



PULPIT

PROJECT

Volume 1 | Fall 2024

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DESIGN TEAM

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In August 2024, two dozen clergy from the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church gathered at the Orlando Science Center. They were invited to pilot a new, untested workshop called “The Pulpit Project.”

For three days, guided by a spirit of creativity and collaboration, these preachers worked together to produce a collection sermon series as a gift to the Church.

Too often, we do this work alone. But we found that when you fill a room with people who are committed to the Gospel, who take the responsibility of preaching seriously, and who are willing to give and receive feedback, you not only leave with greater quantity but quality as well.

This document is the product of their work and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration.

Some of these series are more fully-formed, and some are more conceptual. All of them are meant to be jumping-off points that you can adapt for your context. In that way, you join us in the creative collaboration.

It is our prayer that this collection is the first of many to come!

“I have crafted sermon series before, but to be part of a collective took the work and experience to a different level. What a witness to see how the Holy Spirit moved in our midst to help us craft meaningful, thought-provoking series through lenses different from our own that will challenge our faith and leave us wrestling with scripture.” – Juana Jordan, Pulpit Project participant

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ONLY MURDERS IN THE BIBLE

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Lent/Easter

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Playing off the title of the TV show “Only Murders in the Building,” this series explores violence in the Bible. What do we do with stories that involve violence, especially when perpetrated by the “good guys”?

How does Jesus push us to look at violence in our hearts through the Sermon on the Mount, and how does the Bible speak to violence in culture?

It concludes with a look at the violence of the cross, making it an potential series for the season of Lent.

FIRST SERMON

Violence in the Bible

Explore stories from the lives of biblical characters like Moses, David, and Paul.

God is defined by forgiveness and grace. God can create redemption in your story.

SECOND SERMON

Violence of the Heart

Selections from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

This sermon reflects on how we may not commit murder with our actions, but we have murder in our hearts. We can even be murderous with our words. Let God cleanse not only how we choose to act but also what comes into our hearts and minds.

THIRD SERMON

Violence in our Culture

John 20:19-23.

Can violence create redemption? Why is our culture so addicted to violence evidenced by the amount of TV shows and podcasts that focus on solving crime? What effect do movies like the Avengers and sports like football

have on our attitudes about violence?

Both consciously and subconsciously, we are a culture focused on violence. How do we replace a culture of violence with a culture of peace?

FOURTH SERMON

Violence of the Cross.

Palm Sunday texts.

The cross is God’s answer to the violence of this world.

RESOURCES

The works of Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr.

Lead creator: Ryan DeLaune

BIBLE STORIES FOR BEGINNERS

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Entry Point

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This series takes stories commonly taught to children in Sunday school and compares them to the actual biblical texts. This is a great entry point for people with little to no biblical literacy or foundation.

Each sermon asks: what lessons are contained in these stories for children, adults, and the church today?

This series also provides the opportunity to encourage hearers to go home and read the stories for themselves, diving deeper into the Scripture and what God might be saying today.

FIRST SERMON

Creation Stories

Genesis 1:31, 2:15-18, 3:20-24

God, the creator in the very beginning, is not finished creating. Even when things go awry, God moves closer to create something new and beautiful. We live in the “Not Yet”—the time and space between what God has done and the fullness of the new creation in what God will do. We are unfinished and even so, there is beauty in the “unfinished”.

Sermon illustration: I used a painting of an old country church by my sister that I think is beautiful, and yet she, as the artist, claims the picture is unfinished. I still hang it on the wall because it is a reminder that we are beautiful creations, God is still at work, and we’re invited to be part of it.

SECOND SERMON

Noah’s Ark

Genesis 9:8-17

God is a promise maker, and we can trust in God. Even after the flood, God is present. Despite all of the evil, injustice, and brokenness in the world, God is moving closer to us.

We can trust in the God who wants to be with us so much that God both came in Christ and sent the Holy Spirit. What is our response?

Referencing John Wesley’s simple rules, and reminding us of our identity as God’s good creation from last week, this sermon helps us turn toward God, accept forgiveness, and claim our place in the people of God.

This sermon provides the opportunity to address texts of terror and/or theodicy.

THIRD SERMON

Abraham and Sarah

Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6, 17:1-8, 21:1-17

God is the faithful covenant maker, and that is still true today. Even in the midst of Abraham’s “messy, soap opera” life with all its twists and turns, he claimed on his deathbed that it was good and full life. In each situation, he turned toward God and found that God was there every step of the way. This became the basis of the covenant God made with God’s people and still keeps today.

This sermon calls us to be faithful in love as God has been for us, and to remember that a full life contains all things—the good, bad and

ugly. Even so, God is there.

FOURTH SERMON

Joe's Coat of Many Colors

Genesis 37:1-11

The story of Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors gives us an example of God working things for good.

-God saved people from famine through Joseph, who used his gifts to convince Pharaoh to store up the food.

-God used Joseph to care for and save his family, who would become the ancestors of the tribes of Israel.

-God brought Joseph and his brothers back together, and Joseph was able to forgive his siblings and reconcile with them.

-God created a fresh start for this family, allowing them to live into the command to be fruitful and multiply so that the nation of Israel would become populated with many people.

This sermon reinforces that our lives can become something we could never have dreamed because God is with us, inviting us to co-create alongside. God wants good

things for us because God is good, and God loves us!

FIFTH SERMON

Daniel and the Lion's Den

Daniel 6:16-28

Daniel put God in the proper place in his life even in the face of death. He recognized God as creator, ruler, and preserver of all things— infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love.

God delivered Daniel because God rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of his children.

God did it for Daniel. God can do it for us... The message of this ancient story told to God's people in the past is true for the people of God today. That's why it's so powerful to share stories of deliverance and God working in our lives. The gift of the Church is that we don't have to be in the lion's den alone. We have each other.

SIXTH SERMON

Jonah and the Whale

Jonah 1

This story is included in most of the children's Bibles and is featured prominently in Sunday school lessons and children's sermons.

What could this old story about an epic adventure and a big fish still teach us today? While scholars can't agree on what genre of writing Jonah falls into, it is clear that this is less a story that has to be scientifically and factually true and is more of a legend, a folktale, an allegory, or a parable. It asks us to ponder what it means to be called by God, what happens if we run from that calling, and ultimately what happens when we finally answer the call.

Lead creator: Emily Edwards Shughart

GOOD GRIEF: EATING OUR SPIRITUAL VEGETABLES

SERIES TYPE

Seeker Sensitive, Topical, Book of the Bible

SERIES DESCRIPTION

No one likes to talk about it, no one likes to go through it, and we often feel the most alone in the midst of it. I'm talking about grief, and during this series we'll look at the book of Lamentations to discover how to have good grief: grief with God by our side.

FIRST SERMON

Remembrance

Psalm 89:46–52, Lamentations 1:1–3, 4:1–5

Summary: Remembering what we lost can be painful, but it is a pain we must express if we are to let God truly redeem it.

1. What is grief? Grief is simply a response to loss, any loss. Stages are not linear. Grief is incompatible with shame, but we often try to silence it in ourselves and others.

2. Responding to grief: Judah as a case study. Lament, a passionate expression of grief; or sorrow, which is emotional, senseless, painful. Much of the Bible reads like a stereotypical country song—there's a LOT of lament (Ps. 89). History of divided Kingdoms: Assyria conquers the north, Judah is now gone. Playing this song backwards won't bring everything back!

3. Standing in the Sorrow: inviting grief inside. Do not manage grief chemically without also processing it psychologically with others. Talk about it, even if people think you're crazy. Find a trusted friend and reach an agreement to let you let it out once in a while. Talk about it with God—this is

prayer—or yourself—this is talk therapy, and it is helpful! Write your grief down. As you invite grief inside and release it, you begin to process the emotions and turn the pain into remembrance.

Challenge: Talk. Don't buy into believing grief is shameful.

Illustration: COVID grief, passing of loved ones

SECOND SERMON

Convicting Grace

Lamentations 3:16–33

Summary: In order to heal, we must become convicted of our need of God in order to live the incomplete life that remains.

1. **Illustration:** Wally Funk & grief. She finally went to space...can you imagine what could have been? Celebration, but also grief. There are many times in life that involve both, and that is normal.

2. Listen for the grief stages in Lamentations 3:16–33. God hurts when we do. In the end, our hope still lies in God's grace and favor. As long as we are convicted in this fact, we can begin the healing process.

3. Loss means life will never be the same, and it will always feel/be incomplete. Only God can fill the void of what's missing and keep the incomplete us going.

THIRD SERMON

From Lament to Story: Memorializing

Lamentations 5:1-3,15-22

Summary: In memorializing our grief, we are creating touchstones to help us continue this grief permanently, not end it in victory.

1. Illustration: Tombstones from my family plot in Marianna, FL. 1850 Yellow Fever epidemic led to death of wife, infant son, and toddler daughter. Why do we create memorials? We create memorials to seek restoration and a new identity. Lam. 5:18: creating Mt. Zion as a memorial to their lost identity. We shouldn't rush to this step, but make sure we process through events.

2. As they meditated on their memorial, we read the vision of the desolate Mt. Zion starting in v. 19. GOD reigns forever. RESTORE us to yourself. RENEW our days as of old. UNLESS it's really over this time. They realize that connection, not the

building and memorial, was what they really needed this time. They needed a new identity in light of their loss to find purpose again. We move through loss, not from it.

3. Challenge: How will you create a memorial to be a touchstone to remember your loss and create a new identity for yourself with God in a new way?

Lead Creator: Robert Roseberry

A PROPHETIC IMAGINATION

SERIES TYPE

Lectionary, Discipleship

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Who are our modern-day prophets? How are we applying the timeless truths of the prophets to the events of our lives?

FIRST SERMON

Receive the Holy Spirit

Acts 8:14–17

Is there more to how we act and live and work than just what we can see? What does it mean for us to live by the Spirit?

SECOND SERMON

New Wine

Isaiah 62:1–5, John 2:1–11

Jesus' first miracle shows that life in him can give us a life beyond what we could put together for ourselves.

THIRD SERMON

Drink Sweet Wine

Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10; Luke 4:14–21

God wants God's people to experience release and freedom as well as joy and pleasure. What are the ways that we experience God's blessing, while sharing it with others?

FOURTH SERMON

A Prophet to the Nations

Jeremiah 1:4–10, Luke 4:21–30

When we open our imaginations to the Holy Spirit, we find that it takes us away from the worldly expectations. When we are in a community of people who are in the Spirit, we experience the joy together. But for those who still have worldly expectations, this can upset their perspective and cause division.

FIFTH SERMON

Purified

Malachi 3:1–4, Luke 2:22–40

We often think of purity as what we keep refrain from doing, but God's sanctifying grace purifies us through all that we experience in our lives.

SIXTH SERMON

The Courage to Go Deep

Isaiah 6:1–8, (9–13); Luke 5:1–11

We often frolic in meadows of mediocrity, fearing what would happen if we dove deeper in our faith.



SEVENTH SERMON

Bless Your Heart

Jeremiah 17:5–10, Luke 6:17–26

Our hearts are not evil, but can be overtaken by evil parts. Recognizing the divine image in ourselves and others is a way to heal and bless our hearts as well as the hearts of others.

EIGHTH SERMON

A Good Measure

Genesis 45:3–11, 15; Luke 6:27–38

Forgiving others is a way for us to experience joy and abundance.

Lead Creator: Heather Harding

HOLY FEAST: UNPACKING THE COMMUNION LITURGY

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This series is meant to focus on breaking down our United Methodist communion liturgy. Many people are committed to saying the traditional words, but they aren't often connected to the meaning behind them. The goal is to introduce congregants to the pattern of the liturgy, and compare it to the pattern of a meal: first we wash our hands, we bless the food, we break bread together, we are renewed by stories and laughter, and we go out building relationships with new people who belong at the table.

FIRST SERMON

Wash Your Hands

Genesis 3:1-13

Communion Liturgy: INVITATION, CONFESSION, AND PARDON, p7-8 in the UMH.

Our liturgy begins with an invitation, confession, and pardon. The comparison is made to being asked to wash up before you come to the table. My initial preaching of this was to college-aged young adults, many who struggle with messages of shame. So the emphasis is placed on confession, not as an act of shame, but as a necessity for open, vulnerable and deep relationship.

SECOND SERMON

God is Great, God is Good

Exodus 14:10-14, 21-22

Communion Liturgy: THE GREAT THANKSGIVING (from "The lord be with you" through "Hosanna in the highest"), p9 in the UMH.

Our Great Thanksgiving tells the story of God's faithfulness from the beginning. It

acknowledges who we are. As we gather at the table, we often say a blessing. This is an opportunity to give thanks to God and acknowledge who God is. It might even be interesting to pair it with the sing-song prayer "God is great, God is good." Both are captured in our passage. Exodus is central to us understanding God's character. God is great and powerful, able to part the Red Sea. And God is good, hearing the cries of God's people, caring for their needs on the journey. There's a beautiful paradox of inaccessible power with accessible, gentle love.

THIRD SERMON

Great Grandmother's Cornbread (make this title personal if you have a family recipe)

Luke 22:14-23

Communion Liturgy: THE GREAT THANKSGIVING (from "Holy are you" through "Christ will come again"), p9-10 in the UMH.

The focus of this portion of the liturgy is around Jesus' presence at the table. This feels like it could be its own sermon series, so to focus the sermon, I am focusing on our

theological understanding of Anamnesis. This is how we understand Jesus' real presence at the table. The primary way to connect this concept is with family recipes. Eating my great grandmother's cornbread can transport me to the thanksgiving table in her small home in Glynlia in 1995 with the green shag carpet and her olive green appliances, etc. But I am not just at that table, I am at the meal I am currently at. I have been formed by so much then and since. Similarly we aren't just at the Upper Room table, we are also connected to Jesus' saving acts that are still at work in the world today. Jesus' real presence and real sacrifice persists, so that in the bread we are feasting on God's love for us.

FOURTH SERMON

Lingering at the Table

Romans 12:1-8

Communion Liturgy: THE GREAT THANKSGIVING (from "Pour out your Holy Spirit" through "now and forever. Amen."), p10 in the UMH.

In those really delightful, restoring long meals, I often find myself sitting at the table

for hours, with the dirty plates in front of me as I listen and share stories. I am renewed in this moment with the laughter that comes both from remembering who I have been (and am thankful that I have grown since then) and who I can be. In the invocation, when we are asking for the Spirit to be poured out, we might do some similar lingering around the table as we remember the story of Jesus' sacrifice, and we are prompted to be living sacrifices. Here we can also capture the beauty of the diverse table, that as we experience the Spirit enlivening us and our gifts, we are thankful that many are with us, who have different gifts.

FIFTH SERMON

Until Next Time

Acts 1:6-11

Communion Liturgy: The Prayer after Receiving, p11 in the UMH.

The energy is focused around our need to come back to the table. No meal in this life will be so satisfactory that we won't find ourselves hungry again. But more than that, we want to focus not just on our need to return to the table, but we work to make

the table look like the heavenly feast. This means we need to invite people to the table. With energy renewed in this feast, might we evangelize and invite more to come to the feast. There is room for many, many more.

Lead creator: Haley Eccles

DO NO HAM: MISREAD TEXTS IN THE BIBLE

SERIES TYPE

Seeker Sensitive, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This series tackles passages of the Bible that are often misread or misinterpreted. Some unhelpful readings are due to preconceived notions we have about the Bible. Similarly, some of these stories are shocking and leave us trying to reconcile them with the character of God. Other passages feature stories that pose a challenge to translate across time/language/culture.

FIRST SERMON

Abraham and Sara: Are you my sister?

- What do we do with Bible greats that do odd things?
- Value of Sara's body
- Who gets to matter?

SECOND SERMON

Jephtha's Vow: God didn't ask for that

- Sanctity of life
- Someone is offered up and not viewed as a full person
- Rigidity in faith

THIRD SERMON

Ananias and Saphira: The sin is the pride (not the gift)

- Taking the Lord's name in vain
- Things we say we are doing "for God."
- Pride of holiness

FOURTH SERMON

Creation Narratives: True vs. Factual

- The intent isn't to describe post-enlightenment science

- Rather, how can we discover God's foundational wisdom through the poetry and storytelling of Genesis 1-3?

FIFTH SERMON

Oppressive Texts: Slaves/women/children

- Naming the challenge of applying passages across time/culture/language
- Being clear that the Church has been wrong and changed our minds

SIXTH SERMON

Joshua and Genocide

- Are we to read conquest texts as our own invitation to conquer?
- What do we do with stories that seem counter to our understanding of God's character?

Lead creator: Meghan Killingsworth

THIS IS US

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

4-week sermon series on who we are as Christians, Wesleyans, United Methodists, and St. Luker's (the term used for those connected to our local church).

FIRST SERMON

This is US: Christians

- What does it mean to claim you are a Christian?
- Focus on the tenants of Christianity.
- Compare and contrast this with modern day evangelicalism/fundamentalism.

SECOND SERMON

This is US: Wesleyans

- What does it mean to claim you are a Wesleyan?
- Wesleyan core theological focus: Grace.

THIRD SERMON

This is US: United Methodists

- What does it mean to claim you are a United Methodist?
- UM core theological focus: Personal holiness and social holiness, inclusion, and service.

FOURTH SERMON

This is US: St. Lukers

- What does it mean to claim you are a St. Luker? (This is a term for those engaged with our local church.)
- Focus on our church's core values.

Lead creator: Jad Denmark

DEAR CHURCH

SERIES TYPE

Leadership/Vision, Discipleship, Lectionary, Lent/Easter

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Just when we may have thought Jesus to be silent in the midst of our day, Revelation reminds us that he is still speaking. The question is are we listening? This series looks at the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 that Jesus has John, who is on the island of Patmos, write to the seven churches in Asia Minor. What may Jesus be saying to us today through these letters?

