

# **First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**

**Sunday, June 13, 2021**

**“Creation to New Creation”**

**Part 2: “The New Creation Lives in Us”**

**Rev. Ashley S. Ashley**

## **Rev. Ashley S. Ashley – Welcome, Announcements and Opening Prayer**

Good morning, friends, and welcome to the worship of God today at the First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. I am so glad you decided to join us! Today is Sunday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. I'm joined in worship today by Mark Hovermale and Darlene Maginley, and we have great music to go along with our service. Sue Scott will be leading the Joyful Ringers, our bell choir, this morning, and Carole Moon will be accompanying them as our vocalist.

I'm also excited to share that we will be celebrating not one, but two, baptisms today. We will be celebrating the baptism of Jack Rodriguez and his father Jesiah Rodriguez. Jesiah is the husband of Beth Ann, who is the daughter of Kim and Fred Heldmeyer. So it is exciting to be celebrating those baptisms today. It's always a good day when you have baptisms to celebrate.

Before we get to our worship, though, I do have a couple of announcements that I wish to share with you all. As always, I invite you to read the bulletin with care to check on any details from these announcements or any other items that are going on in the life of our church.

First, the Presbyterian Women are hosting a Meet and Greet on Tuesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 7:00 p.m. in the church parking lot. You're invited to contact Kiki Farrow for more information about that Meet and Greet and to RSVP.

Second, families I encourage you, if you haven't already, to check out our registration for Vacation Bible School (VBS). This year's theme is Rocky Railroad, which is really exciting!

Ms. Darlene has been working so hard to make this adventure one that you will never forget. The train pulls out of the station on July 18<sup>th</sup> and trust me, you don't want to be left behind! Check out the church website and information in the bulletin for more on how to register and how this year's event is a little different but just as much fun as you've come to expect from all previous experiences.

My third announcement this morning is that throughout the month of June Youth Haven will be collecting clothes for their campers. If you check out the bulletin you will see that there is an Amazon link, and at that link you can see all the kinds of items they are requesting. I invite you to go and look at that some more.

And finally I want to say a big thank you to everyone so far who has donated to our Renew, Refresh and Return campaign. I'm excited to share that we've already raised \$30,000! I heard today it was \$31,000 and that is very exciting! That gets us painting of the ceiling, upgrading of our sanctuary light fixtures, and adding live stream capabilities.

All three of those things, the painting of the ceiling, the live streaming and the lighting itself are in the sanctuary. Our next big marker is \$40,000. If we get \$9,000 more, we have an opportunity to refresh our sanctuary with new carpeting, which is always so fun and exciting. I encourage you to check out the pamphlet that you received in the mail, or call the church office if you didn't receive one, to learn more about this campaign that is going on. I'm excited because when we return to the sanctuary in late July we will have all kinds of wonderful blessings awaiting us. So thank you to everyone who is helping with this so far!

Now, friends, speaking of worship and worship spaces, again I am so glad you are here and invite you now to prepare your hearts for worship as you join me in our opening prayer. Friends, let us pray together.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, we ask that you would prepare us right now for worship. Cleanse our hearts and focus our minds by the power of the Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you, and would magnify your holy name, both this day and forever. Amen.

**Joyful Ringers Bell Choir, accompanied by Sue Scott on the organ and sung by Carole Moon – Hymn #466: “Take My Life and Let It Be”**

### **Darlene Maginley, Director of Children's Ministry – Children's Message**

Good morning, kids. We are celebrating something very special at church today! Today is Unsung Heroes Day. I know you know what a hero is, especially with all of the talk about superheroes, with all of the movies that are out with superheroes in them! But what is an unsung hero? Well, an unsung hero is someone who works sort of behind the scenes where we don't really see them.

Have you ever noticed that our church has beautiful flowers that are planted outside? We have people who take care of our flower beds. Have you ever noticed that we have cookies and coffee when we come to church? We have people who make coffee. Have you ever noticed that our building is in good working repair? We have men who take care of our building for us.

