



***Theme: Restoration and Renewal – Live and Pandemic
“Celebrating the Future Together”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...
September 04-05, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals, including the Lord’s Supper, and to prayer. –Acts 2:42

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Celebrating the Future Together”

This past week I received an email from one of our church members I wanted to share with you as we wrap up this series of sermons on the pandemic.

The sermon got me to thinking about how the pandemic has molded me. I think the best part is I have really tried hard to be positive and kind in my dealing with other people in person and on the phone. Often in the past, I would get impatient and intolerant, and now, not as much. It’s been a good thing for my own mental health and others.

Recently, my car got the left front fender crumpled in an accident

while it was parked off the side of the road. A semi-truck driver lost control at a sharp turn, rolled over, and smashed into our car. Fortunately, I was not in our car and the driver was unharmed. Our car was drivable and otherwise undamaged, so those were three things for which I was thankful.

When I met with the driver, I started off the conversation with, "I am not angry or upset with you but grateful that you were not hurt." I repeated the same sentiments to his wife who gathered the information I needed for insurance and promptly emailed it to me. I'm not sure I would have acted this way before the pandemic. What a wonderful difference for me!

Last week we talked about the importance of being intentional and drawing upon our faith in times that are challenging, and I so appreciate the wisdom this person had learned from the pandemic. Here's another email I received I thought was great.

I was thankful to find I could worship without being in church, and in fact, I get more from the Online service because if I don't hear or understand something, I can go back! Also, it was great to sing as loud as I wanted in my home and not worry about what the people around me were hearing!

I have heard many stories during the past few weeks about how people's lives have been changed during this pandemic and I wonder if there are things in each of our lives which are opportunities for change which will never come again. It's not too late because we are still working through this pandemic and a good question to ask is what opportunity might still be in front of me to become something God wants me to become. I read a story recently have two young people who were in totally different professions but decided to go to seminary and train to become pastors during this pandemic because they have lost their

previous jobs when their business shut down. It was powerful to read their story about how life was now different and better because of the pandemic.

Today, we are going to conclude this series of sermons we been doing on restoration and renewal and life in the middle of pandemic. We have talked about being thankful and embracing failure and getting a new perspective and how we might come out of this better rather than worse because in the midst of difficult moments there is opportunity for God to be at work if we will place our challenges into God's hands.

I remind you of these categories we have been using the past month which were developed by Walter Brueggeman, a professor of Old Testament theology at Columbia seminary. He captured the life experience of the Israelites in the Old Testament in a way that resonates with every human because it is our life experience and is especially appropriate and helpful during this time of pandemic. Here is how he describes it.

GRAPHIC Orientation Circle

Orientation is when life is good. In terms of the weather, it's sunny and warm. But that never last forever for anyone. A time of disorientation comes when life gets hard as we experience a job loss or divorce or a national crisis like 9/11 that we will remember 20 years later next weekend. Eventually, that also subsides, and we have a reorientation for life that brings us to a new normal when things are different, but they become stable again. We are changed but it becomes a new part of who we are. That also never last forever and the cycle begins again after the new normal sets in.

GRAPHIC Orientation Doodle

I appreciated this doodle drawing of this cycle. During orientation we, like the Israelites, praise the Lord because God has saved us and made

a strong. Then life happens and there is pride, greed, anger, fear, hatred, violence, disappointment, and we cry out to God, “Where are you?” We are disoriented and confused. I was speaking this week to a family who lost their son to suicide last weekend and we talked about this place of disorientation and how it feels dark and sometimes we wonder if we will ever come out.

Eventually, we experience reorientation when life becomes good again and we again praise the Lord! We experience God’s help when we are weak, and we trust in God again! After we settled into that time of reorientation, we move through the cycle again.

GRAPHIC Orientation Circle with RED X just after disorientation

I think we are today on this graphic just after disorientation and moving towards reorientation in some form. We have started to make that turn and we are hopeful that we can see a light. We begin to feel hope already, but I also remind us that this is a marathon and Sprint when it comes to working for something like a pandemic. Even though we are not clearly out of the woods yet, and we might still be in the shadow of the cross after a time like Good Friday, we know that Sunday is coming. Today I want to focus on what will never be the same because here is a truth about moments of disorientation as we move towards reorientation.

SLIDE Reorientation allows us to celebrate the future.

