

July 1. Read Isaiah 43:19. *“A New Thing” by Sammy Prim.* Forty years ago this summer there was a new thing in west Dothan. There was a beginning of a new church and some 25 to 30 people met together to be the beginnings of this church. There are many churches that are built out of a reaction to scriptural interpretation, theology, doctrine, personal disagreements, and pastoral leadership. However this church was begun with a vision of the need for a new church in West Dothan and not out of any negativity. The United Methodist conference send a Dothan native, Dr. B. Michael Watson to provide leadership for the birth of this new church. Little did we know what was involved in starting a new church We had no land, no money, no specifics, and not even a name, but we did have leadership and love for each other and love of God. We did this with God’s leadership and with great expectations of what the future would bring. We served on all the committees but because they were so few of us and we never knew the Methodist Church had so many committees therefore we were on all the committees. All of our needs seemed to be supplied as needed not that we did not work at it but there seemed to be a plan beyond our knowledge. At one time nearly every member of the church tithed and approximately 50% of our budget went to missions and as yet we were nothing but a mission ourselves. God blessed this mission greatly and still continues to do so and I think that this church still presents as a place of positivity in the name of Christ. The scripture above in Isaiah seems to be very appropriate to this church. We set out with God’s help and leadership and with community help to start a “new thing” and the community could see this “new thing” was a living church growing as a place of acceptance, love, and healing. There was excitement and a thrill that only God can provide at a time like this and still provides it yet today. Those of us who were there at the beginning believed that God could do a “new thing” in west Dothan and that He could use even us to be part of the doing even though we could not see it immediately but we knew it was going to be good. So this church is still a “new thing” every day to the many who come here. We as a church pray that this will continue to be new place for all to come to know God through His Son Jesus Christ. Just as His Love is new every morning for all so is it here. So often we miss what God is doing because we do not have eyes to see. Let us continue to be “new wine” and not become old wine skins so this community of people will see that this “new thing” includes them. What new things are you and I seeing? Dear God let it be in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit.

July 2. Read Hosea 4:6. *“Just stay out of the way” by Bill Carn.* Most of us don’t give much thought to what Highway 84 West looked like forty years ago. Fewer still will remember that there was a home that sat just to the east of our current location. We just referred to it then as “the Pittman house.” It’s our starting point for this message. Our mandate was to start a church on the west side of town. We were very fortunate to have leadership (and the leadership was the difference) that recognized the importance of factors such as acreage size and shape, highway access, traffic patterns, population growth potential, site condition, surrounding properties, and so forth. That is about where our actual knowledge ended, however, because no one had ever started a church from the ground up. It is not something you do every day. The UMC offered a lot of resource material, but none that said “[H]ey guys, this is the spot.” A number of properties were considered, but nothing seemed to feel just right. And then, the Pittman property just sort of started to materialize out of the fog; but as I recall, slowly. The location was ideal, the acreage was right, access was good and population growth in that direction seemed promising. There was just a warm, fuzzy feeling about it. The members of the Pittman family who actually held title lived in Mobile, however, and none of our committee had any personal relationship which they could call upon. We also knew this property had been in their family for a very long time, and that its’ sale was certain to have significant tax implications. It was, and it did. So we waited, knowing a number of things had to fall into place. We stayed out of the way. It was not long before Mrs. Pittman was moved to sell the property to us provided some necessary financial implications could be resolved. Behind the scenes, her attorneys and accountants quietly worked out a plan that included a substantial charitable donation in property value, which made the tax implications acceptable for Mrs. Pittman (and gave us some much needed relief). We then had some things to work out at our end, and as you will note from looking around you, we worked them out. For whatever reason, the usual glitches that attend many real estate transactions just didn’t happen. It also just so happened that Don Lewis was building the McClintock building next door, and when we got ready to break ground, he could break it a little more inexpensively. One of my former law partners, Dwight McInish, once gave me some advice that I’ve had the good sense not to forget. I was very young then, worrying over something and he said to me: “You know, if you and me and everyone else will just stay out of the way, things will work out the way they are supposed to work out.” Isn’t it comforting to know that there is a way things are supposed to work out? The challenging part for us is staying out of the way. This congregation came to rest at this location because it was supposed to be here. It’s just that simple. Our early leadership had the faith, and the trust in God’s plan, wherever it might lead them, to stay out of His way.

