

December 29, 2022

Happy New Year!

On Sunday, people everywhere will ask that dreaded question, "Should I make a new year resolution." Already ads have begun to encourage people to fulfill their exercise pledge by joining this or that gym. Others suggest a food service so we can accomplish our goals of healthier eating. Of course there are the ads for all the things we need to keep up with the neighbor who got a new wardrobe, or new car, or new anything from Santa that suggests we are falling behind.



What would a new year resolution ad look like if you wrote one for the church, for Jesus? Would it include commitments that you confess failing to keep in a month or so? Would it be something you could buy to read or study or donate? Would include time?

On Sunday, with your possibly sleep-deprived or over-indulged headache, join Rev. Nancy Neal, and Josh and Kirsten Shields to think about the times and the ways God may be leading you in the coming year. Just as the wise ones from the east went in search of a new hope, perhaps God will be sending you a shining star to guide your way in 2023.

Yes, you will receive a Star Word on Sunday. If you are worshipping online, there will be a link for you to use to obtain your Star Word. For more information, make a resolution to start the new year with worship!

Peace,

Beverly

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December 22, 2022

Snow Day? One week later? It is slightly shifting from sleet to rain on this Thursday. The slush has gathered in the roads and parking lots. The last days before Christmas comes may grind to a halt if the roads are wet and freeze up. Whatever did not get finished will have to wait. Whatever was planned will have to be rearranged.

Do not fear! Christmas is coming—with or without Santas, and carols, and candles. Our busy-ness may bring us much joy as we gather for the traditions of this holyday. Yet, it is the stillness of the moment when a newborn child is taken into its mother's arm and quiets down that we celebrate on Christmas. From our hurried lives, we are called to look into the cradle of hope and find the little Prince of Peace sound asleep.

It never ceases to amaze me that the one we call "Almighty," chose to become a helpless baby. Chose to become a baby in a world when newborns were more likely to die before they reached age 5 than to live more than 35 years. This is the miracle of the Incarnation for me. The Eternal God chose to come experience our lives in all its fullness, even death.

The gift of Jesus Christ is the gift of divine companionship. When the snow lays on the ground this winter,



Consider the stillness of
heaven on earth
at the time of Jesus' birth.

A mother's tear, a father's fear,
the shepherds' and the angels' cheer,
They find their home, one and all,
Where, in a manger stall
God-with-us then and there,
Emmanuel, now and here.

JUST IN CASE: Please watch your email and Facebook group for updates if we need to rearrange or cancel any services. The worship bulletins will be posted to Facebook and on the website so that you might enjoy the liturgy from home.

4:00 p.m. Friday Children's Pageant

Followed by Spaghetti Supper

6:00 p.m. Saturday Worship

10:00 a.m. Sunday Worship

Merry Christmas--Rev Bev

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December 15, 2022

Snow Day! Did you take a beat this morning and enjoy your coffee while watching ice form on the tree limbs? That kind of slowing down is so difficult in normal times and much more so during holydays. No, that is not a typo. Holy-ness is more than a striving or accomplishment of wholeness or perfection that we call saintliness. It includes



the idea of being set apart. Holydays are times set apart to focus our attention, to notice the sacred, the things and moments that are special, and for religious people, the spirit around us that is divine and holy.

Perhaps you found a moment to notice ice forming. Perhaps you will set aside a time to share gifts or a meal with those you love. Have you made time for the one who loves you unconditionally from all eternity? Some time that is not your normal routine, even if it includes a regular attendance in worship (either in a sanctuary or online and in your personal sanctified space)?

It is not easy to stop. Yet, we belong, in life and in death, to one who invites us to

“Be still and know that I am God.” Ps 46: 10

Imagine the stillness of meeting a newborn for the first time. After the oohing and ahing, do you remember how you sat and watched the little one sleep?

Imagine that God watches us with that same peaceful, do not disturb, watchfulness. Imagine looking at the world with that kind of stillness to see if you catch a glimpse of Holy Spirit taking it all in or walking by enjoying the beauty of creation, or looking back at you with love.

May your Advent and Christmas season be merry and filled with moments of



Peace, Rev Bev

December 8, 2022

Heard any bells this Advent season? Any angels getting their wings in your presence? Angelic appearances have two parts. The first is to calm down the human as they begin their job as a messenger sent from God. Apparently, angels do not look like friendly Clarence in “It’s a Wonderful Life.”

The second part of the visit is to redirect people toward their purpose. In biblical tradition, that purpose is aligned with the saving grace we know in Christ. However, as we do not know where the wind will blow, neither do we control where or when the Spirit of the Lord will arrive. We are invited to trust that acts of love, justice and mercy belong to the ministry



of the Lord, regardless of who does them.

In Advent the coming of light is the sign and symbol of this trust. We light the Advent Wreath candles weekly to remind ourselves of our part. Hope is first, a glimmer of truth that every life matters. No one knows what the world would be if any individual were not part of it. Therefore, we hope in the Lord and hope in each other, even though we may not see the good buried deep within every beating heart.

Peace arrives on the wings of hope. Knowing that differences exist, we acknowledge conflict is a normal state of affairs. The children of God, full of hope, attend to each other by seeking each other's wellbeing without preconditions. As Christ puts it, friends are those whose lives are freely and fondly offered. Peace is the unity we discover when hope uncovers common humanity we share.

Third, we celebrate joy. Perhaps this light cutting through the darkness is the most neglected because it

is the one most expected in holiday seasons. However, joy and happiness are not the same. Joy is the contentment that arrives after dark and in the dark. Joy is the sense that for a moment all is right with the world. Joy knows somewhere hidden in the darkness, everything is at it should be. Joy's light is a glowing ember awaiting the right conditions to break upon us like the dawn of a new day.

Just before the arrival of Christmas is love. How many definitions of love might there be?

This week, let hope, peace, and joy open your eyes and ears and heart to the sounds of love's arrival.

Peace,

Rev Bev



December 1, 2022

It's the most wonderful time of the year...unless it is not. For many of us this day, this week, this month is a difficult time filled with challenges. How do we navigate the joys our neighbors and loved ones are sharing while we are struggling with heavy memories or unmet expectations or burdens which others do not know we carry? For some of us, this month of happy holidays and merriness leaves us feeling alone and lonely.

That's okay. You are okay. By which I mean to say—you are not alone in feeling blue. Very possibly the people you don't want to be around know something about what you are going through. They may have experienced rough times and challenging holidays. They possibly attended, or avoided, family celebrations when they themselves have felt beaten down, put off, and felt anything other than festive. And if you hold some ideas that your blue Christmas will ruin other's fun, it is helpful to share your state of mind so they can offer the gift of kindness and understanding. You may find someone to walk through this time with you, or offers that the door remains open if you want to join them for a little while.

More over, you are the ones for whom Advent is made. Advent is a time of anticipating a dramatic interruption in the raw grief of a chaotic world where life is not fair and injustice is everywhere. Advent is the time of waiting. We wait for something to give. We wait for the wind to blow in a new direction. We wait for the clouds to lighten from dark, foreboding gloom to silver-lined, sun-kissed billows backed by blue skies. We wait for our own dismay and disbelief to lift that we might rediscover hope and peace, joy, and above all, love.

If you are having a blue holiday season, please know that some of us are waiting with you and you are not alone. While you wait, we will hope and pray on your behalf, and stand here firmly, ready to catch any tears you need to share, until new life is born in you.

Christ is on the way. Until then,

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Psalm 27:14

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November 23, 2022

Rejoice in the Lord, always, again I say rejoice!

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ to whom I give thanks for you. As many of you are, I am grateful for local, distant, and virtual time with friends and family. I am thankful for times of work and play, for time away, and times to pray. I hope you will enjoy and give thanks for yours as well. On Sunday be sure to pick up a printed copy of the Advent Devotional and the Advent Calendar.

If you would like to use the devotional through an online version, we are delighted that our friends at A Sanctified Art have provided a special e-reader version of this year's Advent devotional, which you can access on your computer and mobile devices: [Advent Devotions](#)

In order to protect their work, please refrain from sharing this link or posting it on social media.

May you discover new blessings of God throughout this season of Thanksgiving and Advent. See you soon!

Peace, Rev Bev

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November 17, 2022

Dear Friends:

Thankful! Gratitude has become a trending topic. Research has shown that gratitude can lead to a healthier life and/or better immune responses when ill.¹ As we come closer to Thanksgiving, many of us will be reflecting on the blessings in our lives. We will likely settle on being grateful for friends and family. And for some of these, gratitude will extend to thanksgiving for your church family.

Years ago, my father, a new deacon at his church, asked why a certain man always stood at the door. These early days of integration should not surprise us with the response he received: to let the right people in and keep the others out.

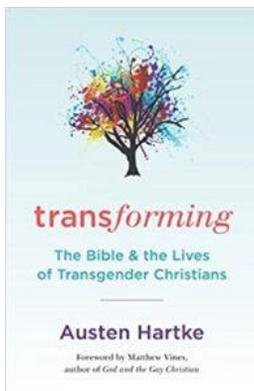
Friends, may we be greeters who open doors rather than slamming them shut. And this year I invite you to consider how you can open doors for trans Christians and seekers who need to know that they belong to a loving Creator whose table always has room for

one more. Please don't join the ranks of those who scroll on, click off, or ignore this note



and thus, these people. Keep your mind's door open:

On November 20, this Sunday, people will honor Transgender Remembrance Day. Worldwide, people will express gratitude for "chosen family," friends who have become their family because their own adoptive or biological family abandoned them.



Austen Hartke has written a book, *Transforming The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*. The dedication reads, "For every trans Christian who feels alone; for every parent caught between a rock and a hard place; for every church and every ministry professional committed to holding the door open—this book is for you." A small group at my previous church read this book together to gain a deeper understanding of God, ourselves, and our neighbor, whom we are called to love second only to God. I remember thinking and all of us discussing, that as informed as we thought we were, we learned so much from the honest and vulnerable testimony of these Christian siblings, and our own faith grew by their witness.

May SAPC be a place where every **body** finds the sanctuary to grow in hope, faith and love, together.

Peace,
RevBev

¹ [Mayo Clinic gratitude](#)

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November 10, 2022

Dear Siblings in Christ:

The link and following excerpt are from a PCUSA chaplain who serves our military. On this Veterans Day, let us consider what it means to honor the service of others, especially at a time when military suicides are so frequent. If you are struggling with thoughts of self-harm in any way, please know, there is help and if there is help, there is hope, and if there is hope, your battle is not over, and not lost. The peace of God be with you in this fight for your life and well-being!



And for Veterans, this Crisis Line offers free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year by:

- Dial [988](#) and Press 1
- [Chat online](#)
- Text [838255](#)

"In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that Christians should render honor to those due honor and fulfill God's law by loving our neighbor. How might we as Christians honor and love our neighbors who are veterans not just on Veterans Day but always? I think that we as a Church can do better than just singing patriotic hymns on American holidays or saying, "thank you for your service."

So how do, we, as Christians first but also as American citizens, honor our veterans?

[Click here to read more: blog post by Rev. Erin Duke McArdel](#)

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November 3, 2022

(An open letter to my siblings in Christ. Dear reader, this post is longer than most. You might need more than minute. Thank you for sharing your time with me!)

Dear Christian:

Grace to you in the name of our one Lord, and peace, through the Way, for we are one in faith by our baptism. Can we become vulnerable enough and hold each one's heart gently until we can share with each other what on earth, or in hell, is scaring us so much that, passively or aggressively, we prefer funerals to laboring in the vineyard together? Can we lay down our finger-pointing in order to pick each other up in love? I'm trying to understand why any of us tolerate images and words of violence, either overt or subtle, from each other much less from those outside our faith, when we follow the Prince of Peace, who declares that the peacemakers are children of God?

Recently a political commentator said something that resonated with me (don't click off – this writing is not about any political agenda). Whoever it was summarized the gift of democracy as the only governing style that gives hope because of the possibility, often reality, that it is *everchanging*. The curse of one administration can be corrected by the next. The blessing that comes in this year can be kept while voting out the agendas that make for tragedy. There is no political side to that **process**. Every voter gets to decide whether the current status is blessing or tragedy, commendable or cursed. Change is the locus of hope in the political landscape—the next election is coming. *Just wait it out.*

However, this analysis brought to mind a saying I have heard in churches for as long as I have been in ministry. It's been turning over in my head until this week I heard myself say it aloud a couple of times. The first time it came out, I felt jarred and discomfited. The second time, embarrassed and more than a little horrified at my lack of awareness at the violent nature of the thought.

Whatever it is about the last couple of weeks that has made me (again) highly cognizant of the way in which words carr



y violent or peacemaking possibilities, the line is not funny, innocuous, or easily laughed off anymore. I know you want to hear it. First, scripture:

“Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’

And when they were in the field,

Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.” Gen 4: 8

Abel was not the problem Cain was trying to solve. Abel was the target of Cain’s inability to confront his own lack of self-worth, his own inability to trust his strength of character and will, and his inability to believe God’s love was big enough, broad enough, deep enough for both him and his brother. Human beings go to war with each other rather than dealing with their own fears and insecurities.

