



The **REST**
of the **STORY**

First Christian Church of North Hollywood
2024 ELDERS' LENTEN MEDITATIONS

A MESSAGE FROM OUR ELDER CHAIR

As is our tradition, the Elders of First Christian Church of North Hollywood offer you, our church family, this book of daily meditations to accompany you on your journey through the season of Lent. This year, of course, we are celebrating a truly remarkable milestone: the 100th anniversary of our church. And so we find ourselves mindful, even more than ever, of those who came before and paved the way for us.

To honor them and this wonderful occasion, we have decided to include meditations written by previous Elders in this year's booklet. We asked current church members for the names of those Elders whom they found influential in their faith journey. There will likely be names you recognize and some you don't. But each one represents a small piece of the collective wisdom and experience of our spiritual ancestors, those who inspired us, mentored us, befriended us, taught us, touched us, made us laugh. Those who helped make us who we are and on whose shoulders we stand.

We thank God for them and for the church they bequeathed us. They began our Story, and we are immeasurably grateful. And we draw on their reflections as we continue to write The Rest of the Story.

— *Brett Elliott*

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INTRODUCTION

Pastor Jonathan Hall

Dear Church family-

I am excited to join you on this Lenten journey as we reflect upon “The Rest of the Story”! Lent is a 40-day period for us to remember the events that led up to and included the death of Jesus. We may want to rush to the empty tomb. Of course, it makes sense. Let’s get to the easy, comfortable part. However, it is, as the saying goes, about the journey, not the destination.

As I write these words, I am reflecting upon a recent trip to a retreat center where I walked the stations of the cross, which begin with Jesus being condemned by Pilate. However, if we are to remember the events that led up to the death of Jesus, we can also remember the times when He made public demonstrations, spoke up for the voiceless, stood in solidarity with the vulnerable, cared for those who society preferred to not see, etc.

As I think about all of those events, I think about the times when I stay timid, don’t speak up, blame the vulnerable, ignore those who others ignore, etc. I can remain in the easy places of life where I am comfortable. Yet, if we are serious about being disciples of Jesus, it means that we are willing to follow Jesus when things need to be named out loud, talk about how things aren’t ok, stand with our neighbors who are different than us, empower those who we have pushed to the margins, and more.

You may think that you can’t do those things because you may lose your job, a friendship, and/or standing in your community. Now, perhaps, only now, do we see why Jesus was killed. Some people thought that they could silence a movement from God by killing Jesus. However, we are the rest of the story. We are the ones who now have the opportunity to embody God’s dream for creation. So, let’s be the rest of the story!

Richard Frollett

AN ACROSTIC

There's something about stories:

Hearing them from different voices

Expands our joys, deepens our sorrows, develops our humanity, reminds us of our divinity.

Realizing this, we can freely meld into the

Empathic experiences of lives beyond our own.

Stories, you see, hold majestic power, a power

That can cut and cure, injure and restore, enfeeble and ennoble.

Oh, my friends, may we in this season of Lent

Find the stories that give the greatest gifts: the stories of affirming life.

There are those who

Hold that such an affirmation is

Exclusively through the One Who came to save us—yet

Save us from what? Let us in this Lenten season

Turn away from the crushing fear in abjectly avoiding evil, in merely avoiding the negative, and

Only recognize, fundamentally, that the One sent from our Creator casts out all fear and

Really demonstrates how to be like Him, how to live our more abundant, love-filled lives.

Yes, we are truly called to be mini-Christ: we're the rest of the story fulfilling God's love.

15 FEBRUARY 2024

Patsy Meyer Kreitter

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 18, 2013)

For another year, God has blessed me with a view of the ocean and mountains while I write this Lenten meditation. This beautiful view, bonita vista, comes during a time of rest that allows me endless time to spend in His presence. The soundtrack of chirping birds and ocean surf plays a relaxing melody in my soul. I am thinking, “Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.” On this balcony, I feel like I am removed from the world, away from work and everyday worries where I can run into Christ’s waiting, restful arms. Yes, Miss Patsy (preschool music teacher) has on her “listening ears” and is now ready for the two-way conversation with Christ.

While my body and mind are resting, I am even more aware of God’s presence and His gentle nudges, as He awakes my heart and soul. Christ knows I’ve come here to meet Him and be in His presence. He has made me laugh, cry, think too much for a vacation, and has even whispered a thought-provoking question to me for contemplation. I have been invited into a space where my soul can awake and therefore be changed by being in His presence.

During the 40 days of Lent, I encourage you to find a special, restful space and put on your “listening ears” to listen for His still, small voice so your heart and soul might be awakened and be changed.

Peace.

16 FEBRUARY 2024

Anna Sigala

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 14, 2019)

When I pray, I often speak to Him as two friends do. Walking or driving to my destination makes time go by with ease. I pray, and as I do so it often feels like we are walking together.

Knowing I have my Lord walking beside me brings me comfort during moments of uncertainty. Looking back, I know He has lifted me up and carried me during difficult moments and sorrow.

Faith is knowing your Lord will hold your hand and sometimes give you that push into a new environment or circumstance that you were not ready for. You can also feel joy and happiness and know He has blessed you with those moments.

I am very pleased and blessed to have prayer lead my life.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. – 2 Corinthians 5:7

17 FEBRUARY 2024

Pastor Taulau Tupua

When I first encountered Mark 16, I was shocked to find out that there was not one but two ending options. The short ending felt abrupt and unfinished. We went from a scene of the women who were shocked at the tomb, to an entirely different scene where all who were commanded by Jesus obeyed. The longer ending in verses 9-20 gave me hope. Jesus appeared before Mary Magdalene and the Disciples, interacting with them and inspiring them to continue believing and inspiring others to believe, too. The longer ending made me think of the protagonist cowboys of the Wild West movies. The hero came and helped the struggling little town. Once his mission was complete, he'd bid them goodbye and head off into the horizon. Jesus had done just that. However, cowboy Jesus doesn't feel like the man I got to know in the previous 15 chapters. This ending also felt unfinished.

What if we had a third ending option to consider? An ending that wasn't like the other two. An ending that the author of Mark intended to leave incomplete so another writer can pick up the pen. What if Mark had intended to give that pen to *us*? The privilege to hold the pen and continue the story feels powerful yet strange. Why *us*? This was my first instinct. This was a natural response from most of the women and men who were called by God in scripture. However, I've learned to embrace a new question. Why not *us*? How can *we* finish this story? I don't have the right combination of words to finish the story, but I have a pen and courage to write. These two things have helped me to grow closer to God's word because God's word is my story, too.

18 FEBRUARY 2024

Margaret Defibaugh

(ORIGINAL DATE: 1978)

"All things are possible to him who believes." — Mark 9:23

In the springtime it seems easier to believe in life. All about nature is stirring and the world seems attuned to this newness. It seems easier to take hold of new life and easier to let go of the past and rise up in our faith to claim our heritage as children of God.

During the Easter season it is good to think about the words of Jesus, "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (John 11:25), and to rise above all our trials. Do not be afraid, "*I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20).

Every day I must keep a time apart for God so that I may be transformed mentally and physically. It is not so much the time spent in praying as the time spent in God's presence. I cannot understand the strengthening and healing powers received but can feel them. I believe the poor

sick world would be cured if every day each soul waited before God for inspiration to live aright.

Strength comes to us from our believing in God. Praying in quiet times, you begin to feel stronger that your prayers are being heard. Just like the wearing away of stone by steady drops of water, so will our daily persistence wear away all difficulties of spiritual success. When you look to God for strength to face responsibility, His healing touch brings renewal of our courage, and when you have feelings of inferiority, you can rely on His Touch to support you.

Prayer:

Thank you, dear Heavenly Father, for the strength and support you give our daily lives. I pray that I may be shown the direction to go, knowing that I am an expression of God and that I have Christ in me coming forth in renewal of my hopes and dreams. Amen.

