

[PRAYER] [BLANK] In theory, this is Fall. The way that the weather has been going, it's hard to be convinced of that as an actual fact. We had more than a few days in the seventies, recently, and I am putting on long-sleeved shirts reluctantly; I know that there are plenty of times when being cool is as important as being warm.

Even so, we know that our seasons are shifting. Daylight savings time ended today, and so our perception of time is going to change, no matter what. The days are shorter, no matter what. Life moves on. Our story moves on. And so, as we look at our reading from Joshua today in the Hebrew Bible, we see that God's story has moved on, too, into a new time of remembrance and hope. Last week, we celebrated the ministries of Moses at the end of his life, a prophet of God who led the people of Israel out of Egypt through the desert for forty years, to the promised land of Canaan. Moses did not go into Canaan with them. God's story would move on under the leadership of Joshua, son of Nun, anointed by Moses to be God's servant to lead Israel.

[OIL SLIDE] We, too, were anointed last week. Those who were here for worship came forward, and we were anointed with oil, as we invited God's Holy Spirit to bless us all in ministry to God, as the generation who will help God to lead new generations of Christians into this church, just as Joshua led a new generation of Israel into Canaan. Anointing invites God's grace to be with us intimately, to have us feel right on the flesh of our bodies the direct contact of God, guiding us forward in our service to God. We are touched by God to touch the world for God, with God. We have been chosen by God to complete the next chapter in God's story that will unfold in this place. [BLANK]

We won't do this alone. Faith is not a solitary activity. Even when we find faith in our moments of quiet reflection alone, we are not truly alone. God is with us, and our hearts turn not only to God, but those who we ask God to touch. We ask God to touch not only those who are alive today, but also those who have moved on to eternity. We are part of a vast extended family of faith, a family alive both in this world and the world to come. God wants us all to dwell in God's everlasting love, now and forever, and to have kinship with one another, like God experiences kinship even with God's very self - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To be with God and in God is to be with family, forever.

We don't forget family. We keep their memories alive. Our memories are our monuments to our love for them, and their love for us. In our gathering hymn, "Come Thou, Fount of Every Blessing," the second verse begins, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I've come." The reference to something called an Ebenezer is probably pretty obscure for most folks. In Hebrew, Ebenezer means "the stone of help."

[EBENEZER STONE] It is the name of a place where the prophet Samuel set up a stone to mark the spot where God helped the people of Israel to win a great battle, after they had repented for worshipping idols. Israel was emerging from a long period of weak leadership, and finally they began to come together as a people, united for a common cause under God's leadership. God did not want the Israelites to forget what it meant to be a member of God's family who was helped by the saving God who loved them. God wanted them to remember when they re-joined one another as God's people - re-membering, you might

say, reassembling themselves as members of a Godly cause greater than themselves, greater than their personal family or tribe. [BLANK]

Joshua did something similar when he crossed the Jordan river with Israel from the desert into Canaan. Like Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, Joshua led Israel across the parted waters of the river Jordan, [COVENANT ARK] parted by the ark of the covenant, the container for God's ten commandments. God's promises to Israel in God's commandments, and Israel's faithful obedience to God's commandments, would keep Israel safe, even in deep and deadly waters. The God who loved them continued to help them, even though Moses had passed on leadership to Joshua. [TWELVE STONES] When Joshua got to the other side of the river in Canaan, he asked that one person from each of the twelve tribes of Israel go into the river and bring out a stone. They piled them together into a monument, to remember that God's promises were with all of them, together, when they were a people with God, together. [BLANK]

We need monuments like this in our own lives. We need to remember to re-member, to make ourselves aware of who we are with God and with one another, at the important points in our lives when we passed through our challenges together, with God helping us. We need to remember that we didn't make it through those challenges alone, that we needed to be together not just physically, but spiritually, in our minds and in our hearts. We need to remember those moments when God's living word guided us together through the impossible places, through the moments when we were sure that we would stumble and fall into the deep and cold waters of despair and hopelessness. We need to remember those moments when our church was there for us with God, guiding us, comforting us, lifting us up, and giving us a chance to heal and find hope. And we need to remember those who have gone before us, those who were willing to be with us along the journey, helping us to be who we are, as we tried to find out who God wanted us to be, together.

Those who have gone before us, and who now rest with God in heaven, we call saints. This doesn't mean that they were perfect. But it does mean that God shed his blood for them on a cross as much as anybody, and that God offered them eternal life as much as anyone else. Today's reading from Revelation reminds us that God wants peace for all of the saints, and that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is both their king and their shepherd, guiding them even in heaven to the water of life, wiping away every tear from their eyes. God wants us to remember to re-member with them, too, to find our own new life in Christ with them together, so that our joy in this life will be completed by our assurance that God wants them to have joy, too.

As we move forward as a church, I hope and pray that you remember that your active membership in our church is a way to keep the discipline of re-membrance alive for you, and for the generations to come. Some of you will be moving on to new lives in new places soon. Others are making transitions into new phases in your lives, as your children grow, as you mature, as family members move away or move into God's eternal kingdom. Like Moses anointing Joshua to carry on his mission for God, the church's mission will go on, too, anointed by God to make new monuments to God's faithfulness in our lives.

We will never be done with God's work in this place. We will never be done with the opportunity to make the story of this church, in this community, God's story, a story that has a new chance to unfold for people who God wants to touch with life-changing, life-saving faith. God is never, ever done with us, always challenging us to trust in God, and to reach out to one another as God is always reaching out to us. God challenges us to be people who spread our circle of re-membering farther than we ever thought that we could spread it, inviting people who we have never met, or who we never even liked, to become part of the family of Christ, who we will depend on to help us become who we are meant to be in Christ.

God did this with me, when God brought me to you. [STONES AGAIN] Those twelve stones that I showed you earlier? I put them on the bank of the Quinnipiac River when I walked through its waters to South Meriden on July 1st, my very first day as your Pastor. I wanted to remember the forty years that God used to prepare me to serve you. I wanted to remember all of the saints, alive and in God's heavenly kingdom, who helped me to make my story part of God's story. I could not have come here without God, or without their help in God. And so, I re-membered with them, and with God. [BLANK]

Remember how you got here. Remember how God has helped you this far. And, with faith in God's loving help, let us build new Ebenezers together, marking the places where God helped us to build new re-membrances of God's story together, as God's family in this place. We live in God's promised land, as God's people anointed for God's mission of love and transformation. May we use the remembrance of who God is making us together to build the next part of God's story here, in our new season of faith, a season of growth, healing, and hope. Amen.