When the new guard and the old guard are at odds, when the way things are does not make one happy but the other seems immovable, then it has been said, “we are one or two funerals away from the church we want to be.” There has never been an aggressive and violent intent behind these words. Nevertheless, the passive aggressive thought behind them covers up the need to do the hard work of self-examination and mutual reconciliation.

More than that it puts all the perceived “problems” of the moment upon specific people rather than taking responsibility for one’s own part in defining the concern and seeking change. “If *they* would change, if *they* would leave, when *they* die,” erupts during periods of instability, when the earth shakes and the mountains tremble, and fingers are pointed, and then churches land in heated conflict, or the nation does. Placing blame negates the possibility of working together to determine what is being born in the church, and the country, that both can midwife.

I am grateful to be here at St. Andrew. You display a large capacity for engaging tough things together. I have witnessed a number of challenges about needs of the church in which people had very different opinions about how to address the concerns. And every time, open, honest, direct conversations were engaged. I also know that the politics in the wider culture created challenges that shrank the membership as people decided to go elsewhere for a variety of reasons over the last several years.

Maybe that change brought such sorrow that those left behind discovered a response and put it into practice that does not ignore difficult topics, nor assume winners and losers. Rather you embrace a strength in unity that celebrates diversity. In fact, when someone does want to go in search of new places, blessing the call is valued, not as another level of “good riddance,” but of commitment that in God’s realm, there are many ways to serve. What a gift this way of life can be to a world being crushed by conflict.

You have heard me say that if there is one thing the church can bring to our national conversation it is to embrace and live Christ’s way of reconciling practices. If the church can learn to sit at table and share the bread of life and the cup of salvation, while having that awkward holiday conversation—minus enmity and animosity—then we could change the political landscape beyond our fellowship.

Thus, we must realize that the only funeral we should hope for is the burial of our sibling rivalry. The church must reject Cain’s solution and we must be passionate and vocal about it. Violence is never the solution. Non-violent resistance is “passion” in its basic meaning—long-suffering—as in the *passion of Christ*, in order to show a better way. For us Christians, the way of Christ is to show that the only hope for new life is love. Loving is hard work. Let us pick up our own cross, and that little light within—let it shine!

Peace,
RevBev

Image: "[File:Sligo Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception West Aisle Window 02 Cain and Abel, Deluge 2013 09 14.jpg](#)" by [Andreas F. Borchert](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

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October 27, 2022

Dear Friends:

Once upon a time, a man was sharing about the strains of the economy and the needs of family members. Having shared how he had pulled himself up with minimal support from his own parents, how he raised his kids, how they left home with jobs and no debt when they came of age, his face showed the lines of age and worry. Bills were growing but his income was now fixed. Yet, his phone rang, or visits came as his children regularly asked for a "loan." He knew they had no intention of paying it back. He hoped if he ever needed them they would be stable enough to support him, but,

"they never seem to have enough. They are faithful to God though, praying all the time, sharing with others constantly, even letting strangers move in if they have no shelter, and feeding tons of friends on a moments notice. They're very generous. They feel called by God to give away everything. Once I got a call in which they rejoiced over how good God is to answer every prayer, and every time they needed money, it came. I decided to tell them then and there, despite what they may believe, I need them to 'quit praying—I am not God.' I don't have any more to give."

All who believed were together and had all things in common;

they would sell their possessions and goods and

distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Acts 2: 44-45

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul,

and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,

but everything they owned was held in common. Acts 4: 32

Though we are not "god" to one another, when we join together, we can all have enough. When we all come together, the abundance of creation becomes clear. Yet, even as we hear the "all things" of these texts and so many others, God asks for all of our life and only *a tenth (10%)* of our tangible gifts.

Is it possible this year to stretch another step towards a 10% offering of your funds, or celebrate with joy that you have been making this offering and manage to continue it

once again? Things are tight and prices are high. Let us see if God stands by God's



promise, is faithful to the word in Malachi 3: 10:

**Bring the full tithe into the storehouse,
so that there may be food in my house,
and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts;
see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and
pour down for you an overflowing blessing.**

Shall we be those whom Jesus commanded, "Feed my sheep?" Let us serve one another even as we serve those in need around us.

Peace,
RevBev

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October 20, 2022

Witches and Goblins and Villains everywhere! Where do you land in the Halloween debates—is it okay for Christians to "celebrate" Halloween?

I have no answer for you that will settle that question – if you have even wondered about it. However, I have some serious concerns with Halloween horror stories being used to scare people into heaven. Is that a thing here in NOVA? It surely was further south. As a youth director I knew the week after Halloween would be spent answering questions of salvation for our kids. My go to verses are [Ephesians 1: 3-10](#) as this provided the clearest Biblical answer to the question they had been hounded by from their non-presbyterian peers, "are you saved/when were you saved."



The short version of heaven vs. hell that I offer is God loves all that God has made—including you. Whenever we deny our humanity by claiming the power to condemn or save through horror stories or even the power of our missionary zeal, we have entered the gates of hell. This eternal place of death from which we pronounce divine justice is where we become lost in a world of inhumanity and embody the evil witch, the ugly goblin, and villain whom Christ has come to save.

Even when we sit in judgement over one another, God's love is relentless to reconcile us, reunite us with the holy image of God we bear that makes us fully human. The "kingdom of heaven is near," Jesus proclaimed while gathering a crowd around himself. Heaven is wherever the Lord is pleased to dwell. Strangely, the word tells us that,

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol [the place of death], you are there." ([Ps 139: 7-8](#))

This is the good news. It is not a horror story. It is a love story.

May your Halloween celebrations remind you, God loves you, every bit of you, even the witch, goblin and villain that lurks inside, for God has and will and is saving us always from ourselves.

Peace, Rev Bev

Image Credit: "[Vintage Halloween Postcard](#)" by [ripheskull](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

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October 13, 2022

Dear Friends:

This will be the last Sunday to receive the Global Peace Offering, a special offering of the Presbyterian Church. One of the avenues of peacemaking is to help people cope with

the effects of climate change and this is also an aspect of the sermon topic this Sunday. Our Treasure Hunt will begin in Genesis 1, where people are assigned by God to be stewards of creation.

Here's the blog from the PCUSA entry on climate concerns and how we are helping, loving, our neighbor:

No place like home

Peace & Global Witness Offering supports efforts to accompany Fiji's environmental migrants



No one spread a mat for Selai.

Born and raised in Vunidogoloa [voo-nē-dō-gō-lōah], a Fijian community that was forced to relocate due to the impact of climate change, Selai [Suh-li] felt unwelcome in her new home.

“When I walked into the house, I did not find my mat,” she said, referencing the Pacific Islanders’ custom of welcoming family members and honored guests alike to sit at the same level on mats on the floor. “It felt like I don’t belong here.”

Since 2014, the island nation of Fiji has had roughly four such relocations. According to Frances Namoumou [nah-moo-moo], the Ecological Stewardship and Climate Justice program coordinator for the Pacific Conference of Churches, or the PCC, the churches of the Pacific have envisioned worst-case scenarios. Climate change, as well as the catastrophic impact of the cyclone season, contribute to the mounting number of necessary relocations.

The PCC’s call to peacemaking — including addressing the mental health concerns that result from the impact of climate change — is made possible in part by gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering.

The Peace & Global Witness Offering is unique in that half of it is directed to peacemaking and global witness efforts at the national church level to address critical issues around the world. Twenty-five percent is retained by congregations just like ours for local peace and reconciliation work, and 25% goes to mid councils for similar ministries on the regional level. Here at (YOUR CONGREGATION) we have used our portion of this Offering to (TELL ABOUT YOUR MINISTRY).

Frances says, "It is our calling both as a people and as Christians to take care of Creation and our impact on this planet. It's not like peacemaking is some foreign flower that was introduced to us so that we can see the connection between us and the environment. It has always existed in our culture and traditions."

The Rev. Carl E. Horton, director of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, says that the program is increasingly called to focus on issues of migration and climate change and how the Commitment to Peacemaking can be applied to address the root causes that force people to relocate.

"The Commitment to Peacemaking includes 'making peace with the earth,'" he said of the popular Presbyterian resource, "and describes that as 'protecting and restoring God's Creation through study, advocacy and environmentally mindful stewardship.'"

Frances is grateful for the PCC's partnership with the PC(USA).

"Thank you," she said. "If it weren't for the funding we receive from the PC(USA), we would not be able to support communities like Selai's and to help sustain a livable world for her family and all future generations."

Selai may have felt alone, but she is not — the Peace & Global Witness Offering unites as peacemakers with those right here at home, and around the globe.

Please give what you can — when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Let us pray ~

God, maker of all things: You created this world, it belongs to you, and you have entrusted it to our care. May our use of this good gift honor you and serve all your children who call this planet home. Amen.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/weekly-offerings/2022/09/19/1988/>

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October 6, 2022

Dear Saints fo St. Andrew:

Today's blog post comes from the PCUSA special offerings guide for the Peacemaking and Global Witness Offering. We will receive this offering again this week, if you were not able to share last week. Notice in this comment that the story connects with our own mission statement to be an open, welcoming, and affirming community of faith who embraces the stranger.

"Wandering the streets of Athens with two small children in tow, Fatima had nowhere to turn. Left homeless following a massive fire that closed the Moria Refugee Camp in Greece, the native Afghani was arrested and imprisoned after unknowingly becoming involved with drug dealers. Devastated and alone in a Greek prison — her two little ones sent off to a shelter for unaccompanied children — Fatima may as well have been invisible, until her case was referred to Lesbos Solidarity, a migrant justice organization. They collaborated with human rights lawyers to secure her release from prison, provide her with housing close to her children and help her find employment.

She now supports other women who are in a vulnerable position like she was. "Injustice must not become invisible," said Efi Latsoudi, one of the founders of Lesbos Solidarity, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partner. "If refugees are seen as a threat coming to invade your country, people don't see their human face. People are afraid; and ultimately, we



fear the stranger."

Luciano Kovacs, area coordinator, Middle East and Europe for the PC(USA). "Helping those who leave war-infested areas is a peacemaking act." The annual Offering is traditionally received on World Communion Sunday, October 2. It is a shared offering with 50% supporting peacemaking and global witness work around the world, 25% retained by congregations like ours for local peace and reconciliation work, and 25% to mid councils for peacemaking ministries on the regional level.

For Lesvos Solidarity's founder, Efi Latsoudi, it all comes back to witnessing. "The most important thing for me is not to close the eyes," she said. "As hard, uncomfortable and painful as it sounds, we need to be aware of what is happening in this world, and to stand in solidarity in any way that we can. We also need to create connection, because what is happening in the U.S. and in other places is all connected. Peace begins with each of us. Please give what you can. For when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Prayer: God of the traveler, God of the journey, please protect our siblings who have been displaced from their homes in search of shelter and safety. May we be instruments of your peace as we welcome others as we would welcome Jesus. Amen."

To read the whole article and more go to: <https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/resource/building-connections-welcome-stranger/>

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September 29, 2022

Grace and Peace to you in the name of our God through Jesus Christ, our hope for years to come.

This week has been daunting. The politics of immigration reform resulted in an inhumane abuse of power over vulnerable people. The devastation of hurricanes from Puerto Rico to Canada, Cuba to Florida is horrendous. The escalation of the war in Ukraine haunted the halls of the United Nations meetings. Riots erupted in Iran by women burning their hijabs. Students walked out in protest of proposed discriminatory policies regarding LGBT students.

And our worship has been centered in a metaphor about football. Is that flippant? We're hosting a chili cook-off on Sunday. Is that disrespectful? Sunday we will receive, during worship, the summary of results from the Congregational Assessment survey you completed. Is that really worshipful?

Life is awful. Life is good. Can it be both? Is it okay to enjoy life when there is so much misery around? Is it okay, when chaos surrounds us, to celebrate what is decent and ordered and fun?

Yes.

We do not celebrate in order to avoid the difficulty and suffering around us. We celebrate to lift up that very suffering before God in the sure and certain hope that death will be swallowed up in the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This hope is global. All over the world on Sunday, Christians will participate in the sacrament of Jesus's last supper, in communion, giving thanks with joyful faith in the power of God to bring life out of death. Millions of people, over a number of hours, gathering and saying the same words of comfort to one another, "Peace be with you." Hearing the words of Christ, "given for you, for the remission of sin, a new covenant." Receiving the promise, "until I come again!"

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentation 3: 21

God is good....

Peace,

Beverly

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September 22, 2022

Dear Friends:

Yep--this is that important for the next phase of SAPC ministry that I am repeating the entry on your weekly e-news--feel free to re-read until you decide this matters to you and your spiritual growth.

When are we going to elect the Pastor Nominating Committee? If you have not asked me that question yet, it is likely not too far off your mind. In order to get that piece of the transition puzzle in place, we need YOU!

This week the small group meetings are very specific conversations about what you think God is calling SAPC to be and do in the next few years. This is a critical part of enabling the Session to describe the church with a statement of Vision (who God sees us as), Mission (how God is equipping us to become the Vision), and Ministry (what specific actions --think SMART Goals- do we do).

