WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH A CHANCE AT NEW LIFE
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children’s Sermon: Psalm 51:10 & Psalm 51:15

I invite our children to come forward at this time for our Children’s Message. All the children present.

Good morning! Welcome here to Calvary. It looks like a lot of our friends are out having their last holiday before school really gets in gear, but I’m glad you are here this morning! Are you having a good weekend? Great!

There have been several times this year I have mentioned to you about the importance of getting fresh starts. It is like when you’ve tried something and you want to give up because it didn’t work out. We’ve all done that, right? You try to do something in homework in school and it doesn’t work and you want to give up. But we can’t, we have to get a new start. And all of here today, we all need new starts from time to time and it’s important that we need to know that a fresh start, just like when spring comes, you know and all the new stuff comes up out of the grounds, we can have that kind of new start day after day.

I had given you an example of spelling. How some of you…did all of you start school already? I know some of the schools were starting after the holiday, but you probably had a chance to learn things on math and on science and on English and spelling and all these different subjects and sometimes when you try your best it just doesn’t always work out. But the good news is, you can try again, right? Anything we do in life and most of the things you do whether it is riding a bike or passing a ball or learning to dance or sing or play an instrument, whatever it is, most of the time we have a chance to redo something. Sometimes there are consequences that it wasn’t as good as if we had learned it right at the beginning, but we always have that opportunity to try to make things right.
Sometimes even in our life, and I have given you this example before, that our bedrooms get all a mess and our parents want us to get them all cleaned and straightened, but when things are together right, doesn’t it feel better? Usually. When we get that fresh start things are nice.

Sometimes even adults, now I did not back through my garage door, but I have known people to back through their garage door and I know one person who went twice through the front of the garage. They thought they were going backwards and had it in forward. That requires a fresh start, doesn’t it? Right, people? You do that about once and you wish you hadn’t.

But the good news is we get fresh starts. Sometimes when we need that we talk a lot and I’m sure if you are in school you are finding there are times we can’t talk, but here at the church when we get a fresh start, it is kind of good news! Hey look, I succeeded this time! I had more spelling words right! Hey look, I couldn’t pass the ball, now I can! I couldn’t ride a bike, but now I can. I couldn’t swim, but now I can.

There are all kinds of things that we thank God that we can do and it’s a great thing to be able to shout it out, to be able to talk from the universe and to tell everybody that will listen to it.

And there is another passage of scripture that I want to share this morning because it talks about God inviting us to tell other people about God’s love: Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will praise you.

There are a lot of things that we have to give thanks for. If I were going to go around this morning you might be able to say, “I thank God for my mother and father, for my grandparents.” “I thank God for a bed.” Did any of you sleep in a bed last night? Most of us sleep in beds, don’t we? How many of you had a roof over your head in a house last night? Everybody? How many of you had something to eat this morning? Most people. Ok. We have many, many things to be
thankful for, even all the things that happen daily in our life. If we were to look around, we kind of expect that they will just always be there, but not everybody has a house. Not everybody has something to eat. Not everybody has a school to go to or a book to read. So we have many things for which we ought to give thanks and because of that, and because we are enjoying God’s blessing, God says we should get up every day and shout…do any of you shout? I don’t believe that! You are telling me you never…that’s the smile I thought! We all shout. We get excited at sports events or music events or school events with our family. We get excited when we see people we love. It’s a very important thing and we shout from the mountain tops. But we should also praise God and shout to others about how much God loves us and cares for us.

So, this week as you go around and enjoy all the many blessings, firstly I hope your parents will help you be mindful of things to be thankful for because we have much to be thankful for. Go and praise God in all you do.

Thank you for coming up today. I wish you a most wonderful week!

Message: Isaiah 35:4-7a & Mark 7:32-37

What would you do with a chance for a new life? There are a lot of times through life I’ve heard people saying “Boy, if I could just start my life out over again.” We can’t go back to our mother’s womb, that was a question Nicodemus had long ago. We can’t go back that far, but if you are unhappy right now, if you are not where you know God wants you right now, today, this day, this moment, is a chance to say, “I want my life to look a little different.” Whether it is a matter of relationships or finances or whatever that issue might be, if there is a change that needs made, God tells us it is a chance to do it.

