

## **“ReNew: The Spirit of Renewal”**

Psalms 51:10-12, Romans 12:2

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These next three Sundays, we are going to have a new sermon series *ReNEW*: the Renewal spirit for church ministries and our spiritual growth. We will explore our church history and Methodist movement and learn from our faith tradition. The renewal spirit was essential to Jesus’ ministry. Radically speaking, Jesus didn’t create a new religion. He renewed people’s minds by deconstructing their narrow understandings of God, and proclaiming the love of God for everyone regardless of their conditions. Jesus’ progressive and renewal ministry was deeply based on his strong spiritual relationship with God. Christian Spirituality matters. What is Christian spirituality? That is a new and right spirit in Christ. This morning, I invite you to explore what a new and right spirit is for our church.

Our Old Testament reading reminds us of important basics. Our spirituality is firmly rooted in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God and put a new and right spirit within me.” Whatever ministries we are pursuing, if we are not well grounded and centered deep in relationship with God, our Christ Jesus, we cannot grow. It is simple. A tree can’t grow without roots; a building cannot be raised without a solid foundation. Likewise, the soul is nurtured by a lively faith, but what if our faith is not growing? Then we can’t expect a healthy church. Last Sunday, I explained the purpose of faith development using the image of wild yeast in making bread. Let’s replace wild yeast with spirituality. Without spirituality, there is no life in the church. We need to practice how to trust the Spirit and let the Spirit lead us in our daily living, even in our worship. The purpose of our new worship format is to increase our spirituality. Let’s remember this: Our Sunday worship is not a place to repeat our spiritual routine, but a place where we engage God and experience the living God through our participation.

How can we deepen our spiritual relationship with God? There are two important clues in our reading: First, create in me a clean heart and second is to put a new and right spirit within us. Let us begin with the first question: What is a clean heart? The word, “a clean heart” immediately reminds me of two images; washer and dishwasher. Speaking of dishwasher, I want to share my story with you. I always want to be a good husband and parent to my children. Whenever we have meals, definitely I want to help my wife wash dirty dishes, but Youngjae is not always satisfied with my work because she thinks that the

dishes that I washed are not clean enough. My wife says that I wash dishes fast, but not thoroughly. We do not often use our dishwasher because Youngjae prefers to use her hands.

When I grew up in Korea, I never saw or used a dishwasher. I still remember the first mistake that Youngjae and I made about the dishwasher. One day, we realized that the dishwasher detergent ran out, so we put dish soap into the machine. Bubbles flood all over the kitchen floor in a minute. I thought a ghost was coming out of the dishwasher. After hearing some criticism from my wife, I started using our dishwasher more often! It is my liberating experience! No more worrying about the quality of dishwashing. The machine takes care of everything and even heated drying as well! Once it is done, it really looks clean!

What about the soul? “How can we create a clean heart?” It may sound silly to you, but I imagine the dishwasher as a metaphor for renewing our spirits and minds. Please, don’t get me wrong!! I am not talking about “brainwashing”. A dishwasher can’t change materials, but just make them clean. So it is with our souls. In a sense, our church and worship can be compared to a spiritual dishwasher and God’s grace is God’s special detergent for our souls.

Eugene Peterson, the author of “The Message” paraphrases today’s Scripture reading using different metaphors. For example, he describes our soul renewal as “Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean and scrub me, I’ll have a snow-white life. God, make a fresh start in me and shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. Put a fresh wind in my sails!” Some biblical scholars argue that Psalm 51 is King David’s confession of sin and his plea for forgiveness over the taking of Bathsheba. A brief background for this story is this: King David intentionally sent one of his faithful generals, Uriah and had him killed in battle because he wanted to take General Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. When Nathan the prophet confronted David about his affair with Bathsheba, David repented his immoral act before God. But I don’t want to focus on sin nor guilt over our faults and mistakes; I want to emphasize that our God is willing to help us to make a fresh start and cooperate with us to shape a Genesis week from our chaotic life. God wants to restore us and sustain in us a willing spirit.

For a second question, how can we put a new and right spirit within us? Apostle Paul gives us spiritual advice for this question. He says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by renewing your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.” Paul challenges us asking for spiritual sensitivity within us by disciplining ourselves, renewing our minds and discerning God’s will for us. While I was reading our church history, I was very moved by some prophetic voices and acts that we have done. Originally our church started back in 1890’s in the Fair Oaks village. Between 1919 and 1952,

our church was a federated church which means Methodists and Presbyterians together as one body. Officially we re-started our own Methodist church here on this campus site back in 1954. In 1992, our congregation became a “reconciling congregation” at the annual charge conference. About 50 members were present for the vote; 48 voted in favor with 2 abstaining. In 2006, we welcomed our Tongan group and they started Tongan language worship service in 2007. Through long years of history, our church has been firmly standing on the foundation of Jesus Christ as a progressive Christian community. Following Jesus Christ with open minds and hearts is a proud heritage of faith as a Christian church in our history.

The heart of early Methodist discipleship is the spiritual discipline. Through small groups, or class meetings gathered weekly to support one another. John Wesley, our Methodism founder required every participant to reflect how they are living and challenge their faith. Here are some examples of those questions:

- Am I a slave to dress, friends, worries, or habits?
- Did the Bible live in me today?
- When did I last speak to someone about my faith?
- Do I pray about the money I spend?
- Do I disobey God in anything?
- How do I spend my spare time?
- Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I going to do about it?
- Is Christ real to me?

Most of all, they all asked one another a simple but hard question for checking into their spiritual life. That is “How is it with your soul?”

I am wondering how much we are sensitive to our spiritual wellbeing or shalom. We need to restore our spiritual sensitivity through ongoing spiritual practices, prayers, self-reflection, small groups or classes and Sunday worship services. I hope and pray that you develop your faith and deepen spiritual relationship with God in your daily living. Amen.