

It is good to be back among F(f)riends. I was in the city not long ago, speaking at a church, and after worship was given a brief tour of the building. You can tell a lot about a church by its architecture and design. This church had a history room, which is the first time I've ever seen that. A little museum right inside the church. A lot of churches might have a picture of a previous church building in the front hall when you walk in, or a picture of the founder, or maybe pictures of all the pastors who've served there, but this church had an entire room dedicated to its history. Pictures of the deceased, and remnants from the past, old bulletins and communion sets and such, arranged in their history room. I looked around for a future room, but couldn't find one, which made me suspect the church thought its best days were behind it.

Still, there were some signs of a future. After worship, the teenagers in the church fed a meal to the homeless people downstairs in the basement. But it was interesting, most of the adults stayed upstairs and had cookies and coffee in the parlor while the children were down in the basement doing the work of the church. I have a feeling those children, when they're in charge, aren't going to be spending much time in that history room.

We've been talking about passages. Started at birth and made our way through first grade, and first loves, and marriage, and having children, and vocations, and success, and disappointment and the re-evaluation of our lives, and today I would like to talk about death. More specifically, I want to speak with you for a moment about that little history room each of us carry around and how it can sometimes be comforting to dwell there, but if we do, we'd better make sure we have a future room, too. It's alright to be eating cookies in the parlor, but we'd better have something going on the basement, too.

It's not unusual for me to be present as someone is facing death. When we're dying, we do something gerontologists call "life review." We talk about our past, not about our future. Sometimes this life review will be brief, but other times, in certain instances, people might begin it years before they actually die, especially if they believe their past is better than their future. All they want to do is look back. Do you remember the story of Lot and his family escaping the city of Sodom before it was consumed by fire? God sent angels to tell Lot and his family to flee, to not look back, to only look ahead, lest they be consumed. But Lot's wife couldn't resist the temptation and she turned and looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Salt, we know, has many uses, one of which is to preserve. So here is this woman, longing for the past and wanting to preserve it, so is preserved along with it. But it costs her her life.

When Joan and I purchased her childhood home, we knew it needed renovating, but couldn't quite figure out how to proceed. Joan had one idea, and I had another. We weren't fighting about it, we just couldn't, as we Quakers say, reach consensus. We tried voting, but it was always a tie. Here was the problem: I was under the assumption Joan didn't want anything to change. I thought she wanted the house to reflect her early family life and the decorating choices of her deceased parents. Then one day she said to me, "I don't want it to be a museum." As soon as she said that, we began making progress. But I had to shift gears, because I was thinking museum and death, and she was thinking second home and life. I was looking back, she was looking forward.

This happens everywhere, in every facet of human life. If you listened carefully to the campaign rhetoric these past few months, you realized both parties used nostalgic images and evocative language that were intended to inspire feelings of comfort and reassurance in this time of anxiety and fear. When Joan's mother passed away, I thought the best way to comfort Joan would be to recreate her childhood home so she would feel as if nothing had changed. But she knew better. She knew if all you did was look back, you'd turn to salt. This is true of government, this is true of relationships, this is true of churches. Oh, it's especially true of churches. Try moving the church's theology forward into the 21st century and see what the church does.

We've faced this same issue in this meeting. Do we keep things the same way, or are we willing to change? Do people come here because it reminds them of their past, or because it helps them find a future?

I know a lady whose husband died a half dozen years ago. She won't change anything in her house. After six years, the can of shaving cream he used the last morning of his life still sits on the bathroom sink. There's a ring of rust underneath it. His clothes still hang in the closet. His dirty laundry is still piled in the clothes hamper. His death became her death.

This isn't to say we don't honor those who've gone before us. Of course not. Of course we can remember them fondly and think of them often and even reminisce aloud about them. But we do not let their deaths become our deaths.

I was the best man at my best friend's wedding yesterday. Two years ago, his first marriage of 30 years died. He was devastated. But he did not let the death of his marriage become the death of him. He learned to stand again and say, *I can and I will*. And yesterday he stood and said *I do* to a kind, beautiful woman, Jen, and her adopted Ethiopian daughter, Ella. New family. I phoned him last night to see if he was happy, but he wouldn't answer his phone. But I bet he's happy.

We can not let the death of our dreams, became the death of us.

Lot's wife let the death of Sodom become her death.

Learn this lesson: We can not let the history room each of us carry inside crowd out our future room.

What is in your history room? What is in your future room? In which room do you dwell?

Remember, remember, remember, the angel's advice to Lot. "Move forward, lest ye be consumed."