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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“WHAT YOU ARE MADE OF”
Isaiah 51:1; Matthew 16:15-18

Congratulations, Keelin! You have come to an end, and a beginning.

The *end* is obvious. You have completed our Confirmation course.

As for the *beginning*, this is {CBW, p 352} **“one step”** among many **“in the life-long process of strengthening [your] faith so that [you] may increasingly live as effective disciples of Jesus Christ.”**

You are gradually entering the age of accountability. You are becoming more responsible for your decisions, some of which will have eternal consequences.

- You are not alone. Your Creator is saying, {Jer 33:3} **“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”** He has also provided us, your brothers and sisters in Christ, to give guidance and support.

Even so, as you come to each fork in the road you are the one who will turn left or right. No one can live this adventure for you.

Allow me to impart two Scriptures that might be of help to you.

- The first is Isaiah 51:1: **“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”**

★ That is, remember the substance of which you are made, remember your spiritual DNA.

℞ Remembering is essential to biblical faith. If we are to {Ps 96:3} **“Declare [the LORD’s] marvelous [acts]”** we must remember what he has done. If we are to {Ps 7:17} **“give thanks to the LORD”** we must recall **“his [righteous deeds].”** If we are to love God with our obedience today, we must remind ourselves how he loved us with kindness and mercy yesterday. Scripture repeatedly commands us to remember.

℞ A word of caution: the imperative to remember is not an invitation to reminisce. It is not a call to pine for the good old days. Our Creator designed memory as a launching pad to the future, not a retreat from the present. Remembering well can inform, guide, correct, warn, encourage and strengthen us for every aspect of discipleship today and tomorrow.

And so the word comes to remember the substance of which you are made. **“Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”**

→ We, the Church, are being {Eph 2:20} **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”**

→ We have inherited most of our spiritual genetics from Jesus. Hence, {Eph 4:4-6} **“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** We are related to all who are being saved {Eph 2:8} **“by grace... through faith.”**

- And yet this passage also states: **“to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it”** (Ephesians 4:7). There is no generic Christian. As part of that reality, God {Ps 68:6} **“sets the lonely in”** distinct **“families”** – including our church families.

- Like the Evangelical Free Church and Baptist General Conference, our denomination grew out of a movement called the Mission Friends. They are some of **“the rock from which you were cut,”** part of **“the quarry from which you were hewn.”**

What are we remembering as we **“look to”** them? What legacy have they handed down to us?

Two questions and a catchphrase can help us get to the heart of Mission Friends life and faith.

- ⊛ The 1st question has two parts: **“Where is it written?”** and **“What does the Bible say?”**

When Mission Friends discussed theology or Christian living (or, for that matter politics, economics or culture) they would ask, “Where is it written?” Then they took the next step and asked, “What does the Bible say? What does it mean?” Text interprets text. No individual verse is Scripture in isolation.

I invite you to wrestle with these questions when you come to a fork in your road:

- ✧ Am I exploring the biblical text through devotional reading and study, alone and in community with others?
- ✧ Am I being formed by the whole Scripture, the law and the gospels, the history and the epistles, the prophets and poets?
- ✧ Am I letting Scripture control me?

- ◆ Many believers think it is most important to *get the text right*. They want to master God’s Word, but their lives demonstrate virtually none of its power.

- ◆ It is more important that *the text gets us right*. When we humbly submit to God’s Word it becomes the {Pia Desideria} **“powerful means”** by which God changes us. Don’t try to master Scripture; let Scripture master you.

“Where is it written?” “What does the Bible say?” This is the stuff of which we are made.

- ⊛ Question 2: **“Are you following Jesus yet?”**

- What did Jesus say in the **Great Commission: “Go and make”** believers? No! Converts? No! Christians? No! **“Go and make disciples of all nations…”** (Matthew 28:19-20).

Our forebears called each other to authentic discipleship. They challenged each other to daily cross-bearing. They rebuked those who fell into sin, encouraged the wavering, and celebrated spiritual victories together.

Discipleship is a process of continual decision and growth. For that reason, the Mission Friends even asked saints who had walked with the Lord for decades: “Are you following Jesus yet?”

I invite you to wrestle with these questions when you come to a fork in your road:

- ✧ Which path will draw me closer to the Lord?
- ✧ Will one way make obedience to God easier than the other?
- ✧ How will the choices I make about time, money, and relationships make me more or less like Jesus?

“Are you following Jesus yet?” This is the stuff of which we are made.

☼ On to the catchphrase: **“God’s glory, neighbor’s good.”** The greatest commandment is two-fold: {Mt 22:27-40} **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with your soul and with all your mind,”** and **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Everything hinges on this.

◆ Our Mission Friends responded to the Law of Love with ministries of evangelism, compassion and justice. God revealed to them that {Covenant Affirmations} **“The great commission and the great commandment ... cannot be separated without diminishing the gospel. [And so we seek] to hold together proclamation and compassion, personal witness and social justice, service and stewardship in all areas of life.”**

If I believe sound biblical doctrine but do not actively love my neighbors, God is not glorified by my confession.

If I praise God in song and prayer but do not actively love my neighbors, God is not glorified by my worship.

If I study Scripture night and day, but do not actively love my neighbors, God is not glorified by my knowledge.

If I bring large offerings but do not actively love my neighbors, God is not glorified by my giving.

If I vote and lobby for the right causes but do not actively love my neighbors, God is not glorified by my activism.

I invite you to wrestle with these questions whenever you come to a fork in your road:

✧ How can I glorify God in this decision?

✧ What opportunity does this decision provide me to love my neighbor?

✧ Can one way better equip me to translate my commitment to *αγαπε* love into action?

“God’s glory, neighbor’s good.” This is the stuff of which we are made.

○ Now, Matthew 16:15-18. Jesus asks his disciples, **“Who do you say I am?”** and Simon Peter answers, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

Then Jesus declares: **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”**

◆ **“On this rock...”** **“This rock”** is not Peter; it is the great reality to which his inspired confession points: Jesus is God’s anointed, the {Jn 1:14} **“Word [become] flesh,”** the {Jn 3:16} **“one and only Son.”**

● The church is built upon this rock, for {Jn 1:12} **“to all who”** receive Jesus, **“to those who [believe] in his name, he [gives] the right to become children of God.”** And {1 Pe 2:4-5} **“As you come to him, the living Stone... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.”** {Eph 2:21} **“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord... in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

Three brief observations that come out of this:

☼ 1st, Jesus (in his person and his ministry) is the indispensable foundation. Remove him and there is no

kingdom of God, and no church to serve it. The Mission Friends' spiritual DNA is excellent precisely because the movement gave him first place.

☼ 2nd, Submission to God is our essential response. The Word says “**Look to the rock from which you were cut...**,” not from which you cut yourself. “**Look to the quarry from which you were hewn,**” not from which you hewed yourself. We “**like living stones, are being built together**” – but it is not we who do the building.

- We can *cooperate* with God as we seek to accomplish the {Eph 2:10} “**good works, which [he] prepared in advance for us to do**”; still, it is God who does this work within us. As Isaiah 64:8 says, “**We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.**”

The Mission Friends understood this. They strove to be good clay, to be useful stones.

☼ 3rd, Your future, in time and eternity, depends on your response to God in Christ. Will you be “**built together**” with all the people of God “**to become a dwelling in which God lives**”? Will you live as a “[child] of God”?

I urge you in the strongest possible terms: “**Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.**”

Above all, love Jesus “**the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” This is the rock upon which Christ has founded and is building his Church.