

Trinity United Methodist Church, Iron Mountain, Michigan
The 26th Sunday after Pentecost, November 18, 2018, 10:30 a.m.

Scripture Readings

Hebrews 10: 19 – 25 (*The Message*)

So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into “the Holy Place.” Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice,
acting as our priest before God.

The “curtain” into God’s presence is his body.

So let’s *do* it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out.

Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going.

God always keeps his word.

Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out,
not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on,
especially as we see the big Day approaching.

Ephesians 2: 21 – 22 (*The Message*)

That’s plain enough, isn’t it? You’re no longer wandering exiles.

This kingdom of faith is now your home country.

You’re no longer strangers or outsiders.

You *belong* here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone.

God is building a home.

God is using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building.

God used the apostles and prophets for the foundation.

Now God is using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone,
with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together.

We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God,
all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Message

Jubilee!

Pastor Geri

Some of you may be thinking...The Building Up the Temple campaign was finished up last week but here we are today, still talking about Jesus as the cornerstone and all of us as being the temple in which God makes a home.

It just goes to show you...The Campaign may end but the Holy work of God through God’s people just keeps on going! *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy!*

I chose these readings to help us remember that in spite of the rapid rate of change all around us. Regardless of the new and different things that keep cropping up in technology and in our politics and through the younger generations... We are not wandering exiles in a changing and difficult landscape. No...this community of faith here in Iron Mountain is our home country. Even if this is your first time here or your 500 thousandth time here...you are no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here...at Trinity UM...in the heart of God who is building a home here, in and with and through us.

Just as the choir sang for us last week...God is faithful to his word.

Just as we know, ourselves, Jesus has cleared the way—through his sacrifice, through his love, through his resurrection...Jesus has cleared the way for us to BE the people of God together. And on this Charge Conference Sunday, it is good for us to remember and to celebrate the great things that God has done for us here at Trinity UMC since the last Charge Conference.

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!

This has been a special year in the life of this church...we call this our Jubilee Year. If you haven't been here let me explain this Jubilee concept. Jubilee in general culture refers to the celebration of an anniversary...a special year commemorating the milestone for a king or queen or organization. In our Christian tradition, the concept of Jubilee can be traced all the way back to the creation of the world story in Genesis where God declares the Sabbath day Holy...Gen 2:3 *So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.* Jubilee!

God's law, as given to Moses makes it very clear: Lev. 25 *The Message* *Sow your fields, prune your vineyards, and take in your harvests for six years. But the seventh year the land will take a Sabbath of complete and total rest, a Sabbath to GOD.* The Lord spoke to Moses and said...let the land rest. Jubilee!

And then...God went on to say...*Count up seven times seven years of Sabbaths...49 years and then Sanctify the fiftieth year; make it a holy year...The fiftieth year is your Jubilee year!*

As one Bible translation (CEV) writes it: *This fiftieth year is sacred—it is a time of freedom and of celebration when everyone will receive back their original property, and slaves will return home to their families.*

Jubilee is not just an Old Testament concept. Jesus actually preached Jubilee in his very first sermon in Luke Chapter 4...he was reading from the prophet Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

The Year of the Lord's favor...code for Jubilee!

And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Jesus was saying: The Jubilee is here and now. God's kingdom come, God's will be done...on earth as it is in heaven.

Ever since that day, we who follow Jesus have been trying to figure out how to live that new Jubilee reality that Jesus brought to us. How to be faithful to releasing those who are captive and setting free those who are oppressed and bringing good news to the poor.

We can look at the history of the church and see how down through the centuries the Jubilee year concept has been used to remind us of wise land use...of economic justice...to notice the unequal distribution of food and resources and to make an effort to right the wrongs that can build up over time so that people have a chance to be set free from bondage to debt.

I understand that even to this day, the Jubilee is celebrated every 25 years in the Catholic church and In 2015, Pope Francis called for an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy—out of sequence with the 25 year pattern. He called for a world-wide celebration of God's mercy and forgiveness...We all need that, don't we?

And here we are, at Trinity in 2018, in our own Jubilee Year. Your church Council agreed that our Jubilee year would be a time of celebration. Celebration of God's work in our history as a community of faith here in Iron Mountain. Our Jubilee Year is also designed to be a time of re-connecting with God through prayers that have been written specifically for our church by people in our church—asking for knowledge of God's desires for us and the power to carry that out.

This Jubilee Year has been a special year of Reading Through the Bible in a Year...not to get a medal or another jewel in our crown...No we are reading the Bible so that we can a better sense of how we, this Trinity UMC, fits into God's bigger plan for humanity. For the earth. For eternity.

