

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • OCTOBER 28, 2018**  
**60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION MONTH**

**The Psalm Litany**  
Based on Psalm 34

We will bless the Lord at all times!  
**God's praise shall continually be in our mouths!**  
Our souls make their boast in God!  
**O magnify the Lord**  
**and let us exalt God's name together.**  
I sought the Lord and was answered;  
I was delivered from all my fears.  
**Look to the Spirit of Life and be radiant!**  
Let us pray:  
**We taste and see that you are good, our God.**  
**We seek you and lack no good thing. Amen.**

**The Scripture**  
Philippians 1:1-6

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*

**The Message**  
***Love Letters***  
**Rick Frost – Senior Minister, 1986-2008**  
**and**  
**Kim Gage Ryan – Associate Minister, 1989-2009**

*Rick*

It is such an honor for Kim and me to be invited to this pulpit today. And, I gotta tell you, I'm glad I get to speak first! As some of you may know, Kim and I worked together for 20 years. For 20-years' worth of board meetings, Kim always got to go first!

It was amazing. She would make her report and talk about all the wonderful things we were doing. Then she would tell some story that would touch all our heartstrings, and we would weep, or clap, or pull out our check books, or sign up to do this or that – whatever she wanted. I mean; it was inspirational!

Then... it was my turn to make my report. Oh, man! The meeting was over. Folks headed for the door. She was a tough act to follow!

So, today, I get to go first, on this day that culminates the celebration of Broadway's Birthday – Broadway's 60-years of life!

Now, as some of you may not know, Jan and I have four grandchildren, and Kim and Bill have one. I know; I know. It's hard to believe we are old enough to have grandchildren, but it's true.

At the recent request of my daughter, Molly, I've been writing letters to my grandchildren. You know – sort of a paper time capsule. Write now, read later, hopefully treasured forever. It's been fascinating. Letters like:

- “Here is a special story about our family that you do not know.”
- “It may surprise you to learn that when I was young...”
- “One positive change in the world I have witnessed is...”
- “My wishes for you are...”
- “My brightest hope for the future is...”

Stuff like that.

As Kim and I were planning today, it occurred to us that two-thirds of the entire New Testament is made up of letters written by faith leaders to various congregations – essentially love letters designed to encourage, to teach, to spiritually direct, to inform, and to inspire.

Just listen to this, found in various translations of our text today... Paul writes,  
*“To all the saints (that's you, Broadway), all the servants (that's you, too),  
all the Christians in Philippi,  
I thank God every time I think of you.  
My prayers for you are a real joy,  
because we have worked together for the Gospel.  
And I am confident that the One, who has begun this good work in you,  
will go on developing that good work until the day of Jesus Christ.  
You are always in my heart.  
You are very dear to me!  
Only God knows how deep is my love and longing for you!  
And this is my prayer for you:*

*that your love will keep growing more and more,  
and at this same time, you will keep growing in spiritual knowledge and insight.  
I want you always to be able to recognize the highest and the best  
and to live sincere and blameless lives  
full of true goodness that comes through Christ Jesus!"*

So, in that vein, on your birthday, Broadway, Kim and I decided to write you a love letter – a letter of hope, encouraging, communicating, teaching, spiritually directing, informing, and inspiring you in these trying times.

I thought it might be helpful if I shared a little bit about what's going on with me. Thanks to my beloved and others, I have been introduced and reintroduced to people of faith like Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, James Finley, and others. I want to unashamedly refer to these in the next few minutes, because they have articulated for me things I have felt and thought and desired for some time now but didn't have the words to say.

People like Carl Jung having observed that there are fundamentally two halves of life. As he said, "One cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning. For what was great in the morning will be of little importance in the evening. And what, in the morning, was true will, at evening, have become a lie."

Wow!

So, what are the essential tasks of the first half of life? People of mature faith say that the first half of life is about creating a proper container for your life. By that, they mean every human being needs to answer and address their critical questions.

The first and foremost is, "What makes me significant? Who am I, and more importantly, whose am I?" Get this right and you're on the way to a meaningful life. Get it wrong, and you're going to struggle for the rest of your days.

Number 2: "What's my place in this world? How am I going to support myself? How am I going to make a living?"

Number 3: "Who is going to journey with me? Who is going to walk the path with me every day and every night?"