The small group Q & A will be a directed exercise to elicit from you a bunch of data points toward answering the above question. Combined with the CAT survey you completed, and a demographic overview of the “mission field” around us, the Session will develop a few sentences and some specific ministries that describe the church.

Then a Pastor Nominating Committee will be able to write that resume which prospective pastors read to say, “Hey, that church is about the same things I believe God is calling me to be and do!”

There will be a few other pieces of the puzzle we continue in the coming weeks, but it is very important that you offer your prayerful input in these small group meetings.

PLEASE register for 1 (one) group. The form can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/SAPCvisionsmallgroup> or by following the link in the QR code here:



The schedule is:

9/25 Sunday 5:30 p.m. in-person only

9/26 Monday 10:30 a.m. in-person only

9/27 Wednesday 7:00 p.m. HYBRID

9/29 Thursday 6:30 p.m. online only

See you soon. Until then, Peace be with you!

Rev Bev

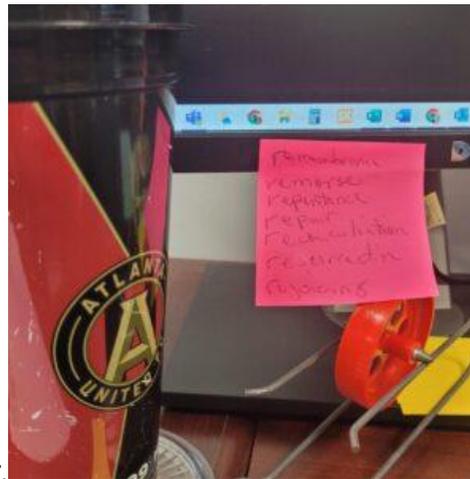
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September 15, 2022
Dear Friends:

I have a sticky note on my computer that reads:

“Remembrance, Remorse, Repentance, Repair, Reconciliation, Resurrection, Rejoicing.”

I cannot remember the webinar from which I made this note except that it had to do with racial reconciliation, I think.



I practice it everyday as a guide for prayer.

I consider it everyday as guide to staying connected to those I call friends even if we hurt one another.

I wonder about it everyday as a hope for unity in diversity throughout my community and the nation.

How do we talk to people who disagree with us so much that we get angry or say things we wish we could take back?

We have become a society that easily talks with those who think like us in ways that are less than helpful at connecting to those who do not. We have stopped talking through, much less about, our differences regarding subjects of consequence. The mission of reconciliation requires tools to navigate the difficulties of conflicting objectives. I'm not

talking about disagreements that have no grand repercussions on a relationship. I am referencing the big three: money, sex, power.

In political terms these are: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In spiritual terms these are: daily bread, belonging, purpose.

Money, sex, and power form the root of the crises facing us as a nation, a state, and community.

As ambassadors of God's reconciling gift in Jesus Christ, how do we live this mission on a daily basis? The world needs to see and experience people actually moving from confession to joy. If the church and the priesthood of all believers (you and me) are not practicing this work together, how can the hope of Jesus Christ be good news that invites others to join the movement?



"...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God." 2 Cor 5: 19-20

"[Communion-1](#)" by [Weiers](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

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September 8, 2022

Dear Friends:

Who follows you? No, I'm not asking about your FB or TikTok followers. At least not directly. I'm curious if you are aware of your sphere of influence.

Perhaps you remember the game, "6 Degrees of Kevin Bacon." This was a fun way to discover how many connections we have and how one person can become the center of our world. In our increasingly connected virtual lives, we easily overlook the interpersonal impacts we each have upon others.

If you are not a member of St. Andrew, take time to think about the people in your circle and the ideas you've shared, the shape of your life in light of these connections, and the impact you have made.

As St. Andrew kicks-off the fall season, we are beginning to consider next year's influencers here. You are invited to consider how God will use you in the coming year to serve as an ambassador of reconciliation through this ministry. Some of you will hear an invitation to serve as an [elder, deacon, or trustee](#), and quite possibly, on the [Pastor Nominating Committee](#).



For more information about any of these options, feel free to speak to the people already serving. Their names are listed in the weekly order of service. If you would like to be considered, please speak up--tell Priscilla O., Kate G., Sarah R., Frank D. or George M. These are the members of the Nominating Committee who are now looking for God's chosen ones!

Take time to notice the ways God is prodding you each and every day to do the work of discipleship. You are servant leader for whom someone in your sphere of influence. And they may be that to you as well. You do not do the work alone, for Jesus says,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and

humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Mt 11: 28-30

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September 1, 2022

Dear Friends:"

I am passionate about UGA football. Would I describe my faith with the word, "passionate?" What is passion?

As a sports fan, I keep up with my team and try to learn who the players of consequence are. I study their opponents' records before we play each other. I listen to stories about potential wins and losses, chances for the playoffs and the possibility that my team will



come out as the national champion.

During a game, I watch what is happening. I coach from my seat in my living room or the stands. I enjoy the time with no other distractions. I cheer loudly while wearing my school colors. I yell for my players to give them a special boost in their efforts. At times, I circle the room, as if running the ball, even dodging furniture ready to tackle me with the least little misstep.

As for my faith, dare I confess to you my lackluster passion?

In September and through World Communion Sunday, our theme is ***Tale-gating with Jesus***. I am curious about how I will reshape my whole week to make sure I have time for a football game and whether I make the same commitment to the things Jesus cares about? What does life look like when I cheer for Team Justice? What might happen if I spent time learning what my church friends' strengths are and where they best fit?

(pause)

I'm not passionate about football after-all. I'm interested in and enjoy it. Passion is interactive and not one single person on the UGA team knows I exist. If anything I am a bobble head on a stadium seat (or sofa in my living room). The only thing my participation in this Saturday afternoon ritual offers is more money in someone's pocket.

Church. That's a different story. I hope to see you this week at the tale-gate with Jesus. If you can't make it, let me know and maybe we can tailgate.

Let's be more than bobble-heads.

"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." James 2: 17

Image: <http://janevoigts.com/blog/2015/6/19/slumber-party>

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August 25, 2022

Dear Friends:

I'm enjoying a last minute getaway. First, thank you for providing the time away and to all the people who step in to cover when pastors are away. This week, Kate G., will provide the message during worship.

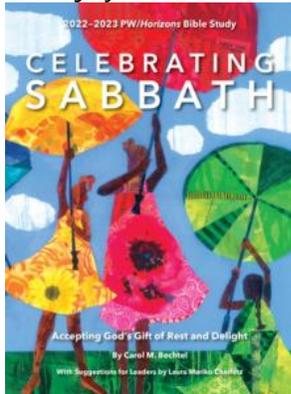
Second, over the course of this last year, I have celebrated the depth and commitment of the members of this church regarding your exploration and willingness to learn and grow and share with one another. It is something this church can be proud about—being church is more than showing up for a long "TED" talk and music on Sundays.

For you it is watching for the appearance of Christ in the friendships that are made, the shared support during difficult times, the concern for the well-being of families and children who need childcare, the awareness of economic issues in the county that leave some families in need of hunger relief, and so much more. Church is more than a faith statement here.

Church is a testimony to the presence and call of God on each of us to strive for a just and peaceful community. We call

it "on earth as in heaven." One of the heavenly practices that is vital to healthy lives is rest. I am not very good at weekly rest and renewal. Even though the Creator of the

universe worked for a few days and then said, "Wow—look what I did. I'm taking a break to enjoy the fruit of my labors," I often struggle to follow God's example.



My fall commitment to renewal will include Sabbath. As it happens, the fall bible study from Horizons that the Brunch Bunch will be starting in September is about this very topic.

Brunch Bunch: 2nd Mondays, 10 a.m., at the church.

If you would like to participate in an evening monthly small group using this curriculum, please contact Beverly.

Peace,
Beverly

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August 18, 2022



Dear Friends:

Invite a friend! This weekend we will celebrate back-to-school with a Backpack Blessing. Teachers and students are invited to bring their "backpacks," to worship.

After worship we will head to Franklin Park for a community-wide picnic. This is an

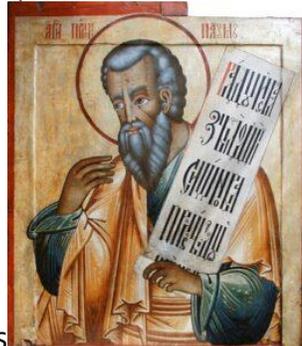


opportunity to invite someone to “come and see,” what Jesus is all about in our community of faith. They will find friendships, fun, hope, engagement in the community, and of course food. (Details about the picnic are in the weekly newsletter.)

And you will need to be prepared for the sermon scripture. As part of our banned books series, we will be reading Jude, in the New Testament. There’s a lot of judgement in Jude’s preaching for just 25 verses! The banned books are Salman Rushdie’s “The Satanic Verses,” and Nikos Kazantzakis’ “The Last Temptation of Christ.”

However, do not be afraid! As always, we are pondering what these texts tell us about the love of God for all God’s children. The question before us is whether there is any good news in texts of God’s judgement.

In Obadiah we find a purpose—like Abraham, we are called to stand with those whose



anger at God’s slowness

in bringing justice for the oppressed is shouted to the heavens.

In Nahum, we find God’s rejection of hate and oppression and are reminded that even when we have been declared useful to God’s purposes, we must not assume God’s authority over others.

This week, Jude will remind us that our toleration of a variety of perspectives must still hold a line against dehumanization of others.

Let anyone with ears hear what the prophets are saying to the church. May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be pleasing to the Lord our God. See you Sunday!

Peace,

Beverly

Images: Picnic tray by [Flying Pig Party Productions CC 2.0](#); Nahum icon, [Public Domain](#)

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August 11, 2022

Dear Friends:

The Purcellville City Council is not immune to personal attacks being on public display first rather than attempting to resolve differences one-to-one.

A conversation I had this week included a discussion of the Charter for Compassion.

Having asked someone else a general, "what do you think I should write about in the blog," question, the answer was, how to be nice.

This is so sad!

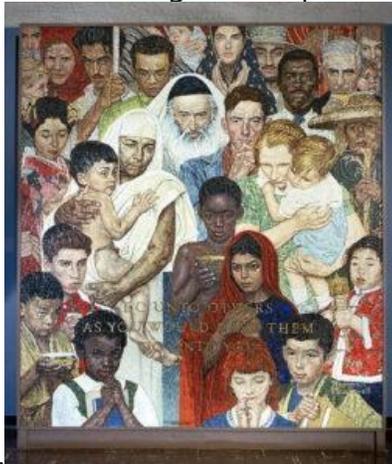
Being nice to each other is something that we all should have learned in the sandbox AND carried into adulthood. AND been able to pass on to the next generation. And so on.

While I am preaching a short series about God's judgment, it is important to note that God's wrath is always pushed to its limit by the lack of loving kindness between people. Violations of another's humanity can be simple as not listening to each other and as horrific as plotting, justifying and carrying out their execution, from apathy to intractable conflict culminating in war.

The Charter for Compassion recommends the use of the "golden rule," as a guiding statement. This is present in some form in all healthy spiritual traditions.

"Do unto others as you would have done unto you."

At the risk of sounding too simplistic, maybe we are treating others the way we treat



ourselves.

Consider the part of the commandment to love that is often ignored: "as yourself." Perhaps our niceness, or lack thereof, is a reflection of how we feel about what we deserve. Which is why I believe the embrace of God's grace is such a critical part of our faith.

If loving kindness begins internally, we might ask ourselves, "do I *love myself* with the love I believe God has for those I care about?"

Be kind to yourself. This week, talk nicely to yourself. Not with a big head, just with a compassionate heart. Take time off from not being good enough. Take a break from producing more than is required so you can rest.

Ah—rest! Sabbath! If even God was self-centered enough to take a break from the work of creation, can you be self-ishly kind--take a beat, and breathe, and play in this marvelous handiwork of God called earth?

Peace,

Rev Bev

Image: "[Norman Rockwell Mosaic 'The Golden Rule'](#)" by [United Nations Photo](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

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August 4, 2022

Dear Friends:

It is back to school time.

Banned books! Sex everywhere! Hide them now! Here—under the mattress, quick, the



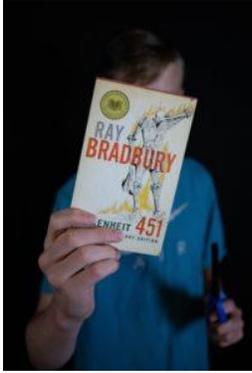
children are coming! Clear the bookshelves!

I took away some music from my kids once. The lyrics were nasty and misogynist and violent. I spent a good deal of time learning about the artist, the lyrics, and then explaining to my kids why it was not acceptable in our home at that time. We discussed it. I did not protest the radio stations or the music stores or expect other people to believe and do as I did. I knew they heard it with their friends. I was not banning them from friendships, but teaching them about healthy boundaries and respect for people. Was I perfect, or right? Who knows?

Consider this: *Ferris Buehler's Day Off* (PG-13) depicts a number of inappropriate actions all day long, sins. At the end of the day, he gets away with all of it. *All That Jazz* (R) depicts a number of inappropriate actions, sins. The main character, after multiple conversations about the wages of sin being death, has a heart attack and dies.

