

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

July 11, 2021, The 7th Sunday After Pentecost/The 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 24 (The Contemporary English Version), Ephesians 1:3-14 (The Message Translation)

“Oh, There You Are...”

We as a church family have just walked through a difficult month of saying three goodbyes to much-loved church members who have been a part of our life for many years. Those three goodbyes are added to the seven goodbyes we have said since last All Saints' Sunday in November 2020.

Lately I have been in conversation with many of you about how many banners there will be this coming November for All Saint's Sunday, and how one death after another has begun to weigh on our hearts and lives.

We don't have a lot of emotional reserves, do we? In different ways for each of us, the past 16 months have asked a lot of us. We have been changed by what we have lived through, what our nation and our world, our families, and our church family have lived through.

Because I have been in conversation with so many of you, on the phone, in person, in emails and texts about the amount of grief you are experiencing, I've been spending time thinking and praying about what has happened, and is happening, around us.

It seems to me that when we experience grief upon grief, it is easy to feel like we have lost our way.

As many of you know, new griefs often awaken old griefs, and it begins to feel like we are stuck in an overwhelming avalanche of grief, and we can't catch our breath.

When that happens, not only do we feel like we've lost our way, but it's easy to start feeling disconnected from our selves too.

We begin to feel disconnected from who we knew ourselves to be,
what we knew to be true,
what we believed about God,
and how we understood the world around us.

For me and for many of you, these last three goodbyes have really escalated a lot of those feelings. And while that is normal, it isn't comfortable or easy.

As I thought of my own feelings, and what many of you have been sharing with me, I was reminded of a scene from an old movie about a person who was lost and disconnected from who he truly was. The scene is in the movie *Hook*, which is amazingly 30 years old. So those of you who are younger may not know it, and those of you who are older may not have seen it for a long time, but it is definitely worth watching again, in whatever way you now access old movies. It's a fun movie with some hidden truths in it.

It is the story of Peter Banning, played by Robin Williams. Peter Banning is actually Peter Pan, all grown up, with grown up responsibilities. He no longer remembers who he really is. His old enemy Captain Hook comes to London and steals Peter's two children, taking them back to Never Land. Peter's old friend Tinkerbell comes to get him so he can rescue his children, but he doesn't remember who he is. She brings him back to the Lost Boys who he used to live with, who find it very hard to believe that this old man with glasses, who is a lawyer of all things, is actually Peter Pan, the Boy Who Never Grew Up. An exhausted and scared Peter Banning also finds it hard to believe.

His children need to be rescued, but Banning can't remember who he is, and the Lost Boys see no reason to support him. Finally, one of the smallest boys, Pockets, walks up to Banning and

gently tugs on his sleeve until he kneels down in front of him. This small boy of four or five reaches up and takes Banning's glasses from his face, and folds them up and sticks them in a pocket.

Then with his small child's hands he gently reaches up and begins to smooth the wrinkles on Banning's forehead.

He pushes on his cheeks and watches the old wrinkled skin spring back into place.

He looks into Banning's eyes, into his face, trying to see who is there.

Finally using both small hands he pushes Banning's sagging cheeks back, lifting his face into a smile,

and recognition dawns on that young boy's face,

and he says with wonder in his voice:

"Oh, there you are, Peter."

And Peter Banning remembers who he really is. He is Peter Pan, and he *can* go save his children. (see SER-15-01-07)

This morning I want to invite you to let the words of Ephesians 1 be like the little boy Pockets. Let these words reach out and touch your face and your heart and your spirit and your mind, and remind you, in the midst of sorrow, grief, change, and funeral upon funeral, that there is a deeper truth within you that has the power to hold onto you and hold you up, in the living of these days.

Let these words reach out, and smooth the wrinkled places in your heart, the wrinkled places in your spirit, the wrinkled places in your mind,
and remind you who you truly are,
even and especially in what your life is holding right now.

Listen to these promises that are for you this morning from Ephesians 1, reading from the Message Translation:

"Long before God laid down earth's foundations, God had you in mind,
had settled on you as the focus of God's love,
to be made whole and holy by this love.

Long, long ago God decided to adopt you into God's family through Jesus Christ.

(What pleasure God took in planning this!)

God wanted you to enter into the celebration of God's lavish gift-giving
by the hand of God's beloved Son.

God thought of everything, provided for everything you could possibly need,
letting you in on the plans God took such delight in making.

God set it all out before you in Christ,

a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in Christ,
everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

It's in Christ that you find out who you are
and what you are living for.

Long before you first heard of Christ and got your hopes up,

Christ had his eye on you,
had designs on you for glorious living,

part of the overall purpose Christ is working out in everything and everyone.

It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit.

This down payment from God is the first installment on what's coming,
a reminder that you'll get everything God has planned for you,
a praising and glorious life."

Beloved children of God, adopted into God's family,
we are not alone in our grief,
we are not alone in this world pandemic,
we are not alone.

In Jesus Christ we are claimed, we are saved, we strengthened and we are loved.

This is our promise and our strength.

This is always our Good News.

So today when you go home, and tomorrow morning when you get up, and any time you need to hear the truth of who you are in the midst of all that your day is holding, I invite you to look in the mirror and say to yourself:

Oh, there you are, child of God.

“Long before God laid down earth's foundations, God had you in mind,
had settled on you as the focus of God's love,
to be made whole and holy by this love.”

Hold onto these words, they were crafted especially for you.

Amen and Amen.