



Forward
TOGETHER
IN *Faith*

First Christian Church of North Hollywood
2023 ELDERS' LENTEN MEDITATIONS

*This booklet is a gift to you from the Elders of
First Christian Church of North Hollywood
— the hope is that these meditations will inspire you to join us
in moving “Forward Together In Faith”*

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INTRODUCTION

Pastor Jonathan Hall

Lent is upon us! Lent is a 40-day period (excluding Sundays) of preparation before Easter. There are many ways to honor this season. For some, they fast or don't eat certain foods on particular days. For others, they spend more time devoted to God in prayer. In some traditions, people deny themselves certain food and/or drinks as a way of fasting. There is, truly, no wrong way to remember this season!

The practice of taking six weeks to focus on our relationship with God is said to have begun with Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11), which we recently read in worship. This is the period when Jesus spent time in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry.

We know that Lent began in the early years of the church for those who were considering baptism. It was also a time for people to focus on reconciliation. Lent officially began thanks to the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. By the 6th century, it began on a Wednesday with ashes imposed on the forehead as a sign of the season.

For most traditions, Lent ends on Maundy Thursday, the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover meal and washed His disciples' feet. The following day, Good Friday, is a time to remember the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. I like to also remember Holy Saturday as a day of "in between." We are in between the difficult and celebration. It is a space where many of us know. In some traditions, there developed a story about what Jesus might have done on this day. However, I prefer to focus on the "in between." Again, there is no wrong way to remember Lent.

Various traditions end on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. I know, it is a complicated season! Regardless, it is important to get to Resurrection Sunday - Easter! Regardless of the way(s) that you remember Lent, I hope that this booklet is helpful as we remember how God makes a way when there is thought to be none! It is only because of God that we can move "forward together in faith!"

– Pastor Jonathan

22 FEBRUARY 2023

Richard Follett

An Acrostic

FCCNH is truly at an inflection point

On our journey to serve our all-inclusive God.

Right now, in Lent of 2023,

We are seeing a rebirth of energy in our congregation—

And some may be feeling discomfort over concerns that we may be

Ridding ourselves of some rich FCCNH traditions and

Disciplines which sustained us in the past.

Together, though, we—our whole church family together—in

One may move to where the Holy Spirit is

Guiding us,

Ever both mindful of and grateful for where we have been and now fully,

Truthfully open to where She leads in

Her Wisdom, sometimes only

Embryonically

Revealed and then slowly, gloriously unfolded like Her wings around us.

Indeed, such an evolution of our congregation

Never needs to frighten us—as we, like Jesus, journey toward our Jerusalem.

FCCNH members and friends, like the original Disciples, may we each

Acept our Lenten call

In faith—”the assurance of things hoped for,

The conviction of things not seen.”*

How delightful to be on our journey forward together in faith.

*Hebrews 11:1 NRSVue

23 FEBRUARY 2023





Nola Sarkisian-Miller

This is for you folks who aren't off to the best start in 2023. I write this in January weathering a rough month, hoping for the return of 2022, and wishing to hide my head in the sand. Not the most practical problem-solving approach to facing adversity.

Merriam-Webster says adversity is a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune. According to behavioral experts, there are six types of adversity: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial. Break a leg? Lose a job? Crash a car? Or all three? You are in the maw of adversity.

So, what do people do when everything seems to go wrong or they have been dealt a setback, no matter how major or minor?

While in my research I never found one expert claiming it would be easy, there are strategies to help you navigate the bum cards you've been dealt, and a few stand out the most.

One is your attitude. Folks who do not allow themselves to be defined by their limitations or situation can go far. In last year's documentary, "Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down," the story of the former Arizona congresswoman who was shot in the head in 2011, you see her break into "It's a Hard Knock Life" during her physical therapy. The film is a testament to her unyielding optimism. "My spirit is strong as ever," Giffords said at a 2019 event promoting gun legislation. "I'm still fighting to make the world a better place, and you can, too!"

Another way to feel better is to rely on your peeps. Literary critic John Churton Collins once said, "In prosperity, our friends know us; in adversity, we know our friends." There is no denying the value of a support group when we are going through tough times.

And that leads us to your faith. Hopefully, you can turn to God for comfort and solace and prayer. We know God stands above it all and that Colossians 3:2 tells us in the worst times to look heavenward, "Set your minds on things above, not earthly things."

Your church is here for you. Your minister, your friends, your pewmates, your choir, your deacons, your elders. We are one in this journey, moving forward together in faith and hope and love.

24 FEBRUARY 2023





Née Léau

One of the best examples of moving forward in faith was seen at our church during COVID. The sudden pivot and move to online services with only four days of preparation was remarkable. In the face of adversity, Pastor Bob said, "We have to keep this church family

together.” Pastor Bob did not want to stop serving God or our congregation. So, a small group of us followed his lead and made it happen. We put together an online service every Sunday for a year and a half.

There were times when we thought that there was no way we could keep up the grueling schedule. But faith, our church family, and Pastor Bob pushed us forward knowing that God’s work had to be done. Teamwork made the dream work. Out of the hundreds of examples that this church has, this was Pastor Bob’s final example of working to keep our church together; and moving our church family forward in faith.

25 FEBRUARY 2023



Kevin Bailey

The Lenten season for people of faith is a time for self-reflection. Many choose to fast or give something up as a form of self-discipline during this Holy season. This brings us closer to God; to prioritize God; allowing Him to be the center of our minds and lives; making Him the focal point.

I’m praying for strength this season to be a better person.

Slow down.

Take time out of my day to make someone smile.

Find time each day to make a friend, a family member feel special and loved.

Compliment or recognize someone who might tend to be overlooked.

Take time to listen to someone struggling without adding an opinion.

The Bible tells us to be kind to one another because of the sole reason that our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father are kind to us.

26 FEBRUARY 2023



Jon Butler

Forward is Love

Forward is Grace

Forward is Inclusion

Forward is Empathy

Forward is Forgiveness

Forward is Compassion

Forward is Hope

Forward is Trustworthiness
Forward is Humility
Forward is Patience
Forward is _____

Will you join us this Lenten season as we move forward together as a church family?

27 FEBRUARY 2023



Jenny Harris

I watched the movie “Oh, God” the other day. It is a sweet movie from the 1970’s in which John Denver plays a man named Jerry who God (played by George Burns) comes to visit several times. God asks Jerry to help spread the word about God in order to help people have faith and asked us to be good to each other and to our Earth. Some of the funny things that God says is that He made a mistake with avocados (He made the pits too big), He actually thought about how to make the world for 5 days and then did it all in one day because “I do my best work under pressure,” and that the last miracle he did was the 1969 Mets.

