

“Hope of Calvary Address” Notes/Manuscript

January 27, 2021

Pastors Anne Scalfaro, Morgan Fletcher, & Alice Horner Nelson

Anne: Introduction (Manuscript)

Tonight our Hope of Calvary address looks different than previous years. Even as we expect that we will be back to gathering together in person this year, because the pandemic makes it impossible for us to predict exactly when that will be or exactly what ministry will look like, we want to focus tonight on what we DO know, rather than speculate on what we DON'T. We DO know that the Spirit of God has been moving in our church in meaningful ways this past year, and we DO know that God will continue to call us forward into significant ministry in 2021.

So - in the spirit of celebrating how we've seen God's Spirit at work at Calvary, Pastors Morgan, Alice, and myself are going to share with you three values or spiritual strengths that we have seen emerge in our collective life together this past year: 1) that we've been WILLING LEARNERS 2) that we've cultivated RESILIENCY, and 3) we have an EXPANSIVE WELCOME and increased ENGAGEMENT. As we celebrate these significant spiritual growth points, we'll also explore just the tip of the iceberg of how we feel they will continue to serve us as we move into the future.

Morgan: WILLING LEARNER (Notes)

- We've learned with Humility how to be Willing Learners this year – in so many areas
- Adaptability – applying new learnings, example: zoom
- Transparency – people sharing what they need/how they are feeling
- Security has been taken away – connect with others more intentionally because you need to
- There are no experts, we are learning together and living in the not-knowing
- Examples of being a willing learner:
 - Within the early weeks of the pandemic folks adjusted to zoom
 - Over the summer when we knew safety measures weren't adjust so we could meet in person often classes/groups worked together to change their formats to meet online
 - Congregational care team sought to reach one another to try and have others feel seen/thought of
 - Recording for worship
 - Uploading to google drive
 - Watching worship on-line
 - Using the live chat
 - New tablet or laptop; sometimes shifting from PC to Mac
 - Vulnerability to say when something wasn't clear or something wasn't familiar, leaning into the learning process

- Trusting staff to assist and support
- Staff learned to shift ways of doing their jobs, as we heard earlier
- Virtual Vacation Bible School/Christmas Pageant/Annual Meetings
- Parking lot worship required a willingness to learn to worship outdoors/social distanced/masked and potentially cancel at the last minute

Anne: RESILIENCY (Manuscript)

The next value and point of growth we've experienced this year Calvary is Resiliency. We have the capacity to get through tough things together. RESILIENCY is the ability to overcome challenge and bounce back stronger, wiser, and with more readiness, reserves, and resources for the next struggle or growth pain that we might endure. If you think of our congregation as a stretchy material, this year our 'traditional' shape of what church has looked like has gotten stretched and pulled in different directions – it's taken on a shape that none of us would have recognized this time last year. When we get stretched and pulled it can be uncomfortable and the immediate instinct most of us have is that we want to snap back to the shape that we were in. Well, resiliency, helps our collective material learn how to return to a non-stretched out, non-stressed out shape faster – but that shape will not be the exact same as before. Resiliency means we can survive the stretching and the stressing, and it means we can flex enough to fit into a new shape and keep morphing and changing as needed – without getting destroyed in the process (torn apart).

While we do not know what the future looks like – we'll continue to need to be resilient because the stressors and unknowns on our life together are still with us in 2021. And we can lose resiliency, if we don't work at it. So here are 5 ways that we can continue to cultivate resilience, or 5 things that resiliency requires:

1. Resiliency requires intentional attention to our collective spiritual health. As we've been apart we realize we don't always know how each of us is feeling about certain things – what is 'tough/difficult' for one person is 'energizing/hopeful' for another so we know we need increased opportunities to connect, share, and listen beyond the groups and classes we normally connect with – so we can listen to one another and be fed spiritually by this co-learning and sharing.

2. Resiliency requires ALL of our membership engaged. Our Calvary community includes all demographics in all different seasons of life spread out throughout all metro Denver and across the United States and beyond. Morgan was able to put into words the other day what we as staff have been seeking to name for a while: in order to engage and serve and utilize the gifts of ALL who connect with us, we need to think about our ministry in three ways: onsite, offsite, online. Onsite (on Calvary property and grounds), offsite (how we engage in homes, one-on-one in coffee shops or hospitals, at parks, or with mission partners in the community), and online (zoom/youtube, website, apps, virtual worship, livestreaming). Before the pandemic we prioritized onsite ministry; moving forward we want to give equal priority and energy to offsite and online ministry as well – so we can reach and engage as many people as possible. Our staff has a lot of ideas about this, and we know you do too. Pastor Alice

will share more about this in her segment, but one of the ideas we've already voted on tonight – having an online only member rep on Council – Christine Zeiler (and we have Rick Breitenbecher of course too!)

3. Resiliency requires resources. The larger landscape of financial giving was already changing – but 2020 exponentially sped that up. The Stewardship Committee and staff will continue to explore this and how we can diversify and increase our resources and giving. Even as our methods, means, and motivations for giving are changing, generosity remains – which is good news!