If you do know both movies, you might agree that the rating system has to do with the particular behaviors depicted in the stories but not the moral of the story. The morals of the R-rated film cohere more effectively with the "family values," arguments than the consequences Ferris and friends don't get for their bad behavior. How do you decide which movie is most appropriate? Is it naked bodies or willful disobedience that makes a bigger difference?

This is where we fail in our discussions about censorship and book banning. Being angry and vociferous about depictions of sexuality or violence that our kids certainly see and endure regularly and banning a book is not a fully effective parenting process for passing on moral guidelines for healthy growth. We have to have face-to-face conversations. Even if we do personally take away music, books, movies, games, it is the conversation that makes the difference.



Public displays of book banning in our schools are publicity stunts for political gains. There, I said it. If it makes the news, it likely has little to do with making sure our own kids are learning our own morals. If it did, we would have to ban the Bible. That is, if we actually read the stories.

Join me the next three weeks as we consider some ignored stories of Scripture.

This week: *Fahrenheit 451* and Obadiah.

Peace,

Rev Bev

Image: book, Photo by [Will Porada](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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July 28, 2022

Dear Friends:

On my desk is a prayer by Thomas Merton. A wall hanging nearby portrays the Lord's Prayer. An exterior photo of the sanctuary is centered on another wall. An image representing the Laughing Jesus invites the observer to ask "what is so funny?" Prayer and contemplation are clearly marked themes of the office space.

I find myself praying all the time, if saying, "Lord help (fill in the blank)," counts. It does. Nevertheless, I resonate with the question from the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Last Sunday I spoke about intercessory prayer as it relates to our communities, cities, nation, to our leaders. It was my hope that coming out of this phase of the Jan 6

hearings, you would have a tangible way to think about faith in the private sphere directly related to the public square **and** which is not about participating in the Christian Nationalist movement.

Sen. Raphael Warnock has said that a vote is a prayer. That is quite different from the events of Jan 6 and since then regarding the hardening line toward “making America into a Christian nation.” Voting and interceding with God through prayer is very different from forcing other free citizens and residents to follow our particular brand of Christianity. Thinking about and voting according to how you understand your faith, about how peace, justice, and mercy can be articulated in legislative acts for the common good, is radically *not* about creating a nation defined by a branded theology of Christianity.



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us all,

“Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated.

Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless.”

Christian faith, following Jesus is meant to be transformative, to be seen in moral acts of loving God and loving others, and loving oneself. This is not a law that can be codified. Indeed, it is God’s word that tells us,

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts,

and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people.”

Jer 31: 33

Did you? Will you? Will you pray for the nation this week? Let us join our hearts and voices to ask God for peace, prosperity, kindness, relief, and laws and policies that reflect the same love and grace of Jesus Christ offered to his fellow Israelites, and the

Syro-Phoneicians, and the Canaanites, and the Samaritans, and even the Romans. Let us cry out to the Lord with the oppressed, and with Abraham. Let us pray for the USA and all the nations.

This Sunday we will talk about prayers of lament in a time of pursuing meaning yet finding despair. Come pray with me.

Peace,

Beverly

image credits: MLK and Washington Monument: Scott Abelman,
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July 14, 2022

Dear Friends:

We were studying the existence, creation, and ongoing conflict in Israel. It was 1973-74, in the headlines, and we were studying WWII. Our class was going to debate the Jewish state and Palestinian rights in light of all these events. I was so glad to have the chance to prove in a debate that the Jews were God's chosen people, and I was one of them, even if I was a Christian. But, my teacher assigned me to the team debating for Palestinian rights. I was so disappointed, maybe even angry.

However, I wanted an A, so I did the work. I studied with my team. I learned the history. I asked hard questions (for an 8th grader) and researched for the answers to the questions the debate was to address. We held the debate. I got my A, but I don't remember which team "won" the debate.

I, however, was forever changed. This was my first exposure to listening to "voices long silenced." Mainly because Jewish voices had a place in my growing up, even if minor, I never thought of Jews, despite the horrors of the Holocaust, as something absent, silenced, from my life. Non-Jewish Palestinians were a complete unknown and because of headlines about bombings were equated with Jewish-hating Nazis in my young mind.

What, or better, who I discovered as I did my homework was something altogether different. I recognized Palestinian people striving to create happy homes to raise their kids. They were not different from their new Israeli Jewish nationals or my family. These

two peoples were quickly developing a common history: being restricted to ghettos, fenced in by a new government, rationed infrastructure and necessities, restricted travel, forced removal, excluded from employment, from citizenship in their own country, and from the rights and privileges of participating in their government. They were demonized as a whole people for the violent actions of the minority agitating for justice.

I could not help but remember what I learned about the forced removal of the indigenous peoples of Georgia and North Carolina to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears." I could not help but remember Kristallnacht and the fenced neighborhoods that became Jewish ghettos before forced incarceration and extermination. I could not help but remember lessons about Irish Presbyterians and Catholics fighting. I could not help but remember the ongoing struggle for civil rights in our time in our country for descendants of people who had been bought and sold as slaves, some by my very own ancestors.

In getting ready for our debate, I found that I could, as a kid of Jewish descent, want "my" people to be better than those who hurt them, hated them, and killed them. But I found that "we" were not living up to that goal.

In South Africa, when the world named the apartheid state as such, the truth prepared the way for reconciliation.



"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
John 8: 31b-32 (NRSVUE)

We cannot hope to become better if we do not name the truth of our current reality. This is the hope of joining other voices who have taken this same step in regard to Israel, that is, declaring that the actions of the Israeli government fit the definition of apartheid. I would have voted for the statement at the PC (USA) General Assembly this summer doing just this.

And we are not outsiders to this conversation. We are joining our voices to those who live and work in Israel and Palestine who have longed for peace and a two-state solution only to be powerless before their government. This is a key word in the PC (USA) statement. We are not making a statement that shuns Jews and is anti-semitic. It specifically identifies laws and policies enacted by the government, in opposition to the will of the people, both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims, who want a homeland where all the people of God live in peace with equal justice under the law.

May the God of Abraham, Ishmael, and Jesus show all of us a way of truth, the path to reconciliation, and how to live together as a light to all the world.
Shalom, salaam, peace. Amen.

image credit: "[Star of David Coexistence- 2](#)" by [zeevveez](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

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June 30, 2022

July 2022—National Music—The Battle Hymn of the Republic



This song has a long and interesting history. I have sung the refrain, with a bit of a twist, for many years, "Glory, glory to ol' Georgia...and to %&! with GA Tech."

Current usage has a limited awareness of this song's abolitionist history or the story of John Brown ("John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,") and the Harper's Ferry insurrection (only later dubbed a "raid," and later recognized as a prelude to the Civil War). It has been sung by Anita Bryant in anti-gay rallies and at Ebenezer Baptist for

Black civil rights. See the #NPR review of its history [here](#). As you can see, it is easily co-opted to support any number of things people want to thwart with the wrath of God's sword in *their* hands.

In a time of rising Christian Nationalism and increasing violence, I believe a song that claims divine favor coupled with wrath shown in battle is incendiary. I am not on board with glorifying an Armageddon fought by the imagined armies of heaven here on earth. In addition Julia Ward Howe's original word was let us "die" to make them free. During a time of martyrdom by suicide bombs, this is a troublesome image. All this before getting to the absence of the Prince of Peace in the lyrics, the one whose death for our freedom came as a nonviolent activist, who shared his last supper with his betrayer, who refused to call the army of heaven he commanded, and who instructed his disciple to sheathe his sword.

I am aware of my own desire that if we enter a battle-- finish it swiftly, with a shock and awe fierceness. I am not content with that streak of violence within myself. I am very conscious of the call of Christians to be light for all the nations and all peoples, called to be ambassadors of reconciliation. To claim ourselves as "children of God," is to be identified with

"Blessed be the peacemakers," in Matthew 5.



If God's Truth is Jesus Christ, rather than going off to battle stirred by fear and dread, I want to follow the Prince of Peace, marching from the table, where the Lord gathers all us sinners and saints, to stand up for reconciliation and peace with wine and bread.

So, I wrote new words of thanksgiving and praise. They're not perfect. They've changed since my first iteration and continue to be revised. They are an articulation of my faith in relation to my country, both of which are reformed and being reformed by God's Truth. They are an invitation to others to sing for a truth and truce that ends the battles of the nations with an abundance of love and mercy. Let us sing praise to the coming peace of Christ—Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!

A New Hymn for the Nations © (words of verses by Beverly Friedlander Ostrowski)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

God is calling faithful people through the Spirit and the Word,

And reforming all the nations so true justice is restored.

God's truth is marching on.

Chorus

Glory, glory hallelujah.

Glory, glory, hallelujah.

Glory, glory, hallelujah.

God's truth is marching on.

Christ's eyes have seen our battle lines, the blood upon our shores.

And is breaking down our weapons and the walls we build for war.

Making peace among the nations, we shall be in one accord.

God's truth is marching on.

Chorus

I have heard the angel chorus and the seven trumpets roar.

Christ is setting up the table, bread abounds and wine is poured,

Overflowing love and mercy for God's children, evermore.

God's truth is marching on.

Chorus

IMAGES: "[USA PATRIOTIC 4TH OF JULY 1776 CIVIL WAR THE GRAND OF REPUBLIC MUSIC PLAYING WOULD BE THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC Postmarked 19122](#)" by [UpNorth Memories - Don Harrison](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).
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June 23, 2022

Dear Friends:



Writer's block.

I've been looking for wise words for this week's blog and have stumbled through many prologues and passages of scripture. Nothing seems to fit.

The refrain that cycles through my head every day is the number of times I read or hear someone say, "what is wrong with people?"

Whether they are commenting on a shooting, an ugly remark about another person, a political commentary, a public event or private experience, I am perceiving a generalized perplexity regarding human empathy and understanding.

I'd love to say, "Well, they don't have Jesus!" As true as that may be for some, it is us Jesus people who also seem to be the target of, "what is wrong with you!?"

Our news networks are never going to write a story about a church that educates 130 children from the crib to kindergarten in the ways of kindness and sharing and respect and play. They will not spotlight the middle school conference where kids are learning what blessings give to and ask of each of us. They will not do a deep-dive into the meal trains for grieving families, or the forgiveness that occurs when church members hurt each other's feelings, or the answered prayers to healed marriages because of regular though brief conversations with a long-time married couple sitting in the pew together.

It was national news when the Baptists held a convention and discussed ordaining women and lists of sexual predators. But the dancing to the song "Celebrate"



after the election of the PC (USA) co-moderators—two ordained women of color—did not make headlines anywhere.

The food pantries, the medical services, the space for 12-step groups, and so many more of the good works of good church people is seldom recognized in the public sphere.

Let's not forget this. There is a lot right with people and lot of them are in the church. Many are not. All who seek the good, the well-being of their neighbor, and provide loving kindness the vulnerable are doing the work Christ sends us to do. While the good, who bear the fruit of the Spirit, will seldom be shown in primetime, we can help turn the negative question into a positive celebration. Maybe there is a word from the Lord:

Whoever is not against us is for us.

Mark 9: 40

Image: "[#ds139 'Writer's Block'](#)" by [Sharon Drummond](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

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June 16, 2022

Dear Friends:

"Back to Basics." Vince Lombardi reportedly started every season's first practice by holding up the pigskin and saying, "Gentlemen, this is a football." They then spent time reinforcing the basics of stance, tackling, blocking, throwing and catching, and even running.



Reassessment of our lives is good practice. New Year's Day in the secular world is one example of that reflection period. Lent, the season before Easter, is an example in the Christian world. Transition times are excellent times to relearn what we already know. Summer times are excellent times to take stock.

You likely have some significant reflections from the pandemic times, moments when you said to yourself, "really, for this?" Maybe you have already changed jobs, or even relocated to be closer to grandkids. Perhaps you have made new commitments to the things or people who matter to you.

*"The only place success comes
before work is in the dictionary."*

--Vince Lombardi

I invite you, particularly if you do not already do so, try a daily practice that has made the crossover from spiritual disciplines to ubiquitous advice: practicing a daily review. This summer I will be revisiting the basics of our faith. The following suggestion is meant to support the *basics of personal joy and growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ*. The practice begins the day by anticipating an opportunity to see or serve Christ, pauses the day to recenter in Christ, and ends the day confessing the joy (gratitude) and sorrow (grief) from the day, and everything in thanksgiving.

This one is connected to the scriptures that will be part of the Massanetta Middle School Conference theme. Let's join the youth in a daily reflection on the Beatitudes.

The Practice of Prayer:

Wake up time—recite the assigned Scripture and give thanks for something you will do that day.

Lunch time—take some deep cleansing breaths and offer a breath prayer (a word you say when you inhale and a word when you exhale—the words are listed daily).

Bedtime—recite the Scripture, consider how you experienced the text throughout the day. Write down a grief and a gratitude regarding this living word in you day.

Bev's e.g.:

Wake up: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Thank you, Lord, for the chance to share a daily practice with the people of SAPC.

Lunchtime: breathe in-"One;" out-"Love."

Bedtime: Scripture, Grief: For the ways I put others first today, forgive me Lord. Gratitude: for the way people of SAPC have shown your love by committing to serving you here.

