

All Saints Sunday  
Renew: To Everything There Is a Season

November 10, 2019

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**1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 27**  
**John 21:15-17**

### **Renewed in Ministry**

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.* – 1 Corinthians 12:27



No Men are Foreign by James Kirkup

Ministries. After our parents and grandparents, ministries are the key influencers of our faith. How old were you when you learned to sing, “Jesus love me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so”...two or three? Some of you learned that precious truth here at Woods’ Vacation Bible School, in Sunday school, or at the CDC.

Or maybe not...maybe you came to faith later in life -- as a teen in youth group, Middle School Bible Study, WoodsWork, or Montreat. Or maybe for you it was decades later, when the stress got the better of you. You found hope and healing in our more than one dozen 12-step groups that Woods hosts each week.

Or maybe you found your heart’s true home serving in one of our Woods’ missions: Backpack Buddies, Winter Relief, Meals on Wheels, Cuba, Guatemala, or Malawi.

Or was it in a ChristCare group...your Bible Study...or right here in worship in the sanctuary?

Maybe you are still waiting, hoping for that promised transformation. Open your mind and heart and pray. It WILL come. The Holy Spirit never disappoints.

For me the transformation happened when I was a teen. I was involved in youth ministries at our Church... Sunday morning bible studies and youth group. Like Woods, the church where I grew up had an active recreation ministry. We had softball and basketball. We also played volleyball in the parking lot on Wednesday nights in the summer. You can believe those summer nights in Georgia were hot!

One night during a water break somebody threw ice at somebody, and before long there was a full-blown water battle going on. Kids started filling coolers from the hose, sneaking up behind each other and dumping whole coolers full of water on each other’s heads. At one point someone got the hair-brained idea to climb up on the roof with one of those coolers full of water. It wasn’t my idea, but I went along. We hoisted the cooler full of ice water up the ladder and waited for the next group of players.

You know what I'm going to say. The next group to come around that corner was not a group of volleyball players but our senior pastor and two of the deacons on their way to a meeting. We soaked them, head to toe. They had to go home and change.

That was the night I discovered that the church has many ministries, that it's not just youth programs.

Not long after the baptism by cooler incident, I attended one of the church's youth summer camps. During the obligatory time of silent prayer, I experienced a Jeremiah-esque call. I was 16, and it was terrifying, and wonderful, and our youth leader urged me to tell that same senior pastor that I believed God was calling me to ministry.

You want to know what he said? Do you think he said, "Here's a dime, Ice Water Girl. Go call your mother and tell her you will never be a Presbyterian minister?" No. He welcomed me with open arms and offered his help. He even arranged for the young couples' ministry to sponsor me with a monthly stipend for the seven years of school required for me to wear this robe and stand here this morning...unending love...amazing grace.

You and I experience mercy, grace and truth in our ministries. Ministries are the way the Spirit works in the church. Here at Woods there are dozens of ministries happening, all at the same time, in the same space – pastoral care, education, mission and administration, all of it for the same reason – to be a voice of faith, transforming lives through Jesus Christ. And they do.

I wish you could read my mail. Every week I receive notes of gratitude from people who are impacted by what we do here in Christ's name. I hear from seniors who receive healthy meals, delivered with love by Meals on Wheels volunteers. I hear from current and former youth group members and parents of kids in our scout troops, our children's ministries and the CDC. I hear members who are able to express their love for Jesus Christ through visual arts, music, and drama ministries; people who have found spiritual strength and lasting friendship in our ChristCare and other small groups, people who have been sustained through times of personal tragedy by Stephen Ministry, encouraged by our deacons, and taught God's truth in our educational programs.

These are our ministries. There are hundreds more -- launched from this building every week. They are all to the glory of God, in the service of Jesus Christ.

What is ministry? Very simply – ministry is what happens when we use God's resources to meet the needs of God's people. St. Paul, who was inclined to metaphor, uses the metaphor of a body. We are the Body of Christ, with our Lord himself as our head – we are his arms, his hands, and most importantly, his heart, called and commissioned to do the things Christ did on earth – teaching, healing, feeding, doing this to the glory of God.

