

New Beginnings /clean slate!

January 21, 2018 Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

As a little girl I wanted to ride my older sister, RosaLee's bicycle, but was afraid of falling. Watching her ride down the hill by our house, her beautiful long hair blowing in the wind and a smile on her face caused me to take the first step. After many attempts, I learned. By the time the bike was passed down I had mastered the skill. I had a favorite trail in the woods and my Uncle Rodney would ride with me on the old back roads of Garland and he would stop at the country store to buy snacks and a drink. I loved riding bikes with him for I never had to worry about getting lost. He was a bit older than I and I felt safe with him. What if I had never overcome my fear of falling? I would have missed the wonderful memories of those years of adventures on my bike. The fresh country air, the exercise, and the beautiful scenery that I was exposed to were absolutely delightful from a bicycle seat rather than being a passenger in a car. The few times that I fell, got hurt, or had a dog chase me were minor compared to the fun and enjoyment I had with the freedom I gained by riding the bike. My Uncle Rodney was my favorite playmate and he made every day an adventure for me. I learned to trust, follow, listen to directions, and had fun with someone who loved me and wanted the best for me.

When I think of Jesus Christ, I think of the power that he desired to give to people to overcome sin in their lives. He came to give mankind a new beginning, a clean slate, and the ability to discern right from wrong, evil from good, darkness from light, and offered a chance to take a leap of faith with Him to guide us into eternal life. All through the Old Testament, He sent prophets, teachers, judges, and leaders to help people to live holy lives. He desired to give his best to humanity, but he refused to force himself onto his beloved. Freedom to choose was the path that he laid out for us; love has to be freely given and freely received or it is not love, it is bondage. There is always a price to pay and a risk to take when love is extended. Jesus came that we might have life and more abundantly. In John 10:1 Jesus said this, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber." There are no short cuts to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus went on to say that He is the door, and the sheep know his voice and they won't follow a stranger. He goes ahead of his sheep and they trust him for he leads them to green pastures and protects them from the wolves that seek to destroy them. Jesus is the gate and whoever enters the sheepfold through the gate will be saved. He is the good shepherd who lay down his life for his sheep. Jesus spoke that his Father loved him so much because He was willing to lay down his life for the salvation of the world and He would take up his life again. He explained that no one could take his life from him; He laid it down of his own accord. He said, I have authority to lay it down and I have the authority to take it up again". This command had come from his Heavenly Father. Jesus reached out to the people but they were divided on their reception of his words. Some said that he was demon possessed and raving mad and asked others why they would bother to listen to him. Others listened with their hearts and understood that His sayings didn't match that of one possessed by a demon. They asked, "Can a demon open the eyes of the

blind?" I ask you "What do you say about Jesus Christ? Who do you say that He is? What is your response to the gospel? Are you interested enough in his claims to prove to yourself that the Bible is the inerrant word of God?" Look what He did with a handful of followers who were just ordinary men who followed their fathers to become expert fishermen. Levi was a tax collector and the women who loved him, Mary Magdalen had 7 demons cast out, others were social outcasts, with no future ahead of them until Jesus passed by. Prior to choosing his disciples, Jesus was led out into the wilderness to face his enemy. (See Luke 4). There was a lot at stake if Jesus failed the test. Satan offered him shortcuts to becoming the ruler over the world. His offer was ruler ship over this world without trials and suffering. What did Jesus use to overcome the temptations of Satan? He used the word of God. Jesus was alone out in the desert and hadn't eaten for 40 days. Satan came to him when He was extremely hungry and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered "Man shall not live by bread alone." (See Deuteronomy 8:3). The devil took him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. He promised to give Jesus all the authority and splendor that had been given to him through the fall of man. He told Jesus that since it was his he could give it to whoever he wanted. "Worship me and it is yours", he said. Jesus answered, "It is written; Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." (See Deuteronomy 6:13). The devil then led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here," Satan said. Then Satan quoted Psalms 91:11 to Jesus, "It is written He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered, "It is written; do not put the Lord your God to the test." Satan left Jesus until another opportune time. That is very insightful. Satan will never stop tempting you to be rebellious against the will of God for your life. He was defeated by the word of God, yet he would continue to look for ways to destroy Jesus, the Son of God.

How will you overcome Satan and the temptation of this world? The same way Jesus did; through putting the word of God in your heart and mind. How did Jesus endure the cross? Look at Hebrews 12:1. It tells us to throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and protector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." We are encouraged to think about what Jesus did for us so we won't grow weary and lose heart.