4. Resiliency requires letting go and making space. We can't get back to any kind of healthy shape if we're always stretched out/stressed out. Our habits and pace of life as a church has changed in 2020 and we plan on maintaining the parts of this pace that are more life giving for us as a staff and congregation – that might look like limited office hours, evening meetings on zoom or neighborhood based small groups so we're not fighting rush hour traffic, supplemental pastoral care visits on facetime. As soon as we are able to gather safely in person, we will – that's what we know best and we will not lose that. We just don't want to snap back to the exact same shape we were, as we know that if we do that – we'll lose a lot of the engagement and growth we've had this year.

5. Resiliency requires community. Calvary can't stand on its own, to love our neighbor we need to work with partners and organizations that share common mission – New Hope Baptist Church, Family Promise, Jewish Family Service, Interfaith Alliance of Colorado, the Bolicks and the Reeds and Lauran Bethell. We are stronger together. We have much to offer and we have much to learn from others. Cultivating these partnerships will continue to be critical.

So as we move into 2021, in order to maintain this resiliency we've cultivated in 2020, we want to prioritize 1) our collective spiritual health, 2) engaging all of our membership onsite, offsite, and online, 3) exploring new ways of giving and diversifying resources, 4) letting go and making space for a life-giving pace of ministry 5) and working alongside and with the community.

**Alice: EXPANSIVE WELCOME/INCREASED ENGAGEMENT
(Manuscript)**

This year we hope to return to in-person worship, but we aren't looking to just return to the ways we did things before. We've invested in our livestream equipment in the sanctuary to be sure that those who are worshipping virtually will have the best experience possible. We are looking at how we can welcome and engage with people on-site and online.

This may seem intimidating to some of us, but I see it as a place of growth for our church, an expansion of how people can engage, and how WE, you and me, can expand our welcoming spirit.

During this virtual time we have learned a lot about how ministry can function online. We've seen changes in how people engage. Folx who haven't been able to attend regularly in the past now are able

to engage more frequently. We've seen a "cross-pollinating" of groups who didn't engage with each other in the past, now they are getting to know each other with these different virtual opportunities.

With the doors that technology can open, I truly think that inviting friends to church is easier now in this virtual time than ever before. People can become connected to Calvary from their couch by simply being sent a link, anywhere around the world. Many times we underestimate our own power and influence, or we assume that our invitations are unwanted. That couldn't be farther from the truth!

We talk a lot about growing the church, often looking towards the pastors to do so, but we don't realize that WE are the ones that can do that by inviting others- you and me have the power to expand our welcome with a simple invitation. Growing a church doesn't always require massive resources, it requires a massive welcoming spirit! I have seen this at The Gathering, where we now have a regular attendee and giver who was invited by Christine Zeiler.

And it requires a hope in how church can grow and adapt. As difficult and heartbreaking as 2020 was, it did teach us that being the church doesn't require being in our building. There is a place for ministry both on-site and online. There is a place for engagement both onsite and online.

We are excited for the time when we gather in-person again. But let's not forget what we've learned this past year. Let's not forget the hope that virtual ministry holds for our community. Let's continue our welcoming spirit in all places and spaces that ministry can happen.

Anne: Closing Comments (Manuscript)

Calvary, there's so much we could say about all three of these areas, they aren't the only points of spiritual growth that we've seen in 2020 – we have a long list! We invite you to reflect on what YOU'VE learned about your faith and church this year – the challenges and the opportunities – and how those learnings are shaping your own spiritual journey, and our collective journey together.

And just know that through all of this – know that we understand that we're all weary of pandemic life. We're all wondering how much more we can take and what will church look like and feel like when we can return to the building? While on the one hand we can't wait to get back together to sing and make music and share in coffee hour – we also wonder – will our worship attendance remain as "high in numbers" and as "engaged in spirit" as it's been this year? As Bill Warren said, "we've become a Pentecostal church as we engage in the chat during worship!" It's pretty cool.

Sometimes it's easy to place our hope in our human plans and what WE'D like to see happen, but as we know, our HOPE is in Christ and where God is leading us – and we're poised and ready to follow Christ's call wherever it leads. So even when we're barely holding on, let's keep "holding on" to hope – – because God is always and forever holding on to us.

**Benediction: Anne
(Manuscript)**

Holding all that we have shared together tonight and holding on to the hope we have in Christ and in our life together as Christ's church:

May the Lord Bless You and Keep You;
May the Lord Make His Face to Shine Upon You
And Be Gracious to You.

Even in a pandemic...

May God Grant You the Grace Never to Sell Yourself Short,
The Grace to Risk Something Big For Something Good,
The Grace to Remember that
The World is too Vulnerable for Anything but Truth,
And too Small for Anything but Love.

And whether you are engaging in ministry onsite, offsite, or online...

May God Take Your Minds and Think Through Them;
May God Take Your Lips and Speak Through Them;
And May God Take Your Hearts and Set Them On Fire, for Christ's sake,
Amen.

**William Sloane Coffin Benediction adapted by Rev. Dr. H. Stephen Shoemaker,
with additional adaptations by Rev. Andrew Daugherty, and then Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro*