

Sermon December 26 2021 JaQuan Beachem Sunday after Christmas

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:12-17

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Creator through him.

SERMON: "Into the Unknown: Renewed" The Rev. JaQuan Beachem

Friends, here we are. We lit the Advent candles, one by one, that of hope, of peace, of joy, of love and of Christ.

We have met Hagar in her wilderness, recognizing her wisdom against the odds.

We took some time with Hannah as she prayed zealously, so much so that her actions, in her moments of passion with God, were not initially recognizable.

We took a glance together at Elizabeth, who showed us how we might speak truth to power boldly, and provided some tips on how we might be in solidarity with our siblings in Christ.

We journeyed with Mary and Joseph, the ones who were on the run, the ones who chose an otherwise, and against all of the odds gave birth to joy, to a Savior. We met them in a messy manger. We sat with them, recalling a love that inspires us to carry on.

It has been such a blessing to be with you all this Advent season. I have found myself going into an unknown, and coming out renewed.

Will you pray with me: Holy One, gracious God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of each of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight. In Name of the One who came to save, we pray. Amen.

Week to week, we came together to sing O Come Emmanuel -- with our voices and bells -- with all, young and old. Now we are here, both together and yet apart, in the remnants of Christmas.

Do you want to build a snowman? Take a run through the halls? Wait, that's not the correct tune. That's the first movie! Has anyone here seen Frozen II? If not, no worries... I will fill you in! We are back in action with Anna, Elsa, Kristoff, Olaf, and Sven in the land of Arendelle. Now queen, Elsa rules the kingdom, having harnessed her powers, and is enjoying life with her sister Anna and playing games like charades with Kristoff and Sven.

Until -- a quite melodious voice begins to call -- or sing-- out to Elsa. Elsa initially tries to ignore it. The voice continues from this siren of sorts... Elsa cannot sleep, cannot find rest or solace. And so Elsa pursues this invitation. Mind you, strange things are happening in Arendelle and in neighboring villages. Elsa follows the voice with curiosity and wonder... Elsa wanders into the unknown. This decision is accompanied by a wonderful duet in the movie. At this moment, I will not share any more details. No spoilers for those who may not have watched yet. But I want to point our attention to this wonder and curiosity that consumed Elsa, that motivated her and gave her the courage to move into the unknown.

Beloveds, I would like to speak to you today from a message titled *Into the Unknown: Renewed*.

Our passage of scripture for today comes from Paul's purported letter to the Colossians. This third chapter of the letter to the Colossians gives us some insights on how we might engage the full regalia of God. Colossians provides an invitation into the fullness of God, which is an invitation to new life, to the life that God calls us to, even amidst the darkness.

Now, if you've been with us during the Advent season, we've been reflecting on virtues such as hope and peace, that are meant to be nudges or reminders to expand our capacity as we move into the fullness of God.

This text invites us to put on new regalia, such as a graduation gown or a clergy stole. And I note that regalia can be very beautiful and a meaningful thing. However, it is not the fabric alone that grants us the capacity to do the work that we are called to do. The regalia, in some ways, may even add some weight or make the call feel a bit heavier.

This is where Colossians comes in. The text invites us into a renewed sense of belovedness. A belovedness that exists without any work or earning of our own. A belovedness that we receive purely by being born. It is here that we are reminded that we are children of God, of the Most High. It is here that we re-commit to our path of peace and harmony that we are on.

I was told before I arrived here that you all were doing some homework assigned by Rev. Brent, to investigate the use of the church today. So I ask: What is the church for as we continue to wade through wilderness experiences of our own? What might the church offer us as we continue to wade through the waters of variants and violence? And further, what ought the church do as we move into a new calendar year, as we continue moving into new unknowns?

It is in this moment that I invite you to recall your spiritual practices -- that of prayer, of song, meditation, jogging or journaling. And I also invite to your hearing the words of the late Bell Hooks, who shares that: "Some find sacred connection to life in communing with the natural world and engaging practices that honor life-sustaining ecosystems."