When we look back over, there are sometimes I look at life and when I look back sometimes I am very unhappy at the mistakes and errors in choices. I can’t change the mistakes, the error in choices. I can just try to, on the brighter side of things, make better choices, get my feet on a better path and try not to, of all things, repeat the bad choices and decisions of the past. When we look at our past, it’s one thing to be
unhappy with it, but it is something else to simply say “I need to stay there.”

I gave an example in the first service about probably more than ten years ago, maybe ten or eleven years ago, I decided to take dance lessons, picture that. And in the midst of taking ballroom dancing I met a wonderful gentleman and his name is John Grumbine and John was about 89, I think, at the time. John lost his wife at age 82 and he wondered what he would do with his life. Now, most of us at 82 think neutral. I’m going to relax. I’m going to do whatever I can. John said, “I thought, I had been in retail 45-50 years selling stuff.” He originally had lived in Gettysburg, PA and he thought “I need to do something different. I think I’ll go to college and become a counselor.” I’m saying “You’re 82 and you think you are going to live to graduate from college?” Now if you are 82 today, I’m not trying to be negative. But there is a part of me that would wonder, “Am I really going to finish college?” John finished college. He became a counselor and he’s now about 95, something like that, whatever 10 years goes onto the other, and he’s still working as a counselor, but when he graduated from college he decided then to find himself a new wife. He started going clubbing down in Baltimore. Yes, I’m telling you the truth. And he met his wife, Betsy, who I had the fortune to meet a few years later. They were married when he was around 92. She told me their wonderful story, meeting on the dancefloor. I need to go clubbing, I guess, I don’t know. And they met on the dancefloor and she said “You know, we only dated six months. We don’t know how long we have.” So they got married and unfortunately, Betsy passed last year and I was dancing about a month ago and I saw John and asked what John’s doing and John’s doing just fine. He misses his lovely wife. He’s still dancing. He’s still counseling, because he chose to do something with his life. Hear that? He chose to do something with his life.

There was a call in Isaiah that tells us about God and about the power of God, the life-changing power of God. The word says: He’s the one that will come, to strengthen the feeble hands. He will steady the knees that give way. He wills say to those who are fearful in heart “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance, with divine retribution he will come to save you.” Then the eyes of the blind will be open. The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the
lame will leap like the deer and the mute tongue shall shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs and the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

This was the prediction about Jesus Christ, the one who would come to give us new life, the one who I believe still does all of that today. Do you believe that? Oh, Lord! That’s it? Do you believe that? (Yes!) Amen! I believe with all my heart, and there are sometimes I get the ideas when I go around and when I go up to the mountains where I am from near Lewistown, Mifflin County, I got up and look out over the valley and sometimes I’m amazed whether it is there or out west as I look around and the grandeur of God in the simplicity of the farm fields and what God is able to harvest or what’s God able to do that I want to shout from the mountaintops, but I think in my mind I sometimes not only am thankful for that, but there are moments I wondered: what does God really want from me, not all my life because I know I gave myself to Jesus Christ, I know I felt called into the ministry, but is it different today? What is it that God wants for me? What is it that God wants for you today forward? It doesn’t always have to be in some rut, some groove that’s been forever. Where is it that God would have you serve?