Friday, 6/17 Mt 5: 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed, poor

Saturday, 6/18 Mt 5: 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Mourn, comforted

Sunday, 6/19 Mt 5: 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed, heir

Monday, 6/20 Mt 5: 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Hunger, thirst

Tuesday, 6/21 Mt 5: 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Grant, mercy

Wednesday, 6/22

Mt 5: 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

May I, see you

Thursday, 6/23

children of God.

Mt 5: 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called

Peace, maker

May the Holy Spirit fill you with all peace.

Rev Bev

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June 9, 2022

Trinity

Dear Friends:

What good is the Trinity? I don't mean what good is God, even though that question is a fine question to be able to answer. I am wondering whether you give thought to one of the most critical doctrines of the church. It is one singularly important distinction between Christianity and Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and others. Yet, it is the doctrine we struggle the most to define.

Trinitarian doctrine is often emphasized as "a mystery." Something we believe, and have language for, yet cannot fully explain. What good does it do us if we cannot apply it practically in our everyday lives beyond stating it in prayer, or affirming it in ritual?

The doctrine is: we believe in one God, revealed in three persons (which does not mean humans).

The doctrine is about relationship and community. God is God-with. God's with-ness is the creation of, center of, and overflowing font of love. The divine communion means God is bound to, united with, and always acting on behalf of God's self-in-relation. The Father is only so because of The Son and The Spirit. So it is for all other arrangements of God's relations. None act apart from love and the act of one is the act of all and their very nature is unknown apart from the substance of the others. And yet, to speak of the "other" is to speak of the one.



The Triune God is the model for human community.

To be holy as God is holy is to honor our nature as communal creatures, made to be with and for others in order to be whole and complete.

Our relational nature means we will seek connection. We will always be working toward belonging to another and acting on their behalf.

Therefore, our choice is to live into our humanity in which the connection, the communion we seek, is lived -- out, with, and for -- the holiness of our Creator-Savior-Sanctifier, or, sadly, it will be lived out/with/in cooperation among that which is evil.

The heartache you feel for the families of Uvalde is a sign of your divine nature.

A trinitarian faith would act in communion with and for these families in this time of grief and unnecessary horror. A trinitarian faith acts in order to provide for a life-giving, just, and peacemaking path through this terror. Trinitarian faith acts in imitation of the Divine communion.

Trinitarian faith is applied faith. It is not an empty or simply mysterious description of an unknowable God. It is the continuous overflowing love that runs straight from the Divine One into the communion of the saints for the creation of the beloved community.

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May 2, 2022

Thoughts and Actions to become response-able.

Day 6 – Moving from Tragedy to Triumph

Dear Friends:

Reba McEntire sings, "Pray for Peace." We have been working on moving from thoughts and prayers to action and change.

John Lennon sings, "Imagine all the people Livin' life in peace You may say I'm a dreamer But I'm not the only one I hope someday you'll join us And the world will be as one." We've been working on becoming aware of our own broken hearts and mending them that we might be whole.

Jesus prayed and lived, "**As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.**" **Now, we come together, sent, to be ambassadors of reconciliation and peace.**

The heavy question is always, "what difference can I make, I'm just one."

We begin by trusting--if we trust that God answers the prayers of Christ, you and I are one, and we are one with others. Therefore, your suffering is mine and your peace is also mine. Only together can we begin to pray, imagine and go out to bring about the kingdom of our Creator God.

Gun violence is one of the principalities and powers of evil that works against our striving for peace.

We are not hopeless. We are not helpless. We are not unable. And we are willing.

Personal actions for your own peace of mind:

If you own a gun:

1. store it without ammunition loaded, and

2. secure it with a trigger lock in a locked location, away from access by young people,
3. ask yourself honestly why you own a gun, or more than one, and
4. what kind of guns you own, and why those.
5. take a gun safety course, even if you don't own a gun.

Remember that the work we do each day may save someone's life, possibly someone whom you will never know.

Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't give out. (Hon. John Lewis)

Within the society,

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Gun Violence

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1. Contact your representative in the U.S. Congress and ask that they support:

- Universal background checks and waiting periods for all gun purchases;
- A ban on semiautomatic assault weapons, armor piercing handgun ammunition, and .50 caliber sniper rifles.
- Help close the gun show loophole that allows purchases with no background check.

[Find your US Representative here.](#)

[Find your US Senator here.](#)

[Find your state of Virginia Delegates and Senators here.](#)

2. Identify the organizations in your community engaged in gun violence prevention and get involved. Examples:

Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions

- [Moms Demand Action](#)
- [Everytown For Gun Safety](#)

3. Attend a peaceful demonstration or public prayer service to end gun violence.

4. Contact your mayor and city council members to learn what steps have been taken in your community to prevent gun violence and support actions.

5. Plan a screening of Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence for your group or organization. Visit pcusa.org/storyproductions to get suggestions and resources on hosting a screening.

6. Join or form a local chapter of Heeding God's Call, a faith-based movement to end gun violence. Visit heedinggodscall.org for more information.

7. Ask the leaders of your worshipping community to address gun violence in worship services (with periodic preaching, liturgies, and prayers) and education classes. Resources can be found at presbyterianmission.org/gun-violence-resources.

8. Learn about your state's laws:

- concealed carry laws, which may allow guns to be carried openly, including into houses of worship,
- encourage your places of work and worship to prominently display signs that prohibit carrying guns onto their property,
- purchasing requirements,
- Weapons allowed to be privately owned and sold.

9. Encourage those you know (citizens, hunters, and law enforcement officials) who regularly handle weapons properly to be wise examples in reducing risks and teaching how to prevent the misuse of deadly force.

10. Educate yourself and your friends about what we can do to make our communities safer.

Celebrate and send thanks when progress is made!

All suggestions are based upon the recommendations approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) in Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call.

St. Andrew Saints: What will we do as a community to prevent gun violence?

Peace,

Beverly

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May 31, 2022

Thoughts and Actions to become response-able.

Day 5, RWA (ready, willing, able)

***Do not be conformed to this age,
but be transformed by the renewing of the mind,
so that you may discern what is the will of God—
what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

Romans 12: 2

I began this series because I join many of you in asking, “what should I do, what can I do,” and avoiding the question, “am I responsible to do.” I began this series following the tragedies of three mass shootings in four days. Since that time, there have been 17 more that have not made the national headlines. While the circumstances of each vary and affect why editorial choices are made to emphasize each of these horrific events, all whose friends and families are involved are no less aggrieved. I began this series to consider the questions:

Are we actually helpless?

Are we actually unable to change our society?

Are we actually unwilling to do what is necessary?

The first four days addressed the emotional toll these events take on each of us regardless of how close we are to the victimized, or for that matter, the

perpetrators. The underlying supposition is that as we know ourselves, and learn to feel the emotions that arise, recognize their distinctiveness, affirm our own truth within the larger context, and begin to ***make choices*** about how to use the energy within them, we will see that we are not held hostage by the random or targeted acts of violence that occur.



We are not helpless.

But are we willing?

Are we able?

1. Think of something you wanted and actually had to work toward obtaining. Jot down all the things you had to do in order to accomplish your goal. (e.g.: getting a better grade, graduating school, learning a craft, learning to play an instrument, saving money for a special vacation or purchase, developing a habit for positive life change, etc.)
2. What do you notice about your setting a goal, making a plan, and following through.
3. What were the roadblocks and how did you overcome them?
4. Why did it matter to you to obtain this goal?

In this exercise, you are learning what motivates you to be ready, willing, and able to make a difference in your own life.

Societal change is rarely effected by a single individual. It is never effected by only a single individual. God chooses, over and over again, throughout history to call people into partnership for the justice and righteousness God intends. Here's an example from Paul's experience:



you have always obeyed me,

not only in my presence but much more now in my absence,

work on your own salvation *with fear and trembling,*

for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2: 12-13

In Scripture, we have this assurance that each of us has the possibility to change. Personal growth is an act of one's will in conjunction with the work of Holy Spirit. For non-Christians, we might note that the Ten Commitments of humanism include an awareness of and accountability to act for the wellbeing of others. The universal human ethic calls people to live in community, and to will and work toward justice and social righteousness. Christians and Jews share this calling from God:

***I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.***

Amos 5: 21-24

Today's exercise demonstrates our ability to will and work for something that matters to us personally.

The question for each of us is what matters.

What matters enough regarding gun violence for you to will and work for a change?

If you have no ability, it is not because you are inherently helpless, or unwilling.

If you have no will, it is not because you are inherently helpless, or unable.

If you have no sense of being help-full, it is not because you are inherently unable or unwilling.

You can choose to be ready, willing, and able.

You can be response-able.

Tomorrow, I will provide a list of possible avenues for you to use if you are, indeed, RWA—

Because we are all response-able and in some way responsible.

Peace be with you.

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May 29, 2022

Thoughts and Actions to become response-able.

Day 4, Fear-free

Dear Friends:

It has been one week since the mass shooting in a Buffalo, NY grocery store, and a Laguna Woods, CA church. The headlines have been filled with the sorrow, and anger of victims' families, neighbors, "experts," and politicians. They have spoken the same words we have rehearsed many times before. In between the stories, advertisements play showing us the good life.

[caption id="attachment_8906" align="alignleft" width="300"]



Replace fear of the unknown with curiosity.[/caption]

Perhaps you've managed to limit your tv time and scroll through much of your social media, in order to create some new Joy Breaks. Good for you. Today we look at the fourth of the primary emotions, fear.

1. Grab a piece of paper or your journal. It is important to write this down.
 1. Start by writing, "I am afraid." Don't add anything. Just read that short sentence and allow your body to feel the weight of admitting this small piece of the complex human being you are.
 2. Read those three words a few times and pause.
 3. Read it out loud to see what it sounds like. Pause and feel. Don't think about what comes next.
 4. Read it in different tones of voice—low or normal or high-pitches. Read it in different volumes—whispers, conversational, louder, shouted.
 5. Write a few sentences about this experiment. What did you notice about yourself—your thoughts, your body, your spirit?

Because this is an exercise in grounding your emotion in a rational and physical action and reflection, the hope is to discover that when fear arises, you will have

taken time to recognize some of the signs you normally experience and what happens when you acknowledge this emotion in various ways. Like batting practice with the coach, you are building your self-awareness and “muscle memory,” so to speak, with actions you can take when fear shows up. When you are ready, move on to trying the next exercise.

2. Write “I am afraid,” again but this time, in light of the events that have happened, add the word, “that,” or the word, “when,” and complete the sentence. If naming the fear causes you to feel off balance, gearing up to fight, or flee, or freeze in a panic, look over the options worked through in the first exercise. Make use of an action that gave you a sense of strength or peace even in the idea of fear.

There is little we can do to assuage fear beside acknowledge it. Bad things happen. Bad things happen to good people for no reason. Bad things happen as a consequence of choices, even when the outcome could not be anticipated. Our most rational fears recognize this reality of good and evil.

Most of us cope effectively, even if slowly, with the “natural evils,” that occur in our lives—fires, floods, storms, illnesses, accidents, and even the failure of friendships due to disagreements and disappointments. Any one of us may be afraid of natural evils, even “deathly afraid.” In these cases, we have or can plan for and take steps to recover from these ups and downs in life.

Moral evil is another thing. This is the willful harm done to another. It comes without warning. The psalmist has said,

**“My companion laid hands on a friend
and violated a covenant with me
with speech smoother than butter
but with a heart set on war,
with words that were softer than oil
but in fact were drawn swords.**



Psalm 55: 20-21

Human beings know how harsh we can be, and even know that darkness lies deep in our own souls. Because of this inner knowledge, fear of moral evil making itself known in our lives lurks near every horrible thing that happens to others.

In a chapter about love, John writes extensively about our relationships with one another. Right in the middle of the exhortation, he declares,

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear;

for fear has to do with punishment,

and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.” 1 John 4: 13

How many horrible times have we wondered what those people did to deserve such an awful punishment? That may be our deepest fear—that we are on our own here and whatever horrible thing happens to us, we will have deserved it. Even if that were true, love yourself. Love yourself any way, all the time, and abundantly. Love yourself enough to realize that you are more than able to confront the fears you have, the demons lurking in darkness.

3. You wrote “I am afraid that/when.” It is likely that you wrote down the worst possible thing—the event that scares you the most. The probability of a worst case scenario happening is not zero, neither is it 100%. Therefore, something else *can* happen that is fearful, that is more likely to occur—not zero, not guaranteed. If the worst did not happen, what else are you afraid might happen. Keep working through it until you find a piece of this fear you can actually do something about, something you can control.

Take a look at what you have listed. In what ways does your list move from death to daily living, to the fullness of life. The challenge is to overcome moral evil with the same resilience tapped to endure natural evil. Furthermore, active labor on the side of good, do one's part to bring hope into hope-less situations, is the path that leads to defeating the power of moral evil.

This is what we God-fearers bring to the world. We are grounded in a cycle of remembering the liberating power of God who freed the child from a sacrifice to the gods, released the enslaved people from Egypt, returned the exiled to their homeland, restored the beloved community in the face of oppression and occupation. For us Christians, we remember a God who opened the tomb and resurrected Jesus from the dead. The appearance of this God must be something for even the presence of God's messengers prompts them to declare immediately, "Don't be afraid! God sent me."

4. Now rephrase the sentence, "Once, even though I was afraid..." and complete it.

Beloved, you are not powerless, or paralyzed, by fear unless you choose to be. Your love of life is stronger than the death you are afraid of. Let your memory of how you responded at times when you were afraid build your confidence that you can handle the deepest fear you have; your resilience is a practice to be cultivated.

Be freed from fears' enslavement: love freely and fiercely. Be response-able!
Tomorrow:

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May 28, 2022

Day 3: Sad Storytimes

Dear Friends:

Give yourself a little extra time today for this reading and exercise. Sadness takes investment and energy.

Perhaps, now, four days after the shooting, and into the long Memorial Day weekend, your initial rage has subsided. That guilt about whether it is okay to enjoy

your holiday plans, and kick off your summer celebrations is ebbing. Perhaps you justify shifting your attention back toward your own daily lives with needing to give your kids a sense of normalcy and an absence of fear.

Nevertheless, every moment offers a longing to protect those you love from random violence. You notice you scan the room for anyone who looks threatening. Suddenly you notice bulges on people's waist where a gun may be hidden. Maybe a child you love has fits of rage or tears that seem to come from nowhere. And the dawning realization that life seems to be so tenuous and frail is bringing on a sadness you had not felt for some time.

Sadness is normal. Sadness is human response to change that includes letting go of something meaningful in our lives. You are not weak, nor sick, when you feel sadness. Sadness can last a long time. A person may feel like sadness will never go away. You are experiencing a common human response of grief and sorrow.

I've been a grief specialist in my ministry. I often encourage people to pay attention to their sorrow and realize that deep and painful sadness that seems overwhelming is not necessarily depression. Our culture has pathologized sadness. We have made normal human responses to heartbreaking experiences into a sickness to be cured. This contributes to our fear and thus our intentional avoidance of feeling the fullness of our sadness.



As a caution, note that depression is an illness. It is treatable. I am not a therapist and cannot diagnose the difference between sadness and depression in a given individual. However, there are some symptoms that may indicate a need to get extra help. Speak to your doctor or therapist if you have unshakeable feelings of despair and hopelessness,

or feelings of self-harm or violence toward others. If all the color has drained from the world around you and darkness seems to hover nearby, and your normal routines are being disrupted by choices you normally do not make, including the way you eat or drink or use other substances, you may be drifting into depression. Help is available. Do not ignore persistent changes and symptoms such as these.

Neither should you automatically assume you are depressed.

Let's talk about being sad. If we are striving to move from the tragedy toward triumph over senseless violence, we can use all the primary emotions the tragedy inflames to minimize becoming numb and ineffective or passive. The role of sadness is one that most influences our connection to others.

- Who are your resources for personal support? Draw a timeline on a page. On the right end write today's date. About one-third of the way across the timeline from the left, make a hashmark and put the name of the one who is your longest and healthiest friendship and the year you met. Add at appropriate intervals the names of two or three others with whom you have enduring friendships. On the left end of the timeline write a year about 3 years prior to the first friend's date.
- Try to remember the moments that cemented these friendships. Mark those moments with a word or symbol in the appropriate dates on the timeline. How often was a disappointment, a breakup, a death, a failure at the beginning of your realization that this person was your go-to forever friend? Or perhaps it was their experience of sorrow that drew you to being a caring responder. In that self-offering you discovered a new level of commitment to another person. You became someone's rock, someone's trusted companion.
- These Sad Storytimes are the periods when we discover the resilience of our humanity, both as someone in need and someone who can always offer support to another. By recalling the Sad Storytimes, we recount the ways our vulnerability led to new life. We relive the gift of being strong for another until their new life began to emerge. Below the notes you've made, make a list of the things you learned from your or your friends' Sad Storytimes. Perhaps you learned how to let someone cry, or to cry in front of another yourself. Perhaps you remembered a Sad Storytime you thought you'd moved on from, but discovered it still comments on your life.

- Complete the sentence: When I am sad...



- Draw a circle and place your name in the middle. Around the inside write down as much as you need to describe this time of sorrow. Looking at these three diagrams and your lists, complete the sentence around the outside of the circle:
 - My sadness needs _____ from me, now.
 - I need _____ (fill in your own strength), now to with this pain.
 - The people who will understand are _____. Reach out for this community with thanksgiving for this bit of manna from heaven.

This exercise uncovers your resilience in coping with sadness. It also demonstrates the emotional maturity you have to empathize with the grief others feel. You can be human with other humans. By acknowledging the heartbreak with truth and vulnerability, you honor your sorrow. You do not shortchange this little one. You may find sadness is often the center of what you personally value the most in this terrible moment. It would be what you would miss and thus what you would bargain to keep, even compromising your values and ethics to hang onto.

Remember to take a Joy Break, and to explore your Mad Moments to protect against ignoring the depth of your sorrow. Offer thanksgiving for the things you've learned in the house of mourning.

According to "The Preacher" (Ecclesiastes 7: 1-3)

"A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death, than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of everyone, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad."

The preacher is declaring that our grief is the sponsor, and mentor to, recognizing the full value of life, everyday. Only by embracing the suffering that comes with mourning can we embrace the fullness of this life in the next minute.

We do not go to someone in the throes of a fresh grief with this bible verse. Rather, we go to them with the knowledge of our Sad Storytimes, and the confidence that grief is not eternal. Therefore, we can be the strength they need for the moment, until their own resilience is revived by drawing on our resilience within our own sadness.

For our purposes in this current tragedy, we also do well to consider the words of Paul:

now I rejoice, not because you were grieved but because your grief led to repentance, for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter.

2 Cor 7: 9-11 NRSVUE

With this encouragement, tomorrow we will consider how fear keeps us from becoming the agent of redemptive power in tragedy. Today, let the days own troubles be sufficient for the day.

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**I Feel Sad Mom by [edenpictures](#)
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May 27, 2022

Day 2: Mad Moments

Dear Friends:

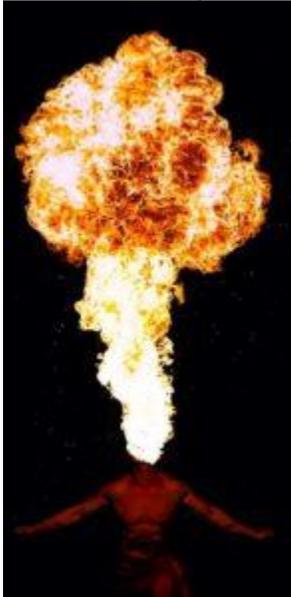
Did talking about joy make you angry yesterday? It's not fair that anyone celebrate life when parents can't bring their children home, ever; that never again will their little one run with joy into their arms. How dare anyone have a good day.

This is one kind of a common anger. We are used to the comparative guilt in tragedy. "There but for the grace of God," some say. Then the sorrow and grief we recognize, becomes a sense guilt for shedding tears, expressing rage, kissing the kids, and working our way back fairly quickly to our regular routine.

However, we prefer that no one point out the way we take our joy breaks and gladness so quickly after a tragedy.

And none of that erases the mad we do feel, deep in our bones about the catastrophe we mourn. Today, we take time to explore our anger through a Mad Moment.

Mad: You may be using the strength of anger, its power, to avoid sadness.



If so, take time to be sad. We will address sorrow tomorrow. For today, we will focus on our Mad Moments. We will seek avenues to recognize and process the immediate energy of anger as a motivating emotion for action. Don't work on discovering an action, just recognize you actually have a full fuel tank for doing something when it is time. Choose a time to pay attention to the mad that you feel. Take a Mad Moment, when it comes over you or schedule time to let it come forth.

- Feel the strength in your body. Examples: Where does your anger tighten you—jaws clenched—what are not saying? Fists balled up—what is it you need to hold onto?

Notice, you are not using the anger to fight or throw things, but to understand your internal processing. Take time to appreciate the way you are physically made for responding bodily to anger.

- Feel the power of thoughts. What do you repeatedly think about—what words come over and over? How do they help you manage anger in a positive way? What can you learn about your choices to think in ways that hurt yourself?
- Feel the solidarity of spiritual vitality. During tragic times, we hear and speak, “Why?” Human beings seek meaning. Perhaps, like a child, we ask this question repeatedly, “why?” Use this question to write down every answer that comes to mind. Don’t judge the correctness, or even the factuality of your considerations. Anytime you ask, “why,” try to list every possible answer that comes to mind.
- As you build the list, you will begin to reflect on trends in your answers. Remember “why,” matters because you are angry about what has happened. The list you are making is a record of both the excuses that allow you to release the anger, the blame you can place in order to judge another, and the way your life has been violated. If you know the “why,” you presume that you can prevent being robbed of what matters to you. Thus, you are clarifying what you love and fear losing.

The power of anger allows you to consider how you can control your life in order to avoid being victimized, or let go of control.

The danger of anger is reactive use of its power to destroy anything or anyone believed to be a threat.

By sitting with our mad, we gain clarity on communal values and the ways we support or fail to hold them up with accountability. We increase our ability to name the loves we hold dear. We build our self-awareness about our vulnerability and thus increase our empathetic humanity with others.

In this space we move from venge-seeking, reactionary rage into righteous, response-able anger.

Righteous anger can even show us our complicity in the culmination of tragedy.

Righteous anger shifts our perspective from vengeance to justice.

Anger is powerful in our body, mind and soul. It can create it's own fear within us, or move us toward healthy and creative engagement in building the beloved community.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people,

but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

So then, putting away falsehood,

let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor,

for we are members of one another.

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go do

down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.

You must understand this,

my beloved brothers and sisters:

let everyone be quick to listen,

slow to speak,

slow to anger,

for human anger does not produce God's righteousness.

Leviticus 19:18; Ephesians 4: 25-27; James 1: 19-20

NRSVUE

Tomorrow, we will address our sadness.

Peace.

Photo by [Raphael Renter](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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May 26, 2022

I will eventually write about the actual events, and preach. Today, I'm in a different pastoral mode.

Have you offered your thoughts and prayers? Have you complained to your friends? Have you cried or screamed or decided you'd rather not think about it at all? Or maybe you have succumbed to the pain of depression and cannot stop thinking about it?

I have found myself speechless and mad as hell. There, I said it, slightly nicer than it actually rolls around in my mind, or even out loud in the privacy of my space and closest friends, which does include Jesus, BTW.

Are we actually helpless? No.

Are we actually unable to change our society? No.

Are we actually unwilling to do what is necessary? No.

Then how do we move from paralysis to action? I will post responses to the above questions over the next week in the hope that you will be inspired to move from "thoughts and prayers," from "hearers of the word," to "policy and change," and "doers of the word.

Today I address our will. Changing society is too big for any one person. So we feel stuck and we give up. Changing other people is not our job. We know how it feels to be told what to do and we don't want to be that kind of Christian.

To be willing to do what is necessary,
we need to take emotional stock and
gain confidence in ourselves,
from the inside out.

Changing ourselves in cooperation with the Holy Spirit is the only thing we can do. To develop a strong will toward change is to start by making small changes in your own life. Begin with an emotional self-assessment. For the next four days, we will address one aspect at a time from the emotional experience of grief.

Moving our will from Freeze or Fight or Flight into Response-enabled Action: “Glad.”

1. We start with glad because anger, sadness, and fear will paralyze or destroy without a break, however brief. Please realize this is not to rush you through mad, sad, or anger. Every time you feel those things, you can write down another revelation. By beginning with glad, you reclaim your resources to cope with the other emotions. You are drawing on your strength, but not to avoid the painful emotions you feel. Rather by getting clear on these Joy Breaks, you will be stronger in engaging the fullness, the depth of your mad, sad, and afraid moments.
2. In moments of trauma or crisis, our joy is often jettisoned. It need not be wholly eliminated. It is the center of your hope in the midst of despair. We will create a list of “Joy Breaks,” which you can take when the mad, sad, afraid parts of life make you ready to kick something or crawl in bed and hide forever. And there are times when those, too, can be done safely—as a Joy Break, even.
3. Think of the way in which children ask the hard question, receive the painful truth and then go play with their toys and each other, as if nothing happened, until later, when they revisit the pain they feel. They take hard things in small doses.
 1. Action: Write down what makes you glad, mad, sad, afraid. Or make a collage. But get something visible that can be characterized by each of those words. And preferably with your hands on something other than a keyboard.
4. Focus today on the items you identified as “this makes me glad.” Your Joy Breaks may include:
 - - - - Turning off the news and your social media notifications at various times of the day.
 - Get crayons and color.
 - Listen to a favorite song.
 - Fake laugh until you crack yourself up and feel the laughter throughout your body. Or watch funny videos. Or tell knock-knock jokes...find a way to laugh.
 - Workouts—even punching a punching bag or pillow, or kicking a soccer ball, or hammering nails, chopping wood, meditate.
 - Take a walk, yoga, ride a bike.
 - Looking a photos of happy family and friend events—and if it includes images of someone who has died, or you fear losing, let the moment’s joy be what is most reflected upon.
 - Whatever makes you smile, even for a moment can go on your list.

