

**On Saying Good-Bye  
First Christian Church  
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I have been told by some of the great professors I have known, that one of the biggest let-downs in a professor's teaching experience is when he seeks to passionately communicate a powerful lecture, painstakingly lifting up all of the major points and seeking to truly communicate something awesomely powerful, and at the conclusion ... some student half-asleep in the back row holds up his hands and asks ... "Will this be on the final?" Tony Campollo makes that point in one of his books ... and you really have to have heard Tony Campollo preach a sermon to understand his passion. He is one of those preachers who keeps a folded handkerchief in the palm of his hand ... he becomes so animated ... and so passionate in his preaching ... that he knows he will need to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. I can imagine how the professor must feel ... when someone asks him after one of those animated lectures ... "Will this be on the final?"

Jesus must have felt that way over and over again with his disciples. Perhaps most especially on the night of that last Passover meal ... their last time to be together before the horrific scene of the crucifixion. I can just picture the scene as the disciples were gathering for dinner, and James and John said to him ... "Jesus ... we have one little request. Would it be possible for us to sit on either side of you in your new kingdom?" They obviously had a sense that something big was getting ready to happen. Their lives were getting ready to change ... and life would really never be the same again. They sensed that ... and they wanted to kind of be in charge of their future. "Jesus, I'd like to be Vice-President, and my brother here would like to be Secretary of State. What do ya think?"

They had totally forgotten what Jesus had taught them ... remember that admonition over in Luke's gospel? The subject was humility. Jesus talked a lot about humility when he was in the presence of Pharisees. They were short on humility ... but then again, we all struggle with humility sometimes ... even Jesus' disciples. Here's what Jesus said:

**When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited you may come and say to you ... 'Give this person your place ... and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.**

James and John had completely forgotten what Jesus had taught them ... about humility .. ... and they had no idea that that lesson would be on the final! James and John knew their lives were going to be changing. They wanted to manage the transition.

Transitions can be difficult. If you are like me you have a tendency to want to kind of hold on to the way things have been. I have had so many memories come to my mind over the past couple of months ... Memories of these 20 years here at FCC that I have come to the surface of my memory bank as I have contemplated the termination of our pastor/parish relationship. Memories of directing church camps years ago, and being short sheeted ... finding a toad under my pillow ... being thrown into the pool by all of the counselors ... Memories of some of the saints who have passed away over these 20 years ... WATCHING KIDS GROW-UP AND ADULTS WHO REFUSE TO GROW UP ..... and the list just goes on and on. Some memories are pleasant ... a few are less than pleasant ... but they are all held in sacred trust.

Somehow ... memories of the way things were come to mind at the time of major transitions in our lives ... like when your kid's get married? Or when you face the death of someone you have loved. Memories just start flowing all over the place ... and you get out the picture books. And you remember. And a part of you wants to go back, right? I have to admit ... a couple of times over the past few months I've had to ask myself ... "do I really want to do this?" Usually though, those thoughts are the ones that come in the midst of the darkness of the night. Does this happen to you? In the darkness of the night ... you're not quite so sure about decisions you have made ... as you are in the light of the day? In the midst of the night ... that's when I want to hold on. At the dawn of the day ... I have no doubts!

The Gospel lesson we heard this morning from John's 20<sup>th</sup> chapter ... we usually hear that story on Easter morning ... but I thought it might be a good teaching ... to be a part of the final. There is something I want you to take note of in this narrative. I think it is worth noting ... that John casts this exchange between Mary Magdalene and Jesus ... as "very early in the morning ... before dawn." It was in the darkness of the night ... those times in our lives when we are most likely to worry about the future ... most likely to feel the most alone ... most likely to feel the sting of grief most deeply ... and, most likely to want to cling to the past. John tells us ... Mary is making her way in the darkness on the first day of the week. As she made her way down the dark road to the tomb, I can imagine what she was wanted to hold on to. Memories of better days in Galilee tried to pierce through the darkness. Ah, Galilee. How far away that must have seemed from this wretched place. Death on a cross ... in a garbage dump. Jesus didn't deserve this awful end to his life! Can't you just imagine her thoughts. Jesus was popular in Galilee. Hope had taken root in Mary's heart in Galilee. No one ever knew exactly what to

expect of Jesus, but clearly they all had higher hopes for him than that he would be crucified as a traitor to Rome and a blasphemer to the Jews.

