

## **God of new beginnings | 1 Cor 1:1-9; John 1:35-42 | LUMC | 01,15, 2023**

Dear Church family and friends: today we are considering new things God has done and is doing. From creation to modern times God continues to do new things with his creation. God continues to reveal himself to humanity despite our limitations. We experience God's presence through his dealings with the creation. We experience God in the works of John the Baptist, Jesus, the disciples, other faithful followers, and our past Bishop Elaine and the incoming bishop's message of hope. This sermon explores John's transitioning his disciples to Jesus and our new bishop's message of reconciliation and hope. What a sermon!

It was on the third day after Jesus' baptism that John pointed out Jesus to his disciples. John carefully introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away human-kind's sin. By calling Jesus a lamb, John was using contextual and sacrificial language his hearers could identify with. Last week we reviewed the significance of the scape-goat in Jewish rituals, and now a sacrificial lamb has the same meaning—taking away sins: 1) by running with the sin; and 2) by spilling blood to cleanse sins!

John was not like modern day church leaders, pastors, and congregations that want to keep their members at any cost. John rejected thinking of himself as higher than Jesus. He was happy to bid farewell to two of his disciples who decided to follow Jesus.

It is interesting also to hear Jesus' message to new believers. Jesus asked these disciples why they left John and what was their interest. Blessed are those who point others to Christ, not anywhere else.

John's disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter, honestly said they were seeking to fellowship with Jesus for their spiritual nourishment. They called him a teacher—meaning 'a great one' compared to John? What a revelation! These disciples did not leave John for worldly self-gain. We know there are Christians who leave one congregation for another seeking leadership, self-praise, or because that is where their friends are. John the Baptist and Jesus advise us to leave a congregation only where spiritual nourishment is lacking, and go seek spiritual blessings elsewhere as opposed to trying to fulfill some self- or worldly-interest.

Our new bishop also affirms those Methodists who want to move from the United Methodist denomination to go where they feel spiritually nourished and can become faithful disciples. He also encourages those who decide to stay in the United Methodist Church to make sure their staying prepares them for eternity and nothing less. My uttermost prayers for Christ's church are to find purpose, to preach in season and out of season until new believers announce thrilling news like John the Baptist's disciples who, "found the Messiah" and stayed focused until Christ returns to reign. When I experience members living their call and sharing the thrilling spiritual news with their families and friends, my joy is over the rooftops.

Like John the Baptist transitioning his ministry to Jesus, Bishop Elaine last month transitioned us to Cedrick, our new Bishop. We are in a new beginning and

experiencing God's faithfulness as we celebrate the bishop, recently elected with the highest vote—73.

Listening to his testimony, God has endowed Cedrick with love, patience, and courage to continue serving the church that in the past has shunned him and his gifts or at least minimized his gifts. Hear him in his own words, 'The church institution often appeared to chew and spate me out'. Jesus also relates with the bishop as he defined the struggles, he went through to save that very humanity who continued to reject him and his ministry. God is the God of new beginnings, the stone rejected by the builders, was later made the cornerstone.

My friends, God is transforming the church even though a few members want God to do their bidding. What do we learn from St Peter in the upper room? He wanted God to do his bidding. God brought St Peter food and Peter rejected the food saying, "My culture taught me not to eat this kind of food. I am a Jew!" God took the food away and Peter remained hungry.

May we allow God to free the church from human desires and interests to preach the message of salvation. May all of us, like Andrew, point others to Christ. When he was convinced Jesus was the Messiah, he brought his brother, Simon Peter to Jesus, the right person in the right place. Simon later became the preacher of the good news leading to St Peter's Cathedral in Rome being named after him. When we do the right mission, the mission continues to bear fruits. And we can find in each of us something to thank God for. The church can become a home of people freed from their wicked lives; a place where everyone is welcome.

Both Bishop Cedrick and John emphasize the church's freedom, where everyone can feel when they are in that the space, that they are accepted. The freed church can let people fulfill their Christian purpose in life without worrying of minimization and being "chewed and spate out."

I pray we all enter in the new beginning and let all people in the church receive God's grace in this season of their lives. God through Christ extends grace to believers and offers spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge and preaching. Our being together in the church confirms that each of us have some spiritual gifts. However, having spiritual gifts is one thing and putting these spiritual gifts into action is another matter entirely. God can reprove those gifted people, and when these gifts are not put into use; it grieves God. In a moment we shall hear the bishop introduce his spiritual and leadership gifts and the way he will use these gifts among us to bring love, cooperation, healing, and preaching us into new beginnings of his spiritual leadership. Now let us conclude the sermon by listening to the bishop:

<https://greaternw.org/news/bridgeforth-brings-experience-collaborative-mindset-into-new-role-as-bishop-in-the-gnw-area-1/>

May the spirit of God through our lord and savior Jesus Christ, bring all of us to this new season in one accord. Amen

By Pastor Grace Kanake

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