It’s one of the reasons I remind you that the worst thing in our life will never be the last thing in our life, because of our faith and the fact that reorientation moves us towards celebration, and we must do that together both in big and small ways. It doesn’t mean that we are not honest about what we’ve lost, but we do recognize that this time of disorientation will not last forever and that we will laugh again and be able to celebrate. Let’s remember a few things that are different for us today than they were 18 months ago. There are some clear examples I want to

be sure that we celebrate and remember today.

GRAPHIC **I'm Actually Smiling Face Mask**

GRAPHIC **Cow Tongue Face Mask**

GRAPHIC **Cat Tongue Face Mask**

GRAPHIC **Cat Face Mask**

All of us now carry these things with us wherever we go so we might as well have some fun with them! I had never worn a mask in public before, except on Halloween. I had worn them occasionally in the hospital to see people who were highly contagious because it was required. Now, I carry them everywhere, and I have found we can enjoy them by having ones that are unique or different.

GRAPHIC **Share Jesus Not Germs**

GRAPHIC **Just Livin' on Hand Sanitizer and Prayer**

I now carry hand sanitizer everywhere! We use baby wipes on things, and we used to use the spray gun after every meeting or worship gathering in the church. I celebrate we no longer need the "germ gun!"

GRAPHIC **Wash Your Hands and Say Your Prayers**

Because Jesus and Germs are Everywhere! We now seem to carry hand wipes everywhere. We now wash our hands more regularly and more thoroughly. We went from shaking hands to bumping elbows and then back again and now we wonder if we can hug. We were doing air hugs and virtual hugs.

I think of all the changes in commerce and how we buy things. The pandemic sped things up when it came to lot of things in our world. We were already moving to a cashless and checkless society as everything moves online. Cash and ATM use were down 25% over the last year. People don't go in bank lobbies anymore and most people do their

banking online or on their phone. I'm guessing that telehealth and telemedicine are here to stay. I have a counselor I used to see in Colorado Springs, and I reconnected with him over the pandemic and now we see each other on zoom regularly.

We now can pick up cars, groceries, and shopping curbside, or even have them delivered! We have seen rapid changes in the restaurant industry and most retailers are playing catch-up. The same has been true for churches and our faith over the past 18 months. Almost every church in America went fully online for several months, including many small churches who would never have thought about doing that. Here at Summit Church, we were already online, but we had to make drastic changes and work to discern how to stay connected with each other through zoom small groups and other electronic means. We had to learn how to do children and youth ministries and vacation Bible school and mission and serve and Bible study.

At the height of the pandemic, we had more than 1500 people online worshipping. That has dropped dramatically, but we still have almost 200 who worship with us online throughout the week or on the weekend. One of the things we have changed is how we do communion, and we pray over elements here in the room and at home. We gave away Bibles by leaving them out front so people could pick them up. We celebrated Christmas by giving you an Advent box to use at home and did services in the parking lot. We did Easter outdoors, online, up on top of the hill at the Lion's den and in the parking lot and with reduced numbers indoors.

We were doing daily devotions on our platforms and now we do that several times a week which I had never thought of until 18 months ago! We can connect with people halfway across the world through zoom and people all across the country who didn't even know each other began connecting in small groups on zoom. I preached funerals on zoom and visited with people in the hospital. People join the church online and I

prayed with people on zoom. I did pre-marriage work with couples on zoom and even one wedding! How crazy is that?

We have people who have joined the church during the last 18 months that don't live in Durango but call this their church home. We even baptized persons in the river last week who don't live here but profess their faith in Christ by spending time on me with zoom and then getting into the river after making a trip to Durango. Moving forward, we will continue to have both in person and online worship.

We removed our pews and put in plastic chairs at one point because the virus could be cleaned off plastic easier than fabric. It also became clear that having flexibility in this room was going to be important so instead of putting in pews again we will have chairs that hopefully will arrive in the next month and will enable us to move them to the side when we host things like Eagle Lake Camp or need a large indoor space in addition to our fellowship hall. We are going to do what we need to do to connect with people, whether online or in person. I think of the apostle Paul who said these words in 1 Corinthians 9.

BIBLE

²² When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. ²³ I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

That's why we will use every means at our disposal to reach as many people as we can with the hope and the good news of Jesus Christ. One of the things we learned during the last 18 months which I found listed at the top of every survey when people were asked how they had grown is this truth.