19 FEBRUARY 2024

Brett Elliott

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. – Luke 24:13-16 (NRSVUE)

Much as I hate to admit it, I can really relate to this passage.

At first, it seems unbelievable, right? Two disciples traveling together, just after the crucifixion. They're distraught, bewildered. They can't stop thinking about what happened. They're wondering, what does it all mean? What more could they have done? They're gutted, grief-stricken, and lost.

And then suddenly, right there next to them, is the very person they're talking about. Christ Himself. Walking beside them. Chatting with them.

And they don't recognize Him.

I get it.

I'm always the last to hear the office gossip. Or the church gossip. Or pretty much anything. That's me. Captain Oblivious.

It took me five years to propose to my wife. Five years. Thankfully, not only is she quicker on the uptake than I am, she's more patient.

So, yeah. If anybody would be sitting at dinner with Jesus and not know it, it'd be me.

In my defense, God does work in mysterious ways...

Sometimes the answer to prayer is "yes." Sometimes, it's "no." And sometimes (if you're me), it can be hard to know which is which.

And so I've learned, when I go to God with the desires of my heart, I must go humbly. Knowing they may very well come back to me in a form so different from my narrow, selfish, ego-driven, human preconceptions that they may seem unrecognizable.

I've learned the hard way that I don't always know what is good for me.

Just ask my wife.

20 FEBRUARY 2024

Bill Hayes

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 6, 2014)

We Elders have taken “God’s Promise Fulfilled” as our theme for this 2014 Lenten Meditation booklet. And we have singled out three verses of scripture for inspiration. One of these is Philippians 4:17, which reads, “*Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.*”

How do these relate?

The operative word is YOUR in that last prepositional phrase. Not MY account, YOUR account. That makes the meaning clear as high def.

As I put the two thoughts together, “God’s Promise” is that if we can stop thinking about ourselves and our own wants, and desire fruit for others, the Kingdom of Heaven may be ours.

It relates to Pastor Louise’s sermon about the “begging bowl.” How did she put it? I shall paraphrase: We are all supplicants. We hold out the bowl and beg for – not fabulous gifts of bling and things for ourselves – but God’s grace for the family of man.

“I desire fruit that may abound to your account,” is a way of saying, “I pray for you, for your health and well-being, for your happiness and satisfaction. That is what will make me happy. That is my true desire.”

Christmas, reliving the coming of our Lord, is the giddy happy time of birth and tidings of joy. Christmas equals excitement, excitement!

Easter time, reliving Jesus’ passion – His betrayal, degradation and death, topped by the miraculous resurrection – is more serious. Easter time infuses the days of Lent with a different kind of joy: empathy, sacrifice, rebirth, belief in the future. Easter, in a way, is a metaphor for “God’s Promise.”

Let us all add to the future by praying the words from Philippians: “*Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.*”

21 FEBRUARY 2024

Fred Sloan

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 20, 1992)

It is frequently said that we couldn't appreciate the good times if we didn't also experience the bad times. My mother has great difficulty throwing anything away because she did without, growing up in the Depression. She learned to appreciate what she had and to be thankful even if it was not of the best quality, or if she had no immediate use for something. She did not enjoy living through the Depression, but it made her a stronger, more appreciative person. The cloud had its silver lining.

Speaking of clouds, about a month ago, the valley received enough rain that some people were caught in their cars in the Sepulveda Dam Basin by an overflow of the river. Others suffered damage from mudslides and auto accidents caused by the severe storms. Storms that we desperately need to help end the drought we have been enduring for the last six years. The bad times can have positive results. We can learn in difficult times and grow as people.

Similarly, as Christians, we have learned that Christ suffered terrible pain and indignities so that His followers would be forgiven their sins and have everlasting life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, As we struggle through adversity in this life, let us become better and wiser people. Let us also remember during this Lenten season that our sufferings are minimal as compared to those of Christians that have gone before us. Let us be appreciative of the glorious gifts we have been granted and the opportunities we have been given. Help us to live our lives to further the glory of God.

22 FEBRUARY 2024

Sarah Lord

It's with more than a little contempt that many of us older members cast our eyes on so many around us totally involved in what is happening on their cell phones, oblivious to what is going on around them and failing to have personal communication with others.

At least half our congregation gathered here today grew up reading books, hand-writing school assignments, and sending letters and thank you notes to our loved ones. Frequently we wish today's electronic methods of communication, particularly the internet, had never been invented.

However, let us further consider that for reasons of distance and encroaching age or health challenges, a number of our FCCNH disciples are not always able to attend our church services in person. If it were not for the ability to view our FCCNH services on the internet, they would not

be able to enjoy what we, our congregation who are able to be present in person, are able to enjoy, the uplifting words provided each week by Pastor Jonathan and Pastor Tau. Let alone experience the joy that is brought by listening to our wonderful choir. What a loss that would be! For so many, just the act of joining us in worship deeply buoys their spirit as well as keeps them as an integral part of our Church family. This is especially important at this time as we gather together to celebrate the Lenten season leading up to Easter. Records indicate that more than 400 of our congregation join FCCNH online each week, and it should be said, their support is invaluable to our church.

So in the future, let us look at the internet as a means of unifying our congregation. Times change, but there are positives in many of the changes. Knowing that there are greater things ahead.

23 FEBRUARY 2024

Barbara Campbell

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 17, 2005)

MY SHEPHERD

It's funny how your priorities change as you get older. And I don't mean funny "ha ha" – just funny, as in peculiar. In my twenties, I was goal-oriented and much of my life centered around my voice and my career. I had relationships – I fell in love and married in my twenties – but still, I had definite goals that I was determined to attain. And I did – for the most part. Oh, not on the scale I'd fantasized about – but still, I did meet most of the goals I'd set. In my thirties, as I had my children, everything changed. I couldn't think about *goals!* I was too busy trying to figure out how to be a good parent, contribute to the household budget, maintain my marriage – that was my goal and my life's work. I dreaded turning 40. Then when it happened, I felt free – and I felt a resolve to make the most of the rest of my life. I changed careers – and I began an earnest quest for faith.

Most of us want more. I think it's human nature to question what we have and to long for something else, something better. If only I'd done *this*, I should have done *that*, I could have done *more*. Those longings can consume us if we're not careful. They can prevent us from recognizing the fullness of what we have. This is the advantage of growing older. I don't have the same nagging concerns. Yes, I have occasional regrets and worries but, all in all, I feel pretty good about things. I consider this a gift that has come from life experience, the opportunity to do good work, and the grace of God. "I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst." That is what Jesus is quoted as saying in John 6. That thought isn't always with me – it doesn't always live inside of me. So, when I begin to feel those pangs of regret or anxiety, I will try to remember those words. And if that doesn't pull me through, I resolve to remember, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want."

24 FEBRUARY 2024

Opail Hayek

*Now that we have learned how to fly in the air like birds,
And dive in the sea like fish, only one thing remains . . .
To learn to live on earth like humans.*

– George Bernard Shaw

I sometimes wonder what the Lord thinks of our story. Have mankind's accomplishments outweighed the continuum of violence since Jesus died on the cross?

History chronicles when man has led with love and compassion in the harshest of times. Historically, almost one-half of children worldwide died before age 15. But that number has been declining steadily since the 19th Century. The United Nations projects that last year 3.6% of children died before age 5, the lowest number in history. In addition, the United Nations also reported that extreme poverty has reached a record low, affecting 8% of the world's population. And the work to lower those numbers continues every day.

Yet, we observe on a daily basis atrocities and destruction on the streets of our country and around the world. Too many children live in fear of bullets and bombs, face daily hunger, and struggle to find life's joys in the midst of all of the brokenness.

