

**New Chapters . . . in God's Plan (Jesus' New Covenant). (The fifth and final sermon in series, New Chapters: Hope in Co-authoring our Life Stories with God. Pastor Fritz Wiese. 17 March 2024**

Well, welcome to the fifth and final week in our Lenten Series, New Chapters: Hope in Co-authoring our Life Stories with God. Vocationally, there are twists and turns. Thanks, Pastor Miriam for sharing with us how you're doing with your upcoming retirement transition. Life in general is full of new chapters, as babies are born, relationships go through highs and lows, as we age, fail and succeed. In terms of Location, we shift GPS coordinates from time to time while the even the good old places or situations inevitably change or feel different—let alone when we take on renewal projects as we are for the sanctuary. But as our stories inevitably move on to the next chapter, we take them on with great HOPE! For God has plans and a story for us. No, we are not merely puppets. All of us have agency. We tell our confirmands we confirm or deny God's script for us every day as we bring our God-given passions and personality to the writing table. Indeed, we are Co-authoring our lives with God who promises he is with us, for us, and calls us friend. How energizing it was last week to learn from Jesus New Command that a meaningful daily agenda is measured not in how much money we've made or people impressed, but in Love for others shared and celebrated. (And if you didn't see Luna that talking dog who served as our faith testimony this Wednesday, make sure you do!)

Next week is Holy Week. And so much of the story takes place in Jerusalem, centered with the temple. As we learned in our trip last June (and we hope you can come to our Footsteps of Paul trip NEXT June), in a very hilly city, a huge flat area was built for the temple and courtyard. In the upper left, you see the Antonia Fortress, from where Roman forces monitored all temple activities, illustrating why so many were hoping for a Messiah military in nature, to throw off by force their oppressors.

While the temple gathered Jews together from many nations, it's hard to look at these maps and not be struck with how the temple mount functioned as a place of limitations, barriers, gates and fences. You can see the largest part of the mount was called the Court of Gentiles. Non-Jews were allowed in this area for trade, but they could go no further.

It's hard to see on the screen, but a Courtyard of Women is depicted. As Jews, they got to go in; as women, only so far. If you were a man—a man who wasn't blind or lame (which activated a whole other level of restriction) --you were allowed passage further, into the Courtyard of Israel. Well, if you were the trifecta of non-physically blemished man, Jew, and priest, well then you were granted permission through another fence and gate . . . into the Courtyard of the Priests. And in the corner of the Courtyard of Priests, you can see the altar, upon which animals were continually sacrificed, as proscribed by a series of ritual laws.

As for the Holy of Holies itself, the High Priest of Israel was the only authority permitted to enter, and only did so on Yom Kippur, carrying the blood of a sacrificial lamb while burning incense. Wow, one fence and space of limitation after the other!

We've heard the story that when Jesus comes to Jerusalem and makes his way on to this temple mount, Jesus goes beyond words in expressing his dissatisfaction with what he witnesses. In this space designed for healing, prayer, and connection, Jesus sees people getting gouged by money-changers. You see, in order to buy animals for your ritual sacrifice, you had to exchange your regular money into temple money. And the money-changers charged exorbitantly for such transactions. Furthermore, was Jesus upset seeing one layer after the other of stratification and separation of God's people based on gender, nationality, physical attributes and more? Was he saddened with how the Covenant with Israel was playing out over the centuries?

Whatever the case, we will remember in Holy Week, especially on Maundy Thursday . . . as we remember each and every Lord's Supper, that on the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took a cup on that Passover night. This annual meal commemorated, of course, how God commanded Jews to sacrifice a lamb and use its blood to mark the posts of their homes so that death would PASS OVER and they could start their journey from Egyptian slavery into freedom. But as THE Lamb of God, holding that cup, Jesus declares that with this Cup, it's time for a NEW Covenant. For you and ALL people. In my blood, with my sacrifice, For the forgiveness of sin, for all--once and for all. A new chapter in God's plan!

About 3 years ago, I shared with you the story from William Barclay, the Scottish theologian, who was on patrol in WW2 France when their captain was shot and killed. They wanted to give him a proper burial. So, they went to the first church they found and asked the priest if they could bury their friend in the graveyard next to the church. The priest asked if the man was a Catholic. He was not. Only Catholics could be buried in the graveyard.

Seeing the soldiers' sadness, the priest thought of a compromise. He said they could bury their captain just outside the wire fence, and he would personally see to it that the grave was cared for. And so, they did that. The next day, wanting to put flowers on the grave, the soldiers returned to the church. They looked and looked but could not find the grave. They went to find the old priest.

He saw them coming and came to meet them. "You're are looking for your captain's grave. Well, I'll tell you what happened. Last night I lay in bed, but couldn't sleep. I kept thinking of your friend and his grave resting outside the fence line. So, in the middle of the night, I got up and moved the fence."

Fences. Who gets in? Who can only come so far? It's a question the church has been asking for 2000 years ever since seeing all the fences of separation throughout the temple mount. Who gets into heaven? Who gets into my heart? Who gets into my family? Who gets into my church? Who gets close to where the action is on the temple mount, or with Jesus? Who gets to be inside our fence?

