

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR PATHWAY?
A SERMON TO PATHWAY FELLOWSHIP UMC
UPON NOTICE OF CLOSING
DECEMBER 9, 2012**

Good morning.

My name is David Trawick.

I'm the senior pastor of NWH UMC,
the parent church that has been helping support Pathway Fellowship
with our finances
and by sending some of our members to be a part of your ministry.

This is a difficult time for all of us, but especially for you.

Some of you have poured a lot of yourselves into this ministry.
And to think of Pathway no longer being here is painful.
There is sadness, even grief.
You might wonder if you wasted your efforts and resources.
Frankly, many of us at NWH share your pain and sadness.
We dreamed of Pathway and saved money for this effort
for several years before the works started down here.
So we share your disappointment.

But it's important that we celebrate the fruit that *has* been born.

Many lives have been touched by the services to the community carried out by Pathway.
And those of you who ARE Pathway have been blessed, too.
The Scriptures have been taught,
God has been worshiped,
and friendships have been forged.
Children have learned about Jesus and the Bible and the love of God.
Some people have joined the church for the first time,
or for the first time in a long time.
People have been baptized into the family of God.
Friendships have been forged.
People in need have been served,
the love of Christ being expressed in a number of tangible ways.
Some of you learned, perhaps for the first time,
that you have spiritual gifts and abilities
that can be used by God in his kingdom work.
Each one of you has been touched in one way or another.
There's a ripple effect that goes out through you
to everyone you come in contact with.
That includes numerous people you are not even aware of.
Your investment in Pathway Fellowship has made an impact
that we'll fully understand only in heaven.

But now you face an ending.

Financial realities have pressed in on us,
and we've had to admit that Pathway is not financially viable.
Funding from the Annual Conference is soon to be greatly reduced.
The congregation has not grown large enough in numbers and finances to support itself,
even with the help that NWH is able to continue providing.

So these doors will close.
 This won't make the news, like the closing of the doors of Hostess Twinkies.
 You don't employ as many people as Hostess.
 But what you have been about is infinitely more important than
 Twinkies and Ding Dongs and Wonder Bread.
 You have been serving up the ultimate Wonder Bread,
 the Bread of Life, Jesus.
 Yet Christmas Eve will be the last public worship service for Pathway.
 But this is Advent, a season of hope and anticipation leading up to the coming of Christ at Christmas.
 So, in the spirit of Advent hope,
 I want to suggest that this does not have to mean the end of this ministry that you are engaged in.
 It is an end of this ministry as you have known it.
 But God is not a quitter.
 God is in the business of doing a new thing.
 God is in the business of bringing redemption to a fallen world.
 And he does it in the most extraordinary ways.
 A young, as yet unmarried woman named Mary.
 A baby born in a stable, with a feed trough for his cradle.
 Even a dead man hanging on a criminal's cross.
 The Bible assures us "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Ro.8:28)
 In what things?
 In ALL things.
 In all things God works for the good of those who love him.
 Because God is in the business of resurrection.
 Not just resuscitating a dead body,
 but transforming the body to give it a new form.
 God has always been about that sort of business.
 And I believe he can do that, *and intends* to do that, here and now.
 Every ending, when placed in the hands of God, can mean a new beginning.
 For instance, God raised up Moses,
 who led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and into the wilderness.
 They wandered there for 40 years.
 When they finally came to the border of the promised land
 and prepared to cross over the Jordan River,
 Moses died.
 Their leader, the only leader they had known,
 the one who faced down pharaoh in Egypt,
 the one who led them through so many difficulties,
 the one who interceded with God for them,
 was gone.
 But it was not the end.
 God raised up Joshua to lead them,
 and their movement into the promised land continued.
 Generations later God spoke to the wayward kings of Israel through a prophet named Elijah.
 He was a courageous speaker of the truth,
 and God worked miracles through him.
 But Elijah was getting old,
 and God told him his time was about done.
 How could it be?

