

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

**“I Am the Bread of Life”**

**Sunday, March 7, 2021**

**Anniversary Sunday—Celebrating 186 Years**

**Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor**

## **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Welcome, Announcements and Opening Prayer**

Friends, good morning! Welcome to worship at First Presbyterian Church in Plymouth.

Today we are celebrating because today is our church's 186th anniversary! Our church is built on a legacy of faith that has existed here through the years. Later in our service we will celebrate this legacy as we recognize, within the service, those members who have been part of our church for fifty years or longer.

As one family of faith we will also celebrate communion together and so when our announcements are done, there will be an opportunity for you, within your own homes, to gather together communion elements so we can share this aspect of worship together. I am blessed today to be leading worship here along with my colleague Ashley. Four members of our Chancel Choir, Carole Moon, Linda Park, Tom Weaver, and Lawrence Zane are all providing music for us today. I'm grateful today, as well, to Susan Underhill for bringing all of these parts of our service together with her wonderful video skills.

Before we get going today, I have one reminder for you. Next Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, daylight savings begins. Please remember to jump forward an hour with us.

Finally, friends, I want to close today with one personal announcement. Happy birthday to Mary Ann Riley. Today, Mary Ann is celebrating her 80th birthday, and you may wonder, who is Mary Ann Riley? She is my mom! Happy birthday! I know you're watching. I hope you have a wonderful, wonderful day and I hope to celebrate with you soon.

Now, friends, let us prepare for worship. As we take a moment, first, to gather our communion elements and then let us prepare our hearts for prayer.

Would you all please pray with me. Holy God, you are worthy of all praise and honor today for your gift of life and for your promise of eternal life. We praise you for the faithfulness and love you have so generously offered to each of us. You make a place for us at your holy table, you sustain us by your Word and Spirit. Your grace covers all our sins. Please pour out your Spirit upon this service of celebration today. May our hearts be caught up in the praise of the angels as we worship you. Our heavenly Father, almighty and eternal God, you are faithful forever and we praise your name. Amen.

**Congregation sings “*The Church’s One Foundation*” (Recorded December 2, 2018)**

## **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Offering of Praise**

Friends, our church is blessed with a long and rich history. Some of you may know that this congregation came into existence in 1835, which is actually two years prior to Michigan becoming a state. This anniversary Sunday we are celebrating our 186th birthday and we are so very grateful today to everyone who has served this church, both in the present and in the past, as elders, deacons, staff, committee members, and mission volunteers, ensuring that we would have a strong foundation to build upon today.

It is our joy to recognize this morning 31 members of our church who have been members for 50 years or more. They are:

- James Carney
- Margaret Daniel
- Stewart Dodge
- Marion Dunaitis
- Sally Evans
- Diane Phelps Feldcamp
- Betty Hees
- Joyce Holmes
- John Johnston
- Jack Kindree
- Geraldine Kitchen
- Lester Kitchen
- Betty Leach
- Marjorie Lynch
- Barbara Mason
- Charles Mather
- Jean McAllister
- Carolyn Minnick
- Judy Morgan
- Don Morgan
- Dorothy Moszynski
- Gregg Packard
- Patricia Rupert
- VeraLou Scott
- Lary Smith
- Laura Upton
- Lila Vincent
- Douglas Vincent
- Nancy White
- Bob White
- Karen Williams

We thank each of these members for helping to make our church stronger through their presence. In this week's live parking lot service we will also be honoring our 50-year members. Each of them will be receiving a small bouquet, both those who are present, and bouquets will go out to those members not present, who live in the area.

Continuing a series on the "I Am" statements which Jesus gives throughout the entire gospel of John, this morning we'll be taking a closer look at when Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." Let us turn to scripture now and hear in Jesus' own words what he meant by that statement.

