

PTGIF

Colossians 1:10-20

This morning if I were to ask you, “What comes to mind when you think about the future?” I wonder where most of us are right now. For some of us it would be our Thanksgiving plans. For others, we’re already busily thinking ahead to Christmas with visions of sugar plums dancing in our heads and visions of credit card bills arriving in January.

This past week as I have pondered the things that lay ahead of us as a community, here are the things that came to my mind:

1. Tuesday night I gathered with others from All God’s Children and with other faith leaders from across the Metro in Anoka to talk about how faith communities can assist people in using strategic story-telling as a tool to end bullying and suicides in our schools and to promote safe families for all. We were in the epicenter of the blast that has destroyed more children through suicide than any other place in the state and the room wasn’t full. Our Outreach Director is putting together a prayer brunch on December 11th for city council members, mayor, school officials and other congregations to continue to raise the issue of bullying and safe schools. See Brian (point him out) after worship to help with that event. Our event needs to be full. It is that important. December 11th, 11AM-2PM.
2. I pondered the fate of marriage equality for Minnesota. Just a few months ago we were looking at 2011 as a time when marriage equality could finally become the law in Minnesota. The possibility of a new governor and a new legislature had that goal in reach. Now we know that not only will marriage equality not become a possibility through the legislature but that the new Republican leaders of the State senate and house have indicated they will push a constitutional amendment banning marriage equality. We are forced to return to preventing the threat of discrimination written into the constitution of our state and once again defending ourselves against those who see our families as a threat. The good news is that Golden Valley became the seventh Minnesota city to pass a Domestic Partnership registry. They did in unanimously.

3. I received a call from a teen at a Catholic high school who wants support in possibly forming a GSA and supporting gay students coming out. Our Outreach Director, Brian, and I meet with them on Tuesday this week to see how our congregation can help.

I thought of these things as I listened to our reading from Colossians where Paul was praying for the church there to be “strengthened with all power according to God’s glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Creator,”

Whenever we are facing challenges in life Colossians is giving us the same advise that my Dad use to give my siblings and me when we were facing something difficult: PTGIF. No, this is not just the stock exchange moniker for PT Medco Energi International. It is not some play off of the “thank God it’s Friday” idea. It is what you and I need to do whenever we begin something that is going to take us far, through many twists and turns and around many corners where we don’t have all the details of the trip. This is what it takes to begin that process. PTGIF – Put the gear in first. This phrase actually carried two meanings in our household. One was that we needed to put the gear in first – that is, you can’t begin a journey of a thousand miles until you do the first things first. Now, this makes no sense to new drivers today because most of us have automatic transmissions so we just put the gear in drive. But when I was learning to drive, if you wanted to get anywhere in life you had to negotiate first gear and a clutch and learn the delicate art of letting go while giving it gas. Learning to drive that way required a great deal of endurance and patience. But the result was a sense of accomplishment and joy when you figured out the right mix of letting go and giving it gas that would forever free you from a world of simply walking. The second meaning of that phrase for me was that I needed to put the gear in first – I needed to engage the challenge, take action, put together a plan, made decisions. If I didn’t have the gear engaged, no amount of gas was going to do anything.

Today we install a new group of leaders to our Board of Directors and a new set of Lay Delegates. We are asking them to provide their skills of

leadership to help us move forward in our work and mission as a congregation. We will need the right balance of letting go so they can do their work and giving gas so that we have the energy to move forward. We as a congregation have engaged the gear and with their leadership and the leadership of so many more in ministry teams and outreach and congregational care and teaching, we are giving it the gas. The results have been almost immediate – new energy for ministry, new excitement about our mission, new possibilities for what we can accomplish in the world, new hope for those who need to hear our message. We are finding our stride in balancing letting go and giving it gas. This new group of leaders will help us put the gear in first.

Today we also honor the lives of part of our community that faces some of the most abusive prejudice of anyone in our society. The transgender part of the GLBTQ community is targeted more often and more violently than any other sexual minority. Because they dare to push the boundaries of gender and gender role expectations, they are often perceived as a threat worthy of death by some who fear any challenge to their worldview. They are often the easiest and most visible targets for hate. And at every point in the journey towards equality and human dignity for the GLBTQ community, transgender people have paid the price with their lives. The National Transgender Day of Remembrance which we observe today was begun in 1999 because too many of our sisters and brothers have perished – many of them in anonymous graves or never collected by fearful families. We will name those who have died this year during our offertory time because even if we don't know them or don't know their names, they are a part of us. It is a long journey toward justice. PTGIF

Thanksgiving is here this week. Christmas will be here before we know it. Today, before all the madness begins, let us ponder our own experience of what it means to let go and give it gas so that the holiday season doesn't take us over a cliff but to a destination worth taking the trip.

Sources:

www.homileticonline.com How to Make Your Christ Wish List, November 2010.