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PASSING THE BATTON

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As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 2 Timothy 4:6-15, 18

I-INTRODUCTION:

Mydear Holyrood/Santa Cruz family. A successful transition depends on much prayer, preparation, planning, and a process. It is the work of God.

For six years we have worked side by side, continually exploring our faith. We've gathered in large and small groups to discuss our ideas about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We've sought to discover what it means to be a Christian. We've worshipped, worked and celebrated together. I have seen God working in your midst.

We've come together as Preacher and Congregation but also as Priest/Pastor and Parishioner: individuals in relationship with each other. I thank you for the times that you invited me into your homes and into your lives; sharing with me the highs and lows that come with life. Whether when welcoming a new baby into our world or being with loved ones as they departed, it is always a privilege and a blessing to walk with you for life-changing moments.

My heart has been heavy as we have said farewell to many sisters and brothers who lived and worshipped among us. Folks who have died but remain a part of our congregation and

whose presence will always be a part of this sanctuary; and also, for those who in the midst of problems and disagreements left the church. Every day I ask God for forgiveness, and I wonder if I have been a stumbling block for someone in our church. If that is true, I hope you can forgive me for what I have said or done erroneously.



We have said goodbye to some and have welcomed many new friends into our community and they have become an important and integral part of the work we do in Jesus's name.



YOU ARE IN MY HEART



II- THE BATON-PASSING IMAGERY:

The baton-passing imagery is huge here because at first the baton passer and the baton receiver are both running as fast as they can, but then one slows down and the other speeds up. When you pass the baton to someone, you are handing over the responsibility of something to another person. You are relieving yourself of command and trusting the other person to continue the task or project as well as you, if not better.

In a relay race, there is an “incoming” and an “outgoing” runner. At different times, and in different races, runners must play either part. So it is in pastoral transitions. At various times in a typical ministry career, any given pastor will be either handing off or receiving the baton. Pastoral leadership requires competency in both roles.



In the relay race, the incoming sprinter carries the baton and hands it off to the outgoing runner in the changeover zone. Who carries the baton in the pastoral transition? The outgoing pastor! He or she must grasp it firmly, charge full speed into the changeover zone, set aside ego, and realize that if the baton is dropped or the transition is poorly executed, it hurts everyone. Exiting pastors must come into the changeover zone with a 100 percent commitment to succeed in passing the baton! They will enthusiastically put in the time, work, and effort to make it a smooth and seamless handoff.

In the relay race, there isn't much room for error. Every step and every move must be timed and synchronized perfectly with the other runners on your team.

In a relay race, there is a critical moment when the baton gets passed from one runner to the next. It's a short window of opportunity – only 20 meters, with a 10-meter acceleration zone for the next runner to get up to speed. And there are lots of ways things can go wrong.



If you drop the baton, you will be disqualified. If you run out of your lane during the baton pass, you will be disqualified. If you run out of the takeoverzone without changingthe baton, you will be disqualified. if you cross the finish line without the baton, you will be disqualified.

When Paul saw his life drawing to a close, he knew there were some important things he needed to pass on to the next generation of pastors and teachers. Duringhis lifetime, he had seen asmall, loosely organizedgroup of Jesus followers become a huge movement of faith. They had gone from calling themselves ‘followers of the Way’ to identifying themselves simply as “Christians.” From a few dozen believers in Jerusalem, they had grown to a large network of churches throughout the known world.



As Paul prepared (2 Timothy 4:6-15, 18) for his own end, heneeded to pass the baton to a trusted teammate. There wouldn’tbe much room for error,there wouldn’t be much time or space to accomplish the handoff. If either of them dropped the baton, they’d be out of the race. But Paul had faith, not only in his teammates, but – more importantly – in the prize they were all running toward.

II-TRANSITION:

When most people hear the word transition, they immediately become concerned because transition represents change. However, change is not always a bad thing. Change can be good if it's handled correctly. Every Christian knows that the Bible is full of transition stories



As I previously mentioned, transition is uncomfortable and the only thing I knew to do about God's request was to pray.

