

January 10, 2021



Greetings in Christ Jesus,

Today, I will be joining you for worship virtually because of COVID and because I was already scheduled to preach elsewhere. The amazing power of technology has made so many things possible now! I have been praying for you as you have discerned how to be two churches sharing one space and one pastor, as you have searched for that pastor, and now as you await his arrival. I will continue to pray for you as you welcome him and begin ministry together.

Today, we celebrate the day Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Ted used that passage last week as you ordained and installed officers, but I want to remind you of a few things about baptism as you begin this new portion of your journey.

While I do not remember my baptism, I do remember the many people who have taught me about who God is and about who I am to be in response. It is the prayers and witness of all those people who are responsible in part for the Christian I have grown to be. You have all done that over the years in both congregations, been the people who told children and adults about God's love for them. That is our continued call.

A Methodist pastor tells this story: "A pastor baptized a baby. After the baptism, the pastor said to the baby, in a voice loud enough to be heard by parents and congregation, 'Little sister, by this act of baptism, we welcome you to a journey that will take your whole life. This isn't the end. It's the beginning of God's experiment with your life. What God will make of you, we know not. Where God will take you, surprise you, we cannot say. This we do know, and this we say - God is with you.'" –Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 52-53.

Baptism is a powerful reminder of what God has done for us and continues to do for us throughout our lives. Next week you will meet together and be led in worship by your new pastor. It will be an exciting day – one you have awaited quite some time.

Your new pastor will come to get to know you and learn your traditions, the ones that make Palma Sola unique and the ones that make Westminster unique. But in a fairly short amount of time your pastor may ask you to make some changes, to turn around some old ways of doing things. That will be difficult at first because we all like things that are familiar, but our baptismal calling is to find ways to share the love of Jesus Christ.

This year alone what that means has changed dramatically.

I encourage you to trust your new pastor and take risks for the gospel. This might mean finding new ways to participate in worship so that you can reach more people. Both churches already do significant mission work, but there may be other places you can touch lives in this community. There could be different and better ways to include people in leadership roles in the church so that all the talents in both congregations are utilized.

I pray that you will open your hearts, minds, and hands as you welcome this new pastor and look forward to turning around the lives of these churches and let the Holy Spirit come to work.

Where God will take you, we do not know. What God will ask of you, we cannot say.

What we do know because of the waters of our baptism, is that wherever you go, whatever you do, God goes with you.

Blessings,
Melana