

As we prepare for the ordination and installation of our Ruling Elders, I remind you that one of the requirements for this office is that they come before the Session, and each has given a statement of faith and their prayers for this church as we move forward.

In the same manner, our first lesson is Paul’s statement of faith and his words about pressing forward, moving on, not looking back but to look forward as to where Christ leads.

I have a cartoon of a preacher heading into the pulpit. He’s thinking, “I feel a spiritual crisis coming on...if I just had a sign to ease my doubts...a sign to buoy my faith...if I just had a sign!”

In the next to last panel, there is a ‘zap’ of lightning, and then, in the last panel, the preacher is holding a “No Parking” traffic sign. He says, “I don’t know what it means, but I think I feel better!”

As an intentional interim minister, I know that sign well – I live by that sign. What I attempt to do is help congregations see that sign for themselves – No Parking – and figure out what it means.

And I believe that all of us – whether you are in an intentional or unintentional interim, whether you serve as an elder or PW officer or Sunday School teacher – as Bill Engvall would say – here’s your sign: NO PARKING.

One of the things this sign means is “change.”

I saw an article the other day in which someone noted how fast things change by saying that what had been in Tomorrowland in Disneyland when it opened is now in Frontierland!

It’s why you hear about Pastor Nominating Committees who say: “We’re looking for a

dynamic candidate to lead us in a ministry of transformation where we don’t have to change!”

Life is a matter of “no parking” - but which way to go and how to get there?

In the book of Proverbs, which underscores the place of wisdom for leadership, there’s a passage that describes our traffic pattern: *Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts. In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand. At the busiest corner she shouts: Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance? How long will you refuse to learn?*

We are all members of the human race, but we’re all running our own race in different directions and trampling each other in the process.

For we live in a world that is splintered, shattered, ruptured by political ideologies, religious antagonisms, racial bitterness, social hostilities, and economic inequities.

Even within the Church we are slip-sliding away with divisions over sexuality, theology, mission, and money.

That’s another thing this sign means: the critical role of leadership that guides us along the way in the uncharted territory of the future.

In a few moments, we will ordain and install Ruling Elders for this congregation. They will make their promises as to their leadership, their discipleship, their service to the church in the name of Jesus Christ.

Gil Rendle, in his book Leading Change in the Congregation, says that the role of congregational leadership is “to be faithful to the journey - to the challenge, the experimentation, the trial and error of ministry in a culture of change.”

In other words, “Here’s your sign, NO PARKING.”

It’s the same sign as when Jesus told his disciples to “go...and make disciples of all the nations.”

Have you ever wondered how they did it without AAA or MapQuest or GPS?

But on a deeper level, the disciples did have to use a spiritual map that moved them beyond the world they knew and into the future God had promised for them.

I’ve read that ancient mapmakers had one interesting habit in common. As they drew maps of the known world (and some did surprisingly well), when they came to the limits of their knowledge about their world, they would write on their maps: “Beyond this, there be dragons!”

Beyond the boundaries of what they knew, they pictured a place of great danger and death. And not just by known causes, but by dragons – creatures of myth and fable and legend – creatures that existed only in their fearful imagination.

I have seen many churches stand on the edge of their tomorrow: unable to move beyond the world they know today, because of the imagined ‘dragons’ they have written on their maps.

These churches are soon lost to forgotten yesterdays.

Or to put it more bluntly: we have parked our Presbyterian posteriors in our predestined pews and the only traffic we have a passion about is beating the Baptists to Sunday lunch!

What about you? As this church comes to the edge of its present map, what would you write?

The basic issue for us as Christians in these times is not so much to talk about God in a culture that is not religious, but to help people respond to the presence of God in their world – less God-talk and more God-walk – No Parking.

Just as Jesus was always on the move - as James Moore put it: "he was born on a journey, died on a journey, rose again on a journey..."

Which leads to the second part of this journey: to build relationships with people in the here and now, where the tired and the weary, the poor and the hungry, the outcasts and the oppressed look into their future – fearfully and faithfully.

The late David Bosch, in his book “Believing the Future” put it this way, “As we call people back to faith in God through Jesus Christ, we must help them to articulate an answer to the question, ‘What do we have to become Christians for?’”

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Think about that for a minute: What do we have to become Christians for?”

The answer to that question, “What do we have to become Christians for?” is found, of course, in having something to say.

This is particularly an issue for us Presbyterians: for one thing, so many of us believe that people should be left alone with that question, and even more, so many of us are not certain we know what our own answer is to the question.

These are the people in our world, some who don’t come to church and some who do; not bad people, but people tired and anxious, puzzled and dismayed by the circumstances in which they find themselves, in a spiritual crisis, looking for a sign, wondering what lies beyond on their map.

My friend John Killinger describes them, “They don’t come to church because they’ve got everything together. (He’s talking about you and me, so let’s change the pronouns) [We] come because [we] don’t have it together, because [we’re] looking for something, because [we] vaguely hope [we] can find it in church....”

Church, this community of faith, is where we enter the stories of God’s movement into the

future, where we enter the traffic pattern as the people of God!

NO PARKING!

Our Book of Order says it this way, “The Church is called to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ.”

Or let me say it another way: An older member of a Sunday School class was reading from a Bible that used the Hebrew name “Yahweh” for God. As he read the text, he actually misread it, “Yahoo said...”

But in that misreading, he gave what I think is a very dynamic interpretation of the text, of the story of those disciples, of the sign of God’s new reality for God’s people – it’s what First Presbyterian Church should be able to write on its map: ***“Beyond this, there be limitless opportunities to do great things for God!”***

This is the map and the promise that has brought this great church to this place and this time.

Now it is up to you to continue going where Jesus Christ sends you...the great things you see this church doing, that you see yourself doing - because you have the same promise Jesus gave the disciples: “I will be with you always, to the end of the age”

The sign for this church and your leaders is surely “No Parking.” And the journey should be a yahoo adventure with Jesus Christ!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!