At this time let's not talk about retirement. I prefer to talk about a proactive transition from one role or situation into the next, why? Because while we struggle against personal sin and against social sins, retirement is not an option in the Christian life. We are called to persevere in the faith, and that requires active effort on our part.

For Christians, proactive transition is not an excuse to stop but an opportunity to do more and a reminder of all that is yet to come.

The past six years have been significant for all of us in different ways. We have all learned things about the world we live in and, if we have been attentive, we could have noticed that we also learned things about ourselves and our way of responding to the current situation.

I still believe that our decisions to take the precautions we did were the right ones. That said, time will yield more perspective and new lessons from events. It will be interesting to see how each of us look back on this time period in the years ahead.

Such perspective is of course not available to us when we are “in it.” When this challenge was suddenly upon us, we needed to look at the information at hand and decide what we would do (or not do) then and there. It would have been great to have had more information (it would still be great to have more information now); nevertheless, decisions had to be made. To me, they still seem the right decisions; however, I am very aware that to others they could have appeared wrong.

I am very thankful to those of you who have taken the time and exercised the patience to help me better understand your perspective and your thought process over the last six years.

We have faced complex questions regarding how to respond to our challenges and required us to take positions on a number of issues which then had to play out in very concrete ways. In such situations it is very necessary to recognize that sincere and thoughtful Christians will come to a range of different conclusions resulting in a range of practical responses. This does not mean that our conclusions do not matter – they do and we are responsible for them before God. Some of them will be right, and some will be wrong. Some will be exercising more wisdom, and some will be acting in foolishness without knowing it, but each of us must do our thinking with humility and acknowledging that while we are doing our best, we may still be wrong. Thus, each of us must love our brothers and sisters who disagree by showing them respect and assuming the best of their motivations.



For many of us all of this has been a lesson (certainly for me) in walking in love and humility with those we disagree with. I hope I am learning and I ask for your forgiveness for any ways I have fallen short of that calling in the previous years.

My earnest desire is that our Church be characterized by humility and love. We will still need to make practical decisions. We will continue to take precautions as a congregation, but our calling is to take each step in humility and love. Please pray to this end for me, for our session, for all of our leadership, and for our congregation.



I am completely convinced that a Church that struggles to change the world- like Holyrood Church/Iglesia Santa Cruz- knows it well that we are not here to contemplate the world. “Karl Marx urges people not only to interpret the world, but also to try and change it. However, we do not believe that this captures the meaning of the sentence. What we believe that Marx is saying is that it is those who try to change the world that have a better sense of its constraints and possibilities, for they come upon what Frantz Fanon calls the ‘granite block’ of power, property, and privilege that prevents an easy transition from injustice to justice.” Jesus, however, many years before Marx and Fanon demonstrated that we need to change the church and the world in a way that are relevant and reverent to people’s realities, an approach to pastoral theology from the underside/concrete setting of history. And we do this with two basic questions: What does the Bible have to say about oppressive situations? How might religion have contributed to the situation? For me this is the foundation for any “strategic plan” that we prepare in the church. As a prophetic church we have at our door a great challenge with Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism identifies the nation with the will and action of God in the world; combines national identity with Christian identity; and identifies service to the nation with service to God. This is an aberration to the Social Gospel of Jesus. We must keep fighting it.



In all these years of walking together we have learned that sometimes, people will disappoint us, just as Demas disappointed Paul by deserting him and heading off to Thessalonica. Sometimes, people will just leave, like Crescens and Titus. Sometimes people will stay with you, like Luke. Sometimes you must call them back from somewhere else, like Mark. And I must think that this is the same ‘Mark’ who caused the first major split between Paul and Barnabas back in Acts 15:39, when they argued about taking him with them after he’d abandoned them two chapters earlier. If so, there must have been some reconciliation, for Paul to describe Mark now as ‘useful in his ministry.’ Situations and people may change, but we are all still running this race together, as a team. And we are running it to the end, through the finish line without stopping.



I am sharing with you that I am honestly concerned that when I go out as your pastorsome people will develop a power struggle: who is in control here. According to our regulations, the Vestry is in charge. These seeking power people do not seek to cooperate, they pursue unconditional support and believe they have the right to meddle in everything.



I remind you that during this Parish Transition it is of great importance that you be clear that the Vestry and the Office of Transitional Ministry directed by The Rev. Canon Nora Smith will be working hand in hand to bring in a new priest in charge or if necessary, an interim one. It is not the Wardens, nor the Executive Committee, or the Finance Committee, nor is the Vestry leaving out the Wardens. It is the complete representation of the Vestry with its Wardens and the rest of the members. Hence the need for you to trust and respect your Wardens. But at the same time, the Wardens must be clear that they are not the Vestry, but rather part of the Vestry. Hence the need to consult and promote what the Vestry decides, not what they want. Therefore, the Wardens must keep the rest of the Vestry informed. And when you have a priest in charge, work with that person collaboratively and continue to revitalize the church. As Christians and as a Church we have the responsibility to interpret, change, and serve inside and outside the church. This is not a space for us to be served or boast about having a position of power.

The final decision of who that priest in charge will be rest with Bishop Andrew Dietsche, but there is always a great opportunity to negotiate, negotiate and negotiate. Needless to say, we begin by praying, continue to pray, and end by praying.

II-WHAT BEHAVIORS PREVENT HEALTHYPASSING OF THE BATON IN A CHURCH?

1. Criticism withoutaction

...encourage each other and help each other...1 Thessalonians 5:11



Some people in churches call themselves critics or judges, but often taking this kind of position results in more judging and less doing. Someone once said that if you criticize it is because you can do better; however, the vast majority of critics are only there to point out what is wrong or what they think is right. God is the owner of the Church and, therefore, He is the only one who has the right to judge. Our job is to obey His commandments and do Her will.



1. Gossip and unfounded rumors

Do not gossip about anyone... Leviticus 19:16

Regardless of the excuses that can be made, gossip never leads to anything good. Some disguise it as a prayer request; however, instead of praying, all they do is to spread the rumor more. In churches, gossip causes prejudice, spreads hatred, divides Christians, and prevents fellowship with God. In the Bible it is warned that everyone who has Jesus in his life cannot practice gossip because it is a sin.



1. Avoidance of confrontation



Many misunderstandings originate when a situation is not confronted. The fear of directly confronting a person about something that has happened makes a fact grow and worse. There are stories of churches that have divided (or disappeared) because their members were carried away by the sayings of others, instead of verifying a rumor. Matthew 18:15-16

If your brother or sisters does something bad, go and talk to him/her alone. Explain to her/him what was the evil he or she did. If he or she listens to you, you have got your brother or sister back. However, if he or she doesn't listen to you, go talk to her/him again, accompanied by one or two other people, so that they can witness everything that is said.

4. Prayerlessness

Never stop praying. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Prayer is one of the most important tools of Christians. If the members of a church do not give due importance to prayer, it is useless for them to carry out great activities or have the best infrastructure. The best way to have a personal relationship with God is through prayer and reading the Bible, but if these practices are replaced by something else, it is likely to inflict damage to the church in the long run.



5. Division into groups



Brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you that you all always agree and that there be no divisions among you. Live in harmony, thinking and feeling the same way. I Corinthians 1:10

Although working in small groups allows for better fellowship among members, sometimes this leads to having churches within the church. Care must be taken in managing these groups and seek greater interaction between them; hence, it will be easier to promote a behavior of friendship and companionship rather than competition.

6. Bad leadership

Beware of those liars who claim to speak for God. They come to you disguised as sheep, but inside they are ferocious wolves. Matthew 7:15



Another behavior that damages the church is bad leadership. Having a leadership position within the church is a great responsibility and if you do not know how to exercise it properly, you can fall into manipulation, abuse, and discrimination. The leader should be someone who leads others to reflect the character of Jesus, not someone who misuses his or her office. Jesus is the best example of a leader who all those in a position of authority should follow.