How do we, as Christians, keep mentally and spiritually healthy as we witness those suffering? Ecclesiastes 7:14 reminds us, "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other."

Faith saves us. God's spirit lives within us, guiding and strengthening us with the love that He has instilled in our hearts. His spirit connects us to all human beings. We are part of a greater community, and we cannot succeed without the help of others, and they cannot succeed without us. Pain brings us together. It doesn't matter our color, gender or income, we pray for the same thing – grace, strength and healing for all.

Lent is the season of renewal and I believe that Gandhi's advice to each of us would make our future stories better: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself to the service of others."

25 FEBRUARY 2024

Michael Immel

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 26, 2004)

GIVE IN, GIVE OUT

A modern mantra seems to be simplify, simplify. Getting rid of stuff will make life better. Shed the excess pounds and bad habits, etc. Ben Franklin suggested moderation in all things.

We approach the season of Lent with the attitude that we have to give up something. I have a new proposition, or rather a different preposition. Rather than give up something perhaps we should give in.

Don't just give up fatty foods, but give in to the urge to share a meal. Rather than cut down on your long distance phone calls to reduce your bill, call up a neighbor more. Include a stranger in your group activity. Instead of pinching pennies, give in to the urge to put more in the offering plate, not just the loose change, but the twenty you were hoarding for a night out.

Practice deliberate and continuing acts of kindness in addition to the random ones encouraged by pop culture bumper stickers. Volunteer to go the second mile, yea, even the third. Yield to a cry for mercy. Seek out ways to do justice. Witness more. Share your faith. Proclaim it not just from the rooftops, but in every word and every act.

Jesus came so that we may live life abundantly. Let us give in to the temptation to live that life abundantly.

26 FEBRUARY 2024

Jeff Henderson

When he was a child, his parents made him go to church.

When he was in junior high, he went to youth group because there was a girl there that he liked. He attended two meetings and at the second one, he found out that she had a boyfriend. So he quit.

When he was sixteen, he told his mother that he was going to skip church and watch the Super Bowl pre-game show instead. She tried to argue with him, but she was a single mom and he was bigger than she was. She went to church without him and that was that.

The next time he set foot inside a church, he was twenty-two. He had joined the Air Force and was sent to basic training in Texas. One Sunday morning, he and his buddies were offered a choice... They could attend a service or they could clean the communal showers. That week, he opted for church, but subsequent Sundays found him prowling the parade ground, picking up

cigarette butts.

When he got out of the service, he came home to California and got on with his life. He read a lot and wrote a little and thought about God and talked with friends and had relationships and established a career and played softball and lost people that he loved. He didn't go to church, but he considered himself a good person. Better than most, truth be told, but religion just wasn't his thing.

When he was pushing forty, he took a writing class. After class one evening, some people went out for a beer and one of his classmates, Karl, presented him with a book. It was Oswald Chambers' classic daily devotional, "My Utmost for His Highest." When asked why, Karl just shrugged. "I thought you could use it." Okay then, whatever. He thanked Karl and ordered another beer.

The class ended a couple of weeks later. He never saw Karl again, but he did start reading the book. It consists of a year's worth of daily meditations, each 200 words or so, and he read it every day for the next three years. And one Sunday morning, he put on a suit and walked down the street to church.

That's just one story, and everyone here at First Christian has their own tale to tell. Some of the stories start out strong, while others may take a while to get going.

The church itself has its own story. The rest of it is yet to be told, but I believe that each one of us has a part to play. May we all take time during this Lenten season to consider what that role might be.

27 FEBRUARY 2024

Irion De Rouen

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2005)

MY GOD, MY PARTNER

I spend a lot of time, probably too much time, thinking about how I am the only person in the world who can view life through my eyes. I usually think about this when my brain pushes rewind and I screen little scenes over and over and can't understand why another person didn't understand what I was saying or why I reacted the way I did. I walk up to my front door and always think, "nobody sees life from my vantage except me."

And, inevitably, this is when I quickly remind myself that God is near. That God understands me. That God is in my heart and is able to look at life through my eyes and I am not alone. That God is my partner in this sometimes difficult journey called life.

During the Lenten season, more than any other time during the year, I feel God's presence in my life. The teachings of Jesus Christ are etched in my heart during this season. I go to His table, starving for nourishment and knowing it will be abundantly fed.

I go to God for strength, for guidance, for wisdom, for patience, for understanding. I thank God for sending His son, Jesus Christ, to mentor me. I am grateful God is my partner in life.

28 FEBRUARY 2024

Annie Wilson

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 18, 2014)

HOME BODY

Every time I come to our church, I am aware of how grateful I am for the gifts I receive there. The list of my gifts is long: Members of the prayer group that nurture and care for me, my family and anyone else who stands in the need of prayer; a choir and music director who work many, many hours to bring the spirit of Christ home to me in music; a pastor and associate pastor who guide and care for me and my family; an excellent and spiritually enriching children's program that forever changed our daughter into someone rooted in Christ; the beauty of the church building and the sanctuary; and the members of our church family who have given and continue to give so much in so many ways to everyone, along with me and my family. The list could go on and on.

I always have the sense that everyone at church is doing everything they can do to try to make each of us have a closer walk with God – even when we disagree about the path to take.

The Bible tells us that as a church, we are “the body of Christ and individually members of it.” Therefore, we at First Christian Church are the body of Christ. Every time we take communion, we have yet another opportunity to commune with each other and with God in the body of Christ and to remember the greatest gift ever given. The abundance of that gift was Christ's sacrifice, giving us the Resurrection and forgiveness.

We are truly living abundantly in the body of Christ each time we come to church. We are blessed to have each person striving to bring the abundance of Christ to one another. To share this in the sacredness of the bread and the cup is our treasure.

Let us rejoice in our great abundance!

29 FEBRUARY 2024

Dan Miller

A memory that has stuck with me from my father-in-law Stan was a comment he made during his 72nd birthday (he lived to be 93). He said that as you age time seems to go faster and faster. He theorized that when you're a child, your memory has relatively few things that comprise your entire life, but as you age and build history, there are hundreds of things to look back on that fill your timeline, giving you the feeling that time is going faster.

With that thought, I recalled the documentary created by John Currin and the late John Full-

er titled, “*A Journey In Faith – 75th Anniversary First Christian Church of North Hollywood*.” The documentary covers FCCNH history from 1924-1999. It has now been 25 years since the documentary was created, and now FCCNH is getting ready for its 100th birthday. What if we were all invited to the Church’s birthday, and the Church could talk?

During the Christmas pageant this year I was caught in a happy-sad mental state as the little kids walked down the center aisle dressed as floppy-eared lambs, goats, and cows. To be clear, the emphasis is the floppy ears. I witnessed the joyfulness of parents as they captured the moment on their iPhones. I then experienced nostalgic melancholy as I recalled memories of my sons dressed as floppy-eared animals, and me too trying to get photos. As parents, we all must share a page in our Church story and with pictures, too!

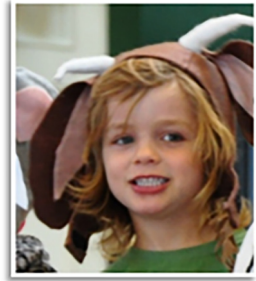
If the Church could talk, I would ask, “Given your 100 years of experience, what is your advice for a new church member to build their own Church story?” I believe the Church would reply, “Be present, get involved, build relationships, and know that your story’s richness develops over time.”

Are you working on your Church story? There is a whole church family willing to help.

*A Journey In Faith – 75th Anniversary First Christian Church
of North Hollywood*
Chapters 1-6

<https://youtu.be/6IgLLEMIWGBE>

(Video to be available from www.fccnh.org soon)



Carson Miller 2013

1 MARCH 2024

Sally Hallada

People like to say that the Bible is a 2000 to 5000-year-old book and because of its age, it’s irrelevant. The other way to look at it is that it took over 18,000 years for humans to evolve to be able to write the Bible and it’s still here, so there might be something to it.

