

October 11, 2026

Marion Weekly Update

Sermon "Putting the 'Re' in Religion"

Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Acts 3:19-21, Colossians 1:13-14

Two weeks ago I said today we'd be looking at a simple prefix. That prefix is "re". Simply put this prefix means "again". It's all through our Christian language. Rebirth, renew, restore, refresh, redeem, resurrect, recommit, recreate and more. Let's take a look at some of these terms directly:

Rebirth- to be born again. This is made famous in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. The term describes a life that has symbolically passed away to being given over to worldly ways and embracing sin to embracing Christ and being born to a life that fights against sin and temptation. Everything changes.

Renewal- This is our Romans passage. Transformation starts with the "renewing of our mind." When something is new it's blank. It's ready to receive and take in or on whatever comes its way. Think of a painting canvas. When it's new it's ready for whatever the artist paints. Once it's covered whatever is there gets in the way of painting something fresh. To renew is to make it new again and ready to receive something different. We are no different. It's part of rebirth. The clutter of what has been passes away to make room for what can be.

Recommit- When our dedication fades we take a moment and bring that moment back freshly. We commit again with the hopes that a renewed commitment will carry us forward in life and faith.

Refresh- Acts talks about repentance leading to a refreshing. Something that has been covered with dirt and grime is no longer fresh. It needs washed and cleaned up. This is repentance. We are forgiven and then move forward intentionally working to not repeat that same mistake.

Recreate- Corinthians talks about becoming a new creation. That's what this is. To create again. Every time we overcome something in our lives or in this world there is a new beginning, a new start. In each of those moments we are recreated into a fuller life and faith, becoming more like Jesus each time. Recreating happens all the time, sometimes even daily.

Restore- this is putting back to the original setting or condition. In the Prodigal son the son gave up his sonship voluntarily by abandoning his family. When he came back humble and changed the father brought him back into his sonship. No judgment. No harshness. Just welcome and a return to that initial condition as if he'd never left.

Revive- to live again. It's possible for our faith to become stale and even feel dead. When this happens we search God for how to engage and embrace life and faith all over again with a recommitted, renewed, refreshed passion. We restore faith to that condition when we were most excited to have and live into it.

Redeem- This is being made right with or brought back to God. God claims us as God's own. The consequence for our sin is forgiven not just in a moment but for all time.

Re-surrect- To be raised to life again. Different than revive this is a total transformation from life to life. It is an extension. We live and when the body gives way to death the spirit carries on in a new form and experience. It is living again in a completely different and grander fashion. That's a lot of "re".

What is remarkable and so hopeful about the constant use of "to do again" is it reminds us that God gives us chance after chance after chance. We have unlimited do overs. Jesus told the disciples that forgiveness is to be given without limit. Meaning that not only are we to grant this to one another but we are assured that God doesn't have a cap on how many times we are forgiven.

That we constantly have to be reminded that we can renew, refresh, restore, recommit, recreate, and so on also reminds us that faith is a never ending process. It requires patience, intention, and effort. It means surrendering to God as we reflect on how to grow in life and faith. In the process every time we overcome one thing that is out of step with God we hit a do-over, we might call it a "Reset".

Then we become aware of some other area where we need to grow and become again. That process of celebrating one victory restarts another journey as we strive over and over to be more like Christ.

The constant of "re" in our faith and lives is the adventure that we are never quite finished. It is also the beautiful truth that God is never finished with us. We are in a journey of becoming that God walks with us side by side.

Communion is a great reminder of all of this. Do we take it seriously though? The remembering of the cross, the grace and forgiveness poured out for us, and the ongoing journey of faith should bring us into a state of reflection. Do we genuinely appreciate the moment? In holding to it reverently each and every communion is a chance to do all the "res". Repent, Recommit, Renew, Refresh, be Restored, and celebrate that we are Redeemed. All with an intention to be Recreated better than we were before and recreate our lives a little better than THEY were before.

The thing about all of this is that if we want to experience all of these fantastic aspects of faith we have to give them to everyone else in our lives as well.

In order for me to truly experience all of this I need the people in my life to give me the chance to keep becoming. I need forgiveness and second and third and fourth chances. I need grace and compassion measured in with accountability.

There is much truth to the statement that "the best way to make sure someone never improves is to keep reminding them of their past." Too often people give up on change because those around them won't let them escape who they were. So it quickly gets to "what's the point? It won't matter anyway because no one will let me move on."

Part of the fullness of all of these start overs, do overs and "re"s is being willing to extend what we need in our times of transformation to everyone else.

It's certainly not easy. Hurts can run deep. But if we want a world that is always open to elevating and improving we have to find a way to encourage one another in those processes. Forgiveness, patience, support, and genuine community are absolutely essential to making this a reality.

To that point, I want to remind us that we are going to be re-imagining what worship looks like. We talked about this a month or so ago. October 25 right after worship during Sunday school hour we will be assembling our shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. We'll also be mixing some things up from time to time be making things more interactive in the service itself. My hope is that you will be open to trying something different and also very honest with how it speaks to you or doesn't.

You've heard me talk many times about faith and worship being participatory rather than spectating. That means more than one way communication.

I want to remind you this morning that you matter. Our worship isn't comprised of a bunch of islands near one another listening and singing and watching. Genuine worship is connection not just with God but with one another. With God expressed in each person who gathers. It's why presence, actual presence in the space is so vital. You can't get the experience through a screen.

And here's the thing. God expresses uniquely through each of us. Through you. Which means when you aren't here the whole of our congregation misses out on what you bring uniquely into the space, the service, and the community.

Community isn't forged simply by being near one another. It's forged through purposeful interactions.

When Em and I were on vacation there was no church service on the boat. Yet we were fortunate to meet people that we had dinner with every night who were kind, warm, and we got to know one another.

The last night over dinner we pulled tables together to make one long family situation. One of the folks had just lost their mother 6 months ago. The table gave space for her to express herself and the many tangled issues around that moment. She was free to be vulnerable and honest. She was met with grace and love. Through the night we got to hang out some more and have genuine conversation. One of the guys was a former pastor who still does ministry on his own. We talked about, among other things, faith. We talked about church and hurt and struggling to keep faithful when church chews you up and spits you out.

In all those conversations we didn't have hymns or scripture readings. But we did have church. We were in those moments a small body gathered together, each having a different expression of faith yet a common faith in the same God.

The church today doesn't need more entertainment. It doesn't need more division. It doesn't need more exclusivity.

It needs more connection. It needs more community. It needs more genuine bonds of affection amongst those who gather. Sometimes we see our size and get frustrated. I am going to suggest that in this moment in time our size is a strength. It affords us an ability to keep forging those bonds of Christian love that the world desperately needs.

Which means we continue to build the kind of foundation that people who are seeking true Christian community will find and we can offer. Rather than finding a place filled with thousands in a place that will feed the want to be entertained and feed the need to be emotionally stroked, they find a place that feeds the deepest parts of the soul. They find the church of Christ.

I invite you this morning as we go to communion to breathe out and forget whatever else is going on in the world around us for a moment. Let yourself find a repentant heart within. Then let the Spirit renew, refresh, recreate, restore, revive, and celebrate that we are redeemed.

BIBLE STUDY 2 Timothy 4

The final chapter in this letter to Timothy wraps up somewhat familiar. Final instructions are offered along with a litany of names and greetings.

The wrap up seems pretty simple. Timothy is urged to keep focused on his ministry. Do it faithfully, patiently and intentionally. The warning is that people will be deceived by unsound teaching. The reason is that what folks are looking for is teaching that will make them feel good. Teaching that they agree with rather than teaching that they need and need to be given over to.

