

8 years, 5 months, and 5 days ago, on March 25th, 2018, I stood next door, and informed our church that, due to our church building being given a 10% rating, *“we will temporarily cease using the church for our services.”*

As that date was Palm Sunday, thanks be to The Lord’s timing, I then went on to share the following words, *“I will be honest with you, there is nothing we could do to prepare for this news, and some would say that it has the worst timing in the world, as Holy Week is next week.*

While, as we know, there is never a good time to receive this news; I want to say, that the start of Holy Week is possibly the best time to receive this news. I say this seriously, and in Gods Spirit.

In the reading today, we mark the welcoming of Jesus, yet we know what lays in store. We know that Holy Week is a journey that we must take; we know that it is a journey of uncertainty, confusion and loss.”

We gather here today to mark the end of that journey that started in the hall on April 8th, 2018, and concluded on November 21st, 2021. Our journey in this Chapel commenced on November 28th, which was also the First Sunday in Advent- another deeply significant date.

As often, as I like to do, I want to present an image for us to hold onto, to capture what we are doing today.

The image I want us hold is the image of farewelling a loved one at the airport, as they head into a new season of life overseas. There is a mixture of sadness and excitement; hope and worry; and feeling happy for them but knowing we will be missing them.

Our emotions are not binary and separate, are they? Our emotions and feelings often sit on a continuum, or a sliding scale if you will. They can also exist together, and like that image, we acknowledge that today there will be a range of emotions that have been felt during our journey.

Looking back, on that distant Palm Sunday, it was clear that uncertainty, confusion, and loss were the overwhelming emotions that were felt, and they have been, no doubt, felt many times by many of us.

In times of human uncertainty (which is natural), we had to press into the promises of Scripture; in times of human confusion (which is natural), we have had to trust in The Lord's plans for us- even if they seemed distant, or hidden. In those times where we have grieved not using the church (which is natural), we learned to press into The Lord's Spirit wherever we met; we were also blessed by our sisters and brothers from Waiwhetu Uniting, in sharing services with them.

As our journey concludes today, we may find ourselves feeling a mixture of emotions.

We may feel a sense of loss, as we move from this smaller space into a bigger one. So, in The Lord's presence we welcome and acknowledge that sense of loss. Not because we want it to disappear and be replaced, but because we know The Lord desires that we bring all of ourselves to worship Him.

We may have feelings of uncertainty as to how it "will all work", and today we acknowledge that. Again, that is not a negative feeling, it just shows that we are all human beings.

We may find ourselves recalling those who we were unable to farewell from our church, and so we held our funerals elsewhere; and still felt The Lord's peace and comfort of family and friends. Today, we acknowledge those feelings, and those loved ones who know the touch of grief.

This space, and the hall (for the season that we met there) was not to everyone's liking, and as such some chose to worship elsewhere. We acknowledge them, and take comfort that they were planted elsewhere, and that we are part of the much wider Body of Christ.

Yes, because of the move from the church, attendance dropped- yet the faithfulness of those who gathered each week continued.

Now, I am not trying to be negative- far from it! In drawing any season to a close, we must draw it all to a close. We must acknowledge those things that have been a presence with us, at times, and those feelings and others unnamed are not to be dismissed or explained away.

Because, at the same time we experienced those feelings; there were other feelings present. As much as we feel we have lost over the 8 years, we have

also gained and experienced The Lord in new ways- ways that we would not have, if it were not for our journey.

That fact that, next week, we gather next door to celebrate is a testament to The Lord's leading and provision, isn't it?

We know that during our journey (and today) there has also been joy, hope, peace, strength, confidence, and endurance.

We have also known The Lord's leading, guidance, provision, equipping, and voice speaking to us.

We have, in the hall and in this space, baptised young and old alike! The Lord has touched countless people in both places. We have seen people respond to God's call and head into new seasons of ministry. The Lord's Spirit has been felt peacefully and dramatically in both places; not because the hall and chapel suddenly became "mini churches", but because God's people worshipped in those places. God's people filled those two spaces with prayer, joy, lament, worship, praise, laughter, tears, the reading of Scripture, and the preaching of God's word.

We have learnt to persevere and to endure; we have not given up hope- even when it may have felt like there was no path forward.

We have learnt to lean in to and trust The Lord in new ways- and that cannot be a bad thing.

When I stop to think about it, and as I have said before, our journey has not actually been a journey about the church building, hall, or this Chapel, is it?

It's been a journey of a group of people over 8 years, 5 months, and 5 days; a group of people seeking The Lord's will, guidance, and provision.

It has been a journey that The Lord led us on, sustained us on, and now which, today draws to a close. I am glad to have been on the journey with you all- whether you have journeyed the past 8 years, or the past two weeks.

Now, I have referenced the Children of Israel many times, during our journey, and in closing I want to revisit them one more time before we end this journey.

The mistake we make when thinking about the Children of Israel and The Promised Land, is that we think it is all about the Promised Land.

But I want to suggest that it is not. Sure, it's a fitting end to their journey, but that wasn't the point of their journey. Their journey was about their formation from escaped slaves to Israel; which we see in their journey of ups and downs, a journey of faithfulness and then faithlessness. A journey where emotions ran high, and yet The Lord still provided for them

It is what occurred on the way to the Promised Land, that prepared them to enter it; it was not the Promised Land that defined or shaped them, it was the journey that they were led on that prepared for a new season.

They entered the Promised Land because they were ready to; while the church, is not the Promised Land (although it feels like it), we enter it next week because it is The Lord's timing that we do.

As we end this journey today, we do so knowing that it is The Lord of all creation, the Alpha and Omega, The First and Last, The source of our Salvation, and our creator, redeemer and giver of life who has led us each and every day over the past 8 years, 5 months, and 5 days.

While this journey has come to an end, a new one starts...but more on that next week.

I want to finish by reading Psalm 100 and then praying.

Psalm 100

A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

¹ Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

³ Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his^[a];
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Let's pray,

"Lord, we know there is a time for every purpose under heaven. As this chapter closes, we trust in your unchanging love."

"As you draw the season of this chapel to a close, the work of your kingdom does not end."

Amen.