“If you can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches,” Jesus says at the end of each letter.

FIRST SERMON

The Revelation of Jesus

Revelation 1:1–20, Focus: v. 17c–19

When we think about the Book of Revelation, we often think about this book that speaks about dragons and demons, the mark of the beast, angels, and plagues. There is lots of violence and horror, and the imagery just doesn't seem to make sense. We think about a book that has been described to us as the unfolding of the end of the world events, when it is not so much about the end of the world as it is about the unveiling—this is what “Revelation” means—or the uncovering/disclosing of who Jesus Christ is. It is about his return as King and his establishment of his kingdom.

Explain who the writer John is. Share background on him. Share insight into this being Apocalyptic literature. Give an overview of what the series will be about.

Share basic outline structure for each letter

- A description of Jesus
- A diagnosis of the believers being addressed
- A directive to act

- Jesus will posit a danger to consider
- Declaration of a reward for those who conquer or overcome

What we will see over these next weeks is Jesus giving us a blueprint, and asking us to do an assessment of who we are as individuals and as the Ekklesia (the body of believers).

Scripture to consider complimenting and weaving into the sermon: Luke 12, Isaiah 55:8–11

Revelation speaks to the mystery of God and calls us to look and see and keep our eyes open. We are called to see with eyes of faith. Don't sleep through or turn a blind eye to the present day that Jesus reveals. He says, you are good at reading the weather signs, but you fail at reading the spiritual signs and the spiritual season we are in. The only way we can see the redemptive work of Christ is if we are awake and paying attention.

SECOND SERMON

Ephesus: You've Lost that Loving Feeling

Revelation 2:1-7, Focus: v. 4-5

Opening: Do you remember the first time you fell in love? What was the relationship like? Because first loves are exciting. You are all giddy, touchy feely, you want to be together all the time. You want to do things together. Do things for each other. Carve out time to be together. You want to please the other person. When you are in love, you really begin to live out 1 Corinthians 13: Love is patient, love is kind. It doesn't brag, or is arrogant.. You weren't petty. You overlooked when they did something wrong. You understood more easily and forgave often.

Share background and what we know about the city of Ephesus. The church was faithful, but there were different groups emerging that challenged the Christians and their doctrine. One group followed God's instructions faithfully. Others compromised on things such as food issues—should they eat the food offered to idols? We have to be careful, because false gods have a subtle way of capturing our hearts.

What does the loss of your first love look like? This is a great way to illustrate what Jesus meant and must have been feeling.

Illustration: The song “You've Lost That Loving Feeling”

Fruits of the spirit start to fade. Instead of goodness, kindness, and gentleness, you become indifferent, leading to coldness and harshness. We lose the desire for Christian fellowship. We lose joy in studying the scriptures and growing in godliness and righteousness.

In Klye Idleman's *Gods at War*, he makes these points about idols:

“The problem is we have tried to follow Jesus without leaving something behind.”

“Idols are not defeated by being removed, but by being replaced.”

How do we reclaim that loving feeling? Verse 5 tells us: We remember (do an assessment of where the relationship had been and what has happened) and repent (change our minds, actions and behavior and do again what we did the first time to have that love relationship).

THIRD SERMON

Smyrna: Persecuted, but Prosperous

Revelation 2:8-11, Focus: v. 10

Smyrna was an important, prosperous seaport and center of trade 35 miles north of Ephesus. The presence of a Roman imperial cult and a large Jewish population made life difficult for believers in Smyrna. They were one of the first cities to engage in Emperor worship, erecting a temple to the goddess Roma. Those who did not worship may have ended up imprisoned.

We reflect the theology we espouse. We have to be careful of naming ourselves, because it will reflect our mentality. Smyrna in Greek means “myrrh,” which means bitter. We have to be careful of what we speak over ourselves and about situations in our lives.

We internalize the things we confess everyday, and it becomes lived out behavior.

Use Prayer of Jabez: I Chronicles 4 as illustration of a character who refused to internalize his name's meaning.

If the Smyrna church had allowed its name to limit them, they would not have

gotten the commendation from Jesus that they received. This church, along with Philadelphia, are the only two churches that Jesus did not criticize.

FOURTH SERMON

Pergamum: Constant, but Compromised

Revelation 2:12-17

Open with your own story of when you may have compromised yourself and your values.

Points of note: There are historically seven churches, but they represent the whole Church. They are a picture of the issues we face in every church.

Define rebuke: Not punishment, but protection. God's protection. Rebuke means to "beat back, keep something back." The Lord knows that something is coming that will destroy you, so I have to push it back.

Points of interest: When something has been compromised, it is not able to work at its optimum level or function properly. Think of intelligence agents. They are not seen in the same light as they may have been seen when you are compromised.

Sometimes we are blind to what is truly

dangerous.

Jesus is first seen by John as dressed in white with a two-edged sword coming from his mouth. In this letter, he has the two-edged sword. The phrase "His word is powerful and sharp like a two-edged sword" refers to the judgment of God.

Background for verses 14-15: John considers the Nicolaitans's teaching to be just as much of a threat to the Christians in Pergamum as Balaam was to ancient Israelites.

In the OT, Balaam was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to pronounce a curse upon the Israelites. Every time Balaam tried, God would frustrate his attempts and turn the curses into blessings. In Numbers 24, Balaam tried again to undermine the Israelites. But this time, he used idolatry and immorality to tempt the Israelites away from the one true God. Numbers 25 reveals the people gave in to these temptations, and 24,000 were killed under God's judgment.

When we compromise spiritually, it destroys one's connection with God.

Scriptures that may be helpful: 1 Timothy 4, Titus 1:16

Where do we make compromises? In our ethics, what we watch, what we read, what we allow to entertain us, what we listen to, who we stand with, who we allow to stand for us, what we allow, what we tolerate? We become the influenced, rather than the influencer.

At every level of one's walk with God there will be a call to surrender our attitudes, habits, norms, convictions, opinions, behavior and so on. This is the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

Illustration: As the story is told, a family from New York purchased a large farm out West with the intention of raising cattle. They bought the land, set up the ranch, and started on their dream. Months later, some curious friends visited the family and asked the would-be cattleman if he planned to name the ranch. "I wanted to name it the Bar-J," he responded, "my wife favored Suzy-Q, one son liked the Flying-W, and the other wanted the Lazy-Y. So we're calling it the Bar-J-Suzy-Q-Flying-W-Lazy-Y." "But where are all your cattle?" the friends asked. "None survived the branding."

FIFTH SERMON

Thyatira: Increasing, but Indulging

Revelation 2:18–29, Focus: v. 24–25

Thyatira was the least known of the seven cities. Located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. It was a known trade city with many professional guilds devoted to metalworking, wool production, leather makers, linen makers, tanners, potters, dyers. In fact, a well know dyer that we may remember from Acts 16, Lydia. She had met Paul, Silas and Timothy and was known as a seller of purple dye. She was described as a God-worshipper.

Thyatira, is not the most popular church, but it is doing some great things and some not-so-good things. Pagan practices made it hard to be a Christ follower in this city. Because of the many guilds, there were many guild parties and office parties that included the practices of idolatry and sexual immorality.

It is hard to hold on to your ethical and moral standards in a culture that does not value morality. Maybe share a story on when you or someone else displayed having difficulty holding on to their ethical and

moral standards. It could be a situation you witnessed or heard about.

We don't know if Jezebel is actually her name, but Jesus points to her actions. She is leading the people to compromise instead of endure. Jezebel's name is synonymous with evil. She was a princess of the Phoenicians and was married to Ahab, king of Israel for political reasons. She worshipped Baal and brought her religion with her (hence the reason God forbade marriage with foreigners). She convinced Ahab to build a temple to Baal in the capital of Jerusalem and set out to exterminate the worship of the One, True God. She installed 850 priests of Baal and slaughtered God's prophets.

In the end, she died by being thrown out a window and driven over by a chariot. Her body was left to be ravaged by the dogs, fulfilling Elijah's prophecy (1 Kings 21).

Scripture that may be helpful: Deuteronomy 30:11–14

Jesus reminds us to hold on to what we have.

SIXTH SERMON

Sardis: Acclaimed, but Apathetic

Revelation 3:1–6

Opening: How many of us have a reputation? All of us have a reputation for something. We are known in our circles of influence for something.

Share as an illustration what you have a reputation for. Maybe you are known for your family cookies, or for making those check-in phone calls to the people in your family. You used to go visit the ladies who couldn't make it to church, and now you don't do that anymore? What happened? You used to be known as one of our leading Bible study teachers, but what has happened? You used to be known for your beautiful plants in the yard, but I haven't seen anything growing for while. Are you sure you are okay?

We are all known for something.

Sardis had a reputation for being alive. Thom Rainer, author of *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, did a study like a medical examiner on what has been the cause of church deaths. How do they go from having a reputation of being alive to being dead? He noted 10

causes, and here are few:

1. Slow erosion of the ministries that once had an impact. The facilities began to take on wear and tear that the church can no longer handle.

2. They look at the past as the hero. They get stuck there, refuse to listen and fail to see the reality of the decline and often cling to the ways they have always done it and what makes them comfortable.

3. Refuse to reach out to the community. The church does not go out in the community so that it looks like them, but expect the people to come to them.

4. The budget becomes inwardly focused rather than funding to engage in the Great Commission—go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

5. It becomes a preference-driven church. People want things their way and lose sight of the mission to be the church that equips and goes out.

Question: When the church becomes apathetic and refuses to move with Jesus, then what good is our witness? What does

it say about our witness? When we tire of living in faith, lose our zeal for the Lord, no longer stand for those who are less fortunate, oppressed or with their backs against the wall, or no longer take notice of the neighbor as neighbor, then who are we?

Jesus calls for us to wake up and strengthen whatever we have left and remember what we have received and heard.

SEVENTH SERMON

Philadelphia: Powerless, but Persevering

Revelation 3:7–13, Focus: v. 8b, 10–11

Opening: The city of Philadelphia was established and named by the Pergamum King Eumenes II (pronounced: you means) after his brother who was called Philadelphus. That means, “he who loves his brother”. It was a small city located about 40 miles southeast of Sardis. It was between Smyrna and Sardis, known to be a wealthy, and was a commercially important city with its vineyards and wine production. It had also suffered considerable destruction from an earthquake in the early part of the 1st century. They were situated on a fault line and there was some shaking up in the city.

What do you do when your world is shook up? How do you respond?

Notice Jesus’s introduction: it is slightly different than those others in the past that have pulled from Revelation 1. He regards himself as the one who has the key of David, as in Isaiah 22:22: “And I shall place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open.”

Like the Smyrna church, this church is suffering persecution. They are being ridiculed by Jews in the city that Jesus calls the “Synagogue of Satan”, because they have aligned themselves with the enemy of God by positioning themselves against God and God’s people. It is likely they would have been stirring up trouble, possibly slandering the church’s name, and saying they are not a part of the covenant of God. They were trying to convince them they were outsiders, dirty Gentiles, unfaithful Jews that did not truly belong to God, as well as pretenders and corrupters of the truth.

Scripture that may be helpful: Matthew 23:13

Illustration: In Ireland, from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, they experienced the Troubles, the conflict between Protestants who supported the United Kingdom and the Catholics who wanted to secede and join the Republic of Ireland. It was a conflict rooted in religion, ethnicity and politics. These sectarian divisions that led to violence and trauma. Sectarianism is the attitudes and practices that are evoked as a boundary marker relating to religious differences. Pastors from the Florida Conference had the privilege to hear a few of the Irish Republican and Loyalist narratives. They shared stories of what it was like growing up Catholic and Protestant and how the divisions continue. They shared how they were “managing conflict, rather than solving it.” And how every day of the year marks an anniversary of someone’s death due to the conflict.”

While they may not have much political influence or social capital, Jesus in this text comes to reassure them, “I HAVE THE KEYS! I am the king of this kingdom! I say who is in and who is out!”

Jesus says, “I have set before YOU an OPEN

DOOR... THEY cannot shut it! Behold, I will make THEM come and bow down before YOUR feet, and they will learn that I have loved you!”

Remember what Jesus told the Church of Smyrna: Present feelings of duress can never change future blessings of access. Feelings from present animosity, can never change future blessings of affirmed affection. Present feelings of danger can never change future blessings of delight

They had little power, but they persevered because of another power that was at work in them and alongside them. The death of Jesus gives us power to live today, power to endure!

EIGHTH SERMON

Laodicea: Pleased, but Pitiful

Revelation 3:14–22, Focus: v. 15–16

Opening: Of all the churches, Jesus has nothing positive to say to them. He offers only rebuke. Jesus introduces himself as the “Amen”. In Greek and English, it means “Truth”, which is how he described himself to the church of Philadelphia.

As holy, Jesus is right in character. As true,

he is right in conduct.”

Notice, he doesn’t really praise the church for a lot. He begins to admonish them.

The city of Laodicea was a wealthy commercial and banking city. They were known for producing clothing and carpets from a special kind of wool available in the area. They had a medical school that specialized in healing eye diseases. They were known to have a salve made by this guild of physicians. The city was so self-sufficient that when they suffered considerable damage from an earthquake, they refused help in recovery from the Roman Empire, boasting how they recovered entirely through their own resources and power.

They had water that flowed from the hot springs of nearby Hierapolis. By the time it got to the city, the quality of water wasn’t very good. It was neither hot and medicinal, nor cold, refreshing, and clean.

Define Lukewarm Christianity. Problems that arise such as: self-sufficient, complacent, no sense of need to admit powerlessness and helplessness and turn to

Christ—characteristic of practical atheism. They live as though Christ does not exist because they are so self-sufficient.

Somewhere along the way they began to believe their own hype.

When was a time when you acted as if you were self-sufficient? Acted as if you were God and did not need God?

When Jesus writes the first letter to the Ephesus Church, he tells them that they have lost their first love. And with this last church, we witness that Jesus is indeed not first. As a matter of fact, he is outside of the church, standing and knocking to be let in.

But he engages in love, saying “I correct and discipline those I love.”

Scriptures that may be helpful: Proverbs 3:11–13; Hebrews 12:7–11

Lead creator: Juana Jordan



PURPLE PEWS

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

We live in a politically divided culture in which the most extreme voices try to shape every area of life, including our life in the church. In this sermon series, Purple Pews, we explore the intersection of faith and politics, delving into why the church must engage in political conversations rooted in justice and compassion. We'll examine how our faith should shape our political views and provide the rules of engagement for productive conversations. When we are required to "agree to disagree," we can stay united by refocusing on the mission of Jesus in our local communities.

FIRST SERMON

Should We Talk About Politics in Church?

Micah 6:8, Psalm 72

This message explains how Christian faith includes a command to pursue justice, making political conversations necessary. If we don't talk about politics from a biblical perspective, focusing on the value system of the Kingdom of God, then the most extreme voices on cable news and social media will reinterpret our faith for partisan gains. Since the word "politics" has become so negative in our culture, it's important to define it in simple terms as the process of making decisions about how a group, community, or country is governed, and how power and resources are distributed among people. Understood in this way, it is easy to explain why the gospel should be taken into consideration when making these big decisions. In fact, the church should be a model community—a witness to the world—of how we can organize ourselves around love and justice and empower leaders who embody the kingdom values taught by Jesus.

Resources: It may be help to read the

Introduction and Part 1 of *God's Politics* by Jim Wallis. It may also be helpful to look at some of the New Testament letters like Ephesians and Colossians, paying attention to the kinds of group conflicts that emerge and how the author helps the church deal with them in ways that honor God.

SECOND SERMON

Faith First

Colossians 1:15–17, Matthew 22:36–40, 1 John 4:20, Matthew 5:43–44

This main point of this message is that our faith should determine our politics and not the other way around. Jesus must be Lord in every area of life, including our political life. Our faith must always come first. This is a great opportunity to define what is essential in a Wesleyan understanding of Christian faith, starting with the centrality of love as articulated in the greatest commandment and developed in the Sermon on the Mount. It may also be helpful to remind people that the command to love includes loving our enemies, including our political enemies, and that love in politics looks like justice.

Resources: “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” in the *Book of Discipline*; John Wesley’s analogy of faith.

THIRD SERMON

Rules of Engagement

Ephesians 4:15, 29–32

This message focuses on the Christian values that should guide our political conversations. How can we talk to each other in ways that uphold the kingdom values of Jesus and honor God, especially when we have passionate political disagreements? It is also important to talk about the importance of face-to-face conversations, and how these should always take priority over the diatribes of cable news and the pseudo-conversations of social media. It is harder to mistreat someone when you are looking into their eyes.

Resource: Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers, *I Think You’re Wrong (But I’m Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations*.

FOURTH SERMON

When All Else Fails, Focus on Mission

Micah 6:8, 2 Kings 10:15, Matthew 28:16ff

John Wesley once said: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.” There are some disagreements so deep that they cannot be overcome in the present moment. After engaging in God-honoring conversations, sometimes we must agree to disagree. But this does not mean that we must divide and part ways. We can choose to focus on the mission of Jesus, which calls us to make disciples for the transformation of the world, and focus our energies on serving the most vulnerable populations in our community.

Resources: John Wesley, “The Catholic Spirit.”

Lead creator: Mark Reynolds

FAR FROM PERFECT: FROM THE MESS COMES THE MESSIAH

SERIES TYPE

Advent/Christmas

SERIES DESCRIPTION

How many of us feel discouraged, or even guilty, for falling short of the perfect Christmas? We want the food delicious, the decorations beautiful, the gatherings joyful, and the experiences meaningful. Matthew reminds us the first Christmas was far from perfect. Amid the mess, God brings forth the Messiah. Christ's incarnation demonstrates God's grace and redemption are found even in the most unexpected and broken situations.

