

DATE: April 12th, 2026

TEXT: Isaiah 43:19-21; Psalm 136:1-9

THEME: God's love endures forever.

SUBJECT: Trust

TITLE: Where are we going? Are we going to be OK?

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: How shall we move forward from here?

Exigency: Easter season
First Sunday with transitional pastor

Children's: Introductions. I'm a transitional pastor. What does "transition" mean? I'll be with you during this time of change and being "in between". In-between what? — What will that look like? I'll ask questions. I'll help this congregation think about who it is and what it wants to do/be in the future. Do you know what Artemis II is? Artemis II just came back from the moon. We've sent rockets and explorers into space with interesting names: Pathfinder, Endeavor, New Horizons, Discovery, Enterprise, Curiosity. All of these are good ways to think about being in transition. If you're stuck, find a path, a new horizon. My favorite is **Curiosity**.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Spirit, fill our minds with your Word and help us to be curious. Increase our love for one another, and inspire us with a commitment to create a transformed world, starting with ourselves. Amen.

Good morning! I'm your new transitional pastor, Kris Voss-Rothmeier! I've been a member of Cascades Presbytery for 25 years, some of that time serving churches and some of that time serving as a public school teacher. After pastoring two churches in St. Louis, I moved here with my wife in 2000 (and no children yet) to take a call at Milwaukie Presbyterian where I led the jr. and sr. high youth groups and coordinated children and adult education programs. Five years later, I got a teaching certificate at PSU and entered public education; I spent 16 of my 18 years in education in middle

school. For 10 years during that time I was Parish Associate at St. Mark. When my kids were grown, I decided to go back into parish ministry and so I received transitional ministry training and gratefully accepted an invitation to serve at Portland Mennonite Church in SE Portland. And now, two years later, here I am. Thank you for extending your own invitation to me to journey with you during this important time in the life of Southminster. Together, we are transitioning into something new and await with hope for what God has in store for us.

Scripture is filled with transitions. In Genesis, the Spirit hovered over the surface of the deep as God began the process of creating, starting with nothing, and making it something: plants and animals, lightness and darkness, people, land and sea. Noah and his family floated over the face of the deep in a boat filled with animals, carrying life from one world to another. Later on, the people of God wandered in the desert for 40 years after getting away from slavery in Egypt. Moses, their transitional pastor, didn't cross the Jordan River with them into their new home. Instead, Joshua led them. Once in that land, God raised up judges to lead the people. But they were transitory too. In time, kings led the Israelites until the time came when ... they didn't. The reign of the kings gave way to decades of transition, it turned out, in Babylon - a period which itself ended in a return to the city of Jerusalem about 50 years later. The Hebrew people could finally settle in, right? Well, if they did, they got antsy before too long and then they struggled to follow God. So God sent prophets to call them back until the voices of the prophets were silenced. In the fullness of time - on the other side of yet another transitional period - God came to us directly to call us back. Jesus lived among us for a short time - a transitional time - and then sent the Holy Spirit to be our "installed"

counselor. Throughout all of these transitions, surely people asked the same questions we're asking now: **Where are we going? Are we going to be OK?**

Jesus once compared the Spirit of God to the wind. The wind blows wherever it pleases. We hear its sound, but we cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. God is that wind. Sometimes a mighty rushing wind. Sometimes a gentle breeze. God's spirit is still hovering over the waters. God is still creating, and so we live in an ever-changing cycle of the seasons, in and through transitions that lead to other transitions. **Where are we going? Are we going to be OK?**

Life's transitions come in endless varieties. People marry, they separate, they change jobs, they change vocations, they move away, they move back, they progress through school, they find work, they become unemployed, a loved-one dies; people get sick, they recover (maybe not fully), they grow older. When you think about it, when is life NOT in transition? I don't know about you, but sometimes I'd like things to stay the same for a while. I like the comfort of certainty. It's hard work to adjust to a new situation. As I myself taxi around on the tarmac and approach gate # 62, I increasingly appreciate when things don't change. Oh, they do stay the same at times. But in the end, all things have a beginning, a middle and an end. Nothing lasts but the love of God. That's how creation works. **Where are we going? Are we going to be OK?**

