A.M.D.G. June 30th, 2019 Texts: Jeremiah 29: 11-14a

 Val’s last Sunday at Lakeview Multicultural Matthew 6: 25-34

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for Me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find Me, says the Lord.*

In Our End Is Our Beginning

I subscribe to a very interesting magazine called the ‘Biblical Archaeological Review’. It gives information on the latest archaeological discoveries and offers articles that share insights into the ancient Near Eastern mind of biblical times. In the latest edition, there is an article entitled ‘A Tree Grows In The Desert’ about some date palm seeds found about 30 years ago during excavations of King Herod’s palace in Masada – a desert wilderness retreat, dating back to the time of Jesus. Dr. Sarah Sallon, of the Natural Medicine Centre in Jerusalem, planted some 2,000 year old seeds to see what – if anything – would happen, although the likelihood of seeds that old germinating was considered remote. Added to that, this particular species of date palm had long been considered extinct. To the astonishment of everyone – one of the seeds began to sprout. The seedling – which has been nicknamed ‘Methuselah’ after the biblical character from the Old Testament book of Genesis, who supposedly lived for 969 years – now stands at a little over 2 feet tall and has 5 leaves. Against all odds – the potential that had laid dormant in that tiny seed for 2,000 years began to grow from something that seemed dead. A miracle of God’s creation!

And isn’t that true in our own lives as well? Changes occur – some welcome, and some not so welcome – and we grieve our goodbyes, and mourn what has been. But the seeds of potential are always present in every ending – sending shoots of possibility that open into new beginnings. Things are never the same – but all the richness that has been gained from love and friendship given, from shared experiences and cherished memories is never lost – and becomes the fertile ground out of which something new begins to sprout and grow.

These last 10 months with you here at Lakeview have been a blessing in many ways. It has been a privilege and joy to walk alongside you in ministry. And it has been so interesting for me to learn more of Filipino culture – about which I really knew very little. More importantly, I am so grateful to have gotten to know each of you and to have had the opportunity to share our stories, our faith, our tears and our laughter.

You sure know how to praise God, to eat, and to have fun together!! And that is a very special part of this congregation that I will carry with me in my heart.

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If I may respectfully offer a few words of advice as I leave, it would be these:

1) I think communication is key – and even more so as things begin to change with the redevelopment process ramping up. I have tried hard all year – through things like the email listserve, the website, and the powerpoint – to make sure everybody is kept in the loop, and knows what is going on. This takes some intention, because we sometimes assume everyone is up to date on all the information, when in fact, there they are not. Perhaps this is a task for the Board to ensure communication is open, direct, transparent and available to everyone – especially in the midst of all the changes.

2) You folks have a lovely, warm sense of hospitality and a strong sense of family. These are wonderful characteristics of this congregation. However, I have noticed that sometimes everyone is so busy chatting and catching up on the news of other members that newcomers and visitors are left to fend for themselves a bit. On Sundays, it will be particularly important to make a point of welcoming any newcomers – including them in the circle of this church family. This is something everyone should take responsibility for. Welcome newcomers with the warm smiles that are your trademark here at Lakeview. Perhaps invite someone who is new or visiting to sit with you, and make sure they know they are welcome to join you for lunch following the service. Little things like this are so often overlooked – but they can make the difference on whether people feel comfortable enough to return.

3) I have also noticed through the year that one of the traits of Filipino culture is to be somewhat laid back. Now, there is great value in learning to let go and not be so driven – especially in these times of social stress and hurry. And I have appreciated the opportunity to not be so tied to schedules and deadlines! But it can also have disadvantages as well. In the coming final year of being in this building, some deadlines will have to be met, some specific planning will have to be done, and some decisions will have to be made in a timely fashion. And I encourage you with a gentle nudge of love, to be attentive to that.

4) And, of course, I encourage you also to continue to look after one another in love. There is great excitement on the horizon – but there will also be challenges as well, with all the change and stress of saying goodbye to what has been your church home here – and venturing into the unknown for a while. But just like Moses and the Israelites in the Exodus wilderness, always remember that God will be with you to guide and sustain – and bring you to the Promised Land – your new church home. Along the way, you will need to help one another, forgive each other when the stress of the journey proves daunting, and discern together this new thing that God is doing in your midst. It will mean being willing to adapt and change as the Spirit shows you. It will mean making sure that everyone is included, and that you make a point of working together in all things. And above all, it will mean being generous and gracious to each other, as God is gracious to you.

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I have made bookmarks for everyone with our scripture from today to remind you of the promises God is making to you:

*“Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for Me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find Me, says the Lord.”*

I know you will offer a warm welcome to whomever comes in my place to continue the journey with you. And I’m sure that they will appreciate the many gifts of hospitality, faith and leadership that I have appreciated in my time here. I will be eager to hear all about the future that God is unfolding for and with you. I will hold you in my prayers, and ask you to do the same for me. You Lakeview folks will always have a special place in my heart. And I thank you all for welcoming me into your family of faith with such gracious love. I pray that the seeds of what we have planted together here will continue to blossom and grow into the new beginnings to which we are both being called by the grace of God. May God guide and bless each of us in the adventure of faith that awaits – *“unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.”*