Thank you to Rev. Juana Jordan for the phrase "from the mess comes the Messiah" that inspired this series.

FIRST SERMON

A Generational Mess

Matthew 1:1–17; Isaiah 11:1–5 (Consider using the Voice Translation for this text.)

Families can be complicated—nurturing and neglectful, passing unhealthy choices from generation to generation. Jesus' lineage includes individuals with flawed, even traumatic, stories. Pain-full, imperfect people and situations do not limit God's redeeming work through Christ's coming.

SECOND SERMON

An Unexpected Mess

Matthew 1:18–25, Isaiah 7:14

Sometimes our mess is expected—the consequence of our own choices. Sometimes the mess surprises us, coming from a direction we never expected. What did Joseph feel when Mary revealed her pregnancy? Confusion, betrayal, skepticism, heartbreak... Joseph chooses a gracious response, yet God invites him to an even more gracious response. God is working all things for good, bringing clarity and calling from chaos.

THIRD SERMON

An Unfolding Mess

Matthew 2:1–12; Micah 5:2

Sometimes it's a mess on a mess on a mess, one after the other. Consider the challenges and obstacles faced by the Wise Ones—discerning what the star meant, funding the trip, organizing the caravan, traveling long distances, Herod's schemes. Through it all, the Wise Ones persevere, staying true to their mission and open to God's steadfast direction.

FOURTH SERMON

A Dangerous Mess

Matthew 2:13–18, Hosea 11:1

Sometimes the mess comes from getting caught in the backwash of other people's evil, destructive choices. Herod the Great uses his privilege and power to destroy, thinking this will protect his position. Compare Herod with Pharaoh. What drives them? What drives us, collaboration or fear? What drives God? Vulnerability, compassion, deliverance, solidarity.

RESOURCES

Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph by Adam Hamilton

Matthew (Westminster Bible Companion) by Thomas G. Long

Advent Wreath Prayer by Lisa Degrenia

This Advent Wreath Prayer combines themes from The Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79) with a prayer by Dimitri of Rostov (UMH #466). The same responsive prayer is used all four weeks of Advent.

ONE

Every year we light candles as we prepare for the coming of Christ.

More and more candles, more and more light,
as we watch and wait for Jesus, the Light of
the World.

ALL

God of Promise, come into our darkness.

Renew your hope and your peace in us,
for you alone bring life out of death.

ONE

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,

in Christ, you visit us and redeem us,
in Christ, you raise up a mighty savior
for us,
in Christ, you deliver us from all that
seeks to destroy us,
in Christ, you show great mercy to us.

You keep your promises and your covenant.

ALL

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness.

Come, my Life, and revive me from death.

Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds.

Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the
thorns of my sins,
kindling my heart with the flame
of your love.

Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my
heart and reign there,
for you alone are my King and my Lord.
Amen.

(Light the candles appropriate for the week.)

First Coming by Madeleine L'Engle, adapted
God did not wait till the world was ready,
till nations were at peace.

God came when the Heavens were unsteady
and prisoners cried out for release.

God did not wait for the perfect time.

God came when the need was deep and great.

God dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

God did not wait till hearts were pure.

In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin
and doubt.

To a world like ours, of anguished shame,
God came and God's Light would not go out.

God came to a world which did not mesh;
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

In the mystery of the Word made Flesh,
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,

For to share our grief, to touch our pain,
God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Lead creator: Lisa Degrenia

GUESS WHO: UNNAMED PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

What is the power of a name? What comes with a name—good or bad? Who are we apart from our names?

FIRST SERMON

A New Name for the Excluded

Explore stories of Jesus' interactions with non-Israelites (Ex. the Canaanite woman)

How does Jesus' interaction with non-Israelites offer them dignity and inclusion in the ministry of God?

SECOND SERMON

A New Name for Those in Need of Healing

Explore stories of healing of unnamed individuals (Ex. Man born blind, woman bleeding for many years)

How does Jesus' healing of individuals primarily identified by their infirmity or disability allow them to be restored to community and religious practice?

THIRD SERMON

A New Name for Generosity

Explore stories of people offering things to God/Jesus (ex. loaves and fishes, the widow's mite)

Jesus has a habit of noticing those who are giving what they can, even if what they have to give seems small. How does his honoring

of their generosity inspire us to offer what we have?

FOURTH SERMON

A New Name for Power

Explore stories of Jesus' interaction with the influential/powerful (ex. Centurion, Rich Young Ruler)

How does Jesus' interactions with the influential and powerful give us a glimpse of the power inversion that comes with Jesus' "upside down kingdom."

FIFTH SERMON

God Remembers You

Luke 12:4–8

All of the unnamed people in the Bible did, in fact, have names. There are many groups and crowds that are comprised of unnamed individuals. And how many countless others were a part of the history but could not be included in the curated stories? A very small fraction of people are remembered beyond their time, but God knows, values, and loves all of us.

Lead creator: Pulpit Project Group 4

ANTI-HERO

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

People are complicated. Each of us contain multitudes. The power to do good or do evil and sometimes a little of both. The Bible is chock full of anti-heroes: David, Samson, Rahab, Moses, Rebekah.

Things aren't always cut and dry: there exists a lot of grey within each of us, yet God still uses these "anti-heroes" for good. The stories of these anti-heroes show us that God uses imperfect people to fulfill God's purposes.

FIRST SERMON

David

Psalm 51

David was the man after God's own heart. He slayed Goliath, spared Saul's life, escaped the terror of King Saul, and led the nation of Israel into a time of prosperity. But he has a past- he killed the husband of Bathsheba to claim her as his own. He got greedy and God did not allow him to oversee the building of the Temple.

David reflects on his failings in Psalm 51 and asks God to create in him a new heart. He sought out that forgiveness. Like how Taylor Swift says: "It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me" There is strength in self-awareness and acknowledging our faults. There is redemption in humility. David is an example of sanctifying grace.

SECOND SERMON

Samson

Judges 16

Samson was a ladies man, to put it generously. He was supposed to be set apart, and he forgets who he is and succumbs to

his temptations. He forgets what he was set apart for. His hubris and impulsiveness got the best of him. It wasn't until he was at his lowest, mocked and chained, when the last thing he could do was end it on his terms. In the end, God restored His power to Samson, and in the New Testament, Samson is listed among men and women who lived by faith. His legacy was redemptive.

THIRD SERMON

Rahab

Joshua 2

Rahab was a woman on the margins- a Canaanite prostitute. Her position on the margins helped her save Joshua's spies. Rahab was remembered for her bravery and was listed in the genealogy of Jesus. As the outsider looking in, she is the perfect example of prevenient grace.

FOURTH SERMON

Moses

Exodus 2:11-3:22

Moses killed an Egyptian overseer and fled Egypt until he later returned to demand

Pharaoh on behalf of God to “Let his people go.” Moses was not a good public speaker and was an unexpected leader.

Moses was told he would never enter the Promised Land but maintained that vision as he led the people through the wilderness. He could’ve given up knowing he wouldn’t see the fruits of his labor but persevered.

FIFTH SERMON

Rebekah

Genesis 27

Rebekah assisted her favorite son Jacob in stealing his brother Esau’s birthright by tricking her ailing husband, Isaac. She also used a little white lie while traveling and pretended to be Isaac’s sister to secure their safety. She was a strategist for survival. Her cunning helped her favorite son get ahead and helped her survive on her travels with Isaac. Her story forces us to wrestle with “white lies” and moral purity. Was she wrong for lying even if the outcome was good? Here is a “grey area” for this week’s anti-hero. There is grace. God understands.

RESOURCES

We were admittedly inspired by Taylor Swift’s Song AntiHero where she wrestles with acknowledging her own faults. There are plenty of pop-culture references if T.Swift doesn’t fit your context: Disney villains, Marvel Universe, Harry Potter (Snape), Wicked, etc.

“The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either- but right through every human heart- and through all human hearts.” - Aleksander Solzhenitsyn

Lead creators: Amy Armistead, Emily Sterling-Strongman, Staci Plonsky, and Robert Roseberry

A SUMMER TO REMEMBER: CELEBRATING MOMENTS OF HOLY WONDER

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Lectionary

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This summer you may be going on a family vacation, heading off to summer camp, soaking in the sun at a nearby beach, or heading north to the mountains to find respite from the heat. Whatever your plans, you'll want to make time to join us for worship and our relaxed sermon series entitled, A Summer to Remember: Celebrating Moments of Holy Wonder. Recalling our childhood memories and experiences can inspire our faith and cause us, at any age, to better see and experience God's presence in our lives every day. Come and spend time with us in person or online as we celebrate the joy of summertime and the wonder of God.

FIRST SERMON

Cloud Watching

Psalm 98 and Matthew 16:24–27

Focus: This first sermon in the series uses the summertime experience of cloud watching, of finding and seeing familiar images in cloud formations, to reflect on how we are called to live as we await Christ's promised return. It's a sermon that calls us to wait with hope, and practice self-denial, self-sacrifice and surrender in the meantime. Ultimately, it's about striving to live each day in harmony with God, with creation and with one another.

Summary: Lying on a blanket, looking up at a cloud filled sky is an invitation to cultivate wonder and imagination. Watching clouds drift by, seeing the shape of a dog running, an elephant dancing or an angel with wings just might be the least expensive entertainment a person can find. While cloud watching is fun, I'd like to suggest that it may actually be a helpful part of our Christian practice.

Matthew's gospel points out that clouds, like the ones at Jesus' Ascension will also be a part of his promised return. For believers,

living in the meantime, between anticipating Christ's return and the judgement that will accompany it, is an invitation to keep the faith and keep looking up, to focus on growing in our relationship with him and living and loving as he called us to. Having a relationship with Jesus means that we trust and rely on Christ's righteousness; our past faults are forgiven, our future is now secure, setting us free to live for him and to love and serve others in his name. The reward of righteousness and love is to be found fearlessly rejoicing along with all of creation whenever Christ returns. For when we see him descending from the clouds, we shall not fear his judgment, "for He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity." (Psalm 98:9)

SECOND SERMON

Counting Stars

Psalm 8, especially verses 3–9

Focus: This sermon is about stargazing and how it has the power to create a deep sense of awe and wonder within us. Counting stars can also make us feel small and cause us to question our place and doubt our significance

within God's grand story. Recounting an experience of stargazing while on a mission trip and pointing to examples of God calling of ordinary people like David, Mary and Abraham to do extraordinary things, the goal of this sermon is to awaken a sense of awe within the listener and invite people to ponder their significance of their lives and callings. What if each of engaged in the spiritual practice of looking up with eyes of faith and asking God to show us what God might want to do in and through each of us and our families, in our church, community and the world? The bottom line is, God is big, and we are small. Without the power of God, we can't do much, but with God's power at work within us amazing things are possible.

Summary: An opening story about stargazing invites listeners to recall their own experiences of stargazing, of a time when they looked up into a night-sky and felt a deep sense of awe as they considered how big our creator God is. At the same time, they may have thought about how small we are as humans. Whatever their feelings or train of thought regarding God and humans, the sermon leads to a reflection

on the of wonder of our God who regularly chooses ordinary people like a shepherd named David, a peasant girl named Mary, and the first stargazer, Abraham to fulfill God's purpose(s) in the world. Considering all that God has done through them and so many other ordinary people, the question becomes: what might God want to do in us and through us and our families, our church, our community and in the world? Each of us is invited to dream and wonder, ponder and pray, to make stargazing a spiritual practice. The gift to us is that when we pay attention, if we intentionally take the time to look up, and count the stars, we just might remember that every one of us has been given a light to shine in the darkness. And when we are faithful, it is very likely that someone somewhere is looking up to the heavens and giving thanks to God for the light they see in us. Because, more often than not, God chooses and uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

THIRD SERMON

**Sippin' Sweet Tea and Lemonade
(includes invitation to Holy Communion)**

Based on readings from Psalm 63:1-8 and John 7:37-39.

Focus: This is a sermon about thirst, both our physical thirst and our spiritual thirst for God. Recalling a childhood experience of sipping sweet tea or lemonade on a hot summer day, the goal of this message is to invite people to identify their own experiences of physical and spiritual thirst and to remind them of the beautiful declaration and invitation of Jesus, and to invite them to return to Jesus (and to holy communion) who is the source of our deepest refreshment and restoration.

Summary: Rising temperatures, increased outdoor activity, and simply navigating life's challenges can leave us depleted and thirsty. In the same way our bodies become dehydrated needing refreshment, our souls can become parched and dry.

In Psalm 63, David, (King David) is thirsty. After being deeply betrayed by his son Absalom, he flees the city of Jerusalem. In the wilderness, David experiences both physical and spiritual thirst. Keenly aware of his physical thirst...fearing for his life, he

has fled into the wilderness...David longs for a drink of cool water. Aware of his spiritual thirst... he is isolated, alienated, and alone, David longs for God's presence.

Recalling a childhood experience of sipping sweet tea or lemonade on a hot summer day, invites people to identify their own experiences of physical and spiritual thirst and to remind them of the beautiful declaration and invitation of Jesus, in John 7:37, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." This is a perfect opportunity to invite people to turn to Jesus who is the source of our deepest refreshment and restoration. This message could end with a time of confession and prayer inviting God to quench our deepest thirsts. It could also serve as a wonderful lead into celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion.

FOURTH SERMON

Catching Fireflies

Genesis 1:1-3, John 1:1-9, and Matthew 5:14-16

Focus: This sermon is about the joy and

wonder of catching fireflies, the gift of light in our times of darkness and God's call to us to become a light-bearers to others.

Summary: An opening story about catching fireflies in a jar and the wonder of discovering the amazing and wondrous phenomenon of synchronous fireflies leads to a reflection on the powerful work of God bring light into the world and into the dark and difficult circumstances of our lives.

In our times of darkness there are some things we can remember:

- Jesus is our light and our salvation.
- God does his greatest work in the dark!
- Christ calls us to live in a synchronous relationship with him, to be light with him and to allow his light to shine through us.

Lead creator: Robin Hager

CLEAR EYES, FULL HEARTS, CAN'T LOSE

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This series is inspired by the motto of the T.V. show “Friday Night Lights.” Just as this motto focused a team towards the goal of winning Texas State football championships, it also serves as biblical ethic that drives the church to become a community that fulfills the mission of God in this world. This series will challenge your congregation to see with clarity, love with fullness, and trust in the unshakable truth that in Christ, we can’t lose.

FIRST SERMON

Clear Eyes

Matthew 7:1-5

In order to be deeply hospitable it requires self reflection so that you can see past yourself and therefore see people the way God sees them. The goal of this sermon or some goals of this sermon would be as follows: see people not problems. see opportunity rather than threats. look through the eyes of God when looking at others. see the person not their label or the way others label them.

Resources: The Anatomy of Peace by The Arbinger Institute , Matthew 6:22-23 (Eye is the Lamp of body) is the start of the text

SECOND SERMON

Full Hearts

1 Corinthians. 12:12-27

When we can see past ourselves, with clear eyes, we can then begin to think about living out God’s mission as individual members who work together. This sermon focuses on commitment to both individual and group goals as a community of Love.

Resource: Matt 6:16-18, 6:19-21, 7:7-14. Wesley’s idea of being perfected in love.

THIRD SERMON

Can’t Lose

Matthew 7:24-27, Matthew 25

When we have clear eyes and see our purpose in a collective body we are able to persevere in the face anything that may come our way. Assurance of how God’s love always prevails.

Resources: Revelation 7:9- consummation, Love Wins by Rob Bell

Lead creator: Tim Barton

CONFIRMATION FOR ADULTS: WHY DO WE NEED CHRIST?

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

People transfer from other congregations or denominations but were never confirmed. This gives the whole congregation the opportunity to learn what is traditionally taught in a confirmation class.

FIRST SERMON

Who is God?

John 7:16–17; Isaiah 40; Genesis 1: 1–5

Theme: Our belief in God is rooted in the concept of the Trinity, in which God is inherently relational. God's desire to be in relationship with us is most fully expressed in Jesus, who was both human and divine. Through the Holy Spirit, God is directly involved in the activities of humanity, desiring to reconcile all things back to God's intended order.

SECOND SERMON

Belief: Who Are We? (Humanity)

Genesis 1:26–31

Theme: Humans are created in the image of God, a notion introduced in the story of creation. Because of sin, we are both separated from God and unable to fully express the image of God within us. It is only by God's grace that we can have a restored relationship with God.

THIRD SERMON

Church: Who Are We? (Christians)

Ephesians 4:1–4; 1 Corinthians 12:12–20

Theme: The church is the living expression of the work of Jesus in the world. We are the body of Christ, carrying out the mission of Jesus to make disciples.

FOURTH SERMON

Who are United Methodists?

Ephesians 2:1–7

Theme: United Methodists have a distinct view of grace (which is derived from Paul's understanding of grace in the letter to the Ephesians) along with unique views of the quadrilateral, the open table, the via media, and connectional polity.

FIFTH SERMON

Christian Life: What Does it Mean to be part of this United Methodist Church

Acts 2:42–47

Theme: As United Methodists, we live out the legacy of the Christian faith through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

SIXTH SERMON

How Do We Live?

1 Peter 1:13–16

Theme: United Methodists believe in a balanced approach to both personal holiness and social holiness. These two must be held in balance and lived out both privately and publicly. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to offer our gifts in service to others (through spiritual gifts) and by putting our faith into action.