Jerry asks God many questions at first, like why bad things happen in the world. God tells him, “I gave you a world and everything in it. It’s all up to you.”

Jerry asks Him, “What if we need help?”
God says, “I gave you each other.”

This made me think of how we can make a difference for each other. We can move forward together in faith and help each other.

At one point in the movie, Jerry is defending himself in court and the judge asks him if he wants a lawyer because “it is a tough time for you to be alone.” Jerry answers, “I won’t be alone.” After doubting God at the beginning of the movie, Jerry now knows that God will always be with him. We are never truly alone because God is always with us.

At the end of the movie, God shows up one more time to say good-bye to Jerry. Jerry is sad that this human form of God won’t be with him any longer. He asks God, “Sometimes, now and then, can we just talk?” God answers, “I’ll tell you what. You talk, I’ll listen.”

God has given us everything we need, and we can go forward together in faith, with each other and with Him.

28 FEBRUARY 2023

Gloria Zell Green

UGH, I HAVE TO MOVE!!! I HAVE TO CHANGE!!! I HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT!!!!!!

What is so interesting about the last few years is that we all had to move, change, and be different. We got so good at it. Some started matching masks to outfits. The pandemic had us scared to go anywhere, to be around family we knew for years. Parks closed, restaurants and stores closed, even our church closed. Everything changed for everyone. So many jobs were lost, and some companies never recovered. We really found out how much faith we had during those times. (Hmmm, are we still in a pandemic? I think so but we don't care as much. Or we don't scare as much.) No one liked that much change. Folks you used to hug, would terrify you if they were closer than 6 feet. Ha! We moved on through faith. Heck (can I say heck?), fiddlesticks, we had no choice but to have faith. Maybe that's why some things happen like a pandemic.

In Noah's day, there was a flood and so much in between. We made it, and we are making it day by day. Some of us truly only had mustard seed faith. The world completely changed overnight. You are not alone. We have come this far by Faith. And we can keep on going. Thanks for the test, God. Got it. We know now we can do it. Let us continue to move forward through Faith after all. We are proof Faith works!!! Xoxxo

1 MARCH 2023

Gail Hayek

WALK ON FAITH

"Walk on Faith" is a song written by Mike Reid in 1990 and it became a No. 1 song on Billboard's Hot Country Songs play list. Mr. Reid was inducted into the Nashville Songwriter's Hall of Fame. He was a prolific songwriter and wrote hit songs for many popular country western singers after a career as a pro football player for the Cincinnati Bengals.

The lyrics to "Walk on Faith" are inspiring, especially during this Lenten season when we focus on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The message embodies Jesus' teachings to love – Endure and trust in your unwavering faith in the Lord.

We have come to a place in our love
Where faith must be stronger than fear.
For if true love is our destination
Through every storm it must always be clear.
The surest way to get there from here is to . . .
Walk on faith, trust in love,

Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.
When the valley's so wide, we stumble in stride,
Everything inside wants to give up,
Walk on faith, trust in love.

Farther on beyond the shadows of our doubts
We will live, where true love never dies.
Though the road we must travel is uncertain,
There is a truth in our hearts that never lies.
It is by such grace, we are bound to arrive.

Walk on faith, trust in love.
Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.
When the valley's so wide, we stumble in stride,
Everything inside wants to give up,
Walk on faith, trust in love.

2 MARCH 2023



Trudie Kirkland

Faith is Something Big

Have you recently decided to commit to something Big? Maybe a New Year's resolution reclaiming your health, a new job, or planning a vacation half a world away? It can feel scary and exciting, all at the same time.

Maybe you've chosen to give more, pray more, care more. When we commit, the work begins. That may be the scariest moment of all, but Faith guarantees great reward as we dig in. We start by believing our results will be amazing no matter how hard it is to keep at it. We feel the sun on our face, the breeze at our back, we feel strength as pain ends. We experience joy on the faces we love. To yield these results, we grow in Faith through prayer and communion, visualization and empathy. Faith keeps us grounded and on purpose. Faith elevates our human nature, dials up our spirit, offers enormous strength ... even wisdom.

During the days leading to Easter and throughout Lent we travel a most intentional journey of Faith. This is a spiritual destination of reboot. Faith reminds us all things are possible. That Something Big is ahead and change is upon us.

God walks with us in Faith; we are not alone. This may be our purist intention as Christians; that as Faith grows so does love for all people. Faith grants us the most beautiful relationship with God. We need only believe a step at a time. Our prayer is that all hearts and souls know God's love, for this is the change we believe in. The change lived by Jesus, sent by God, and alive in Heaven and on Earth.

So... what is your Something Big?

3 MARCH 2023

Brett Elliott

Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." – Luke 9:23 (NRSV)

I count among my spiritual mentors a professor I had in graduate school named Ari Goldman. Professor Goldman is an Orthodox Jew. Prior to meeting and learning from him, I knew next to nothing about Orthodox Judaism. I'm still certainly no expert, but as a result of knowing and observing him, I have a great deal of respect for those who follow the faith.

I'm a bit in awe of anyone who even attempts to follow the kosher laws. Not only are there, in my opinion, lots of arcane rules, they impact fundamental daily tasks like driving and eating. So different from anything in my experience.

The more I heard him talk about his faith, the more I watched him instructing his children in its strictures, the more he earned my respect. The structure, the rigors, the day-to-day discipline, they really seemed to ground him in his faith and his relationship to God. The details of keeping kosher required that he remain attentive, focused, and committed to his faith, day to day, moment to moment. What a gift. I actually felt a little bit envious.

And so, when my pastor at the time suggested adopting a Lenten discipline, I decided I'd do it. And I've done it each Lent for the past 15 years. I try to pick something achievable but non-trivial. I want something that will impact my daily life. Sometimes I'll give up something I enjoy. Other times, I'll add a daily time of devotion or meditation.

I've found that what I choose isn't critical. What matters is that I find something that, at least once per day, will cause me to stop for a moment, think, reset, and refocus on my faith.

What a gift.

4 MARCH 2023

Sarah Lord

As I said in a Communion Meditation a while ago, I was adopted when I was six weeks old. I don't know when my folks told me; seems like I always knew. I felt special.

One of my earliest memories was playing with my cousin Judy. She ran off crying to her folks, saying "Sarah was picked; you just had me!" That caused a ruckus in my aunt and uncle's house that night, for sure.

In 1940, while World War 2 was raging, babies for legitimate adoptions were scarce – Mom and Dad had waited five years for me. Their attempt to adopt a sibling was futile.

However, our home was always open to those who needed it. Throughout the years

many did. There was Lupe, whose dad couldn't take care of her anymore. There was Glenda, my classmate, who needed love and stability in her life. There was Patsy....

