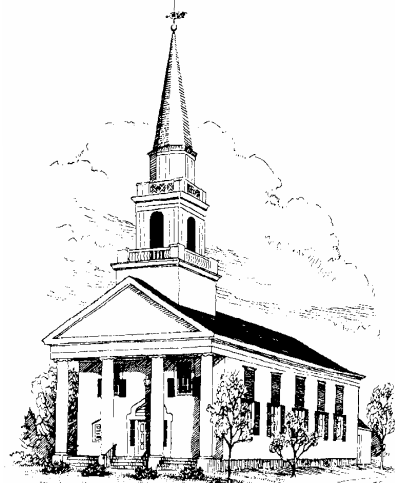


Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from May 6, 2007
Rev. Barbara J. Libby
“All Things New”

Scriptures:
John 13:31-35
Revelation 21:1-6



This Mystic Congregational Church knows quite a lot about change. This church knows a lot about times of transition. One of the recurring themes that I’ve heard talked about in the start-up of my ministry time among you has been the amount of change that this church has been subject to, not just in recent months, but for quite a number of years. The last ten years here at Mystic Congregational Church have been filled with quite a lot of change and a series of transition times.

Most recently, you had been in an interim time for awhile after your Senior Pastor, Dorretta Colburn, left. You had worked with your previous interim, Pat Liberty, on what are known as the five basic tasks of the interim time—tasks which all have something to do with adjusting to change and also preparing to make things new. Just as a quick reminder, the five basic interim tasks include:

- Coming to terms with history,
- Discovering a new identity,
- Leadership changes,
- renewing denominational linkages, and
- commitments to new directions in ministry.

Pastor Pat and this congregation did some important work during your last interim time together in readying this church to move into a new place and in preparing to be ready for new things. This church did some important work around recognizing the best of the past, considering new possibilities for the future, recognizing the many gifts and talents of the folks that thrive here, considering new connections and new ways of doing things, and being open to re-examining, renewing, and revitalizing so that this community of faith might be ready to receive a new settled Senior Pastor.

Then you did call Thomas Ratmeyer as your new Senior Pastor, after he had been serving here as your Associate Pastor for awhile. Unfortunately, that ministry did not have a chance to unfold or prosper as it might have. Thomas was removed from this pulpit last July and his standing as a pastor was revoked for misconduct in October. His ministry here among you came to an abrupt and all-too-sudden end. That abrupt ending and the lack of closure around the end of Thomas’ ministry has left a wide variety of mixed feelings among many members

and friends of this church.

For many of you, there has been too much change and too much disappointment, too much dissension and too much discomfort. Some of you are ready to move forward. Others of you are still processing all that has happened in the last year.

Each of you has been moving along on this continuum we call a time of transition. I often describe this transition process as a process of turning from looking backwards at what we lost and what we had to let go of and our strong feeling about that past to starting to turn to look ahead towards the future and all that it might hold for us.

Times of transition are difficult times for many. Transitions push us to change and to adapt in ways we don't always want to do. Transitions ask something of each of us. We each respond in a wide variety of ways to these times of change.

As we move through this incredibly beautiful and long awaited springtime, I've noticed again that everything comes on in its own time. Spring does not just pop out brand new all at once. Rather, God's creation comes awake gradually in its own unique series of steps. Springtime comes on gradually. The creation is renewed and recreated with each new day, one step at a time, as if God is reminding us that it takes time, it takes creative loving, and it takes some effort for all of creation to be reborn and to be revitalized.

This spring has reminded me again that things don't happen all at once or at the same time. We've had lovely sunshine and warmth, and then more cool, wet, and windy days. Spring here in the Northeast reminds us to wait patiently for all the bulbs to come up in their own time, to wait for the leaves to unfurl on each bush or tree in its own time, and that things bloom at their appointed time. God's creation is renewed and reborn with each day. It takes time for it all to unfold. So, too, with this church, as it moves into another time of transition and interim time.

I believe with all my heart that God is actively working with us and bringing about a new thing here! John's apocalyptic writing in *Revelation* reminds us that God promises to make all things new, not just in some future time but that God makes things new all the while, because God dwells among us all the time.

This church community is once again engaged in a transitional process, a time to prepare to become something new. It will be awhile before a new settled Senior Pastor will arrive here at Mystic Congregational Church. It's okay to move through this particular transition time at your own pace and in whatever way is helpful for you. There is no one "correct" way to move through this time of transition, this interim time.

This interim time does mean more change and even more "new things" to come. I can't be Thomas for you. I can't be Pastor Pat for you. I can't be any of your former pastors. We do have to learn how to work together and how to do the work of ministry here in Mystic at this particular moment in time together, with God's help.

Whoever comes here next will not do things exactly the way I have done them. Whoever comes on board as your next settled pastor will not do things exactly the way either Pat, or Thomas or Doretta or Sam or whoever else did them.

Things will continue to change. There will be new things to adjust to and there will be, without a doubt, new things that emerge that will be different from the way we remember things, different from the way “things have always been”.

Life is full of change. We may not always like it. We may feel quite resentful about the need for change but we will not be able to stop change. We are always in the process of getting ready for a future ahead—a future filled with unknowns and mystery!

Jesus invited his disciples of the first century (and his disciples of the twenty-first century) to consider a new commandment—that we love on another. Jesus even went so far as to suggest that it will be by our love that we are known as his disciples.

Jesus speaks with a sense of urgency about this matter at his last supper with his disciples. He offers up a new commandment, a new covenant really, that we should love one another. Yet Jesus doesn't just suggest that we love one another. He commands that we love one another.

Jesus seems to suggest that we will find him in the love that we share. We will find him whenever and where ever the love of our brothers and sisters becomes a sign of God's love for us!

And so we prepare to come to this communion table this morning. We come to this table hungry, to be filled with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We come to this table knowing deep in our hearts that we do not walk this earth alone but, rather, that we walk this earth with God's abiding presence always. We come to this table to be filled with the sustaining love of God. We come to this table to be nourished with the symbols of the lifeblood and the very presence of God—a God who came and lived among us in human form, a God who came to this earth and suggested that we should love one another.

Let us come to this table to be fed and let us go out this week to be Christ's disciples in the world, sharing a love that sustains each of us and that offers to make all things new. Amen.