Lead creator: Jacob Park

90 DAYS THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

SERIES TYPE

Books of the Bible

SERIES DESCRIPTION

A plan for preaching through the New Testament across 90 days. The original creator used this as a summer series. The series was accompanied by a reading plan with 3–4 chapters per day, and a podcast with the daily reading and a 5-minute commentary about the key parts of those chapters. They also held a Zoom class each month to talk about what stuck out in our readings.

FIRST SERMON

Matthew, Part 1

2 Timothy 3:16–17

Theme: How do we read the Bible, and why does it matter?

Resource: Robbie Muholland’s “Shaped by the Word”

SECOND SERMON

Matthew, Part 2

Matthew 1–21

Theme: Focus on Matthew’s Gospel, what makes this writer unique? God’s kingdom, fulfilling Messianic promise.

THIRD SERMON

Mark, Part 1

Matthew 22–28, Mark 1–12

Theme: Why is Mark shortest gospel? Focus on Jesus’ action, Suffering Servant

FOURTH SERMON

Mark, Part 2 and Luke, Part 1

Mark 13–15, Luke 1–15

Theme: Focus on resurrection, and Luke’s

Gospel- resurrection is linked with an action.

FIFTH SERMON

Luke, Part 2 and John, Part 1

Luke 16–24, John 1–12

Theme: Focus on John- Light and Dark Language, Signs of John.

SIXTH SERMON

John, Part 2 and Acts, Part 1

John 13–21, Acts 1–12

Theme: Acts of the Apostles’, Saul to Paul, his journeys through Acts.

SEVENTH SERMON

Acts, Part 2 and Romans, Part 1

Acts 13–28, Romans 1–3

EIGHTH SERMON

Romans and 1 Corinthians, Part 1

Romans 4–16, 1 Corinthians 6

NINTH SERMON

1 and 2 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7–16, 2 Corinthians 1–9

TENTH SERMON

**2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,
Philippians**

*2 Corinthians 10–13, Galatians 1–6,
Ephesians 1–6, Philippians 1–3*

ELEVENTH SERMON

**Philippians, Colossians, 1–2
Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy**

*Philippians 4, Colossians 1–3, 1
Thessalonians 1–5, 2 Thessalonians 1–3, 1
Timothy 1–6, 2 Timothy 1–4*

TWELTH SERMON

Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James

*Titus 1–3, Philemon, Hebrews 1–13, James
1–3*

THIRTEENTH SERMON

**James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude,
Revelation, Part 1**

*James 4, 1 Peter 1–5, 2 Peter 1–3, 1 John 1–5, 2
John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation 1–3*

FOURTEENTH SERMON

Revelation, Finale

Revelation 4–22

Lead creator: Will Wold

BEARING LOVE: BIRTH STORIES IN THE BIBLE

SERIES TYPE

Advent/Christmas

SERIES DESCRIPTION

The season of Advent is about building expectation and waiting, both for the birth of Christ in Bethlehem and for the current church waiting for the fully realized Kingdom. While the waiting takes time, it is an active process. A great metaphor for active waiting is the work that happens in a woman's body as she waits for the birth of her child. Biologically, emotionally, in her space, there are changes happening throughout this time. Looking at pregnant women in the Bible, we'll consider what actions they do to prepare and how these compare to the work the church needs to do.

FIRST SERMON

Sarah Laughed

Genesis 18:1-15; (21:1-6)

Sarah's laughter is the sound of hope. Her laughter is at picturing herself as a mother in her old age, so what a faithful thing to picture it. Her laughter also becomes invitational in the birth of Isaac and his name. It might be worth considering Abraham's laughter in Genesis 17:17. What are the hopes we have for our church for our future that might make us laugh as they seem so far off? How can we be inspired by a God that surprises us and makes us laugh.

SECOND SERMON

Jochebed Resists

Exodus 2:1-10

Moses' mother isn't named in the selected passage, but is named in Moses' genealogy in Exodus 6:20. She is a pregnant woman who doesn't accept the certainty that pharaoh will kill her son when he is born. She resists the intention of the command to throw babies into the Nile by placing Moses first into the basket, but complying with placing

him in the Nile. Emphasis in this week can discuss what we need to resist in our culture as we look to the coming kingdom. What does heaven on earth look like and how to we resist when we experience hell on earth?

THIRD SERMON

Hannah Wailed

1 Samuel 1:(1-8), 9-20

Hannah's inability to conceive was a source of pain. She was hurt by the words and actions of her husband's other wife in her season of waiting for a child. She took her grief and desperation for a child to God. Emphasis needs to be placed on the indignity of her prayer. It is raw and visceral, and she's called out for it. The church can consider our own practices of lament and how we can be honest and even undignified before God as we experience grief and sorrow in the present world.

If your church is hosting a longest night service, this might provide an opportunity for deeper invitation to practice that in a season where others rejoice. We also need to be careful to rush to the outcome of her pregnancy with Samuel as being the easy

answer to our laments. They might not be that neat in this life, but God's presence still matters.

FOURTH SERMON

Elizabeth Welcomed

Luke 1:(5-25), 39-45

We don't wait alone. In Luke 1:24 we read that Elizabeth waited in seclusion in her first 5 months of pregnancy, but as she begins to trust and believe that this blessing is coming, not only does she share her joy, but she welcomes her cousin Mary and allows her waiting to be a gift to another in a similar space. As a church we give each other hope in a time of waiting. We believe when others doubt. We see signs of God when some see only darkness, and we share the grief, surprise and celebration as a community.

FIFTH SERMON

Mary Sang

Luke 2:(26-38),46-56

This sermon can be tailored to your context. For many churches, Christmas Eve isn't Christmas Eve unless certain hymns are

sung. Songs are acts of communal prayer, but songs are also acts of resistance. Mary's song is aspirational and justice oriented and might be better compared to African American Spirituals that carried slaves through oppressive work while singing and proclaiming worth and freedom. Songs carry us and provide us hope in this season of waiting. What are the songs our churches need to sing to carry us through.

RESOURCES

Special care should be taken that the faithfulness of these women isn't that they bear children, as we have women in our churches who have experienced infertility, child loss, or have made the choice to not have children. The actions that these women take are ones that all people can emulate in their faith lives.

Potential Alternative Title - Lessons in Nesting: An Advent Series

"Creating with God" by Sarah Jobe informed a lot of my own thoughts and provides some great stories and illustrations.

Lead creator: Haley Eccles

MOUNTAINS OF FAITH

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

John Muir once said, “The mountains are calling, and I must go!” All throughout scripture, mountains play an important role in the revelation of God. Together we will climb and seek the goodness of God!

FIRST SERMON

Mount Ararat – A New Beginning

Genesis 8:1–5

Theme: Restoration and Renewal

Sermon Focus: The story of Noah’s Ark and the flood. The significance of Mount Ararat as a place of new beginnings. God’s promise to never destroy the earth again and the rainbow as a sign of hope. Embracing new beginnings and trusting God’s promises in our lives.

SECOND SERMON

Mount Moriah: The Mountain of Sacrifice

Genesis 22:1–14

Theme: Trust and Obedience

Sermon Focus: The story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah highlights the themes of faith, obedience, and God’s provision. Explore the tension between human sacrifice and divine intervention, and how ultimate trust in God leads to unexpected blessings.

THIRD SERMON

Mount Sinai: The Mountain of Revelation

Exodus 19–20

Theme: Covenant and Law

Sermon Focus: Mount Sinai is where God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses, establishing a covenant with the Israelites. This sermon can focus on the significance of God’s law, the holiness of God, and the call to live in covenant relationship with Him.

FOURTH SERMON

Mount Carmel: The Mountain of Decision

1 Kings 18:16–39

Theme: Commitment and God’s Power

Sermon Focus: Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel calls the people to decide whom they will serve. This sermon can challenge the congregation to examine their own loyalties and recognize the power of God in their lives.

FIFTH SERMON

Mount Nebo: The Mountain of Promise

Deuteronomy 34:1-7

Theme: Vision and Legacy

Sermon Focus: From Mount Nebo, Moses views the Promised Land but cannot enter it. This sermon can reflect on the themes of vision, leadership, and the legacies we leave behind, even when we don't see the fulfillment of all our dreams.

SIXTH SERMON

Mount Hermon - The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-9

Theme: Revelation and Glory

Sermon Focus: The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. The significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus. The voice of God affirming Jesus as His beloved Son. Understanding the glory of Christ and our call to listen to Him.

SEVENTH SERMON

The Mount of Olives: The Mountain of Prayer and Betrayal (Watchfulness??)

Luke 22:39-46

Theme: Surrender and Faithfulness

Sermon Focus: On the Mount of Olives, Jesus prays in Gethsemane before His arrest. This sermon can explore the themes of prayer, surrendering to God's will, and remaining faithful in times of trial. Another angle would be the call to watchfulness?

EIGHTH SERMON

Mount Calvary: The Sacrifice of Love

Luke 23:33-49

Theme: The significance of the cross.

Sermon Focus: Mount Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for humanity. This sermon can delve into the significance of Christ's sacrifice and what it means for our salvation and daily lives.

NINTH SERMON

Mount of Ascension: The Great Commission

Acts 1:6-12

Theme: The mission of the church.

Sermon Focus: From the Mount of Ascension, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission. This final sermon can challenge the church to live out the mission of making disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, until Christ returns.

TENTH SERMON

Mount Zion: The Mountain of Redemption

Hebrews 12:18-24

Theme: Fulfillment and Hope

Sermon Focus: Mount Zion represents the heavenly Jerusalem and the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. This sermon can focus on the hope of eternal life, the joy of being part of God's kingdom, and the call to live as people of the New Covenant.

Lead creator: Melissa Pisco

PATHWAYS TO PEACE: FINDING GOD'S PRESENCE IN LIFE'S CHALLENGE

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

In the midst of life's heartaches and challenges, there is a path to healing that God offers us. Join us for our upcoming sermon series, "Journey to Healing," where we will explore how to find peace, renewal, and hope even after the most difficult losses. Together, we will discover how God's love guides us from the shadows of sorrow into the light of new beginnings, bringing comfort and strength every step of the way. (Based around the 5 stages of grief from Kubler-Ross, for a congregation that would benefit from some pastoral care and grief processing.)

FIRST SERMON

Honest Hearts

Confession, Denial

- "The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won't face facts" (Proverbs 14:8 TLB)
- Psalm 119:29 "Remove all false ways from me; show mercy to me by means of your Instruction ..."
- Job
- John 5:6 "Do you want to get well?"
- 3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 -"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

SECOND SERMON

Letting Go of Control: Trusting God's Sovereignty

Talking to God, Bargaining

- 2 Corinthians 12:8-9
- Romans 8:26-28
- Job-innocent, yet still suffered. Theological concept-God is sovereign. We can't control outcomes of nature/sin in the world/other people through our own actions of goodness or sinfulness.
- Releasing our own sense of control to trust God

THIRD SERMON

When Anger Speaks: Using Our Emotions for Good

- Identifying and Clarifying emotions as gift/indicator/normal-response to anger
- Anger can be energizing, or it can be masking a different emotion.
 - Brene Brown: "Anger is a catalyst. Holding on to it will make us exhausted and sick. Internalizing anger will take away our joy and spirit; ...we need to transform [anger] into something life-giving{ courage, love, change, compassion, justice. (Atlas of the Heart, 224).
 - Cain/Abel: Genesis 4: 6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your

countenance fallen?

- James 1: 19–21
- Matthew 5:21–22
- “willingness to let anger go”
- “recognize we need God’s help in order to extinguish the flames of anger” (Baggett, 86)

FOURTH SERMON

Anointed with Hope: Finding Strength in the Struggle

Cultivating Hope-Depression

- 2 Corinthians 4:8–9
- Psalm 30:5
- Psalm 34:18
- Tears-healing
- “Hope is a function of struggle-we develop hope not during the easy or comfortable times, but through adversity and discomfort.” (Brene Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 100)
- Healing service? Anointing with oil?

FIFTH SERMON

Heart of Peace: Finding Joy in Life’s Transitions

Embracing Peace, Acceptance

- Jeremiah 31:13
- 2 Corinthians 4:16–18
- Psalm 126:5

SIXTH SERMON

Beauty from Brokenness: Embracing Resurrection Purpose

New meaning and purpose, Resurrection

- Luke 24:50
- Kintsugi - Japanese art of turning broke pottery into beautiful art by mending the pieces with gold/silver bonding agents.

RESOURCES

Atlas of the Heart by Brene Brown, *Finding the Good in Grief* by John F. Baggett’s

Lead creator: Staci Plonsky

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE SERIES TYPE

Topical, Seeker Sensitive, Leadership/Vision

SERIES DESCRIPTION

You may know Paul, but what about his healer, Ananias? And Moses- we don't get him without Shiphrah & Puah! Join us for a 6-week worship series as we explore the folks we often miss in our scriptural stories, and how often overlooked characters are part of the story God is telling.

FIRST SERMON

Hebrew Midwives

Psalm 124; Exodus 1: 6-22

Quiet Defiance for the sake of Justice.

We often hear about the power, call, and commissioning of Moses but we would never have gotten him without the Hebrew midwives why defied the command of Pharaoh. Shiphrah and Puah served God by defying Pharaoh, a risk to their lives and their livelihoods. Possibly include references to Moses's mom, sister and wife as all the women who saves Moses, over and over again. Highlight & challenge: How do we see the uncelebrated folks in our world who take small and large risks to move God's mission along? How do we begin celebrating the every day ways we can say yes to God's story?

Great opportunity to celebrate folks in your congregation who do work that goes unnoticed but is critical to the mission.

SECOND SERMON

Nathan

2 Samuel 12:1-13; Matthew 18:15-20

Saying hard things, for the sake of holiness.

Do you have friends who can be real with you? Are YOU a person who has the ability to say a hard thing with grace? David is revered throughout biblical history but he was not without his flaws. He needed redirection and correction from Nathan. And, all of us need good friendships where it is safe to ask hard questions and give/receive feedback. The trajectory of God's story was impacted because Nathan courageously pushed David.

THIRD SERMON

Rahab & Simon of Cyrene

Joshua 2:1-14; Mark 15:16-24

Discovering and celebrating accidental heroes.

Rahab and Simon of Cyrene found themselves in the right place and the right time, by accident? They didn't have time for deep thinking or contemplative discernment. They found themselves confronted with a big decision and they stepped into God's story and mission.

Great opportunity to celebrate local heroes who have accidentally found themselves

making the right decision in a critical moment.

“Very rarely do we get just a clear narrative, a joyful ending, and an immediate sense of accomplishment at serving others or God’s mission. Rather we find stories like a prostitute with few options who saves her life but loses her community and her country; and a random dude who didn’t sign up for any of this, getting dragged into helping a doomed prisoner who will still be put to death. Nevertheless, it is these folks who step up when no one else seems there, that can find themselves accidental heroes. These accidental heroes can assist in God’s mission, even in the midst of our utterly broken world now.

For all of us, there may come a day in your lives when you look around expecting someone who is more prepared, more willing, more educated, or more “called” to do something. You may think, “Did everyone else get a burning bush moment?” But I want us to hear today that characters like Rahab, and Simon of Cyrene, and Lt. Antonio Bailey (Police officer who helped mitigate the shooting in Jacksonville, preventing a

shooting also on Edward Waters campus) are folks that– while they may often go unnoticed in the big narratives– are absolutely part of God’s subversive story.”

FOURTH SERMON

Friends of the Paralyzed Man

Ecclesiasticus 4:9–12; Luke 5:17–26

Carrying one another, whether we’re named/remembered or not The Pharisees came to talk/debate Jesus versus the image of friends lowering the man into the center of their conversation; Literally they drop this guy directly into the laps of the people having religious/theological debates. They came with their best talking points! They came with the hottest arguments of the time! Headlines, doctrinal statements, PhD theses ready...

Do you have friends like this? Friends who will show up at your door and do for you what you want but can’t do for yourself? Do you have friends who will carry you to Jesus when you’re having a hard time carrying yourself there? These companions on the journey are part of the way that the mission of God keeps moving when we have lost our

fire.

Possible illustration: Preacher–Talking about your own experience with compassion fatigue or burnout IF you are already past it. Celebrate the folks who walk alongside you, which both helps humanize you AND gives others permission to need help along the way.

FIFTH SERMON

Joseph

Luke 3:23–31; Matthew 1:18–25

Supporting the work God is doing in others, using your privilege or platform to support/protect/affirm the work God is doing in others.

SIXTH SERMON

Cornelius

Acts 10:1–16; Acts 10:17–35

Cornelius is our hero today because he had a vision just like Peter. He loved God just like Peter. He has a worldly title and access to power if he wanted it, but when the rubber meets the road, Cornelius is just trying to do what God tells him. Cornelius gives us this

beautiful image of obedience to God, even if you aren't used to be a person with religious authority. Unlike Peter, so caught up in his religious rules of the time, Cornelius is willing to hear from God whatever God has to say. No hesitation. No double checking the rule book. No 4 verses and 3 grown men to have to intervene. Even the Apostles have something to learn from an average, God-loving man trying to follow what the Spirit told him. In fact, Peter's proximity to religious power made it harder for him to hear God saying a new thing because he had rules. He had a lifetime of operating a particular way. Cornelius changed Peter's heart not just by what he said but by being who he was- a Roman soldier- who happened to love God and to (later in this chapter) receive the same Holy Spirit Peter had been questioning.

Illustration opportunity: highlight where lay folks in your congregation have lived into gospel values, maybe in a even when it was a challenge for you.

SEVENTH SERMON

Ananias

Acts 9: 1-19

When this chapter is labeled in our bibles its often called the Conversion of Saul. And, we spend a great deal of time celebrating Saul's change of heart and life, but without Ananias, Saul would still be without sight. Ananias's courage to overcome his fear of a persecutor, to follow God's direction, and to save Saul's sight changes the trajectory of the mission of God's church. Where is God inviting you, as a Saul, to depend on others to help heal you for the sake of God's mission? Where is God inviting you, as an Ananias, to overcome your fear for the sake of God's mission.

