

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

From the Gospel reading appointed from today: 'he (Jesus) passed through the midst of them and went on his way'. Jesus was on the move.

As we know, Jesus was a bit of an itinerant during his entire lifetime – certainly during his adult years. But we human beings also go on our way – perhaps not quite in the same fashion, for most of us, we do 'go on our way' many times during the course of our lifetimes.

But whether we're the one 'going on our way' or whether we're staying behind, we cope with the change. Some people, to be sure, cope more easily than others, but we all manage to survive. As this parish knows quite well along about now, when it is a priest who 'goes on his or her way' - i.e. when a priest leaves a parish - the congregation – with the help of the Bishop's office – copes in a particular way, as it gets about the business of searching for a new priest.

As we all know by now, the search process can seem awfully long and drawn out. Which is why there are such creatures in the church known as intentional interim clergy.

As many of you have heard me say, while the process does take a while, it does afford opportunities for the parish. As we experienced not too long ago, the time of transition is a chance to learn about and learn from the parish's history.

Likewise, the time of transition offers opportunities to discover new ways of serving our Lord and our neighbors. Transition times also provide the opportunity to challenge old ways of thinking and old ways of being.

One thing I've learned to do in interim situations is to ask not only how things are done in a given parish, but also to ask why they are done that way,

so that we can examine not only what we do, but also why we do what we do. I'm not a fan of change for its own sake, but I am a fan of claiming our customs for good reasons not just 'because we've always done it that way'.

Of course even asking those kind of questions doesn't always make me wildly popular. We human beings often resist any form of change – or even the threat of change no matter whether the change is good, bad, or indifferent.

So I can sympathize with what we encountered in today's Gospel lesson. At the beginning of the episode, 'all spoke well of him (Jesus) and were amazed at the gracious words that came out of his mouth'. But as he went along, he made reference to the widow at Zarephath and to Naaman the Syrian, and that – apparently - really annoyed them, presumably since the widow and Naaman were foreigners. Was Jesus suggesting that they welcome people like that – people who are different? Was Jesus suggesting that they change?

And by the end of the reading, we heard (and I'm quoting here) 'all in the synagogue were filled with rage' But the reality is, following Jesus often does require that we be open to change – change in how we do things, and change in how we think about things. Not change for its own sake, but change for the sake of the Good News. I've often teased that every parish insists that it wants to grow. Sure they do, I remark rather sarcastically, unless that means some stranger will sit in *my* pew or (gasp) have a new idea about how to do things.

We are creatures of habit, after all. And we develop habits and routines to help us cope with life as we encounter it. But so often our routines turn into ruts, and ruts are uncomfortable and confining places. Also, if we're not receptive to thinking in new ways or acting in new ways, then we're risking excluding ourselves from wonderful possibilities.

We may even be distancing ourselves from what St. Paul described so eloquently in today's Epistle reading, the gift of love. To be sure, thinking in new ways and acting in new ways can be dangerous business. When we risk making changes – even when we do it in the name of love - we risk falling from favor. And sometimes that's just what happens, just as it did with Jesus in the synagogue. But when we act in the name of love and welcome others as we would wish to be welcomed, and when we are at least

open to change, then it is that we discover that love is patient and kind, that love is not envious or boastful or rude that love hopes all things, endures all things, and that love never ends. And Jesus Christ came into this world that we might encounter God's love. And Jesus Christ suffered and died out of that love, so that we might travel through this world embraced by that love, no matter where our travels might take us.

Thanks be to God, through the Lord of love, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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