

"Our Faithful God"
Isaiah 46:3-11 and John 1:1-18
Rev. Meredith Loftis
November 17, 2019

Let us pray.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The Word of the Lord.

It has been quite a couple of weeks for our congregation. We have celebrated births, mourned deaths, seen some of our church family through surgeries and continued chemo treatments. We even hosted a youth lock-in Friday night. And that's on top of regular busy life, homework, laundry, traffic, illness. I hope by now you have learned of the news of our senior pastor William Pender's retirement, with the conclusion of his call at the end of January after twelve years of serving alongside you. For those of you that have retired, I hear it's a wonderful thing and highly recommended. If you're like me, you may be going through a series of emotions at this news: shock perhaps, sadness, gratefulness, and a bit of anxiety about the future.

William's intention was to preach to you immediately following his retirement news, but life happens, and he was called to be home with his mother and family this past week as they laid to rest William's father after a very quick illness. Several of us traveled to the memorial service on Friday and were able to represent our church's love to him and Sheri. William is doing well and is certainly grateful for this time with his

mother and extended family and for all of your blessings and gestures of love you've sent him.

And so in the midst of a bit of a turbulent week, I turn to prayer, to loved ones, to scripture, and I even turn to a tiny spoonful of sugar from Disney+ for a little fluff and joy and levity. Yes, I'm one of those millions that subscribed to Disney's new streaming channel, similar to Netflix, called Disney+. It is chock full of your old Mickey Mouse cartoons, Disney princesses, Pixar films, old movies like *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* and *The Sound of Music*, as well as all the Avengers superheroes, the entire Star Wars franchise, National Geographic documentaries, and zillions of singing animals. And there are certainly nuggets of wisdom to unveil—even theological insights that come from the unexpected.

One of my all time favorite scenes from a Disney movie involves that old pull-string cowboy doll, Sheriff Woody, and his new nemesis Buzz Lightyear. In the 1995 Pixar animated movie, *Toy Story*, we learn that when we leave our rooms and houses our toys come alive and have lives of their own. Woody has been the favorite toy of his owner Andy ever since he can remember. But Woody's anxiety grows with every new birthday because it could mean a new and more exciting toy will take the cherished "favorite" status away from him. When glitzy action figure, space ranger Buzz Lightyear, arrives from Andy's most recent birthday party, Woody is terrified he'll be forgotten and shoved under the bed. So he takes matters into his own hands and knocks Buzz out of the bedroom window and into the bushes below, hoping he'll be forgotten; failing to trust that his owner is capable of loving them both. Eventually, after a long rescue mission with Woody trying to get them both back home to Andy, Buzz ends up in the next door neighbor's bedroom of terror with other terrified toys. Sid, the evil kid next door, relishes dismembering and destroying toys, and has such an evil plan for his newest victim, Buzz.

Buzz, who is so close to his actual home, despairs in Sid's bedroom, believing he is about to meet his end and about to give into his demise. Yet, a small moment gives him tremendous hope. He turns one boot over and sees his owner's name - Andy - written in thick black magic marker on the bottom of his foot. And he remembers whose toy he is. He is claimed and loved. He knows who he is and who claims him, and his joy gives him the strength he needs to face the devilish child and the chaos around him. He doesn't know if he'll get out, but he remembers his identity.

And so in times of anxiety, times of change and instability, we need a reminder that no matter what happens for our church in the future, we belong to God and that God's Spirit abides with us in the known and the unknown. We have been claimed by the One who was there before time began. We can try to fill our insecurities with other things, try to control situations, create narratives that we think will fulfill us; but ultimately, the only steadfast and faithful one is the God of our lives.

We have a beautiful building, a rich, long history, lots of hard working committees and ministries, and these will continue to serve us. But they are not our identity, nor the foundation we should lay our hopes on. Ultimately our faith is in the One who is eternally faithful.

Isaiah reminds us of this promise God makes to us over and over in Isaiah 46. God calls to us, “Listen! Remember I have known you from birth; in the womb I watched over you, and even when you’re gray haired and bent over, I will carry you.”

Listen to the beginning again from the New Revised Standard version:

*Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth,
carried from the womb;
even to your old age I am he,
even when you turn gray I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.*

It is this reminder of God’s faithfulness of the past coupled with the future tense that we should cling to...

“I have made...I will bear...I will carry...I will save.”

It is the future tense that the Israelites cling to, living in exile in Babylon. They have seen their homes torn to shambles, their Temple destroyed, and they are forced to travel to a foreign land. It seems as though God has been defeated and these foreign gods have won.

But God is not silent. In fact, God claims God’s power and faithfulness in no uncertain terms...“I have made...I will bear...I will carry...I will save.”

I have made you My people.

I have borne you through the wilderness and into my promised land.

I carried you when you thought all was lost.

And I saved you again and again and again.

And I will continue to do this forever.

With great mocking, God belittles the idols the Babylonians worship. They take their most prized possessions, gold and silver, and hire a mere human who will melt it and mold it and shape it into a god that they will fall down and worship. But this god is worthless! No human hands molded Yahweh! They must lift and carry these heavy idols and set them in their place. They must rely on stubborn animals to carry them upon their backs. And when it gets to its designated space, it only stands there, it cannot move. It does not answer if someone cries out or is facing trouble.

God calls out, “I have made...I will bear...I will carry...I will save.”

“Remember this and consider...remember the former things of old.”

God is calling us to remember God’s faithfulness, even amidst our uncertainty, anxiety, and doubt. Though God points to the future, God points at the fulfilment of every promise and covenant God has made in the past. God points us to evidence that He is faithful. God has never abandoned them.

Verse nine says, “I am GOD, the only God you’ve had or ever will have— incomparable, irreplaceable—from the very beginning telling you what the ending will be...Assuring you, ‘I’m in this for the long haul, I’ll do exactly what I set out to do.’”

I love the way *The Message* translation writes this, God says, “I’m in this for the long haul.” I’ve been there from the beginning...I’ve planned it, so it’s as good as done.

When God told old gray haired couple Abram and barren Sarai they’d be the father and mother of an uncountable number, that their descendants would number the stars and God would be their God, a baby boy was born and started the generations of Isaelites to come.

When God told Moses God would lead them out of Egypt and out of slavery, God separated the waters of the Red Sea and the Israelites found freedom.

When God promised a Savior, God had already decided before time began that God must dwell among us.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The Christ child was born, a king among kings, flesh and blood in a world that sought power and control through human ways, when only power in love was and is possible through God. We are marked by Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

In the coming weeks, our newly appointed interim pastor committee will work with our Executive Presbyter of the presbytery to identify names of those that may come to serve us during this interim period. God will continue to lead us in faithful ways.

“I have made...I will bear...I will carry...I will save you.” God’s covenants stand forever. God’s faithfulness is eternal.