Daddy built a beautiful house on 1-1/2 acres in the foothills of San Bernardino. When I was high school age, he turned the stable and corral, which had housed my beloved horses, Chubby and Mr. Nifty, into what would be called "the little house." There, for many years, lived my grandpa or a distant relative, or anyone who needed help.

My parents moved forward in faith, at Church, and in their lives as Christians and as Educators. Jesus was a mainstay in our home. Looking back, I was the luckiest girl in the world.

5 MARCH 2023



Sally Hallada

I've thoroughly enjoyed returning to Sunday School this year. We've already had some lively discussions. In an age where everything is at our fingertips, it's important to remember the lessons carried forward by our wise ancestors.

One Sunday we discussed the Ten Commandments and how amazing it was that these ancient people understood how human nature is predisposed to worship something. How God gives us free will to choose to worship a Loving God over money, possessions, Harry Styles, or even ourselves, and how it still can be a challenge. Also, how honoring our parents, not stealing, and not murdering are still pretty good rules.

The discussion over how the concept that it's ok to like a classmate's sneakers but not hate them for having something you don't, actually made it to the top 10 and has stayed there, was an especially good one.

It's heartwarming how our kids completely understand these ideas. So we decided that whatever the future holds for us, we must hold on to these timeless fundamental lessons our Loving God has given us to make the world a better place.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself?" Luke 10:27

6 MARCH 2023

Rodney Gould

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. – Isaiah 43:18-19

Sometimes I think the best thing that could happen to every person is to have to move. The act of moving would be a blessing if we took the Isaiah passage to heart. If you have moved any time recently you might understand what I mean. Moving requires packing up personal items and maybe getting rid of some things, too. It's the stuff we get rid of that I want to think about.

Please make a list of the stuff you last donated to charity. Take your time, I will wait. Can't remember what it was you took to the Salvation Army? It's because you don't miss it. The treasured collection of thimbles and the beloved sweater that you hadn't worn in three years are now gone from your memory. The place they held in your psyche has vanished.

That's what we are learning in Isaiah. Give up on those old things or the memories that are holding you back. Move ahead in the "now" because God is waiting around the corner with fresh and exciting possibilities for you.

Now, do me one more favor. Look at your feet. Your feet are right here, right now. They aren't mired in the past or anxious for the future. And we are where our feet are at – taking one step at a time – right here, right now.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to release the past and be with You now. Amen.

7 MARCH 2023

Gail Hayek

I would like to share a portion of Frederick Buechner's writings taken from "A Room Called Remember." It comes from a chapter entitled "All's Lost – All's Found." As many of you know, Mr. Buechner was an American award-winning writer, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, preacher, and theologian. He was an ordained Presbyterian minister and the author of more than 30 published books. Mr. Buechner passed away in 2022 at the age of 95.

In this portion of the essay, Mr. Buechner writes about moving forward in faith, in spite of so many unknowns.

"I begin, at last, to see that death is not merely a biological necessity but a necessity too in terms of the mystery of salvation.

"We find by losing. We hold fast by letting go. We become something new by ceasing to

be something old. This seems to be close to the heart of that mystery. I know no more now than I ever did about the far side of death as the last letting-go of all, but I begin to know that I do not need to know and that I do not need to be afraid of not knowing. God knows. That is all that matters.

“Out of Nothing He creates Something. Out of the End He creates the Beginning. Out of selfness we grow, by His grace, toward selflessness, and out of that final selflessness, which is the loss of self altogether, ‘eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man’ what new marvels He will bring to pass next. All’s lost. All’s found. And if such words sound childish, so be it. Out of each old self that dies some precious essence is preserved for the new self that is born; and within the child-self that is part of us all, there is perhaps nothing more precious than the fathomless capacity to trust.”

8 MARCH 2023



Richard Follett

Imitate Jesus

Having taught literature and composition for my entire career, I now enjoy reading non-fiction and theology for pleasure. While reading Brian D. McLaren’s newest book, *Do I Stay Christian? A Guide for Doubters, the Disappointed, and the Disillusioned* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2022), I was struck by this paragraph:

“Christians very much like to call Jesus the Son of God. Jesus much preferred to call himself the Son of Man (or son of humanity). There are many layers of meaning to the term. But the simplest and most obvious is this: a son of humanity is a human being. If you want to put a finer point on it, son of means the essence of or perhaps a new generation of. Jesus is saying that he represents the essence of humanity, a new generation of humanity, a new kind of human being. In this light, his constant invitation, follow me, means imitate me and join me on my journey toward a new way of being human” (page 217).

Wow! “Join me on my journey toward a new way of being human.” Isn’t that the essence of FCCNH? As an inclusive, progressive Christian church, we seek to exemplify Jesus’ new way of going forward together in faith:

- non-judgmentally accepting each other in our congregation,
- finding deep, inward joy in service to others,
- challenging each other by deeds (and sometimes words) to be better than we thought we could be,
- having each other’s backs,
- disagreeing agreeably,
- offering support to our members and the wider community,
- living out our joyful faith of beauty and grace,
- and so forth!

Yes, at FCCNH we are going forward together in our positive faith. Come along and journey with us.

9 MARCH 2023

Nola Sarkisian-Miller

When I think of moving forward together in faith, one amazing group that so embodies this spirit comes to mind: the FCCNH prayer group.

We are beyond blessed to have such a dedicated group of volunteers who meet weekly to pray as a group and continue to pray daily as individuals for our journeys in life. They take our needs and concerns as well as the joys and lift them up to God. I believe it's a calling from the Holy Spirit to engage in fulfilling such a vital role in the life of our church. What they do is sacred and deeply intimate. Our congregation shares with them all kinds of trials and tribulations and hopefully triumphs too, whether it's job losses or promotions, deaths or births, sicknesses and healings, personal conflicts and challenges, and these prayer warriors take on the mantle of fervent, urgent communication with our God. This is a strictly confidential endeavor. Their unwavering devotion to this practice is testament to the faith they have in the power of prayer, especially when we gather together. In Matthew 18:19, Jesus says, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in Heaven."

I was personally moved by this power when I submitted my prayer concerns for the first time earlier this year. Just the act of writing them down in church and submitting them was an act of such release and relief. I felt unburdened and the thought that my prayers would be amplified filled me with hope and faith and helped me to move forward when I was feeling stuck. God wants us to be in spiritual communion with one another and our prayer group is a loving example of this most holy connection.

10 MARCH 2023

N'e'e Le'au

I have been a team player my entire life. Growing up on a farm, my Samoan culture, my mom's hard-working family, and team sports all taught me that working together for a common goal was important. Having all of these strong examples of teamwork early in my life helped me learn to be a good example for others. In my life, I've learned that it's important that we volunteer to help. Sometimes, that means stepping up to be the leader. Sometimes it just means that we get involved.

