

NEW SEASON, NEW START, NEW CREATIONS!



Scripture:

Psalm 143: 8, 10

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.....Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

1 Corinthians 13:12, 13

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Jeremiah 29: 11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

2 Samuel 22: 33-34

The God who has girded me with strength and has opened wide my path. God made my feet like the feet of deer, and set me secure on the heights.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

The Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



FALL EQUINOX

I hope you had a chance to celebrate the Fall Equinox this past week. Did you celebrate the equinox? Did you notice we had an equinox?

There are two equinoxes every year: one in September (last Thursday) and the other in March. The Equinox is when the sun shines directly on the

equator and the length of day and night is equal. Equinox is Latin for "equal night."

SAMHAIN

In the Northern Hemisphere, the September equinox marks the start of fall (autumn). Many cultures and religions celebrate holidays and

festivals around the September equinox. In our culture, we celebrate Halloween much more than the September equinox. But in the Celtic tradition, the celebration of the end of summer is a big deal. It is called “Samhain,” which means “summer end.”

In ancient days, the Samhain was celebrated as if it was the last gasp of summer, a time of uninhibited feasting, and dancing around a fire. It was a time of release, a time to let go of all unwanted baggage, fears and attitudes, just as the trees let go of their leaves.

CHANGES

This is a good time to be aware of the turning of the leaves, the changing seasons, the way God, through nature, inspires us to change, to turn over a new leaf.

Life is full of changes. And as we transition from one change to another, God is with us to help us cope. These scriptures today are examples of the way God inspires and reassures us to stay on the path of faith as the world keeps turning. Even when it seems like it is spinning out of control.

The first reading today was from Psalm 143. It contains an appeal to God to reassure the Psalmist-author of God’s steadfast love and willingness to provide the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

All of us need this, don’t we? Unless we are reminded of the deep love God has for us, it is easy to fall away from her path and get distracted by worldly temptations such as the sin of worry and self-centered ways.

COMFORT IN THE TIMES OF TRANSITIONS

Then the 1st Corinthians passage, about seeing in a mirror dimly, acknowledges that we don’t fully comprehend God’s will and God’s ways. We don’t understand why so many good people die young, or all the details about dying. What awaits in heaven is still a mystery. But this passage reassures that although we see these things dimly now, when the time comes, in God’s timing, then we will see and understand God clearly.

I love this passage because it provides comfort in the mysterious times of transition from life to death and from confusion to trust in God’s power. In this in-between time of eternal life, we are to trust in faith, hope, and love and especially in the love of God.

The Old Testament passages in Jeremiah and in 2nd Samuel remind us that God has given us

strength to have a future with hope. And the two final passages remind us that to stay on the path we must not be afraid but have the courage to let go of the past and become new creations of God.

Last Wednesday I taught the new Stephen Ministers in training how to help a care-receiver cope in times of crisis. These passages today not only guide us through transitions in the turning path of life, but they also provide a sacred framework for healthy coping during times of crisis, those times when the path seems to drop out from under us and we don’t know how to move forward.

We are not to fear, but be courageous about the changes that come along on life’s journey and trust in the Holy Spirit’s guidance. When you keep faith, hope, and love as the foundation for your life, you have the coping skills to overcome times of crisis.

CHALLENGING TIMES

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 is another classic scripture that promotes going with the flow of the seasons and the changing of time. When we step back and realize that all of the human family experiences times of joy and times of sorrow then we don’t feel so alone. Everything in our lives has a season and a time for every purpose under heaven.

The following video was shown to the congregation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKP4cfU28vM>

Yet these are challenging times. This fall feels like a time of turning, a season of change.

Bob Dylan wrote *The Times they are a Changin’* in 1964, in the heat of the Vietnam War when the protests were even bigger and much harsher than the protests this past week in Charlotte, NC. (The protests reminded me of that era.)

Bob Dylan said in his *The Times They are A-Changin’* song:

**Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.**

To some, these times may seem to be very scary times. And for most of us change is not easy. With the extreme ISIS terrorism, the tension between police and citizens in North Carolina, the strange happenings in our presidential campaign, global warming, the times they are a changing. We better start swimming! It's not time to tread water!

The Charlotte protests are a call to change the way the police treat one category of people differently from another category of people. It is time to change this pattern of behavior. And it is time for the church to change, too. And we are. We are finally becoming less discriminatory and more diverse.

CHANGES IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

The PCUSA just completed their General Assembly and we are transitioning into a more socially just church! Thanks be to God! Our commissioned elder, Chris Rhodes, was in attendance at General Assembly up in Portland and he plans to share about his experience with us at an adult forum soon I hope.

