

(remarks at the end of Paula's sermon)

Paula has spoken very eloquently about transition – as we reach the end of a lengthy and somewhat difficult period between rectors. Having been an interim 13 times now, I have to say that the hardest part of being an interim is saying good-bye. Transitions are hard. We all know that, don't we.

It reminds me of a *New Yorker* cartoon a few years ago, of Adam and Eve walking out of the Garden of Eden hand in hand, one saying to the other, "Dear, I believe we're entering a period of transition."

Transition often involves loss, as well as gain. Think of your first day of school. Graduation. Marriage. First child. Death of a parent. Loss of a job, or a new job. Moving. Death of a spouse. Your own death.

Each involves a loss, as well as a gain.

And the Good News, what Paula so beautifully portrayed, is that God's message of love transcends our physical world of time and space. Life changes, constantly -- our world changes, constantly, and we have to change with it or be left behind.

Let me share with you a parable, a Sufi story, from the author Belden Lane.

Awad Afifi the Tunisian was a nineteenth-century teacher who drew his wisdom from the wide expanse of desert North Africa. He once shared with his pupils a story that began with a gentle rain falling on a high mountain in a distant land. The rain was at first hushed and quiet, trickling down granite slopes. Gradually it increased in strength, as rivulets of water rolled over the rocks and down the gnarled, twisted trees that grew there.

Soon it was pouring, as swift currents of dark water flowed together into the beginnings of a stream. The brook made its way down the mountainside, through small stands of cypress trees and fields of wild flowers, down cascading falls. Finally, having left its heights in the distant mountain, the stream made its way to the edge of a great desert. Sand and rock stretched beyond seeing.

Having crossed every other barrier in its way, the stream fully expected to cross this one as well. But as fast as its waves splashed into the desert, that fast did they disappear

into the sand. Before long, the stream heard a voice whispering, as if coming from the desert itself, saying, "The wind crosses the desert, so can the stream." "Yes, but the wind can fly!" cried out the stream, still dashing itself into the desert sand.

"You'll never get across that way," the desert whispered. "You have to let the wind carry you." "But how?" shouted the stream.

"You have to let the wind absorb you."

The desert replied that the stream would never cross the desert so long as it remained a stream. "Why can't I remain the same stream that I am?" the water cried. And the desert answered, ever so wisely, "You never can remain what you are. Either you become a swamp or you give yourself to the winds."

The stream was silent for a long time, listening to the distant echoes of memory. From that long-forgotten place, it gradually recalled how water conquers only by yielding. From the depths of that silence, slowly the stream raised its vapors to the welcoming arms of the wind and was borne upward, carried easily on great white clouds over the wide desert waste.

Approaching distant mountains on the desert's far side, the stream then began once again to fall as light rain. At first it was hushed and quiet, trickling down granite slopes. Gradually it increased in strength, as rivulets rolled over the rocks and down the gnarled, twisted trees that grew there. And soon it was pouring, as swift currents of dark water flowed together – yet again – into the headwaters of a new stream.

Awad Afifi refused to say what the story "meant", how it should be interpreted. He simply pointed his students to the desert nearby and urged them to find out for themselves.