

## **Transitions**

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**This morning I have felt led to speak on one of my favorite message themes, the theme of "Transitions and Passages." If we live long enough, we will pass through various life transitions or passages. Such passages include the death of a loved one...the wedding of a child...divorce...change of job, position, geographical location, and even the gentle inner tugs on one's soul that acknowledge that the life we are now living is not spiritually fulfilling. All of these transitions make us vulnerable for spiritual transformation.**

**Some of the issues surrounding the passages and transitions of life include: Love and Intimacy...What are they to me? How do I experience them? Spirituality and Religion...Is my religious tradition meeting my spiritual needs? Work and Career...How has my work and career defined who I am? How has my work and career become intrusive to my spiritual and emotional life?**

**Relationship and Aloneness...How do I balance my need for both?**

**Thinking and Feeling...How do I make the journey from my head to my heart, or how do I balance my feelings with my thinking?**

**Freedom and Responsibility...How do I remain free and independent, and yet responsible for my actions in family and work.**

**Spouses and Children...Who am I when I no longer have a spouse or when children no longer need me? Restlessness and**

**Contentment...How do I handle my feelings of spiritual and emotional restlessness? Where do I experience contentment?**

**Authenticity and Vulnerability...How do I become more authentic and vulnerable in my times of transition and spiritual growth? Loss and Death...How do I face and respond to the demise of loved ones? How do I face my own mortality?**

**These and many other issues are a part of processing the experience of disruption that we feel as we move from one emotional and spiritual place to another. These are sacred issues. According to the mythology of Genesis, we were created out of chaos, and it is**

out of chaos, transition and passages that we are re-created anew. It was Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, (and I would guess that I am the only minister in the world this morning who is quoting Nietzsche), “One must have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star.” This has certainly been my experience.

One of the major delusions humans tend to believe is that we have life under control. Diseases can be cured. Sensible precautions and wise laws safeguard us against tragedy. Bridge inspections can keep bridges from collapsing. We can predict economic shifts. We believe that we are intelligent enough to handle all things.

But then come those moments in life where we catch a glimpse of just how fragile we are. Those moments of vulnerability when we hear about another mass shooting, or when planes drop from the sky, or the earth shakes and volcanoes explode, or when we experience disease or personal heartbreak. These are the moments when we face the terrifying reality that, despite our advanced technology and five-year plans, we are not as in control as we

**thought. These are the moments of reality when we recognize that our worldly power and money, our many connections, or whatever else we may have that keep us in control, cannot save us. It is in these vulnerable moments where we realize that living in North America, complete with border walls or immigration policies that divide parents from children to keep the “riff-raff” of the world outside, cannot insulate us from the pain others are feeling. We cannot be insulated from the economic forces or totalitarianism in other countries, or the tragedy of too many guns in the hands of too many unstable people, or a terminal disease, divorce or death. It is easy to lose faith in such life experiences. Depression can quickly follow disruption.**

**I do believe, however, that tragedy and pain can also open our spirits. In the end, we are all spiritual beings in search of connection with the Inner light or Living God. Difficult transitions and passages can intensify this quest. Our hearts can be opened to the suffering of others because we have experienced such suffering**

**in our own lives. Whatever else we thought the meaning of life was before we experienced disruption in our lives, we now know that the meaning has changed. In transition we learn that life is a shifting fault line, and there is no such thing as a solid foundation.**

**Questions that we never thought of asking before begin to emerge, and the more we seek for answers, the more questions there are.**

**Although life in transition is a shifting fault line, I find some solid ground and reassurance in the writing of Paul in Second Corinthians. This, by the way, has become my favorite passage of Paul's writing: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day...We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."**

**The Quaker Thomas Kelly reminds us that "within the silences of the souls of persons an eternal drama is ever being enacted...And on**

**the outcome of this inner drama rests, ultimately, the outer pageant of history.”**

**Within the various tragedies of life that we have, are or will experience, a space will open within us. In this vulnerable space the Inner Light shines brightest. This is where the sacred and the chaos of our lives meet, and where intense spiritual growth takes place.**

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