Southminster's transition is inevitable and, I submit, will prove to be an invaluable part of the life of this congregation. It will force us to think differently and it will cause us to ask questions we may not have had the will to ask for a while. Who are we? Where are we going? What is most essential to us? What might we need to let go of? What would we like to begin doing or being? Do we believe what we say we believe? Are our

actions based on our beliefs? Does our budget reflect our beliefs? Over the next year or so, we'll explore these and other questions. Why? Because asking questions helps us define ourselves, helps us learn. I told my students many times over the years, "If you learn how to ask good questions, then eventually I'll be out of a job."

Even as we move into this new phase, I think we're going to be OK. I also know that people are on a spectrum. Some are ready to live into this in-between time while others are asking why we need to transition. Why can't we hire a pastor as soon as possible and get on with the work of the church? She or he will help us ask the questions I've just posed. "Pastor Kris, we appreciate you, but we're ready to begin building a new relationship with a settled pastor." I would just say that we may unearth some things during this time that might put a strain on the beginning of a long-term relationship. I don't know what those things are now. I don't have any secret knowledge about you that I'm trying to hide that will come springing out like a monster under the bed in September. Yes, I have transitional leadership training, but my training isn't an exact roadmap for where we're going. I say to you now: I'm not coming to you with answers and I'm certainly not the smartest person in the room. The smartest person in the room ... is **all** of us and we're in this journey of discovery together. And I also want to tell you, **we ARE going to be OK together.**

Isaiah writes: "See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. ... to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself, that they may proclaim my praise."

I said I don't have an exact roadmap, but I do have some guidelines about how we can find streams in the desert. First, **be curious**. A recent article in *Psychology Today* (May 3, 2023, How Curiosity Can Help Ease Anxiety) makes the point that it takes 10,000 hours to master a skill. And if that's the case, most of us are expert worriers; that is, we have set up anxiety "habit loops" in our minds. Since anxiety medication seems to benefit only one in five people, Neuroscientist Jud Brewer looked at how we might interrupt those habit loops without using medication and he made an interesting hypothesis: "Anxiety could be driven as a habit by triggering worry as a mental behavior." In other words, the more we worry, the more we worry, the more we worry. Medication has its place in dealing with anxiety, but Neuroscientist Jud Brewer suggests that we already possess the tool we need that could help break this habit. That tool is not sheer willpower, nor is it knowledge and understanding about how anxiety is caused; that tool, he says, is simple curiosity. As we transition, there may be times when we become anxious about the process. We don't know when it will end. We don't know who the next called and installed pastor will be. Asking certain questions may make us uncomfortable and may even stir up conflict and I want to encourage you to sit with the questions and try to be curious when those times come. If you're feeling anxious because the answer isn't clear, be honest and say, "I don't like when I don't know the answer because it makes me feel out-of-control. Why is that?" If you're comfortable with the way things are, ask yourself why THAT is. **Be curious. It's OK.**

And second, **trust God**. There was a time, when I was a young child of 3 or 4, that I trusted in the one whom I saw as the most powerful force in the universe: my

mother. I don't have many memories that reach back that far, but I do have a few. One is more of an image actually. Our family lived in Amherst, NH. My mom took me shopping in Milford, the next town over, and I was sitting in the child seat of the shopping cart. I don't remember going to the store, wheeling through the aisles or checking out. I do remember this: I was still sitting in the cart as my mother loaded groceries into the car that was parked on a slight grade. At one point, the shopping cart began to roll away from her and I cried out as I reached out my hands. I remember my emotion - fear - and I also remember the look on her face. I was scared and I expected her to look scared too, but she wasn't. She looked calm as she stepped toward me and took hold of the handle of the cart. Fear made me believe that I was close to the bottom of a long hill. But in reality, I probably rolled back a foot or two.

