

Let us pray: Heavenly God, be with us this morning. Send your Spirit to me, and speak to your people through the words I have prepared. Be present with us this morning, and bless us with understanding. May our ears be open to hear your voice. May we repent of our sinful ways, may we be transformed, may we accept your forgiveness, and may we learn today to forgive others. Amen.

Sometimes, what we think is the finale is really only the opening act. Sometimes this is unwelcome news. I remember Michelle and I going on a backpacking trip during our honeymoon in Bruce Peninsula National Park, along a section of the Bruce trail that was, unbeknownst to us at the start of the trail, of a difficulty level that should have placed it out of our league. Halfway in, we were scrambling up slick rocky hills, step, pull, climb, to peek over the top in the hopes that maybe this was it? Was our campsite there yet? Had we arrived? Nope, not this time, just another downhill and then step, pull, climb and hope our way up the next hill again. And then, finally, we came to the turn-off for the campsite, with a little sign pointing off the trail. We were ecstatic, because we were tired and sore and ready to get off our feet and out of our boots. We'd finally made it, or so we thought, but as we turned down that path, following the cheery arrow that said "campground", we saw that the path ended at a tree with a rope tied around it, a rope that hung down the forty-five degree incline to the left, with a cheery arrow pointing down that said "campground!" We were not impressed. We eventually made it to the site, but the hoped-for end took much longer than we hoped.

And how many times have we spoken to someone, given them a word of encouragement that we thought was a one-time contact, heard and forgotten, but only heard back from them later of the lasting impact our

words had? Or can you think of a time that someone else's words "stuck" in your life?

We can be bad at identifying endings. Our gospel reading for today comes from the very end of the book of Luke, a gospel written (according to Luke 1:3) to a "Most excellent Theophilus", perhaps a name, or perhaps a title since it means "One who loves God", a title for all the readers of the words of that Gospel. The Gospel ends with our story from this morning, the story of the ascension. Christ has taught his disciples, died, and risen again on the third day just as he said. He spends a little more time with them after coming out from the tomb, and then he ascends to heaven. Luke finishes off with "and they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God." It sounds an awful lot like "and they lived happily ever after". It really sounds like the end of the story.

Sometimes what we think is an end is really only a beginning. There was a second book written to Theophilus, the story goes on! The disciples stand watching the ascension, maybe they were feeling a little like it was the end of the story. But "suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" It's a dramatic moment, as they all 'snap out of it'. All of the eyes that were gazing up come back down, and although the book of Luke has come to an end, the book of Acts is just beginning, and it goes on to record the earliest days of the Christian movement, as the apostles went out into the world and did amazing things, they preached, they healed, they went on long journeys and brought the message of God's love to all the corners of their known world. It's really a good thing that they didn't stay standing there,

looking up at the sky; it's a good thing they realized it wasn't just an end, but a beginning, too.

In our lives we face many ends: occasionally it's a transition like moving to a new home, or becoming a parent or a grandparent for the first time. As we say goodbye to the way things were, we know that we are moving into something new that we at least understand a little bit.

Sometimes it is a transition that is more unknown, like the recovering addict who is, by the power of God, celebrating their first few days sober in a long time, or someone who has been living with a secret and finally had the courage to share it. Something old is behind, something new is ahead.

Sometimes it is more painful to move forward, because sometimes we are remembering a loss, the end of a life or a friendship. This morning, we remembered Elizabeth Berghuis and David Pippy by placing their names on our memorial tree, an ending, and a loss, which is near to many of us. And yet, at the same time, we recognize their legacy. Although they have died, it is not only an end. We have faith that it is not the end for them, and we know that it is not the end for us, because the impact that they had in their life is still a part of the story of St David's.

In the story of Luke and Acts, we learn that God delights in making endings into beginnings. This is a theme all through scripture: Sarah, whose child-bearing years have ended fruitlessly, conceives and has a son in her old age. Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, is brought out of jail to become second only to the pharaoh. Moses runs from Egypt only to return and lead God's people to the promised land, Jesus dies and rises, Paul is struck down and then transformed. The ascension is a beginning, not only an end.

We worship the God of life from death, of new growth from barrenness. If you are aching, be encouraged. If you feel like your life is coming crashing down around your ears, trust in God, he makes all things new. If you feel surrounded by new beginnings, have faith that God will be with you forever, working in your future as well as in your past.

So as we come to the end of our worship service today, think of the new beginnings. As we give our money out of gratitude and thanksgiving, that is not the end of it: this church accomplishes a great deal through your generosity. The offering is a beginning. As I raise my hands to give the benediction, I will bless you, not just at the end of the worship service, but also at the beginning of your week. Be open to the renewal of the Spirit, do not, like the apostles, stand still and lose yourself in looking back at the way things once were, even though it was only the first chapter of the book. God is making all things new. Hallelujah, and Amen.