7. When we do not accept reality “Moses my servant is dead” Joshua 1:2.

Can you see the humor? God interrupts Joshua staring into space, his eyes glazed over. Moses had been dead for a month. This wasn't new information. God's interruption startled Joshua into consciousness. “Wake up! It's time to get moving!”

A pastoral transition requires acceptance of the reality that a chapter has closed and a new one is opening. If that sounds simple enough, put yourself in Joshua's shoes. Moses was a towering figure. Joshua likely felt dwarfed under his shadow. Who wouldn't feel intimidated? Joshua must have thought: Who am I? We can understand his paralysis. Those who have followed an esteemed and long-term pastorate know the feeling.

Still, the church can't remain in limbo. Yesterday is gone no matter how glorious it may have been, and today won't wait. You can't move forward looking through the rearview mirror. The future is now.

8. When we argue about who is the greatness

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. Luke 22:24:



Again, in the Gospel of Jesus, the struggle for power in the Church must not exist, however, when the real power is not service, we open the door for evil struggles.

Vestry members must be very careful not to fall for this power play once I leave the church. The temptation for prominence as a power struggle is always at the entrance of the door. Until now we have been able to work collaboratively, understanding boundaries and roles, it is necessary that you continue with this methodology.

V- II- The Open-Door Methodology:

During our subversive pastoral theology in Santa Cruz/Holyrood we were able to implement the open-door gospel pastoral practice: inclusion with participation.



As your pastor, I can guarantee that our sister Maureen "Mary" Kelly played a decisive role in this pastoral practice of our church. She constantly led me to question my pastoral practices and I had to constantly ask myself: where is God in what we are doing. If you look carefully at the open-door policy of inclusion with participation you will see it in our ministries: Lay people at liturgy and leading morning and daytime prayers, preaching, and doing tasks that are only "priestly privileges"; LGBTQ; Sanctuary Church; Undocumented Immigrants and Refugees; Sharing the building as a community center; Deaf or Hard of Hearing people; People with physical challenge; Homeless; Drug users; Covid challenge (this turned us into a place of worship around Washington Heights that never closed its doors). With responsibility for preventive public health, we became a place of rest, meditation, prayer and comfort for our community.



Food pantry (remember that during the Pandemic it was decided - and **I was not part of this decision - to close the doors of the church indefinitely**). As a pastor, I exhorted the decision makers that this practice of exclusion was not in keeping with the Gospel of Jesus. We open the doors and we continued with them opened and this is one of the most solid accompaniment ministries we have.

Social Gospel (to attack the social sins, inequalities, and oppression that our capitalist socio- economic system produces, and including other social sins such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, ethnocentrism, adult centrism, etc.).

For all this we have become recognized as a People-Church not only at the city level but also at the national level. **That all this may disappear or some of these ministries may be closed during the transition, that is clear to me. Just ask yourself before making a decision: where is God in what we are going to do?**

II- Conclusion: “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you ... that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best ... the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:3-11)



My last Sunday with you will be January 29, 2023, and my last day will be Wednesday, February 1, 2023. This day we will celebrate a mass in the San Romero Chapel as we did when I started 6 years ago.

My deepest desire in the time remaining is to have the opportunity to worship with you and enjoy conversation and fellowship, celebrating our time together, and praying God's blessing upon all of the new beginnings yet to come in the life of Holyrood Church/Iglesia Santa Cruz.



Amarilis and I are so grateful for all the blessings you have given us. We are very thankful for these years spent in ministry togetherwith you, and we know that God will continueto bless you abundantly in the years ahead.



Please believe me when I tell you that this separation is also painful for me. I will continue to love you from a distance, and you will always be in my prayers. You do the same. And somewhere we will meet and celebrate the good news as this ministry continues to grow. That will be my satisfaction. Let's continue walking with the people and serving them and thus we will bring heaven to earth.



**In solidarity love, the most important sacrament, Amen & Ashe.
Your son, brother, and fellow pastor,**

Luis+