I would say that the church ought to be doing its part in caring for its siblings, human and non-human alike, as we share this planet that we reside on. And I would also encourage you as you are on the road, to take some time with nature, to reflect and to reset.

Bell Hooks further informs us that: “To some folks, daily service to others is an affirmative spiritual practice, one that expresses their love for others.” I think that is a special job for the church, too, to have a sense of *how* it can best contribute to its neighbors given its social location, resources, and gifts. With this recently dedicated Capital Campaign, this community is pledging to do a new thing, as the prophet Isaiah would say. My prayer for you is that you continue moving forward faithfully, keeping your neighbors in mind.

When we make a commitment to stay in touch with the divine, we are choosing to lead a life in the spirit. In our Disney film, our protagonist is called to a new place, one that she had never encountered before. A road map by way of memories appears to her along the way; however, not before taking a leap of faith into new territory. I would say that this engagement with memories and traditions will continue to push us forward. And that said, in this moment in particular, we have been compelled to rethink some traditions, holding on to as much as we can, while also allowing some room for new territory. Going into the unknown.

When I replied to the invitation to serve as your Advent minister, I replied with an enthusiastic YES. With God’s help, I said yes to a new experience, to a congregation that I did not know, to lead a liturgical season in a way that I had never done before. Trusting in the call placed on my life, I said YES to moving into the unknown in a time of great uncertainty. Now that we have made it to the conclusion of this time together, I can faithfully say that I have been renewed, made better, by this experience.

I have been renewed by the willingness of this congregation to invite in and trust a guest minister. Renewed by the warm welcome, and the affirmation of my call, even prior to my ordination. Renewed by the courage to collaborate with me in a historic moment that none of us have ever witnessed before, where disheartening news, changing COVID numbers, and disappointing realities have been ever present each step of the way. Despite all of this, I have been renewed by this choice to move into the unknown with this church body. I hope that you may be able to say the same in some capacity.

Together, we have remained flexible, adjusting to new pieces of information, from forecasts to some misfortune, addressing each new inquiry as they arose. Through it all, we have found new hope, peace, joy and love. AND if we have not encountered each of these, we have at least reflected on each to discover new disciplines and strategies to cultivate them. Alone, but together as well. This has been a gift!

My hope is that you might hold onto these as you move into the next chapters of your lives, together and individually. My hope is that you will continue to move as the holistic -- the artistic, healing, and powerful -- congregation that I have learned that you are.

Again, here we are in the remnants of Christmas, looking towards a new calendar year, with Jesus’ invitation to new life fresh in our minds. Into the unknown we have gone, and into the unknown we continue to move. Beloveds, as believers, we must continue to lean into the mystery.

Elsa in “Frozen” became a bridge. How might we be called to be bridges, too, even now? As we move through deep feelings of pain, and at times carry our burdens as well as those of others, how might we continue to turn to the Gracious One, in even such a time as this? For we do not know where life’s journey may lead, nor we do not know how much longer we will endure the pandemics of our lives.

Still, we must choose love. Bell Hooks reminds us that “*when we choose love, we choose to move against fear, against alienation and separation.*” The choice to love is a choice to connect, even if we are at distances. It is a choice to find ourselves in another.

Now, this can be trying and scary, challenging work. Relationship building can be messy, and conflicts can arise. But I think in this season alone we’ve shown that with God all things are possible. That said, may we not become *frozen* by fear and anxiety as we pursue our callings. For we are not in this alone, but together and with God’s help, the unfathomable can occur.

When we drop fear, we can draw nearer to people, we can draw nearer to the earth, we can draw nearer to all the heavenly creatures that surround us. This is yet another example of what the church is for! To be a gathering place, a reminder of the unity that still exists even when we are far apart, through Spirit, love and care. A brave space to encounter and engage another’s difference in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility.

Though we may have moved through another December 25th, Christmas is not over! The birth of the Bread of Life inspires us still. His call, like the story, lives on within us and through us. So go tell that on a mountain!

As the author of Colossians writes, may the Chosen One become a deep watering hole inside of you. May God’s grace guide you, and you one another, with wisdom and understanding. And may you dance your prayers and give thanks!

May it be so. Amen.