

A SERMON PREACHED ON SUNDAY,
SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

AT BETHANY BEACH CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
BETHANY BEACH, DE

Good morning. It is good to see so many old friends and new on this wonderful occasion celebrating the 20th

Anniversary of Bethany Beach Christian Church. It was especially moving to hear about the early days of BBCC from Jim Crouch, Bette Meredith, and Sue Fuller and to relive part of our past through them. I know you are all anxious to greet them and others at the Peace and following the service.

Jim gave us a look at the earliest of days when a small group (I'm told that the number varies depending on who is telling the story...) of folks gathered to explore the possibility of worshipping together. Jim has told the story quite well of the beginnings of the church. I'd now like to take us on a journey to where I think and hope we can grow as a congregation. I've been here just a year so I can't fill in the many pages of the years that followed that first service we celebrate today. But I do know from hearing from all of you of the rich friendships that have developed, despite some ups and downs, from the days of

the earliest meetings to the present. When folks speak to me about BBCC, it's usually with an addendum of "and I met some of my closest friends there - - and we're still friends!" So walking forward, I hope that this remains true, and that you will find new forever friends here in the days and years ahead!

The theme of this celebration and our vision for the future is 1) inclusion and 2) God's love. The new banners, created by Pat and Bonnie, honor this reflection of God's vision for us and God's participation in our mission and ministry. It is our prayer to always be headed in the direction of going forth to share God's love with others, while at the

same time keeping the doors of the chapel open to welcome all who enter in. We are bold to claim that we are an Inclusive Church, which means we are a group of Christians uniting together around a statement of belief that we are a church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. We believe in and preach a Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and

deep is the love of Jesus Christ." We know what this entails and plan to live into it.

We are confident, however, that this can only be accomplished through God's perpetual love, so above all we seek to be united with God on a daily basis. As we do this it will become the source for true happiness. When I asked folks how they envision BBCC in the time ahead, many said they hoped we could say that we are happy, so that's a priority. Folks come to church to find a key to happiness. What would that look like to you? To me, it would look 100 seats full, having to use the folding chairs. It'd be fine with me if we took the first ten chairs, turned them sideways to

accommodate a choir. I'd be very satisfied if we had three-hour outreach meetings because we had so much money we wanted to give away to the poor and needy. More baptisms. More weddings. I'd like us to dream using this prayer: O God, if money were no object, I'd like to see BBCC do XXXXX, then set a goal, and do it. I'd like to see more people of color and ethnic backgrounds at worship and at all else we do. I think it would be great to have a youth group and a Sunday school. Or maybe we should choose just one of these challenges and be happy we were able to make it all work! Happiness comes in many forms; perhaps stasis is one of

them. We may be happiest to let things stay as they are.

But I believe in a greater mission for BBCC. We are already the only welcoming church in the entire beach community (that tells you a lot about the notion of community, does it not?) It would be great if that were the first thing folks said about us, how we were identified, how we were known. There is an old song that says *They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love*. May it be said of us, “they include everyone! We’ve never experienced anything like it! Can it be true?” Through the love of God it can, it is, we are.

These are truly Happy Days to be in your company! This is always your home, and you are always welcome here.

ⁱ <https://www.inclusive-church.org/>