

January 25, 2015

1st of Pathways Series, logo unveil; Scott testimony; new coffee approach
Boone UMC; Jason Byassee

I was with one of you this week who's newer to our community, a retiree who's become part of our church. And you said something that was a deep compliment to our church that we should all hear. You said this, your church, Boone Methodist is full of people who are serious about pursuing God, *and* who ask hard questions. You can usually find one or the other in a church but not usually both. That's right on, you can find people serious about God who ask no questions; or people who only have questions but don't leave space for God. Then you said this, your church is so good it's almost scary. Wow. That's right. Sister it took 150 years to build that. I wonder what the next 150 will be like? There's only one problem I said. You keep calling it your church. Can we call it ours?

Today is the first in a series of sermons called Pathways. We're using it to unveil our new log and graphic identity.¹ Here it is. You've already seen it on our new bulletins and banners around church. You'll see much more of it because it's beautiful. This sermon will say much more about it shortly. For now I want to thank Michael Haas for leading the team that designed it, Kelly Broman-Fulks for leading the vision team that led to it, those groups have worked hard for years to make this happen. On behalf of your church thank you. Let's turn to God's word in scripture. This passage describes the end. Where we're all headed. Most people think of the book of Revelation as a description of the destruction of the world. No wonder we avoid it, who wants a faceful of that early in the morning? But listen as I read. This isn't destruction. It's a wedding. This isn't agony. It's healing. It's not narrow. It's life for all. It's a perfect word for where we're headed Boone Methodist. Not by our power, but by God's. It can help us order our church's life to get ready for the beautiful conclusion God is bringing to the universe. Hear this word of unimaginable hope.

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

That's the word of God, for the people of God, **thanks be to God.**

The beginning of our new mission statement and today's graphic identity that illustrates it were humble. We were worried about our debt. So many longtime leaders of our church and some new leaders gathered to seek wisdom on what to do about it. It's no good spending money on interest that could be going to ministry. And a consultant came and said what if I told you you don't have a money problem. You have a vision problem. People don't give to debt or light bills or ceiling tiles. They give to a dream. A story. A vision of things being better than they are. This is what we came up with over more than two years now: "Loving our community and inviting all to discover life in Christ." That's a big enough vision to jump on board with. Jim Deal and Bobby Sharp who co-led our church's move out here to New Market from King Street 15 years ago

¹ Logo on screen please

came to describe this vision process as the completion of the move. This is who we are who are now in this building. We are people who love Boone, who love Jesus, and want to see the two meet.

Our scripture is a quick description of the point of the whole bible. And here's the point of the whole bible: *God dwells with us*. God does! The God whom heaven and earth can't contain comes among us in Israel. Then in the tiny child under Mary's ribs. Then in each of our hearts. God makes his home here now with us. With us! Sinful and self-absorbed and hurtful and injured people that we are. God says *you!* I want to come and live with you today. This is the first of the year, gyms are still full, new year's resolutions still have some steam in them. Some people want to read the whole bible in a year. Ambitious and wonderful. So they start out in Genesis. This is awesome! Bono from U2 calls Genesis the action movie of the bible. Car crashes and love scenes and bad guys. It keeps on in Exodus. Until about chapter 20. Then the rules start. What to do if your animal is gored or if your enemy's donkey collapses or with different kinds of cloth. Not interesting. Resolution over. And that's a thousand pities.¹ Here's the thread that holds the bible together: God dwells with us. And just because God knows we get lost in the details God puts the thread here at the end as well as the beginning. God reigns in us forever.

The logo we unveil today tells our story as a congregation. But our story as a congregation is much bigger than just ours.² We're United Methodists, and the cross and flame logo of our denomination is still very much in play, its on our outer wall, our signs, it says what Methodism is across our 8 million people in the US and around the world. This logo though is for *this* congregation of the church in this town with these people. We have other important logos—the dove window behind me is beloved. The Crossroads cross through the mountains is too. Do you see how both are in this new logo? The circles echo the circular dove window. The cross through the mountains shows a pathway for us. The circles show our openness as a community. There are several ways to enter. Just as we all enter by different ways—growing up in church or not, through this service or one of our other 5 worshiping communities. And yet the way we go together is the way of the cross. It is Jesus we find here, he's the heart of who we are and all we do. The mountains show our setting—Boone, a town we love and if we're honest makes us crazy. That's true too of all things good—of ourselves, our spouse, our friends, our parents, all the ones who love and harm you. In this town we value openness, discovery, exploration, vibrancy, that's why you move to the mountains. This is also a place of deep deep traditionalism—people moved to the mountains originally to get away from other people, you can ask a total stranger in Watauga County where they go to church. We have great small businesses here, great educational institutions, great non-profits, we're a retiree and second home mecca. And in all this swirling beauty is us, Boone Methodist. What do we have? We're as flexible as Boone is. And as committed to Jesus as the church is. Seriously pursuing God and asking questions both.

