

Dear Friends,

We are entering the gateway to summer as we begin May. And with us moving into summer, I want you to think about what's next for Plymouth. I have found the book, Being Church in a Liminal Time: Remembering, Letting Go, Resurrecting (Jeffrey Jones and David Frederickson, 2023), to be particularly helpful. In many discussions I've had with you, we have agreed that congregation life has fundamentally changed since Covid-19.

This book takes on that subject to explore both the challenges and opportunities that this church is facing in this period of transition (from what we've been and done in the past) and uncertainty (to what we will need to be and need to be doing in the near future). The writers suggest that the traditional models for doing church no longer will be adequate to engage the complexities of the modern world. The term they use, "liminal time", refers to a period of transition where old structures are breaking down and new ones are emerging but are not in full view yet. Jones and Frederickson point to the changes in worship attendance, declining interest in institutional religion and what it means to do ministry in a post-Christian culture. In the past it was said, "If you build it (a sanctuary, hire a youth minister, etc.), they will come." Today, what we find is "they don't come".

So rather than cling to outdated structures or resorting to superficial methods of evangelism, they advocate for a willingness to embrace change. Change has never been easy for Presbyterians. "How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? Change!? Well, my grandmother donated that light bulb and that light fixture! Don't you dare touch it!"

We must embrace change. The state of change is the constant here!

Jones and Frederickson advise to experiment with new forms of worship (like under a tent in the park with dance and art) and community engagement (with a booth at the community fair offering training classes in computing skills). And by so doing, this and more, a congregation like ours could cultivate an authentic witness that resonates with the deepest needs and aspirations of St Helenese people today. I've had to shorten much of what these authors say. And, yet... we have the opportunity before us for renewal and rediscovery of what it truly means to be the body of Christ in the world today. We can discern a way forward in this time of change. Our way forward will include remembering, letting go, and resurrecting.

In the grip of grace,  
*Pastor Peter J Blank*

P.S. Here is an inspiring movie title I recommended to the Tuesday Lenten Study group that I also want to share with you. It is called "August Rush" (2007). It is about a musically talented orphan Evan, played by Freddie Highmore, who runs away from his orphanage searching New York for his birth parents. On his journey, he's taken under the wing of the Wizard, played by the late Robin Williams, a homeless man who lives in an abandoned theater. After discovering his talent, the Wizard gives Evan the name "August Rush" and devises a plan to profit from his talent. Little does Evan know that his parents, Lyla (Keri Russell) and Louis (Jonathan Rys Meyers), are searching for him too. I think you'll enjoy this story for the rich music and the encouraging message.