

Something old, Something new, Something borrowed, Something Blue
Sandy Reimer **June 29, 2011**

SCRIPTURE AND READINGS

In the general framework within which our separate destinies are worked out, periods of stability alternate with times of transition. I have found that little can be understood as *either* and *or*. I have found that the answer to the question, *Is it this or that?* is often *Both*. It is true that the present is powerfully shaped by the past, but it is also true that the circumstances of every life transition can shake up and revise the old arrangements. And it's true that insight at any age can free us from singing the same sad songs again. We can't understand our history in terms of continuity *or* change. We must include both. ~ *Judith Viorst, Necessary Losses*

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but I do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know now only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. ~ *First Corinthians 13: 1-13, The Spiritual Formation Bible, New Revised Standard Version*

Sometimes it is scary to make these transitions. For many of us, change is problematic and filled with anxiety. Yet through change, whether thrust upon us or self-consciously willed, we restructure our lives and start to see other possibilities, new directions. It takes courage, humor, self-reflection, time and patience. Home base and journey, home and away, inward and outward – we all need to experience these dialectics of life's polarities to be fully ourselves, to be deeply integrated in the rich complexity of who we are meant to be. ~ *Clare Cooper Marcus, Life as a Mirror of Self*

SERMON

It's June – a month often associated with weddings. The movie "Bridesmaids" has attracted a lot of notice and a lot of movie-goers in the past month. And weddings are a good symbol of a major life transition, and transitions are what I want to reflect on this morning. Our worship theme - A New Way of Seeing – reminds me of times of

change, when I see with fresh eyes my life, my spiritual journey, my relationships, my hopes and my dreams.

I kept hearing friends talk about the movie "Bridesmaids," and most of them recommended seeing it. So I did, thinking I'd get at least a good joke to begin this sermon with. "Bridesmaids" is a fun movie. The New York Times reviewer says it would be easy to oversell this movie (which I won't) but also says it would be easier and more foolish to dismiss it, which I found to be true. The movie certainly puts to rest the question of whether a cast of women comedians can be really funny. Kristen Wiig, co-writer and star, is amazing as Annie the maid of honor, and her female co-stars are equally terrific. There are hilarious scenes, entertaining moments, and – *a warning* – also a lot of bathroom humor, yet none of that translated into a pithy funny good joke I could tell to start this sermon.

The film spells out clearly the way that the wedding industry, coupled with our own consumerism, can morph a wedding from a sacred ritual into a spectacle, from a lovely event into a marathon. However, what surprised me most was the film's insightful glimpses about relationships and transitions. I would wager that most of us have run into a woman like Helen, the bridesmaid who manipulatively and competitively wiggles in between the bride and the maid-of-honor and runs away with the shower, the bachelorette outing, and the wedding itself. I wager that most of us have run into a man like Ted, dubbed by the New York Time review as the thinking woman's brute, who uses women for his convenience and his ego. And I also know that most of us have someone in our lives like Lillian, the bride, a good friend who knows us well and loves us in spite of our flaws – and someone like Officer Rhodes, the steady, caring good guy who is both strong and vulnerable. This movie is less about weddings than it is about relationships.

In the midst of it all, there is a poignant moment focused on the experience of transition. The bride, Lillian, is nowhere to be found on the morning of her wedding day. Helen, the take-it-all-over bridesmaid, is so desperate to find Lillian that she reaches out to Annie, the maid of honor that Helen has alienated and whose place she has co-opted. Eventually Annie finds Lillian at home, in her bed, with the pulled covers over her head. Lillian bemoans the way that Helen has usurped her wedding and then begins to cry as she says "Everything is going to change. This is the last time I will ever sleep in this bed, in this apartment. It is the last day I'll ever get to use my bathtub, and you know how I love my bathtub. This is the last day my life is just me."

This scene, beautifully underplayed and wisely allowed to be NOT funny, brought tears to my eyes. It reminded me of that moment when I woke up on the morning of my wedding in the bedroom where I had grown up and I knew that I would never be in that room the same way again. It reminded me of that moment, when I was in the car in labor with strong contractions, and Larry drove into the parking lot of the small hospital in New Milford, Connecticut, and I thought "I'm not ready for this. My whole life is about to change and I want to go home." It reminded me of the day I walked my son to his kindergarten class for the first time, the days when I took each of my sons to college their freshman year, and yes, it reminded me of waking up on that morning of each of my son's weddings too.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue – that old good luck rhyme that most brides hear as advice to what to carry with them on their wedding day – speaks as well of what we need to bring with us during times of transition. I searched for the origin of the rhyme and found no one who could trace the source with accuracy. The rhyme was in use during the Victorian era. It was printed in an 1894 edition of a Pennsylvania newspaper, where it was listed as “A Puritan marriage custom.” In those earlier times, there was an extra line: “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue and a silver sixpence for her shoe.”

As a bride, I carried my mother’s small white Bible, given to her for her wedding by her mother. I wore a new pearl necklace, a wedding gift from Larry. My good friend, whose name was also Sandi, loaned me a St. Christopher’s medal to tuck into my dress. I wore a blue garter on my leg. And a family friend gave me a shiny penny to wear in my shoe.

