

# Sunday, July 1, 2018 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost

## Sermon: Once Upon a Time

### Read Philippians 1:3-11

Every good story has a beginning, a middle and of course an end. We are beginning our story together this morning. You all come with your own stories. And naturally, Vern and I come to you with a treasure trove of stories. So, it just seems natural to me to start our story with...say it with me....Once Upon a Time.

Well, Once Upon a Time in a land far away, a princess was born into a young family in New England. She was the third child born into this family which would eventually grow into 4 girls and 2 boys each of them outgoing active youngsters (noisy). They did the normal things as a family – starting each week by going to Church, working and going to school, and every June they would go to visit the family run resort in Stowe Vermont. This was a very favorite time for the princess as she loved the mountains. These six siblings eventually grew up, moved away got married and had families of their own.



But back to the princess...the princess was named Elizabeth, but at a very young age, her younger brother could not say such a long name and called her Tizabeth, which quickly became Tizzy and I have been Tizzy or in a Tizzy ever since. When I was about 5 years old, younger than this picture, my Papa first introduced me to Jesus by telling me I needed to be good during Advent so that my heart would be ready for Christmas when Baby Jesus was born. In that instant, I fell in love with Jesus and remain so to this day. I graduated High School – Dominican Academy. College from Salve Regina College in Newport Rhode Island and received my first Master's Degree from SUNY Albany in higher education. It was during my time in Grad school that I made a formal commitment to Christ. I had learned that all the love I had for Jesus could not be compared to the love Jesus had for me. Once I learned this, I asked God to show me how I could live my life serving Him and telling other people about the love of Jesus.

My journey at this point took many twists and turns. For many years I worked in the family hospitality industry, but then felt God pulling me into the direction of working with young people. I spent a year as a Residence Hall Director at the University of Toledo where I learned about a campus ministry based in Pittsburgh PA that was looking to place campus pastors to work with college students. I spent the next 2.5 years doing just this at Davis and Elkins College, but was so homesick for Vermont that I went home December 1981. It was while I was working with my brother at the Trapp Family Lodge that I met my knight in shining armor. Well, he really looked more like this! Vern quickly became the love of my life

and we were married 6 months to the day we met on June 18, 1983. Vern came with an almost 7 year old son, and 9 year old daughter, so I really married a family. Shortly after our wedding, with his encouragement I lived into a lifelong dream and spent the next 15 years as owner operator of a full service alterations business, “Tizzy’s Touch.”



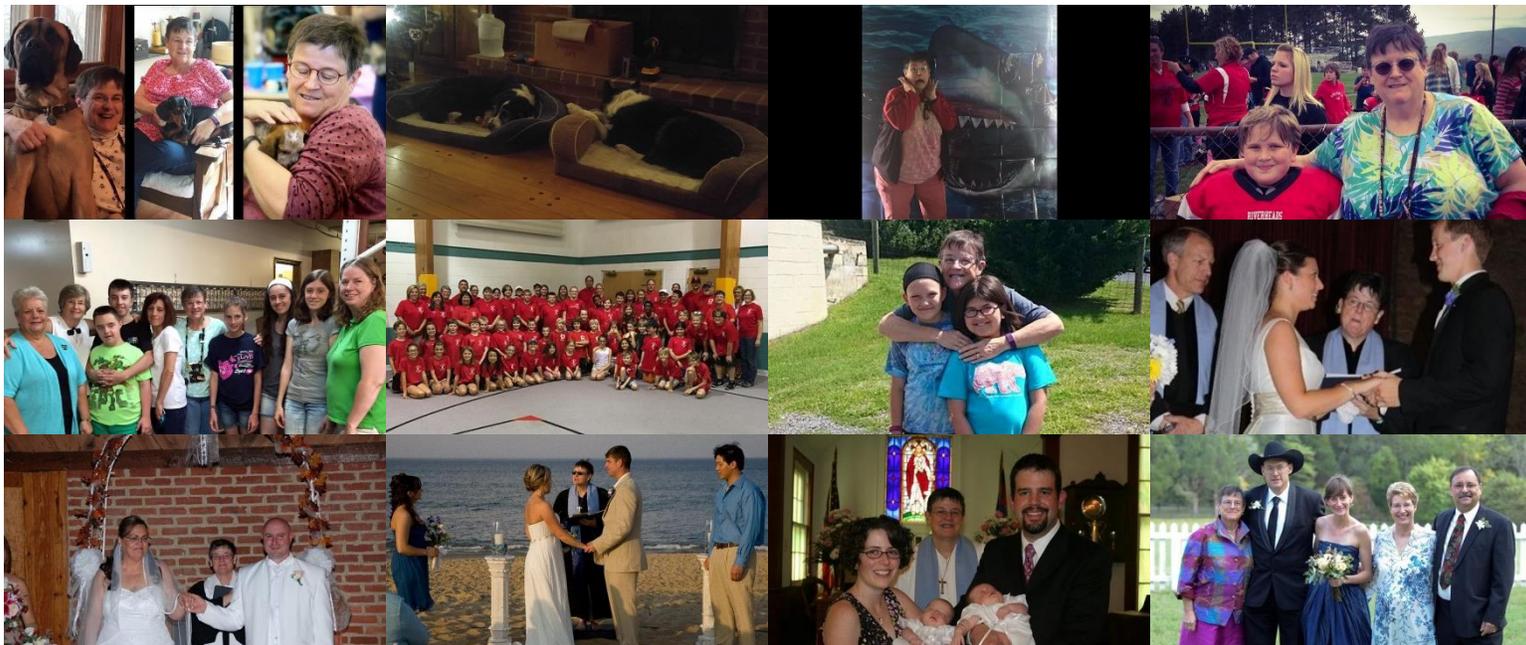
In 1991, we found ourselves leaving our beloved New England for unknown frontiers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. We have often been asked how it was that we moved to Virginia and each time, Vern points heavenward and says, “God brought us here.” Then we moved to Albemarle County where I met the person God sent to me to direct me back into full time ministry. The late Rev. Pamela Sawyer was our first woman pastor ever. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and had a strong gift of discerning God’s call to ministry for others. It was under her mentoring that I went to Eastern Mennonite Seminary where I completed the three year seminary degree in four years!