The 5th Commandment - Honor your Father and Mother – is not just about the actual people who brought you into the world. On a societal level, it’s those ancestors who wrote down what would help, guide, and comfort those they would never meet. It’s always been the burden of current generations to learn to shake off the notion that they “know better” and humble themselves to ask WHY before the ideas of the past are tossed aside. Some learn earlier than others. I like to say I’ll stop believing in the Bible when the lessons in the Bible stop repeating themselves daily!!

On the 100th Anniversary of our beautiful Church, with God’s guidance, let our present members continue to take the time and reverence to learn from our past members to make sure our future members have what we have – a beautiful place to worship.

*Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy;
at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. — Psalm 16:11*

2 MARCH 2024

Janet Bruce

(ORIGINAL DATE: 1996)

We celebrate the miracle of Christ's birth with pageantry and joy. And, we celebrate the miracle of His death and resurrection with equal, if differently focused, enthusiasm. But I believe the real miracle of Christ is not His birth nor in His death and resurrection.

I believe the real miracle is in the way He lived.

The miracle of Easter, it seems to me, is how a man, who had done so many kind and good and honest things in His lifetime, could hang from a cross and still find it in His heart to forgive those who had hung Him there. And yet, He did only what He had done throughout His life – He loved people.

The legacy He truly gave us was not how to be born, nor how to die.

The legacy He truly gave us was that He taught us how to live.

3 MARCH 2024

Jeremy Gillett

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2016)

Life has the ability to present a wide variety of experiences. In turn, such experiences produce a wide range of emotions, from joy, to bitterness, fear, love, hate, to name a few. I invite you to direct your attention to the emotions felt during junctures in life surrounded by Darkness. According to Merriam Webster, Darkness is defined as: Having very little or no light. In our earthly encounters with darkness, one may see no hope, feel as if redemption is a mere saying, allow hatred, greed, and envy to become the food for our daily walk. Today, my friends, Darkness has adopted the identity of the hopeless. Where... oh, where... do we hide from Darkness? Lord, how do we overcome the burden of circumstances? Well, my friends, I am thrilled you asked. Joy surrounds me. Because while I know Merriam Webster is accurate in defining terms, it is Not THE BOOK that defines life.

Psalm 139: 11-12 states: *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

My friends, even in the deepest darkness, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has placed a light in and around us. And that light shines with love, compassion, forgiveness, and healing. For that intimacy, all we have to do is call on His name. My friends, don't allow a temporary experience with Darkness to overcome the LIGHT within you.

4 MARCH 2024

GloZell Green

WAIT LET ME TELL YOU

Wait let me tell you,
This is a brand New Day,
I'm making a difference, starting right away.
Can't slow me down,
It is in my soul,
I must work hard, to reach my goal!

Wait! Let me tell you,
I believe I can soar,
I am the key to the future's door.
I am Music, Dance and Theme,
I am the one in Dr. King's Dream.

Wait! Let me tell you,
You can count on me,
I am continuing a beautiful History.
My past and present,
I am proud,
So I can say it, right out loud.

Wait! Let me tell you,
I am nobody's fool,
I'm going to learn all I can,
Life is a school.
I am young, gifted and free,
I can be anything I want to be!

Wait! Let me tell you.

5 MARCH 2024

Rodney Gould

God has a way of choosing the seemingly least qualified people, ordinary men and women, to do the most extraordinary things.

Noah - used to build an ark to save the world. (Genesis 6-9)

Abraham and Sarah – an elderly couple God used to build a nation. (Genesis 11-25)

Moses – a stutterer who became God’s spokesman and leader. (Exodus 3-4)

Rahab – a prostitute that God used to help His spies to overtake Jericho. (Joshua 2)

Esther – the adopted orphan who became queen to save Israel. (Esther 1-8)

Peter – a quitter who God brought back to start the kingdom (Matthew 26, John 21, Acts 1-2)

Paul – the enemy who became the most prolific Christian in the New Testament. (Acts 7-9)

There was nothing about the pasts of any of these people that disqualified them from being the candidate that God chose for His work. You are also His candidate.

To be His candidate you need to show:

1. **Courage:** Take the step you have been contemplating. Make the move that feels right in your heart. God will fortify every action you take.
2. **Willingness:** Can you really be courageous if you aren’t willing? Be open to the calls in your life and the possibilities that are waiting for you. God has plans for you and only you – be ready to accept them.
3. **Be Teachable** – Can you imagine what it would be like to be on a team that was not coachable? God is calling us to be hungry to learn. Hungry to learn. We might not catch something on the first go around but if we stay motivated to see things a new way, to learn new tricks – God will reward us with extraordinary pathways.
4. **Purpose** – If you were to read the book of Acts, you would see that Paul understood that God had him on earth for a clear purpose. He had a mission. You do too. If you lose your Christian purpose and vision, you will stall out. Our Christian lives are not rote acts hemmed in by an uninspiring set of rules. Let your daily interactions with God renew your vision and remind you of the purpose God has set in your life.

God knows every day of your life (Psalm 139:16) – He has a plan for you. You will go from the ordinary to the extraordinary – no matter where you came from or the circumstances of your past. Ready. Set. Go.

6 MARCH 2024

Dr. Merle E. Fish

(ORIGINAL DATE: 1978)

*“Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.
Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” – Matthew 6:34*

Jesus was not trying to tell us that there is no point in thinking and planning for tomorrow, but He was reminding us that there is no point in worrying about it. Learn how God operates and trust Him.

Worrying wastes everything. It wastes time. Thomas Carlyle said, “Our main business in life is not to see what lies dimly in the distance, but to do what clearly lies at hand. Worrying wastes energy. Worry does not empty a day of its trouble but only of its strength.” It wastes thought. There is a lot of difference between worrying and thinking. Thinking plans constructively.

Worry shows lack of faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not worry about the fiery furnace. They served God and trusted that He would take care of that. Some people refuse to think when they receive a telegram. Good news seems impossible to expect. In the film, “Oh, God,” George Burns says he has made the world and given it to us, and we will have to determine what happens here. Never will everything be just as we desire it, but to worry about it is to show lack of faith in the God who made things as they are. “A pessimist is a person who turns out all the lights just to see how dark it is.”

There was once a man who had no worries. When asked “Why?,” he replied, “Many years ago I said to God, ‘You do the worrying and I’ll do the work.’ He’s kept His part of the bargain and I’ve kept mine.”

Prayer: *Father, help me to have greater faith in Thee and Thy plan. Let me work with Thee. Amen*

7 MARCH 2024

Erica Christensen

“You are enough.” In the last few years, this phrase has been all over our popular culture. It’s in memes, on t-shirts, stickers, jewelry, and many other items. For good reason. We desperately need the reminder. Through other parts of our culture, we are constantly told that the bar is high, and everyone must be the best. We need the best car, the best job, the best grades, and we must win the championship. We have to do or have these things, to be “enough.”

When Jesus picked His disciples, He didn’t ask for their credentials or their GPA. He didn’t ask them to go over a list of their good deeds and extracurricular activities. They were not perfect people. He knew that going in. After the last supper and before His arrest, three fell asleep when He asked them to keep guard, and one full-on betrayed Him. After Jesus’s death, I am positive His

disciples struggled with the question of, am I enough? What could I have done differently? Where did I fail? If I had stayed awake, could I have saved His life? And then, the question of, what now? The task was insurmountable. Could this small group of people really get the word of one man out to the world? They had no internet, no money, life expectancies weren't long, and the Roman government was not friendly. How could they possibly be enough? But this group of men and women were enough.