You will get to read in the Charge Conference packet the numbers of baptisms and confirmation memberships and all the statistical information that we put together for this annual gathering of the congregation but I find it so much more fun to stop for a minute and remember the good things that have been going on around here this year.

Activities: *Let the congregation participate*

Spirit Sundays in January...Hometown, Yooper, Dress Up and Sports Jersey Sunday Church Wide Birthday party.

Town Hall meetings that held up a mirror to our history and current situation relative to 10 years ago.

Confirmation ... 4 youth. 1 in 4 still participates. Six in process.

Camp Michigamme Cabin re-named Iron Mountain Cabin.

History articles this summer *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!*

Six high school graduates.

Workshops...Praying for healing, insight and direction. Stronger connection to the Conference.

VBS

Cinnamon Rolls

Family dinner, Church picnic, Marshmallow roast, Poinsettia party

Learning names...Calling people who aren't here.

One of our Women's Circles has reached out to the newer women in the church and actually outgrown the room where they have met for a long time...needing more tables and chairs and desserts. *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!*

Even as some of our finest musicians...the Hunts...have moved to Stephenson and our own Emily and Scott Ritsema prepare to move to Kalamazoo area next summer...I see new faces in the choir and we get hear

Praise Team...stick around

Brown sheet stories

Pictures are coming on-line

History corner and display are being planned

Can you hear it as we talk? *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!*

But celebration, fun times, educational opportunities and missions don't tell the whole story of this 2018 Jubilee year. The bigger story also includes our reflections and insights...the kind of awareness and observations that come when we slow down and give ourselves time and space to see and feel and experience current realities.

- Like the fact that there are many of us in this church who are tired and worn out from doing the same things year after year. That's real.
- In the Healing Conversations Workshop, we gathered and witnessed the hurt and the pain and the tragedies that many of us carry in our hearts and minds. But you would never know it because we bring our happy faces to church but that's not the whole story for any of us, is it? That's real too.
- Then there is the sad fact that so many of our blessed saints have withdrawn from this life to go and be with God. Or withdrawn to a quieter time in their life which puts fewer demands on their time and energy. We grieve the loss of these people, even as we celebrate their lives and their time with us in this church. That's part of who we are.
- Jubilee Year practices have also brought to mind the people who have chosen to go to other churches or simply to stay away from this one for their own personal reasons. Reasons we may never know...or understand...we can only respect that God and life and individual preferences are at work. And yet we miss them. Really.
- And of course, hanging over us like a thunderstorm on the horizon, is the reality of our larger church—The United Methodist Church world wide preparing for a Special Conference in February of next year. To make decisions that ripple through the Conferences, Districts and local churches like ours. That's not real yet but it's coming.

The Jubilee Year has given us an opportunity to slow down and ponder these bigger themes and patterns at work in the life of our church—and there are probably others too. So we wonder...what is it that God wants of us? Where do we fit into God's bigger plan? Where do we go from here and how do we figure that out?

Those questions are still swirling around in our minds and our conversations. And that's OK. We didn't give God a deadline for revealing our path to us...and even if we did...wouldn't God just kind of chuckle and say...All in good time my children. All in good time. And that really is OK because the Jubilee Year preaching and praying and Bible reading makes it perfectly clear, when we stop long enough to look at it:

- God loves this church and has kept it rolling along for a long, long time. It was back in 1832 when Methodism came to the UP. Sixty five years later, in 1887, that the first Methodist Episcopal congregation was formed here in Iron Mt. and here we are in 2018...alive and kicking! *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!*
- This Jubilee Year makes it more and more obvious that God is not done with us yet. In God's geography, God is always preparing a new way, an alternate route. Yes, maybe a detour of sorts. A side trip or two or 10....but I hear and I sense and I read over and over again...Yes, even in those dark and dreary books of the prophets...there is hope. God has a better way in mind for the faithful. For every ending, there is a new beginning.

I say to you: Let's just keep on following Jesus. When we do that, our path, as disciples of Jesus becomes more and more clear. We will find our way, God's way. And...knowing Jesus as we do, there's a good chance that God's way will be a pretty grand and amazing adventure for us all!

As Paul says in his letter:

Let's do what we need to do, knowing that we're home...in the kingdom of faith. No longer wandering exiles.

No longer strangers or outsiders.

Belonging here and now...God's people. God's holy temple.

Friends and followers of Jesus.

Let's ponder how it is that

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are, we can be filled with joy!