

Moving Day

a sermon

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Trinity Reformed Church

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Revelation 21:1-6a

Moving is hard.

The sorting. The discarding.

The packing. The discarding.

The unpacking. The discarding.

The whining.

Moving is hard.

There's this lady I know. Very nice lady. Kind, and wise. And beautiful. *Sooo* beautiful. Maybe you know her. She says that the last move she did was the hardest, most stressful thing she'd ever done.

Moving is hard.

For some people, moving can be a bit emotional. So many emotions. So many.

Excitement. Anticipation.

Sorrow. Regret.

Anger.

Joy.

Worry.

All of these, it seems,
about what's left behind,
about what lies ahead.

Moving is hard.

It's hard, too, for those who don't move, the non-movers, the one's who stay put, or stay behind, or are left behind, but in any case those who don't go on the move but still are affected by the move of those who go away.

They, too, have a mix of emotions, perhaps the very same ones:

sorrow,

regret,

anger,

disappointment,

joy,

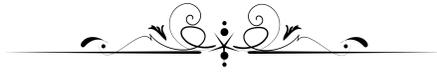
worry,

about what's left behind,

about what lies ahead.

Or maybe they have different emotions, or none at all. But they feel how they feel and it doesn't do any good, it is neither respectful nor helpful to tell them that they shouldn't feel what they feel.

Moving is hard.



On a day like this one, All Saints' Sunday, the mixed emotions of moving can rise right to the surface. On this day, we remember and give thanks to God for the lives of those who have honored Christ and blessed us with their living, yet now are gone.

On this day, we are keenly aware that, yes, truly, moving is hard.

Just last week, Gus Cooper passed away.

Earlier this year it was Margaret DeLeeuw.

Others have died, too, whose names I expect you are recalling right now.

It doesn't matter if they died yesterday, last month, last year, three or twenty years ago. *It still hurts.* Their moving away still matters. It *is*, it really is, hard.

In high school one of my dearest friends was Connie. She was sweet and strong willed, humble and loud, short of fuse but quick to love.

In the middle of my freshman year in college, I got the phone call from a friend. "Dan? This is Liza. I think you'd better sit down." Connie was dead, her car having come across a patch of black ice, causing her to crash.

I wasn't able to attend the funeral. I had no way to make the 700 mile trip to Albany.

I'm kind of glad I didn't. I think something that happened there would have just made me mad.

It did anyway.

Another person from my high school — she had graduated a year before me — was there at the funeral. She had an exuberant Christian faith, but she was also, well — how do I say it? — wrong. Not about everything. Just some things.

At the funeral, she saw these many people, most of them teenagers, weeping over Connie. So this young woman, seeing an opportunity to evangelize, started to scold those sobbing young people. They shouldn't be sad, she said. They should be glad, because Connie was now in heaven.

Even all these years later, I am troubled by her words.

I believe I now understand them, and her, a bit better. I think I understand that she, too, was trying to deal with her grief. I'm sure she meant well.

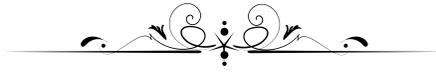
But what she said was wrong.

Sure, Connie was in heaven, embraced by God's nearer presence. She was right about that.

But my dear friend's death was not simply an occasion for rejoicing. It also surely was a time for mourning, for tears, for grief. Because life as God gives it, from cradle to grave, is a blessing. And to deny sadness when death intrudes, to reject sorrow when tragedy strikes, is to say that God's gifts aren't good. And if you don't believe the *gifts* are good, what does that say about the *giver*?

Moving is hard.

In some ways, maybe it's supposed to be.



The Bible passage I read messed with my head this week.
Isn't that great?

Actually, I find it amazing: the power God gives the Bible, so that verses I have read many times before will suddenly rise up and show me something about themselves I hadn't noticed before. Or something about me.

What struck me in this passage is the *movement* in it. Its direction. Its flow. Basically, it's the opposite of what I'd expect. And maybe you, too.

You see, all of the movement is *from* God *toward* us. Which is so different than how we think of heaven, and the afterlife, and what comes at the end, the destiny of souls and the consummation of all things.

So much of what we tend to think of with those things involves *us* doing the moving, with the direction being from here to there.

We go to heaven.
The dead make their journey to the beyond.
The departed have gone to be with the Lord.
Those we have loved and lost have stepped out into eternity.

That's the direction in mind, or imagined, by many.
But not in these verses.

Here, the vision of John is about the movement of God toward the people of God.
We won't move to the holy city. Instead, the holy city will move to us.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

We won't move to be with God. Instead, God will move to be with us.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them..."

Who gets us ready for the move? Who makes us ready for the living beyond this life? Who prepares us for moving day?

[God] "will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Who gets the new place ready to move into? Or tidies up the old place?

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

Not you.
Not me.
Not churches.
Not governments.
Not armies.
Not businesses.

God does. God is making all things new. This work belongs to God, who brings it to us who neither deserve nor can complete it, brings it to us

as gift,
as grace,
as blessing,
as sacrament,
as water turned into wine,
as bread and wine become body and blood,
the gifts of God for the people of God,

preparing us for moving day.



Moving is hard. Especially the moving into death.

I remember Anne DeYoung saying to me years ago, “When I get to heaven, I want to ask God why it has to be so hard to die.”

Yet here scripture tells me that God does the bulk of the work. And I am comforted.

It tells me God does the heavy lifting. And I am consoled.

It reminds me that *God* will come to *me* at my closing breath, when my moving day comes. And I am given hope.

It shows me that God’s intention for the world is not to destroy the world, but to remake it.

And I am encouraged in my thirst for justice,
and I am strengthened in my desire to share in Christ’s self-giving,
and I am deepened in my love for all whom Jesus loves and for whom he
died.

Dear ones, may the light and love of the Lord Jesus Christ shine on you in your every move.