You may look at the long list of incredible people who built this congregation and be intimidated. So many wonderful leaders, innovative thinkers, and talented artists. Who am I? What can I add? I'm sure all those people that we hold in high regard today, had those same thoughts. But just as without ALL the voices, a choir is just one mumbling singer, without ALL the people, a congregation is just one person sitting alone in a big room. God isn't looking for perfection. God is looking for you. You are right where you are meant to be. Don't limit yourself. You are enough and we need you. The next 100 years of FCCNH needs you.

8 MARCH 2024

Pastor Alfredo Gomez

(ORIGINAL DATE: APRIL 16, 2019)

WALKING IN THIS WORLD

Now therefore, I pray you, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your ways, that I may know you, that I may find grace in your sight: and consider that this nation is your people. And He said, My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest. — Exodus 33:13-14 (KJ2000)

Some of my best memories are my dad and I going fishing; for sure It would be a day to learn something new, to have a lot of fun, to hear stories, but most important it was a time to spend with my father. I did not learn academic topics from him, but life. I also learned warnings: If you do this or that, those will be the consequences. However, once I grew up and left home, the time came to apply or ignore those teachings that became life lessons.

Many times, while I was trying to figure out what to do or what to say in circumstances when I was struggling, his wise words or teachings helped me a lot. Many times, I did make mistakes, and then I realized my father was not next to me to help me. I believe Jesus' disciples passed through something similar; spent time and had experiences with Him but once they were by themselves, problems, concerns and all kinds of issues appeared. Surely they would ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?"

The same happens to us: We are confronted by different issues and situations that make us feel we are walking in darkness, and we wonder how to deal with it, but the disciples and we have a promise from our good Lord.

Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. — John 8:12 (KJ2000)

9 MARCH 2024

Trudie Kirkland

THE REST OF WHOSE STORY?

I keep thinking how hard life had to be centuries ago. When life didn't include plumbing for daily showers; didn't include electricity for lights after dark; no cars for transportation, only mules if one was lucky. Such improvements created ease and a life forever lived differently.

Ease makes things interesting. Choice is the key.

Hundreds of years ago ease was an extravagance, and if we look around our cities today... ease is unquestionably missing. So much so that one might ask, "How did this happen and where is God in this place?"

Some time ago, behind closed doors probably, people began thinking thoughts of compassion and hope. Those thoughts began to change lives. Years before, a man named Jesus, the Son of God, came to teach us these things. He spoke of life's wisdoms, He spoke of choice, He offered new hope, and His gospel taught us faith. People will always be born to earth to continue His gifts of mercy, light and love. No matter where, no matter who. So, what is our story from stories past? Do we hear Jesus speaking His word inside our thoughts? Is God working in our life? It is for each of us to ponder. Jesus offered us new life because He lived this life. He said to His Disciples sitting around a table sharing a meal on the night He was betrayed, "Take, Eat. For this is my body and blood shed for you, do this in remembrance of me." He gave us life.

I love this passage for no matter our story, what we choose creates our life. "For as a man thinketh, so does he live."

10 MARCH 2024

Craig Brooks

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 6, 2012)

I'm a military brat, an Air Force brat to be more precise. Growing up, our family moved a great deal, and with every move came the difficult task of starting over.

Being the "new kid" was never easy. Starting a new school and learning the rules was always trying, not to mention trying to make new friends. It was difficult, but along with the difficulty came a positive side. Being the new kid was a chance to start over with a clean slate. It was a brand new day and fresh start.

There was excitement in being new. I never knew just what the future held. Having to start over every few years also taught me a great deal. I learned how to take risks and not be afraid to put myself out there. It gave me confidence and helped shape my character. I learned how to feel completely comfortable in a room full of strangers, a skill that serves me well as an adult. Starting

over was hard, but I know I benefitted from it.

When I think of the Lenten season, I think of that chance to be the new kid again. I see it as a time where I can start over, and it's exciting. I want the chance to be renewed. Of course, we have that chance to be spiritually renewed every Sunday at the Communion table and through prayer and meditation, but the time leading up to Easter is a period where we can focus ourselves on the gift of renewal. This season of the year is a time to reflect on and celebrate Christ's sacrifice. It's a chance to understand the gift He gave us and a chance for all of us to be the "new kid" and start over with a clean slate.

11 MARCH 2024

Cindy Holmer

"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

– Matthew 4:1

When Jesus was baptized by His cousin John, we are told that the spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove. Whether that phenomenon was as visible to the naked eye as the Gospel of John describes it is beside the point. Jesus was completely filled with the spirit of God in a way that was as obvious to everyone around Him as if they had literally seen God enter Jesus' body.

The world believed that Jesus was finally ready to begin His ministry, but He wasn't. Like Moses at the burning bush, Jesus had come in contact with the flame of the spirit, and the flame spread. Still, Jesus knew that He had to wait.

Our natural instinct when we catch fire with God is to burst out of the gate – manically, impatiently – and to get as much out of that feeling as we can before it burns out. Because it always seems to burn out. But Jesus didn't do that. In fact, Jesus didn't do anything. He just prayed for forty days.

I think that the act of waiting is the most underrated discipline in modern life. But what Jesus reminds us is that waiting is often the most important thing we can do. Before Jesus could do God's will, He had to be quiet and listen for it. When we are afire with God, Lent is a reminder that we must be quiet enough to hear "every word that comes from the mouth of God" and patient enough to wait until we do.

12 MARCH 2024

Kathy Defibaugh

(ORIGINAL DATE: 1978)

Give, and it will be given to you; good measure shaken up and running over, they will pour into your robe. For with the measure that you measure, it will be measured to you. – Luke 6:39

Ever since I can remember, Sunday School teachers, friends and relatives have taught me that it is “better to give than receive.” Now when you tell a young child something like that, they may think they’re getting the short end of the deal. Well, it wasn’t long before someone straightened me out of this dilemma by restating the phrase to “give and ye shall receive.”

What I hadn’t realized was that in the giving was the receiving. They are both gifts that work only when they go hand in hand.

There are many things that cause us to lose sight in understanding what giving really is. Maybe it’s because we don’t see the rewards right away. But the real reward is the fact that you have given of yourself.

A friend recently pointed out to me that when we go to church, work, school, or wherever it may be, if we go to see what we can get from it, we may end up with 50% if we’re lucky, but if we go with the attitude of seeing what we can give to others, we will all end up with 100%.

Don’t be afraid to give even if you can’t see a reward in it for yourself because “For with the measure that you measure, it will be measured to you.”

13 MARCH 2024

Kevin Bailey

I came across this traditional Lenten prayer years ago. It brought calm to me for a long time and continues to reassure me when I get disconnected from the Lord.

“God, may your light guide my day and your spirit bring me peace. Amen. God, may my sacrifice of today remind me of my dependence on You for all blessings I enjoy.”

Each Sunday at First Christian Church of North Hollywood, I feel blessed sharing my faith with our church family. We are all different people who come to church each week with different thoughts, concerns, and lifestyles. When I have had a rough week, I am reminded that the Holy Spirit will guide me through the most difficult times in life. Through the love of Christ, we are united.

As a church we are celebrating our 100th Anniversary. I am eternally grateful for those who have built the foundation for all of us to experience through their hard work and dedication. I feel

through a difficult few years, we are a church and a work in progress. Selflessness and love for each other must continue so that current and future generations can receive the gift of love and hope.

14 MARCH 2024

Nancy Ledner

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 28, 1996)

God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life... There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here. – 1 Peter 1: 4 & 6 (The Living Bible)

I was reading a delightful book entitled “Prescription for Living,” by Dr. Robert G. Wells. What I found particularly of interest was his discussion of why God allows adversity to happen in the lives of “good people.” He cites four reasons for God allowing suffering in the lives of “His children...”