Two beautiful things that happened at General Assembly were history making:

- **Two co-moderators of General Assembly were elected instead of just one. And this year both were women; one is black and the other is white.**
- **J. Herbert Nelson made history when he was overwhelmingly elected Stated Clerk. He became the first black man ever selected for the Stated Clerk office which functions as the head of the PCUSA national government.**

Our commissioners also voted to add the Belhar Confession to our Book of Confessions which is half of our church constitution. The other half is called the Book of Order. The new confession was developed in South Africa in response to Apartheid in the late seventies. The text of the Belhar Confession speaks deeply to the heart of the Presbyterian Church, reminding us to never forget we are all one, equally precious in the sight of God.

Another significant move our General Assembly agreed upon was to make a formal apology to all the LGBTQ people who had suffered in the past due to discriminatory church policies. Our PCUSA officially recorded an apology for harm done to

LGBTQ pastors, church elders and aspiring clergy whose lives were harmed by discriminatory practices that put obstacles in their way rather than allowing them to live out their Holy Spirit-led calls to ministry.

MY CALL TO MINISTRY

Speaking of calls to ministry.... Next week, my number one role model in church leadership, my mother, is coming to visit me. She's ninety-four and still flying!

I am so thankful she made me go to church when I was small and she showed me how to be faithful about getting involved in the church leadership. Mom helped God put me on the path to becoming a pastor.

But I had to be patient on that path. In 1993, I wanted to start taking courses at a seminary in Washington, D.C. when we lived there. But in my discernment process, I asked our Pastor Peggy at National Presbyterian Church for advice, and we prayed about it together. Afterward, she said it didn't seem to be the right timing or the right season in my life for seminary because my Kathryn was just three years old.

I listened to that prayerful guidance and waited seven years. Then, when we moved to New Jersey, everything fell into place and the doors swung wide open at Princeton Seminary. The season, the place, and the timing were finally right.

All those years of accompanying my mother to church helped me get through seminary, too.

ANNE LAMOTT

Author Annie Lamott, who happens to be a member of the Presbyterian Church in Marin City, wrote in her book, *Traveling Mercies*, about why she makes her son, Sam, go to church every Sunday with her.

She said, "Sam claims he is the only kid he knows who goes to church. He rarely wants to go. But," she says, "once he gets there he enjoys himself and only has to sit still long enough to hear the children's sermon. After that he goes to the Sunday school time where people genuinely care for him and he has learned to care for them as well."

Lamott says she makes her little boy go to church because she can. She outweighs him by seventy-five pounds.... But the main reason she makes him go is that she wants to give him what she found in the church: a path and a light that brightens her world.

Lamott says, "I want him to have purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, and joy. The people who have these are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community who pray and practice their faith with others in community: Buddhists, Jews, Christians, people all banding together to work on themselves and for human rights. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle. They are part of something bigger than themselves that is beautiful at its core."

Further in the book she describes the time when she was at the end of her rope, and the people of her church "tied a knot in it and helped her hold on." The church became her spiritual home and her family. Years ago when she announced at church that she was pregnant, the congregation cheered despite the fact that she wasn't married. She took Sam to church when he was just five days old because that was where she felt the most nurtured. The women lined up for a chance to hold him and many slipped her money to help her survive those early days of single parenthood.

WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED

A Jewish proverb says: "A human life is like a single letter of the alphabet. It can be meaningless alone, or it can be part of a great meaning."

In Matthew 18 it says, "Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name he is present." And Colossians 3 tells us how to respond to his presence when we gather. It reads: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." That is why we sing in church. We have much to be grateful for.

This is a sacred place, a sanctuary for healing and wholeness, where you can meet people who are willing to "Rejoice with you when you rejoice and weep with you when you weep."

It is a community that seeks to hold you up and help you through the joys and the sorrows in the turning of the seasons of life. For example, last Thursday at our new Widow's Support Group, I heard many testimonies of how the church had helped each widow cope when their worlds turned

upside down in response to the death of their husbands. When crisis suddenly hit, the church was there for them.

We are becoming new creations all the time with the help of God and one another. Thanks be to God for creating the church for times such as these, and for keeping us adaptable to the changes of the seasons. Trust that God is in the turning.

May you be a new creation who is willing to go forth into the changing chaotic world with Christ's reassuring words of faith, hope, and love on your lips and in your soul. Amen

Benediction:

Time turns, taking us where we may not choose to go.

Time turns, going slowly and other times, going too fast.

Suddenly we pass a point we will never pass again.

Turning points....

Looking back we see them for what they really are, breakthroughs to beatitude, bedrock that gives us hope and courage to keep living, inspiration to keep turning to God again and again.....

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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