

My dearest Lake Shore,

I don't know where to begin. The first time I walked into your doors I remember being in awe. The first sermon I heard from our pulpit was inspired by the romantic and erotic poem, Song of Solomon. Rev. Burt Burleson stood in front of all of you and expertly and humorously told the truth behind this text and the reality of its sexuality. I had never heard such a sermon. That in and of itself would have been enough for me.

But then, you all did something else...you laughed!

I can still hear Bruce Evans' uninhibited laugh, we all know that laugh, snapping me out of my astonishment. Witnessing a community welcome such preaching and laugh?!? I fell in love with you then and there.

That entire year I dreamed of one day preaching to this community. I jumped into a Sunday School Class that read Alison Bechdel's, "Fun Home," and continued to laugh with John Warren. Steve Swanson made me think deeper and harder than any professor I ever had. I rotated around other classes and found the "Metanoia" group. I puzzled and dabbled at meditation alongside Claudia Beale and Sandy Londos. I, like many of us, argued with Andy Powell and learned how argument between strangers can turn into a treasured relationship. I spent time with our youth and accidentally left Lum sleeping on a cot when it was time to go to dinner at Mid-Winter. She continues to remind me of that deplorable act.

The day I left Lake Shore and moved to Fort Worth was the day I was taught how difficult it is to find a spiritual home outside our shared space—a refrain we all know too well.

And, years later, here we sit. The church I fell in love with welcomed the whole me back. I was not only welcomed, but entrusted with the care of our children and families. This responsibility continues to humble me.

As most of us already know, Rev. Charlie Fuller, our Transition Pastor, has formally resigned from his position as of last Monday...

If I may, I would like to take a moment.

Charlie joined our staff in December of last year. As a young minister, new to my position, I was, to be honest, worried about working under an older white male.

Sorry, Charlie.

But this past year was the most educational and supportive year of my ministerial career. Partly because of this position. But largely because of Charlie's guidance and full acceptance of me as a minister. I've never worked with a more pastoral and caring person in my life.

So, to Charlie, thank you for your devotion and love. Our church has been made better by your presence. We have much to learn and much growth ahead of us, but you taught me and so many of us, that growth may be hard, but with the right guide it doesn't have to be scary.

It is queer that today's lectionary passage in Genesis is more fitting than I originally thought.

This reading is one of my all-time favorites. And, it has almost nothing to do with Joseph or his brothers.

The author of Genesis introduces an unnamed character who can easily be forgotten. Due to today's reading, we, as followers of the Lectionary, have experienced whiplash. Last week we witnessed the story of Jacob wrestling with God, gaining a limp and a new name. We then

skipped five chapters of Jacob's life. Somewhere in there Esau forgives Jacob for all his dastardly deeds. We cruelly skip the horrific story of Dinah, say her name, who was Israel/Jacob's daughter. Then we finally skid to a stop at the feet of an arrogant younger brother, whose ego breaks all possible relationships with his brothers.

This story catapults us through the rest of Genesis. We learn intimately of Joseph's highs and lows. We hear—spoiler alert—the reconciliation of Joseph with his family. All of this is a crazy thirteen-chapter rollercoaster.

But today, we'll have nothing to do with that tale. Instead, I invite us to turn our gaze upon an obscure man. In verse fifteen, Joseph is met by an unnamed man. Joseph, as we read, was seeking his brothers at his father's request. As Joseph stumbles around in a field he bumps into a man who radically changed his life with one question.

“What are you seeking?”

Joseph, lost, is brought face-to-face, just like his father before him, with a man who sees through him. While Jacob wrestled, Joseph asks for directions.

Joseph quickly answers the man's provocative question. But he answers incorrectly. You see, the man didn't ask, “Who are you seeking,” he asked, “What are you seeking?”

We know Joseph gets the answer he wanted, and leaves on his merry way.

But I want us to sit with this question and not rush to an answer.

“What are you seeking?”

Beloved church, we live in a world that's seeking. Our nation seeks racial justice and peace. Our country seeks equity for Black and Indigenous folx, queer folx, disabled folx, and poor folx. Our

people seek guidance from our government while we're paralyzed by a pandemic that just won't end.

We are seeking people.

And if we are not careful, our outward seeking will blind us to the inner work our souls are seeking.

My partner often reminds me of what every frequent flyer hears regularly: when the plane is going down, you must put on your own oxygen mask before you can do any good for the people around you.

My beloved Lake Shore,

We are seekers and risk-takers. We strive to expand our borders and welcome the stranger. We yearn to be a haven for the spiritually wounded. We have burst open our doors to the marginalized.

And...we also need to stop.

We are like Joseph. When we're asked to move mountains and find the lost, we dash down the road and into the fields, looking and serving. But if we're not careful, we will be asked, "What are you seeking?" and we will answer incorrectly.

Last Fall we took a risk to find an intentional interim who could lead our congregation through a regular checkup and internal work.

Back in December we thought we found our fit. Charlie worked with us for such a brief time before the pandemic hit.

And let me tell you something, pastoring in any form during a pandemic, is rough and tough work. Add to this our need of transition work, and a situation arises in which it's impossible to do both.

With his resignation fresh on our minds, I yearn to comfort and love on this community. But I also know that this is a moment where we have got to stop and focus on ourselves.

The world is a dumpster fire right now. And we are people who want to be firefighters against the blaze of injustice.

This is good! This is holy work!

But it is imperative that we stop, put our oxygen masks on, and try to aid our community in its own hurts and pains. This is also holy work.

Our families are living in anxiety: How can they work from home and raise kids? Now the school year is beginning, and every decision feels like a dare, with no perfect answer to the questions of whether to home school, go all online, or go back to face-to-face education.

Our educators are once again being asked to risk their health, as officials force face-to-face education. Our educators are also pushing themselves to learn the best online teaching practices, because even in the face of a global pandemic, they're committed to the children and youth of this state and nation.

Our health care and essential workers are risking their lives every day for the needs of others.

Some of our older folx are feeling the weight of loneliness as they sit at home or in care centers, missing out on human connection.

Some of our people are drowning in financial peril, as finding a job is nearly impossible in this climate.

And all the while, the pressures and anxieties are pressing down on us as we, yet again, seek to find another candidate to lead us through this turbulent season.

big exhale...anyone else feeling anxious with that list?

This is a season in our church life where we must sit with the question: What are we seeking?

In this moment, perhaps more than any other, we need to stop stretching ourselves thin and seek to sit, together, in this tension, fear, and hurt.

We're separated by computer screens and house walls, but we are still compelled to love and care for those who have committed themselves to our community.

I am, by no means, preaching that we stop our commitment to speaking truth to power or standing beside the oppressed and marginalized. I am, however, asking if we even know what we are seeking to do as a community anymore?

Who are we, Lake Shore?

What unites us?

What feeds our collective soul?

What and who are we fighting for?

Who are we committed to caring for?

Who are we to one another?

Who are we to the world?

And, most importantly of all, what are we seeking?

I pray that we use this time and season to reflect, rest, recharge, and re-envision. We're all tired, worn thin, and run ragged by the new reality in which we dwell. Before we rush to answer this question, may we sit and wrestle with it long enough to hear it properly.

So Lake Shore, what are you seeking?

Amen.