July 3. Read Psalm 18:2. Psalm 62:6. Luke 6:48. *“Our Rock, Christ, the Church” by Sue Bradshaw.*

Our church has always been so much more than just the physical property that sits on 3610 W Main St. Our church is, and has been, a gathering of God's children; and along the way we found places to meet. Such as a local school, where we gathered to worship God while growing spiritually and in numbers. We also met at Wesley Manor, and during our time there a visitor once asked what kind of retirement center also had a three-year-old Sunday school class! In fact, it was while worshipping at Wesley Manor that we officially named our group Covenant United Methodist Church. We continued to grow close to God, spread His Love, and just like the church in Acts, God continued to add to our numbers daily. Finally, we were overjoyed when God provided us with a permanent home where we continue to commit ourselves to God and the church, by offering our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Just as God's love is deep, so too are His blessings boundless. God's provision extends beyond our meeting space, as He provided us with humble shepherds to help guide our church over the years. After our founding shepherd, Dr. Mike Watson, God sent Dr. Joe Burlington, Dr. Al Harbour, and then our current pastor Dr. Hays McKay with Rev. Kyle Gatlin added as associate the next year. Our growth in professions of faith, baptisms, membership and meeting space is a testimony to God's faithfulness to His children and this church during all of life's seasons. Both of my grandchildren, Rev. Gillian Lisenby Walters and Rev. Woods Bradshaw Lisenby, were baptized at Covenant and are now serving as active United Methodist Ministers. When my Husband, Wayne Ellis Bradshaw moved to Heaven, my Covenant Family surrounded our family with prayers, love, and care. Yes, Covenant is more than a building. God has been with us then, God is with us now, and God will be with us always!

July 4. “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs

22:6. *“Methodist Memories” by Joy Voellinger.* I dearly loved by maternal grandmother, Magnolia Wingard King, aka Mammaw. And Mammaw dearly loved being a part of her little Methodist Church with the white steeple in Fultondale, Al. To say that she and Pappaw were there every time the doors opened is not that much of an exaggeration. Mammaw modeled for me and for others the love, kindness, and goodness of Jesus. And Pappaw was the person from whom I learned that it's ok to underline and write in your Bible. I still have one of his vintage Sheaffer fountain pens that he'd let me fill up in the ink bottle. I can just see Pappaw now standing in the driveway of their home, looking at his pocket watch, and waiting impatiently for Mammaw to get in the car with us to go to church. Nevermind that she'd had been cooking all morning (plus Saturday, preparing one of her wonderful, huge Sunday dinners that we'd enjoy as soon as we got back home. I also remember those Sunday evening church services in warm weather with the sweet smell of honeysuckle and the sound of crickets coming in through the open windows. And oh my, did we ever sing – that Cokesbury hymnal was well used! I indeed found what a friend I have in Jesus, and that I have victory over death through His love, mercy and grace. I'm so thankful for godly grandparents who instilled in me a love of Jesus and the importance of being part of a church family. Mammaw, even though I no longer own a wide brimmed hat or a pair of white gloves, I hope you know I'm in church on Sundays, still singing! And, because of that old rugged cross, I look forward to seeing you again and spending eternity with you.

July 5. With long life, I will satisfy him and let him see my salvation. Psalm 91:66. Wisdom belongs to the aged and understanding to the old. Job 12:12. *“Thankful” by Kathy Peacock.* I was a young mom when we made the decision to start a new church. What an adventure! Through changes in my life and the life of our church over these 40 years, I hope that I have gained wisdom and strength and God is happy with my salvation. Thank you God for life and the life of this church! *Prayer: Dear God, my prayer is that I grow in age, I grow in wisdom and please you in my salvation.*

July 6. Read Galatians 6:10. *“Family” by Donna West.* The concept of family has evolved and changed over the decades such that there is no such thing as a “typical” family—if there ever really was such a thing. However, the concept of the church family seems to have stayed the same—that it is the family of God, a family community which shares in the grace and gifts of God. I have experienced the comfort and joy of this church family here at Covenant for the past forty years through the highs and lows of my life and that is why I have stayed in this church. That is the true essence of a church and what is most important—not the preacher or the music or the programs—but the church family. As individuals we each have our own talents and abilities but together we share in—love, unity (community), forgiveness, tenderheartedness, compassion, courtesy and generosity—the gifts we receive as the children of God and His family. Dear Covenant Family, my heartfelt thanks to you for being my church family and for blessing me and my life!