

Natural life cycles...

Life and death—new beginnings

We see it in the life cycle of plants and trees—birth, growth, aging, dying, rebirth...

There is a process of recreation that occurs naturally

Mt St Helens and the removal of the Elwha Dam are 2 examples locally

New life returns after the devastation

It also occurs every spring as the world turns green and springs to life

The dead of winter gives way and new growth emerges

We like it best when there is a constant surge of growth

As Americans we're drawn to the growth model—bigger and better

When things begin to wane, we get nervous

Rather than see it as the natural life cycle and look for how God is at work we want to fix it

How do we pump new life into something?

Often we struggle with endings—rather than being aware of the natural rhythms of life

We prefer beginnings to endings—sometimes we even rush beginnings

Moving quickly to the new thing without finishing well the old

I see that in job endings—one friend that simply didn't show up his last week of work

Most end a job on Friday and start the new one on Monday with no down time

With hard things, we're tempted to bolt and run, rather than stay present to what is happening

Transitions are difficult—even when we are transitioning to something good

Transitions work best when we end well and don't rush the new beginning

When we embrace the in between time—the down times

When we see the dips less as failure and a time to notice what is happening

To find that God is just as present here as when there is obvious growth

I often think of transitions as being in the fog—like crossing a bridge on a foggy night

Astoria bridge is 4.1 miles long—weird on a foggy night

We can't see the other side—we have to trust the bridge and the Dept of Transportation

Keep driving and we do come to solid land

Just like we don't like driving 4.1 miles across a bridge in the fog—we don't like it in life

We don't like it when life seems stalled in the in between places

Everything in me wants to get through it quickly

Some bolt and leave—others try to fix and change the reality

Others stay, but hold it at arms length, waiting for others to figure it out

Waiting to see if the new beginning is one I want

But like driving 4.1 miles across a bridge in the fog—I must stay in this present moment

Focused on what is in front of me—watch the white line—drive slowly

In life I focus on Jesus, slow down and hold on—I ask Jesus what is next and Listen

There is life here, it just feels more obscure

As a church we are in transition—a natural time of change

We keenly feel the loss of those who are moving on—from retirement to a place of stopping

Their good choices impact us—attendance is down, finances are down, loss of skills

One person said to me "the church is dying"—maybe you've felt that way—and pulled back

But I don't see that—I think we are in the midst of a natural life cycle of change—a natural down time
God is at work and new life is happening
God is remaking us—the old must give way to the new
But it is a time of transition—of shifting
Nowhere is that felt more keenly than with this building
Our property here is overgrown and in need of being redone
The school wants to buy our building—but we haven't found a place to go
Our congregation can no longer simply let it ride, assuming that the past will carry us forward

We're in a foggy place of in between—we don't know what the future will look like
Tempted to... pull back—wait and see what **they** do
Leave and go somewhere else
Come up with "fixes"—if we would just do _____, we would grow
Loose hope, loose heart—shift into "plodding gear"
Ignore the whole thing
Rather this is a time to pull together, not apart—an all hands on deck
We all show up for church and come a little early—there is life here—we're here
A time to declare that God is not finished with us yet
Remember a chorus "God did not take us out this far to take us back again"
Based on the Israelites in the desert after leaving Egypt
God is present with us and does have a future for us—we need to stay present
Be in this present moment—pulling together and finding way forward a step at a time
Stay in this present moment as long as it takes without rushing it
So that we do the full work that is ours to do in this space
Notice and tend to the tender shoots of new life as they show themselves
Encourage each other and pray for each other
What we do in this time of transition will determine how we move forward in the new

Read a couple of scriptures out of the Message Bible...

Matthew 6:33-34

1 Corinthians 13:12-14:1a