

**“The Character of a Methodist”
“Loving God with All Our Heart”**

This Sunday we begin a new sermon series “The Character of a Methodist.” In our culture, the New Year offers a “re-do,” a chance to make resolutions and tend to all those things we meant to do throughout the previous year. In the Christian tradition, every day, every week is an invitation to “re-do”, to come to worship, confess our sins and shortcomings and experience God’s unfailing grace and mercy, and to be reminded that we are loved. This sermon series will invite us to recommit our lives and our hearts to Christ, who has come to offer light, life and love. In both the Hebrew Scripture and the words of Jesus, we are reminded that the greatest commandment is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.” What better way to begin a new year and a new commitment than to look to the Baptism of Jesus. Jesus identifies with us and invites us into living out our love with everything that we are and everything we have been given. As we begin a new year, we were invited to remember our baptism and to pick a prayer focus word. Please use your focus word throughout the year and see how God will speak to you, and guide and direct you as you are part of transforming the world into the kingdom of God. ---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Loving God with All Our Heart”**

Prayer for the Week

God of new beginnings, you wipe away our tears and call us to care for one another. Give us eyes to see your gifts, hearts to embrace all creation, and hands to serve you every day of our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. (Consultation on Common Texts, 2002)

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, 1/15/18 Mark 1: 9-11

The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels and the most succinct. The author doesn't waste words and unlike Matthew and Luke, spares no space for birth stories or John, who waxes poetic. Mark gets right to the point even in the first verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The next few verses introduce John and then exactly three verses on Jesus' baptism. In verse 10, most versions speak of the heavens opening up, but in actuality, Mark's words are far more dramatic: splitting open or torn apart might be more accurate. Mark is showing that even in baptism, God is going to do something amazing, something spectacular in Jesus and it begins with Jesus being labeled beloved and his being baptized. *How does your baptism and/or confirmation tie you to Jesus? How does your prayer word affirm your calling and your baptism?*

Tuesday, 1/16/18 Isaiah 43:1-2

In the second part of Isaiah (beginning with chapter 40) a restoration theme is dominant. The people of Israel are tired, overwhelmed and the word of Isaiah brings hope. In Chapter 42, we have the first of the Servant Songs (which describes the Messiah or the Christ and in the Christian tradition describes Jesus for us.) These two verses remind the people of Israel that they are loved and precious. No matter what might happen in their lives, God is there and calls them by name. That is real love, love that walk through the fire, the waters and the craziness, a love that withstands the most powerful storms. It is the love that Jesus shares as he is baptized and called Beloved by the Spirit of God. You are also beloved of God. *Today, be in prayer with your word, that God might open you to what He has in store for you.*

Wednesday, 1/17/18 Isaiah 43: 3-4

The prophet gives witness that God is God! "You are precious in my sight and I love you." There are no more powerful words than God giving voice to how precious each person is and how each are beloved. *Recalling Jesus' baptism and call, how do you experience the love of God? Do you really believe you are precious in God's sight and honored and loved? God is calling you, by name, to live out the love you have been given. Today you are invited to say yes to God's love and God's call in your life.*

Thursday, 1/18/18 Isaiah 43: 5-7

The prophet reminds the people that out of love God will bring them home and will restore them. Their families will be reunited and they will know, in a real way, God grace and love. I think Jesus promises us that kind of hope and love through the community of faith. Jesus invites us to love one another and in loving one another, experiencing and seeing God in a new way. *How are you loving God with all your heart? How can the call of Jesus be made real in the community and through the actions of our lives? As you focus and mediate on your prayer word, may the love God has for you surround you and may you find ways to love God in return.*

Friday, 1/19/18

"What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist, according to you own (John Wesley's) account?" I answer: A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" one who "...God is the joy of his heart, the desire of his soul." (Taken from John Wesley's the Character of a Methodist) In remembering our baptism, we are invited to recall that God is the joy of our heart and the desire of our soul or spirit. In baptism, we are marked and named a beloved child, a beloved son or daughter of the Divine. *How does the love of God change your words and actions? How does your loving God make a difference in the world?*