Well, at least once every year we like to celebrate somebody who has done something very special for our church, but most people haven't really noticed that, and those are called “unsung heroes”. So, today, whoever the unsung heroes are, we thank them for all of the work that they did.

Now I don't know if you're aware, but the Bible has a lot of heroes! How about Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the promised land. How about Daniel who got thrown into a lion's den because he still wanted to pray to God. How about Jonah who got swallowed by a big fish and did what God asked. Well, like I said, you know about superheroes because we talk about them all of the time. But did you know that there is only one really truly superhero? I think you know who that is! Of course, it's Jesus because of what he did for us. He not only gave his life for us, but he also took away all of our sins.

So here's my challenge for you this week. I would like you to say “thank you” to somebody who does something special for you that normally you just kind of take for granted and don't think about. I also want you to try to tell somebody in your life about one of the heroes in the Bible. And I especially would like you to tell somebody about the one true superhero—Jesus, who is there for all of us and loves all of us. So say thank you to Him also. Let's do that right now, together.

Dear God, we thank you for all of the things that you had given us. We thank you for all of the people who help to take care of us that sometimes we forget to thank. We thank doctors and firemen and policemen and teachers and moms and dads and mostly today we thank Jesus for coming to earth, taking away our sins, and giving us an opportunity to live with you in heaven. And it's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – The Covenant of Baptism**

Baptism of Jack Alexander Rodriguez, son of Jesiah and Beth Ann (Heldmeyer) Rodriguez  
Baptism also of Jack's father, Jesiah Rodriguez  
Maternal grandparents: Kimberly and Frederick Heldmeyer  
(Baptism performed and videotaped on May 27, 2021)

### **Rev. Mark Hovermale – Reading of Scripture**

#### **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

#### **1 Peter 4:8-11**

<sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Rev. Ashley – Sermon: “The Creation Lives in Us”**

Friends, let us pray. Gracious and loving God, pour out your Holy Spirit as your Word is read and proclaimed. Teach us how to serve your people and glorify your name with all of our hearts, minds and souls. Amen.

One of my favorite theologians is a gentleman named Karl Barth. Barth is a Swiss reformer who is very well known for his lengthy, but sadly incomplete, theological treatise called “Church Dogmatics.” He's also well known as an author of the Barmen Declaration, an article that was written during the 1930s opposing an effort by pro-Nazi German Christians to control and dominate the Protestant churches in Germany through formation of a national church. Actually, a fun fact: that declaration can be found in our Book of Confessions.

Now, as luck would have it for me, Karl's son, Markus Barth, was actually a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where I went to seminary. While he was there, Markus gifted the seminary with Karl's desk, the very desk where he wrote all of those thousands and thousands of great theological ideas and premises and theology.

It is a true gift to the school and it's a joke among students, especially during final exams, that you should study as close to the desk as you can! You can't touch the desk, as it is an historical artifact, but you should try and get close to it and just try, like osmosis, to absorb some of that theological genius. Of course, it is just a great joke, but it's fun to think that just by being near something you can be inspired by the same person.

Just like any seminary student sharing space with the theological giant's great desk, Barth, too, found inspiration from an item that he also kept close to him in his proximity. You see, Barth had a painting, "The Crucifixion," on the wall of his study that was painted by the artist Matthias Grunewald. In that painting, there is an image of John the Baptist who's pointing at Christ crucified in the center of that painting. Now many have noticed that the proportions of John's head and his hand seem a little bit off in the painting, as John is pointing to Jesus. If you look closely you'll notice that his hand and pointer finger are almost the size of John's entire head, and as you can see with mine, that's not true. So this is a strange disproportionate hand-to-head ratio. Now again, many scholars believe that this isn't an accident, but is on purpose to make a point. You see, what John is doing in this image is pointing to Jesus, pointing to the crucifixion, and although John is an important figure, the most important thing about John is he always points to Jesus.