I graduated in 2000 and this is my 5th appointment in 18 years. It began with a two point charge in Southampton County, The Trinity Circuit for 6 years, followed by 6 years on the Northern Neck at the Richmond Charge, a three point charge. In 2012, we returned to our beloved mountains with an appointment to a two point charge in Fairfield and Emory United Methodist Churches. When we were still newlyweds, we enjoyed a couple of wonderful vacations in the Shenandoah Valley – so much so that we talked about living here in our retirement. God is good! Yes?

As many of you know I have spent this past year as a Resident in the Clinical Pastoral Education program at the University of Virginia Health Center, Charlottesville, VA. This has been a challenging but very rich year. I have completed the clinical portion of my residency, but will continue with class one day a week until the middle of August. I have a whole new appreciation for the work of medical professionals as well as Fire and Rescue personnel in the surrounding counties. Along with many stories.



What can I tell you about my ministry of the past 18 years?? The following pictures will do a far better job than my words. As you can see, I love babies, youth and, oh yes, dogs. There will be a sermon one day of the similarities between God and Dogs!! One of the exciting things about ministry is that God is always creating and recreating new opportunities. Thus Vern and I find ourselves starting a new adventure with all of you. A little side note, this brief biography is merely the tip of the iceberg. You can plan on hearing many, many more stories because, God has always been part of my life as I am fairly certain God has been part of yours; sometimes, we just need to intentionally recognize the God sightings in our lives.



I have many favorite scriptures, but there is one I really connect with as my life verse. It is Philippians 1:6 – God will bring to completion the good work begun in you on the day of Jesus Christ. Or as we see in the Common English Version - God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.

This particular verse resonated with me many years ago, because it is a verse filled with promise. Let's hear it again in the full context of the passage in Philippians:

3 Every time I think of you, I thank my God. 4 And whenever I mention you in my prayers, it makes me happy. 5 This is because you have taken part with me in spreading the good news from the first day you heard about it. 6 God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns. 7 You have a special place in my heart. So it is only natural for me to feel the way I do. All of you have helped in the work that God has given me, as I defend the good news and tell about it here in jail. 8 God himself knows how much I want to see you. He knows that I care for you in the same way that Christ Jesus does. 9 I pray that your love will keep on growing and that you will fully know and understand 10 how to make the right choices. Then you will still be pure and innocent when Christ returns. And until that day, 11 Jesus Christ will keep you busy doing good deeds that bring glory and praise to God.