5. Choose something from the list, do it at least once today! Take a break. Then say thank you out loud somewhere for the Joy Break. Put a Joy Break on your daily calendar and keep your schedule.

Tomorrow, when we discuss MAD Moments, remember your list and take a Joy Break at least one time. Put it on your schedule for the day.

***Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

***Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence and
if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.***

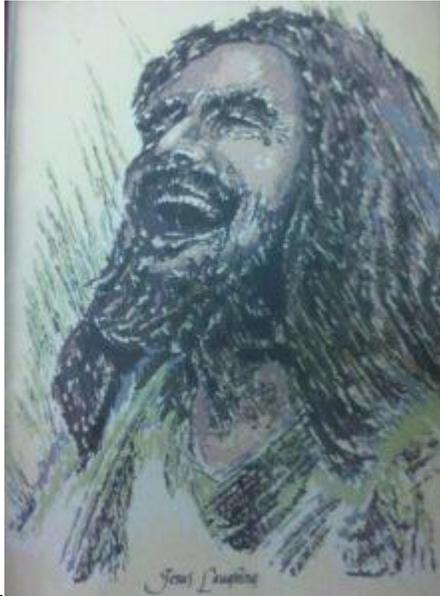
Philippians 4:6-8 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

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April 28, 2022

Dear Friends:

Every Sunday is a resurrection celebration. I am aware that I tend to be a worst case scenario person, however. So even on the best days, I am often thinking about all the ways the world experiences death, loss, grief, sorrow, fear.... If I can get stuck in that kind of thinking, I can get pretty hopeless.



But, Jesus.

Jesus is alive. I know it is not a popular belief system. I know that we who actually believe in the bodily resurrection of a dead man from 2000 years ago are considered superstitious, and misguided (at best) and dangerous (at worst—because of the things often done in Jesus' name). Nevertheless, I am one of the absolutely convinced that this is true: Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried, is alive.

The difference it makes in my life is an ability to leave behind the nightmares of daily news in favor of the goodness that is greater than the life we live. A goodness that is always bringing new life from the ashes of death means, to me, that the evil we see, and even commit ourselves, and cannot fully avoid anywhere we are, will never have the last word.

War will not win against the peacemakers. Violence will not win against cooperation. Hatred will not win against love. If we choose to disbelieve this, what hope is there for anyone to enjoy a life of love and laughter.

Let's talk about it Sunday.

Peace,

Beverly

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April 7, 2022

Dear Friends:

This week, in the cycle of holy days for Christians, we begin with a parade, are engulfed by a riotous crowd, experience state-sanctioned violence and the execution of our friend, mentor, and author of our faith, sit in grief at the end of all our hope, and rejoice in the new life of resurrection.

Don't skip straight to resurrection!

Our world knows the pain and suffering of holy week. We need to endure it again with Jesus at our side. All the headlines and newsreels tell us what havoc exists around us. Yet, it is easy to read or listen, or even see the sorry state of our world with some disconnect due to our personal distancing.



As followers of Jesus Christ, this week we are reminded that the way of the cross is the way of these horrors. Yet, we do not walk that street alone. We must choose whether we will walk together **away from** the suffering or together **with Christ into** the suffering.

“Holy Week” is the culmination of our Lenten pilgrimage. We have left the solitude of a wilderness journey and arrived in town to the joys of a parade. Yet, the oppressors and tyrants are watching us. Will we live into hope of regime change—the coming kingdom of God—even if we must die in the reigning terror of this present darkness?

Practicing the walk to the cross and within the grief and shock of death, we learn and develop the spiritual memory muscles necessary to live in a world that does not know and refuses to respond to the good news of resurrection.

Don't rush past Holy Saturday. Go with God, even to death, death on the cross, and to the grave, even the darkness of unspeakable grief.

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world...but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

1 Cor 1: 20b-25 (excerpted)

["IMG_2121F Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo. 1727-1804. Venice. Golgotha. vers 1755. Rotterdam"](#) by [jean louis mazieres](#) is marked with [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

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March 31, 2022

Dear Friends:

"Outdo one another in showing honor." Romans 12: 10

What does honoring another mean to you?

God's word invites us to think on this, act on this, be this kind of Christian.

Will you...?



When have you...?

When have you received this can of treatment..?

When has being "honored," made you want to "outdo" them, to reciprocate?

"Outdo one another in showing honor."

Peace,

Beverly

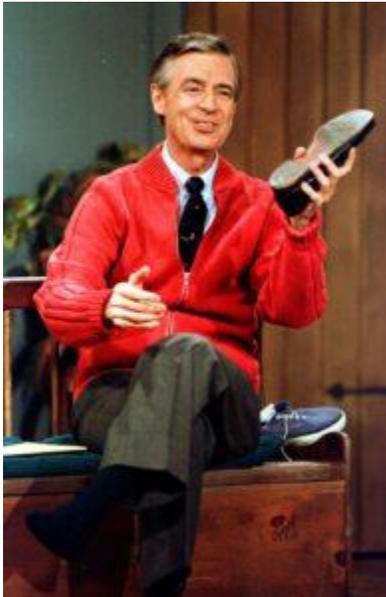
Image: "[Footwashing](#)" by [crunklygill](#) is marked with [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

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March 24, 2022

Neighbors:

WEAR YOUR FAVORITE SWEATER SUNDAY and shoes you love --



This Sunday is Mister Rogers Day. This Presbyterian minister, whose birthday was March 20, made a positive impact in the lives of so many of us and our neighbors, it is a joy to take a moment to honor his legacy. We will do so by sharing some of his words as part of our understanding of the gospel.

The fifth Great End of the Church is the Promotion of Social Righteousness.

Whether Mister Rogers was helping us understand the complexity of caring for creation at the zoo, or cooling off in a wading pool with his African American neighbor, his ministry was focused the unity of all God’s children. He taught us that loving each other, “just the way you are,” was the foundation of neighborliness. Ultimately it is the foundation of peace and justice.

Let us come together to celebrate this modern day prophet who proclaimed the gospel in a wonderfully creative and simple way—by sharing his call from God in song, curiosity, and love for others.

“We all have different gifts, so we all have different ways of saying to the world who we are.”

-- Life’s Journeys According to Mister Rogers Things to Remember Along the Way, Fred Rogers, 2005

photos: "[15 reasons Mr. Rogers was best neighbor ever - CNN.com](#)" by [bbaltimore](#) is marked with [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

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March 17, 2022

Happy St. Patrick's Day, Beloved:

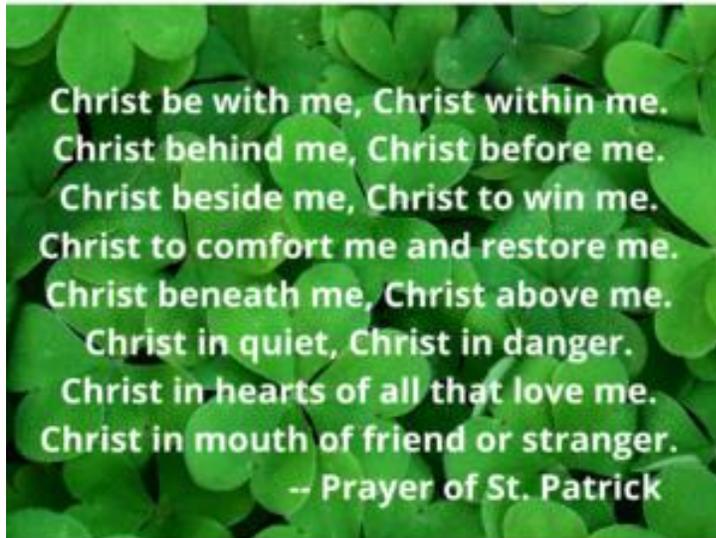
Truth. This is the topic for Sunday’s lesson. There are so many pressing needs to discuss that relate to this topic. All are relevant and crucial dialogues worth having. Today I am thinking of our siblings who are regularly confronted with the process of naming themselves.

Have you ever been asked, “what is your truth?” If so, it most likely was a thought experiment, a philosophical exercise. For a significant part of our population, there is often a sacred unspoken answer. I received an email celebrating the fact that the “Don’t Say Gay,” bill in Georgia failed to obtain a vote on the crossover day. At one point in this legislative session some 100 bills were being considered around the country regarding the rights of people who identify as LGBTIA+.

Notice the plus symbol. Even in the most inclusive acronym we have, there are people for whom their truth, their living, breathing selves are unidentified. Parents are being

reported as child abusers in Texas for loving and serving the needs of their transgender children. Thankfully, [a judge has paused](#) the investigations.

Imagine a first grader shining in the spotlight of that routine called "Show and Tell." During their presentation, they comment that what was brought to class was a gift from their grandmas. Imagine that child receiving a negative response from those around them. Suddenly, there's an awareness that their family is not normal and is s



omewhat less than others.

When Jesus proclaims that what is hidden will be revealed, and

"The truth will make you free,"

he is reminding all of us that we are beloved children of God meant to live in the light of Christ.

I look forward to the day when no one has to, "come out," because all people simply live their truth without fear for their well-being much less their very existence, when no child will be left questioning themselves or their families about love and loving relationships.

Let us live in such a way as siblings of Jesus Christ, that all people know they are welcome, celebrated, and safe in our presence.

Peace,

Beverly

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March 10, 2022

Beloved:

Our God is ***slow to anger, full of mercy, and abounding in steadfast love***. This phrase is one of the most common biblical descriptors of God. It is the character of Jesus Christ manifest in his life of healing, and hope. These are the verbs, the actions, of those who display the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against such things.

War does not inspire any of this. We are angry, ready to cast mercy aside in favor of punishment, and the idea of loving our neighbor leads us to conclude we must hate the enemy and the enemy must be destroyed. These are human emotions and our humanity is to be acknowledged with forthright honesty.



Here's the strange part. We are not called to confession simply to say, "see how human we are—we are mad and have a right to be so!" As followers of Christ, we confess our current state in contrast to the transformative work of Holy Spirit in us, reforming us into our true humanity.

We confess because of sin's power to turn our fallen humanity into a weapon we use on God's other children. We confess because we desire a different solution to enmity. We confess because we trust God is the source of peace. We confess so that we may begin to imagine alternatives to war.

We confess that we may become more loving. We confess that might follow the way of the cross.

By striving to let my old self die, Christ comes to renew, revive, resurrect my true humanity, the child of God I am meant to be. As Paul points out in Gal 2: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me—the one who loves me---and loves you, and gave his own life that we might have ours abundantly.

As we pray for peace, as we cry for the suffering, as we restlessly sleep trying to dull our fear, let us lean into the way of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Let us lean into the way of the cross.

Photo by [Priscilla Du Preez](#) on Unsplash

Rest in the peace of Christ, Beloved,

Rev Bev

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March 3, 2022

Why must Christians use words that no one else uses or understands? How do we spread the good news of Christ when our language is obscure? With the world in such turmoil, okay, with the world at war, we need simple, straightforward ways to talk about our faith.

“Lent” means lengthening as in more daylight. Also known as spring. (Note the exclusionary posture this word creates by ignoring the global south, which happens to be where the church of Christ is growing exponentially.) With our siblings around the world, the weeks preceding our Easter celebration are a season of devotion to renewal.

Like a lot of people, we engage in a little spring cleaning of our spiritual lives. When Christians join together to make confession and to enter a holy lenten fast, we are getting in shape for the work of ministry. We first look in the closet and the corners for cobwebs and things we no longer need. We continue by looking in the mirror and considering a new look. We may try on new clothes and discover a need for a new regimen of fitness.

Let the words of confession during this season initiate “ministry training,” for the work of reconciliation, within one’s self, with God, and with others.



I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ...Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence,

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Philippians 1: 6,

2: 6-15

"Ash Wednesday" by [Lawrence OP](#) is marked with [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

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February 17, 2022

Dear Friends:



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Photo by Zoe Schaeffer on Unsplash[/caption]

Seven Signs of Life – A weekly Lenten experience series that is NSFW.

Now that I've got your attention, let's talk about Nurturing Seeds of Faith and Works. How are you doing this for yourself—nurturing yourself that is?

What is the soil like where you are planting seeds of faith? Is it old and worn, dusty and tradition? Or is it full of nutrients, earthworms and organic matter?

What kind of water are you drinking? Is it full of poisonous matter or filtered, enriched, and life-giving?

What fertilizer gets dumped into your heart and mind? Is it just a load of manure or a cultivated pile of healthy bacteria?

And what are you working on so hard? Does it leave you exhausted or exhilarated?

You have two opportunities on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during Lent to join others in an open and honest exchange as we explore the vital signs of healthy spiritual growth. Because being Christ's faithful disciple is more than a Sunday gig—it's daily life.

Real. And vital. Come till the soil of your life, allow the River of Life to nourish you, and the Breath of God to fill you with all good things.

Please join us on Tuesdays at noon for L@L (Lessons at Lunch)—online at:
<https://tinyurl.com/SAPClectionarylunch>

Or Wednesdays for B&B (Brews and Bibles—pairing great flavors with great texts). Location to TBA

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February 11, 2022

Dear Friends:

“If you only had 3 months to live...” We have faced this question squarely during covid's worst. Some of us began baking. Others left jobs that were not fulfilling. Some moved out of family homes to be nearer the children and grandchildren. Whatever you did differently in the last two years, you were asking yourself, “is this the way I want live my last days on earth if this ugly disease comes for me?”

