

## **New Beginnings**

An Introduction: “New Beginnings”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 7 2024

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Romans 13:7-10; Mark 12:28-34

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

**Greeting:** I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**Prayer:** God, in mystery and silence we feel your presence in our lives. You bring hope from every despair, growth out of every difficulty, and you bring new beginnings out of every ending. We thank you that you have not abandoned us to our own ways but that you labor to make us whole through your love and your grace. Help us now that we may perceive your unseen hand in the unfolding of our lives, and to attend to the gentle guidance of your Spirit. Help us to celebrate that you are always with us, in all that we are and in all that we do. That in both old and new, you are with us in love forever and always. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 121 and hear of God’s help in times of change. That we walk secure because God is there to strengthen us and to shelter us. That the Lord will watch over us in all that we are and in all that we do. How do you share the love of Christ with others? How do you find strength because of God’s steadfast love and care? Who are you thankful for this week? Who is it that you will lift up in prayers this week? Who can you reach out to this week to share the Holy Spirit with? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

**Prayer:** God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Your love is there for us in every new path that is laid before us. Help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with the joys and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each other. We also bring before you the silent

troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 43, verse 16 through 21.

*Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise. (Isaiah 43:16-21 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading is from 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 16 through 21.

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 1, verse 14 through 28.

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" And*

*the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. (Mark 1:14-28 NRSVue\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I thought I would take this Sunday to give a bit of an introduction to myself with how I think and how I express my faith. Because right now, I am a man set adrift. I feel a little uprooted, but I know that that won't last. Because I know that every ending ushers in a new beginning. I also know that God has led me to this place so that I can continue to grow as a Christian, as a pastor, as a father, and I pray that I will help you to grow as well. I believe that God will help me continue to grow in love no matter where I am, and I am pleased to be here with all of you. I know this is going to be a time of transition for all of us, as we grow accustomed to each other. I chose the readings for today based on this idea of new beginnings. In Isaiah, we are told not to remember the things of old because God is always doing something new. God is always forging a new path forward. God is always setting us up for change, and if all that we do is to dwell on what was, we will never see what God is doing right now. And I want to know what God has in store for me today. I want to know what new path God has for all of us. And I'm excited to see what this new thing is going to be that springs forth. But it can also be difficult because it takes time to adjust. I know it is going to take time for me to settle in. It is going to take me time to get to know all of you. But I also know that every day brings something new. That things are always going to be changing. And one of the things that I have come to understand about faith is that living a life in Christ helps us to adapt to change. Because the world will never hold still. New things happen every day that we must face. But we also never stop learning. And because we never stop learning, we never stop growing.

We hear Paul talk about this idea of change in our reading from 2 Corinthians. Paul is discussing how we are a new creation in Christ. That we are called to change our idea of how we view people because of Christ. That we are no longer to have a human view, but to view each other through Christ. That we grow together in love because of Christ being active in our lives. That we can adjust to all of these new things because things are always being made new in Christ. Christ is always giving us something more to discover, always giving us something more to do, and always giving us more that we can accomplish as ambassadors for Christ. That even though the message we have is old, there are always new ways to deliver it and always new ways to understand it. Because if there's one thing that I have come to understand it is that Christ is never standing still. And if I am going to follow Christ, then I cannot stand still either.

That is how I answer my call in Christ. We hear about being called in our gospel reading from Mark. We hear of how Jesus begins his public ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist.

He goes and begins to proclaim the Kingdom of God with a message of hope. And right away he begins to change hearts and lives. We hear about how Jesus called those who were to become his disciples. That he finds Simon and Andrew at work as fishermen and offers them a new opportunity. Instead of being fishermen, they will be fishers of people. They will gather people in, and they don't hesitate to follow Christ. They leave their nets where they are. They leave their old life behind, and they follow. Had they been worried about change they would have stayed put. Had they thought that change was a bad idea, they wouldn't have put down their nets. As Jesus goes along, he sees James and John. They are sitting in their boat, mending their nets. Jesus looks at them and tells them to follow. So, they answer that call and leave their father behind with the hired help so that they can follow Christ. They get up and they go where they are needed. They go where they are called to go because of God. We see Christ beginning his public ministry with a call to change hearts and lives. We see a call that brings new beginnings for his disciples. No longer will they be casting nets into the sea, but they will be casting a net of words to draw people to the Kingdom of God. Jesus brings this spirit of change into the synagogue. When there, he teaches with authority. People are amazed because he's confident as he is proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It is then that a man with an unclean spirit cries out. The spirit recognizes that Jesus is the Holy One of God. And Jesus casts the spirit out. This astonishes the people. They were already astounded by his teaching that surpassed that of the religious scholars among them. They recognize that Jesus brings a new teaching with authority. Not an old teaching that just repeats what they already know, but a new understanding for a new day. It is boldness that convinces them. It is the authority that he brings that causes his truth to spread. Because of this assuredness, people begin to speak about what Jesus has done and they begin to follow him.

I pray that I will be able to share something new with you in our time together here. I pray that we will be able to grow together as we learn together. Because the scriptures I will be quoting from each week are by no means new themselves. They are rather old at this point. But they always have a new message for today. Because this is the day that the Lord has made. We should rejoice and be glad for this new day with new beginnings, with new opportunities to grow in wisdom, understanding, and in love. Because at the heart of everything I believe is love. My confidence to handle change rests on something steadfast and enduring, and that is God's love. Because at the heart of everything that I believe, at the heart of everything that I preach, at the heart of everything that I teach, at the heart of all that I try to do is love. Because I center my entire faith on the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. It is how I interpret scripture. It is how I live out my life in Christ. It is how I call others to a life of faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is where I find strength when I am surrounded by a flurry of change. When facing so many new things at once, I have confidence because Christ will be with me to help me to understand. No matter what, our Heavenly Father is watching over me, helping me to adapt. No matter what may come, the Holy Spirit is still there to guide me and lead me to where I need to be. And I believe that with my whole being.

Over the next few weeks, I'm going to be touching on our Methodist roots. I wanted to look at some of the things that make us what we are as United Methodists. Because it is always a good time to remember how we are called to serve Christ. That it is always good to reflect on why we come together to this place to move forward together. It is always good for us to more deeply explore our own faith so that we can grow together in Christ. Over the next few weeks I plan on going over some of the things that John Wesley taught that became the foundation of Methodism. We will look at his rules for living, the way we study scripture, how we understand God's grace, and how we live out our faith individually and as a community. I'm also looking forward to getting to know you better. I encourage you to give me a call, a text, an email, or a letter. Or to stop in while I'm in the office at Neoga. If a group of you would like to sit down to have a conversation, I would like nothing more than to get to know about you and your journey in Christ. And I hope that you'll allow me to share my journey with you. I plan on starting some new study groups and to start asking for your ideas about how we move forward together in this new beginning. I look forward to getting to know all of you as my brothers and sisters in Christ, that we may learn together, that we may grow together, and that we may share this journey and our Savior together. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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