## **Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor—Reading of Scripture**

### **John 6:25-35**

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

<sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

<sup>34</sup> “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Sermon: “*I Am the Bread of Life*”**

Would you all please pray with me. Lord, we are gathered before you this morning, hungry for your word. We pray that you would give us ears to hear your message clearly and obedient hearts so that we may perform your work in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Friends, today, as we celebrate our church anniversary, I am struck by the fact that we will now and forever be a part of this church’s history, a history that people will talk about in years to come. We are the members who survived the global pandemic of COVID-19. We are the members who had to leave the church building in March of 2020 and not return to the sanctuary for live worship for over a year. We are the members who found new ways to worship through online services, by worshipping outside in cars, even through the winter months. We have found new ways to communicate at home and we are the members who adapted Bible studies and committee meetings, even church-wide congregational meetings, to meet through Zoom technology.

Prior to this year, the most memorable story of our church’s history was the story of the fire that took place 85 years ago. You may or may not know that this fire completely destroyed our church’s sanctuary. But what is shared most about that fire is the fact that the Bible, which sat on the lectern in the sanctuary, fell through the floor of the church and after the fire was put out, that Bible, still sitting on that lectern, was pulled out of the rubble without a single page of the Bible burnt. That Bible remains on display within our church today. Now the story of our church’s Bible and the lectern that survived the fire was actually recorded in Ripley's Believe It or Not in 1936!

It strikes me today that, like the Bible that was pulled out of the fire, one day, hopefully soon, we, the members of first Presbyterian, will be pulled out of *this* fire and our lives and the ongoing ministry taking place in this church will forever speak of the sustaining power of God.

Friends, the God whom we worship does not change! Although the circumstances within our lives and world, and even within our own church building, change on a regular basis, the God whom we worship, the God who identified himself first in Genesis as I AM WHO I AM, provides even deeper insight into his identity and character in the seven I Am statements found in John's gospel. Last week Ashley spoke to us powerfully about Jesus as a gate, a declaration found in John 10 which says, "I am the gate." That gate, the person of Jesus Christ, leads us into eternal life.

This week we focus our attention on John 6 where Jesus says not once, but three times, within that larger chapter, "I am the bread of life." Jesus is the bread that nourishes our faith and by our faith in him we are strengthened to face every challenge in life. This strength is very different than the strength first offered to the children of God when they encountered bread gifted to them by God. Exodus 16 actually records for us the story of Moses leading God's children through the wilderness. As those children complained about their suffering and about the fact that they had to leave everything familiar to them, God answered their grumbling and complaints by gifting them with manna or bread from heaven. That manna would appear new for them each and every single morning. They were told by God, through Moses, to only collect what they needed for that one day, with the exception of the day before the Sabbath when they would collect enough to sustain them through the Sabbath as well. What is interesting is that the way that God offers to feed his people the bread of heaven is very different between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, it was clear that that bread would only sustain for one day. Each day God's children had a choice to place their faith in God by literally gathering physical bread in the form of manna to physically sustain them. In the New Testament Jesus tells his disciples that He is the bread of life. He declares three times, "I am the bread, the living bread," and as we place our faith in Christ we are not sustained one day at a time. We are sustained throughout the whole of our lives. We are in a position where we have the nourishment of God given to us, gifted to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The bread that God offers us through Christ is not only a bread that nourishes us, strengthens us, sustains us in our faith through every challenging experience and through every experience of joy, that bread of life also is the bread that gathers us into our larger community of faith.

One experience that I think all of us have learned a little bit about through this pandemic is the experience of isolation and even loneliness, as we have had to face multiple periods of lockdown where we literally were unable to go outside of our homes. It's easy for all of us to feel isolated and certainly separated from our church family, and certainly separated from our church building. When Jesus says he is the bread of life, we are reminded as we are in our communion meal today, as we break bread together, even if it's in our separate homes, even if it's in our separate cars, that it is the living bread of Christ that brings us together in faith as one family. It's not the fact that we are physically in the same space. The fact is that we are *spiritually* in the same space.

