“Don’t Cry Because It’s Over,  
Smile Because It Happened!”  
(Dr. Seuss)  
Acts 20:17, 36-38

Life is about beginnings and endings. This story in Acts is about the Apostle Paul leaving the church in Ephesus.

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17 From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him.  
36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. 37 There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.  
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I can feel Paul’s grief as he leaves Ephesus. He stayed there three years, more than he stayed in any other place. To leave those people was painful.

I’ve moved 16 times in my life. This will make 17! I wouldn’t trade any of those moves. Each place has its own story, its unique relationships and fond memories. My life is richer because of all those people and places, including here. But with each move there was grief. They say grief is the price you pay for loving someone. It’s worth the cost!

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In 2015 when we left the church in Charlotte, my assistant, Carol Ruhl, gave me this Dr. Seuss quote;  
Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened!  
That’s true about a lot of things in life, isn’t it? Life is a string of beginnings and endings. We leave our mother’s womb to enter this world. We leave this world to enter eternal life. In-between are a series of beginnings and endings. It’s how we deal with those that makes the difference.  
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Jay Howell, your new pastor, said goodbye to his congregation at Germantown Presbyterian Church last Sunday. He had been with them for seven years. It was his first
call out of Princeton Seminary. He and Frances were married while he was there. They had their first child there. It’s the first church family he has ever left. It’s his Ephesus! I think it’s safe to say Jay and Frances are grieving. They have loved their church family in Memphis.

When you take a new call as a pastor, it’s like having a funeral and a wedding at the same time! You are grieving the loss of those you love while you are celebrating the new thing that is yet to come. In a sense, you are stuck in the middle.

Each of my moves produced a case of homesickness. I wanted to go back to the friends I left. I felt out of place, lost and lonely in the new place. We felt that way here in the first few months. What you don’t have when you move somewhere are memories. Everyone there has memories of what they have done together, but not you. You’re “new.” It’s hard to be new, and it’s not until you build some memories that you begin to feel at home.

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Paul had memories with the people of Ephesus. They were grieving; praying, weeping, kissing and hugging goodbye. It was all a part of ending well.

Jay has ended well in Memphis. Catherine and I have made some great memories here with you and I feel we are ending well, which makes for good beginnings. You have to go through the grief. It helps in making space for someone new.

Those of us in ministry must learn the art of leaving, or at least changing our roles as pastor. Others follow us and they need the space to become your pastor.

Now it’s time to make space for Jay and Frances. Invite them into your homes. Ask him to conduct your weddings and funerals, baptize your children and share the celebrations of your life. Take them to UT games, (the ones we win!), concerts, and out eat. Ask them out on the boat. But whatever you do, tell them your name...your whole name, over and over again!

Let’s do this. Tell Jay and Frances your name every time you see them between the time they come in August until Thanksgiving Day! (Then he can be thankful you are going to stop telling him your name!) I’m serious. That would be the greatest gift you could give them in making space for them in your lives. Don’t assume they know who you are. There are 1200 of you and 2 of them! It may seem silly, but every time you see them, tell them your name! It would mean the world to them.

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As of today, I will no longer be your Interim Pastor, but we will forever be your friends. That doesn’t have to change. That’s true for Jay as he leaves Germantown. He is no longer their pastor. That’s over, and someone new will come and take his place, but the love he has for the people of Germantown will not come to an end. He will
bring that with him, as he makes space for you. Catherine and I will take the love we have for Sequoyah Hills as we enter this new season of our lives.

*There are just a few differences between Paul and myself as he leaves Ephesus. (Ok, maybe 100 differences!) They put him on a ship when he left. We are heading to Brevard this afternoon in two cars! We will be in Linville next week and then return to move our things on July 15. (We’ll leave in a U-Haul!) And Paul said he would never see them again. Thank the Lord we don’t have to say that! We hope to be back many times over the years to come.*

*Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened!*  

We are smiling, with gratitude for the wonderful memories and relationships we have with all of you. We will be praying for you, and pulling for Jay all the way!  

_Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone be the glory!_ Amen.