

Trinity United Methodist Church

May 24, 2020

“Recalculating”

Pastor Dan Elmore

Welcome and Prayer

Pastor Dan: Good Sunday morning to you. Welcome to worship with us at Trinity United Methodist Church. We're glad that you're here. We pray that you'll be blessed in this worship experience together.

Debbie Spruill: Good Sunday morning. I know all of us are missing the chance to get together as one group and worship God. I'm standing in the FAC, where we have our contemporary service, and I can tell you that one of the biggest things that I miss are all of our little prayer warriors who join Pastor Dan and I every Sunday morning at the prayer bench. We'll go to kneel and those children come running, and it's such a blessing to the whole congregation to see such eagerness.

So, Moms and Dads, if your kids aren't right there with you, bring them in. Tell them Miss Debbie said it's time to pray. They can kneel down right there with you as we join together in prayer before the service.

Our Father, we thank you for this wonderful day. We know that there are trying times, but Lord, we know that you're in control. We ask that you bless these children. We ask that you be with their parents and give them the patience that they need for the time that they need to spend together. Father, I just pray that you will help them be a little nicer, a little kinder to one another. Father, open our hearts, our ears, our minds. Help us to understand the message that you have given Pastor Dan to bring to us today. Be with us in the coming week. May we show your love and patience to those around us. Bless each one of these children. And all God's children say: Amen. Be blessed.

Pastor Dan: God, we give thanks for this day. We give thanks for this opportunity to gather together in this virtual way to worship you. As we begin to reopen various places in our society, we pray that you would keep us healthy and smart and safe. Especially, Lord, as we work on joining together in worship face to face again, help us to understand that this is a process, that this will not be an overnight thing. Give discernment and wisdom to our leaders as decisions are made and ways of being together will be done in which grace will be offered to all, in which we will be able to worship as freely as we can, but in ways that take into consideration all the many

concerns that we have. We thank you continually for the health professionals, those on the front lines. We pray for all those who have gotten sick, all those who anxiously await testing. As well, we pray for all those on our prayer list. For all these things and more, we pray in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 26:31-35

Sermon

As we continue in our *Recalculating* sermon series this morning, the scripture reading will be in the context of the sermon, so I invite you to listen for God's word as we begin together. Would you pray with me? Open our ears and our hearts, oh Lord. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

When it comes to the 12 apostles, the 12 apostles that Jesus chose to be with Him and to continue and multiply His ministry on earth, it's interesting to look them up. You might Google the 12 apostles, read about them and the traditions that we know of them from resources outside of the Bible. They're quite some interesting characters that had some very fruitful ministry.

But one of the reasons for doing that might be so that you might see which apostle you identify with the most. And of course, one of the apostles that we know the most about, and therefore one of the apostles that many of us most identify with, including myself, is Peter. Peter is one that I most identify with among the apostles, because Peter sometimes speaks when there should be silence, like at the Mount of Transfiguration. Here's this great and glorious scene, and if anything should have been said, it would be praise, to break out in song, right? And the Jewish songbook would be the Psalms, so maybe break out in some of those, declaring God's glory and majesty. But instead Peter speaks up and says, "Uh, uh, uh, hey, this is great! Let's build three tents for you, three tabernacles for Moses and Elijah and Jesus!" He doesn't quite get it. Peter is probably chief among those who we might call the "duh-sciples."

Peter often gets passionate about what he thinks is right, like when he first chastised Jesus when Jesus predicted his own death. Peter said, "No! I will never let that happen to you! That should never happen to you, Jesus." And then Jesus turned around and rebuked Peter for having human concerns in mind and not God's. Putting

forth the human agenda first instead of God's. Yeah, I definitely identify with Peter the most.

But where I *really* identify with Peter is that Peter seemed so eager to get it right, and in that, sometimes he got it wrong. That's honestly a big part of what scares me in all of this recalculating that we're having to do, personally, as a family, as a society, and especially as a church, and as the prime leader in our church. But it's what scares me in general any time we have to recalculate, whether it's choosing a different route when going to a destination—"oh, but what if I run into traffic that way?" (Ah...there's those what-if questions, right?) Maybe it's trying something new. Maybe it's realigning priorities. Often it's trying to hold on to the best of what was and embracing what is to come. Even simply embracing a more open and positive mindset and recalculating the mind when we fall down those negative spirals can be somewhat scary stuff, because I'm so eager to get it right, and in that, sometimes I get it wrong.