Now, all of this may sound pretty simple, but it's not. In fact, most of us spend the first 20,30, or even 40 years of our lives on these three tasks. As Richard Rohr said, "The problem is we invest so much blood and sweat, eggs and sperm, tears and years on these tasks, we can't imagine there being a second task, or that anything more could be expected of us."

But here we are. We've worked on these tasks. We've spent so much time on them. We've built our container, and that's good. We have to have a container, and we have said to ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, "That's it. I'm done. That's all there is!"

And to that, Jesus tells a parable in Luke 5 and says, "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If you do, the new wine will burst the old skins, and the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No! New wine must be poured into new wineskins."

Folks, the good news today is that there is a second half of life – a path, a further journey – that most of us, me most included, know little if anything about but somehow have a growing desire for something more. We yearn for something more than just building bigger and bigger and bigger containers.

You see... I've come to believe that God crates us – all of us – with what religious people call "*a soul*." It's our deepest identity, what some call the "true self." It's what Thomas Merton called "The Immortal Diamond." It is that unique little bit of heaven, that's been installed by the manufacturer within the product, at the beginning."

I believe we are given a span of years to discover that soul, choose it, develop it, and thus live out our destiny to the full. If we do not, our true self will never be offered again. We have a period of time to consider it, which is perhaps why almost all religious traditions present these matters with utterly charged words like "heaven," and "hell."

The discovery of our soul, folks, is utterly critical for each one of us and for this world. We do not create our souls. We just find them in the depths of our inner-most being so that we can grow them! We are living in a time that the world needs for us to discover our souls.

And so, my wish for you, Broadway Christian Church, is that with all the wonderful things you have done and are doing, you might consider establishing a ministry centered on the journey into the second half of life. Wouldn't it be something if this community of faith not only was teaching about building the first half of life but would also be helping all of us to find the keys that move us into the second half of life? It will, as Jesus said, "Involve new wine. Our new wine will require new wineskins." But the Spirit of the Living Christ will show you the way if you are willing to go there.

"And this is my prayer for you... that your love will keep on growing more and more and more, and at the same time, you will keep on growing in spiritual insight. For I want you to always be able to recognize the highest and best, and to live sincere and blameless lives full of goodness that comes through Christ Jesus."

And all the people say... "Amen!"

*Kim*

I want to come back to where Rick started to our becoming grandparents in the past ten years. Some of you told us about the glorious world of grandparent world – showed us your photos – shared your darling stories. But truthfully, until it happens to you, one just can't imagine the explosion of love. Can you?

So, it's time for some of our photos. Rick tell us, who is up there. [Editor's note: Two photos of Rick's and Kim's grandchildren are projected. Rick responds, "Our grandkids are Audrey, Avery, Sachico, and Teddy. The Fearsome Foursome!"]

This is Oliver William Ryan, age 6. His granddaddy Billy Ryan introduced to him to donuts very early on in his young life, and he is fan. He is also a fan of Broadway's Vacation Bible School, which he attended for the first time this past summer.

Please indulge me one grandma story. Oliver lives in Kansas City. When he comes to Columbia and spends the night at my house we have our bedtime routine – three books and snuggle, he goes to sleep, and I slip out of his bed. Not too long ago, he was spending the night. We read our three books, were snuggling, and he put his sweet hands on my face and said, "Grandma, I love you more than ice cream." My heart melted. The next time he spent the night, we read our three books, and we were snuggling. He put his sweet hands on my face. "Grandma... (wait for it), You are old."

"Oliver! I am not as old as GiGi!" (Gigi is my Mom, Gay Gage.) "No, she is really old, but your old, Grandma."

So, there you have it.

Dear Beloved Broadway, I hope this past month you have felt the sweet touch of your rich legacy, your dynamic present, and your hopeful future. I hope you have felt yourself loved more than ice cream. And I am here to tell you today – you're old. Not as old your mother church, First Christian Church. She is 185. That means she gave birth to you when she was 125. But you are old. Actually, you and I are the same age. I have been hoping 60 is the new 40. I really don't think that is true. My knees tell that is just not so.