This time of transition may stir many emotions in us all - anxiety, uncertainty, fear, anger, joy - and it may feel like the shopping cart just continues to roll down the hill. But "Look to God and to God's strength; seek the face of God always. Remember the wonders that God has done, the miracles, and the judgments, O descendants of Abraham, servants of God, O children of Jacob, God's chosen ones." (Psalm 105:4 - 6)

Are we going to be OK? Yes, because God is here. Neither life nor death, nor angels, nor things present nor things past, nor transitions, nor mid-term elections, nor doubts, nor trouble, nor anything else in all of God's creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Be curious. Trust God. And all will be well.

I'm proud / deeply satisfied / proud to serve this congregation as a coffee maker, a member of a committee, a musician and as a transitional pastor. And if pride goes before a fall, let it be so ("Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" Romans 5:20) for then we will need to rely on each other in order to find our way forward.

Entering into marriage is an act of faith. People make a promise to love each other for the rest of their lives, but there is no way to see into the future. We discover things about our partners in living with them that we could not have known when we make those vows. Raising children, moving to other parts of the country, struggles to pay bills, mental health challenges, growing older, changing vocations, addictions and so much more manifest character traits over time. All of these occurred in my family growing up. And so, 14 years after my parents spoke their vows, they separated. It was a tough time for my brother and me and we hoped for years that they would get back together again. However, as I look back on it now, I recognize that they were two good people who were doing their best, but that it was probably best for them to go their separate ways.

My parents were married in their early 20s in the early 1960s. Societal pressures at the time had much to do with them getting married at such a young age. They had two children and the budget was tight. 14 years after their wedding, they got a divorce. This was not uncommon in the 1970s. Divorce rates more than doubled between 1960 and 1980; the children growing up in that era took note of their parent's struggles and were more cautious about entering into a lifetime commitment. Today, divorce rates hover around where they were in 1970 - the middle of that meteoric rise.

Life is filled with transition. "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds that you may test and approve what God's will is"

Hymn possibilities:

- Hallelujah, We Sing Your Praises
- Will You Let Me Be Your Servant (778)
- Siyahamba (793)
- You Make Beautiful Things

Prelude

Ringing the Church Bell

Hymn

Welcoming Words

Scripture Isaiah 43:19-21

Hymn

Gathering Our Gifts

Children's Time

Scripture Psalm 136:1-9, with PMC prayers added
Congregational response: Your love endures forever.

Hymn

Sermon Where are we going? Are we going to be OK?

Hymn

Welcome to the Intentional Transitional Pastor

Greetings - Terry Rediger

Prayer

Commitments

Terry: A church family is constantly changing. Loved ones come to the end of their lives. Individuals come and go in our church life. It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today we share the time of welcome with Pastor Kris whose time as our interim pastor has begun.

Kris, in the presence of this congregation will you commit yourself to this trust and responsibility, and promise to discharge your duties in harmony with the traditions of this church?

Kris: I will with God's help.

Terry: Will you love, serve and pray for these people of God, nourishing them with the Word and lead them forward during this important time of change?

Kris: I will with God's help.

Terry: Will you lead these people of God in giving faithful witness to the Word and making known the love of God through loving service among them and this community?

Kris: I will with God's help.

Terry: May Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, inspire you and give you strength so that you may perform them with love and compassion.

Congregation: Amen

Terry: I ask all of you, now, members and participants of Portland Mennonite Church, will you receive this messenger of Christ, Pastor Kris, who continues the work of bringing the Gospel of hope and salvation? Will you regard him as a fellow servant of Christ and work with him in the ministry of this congregation?

Congregation: We will.

Terry: Will you pray for him and honor him for his work' sake and in all things
strive to live together in the peace and unity of Christ?

Congregation: We will.

Terry: By your statements of commitment and with the affirmation of this
congregation, I welcome you on behalf of our family of churches, (family
name).

Congregation: We welcome you, Pastor Kris, as our intentional transitional
pastor at Portland Mennonite Church. May God, who has
called us together to this place and time, work in all of us to
discover new things about ourselves and continue to build us
up into the body of Christ.

Lord's Prayer

Sending Words

Hymn

Benediction - Holden Prayer

Gracious God,

You have called us your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending

By paths as yet untrodden

Through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with good courage,

Not knowing where we go,

But only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us,

Through Jesus Christ, our Light and our Guide.

Amen.