In our New Chapters series, today we celebrate Jesus' passion to make sure that EVERYBODY gets inside the fence. A New Chapter, a New Covenant through the cup, blood, ministry, grace, death and resurrection of Jesus that knocks down all the fences. A new covenant that inspires Paul to declare that in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Nor more fences that keep people separated. For at the feast of Jesus ALL are welcomed at this holy of holies. All are included in Jesus' unfolding story of resurrection, joy and life—including you and me!

A few years back, in our Vision 2020 process, we were challenged to put into "non-churchy" language our values. And here is the first one, that I got

to share again at our New Member Connect Class two weeks ago (SAY TOGETHER): “We Are an Open and Inclusive Community That Welcomes Everyone.” And our intergenerational team came up with this because Jesus rallies the world around his New Covenant: A feast he declares is for ALL people. No more confusion about buying your way through animal sacrifice or buying indulgences in Luther’s Day or trying to prove yourself via social media or other avenues today. No. A clear, new promise. That Jesus pays the price, hosts the meal, and invites everyone to come close to him—without fences. Because you, me, everyone has been made worthy in Jesus’ embrace.

I’m proud of you, COS, for how you live out the spirit of Jesus’ New Covenant. Last year, a tornado ripped through Griffin, Georgia, destroying a ton of homes. But Griffin is 40 minutes away. Why should we worry about them? Well, Jesus says they’re at the table with us, as family. So, Tor and Mary Brunso are down with our COS team rehabbing one of those homes smashed by a tree that fell. Here’s a picture of them w Lutheran students from Valparaiso University in Indiana who came down on their spring break to help out. So MUCH has been done. But the goal is to wrap up the project so the family can move back in and not keep paying the \$2000 of monthly rent. If you can help, talk to the Tor or Mary or call the office.

Our young people right now are at an all-weekend faith event called D-Now. It rallies youth from churches all over our county. But hang on—what if different denominations think differently than us? Hey, Jesus said no fences. Let’s focus on our similarities over our differences.

Next, one cool feature of our Sanctuary Renewal Project is the suggestion from Leslie Klein’s design team that we use colorful stones as a mosaic on the 7-inch vertical faces of the two steps that will lead to the chancel altar. More details to come on this, but we’re thrilled this week to receive little stones that were actually part of a mosaic from the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany where Martin Luther kicked off the Reformation by nailing the 95 Theses on its door. So cool. Likewise, we had our tour guide and friend from Bethlehem, Elias Nawawieh, send us stones from the Holy Land that we also hope to pepper in through Leslie’s mosaic. But guess where they are? Stuck in the airport in Tel Aviv. The government is not allowing shipment for any packages originating from the West Bank,

which includes Bethlehem. A symbol, an example, right of the fences, walls, and divisions that still exist in our world today—abroad and close to home, both.

But you, COS friends, already have hit our financial goal for the Rejoice and Renew sanctuary renewal campaign, knowing that renovation will be a blessing to our weekly worship, yes, but also foster a space even more supportive, functional, and welcoming for the whole community. No fences. (And even though we hit our goal, we hope ALL people—to use Jesus' line—will share a gift financially, because we've got some things we'd like to do that did NOT make it on to the list for this phase, and we want ALL to feel the joy of ownership and connection in what God is co-authoring in our midst.)

Another twist today--St. Patrick's Day today and we'll have to wait for another time to explore his story in full. But are you kidding me? How did Patrick, as an English boy captured by marauding Irish tribesmen ever entertain the Lord's call to go back to Ireland (after he escaped and was educated back in England) to serve his former captors? Perhaps with the radical faith in Jesus' New Covenant that declares we are part of a feast of forgiveness and human family, where all can keep being welcomed in Christ.

On and on we could go with examples. But let me finish by introducing Maya Fond Rose, the in-country director of the Haitian Timoun Foundation. I remember when the very first COS group visited Haiti. And we were worshiping with the wonderful young adults of Wings of Hope, a community of God's children with significant disabilities. (This is a picture of Lazar, whom the Wiese family has the honor of sponsoring). That day, our Scripture was today's Old Testament lesson. God's promise that on this mountain God would set a new feast, **swallow up death forever, and wipe away the tears from all faces,**

That's what Jesus did on the mountain of Jerusalem. And it's what Jesus has done and wants to do afresh in Haiti amid all the country turmoil—through the feeding program known as 80 for Haiti, through the education of children at Trinity School, through the lifting up of women out of ultra-poverty in CLM, through strategic investment of future leaders in HELP, through offering summer camps of hope for at-risk children (which the Hoops for Haiti specifically empowers), for the dignity of developmentally-challenged kids at Wings of Hope, we rejoice!

Yes, Haiti is a different country. Does it seem far away on the news? But Jesus tells us there are no fences in his new covenant. In Christ we are all One in Christ. How true when we get involved in the lives of our siblings in Christ, we ourselves experience the deeper joy and life. So, friends, how about a round of applause welcoming Maya Fond Rose, our brother in Christ in Haiti. . .

*Maya's comments to wrap up sermon.*

In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Luke 22.14-21**

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, <sup>16</sup> for I tell you, I will not eat it<sup>[b]</sup> until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, <sup>18</sup> for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>21</sup> But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.