Theologian Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, says of this passage, "There is a wonderful old prayer attributed to the to the sixteenth century sailor Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596) He prays that when God leads us to undertake any great piece of work, he will also remind us that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same until it be thoroughly finished." The confidence Paul has throughout this letter is that God is a finisher as well as a beginner. The particular work which he has begun, and will finish, is the work of grace through the Gospel in the hearts and lives of the Philippians Christians.

A little background on the church at Philippi. Philippi, in northern Greece, was the first place in Europe that heard the news that there was a new king, namely the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. This letter of Paul's to the church makes it clear that as Paul looked at all the churches he had founded, the people of Philippi were the ones who gave him the most joy. To be sure, he loved them all; but this letter breathes a confident trust and enjoyment we don't always find elsewhere. Hmm..I can't think of a better mindset with which to begin our ministry together here at Marquis Memorial!

When I say I cannot think of a better way to begin our ministry, I am looking further into Paul's letter to the church. This particular letter of Paul's is all about "partnership" – which is one of Paul's favorite themes. You might be more familiar with Paul using the word "fellowship," in his letters, but in this case the word Paul used was the normal word for a business partnership in which all those involved would share in doing the actual work of ministry on the one hand while at the same time being fully engaged in the financial responsibilities on the other. The Philippians, then are 'partners in the gospel' (verse 5); 'partners in grace' (verse 7); they are in the gospel business and the grace business along with Paul and are not just spectators.

Two weeks ago at Annual Conference the guest preacher retired Bishop Michael Watson shared the story of Larry Walters. Larry Walters was a guy happily going through life as a spectator. Each weekend Larry, who was a truck driver by profession, liked nothing better to sit in his back yard in his lawn chair equipped with an umbrella and a cooler filled with ice cold beer alongside his chair. Larry pretty much breezed through his weekends, every weekend in this manner. Except one day, Larry got a brilliant idea: 'What would happen if I tied helium filled balloons to my lawn chair?'

Walters had often dreamed of flying, but was unable to become a pilot in the United States Air Force because of his poor eyesight. He first thought of using weather balloons to fly at age 13 and 14, after seeing them hanging from the ceiling of a military surplus store. Twenty years later, he decided to try it. His intention was to float over the Mojave Desert and then use a pellet gun to burst balloons to gracefully float to the ground,



So Larry and his girlfriend purchased 45 eight-foot weather balloons and obtained helium tanks from California Toy Time Balloons. On July 2, 1982 Walters attached 45 balloons to his lawn chair, filled them with helium, put on a parachute, and strapped himself into the chair in his backyard. He took his pellet gun, a CB radio, sandwiches, beer, and a camera. When his friends cut the cord that tied his lawn chair to his Jeep, Walters's lawn chair rose rapidly to a height of about 16,000 feet and was spotted from two commercial airliners. At first, he did not dare shoot any balloons, fearing that he might unbalance the load and cause himself to fall out. After 45 minutes in the sky, he shot several balloons, and then accidentally dropped his pellet gun overboard. He descended slowly, until the balloons' dangling cables got caught in a power line, causing a 20-minute electricity blackout in a Long Beach neighborhood. Walters was able to climb to the ground. Just after landing, Walters spoke to the press, saying: "It was something I had to do. I had this dream for twenty years, and if I hadn't done it, I think I would have ended up in the funny farm. I just could not sit there doing nothing anymore!"

Friends, Larry went from being a lawn chair spectator, to a person living out his dream. Friends what are your dreams for Marquis? I imagine some of you dream of the church returning to the way it was way back when. Every church I have lead in the last 18 years has had the same dream, and they are still waiting for this dream to come true. So I ask you this morning, how is that dream working for you? Is it possible that God might have a new dream for you, for this church, for this community around us? If Paul had the dream of restoring Israel to its strength as a religious stronghold, do you think he would have traveled the known world at the time sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ? Probably not.

This morning, as we begin our ministry together in a holy partnership, I claim the words of Philippians 1:6 (NRSV) God will bring to completion the good work begun in you on the day of Jesus Christ.” You HAVE been doing a good work, we must trust that God continues to work in and through us. Along the way we might be asked to tie some helium balloons to our faith and consider how God may be asking us to try something new and different. Let us continue to pray in earnest. To close with a paraphrase of Paul’s words, I pray that our combined love will overflow in knowledge and wisdom. I pray that by doing this we will allow our hearts and heads to work together to bring about the kingdom of God. I pray that we will be filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living, not for our glory, not to advance our own agenda, but for the glory of God with God leading us through the Holy Spirit. And all of God’s people said...Amen!