

Remembering Faithfulness
January 2, 2022

This is the first Sunday of 2022. We have **celebrated Jesus' birth**. We have celebrated **the New Year** arriving. So what is next? **How do we move forward into 2022?**

We have so many hopes for this year. Is this the year that the **pandemic ends?** Are things **better** or will things get **worse**.

Usually moving forward has to do with **making resolutions** for the New Year. **The fun is over** and now it's time to get serious. We have **gone to excess** during December, now we tighten things up and **brace ourselves for the cold** of January and February.

You are going to help me with the content of this first sermon of the New Year. If you are here in Midland, in Beaverton, or at home, you have **received a link**. I'm going to encourage you **in a few minutes to start using that link** to send your input. In a few moments I'll tell you what to send. No, this isn't stuff like, **"You're old,"** or **"that shirt is ugly."** Just get ready. That means it's ok to use your phone during this sermon, because you will be participating. **Matt will receive your responses** and signal me when he has something to tell us. **Matt will also be the filter**, since this is being live-streamed. You can give your **name or not**, that's up to you. For those who don't want to use technology, we have **cards**; you can write it on and an usher will bring it to me.

Here's the...[Link](#)

Let's begin by answering the first question, "How do we move forward in 2022?" **We must look back if we want to move forward with purpose.** **This is not where we** create a **historic time line** or a **musical montage** of 2021. We don't list our **kid's accomplishments** on Facebook so that everyone is really impressed. **It's looking back in order to remember God's faithfulness.**

This is not the same as **nostalgia** or any other unhealthy focus on the past. **We aren't living in the past. We also aren't burying the past; that keeps us from seeing God's faithfulness.** It also allows us to **bury the hard things** that we need to deal with **before they grow in the darkness into something** that will make you and those around you sick. **We don't want bitterness to take root, but we do want the faithfulness of God in the past to be the foundation off of which the future gets built.** The past can be the **soil from which flowers grow or mold**, that depends upon how we deal with it.

I have told all your people about your justice. I have not been afraid to speak out, as you, O LORD, well know. ¹⁰ I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power.

I have told everyone in the great assembly of your unfailing love and faithfulness. ¹¹ LORD, don't hold back your tender mercies from me. Let your unfailing love and faithfulness always protect me. Psalm 40:9-11

First part is what the Psalmist is doing in response to God's faithfulness to this point.

The second part is his request for God to continue to do what he has done in the past.

That's the pattern that we need to follow. We need to tell the people, not fearing to speak, not keeping hidden, tell in the assembly of his people of his justice, power, unfailing love and faithfulness. Then, we cry out to him to continue the same in the future.

My friend, Greg Weins, says that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. The best predictor of God's faithfulness in the future is God's faithfulness in the past.

God, being faithful, **does not mean everything went well** or was easy and there was **no pain**. That's not life. God isn't a **lawnmower parent**. That's one who smooths the path in front of their child so that there is little resistance.

Here's a way to make it easier, to remember God's faithfulness, power, and love toward us in the past, and establish a memorial monument. Some physical sign that will momentarily **jog the memory** and take you back to a time when God was faithful.

⁵ He told them, "Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁶ We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ Then you can tell them, 'They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD's Covenant went across.' These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever." Joshua 4:5-7

These reminders also give us an opportunity to teach those who weren't there or were too young to remember. It's passing along the story of the Kingdom of God.

Today, we aren't going to go down to the tridge and pull up some rocks for a monument here. One way we are supposed to do this is by **gathering and worshiping** God weekly. It's a rhythm in our lives that is really important. **We build a monument here.**

When we look back in the right way, not in nostalgia or bitterness, or pride, but rather to see God's faithfulness...**We are reminded that God is good.**

Today, we are going to make this interactive. At any point, if you are here in Midland, or in Beaverton, or at home, text your stories of God's faithfulness. **I'd like you to do it in two categories**, for you and your family or for Eagle Ridge Church of God.

How has God been good to you during 2021?
How has God been good to Eagle Ridge in 2021?

Pause...

¹⁸ Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: "Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. **"Only God is truly good. Luke 19:19-19"**

Jesus is **establishing a very important principle**. God is the **only one who is truly good**. When we see goodness in ourselves or in others, it is from God.

⁵ It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God's grace—**his undeserved kindness in choosing them.** ⁶ And **since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works.** For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved. Romans 11:5-6

In other words, **God's goodness cannot be earned** through good behavior. If that were the case, it wouldn't be grace.

