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Flourishing 2023

***You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
 And the mountains and the hills will break forth before you.
 There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the fields
 Will clap, will clap their hands.
 And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
 And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
 And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
 While you go out with joy.***

(based on Isaiah 55:12)

THE TREES OF THE FIELD

written by Jewish American musician Stuart Dauermann (b. 1944)

Perspectives on Flourishing through Change

“The Trees of the Field” was a favorite for our home church when the kids were still at home, and it always brings back lots of good feels. As we enter another month of church life in my current ministry context, I have to confess that October is my favorite time of year... maybe has to do with it being my birth month...??? More to the point, however, it marks a season of change in our environment which can also be seen as a life metaphor for change. Leaves begin to fall as do walnuts (in southwest Missouri). Colors begin to change. I have always found the in-between times fascinating as well as challenging.

Growing up in my family of origin and in my adult life, change was, more than not, the norm. I calculated that I changed school systems eight times during the twelve years of grade school – repeated first grade due to age and skipped third grade due to performance – go figure. I've lost count of the number of zip codes across eight states that my wife and I have called home during our marriage – most, if not all, in pursuit of my vocational choices. There was a time when I would almost become anxious after being in the same place for a couple years. It pleases me to say that “this is the longest we have ever lived in the same place!” meaning our current residence for nine years and counting.

I reflect on the numbers and types of churches that we have called home over the years and how wide-ranging the variations... small to large, open country to village and city, traditional to non-traditional, missional, multi-cultural, multi-generational, demographically diverse, special purpose, innovative and entrepreneurial, conservative evangelical to progressive mainline. From my early twenties, church ministry has been my life's calling. Once called, always committed. So thankful for a life-partner who has made the journey with me.

Over these many changes and experiences, I discovered the value of the mantra “**bloom where you're planted.**” And, I would add to **invest and celebrate wherever you belong.** I've been reflecting on how others, including my life partner, are excited about their active involvement in congregational life and for the church's mission and ministries. **This is our season and our time to flourish! Let's clap our hands and go forth with joy!**

Join with me in celebrating our heritage and our vision as “People of the Chalice.”

LOVE GOD! LOVE PEOPLE!

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