



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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### “Born Again . . . and Again . . .”

Romans 6:1-11

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I don't know if you are in the habit of browsing through the bulletin, and maybe that is something you do during the sermon (hopefully not today). If you have already, you may have noticed that today, June 25, is my birthday. It is also the birthday of my stepson Kyle, and the bulletin lists several others including one of my guitar-playing buddies, Bill McDonough. Happy Birthday to us all! I don't remember when I figured this out—but as a child, I always thought I had the best birthday ever. Think about it, June 25 is exactly one half a year from Christmas, meaning I was never more than half a year away from receiving gifts from those who loved me.

This year BSPPC has been focusing on sharing stories—sometimes from members, and sometimes from others. So, today is my birthday and I am going to share a little of my story. It will be a different kind of sermon—a little more autobiographical and a whole lot more self-referential than I would prefer—but well, it's my birthday.

On June 25, 1954, I was born at Kaiser Hospital, in Walnut Creek, California, in what we call the San Francisco Bay Area. I was the first of my three other siblings to be born at Kaiser. Not so long ago my mother died under the care of the hospice program at that same Kaiser Hospital; I was there for her first chemo treatment at the hospital, and I was there on the couch in her living room when she died at home. She was there for my first breath; I was there for her last, both with this Kaiser Hospital connection. In the Romans passage, the Apostle Paul reminds us that life—baptism, and death, Jesus' death, our death, are deeply connected, but more about that in a bit.

Not long after I was born, my parents carted me back to the family homestead in eastern Iowa, and I was baptized at First Lutheran Church, in Maquoketa, Iowa. I have been trying to track down the date, and beyond my parents, and I would guess my grandmother, I have no idea who was there. Two weeks ago I had the privilege of baptizing, with Ann Palmerton, the Lobedan twins: Avery Adelaide and Hunter Hanna. I remember holding baby Hunter Hanna, placing the water on her forehead, and cradling her as Ann and I walked the aisles with the twins. For us, baptism is all about life, these precious little ones—with promises from the children and a commitment from the community. But Paul reminds us in Romans 6 that in baptism, we enter into and we share the death of Jesus... and by that, we share in His life.

This year marks the 500 year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and as part of my academic gig, I am off to Germany—Wittenberg in particular—next month. Martin Luther, the catalyst for those Reformation events, was big on baptism. Like many of us, Luther struggled with doubts—doubts about his faith, doubts about his work, doubts about all those changes he was introducing. I like the German word for these doubts of Luther, *Anfechtungen*. His antidote for doubt, despair, *Anfechtungen*, was to remember, I have been baptized! As a young teenager, in Lutheran confirmation class, I memorized Luther's small catechism. To quote: “What does baptizing with water signify? Answer: It signifies that the old Person (Adam) in us, together with all its sin, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and be put to death, and that the new person [man] should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence.”

More sermons can be found online at <http://bspsc.org/AboutUs/SundayMorning/Sermons.aspx>

My life changed pretty significantly as I entered my senior year in high school, in another small Bay Area town. During that summer I attended a huge religious revival at the Oakland Coliseum. I had been there lots of time with my family—to watch Oakland A’s baseball games or Oakland Raiders football games. This day—the revival—was different. There was an altar call, and I went down onto that field where someone—a complete stranger—prayed for me. For the first time in my life, the church thing, God’s claim on MY life, the life of Jesus given for ME—it made sense, it was powerful!! Borrowing words from John Wesley, “my heart was strangely warmed.” In my vocabulary at the time, I was SAVED!!

Well, kinda... it was a year of wrestling with those thoughts, but in March, a friend of mine, my best friend, challenged me. Jeff, he said, you can’t be wishy-washy in your commitment (actually I think he used other words), you have got to be all in with Jesus. Clearly, I was born again; the old Jeff Jaynes needed to die, and there was a new kid on the block! And, I was on fire—my friends, my family, they heard my testimony. That summer, my older cousins, who I always thought were really cool, visited from Iowa. They were hoping I could connect them with the girls and the good times of the Berkeley scene. Instead, they got Bible Study. I was even pretty sure I needed to evangelize the pastor of my family’s Lutheran church. Eventually that zeal ushered me into youth ministry during my college years and then pushed me on into seminary. Born again!

25 years ago, I started teaching at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio—what we usually call Methesco. It was supposed to be a short-term contract. This year the school honored my 25 years of service, and I shared my two-year contract paperweight—it was supposed to be a short-term thing. The faculty, the staff, and especially the students at Methesco challenged me, my life, my way of thinking about my faith. During my first year, one of my African-American students—his name was Guy—approached me after class. Professor Jaynes, he said, is this class really going to be all about white people? When do we talk about black people, when do we talk about my people!! Guy and others students challenged me and changed how I approach church history, what gets emphasized, who I talk about... it wasn’t easy, and it wasn’t comfortable, but it was important, very important. I was also uncomfortable with the ethos of my school—too gay friendly, too open and affirming of folks regardless of sexual orientation. Initially, I kept quiet when the conversations came up... and I was pretty certain I was right. In my mind—the Bible was clear; Christian ministry had no place for openly gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual persons. Welcome in church, ok, but not in ministry. And marriage of gay and lesbian persons, at that point for me, it was unthinkable. I don’t know exactly when I changed my mind—what conversation, what prayers, what reading, what pondering—but I did. So, I have to admit to you today: my teaching was deeply infected by racism and my faith was simply too homophobic. Something needed to die; I needed a new heart, a new vision. In the context of my school, my teaching, I was... born again.

On Easter Sunday, 2005, I attended BSPC for the very first time. As a single, divorced person, Easter was never a good day for me. You know big holidays—Christmas, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July—people look to include you. But Easter Sundays for me were usually lonely and painful. I missed my family, I missed being “home,” I missed my life. I talked to my kids that Easter day, my mother, and my siblings—all together in various settings. It was great to talk, but I cried after hanging up the phone. This Easter, however, was different—I had worshipped here, again, my first experience. David Van Dyke was the pastor then, the sermon touched me; the music lifted my spirit. It felt like a resurrection day for me. In all of my life—I had never joined a church ALONE... it was always with my family, or with my former wife and children. But here I was, alone in my life, and I needed a church, a community of faithful people who could encourage, support, and challenge me. I found that. Beyond worship, I discovered a church that was trying to figure out what it meant to be a good and faithful neighbor in its neighborhood. I first met my wife Sally, then Dingman, at a neighborhood party hosted by the church. I got involved in the Global and National Ministries Committee. I was inspired by folks I met here, and who had strong BSPC connections, like Hunter and Ruth Farrell, and Jed and Jenny Koball in Peru. To be “born again” at Broad Street has been less dramatic than perhaps earlier events in my life. But it

has been about learning to be faithful, and to be part of a church, a community, wrestling with our world, God, mission, story-telling, and story-sharing.

So, that is some of my story. On the bulletin cover, I have included a painting by perhaps our nation's first great African-American painter, Henry Ossawa Turner. It is a picture of Jesus meeting with Nicodemus, both figures somewhat indistinct—you can't really tell race, or age, or even gender. Perhaps Nicodemus was an older guy—like me—and Jesus told him, “you must be born again.” We don't know exactly what Jesus had in mind. I am certain he meant something more than “accept Jesus Christ into your heart as your personal lord and savior.” It's always more complex than that, this being born again, like the stories of our lives. One thing I know for certain, if Jesus was here with me... with you... right now, I think his message might be the same: “you must be born again!”