But, I do think 60 is a wonderful age of well-earned wisdom and the possibility of yet new adventures. Sixty is about being clear about who we are, and what is ours to do and be in this world with a centered boldness and hopefulness. Right? Some might call that "maturity." I would have been fine if Oliver had told me, "Grandma, you are mature."

From Rick's grandparent prompts, I have chosen, "My brightest hope for the future..." From my current life and ministry, one of my brightest hopes for the future resides with

the 200+ new young ministers with whom I get to work in Bethany Fellowships. I was a volunteer leader with Bethany Fellows, while I was still here. Eight-years ago, I became the director of Bethany Fellowships – a ministry that serves congregations in the specific way of supporting young clergy in their earliest years of ministry. They experience two retreats a year for four years. When we began 19 years ago, 30-40% of young pastors were leaving in their first five years. Bethany Fellowships has turned that around for young Disciple pastors. Now 95-99% of Bethany Fellows remain in ministry. In many respects, Bethany Fellowships does the work Rick described, encouraging pastors during their first half of life to create that strong container, giving attention to their souls, so that they can be better prepared for that second half of life. When there is a stumble or a crisis in their lives, or the lives of their churches, they have what they need to fall upwards. Richard Rohr describes this second half of life with the possibility of “Falling Upwards” in one of his great books.

These young pastors are bright and entrepreneurial, courageous, passionate, and prayerful. And they are hopeful. Rebecca Solnit wrote a book called *Hope in the Dark*, in which she offers one of the strongest definitions of hope I have heard: “We don’t know what is going to happen, or how, or when, and that very uncertainty is the space of hope.”

Bethany Fellows don’t know what is going to happen or when or how. They are living and serving and leading in times of incredible uncertainty, and I watch them over and over again step into that space with hope. Bethany Fellows like Hannah Fisher Ryan, Sarah Griffith Lund, Jacob Thorne, and Nick Larson. Need I say more? Of course, it really helps to step into hope when you have a colleague. My wonderful colleague was Rick, and Nick has Terry Overfelt!

But, here is what I must to tell you, especially on this day of celebration. One of my brightest hopes is YOU, Broadway Christian Church. The reason there is a Bethany Fellows ministry today, making such an impact in the lives of pastors and congregations today, is because of you. Yes, you made a bold decision 15-years ago. When Bethany Fellowships began, we were on shaky ground. You could say we were building the airplane while we were flying it. After the first four years and the ending of the first grant funding this experiment, we had to decide if we were done. At that point we had served and supported 20 pastors. Or were we going to apply for a second grant and keep going? To apply for a second grant meant we had to show support from those we were serving. We had to show congregations were willing to invest in this ministry. Broadway Christian Church, you were the first congregation to step up to that plate, and you did so with a commitment of \$100,000 from outreach. An initial gift of \$10,000 followed by a commitment of \$16,000 for the five years to follow. That same year, Mission and Outreach Ministries proposed, and the board and congregation passed giving 10 per cent of offerings to outreach – the increase in the amount of new dollars to be given away was guess how much. Yes, that’s right; \$16,000.

That sweet, Spirit-led decision led to the next grant that took us into the future and now 200+ pastors and congregations have been impacted. From 20 to over 200 and growing. That is the Broadway I know and love more than ice cream. And thank you to those of you who have continued, over the years, to give your individual gifts. Your legacy and love extend hope in uncertain times beyond your knowing and imagining. Thank you.

Finally, Dear Broadway Christian Church, my brightest bright hope for the future is that you and other bold congregations will gain strength and courage from the faith which sustains us always in uncertain times. My favorite Scripture is from the Love Letter in Romans. Countless times I stood in this pulpit and read this Scripture at funerals and memorial services to remind us of God's abiding truth.

*Romans 8 says, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress, or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. For I, Paul, am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us in the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

I once preached this Scripture to a row of graduating seniors right there. I have begun to think that we should read this Scripture at our baby blessings, at our baptisms, at our weddings, and birthdays, and anniversaries, as well as our heartbreaks and separations. What if we whispered it into the ears and hearts of our beloveds – often – every day.

The next time Oliver spends the night – after our three books and a snuggle – I am going to put my hands on his sweet face and say, "Oli, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God."

Happy 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Broadway Christian Church. I hold your sweet faces in my heart always, and I say to you, "There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Be brave; and be bold; and be your wise, mature self.

Amen.

