

“The State of Our Union”

Mark 9: 1-9

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I once heard theologian Brian McLaren talk about an idea that he attributed to Phyllis Tickle. McLaren claimed that no matter what we do, we live in tension with time. We can never be fully grounded in the past, present, or future, no matter how hard we try. We are always looking back or looking ahead, and often we are doing both at once.

The idea of living in tension is generally not an idea that brings smiles to peoples faces. Tension is often thought of as a negative thing – unresolved, stressful, conflict laden. But there is also a different side to tension. Moments of tension are how situations shift and something new is formed. Tension is where creation happens. When faced with a difficult decision or change, tension is the forces rubbing together that allow us to know what our next steps will be.

When Jesus and three of his disciples go to the mountaintop, they were in a moment of tension. This mountaintop story is one we read every year before Lent, the season that prepares us for Easter. It comes at a time when Jesus has just about completed his ministry with the disciples – he is about to go into the desert and fast for 40 days, and when he returns it will be the final days before his death.

The three disciples were holding on to the past – looking behind them at all they had gone through together, and Jesus was focused on the future – preparing himself for what was yet to come. Together there is a tension that they do not want to talk about – they are beginning to understand that soon they will all have to say goodbye to one another. Jesus is trying to focus,

preparing, and making peace with what is to ultimately happen to him in the coming weeks, but the disciples are not ready, so instead of facing the future they stubbornly turn back and look to the past, to Moses and Elijah – recalling the good old days, if you will, and wishing it could always be like that.

In the midst of this tension, God makes a dazzling appearance and holds the past and the future together by focusing on the present, proclaiming, “This is my son, the Beloved.” The disciples are scared. Jesus is speechless. The tension between them is not released, but moves to the surface, allowing them to go down the mountain together and face what is next to come, even as the disciples continue to want to stay in the past.

This story resonates with me because we cannot escape the tension of time. There are three spaces: the past, present, and future, and it is in the tension between these three spaces where, according to McLaren, life happens. We can live in the tension between the past and the present, and we can live in the tension between the present and the future. It is our choice where we reside, but we cannot escape the tension of each place, we can only determine how we will use it.

The space between the past and the present is where we recreate and remember. It is important work. It honors our ancestors, the work we have done together, and it honors where we have come from.

The space between the present and the future is where new ideas are birthed into being. It is where experimentation happens. It is where we take the risk of trying something new or getting to know someone new, not knowing how it will turn out, not knowing if it will end up being a successful endeavor or a meaningful relationship. The space between the present and the future is where we name our dreams and hopes for what is to come.

Today at Edgewood we are holding our annual meeting. This is the time when we look

back on the past year and celebrate what we have done together, name what we have learned from that year, and when we look to the future and begin to name what we might do together. Today is a day when we embrace the positive tension of the way things were, the way things are, the way things might one day be. It is a time when we symbolically discern what we want to hold on to, what we are willing to let go, and what we hope to create together. We hold this tension as a way of honoring the foundation we have built even as we dream what we might design and build in the coming year.

Annual meeting Sundays are participatory Sundays. In our congregational tradition, everyone has a voice, and everyone works together to create the vision for the future of our church. So instead of laying out my vision for Edgewood this morning – I want you to help me build it.

I have two questions that I want to bring to you today. These are not rhetorical questions for you to answer in your head. I would like us to share our brief responses with one another. This is an interactive sermon! These are not questions that are only for official members of Edgewood or folks who have been here years and years and years. I want to hear from our seasoned members and from our visitors, our longtime friends, and our new ones.

What is ONE thing you have experienced at Edgewood that you would like us to carry into the future? It can be a feeling, like hope, or justice, or inclusion. It can be a memory of an interaction or a program, or it can be something else altogether. It can be from this past year or from thirty years ago. What is ONE thing you have experienced at Edgewood that you would like us to carry into the next year?

What is ONE hope or dream you have for Edgewood in the coming year? If this is your very first time here, what would you hope to experience if you returned? If you have been coming for a while, what is an idea you've had but haven't put into action?