



“NEW AND RENEWED”

Matthew 9:16-22

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What a joy it is to be worshipping with you this morning. My name is Dan Hart, and I am usually in our Shine Contemporary service at our Birmingham Campus. I am thankful for this opportunity to be here at Berkley for the first time. Over the last three weeks you have heard from Pastor Elbert, Pastor Zack, and now you get to hear from me as I talk about some of the directives that have been brought forth by our church through our FORWARD process.

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. (Matthew 9:16-22)

What would it mean to reach out in faith, to change our circumstance, to be made well by making a faithful but bold choice? That was the choice of one of our boldest characters in the Bible.

In our scripture we find a woman who had hemorrhages for twelve years. According to the societal norms and the Levitical code, she was unclean, and any that interacted with her would have been excluded from religious rights. She would have been an outcast. Even more so, she would not have

had the opportunity to walk and meet Christ face to face. As a woman in that society, she was relegated to the background—unlike the male leader in the synagogue from our scripture who walks directly to Christ and asks for healing for his daughter. But as a sick woman, she makes the only choice she knows she can make: to reach out to touch just his cloak as Christ walks by.

And Christ responds, ignoring the rules of law and society: “Take heart...take courage...your faith has made you well.”

Holy Boldness—even when it seems like it might not work or others say it is not possible—comes from a Christ who calls us to confidence.

So as a body of believers who are called to live with courage and confidence, we have to ask ourselves: How can we most authentically live out our faith in the context of a changing society and world?

Sometimes it takes us realizing that we are not playing by the same rules. Our expectation for what it means to be a church participant has changed. What many people are looking for in a church and how the church is portrayed in the world look very different than they did 50 years ago.

But one thing has not changed in 50 years or 500 years, in 2,000 years or across time: that God in Christ is the answer to what ails us.

In the scripture text that comes just before our brave woman, we hear a teaching on unshrunk cloth and new wineskins, which comes out of a conversation with the Pharisees, the scribes, and the followers of John the Baptist, all of which were faithful people trying to follow the law. They were asking him, “Tell me, why don’t you follow the same law? Why do you eat with sinners and tax collectors? Why do you and the disciples not fast?” And Jesus responds to their inquiry with grace and truth.

I love that in Christ’s response to those that are questioning his intentions, he never says, “You are wrong and I am right.” Instead, he essentially says, “At some point something new requires a new vessel.” He says, “You are asking me if I am following the rules. I am here to say that what I have to bring doesn’t fit with your rules, because your rules don’t apply. I am talking about new wine, and that requires a whole new wineskin. You can’t just add something on to fit what you already know. You need to change what you know.”

I also love that this scripture is made even more relevant because, even now, we live in a different context than this scripture. You know, glass wine bottles and boxes aside, they are literally making jeans with holes in them. It is a new reality we live in.

But we also live in a different reality than the Pharisees, scribes, and dedicated followers of another prophet. We have seen the living Savior who is in the world today. We have received the new law: Love God, love your neighbor.

So we are not challenged to shuck off the holds of our doctrinal assumptions, but instead we are called to be open to what God is doing in this place. We are called to live, to act boldly in faith.

New wineskins mean we aren't asking for the gentiles to be Jews, but are saying we are made one in Christ. We are one in Christ.

And so when we look at the world today, we do so without the expectation that everybody will conform to do and be who we are, but that we can be moved, and grow by being in relationship with others seeking in faith to love God, and love our neighbor.

In the early Christian church, they were asking some of the same questions. How do we live out our faith? What rules do we follow? The answer was, from the words of Paul and the teaching of Christ: We are united in Christ, so in all things, show love.

And as early Methodist house churches sprang forth and small bands of people gathered together, they asked, "How will we learn of Christ?" By gathering together and supporting one another.

I think of my own faith journey. Growing up in my home church, I had so many people who cared for me. And when I attended Albion, there were small groups, our chapel service, and other opportunities, each of which I came to because of a personal invitation. Each time I sought Christ, it was usually with the support and love of community that both heard my voice and taught me I was loved.

And nothing is different today. People are seeking authentic relationships—with God, with friends, and to make a difference for others.

We are instead called to authentic relationships. We are called to see the fullness and humanity of all people, no matter what age, race, sex, need or ability, orientation, economic station, faith foundation, doubt or faith confirmation. We are all made in the image of God, and that reality calls us to love God and love one another.

