

The Neutral Zone

What is the neutral zone? *Neutral*, on a car, the zone is not *Drive*, nor is it *Reverse*. *Neutral* means that the car is on, ready to go, but not in gear. When a car is in neutral it can roll down a hill or be pushed out of a mud hole, but it cannot “go” forward or backwards on its own.

The neutral zone in our lives is somewhat like this...the neutral zone is the place we find ourselves when something has ended and something has not yet begun.

“Neutral Zone” is a phrase coined by William Bridges in his book Transitions. One important story from scripture, the story of the Exodus, gives us another name for this “neutral” zone...the name is “wilderness”. Once the Hebrew people were led out of slavery in Egypt, they didn’t go directly to the “promised land”. They remained in the wilderness for a generation of 40 years, until they came to the “promised land”.

There are many dangers in the wilderness:

- 1) The people complain because they are uncomfortable and quarrel with their leader...there is no ready food or water in the desert and they were well-fed in Egypt, even if they were slaves (See Exodus 16 and 17)
- 2) The people discover that one leader can’t handle all their needs (See Exodus 19)
- 3) The people receive the law from God and get impatient and create their own version of a god (an idol) who diverts them from a loving path. (See Exodus 32)

There are many opportunities in the wilderness:

- 1) The people grow in trust of God when their needs are provided for and they find themselves sustained in an unlikely place.
- 2) The people “work it out” together so leadership works in a new way.
- 3) The people move towards a new beginning by putting the way of God’s law at the center of their lives.

In some ways the interim time in a congregation is like a neutral zone, a time in the wilderness. The old securities that a pastor provided are gone and there is not quite anything that can take their place. It is uncomfortable and irritating and tempting to want to “get through it as fast as we can”.

It also is a time of opportunity to reflect on who Holy Shepherd has been and where Holy Shepherd is going.

It is a time to return to God, the source of life and call out for the Holy Spirit to lead when the path is hidden.

It is a time to look at each other and the gifts and resources of this place. It is a time to look at the world we live in and how it has changed and is changing. It is a time to ask and listen for answers on where God is leading.

On June 9/10 the Transition Team was commissioned: Shirley Bradsby, Joan Meister-Bridges, Paul Thomas, Don Threlkeld, Denise Ikenberry and Carol Rossini. They have already started to meet to learn and discuss. They will accompany and guide the congregation in this neutral wilderness time. I invite you to be part of the opportunities!

Pastor Kari Reiquam

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