

New Beginnings
Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34; John 14: 12-17, 25-27; Romans 8:14-17; Genesis 25:1-8
Salem United Methodist Church; June 9, 2019
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We are in the season of high school and college graduations. These new graduates are saying good-bye to one chapter in their lives and saying hello to a new beginning. I have found graduations to be a time of mixed emotions. There is joy in finishing this part of one's education, but there is also sadness in saying good-bye to what has become your tribe: teachers and friends. And there is also a bit of anxiety about the new beginning. It might be a new job, getting married, joining the military, attending college or graduate school. With any new beginning comes finding a new tribe in which one can feel at home.

For the last few years I have been hearing the term, tribe, mentioned in new ways. When I think of tribes, I think of groups of people from more primitive cultures, for instance, the tribes of the Native Americans or Africans. The people in these tribes have a strong common identity, such as kinship, culture or ethnicity. However, the newer use of the word, tribe, means a group of people with shared interests, occupations, lifestyles, and/or habits. Your tribe can be your group of friends or even your school. Sherwood High School is a type of tribe. Once a Warrior, always a Warrior. However, within Sherwood there are tribes such as class years, clubs, sports, and music groups. What is or was your tribe?

We here at Salem are a type of tribe. We are a group of people who meet together because of our love for God and the people of God. Even within Salem, there are smaller tribes, as well. Youth Group is a type of tribe. We gather on Sunday evenings to debrief from the week, eat, enjoy each other's company, and maybe learn something about God, too. We have other tribes here. We have small groups that get together on a regular basis to pray, study, and support one another. And Salem is part of a larger tribe called the United Methodist Church. In addition, the United Methodist Church is part of an even larger tribe called the Christian faith. There is one thing that unites all Christians- the belief that God out of love for us sent Jesus, the Son, to live on earth so we could know God. Jesus taught us, healed us, died for us, rose again, and now lives with God in heaven. And with God's great love, Jesus taught that we are to love God and love our tribe. For Jesus our tribe is every person in the world.

Today we heard the Pentecost story. It is about God making God's tribal circle wider to include even more people. The Jewish people were God's chosen people. They were celebrating a harvest festival which occurred fifty days after Passover. Jews came from many different countries to the Temple in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival. Meanwhile, Jesus disciples were grieving the loss of Jesus, not necessarily his death, but his return to heaven. They stayed together, prayed, and tried to understand of all that happened when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Our human language is limited when it comes to describing the supernatural, in this case, the Holy Spirit. So, we say it was like...It was like "the rush of a violent wind." It was like "divided tongues of fire." But more importantly than experiencing all this is what the disciples were able to do after receiving the Holy Spirit. They were able to talk to all the people who came from different countries in their own language so that they could share the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah. This was an incredible miracle. It may not seem so in today's world because there are people who can simultaneously interpret one language while listening to another. What a gift! And with today's technology we can type in one language and a program will interpret it into another language on one click. But we are talking about the first century. What happened at Pentecost had never happened before! God was widening the circle of love to include more and more people.

The Apostle Paul understood this inclusion when he wrote, "That we are all God's children." That's a really big tribe. If we are all God's children, then we are brothers and sisters. We are siblings and what do siblings do? Fight. Paul knew that, too. In fact, in most of Paul's letters to his churches, he is dealing with church fights, arguments, and disagreements. Most of his churches were comprised of people from different cultures and faith traditions. They came together to form a new tribe called the church and that was challenging. Everybody had their own thoughts and ideas. So, arguments and disagreements happened. Paul constantly tries in different ways to tell his churches that we are all One in Christ Jesus. We are all part of the One Tribe of

God. However, this idea of being one tribe or our oneness did not originate with Paul. Jesus talks about being of one tribe. In his prayer before he was arrested and executed, Jesus stated that God and he were one and prayed that we would be one as well. We are all God's children. We are all created by One God in Three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God created us. God sent the Son, Jesus, to show us God's love and teach us how to be one, and together, the Father and the Son, sent the Holy Spirit to help us become one.

And yet, we are not one. There are still divisions. We, even, create tribes for the sole purpose of creating division in our oneness. Can humanity ever become one in Christ Jesus? Is this a pipe dream? A myth? Is it possible? I read this phrase this week, "You will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love. Always be kind." Paul could have used that phrase in his letters to his churches. We could use this phrase in our nation as different political groups spar against each other. We could use this phrase in the United Methodist Church as some seek to exclude those who are LGBTQIA+. We could use this phrase just about anywhere. Part of our tribe here at Salem is going to Appalachia. They will become part of a greater tribe when they come together with other churches. And then they will go out to homes where they will integrate with the tribe of folk in the mountains of Charmco, West Virginia. Part of Salem's tribe will become one with Appalachia Service Project tribe and with W. VA. homeowners.

What does it take to bring tribes together to become one? Do we all have to think alike? Act alike? Do we all have to agree? No. David knew this. King Saul was trying to kill him so David ran to the country of Moan. He was an outsider, but he wanted to become part of their tribe. What does he do? He offers these words, "Peace to you, your household, and all that is yours!" This is the theme verse for the Appalachia Service Project this year. It is very appropriate as our tribe seeks to be one with another tribe. Peace to you, your household, and all that is yours. We did not read the rest of David's time in Moan. Nabal, a leader in Moan saw David as the enemy. He refused to feed, house and provide a safety for David and his men. He would not allow them to become part of his tribe. But Abigail, Nabal's wife, without telling her husband goes to where David and his men are camping. She welcomes them and gives them food. And then she gives one the longest speeches by a woman in the Bible. She recognizes David as a man of God who will become a great leader. She begs for forgiveness for her husband's rudeness. David forgives, blesses her, and sends her home in peace. Within a few days, Moan dies. Later Abigail becomes David's wife and together they form one tribe. My children loved to read "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. These books give the reader opportunities to make choices that determine the main character's actions and the plot's outcome. As I read this story of Moan, I want to make a different choice for Moan. I want to see what would have happened if he would have welcomed David and his men. Would these two tribes become one and lived peacefully together? Would Moan have lived?

We know from the world around us that there are people like Moan who do not welcome peace and unity. This is why we have the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our Companion, to accompany us, to help us choose the ways of peace and unity in this adventure of life. I am going to close with a story from the CBS evening news. It takes place in South Brunswick, New Jersey. A boy named, Carter, and his mother were at the skate park on his fifth birthday. He and his Mom were a tribe of two. Carter is autistic and being around groups makes him nervous. A tribe of middle schoolers arrived at the skate park. Carter's mother was ready to get him out of there before he had a breakdown, but something happened. One middle schooler, named Gavin, began to play with Carter and help him with his skateboarding. Gavin's friends followed his lead. They even sang, "Happy Birthday" to Carter. Because of one person, Gavin, who looked into Carter's eyes, who saw someone God loved and was kind, two tribes became one. This group of middle schoolers and Carter continue to get together at the skate park as God looks down and smiles.

Remember God always seeks peace and unity for all God's children every day. It is we who choose to live in tribes that war against each other. Graduates and ASP team members, as you seek your new tribes, choose ones who seek to live in peace and unity with each other and with other tribes. And be like Abigail, offer hospitality and peace to your enemy. **Reflection Questions:** Who is your tribe? What kind of tribe is it? How does your tribe seek peace and unity for all God's children?

