

Pastor Heather Riggs
A Year Later, Part 2
July 2, 2017
Oak Grove UMC

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

(slide 1: A Year Later: part 2)

A year ago I was new, so everybody, including me, wanted to know what church would be like for us together. Today is part 2 of my reflections after a year as your pastor.

Last week I shared with you the assessment of our District Superintendent, Our Church Vitality Coach, and my own observation that we have 10 years. If we continue to do church the same way we have always done it with the same people who have always done it 10 years from now this congregation will close.

(Slide 2: We have 10 years)

Several of you asked, if we're doomed. Will we close in 10 years no matter what?

No, we'll close if we do nothing, I'm excited that we have 10 years, because if, we decide NOW, that 10 years from now we want to be a vital, growing, disciple-making church here in Oak Grove we have time to make the changes we need to make ... in order to position ourselves to be a vital, faithful church for the next 100 years.

We're not doomed.

(Slide 3:)

We have time to work towards a vital future by:

1. **Creating new spaces for new people** -- and intentionally make new friends
2. **Developing new leadership** -- by including and investing in people
3. **And by Updating** (and continuing to update) our ways of doing things

I didn't tell you we have 10 years in order to make you worry. That we have 10 years to turn things around is good news! Some churches have 2 years or less! And even if we only had two years I would still tell you not to worry about saving the church. Because...

Saving the church isn't our goal. -- the very idea of the church as something that needs to be saved, as if it is an institution, an organization, or a historic site, as if the church was something apart from ourselves -- is theologically incorrect.

(slide 4: We are the church)

We are the church.

Church is, *us*, the community of Christ followers.

We are the Body of Christ.

We are the beloved of God.

We are the community of Love and Forgiveness in the middle of an unloving, unforgiving world.

We don't have to worry about saving the church, because Christ has already saved us!

Our goal is to be faithful.

To show up, pay attention to where the Spirit is already at work, cooperate with God, and accept that any outcomes, like church growth, are the work of the Spirit.

As the writer of Philippians exhorts us, in today's reading,
Do not worry, instead, be faithful.

(slide 5: Do not worry Be Faithful... in Sabbath)

Be faithful in Sabbath -- I committed last year, to practice Sabbath with you,

--not just because if I don't, I will be Pastor Cranky-pants,

--not just because if we don't, we'll work ourselves into the ground,

but because the Sabbath is Holy. God has asked us to not worry, but instead to pray and to trust. I know this is hard. Letting God take care of the world for a day in a culture that tells us that we must be relentlessly busy or everything will fall apart! ... is a holy act of faith.

Practicing Sabbath means that I must accept with humility that I cannot do it all,

not today,

not this week,

not this month,

not this year.

I just can't do it all, period.

And neither can you.

We must trust God, and trust one another. We must cooperate with God in labor and in Sabbath rest and release the outcome.

(slide 6: Do not worry Be Faithful... in Sabbath, in love and forgiveness)

Do not worry,

Be faithful in love and forgiveness. I promised you last year that I would disappoint you -- that I would say something, do something, not do something, not say something, that would probably rub you the wrong way at some point. And that's OK. I've already had the opportunity to personally apologize to some of you! And I genuinely appreciate it when

you let me know your opinion on something. I won't always agree with you, but I value understanding your point of view because we are church together.

And I'm not the only one who will make you unhappy sometimes. Being faithful to God's call for this church is not always comfortable or easy.

Change is not always comfortable or easy.

We live in a culture that frames change in terms of a battle between sides - where one side wins and another loses. Where winners gloat and losers take their ball and go home.

The Way of Jesus is different.

- We can disagree and still respect and care for one another.
- We can make mistakes and forgive and be forgiven.
- We're not on opposite sides competing over who's right or who's wrong because we're all on the same side -- God's side
- And God has given us a clear goal to love God and love our neighbors that we can all work towards together.

(slide 7: Do not worry Be Faithful... in Sabbath, in love and forgiveness, in service)

Do not worry,

Be faithful in Service: Last year many of you were asking me if I would be leading you in doing outreach. At first I was a little confused because you were using the word outreach in a way I had not heard before -- usually outreach means evangelism and publicity. Now I understand that what you mean by outreach is charitable service -- or caring for the "least of these" (Mt 25:40)

Yes, we will be faithful in service together!

And when I talk with our neighbors this is something our neighborhood is interested in doing with us. Even people who aren't interested in worship or even in religion are interested in service.

This is why we've been building relationships with community partners like Clackamas Service Center, and New Urban High school, and why we explored organizing group service projects during our Week of Service.

We are working towards organizing regular opportunities to serve together, and invite our neighborhood into service with us.

(slide 8: Do not worry Be Faithful... in Sabbath, in love and forgiveness, in service, in humility)

Do not worry,

- Be faithful in Humility: There are many, many, many, good, worthy and wonderful things we could do but we can't do them all. We must walk humbly with our God and admit that we are a small community church and we can't do everything. So we have to ask:
- What are the one or two areas of service God is calling us to engage with faithfully and do really well?
- What are the ministries that we have both passion and resources for?
- What are some things that maybe used to work but don't work so well any more that we need to do differently?
- What are some things God is calling us to release, so that we can be open to God's new thing?

How will we know what is what?

What is faithful for us here and now.?

(Slide 9: Do not Worry... (Phil 4:6-7)

Do not worry.

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4: 6-7)

Do not worry. Be faithful to our calling. Let God take care of the rest.

Children's Message: Do not worry.

(Props: water bottle, oil, water, food coloring, liquid dish soap -- separately)

Have you ever noticed how worries seem to keep floating to the top of our thoughts?

It's like this blue water is our thoughts and this yellow oil is our worries. You give yourself a little shake and tell yourself that everything is going to be OK, but your worries keep floating to the top.

Our bible reading today has some help for when our worries keep floating to the top: Pray.

Tell God about your worries and ask God for help. (add soap)

When we pray, it's like we're adding an emulsifier to our thoughts, like this soap. It doesn't make the things we're worrying about go away, but it does help put them back into perspective - so that our worries aren't always on top of our thoughts.

The verse tells us: don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything, and God will give you peace.