

End of an Era

July 10, 2022

Introduction

Good morning everyone.

The ancient Hebrew prophet Jeremiah once wrote that ...

*There is a time for everything
and a season for every activity
under heaven:*

*a time to be born and a time to
die,*

*a time to plant and a time to
uproot,*

a time to kill and a time to heal,

*a time to tear down and a time to
build up,*

*a time to weep and a time to
laugh,*

*a time to mourn and a time to
dance ...*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

(NIV)

That's such a great description of the experience we have had as a church over the past 27 years or so.

- We planted it
- It was born
- We have built it up.

And along the way ...

- There's been a lot of laughing and dancing in celebration of what God has done through us ...

- As well as times of weeping and even mourning.

But now – today, July 10th 2022 ...

- It's time for us to tear down.
- It's time for us to uproot.
- It's time for us to die.

And if this is your first time with us or your first time in a long time, please don't freak out. We're not about to do anything crazy here!

But today is our final day as “North Heartland Community Church” ... because, next Sunday, we will have combined ...

- Our staff and congregation
- With the staff and congregation of Hope

Church KC

... to become one new church: *Hope Church*.

And again, if you're new to us or this is news to you, all the details of how we came to that decision and what it means for the future is available on the merger page of our website, www.northheartland.org which will also be changing.

So, today is the end of "NHCC."

Next Sunday is the beginning of *Hope Church*.

And while that is the future to which we believe God has called us, it doesn't come without at least a few tears and a bit of mourning because ...

- This is the end of an era.

- This is the end of an identity.
- This is the end of something unique God that did in and through so many of us – starting with me as the one who was commissioned to plant this church.

One of the things we've learned over the past 27 years is that you have to acknowledge those kinds of endings *intentionally* and *solemnly* before you can move on.

It's the reason why we do funerals when people die.

In fact, what you're about to experience today is *exactly what we do* whenever we *do* have a funeral service.

Three things:

1. First, we honor God in a time of worship because God is the one who gives life ...

whether it's to people or to a church. Our band will lead us in that in just a minute.

2. Second, we remember and celebrate the life – or the era – that has come to an end. Shannon will lead us in that.
3. Then, finally, we look to the future. I'll have a few things to say at that point that I hope will be encouraging as we prepare to enter into that future.

So, that's what we're going to do today.

We're having a "funeral" (so to speak) for our beloved North Heartland Community Church. We're acknowledging the end so that we can move into the future.

And let's begin with a prayer.

God, we come to you today "just as we are."

For some of us, what's happening isn't really that big of a deal. But, for a lot of us, *it is.*

It's hard to let go of some of the things to which you've called us in this era, like ...

- Our name ...
- Our leadership structure ...
- The role we've played in what You've built through us.

And what we need to know today, Father, is that You understand that it might be hard for us ...

But, also, we need to know that You are as present and active in what lies ahead as you were in what lies behind.

So, I ask that in our time together your

Spirit would plant the seeds of a future in which we are firmly convinced that ...

Neither death nor life

Neither angels nor demons

Neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Neither height nor depth,

Nor anything else in all creation

...

... will be able to separate us from [Your love shown to us] in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

And it's in His name I pray, Amen.

Let's stand together as we honor the One who gave us life and will be with us no matter what.

Honor God

Worship Songs

Remember

Tribute Video

Encourage

So, we've honored God ... we've remembered and celebrated the era that's coming to an end ...

And, by the way, that celebration will continue this afternoon from 12:30-2:30 for anyone who either *is* or *has been* a volunteer.

We'd love for you to stop by anywhere in that time frame for some hors de oeuvres and let us personally thank you and honor you.

And now, *it's my turn* to say something that will

hopefully *encourage you* ...

... assuming, again, that North Heartland is your church and you're wanting to be part of what God might do in our new church, *Hope Church*.

As I thought about what to say, I thought maybe I should point out that ...

1. Even though “North Heartland” will cease to exist after today, we as individuals will not. We get to live on and be part of what God will do next ... assuming we are willing to do so.

I mean, we can all come back next week.

We might even get to sit in the same seat.

If you're volunteering somewhere, you're probably still going to volunteer in that area.

In a lot of ways, things *will be* the same, just as it is when someone we love and care about dies.

I also thought that maybe I should say ...

2. Our experience as “NHCC” will always be part of who we are and it’s OK to talk about it.

It’s not like we can’t ever mention “North Heartland” going forward.

It’s not like this is now “the church that shall not be named.”

It’s been almost five years since my mom passed away, but we still remember her. We still talk about her.

