

Summerland United Church
September 1
All of my Days: Journey

Threshold Often when we hear the word – Journey – we think about traveling outside in the world. However today, we not only affirm the spiritual journey we as a community of faith are engaged in, but are also invited to deepen our own personal spiritual journeys by identifying the work we each can do through prayer, meditation, and reflection. We may find that paying attention to our souls, makes a great deal of difference to our relationships – with ourselves, with God and with each other.

Scripture: Hebrews 6: 17-20, Matthew 11:28-30

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 6: 17 – 20:

In the same way, God wanted to make the heirs to the promise completely understand that the divine promise was unalterable and guaranteed by an oath. Now, therefore there are two unalterable things – the promise and the oath- in which it is impossible for God to be lying. We should now, having found safety, take a firm grip on the hope that is held out for us. We have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

And a reading from Matthew 11:28 – 30, where Jesus says to us:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection: The promise and the oath, we hear talked about in his letter to the Hebrews is a reference to the promise God made to Sarah and Abraham back in Genesis. God promises this couple that their descendants will number the stars, which causes Sarah to laugh because she is elderly and barren. They can not believe that God would provide for them in this way. It seems impossible that new life will come to them at this stage in their lives. Renewal, feels like a far fetched dream. This is the promise, and as Paul says, God does not and cannot lie about the promise.

And we see in the story of Sarah and Abraham that despite having lived long and good lives, and despite being closer to the age where death occurs, God instead provides them with new life.

The oath spoken of is that God will never leave the chosen people. God does not and will not ever abandon the children of God. The people might turn away, they might forget, they might make choices that drive them further away from the presence of God – but God never turns away, never forgets and is always encouraging choices that bring people close to God.

The authorship of this letter is unclear. Sometimes attributed to Paul, it is likely not from his hand. However, both the writer and the listeners were people who would be intimately acquainted with the stories of Sarah and Abraham, of their child Isaac, Jacob and Esau and on through the generations of patriarchs and matriarchs who would form the Hebrew and Jewish faith. Some of these people are now curious about the Messiah who has lived, died and lived anew. We need to be careful when we read Hebrews because it can and has been interpreted as supersessionist. Which is the argument that Christ's entry into human history replaces and dismisses all that has come before him. Including God's covenant with Israel.

Which of course is racist and detrimental to our Christian faith because Christianity grew out of Jesus' faith in Judaism. The two cannot be separated and God's promise to the people is not overwritten by Jesus, rather it is expanded outward to include more people.

In this particular passage of Hebrews, the writer, may perhaps be speaking to people who have doubt about this new-fangled Christianity. The early church was fraught with controversy and confusion over what it meant to be Christian. Where those who were Jewish, still Jewish? Were Christians, just a different kind of Jew? Did Jesus come to earth as fully human, or just seem fully human? Can gentiles and Jews, even though they are now all Christian, eat at table together? Were the recipients of this missive struggling with whys and how's of living into their faith in their daily lives? Were they seeing other people, Christians also, practicing their faith differently and wondering – who's right and who's wrong?

These are questions that continue to cause controversy and confusion today for Christians all over the globe. And for us, as we continue to towards our move to share space with a different denomination many of us are wondering – how are we going to make it work? They do things differently from us. Is one way better than the other? Does it matter?

Yes. And no. How we practice our faith is vital to us, in the same way that how Anglicans and other denominations practice their faith is vital to them. They are neither better or worse – just different.

As to the question – how are we going to make it all work? We're just going to have to figure it out as we go. We need to recognize and remember that we're all human beings who are all just trying to do our best. And we're not alone. We have the oath from God that we can rely on God's presence in our lives and if we remember that *having found*

safety, take a firm grip on the hope that is held out for us. We have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

Having found safety, take a firm grip on the hope held out for us. We have the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. We might feel wind tossed and dizzy from all that is happening around us these days. Both in the wilder world of climate change, polarizing politics, rising food prices and within our close world- selling our building, seeing our church items leave this sacred space, moving into the unknown. We may feel in the middle of the perfect storm of chaos and confusion.

Yet, as the passage tells us, we have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into that inner place, that deep well inside us, where God and Jesus dwell. The outer journey of change that we are embarking on does not have to be all chaos and confusion, if we take moments of pause and turn inward, feel the anchor grounding us, stabilizing us and holding steadfast to what we do know – God is with us. God is calling us to this new beginning.

When I read the Hebrews passage about the steadfast anchor that is Jesus, the Matthew 11 passage came to mind, perhaps because both anchors and yokes are heavy and while an anchor can hold firm it can also drag across the ground, it can be a heavy thing to carry. But paired with Matthew 11, we hear that there is no burden, no difficulty in holding onto the steadfast anchor of Jesus – entering into a connection with Jesus will bring rest, will bring gentle and humble comfort. The yoke we're asked to carry forward on this inner and outer journey, is easy and the burden light.

Despite the difficulty, the hurt and the chaos this ending is, we are called to it, for we have the promise of the new beginning. New life growing from the old. Summerland United Church has done this before, changed and grew as the needs of the community changed and grew. The first building on the property was replaced in 1984, because what God was calling for this community to do and be changed. Now we are being called again, to replace this building with the housing our town desperately needs.

This property can and will be so much more than it currently is. When you come on a Sunday morning, or to Monday Supper, or to Light Up or a concert another event at this building, you see it full of life, full of people. Which is good. But come by any time during the weekdays and you'll see that (other than the basement) all of these rooms are empty. I rattle around this building alone almost all week. We have this huge beautiful spaces that are empty all week, except for an hour here and there. I walk up and down the echoing hall, my footsteps the only ones the floor will feel most of the week.

Then at the end of the day, I lock up these big empty spaces, head out into the parking lot and say goodnight to the folks who will spend the night in our stairwell, or front stoop, because they have nowhere else to go. Outside and pressed up against the walls of a big and beautiful empty building.

This is not what God calls church to be. This is not what we are called to be. We are called to more. And hallelujah we're living into that call after many years of hard work. And, as we know the hard work isn't over. There's still more to do, and that can make us feel weary and overburdened.

So we practice small still moments of prayer. Touch our prayer beads, breath and pray a word or two to God. We've had Thank you, Love, Silence, and today – anchor. A reminder of the solid and firm hold we have with God and through Jesus to see us through any storm.