- 1) It equips us to comfort others in their time of suffering... it develops empathy and compassion for others.
- 2) It promotes Christian growth... problems are one of the best ways to promote individual maturity. It is often a reminder to get our minds off the comforts of the world and back onto Him.
- 3) To teach us to be patient and calm in times of crisis... training us not to crumble under pressure and stay true to the Faith.
- 4) To provide contrast... to heighten our appreciation for things to come, and to make our joys greater.

It is hard to keep this kind of perspective while we ourselves are experiencing trials and adversity in our own lives. Often the trouble seems very unfair and hurtful, and it's very difficult to see it as a gift from God. But when we ride it out, and finally see all the good that lies for us on the other side, we can see that a Wisdom greater than ours was behind it. Maintaining our faith in God through good times AND bad was a key portion of the message that Jesus was sent here to convey, something we should try to live up to, particularly during this Lenten season.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. – James 1: 2-3 (New American Standard Bible)

15 MARCH 2024

Rae Eiklor

MEET TEDDY NAMUYIGA

The hardship Teddy Namuyiga faced in life would have crushed most people. Teddy has three children and was abandoned by her husband when she refused to give away her youngest daughter, who is deaf. In some regions of Uganda, the perception is that a disability is the work of evil spirits. For three years, she had no one to turn to. She and her family lived in a single room with a leaking roof. She washed clothes and dug on a farm where she made less than \$11 a month.

Today, she has land, a home, pigs, five hundred chickens, and a business that sells water to the community. She is also getting a university degree in public administration and helps other women learn how to create their own businesses. Her daughter attends the only school for the deaf in the country. Her income has increased 40-fold. Teddy's husband now wants her back, but she says: "I cannot, I just cannot. He has apologized for everything he did to me and begs me to go back to him, but I cannot."

Relief was possible because of a chance encounter in Uganda when a woman saw a need and created a solution. Teddy is an example of the thousands of women who have overcome their challenges to live their dreams. They changed their lives through the opportunities created by the nonprofit organization BeadforLife. Teddy started her journey out of extreme poverty by rolling beads from recycled paper. The story continued as Stacey Constantine, our church member, brought these handmade pieces of jewelry from Beadforlife to First Christian Church of North Hollywood. Over the years, this church has supported thousands of women like Teddy Namuyiga. Support is part of our story!

16 MARCH 2024

Reverend Louise Sloan Goben

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 20, 2005)

FOR HOSPITALITY

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in. – Matthew 25:35

One of the most satisfying aspects of what I do in ministry is to be invited into people's lives during special times. To be asked to perform someone's wedding, dedicate a child, visit in the hospital – even at someone's deathbed, this is a remarkable gift to me. I feel privileged to know that somehow I represent Christ at those times. I also represent you – the church of Jesus Christ.

Recently, at The Living Room service of worship, a young man entered the Sanctuary with a

smile on his face. He greeted me with a big embrace and said, “I love coming here. Being in this place on Sunday evenings is my hug that gets me through the week.” He is not a member of the church, and I confess, I don’t know his name – but I got the message. Just being here does it for him.

Friendliness shows warm interest and goodwill to another person.

Hospitality is the welcome reception of a guest.

These are different concepts. Friendliness says, “Hi, how are you? What’s happening? See you. Bye.”

Hospitality asks a completely different question. Hospitality asks, “Will you come into my home, join me for a meal or a movie or something else I am doing?”

In other words, hospitality asks, “Will you come into my life?”

Hospitality goes beyond friendliness to friendship.

We have intentionally cultivated an atmosphere of hospitality at First Christian Church. We seek to make people feel welcome and to offer friendship. Sometimes it is not easy. It makes us stretch ourselves beyond what is comfortable.

But it is also important to realize that as the church, when we invite strangers into our lives, we are offering friendship in the name of Jesus Christ. We are also inviting people into fellowship and into the family of God.

The next time you greet a familiar face or a newcomer at church, understand that you are being the face of Jesus Christ for another person who is on the journey. We don’t know what journey they are on – but welcome the sojourners among us. It may just make their week – or their life.

17 MARCH 2024

Drew Powell

The part of the Easter story that has always gnawed at me, even when I was a kid, was the part that Pontius Pilate played. To me, Pilate is like all of us when we feel that something is wrong in our gut but are too afraid of reprisals to act on it. As I’ve gotten older, this verse in Matthew 27 about Pilate’s wife warning him holds a new significance:

¹⁹ *While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.”*

The first lesson is clearly, ALWAYS LISTEN TO YOUR WIFE!!!...If Pilate had, then the story would have changed, and the innocent Jesus would not have been sacrificed. Instead, we have... the rest of the story (also from Matthew 27):

²⁴ *So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”*

There have been many times when I have said, at least in my head, “I wash my hands of this...” thinking it will absolve me...but we know that’s not really true. We must do what is right even when it’s hard...especially when it’s hard. Yet, even in Pilate’s failing, there is still...the rest of the story...

You see, because Jesus was crucified, it fulfilled God’s promise to us that no matter how badly we screw up, no matter how many times we ignore the “still small voice” in our head and heart that is telling us to do the right thing, no matter how many times we fail to listen to our wife’s wise counsel, we will be forgiven (at least by God). That’s the story. All of it. We will be forgiven. Thank the Lord for that...

18 MARCH 2024

George Patterson

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 2005)

THE FEAST

“I’m starved!” rumbled around the 65-foot sailing yacht which had taken my scout troop for a weekend camping trip to Catalina Island. “You didn’t tell us it would take four hours to sail back! Is there anything to eat?” Grumbling and complaining, the 25 youngsters, along with their scoutmaster, realized they had forgotten to plan for snacks or food for the long sail back to the mainland.

I started to rack my brain for answers when the beautiful miracle of the loaves and the fishes filled my mind. A smile emerged from within as I asked all the scouts to reach in their pockets and look through their packs and see what tidbits of food they could find and bring them up by the cabin. Apples and oranges, candy bars, chips, health bars, granola, and various treats started piling up in front of me. We sliced and diced, had everybody take one item, come back for another, and had a three-hour feast which filled all of us, with food left over!

We experience these miracles and fulfillment every day in our relationship with Jesus. We are starved. We do need to be fed. We also have to ask for help! Even now, nearly 2,000 years after His birth, His teachings and love continue to inspire us and provide answers for even the simplest of problems. May you feel your hunger and thirst filled this day by our Lord, our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

19 MARCH 2024

John Currin

I invite you to read and review scripture John 20: 6-10.

This Biblical passage refers to where Peter and another disciple enter the tomb in which Jesus was laid after the crucifixion. And to me, this is where I find my personal “proof” of the Spirit of Jesus, the proof of all that He is meant to be.

In verse 7, the Bible states: “...and the cloth (headdress, napkin) that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up (folded) in a place by itself.”

This tiny, seemingly insignificant, throwaway detail reveals much. Body wrappings were an important part of burial proceedings in ancient times. Depending on their quality of craft, they would have been an expensive garment. The headdress itself had to be special, a luxury item to anoint the dead for their final journey. The death of Jesus was untimely and due to His relatively young age, unexpected. So He would not have had time to correctly prepare for His death; hence, the trappings of burial would have had to be on loan and provided to Jesus’ body by others.

The cloth for the face, the “window to the soul” was certainly a finer, more refined piece of fabric. The fact that mention is made of it being carefully folded and set aside is evidence to me that special care and respect was bestowed upon that cloth. Jesus’ body was not hastily spirited away and hidden elsewhere by others; He arose Himself and exited the tomb to walk upon the land and briefly but purposely reveal Himself.

What sort of person upon arising from death would take a moment to carefully fold and set aside a loaned garment? A respectful person of grateful spirit. A person that held in high regard the trappings of burial lent by others. A person not in a hurry to escape into the world and rejoice in conquering death, but a person in a solemn mode, embarking on a mission of peace and the promise of love everlasting.