Possible illustration: Howard Thurman's Jesus and the Disinherited -> The power of love to overcome all the lines and fear that divides us.

RESOURCES

This helped support, for our congregation, a reminder about assets-based ministry approaches- that everyone has something to give and everyone has something to learn. And, it gave us an opportunity to celebrate the unsung heroes in our congregation and our world.

Lead creator: Worship team at First UMC Sanford

HOPE IN THE WILDERNESS

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Let's journey into the wilderness through the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. We will learn about the different types of wilderness that these biblical people experienced and how God met them in their wilderness. We will learn how God meets us in our wilderness today.

FIRST SERMON

Jesus

Matthew 4:1-10

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. God entered the wilderness. We cannot go through a wilderness that God has not experienced.

SECOND SERMON

Hagar

Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 21:8-21

Hagar encounters God in the wilderness and names God. God sees Hagar in the wilderness and in her injustice. God sees us in our wilderness.

THIRD SERMON

Moses

Exodus 17:1-7

God provided water from the rock for the Israelites in the wilderness. God provides for our needs in the wilderness.

FOURTH SERMON

Elijah

1 Kings 19:1-18

Elijah runs away to the wilderness in fear for his life. God provides rest and safety in the wilderness.

FIFTH SERMON

Isaiah

Isaiah 35

In the midst of the exile, God offers hope of a future where all is whole. God restores and creates new life in the wilderness.

SIXTH SERMON

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 8:1-12

In the midst of the post-exilic return to Jerusalem, there is a lot of destruction and need for rebuilding. People forget and remember God in the wilderness. God rebuilds.

SEVENTH SERMON

John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-12

God uses other people to prepare the way for us even when we find ourselves in the wilderness.

EIGHTH SERMON

Paul

Philippians 1:3-11

God uses people to provide encouragement to us while we are in the wilderness. And those people may be in the wilderness themselves.

NINTH SERMON

All Things Made New

Revelation 21:1-7, Revelation 22:1-5

God offers a vision of life beyond the wilderness. A future with hope where all is made new.

Lead creator: Emily Sterling-Strongman

HOW TO LOVE YOUR ENEMY

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

As followers of Jesus Christ, we're called to foster peace and truth when faced with evil, controversy, division, and conflict. But how do we do this? In this series, we'll explore five Biblical practices that show us the way.

Key Scripture: Matthew 5:43-45a

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven..."

FIRST SERMON

The Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:1-13

Theme: We cannot control the behavior or thoughts of others. We can only control ourselves. This takes self-awareness and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Heineken Worlds Apart video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKggA9k8DKw>

Neuroplasticity - When we are afraid, threatened, or reminded of a hurtful experience, we can be triggered. We respond out of the "animal" part of our brain - fight, flight, freeze, fawn. Some safety and belonging move us to our midbrain where we respond with blame and tribalism.

Even more safety and belonging move us to the most developed part of our brain, the forebrain. This is where we take on the mind of Christ. When we respond from this part of our brain we can be creative, sacrificial, collaborative, and forward-thinking.

Brain Stem Behavior in Philippians 2

Acting from selfish ambition or conceit (verse 3)

Looking to our own interests (verse 3)

Exploitation (verse 6)

The Mind of Christ in Philippians 2

Humility (verses 3, 8)

Looking to the interests of others (verse 4)

Obedience to the point of death (verse 8)

SECOND SERMON

See People as People

Genesis 1:26-27; Luke 18:9-14

Theme: Why is Jesus calling us to love our enemies? How do we do this?

Genesis 1:26-27

All people are made in the image of God. All people are valuable. All have sacred worth. All have the same hopes and needs. Some try to meet these needs in healthy, loving ways. Others do not.

My friend Pru said this - "Being made in the image of God is what gives us our value, but it's also what gives us our power. The power to empathize. The power to choose the ways of Jesus."

Luke 18:9-14

What is righteousness? Right relationship with God, others, ourselves, and the earth.

What is contempt? Feeling a person/thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving of scorn.

Neither the Pharisee nor the tax collector behaved as expected. What would it have been like if the pharisee welcomed and joined in solidarity with the confession of the tax collector?

How to see people as people

Inspired by *The Anatomy of Peace, Fourth Edition: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* by The Arbinger Institute

See People as People

- Not as their label – occupation, culture, race, politics, religion
- Not as a project or problem to be fixed
- Not as a means to an end
- Not as an obstacle to overcome or avoid
- Not as less than or greater than yourself

THIRD SERMON

Listen Deeply

John 8:1–11; James 1:19–21

Theme: Deep listening creates space for understanding. Steve Harper Quote:

“When we stop listening, we stop relating.

When we stop listening, we cease learning.

When we stop listening, we lose perspective.

When we stop listening, we define reality solely on our terms.”

Examples of Listening and Not Listening

We have two ears and one mouth. We are quick to listen and slow to speak. We create space for deep listening and understanding.

- We meet someone, and say, “Hi, how are you?” but we don’t wait to listen. We go through the motions, the ritual of greeting. Instead, take time to be human and make a connection.

- We’re talking to someone, and instead of listening to what they’re saying we’re thinking about what we’re going to say in return, like a tennis match. It’s easy to rush and react. Instead, we can listen deeply, clarify, consider, and respond. Will we react or will we respond?

3 types of conversations

- Swimming- everything stays on the surface

- Snorkeling- go down for a bit, but then you come right back up

- Scuba diving – takes practice, patience, and skills to go deep and stay deep. This is listening to understand. We look below the surface and ask, “What is really going on?”

Peter Senge Quote: “To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the ‘music,’ but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows but for what [they are]. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow our mind’s hearing to your ears’ natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning.”

FOURTH SERMON

A Heart of Peace

1 Samuel 24

Theme: A heart of peace breaks the cycle of escalation and retaliation. This message is inspired by *The Anatomy of Peace, Fourth Edition: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* by The Arbinger Institute

Sticky Questions: Is it possible to have a heart of peace in the midst of violence?

- Can a soldier have a heart of peace? War is part of the job.
- Can a survivor of violence, oppression, corruption, or betrayal have a heart of peace toward those who hurt them? It's complicated. There are issues of safety and justice.

The short answer is “yes.” David shows us it's possible.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAVID AND KING SAUL

- After David killed Goliath, King Saul put him in charge of his army.
- David wins many battles, and he becomes well-known and popular.

• Whenever David comes home from war, the women would come out dancing and singing: “Saul has struck down thousands, and David has struck down tens of thousands!”

If King Saul had a heart of peace, how would he respond when he heard this?

- Celebrate along with the others
- Praise God for sending a leader with such bravery, faith, and skill

King Saul doesn't have a heart of peace. He has a heart of war. He's furious, suspicious, and jealous of David, so jealous he wants David dead.

A Heart of War imprisons us and clouds our perspective. King Saul becomes more and more troubled in his mind and spirit. He sends David again and again into dangerous situations. He then starts sending people to kill David. Finally, King Saul decides to go after David himself, taking 3000 men with him. David has a heart of peace. He has a chance for revenge, but instead breaks the cycle of escalation and retaliation. The war stops with him.

FIFTH SERMON

Do Good

Romans 12:9–21; Psalm 34:14

Theme: What can we do to help the situation: to do good, to reveal, to bless?

A lady got mad at me at the drive-through - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPcT02Vkzxo>

Romans 12:9–21

- When it comes to loving an enemy, which phrase speaks to you the most?
- How do you see the circle of love expanding in these verses?
- Finally, how do you see the circle of love expanding to all people?

RESOURCES

Important Reminder: None of these practices tell you to stay in an abusive or dangerous relationship. That's not ok. If that is what someone is going through, make clear that the church can help.

Love Your Enemies Scripture Reading Plan

<https://revlisad.com/2024/09/16/how-to-love-your-enemies-scripture-reading-plan/>

Make Us One by Carol Cymbala (CCLI Song # 695737)

A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada, UMH #883

The Anatomy of Peace, Fourth Edition: Resolving the Heart of Conflict by The Arbinger Institute

Lead creator: Lisa Degrenia



HELLO MY NAME IS: FAMOUS BIBLICAL NAME CHANGES

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Names in the Bible carry deep meaning. And so when someone's name is changed, it is often to mark a distinct moment in their story or to redefine their future. By exploring some of the famous name changes in the Bible, we can reflect on how God may change our own lives and stories.

FIRST SERMON

Abram/Sarai -> Abraham, Sarah

Genesis 12-17

God entered into a covenant with Abram and Sarai.

God changed their names as a sign of the fulfilment of God's promises.

How does this parallel with the sacrament of baptism? How does baptism redefine someone's future?

SECOND SERMON

Jacob -> Israel

Genesis 32:22-31

Jacob's name change represents a movement from individual identity to the becoming of a "people."

Last names can represent the legacy we are a part of in the bigger picture of life.

How does our personal wrestling and struggle with God shape our faith journey?

THIRD SERMON

Joseph -> Zaphenath-paneah

Genesis 41:37-45

Name changes reflect contextual relationships that may shift.

Joseph was renamed by the Pharaoh which signified his transformation from a Hebrew slave to a powerful leader in Egypt.

How does our faith identity change us and our responsibilities to those around us?

FOURTH SERMON

Gideon -> Jerubabel

Judges 6:11-32

Gideon is given a new name to recognize actions he took to destroy the altar to Baal.

This nickname is based not on his personal faith struggles, but on actions taken to obey God, destroy the altar to Baal and therefore honor God.

How does God overcome who we are and what people know about us?

FIFTH SERMON

Naomi -> Mara

Ruth 1:19-20

Ruth claims her name should be Mara which is more accurate in how she sees herself although there is not an official name change.

Our life stories affect how we see ourselves or how others see us. Circumstances someone goes through can change their self-perception. Our identifying roles and names can change.

How do we find redemption in these changes? How do not allow other's negative perceptions influence the person God calls us to be?

SIXTH SERMON

Simon -> Peter

Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus declares that Simon's name will be Peter reflecting the rock on which the church will be built.

This is an example of an identity shift such as when "mom" or "dad" becomes part of someone's name. Job titles can reflect this

shift such as change to Reverend in which lay people see gifts that we may not see. (May be opportunity to share call your story)

Do we feel like we live as an imposter when God calls us to a task that we feel inadequate to step into it?

SEVENTH SERMON

Saul -> Paul

Acts 13:9

This is one of the more redemptive of the name changes in the Bible. Saul went from a murdered/persecutor of Christians to Paul a leader/evangelist of the church.

We are a new creation through Christ. His personal stature diminishes (Paul means little, small), but his service to God increases. Cultural example: In Korea, people change their name to change their future.

How do descriptions of us reflect the service we provide for God's people? How does God use us in spite of how we are perceived?

Lead creator: Haley Eccles

PETER

SERIES TYPE

Lectionary, Discipleship

SERIES DESCRIPTION

We have a tendency to define Peter by his weaknesses—like when he denies Jesus, and his strengths—such as when he stands in front of the crowd at Pentecost. Of course, Peter, like anyone growing in their faith, is much more complicated than what might seem obvious. We can learn a lot from Peter.

FIRST SERMON

Peter: Trusting God

Matthew 14:22–33

Over the next 4 four weeks, we are going to take a look at our good friend Peter and see what he has to teach us about our relationship with God in Christ. Peter is like many of us. He gets excited about stuff. He has moments of deep spiritual depths. He has moments where he doesn't seem to have a clue. Here Peter is an example of trusting God in something exciting and new—walking on water; and in what some might call failure—no longer walking on water, drowning! When, where, how, and why do you trust God? How does that trust strengthen you to live with and love others?

There are multiple times in the series that I will bring up other Peter stories where appropriate. Definitely his denial of Jesus, breakfast on the beach after Jesus' resurrection, Pentecost, vision at Joppa before going to visit Cornelius, and calling back to explain himself in Jerusalem.

SECOND SERMON

Peter: Expecting God

Matthew 15:(10–20) 21–28

Juxtaposition of the religious leaders and disciples's questions about how God is at work, what to expect from God about who is worthy (clean) and why versus what the woman expects. Rules and Rigidity versus Mercy and Healing. Peter's question could be seen to show an awakening of greater understanding of God's grace that bears fruit in his vision of the heavenly picnic in Acts. What are our expectations of God? Love or law? Grace or grudge? Mercy or malice? Do we show our answers in our lives?

THIRD SERMON

Peter: Spotting God

Matthew 16: 13–20

Peter identifies Jesus. Once we realize what God's love looks like, we start seeing it everywhere. But what does God's love look like? What did Peter see that he called Messiah and Son of the Living God? We start with trust, move into expectation, begin to see and name the reality of God's

very presence. Where do you see God at work? How do you claim and proclaim that? Challenge to share our God sightings.

FOURTH SERMON

Peter: Letting God

Matthew 16: 21–28

Part of growing in our relationship with God is realizing that we do not dictate to God the parameters of God's mercy and grace. People did not understand who Jesus was or why he came. Peter falls into the trap of worldly expectations. In this interaction, we are reminded that part of trusting, expecting, and spotting God means letting God be God, not our God in a box version. Share (and ask congregation to holler out) Bible stories where God surprised folks with grace and mercy. Then make it personal and ask: When have you been surprised by God? How did you respond?

FIFTH SERMON

Peter: Living God

Matthew 18: 21–35

In our story today Peter asks a leading

question. He answers it himself with an extravagant answer as many as 7 times? While Peter's answer IS extravagant, Jesus' is more so: 7 x 70. Jesus' parable is about something bigger than even seven times seventy. It is about a life of forgiveness. Giving and receiving mercy. Which world would you want to live in? The one filled with mercy, or the one where every penny owed (or slight remembered) is constantly being tallied? Forgiveness is about love. It is about seeking and allowing good for the other person, stranger, friend, enemy, or family. This is the love Jesus lives and calls us to live as well.

Lead creator: Missy Turbeville

STORY TIME

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

A sermon series on the parables of Jesus. Jesus told parables or stories not to entertain us but to reveal truths to us about the Kingdom of God. This series is being preached during the “Back to School,” time of year.

FIRST SERMON

Sowing Seeds

Mark 4:1–20

This sermon is based on the Parable of the Sower. Introduce the series and that Jesus taught in parables or stories, not to entertain but to reveal truths to us about the Kingdom of God. This is the first parable told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospels. We often think of this as a parable on evangelism, which it is, but there’s more going on here as well. God sows seeds in rocky, thorny places. God sows seeds in places that often don’t make sense to us. There seems to be lots of failure over and over and over again. But then suddenly, surprisingly, a plentiful harvest comes in the most unexpected places at the most unexpected times. This is a parable, yes, of evangelism, but also of hope breaking through, of harvest happening after much failure.

As an illustration, because of the Olympics, I used Simone Biles as an example. She grew up with a rocky start in foster care, she was adopted, and she is now an Olympic Gold

Medalist. That’s a picture of the Kingdom of God breaking in.

SECOND SERMON

Who is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25–37

This Sermon was on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When the Teacher of the Law asks “Who is my neighbor,” he is really asking, “Who isn’t my neighbor?” And this leads Jesus into this parable. Samaritans were viewed as enemies of the Jewish People. It would be unexpected for the listener that the Samaritan would be the hero in the story. This parable isn’t just an example of how we are to help others in need. It’s a picture of how, in the Kingdom of God, even enemies become our neighbors. Who is your Samaritan? Is it someone of the opposite political party? Is it someone of another religion or race? For Ukrainians it might be a Russian Soldier. For Palestinians it might be an Israeli or vice versa. What does it mean for your enemy to become your neighbor in the Kingdom of God?

THIRD SERMON

A Party in Heaven

Luke 15:1-7

This Sermon is based on the Parable of the Lost Sheep. This chapter of Luke involves 3 “Lost Stories.” There is the lost sheep, the lost coin, and lost son. These parables are told in response to the Pharisees words, “This man welcomes sinners and eat with them.” Jesus explains that a shepherd will leave the 99 to go and find the lost sheep. In real life, this probably doesn’t make sense to leave behind 99 sheep to go after one. But this is the way of the Kingdom of God. Jesus explains in the Kingdom of God, we go after the lost. And there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one lost sinner who repents. Use Fresh Expressions as an example of going out after the lost sheep. Who are the lost that Jesus is calling us as a church to go after?

FOURTH SERMON

The Generous Boss

Matthew 20:1-16

This Sermon is based on the Parable of the Vineyard Workers. This sermon is also

being preached Labor Day Weekend and Communion Sunday. We live in a world where bosses have not always been generous. Hence the reason for the Labor Movement and why we celebrate Labor Day. But this parable shows is about a generous boss. This boss paid the same wages to those who worked less than those who worked a lot. But Jesus isn’t really talking about work and wages. Jesus is the generous boss and he’s talking about whether you come to faith in Christ early in life or later in life you get the same reward. Like the lost sheep last week, we should celebrate those who come to experience the Kingdom of God no matter when they come.

Lead creator: Katie Harrington

YES AND...

SERIES TYPE

Leadership/Vision

SERIES DESCRIPTION

A 4-week generosity series on Genesis 1–3 culminating in Revelation 22. The greatest act of generosity was God’s generous creation of the world. As people made in God’s image, we are invited to mirror God’s creative generosity. In the story of Creation, the serpent convinces the humans that they will be like God in the eating of the fruit—just like how money is a tool that can both self-gratify or give.

Nevertheless, God is still generous to us. As we journey to new creation, we are invited again to join God in his act of creative generosity for the healing of all nations.

