

**Christmas 1 Year C 2021**  
**December 26, 2021**  
**Last Sunday at Trinity, Hillsdale**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Leaving has never been a strength of mine. When my husband and I were dating, we were in a long-distance relationship while we attended different colleges. So, we'd visit for a long weekend a few times a year, and usually spend the summer together or seeing each other a bit more often. Regardless of how long it would be until our next visit, every goodbye meant that I would turn into a crying mess. Unable to hold myself together, we would say our goodbyes, and I would turn away with tears streaming down my face, crying uncontrollably. As someone who claims to "never cry in public", I sure did a lot of it.

In all the ways I've grown since then, this has not been one of them. As the council can attest—and as I'm sure you'll all see by the end of the day—I do, actually, cry in public. In fact, I've kept this sermon short because I didn't know how much I would be able to handle.

The reality is that today is hard. It's hard for me because I have absolutely loved being a part of this community for nearly nine years, and sharing in ministry with all of you. You have become my family and friends. But today is also hard because I know that I am leaving you with grief and uncertainty as you enter this time of transition. This is an even more difficult time for all of you. The months ahead won't always be easy. Even though we've endured 18 months of changes already due to the coronavirus, there are likely more changes ahead for Trinity as you move into a time of transitional leadership and discernment. Additionally, because the pandemic has limited our ability to work together, some of our volunteers are feeling a little strained and overextended. So, as additional aspects of this church's ministry need to be handled by volunteers, you may be asked to be more generous with your time and talents, and share more fully in the ministry of this congregation.

Certainly, engaging more fully in the ministry of the church is a good thing! This is an excellent time for those who feel as though they're on the edges of the community, or not particularly active in the life of the church, to get more involved. But at the same time, as we become more involved in the life and ministry of the church, we must remain grounded in our faith. That is one of the primary reasons we worship—to center our hearts and minds on God, and pray for God to guide us in our discernment and service.

Perhaps this is what Jesus was thinking as he remained in the temple during our Gospel reading this morning. Certainly, he must have had some idea that God had big things in store for him. So, he wanted to be sure that no matter how God called upon him, his faith was grounded in a life of prayer, and his heart and mind were centered on God's will. Jesus took time to worship and center himself as he entered his teenage years approaching adulthood. The transitions and changes ahead would be challenging, and God would call him into service well beyond what he may have imagined.

This has been true of our ministry together over these nine years. We have faced challenges and changes, but we have remained grounded in our faith, and God has called us and worked in us in ways that we didn't expect. When I first came to Trinity, the congregation was somewhat invisible to the larger community. Most people in Hillsdale either didn't know Trinity existed, or assumed that it had closed years ago. Even at King's Kupboard, people were unaware that there was a church next door, and that King's Kupboard is part of Trinity's ministry. Over these nine years, God has worked in us and guided us to become more present within our

community, to become a church that lives and speaks outside its own walls. The Spirit has guided us in claiming an identity in this place, learning more about who we are as Lutherans, and how God is calling us to live as people of faith in our corner of the world. We have become an oasis of grace for those who have felt unwelcome at other churches, for those who don't necessarily feel like they fit in with the Hillsdale crowd, and for all those who need to hear a message of mercy and forgiveness from a God who loves all people unconditionally.

God has challenged us and guided us in our ministry together, and God will continue to do so. When Trinity is ready to call a new pastor, God will guide this congregation into new ministries, expanding the mission of the church in ways I could never dream or imagine. Trinity will remain a beacon of hope and an oasis of grace, but as the Spirit continues to move, God will have new and exciting things in store. Even during transition and challenges, there is always hope as we look to see how God is at work in our midst.

So, as you enter this time of transition, I pray that each of you continues to worship regularly, because this is how you remain centered and grounded. Join together in prayer and praise, scripture and song, and be strengthened through God's word and sacraments. Guide one another to live as Colossians calls us to live: "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, ... forgive each other, ... [and] above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Continue to be in relationship with one another and support one another. Trust that God is at work in this congregation and in this transition, and that the Holy Spirit is moving in this place. Know that Christ has walked this road of uncertainty before, and that you are not alone. Know that God has provided you with others who will support and guide you in the times ahead. Pray for your leadership, and hope for a bright future. Remember that I hold you in prayer, and carry you in my heart. And give thanks that God has called us together into one body of Christ, so that we shall all meet again as we join in communion with the whole body of Christ throughout the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.