

We were on vacation in San Francisco, and we were standing at Battery Spencer, the promontory which looks across the Golden Gate Bridge back to San Francisco.

We asked a young man to take our picture with that iconic background, and he returned the camera to us with the words, “Enjoy the journey.”

I took that as a word from God, as this was in the fall of 2006, and I was finishing my first Interim service in Darlington, South Carolina and looking to move to another Interim service.

Enjoy the journey!

There’s a theological foundation to those words. The first question of the catechism asks what the chief and highest end of humanity is.

What are we supposed to be doing, our purpose in life, our mission, if you will?

And the answer is simple: “To glorify God and enjoy God forever.”

“Enjoy” and the word ‘journey’ has a biblical base.

Our lessons are just two of the journey passages in the Bible: spiritual, geographical, missional, personal.

Abraham had no clue what God would do with his life. All he knew was that God was one step ahead of him, and he had to go from home to God-only-knows-where!

God is always calling people to journey out. It is no accident that there are so many stories in the Bible about people making a journey because it is, in fact, Abraham, who sets the pattern for their faith and our faith.

This faith of Abraham, by which he said, “Yes, I will follow,” is the pattern of faith which God gives to you and me today so that our names can be joined not only with Abraham, but with Moses and Joshua and the disciples and Paul.

It is the gospel, as Jesus tells the disciples: “Go into all the world, and I will be with you until the end of the age”; that promise means ‘enjoy the journey’!

We’ve been on that journey, and I’ve heard the questions along the way, and I imagine Abraham asked them, the disciples asked it.

It’s the question of all children on the journey, your children, my children, God’s children: How Much Longer? Are We There Yet?

Well, you’re almost there; and my part of the journey with you is over. I have enjoyed the journey; I hope you have.

And what I want to say now is all about the journey you will be making with Ryan Baer.

The best question I was ever asked by a Pastor Nominating Committee, and I rephrase it for you because I think it’s the right question for you so that you and he will enjoy the journey:

What does a minister need from the members of this church in order to be effective as your pastor, so that you all ‘enjoy the journey....’?

I will start with the short answer.

As part of the Minister’s Installation Service, you, the congregation, will be asked the following questions from the Book of Order:

- Do we, the members of the church, accept Ryan Baer as our pastor, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to guide us in the way of Jesus Christ?
- Do we agree to encourage him, to respect his decisions, and to follow as he guides us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?
- Do we promise to pay him fairly and provide for his welfare as he works among us; to stand by him in trouble and share his joys? Will we listen to the word he preaches, welcome his pastoral care, and honor his authority as he seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?

Your “Yes” to those questions is the short answer!

The long answer comes in the day-after-day, month-after-month of life together.

If Ryan Baer is to have an effective ministry with you, for you to enjoy the journey with him, you will need to follow through on your affirmative answers to these questions.

I think of it in terms of 3 H's: Honesty, Humility, and Humor.

First of all: Be honest with each other. This is a matter of openness and vulnerability.

You need to tell each other what's on your mind, but you will also need to listen honestly to each other; that is, I want you to listen to the minister, and he will work extra hard to listen to you.

That, to me, is the foundation of an honest relationship, a friendship built on respect and love.

It means getting to know each other, taking the time to build a friendship.

How does it happen? By calling Ryan Baer as your pastor, you have already invited him into your lives.

But it's the personal, one-on-one invitation that is necessary to make that honest relationship, that kind of friendship come alive.

I cannot stress enough the need for friendship. This means doing things together: from Bible classes to the golf course, from sitting around a restaurant table with a good meal to sitting on a back porch with a cup of coffee, from stopping by the pastor's study to asking him into your home.

Let him get to know you as you work hard to get to know him: Begin with an honest relationship

The second part of this relationship is a matter of 'humility'.

Humility allows us to enjoy each other's company because if you're honest with each other, you will find that you don't have to kid yourselves about who you are or hide yourselves from each other.

It's what one pastoral mentor told me as I went into the parish, “Bruce, you're not as bad as some people will tell you, but then, you're not as great as you or others will think.”

Humility is that point of accepting that we all make mistakes; we let each other down, but we're here to pick each other up and carry on.

It means that if a congregation is to stand by a pastor and share his troubles and joys, then he has to let the members know what those troubles and joys are.

And the members of the congregation have to do the same for the pastor.

Humility is knowing that we're not in this by ourselves, but we are in it together with God.

So, you see, humility builds on the honest relationship we have.

Finally, what the new pastor will need from the members of the congregation in order to be effective is a healthy sense of humor.

You know how I like to laugh at myself and with others.

As I've tried to be honest with God and humble before God, I've come to believe that God has a tremendous sense of humor: I see this every time I look in the mirror!

I think it's what's at stake in the answer to the first question of the catechism: “To glorify and enjoy God forever.”

A sense of humor allows us to enjoy God... a sense of humor is how we enjoy God.

It means that we don't take ourselves so seriously as to believe that God couldn't do it without us.

It does mean that we take God seriously enough to believe that God wants to do it with us.

That's the enjoyable side, the filled-with-joy part of the journey that carries us through the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the highs and lows of this life called Christian as we follow Jesus Christ.

As Frederick Buechner heard the great preacher George Buttrick say, "among confession, and tears, and great laughter."

That's what your minister will need from you: the pure pleasure and joy of being together because God loves all of us all of the time.

Honesty...Humility...Humor.

As God said to Abraham and the disciples, to so many others in the story of faith, and as God says to you and me:

"Come on. Follow me. I can't tell you exactly where we're going; but trust me to lead you there, and you will live a life which in every way is a celebration of faith."

Enjoy the journey!

Or as John Calvin, who journeyed from his native France to Geneva, Switzerland about five hundred years ago and gave us our theology for our journey as Presbyterians, would say it, and if he didn't say it, he should have said it: "Laissez les bon temps rouler!"

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.