Life is so much better when we participate! If we don't volunteer, if we don't step up to be a leader, then who will? How will our children learn these values if we don't lead by example? Our actions teach louder than words. When we volunteer, when we step up, our children learn that that's what you're supposed to do.

As a Christ-centered community moving through this Lenten season, let us focus on giving of ourselves in ALL ways, so we ALL can move forward together.

11 MARCH 2023

Kevin Bailey

Each Sunday, prayer cards are inserted in the bulletin for the congregation to express their prayer concerns. Pastor Jonathan announces every week the importance of filling out these cards. This also allows the church to keep track of our church family and attendance.

We have an amazing prayer group at FCCNH that have been meeting each week since 1950, gracing us with the power of prayer. Their importance is undeniable and magical. Bringing your prayers to God will only strengthen your relationship with Him, allowing the blessing of the Holy Spirit to flow through you. He is the almighty and the all-powerful spirit.

During this Lenten season, please pray for this wonderful group of people in our prayer group. They are the spiritual backbone of our beloved church. We are so blessed to have them.

12 MARCH 2023

Jon Butler

“Life is a journey.” You’ve all heard it said. The idea of life as movement from place to place is common, and I would say I agree with the notion. We are constantly moving...somewhere. The part of this saying that is missing, however, is direction. Which way are we moving in this life, this journey? Sometimes you may feel like you’re moving backwards. You may be moving away from something. You may be seemingly moving in place. You may be moving sideways down the wrong path, without knowing. Oftentimes, we are lacking direction.

I feel fortunate because I feel I have direction. Faith gives me direction, and that direction is forward. No matter how fast or slow, no matter how far ahead I can see down the path, and no matter how little I know about what the path will look like or what I will encounter along the way, I know where I’m ultimately headed. So long as I am on this journey with you, sharing the message of love and forgiveness that Jesus brought to us and ultimately died for, I know I am moving in the right direction—Forward.

I’m so happy to be on this journey with YOU.

13 MARCH 2023

Jenny Harris

When I was a child, I attended Echo Mountain Ranch summer camp for a week every summer between the ages of 10 and 15. It was a lovely little summer camp nestled in the mountains between San Jose and Santa Cruz in Northern California. It was a Christian camp, and we would ride horses and swim, do crafts and sing at campfires. It was wonderful.

We all experienced a lot of joy at that summer camp. I really admired the counselors, the camp owners, and the managers of the camp for their love of God and for the way they lived their lives. It helped me to grow in faith and want to live a Christian life.

Recently, my family took a trip to Northern California, and as we drove up Highway 17, I asked my husband to turn onto Bear Mountain Road so I could see the camp again. I heard that it became a corporate retreat years after I went there as a camper, but I thought that even though it may have changed, we could still walk around it and I could show my family where I went to camp.

We drove up Bear Mountain Road and I couldn't find it anywhere. It could have been demolished or it could have just been that I didn't remember the turn-off from the road and the camp was hidden by all the trees that surrounded it. It was disappointing, but it's okay because I know that I can keep what I learned at camp and take it with me wherever I go. I can move forward with the joy and the love and the knowledge of God that I received at that magical place.

We all have memories of times and places that have influenced us as Christians. I hope you can hold onto your memories, and that they can help you to become an even stronger and more joyful Christian.

14 MARCH 2023

GloZell Green

I never had to use my faith until recently. I sang about faith, believing I had faith, but life was pretty good so no reason to really need it. But then all you know is gone, then who you know is gone. During the pandemic (again, not sure if we are in it. Pandemic light? Pan Jr?), it was hard to get help or even sympathy because everyone was either in the same broken boat or knew someone in it. Not unique. Yeah, my brother got laid off, my father passed away. Everyone during the heart of the pandemic needed help or was helping someone or several folks. Reality was lights going to be cut off, evictions for so many, so insert this Faith that I have been singing about. Is it real? Can I trust it? Like, do miracles really exist in these days and times during a pandemic when it seemed like no end was in sight?

Yes, and when you can return to somewhat normal again, it's all different. The world is different, you are different. Yeah, we made it. We are alive. Faith without works is death. Where is your faith in God? Just like Dorothy, it was there inside us the whole time. We are always moving forward. Make it easy on yourself and move forward through faith. xoxo

15 MARCH 2023



Gail Hayek

I read an interesting article in the New York Times written by Peter Wehner, a senior fellow at the Trinity Forum. It was about Jesus' relationship with humanity, focusing on the importance of Jesus interacting with everyone as a friend.

Jesus tells the disciples "that as God the father has loved Him, so He loves them." His command to them is that they love one another. Jesus then says: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you".

The article focuses on how revolutionary this concept of friendship was and that it would have been almost unheard of for an ancient king, let alone God, to refer to his subjects as friends in the way Jesus did. An earthly king would certainly not have walked and lived among us in the way Jesus did. People of wealth, power or status were very unlikely to have chosen friendship as the way to connect but Jesus did.

Jesus treated everyone on a level with Him. He recognized the intrinsic worth of each person not only made in the divine image but also as His confidants and companions.

John 15: 12 tells us "to love one another as I have loved you." John understood what Jesus was imploring us to do and that was to love everyone. Jesus repeatedly reminded us that we belong to one another. Instead of being judgmental and finding fault, we are asked to welcome, respect, and help everyone. We should be the light of hope, joy, and compassion, especially to the outcasts, the socially marginalized, and the sinner.

Each of us has the opportunity to offer ourselves as a friend to all. Jesus meant for us to not only experience love but extend that love to all. What a glorious way to move Forward Together in Faith.

16 MARCH 2023

Trudie Kirkland

The Journey

Born from the light of goodness, from heaven's heart to ours, Easter is our wake-up call. It's our best day ever. We make it hard to give our life to the Lord, but God's plan includes you. Despite any wrongdoing you've lived, or any dirt anyone can dig up...there is a table laid out with your name on it. A table set for peace, and for forgiveness. For Jesus walked a walk of great surrender for you, and for me, from the table to the cross, so we could be free from the sin of this world. Jesus laid down His mortal life to give us an eternal one.

Jesus only asks you to love God with all your heart

Let go of your worries & burdens. Lay them down. And Imagine...God can take the biggest mess and turn it into the biggest message. He is all powerful and His blessings enormous. God loves when you pray and lean into forgiveness and when you serve; but the choice is yours. For the love He has for you is everlasting and it's why Christ's blood was shed.

And God asks

Forgive others, and ourselves. Make Peace. Shine a light, your special light, and ease the suffering around you. Pray and talk to God. Love your God, and others whom He loves dearly, and the Kingdom of Heaven will be your greatest life of all. That's the journey and the road we take together during Lent on to Easter.

The journey to the heart of God's love.