What is noteworthy is that even if they were fading from thinking Jesus was returning in their lifetime, they likely thought He would return soon. This sense of bad teaching would have been limited in their minds. It could only extend so far given their technology and scope of the world. Cut to today, thousands of years later. Time has allowed twists and turns of teaching that departs from the central gospel of Christ. Technology allows those teachings to spread far and wide in the blink of an eye. The warning to Timothy is a warning to all of us.

Just because we agree with something, it gives us permission we want, or it supports our agenda doesn't mean a teaching is correct. In fact if I'm too happy about something that is a call to make sure I'm studying and discerning all the more. I may be understanding correctly or I may be creating God in my own image. At the same time just because people disagree with something doesn't make it accurate by virtue of "not tickling ears".

In our modern era genuine, honest study is more important than ever. The loose attitude many Christians take, the willingness to just take in whatever feels good, and the cultural push to let opinion override fact causes a lot of bad teaching to be accepted and adopted. What Timothy had to look out for now is more than a local issue. It is a global phenomenon that in some ways is destroying the message of the church.

Still, there is a positive for every negative. The same reality that spreads bad teaching can also spread good teaching.

Then Paul gives the "why" of his passion for Timothy's ministry. He knows he's not long for the world. There is a beautiful assurance in the confident words that his life has been given over to the right cause. He knows where he is bound. At the same time knowing he's going to die, he wants to ensure that this gospel he's come to cherish won't perish. Timothy and others have to pick up the torch and carry it forward.

Next there comes a lot of heartache. There are people who have hurt Paul. Many have left him alone. Some did it under sketchy or outright problem circumstances. Others left because they had work to do.

Playing the scene out in my mind I can see and hear the conversations. "We want to stay with you longer." "We don't want to leave". And I can hear Paul saying "No, you go. I'm here, you

have work to do and it won't wait." That's a lot of struggle. Dealing with those who betrayed and having to say goodbye to those who are going to be his legacy of ministry.

The feel here is that Paul is lonely. He's in his last days and largely by himself. So he asks Timothy to come visit. He wants one more audience before he dies with his beloved mentee. In our study the request for his cloak and scrolls/parchments was perfectly summed up. "I'm lonely, it's getting cold, I want to curl up with my blanket and a good book." We don't know the content of the writings but can likely be assured they were scriptural/spiritual in nature and were a comfort to Paul as he faced down the impending grave.

Some of the names in the greetings and litany are familiar. One that absolutely should not be skipped is Mark. This is the same Mark that Paul took major issue with in Acts. He and Barnabas actually split ways over the argument. Barnabas wanted to take Mark on a mission. Paul didn't trust it because in some previous circumstance Mark had left him high and dry. It was so harsh that the two broke company. Barnabas took Mark and Paul went with Silas. It was drams and friction.

Here Mark is listed as helpful to Paul and Paul even requests Timothy to bring Mark with him for a visit. In other words whatever the problem the would was healed. They had reconciled and now were on good terms not just in ministry but as people. These kinds of stories are encouraging and hopeful. They remind us that arguments, even harsh ones, don't have to be the final word. We can forgive, reconcile, reconnect, and move forward in strength, love, and community.

Of the final names in the list of greetings, Linus is one you might not have heard outside of Charlie Brown. There is suggestion that this Linus might have actually succeeded Peter in leadership after Peter himself died. Just a neat little piece of trivia that the names on any page are more than just names. They are people, and every person carries a story. Sometimes those stories are epic and filled with power, influence, and inspiration.

This letter to Timothy is packed with tremendous insight into arguably the most important aspect of our faith. Keep the main thing the main thing. No matter what is swirling around us don't get distracted from that central gospel, and calling to live into the example of Christ. It also reminds us that faith and community are filled with love and relationships. Those relationships are dear, fulfilling, sustaining, and instructive. Where are those relationships in our own lives? Reflecting on that fills us with humility, gratitude, and inspiration.