

**Oregon City United Methodist Church**  
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**Series: Fiddler On the Roof**

**Sermon: Far From the Home I Love**

**I Kings 24:10-14**

At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, 11 and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. 12 Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him.

In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. 13 As the Lord had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. 14 He carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

**Sermon**

Winnie the Pooh told his friends, “How Lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” I agree with Winnie the Pooh. Saying goodbye is never easy when you have developed such a love and concern for the people to whom you are saying good bye.

We all say goodbye in many ways and in many different settings: the death of a loved one; the loss of a job or a retirement; College Graduation; the birth of our first child; when the last child flies and be free; the end of a relationship. All of these mark the end of one chapter in our lives and the start of another.

Saying “Goodbye” recognizes that something we value, something that is essential to who we are right now, is ending.

Most of us have had to say “Goodbye” to loved ones who died. And someday, those we love will say Goodbye to us when we die. With death, all that we are slips beyond human grasp. All that is left of us here in this world are the memories of those who knew us – good memories and bad; memories that those who love us will carry with them as they move forward into their own future. Death means saying goodbye to those we love.

The loss of a job or a retirement is another way of saying goodbye: it marks the end of a way of life or a career. We must say goodbye to the friendships and the community and sense of self that are all wrapped up with that position. We are no longer a teacher, or a manager, or a police officer, or a writer – or a preacher. Part of our identity dies, and will never come back again in exactly the same way. Leaving a career means saying goodbye to a big part of how we see ourselves, and what defines our place in this world.

College Graduation is another way of saying goodbye. ...Yes! School is done! But what now? Get a job?? Be responsible?? Rent an apartment and get a car??? OMG, I have to “adult” now??!! ...Nah, I’ll just move back in with my parents!

The birth of your first child is a goodbye, as well. They depend on us for everything. Our life changes: we can no longer work an insane number of hours each week. We can no longer stay out late at the bars, or go to a movie or ball game on a whim - without preplanning. Finding babysitters and making sure we have an adequate supply of diapers becomes essential to our sanity. Having a baby, and getting married too, means saying goodbye to living life purely on our own terms.

There's that old phrase, "time heals all wounds." In my limited experience, I haven't found this to be the case. Time doesn't heal wounds. It gets easier every day, with the passage of months and years, but you're never really healed. You carry scars just by walking thru life, although we all carry different kinds of scars. Saying Goodbye to anything that is central to how we conceive of ourselves is still a Goodbye. Goodbyes can be very complicated.

I feel for Cheva, the middle daughter, of Tevya. Her husband was sent to Siberia, and she had to choose. Stay with her family, her mother, father, siblings, the town she knew and loved, or go off into the unknown to be with the one she loved. And off she went. Some of you know the pain that she faced. Your hometown isn't Oregon City. This is foreign territory. Just by a show of hands, who wasn't born in the Portland metro area? Who wasn't born in Oregon. Wow. The Oregon Trail is still alive and well. We've been here 6 years, and we've been saying to those moving in - Go back to where you came from - we're too full right now! 205 is a mess! There are days I wish I could snap my fingers and go back to my homeland and walk around the farm, or the town I grew up in, or the favorite places we knew. We're going back after Christmas for a week, and we have around 50 places the kids want to go - ain't gonna happen. And when family comes out here for a week, we have around 50 places that we want to show them! But there are days when you miss your homeland, where you came from, the people from the past, the town as you once knew it. Goodbyes are hard.

The people of Israel had a forced goodbye. Generations after Samuel, David, Solomon, and a succession of kings, prophets and leaders - the nation was collapsing. Literally. Nebuchadnezzar was in town, laying waste the towns of Judah and Jerusalem was the prize. They took the current king and his family, his court, and took them to Babylon, present day Baghdad. The Temple was destroyed. The artifacts that were in the temple and palace were taken back as prizes of war. The nation's identity wiped clean. There's a saying - you can never go back. And here, it was true. There was nothing to go back to. In a generation or so, a remnant would be allowed to return, but they would have to rebuild and start again. And many, I can imagine, stayed in Babylon. They grew up there, started a new life. Things were working out. Why go back?