17 MARCH 2023

Brett Elliott

[Christ Jesus], *though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.* – From Philippians 2:6-8 (NRSVACE)

The passage above tells me that when Christ chose to assume the mantle of humanity, He did so completely, not simply walking among us, but being one of us with all the frailties, finitudes, and limitations that implies — all taken on voluntarily.

And so it was with particular interest that, in reading Zealot by Reza Aslan recently, I learned that just prior to Jesus's ministry, there was another itinerant preacher and Jewish leader from Galilee who had gained a following. The man was called Judas the Galilean, and he's mentioned in the book of Acts. According to Aslan, his movement was ultimately put

down by the Romans in brutal fashion. Judas was killed, a city was burned to the ground, and its people enslaved.

Galilee was hardly a sprawling metropolis. Word of this Judas's movement and its violent suppression would have been big news in this intimate community. Jesus would have known the story very well.

What did Jesus, the man, make of this? The last preacher from His hometown to attract the attention of the Romans was brutally massacred. It did not take divine foresight to know that the Romans would have zero tolerance for anything that smacked of troublemaking.

What courage, what resolve, from this son of a carpenter. What supreme dedication to His ministry and His message.

For me, Christ's faithfulness to His mission is rendered all the more miraculous by His humanity.

18 MARCH 2023



Sarah Lord

Throughout time there have been different methods of dating the centuries. As an example, Ancient Greeks started dating their calendar from the time of the first Olympic Games, and for Jews it was started from the time God created the world.

In 1582 the Gregorian calendar was established as the Christian calendar, denoting the time as BC - Before Christ - and AD - Anno Domini - the year of our Lord. For us, as Christians, we embrace that our calendar starts at the time of the birth of Christ - Christmas.

We attempt to follow His teachings of love for all our fellow men, as well as loving and forgiving our enemies. He also taught that through this love, upon our death we would join God, His Father, in Heaven, along with those we love. Jesus' faith was so strong that He was willing to die so we would know the importance of His Word.

Due to His supreme sacrifice, we now as Christians celebrate the second most important Christian celebration, Easter. Easter is held as one of the oldest and most important festivals of the Christian Church, allowing us to rejoice in our Lord's resurrection and ascension to Heaven.

Consider the bravery that Christian followers have had to demonstrate through the centuries in order to continue their Christian faith. Then, consider how fortunate are we today, to be able to move forward together in faith with no fear of persecution. So let us celebrate Easter together at this time and continue His Word as we join in faith in His name.

19 MARCH 2023

Sally Hallada

When faced with a difficult and painful task, nothing is more comforting to me than to think of Jesus's agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Immediately, I'm grateful that no dilemma of mine will ever be as terrifying as His. However, what comforts me is knowing that if Jesus can show His vulnerability and beg God for mercy even when He knows His destiny - so can we! It strengthens my belief that God knows how fragile we are and how painful our life can be. He sees our heart and hears us when we cry out to Him. So when it's obvious that our future isn't what we asked for, we know, as with His son Jesus, He will not forsake us.

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done. And there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." – Luke 22:42-44

20 MARCH 2023

Rodney Gould

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, clear a straight path for him." – Mark 1:3

How are we supposed to prepare the way of the Lord? How can I do anything to make the Lord's path straight?

Those questions make me think of Isaiah 40:4: *"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."*

Unless we are geological engineers, we probably won't be able to figure out, literally, how we could do everything to make a path straight or even or plain.

But we can make the Lord's path to our hearts straight. Where are the places in your life where you have made a winding path? Where have you made mountains in your life or dug your own valleys?

I think we all have places of haughtiness and conceit that keep us from God. If we lower those mountains in our lives by seeking to treat everyone with love and fairness, we are straightening the Lord's path to us.

Most of us also have areas of self-doubt and shame that keep us from God. If we can remember that we have been made in God's image, that we are good and worthy of His and others' love, we can raise those valleys in our lives and straighten God's path to us.

Have you treated someone poorly because you feel superior to them? Have you let yourself or others down because of your lack of self-worth?

Make God's path to you as straight as possible and then join hands with Him and see where he leads you.

21 MARCH 2023





Kevin Bailey

June 6th, 2021 was the first day back in 15 months to our sanctuary after the pandemic, coupled with losing our beloved Pastor of 52 years, Rev. Dr. Robert Bock.

The excitement of having a live service in our sanctuary was quickly tempered with the reality that the church and its people had a long road back. I think we had 60 people that day, fully masked, uncomfortable, and strange. Standing at the front door I was disheartened that more people didn't show up, but understood why. I missed Bob and the rest of our church family. I wondered and worried if all the good established for many years could just be a memory.

As a church we still have a long way to go. Considering where we are now after all the church has been through is miraculous. God's light is shining brightly on First Christian Church of North Hollywood. We have an energetic and talented new pastor in Jonathan. The future is looking better every day. As my dear friend Dick Kline told me, "When things in life get really tough, put one foot in front of the other each day until things get better."

22 MARCH 2023





Brett Elliott

Then the disciples came and asked Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

– Matthew 13:10 (NRSV)

I can really relate to the disciples' question in this passage. I remember a young adult me wrestling mightily with it. Why does Jesus speak to us in riddles? Why doesn't He just come out and tell us what He's thinking? He knows all the answers. Why doesn't He just tell us instead of making us guess? With all the power of the universe at His command, why doesn't He just proclaim the truth, out loud, unambiguously? Why speak to us in the "still, small voice"?

Put another way, if God is real, why doesn't He just make it easy for everyone to believe?

For me, this is a tough question—one that lies at the heart of the journey of faith. As Christians, we must come to grips with the fact that God doesn't just hand us the answers. Instead, He calls us to wrestle with the questions.

One of my favorite spiritual writers, Christian Wiman, says:

Christ speaks in stories as a way of preparing His followers to stake their lives on a story, because existence is not a puzzle to be solved but a narrative to be inherited, and undergone, and transformed person by person.

The longer I continue in my Christian walk, the more apparent it is to me that Jesus did not come to wave His hand and erase my difficulties or my doubts. He did not come to make my life easy or to fix this world for me.

Rather, He calls me to the struggle. He calls me to engage. He calls me to invest and participate, to take ownership and agency. He calls me to grapple, to grow, to strive, to give.

For Christ Himself came not to be served, but to serve. So then, too, are we.

23 MARCH 2023



Sarah Lord

Decades ago, I wrote this song, and I will share the lyrics with you now.

Actually, on New Year's Day of this year, I incorporated a verse into my Communion Meditation. However, I was a bit nervous and sang the wrong part. LOL. I am used to singing it with a little piano in the background and not saying the words standing at the altar with my Church family present.

