

Jon Hauerwas – May 27, 2018 – “Spirited”
Isaiah 6:1-8 and John 3:1-8

Today, our worshiping community has many aims. To give thanks to teachers. To celebrate the gift of baptism. To honor the work of the Trinity. To pay tribute to those who have given their lives in behalf and in service of our freedoms. To empower our youngest children to grow in confidence and faith. To celebrate the many artistic contributions of this body. To share in fellowship together. And to bid farewell to our beloved Music Director and Organist, Jim Mismas.

In our lectionary reading from John, and in keeping with Trinity Sunday, we are reminded that ours is a three-way covenant between the newly baptized, the community of believers, and our faithful God. Each time someone new enters into our community in a significant way, we are born anew. Yes. When we gather at the font of baptism, our community is renewed by the fountain of God’s everlasting hope, forgiveness, and promise.

Twenty-three years ago, on August 6, 1995, to be exact, Jim Mismas entered into this community in a significant way. That was the first Sunday that he began serving as Music Director and Organist at Westminster Presbyterian Church of Akron, Ohio. Now, more than 1,200 weeks later, we bid Jim farewell and extend to him our most sincere thanks and appreciation on the occasion of his retirement.

Those who know Jim well are quick to say that his personality, his leadership, and his talent could all be described as spirited, which is also the title of my sermon this day. With the support of Jim's vision and guidance, many things have come to life within these walls, including the Five at Five music series, the West Side Vocal Academy, the Infinite Legacy Project, and a new organ. Personally, Jim has graciously nurtured and mentored hundreds of musicians who sought to offer their gifts in worship and to the glory of God.

Jim understands that even on the most somber occasions, music is never intended to be drab, or dull, or lethargic. Instead, spirited music is alive, joyful, and full of creative energy. In a similar fashion, he is not sputtering into retirement or merely going through the motions from week to week. Even now, Jim's lifelong vocation has not robbed him of the pleasure of making music. No. He still offers his musical gifts with great passion. Jim still laughs often. He still loves deeply.

In other words, our Music Director has chosen to retire not because his calling was ever in question, but because the same Spirit who brought him to this place is now calling him to pursue some of life's other pleasures – like family, and leisure, and rest. Friends, even as we speak, Jim is being born anew, as we hear in our Gospel

lesson this morning. And so is Westminster. Even now, God is preparing us for the next chapter.

While I don't say this nearly as often as I should, I am regularly amazed by the depth and breadth of talent that is visible in this place. And I am grateful for the level of commitment that is demonstrated here on a weekly basis. From the first day that I joined you in ministry, it has been obvious to me that God is at work in this place – in classrooms, in worship, in service, and in fellowship. Ours is a community that is consistently being born anew.

So while today is certainly an ending, yes – and a tearful one at that, it is also a beginning. A new beginning for Jim and a new beginning for the congregation that he has served so faithfully. As scripture reminds us, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Jim, thank you for the so many good memories in this journey together. One of the greatest blessings of all is that the Spirit brought you into our lives. We will miss you so much. May all thanks be to the God of hope both now and forever. Amen.