Before he ascended to the Father, Jesus entrusted this ministry to his church.

Maybe you remember the story. It's one of 13 times Jesus appeared alive to his disciples after the crucifixion.

Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John had gone fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They had fished all night, and they were exhausted. Then, just as the dawn was breaking, they looked up and saw Jesus standing on the shore. They didn't recognize him at first, but when he called to them, Peter recognized it was Jesus! He jumped into the water and swam to shore.

Jesus met him there. He even gave Peter something to eat. The gospel reading today is the exchange between Peter and the risen Lord. Remember, this is the disciple who denied him three times. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church.

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter said to Jesus, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."*

*A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."*

*He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Back in the 1990's a sociologist named Rodney Stark wrote a book called The Rise of Christianity.<sup>i</sup> The book got a lot of attention because it explained in social-scientific and secular terms how the Christian faith grew from a small, marginalized group of individuals in the first century to over half the population of the Roman Empire just a few decades later. What happened?

Looking at all the factors Stark came to the conclusion that the rapid growth of the Christian faith was largely the result of one thing; the Christians' lives simply did not look like everyone else's'. The members of the body of Christ lived in a demonstrably different way from unbelievers. The way they welcomed women, children, and minorities was different. Their generosity was different, and their love was different.

In particular Stark studied the way the early Christians cared for their neighbors. Two epidemics in the second and third centuries AD killed a third of the population of the Roman Empire during that time. People panicked. Those who were able fled the cities, but the Christians stayed. They stayed and ministered to the sick, offering basic nursing care to everyone -- Christians and non-Christians alike. They used their own money to care for people they didn't know. As they did they shared the hope of eternity and they saved many lives. Some Christians died because they became infected themselves.

Many people came to faith in Jesus Christ, because they experienced the transforming love of Jesus Christ through the ministries of the church. They received the Christian's gifts of

hospitality and welcome. They were transformed by mercy. *Peter, do you love me? ... Feed my sheep.*

In a few minutes we are going to “hear” from some Woods members who have experienced life-giving transformations in the ministries of this church. They are only a small group. There are many more who could say the same thing.

When Paul tells us that *we are the body of Christ and individually members of it*, he is reminding us that we exist as the followers of a Savior who taught his followers to be demonstrably different from the world around us, particularly with regard to our generosity.

When people at Woods stay up all night so that neighbors experiencing homelessness can have a warm, safe place to stay, THAT is a witness to Jesus Christ. When Deacons visit the sick and elderly, and mothers and fathers in faith teach the children in a safe space, THAT is a witness to Christ. We are all being shaped in our obedience to Christ by our giving, lives are transformed. People receive hope. His sheep are fed. Faith is formed and God is glorified!

Last week Pastor Nancy talked to us about the faithful people who went before us here at Woods Church. They have entrusted this place to us. Because of their sacrifice we have these beautiful buildings today. People like Don Erickson, Jan Lynn, Jean Parker, and Bill Minton. I can still see them sitting there. Stan Davis, Elizabeth and Jerry Wyble, Joie Myers and Ione Williams, Joe Gillespie, Bill Hitzrot, Maynard Huddleston, John Robinson, Trudy Weaver, Ted Brayman and so many others.

They gave us this campus, basically debt free. We have the privilege, and the responsibility for the upkeep and renewal of it. In the end we are just replicating what they gave, what God, in self-emptying love gave us.

That’s why we are undertaking this Renew capital campaign to make improvements to this building so that it will be more energy efficient, greener, more welcoming and safer. This is our challenge and our opportunity.

Renew is not an end in itself, but a very practical, down-to-earth offering that we are making together as the Body of Christ in this place. Renew is going to make more transformational ministry possible. It will free up more money that we are now spending on energy cost, free up money for mission, education and the arts. It will allow us to do more transformational ministry in our community for decades to come.

This building is a training center. It’s a gathering place where ministry happens.

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<sup>ii</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Harper San Francisco, 1997