The other option is to move forward thinking that God isn't good, making him the cause of all that is bad. Then you become the cause of all that is good. "I did it on my own." **We can move forward, but not with what God has planned for us. Sin is also based upon God not being good and is holding out on you. Go make your own path.**

When we look back in the right way, not in nostalgia, bitterness, or pride, but rather to see God's faithfulness...We are reminded that God is good...And likes to use the weak and unworthy.

Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in **weakness**." So now I am glad to boast about my **weaknesses**, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my **weaknesses**, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

List some of your weaknesses...Those are the avenues through which God can be strong. God wants to use your brokenness so stop burying it!

What about us as a church? Let's look at our weakness.

- Not the biggest church...actually smaller than before COVID began.
- Cut budget by 30,000.
- Your pastor is terribly flawed, introverted, not particularly dynamic, and struggles with depression and anxiety.

There is nothing about us that is special or worthy of distinction.

So when great things happen and lives are transformed, we can't take credit for it. We praise God.

It's like breathing. You take in the blessing of faithfulness and then you exhale the praise.

He remembered us in our **weakness**. His faithful love endures forever. Psalm 136:23

The other option for moving forward is that we seek power to be served, not to serve. Now we take credit for the blessings we enjoy and they become an end to themselves. Then I must earn what I get instead of receiving grace from God through Jesus. This is the human paradigm.

When we look back in the right way, not in nostalgia, bitterness, or pride, but rather to see God's faithfulness...We are reminded that God is good...And likes to use the weak and unworthy...Who trust Him.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend (Lean) on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

When I lean on something, I am trusting that what I am leaning on will hold me and keep me from falling.

Look at what God has done through a small church in mid Michigan during a pandemic. We, like many churches, have fewer people coming to our Sunday services.

Here are a few of the ways he has been faithful.

One year as one church and two locations.

- **Miracle of raising the money for the building.** Going into a financially lean time with a building that was going to continue to cost money was not an option for a church our size. **God raised \$100,000 when other funding fell through.**

Robin's Missions report.

- Giving
- Uganda
- Lawrence and Jo

Cultivate Coffee...our second intern this year who will learn how to set up their own bridge into our culture and go do it in another community.

Partnership with **Terry and Sandy Lodico**...I'm still here because God used Terry.

Italian house church
Pics of house church

Hope Church...

Daniel and Christie Griggs

Multiplication is happening. Let's try to picture if all of this were **additional growth**, here in this place, right here where we could easily see it. What would happen?

1. **We would need more staff and more programming** which goes together. **We would need more money** to pay for all of that. **We would need another service**, which would mean that we need more

people to do all the things it takes. **More of the building would be for services for those people and, therefore, not available to the community.**

2. **We would not have a presence in Beaverton, Italy, Hope, and at a very large Lutheran church outside of Midland. It would all be consolidated here. Multiplication gets to a bigger number faster than addition.**
3. **We would have a pride issue**
4. **We would be more about inviting to come, instead of going. More centralizes like the temple, which Jesus came to make obsolete.**
5. **We are becoming a sending Church, not an accumulating or warehousing church!!!**

We have looked back at God's faithfulness and goodness, now we are prepared to move forward. That means taking steps in the direction God is leading us. **Steps of Obedience**

1. Commit to going all in this month.

Fellowship is crucial and Sundays are important. This topic is really important for our effectiveness as a church. It will be challenging. **That's how we build a monument here, by gathering together to praise him and learning to walk humbly with our God.**

2. Open yourself up to Jesus' body

There are ways to do this. **Becoming the person God created you to be will be stunted without relationships within the body of Christ the church.** There are ways to make this happen. **You can begin by coming to worship.** That takes us to back to step #1. **If you aren't medically vulnerable and you've just gotten comfortable watching at your convenience or just having Sunday mornings free, get here in January. Test God.** Being here, singing these songs, together, hearing the word together is important. **It bonds us together ready to be his presence in this culture.**

Then once you come, you can linger after in order to talk to people. You can stay for **soup on Sunday** and talk to people. Then you can **make connections with people,** open yourselves up to one another, other broken people like you. **In many cases, this is simply reestablishing a relationship that was stronger in the past, but life, COVID, business, consumerism got in the way.**

Then the next step is to follow one of those people to a bridge group, which is a relational context where we talk about the subject of the sermon series, pray for one another and help each other follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus and commit to Jesus' mission.

3. Find your part in what God is doing here!

Use a card that people can mark.

Come forward and place it on the altar if you are here in Midland or in Beaverton. If you are at home, use the link that was given to text in your praises to **I want to find a bridge group** or **I need help finding my part in what God is doing**.

When we look back in the right way, not in nostalgia, bitterness, or pride, but rather to see God's faithfulness...We are reminded that God is good...And likes to use the weak and unworthy...Who trust Him.

Are you ready to move forward? Let's do it together!