The more I thought about this rhyme, the more sense it made to me as good advice for transitional times. Something old represents continuity, perhaps with family, perhaps with beliefs or customs, perhaps with a previous time or thread in our life. Something new represents the future, seeing with new eyes, new beliefs and dreams, a new chapter in life. Something borrowed ... represents the sharing and the wisdom, the help and the connections of friends, reciprocity in relationships since what we borrow we also return in some way. And something blue well, that’s interesting to me. Blue is a color that in ancient times was a symbol of faithfulness and fidelity. Blue also reminds me of the blues in jazz music, the bittersweet poignancy of melodies about when we’ve been hurt or wounded and yet we’ve been able to heal and turn our pain into songs. Another twist is blue is the color associated with the birth of a boy, so something blue for a bride, for a woman, could represent the masculine, the animus, the mirror of our shadow, of our opposite, a foreshadowing of the changes in strengths and maturation that will lie ahead for her in the years to come. Seen this way, for a man, the mirror, the shadow, would be the feminine, the anima.

Think about your own life right now – think of a transition you are experiencing or a transition that lies ahead. What is something old, the continuity that is important for you to carry with you into and through this transition? What is something new, a fresh way of seeing or being, that this transition holds out as promises for you? What help and support and resources do you need to borrow, and who are the people who can share them with you? And what faithfulness, what learned healing or what opposite mirror calls to you, as something wise to bring along as touchstones.

My first grandchild, Andrew, graduated from elementary school two weeks ago and heads off to Fletcher Middle School in Jacksonville Beach this August. Andrew is already attuned in new ways to his own peer group; his body is growing and changing. I’m seeing clearly that this is also a transition for me as Andrew’s grandmother. In this transition, I take with me the firm foundation of my relationship with Andrew, all the time I have shared with him since he was four days old. I am looking for new ways to connect with him, exploring what an adolescent male needs most from and with his grandmother. I’m borrowing ideas from other grandparents who have been through

this change and especially remembering the example of my own grandparents who were there for me at every stage of my growing up. And I'm seeing at the same time the shadow, the mirror of my own aging, as I face the reality of things I can no longer do at the same time when Andrew is exploring all the new things he can do, as he expands his horizons.

As I face these transitional changes, both Judith Viorst and Claire Marcus helpfully remind me that I can't neatly separate life into two worlds: one of change and the other of continuity. Life is both change and continuity interwoven and flowing back and forth between those two touchstones all the time. I trust that my transition with Andrew will include both those moments of continuity and of change in the years ahead.

Our scripture passage from First Corinthians 13 adds to this understanding of transitions. One problem with this passage is that it is used so often at weddings and commitment ceremonies that when we hear the words, we tend to think this passage is about love between two people who are promising to spend their lives together. Instead, Paul, the author of this text, is talking about love as a sacred virtue, love as the moving force of creation, as the abiding enduring energy of the holy within us. Paul begins by reminding us that even our extraordinary talents, skills and abilities are emptied of any worth if they are not used in the service of love. He reminds us of the power of love in all relationships, of how it functions – "love waits with patience", is "kind and merciful" and "keeps no score of wrongs," the kind of running ongoing forgiveness that is necessary for any sustained relationship. Implicit in this passage is the image of love as a two-way interaction between each person and others, between God and us, and between communities of people. That is the context in which love enables us, with the support of others who are linked to us in love, to bear and endure whatever comes along. That undergirding of love is the foundation we rely on both in continuity and in change, both in our spiritual journeys and in our life passages.

At most weddings, the person who reads this passage usually skips that part about seeing in a mirror dimly, but later seeing face to face. That can be understood as our ability to see God, to know the Holy, which is now dim knowledge as through a mirror, but some day will be full knowledge face to face. It is for me also a powerful image of transitions. No matter where I am in life, no matter how well-planned, well-understood, even much longed for a particular transition is (or isn't), going through a transition is always seeing the ramifications of that transition as in a mirror dimly. It is later, looking back, that we see face-to-face what that transition has meant to us and how it has enabled us to become who we are. Our mirror of ourselves and our lives flips in and out of focus continually throughout our journey.

So whatever transition you are in or whatever transition unexpectedly finds you, keep in mind this rhyme to guide you so that you bring along this you: "Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue."

And don't forget that shiny sixpence for your shoe, a little spare change so that anywhere you wish, along whatever new path you are on, you can stop and buy yourself a latte, a frosty or a double scoop of ice cream, and enjoy for a moment the new landscape of your life that you are discovering.

Let us join in prayer:

Creator Spirit, God of steady touchstones and of surprising changes, we pray for wisdom and patience this morning as we focus in silence on a transition that we are in the midst of or a transition that lies ahead.

We lift up into your light our hopes and our dreams

We lift up into your light our anxiety and our fears

And we open our hearts and souls to the miracle of grace which hums along quietly within the flow of the seasons of our lives

- grace that unfolds under our feet as we journey on our way

- grace that sustains us through both continuity and change

- and grace that we see clearly only when we look back at

where we've come from and breathe a sigh of deep gratitude.

Come, Spirit, Come that love may guide us and sustain us and free us. Amen.