

June 28, 2020
Psalm 23
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
Mary E. Beard

Journey

FAMILY MOMENT

Sixty-seven years ago today Jeanne Frye and Charles Begley were married. They took a leap of faith to commit to sharing their lives together. Then they took a leap of faith to have children. I am one of those children. (Due to the fact that we are online, my mother has been able to join us the last few weeks.) Thanks, Mom. I am grateful to share life's journey with you. Thanks to my brothers, Charlie, Paul, and Mark. I didn't always know it as a child, but I've been blessed by their presence in my life.

This last Wednesday was the 36th ordination anniversary for both Ron and me. Our journey together in marriage has been woven together with our journeys of service in the church. Thanks, Ron. I couldn't have done it without you.

And thanks to our children, Lauren & Karin, who are now adults. It has been our joy and privilege to share life with you. We are grateful for all the ways you have helped us grow up.

Sixteen years ago I came to First Parish Church. I am grateful for the journey we have shared together over these years. When I was installed as the Associate Pastor you gave me this picture. It is a tree made from the thumbprints of many of the children in the church school at that time.

It has been on my office wall all these years. One of the great joys of church life is that we interact with and learn from one another across the age spectrum.

Then when I was installed as the Senior Pastor you gave me this painting, by a local artist, which has also been on my office wall. The perspective is from Cleaveland Street, where the church office is. You can see three white houses that are lined up there and the tower of the church showing through them. Thanks to Bill Ferdinand who found this painting. I like this painting because it depicts a church in the community, which is what we strive to be.

The journey of life and the journey of faith are about the people with whom we share the journey. Thanks for being part of my journey.

SERMON

When I was ordained, I knew the day of retirement would come, but it seemed in the far distant future. Now it seems to have come so quickly.

For some years now, I'd been thinking I would probably retire when I turned sixty-five, which I did last November. However, I wondered if it would seem right when the time actually came. I am grateful that there has been clarity for me the last couple of years that this is the right time.

The time of retiring gives me an opportunity to look back at our life together and to mention church staff who make our ministries possible.

Near the beginning of my time as Senior Pastor, we voted to become an Open and Affirming congregation in the United Church of Christ, which is reflected in our welcoming statement. But for many of us it became particularly real when Ray Cornils and David Belleville invited us to their wedding in the sanctuary after Maine passed the Marriage Equality Act. It was a great day in so many ways!

To provide spiritual enrichment to the wider community we built an outdoor labyrinth in conjunction with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust and in honor of Susan Fitzgerald. I miss her.

A significant ministry in the life of a congregation is to honor human life. We rejoice together and we grieve together. Over the years I have celebrated about 100 baptisms and 150 memorial services with you.

One of the first memorial services was Jane Connor's mother, Barbara Marriner, and then years later her father, Norman. In honor of them we worked with local fabric artist, Catherine Worthington, to create our green parament (pulpit cloth.). This started a wonderful relationship with Catherine which led to a whole collection of paraments and our 300th anniversary wall quilt, to which our church school children contributed squares. It is now hanging in Pilgrim House.

We have made a commitment to our children by providing them with staff to be

their church school teachers. Thanks to Bridgette, Erin, Carley, and Jocelyn. We are grateful for online church school.

Behind the scenes, Geoff Parker moved us into the 21st century with technology upgrades. How grateful we have been especially as this global pandemic has moved us to online communications and worship.

Thankfully, this year Becky Wilkoff was already working on transferring us to a new data base, which is much easier for all of the staff and key lay leaders to use.

Thanks to Homer Kenison, Steve Williams, and Peggy Mast who over the years have helped us to keep track of our finances, making our ministries possible.

When we suddenly had to move to online worship, Jessie Crabtree took on the challenge of figuring out how to provide a smoother online worship experience for us. And she did!

Jessie has now passed that baton to Jared Morneau, who is now broadcasting worship for us. Jared and Henry (who read scripture) were both in the youth group I led when I first came, and I've had the joy of officiating at each of their weddings. I'm not surprised they are still among us. They are special people!

In this new online world of church, Jane Hagness has graciously provided weekday enrichment with evening hymn sings. She is also learning how to have the choirs share music with us. This takes hours and hours – Thanks, Jane.

Francesco Marshall is the newest among the staff but we sure are grateful that he is in our midst and has agreed to increase his hours to provide pastoral care in the coming months.

In July we welcome Annette Mott as our Interim Consultant. Annette is already a member of First Parish and nine years ago we celebrated her ordination. She has since been working with churches in the Maine Conference who are in an interim time. She brings deep spiritual wisdom and practical experience for churches in transition. Thanks, Annette.

Our lives have been woven together in the 300 year tapestry we call First Parish Church. We have been enriched by those who have gone before us and we offer blessings to those who will come after us.

All journeys have beginnings and endings. Today I will be released from my role as Senior Pastor. I do this with some sadness, but mostly with gratitude for our time together, and with hopefulness for my future and the future of the congregation. Each ending portends new possibilities.

I found a poem this week by David Whyte that speaks to this intertwining of leaving and arriving. It's called *The Journey*.

I'm going to read it for you in David Whyte fashion. The first time through I'll repeat some phrases so that the poem echoes and builds on itself. Then I'll pause for some silence and then I'll read it again – straight through.

THE JOURNEY

Above the mountains
the geese turn into
the light again

painting their
black silhouettes
on an open sky.

Sometimes everything
has to be
enscribed across
the heavens

so you can find
the one line
already written
inside you.

Sometimes it takes
a great sky to find that

small, bright
and indescribable
wedge of freedom
in your own heart.

Sometimes with
the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire
has gone out

someone has written
something new
in the ashes
of your life.

*You are not leaving
you are arriving.*

Peace be with you.