

If you were at the annual meeting last year you heard me talk about APC being in the midst of having to acknowledge that we are no longer the church that existed in the last century and, equally important; acknowledging that we don't know what the church will look like in this century. I talked about being in the uncomfortable "betwixt and between" an undefined intermediary space that is hard to live in.

And after a lot of work this past year, engaging in the New Beginnings process, we continue to be in that "betwixt and between" space or, as I have come to know it, "liminal" space. Liminal space is a term that applies to those uncertain times in our lives when we stand in the "threshold" between the "old" which may no longer work and the "new" which is not yet clear. We know and we don't know. We know we need to change but we don't know what that change will look like. We know we need to engage our surrounding community but we don't know how to do that. We know we need to be able to tell people who we are as a faith community and what Jesus Christ means to us – but we don't have answers to those questions.

It seems to me that the Bible never promises us absolute and certain answers. God's only promise is God's presence. Moses "sees" and "hears" God to some degree, but he doesn't get to see God's face (so he knows but he doesn't fully know). In the story of Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration, Jesus is presented in a dazzling light but then there is an overshadowing cloud. When Moses asks God what to tell the people when they ask God's name, God responds "I am who I am" – which seems to convey discreet withholding (you can't know my name) and total availability at the same time. In John Chapter 16, Jesus tells his disciples that He has much more to say to them, but it's more than they can bear – so the Spirit will make it known to them eventually. There is this tension of knowing and not knowing. There are revelations, but it's the journey – it's *how* we get there that determines where we will arrive and what we arrive as. And we cannot become a people of faith without being on a journey of faith.

Jon Etherton has used the example of God providing manna to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert – just enough manna for each day, no more. To expand on that theme, we are also told in Exodus that God did not lead the Israelites by the most direct route instead he led the people by the roundabout way.

I know that in our current culture of being able to get what we want almost instantly – the thought of waiting for clarity, of working without knowing exactly what the end results will look like is really hard to wrap our minds around. And, as Hebrews chapter 10 verse 31 says, "It's scary to fall into the hands of the living God!" – but as we mature as Christians and our faith deepens, we begin to be able to hold that *ever present* tension of knowing and not knowing - as we allow ourselves to make that fall and allow *God's* knowing to suffice and *God's* arms to save.

Recognizing that there is some that we know and much that we don't know, when session met with Sharon for her annual review we determined that setting goals for the whole year would probably not be that helpful. Instead we decided to work at this one quarter at a time and at the end of each quarter we will review what worked, what didn't work and in what direction the Holy Spirit seems to be leading us.

So, for the first quarter of 2012, session would like Sharon to work towards meeting the following goals:

We have two broad categories – Continued support of the New Beginnings process and Office Administration, with sub-categories under each.

Under support of New Beginnings process, the first sub-category is:

- Deepening our faith identity, commitment of the Session and the congregation, goals included under this sub-category are:
 - o Develop a Lenten worship program with the Proclaim Ministry Team that emphasizes preparation for the further exploration after Easter of the five questions: Who is Jesus? What is church? What is salvation? What is evangelism? What is service? Emphasize the development of an active prayer life outside of church in preparation for the time of working with an outside consultant on our future as new mission church.
 - o Use time at each Session meeting to prepare Session members to lead worship with the congregation during Sharon's sabbatical.
 - o Focus on using the worship time between Easter and Pentecost to deepen congregational understanding of their beliefs around "Who is Jesus? "

- The 2nd sub-category under support of the New Beginning process is: Engagement with the community, goals included in this sub-category are:
 - o Plan for field trips and engagement of not only Session members but the rest of the congregation and how to communicate the insights, lessons, and findings.
 - o Meet with each individual member of the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization (CPRO) with common questions to gain deeper insight into the developing community around us and the needs.
 - o Lead the church in working with VOICE, Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement, to establish a series of listening sessions in conjunction with Trinity Episcopal on the subject of affordable housing.
 - o Set aside substantial intentional time each week to be out of the church building to visit local merchants and others in the neighborhoods and report on the insights and experiences regularly in blog-type articles in the New Bridges newsletter.
 - o Explore with the members of the Proclaim Ministry Team ways to transform the website and APC Facebook page into a more effective tool for community engagement.

Under the broad category of Office Administration we have developed one sub-category, which is

- To support greater ability to conduct ministry outside of the office, the goals of this sub-category include:
 - o Empower Maria, the office manager, with greater decision-making authority in appropriate areas.
 - o Explore more structured approach to staff oversight and communication to free up time in the week.
 - o Increase engagement of and reliance on Ministry Teams in their areas of responsibility by both Sharon and Maria.

And finally, for this first quarter, we ask that Sharon plan to meet with Session in early April to review progress, accomplishments, and lessons – learned, and to set goals for second quarter.