

Tradition is an interesting concept. Tradition by definition is the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation. As we get older, it seems that we become more and more comfortable with tradition. We feel the urge to pass our way of doing things to the next generation which we often see as inventing the wheel all over again. Tradition is important as a foundation and guide for doing things, especially at church. However, it is important to keep our eyes and our hearts open to new things that God might be doing. Interestingly enough, tradition and innovation do not have to be mutually exclusive. Tradition should provide the template which allows God's creativity to fill in the blanks. As you may know, during Lent we are trying out a new Order of Worship. While it seems quite awkward to some of us, in actuality it is more "traditional" than the order we have used for years. Our new Order is similar to John Wesley's and structures the entire worship around the authority of scripture. Still, within the "new" structure, we find there are many ways to make worship fit our context, where we are, who we are, and how we worship God. When tradition enlightens us and simultaneously frees us to be the church God created us to be, God can do great things. Of course, we have heard the word "traditional" often over the last few months as our General Conference voted recently in St. Louis to support the Traditionalist Plan for the United Methodist Church's treatment of human sexuality. I had the great pleasure of voting in the legislative committee on this measure as my final act as laity in the United Methodist Church. Now that the dust has settled and we have our direction, it is time to go forward. It is my prayer that we will use our tradition in the current Book of Discipline as a foundation and guide for our local church while we also use this milestone as the opportunity to be free now to do real ministry. Our task is to more and more clearly define at Shallowater United Methodist Church our context, where we are, who we are, and how we worship God. In other words, we need to keep striving to be the church God is calling us to be. The truth is that we cannot survive by living in tradition alone. Nor can we abandon the structure in which we live. It will take innovation within the traditional framework to successfully move SUMC into the places where God is calling us. God is truly doing great things here. Jesus Christ is alive and present at SUMC. Our challenge going forward is to balance in a healthy way our tradition that honors our roots, and the creativity that God will use to make new disciples in new ways of Jesus Christ for the transformation of Shallowater and the entire world. Blessings to you this Easter Season. Jeff