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I would like to thank Jessie and Olivia for coming and sharing their gift of song with us this morning, they were kind enough to sing and song lead for the Sunday night interfaith services each week at camp, which made for an entirely different environment than my voice trying to song lead.

I like to apologize to everyone for the unfortunate scheduling of My father and I back to back. Even I would not want that.

Thank you to the scouters who have shown up, many of you had the unfortunate privilege to hear me pray or share messages for 8 weeks this summer, and still were willing to come here this morning!

And thank you to the church leadership for allowing "The Kid" an opportunity in the pulpit.

The scripture this morning comes from 1 Peter chapter 4, 1 Peter is a letter written by the Apostle Peter, during the persecution of Christians in Rome by the Emperor Nero. In this letter Peter is giving instructions to Christians for how to act in the years to come, as what was believed to soon be the end times. These were general instructions for anyone, not just romans, and also were specific instructions for those who had not been around to physically see Jesus Christ and were probably new believers.

This reading will be in my preferred translation, the New Living translation.

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1 Peter 4:8-11 New Living Translation (NLT)

8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

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10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you.

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Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

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For those of you who do not know I spent 9 weeks this summer serving as the Camp Chaplain at a Boy Scout camp in Loveland, Ohio called Camp Friedlander. I have had the challenge and opportunity to work there for 5 summers previously, then had the opportunity to spend this last summer SERVING! I had been a merit badge counselor, I had been the Adult leader trainer, I had been assistant manager of the trading post, then for 2016 and 2017, I got the opportunity that I had been waiting for, I was the Camp Commissioner, which for non-scouters, means I was in charge of operations, anything that was not teaching a scout a merit badge fell to me: Dining Hall

Operations, Adult training Facilitations, Weekly check-in and Check-out of 500+ campers, as well as guiding and operating the Counselor in training program and being the primary customer service agent for the camp. I loved to hate that job, but I always felt privileged to do it, as the end of the 2017 season came I began to ponder the future, I was seriously looking at what I needed to finish college and start thinking about what life would look like. Oh, and during 2017, in addition to all my duties, I also had the opportunity, privilege, and sometimes challenge to break in a new Camp Director. He and I spent quite a bit of time each day, discussing the task list for that day, as well as any upcoming events that needed planned for, in addition, we spent a lot of time getting to know each other. For those of you who have worked on any kind of a camp staff, you know that the staff becomes your family, but the new director and I knew nothing about each other, except what others had told us. As the summer ended, and I discussed the possibility of myself moving on, the Camp Director asked his wife to leave the room and shut the door. At that moment, my heart sunk. What was he going to say, had I completely missed the mark that year?

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It was at that moment, he asked me to consider returning the next summer to serve as the chaplain, my heart raced with excitement and fear, all at the same time. I knew our longtime chaplain was calling it quits, and I had a great deal of respect for the role the chaplain played in camp life, as a supporter, confidant, and sometimes mediator. I discussed it with a few close friends and leaders on the staff, who all told me I was meant to really do that job. So, I accepted.

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As the fall came, I began to look at training available to Boy Scout Chaplains, and quickly realized, that it was just meant to teach people about scouting. I met with my predecessor over lunch, and asked him questions, and tried to take notes, as he shared with me a decade of gained knowledge. I spent an afternoon sitting with Rev. Steffy, unknowingly only a week before he passed, who made a point to tell me what he thought my role as a camp chaplain would be, I continued to realize all summer, just how right he was. I enrolled in a religion class at school and learned a great deal.

In January, I met with the Camp Director, to discuss the previous and coming summer. While I was there, he asked “What is your Vision for the Chaplaincy?” I had no answer, except, that I did not want anyone to say I did exactly what the previous chaplain did. I ended up thinking, I wanted to make an impact, I wanted someone to say, hey, he cared!

But as the off season rolled, I started to realize, nothing could truly prepare me for what I was going to do. Lead worship services, yeah, I could do that, talk about faith with people, yeah, I could probably handle that, but there was still that unknown.

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So, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, rolled around, I moved into camp for the summer. As the staff week continued I found myself already counseling staff, who were stressing about a lack of staff, and a lack of time left until we had campers onsite. When Sunday of staff week came, I gave a message, that had been in the back of my mind about how time is our most precious possession, and time spent at camp, was time well spent.

As I saw the message sink into the staff, I began to feel like, maybe I was meant to spend my summer this way.

During staff week, things had gone as could have been expected, then one of our counselors in training, had a rough day, that last day, as they explained how their family had forever changed, due to the actions of a father, and how since that time, his support at home was very little. I cried with the medic, and nothing is worse than two adult men, sobbing like babies.