How about you? You know, I think nearly all of us, in our hearts, really are trying to do the right thing most of the time. The trouble is that our hearts can be faulty. John Wesley even said that our hearts are sick. Not with something like cardiomyopathy or whatever, but that our hearts are sick with sin. And just like with COVID-19, some of us appear asymptomatic, but it's the human condition nonetheless. Some of us have minor symptoms, like maybe we get a little jealous here or there. Some of us are in denial about it. "Oh, it's just a cold." And in the meantime we're going around spreading our spiritual germs all over everybody. And let's face it, some people just need to be put on a spiritual ventilator. Now, please don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to make light of COVID-19. I'm trying to help us understand the seriousness of sin that infects our hearts all too easily, such that even when in our hearts we're trying to do the right thing, sometimes we still get it wrong.

That seems to be Peter's pattern. And we read about it in today's reading from Matthew 26, verses 31 and following. "Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.' Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same."

Now many of us are familiar enough with this story and the way that it ended, or the way that we *think* it ended, for later that night. Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and the servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the

people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

If I were caught outside—if I were caught denying Jesus—I think I’d weep bitterly, too. But where I identify with Peter the most is, he really had tried so hard to get it right. And in the end, he got it wrong. One of the worst feelings in the world is the realization that there is no one to blame but yourself.

What happened here to Peter? Some people say it was his bravado. Some people say it was his pride, it was his arrogance. Whatever the reason, what it boils down to is that Peter was trying to get it right so hard, but he was relying on the strength of his own spirit. He was relying on his own will. He was relying on his own intentions of his heart. And friends, let me tell you: Any time anyone in the Bible tries that, it never goes well for them. And so why would we think that that would go well for us?

As we think about recalculating, especially as we begin the process of reopening society, of reopening our church, of trying to return to what was but yet embracing what is to come—what are we relying on? Maybe more importantly, *who* are we relying on? Whether you think that this quarantine is some crazy government conspiracy or whether you think that we should indefinitely wear masks from here on out, I really do believe that all of us are really trying to do the right thing, trying to do what’s right. But maybe we could also hold out the possibility that in doing so, we might get it wrong, too.

So what happens when that happens? Are we stuck? Was Peter just left to the wiles of the devil? Was he cut off from Jesus from then on for denying him three times before the rooster crowed? No. That’s why the story doesn’t end there, where we think it might end. Because in the account of the resurrection, one of the phrases that is in just about all four resurrection appearances, the women find the empty tomb first and there’s different accounts of how exactly that happens. But in chapter 28, verse 8, we read: “So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers’”—Peter was included in that, because remember, Peter wasn’t the only one that denied; all the others tucked tail and ran in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested—‘Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me.’” And of course we know from the book of Acts and on into the New Testament that Peter went on, indeed, to become the Rock, which Jesus had named him, on which Jesus built his church.

So therefore, we the church, we the people of God here today, in the midst of all our recalculating—let's not rely on the strength of our own spirit. Let's not rely on our own will, our own agendas. And good golly, please—let's not fall prey to everything we read on the internet. Let's make sure we're tuning in to God's voice through prayer, through scripture reading. Especially before we start scrolling on Facebook and reposting all the stuff with which we agree. Let's make sure on *whom* we are relying. Indeed, the Solid Rock—*On Christ, the Solid Rock we stand; all other ground is sinking sand*. All other ground is, indeed, sinking sand.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Friends, I hope that you have a great week. We are, indeed, making plans to return as quickly as we can to in-person worship, but it will be a drawn-out process. Our conference has many regulations, requirements and stipulations which need to be met. But we have a great leadership team in place of staff and laypeople who are working on that. You will be hearing more information about that very shortly this week. So please stay tuned. Keep us all in prayer. God bless. We'll see you again soon.