SLIDE We are more resilient and adaptable than we thought.

That was one of the top answers given by many of you when you

responded to our survey. The other thing that was atop response for people coming out of the last 18 months was this one.

SLIDE Make more time for relationships.

When we were not able to be in relationships, we realized how much we needed that and even craved it. Even introverts and those who enjoy time alone recognized a need for human companionship and interaction with other human beings that was not on a screen. Many of us had more time to eat meals together which we began to cherish. As a moving to a place where it feels like the pandemic is easing, there is one concern that continues to be at the top of the list for many because of all the new ways we have learned to do things online.

SLIDE Isolation and Loneliness

While being able to stay connected online throughout the pandemic has been important, the concern is that if we continue to only be online that there will be an epidemic of isolation and loneliness which lead to depression. Talking on the phone or over zoom is great for a while, but then we miss out on one of the basic human needs which is personal connection. Almost 50% of Americans in surveys have said that their personal friendships and relationships has diminished because of not being able to see their friends in person.

We sometimes don't even realize the toll of wearing masks, not hugging, not being in person, and being isolated takes upon us. To be the church, the body of Christ, is in large part about being in community together with other people. While we can do that digitally in many ways, there are needs which cannot be met in that way. The story of the early church is one that helps us see this need for connection. In the book of Acts, we find the first believers and followers of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus. 3000 people put their trust in Christ and then we read this happens in Acts 2.

BIBLE

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

SLIDE fellowship = “community” = koinonia

SLIDE koinonia = “sharing life together”

Koinonia means friendship and caring for one another. This is what it meant to be the church. That text goes on to talk about how those early followers of Jesus met together in one place and shared everything. They worshiped and broke bread. Notice that this text says they were united because of the time they spent together, and I want to suggest to you one of the reasons we became so polarized over the last 18 months is because we have gotten used to saying things in our electronic communication we would never say to someone's face and we have missed the ability to break bread and be in the physical presence of each other.

This text reminds us that they were praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people, which was the essence of the commandments of Jesus gave them to love God and love others as we love ourselves. Notice that the end result was that each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. What I read this text I'm

reminded that one the reasons I think the church is struggling in North America is because we don't look like this to the outside world. Instead of seeing joy and generosity people see division and bitterness and selfishness inside the church as we seek to demand our own way instead of giving ourselves away, like those early believers.

The early church grew like wildfire because of those relationships and the generosity which was generated by their goodwill and willingness to praise God above all things. It's one of the reasons that we as a church occupy the "messy middle" and try very hard not to be pulled to one extreme or the other when it comes to politics or faith. Yes, there are moments we are called to be prophetic and stand up for justice, but if we do so without staying connected in community and being willing to share and be generous and experience joy, then it is pointless and will not help bring about the kingdom of God.

The key to those first century followers of Jesus was not just about listening to great sermons from Peter or Paul, but about living together and community, caring for one another, blessing each other, giving sacrificially for the community. I was thinking about someone who was part of our congregation when I first moved here. They reach out to me because they had sunk back into the addiction about the whole and were struggling. I met with this person who was twice my age and they told me they had no one else to talk to about their struggles. I had only known them a couple of months and was heartbroken because they needed a group. He finally began going to Alcoholics Anonymous and then connected with one of our small groups and his whole life changed because he wasn't doing life on his own, isolated with his bottle in his home.

The New Testament is filled with scriptures about, "one anothering." Jesus says to his disciples at the Last Supper, the meal we will remember when we take Communion here in a few minutes, these words we read in John 13.

BIBLE

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

The world will not know we follow Jesus because of our Bible study or are memorization of Scripture or many things we think lead to salvation. Our willingness to love one another in profound ways is what will change the world. Jesus shows them the full extent of what it means to love one another by washing their feet and going to the cross the next day. Jesus tells the disciples four times at that Last Supper to love one another and that is what it means to follow him and be his presence in the world. It is what we are meant to remember when we take the bread and the cup each time.

All of Paul's letters are written to churches just getting started, many of them in conflict, or church leaders, struggling to leave their churches. Paul uses this idea of community and doing things for one another to describe what it means to be the church. He uses all these phrases.

SLIDE Greet one another... (EACH ONE FLY IN)

Be devoted to one another...

Honor one another...

Build one another up...

Love one another...

Live in harmony with one another...

SLIDE Bear one another's burdens...