And so there is a new word today, it’s in the Gospel of Mark and it’s at a point where Jesus was called in to give people hope who had no hope. There were people who were demon-possessed, people who had other illnesses and if you would read the earlier part of this chapter, but, this is a chapter where people were really wanting their life changed in drastic means: Some people brought a man who could neither hear nor speak and asked Jesus to lay a healing hand on him. He took the man off by himself, put his fingers in the man’s ears and spit on the man’s tongue. Then Jesus looked up from the prayer, groaned mightily, and commanded, “Ephphatha! – Open up!” And it happened. The man’s hearing was clear and his speech plain—just like that. Jesus urged them to keep it quiet, but they talked it up all the more, beside themselves with excitement. “He’s done it all and done it well. He gives hearing to the deaf, speech to the speechless.”
And I stand bewildered. I stand bewildered because I’m wondering in this day and age, do I think Jesus is doing anything anymore? Because when I look at the Church of Jesus Christ I think that’s where we stand: bewildered. It’s as if we expect every day to be like it is today. One of the reasons I believe we are becoming more bewildered is our life is so good. If we would have gone back to the 1800s and earlier and if we would go back even to the early 1900s we would see families who lost loved ones in farm accidents. There were illnesses that thank God for all the vaccines that we’ve had that have prevented people from becoming handicapped, prevented people from dying. And we expect that we are going to get up this morning. We expect that we are going to have a nice house. That we will have heat in the winter and cool in the summer and food in our closets and food in our freezers and food everywhere and most of the world doesn’t live that way. Most, not some, most of the world does not live that way.

And so it is that we forget about God because we just think this is life. We have forgotten that we have much for which to be thankful and we do not express thankfulness and we do not express to God where everything has come from. We are so tied up in the technical world when we look at all these gadgets that take us and do things that we have forgotten the simplicity of life. We have forgotten to give thanks. The words, it is not happy people who are thankful but thankful people who are happy. We have become, I believe, by and large a people who are ungrateful. Not we who are just sitting here alone, but we as the people of God and we as a nation of people. We complain, we groan, how tough life it is. I will take you some places where there is tough life, and it is not America, folks. It might be tough the way we want to live, but if you have more than something to eat and a little shelter in God’s kingdom, that’s a lot. That’s a lot. It is just that we live such an excessive lifestyle here. It is as if the signs from the 60s, seriously, there is no God. Not in my book. God is a powerful God. God is present.

There are those who would say in this day and age there is no God, there is no Satan, just take responsibility, live a good life and that’s it. I don’t believe that either. I believe the God who reigned in the Old Testament, who the prophets spoke to who come in Jesus Christ is the God who’s the God who runs my life today, who is forever present,
who is forever blessing me in ways I couldn’t imagine.

Jesus would gather with those disciples years ago and they talked. It said in the scriptures that when these things happened, the eyes of the blind were opened, the deaf could hear, the blind could see, they couldn’t stop talking. He was doing it well. And yet, where we know of people whose ears have been opened, whose eyes have been seeing we are quiet.

Last year I couldn’t walk for seven weeks. I want to tell you I praise God. God is the divine healer, but for the doctors and nurses and caregivers of all levels who made it possible for me to walk. I imagine if we would go back a little bit in history, there are a lot who would speak praises here. There are those who wouldn’t even be here if it weren’t for some medications, right? There would be those who before there were such things as heart surgery and before there were possible other kinds of internal surgeries you would be gone and yet we take it because we live here that this is just life. We don’t praise, we don’t thank, we don’t glorify God. We talk about everything else under the sun.

How many of you know who this team is? I bet there is more talk about that team in Pennsylvania and there should be praise God for those little kids and the coaches who made them so. But could we give a little talk to the Lord? We know about all the things that go around us.

In recent years there are all kinds of fads. One of the fads out there now days is all the home brewing and all the wonderful things they are doing. I’m not against those things, but fads get talk.

I was mentioning some of the fads I grew up with at the early service. Do you remember the fondue stage? I liked that and miss it. You know, the fruit, the vegetables, the chocolate, all that good stuff. And then there was that time in the 70s when at least my family and everyone around us seemed to be doing the ceramic thing and we could just go down through history all the different fads. Well, when I look at these fads, whether it is the drinks or whether it is whatever, how come we talk about all that stuff and in the midst of that you get together
even with a bunch of church people, how many people are sitting around talking about God?

If there is one scripture that we have carried well, it is the one where Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. By gosh, we’ve got the best secret in town. We’re not going to tell anybody about Jesus Christ. We’ll keep him all to ourselves. And that’s not a good thing. We talk about anything, anything in the whole world, many things that should never even be talked about in public or in private for that matter, because we have no shame anymore.