When “going to church,” was instantly transformed into “watching worship,” the experience of God through the institutional church shifted permanently for our lifetime. While church regulars had been lamenting the declining attendance in organized religious celebrations, they now discovered new life on Sunday mornings that had nothing to do with worshipping as a religious community.

A large portion of the population who engaged in church life as it was in 2019 will never return or even go in searc



**Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”
Isaiah 43: 18-19**

h of “church” again. We can grieve it, fight it, lament over it. But we must also let them go with our blessing. Because:

This is good news.

Being uprooted forces to find the ground of our being. Knocked off-center, we navigate the maze until we discover a path into the heart of the matter. Unavoidable change unmoors us from the fear of change that kept us tied to the past.

Isaiah’s people were aliens, living in a strange land, far from home.

Everything that gave them assurance had been ripped from under their feet. Nothing was the same. Except this promise of God. When they returned to their homeland, they rebuilt their temple and their lives. A period of revival gave way to the return to what was. They rejected what had become. They lost the opportunity to launch into the deep for a new and abundant catch (Luke 5: 1-11).

As we return to our familiar “land,” let us be wary of the trap of adopting the old as if it is new life. Let us not miss the chance to be re-created in Christ – re-incarnated, if you will, personally and as a church.

To carry on this conversation, you may come to the Lectionary Lunchmeet on Tuesdays at noon or the Brews & Bibles on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Both are currently [online](#).

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February 3, 2022

Dear Friends:

We are returning to in-person and online worship this Sunday.

For those who are cheering, yay! For those who are wrinkling their brow, we know, we get it. There is still a lot to be concerned about.

Not the least of which is—will I be forgotten if I am not physically present? The short answer is no. The long answer is no, because we are in the process of discerning how to create new opportunities for meaningful relationships and exploration of one’s beliefs and loyalties, both IRL and VR. IRL = In Real Life, which I think misses the point that VR--Virtual Reality--is real life. SAPC will be making sure that both avenues of ministry and mission are meaningful engagements with God and each other. New life is coming throughout the year.

This week that begins with a confirmation class of young people. They will be exploring what it means to say, “I follow Jesus.” We will meet in person (F2F), and also do some virtual work. One of the things that is life-changing for younger disciples is the older ones, the adults who share their faith journey with them.

I still remember my church-school teacher sitting with me in “big church,” when my parents dropped me off in the preschool room.

I still remember a 2nd grade teacher (public school) and her comments about bible reading (yes, they can *still* discuss this, if a kid is asking).

I still remember the Sunday a pastor read about the followers who tore the roof off the church to get their friend inside to see Jesus.

Wouldn’t it be cool to be that kind of church, one where people will do anything to participate, virtually or in-person?

In fact, SAPC is so close to that level, I can feel it. Joining the confirmation class to support the faith journey of your children is one way you can feel it. Please speak to Jessica or me about participating as a prayer partner, mentor, or chaperone.

The requirements are:

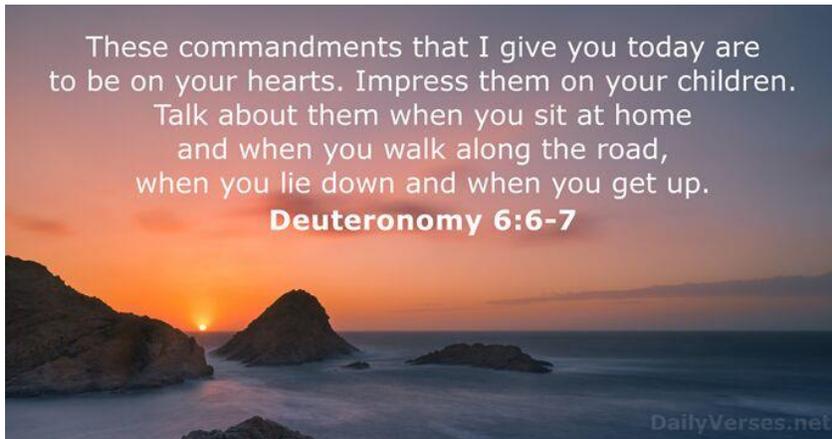
PP—commit to praying regularly now through Pentecost for a particular person. We will regularly ask them what they want us to pray about and you will receive that info. In addition, you may email or text, with parent’s permission with them for occasional 1-1 prayer discussions.

Mentors—meet on Sundays, after worship, to participate in the group learning with the class. This class will begin each week at about 11:30 a.m. and end no later than 12:30 p.m. Again, with

parent’s permission, there may be other opportunities for 1-1 conversations and meetings. (In addition, anyone meeting outside of the church scheduled times will be required to involve two unrelated adults approved by the CYM committee per our safe children policies.)

Chaperone—meet on Sundays to ensure that two unrelated adults are always present with the kids. You can sign-up for 1 or 12 Sundays. Additionally, if we take a field trip and mentors cannot attend, we may have an opportunity for chaperones to join in mission.

I am excited to lead this program with Jessica and all of you who feel called to serve, and especially with our youth!



See you Sunday,
Beverly

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January 27, 2022

Dear Friends:

This month we are celebrating African-American History. I saw a t-shirt that emphasized this history is not the history of slavery only. We are all aware of the debates about how to teach history to our students. The rhetoric around this has become vitriolic—for good reason.

Everyone is engulfed in what we church people call sin, for which the outcome is death. Stay with me here. Sin is the universal power that creates human fear. While there are a lot of little fears of the monsters under the bed, the universal human fear is that our lives do not matter. If that were not true, would we have seen the backlash of “All lives matter,” to the exhortation that “Black lives matter?” Are we invisible? When we are gone, dead, and buried, will the world even notice? Will any “history book,” remember us in any way?

It’s why we take so many photos, I think. We are creating a history of joy and fulfilment to leave behind.

The idea of teaching history through the lens of the whole truth threatens the white “photo album” of success through good, hard work. The idea of teaching history without the lens of Black achievement inclusive of the full and painful narrative of enslavement threatens the Black “photo album” of “Still I Rise.”^[1] Both threats are the work of sin and the evidence of evil.

Nevertheless, one choice demonstrates a faith built on hope and love. The other is founded on despair and fear.



By definition, we, the church, are a redeemed people, full of hope, unafraid of our truth because Jesus! Christ has seen us, all of us, and forgiven us for the things we have done, and what we failed to do, what was said, and what we failed to speak. Therefore, we are free, not to ignore those actions, to point them out in order to give God the glory for our

acquittal and reconciliation.

Christians are called to be at the forefront of confession because it is the joyful and grateful response to the good news of Jesus Christ. This is a contrast to typical understandings that forgiveness is the result of confession. In February, as we learn about our African American Presbyterian history, we will be invited to confess the sin of white supremacy, not for the purposes of embarrassment or shaming. Solely for the purpose of giving thanks to God.

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January 20, 2022

Dear Friends:

This week we began a spiritual gifts discovery process. You can join in anytime. We are hoping to discern the superpowers of St. Andrew Presbyterians and thus the way we are equipped to do the work of Christ by the gifting of Holy Spirit.

Sunday we considered the very first superhero of the comic book era: The Phantom.

Two primary aspects need to be noted. The Phantom was an ordinary guy who discovered a passion and extraordinary gift for seeking justice and accountability to defeat crime. He also did so out of a traumatic situation and his work was due to a need for vengeance.

Christians seek justice, with a passion for peace and reconciliation. We operate from a mode of discipling so that the punishment associated with vengeance becomes rehabilitation and reunion associated with mercy, compassion, and community. We seek to discover, or uncover, the gifts of the child of God in each other, even our enemies.

This week, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we will pick up with Part 2: All for One & One for All. The Corinthians were a church in disarray regarding their sense of unity because they realized they were so different from one another. Let's learn how our gifts unite us with a look at the teams of superheroes, including the Paw Patrol!

Text: 1 Cor 12: 12-31a

Then on Jan. 30, we will talk about Bruno! The sermon will pick up on how using our gifts will sometimes feel threatening to those who don't understand. Part 3: The Gospel According to "Encanto." Texts: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4: 21-30

#cusundayonline #spiritualgifts

Peace,

Rev Bev

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January 6, 2022

Dear Friends:

Today is January 6. Epiphany. The day the Messiah was revealed to the Gentiles, and who are known popularly today as "the three kings."

This twelfth day of Christmas reminds us that God provides a guiding light even when we don't know we need it. The shepherds were told to find the child who would save them. The wise men, kings, were told to follow the star to the child who would rule in righteousness. Even Herod was made aware of the presence of a holy newborn who would be God's anointed. When we wonder

how we will know what to do, we begin with trusting that God will provide the light we need to find Christ.

To find Christ.

This is the point of God's guiding light: to direct our attention, our footsteps, our worship, our hope, our allegiance to Jesus Christ, and our actions point to the righteousness of God, who is Christ. Our epiphany, from God helps us today to see the work of Holy Spirit bringing order in chaos.

I'm guessing you haven't thought a lot about Epiphany with the news discussing the other January 6. In all you hear and see about the events of 1/6/2021 at the US Capitol, do you see any light that shines on Christ?

I do. The workers who secured the electors' votes displayed wisdom and calm in a moment of terror. This is a point of light guiding people to the side of goodness. Eugene Goodman, who was like a star leading the mob *away* from their targets, was the iconic representative of all who tried to maintain maximum safety and minimal loss of life. The elected officials who survived and returned to do their work from a basis of truth and provable facts, refusing to be intimidated by fear for their lives, were points of light that speak of the rule of law and the ethical imperative that binds this nation's peaceful transfer of power. All these actions, and many more on site and in our communities, were done to bring order in the midst of chaos. These were the actions of shepherds and wise ones following the light.

On the other hand, the mob of people who broke in, shouted insults, threatened lives, damaged property, wreaked havoc and caused people to hide in fear were creators of chaos, literally, disturbers of peace. Theirs was not righteous behavior. This was the behavior of Herod who tried to use the light to destroy God's beloved.

Jesus does not call us to kill, maim, or threaten the lives and livelihood of others. The gathering and march did not constitute sin but provided the field of play for evil's darkness to erupt. It seems so obvious that it is shocking to me on this anniversary that we must still name such endangerment as anti-Christian. I do not say this lightly.

Christians must hold our siblings accountable for choosing to believe in lies and follow the darkness. We must name the events of Jan. 6, 2021 as a denunciation to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must invite the people back into the fold and welcome them, forgiven and redeemed, when they return.

We must be the church. The marks of the church are the "pure" preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of ecclesial discipline. These reformed marks reach back centuries and call us to return to our roots. If Christians believe that what occurred on Jan. 6 was in any way faithful to the gospel, the church bears responsibility for failing to be the true church. We, the church, must repent of our failure to disciple a spiritually mature faith that does justice, loves mercifully, and walks humbly with our God. Let us pray that God will provide

St. Andrew, for one, a bright shining light guiding us to a new level of faithfully churching one another. May we seek and find Christ together.

Peace be with you.

Rev Bev

For references, Mt 2: 1-12 and the PCUSA Book of Confessions and Book of Order describe aspects of the marks of the church and the occasion of our holiday, Epiphany.

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December 30, 2021

It's my birthday!

And as always, I am thinking about the new year, and the New Year.

Many of us consider that birthdays and New Years suggest (or demand) a chance to do a new thing for ourselves. Others may lower their heads thinking it will be just another year of the same ol'-same ol'. And everything in between. You already know habits are hard to change; the status quo is hard to disrupt. The challenge is deciding what is worth the effort.

An intentional interim time in the life of a church asks us to decide what changes are worth the effort. We will begin to explore whether and how to overcome our status quo in order to gain a deeper and more intimate relationship with God, each other, and our purpose in our community.

We will examine our "habits," aka, "we've always done it this way." The mere fact that we will put things on the table to look at them will create some change. This may be uncomfortable. Growing pains usually are. Just as Jesus, following his trip to the Temple at 12, is said to have grown in stature and wisdom and favor, we can choose a path that will increase our wellbeing.

This may feel like a monumental task right now with the upheaval in our personal lives due to the political crises, the pandemic persistence, and economic uncertainty. In my first quarter here among you I have heard one consistent ask: more engagement with one another around meaningful spiritual opportunities. In short, create opportunities for relationships of meaning.

It is in that experience that change actually transpires. As relates to God's nature, this is called process theology. The concept that God is unchanging in goodness, and affected by what happens in creation, including in you and me, suggests that relationships matter. If God engages us for the purpose of persuading us to peace and justice (aspects of God's goodness), how much more so are we called to engage each other for the same?

As the plan for revisioning calls for your presence at town hall meetings, or small groups, or individual reflections, I ask that you commit to engaging. Your presence will grow relationships. Your response will foster change. Your proposals will inspire new understanding. It's up to you.

I pray that St. Andrew's future is worth the effort from you and look forward to the next steps we are beginning.

Happy new year!

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Rev 21: 5