

Sunday, August 4, 2024

First Lesson: 1 Peter 2: 2-3

Gospel Lesson: John 6: 24-35

Sermon Series: Read the Story: Turn the Page

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Good morning Beloved Community.

- We are continuing a 12-week journey through the sermon series "**Read the Story,**" focusing on the profound lessons found in the first epistle of Peter, tying in new gospels lessons each week beginning with the Gospel of Mark.
- I would like to firstly give thanks to Rev. Bonnie McCord and Alex Steadman for covering the pulpit these past couple of weeks.
- We as a congregation are truly blessed to have so many people within our worship community with a multitude of Spiritual Gifts.
- 1 Corinthians 12:4 tells us that *there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit*, and I believe that this is very evident

within our worship community of which I am forever grateful for!

- There is a purpose besides celebrating community in which I have chosen to begin this conversation from a place of recognition and acknowledgment.
- For in defining this concept of “**turn the page,**” it is my belief that it takes every one of us exercising our spiritual gifts for the Church, to be able to navigate through the highs and lows of ministry and life!
- **Turning the page** individually for me means recognizing past mistakes, learning from them, and not letting them define the future.
- **Turning the page** is about forgiving oneself and others, shedding old habits or mindsets, and embracing a path of continuous growth and self-improvement.
- **Turning the page** symbolizes new opportunities and the chance to pursue different goals and dreams; thereby making the ultimate benefit of us being able to **turn the page** is that by doing so, each new page represents a fresh start, where one can redefine their identity, purpose, and aspirations.

- This in a nutshell is how I equate God's mercy and grace that is extended to all of us to really mean.
- It is through this grace that you and I have the ability **to turn the page**—meaning you and I have the ability to reset, renew, recharge and redo whatever past failure, mistake or transgression we may have contributed to.
- This is the main reason why my heart for justice tends to lean towards supporting rehabilitative, restorative options as it pertains particularly to our three community issues we are continuing to make progress on with *Justice-in Action*; pre-trial diversion, affordable housing and mental health.
- Studies show that participants in restorative justice programs have lower recidivism rates.
- For example, restorative justice programs have an average recidivism rate of 18%, compared to 27% in the traditional criminal justice system.
- Second chance programs and opportunities such as these have shown significant success in helping individuals reintegrate into society, reducing recidivism, and improving employment outcomes.

- From a biblical perspective, the theme of **turning the page** is implicit in just about every story we will encounter—primarily this idea that through all of humanity’s activity and free will decisions and choices, there is an invitation for us all **to turn the page** in their situation and/or circumstance.
- Bringing our gospel into closer discussion there is no doubt a theme of **“turn the page”** is there to be discovered.
- The crowd seeks Jesus after witnessing the miracle of the loaves and fishes.
- They are searching for Him, **not out of a desire for spiritual truth but rather because they were filled with physical bread.**
- Jesus confronts them, urging them to seek the "bread of life" rather than perishable food.
- He declares, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35, ESV).

- In this passage, the concept of **"turning the page"** can be understood as a call to transition from a superficial, earthly focus to a deeper, spiritual pursuit.
- Jesus invites the crowd to move beyond the immediate satisfaction of their physical needs and seek the eternal nourishment that only He can provide.
- This turning point is crucial; **it's about shifting one's perspective and priorities**, akin to turning the page in a book and beginning a new chapter.
- All which on paper seems like a reasonable ask for a person to consider—to shift a perspective and be open to other possibilities.
- However, if we have lived longer than three seconds, we know that the human dilemma is that **many of us are not willing to shift our perspectives that easily.**
- As I reflect on the current landscape of society, it has become increasingly clear to me that several areas require a significant shift in perspective or a paradigm shift to foster progress, inclusivity, and sustainability **and yet as a human race, we still have work to do.**

- For example, traditionally, mental health issues have been stigmatized, often viewed as a personal weakness rather than a legitimate health concern.
- This perspective not only discourages individuals from seeking help but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes.
- Therefore, **a paradigm shift is needed** to recognize mental health as an integral component of overall well-being. This includes prioritizing mental health education, promoting open conversations, and integrating mental health care into primary health services.
- Another example: Our current approach to environmental issues **often focuses on short-term solutions rather than long-term sustainability.**
- The prevailing paradigm of exploiting natural resources for economic gain needs to shift toward a model of stewardship and conservation.
- For me this means rethinking our relationship with the planet, embracing renewable energy sources, and implementing policies that prioritize ecological balance over immediate profit.

- This involves you and I acknowledging the interconnectedness of all living things that can help foster a sense of responsibility for future generations.
- **Another example: The traditional education system, characterized by standardized testing and a one-size-fits-all approach, often stifles creativity and critical thinking.**
- **A paradigm shift is needed** to embrace diverse learning styles and promote holistic education that prioritizes emotional intelligence, practical skills, and real-world application.
- This entails moving towards personalized education that can empower students to become lifelong learners, equipped to navigate an increasingly complex world.
- **Finally, in many societies, there exists a dominant culture that marginalizes minority voices and perspectives.**
- A fundamental shift in how we view diversity is necessary—moving from tolerance to genuine appreciation and inclusion.

- Embracing a multicultural society can lead to richer dialogues, innovative solutions, and a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.
- This involves celebrating differences while finding common ground which is vital for social cohesion.
- All of this and more is why being able to “**turn the page,**” in our personal and collective lives is so critical for us to truly thrive as a society.
- For I don’t know about you, but the older I get, the more I strive to not get stuck in a rut,
- Verse 27 of our gospel echoes this a little differently when Jesus tells the disciples *Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life—*
- In other words, when we get stuck in a perishable mindset—we stunt all other possibilities that could come our way,
- We stunt our potential,
- We stunt our growth,
- We stunt our transformations,
- We stunt our possibilities,



- We become like the 23rd Psalm, stuck in the valley of the shadow of death—immobilized by our fears, regrets, and the weight of past experiences.
- This metaphorical valley that we normally glean from during celebration of life services, represents not just a state of despair, but also a pivotal moment in our lives for us to consider, Can we turn the page—can we let go and let God...can we confront our challenges and choose to move forward?
- These are questions that I leave with all of us to consider as we continue to navigate life through our families, jobs, society and more.
- The good news is that you and I do not have to navigate this valley alone!
- Our connections with others and our connection with God can provide the support and encouragement needed to **turn the page**.
- There is a palpable collective strength that comes when we choose to come together in community like we are today both in person and online.

- For ultimately, every time you and I make the decision to show up in community, **this is how we turn the page!**
- For turning the page is an act of hope—
- **Turning the page** is an act of faith—
- **Turning the page** is an act of courage—
- **Turning the page** is a living witness to the world that we believe in a future that can be brighter than the present—
- **The power to turn the page** rests within us all.
- By confronting our narratives, embracing change, seeking community, and fostering hope, we can emerge from the shadows and step into the light of new beginnings.
- The journey may be challenging, but it is also filled with the potential for renewal and growth.
- For our story is not over, the best is yet to come!