Jesus commanded them not to talk. I’m not sure why, whether it was reverse psychology or what or he was just exhausted and he knew his word would pass on. But this I do know: we are expected to tell others.

The early church had a man named Nicodemus and you will remember that name if you’ve read much of the scriptures as a man who wanted to come and Jesus told him to be born anew. He said “I can’t reenter my mother’s womb.” But the important thing in this message is when he came to Jesus. He didn’t walk up to him after a church service. He snuck to him at night. He didn’t want anybody else to see him.

When you get up in the morning, do you look out the door and say “I’m going to church this morning, make sure nobody sees me.” You might as well, as tight lipped as we are. It’s as if this is the only place we can be religious. This is the only place we can talk about God. This is the only place we can mention Jesus Christ. We forget that we take him to our workplace, to our family, to the sports, to the music, to wherever we go, Christ is with us! And we have let down on that and we have forgotten because we have forgotten what God has done for us.

We would go into the political and the economic realm today and I would ask you: What do you think about all the government bailouts over the last ten years? Rrrrr. We could have all kinds of grumblings, couldn’t we, right? If you are seated here this morning, you’ve been bailed out. My leg works: God bailed me out. If you are wearing these, you are bailed out. Do you realize a couple of centuries ago no
one had glasses? If you have a hearing aid you were bailed out. If you’ve used a walker and how you are walking again, God has bailed you out. If you’ve overcome financial problems, if you’ve overcome health issues, if you’ve overcome educational and stumbling blocks and bad relationships, God has bailed us out, time and time again. And where are we thanking God?

God has thrown us this preserver so many times and we forget God. We complain in this country, and quite frankly I’m tired of it. I don’t care what president you want to blame, there are 300 million Americans. There are not that many people in Congress and leading our nations and our communities.

The problem with America is us. It is we the people who have become so tolerant of what shouldn’t be tolerated. We have become so apathetic about what we shouldn’t put up with. We’ve become so quiet about God that anything goes. Anything goes! We have allowed America to become generation after generation people who do not know about God because we’ve not told our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren. It breaks my heart to realize that my own grandchildren when I would try to get through the church couldn’t. And the families didn’t bring them. And that there were sports practices and other things you could get up at 6 o’clock for and travelling teams. Those things are possible, but you can’t get up to go to church. Why? Because we’ve never taken up enough stand to say “This is a holy day. We will worship our God.” If all the families of all the teams would have done that, it wouldn’t be there, right? But we are quiet. When good people do nothing, problem happens and good people, whatever we think we are, we’re letting our nation, we’re letting the world, we’re letting God down. The God who has bailed us out, who has brought us salvation, we are letting God down. We forget that all of us who have been injured and all of us who have needed any kind of help through the years need God and God’s presence.

I put this sign up not as a something to produce debate on healthcare. I wanted the position of someone protesting something. I don’t know when last I saw a position of a Christine who was willing to take a stand on anything. Really. When are you boldly able to take a stand before your family, before your friends, before anyone else? You don’t
necessarily have to be out on the street, but do you even know, not just your opinion. You see a lot of our opinions are, from my perspective anyway, based on the wallet. How it is going to affect me. Whether it is healthcare, whether it is caring for someone else’s children, whatever it is. I’m talking about scripturally. Have you read the word and said “What would God want me to do about this?” Don’t let the wallet control you. Let God’s word lead, guide and direct us to make decisions that we could believe what is right, that we could teach what is right. How can generations of people know what is right when we do not read the word of God.

When I mention names like Nicodemus or Ruth or Boaz and people of the church say “I never heard of them.” Well, how will you hear of them if you don’t read them? And how will you have good news if you don’t share it? We are the people who have been bailed out by God and God who is ever generous says “I’m always here for you.” But He must still be wondering “where are those people who one day searched for me with their heart?” The children and grandchildren in my own family don’t know much about God. It’s not important enough. Of all the other activities, congregational time isn’t the best time. And if we in the church don’t know much, what do you think it is like out there in the world, of people who never enter a church? Again the apathy.