We hope our mission statement guides all we do. We hope this logo reminds us of our story from 1866 till now. And we hope these new icons will remind us all how we make disciples. We worship, we connect, we serve, we grow, a sermon on each of these is to follow the next 4 weeks. For now notice you'll see them everywhere. When we list something in the bulletin or on screens or online or in Facebook you'll see an icon by it. What's this for? Oh, it's for worship, or growth, or connection, or service. In other words all we do is directed toward those ends or we don't do it. You'll notice the bulletins have less information in them. This is intentional. We don't need to print so many or recycle so many. We'll print a new one for each series now. And these are designed to help people new to church, not just ours but church altogether, to see what we do and why. What this series is about and why. We'll still print inserts with prayer lists and announcements, you can pick one up in the back if you like. But there's no reason to hand out a small book each week. I find as a worship leader I check the bulletin obsessively. *I'm the minister—I know what's coming*. What I should be doing incessantly is worshipping God, taking all that nervous energy and praying. When I look out there I often

² Cross and flame up plz <http://www.l-lumc.org/Media/transparent-cross-and-flame.gif>

see noses buried in the bulletin. It's not that interesting y'all! But God is, let's look up at him together. I know this is all new and unfamiliar. Let's try it and see how it goes. One thing I treasure about our church is this, if you don't have this as a church you can't get it. We're open to the new. I think this is why. We moved buildings 15 years ago. If you thought church had to always be like it was you didn't make this move. And by the time we made the move we were all united, unanimous, ready to go where God calls.

When we first bought this land but before we'd built the church we started having events out here. We put in the picnic shelter first. To have meals, to consecrate this place as holy ground—Jesus always meets his people with food. We have vacation bible school out here. Our children consecrated it with their laughter. Next generation now our value says. We saw a future coming and we wanted to get ready for it. That's what this passage in Revelation is doing. It's describing what's coming. God is bringing his kingdom. There's not a thing we can do to stop it or hurry it. All we can do is align our lives right to be ready when it comes. All in line with God's kingdom will be established forever. All that is not will pass away. What does Revelation say about the shape of things to come?

Three points here. One, God's city comes down like a bride. Two, God is in the tear-drying business. And three, God. That's it for that last point, just God.

Point one God's city comes down like a bride. This is contrary to how much of the church thinks of life eternal. We speak of heaven as a place you go when you die. And that's not wrong. It's just not big enough. Here in Revelation God makes clear. Heaven comes to us. And by us I mean us. All of us. Faith is not limited to the tiny confines of an individual heart. It's big, cosmic, it's a city. Here in Boone we don't live in a city. A community, a town, a county, sure, but a city? Nah. I lived in Chicago for some years and loved it, loved the energy the city pulses, the things to do, the people. Thing is cities are a headache too. Expensive and crowded. People live close which is great till it's not. It's also easier to abuse and hurt, to be abused and hurt. I saw the same homeless people on the way to and from work in Chicago. Back there last year I saw some of the same. Others were gone, God knows where. We have a love/hate relationship with cities don't we? But God's city is a city scrubbed clean of evil and violence and death, with people clothed and in their right mind, all fed and all a hum of activity.