Now, it is said that whenever Barth would talk with visitors about his own writings, when he would take them into the study, he would show people this piece of artwork and say, "All I want is to be like John's finger. Barth didn't want to be remembered as a great theologian, although some would argue that he is the greatest theologian in over one hundred years, but Barth wanted to be remembered for serving God's people and for serving God faithfully. In fact, Karl Barth really didn't care about being remembered at all. All he did care about was pointing others towards his Lord and his savior Jesus Christ.

Now last week Mark introduced us to the theme verse for this series, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, chapter 5. He reminded us that not only does God form us, as God's blessed creation at our birth, but that God also forms us as a new creation, through Jesus, his life, resurrection and ascension on the cross. We are freed from the powers of sin, chaos, and evil because of what Jesus has done on the cross. We are now invited into the family of God where we receive new life, or we become a new creation.

In our first scripture passage for today we learn what this new life, this new purpose is, what it means a new creation actually looks like. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, chapter 5 verses 14 through 15, tells us, "Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who lived should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and who raised again." I love that! We should live for He who died for all. No longer should we live for ourselves, but for Him who died and was raised again.

Friends, Jesus died for you and Jesus died for me. We know that this is the good news of the gospel, but I think it's one sometimes we overlook quickly. We know it to be true but what does it mean? I'd like us to take a minute and sit with that statement, that Jesus died for you and unpack it just a little bit more. God loved us so deeply, so powerfully, and so passionately, that even despite our own sin, our own alienation and brokenness, God

wanted to be with us, so much so, that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He took on human flesh and walked the earth as a poor wandering Jewish rabbi in order to do just that. But just a couple of years on earth wasn't enough for God. God doesn't want to be with us for just a moment or even for just a lifetime. God wants to be with us forever, again, so much so, that Jesus willingly paid the price for that sin, our alienation, and our brokenness. Jesus defeated death, conquered evil, and reconciled all of us to God so that God's ultimate goal could be and was accomplished. God can be with us and we can be with God forever.

Now, friends, again, we know this is the good news of the gospel. This is what gets us excited. This is what propelled Mark last week to preach his sermon, and this is what I live every day for, as well, and so many of you, and guess who else, Paul! Paul also believed this good news. So excitedly did Paul experience the love of God when Jesus encountered him on the road to Damascus, that encounter turned Paul's whole life upside down. Before that he lived for himself. He lived doing what he thought was best, but once he encountered the love of God, once he understood the depths of that love, he was, as verse 14 states, "compelled to live not for himself but for him who died and was raised again."

The underlying motivation for all the apostle Paul did was not found in a theory or, dare I say, in a theology. It wasn't out of fear of judgment, but because he had experienced the love of God. And the life that Paul led proves the power of this love. It is a love that transforms us into a new creation, one that gives us new energy and urges us to serve God with all of ourselves and with all of our lives.

One of Brendan's favorite professors while in seminary was the Reverend Doctor Johannes Swart. He was passionate and charismatic, an incredible lecturer and preacher who tended to get louder and louder the longer that he talked. One day, one of Brendan's classmates asked him about the motivation behind this kind of loud habit and Jannie responded with a booming voice, "I just really believe this stuff!" It was like he couldn't even keep it in! He just really believed this stuff, because Jannie, like Paul, had experienced this incredible love of Jesus Christ. It permeated his life so deeply that it came out as an actual roar every time he talked about it. He had learned the joy of living no longer for himself, but for, you guessed it, his Savior Jesus Christ.

Our second passage for today picks up on this exact same theme. In the second half of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, chapter 4, verse 11, we learn that the purpose of our actions and words should be so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. And Peter truly means "all things." He calls our attention to all that we do, our words, and our deeds. First, he instructs Christians to serve; specifically, to offer hospitality without grumbling. This imperative is easy to follow when the ones we're supposed to offer hospitality to are people that we already like or would enjoy spending time with. However, as we can imagine, it becomes a little bit trickier when it requires us to stretch, when it requires us to serve those who are different than us, who have habits we don't understand and backgrounds and experiences that we just can't relate to.