This isn’t meant to be a downer; this is meant to be a wakeup call, that we are the people who need to come alive. We are the people who have a story to tell of redemption, of what God has done for us, and we have forgotten it. There isn’t a person in here from little on up who hasn’t been redeemed by God and at some point God hasn’t bailed us out from the troubles we are in. If we want our children and others around us, we need to walk with them through life. We need to teach them God’s ways. We need to walk with them that we might face eternity.

When I look at the year 2015, do you realize that that date is marked from what, the birth of who? Christ. So can it really be that bad that the world would even recognize that we date our calendars from that. It is now called the Common Era, not before Christ and after Christ as we did at one time. It is 2015 years of grateful living and we have for-
gotten to speak of God on high, the one who is still in the saving business if we will allow God to save us, if we will allow to pour ourselves and say “God, I’m not who I want to be yet. I want to live for you. Will you live through me?”

If you love God are you proud to say that? Do folks in your family and friendships and around you really know that God is important? God doesn’t want a halfhearted person. This week someone invited me to the Regal Theater. I usually don’t promote theaters, but I am going to promote it this week. Regal Theater. If you have nothing to do in the next two days, go over and see “War Room.” It has nothing to do with war in a traditional sense. There are no battles, no fighting. It’s kind of a joyous thing. It is a Christian film of a woman who has a prayer room in her house, which is her war room fighting the wars of the world we are in today.

God doesn’t want lukewarm. In Revelations there are several chapters and in one place they said the people in this one city became lukewarm and God said “I wanted to spew them out of my mouth.” How many of you ever took a great big sip of lukewarm coffee? You either like ice coffee or you like hot coffee, right? Drinks are typically made to be cold or hot, not lukewarm, like getting a lukewarm Coke or Pepsi, whatever you like.

It is appropriate that we become alive, that we have something to say about our Savior, that we have a story to tell. If you see something, say something. That’s not…I pulled this theme off of something else. My point is if you see something around you, when I see a couple, oh, 70 years of marriage, walking down the street holding hands and I hear their story, praise God! When I see an ambulance stopping to help somebody, I praise God. The stories that you see every day are stories to tell and you have a story of your own where God has been there through struggles in relationships, struggles in finances, struggles in whatever it is, the temptations, the trials, the deliverance. Every one of us has a deliverance story. Have you remembered it? Are you ready to shout it on high? It shouldn’t be a secret.
There was a song we used to sing “It is No Secret What God Can Do”. Oh, it is here. We don’t tell much of anything about what God does anymore.

We keep it silent and God says it is time to show a change. When we change from that little caterpillar to the butterfly, the chrysalis stage, we have new life and if you are here you have some kind of a new life in you.

Those who long for special renewal, have a passion to hear God’s truth. We get passionate about a lot of things: sports teams, activities, hobbies. We all have them. Could we have passion for God; for God’s Word, to learn, to seek, to know more truth? Then not only just to keep it for ourselves, but to pass it on. Do you want to know the best gift you can give anybody? It’s the love of God. You can take that wherever you go and there are so many people who feel unloved, unaccepted, unworthy that when we can pass that good news along; we have given a gift worth the passion. We are people who have the ability to repent, to change our lives. We are people who can know that we can plug into Almighty God and make a difference.

When I look back on the days of childhood and coloring, I used to like to color, but I could never stay in the lines. Parents would still say, “That’s okay because you are at least trying and it’s creative.” But when we come to Christ we get our life in line. We get our life in line. Does that mean I fall out of the lines once in a while? Oh, yeah, but we try our best to keep our like in line with a godly life, one in a way and in a direction that would please God and please others. And when we see that and we look at that and observe it, sometimes people say “Oh, boy, their life looks so easy.” No, I can tell you stories of people whose lives are in line. They have lost so much. They have lost multiple children, they have been through multiple accidents, they have lost their homes, they have lost their finances, but in the midst of all of what they have gone through, somehow they have kept their life in line. They didn’t let the problems of this world overcome them and
pull them down. They kept their eye on Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the Perfector, the Savior of all of us.