FIRST SERMON

God Says Yes

Genesis 1:1–2:4

The creation of the heavens and earth and all that inhabit it was God’s first act of generosity to us. God says “yes” to us! We are created through God’s generosity FOR generosity. We are to be good stewards of creation. Leadership (dominion over) as God intended it is an act of generosity.

SECOND SERMON

We Say Yes

Genesis 2:4–25

In Genesis 2, God says: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” We are created for community and with the capacity for generosity with others FOR others. Our impact is greater together. “Helper” language isn’t submissive but incredibly powerful. How are we leveraging our resources together to be helpers in our community?

THIRD SERMON

Yes, But...

Genesis 3:1–13, 21–23

The serpent lies to Eve: “yes, but you can have so much MORE.” Our temptations lie in that “never enough” mentality—especially when it comes to money. We’re always striving, longing, and hustling for more, sometimes at the expense of others. We use money to increase our power at the expense of the union with our creative and generous God when we refuse to share. Adam and Eve failed to recognize the abundance around them in their striving. In living a generous life, we’re fighting against the current of “yes, but...”

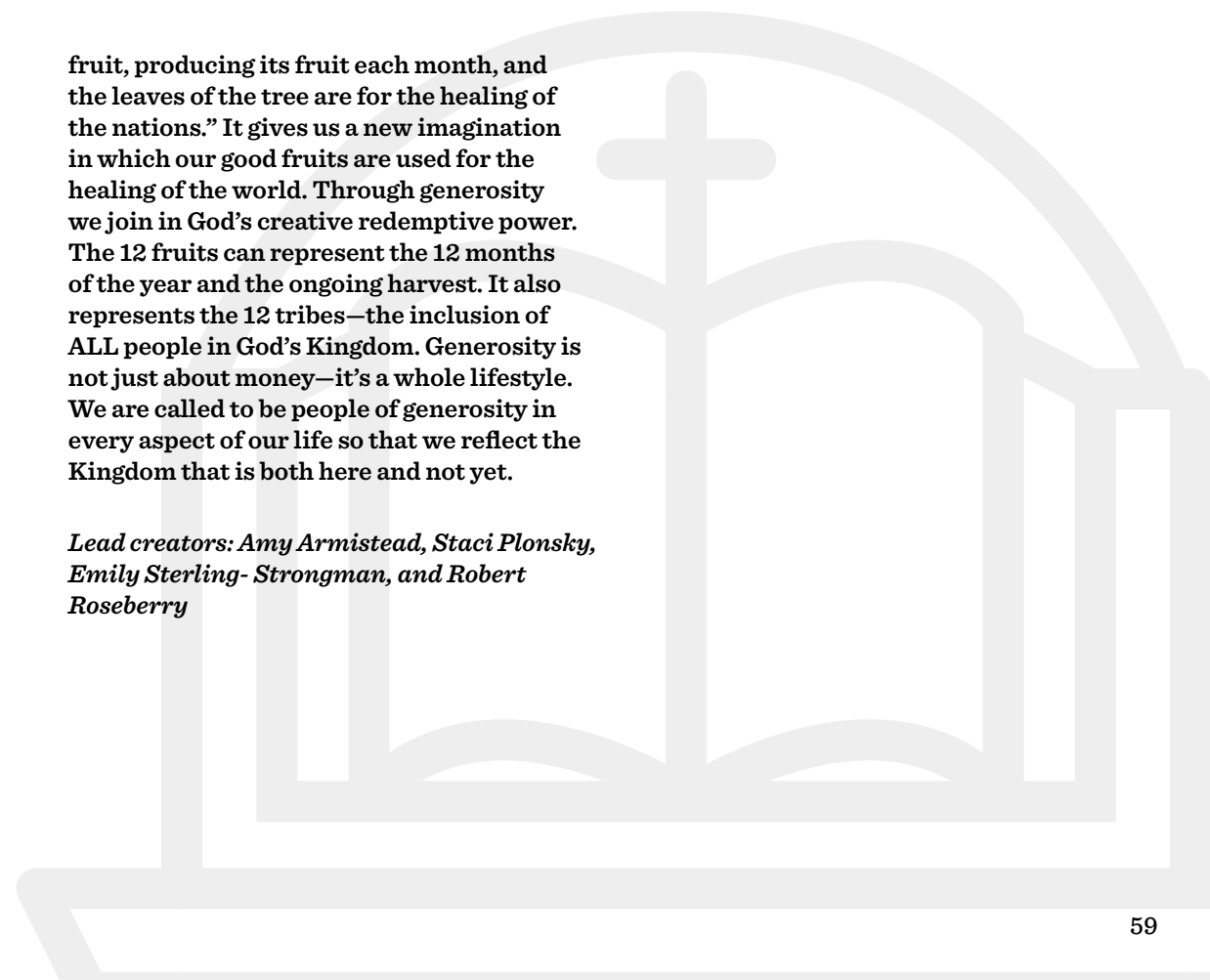
And yes, God does not withhold God’s generosity even when we turn away.

FOURTH SERMON

Yes And Amen

Revelation 22:1–5, 17

The culmination of Revelation depicts a return to the Garden—a new Jerusalem. In verse 2 it says “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of



fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” It gives us a new imagination in which our good fruits are used for the healing of the world. Through generosity we join in God’s creative redemptive power. The 12 fruits can represent the 12 months of the year and the ongoing harvest. It also represents the 12 tribes—the inclusion of ALL people in God’s Kingdom. Generosity is not just about money—it’s a whole lifestyle. We are called to be people of generosity in every aspect of our life so that we reflect the Kingdom that is both here and not yet.

Lead creators: Amy Armistead, Staci Plonsky, Emily Sterling- Strongman, and Robert Roseberry

STRANGELY WARMED

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

This series explores stewardship through the lens of Wesleyan Grace. The main purpose is to show how a heart that is “strangely warmed” empowers us to live in a way that participates in God’s activity in our own lives, our communities, the church, and our world. Congregants will be given actionable steps to take that form them into people who are more deeply committed to the disciplines of prayers, presence, service, witness, and generosity.

FIRST SERMON

Strange Prayers

1 Samuel 1:9–18, 2:1–8

This sermon will connect the stewardship of the praying community to God’s prevenient grace. When we pray, we commit to pouring ourselves out without fully knowing the impact that our prayer will have on our world—just as Hannah could not know the legacy of Samuel when she prayed for and committed him to the service of the Lord. Hearts that are strangely warmed pray knowing that the results are in the hands of God and that the results will be good beyond our comprehension.

Illustrations: Introduction of Wesley’s “Heart Strangely Warmed” as a moment years in the making, congregational prayer ministry, weekly prayer at the flagpole at elementary school

SECOND SERMON

Strange Witness

1 Samuel 7:1–13a

This sermon is focused on connecting the stewardship of presence and witness to

God’s justifying grace. Just as Samuel and the Israelites held fast to their testimony of God’s protection and hope of deliverance from the Philistines, we as the community of faith are called to tell the story of God’s great deliverance of us through Christ. Hearts that are strangely warmed show up and proclaim the power of God and won’t be satisfied until all who need to hear this good news are invited to experience it themselves.

Illustrations: The assurance Wesley experienced at Aldersgate

THIRD SERMON

Strange Service

1 Samuel 12:20–25

This sermon connects the stewardship of service to God’s sanctifying grace. Looking to Samuel’s words about the futility of chasing after idols, we will explore the ways that we are consistently distracted from the mission of God and the purpose that we were created for: to serve this world on God’s behalf. The outpouring of a heart strangely warmed is evidenced by the way that we as individuals and as a church serve and impact our world.

Illustrations: John Wesley's heart to serve the coal miners and impoverished parts of England

FOURTH SERMON

Strange Generosity

1 Samuel 24:1-19

This sermon focuses on financial generosity as well as the generous way that we offer our gifts and time as a sign of our “going on to perfection.” When we give of ourselves and our financial treasure without expecting personal gain we are living out the life that Jesus invited the world to when he said “deny yourself daily, take up your cross and follow me.” By looking at the story of David sparing the life of Saul we will see how sometimes the easy thing to do is to take for ourselves, while the true mark of spiritual maturity is to give with a convicted and joyful heart—even if the one we are giving to isn't perfect (like the local church) and maybe doesn't even deserve it.

Illustrations: John Wesley living off of 30 pounds and giving away 1400 pounds, Dr Paul Fritz who gave 90% of his income away

Note that these are not illustrations to guilt, but rather to create awareness of how seriously some have taken this idea that everything belongs to God.

Lead creator: Tim Barton

UNBEATABLE FAITH

SERIES TYPE

Lectionary

SERIES DESCRIPTION

The series is based on Hebrews 11 and is about having faith that does not fail through people of faith. Through individual biblical figures, we are taught how they lived a life that pleased God by looking at the beliefs they had.

FIRST SERMON

Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3

Winning by hope for the conviction of the things not seen.

SECOND SERMON

Attitude

Hebrews 11:4

Attitude is more important than action.

THIRD SERMON

Companion

Hebrews 11:5

We can enjoy a faithful journey when we walk in the same direction.

FOURTH SERMON

Assurance

Hebrews 11:6

We must believe in two things: Existence & Rewarding.

FIFTH SERMON

Obedience

Hebrews 11:7

We can prepare by seeing the unseen.

SIXTH SERMON

Calling

Hebrews 11:8

There is nothing when we step out.

SEVENTH SERMON

Pilgrim

Hebrews 11:9-10

Travel will be happier when we have a simple life.

EIGHTH SERMON

Breaking the Limit

Hebrews 11:11-12

Faith can make the impossible possible.

NINTH SERMON

Seeking

Hebrews 11:13-16

It is essential to finish our lives with faith.

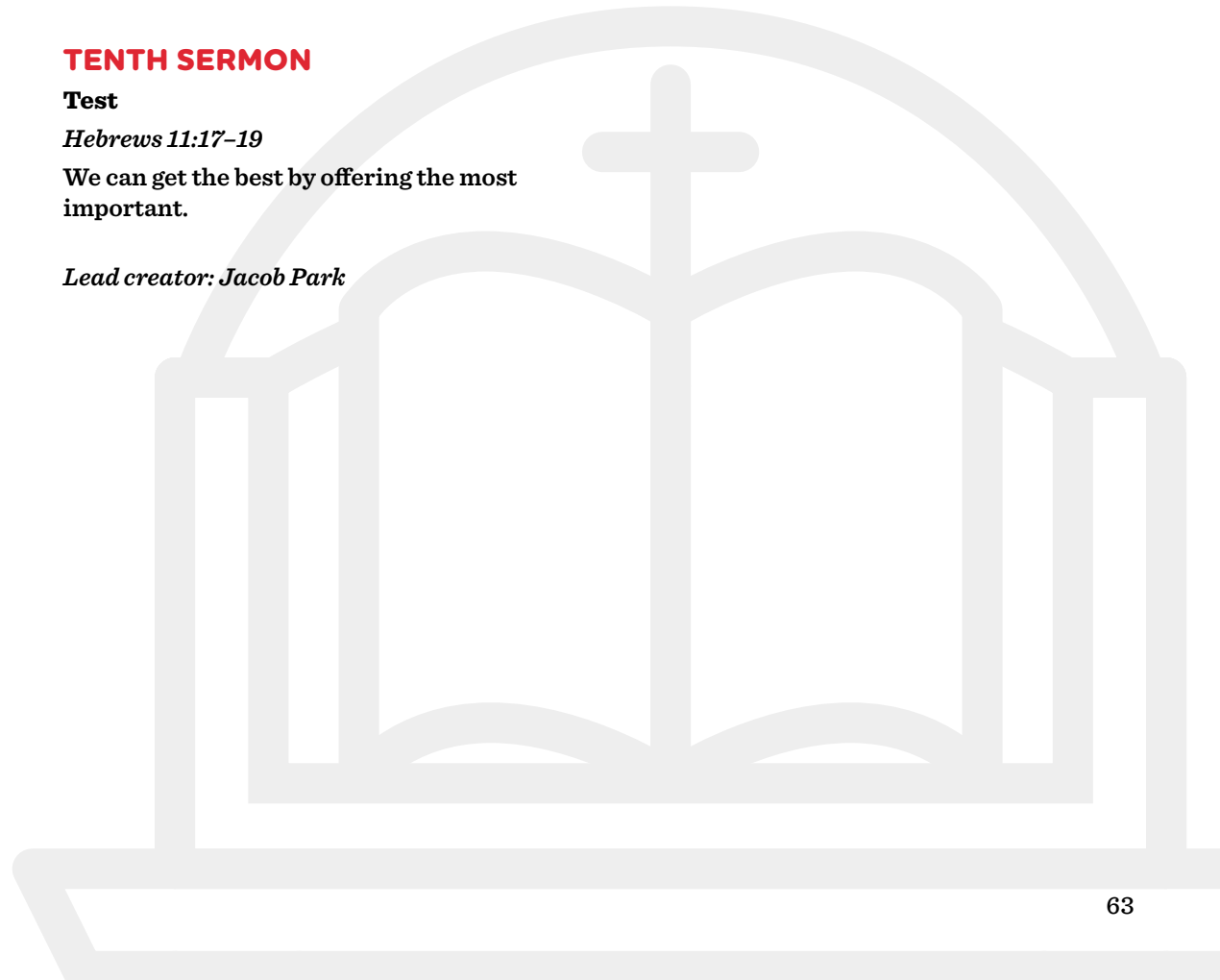
TENTH SERMON

Test

Hebrews 11:17-19

We can get the best by offering the most important.

Lead creator: Jacob Park



WHY IS EVERYONE ELSE AT BRUNCH?

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Seeker Sensitive, Lent/Easter

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Church attendance and engagement are not what they used to be. They were on a downward trend pre-2020, but they were accelerated by the global pandemic. Some fell out of the habit. Others have found community and identity in other groups or pursuits. And still others have experienced “church hurt,” and are avoiding church even if they still believe in Jesus.

How can we better understand those in our community who are disengaged from the church, and how can we help them to feel welcomed, valued, and included?

FIRST SERMON

Telling the Truth About the Church

Things are changing, and we need to be able to talk about it.

SECOND SERMON

Telling the Truth About Our Pain

Learning to listen to those who don't see church or experience it the same as we do

Be curious not judgmental. When things get difficult, turn to wonder.

Address guilt/shame felt by church folks with unchurched family.

THIRD SERMON

Nones and Dones

We are all on a journey. We are not as different from them as we think.

Maybe share MissionInsite data on who is in your immediate community—includes values, interests, etc.

Why and how are people making connections for “church” things, such as community, in other places.

FOURTH SERMON

Joining Jesus for Brunch

Explore the story of Jesus and Peter at the end of John 21.

The significance of a coal fire only being described at Peter's denial and reconnection with Jesus.

The ultimate insider doesn't feel welcome or worthy until he experiences Jesus' love and invitation.

How can we take our experiences of things like hurt, rejection, and reconnection into the world with us?

Lead creator: Meghan Killingsworth

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Seeker Sensitive

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Explore the powerful and transformative nature of God's grace as we journey through our past, present, and future. In this three-part sermon series, discover how God's grace redeems our yesterdays, changes us today, and provides hope and purpose for tomorrow. Whether you're carrying the weight of past regrets, feeling stuck in your daily routine, or uncertain about the future, come and see how God's grace may already be at work in your life.

FIRST SERMON

Yesterday: Grace Behind Me

John 4:1-18; John 1:1; Ephesians 1:7-10

Main Takeaway: God's grace redeems our yesterdays.

Opening Line: Don't you hate when you forget things? Especially when they are important like your keys?

Story: Share about a time that you forgot something important. Humor can be helpful in this space.

Transition: Sometimes we easily forget things in life. But other things, we struggle with forgetting—no matter how much we may want to forget them.

Tension: Build a tension around the types of things in our lives that we wish we could forget such as failed relationships, financial disasters, broken dreams, etc.

John 4:1-18

Highlight the historical tension between the Jewish people and the Samaritans.

A shared heritage that fractured.

Discuss the woman's past. Not from a

perspective of her moral failures (because we don't actually have evidence of them), but from the perspective of the different relationships she has had. These different relationships indicate that she has a fractured past of some sorts. Maybe her choice, maybe not. Regardless there is pain there.

We can imagine what she must have experienced. And she carries that with her. It is highly probable that when she was experiencing these transitions in life, that are messy, she did not believe that someday she would be looking at Jesus face-to-face. Jesus' declaration about her life is a revelation that Jesus himself is someone who knew everything that had occurred in her life. He shows himself to be Lord over time and history.

We see this in the beginning of the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1 NRSVue).

What is amazing about this story is that even in the messy history of the Jewish people and the Samaritans, Christ was present. In the

messy moments of this woman's life Christ was present. In fact, in the places we least expected it God's grace was with us.

Application/Responding: Share a modern story about a person who had a history that they may have regretted or wish they could change. Yet we recognize that those pieces of their life are part of their story. Even in those spaces, God was both present and believed them to be beloved. (You will reference this story again in week 3 and optionally in week 2).

God's grace was active in those spaces of their lives.

Yet, he didn't realize the ways God was with him in that space. The people who surrounded him, the phone calls that came in at just the right time. The grace of God that was with him even in those spaces.

Ephesians 1:7-10

God has been drawing you forward, gathering you to God's self this whole time. What if we needed less to forget the difficult parts of our story but instead allow grace to redeem our yesterday? This is not to dismiss our pain but to let God's grace cover that pain. What if we

need to make space to see the good ways God has been with us? What if we need to forget the guilt and remember the grace. Jesus met with this woman; the same is true of you today. God's grace redeems our yesterdays.

