

BACK TO SCHOOL MESSAGE - SEPTEMBER 1, 2018

A new year of School has started or will start this week! College and university students have already moved in and classes have started. The fall church season gets into full swing next week with Rally Day, music rehearsal start-ups, new studies.

Every new school year, every new season calls for lots of practical preparations. Buying school supplies; making arrangements for carpools or riding the bus, after school care; adequate backpacks, appropriate clothing; signing up for soccer or football or volleyball or dance or gymnastics or music lessons, and for the variety of church activities available.

There are also some concerns and anxieties about new seasons. How hard will classes be this year; what will the teachers be like or what will the students be like; what peer group will my child be attracted to. Where can I fit into the life of the church? I've just touched the surface here. There are so many things that can make us anxious. It's always my hope to help us keep anchored, as people of faith, with some Scriptural and "practical" advice as we enter a new season.

What better place to begin than with today's centering scripture – I love Proverbs 3: 5 from the Message translation: Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your

own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

Every morning, get up, take a few deep breaths, look in the mirror and remind yourself of this most basic and essential fact: I am a beloved child of God, and when I trust Him, there's nothing that's going to happen today that God and I can't handle together . Remember Whose you are: your value is not determined by the color of your skin, or the clothes you wear, or which neighborhood you live in, or how smart you are or aren't, or if you're good at sports or not.

God wants us to be the best we can be, but each one of us is unique. We each have to discover and develop our own gifts, not those of anyone else. You are a child of God – valued, precious and loved.

As you remember Whose you are, also remember what your purpose is as you begin each day. Make it a goal to do something good for somebody every single day. Can you imagine what a different place the world would be if this was a daily goal? "Okay, Lord, help me look for opportunities to do something good for someone today." Imagine the difference in our homes and families and workplaces and schools if just all of us approached each day that way!

Remember that God goes with us into the world, but also that we represent Christ to other people. We are called, we have a responsibility, to live differently in the world because we call ourselves Christ followers. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

It is difficult to focus on these sorts of things at the beginning of new seasons because there are so many other concerns on our minds. So I hope you’ll let your faith and your church help you in this task.

I hope you’ll make worship a high priority for yourself and your family. There’s much competition, I know, but this is the time in the week that the whole church family is invited to come together and do a radical thing as one body: think about something other than ourselves.

We come together to remember that we’re not in charge. That sounds so simplistic, but it’s so easy to

lose sight of when we try to rely on our own strength. We come together to sing praises to God and to express both the heights and depths of faith. We come together to pray – to express gratitude and call to mind the gifts of God in our lives; to confess our sinfulness and ask forgiveness; and to request God’s help and healing in our lives and the life of the world; we come together to hear God’s word for us and be reminded of the good news it contains and the guidance it gives.

If you’re not already a part of a smaller group within our church, I urge you to consider it – it’s a great way to build relationships with one another -- Bible and book studies, choral and bell groups, mission and outreach planning teams and events, grief and divorce support groups, coffee and conversation, prayer groups – just a few of the small group opportunities available for you. If you’re not involved in Sunday School, come next Sunday for Rally Day, sign up for Sunday School and meet your teachers – yes, adults, too! Our relationship with Jesus and with others needs to be nurtured and neither relationships will grow by sitting on the sidelines.

Finally, if you have been visiting or participating at SUMC for while, I want to invite and encourage you to consider making the decision to jump in and become a full member and active participant of this church. Next week, at this point, we’ll be receiving 11 new members – we can always welcome more.

I'm happy to meet with you one on one to answer any questions you may have before making the decision.

So you've got a lot to think about as the new season begins. Rest assured, God goes before you and prepares the way. Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.