To me, a mere Disciple walking in the twenty-first century after Jesus’ birth, walking with the questions and challenges of living a life in Christian faith - I find this tiny and perhaps insignificant detail reassuring. I recognize in this singular act a gesture of Divine Spirit and the true character of Christ. And it leads me to believe.

20 MARCH 202

Bill Goss

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 26, 1992)

After this He went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and He said to him, "Follow me," and he left everything, and rose and followed Him. — Luke 5:27-28

Oh, boy! I like this bit of scripture because it is short and to the point, and yet something extremely good happens.

The groundwork must have been laid long before this event took place, for Levi had probably heard Jesus speak and witnessed some of the things He did in the lives of the people around him. He was probably not very happy with his job and longed for something better. He evidently longed, too, for justice, compassion, and morality, and other long-lasting spiritual values he recognized in Jesus such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So, when Jesus stood directly in front of him and looked into his eyes and spoke just the two words, "Follow me," they were enough. Levi was happy to leave his job and his former way of life, and follow Jesus in this new unselfish way of life that has perfect balance.

Levi must have changed, all right, because he became the author of one of the four gospels. His other name was Matthew.

Prayer: Our Father, let us be confronted with the call to "Follow me" this day, and grant us the good sense and courage to respond as did Levi, and grow a little in the ways of Jesus day by day. In His name we pray. Amen.

21 MARCH 2024

Brad Arnold

As we approach Easter, resurrection is on our minds. Things being renewed and revived. Overcoming death. My family came to FCCNH ten years ago. When we first arrived, we knew this was our new church home almost immediately... but I was wary.

Bob was wonderful but I thought that even in the best circumstances, he'd be gone soon. Even if he stayed healthy, surely retirement was just around the corner. (Clearly, I didn't know Bob.) What would it become when he was gone? As a kid I was raised non-denominational Presbyterian Baptist Lutheran. Basically, my mom and I would bounce from church to church, staying wherever we found a good pastor. Inevitably that pastor would leave, a radically different pastor would be appointed, infighting would start, and things would become toxic. It happened time and again.

So Bob's age made me nervous. Did we really want to connect ourselves to a place that might soon cease to exist? Especially since Bob had been around so long, it almost felt like FCCNH and Bob were one and the same. But we decided that Bob and this church were worth knowing for however long there was left. That was 2014. And then in 2020 the doors closed. Before they would open again, Bob passed away. FCCNH as we knew it was gone. But where it once seemed hard to imagine that it would ever recover, I believe we are now in a time of resurrection. Seats are filling back up. The spirit is moving. Bob's absence is still felt by those who knew him but much like the hole in Jesus' side attested to His death and resurrection, it is proof of the continuity of this church - that it lives and is the same place we've known and loved.

22 MARCH 2024

José Pretlow

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 4, 2013)

I met Billy Reid when I was just 15 years old. He was carrying a six-month-old gift he had never used. It was a brand-new Spaulding tennis racket that he finally decided to give a try. But Billy also had another gift, and this one didn't come out of a box and it wasn't wrapped; deep inside the heart and soul of this lanky kid, God planted a tennis warrior, and he was something to behold.

Unlike the rest of us who had endured summers of tennis camps and coaches, Billy, without a single lesson, stepped onto the court like he already knew the game. In two months, he was on par with the rest of us; in three, he was better. Billy Reid became so good that people would line the fence around his court like wallpaper just to see him play. I almost had him beaten once, but Billy found something deep inside of him and he won, and he made me feel stupid for thinking I could.

I was jealous of Billy and endured three summers of his reign. I wanted him to just go away. I never thought that by the third summer, he would. Billy fell into a bad crowd who told him tennis was a sissy game and that's all it took. Billy was done. I won the park's championship that year and it was the first time I'd won something and not been proud. I knew that trophy belonged to Billy. I spent so much time despising Billy's gift that I had failed to use mine: God's gift of encouragement, support, and praise for others that lives inside each of us. Jesus set the example for each of us during His time here on earth.

I ran into Billy Reid over 15 years later in a mall during one of my trips back home and I finally got a chance to give him my gift. I told him I thought he was the best tennis player I'd ever seen.

23 MARCH 2024

Brett Elliott

*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me will also do
the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.*

– John 14:12 (NRSVUE)

I find myself bewildered by this passage. Greater works than the Son of Man? Surely not. Yet the language is so simple, direct, and concrete, it defies dismissal and doesn't feel like metaphor. What then?

I tend to think the purpose of passages like this is not to arrive at a single, satisfying interpretation. That the goal is not to solve it like a riddle and be done with it. Rather, I think the grappling with it is the point. Not to best it and then lock it away, but to keep coming back to it. To take it out, hold it up to the light, and see what refracts in its depths today.

And so today, I find myself thinking about those moments in the gospels when Jesus performs miracles, healing people, cleansing them, casting out demons, only to then instruct those He helps not to tell anyone about it.

It's as if, wondrous as they are, the miracles themselves aren't the point. Maybe it's not the grandly miraculous works of Christ we're meant to focus on, to emulate, to strive for. I don't know much of those kinds of miracles anyway. So, maybe it's something else. Something more immediate and ever-present.

Christian Wiman writes that God "is everywhere in the world we are too dispirited to love." To feel God, to find Him, then, doesn't usually require a grand gesture. Instead, he says,

"All too often the task to which we are called is simply to show a kindness to the irritating person in the cubicle next to us, say...letting grace wake love from our intense, self-enclosed sleep."

24 MARCH 2024 - PALM SUNDAY

Pastor Bob Bock

(ORIGINAL DATE: APRIL 21, 2019)

In Jerusalem, on that first Easter morning, Jesus' disciples went to the tomb to prepare His body for burial. But the tomb was empty. Jesus had walked from the tomb. He was alive and would soon reveal Himself to His frightened Disciples. And after the shock, after the disbelief, after all the questioning, the celebration began in the hearts of the disciples. Their journey with Jesus could continue. Hallelujah!

But before His crucifixion, there were hundreds of people walking with Jesus along the road,

hoping to see another miracle, anticipating another spiritual gem and counting on the promise that His Kingdom was coming – soon! These people followed Him to Bethany, up past the Mount of Olives and into the Temple. They watched as he kicked over the tables of the money changers and they hung on His every word and action.

We have to ask, as the last nail was driven into His hands and He was hung on the cross, where were those followers? Did they suddenly remember an urgent appointment back home that demanded their immediate attention?

We don't really know where the multitudes that walked with Him into the city on Palm Sunday went, but they were nowhere to be found when things went from bad to worse for Jesus.

That's the thing we must always remember. Walking with Jesus is the greatest privilege in the world. But walking with Jesus isn't always blue skies, birds singing, roses blooming, and time to sit and visit. Walking with Jesus also means walking into a firestorm of controversy, standing against injustices and prejudice, fighting for the rights of children, the homeless, the abused, the victims of greed and crime, and being willing to continue that fight – no matter what! And walking with Jesus means staying with Jesus through all the challenges of life!

Easter is a day of celebration. That first Easter was the beginning of a movement that changed the world forever and for that we truly celebrate – We dance and sing and shout and proclaim the Good News. But for that celebration to continue, we have to accept Jesus' invitation – “Come – and walk close to me!” Nothing can be more powerful and wonderful! And nothing can be more demanding!

25 MARCH 2024

Richard Follett

THE REST OF THE STORY

Let's shift our thinking for a moment and concentrate on the second word of our Lenten theme: the word rest. As normally read, we would think it means the remainder or the continuation of a story in progress. However, rest also means “cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength; an interval of silence of a specified duration.”