Here goes:

A Song for Jesus

“Jesus is my Savior, He can be yours too.
If you open up your hearts and let His love come pouring through.
He died long ago upon the cross to save us from our sins,
So open up your hearts and let my dear sweet Jesus in.

“Jesus is my Savior, He’s the Son of God.
Though He was a carpenter, through the land He trod.
With His twelve disciples, Jesus led the way,
Preaching gospel, Ten Commandments, in God’s Holy name.

“So, Jesus is my Savior, He can be yours too,
If you open up your hearts and let His love come shining through.
He died two thousand years ago, was resurrected from the dead.
So open up your hearts and cherish what the Bible says.”

Lent – Easter: Rebirth – New Beginnings; Thank you dear Messiah for the grace and love that You eternally give us.

24 MARCH 2023



Née Léau

Hands Across America was a public fundraising event on Sunday, May 25, 1986, when around 6.5 million people held hands for 15 minutes in an attempt to form a continuous human chain across the United States. My mom loaded us in our van, and we drove for hours to join this event. Many participants donated \$10 each to reserve their place in line. The proceeds were donated to local charities to fight hunger, homelessness, and to help those in poverty. The event raised about \$15 million. I was 16 years old at the time, and not really sure what I was getting into.

When we pulled over at the top of a rolling hill, there were miles and miles of people as far as I could see along the side of the highway. I was dumbfounded that all these people were actually doing this. Complete strangers were talking to each other while we were waiting around.

Suddenly, I could hear people shouting, “It’s time! It’s time! Hold hands!” After the word spread, we all lined up and held hands. People started yelling, singing, and celebrating up and down the line with great joy. People were laughing and crying. Everyone felt this overwhelming wave of emotion. Fifteen minutes later, it was over. We all just looked at one another, as if asking if that was it. Nobody said stop. Nobody said it’s over. People just let go of hands and slowly said goodbye to the people next to them. Then they got in their vehicles and left.

The power of that moment is something that I will never forget. Millions of strangers working together for one goal: to help those in need. We live in a more virtual world now than we did in 1986. Now we have even more opportunities to reach out and join virtual hands to spread the word of God.

25 MARCH 2023



Richard Follert

Thomas Got Some Bad Press

When most Christians think of the disciple Thomas, they put the adjective doubting in front of his name and dismiss him out of hand. But that’s not fair to him either scripturally or traditionally. In the Gospel of John, when Jesus decided to go from the relative safety of Galilee down to Jerusalem and several of the disciples fearfully objected, “Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’” (John 11:16 NRSVue). In the Christian tradition beyond the Bible, it was Thomas who took the Gospel to India and implanted it firmly on that important subcontinent. Neither of these great accomplishments is covered by the word doubting.

On the contrary, I think of what Ronald Reagan, one of three Disciples of Christ US Presidents, said so often: “Trust but verify.” When Thomas had not seen the risen Jesus along with the other disciples, “. . . he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in His side, I will not believe’” (John 20:25b NRSVue). This isn’t doubt; it’s seeking evidence, seeking confirmation.

One of the many joys of being in FCCNH is our encouragement for asking questions, asking for more and more evidence. Just look around at our members and you’ll find evidence of transformed lives, of inward joys, of obstacles overcome, of broken folks healed and making our journeys together. Listen to our stories over breakfast, lunch, or dinner and see how far we’ve already come. In faith, we continue to journey together — verifying as we go.

26 MARCH 2023



Rodney Gould

John 5:5-8 – ⁵ *One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.* ⁶ *When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, “Do you want to get well?”* ⁷ *“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”* ⁸ *Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”*

I don’t know what Biblical scholars will say about my interpretation of this Bible passage, but to me, Jesus is sharing tough love. As the Nike corporation might say, “Just do it.”

I can only imagine how I would feel if Christ said that to me. Wallowing in my self-pity and condition, I would be expecting the loving, caring, forgiving Jesus. I would want the “There, there, you will be fine” gesture of empathy. But I think I would be shocked by a Jesus who basically told me to bestir myself and move on.

I think Christ is telling us to get over ourselves. If you want to climb the mountain, start at the bottom and head upward. If you want a raise at the office, work harder and make your needs known to your boss. If you want to fit into a bathing suit, start exercising.

Maybe Christ is telling us to quit making dumb excuses and looking to others to attend our needs. We just need to pick up our bed and move forward!

27 MARCH 2023



Brett Elliott

It was for this world that Christ had died; the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around the death. It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for home or children or a civilization - it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt.

– Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*

I used to be a real news junky. But I don't follow it as much as I used to. I still think it's vitally important to be informed, but I find that too much of the wrong kind of news can get me down. One of my favorite comedians jokes that the news is just a bunch of horrible stuff that he can't fix. He has a point. There is much to despair over in our media and in the world it represents. It can leave me feeling powerless. It can leave me feeling overwhelmed. It can, at times, leave me feeling hopeless.

And yet, as Graham Greene so poignantly observes, this is the world that Christ came to save. This is the world He suffered for. This is the world He sacrificed Himself for. This is the world He died for.

If ever I feel disheartened, if ever I feel like disengaging, if ever I feel ambivalence or complacency or apathy start to overtake me, I must remember that Christ thought this was a world worth saving. Worth fighting for. He thought enough of this world (and of us) to walk among us, to suffer with us, to give His life for us. And there is no greater love than this.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. – John 15:12 (NSRV)

28 MARCH 2023



Trudie Kirkland

Do Not Worry

It feels almost impossible, at times. Each day we meet with commitments and concerns, proceedings and issues. It can feel overwhelming. One can only imagine the worry Jesus must have felt, even for just a moment, traveling such a road to the cross. But....

God says, Do Not Worry

Mathew 6: verse 25 - 34

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

29 MARCH 2023

Richard Follett

Just Keep Running

In late July 1970, I reported to the United States Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia, for boot camp in Officer Training.

By chance, my platoon commander had been an NCAA Cross-Country champion from Oklahoma. Slim and trim, he ran us as much as possible from place to place around the base. Since 8th grade, I had been in Midwestern marching bands with 8 high steps to 5 yards — a much shorter gait than cross-country running — which inhibited my ability to stretch out my legs, so running was difficult for me. But the Corps has its ways of teaching its recruits (an understatement).

Most memorable was this lesson: One bright, sunny afternoon, we dressed in full combat gear carrying at least 40 pounds of equipment and 9.2-pound rifles, wearing heavy steel pot helmets, and set out on our longest run. We didn't know in advance how far it would be, but we just kept going, and going, and going. Stopping briefly to drink from our canteens, we were instructed not to think of making the entire journey but instead to think of reaching the next clump of trees, the next bend in the trail, the top of the next hill, the group of rocks in the distance, the stream ahead, etc. That did it for me. I aligned my mind with shorter goals, reached each one successfully, and then found a new landmark goal. When we finally got back to our barracks, we learned all 51 of us had run 11 miles together.

