**1 Cor. 1:26-31 NRSV**

**26**Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28374g)] not many of you were wise by human standards,[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28374h)] not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27**But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28**God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, **29**so that no one[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%201&version=NRSV" \l "fen-NRSV-28377i" \o "See footnote i)] might boast in the presence of God. **30**He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31**in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28379j)] the Lord.”

**Romans 12:2 NRSV**

**2**Do not be conformed to this world,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A2&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28233a)] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A2&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28233b)]

(sermon title slide)

1. Isn’t it great when you can start fresh!

* It’s been a long week. Many have been busy at work. We have experienced frustrations. But today is Sunday. We can start fresh, be renewed.
* A young married couple I know, has been struggling. Not long out of school, they’re piecing it all together in the midst of a pandemic. But they recently had a baby, and in spite of the challenges this new life brings, the baby has given them hope and renewal of life.
* The first day of school for elementary kids is approaching. There are pandemic challenges of returning to school to be sure, whether children will be taught face to face, or virtually. But as they begin again, whatever happened last year is in the past. With the new school year, they have a new opportunity. Renewal.
* I spent a night outdoors recently in the Shenandoah Park. It rained in the evening and the tent seemed small. In the morning, there was considerable fog, but the sun burned through the clouds and I was struck by the beauty of the mountains. Renewal.

Pyramid

**Series Recap**

We’re on week 5 in an 8 week series regarding United Methodist beliefs. The primary belief we’re talking about is the one we have that faith is a process and we’re called to grow in faith.

**Justification**

Last week, we focused on justification. If you grew up Baptist or independent Christian, you heard the word salvation more frequently, but the word justification actually appears more often in the Bible so we use that word a lot in Methodism, but we use the word salvation too. They mean the same thing. I shared my own justification experience, a time when I turned toward God, after my embarrassment of goofing up on a confirmation retreat.

John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, justification occurred after a failed mission in America. He was in a dark place—despondent and gloomy. He wrote in his journal…

* “In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where…
* One (he means a Leader) was reading from Luther’s (Martin Luther’s) preface to the epistle to the Romans.
* If you are familiar with Romans, you’ll know it reminds us that we are “justified by faith through grace”. (Romans 3:22)
* Wesley continued in his journal…”About a quarter before nine… I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation…”

That’s interesting, because in 1519, Martin Luther, was also…

* experiencing a dark time.
* His family had dreamed that he would become a lawyer. Martin had started studying for that, but had dropped out, and was studying to become a priest.
* He not only wanted to be a good priest, but wanted to be an excellent priest. So much so that the other priests had told him essentially to “lighten up”. He was failing at being a priest!
* Luther was frustrated because had not yet experienced new life.
* But just then, he came across the book of Romans.
* He wrote that he felt “altogether born again.”

Think about this for a moment.

* **TWO** different places…England and Germany
* **TWO** centuries apart.
* **ONE** book, the book of Romans.
  + God caught hold of both men’s hearts, renewing them.

Regeneration (Today’s Focus)

(will walks to the chancel visual)

Renewal is a more familiar word, but “Regeneration” is the formal Christian term. We use it to talk “the renewal of a person through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. You could call this also a “healing” of the mind and soul.

* Do you remember my own goof up that I mentioned last week. When the boys in my confirmation class crashed a wedding rehearsal? I got over that.
* In Wesley’s case, he got over the regret and shame of failing in America.
* In Luther’s case, he got over not fulfilling his family’s dreams for him, and his early troubles in the priesthood.

**(slide of the inside of the house)**

**Life in the House**

* Using Wesley’s metaphor of the “House of Religion”, through repentance we are justified and enter the house.
* Welcomed into the house by the God who loves us, regeneration and renewal begin.
* Once we are in the house, come sit down.
* Get cosey.
* Allow the Lord to work.

**Inward Faith/ Outward Faith**

* JW wanted Methodists to have a full understanding of the Bible.
* So, while Regeneration/ Renewal begins as an inward, personal experience. Wesley believed that regeneration must also be expressed outwardly and socially.
  + For John Wesley and the early Methodists, it is abundantly clear that they did not think that salvation was…
    - Just between “me and thee” – us and God.
    - It certainly wasn’t a “pie in the sky by and by” faith.
    - It wasn’t the televangelist appeal that personal faith was the end game.
  + Through justifying/ saving grace, Christ’s character is ***imparted*** to us—part of His character becomes ours. Part of His righteousness becomes ours. Since He cared about others and the world, we care about others and the world too.

**When my sons were babies**, they wanted me to read stories to them about trucks. I read the Big Book of trucks, with its four page fold out, over and over again to them.

So for a period of my life, I was…

* An expert on the virtues of the “cement mixer” truck.
* I could tell you about the “car carrier”, “dump trucks”, and “crane truck”.
* Because my children loved trucks, I loved trucks too.
* I didn’t pretend to love trucks, I loved trucks, because my children did.
* I was really into it. I was a truck expert.

(slide of a dad playing dress up)

Donna and I have never had daughters, so I have always been interested hearing father/daughter stories from my friends. Some of them have gone to great lengths…

* I’ve heard stories of fathers wearing:
  + feather boas…
  + wigs of the kind worn by princess Elsa, from the animated movie “Frozen”.
* I have heard tales of Dads:
  + having applied make-up and lipstick too their own faces.
* I know of grown fathers:
  + sitting on tiny chairs, hold tiny cups, in faux tea parties with their little girls.
* For them, playing dress-up was never on the list of things they planned to do.
  + They did those things for the love of their daughters.

Just as Fathers love the same things their children love, through regeneration, we come to love the same things God loves. Jesus regenerated, and renewed us—healing us and restored us, removing our selfish nature.

Because Christ renewed us, we care about the renewal of other people and the world.

* + Just as Jesus cared about people who needed to be renewed and set free, with our own “regeneration”, comes the desire to heal and set other free too.
  + Personally and inwardly yes, AND outwardly and socially too…
  + John Wesley believed that anyone who wanted to become personally holy, had to become outwardly concerned. If you want to be closer to God on the inside, you must seek to make the world around you better.
    - So Methodists took on the big issues of their day including: slavery, education, medical care for the poor, poverty, and alcoholism.
  + They sought regeneration, renewal and new life for others.
  + They not only provided spiritual help in the form of prayers, but material help too.
  + So today, this situation we are in with this virus has led to financial hardship for many. Some have lost their jobs or their income has been severely reduced.
  + In order to make ends meet, they go to the foodbanks.
  + Here’s a chance for an outward response to inward faith.
    - Pender UMC is collecting canned fruit for Western Fairfax Christian Ministries.
* Children particularly are experiencing hardship during this pandemic. Think about this, if their parents are struggling more than before, then so are their children. They are headed back to school for a new year. Let’s help them have a fresh start.
  + - So, we’re collecting school supplies.
* The problem of systemic racism is in the news. We have an opportunity for an outward reaction to our inward faith by striving to learn more.
  + - You can watch Bishop Lewis’s dialogue on systematic racism by following the link: [**https://vaumc.org/?s=Dialogue+on+Systemic+Racism**](https://vaumc.org/?s=Dialogue+on+Systemic+Racism)**.**

Conclusion

* After a busy week, with Sunday comes the opportunity to be given a fresh start.
* Amidst life’s challenges, the birth of a baby reminds us of new life.
* With the new school year, children have the opportunity to start over.
* After the darkness, comes the dawn.
* Renewal, new life, being born again—Regeneration.
* The inward experience, eventually turns outward.
* We work alongside of God in the work of renewal.