
Transitions: New Beginnings

Sermon Template

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

The following sermon is part 3 in a Sermon Series by Rev. Andrew Conard of the Great Plains Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The rest of the series is found at www.greatplainsumc.org/pastoraltransitions

Introduction

[Share brief personal story about a meaningful new beginning in your life - perhaps starting at a new church, beginning a new ministry, or another significant transition. If departing, focus on anticipation of new beginnings for both you and the congregation. If arriving, describe your excitement about this new beginning together.]

Today, we come to the end of our sermon series about transitions. We've explored how transitions involve three distinct phases: endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings.

In the first week, we considered endings and how embracing them prepares us for future growth. Last week, we reflected on the neutral zone—that wilderness space between what was and what will be. Today, we focus on new beginnings and the hope they bring.

It's appropriate that we end our series with new beginnings, as that's often how transitions unfold. We go through the journey of transition—experiencing an ending with its associated loss and grief, walking through the middle wilderness zone, and finally, when we may not even be sure we'll make it, discovering newness of life, possibilities that open up, and joyful new beginnings!

The Nature of New Beginnings

Jesus speaks about this pattern in John 12:24:

“²⁴ I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”¹

This captures the essence of transitions. Like a seed, something must end and go through a period of darkness before new life emerges.

What new beginnings have you experienced in your life? As you look back, can you see the ending, neutral zone, and beginning in those transitions?

We follow this pattern in most transitions:

¹ John 12:24, CEB.

- We have an ending of some sort
- We journey through a period of wilderness in the neutral zone
- A seed is planted, germination happens, and a new beginning comes

Timing of a New Beginning

New beginnings aren't typically something we can engineer or force. There's no startup manual or procedure that, if applied correctly, will create a new beginning. Instead, when the time is right, the new beginning will spring forth, and new life will come.

[Share an example like learning to ride a bike - there's an ending (removing training wheels), a messy in-between time of falling, and then suddenly, at the right time, you can ride!]

Claiming the End Before Beginning Anew

We want our transitions and beginnings to be neat and tidy, but they rarely are. We want total control, but we don't have it.

We can't just skip to a new beginning or force it to happen. When we try to do this, it's often a way of denying the ending and the losses associated with the change. It can also be a way of skipping over the difficult wilderness journey.

So we must first validate and claim an ending when it happens, then let go of our control and fully experience the time of wilderness. This allows us to be renewed and regenerated.

Then, at the right time, we discover that something new is coming forth in our lives. We see hints of germination, signs that a new beginning is about to spring forth. It's then that we walk boldly into the new beginning.

Actions for New Beginnings

In "Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes," William Bridges offers four practical strategies for embracing new beginnings once we sense they're starting to emerge. These strategies can help us step confidently into the future God is preparing:

Stop Getting Ready

We must stop preparing and simply begin. Unfortunately, we can get stuck in preparation mode. New beginnings are often messy and untidy. We might tell ourselves we'll wait until it's less messy, but if we do that, we'll never start. If we've truly processed the transition, we'll be ready—as ready as we'll ever be. So stop waiting for something outside of us to signal it's time to begin. Listen to the still, small voice within and go.

In our scripture today, Bartimaeus knew what he wanted and seized the moment to proclaim his faith. He found a new beginning!

Live in the New

Start identifying with and living as the person you seek to become. You may have heard it said that we should dress for the job we want—this is a similar idea. Start identifying with, feeling like, and acting in ways consistent with the person you're becoming. The more we connect with and believe ourselves to be the person we're called to become, the more the sprout within us will grow.

Recognize Resistance

Realize there will be resistance to the change and new beginning happening in us—both from within ourselves and from others.

Our unconscious minds often try to protect us from being hurt. When we begin anew, there are real risks as we grow and change. Our brains will work to keep us from trying anything new.

Others will resist too, saying, "Wait a second. Who are you? I don't like this new you. Just stay who you've always been." When we change, all our relationships must change too. Those closest to us may not want this.

In our scripture, Bartimaeus faced significant resistance when he called out to Jesus. The crowd told him to be quiet and not bother Jesus. But he persisted, and his life was transformed.

When you encounter resistance, persist and stay steadfast.

Embrace the Journey

We can get so caught up with the final outcome that we miss the journey. Transfer your energy and purpose from the end destination to the process of reaching the goal.

We can quickly tell ourselves we haven't reached our destination fast enough, and talk ourselves out of the change and new beginning. Instead of focusing only on the outcome, be open to the learning and growth that happens at each stage along the way. It will be an amazing adventure if we change our focus and keep moving forward.

Bartimaeus was healed and began something new very quickly. Most of our transitions will take longer. When we focus on the process rather than just the outcome, we discover our lives being transformed, and a new beginning will come.

Biblical Perspective on New Beginnings

The conviction of our faith is that Jesus lived, died on behalf of all of us, and on the third day was raised to new life. What if this pattern is meant to happen in us too?

The good news is that the power of God can make us new over and over again. We can:

- Die to our old way of life
- Journey through the wilderness of the neutral zone

- Find new life in a fresh beginning

Conclusion

[If departing: Express excitement for the journey ahead—both your new appointment and the congregation's future with their new pastor. Acknowledge that while your journeys are diverging, each will involve multiple endings, wilderness places, and new beginnings.]

[If arriving: Express excitement for the journey ahead—for your family and for this congregation. Acknowledge that while your journeys have just converged, the transition continues with its ongoing adjustment and discovery.]

For every individual and for our congregation as a whole, our journey through life includes multiple endings, wilderness experiences, and new beginnings. These transitions are part of our mission to make disciples and transform our world.

Be open to the transitions in your life. Trust Jesus in all your new beginnings!

Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Jesus, we thank you for the gift of new beginnings. We are sorry for all the times in our lives when we mess up. Forgive us of our sin and all that we know is wrong. Thank you that you died on the cross and rose for us. We trust you with our lives. Help us receive your forgiveness. Please fill us with your Spirit and help us to follow you. In your holy name, Amen.

Adaptation Notes for Pastors

For departing pastors

Focus on the seeds you've planted that will continue to grow after you're gone. Consider a ritual of blessing or commissioning the congregation for their journey ahead.

For arriving pastors

Emphasize that while you're physically present, the true "new beginning" will unfold gradually as relationships form and trust builds. Consider asking the congregation to share their hopes and dreams for this new chapter.

For either context

Consider a ritual element that symbolizes new beginnings—perhaps planting seeds, lighting candles, or creating a communal art piece that represents fresh starts.

Personalize

Add your own stories of meaningful new beginnings where God opened unexpected doors or brought redemption from difficult endings. Your authenticity will help the congregation anticipate their own new beginnings with hope.

Visual aids

Consider springtime imagery, sunrise pictures, or sprouting seeds to illustrate the natural cycle of new life emerging after dormancy.