

I don't like to say good-bye. I especially don't like to say good-bye to people I love. Thousands of memories are about to be detached from relationships that make memories possible. Possibilities for fruitful ministry that I can envision will come to fulfillment under someone else's hand. And yet ... and yet, I feel in my bones that this good-bye is good and necessary. The word of the Lord makes me feel that way. You should hear this word along with me in the Gospel of John 16:5-6.

Advantage and Necessity

Jesus said: **“But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away.”** (John 16:5-6)

“It is to your advantage that I go away.” That's not the first thought that comes to mind on our last Sunday together. Separation stings. It stings because things won't be the same, and we don't know how will they be different. How is that to our advantage? Separation stings because it unravels the tiny threads that have power to hold us together. How is that to our advantage?

We are feeling what Jesus' closest followers felt. He said it was necessary for Him to leave them. It was a necessity they did not feel and did not welcome. It contradicted their idea of the future. It galled them. Jesus explained the necessity to them in a way they would understand only later. Verse 7 is blunt: **“If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.”** The Helper is the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit made Jesus' departure both necessary and good. The coming of the Holy Spirit was to the disciples' advantage. Here's why. Left to their own devices they had no plan and no power to touch the whole world. The Spirit would be the accelerant that caused the fire of Christianity to spread across the Roman world and from there across a world bigger than any disciple of Jesus imagined in his wildest dreams. He would bring about events that fueled that spreading flame. He would raise up the men and women that fueled that spreading flame.

Hope

So, of course, we don't like to say good-bye to each other, but it is necessary and good, and it is to your advantage, and for the same reason. Every pastor is a unique channel through whom the Spirit moves. Every pastor also carries within himself limitations on the Spirit's action. A pastor's departure does cause uncertainty, but it also opens long-shut windows in the House through which the wind of the Spirit can blow.

Nothing can take away the sorrow and uncertainty of separation. But people of faith in Jesus Christ – and you are people of faith – will also discover a sense of expectancy, an intuition that something good is coming.

The book of Acts teaches us that this coming goodness will not be without adversity. The conversion of 3000 people on the Day of Pentecost was followed by Peter and John's repeated imprisonment. The generosity of the Jerusalem church was tarnished by the hypocrisy of some of its members. The Spirit-filled wisdom and courage of the church leader, Stephen, brought him to a place of prominence in the Jerusalem church, and it cost him his life as a martyr.

There is no unimpeded path to the Kingdom of God. We should not expect otherwise as BVBC moves into the future. But we are moving into God's future, and He will have His chosen men and women ready at critical times to point the congregation in the right direction and stir your heart and fire your imagination.

Communion

Jesus said over and over, **"The time has come. The kingdom of Heaven is near."** (Mark 1:15) In other words, watch Jesus, and you will see God's priorities on display. As we have heard Jesus telling His disciples that it was necessary and good for Him to leave them, we learn again that His priorities will at times contradict our priorities.

Unlikely disciples become extravagant disciples as they allow their priorities to be corrected by the Lord they follow. We learn sooner or later that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways. We learn sooner or later that we are not doing Him a favor by following Him. Jesus is pouring out the new wine of heaven upon the earth. It remains to be seen, if we are wineskins that can stretch and not split under the pressure of His expanding presence in our experience.

The One who stunned His original disciples with the announcement of His departure is here with us today by means of the bread and cup to spur us on to love and good deeds. We hold in our hands the visible representations of Him who says to us: "Watch me, and you will see what God is like. God is with you. Don't miss Him!"

You won't miss Him, if you keep in step with the Holy Spirit. You will keep in step with the Spirit, as you give voice to your natural sorrow and then look beyond your sorrow to the Lord, who says, **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."** (John 16:13)

And so we come to the Church's central act of worship: The Lord's Supper. Here, holding in our hands the visible representations of His broken body and shed blood and all they mean, we commune with Jesus Christ. We have never seen Him, yet we love Him. Even though we don't yet see Him, we believe and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy. (See 1 Peter 1:8)

If you are outside the Christian Faith, you should not eat the bread or drink the cup. Christ meant them for those who follow Him. If you are outside the Christian Faith, would you come inside today? Coming inside is as simple as saying what the thief on the cross said to Jesus on Good Friday: "Lord, remember me." Almost as simple is to say, "Jesus, you are my Lord." We who are inside the Christian faith, let us all renew now our determination to seek Him in all our ways with all our heart, that is, with all our love.