Mary Magdalene ... the first to experience ... the truth of the resurrection, according to John's gospel. And the first thing Jesus says ... after calling her by her name ... the first thing he really says to her ... is ... "don't hold on to me. I have not yet ascended to my father." Mary is so excited to suddenly encounter Jesus ... she wants to embrace the one who has been so central in her life. She wanted to hold on to him! Embrace ... give him a hug! Mary wanted to receive Jesus back ... the way he had always been! But she was encountering the resurrected Christ, and he had changed. And her life was going to change. ... and the disciples lives were going to change! Though there was a tendency within them to want to hold on to the way things were ... the whole point of the resurrection was ... that NOTHING ... absolutely nothing ... was ever going to be the same again. And this one event ... was the event that made their encounter with Jesus something earth-shattering. It was the event that would consume their lives with passion. It was the event that would give rise to a movement that would ultimately touch the lives of billions of people. It was the event that would cause these disciples to reflect back on the past ... and tell stories about Jesus that would be handed down ... put in print ... and read aloud to people every week in church sanctuaries on every continent on the globe. It was the event that would cause those disciples to remember that Passover meal ... it was the event that would cause them to remember Jesus saying ... while at that table ... "I will see you again." Resurrection. It was the event that would give rise to a movement that today ... we call the church ... where we proclaim the message of resurrection faith every day as we engage in the ministry called for by Jesus.

I think it is totally appropriate that on this my final Sunday as your pastor ... that the central image lifted up be that of the resurrection ... and the realization that it wasn't an easy transition for Mary ... or for any of the disciples, for that matter. Mary came to the tomb in the dark of the night ... full of grief and hopelessness ... her life had been changed forever as she faced the death of her beloved Jesus ... just as our lives are permanently altered when we face the death of the people we love. And when she did meet the risen Christ ... he told her not to hold on to him. Not to cling.

Mary ... you have to let go of what has been ... in order to embrace the future that is full of promise.

So what does all of this have to say about on the subject of saying "Good-Bye?"

One of the things I remember about my Grandmother Hauser is ... that very often when we would visit at their home, and get ready to leave ... we would say ... "Bye Grandma" ... but she didn't say

Good-Bye. She would say ... "Alright" ... or "Um Hummmm" ... or "O.K" I never asked her why ... but years later ... I came across a Christian author ... Matthew Labriola who told the story of the last time he visited with his mother. As I prepared to leave that day ... I did not realize .... says Labriola, that she was preparing to leave also. "Arrivederci" .... was his mother's word. When it was time to part company everyone would give their parting hugs .... and ... says Labriola .... "Mother would smile wanly and say .... "Arrivederci ... Arrivederci." It means .... *until we meet again*. And ... says Labriola .... that was the last word she spoke to me. Arrivederci. "Good-bye" seems so final!

It was some 2000 years ago ... as the twelve disciples sat around him at one last meal they were to share together ... a Jewish teacher named Jesus of Nazareth ... gathered his friends around him in the quietness of an upper room ... there to prepare them for his leave-taking the next day. His accent was Aramaic, but his word was .... "Arrivederci!" ... "I will see you again."

But when they did see him again ... everything was different. He was no longer their rabbi. He was the resurrected Christ who would lead them into the future. So we cannot cling to the hope that Jesus will take us back to the way things have always been. The way out of the darkness is only by moving ahead. And the only person who can lead the way is the Savior. So my word for you this morning is ... join me in cherishing the memories ... but don't try to hold on to the past. Embrace the future ... God has great things in store for First Christian.

So ... how shall we say good-bye? Let's just not. Let me just say Arrevidercci. Or as Grandma Hauser would say ... Um HUmmm. Amen.