

June 13, 2021 Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV), John 17:20-23

Be good. Take care of yourself. Mind your manners. Work hard. Make good decisions. Learn a lot. Call me if you need anything. Remember, I love you. My first memory of last-minute instructions came when my mother said goodbye as I left for college. Last-minute instructions.

What last-minute instructions do you remember? Those are the kind of things we say when we are leaving or departing. I suspect each of us has said and heard these or similar departing instructions to the ones we love.

At Pentecost, it's the birth of the early church. It would be easy to overlook Jesus's departing instructions to his disciples.

Before the giving of the promised Holy Spirit, let's go back. Jesus knew he was leaving. Soon to be crucified. His disciples would find themselves without his physical presence.

So, why not give some detailed last-minute instructions about how to act, what to do, and ways they should treat each other? To be Jesus' witnesses in the world, they had to learn to trust their future to God. Yet, Jesus did not leave them with departing instructions but a departing prayer. Jesus prayed for unity.

This unity is not something we create. Jesus does not tell the disciples to be nice to each other, get along, eliminate differences, or agree upon a plan.

He doesn't prescribe tolerance, uniformity, unanimity, or consensus.

In his last-minute instructions, Jesus prays for one thing: "That they may all be one." "That they may be one. That they may become completely one." The oneness modeled on the unity of the Father and Jesus, and soon the Holy Spirit. He prays that we would be one as he and the Father and Holy Spirit are one. Jesus' prayer echoes the ancient Jewish's prayer in Deut 6:4 Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is one.

It is this very oneness, the life and being of God bringing oneness into the body of Christ. We cannot establish unity. We must participate in the move of the Holy Spirit where it may lead us.

It doesn't mean we can sit back and wait. It means we lean forward and be attentive to where the Holy Spirit is leading you and me.

Our lives with God are about a relationship. It is a relationship that has outward and visible signs of God's inward and invisible presence. That is what Pentecost is all about. Like the disciples, we learn to become, live, and entrust ourselves to Jesus. To die to self so Christ and the promised Holy Spirit might live in us. It is how we become one with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father.

Last-minute instructions are not about a list of things to do. It is about the unity of the body of Christ. Unity intersecting with the love of God and one another. We have seen each Sunday. It is the vertical and horizontal intersection of the cross. At the cross, in the hour of Christ's glory, his death, and resurrection, we see the preeminent image of a God-entrusted life. At the cross is where we find our oneness. They will know we are Christian by our love.

Each time we live in Christ, each time we trust the Holy Spirit, we surrender to God, our boundaries soften, our divisions not as deep, and our relationships reconciled. Each time we take a step toward God, we understand ourselves. We begin to understand one another, and we move toward oneness.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom; love for God and each other. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is surrender and trust. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, we embody the oneness of our Heavenly Creator. The primary mission of the church is a unity to go and makes disciples-final instruction. The world may seem huge, in truth is smaller than we realize.

It was the mid-1980s. We had just landed at Tinker AFB from a 13 hours flight near the Canadian-American border conducting fighter intercepts, surveillance, and air refueling. We heard the KC 135 refueler land right after us. Debarking our planes, the two crews merge on the tarmac as we went to debriefing. I noticed a captain about my age with a familiar face. I joined him to see where we had met before. We asked the usual questions: What has counties has flown to, where were you station? When these did not result in any conclusive answers. Where did you go to school? His reply, NC. State: When did you graduate? 1976. It was then I looked at his name tag: Wiesenberger. I was

shocked. Mick Wiesenerger, yes, he replied. Then he notices my name tag: Roger Weisner. Yes, I replied. We were both in Air Force ROTC at State, as Vice commander, Mike was my Executive Officer. We talked awhile, and then we said the same thing when we graduated: See you later. Then I realized how we said goodbye in the Air Force because we knew it's a small world. And you never know when we might meet again.

As I reflect upon my life, "a rolling stone gathering no moss" seems to apply. I have always been on the move. I remember asking my mother where I received my intensive drive to move forward. She quickly replied, "Your father." He taught me that we are all pilgrim people in this world, called to move on

My father planted in me the understanding that in every ending, there is a new beginning. Letting go and looking ahead with enthusiasm is how we know we have made it through to the next transition filled with new life and hope.

Farewell thoughts, saying goodbye is not an announcement but rather a process. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross reminds us that we go through different stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, resignation, last acceptance. These thoughts take me back to when I was sitting with my father under a pin oak tree. He was talking about making some changes on the farm. I commented, "well, you better do it sooner rather than later. You never know what might happen." That weekend, I received a phone call from my sister. She said, "dad was wading in the waves at Myrtle Beach; he had a massive heart attack in the ocean." "Later" became "sooner" than I expected. Time moves quickly. It's hard to believe one year has already passed.

We have traveled together, learned from one another. It is time to love and let go, to step into a new opening. I want to thank my lay leaders Sue Pinkston and Terry Fries. They will take charge the next few weeks to proclaim the word until your new pastors arrives. I will be on vacation, but on call, for the next two weeks. It will give me time to rest and prepare for another transition. I want to thank each of you for the wonderful ministries and your contribution to this church. To all of God's people, you are a wonderful church filled with ministries and hearts expressing the joy of the Lord. Cindy and my prayers are with you as we say goodbye. We pray you will trust God as He prepares you to say hello and receive your next pastor in ministry.

We trust that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God. On June 30, I release you from turning to me and depending on me as your pastor. I encourage you to continue your ministry here and pray for you and your new pastor Rev. John Yeager.

Whether we use the word, Goodbye, Farwell, or See you later, we know that our relationship will change.

It is love and graces my final words come from God's word for our farewell:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV) Amen.

With love and grace, blessings upon you all.