

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on June 14, 2009 base on Ephesians 4:1-16.

### In the Right Place at the Right Time

(PowerPoint – picture of Harry Reasoner) In 1988, I officiated at the wedding of Harry Reasoner and Lois Harriet Weber. For the younger crowd among us, Harry Reasoner was a nationally known news correspondent and TV news anchor in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. In 1968, Harry Reasoner and Mike Wallace were the first anchors of a little news magazine show called "60 Minutes." In the 1970's, Mr. Reasoner went on to become the anchor for ABC Nightly News and then returned to 60 Minutes in 1978 for the rest of his career.

Well, how did I, Tom Zoelzer, get to officiate at his wedding? Harry Reasoner was born in Dakota City, Iowa in 1923, which was a town that adjoined Humboldt, Iowa, a small town in north central Iowa. Mr. Reasoner's parents moved to Minneapolis when he was quite young. However, every summer, as a boy, Harry would live in Humboldt with his grandparents and attend worship at the Congregational Church where his grandparents worshipped.

By 1988, Mr. Reasoner was 65 years old and had had a bout with cancer. He wanted to marry his long time friend, Lois Weber, in the church of his childhood and have all his 7 children, spouses, and grandchildren with him. And guess who the pastor of the Congregational United Church of Christ of Humboldt, Iowa was at the time? - Me.

On Memorial weekend, 1988, Mr. Reasoner, Lois Weber, his 7 grown children and families, and a 60 Minutes film crew that he contracted with

personally, came to Humboldt to tour the buildings, cemeteries, and landmarks of the area, get married, and make a video record of his family heritage. At the rehearsal dinner, I sat with Mr. Reasoner and his finance. We had a wonderful conversation, though I noticed that he was still smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes – no filters. In 1991, Mr. Reasoner died of lung cancer at the age of 68.

The day of the wedding there were some media and television crews outside the church and of course his film crew inside the church. It was a very elegant and simple wedding. But I have to tell you that when Mr. Reasoner took his vows, he switched into his professional voice, and it was just like listening to him on 60 Minutes. This all happened because I was in the right place at the right time.

(Picture of the Temptations) In 2005, the Temptations, the Motown singing group popular in the 1960s and still performing today sang at a wedding at I performed in Mokena, Illinois. The groom was like an adopted son of the lead singer, and the groom made arrangements for the Temptations to first sing at his wedding in the church and then perform a 45 minute concert at the reception. What a night! It all happened because I was in the right place at the right time.

Well, I believe with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I am in the right place at the right time to be your senior pastor and guide. I have been an ordained minister for the gospel of Jesus Christ for 33 years now. For the last 3 years, I have been doing intentional interim ministry as a transitional minister.

A transitional minister does everything that a regular minister does plus the task of leading a congregation through a discernment process of who they are, where the Spirit of Christ is leading them into the future, and what kind of leadership is needed to help the congregation get there. I use the word "transitional" instead of "interim" because I want to emphasize that we are actively transitioning from where we have been to where we want to go while being an active church of Jesus Christ instead of waiting and sitting in the interim.

Flossmoor Community Church seems to be a dynamic, energetic, forward thinking congregation, and I see no reason why that needs to end! You have programs, ministries, interests that are exciting, interesting, and faithful, and there is no reason for that to end. You have prayed and deliberated to create a working mission statement and core values to live by, and there is no reason for that to end. You seem to care about each other and want others to grow in their faith and service as part of your congregation, and there is no reason for that to end. It is still the right time and the right place to do ministry in the name of Jesus Christ!

However, there is an issue that I see as I begin – the issue is that you have little investment and perhaps confusion about who I am and what I am doing here. Usually what happens when a church calls a Senior Pastor is that a long discernment process begins with a search committee that deliberates for months over the strengths and goals of the congregation and the kind of leadership they are seeking to be their pastor and guide. The Search Committee solicits and looks through many clergy profiles, narrows them down to a small number, makes contact, conducts

telephone and personal interviews, listens to sermons, comes to consensus and excitement about a candidate, recommends this person to the Governing Board, who if they agree, recommends to the congregation, who listens to the candidate on a candidating Sunday, votes to call or not, and if there is a positive vote, moves forward with ownership and enthusiasm with the new Senior Pastor.

None of that happens for the Transitional Pastor. It is a different process and less people are part of the decision to call. So there is less ownership by the congregation. I am here to be your temporary Senior Pastor. My task is to guide you, serve you, carry out the tasks you expected of a Senior Pastor, and to take you through a process that will eventually lead to new leadership. But most of all, my task is to love you and be a presence in your midst. You will be hearing more about these transitional tasks during the weeks ahead and your part in them. You will also be learning more about me as I learn more about you. In the meantime, I invite you to talk to me and tell me about both what excites you about Flossmoor Community Church and also what concerns you about the congregation. I am here to listen and help us move forward.