And at that point I reminded myself there was more to this job than leading chapel on Sunday and Wednesday night.

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Our first campers arrived, and I was pumped! I had Sunday night chapel, and out of 500+ campers 50 showed up, and it was a heat index of 102 degrees. I was suddenly a little less motivated, but well wishes from friends and scouting colleagues carried me on. Every morning during each week of camp, I lead a morning prayer time for those involved, and this is where it got real, I had a dozen or so people who showed up every morning. I tried to find something to engage them every morning, cause no 12-year-old, wants to sit in silent prayer. I had lead a few different exercises and on Thursday morning a few hours after morning prayer, one of the leaders who had been there came to me in tears, and he needed to talk. As we sat down to talk, he pulled out a prayer request one of his boys had written. As he handed it to me he explained that this boy had been born with a deformed foot, and that he had made it a point to walk everywhere and never ask for help. As the leader explained this, I opened the note. It read "I pray for God to give me a new foot." At that very moment I cried, the leader cried... As we tried to get a hold on ourselves the leader explained that, this paper airplane, had hit him directly in the chest, and that God had meant for him to get this kid's prayer request. He had felt called to help teach this kid, how to overcome his deformity. He had found a way that he was meant to impact this scout's life.

Another week as a camper sat following Wednesday night chapel, staring at his shoes, I walked up, and asked him how he was doing. By this time all the other campers had left, and he was just sitting there quietly by himself. He asked to chat, so I sat down. He asked me if I truly thought God existed. He explained that he was a Christian, and that he had grown up in church, and was baptized at about 10 years old. He asked me how I could see that God existed, that's a Big question...

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As I talked through the friends I have had, and the mentors who have taught me, and the family that has made me who I am. Then, I remembered words shared with me at my baptism When I was about his age, by a member of our congregation who was about my age now. "You will be challenged, but God is always with you." Then I encouraged him to share with his leaders, and that they were there to care. Again, I found myself having conversations and situations, I could not have just been trained to handle.

As the first half of the summer ended, I was eager to look at how the campers had evaluated my performance. Yeah, not such a great idea. As I read over the comments, some staff members who are close confidants of mine, began to get angry as I read: "Not enough ministerial experience, not a pastor, just read off paper, never spoke." As I read through this, I had a realization that, Just

because, that is the way we have always done it, does not necessarily mean that a new way is wrong, just different. Different generations can look at things from a different angle, they can want the same things, and appreciate the same things, but their life experiences may lead them to approach the same issue in a different matter. By doing that does not make it the wrong method, just different.

I learned that I was doing ministry based on the gifts that I possess, which are different gifts than the previous chaplain had. If I had tried to do ministry based on the gifts of another, I would be doing a disservice to God himself. God gave me my own gifts, and to ignore them and try to use the gifts of another would be a waist of time.

Now, you may ask, why am I sharing this with you this morning, but there is a reason. Ask anyone of the scouters present this morning, and they will tell you I ramble on and on about my church. Right? You all know, when I am here, I ramble on and on about Scouting. So, as I went about my summer having these experiences, I could not help but think about where we are as a congregation.

Let's look at the scripture again, this time from the New Revised Standard Version which we are more familiar with.

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1 Peter 4:8-11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

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11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

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God gave each of us gifts, everyone. A group doing ministry, needs to play off the gifts of the members of the group. As your group members change, the gifts you have available change. As your collective gifts change, your ministry style must change with it, or risk not being able to provide an effective ministry at all.

I have grown up in this wonderful congregation my entire life, my family history goes all the way back to the beginning.

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This congregation over 106 years has changed many times, initially, we met in a barn, ok, not an actual barn, but a barn like building. Talk about devout believers, they worshiped in a barn, and

asked their friends to join them, and they Did! Then as they developed a vision for the future of their ministry, they started to build!

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Then as their ministry continued to expand, in the 60's they built another building, to house classrooms, to accommodate the thriving Christian Education Program. Keep in mind, that until the 60's the Disciples of Christ was still not an official denomination, but a movement, a group of Christians, ministering in community with each other.

Then in the 60's society began to change, But First Christian Church held the path. The congregation slowly started to dwindle, as the next few decades came, they found themselves in a building that was more and more expensive to maintain, with a congregation getting smaller.

So, they cast a new vision, with a new building in a different part of town, and the excitement built. The congregation had decided, that it could change, and would change to continue ministry in the Middletown community.