I share this with you at FCCNH knowing that we can reach whatever goals we set for ourselves by segmenting them into smaller pieces and finding little successes along the way. We can go the distance, forward together in faith.

30 MARCH 2023

Nota Sarkisian-Miller

With the approach of Christmas, we light the four Advent candles to mark the weeks of hope, peace, love, and joy.

During the Lenten season, we're continuing to think about our faith, drawing more inward than the festive Christmas season and focusing on reflection as we prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter, our holiest day of the year and bedrock of the Christian faith. Writer Sarah Phillips says, "Lent is a time when Christians separate from the world; when we find out our faith is... one that answers the deepest questions of life and eternity."

The day cements why we are followers of Jesus Christ. We see that death is not the end. There is victory for it doesn't destroy our spirit. Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian writes in the

Armenian Weekly that “Because Christ rose from the dead, death now is a defeated enemy... that life has perspective beyond the grave... and we shall live because Christ lives.”

More importantly, this perspective applies today. What happened more than two thousand years ago is a celebration of what can happen in the present, that in every instant there is a triumph available. “There is hope for all who can roll away the stone of their interior tomb,” Tootikian says. “The stone of sin and self-defeat can experience resurrection through the Risen Lord.”

Fighting hard battles and carrying heavy burdens are not easy loads to bear. We may not know what the future holds, but as Christians, we know Who holds the future, he says. Easter reminds us to move forward together in faith, not paralyzed by fear. Apostle Paul encourages us in 2 Timothy 1:7, “God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and self-discipline.” A spirit that declares with faith and ardor that Christ is Risen.

31 MARCH 2023



Née Léau

Jesus asked the disciples to follow Him. He didn't force them. Jesus asked us to believe in Him and to follow His example. He doesn't make us. All who believe in Him shall have life everlasting in Heaven. He forgives us of our sins. He sacrificed His life for all of us. Let us follow His example. Let us forgive others. Let us live our lives, and love one another as Jesus would want us to.

1 APRIL 2023



Gloria Green

Moving forward through faith is so much better than moving forward through fear. Either way the world is moving and sometimes it might feel like your best years are gone. The family, your friends, work, and even your church are moving on, changing, or have changed so much. You are needed, you are important. We have to put ego aside and realize that you want to move forward and that can be scary, but you are not alone. God is always with us. How many changes have you gone through? Did you survive? (Don't say barely.) Forward can be fun, exciting. Ooooooh, what's next? We have to be willing to trust the trust, focus on the focus, faith the faith.

It can be so comfortable being in one place. You have things set up just like you like it, and then boom, you have to move, quit, stop, go, something has caused your life to change, or someone. God never moves. God never changes. Faith means, “Oh here we go, can't see the entire journey but I trust God that I will be alright.” Are you alright? With all the things going on in the news, are you alright? With God all things are possible and that includes moving forward Moving forward through faith. xoox

2 APRIL 2023

Kevin Bailey

Let Me Be Satisfied Prayer

Christ, my lord, I pray that You help my soul be content. Let me be satisfied with who I am, and who You are molding me to be. May I never doubt my importance in this world. All You have given me is magnificent and beautiful. I pray that I live in confidence, courage, and faith. Remind me that I am a gem that cannot be replaced as Your precious child.

This prayer speaks to what I found at First Christian Church of North Hollywood. I was lost, felt unimportant, and not worthy of being at church, some twenty years ago. Slowly, my faith was restored. I was shown love at our church which reminded me that I was part of the Kingdom of God.

May we always make people feel special and loved, just as Jesus has taught us. All are welcome.

3 APRIL 2023

Jon Butler

Where does your faith come from?

Does it come from reading the Bible? From stories of Jesus and the miracles He performed? Does it come from blind belief and hope?

I can tell you where my faith comes from. It comes from you.

I believe in Jesus and His teachings because I see and feel their truth in you and your actions. I see it in how you treat others. I see it in how you feed others. I see it in how you pray. I see it in how you worship. I see it in your face, I hear it in your voice, and I feel it in your presence. Recognizing how important your actions and feelings are to the formation of my faith, I realize the importance of my own actions in showing that faith back to you and to others. My faith gives me purpose, to show love to the world in all I do.

As we move forward in this next chapter of our church, let us do so together and in faith. Let's show our faith through our love and our giving so others, too, may see it and feel it, and perhaps grow stronger in their own faith.





Cait Hayek

An article entitled “The Happiness Challenge” caught my eye while I was reading the New York Times. We all, at times, have been overwhelmed by health, family, or financial challenges, among others, and happiness has seemed elusive or fleeting, so I was curious about what insights the author, Jancee Dunn, would share.

She summarized those insights by discussing a very interesting study by Harvard College. “In 1938, researchers at Harvard set out to learn what makes a person thrive.

“Every five years, the researchers gathered health records from the participants. They asked detailed questions about their lives at two-year intervals, and, in later years, took DNA samples and performed brain scans. Twenty-five of the participants even donated their brains to the study after their deaths.

“Now, 85 years later, the Harvard Study of Adult Development has expanded to three generations and more than 1,300 descendants of the original subjects; it is, according to the researchers, the longest-running in-depth study on human happiness in the world.

“From all the data, one very clear finding has emerged: **Strong relationships are what make for a happy life.** More than wealth, I.Q. or social class, it’s the robustness of our bonds that most determines whether we feel fulfilled.”

The article also points to additional studies that confirm that if you want to increase your chances on having a happy and healthy life, find the time to develop both old and new relationships.

Neglected relationships can atrophy like muscles, loneliness can change our physical health. So, just as we understand that physical fitness is good for the body, it is just as crucial that we exercise our “connecting with people” muscle.

God has put his light of love and compassion within each of us. He has given the capacity to be joyful and rejoice in the blessings we so richly have received. It has now been scientifically proved what God intended all along. Love is to be shared. God is smiling.



Jenny Harris

When I was a child and attended summer camp, one of my favorite songs was “Pass it on.” It goes like this:

“It only takes a spark
To get a fire going.
And soon all those around,
Can warm up to its glowing.
That’s how it is with God’s love.
Once you experience it,
You spread His love to everyone.
You want to pass it on.

I wish for you, my friend,
This happiness that I’ve found.
You can depend on Him,
It matters not where you’re bound.

I’ll shout it from the mountaintop!
I want the world to know,
The Lord of love has come to me,
I want to pass it on.”

More recently as an adult, I was a counselor at Loch Leven when the kids from FCCNH attended. One of the campers’ favorite songs was “Lean on Me,” the oldie but goodie by Bill Withers:

“Lean on me, when you’re not strong,
And I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on.
Lean on me, for it won’t be long
Till I’m gonna need somebody to lean on.”