I find the calling of the disciples to be amazing. Jesus got into a boat belonging to a fisherman named Simon, asked him to take him out a little ways in the water and He began to teach the people from the boat. When He finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon explained to Jesus that he and his buddies had fished all night and they hadn't caught even a six inch trout. "But because you have asked me to, I will let down the nets," he said. When they let the nets down, they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. Simon signaled for his friends in the other boat to come and help haul the

fish in and both boats were so full that they began to sink. Simon, when he saw this, fell down on his knees and asked the Lord to go away from him because he was a sinful man. He and his companions were astonished at the miracle that they witnessed before their eyes. James and John, sons of Zebedee were Simon's fishing partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men." Then the men pulled their boats to shore and left everything and followed Jesus. Matthew was a tax collector and his name became Levi. He was sitting at his tax booth. It was just another day; another dollar for him. Jesus simply said, "Follow me" Levi arose, left everything and followed Jesus. Soon; he held a great banquet in his house and a large crowd of tax collectors and others came and ate with them. The religious people began to criticize Jesus asking him, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus called ignorant fishermen, unlearned in the teachings of the chief priests and Scribes who copied the Law of Moses and knew the Scriptures. He is the Word and He desired to live the Word before the 12 men that His Father had chosen for him to disciple. He fulfilled the prophecy that said that the Messiah would speak in parables and many would not understand what He was saying. Psalms 78:2 says this, "O my people hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter hidden things, things from of old." Jesus opened the understanding of people to the Scriptures so they could understand what God's plan was for them. Satan had blinded the eyes of people so they had strayed from the path that God had desired his people to walk on. They didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah, not for lack of evidence, for the Old Testament was full of pieces of information that pointed to Jesus as the Christ, but because Jesus didn't fit their mental image of what He should be like and how he should conduct himself. He didn't boast of royalty; he was born into poverty. He didn't come with an attitude of power, but of humility and servanthood. In the Sermon on the Mount, his words were so contrary to the way that people thought of success, of power, of living a victorious life, that the words couldn't penetrate their hearts. Yet the poor, the lost, those who were disappointed with life sought him out and welcomed his words gladly for it gave hope to those without hope. It offered healing to one who had spent all her money on doctors to no avail. By having the faith to touch the hem of his garment, the woman was made whole. Jesus even called her daughter when he addressed her. He told her to go in peace for her faith had made her whole. He offered new beginnings to those who had become social outcasts, those who the religious elite despised and rejected. He too was despised and rejected as well. The pious, religious leaders sought to kill him and denounced him as a blasphemer because He told them that "Before Abraham, I AM". They realized that he used the same words as God did when Moses was sent to Pharaoh and when Moses asked, "When Pharaoh asks who sent me, what do I say?" God told him to say "I AM has sent you."

See Exodus 3:14. Jesus was a poor carpenter, a son of a carpenter, and his parents were not very high on the social scale. The people said, "Is this not Joseph's son? Is not he the son of a carpenter? And don't we know his brothers and sisters?" See Matthew 13:55.

Some of Jesus sayings were so radical that people forsook him and didn't follow him anymore. See John 6:66. Jesus asked his disciples, "Will you also go away?" Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve" Yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas who would later betray him with a kiss. Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, a price of a low grade slave. Yet Jesus called him friend to the end. When Jesus was taken before the council to answer to the false charges people had spoken against him, he was like a lamb before a slaughter. He didn't try to defend himself for He had come for the purpose of redeeming his creation. He was willing to give his life, his sinless blood to purchase the salvation of lost humanity. He told his disciples over and over again that it was meant to be, but they didn't understand. In John 18, the account of Jesus' arrest is recorded. Jesus' disciple Peter swore that he was not a follower of Jesus when asked if he was one of them. Jesus was questioned about his doctrine and claims before the high priest. When Jesus answered, he was struck in the face with the officer's hand. In John 18:28, Jesus was taken before Pilate to be questioned. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered with a question, "Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?" Pilate answered that he was not a Jew; it was Jesus own people who had turned him over to him. He asked Jesus what he had done. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world or I would have those who would fight for me. My kingdom is from another place." Pilate tried to free Jesus but instead the Jews cried "Crucify Him". When given a choice they freed Barabbas, a criminal, and Jesus took his place. Barabbas had his life given back to him because of Jesus Christ. As Jesus hung on the cross people mocked him and stood by just to watch him suffer and to see if anyone came to deliver him. The two thieves that hung on the left and right side of Jesus made different choices. One asked to be remembered when Jesus entered into his kingdom. Jesus told him that "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The other one merely wanted to be given his natural life back and he taunted Jesus that if He was the Son of God to come down from the cross and deliver them also. Satan used his followers to try to force Jesus to deliver himself to prove his deity. Love, the self-restraint, held Jesus to the cross. When all had been accomplished, Jesus mission on earth was accomplished; He cried "It is finished!" Then he hung his head and released his spirit. It was a triumphant day for Satan until he realized what Jesus death meant. At that moment, the curtain in the temple was torn in half from top to bottom; a great earthquake broke open tombs holding bodies of many holy people who had died and the people were raised to life. After Jesus rose from the dead, they were seen walking the streets of Jerusalem. The centurion and guards witnessed the earthquake and exclaimed, "Surely He is the Son of God!" It was a new day! The Law was fulfilled; Jesus conquered death, hell and the grave. Satan received his blow on the head. (Genesis3:15)