Additional ideas: Forgiveness of self. She doesn't get defensive. He offered her possibilities. She drops her load (her pot). Recognizing why we have come to the well. We're hungry for a deeper longing. We can make assumptions about the woman. (Cleveland Clinic Thought Bubbles)

SECOND SERMON

Today: Grace Within Me

John 4:15-26; Ephesians 1:5-10

Main Takeaway: God's grace actively changes us today.

Opening Line: Have you ever felt stuck? Like your routine is stuck, and tomorrow will always be like today. Feeling stuck in our lives can lead us to despair, hopelessness, and a feeling of inadequacy.

Story: (Share a story about being stuck, or here is an example you can use.) When one of my daughters was little, shy of two

years old, she picked up a stick. Honestly, it was probably a twig. She took the stick and dropped it on one of her feet. So when you look at her, you see this young girl in bright pink sandals with a stick across her shoe. She looks up at us and tries to say, "Stuck." She looked back at her foot again, saying, "Stuck." She was convinced that she was stuck under that stick.

Transition: We feel stuck in our lives sometimes, don't we? Whatever that stick is that has us stuck, whether we put it there or not, feels insurmountable.

Tension: Highlight places where our people, especially visitors, feel stuck. Consider highlighting the normal ways of life, including doing laundry, paying bills, mowing our yard, going to work, and picking up groceries. These can all lead us to a place of dissatisfaction. Being stuck creates tension in our lives, and it can feel terrible. We have a strong desire for positive momentum. Often, when we are stuck, we look at the stick and feel all alone in that place.

Recap last week and highlight the story of the

Samaritan woman at the well. John 4:15–26
The woman here is hungry for something greater, “give me this water.” She has a posture of a willingness to receive. There appears to be something different about this Jesus.

When she acknowledges that “Messiah is coming” (vs 25), we can see her willingness to receive and believe there is a better way than being stuck where she is.

As they move back and forth, discussing the elements of worship, we can’t lose sight of this one most important thing: Jesus is with her in that space of exploration.

Application/Responding: God’s grace is active and alive in our lives, in your life. And this is why we can have hope—because Christ came to be with us. The story we celebrate every Christmas, the birth of Jesus being born and coming near us. Even when we feel stuck, lost, or confused about where we are, God’s grace through the Holy Spirit is with us.

Ephesians 1:5–10

“to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved....riches

of his grace lavished upon us...to gather up all things in him.”

Friends, you see in the places that you feel the greatest sense of wandering. Of being confused or dazed. Or stuck in life. These are the places that we can meet Christ sitting at a well. These are the places where God’s grace is lavished upon us if we are willing to converse and be with.

As we saw last week, the woman at the well has had some sort of difficulty in her past. Likely filled with pain. And now she is just doing the ordinary things of life, like getting water. When we are living our ordinary lives, it can be easy to not notice God’s love and grace in our lives. It can be easy to let Christ go unnoticed. But I’m here today to tell you that God’s glorious grace is bestowed richly upon your life. Why? To gather you in God’s love. To gather you right now, in a love that gave all for you.

Additional ideas: She drops the pot. Everything shapes us into who God can make us. Most of her statements are actually questions. Is she teaching by asking questions? She’s a person of depth.

THIRD SERMON

Tomorrow: God’s Grace Ahead Me

John 4:27–42; Ephesians 2:8–10; John 14:26

Main Takeaway: God’s grace gives us hope and purpose for tomorrow.

Opening Line: You stand outside a closed door. On the other side is a room full of uncomfortable and tense conversations.

Story: Perhaps you’ve been there before. You are facing the future, and it seems scary. You have a work negotiation that you really need to work out. You need to meet with your child’s teacher because they seem to struggle mightily in this particular class. There’s been conflict between you and your spouse, and you are nervous to enter into a counseling session.

Transition: Is it possible that a transformed present can lead to a hopeful future?

Tension: We want the future to be filled with hope. We want to believe that today can be better than tomorrow. We want to walk into that uncomfortable conversation believing that good can come out. All the while we walk this path with uncertainties, fear, and feeling

alone.

I'm wondering what would happen if you believed that you were not alone in the future. What could happen in your life if you believed that you had a larger purpose to live for now and into the future?

Recap of the woman at the well story up until this point.

John 4:25–42

This woman whose past has encountered grace and who has sat with Jesus is seeing the world differently. Unlike Nicodemus, who met Jesus earlier in John, this woman sees a different future. Nicodemus would later see Christ fully, but it is the Samaritan woman for now.

She runs to tell people who she has met and what she has experienced. Her community didn't write her off (as some have suggested) because many people returned with her.

Before they return to Jesus, we have this brief section of the disciples who do not really understand what Jesus is about yet.

Many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus, the woman being the first recorded in the

gospel (arguably with the exception of John the Baptist). A transformation occurred within her.

Her future was changed forever, and God's grace went with her. That's the interesting thing about God's grace—it transforms our past, present, and future.

Ephesians 2:8–10

As Paul shares, God's grace in our lives is a gift. It brings us freedom and joy in Christ and calls us forward to a greater purpose—one of God's purposes.

The woman at the well shows us this good purpose so well. She has experienced a sense of joy, of recognizing God in her life, and of sharing that goodness with others.

For you and me, this is not just about sharing verbally but about living into a purpose of loving God and practicing the love of our neighbor.

John 14:26

And as we live into those purposes, as imperfect people who are loved by God, we know that the presence of God is with us.

So when you enter that board room. When

you walk into your lawyer's office. When you take another phone call with your school's principal. In the spaces where we feel the greatest anxieties, we can hold hope that God is already in that space. Before you ever arrive there, the Holy Spirit is there. Before ever answer your phone, God's grace is with you. You can live with hope and purpose so that you can enjoy being loved by God and helping others know that love.

Story: Draw from the story you told in week one about someone who regretted their past. Of course, the person wouldn't want to relive their pains, but they can begin to see a path forward toward redemption and purpose. God was with them in their struggles; it is part of their narrative and has brought them here today. Give them a vision for how it can become a source of good in the future. Perhaps remembering God's grace in yesterday, today, and tomorrow is essential. We practice remembering.

Useful quote: "I am struck by the fact that the prophets speaking about the future of Israel always kept reminding their people of God's great works in the past. They could look forward with confidence because they

could look backward with awe to Yahweh's
great deeds.” - Henri Nouwen

God's grace goes before us, giving us hope
and purpose.

Lead creator: Brian Lawson



CONTENT CREATORS: CO-CREATING WITH GOD

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Discover how God's imagination shaped the world and how we are invited to join in this creative journey. From the creation of the universe to the ongoing work of love in our everyday lives, this series explores how we can see ourselves as co-creators with God. Each week, uncover the beauty of God's love expressed through creation and how our own acts of creativity—big or small—continue this divine work. Whether it's art, music, or even folding laundry, everything we create can be an expression of God's love.

FIRST SERMON

God's act of creation was an act of holy imagination and a declaration of God's love.

Psalm 19:1–6; 1 John 4:8,16

In Psalm 19:1–6 we see the creation declaring the greatness of the “handiwork” of the Creator. There is a sense that looking at the creation reveals the authority, power, and vision of the Creator - placing the Creator above and beyond the created order of the world around us. The very act of giving the gift of the world to us, of life to us, is an expression of love shared by a God who is love (1 John 4:8, 16). To think of a world that was yet to be formed, that was yet to exist in any substance, is a testament to the imagination of God - an imagination that can dream up worlds, the sky, stars, whales, bumble bees, and you.

Action: Reflect on the created world around you. What do you easily miss? What catches your eye or takes your breath away? What makes you dream? What smell brings you back to a place of meaning? What can all of this say about God, our creator?

SECOND SERMON

God's act of creation extends beyond the Garden of Eden into the expression of God's love seen in Christ.

Genesis 2:10–14

In Genesis 2, we see that in the garden of Eden are described rivers that extend beyond the garden's boundaries. The extension of these rivers indicates an imaginative future that extends beyond the bounds of the Garden of Eden. Something was going to happen outside of what was known at the time. Perhaps this is because this was written later, or maybe it indicates something about God and creation. God dreams beyond what we see and intends the world to continue going beyond the original creation. The world is going somewhere beyond what we see. Of course, we know now that what would happen in the story leads us to a need for the incarnation of Jesus, the crucifixion, and resurrection.

Action: What does it mean to think that God was already dreaming of the world to move somewhere beyond the garden? Where have you seen things work out in a way that

you couldn't have imagined? How can you imagine a new future that God is creating in the world?

THIRD SERMON

Human imagination continues what God is doing in the world.

Genesis 2:18–20a; Exodus 35:30–35;

In Genesis, we see God getting into the soil to create magnificent creatures. And of all things, God gives humans an opportunity to practice their own imagination. The human names every animal, which is a situation for humor. We begin to see that God has used imagination to create the world, but now humans are given the opportunity to use their imagination to name animals. Later, we see this continued in Exodus when there were artists who were so significant that we have their names in Scripture. Using our imaginations and creating is a continuation of the work that God began at the beginning. Even more so, it is an act that God invited us into when humans began naming animals.

Action: Call people to practice using their imagination this week as an act of living into something holy. Provide ideas or even

consider sharing pencils and sketchpads with people.

FOURTH SERMON

You are invited to see your life as an act of creating with God.

Genesis 2:19; John 5:16–19; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 13

Every young child is an artist. They draw, color, and paint with abandonment. Somewhere along the lines, though, when asked if we are an artist, we quickly say, “No.” Or we add a qualifier such as, “I just doodle.” Yet, what we discover is that just as God played in the dirt and clay to create, so can we. Jesus came into this world doing the work of the Father. We are God’s handy work created to do good works in love. We are created to live and breathe love in our world as seen in 1 Corinthians 13. Our creating is about continuing the creating act of love that God started in the very beginning. So when we fold laundry, are we doing so in love? When we are creating Excel sheets, are we doing so for a good and meaningful purpose? When we are driving, what are we creating around us - tension or peace? When we live

in this world, we cannot help but create. We create and leave something behind, like the water behind a boat. As Jesus people, we are called to create love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness in the world. By doing so, we are working with God’s imagination of life beyond the garden of Eden or should we say life beyond what we can see in our everyday living.

Action: Call your people to consider the masterpiece they are creating in the world around them. Is it more filled with love than yesterday? Are you seeing your life as participating in something bigger than yourself? Share an example of someone doing good work in your congregation and show people how it creates God’s love in the world.

RESOURCES

Potential Ideas: Ask a painter to put a large blank canvas on the stage. Then, each week, add another layer or step to the canvas as you progress through this series. Perhaps consider finding a way for congregation members to add paint after each sermon.

Another option is to ask a different congregational member to be on stage and create artwork at some point in the service. This could be traditional artwork, such as painting or drawing. You could have someone write out musical notes on sheet music so that it moves from a blank sheet to a sheet filled with music. On other weeks, you could have someone create something that isn't necessarily considered artwork, such as a spreadsheet or folding laundry.

***Art+Faith: A Theology of Making* by Makoto Fujimura**

Lead creator: Brian Lawson



DARK NIGHTS, BRIGHT LIGHTS

SERIES TYPE

Advent/Christmas, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

God's light is revealed in the darkest places (John 1). There is an aspect of healing when we allow the light to shine. In Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as the Healer of the World.

FIRST SERMON

Hope

The only way to be hopeful when things are bad is turning to awe, and looking for the good. Hope is in zooming out, to see more than just suffering.

Comparison image: Suffering

Hope doesn't change the suffering, but helps us to see beyond it.

SECOND SERMON

Peace

Presence is sometimes what we get from God. When we ask for answers, and instead we get God's presence. (Nadia Bolz-Weber-Pastrix)

People diagnosed with OCD- a strategy for dealing with this is to set a timer and let yourself be present with your thoughts until the timer goes off. Meditation is also used for this- being present to yourself.

Comparison image: Conflict

We all understand conflict and experience it. Families splitting up over politics. Friendships fractured.

Jesus breaks in with a message: love one another. Peace as an antidote to division.

Another Scriptural reference: Paul - live peaceably with one another- Romans 12:18

THIRD SERMON

Joy

"I look at joy as an act of resistance against despair and its forces." - Willie Jennings

Comparison image: Despair or cynicism

Sarah's laughter as resistance. Holds Isaac and says we are going to name him "laughter" because everyone is going to laugh with me. Hope in the laughter.

Joy becomes resistance to despair, reflects the surprise.

FOURTH SERMON

Love

Gratitude - Grief is love with nowhere to go. Jesus as an expression of God's infinite love for us.

Comparison image: Loneliness

FIFTH SERMON

Christmas Eve

Jesus the Light of the World

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...”

The light shines and the darkness cannot overcome it.

In dark times, Jesus is the ultimate sign of God’s love, come to be with us.

RESOURCES

Pair a practice with each week. Jesus meets us in the doing, not just in the thinking. How can you practice Hope as an antidote in suffering, peace in the midst of conflict, etc.?

Image Resources:

There are powerful images of Jesus coming at an inopportune or inconvenient time. The Christmas story is the center of that.

Image in Palestine hotel of the hand and a baby in it.

Bethlehem - Banksy - peace dove with Kevlar vest.

Baby Jesus on the mound of rubble.

We’ve already been practicing these in our

world. God enters in Christmas with no room, with everyone fleeing.

Hope, joy, peace, love are an act of defiance.

Scriptures can come from the Lectionary for Advent & Christmas, and can be adjusted depending on that.

Lead creator: Anil Singh

DISCERNMENT

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Are you struggling with life's big decisions and wondering how to hear God's voice? Let's explore how to listen to God through prayer, meditation on Scripture, conversation with friends, and reflection on current events. Drawing wisdom from spiritual writer Henri Nouwen, this series will equip you to make wise and faithful choices in your everyday life.

FIRST SERMON

Embracing Discernment in Solitude and Community

Colossians 1:9–10

It is important to move back and forth between personal time with God and time with friends in the church if we want to hear God's still small voice. We listen to God's voice within and among us.

SECOND SERMON

Distinguishing Spirits of Truth and Falsehood

John 1:1–10 or Galatians 5:13–25

Discernment is not primarily about judging people's motives but about distinguishing good and truthful guidance from harmful and deceptive messages.

THIRD SERMON

Read Your Way Forward: Hearing God's Voice in Scripture and Other Spiritual Writings

Psalms 119:105–112, CEB

Our Wesleyan heritage helps us to see the importance of scripture and tradition,

including the wisdom of others captured in various spiritual writings. But if we read these texts simply to acquire knowledge it will not help us in our spiritual life. We are invited not just to read spiritual things, but to read spiritual things in a spiritual way.

FOURTH SERMON

Pay Attention to the People in Your Path

1 Thessalonians 2:13

God speaks to us through Christian friends and other people we meet in daily life. John Wesley affirmed this when he taught "Christian Conferencing" as a means of grace. This message will help us listen for the voice of God in conversation with others.

FIFTH SERMON

Discern the Signs of the Times

Luke 21:8–18, 25–28

Current events, historical events, and life circumstances can serve as signposts pointing to the will of God and the new creation for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Lead creator: Mark Reynolds

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

SERIES TYPE

Topical, Justice Focused

SERIES DESCRIPTION

The goal of this series is to provide a biblical foundation for the church's role in creation care.

FIRST SERMON

God as Creator and Creation as Good

Genesis 1, Colossians 1:16

Key Points:

- God's role as Creator and sustainer of all creation.
- God calls his creation "good"
- Introduction to the concept of Creation Care as a response to God's love.

SECOND SERMON

Human Obedience/Disobedience to God's Commandments Has Consequences for Creation

Options: Romans 8:18–25, Micah 7:13, Hosea 4:1–3, Isaiah 24:1–3

Key Points:

- The consequences of sin on the created order.
- How human actions contribute to environmental degradation.
- The call to repentance and restoration in Creation Care.

THIRD SERMON

Engaging in Creation as a Spiritual Practice

Options: Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20, Psalm 8:3–4

Theme: Discovering the transformative power of reconnecting with nature as a way to engage with the divine.

Key Points:

- Nature reveals the power of God
- ALL of creation cries out in praises to God
- Engage in nature as a form of spiritual discipline/practice

FOURTH SERMON

The Role of Humanity as Stewards of Creation

Psalm 8; Genesis 2:15

Theme: Understanding our responsibility in Creation Care

Key Points:

- Humanity's unique role as stewards of God's creation.
- The ethical and moral imperative of caring for the environment.

- Practical ways individuals and the church can engage in Creation Care.

FIFTH SERMON

Future Vision of a New Creation

Revelation 21 or Isaiah 11:1–16

Theme: Co-creating a new creation

Key Points:

- The vision for a new heaven and a new earth is a GARDEN! A return to paradise/ Garden
- Encouraging congregational involvement in environmental justice initiatives.
- Our role as co-workers with Christ in the redemption of creation.

Lead creator: Amy Armistead



GOING TO THE MAT

SERIES TYPE

Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Combating loneliness through friendship, family, community

FIRST SERMON

Loneliness

Genesis 1

First time we hear in the Creation story that it was “not good” is human being alone. God creates us for relationship and companionship.

New Testament Example: Man on mat at pool of Bethsaida - I have no one to put me in the water...

Compare this to other examples in Scripture where there are others who “go to the mat” for each other.

God created us to be with one another.

SECOND SERMON

Friendship

Friends tearing open the roof to lower their friends on a mat. - Mark 2:1-12

Are you the friend who would carry someone on a mat? Are you willing to be carried?

THIRD SERMON

Risk of Connection

Woman bleeding for a long time reaches out

to touch Jesus (she's alone in the crowd)- Mark 5.

She takes the risk to connect with Jesus.

Community bringing people to be healed. How are we risking connection?

FOURTH SERMON

Jesus “goes to the mat” fighting evil/sin/death

Loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross. Prays until he bleeds. - Luke 22

Jesus is ultimate example of “going to the mat.”