Be kind to one another...

Regard one another as better than yourself...

Accept one another...

Bear with each other...

SLIDE Forgive each other...

Encourage one another...

Teach and admonish one another...

Serve one another...

Pray for one another...

Each one of those requires more than one person, which is why Jesus said when two or three are gathered is when he is present with them. These things are what it means to be koinonia, community, sharing and doing life together. We have had 18 months of being distanced from one another and while it's great we could be in front of a television or computer screen or on our phone to worship, we do need one another in order to fully experience our faith and be the person God longs for us to be. I praise God for the fact we have learned to adjust and adapt and so grateful for those who still need to gather online to have that ability. We are the church together in this way.

AND we need relationships. This fall we are seeking to start new Community Groups where you can connect with others, and we hope you will let us know either in the chat box or by contacting us through our website that you are interested in doing that so that we can do our best to help you get connected because this is how we can celebrate the future... Together! We can do more together we can grow together and be the church, the body of Christ, together praising God and serving and being generous.

This last Friday I was asked to lead a devotional for a ministry we are part of in Guatemala, a medical clinic which is the only one of its kind for many miles, serving a community with no access to medical care. We have

sent teams there over the past few years and normally we would send two or three year, but have been unable to send any because of the pandemic and we are not sure when we will be able to send our next team. There is one doctor and many other persons serving in the clinic. What you may not know is that COVID is now at its peak in this community and only 7% of the population is vaccinated. They have no ventilators and at the clinic they are now losing one patient a day and sometimes more. They are exhausted and I was brought to tears as I visited with them via zoom and share with them the Scriptures and reminded them that we as a congregation will be praying for them.

VIDEO Guatemala

Here's a video of this team of dedicated medical workers who every day are wrapping a body and disposing of them because the mortician is not allowed in their facility. Families often cannot see their loved ones one last time and there is tremendous discouragement. One of the ways you have brought hope to this community and joined them in their struggles is through these oxygen-aiders. While they have no ventilators, the only thing they have to keep patients alive is oxygen and they have to leave at three in the morning each day to drive to get the oxygen and even then, they are not able to procure enough. So, through the help of Larry and Sandy Turner who helped coordinate this ministry from our church, we have purchased three of these machines which provide oxygen for patients. We hope we can do more in the near future.

GRAPHIC Guatemala medical workers 1

GRAPHIC Guatemala medical workers 2

GRAPHIC Oxygenator

What I talked to this team about was how they were literally being the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing healing and hope for those who can recover. They bring peace and comfort to those who will not recover and

remind them that God is with them as best they can. What I know is that this is what it means to be the church and it puts things in perspective for us here in our North American experience of the pandemic. It's hard to complain about masks or having to be online or vaccines when you enter into the world of a community like this in Guatemala.

What they shared with me, which bless my day and I hope will bless yours, is how much it means to them to know that we are brothers and sisters, connected as community, koinonia, even though we are thousands of miles away. They will gather this weekend around a meal as well, just as we gather around the table today, whether here in the room or in our homes. One of the reasons our table is an open table for communion is because we are asked to do this together, to love one another and remember that Christ loves us.

As we conclude this series of sermons on life and the pandemic my hope and prayer is that you would know that you don't do this alone, whether you are at home or here in the room. We are the presence of Jesus Christ together and we are meant to bless one another and worship together and share each other's burdens and in so doing know the Holy Spirit surrounds us as people of faith. If you are feeling isolated, I hope you will reach out and remember that we are called to live together and love each other as people of faith because Christ loves us.

When we are together, we can more easily remember this truth that we were made by God to be loved by God, and the worst thing is never the last thing, even when we move from this life to the next, because that is something we all have in common just as Jesus remembered this at the Last Supper. Let's celebrate that meal together and community.

SLIDE Communion

September 4-5 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going to talk about how what we can celebrate together as we move through this pandemic.”**
2. One Song, followed by prayer
3. Welcome and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Women’s Retreat
 - Summit Kid’s Volunteers
 - Summit Students Kick Off
 - Rooted starting
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Video bumper plays.
7. Sermon
8. Prayer after sermon
9. 2 Songs of Worship
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Offering SLIDE and Focus
12. Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
13. Prayer quilt for Jada
14. **SLIDE**

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals, including the Lord’s Supper, and to prayer. –Acts 2:42
15. Closing Prayer