



Letting Go

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I hang onto things longer than I should. Near our garage, a cubby holds our boots and coats. Each time I pass through, I see a solitary boot in one slot. A boot for my left foot. The right boot went walking on my move to Wisconsin and hasn't found its way here yet. Its mate waits patiently.

The problem is not just with my boot. I have a little glass box of single earrings, their partners having gone missing. In the garage, I can find at least 5 left-hand gardening gloves. Why is it always the right-hand glove that disappears? Don't even get me started on the basket of unmatched socks!



Some paired items have been separated for years, but I hang on tightly to the one that's left, in hope the other will turn up miraculously and the pair reunited. It's far better, I think, to cling to the remaining item in a pair than to throw it away and later find its missing mate. Oh, the horror! I might not even like the earrings or socks or gloves. Were they a complete pair, I'd likely throw them out.

We hold onto things for different reasons. I apparently crave symmetry. My husband and I laugh at his insistence on saving wood scraps because he might need them one day. He points to his frugality proudly whenever he uses one of the scraps...like, once a year.

In our congregations and ministries, we hang on to things well past their expiration dates. It might be a decoration that someone dear to the community made or donated. Even if tattered, we display it to honor the person's memory. We continue traditions if they represent a time when the church felt alive. We hold on to what has required our investment of money or time. Letting go of the object means letting go of control and puts us dangerously close to the unknown. We rarely stop to question whether these are the best or only ways to honor someone or remember our history or investment.

I recall the story of a man who exited a subway car only to realize he'd left one of his gloves behind. Standing on the subway platform, he could see the glove on the seat he'd just vacated. In one swift move, the man threw the mismatched mate back onto the train, just as the doors closed. The car, with two gloves, pulled away.

The image, for me, is freeing. The man's first inclination was to let go of his glove, not to hold on tightly until it was too late. (Of course, I also like the story because his gloves were reunited!) The story invites us to imagine not just loss, but the power of letting go. Letting go doesn't mean we forget people, their gifts, or sacrifices. Instead, it opens possibilities for the Spirit's movement, creates space, literally and figuratively, for new priorities; and allows others to explore ministries that had been foreclosed. In that freedom, we can begin to imagine the new thing that God is creating in our midst.