Who would speak God's truth to these rebellious rulers?
 Would God now give up on them and abandon Israel?
 But just before God took him up to heaven in a chariot of fire,
 Elijah handed off his cloak to a young man who had been accompanying him: Elisha.
 And Elisha carried on the ministry of bold prophecy,
 speaking God's word to Israel's kings,
 calling them to repentance.
 Time after time we see God's work passing from one generation to another,
 often taking a new form for a new generation.
 The transition that brings the story of God's work to you and me
 is the transition from Jesus to his followers.
 Today I want to draw your attention to a few of Jesus' own words about that transition,
 found in the 14th chapter of John's Gospel.
 Jesus, knowing he was soon to be crucified, said to his followers,
 "I will not leave you orphans."
 He knew he'd be leaving them. (Jn.14:18)
 He would be going to the cross, dying, being buried.
 Their grief at his death would be deep and painful,
 and mixed with fears over their own fates.
 Of course, he'd be resurrected and spend some time with them.
 But he'd be leaving after a short time,
 ascending to heaven till the end of the age.
 And they'd probably feel some grief at that absence, too.
 Oh, it was wonderful that he was alive and well, and even better than ever.
 But it just wasn't the same without Jesus with them in bodily form.
 The face they knew so well,
 the voice that told tales of "there was a man who had two sons,"
 the hands that had touched and healed many,
 the feet that walked alongside them so many miles between villages,
 all gone now.
 But in time, those grieving friends rose up to become the Church,
 the body of Christ, filled with the Spirit of Christ, carrying on the ministry of Christ.
 They remembered he had said,
 "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."
 His Spirit came to them.
 His Spirit took up residence in them.
 And while it wasn't the same as before, it was wonderful, and in some ways even better.
 It was just as Jesus had promised,
 "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing,
 and they will do even greater things than these,
 because I am going to the Father."
 Now the divine power that had been Jesus' power was infused into all his followers. (Jn.14:12)
 They could all minister, each individual,
 by that same power to bring the love and work of Christ to the world.
 No longer was it just Jesus,
 but it was all of his followers, in all their different places,
 communicating God's love by their words and deeds.
 Jesus' followers pouring into the streets on the day of Pentecost,
 proclaiming that Jesus is the risen Lord, the savior of all who trust him,

and 3000 people baptized into Christ that day.

The Spirit was in Stephen challenging the Jewish leadership to face what they had done to Jesus
and calling them to repent.

Phillip telling the good news to a man who then carried it all the way to Ethiopia.

Peter ministering primarily to the Jews.

Paul ministering primarily to the Gentiles, planting churches along the way.

Thomas going perhaps as far as India.

It was no longer Jesus and little cluster of followers walking the trails of Judea.

It was a variety of people fanned out over huge territories,

each one doing ministry in the unique ways that fit

who they were and the people they were trying to reach.

It was nothing like what it had been.

It was wonderful in its own new way.

I think God has something new in mind for Pathway,

a resurrection, new life and transformation,

a new way to be in ministry.

When you no longer gather to worship in this place,

if you should no longer have the name "Pathway Fellowship,"

you are still the church.

You are still followers of Christ filled with the Spirit of Christ,

guided and empowered to continue the ministry of Christ.

And we at NWH do not intend to leave you orphans.

Jesus certainly will not leave you orphans,

and we don't want to either.

We want to continue to do ministry with you.

We don't yet know all of what that looks like.

We want to help you keep up your Journey Groups, your home groups,

with all the learning and growing and friendship that takes place there.

And I'd like for you to teach us about Journey Groups,

the pitfalls and difficulties,

the benefits and blessings,

how to train a group leader,

how to do a Journey Group.

We need that at NWH.

We want to help you find opportunities to keep serving others in the name of Christ.

There may be new opportunities for small group worship in this area.

And we'd like to offer you our Sunday morning worship.

We've got room for you, and we'd love to have you join us.

We've got contemporary and traditional worship for you to choose from.

Of course, you might want to choose together

so you can sit together as Pathway.

But just because there will no longer be Sunday worship in this place

does not mean Pathway is over,

or even that worship is no more.

It only means things will be different.

So while you are grieving the end of things as they are,

you need also to be considering what direction you will go from here.

You've got some time to think and pray about it.

But no matter what you decide, it will mean change.

And change is uncomfortable.

A bride was extremely nervous on her wedding day.

Getting married would mean tremendous changes in her life.

She confided to her pastor that she was not sure she could
make it all the way down the aisle without shaking or crying.

So the pastor, a seasoned veteran of many weddings, gave her a bit of advice.

"When you begin your walk,

just remember this three-point formula:

First, look straight down the aisle.

Second, when you get about half-way, look straight up at the altar.

And third, when you get near the front of the church,
look straight at your groom.

First the aisle, then the altar, then him.

I think this will help relieve your nervousness."

The trembling bride agreed to try his advice.

And it worked beautifully.

She walked with a radiant glow on her face and poise and confidence in her step,
with no sign of nervousness.

However, there was one small problem.

Imagine what the groom thought when he heard her
rhythmically repeating three words over and over,
"Aisle, altar, him!"
Aisle, altar, him!"

Nobody really likes change except for a wet baby.

Or if I'm the one who decided on the change.

But if a change is not of your own choosing,
if it's being forced on you from outside,
it's a bit unsettling.

It's a move into the unknown.

There's a feeling of being out of control.

I'm afraid of what that future might be.

So I resist it.

I may even be angry with it.

I get that.

But as you deal with your feelings and move toward making some decisions,
remember who our God is.

Remember "that in all things God works for the *good* of those who love him."

God can even use THIS turn of events for good.

God is not quitting on you.

Don't you quit on him.

We don't know, we *can't* know, all that the future holds.

But we know the God who holds that future in his hands.

We know his power.

We know his goodness.

So we can hope.

In this season of Advent, we can hope.