I am concerned that our culture has a ubiquitous addiction to struggling, to fighting that is so pervasive we don't even see it anymore. We “fight on,” “run the race,” “tackle the problem,” etc., without much thought to what the very conflict, the very activity is doing to our souls. The scriptures are filled with phrases like “rest in the Lord” and “come unto Me and rest” (click on the link and listen to the soft rendition*). Remember, God rested on the 7th day, too. Do a BibleGateway** search for “rest” and see how often it appears.

If your Christian faith is too burdensome, you may wish to shift to a more Taizé practice or a more Fr. Richard Rohr contemplative focus. Jesus calls us to rest: the battle has already been won, sin is overcome, accept the joy of the Lord, live in the peace and harmony of the Spirit, and

rejoice. Continual affirmations of joy throughout the day and night can move us beyond struggle to rest, beyond worry to relaxation, beyond conflict to acceptance of the peace that passes all understanding in Christ (Philippians 4:7).

Take a break and try it. You might like it. I do.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfgPo5m7ew8>

**<https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=rest&version=NRSVUE>

26 MARCH 2024

Jay Aldrich

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 6, 2019)

LIFE IS AN ECHO...

Life is an echo. What you send out, comes back. What you sow, you reap. What you give, you get. What you see in others, exists in you. Do not judge, so you will not be judged. Radiate and give love and love will come back to you. Never fear; as long as you take a “Closer Walk with Thee,” you will be protected and extend that protection to others as He would want you to do.

27 MARCH 2024

Sarah Lord

*“Up with the sunrise, excitement is in the air,
Easter morning is finally here.
Brand new clothes and a freshly washed face,
Going to Church to give thanks for God’s grace.”*

--A poem by Kelly Roper.

Easter eggs, mostly pastel,
Bonnets and pretty new dresses.
Bees humming in the crisp air.
Mother birds feeding their young,
Dew on the morning grass.
Flowers bursting forth, everywhere.
Smells from the kitchen, signaling an anticipated meal with family and friends later on.
Sounds of laughter – TODAY IS EASTER!!

But, let us remember what makes this day so special – OUR LORD JESUS – who loved us so much that He gave His life for us, that we may have everlasting life with Him in Heaven – RE-BIRTH!!

So while the day is new, let us rejoice in Church. Listening to the beautiful organ and choir, words of wisdom from our Leader, and Holy Communion. Together we celebrate with each other and our gracious God!

28 MARCH 2024 - MAUNDY THURSDAY

Sheryl Fitzpatrick

(ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 21, 2019)

It was 1952 on an early Sunday morning when I was once again awakened by the sound of live music. My grandfather, a Seventh Day Adventist, early riser, and piano teacher, set this day and time to give his grandchildren music lessons. A handsome man over 6 feet tall with large hands and silver hair, he was quite an intimidating figure sitting at our old upright piano. While he waited for my sister and I to wash our faces and brush our teeth, he would play and sing some of his favorite songs. Half asleep and in our pajamas, we both tried to stay awake for our lessons. Bet you can guess how many of his 15 grandchildren took to the piano? You're right, Zero!

His strong baritone voice filled our small house, and I'm sure some of our neighbors' homes, with his spiritual love of God. To this day when I hear songs like Just a Closer Walk with Thee, God Speaks, In the Garden, Ebb Tide, and my favorite Laura (his late wife and my beloved grandmother's name), I am filled with sweet memories of his wonderful voice.

Even as a young child, I knew his voice changed when he sang Laura or Just a Closer Walk with Thee. His normally clear voice would crack and sometimes my strong grandfather would shed a few tears. I didn't understand then and I'm only beginning to grasp now his deep love for God and family.

Love is the greatest gift that one generation can leave to another. – Richard Garnett

29 MARCH 2024 - GOOD FRIDAY

Barbara Sheppard

(ORIGINAL DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2015)

My parents moved to a farm in the mountains of Pennsylvania back in the last century. Otherwise known as the 70's. I admit they had to take me kicking and screaming. Why? I guess because I was used to where we had lived – in the suburbs of Philadelphia just across the Walt Whitman Bridge in a small colonial town in Southern New Jersey. Quite the culture shock for a teenager!

Becoming a new farmer at that age was not exactly what I had expected at my high school graduation. But I went... and lived on the farm for the next year. Even though I moved back to the suburbs a short time later, my expectations of living on our farm were all wrong. I wouldn't give up that memory for anything. What I didn't expect was to see my mother happier than I had ever seen her before. Caring for so many animals and selling our fresh eggs to the locals. I didn't expect to see my father beaming with pride that he taught himself how to run a farm and how he turned a rundown property into a beautiful country home. I didn't expect my little sister to go from riding just a bike on the sidewalk to joyfully riding her horse up to the barn. I didn't expect to come home from my job in town to a lovely family meal where almost everything on the table was grown by us just a short tractor ride from the house. Although I lived there just a brief time, I visited my parents at the farm for the next 15 years.

When I realize how much I was expecting to dislike it there as a 19-year-old, I should have expected the wonderful blessing God gave me and my family for that amazing experience.

Expect big. Expect happy. Expect love. Expect Jesus.

30 MARCH 2024

Jon Butler

How do you want to be remembered? This is a question that is often asked when individuals are thinking about their goals, their image, their brand, or, moreover, their impact on this world we live in. Ultimately, the question is re-cast as, what do you want your legacy to be? I think a lot about the legacy I want to create, and it extends beyond simply how I will be remembered into how my daily example will guide others after I'm gone. The story I am telling in my everyday earthly life, isn't the whole story—not just because we know there is more after this but also because my example, my stories, my interactions continue to live within those I've touched.

I recently brought this up in my elder meditation at church, citing some legacies that came to mind—Bill Hayes, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesus... (just to name a few). The examples these people set, the interactions they had, and what they stood for, live on even after their death. Their stories live on. The only difference now becomes “who” is telling their story. Who is carrying on their legacy?

I believe in what these people stood for, what they told us through their earthly actions, and now, I get to continue to tell their story. More pointedly--and well, because this is a Lenten meditation after all--I believe in what Jesus stood for. I believe in what Jesus taught. I believe in what Jesus did. I believe in Jesus. And now, it is up to us to carry out His legacy and to continue to tell the rest of the story. This is an opportunity we have in perpetuity because this is a story that never ends as long as we continue to tell its central theme of Love.

How are you telling the rest of Jesus' story as you build your own legacy?

Pastor Jonathan Hall

In some financial and legal documents, we find a blank page at the end or in particular places. Usually, we can read the words, “This page is intentionally left blank.”

I see the same thing at the end of the Gospel of Mark. If you have a study Bible, you likely see all sorts of brackets and notes in and around Mark 16. There are multiple endings to this gospel. Originally, it ended with verse 8 - “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Whew, what an ending! The women did not say a word to anyone! Then, we get an intermediate ending of Mark that does not have any verses associated with it. Finally, we get the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20, which many of us are familiar with. Some pastors will hide these complexities of Scripture, but I will always point to them. Honestly, I find God in the footnotes of the Bible too!

To be honest, I enjoy all three endings! However, if we take the spirit of these endings to heart, we should see at the end of Mark’s gospel - “This page is intentionally left blank.”

It is left blank so that we can add the rest of the story. It would be our story or stories of resurrection. Where is it when we thought that the worst thing was the last thing? When did we think that evil defeated goodness? When did God and our loved ones help us make the path forward by walking?

On the other side of this page, you will see the words “This page is intentionally left blank.” My hope is that you will add your story or stories of resurrection in this area. Further, I hope that you will keep adding stories to it throughout this year and beyond. If you are viewing this meditation online, I hope that you will open a word document and see the Holy Spirit through the blinking of the cursor. Apparently, later readers and scribes of Mark did! Why can’t we add our story since this is truly “the rest of the story”?

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