It sounds kind of like our church. We have five worshiping communities now, two in here, one in the gym, one in living rooms downtown, and one in Todd. In a world of 87 flavors of jelly you need some options. Or as Clarissa Schmale told me with a teacher's wisdom this week, we used to have one room schoolhouses. Then we realized you educate better by dividing folks up. Schools and churches are in the same business, we grow souls. God bless a teacher's grace and insight. Our church has gotten more complex and that's good. The trick is to figure out how to communicate well, bear with one another well with patience, love well, assume the best of one another. An example. Two weeks ago Reggie Hunt preached for us in all three services. We remembered our baptism. And Pastor Vern gave an invitation for anyone who hadn't been baptized to come forward if they felt led to be baptized. And two people did. Entirely unfair Reggie preaches and two people are spontaneously baptized. That's not something we do in here. We plan baptisms. No apologies for that. But Crossroads can do something we can't, and the kingdom rejoices. Our church has always been ready for an adventure. That's why we fit so well here in Boone. There's a reason we're called Boone United Methodist and not First Methodist or Somebody Memorial Methodist. We're a church for our town. Anyone want an adventure? The answer is yes, you all do. Jesus is coming. Bringing his bride, the church, made beautiful, gorgeous, perfect, like us at our best, our worst burned away, breathtaking as a bride. Lord make us that now and always.

Point two God has come to dwell with us. The heart of the whole bible. This is a fearful thing. My friend I started with called our church so good it's a little scary. It is! Methodist churches where you have

spontaneous baptisms? River baptisms? We've been having prayers for healing after communion for a few months. And last month someone reported they'd been healed. Not of cancer or something deadly, but of something debilitating, for him. Whoah, we thought, hey, we didn't mean it, we just thought it'd be nice. But hey if you ask God to do something God might do it. A little scary. This is the heart of the whole bible. God is awesome. Powerful. Moses couldn't even see God's face or he'd have been annihilated. And here in Revelation God says hey, I'm going to move into your house and stay forever. And marry you. Unbearably close. And this won't destroy you it'll mean life unending for you. Salvation means receiving gifts you didn't even know you wanted and realizing, wow, I don't deserve this, it's too much. God says yep that's how I roll.

I've learned this from you Boone Methodist. Here I inherited a story I wouldn't have had otherwise. A few examples. Buck Robbins who we lost two years ago now grew up at our church. His parents divorced when he was 4. Do you know what names they called little boys growing up without a daddy in the 1930s? What became his daddy? This church. The men took him in. Taught him how to hunt, how to fish, how to be a man. And guess who always supported our children's ministry? One Buck Robbins. God I miss him. Never would have known him without the church. These windows were built for our church we built in the 1920s, we reinstalled them with a new building in 1984 after a fire. And in that fire a fireman had to smash a window to fight the fire. He reared back with a brick and threw it with all his might and it bounced back in his face. That's faith. It looks really weak. It's actually unimaginably strong. We get to see God's light stream through them every week. I don't know why you're here. I hardly know why I'm here most days. I do know this. Being here means we're daughters and sons of the most high. Siblings to one another. Heirs to an inheritance we didn't know we had coming but we do. Made part of one another. We're a bride, gorgeous. Christ is the groom, majestic and magnificent and true and delightful. And a wedding is coming.

Point three, God wipes away every tear from every eye. Wait a minute, I thought God only cared for certain sorts of people.³ Scripture says, "God himself will wipe every tear from every eye." But wait, I thought God has gifts only for certain sorts of special people but most people are just out of luck? The bible says "God himself will wipe every tear from every eye." I had the honor of being with a group of students on campus as they faced suicide. One of their own gone before she was 21. That shouldn't happen. The church taught for centuries such a one was inevitably lost. You know why we taught that? Because we weren't reading our own bible very well. What's it say? "God himself will wipe every tear from every eye." God is in the tear drying business. And look here, God does it himself! Throughout the bible when God needs something done he sends an angel. To Abraham or to Moses or to Mary. Here at the end of time God comes himself. An gently lays a hand on every tear and wipes it away, God can't stand his creation to suffer. Anywhere there are tears there will be God's gently wiping hand. So many people think God's hand is a fist. Closed. Hard. Forbidding. No. It's an open hand. It is an altogether gentle hand. It has scars in it. And it holds each of us and will never let go.

There's our story Boone Methodist, our story in a logo. It's been our story a lot longer than 150 years in this mountain, though it includes that history, that patch of earth. It stretches back to Abraham and around the globe. And to stand and be part of it makes us human and holy. And those two words mean the same thing.

I'd like to close with a prayer I shared with the students facing loss, Jaylynn shared it with others of you this week. I'll pray it for us, feel free to listen and watch as its prayed so we can all learn from it. We'll make it our church's prayer. It's from Thomas Merton, here it is.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that

³ Rev. 21:3 on screen plz

I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.

ⁱ All from NT Wright in *The New Testament for Everyone* volume on Revelation