In fact, there are moments when I think, “I’m acting *just like my mother!*” ... which is sometimes good and sometimes not so good.

So maybe those two thoughts will be helpful to you like they have been to me.

But as I thought about what it means for us to “die” as a church, I kept being drawn back to something Jesus once said that ...

- Seems kind of *strange* and *difficult* when you first hear it ...
- But also has a promise attached to it – a *good* promise – that I think applies to all of us in this moment and going forward.

So that’s what I want to share with you in the few moments that I have.

It was the feast of Passover, an annual celebration of the Jewish people in which they remembered ...

- The end of one era: *400 years of slavery in Egypt*
- And the beginning of another: *the journey*

towards the Promised Land (in which they would become the People of God through which the whole world be blessed).

It was the Feast of Passover – a remembrance, coincidentally, of letting go, leaving behind, and moving into a new life.

It was the Feast of Passover and John, who was one of the friends of Jesus who recorded the story of Jesus for us ...

John writes:

There were some Greeks among those who went up [to Jerusalem] to worship at the festival. John 12:20 (NIV)

Now, those who first read what John wrote would have understood the significance of what he had written.

These people were not Jewish. They were

Gentiles.

They were outsiders to the story, outsiders to the people of God.

John continues:

They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request.

“Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”

Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

John 12:21-22 (NIV)

So, why do these people want to see Jesus?

It's because the news about what Jesus has been saying and doing has traveled far beyond the region.

It's because Jesus has become "big news" everywhere.

And people are coming – even people who aren't local and people who aren't Jewish – to see for themselves.

In fact, *so many outsiders* are coming to see Jesus at this point that the Pharisees – the religious leaders of that day – are complaining that "the whole world has gone after him!"ⁱ

So, Philip gets Andrew and, together, they go to Jesus.

"Jesus, you are not going to believe this! There's a whole delegation of Gentiles who are here to see you. They're ready to follow you just like us."

"Jesus, do you understand? This is it! This is the moment we've all been waiting for."

"You literally can become King of the World

because people everywhere are seeking you out.”

And Jesus seems to agree with them.

Jesus replied, “[You’re right.] The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” John 12:23 (NIV)

And John doesn’t say this, but I can imagine Philip and Andrew thinking “yes!” and maybe even doing a first-century Jewish fist-bump (if there was such a thing).

I can imagine them heaving a sigh of relief: “Jesus really does get it. We’re not going to be in bondage to these Romans for much longer.”

But Jesus isn’t finished. He has more to say.

And what He has to say is going to sound strange and difficult to them as well as to us.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

But, He says ...

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

John 12:24 (NIV)

Now, we could get all technical with what Jesus is saying because a seed doesn't really die when it is planted.

But Jesus isn't trying to be scientific. He's trying to communicate with people who *thought* that was how it worked.

And they understood that as long as a grain of wheat remained in the head of a stalk of wheat, it would never be anything more.

They understood that only when it was detached from the head and buried into the ground – *as in death* – would it produce more seeds and, ultimately, more grain.”ⁱⁱ

Of course, this is just how life works, isn't it?

- If you've ever fallen in love and committed your life to another, your “single life” had to die so that the new life with your spouse could flourish.
- If you're a parent, your “childless life” had to die, so that the life of your child could emerge and grow up.
- And then, when that child *did* grow up, part of you had to die again. You had to let them go.

And this is the biblical pattern as well.

- *Abram* had to die to his country and his family to become *Abraham* – the seed of a great nation which would be a blessing to all the families of the earth.
- *Jacob* had to die to his old identity as a manipulator and a schemer so that he could become a new man, *Israel*, with a new life.
- *Simon bar Jonah* had to die to his boats and nets to become *Peter*, a “fisher of men” and an Apostle of Jesus.ⁱⁱⁱ

So, Jesus isn't saying anything that people didn't already understand. This is how life works.

What was strange about it was that it didn't seem to fit the situation.

“Jesus, this is it,” Philip and Andrew were saying. “This is your chance to get in front of more and

more people. And you can ride this wave of popularity to glory.”

And Jesus said, “I *will* be glorified – and soon. But the path is not what you think it is.”

“It’s not *getting in front* of the crowds. It’s *dropping away* from them like a kernel of wheat drops to the ground.”

“It’s *dying* for those crowds so that I might bear *them* ... and *you* ... and *all who will eventually believe in me* ... as the overwhelming harvest of my life and ministry.”^{iv}

And I can imagine that Philip and Andrew were taken aback by that because, it didn’t make sense. After all, what good was a *dying* Messiah?

But Jesus – as he often does – takes it a step further. He makes the truth about himself a truth about his followers.

He continues ...

“Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

... which, by the way, is about more than duration or quantity of life.

The word translated “eternal” in the original Greek language was used to describe the life God Himself lives, which is about *quality*.

And then Jesus adds:

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.”

John 12:25-26

(NIV)

In other words, “people who say they’re following me will do what I’m doing.”

Now, to be clear ... when Jesus speaks of “hating our lives,” he’s not speaking literally. He’s not saying we should despise ourselves and our lives.

Instead, He’s trying to shock us.

See, no one accidentally “hates” anything. We might not *like* something, but hating it?

That’s a choice.

And that’s what Jesus is saying.

In the same way that *He* “hated his life” and chose to give it up, we who are his followers are *also* called to make that same choice.

But it’s a choice that comes with a promise – a *good* promise – that ...

- We will experience the life of God – we’ll be part of what God is doing in this world

and in the next.

- We will produce a harvest that goes beyond ourselves.

APPLICATION

So, here's a question for you to consider on a personal level.

And you don't even need to be a Christian to think about it and consider it.

What is the “kernel of wheat” in your life today that needs to fall to the ground and die?

What is it that you're holding onto – thinking you can't live without it – but because you won't let go, you're actually limiting yourself or someone else?

Maybe it's a job.

Maybe it's a certain level of income.

Maybe it's a relationship.

Maybe it's fear ... or resentment ... or guilt ... or disappointment.

Maybe it's the need to "win" or to be "right."

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

So, just a personal question to consider based on Jesus' teaching.

But this message is about us, *collectively* ... we who have been called "North Heartland Community Church."

In this merger, we have made *the choice* to die

to ourselves.

And, in a lot of ways, it really doesn't make sense.

- For instance, Hope Church KC is smaller than we are.

And what makes sense is that *they* would lay down *their* name and take up ours or at least a new one altogether.

But we're choosing to die.

So, we're laying down our name and, except for a minor tweak, taking up theirs because we don't want them to feel small. We don't want them to feel "less than."

And when it comes to the mission God has given us in this community – which is reaching “the Greeks who want to see Jesus” – the name “Hope Church” is better

than any other.

- For instance, Hope Church KC hasn't been around anywhere near as long as we have.

And what makes sense it that *they* should listen to *us* on how to run everything. We've been successful for a long time. We have it figured out.

But we're choosing to die.

So, we're listening to *them* and what *they* have figured out. Because they have figured out some things that we haven't.

And when it comes to the mission God has given us in this community – reaching “the Greeks” who want to see Jesus – that's *really* what makes sense.

And the list could go on and it *will* go on.

And it won't be easy.

It's going to feel weird and it's going to be hard

...

- When Jason stands up here and preaches like this is his church, too.
- When the drum head no longer says "NHCC"
- When the sign down the hall reads "Hope Kids" instead of "Adventureland"
- When our "swag" no longer has our logo.
- When volunteers are called "The Dream Team" instead of ... well, "volunteers."

It's going to feel weird.

It's going to feel like losing.

It's going to feel like ... we're just a worthless seed that blew to the ground in the wind.

And nobody noticed, and nobody cares.

It's going to feel like *death* ... because it is.

But ...

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

And this is the promise of Jesus that we're trusting in.

- That through our death we will experience the life of God in a new way.
- That by dying we will produce a harvest in this community far beyond what we can think of or imagine today.

So, my friends, it's our time.

The hour has come for us to be glorified, not by trying to stay in front but by “dropping away” as “North Heartland.”

Jesus, I pray that you would give us the faith to trust that what you are saying is true, especially in the times ahead when it gets hard and feels weird.

And I pray that you would do something unimaginable in us and in the church we're about to form.

Amen.

CLOSING COMMENTS –

A couple of things about next Sunday because it's going to be a little different from a typical service.

1. We're going to have some fun. It's a new beginning and we're going to celebrate.
2. We'll do a little bit of worship,
3. Jason and I will speak briefly (but it won't be like a regular message)
4. And then we're going to do something very special to commemorate our new beginning – and you really do want to be here on campus. If you have to watch online, that's OK. But what we're going to do really does require you to be “in person.”
5. Most important: don't miss the beginning of the service. Be here on time or even a few minutes early.

Endnotes

ⁱ John 12:19

ⁱⁱ <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/12956/john-1224-in-what-way-does-the-grain-of-wheat-die>

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael K. Marsh, The Secret to Life @

<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2018/03/19/the-secret-to-life-a-sermon-on-john-1220-33/>

^{iv} From John Piper's message on this text (which he has preached at least three times in his ministry) <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/dying-as-a-means-of-loving-part-1>