

Message: Words of Love for the Future

Today isn't about us. That's a truth you may not like.

Today isn't about this beautiful church, the stained glass or the joy we're filled with because you're here. Today isn't about the choir, God's House band, hand bells, Bible readers, ushers, greeters, speakers, women or men. Today isn't about the open house, photo booth or coffee. Today isn't about colorful clothes.

Certainly, the moment is one to enjoy.

But we've been called to be part of a movement, Jesus' movement.

Today *is* about Jesus. It's always about Jesus. He's the most influential person who ever lived. We're consumed with questions about him. Jesus' teaching was a radical change from what was taught in his day. Jesus' teaching on how we are to live and the radical love we can have for others, even our enemies, is still countercultural.

But it isn't what Jesus said that brings us here. If it was just about his teaching, the movement wouldn't have survived the first century. The reason every day men and women risk and sacrifice their lives for Jesus wasn't because of what he said before he died, but what happened afterward. Three days afterward, to be exact.

Jesus came back to life.

Jesus didn't claim to know the truth about the resurrection.

Jesus claimed to *be the* resurrection. Jesus didn't ask his followers to *believe in* that. Jesus asks us to *trust him*.

Jesus' story changes lives. We've been blessed this morning. We've had a glimpse of what goes on behind the curtain. We've heard and seen how Jesus' story has touched the lives of those in our community in the past and present; what lies ahead in the future. God's grace gives us the gift of faith and hope. Even better, God gives us love.

God's love changes the world. God's love gives us faith when we're lost, hope when we're overwhelmed and the courage and love we need to live each day in a world filled with darkness and uncertainty. God's love makes good things happen.

That's what inspired us to be steadfast in years past, calls us to invest ourselves in opportunities to share God's love in the present and helps us look for the way of the future. God's love calls us to be authentic in our faith. We're part of God's answer to the challenges and problems of the future. We don't have all the answers. But, if we're willing to ask difficult questions, wrestle with the needs of our community and look to where the Holy Spirit is at work, we'll find them. When we trust God and rely on Jesus for strength and courage, that's when the impossible becomes possible.

It's been said, "Church isn't a hotel for saints. It's a hospital for the hurting."¹ No perfect people should apply here. We don't have it all together. But there's a growing awareness that we're all in the same boat. We're all working hard. We all have hurts. We're all struggling. We're diverse people with global interests, yet individual needs and differences. Nobody has it made but we're growing and learning. We're learning how to live by faith and finding hope because we're open to God's love.

We're connected by Jesus. That gives us strength for what lies ahead. We're part of a story that gives our lives meaning, that fills us with a common purpose. That's why we keep getting together to worship God. That's why we look into God's Word together. That's why we invite others to know and experience Jesus. It's how we find strength, inspiration and hope.

That's the life we're called to live. That's the movement. We have opportunities to serve. Will you follow Jesus as we move into the future, one step at a time?

I invite you to join me in affirming the vision of our congregation and our commitment as members of Jesus' movement:

Vision of Congregation. *We are a church of blessings, changing the world through words and deeds of grace, showing others how to follow Jesus.*

Our Commitment. *We dedicate ourselves to God through our prayers, presence, giving, service and witness.*

¹ Rick Warren, *Building Your Marriage*: 2 of 6

Let us pray:

“God of us all, we give you thanks for your love, your grace, and your power on this blessed morning! We thank you for the many friends and loved ones who have made the extra effort to gather here with us today. We thank you for the brilliance of the colors on and around us that remind us of new life!

Today, blessed God, we gather to remember:

We remember Jesus, who healed the sick and raised the dead.

We remember Jesus, who gathered children to himself and dealt kindly with women centuries before our efforts at women's liberation.

We remember Jesus, who always kept the mission in the forefront, and the minutia in the lowest place.

We remember Jesus, Son of God, Song of God, who sang God's melody to us.

We remember Jesus, who consented to suffer and die at our hand.

Today, Almighty God, *we celebrate* the fact that Jesus rose from the grave!

We celebrate that not even death is able to separate us from the love of God!

We celebrate the new life that we have in Christ!

We celebrate the assurance that we have of eternal life!

Today we celebrate and give thanks that in life, in death, in life-after-death we belong to God!”² **Amen.**

² A 21st Century Worship Resource by Safiyah Fosua. *Discipleship Ministries (GBOD)*

Genesis 12:1-4 (CEB)

The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth
will be blessed because of you.”

Abram left just as the LORD told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

Matthews 5:1-12 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”