That means if you are worshiping in Berkley or Birmingham...if you have been a Christian your whole life or walk in today saying, "I don't even know if I am a Christian right now"...if you have prayed daily, or raise your hand if you sometimes forget to even really hear our opening prayer...no matter what, we are made stronger when we can rely on one another no matter where we are in our lives. Because each experience, each profound moment can move us to know God just a little bit more.

That also means we have to see the value and worth of all people—people who have been part of our broader church from early on, and those who are walking in brand new.

Baptism is a reminder that we are incorporated into the body of the church to grow and learn together, to build one another in faith, to love and serve together, to know we are one in Christ. All that has distinguished us is essential. We can learn from the uniqueness of our creation, experiences, and beliefs. But we are still made one in Christ. My experiences and beliefs are not more informative or important than yours.

That is part of the important work that we have been sharing together around the FORWARD process. We have been asking our congregation to share their experiences: what has moved you, helped you, brought you closer to Christ and neighbor? And also, what can we do together to

continue to help others connect? Who are we failing to see or invite? Which voices are missing at the table?

Coming out of our conversation, the FORWARD team, with the guidance of many, has listened and compiled information, and has proposed some areas of growth in ministry. They have encouraged our church to continue to stand on the strength of Worship, Children and Youth, and Missions, recognizing their worth and asking them to continue to explore forward. But FORWARD has also introduced three directives that are key to gathering, nurturing and equipping areas of ministry that can grow. The three areas identified are Discipleship and small group ministry, 20s and 30s ministry, and Multi-site ministry.

My question today is, What would it look like if we embraced the possibilities that have come out of our conversations?

What would it mean for our church, our community, and the reach of Christ's love if our church had all of our FORWARD goals come to fruition?

What would it mean if we had dynamic, diversified small groups that reached a wide range of ages, faith journey stages, styles of learning, and locations, so that every time somebody asked in our church, "Do you have a group for people who aren't really sure what they believe?" Yes! "Do you have a group for somebody who has read every book of the Bible, but is ready to read it with a spiritual mentor?" Yes, we do! What if each and every time we were asked if we had a group for somebody, we could say, "Yes, we do!"

What would it look like to have the desired "young people"—the future of our church—instead be the present leaders of our church? What would it look like to build relationships of mutual respect and adoration, not trying to protect the ways of church we are already most comfortable with, but to say, What does church look like to you? What would it look like to connect with students who go to college and question most of what they have been taught in the early parts of their lives, and yet invite them to bring those questions to our church, with confidence in a God that loves them and a church that loves them just as much?

What would it look like to reach out in forums where younger generations can connect? What does it look like to provide meaningful opportunities for mission, service, and study? How about: Let's go put some drywall up in a house in Detroit that will be used to host mission teams across the country, or come to my house—or George and Julie Work's house—for five weeks and talk about God? What would it mean for us to be open to new opportunities that forge new relationships with the generation we tend to want the most, and question the most? What would seeing our younger generations as an important and present voice in our congregation mean for our church and for our ability to honor a group often relegated to the proverbial transepts of our church décor?

What would it mean to reach further beyond ourselves—naming that diversity is limited in this space, but not limiting in our love for people? What would it look like to provide worship space for another church like Berkley to burst forth at the seems? What would it look like to provide a space and place not like Berkley, maybe not in an existing Methodist church, for our congregation to break forth? What if our way to honor the full diversity of the kingdom of God, and to really

reflect the image of God, means we are called to partner with somebody we would be anxious to greet in our pews in this church?

This church has a passion for people. What about connecting with people who know Christ, but worship differently than we do? Or people who want to know God but are intimidated by a hymn book with words they've never heard, or a rock song about a bloody savior who died to save their soul? Maybe the relationships are built when we can say, "We don't have the market cornered on worship. Our worship teams are amazing, but others may experience God in a different way. How can we be a part of that!" What would it look like if we could be a part of something new—building new relationships, open to the work of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the world?

What would it be...who would we include in the conversation... how would we honor the voices that have built our campuses to be what they are and honor as well the voices of those we have yet to reach, or have unknowingly excluded? What if we could sit side by side—with different backgrounds, different social and faith beliefs, different economic situations, different stages in life—and still see one another as God's beloved creation? What would it look like to find our commonality in Jesus, the one who said, "It is your faith that has made you well."

Let us be open to a shift—away from fear, self-preservation, and stagnation—to instead see that if we can just be open to it, God has and will continue to do some profound and beautiful things in this place. What can it be?

Let us be renewed to dream again. Let us believe that in Christ we can be made new to live out love in our world. Here we are, Lord. Embolden us, use us, send us!