FIFTH SERMON

Family

You didn't choose me, but I chose you. - John 14-15

Families - biological or chosen. Scripture has many examples:

Ruth and Naomi - the Book of Ruth.

Jesus reinstitutes family when he gives his mother to the Beloved Disciple. Woman, this is your son. This is your mother. - John 19

RESOURCES

The Well-Played Life by Leonard Sweet

Bowling Alone by Robert D. Putnam

Hidden Brain podcast - You 2.0

This American Life podcast - Swim Toward the Sharks

Video of guy seeking rejection for 100 days
- tries to desensitize himself to it, finds far more yeses than he anticipated

Lead creator: Pulpit Project Group 5

FAITHFUL DOUBT AND THE CULT OF CERTAINTY

SERIES TYPE

Discipleship, Justice Focused

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Certainty is attractive when the world around us is unstable. The easiest way to quickly grow influence is to speak loudly and confidently while minimizing complexity and nuance. At best, a belief that relies on certainty creates a God that is able to be contained; at worst, we have seen it breed more insidious belief like Christian Nationalism. An honest and mature life of faith calls us not only to see the world for what it truly is, but it also calls us to love and serve our neighbors who see things differently. This is the gift of our Wesleyan theological heritage.

FIRST SERMON

Psychological need for certainty

Story of Doubting Thomas

In the first series we want to ground the hearer in our shared humanness. This means that we are invited to consider why we crave certainty. What can be comforting about it, and what is uncomfortable in the world.

Questions to explore in the message:

Where does the desire for certainty come from?

How do we faithfully process complex ideas?

Certainty and humility are opposites

What are the guardrails/non-negotiables that help us when we experience doubt?

“I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything. I remembered something Father Tom had told me – that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.” - Anne Lamott

SECOND SERMON

Bible as Idol vs Inspired

2 Timothy 3:16, Stories like Jephthah's vow

A desire for certainty can impact how we view scripture and connect with its story. A faithful connection to scripture might include wrestling, questioning, struggling, and rejecting the face value of violent and harmful texts. Our Wesleyan heritage provides us with a way of viewing scripture that is not through certain inerrancy but that is with respect and the inspiration of the spirit. We might also consider how the Bible held tightly can be considered an idol or wielded as a weapon against others.

Faith often points to something we cannot see, and belief is inherently uncertain.

The way we deal with Scriptures can invite us into faithful dialogue, not certainty.

The Word of God in scripture is Jesus and not the text itself.

What can we hold onto in the midst of uncertainty? Scripture and Scriptural interpretation

THIRD SERMON

Understanding of Heaven - Eschatology

The Lord's Prayer

In Christianity, some of the desire for certainty comes from the ways we understand and view Heaven as something separate and something that we rely on and something we are waiting on. While a “hope of Heaven” might be a faithful thing, extremes can invite people to “opt-out” of the mission on earth while waiting for heaven, or perhaps even embrace evangelistic tactics where the ends justify the means as we seek to get more souls to heaven.

Give the history for our understanding of heaven. Ex: there was a huge shift in understanding during the Civil War.

Explore the understanding of Heaven on Earth and need to have the hope of heaven. - Revelation 21?

We seek heaven because we need to know that our life matters.

Theological resource: *Surprised by Hope* by N.T. Wright

FOURTH SERMON

Understanding and Deconstructing Christian Nationalism

Acts 2, Ethiopian Eunuch or Peter/Cornelius

Christian Nationalism can be connected to a desire for certainty in our faith because it seeks to make explicit an understanding of how faith should be lived out, using a particular interpretation of the Bible, a view of our heritage as a nation and a belief in America as the supreme cite of God's favor. Hearers should be invited into a more inclusive view of God's care of all nations.

How do we come to an understanding of Christian nationalism?

Look at Scriptures used to defend this, and how instead God invites us to be a people of all nations. Who can we see when God calls us to look beyond our expectations?

FIFTH SERMON

Understanding Christian Zionism/Dispensationalism

Revelation 21

The uncertainty in our world can feel so

unbearable, we can just be ready to leave it. Perhaps you have heard believers say something like “I'm ready for the Lord to come back now” as a way of indicating this. Some believers feel so strongly about this that they have bought into theological views that might speed the Lord's return. One such view is Zionism. A sermon might break down the ways that a view has impacted the religio-political realities in Israel/Palestine and the problematic ethics that “the ends justify the means.” For evangelicals, this belief ties into views made popular in the 19th century about the rapture.

Resources: *Responsible Grace* (Chapter 9) by Randy Maddox

Reading Revelation Responsibly by Michael Gorman

SIXTH SERMON

Spiritual Practice while we wait

Jacob wrestling for a Blessing

God is here with us in the messy in-between. Our faith makes room for questions, doubts, fears, and hope. That being said, on the roller coaster of our faith, it can be helpful to have

some anchors. Our spiritual practices can provide us with something to hold onto in difficult seasons of our faith. In this sermon, you can invite hearers to engage in one specific spiritual practice on their journey or several. This could be a great Sunday to have communion, as the table can be an anchor for us. Emphasis might also be placed on having a community of faith and the ways we can support each other in seasons of doubt. Because faith relying on certainty can really emphasize right thought and right belief, hearers will be invited to the blessing that spiritual practices bring to allow them to act on their belief with their whole being: body, mind and soul. The emphasis moves from right belief to right practice, which grounds our Wesleyan heritage.

What practices/disciplines can help us acknowledge and experience God's presence and activity in our life and in the world?

What anchors us in an uncertain world?

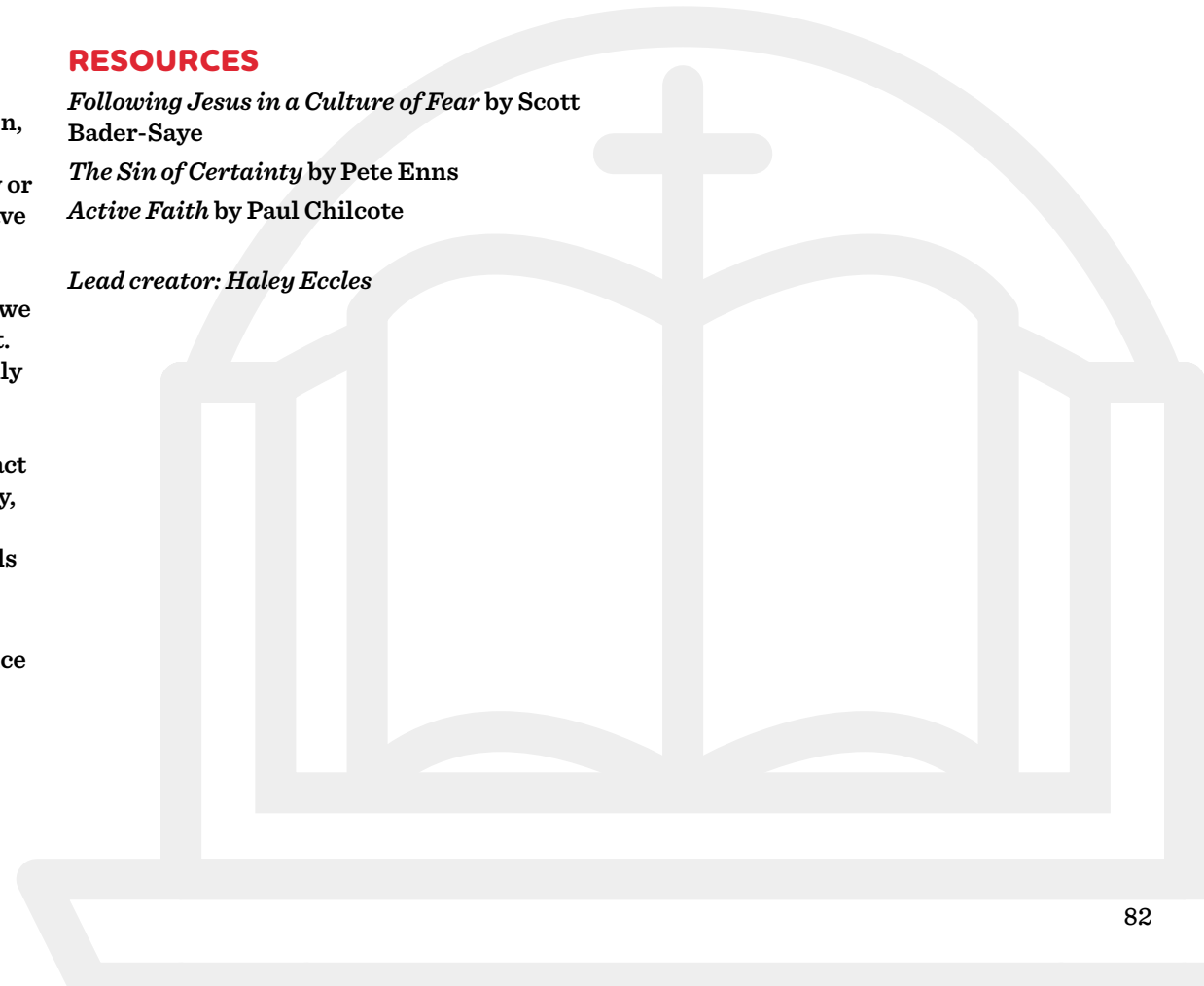
RESOURCES

Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear by Scott Bader-Saye

The Sin of Certainty by Pete Enns

Active Faith by Paul Chilcote

Lead creator: Haley Eccles



WILDMAN: THE LIFE AND WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

SERIES TYPE

Lent/Easter, Topical

SERIES DESCRIPTION

John's prophetic, untamed life inspires us to deeper faith and action. His witness invites us to clarify our identity and our calling and to live it out in powerful, honest, and effective ways.

FIRST SERMON

Good News

Luke 3:1-18

Theme: What is the Good News? Who is it for? How should we respond?

What is God's Good News?

- Some use the two-edged sword of God's word to divide- "us and them"
- Some twist the two-edged sword of God's love into nice. They coat it with sugar, stories, and comfort. Tickling our ears with prosperity and self-help.

Hear the Good News from John the Baptizer: God's two-edged sword in hand- truth and love. The lance we need for healing and new life.

This is the Good News: the wrongs made right, the labels laid aside, turning to God in repentance, and bearing fruit worthy of that repentance.

Make Your Way in Us, O God by Lisa Degrenia

How do we prepare the way in this time and place?

I've witnessed the modern-day prophets
Dipping your two-edged sword in fear

and hate
Divining pure from sin, saved from heretic
Confident in their judgments
There are others, too,
who take a different path
Coating your sword with sugar and stories
Tickling our ears with prosperity
and self-help
We've come so far from Brother John
Your blade in hand
Sharp yet washed in the wilderness of prayer
Dripping with Good News
The antidote for our stealthy,
venomous existence
"Sever your selfishness
so generosity may grow
Cut out the cheating so honesty may flourish
Amputate all falsehoods and threats
That your power may raise the powerless"
This is Your Way
Repentance
Integrity
Compassion
Solidarity
Make your way in us, O God
Make your way in us

SECOND SERMON

Pointing to Jesus

Luke 3:15-18; John 1:19-37

Theme: John is clear he is not the Messiah. Neither are we. What is our identity in Christ?

Isn't it nice to be appreciated, valued, and wanted? This goodness can be twisted into something it was never meant to be. We take on the responsibility of fixing, even saving another person.

What are we to do? Do we stop caring and loving? Do we stop bearing good fruit? No. That's the natural fruit of turning and following Jesus.

People noticed John the Baptist - a wildman, fearless, untamed, overflowing with the Holy Spirit, effective, the first prophet in 400 years. They want him to be the Messiah.

John shows us what to do when folks want to lay the responsibility of savior on our back - verse 16

- Point to Jesus
- God is God. I am not.
- I'm humble before the greatness and

goodness of God.

- The power you see in me is available to you.

Reign and Rain Down by Lisa Degrenia

Reign and Rain down, Glorious One
You alone are God. There is no other.
Reign and Rain down, Glorious One
Let all the earth open to your gifts
New life and right relationship springing up
Budding and blooming in our wasteland
Life comes to our mortality
to our frail clay, to our dust
You hold us and wash us and form us
You flood us and fill us
That we may carry this great grace
as it carries us
O, the glory of your grace
Grace extending more and more
More and more to us and
more and more through us to others
Redeeming and Reconciling
Salvation and Solidarity
The fullness of your unfailing love
Reign and Rain down, Glorious One
Creating power flows from you
Save us
For you alone are God. There is no other.

THIRD SERMON

Increasing and Decreasing

John 3:22-30

Theme: What are we to do with comparison? In the beginning, John's ministry and Jesus' ministries are both happening at the same time. Comparison is understandable. They're both prophetic, baptizing, making disciples, preaching the good news, and fruitful. Comparison can be inspiring. We learn by imitation. But there's a shadow side to comparison- anxiousness, jealousy, rivalry, scarcity, and competition. John shows us how to shut down the shadow side of comparison.

- Presence - God is at work in this situation. (verse 27)
- Assurance - I know my calling and my purpose, and what isn't mine. (verse 28)
Bob Goff Quote: "We won't be distracted by comparison if we are captivated with purpose"
- Joy - I rejoice in the growth of the Kingdom. (verse 29)

Bishop Steven Croft Quote: “Our purpose in life is not, after all, to point to ourselves, to make a way for ourselves, to push ourselves to the top of the pile, to make sure we are the most followed and the most noticed in our family or school or workplace or church. There is great relief in that truth... once we truly believe it. Our purpose in life is to point to someone else, to Jesus, to the Son of God, who has come into the world, to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, to the light which shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it.”

Hold Nothing Back by Lisa Degrenia

Sing! Shout! Hold nothing back!
We are not what we think we are
What others name us
What we name ourselves
We are not abandoned
Widowed
Forsaken
Cast off for someone more desirable
The Eternal is also our Beloved
Who upholds our sacred union
An everlasting covenant of peace
Of whole and holy love
We are not afflicted

Desolate
Disgraced
Shamed and grieved by our barrenness
Look! See! There is a heritage
Our breath and labor are not in vain
Quick! Enlarge the tent
Open and stretch to make room
For the gathering and birthing
of the Beloved comes
Hold nothing back

FOURTH SERMON

Are you the One?

Matthew 11:2-11

Theme: John’s vulnerable, honest questions from prison remind us that the most faithful can have questions and doubts. List of well-known followers of Christ who went through seasons of questioning and doubt. John Wesley, CS Lewis, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther, John the Baptist...

In Matthew 11:7-11, Jesus gives John the Baptist a glowing affirmation. Notice what it follows, John’s lowest point of questioning and doubt.

Where did we get the idea doubt disqualifies

faith or that faith eliminates doubt? Faith without doubt is certainty. Certainty isn’t faith.

Yehuda Amichai Quote: “From the place where we are right

Flowers will never grow in the spring.

The place where we are right is hard and trampled like a yard.

But doubts and loves dig up the world

Like a mole, a plow.

And a whisper will be heard in the place where the ruined house once stood.”

Rob Bell quote: “Faith and doubt aren’t opposites. Doubt is often a sign that your faith has a pulse, that it’s alive and well and exploring and searching. Faith and doubt aren’t opposites, they are, it turns out, excellent dance partners.”

Faith and doubt go hand in hand. Doubts lead to questions. Questions lead to truth and growth in faith. So ask your questions.

“What do you expect from me?”

“Where are you in the midst of this suffering and oppression?”

“Why do the wicked prosper?”

“Are you who you claim to be?”

Hold On by Lisa Degrenia

Jesus, sometimes your way is easy
Your burden is light
It overflows with hope and
 consolation and grace
Sometimes your way is hard
It confronts and challenges
It offends me – what I believe
 and what I hold dear
Sometimes your way is mysterious
I don’t understand
I can’t see it, grasp it
Still, I want to follow
Help me hold nothing back from you
Even my doubts and questions
Help me open the deepest places
 of my being to you
All my weaknesses and wounds
All my strengths and privilege
All that I am and will become
You have the words of eternal life
You are the Holy One of God
Help me hold on

FIFTH SERMON

Head on a Platter

Mark 6:17–29

Theme: The frail ego of Herod leads to the murder of John the Baptist.

John is arrested for speaking truth to power. He’s imprisoned for over a year, kept as an amusement. After listening to John again and again, Herod remains unchanged.

Herod is fearful, impulsive, and strategic. Herod fears both losing his power and killing a prophet of God. Most importantly – Herod lacks a teachable spirit. So does Herodias. Is the same true for those who attend the birthday party and witness the injustice and horror of John’s death? Do they remain untouched? Will we?

Choices by Lisa Degrenia

Holy One,
Your word provides examples
Examples to follow and examples to avoid
You do not sugarcoat life
You reveal the destructive consequences
 of vain, self-serving lives
You reveal the vicious injustice

of fear-full, pride-full, impulsive choices
We call on your mercy and healing
for faith-full living
Grant us a compassionate, courageous,
teachable spirits,
so we may choose your way and life
no matter the cost

RESOURCES

Shall by Lisa Degrenia

The time is now, for you have called
The place is now, for you have spoken
Yes, it is a wilderness, a desert even
So dry, so rough
So uneven
Yes, the gap is so very wide
 between the high and the low
But, you have called
You have spoken
Not an if or when or maybe
Not even a try
You have spoken shall
Every valley shall be lifted
Every mountain shall be made low
The uneven shall be made level
The rough shall be made smooth
So we will persevere in this

wilderness of preparing
We will not forge a path or blaze a trail
but make a highway
A highway for your coming
For your glory, O God shall be revealed
in this place
And all shall see it
All shall see it together

Lead creator: Lisa Degrenia

