it may mean cultivating a faith that leads us to die to ourselves by putting others before our own needs as we endeavor to serve the Lord.

Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision. Think about the words in the Great Commission: go, make disciples, baptize, teach and obey. Again, just like last week, these are verbs, action words. A lot of times these may seem scary or even impossible. However, let us not forget the last part of that instruction. Jesus reassures us that “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” We are to go even if we are uncomfortable.

Take for example, how often we have been asked to bring someone to church with us. Not too many of us have done that, at least not lately. I have made excuses for not doing so and I am sure you have as well. Maybe we need to have a “bring a friend to church Sunday.” We could all make a concerted effort and then make sure the person we bring feels encouraged to come again. I have talked with some of the newer folks who have started to come to Calvary. Almost always they say they feel welcome and that they sense the “family friendly” feeling here. We have good stuff here. Why not share it?

Christ gave us the example of how to live out His message. He “did not consider equality with God to be used for His own advantage.” Instead he had the heart of a servant. He was humble and approachable. And he was obedient to the commands of God. In our Scripture from Romans we receive further instructions on what we are to do and then some encouragement as we do so. In Romans 12: 28 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” And in Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” This is good advice. But how do we make practical use of it?

Next week is Faith In Action Sunday. We will go out into the community or work here on community-based projects. Why would we make bean soup or clean up someone’s yard? The answer is obvious. It helps others to see that someone cares. It is action oriented and it is servanthood. To borrow a phrase from corporations, this is not about the bottom line, at least not in terms of producing a financial advantage. But on the other hand maybe it is the bottom line. It is the bottom line if you measure results from Christ’s point of view. It demonstrates the love of God and represents our efforts to act according to his purposes.

So we now have made progress. We see more clearly what we are here to do. And in keeping with our blooming tulip, we are preparing to grow into something new.