

AUGUST 9, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon "RnRnR: Redemption" 2 Corinthians 11:16-30, Luke 14:27-33

Finishing our series about revival, we end naturally on what is often the focus of revival for new believer and old...redemption.

Something interesting about revival and redemption is that they both hinge on the same thing, our middle message in the series, repentance. If there is no change after the fact, there hasn't been revival. If there is no change after the fact, it's like we haven't been or accepted redemption.

Revival and the saving grace of redemption can happen in a moment. It's what follows that demonstrates the truth of it.

Once again, as you've heard me say many times, the gift of redemption is free. Not earned by our works. However, works are inevitably linked to redemption as a sign that it has occurred.

The change, and ongoing change in our lives is evidence.

This is part of the problem with the metric people today use for success in online ministry, crusades, and "revivalesque" experiences. It's measured at in person services by how many come forward at an altar call. Online it's measured by how many click on the button that affirms they read the "sinners" prayer and were congratulated on "wonderful! You're saved!"

They measure how many had an emotional moment or a moment of prayer. They have no follow up to see whether or not there has been change...repentance. So it looks great for marketing but it's actually pretty hollow in terms of what is actually happening. That Christianity is declining in America is proof of this, as is the way people are treating one another.

The thing about redemption is this question often asked. "What are you redeemed, or saved, from?"

The short answer is "from the punishment for my sin". That or "from hell when I die". If that's all there is no wonder modern Christianity is in such dire straits. That sense of things is what is called "cheap grace". I say a prayer, claim grace and redemption, and then feel free to live my life on my terms with a safety net for when I die. This is NOT redemption. The cost of that grace was steep and deserves humble gratitude. There was a cost to secure that grace and there is also a cost when we truly receive it.

We are redeemed from one life to another. This isn't redeeming a coupon at the store. It's not a transaction like handing the cashier a piece of paper and they hand me a free ham or turkey. There is something we do on the other side.

This is reflected over and over again in scripture. The two we have are just a small sample. James talks about "show me your faith without your works, I will show you mine BY my works". Jesus says anyone who "puts their hand to the plow and turns back isn't fit for service in the kingdom of God". In other words works matter and to make the commitment without any follow through is disqualifying.

In Luke we see this passage we've used a lot recently as it's so applicable. Here it is very direct and relevant. Before we commit to follow Jesus, we need to count the cost of discipleship. In other words if the grace is free the redeemed life is not. The story of the rich young man shows us one response to the invitation. "Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor." This cost was too high. He counted it and turned away. Then we have the disciples. They are asked to leave their vocation to follow Jesus. They counted the cost and did. And they stuck through every price they had to pay as a result.

Corinthians tells the story of Paul's life after he gave himself over to Jesus. It was filled with hardship, jailings, beatings and more. He redeemed the life of a persecutor to be the persecuted. He knew what the price would be and he paid it up to the end of his life as a disciple and apostle.

The evidence of redemption is the before and after.

I'd like to share some stories from my time in social services. In that field you get to see these kinds of transformations unfold before your eyes. You get to see the ones that don't as well, but today we're focused on the positive.

There was a young man whose parents were divorced and the father he lived with was an addict he thought was sober. That said he was filled with anger, was depressed at the same time, and had committed midling crimes that put him in placement. He'd escaped from his last one and came to us as a last stop before a maximum security institution.

Grace given by the judge. Here's your chance kid. The judge offered him the grace to redeem his old life into a

new one. Whether he accepted it would be proved out by the work he did or did not do.

This young man participated in counseling, group therapy, his education, all of the other things designed to help him process his past to create a better future. His journey wasn't perfect. His father wasn't recovered and in fact landed in jail during this kid's stay with us. He worked through it. He reunited with his mother and got their relationship back on track. When he discharged it was with her. He continued on his path and is successful as a man with a job and family of his own.

The judge when he went for his last hearing was stunned. He couldn't believe the young man in front of him was the same one he'd sentenced to our placement. The change was evident. This young man's life had been redeemed from a criminal past to a productive present and future. The evidence wasn't in what this young man said, it was in everything he did and demonstrated.

At a different placement there was a young lady in our semi-independent living program. These kids had more freedom because they were being prepared for independence. She came from a bad part of the city and a hard and abusive background. She was given the grace of opportunity out of that life into one that was her own, sound, and solid.

She got to be too much of a handful for the staff in her unit. The social worker discharged her to a full independent living program which might seem counterintuitive. Here's what comes next.

One day I was walking towards the unit she'd lived in a couple months later. In the driveway I see someone kneeling and it looked like pleading with a staff. I had no idea what I was looking or if we needed some intervention. When I got up there I found out what was going on.

This young lady had come back to ask forgiveness from the staff she'd tormented. She wanted them to know that their efforts weren't wasted. She had heard them and being put more on her own was the reality check that made her appreciate, understand, and live into what they had given her. She went on to a job and a family. Redeemed from one life to another. How did we know? Evidence. She did the work. She took what she was given and her life demonstrated it. She also shows us that redemption isn't easy. It's not a perfect road. In fact it's often paved with mistakes, potholes, and all kinds of hiccups. A mistake doesn't change redemption. It just reminds us that we have more work to do. When we do it. When we fall and let God and the Spirit help us up we continue in the redemption.

Em works in therapy every day. Clients come and go. When they come to her it's because they are trying to be redeemed from one life to another. The therapy is a grace and a gift. But the truth of commitment isn't measured by hollow talk. It's measured by the work. The progress. The evidence. The change.

What are we redeemed from? Yes, the penalty for our sin. But it's so much more. We are redeemed from the ongoing problems, chaos, and damage our sin does to ourselves and the world around us because we are changing day by day.

The surface, superficial idea of redemption is Christianity's Achilles's heel. People hear the claim of following Jesus, hear the self righteous directive to "repent" to avoid Hell, and are uncompelled. They aren't compelled because the evidence that Jesus exists in the heart isn't their. In words, attitudes and actions Jesus is denied by the heart while claimed by the lips.

Here's why we're looking at this today. I want us to be conscious and aware of the powerful gift we have. There are questions we have to ask ourselves and when we have the answers our faith is so much deeper and brighter. The power of our word and witness grows and multiplies over and over on itself.

What have you been redeemed from? How is your life different today than it was before because of your faith? How have you become more loving, more compassionate, more giving, more kind, more merciful? How has your actions changed to be more righteous and right in God's eyes? How have you become more able to welcome and love others with the unconditional love of Jesus?

My assumption is that all of us have answers to those questions. That means all of us can answer that question of "what have you been redeemed/saved from?" with honest and real world evidence. We have a story that is our testimony.

This isn't just for new converts. Our redemption is a lifelong journey. The work is always there. The Spirit is always speaking to us. If you are 80 how has your faith changed you from when you were 60? If you're 50 how has faith changed you since you were 30?

I know looking back the list is long. And I pray what I believe has changed for the better God would agree that I've changed for the better.

Redemption isn't an assumption. It is never taken for granted. We look at our lives and ask what is the evidence? Jesus calls it the "fruit". What fruit do we have? Because if the answer is "I don't have any", the result is judgment.

What is your fruit? If we are going to inspire those around us to faith that's the key. Scripture talks about the

“power of your testimony”. This redemption story is our testimony. It’s the irrefutable answer when someone asks you about faith. It’s the change that causes people to wonder why we are different now than before. Paying attention to that work, yes, work of living into our redemption is often the convincing part of our story. As James says, “show me your faith without your works, I will show you my faith BY my works!”



Pastor Brent’s Bible Study will resume with the new school year, twice a week, as always. If you are able to come out, please come join the conversation in person! If you’re not, kindly spread the word to those who are. Everyone is welcome to participate.



This year Brent has been working to compile the notes and weekly update write-ups from all his past studies into cohesive volumes. They are bound in brightly colored binders, available for anyone to borrow, in the church gathering area. These volumes make excellent personal study guides.