

March 14, 2010
Isaiah 43:1-3a, 18-21

Beth Robey Hyde

Signs of Spring

(note: this sermon was accompanied by pictures symbolizing each of the underlined areas.)

Back in the fall of 2006 and the winter of 2007, it actually must have felt like summer at Christ Congregational Church. Visioning was underway. Surveys were done; A team of dedicated members began to look at your dreams for the best church this could be. A comprehensive plan was laid out. There were big dreams with a big plan, including a one-and-a-half million dollar remodeling of this sanctuary.

The million dollars didn't come. Jerry retired. The congregation soon found itself disappointed, moving toward a chilly winter. Some divisions arose. The congregation shrank. Finances shrank. Energy shrank. When I arrived last August, the statement I most frequently heard repeated was, "we talk a lot, but we don't do anything." It must have felt like you fell from here (showing drawing of proposed million dollar remodel) to here (showing a snow globe with a tiny church in it).

And that is as much revisiting as we are going to do; because we are not here to spend our energy on the past. The future is calling, and we are here today to take a realistic look at where we are and discern where we want to go. Speaking very practically, I think that you will agree we can feel the warming breezes, see the new green sprouts peeking up from the ground; a perfect metaphor for this day when Daylight Saving begins, we spring forward, and we are literally only two weeks from springtime.

So here we go, with a look at the Signs of Spring at Christ Congregational Church.

First of all, and very important, the mode we are now in is one of rebuilding, not one of talking without doing. Change is in the air. The church has had time to mourn its losses, recover from its tiredness, lift its head and discover that life is still good. Worship and fellowship are vibrant. Attendance is creeping upward. And I am here to say that I truly believe that life will be better and better as this year goes on. We are rebuilding relationships, both among ourselves and beyond the doors, as we will see as we move on to the next slide.

Balancing. Congregational leaders and members were pretty apprehensive when it came time for the stewardship campaign and budget building last fall.

Comparing with previous years' financial support, some people thought things were pretty grim.

So we stopped comparing. A budget was built and presented. In fact, it turned out to be a budget that should allow the church to do everything it needs to do this year, and even offer a decent pay package for a quality prospective minister. As it was presented to the congregation, it looked like it was going to have about a \$6000 deficit. After it was adopted, more pledges came in, and lo and behold, like a bottle on the upturned forehead of a clown, or a spinning plate on a slender pole, it balanced! Like every budget, it is only an approximation of expectations, but so far, we're still balancing . . . on our tiptoes, maybe, but we do know how to dance on our toes, to spin plates if we need to, and to keep that little seesaw merrily tipping up and down.

Brightening. Well, mostly spirits. And faces. And relationships. A cookie extravaganza last Christmas brightened lots of spirits. So did a gathering of the Generation Gap, who determined that it is time to get off the stuck spot and move back into the community; and then who decided that our first mission should be to the church itself, and they sparked a return, in a much more doable fashion, to

Remodeling. Now, this room looks like the construction zone it is, and I have heard people concerned that it may repel visitors. But just think of this, if we were in the midst of the million dollar remodeling plan right now, the sanctuary wouldn't be usable at all! It's easy to get discouraged about the pace of remodeling, but when we're doing it ourselves with volunteer labor, we will really feel the accomplishment. And I cannot forget how much larger and brighter this room already is, even in the midst of dust and confusion. Also, by doing it this way, you are retaining and enhancing the church-in-the-round (or in the hexagonal) that you love so much. So volunteer and let's keep moving. This is a sign that we are doing rather than talking!

Rejoicing. I only have to say one word here, and that is thanks. Thanks to the worship and music ministry team. Thanks to Robin Miller, thanks to the choir, thanks to the Christ Church worship band, thanks to the bells. There is no place where new life and springtime are more keenly felt than in our worship. (Unless it is at least the close second we experience at mealtime! Smell the lasagna?)

Then there is Serving. Seventeen people showed up at a meeting to discuss possible missions and ministries to the community. Seven more wanted to be there but were busy elsewhere. The ideas brought forward were numerous and diverse. Next week, another meeting will explore where we are on some of those ideas, like helping with the workdays called Rebuilding Denver, and with graffiti

removal in this part of the city. Habitat for Humanity, crop gleaning, serving suppers here for the neighborhood, and many more possibilities await.

Just so you don't think this is all talk and no doing, let me tell you a couple of things that are happening now. Council has agreed that the church may serve as the emergency evacuation site for the 180 preschoolers and before-and-after school elementary age children of Children's Haven, where we currently have several volunteers doing homework help with youngsters in the afternoons, and where, by the way, they would like some of us to read to young children in the mornings. This particular service would not require background checks. We're also talking about jointly hosting a barbecue block party for the neighborhood this summer.

Here's one you won't know about. Some members of the congregation are especially interested in developing a focus on domestic violence, an issue that the Colorado Council of Churches is involved in. You will hear more about this later, but one thing that has already happened is that the church is opening its doors to a support group for women transitioning out of a shelter into independent lives in the Denver area. These women expect to be meeting here regularly twice monthly. Springtime in the lives of women starting over, in the lives of their children, and certainly a use of our building that feels enlivening.

Someone told me that all that remained for this church to declare itself ready to move into the future was the recovery of mission. It looks like that's underway.

And I cannot talk about caring for the wider community without talking about caring for this congregation. Your new care team is fast at work checking up on shut-ins, taking communion to those who could not be in church, and contacting people who drop away. This new team is learning as it goes; and it welcomes new additions. Thanks to the fellowship team for sponsoring and launching this group.

Finally, we must affirm the welcoming atmosphere here. That picture of Elia Estey and her parents, you will recognize from her recent baptism. In a few weeks, we look forward to baptizing Gentry Neptune. And while our youth have mostly grown up and moved on, we know how everyone rejoices at the sight and sound of babies and toddlers in the church, (even when they make their own kind of music during worship.)

Seriously, one of the strengths of this congregation is the sincere and warm welcome it extends to guests. That welcome over the past few years has brought the congregation some of its most dedicated members, and I know it will continue to do so, as we finish our remodeling and invite our friends and

neighbors to join us in a community that worships, praises, serves, shares, cares and invites all who will come.

These signs of spring are worth celebrating.

When we move into the fellowship hall for lunch and to begin our afternoon work, you will see on the walls a couple of sheets of newsprint. Feel free, as you enjoy your lunch, to write on those sheets the signs of spring *you* see at this church.