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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

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

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

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

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

{Jer 33:3} You are not alone in this. Your Creator is saying, **“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”** He has also given you us, your natural and spiritual families, to provide guidance and support.

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

Allow me to reflect on two Scriptures with you.

■ The first is Isaiah 51:1: **“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD:”** (and I am delighted that you are doing so!) **“Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”**

★ In other words, remember the substance of which you are made, remember your spiritual DNA.

{Ps 96:3} We are called to **“Declare [the LORD’s] marvelous [acts].”** To do that, we must remember what he has done.

{Ps 7:17} We are called to **“give thanks to”** God. To do that, we must recall “his [righteous deeds].”

We are called to love God with our devoted obedience today. To do that, we must recollect how he loved us with kindness and mercy yesterday.

☆ Remembering well can inform, guide, correct, warn, encourage, and strengthen us for every aspect of discipleship. And so the word comes to remember: **“Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”**

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

{Eph 4:4-6; 2:8} We have inherited our basic spiritual DNA from Jesus. Hence, **“There is one body and one Spirit... one hope... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** So we are siblings to all who are being saved **“by grace... through faith.”**

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

📖 As you know, 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 help us get to the heart of Mission Friends life and faith.

✎ The first question has two parts: “**Where is it written?**” and “**What does the Bible mean?**”

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

In that spirit, I invite you to wrestle with a few questions when you come to a fork in *your* road:

- ¿ Am I exploring the biblical text, through reading and study, alone and in community with others?
- ¿ Am I being formed by the whole Scripture, the Old and New Testaments alike?
- ¿ Am I allowing Scripture to master me?

Many believers think it is most important to get the text right. They want to master God’s Word, but their lives demonstrate little or 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 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 mean?” 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! “**Go and make *disciples of all nations***” (Mt 28:19-20).

Our forebears called each other to authentic discipleship. They challenged each other to bear the cross. They rebuked those who fell away, heartened the wavering, and celebrated each other’s victories.

In that spirit, I invite you to wrestle with a few questions when you come to a fork in your road:

- ¿ Which path will draw me closer to the Lord?
- ¿ Will one way make it easier to love God?
- ¿ How will my choices 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.

✎ {Mt 22:37-40} On to the catchphrase: “**God’s glory, neighbor’s good.**” The greatest commandment is two-fold: “**Love the Lord your God with**” your entire being, and “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” Everything hinges on this.

☆ The Mission Friends responded to the Law of Love with ministries of evangelism, compassion and justice.

{Covenant Affirmations} They knew that “**The great commission and the great commandment... cannot be separated without diminishing the gospel.** [That is why 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, my confession does not glorify God.

If I praise God in song and prayer but do not actively love my neighbors, my worship does not glorify God.

If I study Scripture day and night, but do not actively love my neighbors, my knowledge does not glorify God.

If I give until it hurts but do not actively love my neighbors, my offering does not glorify God.

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

In that spirit, I invite you to wrestle with a few questions when you come to a fork in your road:

- ¿ How can I glorify God in this decision?
- ¿ What opportunity do I have to love my neighbor?
- ¿ Will one way better equip me to translate my

commitment to ἀγάπη [agapē] 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 followers, **“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.”**

{Jn 1:14; 3:16} **“On this rock,”** he says. **“This rock”** is not the man Peter; it is the great truth to which his inspired

confession points: Jesus is God’s anointed, the **“Word [made] flesh,”** the **“one and only Son.”**

{1 P 2:4-5; Eph 2:21} The church is built upon this rock, for **“As [we] come to him, the living Stone... [we] also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.”** **“In him [we] are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

Three brief observations:

✎ First, Jesus (in his being and his ministry) is the indispensable foundation of this dwelling. 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.

✎ Second, our essential response is surrender to God so that he has free reign in our lives to accomplish his purpose. 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”** – it is God who does the building, not us.

{Eph 2:10; Is 64:8} We are able and responsible to *cooperate* with God to accomplish the **“good works, which [he] prepared... for us to do”**; still, it is God who does this work within us. **“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.

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

Maeghan, as your pastor, confirmation teacher, and older brother in Christ, I urge you in the strongest possible terms: **“Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”** Be the woman God has created you to be!

Isaiah 51:1 and Matthew 16:15-18 are the word of the Lord.