This could be hard at first. Things are different, and there is a sense of loss. You as a congregation have been through some unsettling losses in the last year. So it may be hard to get excited about the future.

The feeling I perceive at FCC reminds me of the time that I was asked to co-lead a week of summer camp for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. I had only been in the ministry about a year at the time, but I was asked to work with a more experienced pastor to organize this week long camp. It was a

great week! We recruited a great team of counselors and since we were one male counselor short, I ended up also being a counselor for 10 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys.

But it was a wonderful experience! We swam, we learned about God through the stories of the Bible, we talked about how to be a Christian, and we made crafts and sang together. My co-director was a wonderful story teller and every night he would tell fascinating stories about faith and life. Everybody – adults and kids – became very close. We became like a family in the name of Jesus Christ.

On the last night together, my co-director got up after some great singing and laughter and began his story time by saying, "After tonight, we will never, ever all be together like we are tonight. After tonight, it will never, ever be the same as it is tonight."... I have to tell you – that was like a shot to the heart! I didn't want to hear that! I didn't want we had to end. I knew in my head that it was coming to a close the next morning, but I didn't want to think about losing what we had which I had come to value. So I was heartbroken.

But it did come to an end. The next day, the parents came and picked up their kids, and there were hugs and smiles and best wishes. And the counselors had their last session, and there were hugs and smiles and best wishes. I saw many of the counselors again in other settings. But we were never, ever together again like were that week. It was never the same, but I were richer because we had had the experience.

I get the sense here that you are aware that it will never, ever be the same again. For nine years, you have been on a wonderful journey of

ministry and service with a beloved pastor, and there is no reason that that journey will not continue to be wonderful and may be even more exciting in the days ahead. But it will never, ever be the same.

That makes us sad. It makes me sad. But such is the nature of life. Every moment brings something new, and we grieve when that something new is about the resignation of a long time pastor and the lost of such trusted and respected leaders in such a short time. It takes our breath away! So we take time to grieve, to mourn, to reflect, and to remember. Then we fall on the Spirit of God through Christ and ask God to help us as we sort out what we can do to be the best, most faithful church of Jesus Christ in the area.

We can do this because we are resurrection people, not in the tomb people. We believe in the new life and new possibilities that God is always providing us even in the midst of sad, death like experiences. Now we hold on to what we value and trust the Holy Spirit to lead us to a new place and a new day.

Well, how are we going to do that? We are going to do that by practicing Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4 is a wonderful passage of scripture. Many biblical scholars debate back and forth whether the apostle Paul wrote this letter or whether it was written by the next generation of Christians and his name was put on it. This is a discussion for another time. Ephesians 4 is a beautiful passage of scripture where the writing believes that God has a plan to bring the ways of heaven and the ways of earth together in Christ, and in his opinion, this is going to happen by

believers measuring up to God's standard of practicing the qualities of Jesus Christ of humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace.

Our writer puts it this way:

*<sup>1</sup>I therefore, the one bound in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Then he goes on to say:

*<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

This is a great passage of scripture that speaks about how we are bound together in faith and how that bound makes us one.

And then the writer concludes our lesson by declaring:

*<sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

"Speaking the truth in love" is going to be my catch phrase while I am among you. Speaking the truth in love means we practice humility, gentleness, patience and peace in everything we do. It works here in the church, and it works out there in the world. It is the way to bring the ways of God into the world and into our life for a better life and a better world.

"To speak the truth in love" means speaking for yourself, and not assuming what the other person thinks without asking. It means listening as well as talking. It means bearing with one another in the Spirit of love Christ taught us. It means realizing that everyone has truth from their perspective and using humility, gentleness, patience and peace to find the truth that leads to a great wisdom.

We believe in a great God that expects great things from us! This is a great church that can continue to do great things when it keeps its sights on Jesus Christ and allow the Spirit of Christ to guide us into an ever changing a different world.

I am here to help us build a bridge to that new day. Bridge building takes many people with different skills but together we can build beautiful and wonderful things together. Like our scripture today that speaks about different gifts for the different tasks of service and ministry, we need everybody – young, old, middle aged, men, women, youth, and children to build this bridge to the future while we try to be the best church possible for the glory of God and the Spirit of Christ alive in us. And all it takes is faith in a higher power and the courage to practice the qualities of humility, gentleness, patience, peace, and most of all love.

During construction, we will be having many construction meetings about where we have been so far, how it is going, where the bridge should be going on the other side, and what kind of leadership is needed to get there. So let's build a bridge that transitions us to an exciting and new day. It won't be the same. It will be different. But hopefully it will be faithful in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and guide! Let's build a bridge together! Amen.