When relationships change, or die, saying Goodbye is hard and complex, challenging and sad. But, God has already provided a helper who will be there for us (and with us) always. The future is what really matters, not the past. We must say Goodbye, we must let go, to claim the future that has been promised to us. Time keeps moving forward, it doesn't go backwards.

So what do you do? How do you let go of the past and not let the pain of it overtake you? Here are some helpful tips. Tip #1: Be thankful that you had that experience, that relationship, that whatever. Be thankful. I'm happy that I had those years at wherever it is. That single mom or dad could say, It wasn't all bad, that marriage - there were a few good years - it got us this child. Those days I miss my hometown - I'm grateful for those memories. And I should probably remember most things aren't as great as I remember them! Maybe you miss having your kids around the house. Be thankful you had them. Maybe there's the pain of grief of someone who's gone on to greater glory. Be thankful you had the time with them. Gratitude is great medicine for pity parties.

Tip #2: Tell the stories. As you are grateful for that thing in your past, you can keep telling stories - that way they live on. Remember when Grandpa did this? Remember that blizzard that took out the power for a week? Two weeks ago was our anniversary, and we told the kids the story of how we met, where we lived. Our wedding day. In my genealogy work, that's what I want to find - my ancestor's stories. Don't you sit around the table and tell stories about what happened that day? That week? That year? Steph and I do this at New Year's. Who was born this year? Who got married that we know? Who passed away? And we tell stories. We remember. I think I shared this once at a Communion moment, but the word remember is amazing. Re - to do again, right? Redo, rewrite, rework. To do again. Member - belong to something. A family, a club, a community. Re-member: Once again becoming a part of something. When you tell stories, when you

remember, you once again have a sense of belonging in the world. That's what the Israelites did in Babylon. How do you sing songs in a foreign land? You keep singing the songs - you keep telling the stories. It grounds you.

And the last tip, tip #3: How do you get over old traditions? Old memories? You go make new traditions! You go make new memories! We need to understand that God is far more interested in our future than He is in our past. Some people think that God is stuck on their past. That all He wants to do is remind them of the things that they have done wrong. God is more interested in your future than He is with your past. That's where you're going to spend the rest of your life. He says, "Forget about your past. Forget about the former things. Don't think about it. Look at the new thing I'm going to do."

Israel was being punished for their sins and rebellion against God. God wanted to give hope and encouragement to His people. He wanted them to know that even though they were being punished they were not being forsaken. God wanted His people to understand that the punishment that they were experiencing would not be the end of them. The fact is that God want to give them a fresh start in life, a new Beginning in life. Israel no doubt was discouraged because they thought this was the end of them. Maybe they thought God would not deliver us again, it's over. That is when they begin to remember the former things or past deliverances. Israel could remember past deliverances and past victories. They could remember when they were trapped by the Red Sea and had nowhere to go, how God made away for them. They could remember that when the enemy was about to overtake them how He provided protection for them. They could remember the former things, but they couldn't see their future. That is why God said; "I am going to do something new. Maybe that is where you are this morning! You feel that you have made so many mistakes, you have failed God so many times and you have sinned it all away. Now God doesn't want anything to do with you. You feel and believe that you have no future with God. The good news is, God is saying, "It's not over, I have plans for your life. I am about to do something new for you." Maybe you're stuck in the past - you can't get over the passage of time, the world isn't the way it used to be. Maybe your stuck in just remembering a past relationship. Maybe you're stuck in remembering all the time a past injustice that was done to you. Maybe you're stuck in thinking that you're never going to be as happy as you once were. Your temple got destroyed and you're in exile, metaphorically speaking. Guess what! God makes all things new! The people didn't go back to the old temple, to the old way of doing things. They progressed to something different, while honoring the past. How do you get over the crippling sadness of something in the past? Do something in the present! Look forward to the future! Do you know what the definition of hopelessness is? According to the dictionary - yeah, the sermon's getting so dry that I'm now quoting the dictionary: Hopelessness: Incapable of redemption or improvement. If that's where you are, I don't know who your God is, because that's not where God is. God makes all things new.

Be grateful for the good things that have happened, tell the stories and remember the good times. And know, that there are blessings and good things yet to happen, and if we stop looking in the past, maybe, just maybe, we can see the joys of the present, and hopes for the future. Far from the home I love - but its time to make a new home. And the family of God said, AMEN.