



“THE BEGINNING COMES AFTER THE END”

Sermon based on John 12:20-26

Delivered by Dr. Reverend Tim Moore

September 13, 2026 | Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Myers Park Covenant Church. Today, we are celebrating our congregation’s new name. You can see in your worship guide a glimpse of our new logo and tagline, both on the cover and in the announcement pages following the order of worship. If you’ll join us in Heaton Hall after worship, you will get a full reveal and review.

We are celebrating not just a new name, but a new era in our congregation’s life. If the name Myers Park Baptist Church recalls a whole host of tremendous events, moments, and decisions, a particular history and heritage, a new name declares that it is a new day—one that is rooted in the principles and values of this congregation and which is ready to embrace change in our constantly changing world. Claiming a new name, Myers Park Covenant Church, opens us to new possibilities, not simply by the name itself, but by this willingness to take a different path.

The music producer, Rick Rubin, who has worked with artists as diverse as Red Hot Chili Peppers, Johnny Cash, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and Run DMC, in his book, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, said, “Taking a [different] turn allows you to see landscapes you wouldn’t otherwise have seen” [Rubin, 161]. The possibilities of change begin when we take different pathways. We haven’t gone very far down this path. **Eighty-three years as Myers Park Baptist Church, eighty-three days as Myers Park Covenant Church**—we’ve just started down the trail. The trailhead sign is just right back there, behind those walls. So, there’s always time to go back—I don’t mean to revert to our old name, I mean this venture into a new era where we embrace change for the revitalization of this congregation, where we prepare work with a new permanent pastor to translate our principles and values into bold, new initiatives.

In order to embrace the power of change, it takes more than rebranding, more than going to Great Outdoors Provisions or REI to be outfitted for the journey, it means moving down the trail without turning back, but when you’re still just a few hundred yards past the trailhead turning back is always an option. **We are in for a penny, are we in for a pound?**

Jesus’s statement in today’s passage is unique to John’s gospel. The synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, & Luke—each record Jesus saying something similar. “If any wish to follow me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake. . . will save it” [Mark 8:34-35]. John, who doesn’t talk about the cross until Jesus is hanging from it, removes the idea of carrying your own cross and replaces it with the symbol of a seed. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

By repurposing Jesus' original statement with a new metaphor—namely a seed—John gives us a great symbol for change. It's a resurrection symbol, which is why it works for change.

.The power of change is resurrection power; the power to take that which is dead or dying and give it new life.

As I mentioned last week, **God made change a constant for life on this earth**, which spins on its axis and orbits around a sun. There is day and night, four seasons, which we call winter, spring, summer, and fall. Life evolved from single cell bacteria to the wide spectrum of plants, insects, fish, birds, animals, and humans we experience today.

The germination of a seed is truly one of the amazing processes of life on this planet. John's Jesus describes the metamorphosis of a seed into a living plant, which will produce more seeds, as a symbol of resurrection change. But in Jesus' illustration a seed eventually dies in any scenario. A seed either lands in a crevasse and slowly dries up, lifeless, or it is harvested by a bird, an animal, or a person, who in one form or another will eat it, or it will be planted in the ground, die as a seed, yet be transformed into a living plant. Change comes in one more or another. The question is: which leads to resurrection, to bring life to that which is dying.

Change comes rolling in like the waves of the ocean. Fighting it is futile; you can't stop the waves. You can do three things when change-in-life is larger than you. You can stand your ground against the waves, which doesn't sound so daunting if you are at the Isle of Palms or Ocean Isle, where the waves are relatively calm. But if you try that along Cape Hatteras, where that notch of North Carolina juts into the Gulf Stream and creates some of the strongest waves on the east coast, you are going to get knocked off your feet and have your nasal passages rinsed thoroughly with salt water. I love jumping waves and taught my kids how to do it as they grew and Cape Hatteras is the best place to go in the Carolinas for that. But it will flat wear you out, which is what resisting change does. You can resist the waves at Cape Hatteras all you want, but sooner or later you're going to be walking back to the beach short of breath and blowing salt water out of your nose.