I love the message that we can pass on the love that we get from God and can help others feel connected to Him, too. And when we need a friend to lean on, we can lean on each other. What a wonderful way to move forward together in faith!

6 APRIL 2023



Rodney Gould

Micah 6:8:

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.”*

Isn't this a wonderful Bible passage! The first two requirements of God make perfect sense to me – treat people fairly and forgive people readily.

But the third requirement fascinates me. It isn't the humility part. Although I know that my pride rears its ugliness in many parts of my life – and it is definitely an area I can work on. It's the walking.

The Bible is replete when God is happy for people walking with Him. Noah is praised for walking with God. (Genesis 6:9). Abraham walks all over. God tells him to “get up, walk around the land” (Genesis 13:17) and to “walk before Me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). And of course, Micah summed up the Jewish religion by the requirement to walk humbly with God.

What does it mean? I think it means God is expecting you to be an active partner with Him as He goes. You are to move and make an effort – He isn't carrying you on a magic carpet or transporting you somewhere in a time machine. God's requiring you to be an engaged participant in His life.

Have you “phoned it in” recently in your relationship with God? Have you been sitting idly when you should have been walking? The Lord requires that we put forth energy to be with Him. God isn't going to drag you along – He is requiring you to bestir yourself and move with Him.

We don't know our paths but if we want to be with God – we have to walk and make the effort to be with Him.

7 APRIL 2023



Sarah Lord

Easter, like Christmas, has accumulated various traditions that have little to do with the true meaning of Easter. The first introduction many children remember about Easter would be the search for brightly colored eggs. It is recorded that this tradition started in the 13th Century when it was prohibited to eat eggs during Holy Week. Hence, a notion of presenting “Holy eggs” brought about the tradition of decorating eggs. The egg itself became a symbol of the

Resurrection. In Orthodox tradition, the eggs are painted red to symbolize the blood Jesus shed on the cross.

The custom of associating a rabbit with Easter arose in Europe in the 17th Century but did not become popular until the 19th Century. In the United States, it is said that a rabbit leaves children baskets of toys and candies on Easter morning. However, other animals are said to do so in other European countries. This tradition originated in folklore.

As we become adults, we still cherish our childhood memories of our Easter celebrations, as we should. However, as Christian adults, knowing the story of Jesus' Resurrection, Easter takes on a deeper meaning. Just knowing that Jesus could still love and forgive while making His ultimate sacrifice on the cross, should be enough of a lesson to us all. Then, as if we needed more, Jesus' subsequent Resurrection is all we need to believe in His connection to God.

It is with joy, then, that we are able to gather together to celebrate and renew our Christian beliefs at Easter.

8 APRIL 2023



Sally Hallada

Story of the Three Trees

High on a mountaintop three little trees once stood and dreamed of their future.

The first little tree said, "I want to hold treasure!"

The second little tree said, "I'll be the strongest ship and carry a King!"

The third little tree said, "I'll grow so tall that when people look at me, they'll think of God."

After many years, three woodcutters appeared.

"Now I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree thought as the first woodcutter chopped her down.

"Finally," thought the second tree, "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!" as the second woodcutter chopped her down.

The third tree felt sadness as the last woodcutter chopped her down. Her dream would not come true.

The first tree was disappointed when she was fashioned into a feedbox for animals.

The second tree's hopes were dashed when she was made into a simple fishing boat and taken to a little lake.

The third tree was crushed when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountaintop and point to God..."

The three trees nearly forgot their dreams as many years passed.

One night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her

newborn baby in the feedbox. Kings brought gifts.

Suddenly, she knew she was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

Years later a tired traveler and friends crowded into the old fishing boat of the second tree. They sailed out into a horrific storm. The tired man stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped!

Suddenly, the second tree knew she was carrying the King of Kings.

Then one Friday morning, the third tree was yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She was carried through an angry jeering crowd up a hill and soldiers nailed a man's hands to her.

She was devastated.

But then on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, God's love had changed everything.

Suddenly, she knew that her beams would always be the symbol of God.

Sit tight and be patient - God is always thinking of something better for you.

– Source unknown

Pastor Jonathan Hall

Easter

In the gospels of Luke and John, more so than Matthew and Mark, the authors want the reader to know that Jesus had a bodily resurrection. The resurrected Jesus was not a ghost. Jesus declares that He has flesh and bones in Luke 24. In John, He invites Thomas to put his finger into His wounds.

I appreciate the highlight from Luke and John because it is true in my experience that wounds never fully disappear.

Death and resurrection, despair and hope, etc., sit side by side and within each of our bodies.

In many ways, I see these stories as invitations for me to live a resurrected faith and life. I have wounds. I need to be healed. I need to be able, as Jesus did, to invite others to be able see and hear my wounds, so that they, too, can live resurrected lives.

Obviously, the resurrection says a lot about Jesus. However, I do not see it stopping there. The resurrection - today, Easter Sunday - happened for us to be able to live resurrected lives! Life will give us wounds, but because of the experience of Easter Sunday, we can - as the song goes - face tomorrow!

As I write these words, I can imagine myself back in a seminary classroom where debates are happening about whether Jesus had a bodily or spiritual resurrection. I used to find that discussion interesting. Now, I read Luke and John having a focus so that I can think about where I can live a resurrected life in my body - today. With my wounds. With my pains.

Faith is not about escaping this body and saying the correct formula to get a resurrected body in the next life. Better, it is about how all of us can live resurrected lives - today.

It may seem unbelievable, but living a resurrected life means that some of us have to confront issues in our lives. Others will need to go to anonymous groups. Some may need to go through the treatment.

Going “forward together in faith” can mean many different things. “Forward” denotes movement and action. It means not a return to or an escape from. It means the next chapter in our stories. *Hallelujah!* “Together” tells me that we are not alone as we try to live a resurrected life. It means that when our wounds show up again or band-aids fail to help, we can lean on others. *Hallelujah!* When “in” is an adverb, it expresses movement with the result of someone or something becoming enclosed or surrounded by something else. This is why faith is best done in community; it cannot, in its best sense, be done alone. *Hallelujah!* “Faith” or *pistos* in Greek means trust. It means to be willing to trust in the story that the Son of God or as some translations put it - the Human One - is not just a story about Jesus for Jesus. It is a story about Jesus for us. Because of that, we can move “forward together in faith!” *Hallelujah!*

Pastor Jonathan

Christ
is
Risen!



First Christian Church of North Hollywood
4390 Colfax Avenue • North Hollywood, CA 91604
818.763.8218 • www.fcnh.org

Rev. Dr. Jonathan B. Hall, Senior Pastor