In his book, "God Will Carry You Through," Max Lucado writes of that larger family of God. He writes, high above us there is a crowd of witnesses. They are the Abrahams, Jacobs and Josephs. From all generations and nations, we are called today to listen carefully and to hear a multitude of God's children urging us on in faith. "Run," they shout, "Run because God will carry you through every challenge." In this way Max Lucado is actually referring back to a passage from Hebrews, chapter 12, that says since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Friends, Christ, the living bread, brings us strength to run that race. Christ, the living bread, invites us into this larger family of faith as we are gathered around one table, as we celebrate Christ, the living bread. But Christ, the living bread, also brings us peace. That peace is a peace with God. We are made right with God, put into an internal relationship with God. As Christ sacrificed his life, paying the price for our sins, and in so doing he became the literal broken bread. The broken bread brings us healing and peace with God, a peace that lasts forever. The great theologian Augustine, famous in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, is known for saying, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

Friends, this is true. We may hunger and thirst for many things in life, and yet it is God alone who brings us the deepest peace within our souls through the living bread of Jesus Christ, who offers us healing and hope. In our relationship with God we are given a peace which passes all understanding. Today, dear friends, on this church anniversary Sunday, we may wonder how we will get back to who we were pre-pandemic. But I wonder if God is not perhaps asking us how we are to move forward, how we are to place our trust and faith in God, the living bread, confident of God's ability to provide strength and fellowship and peace. I pray that we would not only receive these gifts of God, given to us in the person of Jesus Christ, but I pray that our lives would serve as broken bread to others in need. As we reflect the love and grace of Christ at work today, may God help us live out a legacy of faith that touches generations to come. Amen.

### **Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor—Call to Communion and Great Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer**

Friends, Jesus says, “Come to me, all that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and lean on me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.” And Jesus also says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.”

Friends, let us come before our God in prayer, knowing that at this table Jesus invites us all. Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, you draw us and welcome us, we who are emptied of pride and hungry for grace to this, your kingdom feast. We come, knowing not where we can find the food for which our souls cry out. But here, Lord, at your table, we find sustenance that invigorates us and nourishes us. May it be at this moment, from this bread and wine, that your love might meet us and your life complete us. May this table shape us into your people, a caring community that extends compassion and mercy to all whom we encounter. As God's people, called to love one another, let us pray for the needs of the church, the whole human family, and all of the world.

Oh, God, hear our prayers for those who govern. May they maintain peace in every land, may they exercise their powers in obedience to your commands. We pray that you will strengthen this nation to pursue just priorities so that the races may be reconciled, the young and the old all cared for, the hungry filled, the homeless housed, and the sick comforted and healed. We pray that you will comfort and empower those who face any difficulty or trial, those struggling with physical or mental illness, those who are oppressed, those who are forgotten, those who grieve and those who wait.

Merciful God, as a potter fashions vessels from humble clay, you form us into a new creation. Shape us this day, through this bread and wine, so that we might learn to live a life that proclaims the hopes and promises of the words that you have taught us to pray together, 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.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Words of Institution and Breaking of Bread**

Friends, on the night of His arrest, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and after He gave thanks to God, His Father, He broke it saying, “This is my body that has been given for you. Do this in memory of me.” In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup, and after saying thanks, He blessed it and said, “This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink from it, do so remembering me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.”

These are the gifts of God given to the people of God. Let us share in this communion meal together.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Closing Prayer**

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious God, we praise you for what you have given and for what you have promised us. Here today, you had made us one with all your people, in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service. Now we give ourselves to you and we ask that our everyday lives would be part of the life of your kingdom. May our love be your love reaching out into the life of the world through the strength of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **Congregation singing “*We are A Family of Faith*” from March 1, 2020**

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Benediction and Blessing**

And now, dear friends, may grace and peace be offered to you in its fullest measure. These are the gifts offered to us by God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit.

And may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.