This kind of radical hospitality requires us to maintain a certain type of open heartedness towards everyone and requires us to minister to each other even in the absence of warm feelings and when relationships are strained. It requires us to be a safe space for complex life situations like addiction, abuse, trauma, insecurity, injustice and physical and psychological distress that cannot easily be handled or solved. It requires us to lean into the love that God has shown us, and then, as verse 8 says, "to above all, love each other

deeply because love covers a multitude of sins.” It requires us to be generous with our gifts so that others have the opportunity to see God through our actions.

The second thing that Peter commands of us is to talk as if every word we speak is that of God, a word of God. When we offer advice or counsel to a friend, feedback to a colleague and correction to a child, or when we provide words of encouragement to a sibling, words of support to a neighbor, or kindness to a stranger, we represent the very words of God. In light of this, one scholar states, “Therefore those who speak must understand that they are engaged in serious business, serious business that restrains them from advancing merely their human speculation. Instead, they must speak in accordance with the revelation that God has given in the Old Testament and through the apostles of Jesus Christ. This kind of holy representation requires us, as verse 11 suggests, to draw upon the strength of God. It requires us to study scripture, to know the stories of God’s people, the wisdom of the prophets, the teachings of the apostles, and of course the promises of Jesus Christ. It requires us to boldly proclaim these truths, so that others have the opportunity to hear God's words, to know these stories, to hear how God has acted throughout history and how God will act again, now and into the future.

The aim of everything is that God should be glorified. Acts of service and hospitality are not done to bring prestige to the giver, but to deter people's attention to the God who first gave all for us. Preaching, teaching and bearing witness to the good news of the gospel should not be done in order to show off the gifts or wisdom of the messenger, but to provide space for people to encounter the living God, to hear the voice of the Spirit of God.

So, friends, today I challenge us. I challenge us to consider our motivation. May our own motivation to serve one another and to preach the good news come from the joy that we ourselves have received from the love of God. May we be like Brendan’s seminary professor, whose excitement couldn't be contained because he just really, really believes all of this stuff. And may we be like the long finger of John the Baptist in the painting that Karl Barth held so dearly and may we point constantly and only at the person of Jesus Christ and his ministry for all of us. Amen.

### **Rev. Hovermale — Prayers of the People and The Lord’s Prayer**

Let us pray. Lord, we come before you a grateful people. We thank you for the gift of salvation found through your Son Jesus Christ, through his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. We pray we live a life in pursuit of the holiness you desire.

We take time today and pray for those who are hurting, those who lost loved ones, those who are facing hardships at home and beyond. We pray for your comfort for these people.

We pray for those in leadership in our country, our state, and our local cities and towns. We pray for you to grant them wisdom and the pursuit of integrity. May they serve the people well.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Malawi and praise your name for the new pastor being named at our sister church. We thank you for your faithfulness in that process. We pray for all our mission partners, both local, national and international, that you would bless them and give them the strength and energy to serve you and their communities well.

We pray for Rev. Emily, that her time off gives her rest and rejuvenation.

We know there are many unknown prayer requests that we simply don't know and we lift those to you now. We pray all of this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying,

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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.

**Joyful Ringers play *"Festival Celebration"* by Michael Helman**

**Rev. Ashley — Benediction and Blessing**

Friends, as you go from this space may you remember the joy of the Lord and that God loves you. And may you just really believe this stuff, may you believe in that love, and may that knowledge and that joy compel you to go out and praise our Lord in all that you do and all that you say, so that in all things God may be praised forever.

Friends, receive this blessing. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, and may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and forever give you peace. Go with grace! Amen.