Of course, if you like the direction of change you can ride with the wave all the way to the shore. Once, when our family was vacationing in Hawaii, we found a black sand beach at the dead end of a road just past the town of Hawa at the north tip of the Big Island. After a fifteen-minute hike down a steep trail into the Pololu Valley, we had this beach all to ourselves for three hours. The waves curled so uniformly and rolled in so slowly that it was perfect for bodysurfing. We walked into the water till about chest height and caught the first wave and glided all the way into the spongy black sand. Then, we did it again and again. Every wave was perfect and every bodysurf brought us all the way in. I've never experienced anything like that in my life. **That's what riding the wave of change is like when what you want to do aligns with the changes happening all around you.**

We still have a third choice, if we don't want to flow with change, ride the wave in its direction. Like a surfer, or a windsurfer, or kitesurfer we can use the power of change, its waves and wind to chart our own course up and down the beach, or even in the case of kitesurfers crashing up over the wave and heading back out to sea. I took a surfing lesson once and failed miserably, but from the safety of the shore I love to watch good surfers. Once, when Magay and I were in Maui we

stopped at a beach just outside the town of Paia (PA-e-a) and watched dozens of kitesurfers zigzagging all along the waters just off the shore.

In kitesurfing, your feet are on a surfboard, and you are holding onto the ropes to a large kite or sail up in the air. These kitesurfers were traveling across the waves at amazing speeds, then sometimes they'd turn and ride with the wave picking up speed, and then suddenly turn the opposite way and crash up over the wave and fly 20, 30, even 40 feet in the air before landing back in the water. It was spellbinding to watch. They harnessed the power of the waves and the wind and went in any direction they wanted. You see, harnessing the power of change doesn't just mean you have to go where it is going. If you are a surfer, you can harness its power and tangentially go in the direction you wish.

The power of change is found not so much in trying to force something new, but in either aligning yourself with changes already happening or harnessing the waves and winds of change to chart your own course.

And we know how to do this. This congregation has been riding the waves of change for a long time. When we took the vote to be "open to all and closed to none," we didn't invent the idea. We voted years after Brown vs. Board of Education, after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, and the sit-ins at the Greensboro Woolworths. When we ordained women to be deacons, Gloria Steinem had already started *Ms.* magazine and NOW was pushing for the rights of women. When we defied Southern Baptists to welcome and affirm persons who identify as LGBTQ, this was well after the Stonewall uprising and after noted feminist theologians Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Carter Heyward came out—though to our credit Carter preached in our pulpit soon after her public news. My point is that the decisions in our history that we think are so groundbreaking, were really decisions made while riding the wave of change in our society. **We saw God in what was happening and caught the wave.** That's all Myers Park Covenant Church has to do in the future. Find where God is moving in the changes happening now and catch the wave.

The phrase, "all good things must come to an end," is only part of the truth for Christians. We live as resurrection people; people who understand that God keeps resurrecting our lives from the dead places where they are stuck. As resurrection people, instead of saying "all good things must come to an end," **we should be saying, "the beginning comes after the end."**

Rebecca Solnit, in her book by that title, spoke of how in the spring and summer of 1989 before the extraordinary moments of that fall when the Berlin wall fell nobody had any idea the world was about to change. There was no hint of it in the papers or broadcast media. The communist governments of Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania all collapsed, "thanks to their citizens' largely nonviolent direct action rooted in years and sometimes decades of quiet organizing. . . . [Yet,] no one saw it coming, not even the participants, not with the sudden force it had, a political tsunami that swept away decades of Soviet domination not long before the Soviet Union itself dissolved." **We are so used to what is, that even when we can tell the old ways are no longer working, we cannot see "the new world being born. But beginnings,"** she says, **"are what come after endings"** [Solnit, *The Beginning Comes After the End*, 20].

By claiming a new name for this congregation, Myers Park Covenant Church, we proclaim an openness to catching God in the next wave of change, even if, like the Eastern Europeans in the summer of 1989, we can't see what's over the horizon.

Transformation and resurrection are acts of faith, a letting go of what once was in order to grab hold of what is becoming. As Myers Park Baptist this congregation found God working in societies changes and caught the wave. May Myers Park Covenant be as faithful and as bold. AMEN.