There are all kinds of flat jokes out there after that football game last fall, right? But how many of you like to really drink a flat soda? When the fizzle is gone out of it, it is no fun.

And when the fizzle has gone out of Christians we are no fun to be with. We are worthless, actually. We are either alive for Christ or we are dead in Christ. There is no lukewarm. You are either alive or not and God is asking us to choose alive. This church has had a history that isn’t always good when you mention fire, but I would love before I die in some church I serve to hear this “Boy, is that church ever on fire!” I’m not talking about just doing good deeds.

I got awake this morning thinking about the church and thinking about mission and realized that when you look back in history books that I read through seminary, the early church wasn’t about good deeds. It wasn’t about sending medical doctors, building houses, building schools, educating, it was about witnessing. The Mormons that go knocking on the door, they are probably not bringing you food and they are not offering you services, are they? They are offering you Jesus Christ. What happened that we are so quiet that we don’t do that? Why don’t we send out our students for two years after they graduate from high school and say “Don’t rush off to college. Go tell others about Jesus Christ.” Whatever happened to us sending people? We are so worried about the social needs that we forgot about the spiritual and you know what? We’ll always be hungry, but if you have Jesus Christ, if you have Jesus Christ you are going to find new life.

Sharing the word of God is much more important than just sharing. There are all kinds of programs on about hoarders today. We’ve got God. We’ve got the blessings. We’ve been blessed. We’ve been saved, all that. We keep it all to ourself. God doesn’t call us to be spiritual hoarders. We are here, once we have been saved, once we have found new life, that we can share the good news with other people, that we can walk the walk with our children and grandchildren and even adults who are now children in Christ because they do not know
the journey very well. Jesus Christ brought healing, continues to bring healing and through that made people have a story.

Are you familiar with your story, when you met God? As much as sometimes I love hearing stories of when people met God for the first time, it can get old if 20 years later I’m sitting in a church and you are still telling me what God did to you when you were a kid. I want to know what God’s doing for you today. Is God alive in your day to day life? And if so, how do you see it?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come. Are you new? Have you been forgiven, redeemed and restored and if you have been restored, restored for what? I have a new leg. Why do I have a new leg? What does God want from me now that He has restored the use of my leg?

God has restored us and something is called from us. The invitation today is to ask whether or not you are all in or if you are going to keep a part of yourself out there? Or are you going to jump all in and say “I’m available for whatever God wants. I will have something to say and whenever I see things, I will say it. I will be thankful to God. I will tell other people of my daily encounters with God. I will share good news that those who are lost might find life.”

We live in a land and while most of us don’t travel much beyond Harrisburg or Pennsylvania into the world or at least the United States, we live in a land that is broken. We live in a land that is devastated and I’m not talking just because of political leadership, I’m talking about a people who have been disobedient to God, who have walked away from sharing His word and we have a nation of people who no longer know who God is, and that’s no one’s problem but those of us who sit in a church pew on every Sunday. We are the people who have the good news and if we are all in, will take it out to our families, to our friends, to our coworkers and to the lost among us.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Everlasting Father, You have called us to be faithful. Whenever we have turned our back on You and come home, You are
always there. Teach us not to turn our back. Teach us to boldly, to walk up to Your throne, to ask You to empower, equip, to change us. You have already redeemed us. You have forgiven us of so much. Now, empower us, Oh Lord, that we can live boldly for You, being Your light, being Your salt, being Your power ever place we go. In Jesus Name. Amen.

**Benediction:**

Today is a new day. It is a new path.

Sometimes there are many paths. As long as they are rooted in Jesus Christ, that’s okay. We will go our way and find our place in the Kingdom.

God’s inviting us to know our story, to share our story of redemption, to be all in in everything we do.

To say something that the world around us that’s looking for an answer might find it and the one whom we proclaim. Let us proclaim with loudest voices that Jesus Christ is our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer and friend. Go in peace.