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After that building was no longer new and shiny, and that church was not exciting anymore, the congregation began to decline again, and as a result, they fell back into “That is the way we have always done it.” Don't get me wrong, tradition is good, I love any tradition just as much as the next person, it connects to who we are, where we have come from, and helps us determine, where we are heading, but, tradition with no purpose, leads to death.

We here in the church are at that point, we, myself included, want to do things, the way we have always done them, but without a purpose. Those of us who are newer to the congregation, see those traditions as something done for personal comfort and not for ministry. We are at a crossroads, we can either cast a new vision, that we believe in as the congregation that we are today, or we can do what “We have always done” till the end.

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This does not mean that we must transform into something we do not recognize completely, but we do need to carefully evaluate what we do, why we do it, and if there is something else we feel more called to do. This starts with each of you as individuals and what you are feel personally called to do.

We are at a very interesting moment in the life of this congregation. As someone who has grown up here, the turmoil makes me sick, but we are sick, we are a congregation without a vision we believe in. As we progress from this point, we have a lot of options, we can set our own vision, we can decide what we as Christians want to do in the world, they may mean change, that could mean, opening our space to a new congregation, or dare I say, opening up our church to the community, to help other groups accomplish their mission. But we need to find something that we believe we are called to do and can at least agree on.

A couple of weeks ago, David talked about healing, this time of transition, is first and foremost a time of healing. Then last week Cliff talked about finding your why! We have to come back to what our why is. Why we come to this church, why we are Christians, why we serve. Then we

must start to cast a vision. Last I checked, we are not a congregation with two pastors, a Christian Ed Director and a full time secretary. It is our vision, we are responsible for it.

We cannot do this by sitting idly by, this requires involvement from everyone. We need a congregational vision, which means we need the congregation to sit down and cast a vision, from the bottom up, a vision that is ours. That can be a great thing, but that also can be a scary thing, because, the vision is OURS, not someone else's.

In an article written by Erin O. White, entitled *Church is what we create with each other*, White talks about the things that make a church service. What she has to say about announcements, I feel is applicable to more than just announcements, but the church as a whole. In her article White states:

*“When you are part of a church you accept people’s offerings, even the ones you don’t necessarily want. One week their announcements will bore you and the next week they will make you weep, and sometimes it will be the same announcements. And sometimes during a hymn they’ll start a harmony and you’ll join, and your voices will become [a conversation](#), an expression of love between people who by many measures barely know each other at all.”<sup>1</sup>*

A vision that excites only a handful, gets burned out, because it takes the entire team to work towards a vision, and make it a reality.

Some of this starts with the little things, the welcome and love this congregation has. This congregation has been known for its gift of hospitality, it’s ability to welcome new people, and its ability to love each other. I have seen that evident in this congregation for the duration of my lifetime. That is an excellent starting point. That is the foundation of who we are, or at least who we were, and who we could be. We as a congregation have forgotten what our gifts were and have started to try to minister using other gifts, when we had not lost the gift of hospitality to begin with.

We need to sit down, and create our own vision, that we are all committed to in some way shape or form. This needs to have items, that we personally feel called to lead, not all big rock ideas like leading an entire outreach program like a language class, or a food or clothing drive., sometimes little ones, like coordinating a coffee hour. But a congregational vision, that everyone has a piece they can contribute to, and not a vision, that we can say was given to us by another. This is how we will rediscover who First Christian Church Middletown is, and will build our foundation for the future.

Then, we need to spread the word! Remember when I said that we started and grew in numbers, while in a barn? This place sure is different from a barn. We need to let the world know, why we love being part of this family, and how others will love it to. The world needs the care and belonging that a congregation can give. I know at my age, and I have had conversations with my peers, that tell me, that the current young adult generation, needs a church like this, a blend of tradition and vision, love and motivation, and it is our job to make sure it exists to be shared.

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<sup>1</sup> (White, 2018)

As the Summer ended, I received messages on Facebook from 3 different parents, who thanked me for what I had done, their boys had told stories about the things I had talked about, and the times, I was willing to just chat with them. I had made my impact, I had fulfilled my vision, as simple as it may have been. I had made my impact using my gifts.

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Will we avoid the Big questions? Will we say where we see God? Will someone say we cared? Will we find our purpose to help others? Will we be an instrument of God using our gifts?

Now is the time. History is made now! Will we give up 106 years of history? Today is when a new paragraph in history is written. Will we “Do what we have always done” without reason and follow our congregational traditions to the grave, or will we cast a new vision, and commit to it? Now is our time.

To stop, regroup, plan, and set forth on a new adventure, chosen by this congregation  
**TOGETHER.**