

June 28, 2020
Psalm 100
“Reflections of an Interim Pastor”
Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin

Most of you know that, at Calvary, we typically pull from what's known as the “Revised Common Lectionary”—a three-year cycle of scripture texts built around the various seasons of the Church year, and generally including readings from the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels. We do that as a collective discipline to engage, as much as we can, the wide and diverse range of the Biblical witness.

For the most part I have relied on lectionary texts in my six months as interim pastor, but not today. Today I hand-picked Psalm 100—and two different versions as you just heard—because in this moment of Calvary's long story, as we prepare for pastoral transition and yet more change, I'm drawn to the simple but profound reminder that God's love is unfailing. God's faithfulness continues from generation to generation. Pastors come and go, pandemics come and go, movements for radical social change come and hopefully, with our prayers and our participation, grow stronger, but we as God's people, as those who belong to God and each other, remain grounded in the constancy of divine love and presence. Divine love and presence within and between each and every one of us.

That does not change, if we keep our minds open and our hearts soft to it—and to the relentless possibility of new life it promises. And that, friends, is as close to preaching as I'm gonna get this morning!

What I mostly want to do, as I prepare to step back as interim pastor, is simply to thank you. Thank you for allowing me to be your pastor for the past six months (not that you really had a choice!). I am so grateful for your trust in me, and for the support you've offered in many different ways—fully acknowledging that my stepping into this role after more than 20 years as a member may have been a little awkward for some of you. May still be. I know it was for me, at least at first. I wasn't entirely convinced this was the right move, but you have collectively made me feel like it was. Like I belonged in this role. That has been a gift.

I am grateful to Pastor John, who has been incredibly generous in making himself available to me for both practical and spiritual support, both before and during this time. That has been a gift.

I am grateful to my family for their love and encouragement. To Mary Grey and John, who have so graciously adjusted to having their son-in-law double as their pastor—and who have been so consistently affirming along the way. That has been a gift, but I look forward to just being a son-in-law again!

To my mom and dad and sister, each of whom has buoyed me up as they've been doing my whole life, and each of whom has even showed up for worship (including again today!) thanks to the magic of Zoom. That has been a gift, and frankly, one of the few upsides of a global pandemic.

But I am especially grateful to Amy and Gabe, for their love and patience. They have had to sacrifice so much—more than we bargained for—to make this possible. And that has been some serious gift!

On a practical level, this was—and has been—an opportunity for me to step up and help fulfill an obvious need for pastoral leadership with Pastor John's departure. To help us find our collective footing in the face of that significant change, and in the midst of changes looming with our building and within the United Methodist denomination. And, as it turned out, a whole bunch of other stuff none of us could possibly have predicted. I mean, seriously, of all the six-month stretches to choose! I don't know if we've found our collective footing, but we're still standing.

On a personal level, it was—and has also been—an opportunity for me to try this particular work on in a way that I had not before. To further discern my own calling and giftedness. My own sense of vocation, understood not just as what I want to do when I grow up, but how I want to live my life—what Frederick Buechner describes as the place, or places, where our deepest passions intersect with the world's deepest needs.

That is an ongoing process, of course, for me and for all of us. But, challenging and exhausting as this has been, I can tell you that it's been a profound experience of affirmation and clarity for me. It has been a privilege for me to serve this community—this beautiful, authentic, inclusive, loving, justice-seeking community I love and have loved for most of my adult life—in this way. During this particular chapter in Calvary's story, and in the midst of everything else going on in the world around us.

So as I prepare to step out of the role and welcome Pastor Calvin into it, I'm feeling some grief. For sure. I'm also feeling some relief. Not gonna lie. I'm not, and we're not saying goodbye to Calvary, of course. We'll still be around and adjusting back to life as fellow members of this community, but know that you won't be seeing us at least through the month of July—both so we can enjoy some space away, and to give Pastor Calvin some space to settle in.

But mostly I'm feeling grateful. And hopeful about Calvary's future—and that friends, is because of you. You make, we all make, Calvary what it is and what it will be. And so as we continue to lean and live into our future together, I remind you that I do still plan this summer and beyond, as I've shared previously, to follow up with those of you who call Calvary home, to explore these questions around what you see as your work to do and our work to do together. And I do still want to hear from and work with those of you who are feeling a renewed commitment to explore how we at Calvary can more intentionally and consistently stand up for racial justice.

I look forward to continuing this journey with you. In the meantime, just a whole bunch of gratitude. And prayers ongoing that we hold fast and firm to our own and each other's belovedness, to God's unfailing love and faithfulness, in the midst of so much brokenness and need for healing and justice. And to piggy-back last week's sermon, that we find the strength, courage and wisdom we need to see us through the change. To see us through to new life and a new world. Holy boldness. Revolutionary love.

Let's get to it, friends. May it be so.