

*The daily readings this week are all written by charter members of Covenant. This means they have been a part of Covenant since 1979. They were at the "chartering" worship service and have been a vital part of this church for 40 years. They have served, they have taught, they have sung, they have brought their children, and they have sacrificed to help this church be where it is today. We are grateful for their service and for the variety of gifts that continue to offer to God.*

**June 24. Read John 15:5.** *"New Beginnings" by Diane Carn.* When thinking of the birth of this congregation some forty very short years ago, the phrase "new beginnings" comes to mind. It sounds "catchy," like something you would be more likely to hear from someone half my age. So I did what any middle aged (God will, I hope, forgive me for this exaggeration) person would do, and I Googled it. Turns out the phrase has been around, well, from the beginning. There are tons of congregations named "New Beginnings." There are towns named "New Beginnings." Most likely, someone somewhere named their first child New Beginnings. OK, fine. So riddle me this: How can a beginning be new ("new" means to replace something older, right?) Didn't Seneca say that "[E]very new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." (Google, again). This congregation was born of the First United Methodist Church of Dothan, which was born of another congregation, which was born of another, and on and on. And each one was new, and each one was its own beginning as a congregation. So I don't see it as the end of some previous beginning, and with all due respect, have to take issue with Mr. Seneca. Or, at least, maybe give it a different perspective. Jesus spoke often of vineyards. I suspect the metaphor had a more powerful meaning in those days than today. But even a southerner for whom vine means kudzu can also relate to a grape vine (think scuppernongs). Vines grow; they grow steadily and consistently; they spring from the existing vine; the unsuccessful stems must be pruned, and the plant nurtured. The result when done properly is a productive vine and the most delicious of fruits. But the trunk of that vine never died or ended. So on this anniversary, perhaps a good way to think of our congregation is as another branch on *the* vine. A vine with Jesus as its trunk. And each spring (a new beginning), and each shoot on the vine (a new beginning), and each day (a new beginning) and each leaf (a new beginning). Not the end of another beginning as suggested by Mr. Seneca, but instead, another beginning.

**June 25. "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24.** *"Glad and Grateful" by Otto Voellinger.* Every morning when I get up, I repeat this verse. And one of the things I am glad about each day is that I'm a member of Covenant UMC. As a charter member, I'm grateful to see how our church has grown and how we continue to serve the Lord by serving others. From providing meals for local groups to working on projects in other countries, our church strives to be God's hands and feet. I'm glad we continue to give our prayer, our presence, our gifts and our service to CUMC so that God is glorified and so that all may draw closer to Him.

**June 26. Read Romans 15: 5-7.** *"Different" by Sheri Stevens.* In 2017, I had the privilege to be a part of a mission team sent to serve in a mountain village in Haiti. None of us really knew what to expect. We quickly found out that it was to be a very emotional and fulfilling journey. One afternoon I saw a group of four little girls sitting quietly in the back of the church watching all the activities. I walked over to them and asked to sit with them. I got some curious stares from the girls as I sat down between them. Since they only spoke French-Creole and I only speak English, I can just imagine what they were thinking! As I sat there with these precious girls, they whispered and giggled among themselves. I decided to break the ice by being... well... me. I started acting silly by tapping them on the shoulder then looking away. It didn't take long before the game was on! Quickly our game turned from play into curiosity. One after another these girls wanted to touch me. They touched my arms then my face then my hair. You see, I was different. I am blanc to the Haitians, my skin color is different. I sat quietly as they hesitantly touched me and satisfied their curiosity. It was one of the most beautiful moments I have ever experienced. The thought kept running through my mind: Even though we are different, we are *all* children of God. It truly doesn't matter the color of our skin or where we live or what language we speak, we are all called as followers of Christ to love and accept one another. By doing this, we glorify God. My hope is that every one of us will one day see the beauty in loving one another no matter what our differences might be.

**June 27. Read Psalm 86: 6-7.** *“Blessings of Prayer” by Tommy Peacock.* Forty years ago God put a need in my family’s heart to be a part of a new Methodist church in west Dothan. This was to be a blessed trip in serving God. It taught me that God will answer your prayer. We had a preacher, no land, no building and no hymnals to sing Gods’ blessings. On the first Sunday we received 23 members. Our pastor, Dr. Mike Watson always said "to pray about our needs and God would provide." Bill Lee and Ralph Reeves spoke to the congregation on the third Sunday about tithing. This was something I had never done. I started praying about tithing and God answered me with not to worry he would provide. By his blessings we as a family have tithed ever since. Forty years later, I could not go on every day if I could not pray to my heavenly father. It may be about sickness, friends, loss of a loved one, family needs or just to tell God thank you for his many blessings. Look what God has blessed Covenant with, a church family that will never leave you and continues to pray for you daily. Continue to pray that as members of Covenant we will do the Lord's work of reaching the unchurched. His will be done. *Prayer: Our father who art in haven, hallowed be his name. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in haven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and power, and the glory, forever. Amen ( Matt. 6: 9-13)*

**June 28. Look at how good and pleasing it is when families live together as one! Psalm 133:1.** *“Cherished Blessings” by JoAnn McFarland.* Being a Charter Member of Covenant United Methodist Church is one of the greatest and most cherished blessings of my life! July 1, 1979 was the "birth of Covenant". I remember vividly the first service where we met in a school cafeteria. I have only been a member of three churches in my life of 70 years, and I have been a member of Covenant much longer than at either of the other two churches. My church has always been like family to me, and this is especially true of Covenant which has been my family for the last 40 years. I've raised my children in Covenant, I've gone through my happiest times of my life and through my saddest times of my life, and through it all, Covenant has surrounded me in unforgettable love. Since I am an only child and since my Mother and Daddy are gone, Covenant members are my sisters and brothers. I joined Covenant with the very first group of members-before there was land, before there was a building, and even before Covenant had her name. From the beginning this faithful congregation of GOD'S people has been a mission-minded church and has been devoted to Christian ministry in our local community and throughout our world. I give thanks to GOD daily for the leadership that has continuously guided HIS people here to follow in the example of JESUS CHRIST our LORD and SAVIOR. **WHAT "CHERISHED BLESSINGS" HAVE BEEN SHOWERED UPON ME IN WAYS THAT I COULD HAVE NEVER DREAMED OR IMAGINED POSSIBLE!**

Prayer: FATHER GOD, I give YOU all the glory, and I thank YOU for the tremendous blessing of having Covenant in my life. My heart truly overflows! I pray that YOUR HOLY SPIRIT will continue to guide this precious church into the future. Amen.