



November 16 – New Beginnings

In June of 2024, I watched in horror and tears as the Rapidan Dam failed. It became a national story. For my family, and many others, it was personal. That dam was about 3 miles away from my grandparents' farm. We went to the dam nearly every time we visited. Grandpa would let us borrow his 1974 Chevy Silverado with a rusted out floor, and we would walk out and watch the water with awe and wonder.

It wasn't just the dam. We also like to visit the Dam Store. It wasn't really a store. It was a small, maybe 20-person restaurant, located next to the Rapidan Dam. I would meet my grandfather there for lunch when I had a meeting in the Twin Cities. We even ate at the Dam Store after the burials of family members. We crowded the store and had to eat in shifts. Such memories. In June of 2024, the dam failed and the river kept spreading. Days later I watched the news on my phone as the Dam Store fell into the river. It would never be the same.

These words Jesus speaks sound terrifying. He speaks of the destruction of the temple. He speaks of arrests, imprisonment, and suffering. He speaks of false prophets, or wars, famines, earthquakes, and disasters. It starts to sound like the end of the world, or at least the current 24-hour news cycle. It sounds scary.

That is where we need to be careful. Fear. Fear is one of the tried and true, in fact, best marketing tools the world has ever known. Most commercials rely on fear, even if it is a fear of missing out. Political campaigns often rely on fear, making you fearful of what the "other" will do. These same campaigns make us fearful of one another and view one another with suspicion. Even the Church has used fear as a marketing ploy at times. If people are afraid of taking the escalator down when they die, they will give of their time, talents, and treasures. It also scares people into belief, or even attendance.

Jesus does not look to fear. He looks to people and gives a word of hope. That is something interesting about the Bible. If you actually read it, you discover the Bible never actually talks about the end of the world. It will talk about the end of an age. It will talk about the end of things within the world, but it never talks about the end of the world. There is always a sense of hope in a new beginning. And age or era may come to an end, but there is something new that bursts forth. There is ALWAYS new life.

In a strange turn of events, the Dam Store found a new home, even if temporary. It reopened in the space that once housed another restaurant, "The Wagon Wheel." Sounds mundane, except, The Wagon Wheel was the other restaurant that my family would visit. They had amazing breakfast foods, and it was situated in a nostalgic part of Mankato, MN. Now, the two restaurants with the most memories are combined in one place. Months earlier all seemed lost. Now, there is new life in a new way.

There are times when the world around us seems frightening. I do not begin to understand how and why some people make the decisions that they make. It is easy to become frightened or overwhelmed, feeling like all is lost. People are hungry. People are losing homes, or unable to pay for health care. It starts to feel like all is lost.

God is always about new beginnings. There is incredible hope in this truth. Things may fall apart, but it is NOT the end of the world. Instead, this text points us toward hope. There is always hope. This hope is the work of the Church. We are not simply to invite people to survive. We speak hope into the world in such a way that we dare to sing in the storm. We speak of hope that leads us to live differently, to live abundantly. We reflect the light and love of God into a broken world, knowing that whatever we see around us is not the last word. There is ALWAYS new life.

What is it that brings you life? What gets you fired up, or passionate? Lean into that. The world is filled with too much fear and worry. Lean into the work of the Spirit, the things that bring life. Things may change and change quickly. Never forget there is always hope, and there is always a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt