



The Power of Thanksgiving

Reflections on the deeper connection between stewardship and thanksgiving

By PASTOR ERIC O. LEDERMANN

Stewardship season is upon us. Churches across the country are preparing newsletter articles, announcements, testimonies, and, of course, pledge cards so that they can make significant and informed decisions about their ministries for the following year. Some churches work on a fiscal year that aligns with the academic year, since most church programs follow that schedule, so they may do their stewardship season in the spring. Regardless, it's one of several seasons during which we are invited to reflect on how we might be more faithful stewards of all that God continues to provide.

In September, for many churches it's our offerings to the Church. There's much talk about tithing—the biblical principle of giving to God one-tenth of our “first fruits,” whether that be a salary or wage. In agricultural communities like those depicted in the Bible, it's the first fruits of seasonal crops or live stock.

In November, in the U.S. we reflect on the practice of thanksgiving, which is tied to stewardship. We move beyond the monetary and consider our friends and family, our homes, the food we are able to eat, and maybe even the opportunities we have because we live in the U.S. We give thanks for what we have, which might draw our attention to what we care about and take care of (stewardship).

By at least mid-November, if not October, we can hear the bells of the Christ-

mas season calling us to reflect on the gift of God's light in our lives revealed through Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian season of Advent, oft forgotten amidst the hustle and bustle of shopping and parties, is intended for us to spend time in prayer and reflection on the gift of God's love made flesh in Jesus. During the Advent and Christmas seasons we continue our thanksgiving for friends and family, exchanging gifts and sharing in a bit of revelry.

As Christmas winds down, our attention is drawn to the turn of a new year. We might reflect on the joys and challenges of the previous year as we map out our hopes and dreams for the next year.

Soon the Christian season of Lent is upon us—a season of 40 days, not including Sundays, that leads into the Feast of the Resurrection, or “Easter Sunday,” and the season of Eastertide that lasts for six weeks, or 50 days, culminating in Festival of Pentecost, when Christians celebrate the gift of God's presence through what we call the Holy Spirit. Two more seasons to reflect on God's goodness and gifts—grace, sustenance, love, and hope!

Come April, as we scramble to prepare our tax returns (some of us being tempted to dwell on perceived scarcity as we write large checks to the U.S. Treasury for the privilege of living in the United States, and others savoring the abundance of anticipated tax refunds), we are faced with the often obscured consideration of Earth Day. One day per year, April



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*This issue of the
UPC NEWS & Current Events
is brought to you by...*
the word...

Stewardship

The act of caring for or managing. From the Old English, *steward*, *stigweard*, meaning “house guardian” or “housekeeper”—*stig* (“hall, pen for cattle, part of a house, see also *sty*) + *weard* (guard, from Proto-Germanic *wardaz* and Proto-Indo-European *wer-*, meaning “to perceive or watch out for”). Equivalent to the Old French *seneschal*, meaning “overseer of workmen,” c. 1300). Reflected in the Scottish name *Stewart*, the house descending from Walter (the) Steward, in 1315 married Marjori de Bruce, daughter of King Robert (*Stuart* being French spelling, and adopted by Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots).

THANKSGIVING

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22nd, we consider our stewardship of (or lack thereof) our precious planet, both its abundance and its increasing devastation.

By the time we get to the Ordinary Time of summer we have been invited to consider our stewardship of God's good gifts for much of the year! As I write at the end of August, the slow roll of summer still lingers in my mind. Summer, a season of abundance in many ways. Ordinarily many take vacations. In the Phoenix Metro, we try to escape the heat if we can, even if only for a few days. Maybe summer is another season of thanksgiving?

I can't help link stewardship ("caring for") to thanksgiving. To be thankful is to also care for something or someone. In churches, too often and narrowly stewardship is limited to money and budgets. But, if you've been paying attention, we are being challenged to think much more broadly—stewardship of our buildings and grounds; stewardship of our neighbors, especially refugees, migrants, and those who are hungry or homeless; stewardship of the earth by recycling what we have on the back end and, more importantly, reducing what we use and consume on the front end. The practice of stewardship can take us far and wide, well beyond just money. While thanksgiving can lead to stewardship, stewardship can also expand our practice of thanksgiving.

As our Stewardship Committee invites

us to reflect on how much God may be calling us to dedicate next year to the ministry of Jesus in our midst and through the church, we might also consider the many other areas of our lives that God may be inviting us to consider for stewardship. How much of the material things we "have" do we need? How much of it is really creating joy in the world, not only for us but also for our neighbors? Can what we have be recycled or repurposed to help others? How might we seek to reform our practices to reduce our carbon footprint in the world so that the earth may be made clean again and available in all her beauty for future generations of people, plants, and animals? And how might we heed Christ's call to consider these things in the spirit of truly caring for our neighbor, whether next door, on the streets of our cities, or on the other side of the world?

Just some thoughts to spur our continued reflections and practices of thanksgiving and stewardship. Let's keep the conversation going amongst one another. How might God be inviting us to live differently and more faithfully in other areas of our lives? What or who else might God be calling us to consider in our care of all that God loves?

*Be of good courage
and know that you are loved!*



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MONTHLY DRIVE 'n' DROP

September 5, 2021, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Normally First Sunday of each month! Drop off at church!

TCAA has requested **breakfast items** for the homeless and those needing food boxes. Here are the items needed for TCAA and UPC Refugee Ministry



- tuna
- beans
- canned Meats
- ramen noodles
- canned vegetables
- soups
- breakfast items
- towels/washcloths
- baby wipes
- travel snacks

Financial contributions may be sent to the office.
Make checks out to "TCAA" and reference "Food Pantry"
or to UPC and reference "Refugee" in the memo

UPC NEWS & Current Events is published monthly.
Submissions of announcements, stories, op-eds,
and reflections on recent events at UPC are
welcomed.

Requirements:

Announcements: 500 words or less
Articles/Reflections: 1200 words or less
Letters to the Editor: 750 words or less
Submissions may be edited for content,
grammar, and space available.

**Send submissions
by the 20th of each month to:
newsletter@upctempe.org**

Stewardship Season Upon Us

Help tend God's glorious garden and share God's grace

By KATIE RANES

Stewardship Committee Chairperson

Every September, we at UPC focus on the part we each play in the welfare of our church, our particular patch of God's Kin-dom Garden. Each of us is asked to re-examine our contributions: financial contributions, prayer, worship, and participation in UPC's compassionate outreach programs. And we are urged to

look beyond the present harvest and pray on how we personally can contribute, particularly financially, for the coming year. By Consecration Sunday, September 26, the Stewardship Committee is asking each of us to complete and return a pledge, providing the financial information needed by Session to plan for next year's garden.

Planted in faith, our UPC Kin-dom Garden flourishes when we intentionally

care for its needs. Our facility, like the soil in the garden, needs maintenance and repair. The congregation, staff, leadership, and, indeed, the denomination, are like gardeners, each working with specific skills, tools, and knowledge to keep the church growing and blooming as a living example of the Creator's dream for the world. And as plants in a garden need sun, water, and nourishment, the church's programs for children, youth, adults, and outreach to the community require our support to help each flower into the fullness of God's plan.

Each Sunday in September you will hear a message about the work at UPC to build and grow our garden. And you will receive a letter, either by email or through the mail, containing the pledge form. We ask that you pray about your stewardship...your gardener-ship. Then complete and return the form before September 26. During worship on that day, we will again dedicate ourselves and consecrate our gifts to the care and nourishment of God's Kin-dom Garden at University Presbyterian Church. ■



Memorial Plants

BY KATHY WAGNER

Memorial Plants Co-Coordinator

With the return of in-person worship, the Deacons have begun to purchase plants for our Sunday worship service. There are some open dates for the remainder of 2021 that you might want to consider celebrating a special event or purchasing a plant in memory of someone. The cost is \$12. A check can be made out to UPC Deacons noting memorial plant in the memo line. If you are not worshipping in person, we can deliver your plant, or it could be donated. To sign up, contact Kathy Wagner at (602) 741-3192 or kwagnersunlakes@gmail.com. **Open Dates:** Oct. 3, 10, 24, 31, Nov. 14, 21, 28, and Dec. 5. ■



Schedule an Event!

CHURCH OFFICE

Contact the church office today to schedule your committee, team, or group event! Go to www.upctempe.org/calendar to check the date and time in which you're interested. Contact the church office at upc@upctempe.org or (480) 966-6267 to schedule. In addition to Zoom video conferencing, current rooms available on campus are: Sanctuary, Lounge, and Meeting Room. Please include the following info:

1. Name of event
2. Primary Contact name, phone number, and email
3. Start date and time
4. End date and time
5. Brief description (1-2 sentences)
6. Room preference if in-person (Sanctuary, Lounge, or Meeting Room), or if it is a Zoom or hybrid in-person/online gathering (indicate if you need a Zoom room assigned to your meeting) ■

PC(USA) Calls Welcoming of Afghan Refugees

Office of Public Witness calls for advocacy and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance details how to help

By RICH COPLEY
Presbyterian News Service

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness is calling on the U.S. Congress and the White House to expedite admission of Afghan refugees to the United States, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is providing a guide for how Presbyterians and others can make their communities welcoming destinations for refugees.

The issue became critical earlier this month as the United States military began a planned withdrawal after nearly 20 years in the country as part of the U.S. response to the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in New York and Washington. That is leaving thousands of Afghans who worked with the United States military desperate to leave the country for fear of reprisals from the Taliban government.

“Nearly 80,000 of our Afghan allies are still in danger in Afghanistan,” the Action Alert from the Office of Public Witness (OPW) reads. “We must evacuate ALL of our Afghan allies. It is imperative that we contact our national elected leaders and hold the administra-



The Amiri family is shown this spring on the playground at Second Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The church co-sponsored the family with Kentucky Refugee Ministries for their first months in the United States. PHOTO BY RICH COPLEY

tion accountable to urgently evacuate all of our Afghan allies to U.S. territory AND immediately expand and expedite access to the U.S. resettlement program.”

The alert points out that on Aug. 2 the State Department designated certain Afghan nationals and their families as Priority 2 for admission to the U.S. The designation is for groups of special humanitarian concern to the U.S., but the alert also noted that only a small percentage of Afghans have made it to the U.S. thus far. The Action Alert includes ways for people to directly contact their congressional representatives and the White House.

Both the Office of Public Witness and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) are Compassion, Peace & Justice ministries of the

Presbyterian Mission Agency.

In a Thursday night webinar focused on citizenship for all undocumented immigrants living in the United States, Amanda Craft of the PC(USA) Office of the General Assembly’s [Office of Immigration Issues](#) took time to highlight the Afghan situation.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance said a broad effort will be necessary to support Afghans coming to the U.S.

“We will need every tool in our immigration/refugee processing toolkit to respond in a timely manner to those whose

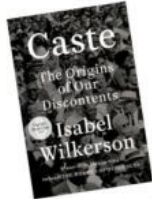
Lives are at risk — as parolees, as visa holders and, eventually, as refugees,” a blog post from PDA’s Refugee Ministry reads. “The U.S. Government has already been working with nine U.S.-based NGOs to receive these allies, resettling them to places in the country where the majority already have contacts.” ■



**PRESBYTERIAN
DISASTER
ASSISTANCE**
OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE



JOIN OUR RACIAL JUSTICE BOOKSTUDY



CASTE

MONDAYS • BIWEEKLY • 6:30 PM

COME AND LEARN HOW BEYOND RACE, CLASS, OR OTHER FACTORS,
THERE IS A POWERFUL CASTE SYSTEM THAT INFLUENCES
PEOPLE'S LIVES AND BEHAVIOR AND THE NATION'S FATE.

**Mon, Sep. 13, 6:30–8:00 p.m. through
Mon., Dec. 13 (Zoom)**

Join people of faith as we study Isabel Wilkerson's masterful portrait of an unseen racial justice phenomenon in America. "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents" is an eye-opening story of people and history, and a reexamination of what lies under the surface of ordinary lives and of American life today.

She tells us stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system—a rigid hierarchy of human rankings. Register at: [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)



Thu., Aug. 19, 6:00 - 7:15 p.m. (Zoom)

Chispa Arizona will begin hosting an environmental justice (EJ) escuela! The escuela will be a series of six sessions to learn about EJ history, principles, timeline EJ & BIPOC frontline communities, intersectionality, and more!

To register go to: [Environmental Justice Escuela \(everyaction.com\)](#)

**Learn more about the Arizona Faith Network
by subscribing to the newsletter at:**

www.arizonafaithnetwork.org/subscribe



Tue., Sep. 14, 5:30-6:45 p.m. (Zoom)

Join us to learn more about the spiritual practice of hope in our everyday lives. Despite the limitations of physical distancing, a new reality of our interconnectedness through technology has blossomed. We realize that our work doesn't need to end; rather, it needs to evolve. Sofa Spirituality allows people of faith and hope, curiosity and interest, to learn about each other while being in dialogue with each other. The intimate style of Sofa Spirituality affords each one of us to have a seat on the sofa and a voice in the conversation.

Our hosts include: Rev. Liddy Barlow of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, Rabbi Ron Symons, Founding Director of the Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement at the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, Rabbi Bonnie Sharfman, Vasu Bandhu, Lisa Derrick and Rev. Katie Sexton-Wood of Arizona Faith Network

Register at: [Sofa Spirituality Tickets, Tue, Sep 14, 2021 at 5:30 PM | Eventbrite](#)



Join the anti-hunger and food systems advocacy calls with the Arizona Food Bank Network and the Arizona Food System Network, held every other Friday. More information and recordings of past calls are available at: <https://www.azfsn.org/>

America's Moral Responsibility For the Tragedy Unfolding in Afghanistan

Political philosopher argues why the current situation in Afghanistan should weigh heavily on the American conscience



Thousands of Afghans rushed to Kabul's airport trying to flee the country as the Taliban seized power.

By **MICHAEL BLAKE**

Religion News Service

Chaotic scenes in Kabul accompanied the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The fundamentalist Islamic group was able to retake power after President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw the remaining U.S. troops from the country.

The withdrawal brings to a close nearly 20 years of American military presence in Afghanistan.

Without the ongoing prospect of U.S. military support, the Washington-backed Afghan government quickly fell – and on Aug. 15, 2021, the Taliban declared the creation of a new political order, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The withdrawal was widely popular in the United States, when first announced by Biden on April 14 – the majority of Americans, regardless of political affiliation, favored an end to the military presence in Afghanistan.

The withdrawal, however, has brought significant costs for the people of Afghanistan. The Taliban has proved itself willing to engage in widespread violation

of basic human rights – in particular, the human rights of women. The decision to withdraw is likely to lead to enormous suffering in the years to come. A hypothetical decision to remain in Afghanistan, however, would also have led to significant moral costs – that decision would continue to put American soldiers in harm's way. As a political philosopher whose work focuses on international affairs, I have tried to understand how ethical reasoning might be applied to such cases.

The first, and most important, ethical question might be: Was the United States justified in withdrawing its troops?

A second question might involve asking about how the moral wrongs that are now emerging in Afghanistan should weigh upon the American conscience. Should American political leaders regard these wrongs as, in some fashion, their responsibility?

More broadly, is it sometimes possible that, in doing the best available thing, we are nonetheless guilty of doing something morally wrong?

Power and moral tragedy

Many philosophers have disliked the

idea that someone might make the best choice available and nonetheless be thought to have committed a moral wrong. Immanuel Kant, for one, thought this vision was fundamentally in conflict with the purposes of morality – which is to tell people what it is they ought to do.

If a moral theory told us that sometimes there is no option open to us that does not involve doing wrong, then that theory would sometimes imply that even a perfect moral agent might end up having to become a wrongdoer.

That sort of theory would mean that there might be situations in which we could not escape from doing wrong. If we were unlucky enough to end up in those situations, we would become liable for wrongdoing because of this bad luck. Kant thought this sort of “moral luck” was simply implausible. For Kant, if we do what is best, we can regard ourselves as having avoided doing wrong.

Other philosophers, however, have been more willing to entertain the possibility of moral tragedy, which is understood as a state of affairs in which all options open to us involve serious moral wrongdoing.

Michael Walzer, a philosopher at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, argues that those who exercise power over others may frequently find themselves unable to do good for some without doing serious wrong to others. Instead of thinking that the good they do outweighs the wrong, Walzer argues, individuals ought to accept that the wrong continues to be a genuine wrong.

For example, the politician who must make a deal with a corrupt colleague in order to help protect vulnerable children does wrong in the name of a greater good. This individual does their best but nonetheless stains their soul in the doing.

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AFGHANISTAN

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On this view, politicians who do wrong while trying to do what is right may do the best thing, but they should also be understood as having done wrong, and having stained their consciences in the doing. For Walzer, it is difficult for a person to be both good at politics and a genuinely good person.

Afghanistan & moral responsibility

If Walzer is right about politicians, his analysis might also help in understanding the morality of international relations – and the morality of the American decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

Taken in this context, the benefits of withdrawal may have been sufficient to make it the right act. However, the human rights violations that are now very likely to follow in the aftermath of this withdrawal are genuinely wrong, and they are rightly attributed to the United States.

The women and girls of Afghanistan are likely to face abuses, and the inhabitants of Afghanistan will likely face significant violence as the Taliban seek to reassert their vision of religious law. This ought to trouble the politicians who defended the withdrawal, and those voters who gave power to those politicians.

This vision of international politics is echoed in former Secretary of State Colin Powell's advice to then-President George W. Bush about the invasion of Iraq – codified as the "Pottery Barn rule" after the



What is the future of women and girls under Taliban rule?

perceived store policy. If "you break it, you bought it." That is: If you make yourself the ruler over others, you are responsible for them, and what happens to them should be on your conscience.

There are at least two things that might follow this moral vision. The first is that, even if the withdrawal entails taking ownership of some moral wrongs, the United States has an obligation to ensure that such wrong is minimized.

It might therefore be obligated to provide refuge to those people who have borne particular risks in the name of the United States, such as the translators who worked on the military bases within Afghan territory and have been targeted by the Taliban for their work.

The second is, more broadly, that the

U.S. tries to avoid entering into such morally tragic situations in the future. If Walzer's analysis is correct, it might be impossible to avoid situations in which the United States is responsible for serious moral wrongs. Having power over others always involves the risk of moral bad luck, and the U.S. has exceptional power in the global community.

But it might at least be expected that the United States, in future conflicts, take account of what philosopher Brian Orend calls justice after war and enters into such conflicts only with some clarity about how and when to end them well. ■

Chinle Circle Returning

Presbyterian Women Gathering in September

By HAZEL DAVIDSON

Chinle Circle will be back in the Meeting Room Sep. 15 at 1:00 p.m. Mary Danforth will be starting us off with the PW *Horizon Bible Study*, "What My Grandmothers Taught Me."

Bring your own beverage. We will do without snacks for now.

If you need a bible study call Jan Felton as she has a few extra.

All women of the church are invited to visit or join us. It is a time of bible study, Fellowship of the Lost Coin, devotions, the *Mission Yearbook of Prayer*, and very important, fellowship.

We are so grateful to Jim Beal for providing us his home for us to meet last season in memory of our friend Jan Beal, our long time beloved UPC PW sister. ■



Presbyterian Hymn Writer Offers a Prayer for Afghanistan Refugees

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette's latest hymn set to "Away in a Manger," entitled "We Pray for Afghanistan's People Today"

By **MIKE FERGUSON**

Presbyterian News Service

The Rev. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, a Presbyterian hymn writer and the parish associate at First Presbyterian Union Church in Owego, New York, has written new lyrics to an old hymn for the people of Afghanistan.

"We Pray for Afghanistan's People Today" is set to "CRADLE SONG," the tune for "Away in a Manger."

"This hymn," Winfrey Gillette wrote, "is written to a gentle, peaceful tune for a people who need gentleness, peace, justice and human rights in their land (as we all do, in our lands)."

"It is a prayer for people who suddenly find themselves as desperate refugees, people who feel trapped and hopeless, vulnerable people, and girls and women whose dreams have been shattered," she wrote. "It is a prayer for people who know that war is a terrible thing and who have experienced many losses."

"It is a prayer for children who have grown up knowing nothing but war," she wrote. "It is a prayer for all in the land — and all of us in this land — who long for peace and justice in every place, and especially right now in Afghanistan."

Winfrey Gillette grants permission for free use of the hymn, including in online worship services.



PHOTO: SGT. RUPERT FRERE, RLC, FLICKR.COM.

We Pray for Afghanistan's People Today

We pray for Afghanistan's people today:
for those who are fleeing — who know they can't stay,
for those who face terror by day and by night,
for those who can't leave and whose dreams can't take flight.

We pray for the people who fear what's in store,
for dreamers and poets who grieve a closed door.
for those who are hiding so no one will see
the people they are — or who they hope to be.

We pray for girls facing a world they don't know,
who still long to read and to learn and to grow.
We pray for young women who live with the fear
their bodies, their voices, may soon disappear.

We pray for young children whose first lullabies
were bombs and explosions and wounded ones' cries—
and for those who served there, who see how it ends,
who ponder their service, who grieve for lost friends.

We weep for the places where war leads to war.
We pray for your hand there to heal and restore!
Bless all who seek justice and peace as your way.
We pray for Afghanistan's people today. ■

Tune: William James Kirkpatrick, 1895
Text: Copyright © 2021 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved.
Email: carolynshymns@gmail.com
New hymns: www.carolynshymns.com/



The Rev. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

All of Life Dances

Seeing the sacred in everyday movements



By ADRIENE THORNE
Presbyterians Today

Bodies in motion are holy — period. That’s my truth and my reset button in a coronavirus world. It’s Janet tottering to the Chinese restaurant on her walker. It’s the UPS man bringing the day’s deliveries. It’s me boogieing to Motown in my kitchen as I make the third meal of a very long day for myself and my kid who quickly learned that one way to combat the lockdown blues was to make dance parties an evening ritual. I think God approves.

As a human who has spent roughly half her life in dance studios and the other half in churches, I see sacred movement everywhere I look — on stages, in gardens, at bedsides and in last breaths. I have come to appreciate the simple beauty in bodies simply moving.

Once upon a time, though, there was just professional dance with its curtain calls and bouquets of flowers. There were blisters and pulled muscles and competi-

tion for leading roles. There was the need to jump higher, run faster, move better — be noticed. What boundary can I break? What height can I reach?

It wasn’t until after my first semester of seminary, where I met Carla DeSola, that I began seeing all movement as holy. Carla, considered by many to be a grandmother of liturgical dance, founded the Omega Liturgical Dance Company in 1974, which was based at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. Carla dislikes the distinction between dance that is sacred and dance that is not. It’s all holy. I, who traveled in elite dance circles, had to learn that. Carla wasn’t sure I could. My dance formation was self-centered and competitive. Could I step back, hold back and shine less so that the holy could have center stage? Could I believe that bodies of all sizes, with varying abilities, doing simply what the Creator made them to do, were stunning? Could I see God in a raised arm, a glance, a walk? I could and I did, and I do.

All of life is a dance and inhabiting the space of holy movement sustains me when stillness, peace and hope are hiding. This trinity emerges when I notice my feet on the freshly mopped wood of my kitchen floor. In the beginning, God moved upon the face of the waters. That’s straight out of Genesis. It suggests that movement was consecrated from the start. If I wanted to impress anything upon you about embracing the spirituality of movement, it would be to invite you to see holy movement as baked into you from the beginning — the ordinary act of stirring a pot to the coordinated flurry of bodies dancing the Pentecost story in church, to the caress of your cool hand on a feverish forehead and a convulsing body at a graveside ceremony bidding farewell to a loved one for now.

All of life dances. Consider that as you make your way to the pharmacy and place your crumpled dollars and jingly coins in a stranger’s hand. Notice that the next time you rise and make your way down your church aisle to receive the doughy bread and pungent communion wine. The way that you make your way to the table to dance with the Christ who meets you there is pleasing to God. Can Jesus have this dance? As you strut or stride or shuffle along, trust and believe that the God who moved on the face of the waters moves still and wants nothing more than to keep dancing with you.

Adriene Thorne is the senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn. Thorne’s performance credits include the Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Metropolitan Opera and the world-famous Radio City Rockettes, among others. When she’s not parenting, pastoring, creating or mentoring, she is probably on the squash court or in the dance studio fantasizing about what is newly possible. ■

The Mitchells

Installment 27—September, 2021

By ERIC O. LEDERMANN

When we last visited the Mitchell family and the good people of Faith Presbyterian Church, a pandemic had gripped the world in a seemingly endless pattern of isolation, masks, and fear. Pastor Cobb had been trying to keep the congregation together, at least in spirit, with pre-recorded sermons and words of encouragement to care for one another. He was a little jealous of those congregations that were able to put together some rather impressive online worship services. But he was also relieved that he and the people of Faith Church did not have those skills. It looked like a lot of work.

Pastor Cobb spent much of his time these days on the phone and on the new standard tool for pastoral care and church business that so many churches quickly adopted, Zoom video conference calling. It had become so prevalent that the business name had become a verb! Not much different from Xerox. Most of his conversations centered on people asking how God could “let” the pandemic happen. He was growing weary of these conversations, trying to help people understand that God doesn’t “let” such things happen. Rather, God is present with us “when” they inevitably happen, more often than not due to poor human judgment, but also due to the natural progression of life. He had conducted nine pandemic-related funerals in the first twelve months of the now eighteen month ordeal. He felt himself growing exhausted in numerous ways.

Just as a faint light at the end of the arduously dark tunnel could finally be seen, infections were once again on the rise, and sharply. This would be the third major wave of infections, despite vaccines being readily and freely available.

Though many, including Pastor Cobb, were mostly working from home, if not entirely, Pastor Cobb’s heart broke under the weight of knowing that many did not have that luxury—emergency and medical personnel, plumbers and electricians, laborers and those restaurant workers who were lucky enough to still have a job, and now teachers as summer came to an end.

He sat at his desk in his study at home, reading and praying, hoping God would give him inspiration for Sunday’s sermon. He didn’t believe God really worked like that, like a vending machine—put in some prayer, and out pops a snack of delicious faith morsels. God’s wisdom is always readily available if we are willing to avail ourselves of it. But, it was hard to shake those childhood Sunday school lessons about God as Santa

Clause or judgmental grantor of *some* dreams. What to say to a community not only torn apart by a deadly virus they can’t see and can hardly understand, but also by the nasty politics plaguing the country? Faith Presbyterian Church was not immune to the gravitational forces of opinion polls and talking heads on the cable news.

“I’ve preached about grace and understanding so much, even I’m getting bored,” he said out loud to no one.

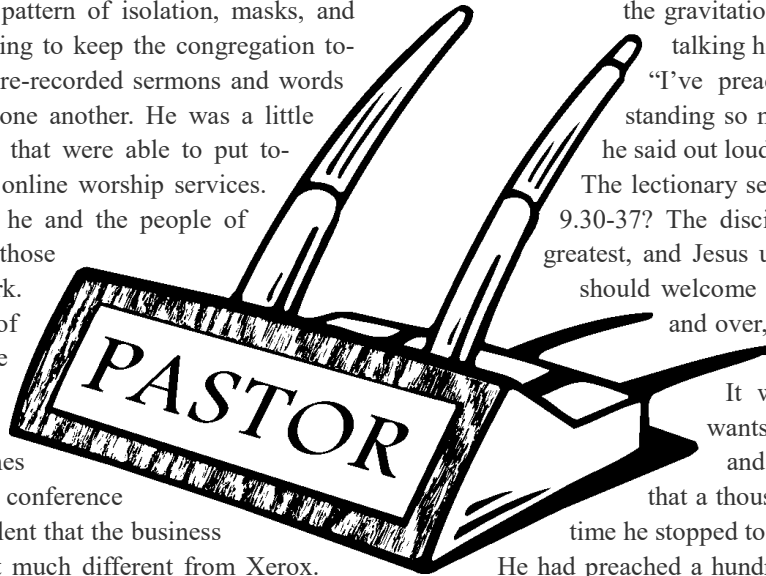
The lectionary seemed to offer little help. Mark 9.30-37? The disciples arguing about who’s the greatest, and Jesus using a child to show how we should welcome him and God. He read it over and over, looking for a morsel of something new to offer.

It was the fifth read. “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” He had read that a thousand times over the years. This time he stopped to read it again a few times.

He had preached a hundred times on self-giving as being a fundamental characteristic of a follower of Jesus. A tough sell in an increasingly narcissistic society. Maybe it was time for some tough love?

Pastor Cobb’s preaching and teaching tended to focus on Christian precepts and principles, on theology and biblical studies, letting people make up their own minds as to how the lessons might apply to their lives. That was one of the few negative criticisms he received consistently over the years. “Make your sermons more practical,” people would say. “Theology is interesting,” one person wrote anonymously on an annual review over a decade ago, “but how do I apply it to my life?” His standard response was always with a gentle voice, asking, “Did Jesus make it plain for his disciples? He taught in difficult parables, hyperbole, and even paradoxes, and then charged his people to wrestle with understanding. If they didn’t listen to the plain directives of the Pharisees.” He’d leave that statement hanging, hoping to make a point. He was never really sure it sunk in. Generally people liked him as a pastor, and he enjoyed that feeling. He tried not to rock the boat too much, to bite the hands that feed him.

Maybe, though, in the midst of a pandemic that is tearing his own congregation apart—masks or no masks, vaccines or no vaccines, meet in person or online—it was time for some tough love?



THE MITCHELLS

Continued from page 10

From his desk drawer he pulled out a pad of paper and began writing, in all caps: “IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU.”

He stared at the words a moment. “Too much?” he thought to himself.

He began crafting his sermon around how people respond to children, how gentle they are, even children spouting grand conclusions based on short-sighted observations of the tiny bits of the world they could see around them. Adults so often try to gently either correct the child, inviting the child to consider alternative ideas, or try to lead them to a fuller understanding of the world that might change their conclusions. Sometimes adults chuckle or marvel at a child’s unique or even naïve perspectives, relishing how simple the world can be through a child’s eyes. Sometimes adults readily observe how much a child has matured since they offered a perspective some months or years before.

He sat at his desk and wrote for over an hour, slowly and deliberately, repeating several times in bold capital letters, “IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU.” Toward the end he wrote out a list that he thought was very practical:

- Masks are not about you.
- Avoiding crowds and, yes, even some of the thing you really enjoy, is not about you.
- Getting the vaccine is not about you.
- Driving on the right side of the road (or the left side if you’re in the UK) is not about you.
- Voting is not about you.
- Engaging the world is not about you.

All of these and so many other things we do in our lives, or should be doing, he wrote, are about welcoming one another into each of our lives as we would a child. It’s not about being the greatest. Jesus was pretty clear—following him and living in this world in a healthy way is about humility, putting our own wants and desires aside most of the time, and caring for one another.

It’s about welcoming Jesus, God, and one another as we would a child we love: with open arms, kind words, and love in our hearts.

He sat back in his chair, pad in hand, and read over the manifesto he had written. He made a few minor corrections with his favorite red pen, so they stand out from the blank ink across the rest of the page. He reveled at how easy it was to write today, after struggling for several days, and at how little editing he did on the second read. His heart and mind may have been more in tune with God than he originally thought.

A slight twinge of anxiety shook through his body. He wondered if, come Sunday, he would be brave enough to say what he had penned. Some of it was definitely more controversial than his normal fare of preaching. He wrote as part of the introduction to the sermon the criticism about the applicability of his sermons, saying, “Well, okay, we’re going to get real practical today.”

He set the pad of paper on his desk, closed his eyes, and offered a short prayer: “Holy God, Force of Love, help me be brave. Help me speak the truth that needs to be spoken. Help me receive your strength, like Esther in whom you put your truth ‘for such a time as this.’ Amen.”

His bones creaked a little as he slowly rose from his chair and turned off the desk lamp. It was the end of the day and time to close up shop. Tomorrow he would put the liturgy together. Now, it was time to join his wife, Lily, in the kitchen to make dinner for the family. It was nice having Brandon and Lizzy home from college and post-grad school. Both were doing their school work remotely as their campuses fluctuated between online and in-person classes as infection rates rose and fell. Their professors gave up and told everyone to go home, that they would conduct class online for the rest of the semester, going up against their university administrations.

The smell of sautéing onions wafted into Pastor Cobb’s nose as she shut the door to his study behind him. ■



We're a Matthew 25 church

pcusa.org/matthew25



I-HELP

Until there's a place called HOME

UPC now hosts I-HELP every week, Friday through Sunday. Our faith partners and Tempe Community Action Agency (TCAA) help provide meals. UPC provides meals the third Friday and the following Saturday of each month.

For info on volunteering, contact Jill Russell, Bonnie Henry, or Cathy Richardson



ONLINE WORSHIP

REGISTER TODAY!

(In-person Worship began Aug 15th)

www.upctempe.org/worship

A confirmation email will be sent with a login link that is unique to you!

Services also live streamed to www.upctempe.org/YouTube.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK

(1-800-273-8255)

Talk to someone.

If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States.

En Español: 1-888-628-9454

Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

MORE THAN JUST COFFEE

CAFÉ JUSTO

Discover the Difference

The official coffee of choice at UPC

For sale by contacting the church office

\$10 / lb.

MEXICO

100% Pure Arabica Coffee

THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE ROASTING

Worship Volunteer Schedule

Below is the schedule of worship volunteers for the next month. If you are listed and have a conflict, you are asked to please find a replacement and then contact Ruling Elder Sada Reed, co-chair of the Worship Committee.

To volunteer or get on one of the rotations, Sada Reed! Thank you!

September 2021

Sanctuary Readiness Team.....Larry Seubert

Sep. 5—23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 18

Liturgist Dan Abbott
Children's Moment Mailman Dan
Worship Tech Chris Trella

Sep. 12—24th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 19

Liturgist Jean Luce
Children's Moment Jean Luce
Worship Tech Chris Trella

Sep. 19—25th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 20

Liturgist Molly Winkler
Children's Moment Molly Winkler
Worship Tech Vacant

Sep. 26—26th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 21

Liturgist Joan Grey
Children's Moment Vacant
Worship Tech Jim Niemann

WANTED: Anyone interested in learning about audio and video production and to serve as worship techs for upcoming hybrid in-person/online worship services. Training provided. Contact Chris Trella or Pastor Eric to volunteer!

October 2021

Sanctuary Readiness Team.....Larry Seubert

Oct. 3—27th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 22

Liturgist Vacant
Children's Moment Vacant
Worship Tech..... Vacant

Oct. 10—28th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 23

Liturgist Vicki Jacobs
Children's Moment Suzanne Niemann
Worship Tech..... Jim Niemann

Oct. 17—29th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 24

Liturgist Paul Green
Children's Moment Paul Green
Worship Tech..... Vacant

Oct. 24—30th Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 25

Liturgist Vacant
Children's Moment Vacant
Worship Tech..... Jim Niemann

Oct. 31—31st Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 26

Liturgist Rev. Shelly Moe
Children's Moment Rev. Shelly Moe
Worship Tech..... Vacant

“RiseShine Bread” Shares Love

UPC bakers invite congregational support and involvement

By **ANDREA WHITE**
Board of Deacons

A group of UPC and community members are beginning a project to provide home baked bread to the food insecure in Tempe. We will start with providing single portions of home baked bread to I-HELP locations, including churches and the Oasis Center. We may branch out to the TCAA Food Pantry once the project gets going.

If you are interested in learning more or volunteering to help bake, collect/deliver, or package supplies please contact Andrea White at (480) 580-3021 or awhite@businessbydesign.us. Here is a link to a video you can view: <https://youtu.be/Go5llLLjTuw>.

To contribute financially to this cause, go to www.upctempe.org/giving, and choose the RiseShine Break Baking Project.

Soon we hope to have our own website where you can volunteer. ■





- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Kit English | 24 Elaine Shelden |
| 5 Betsy Youngs | 25 Jason Reed |
| 7 Karson Hawkins | 26 Fran Higley |
| 8 Sidney Robbins | Vicki Jacobs |
| 9 Nancy Martin | 27 Linda Kesler |
| 16 Sue Legg | 28 Cheri Hardy |
| John Asher | Barbara Gust |
| 18 Hazel Davidson | 29 Jessica Hardy |
| 20 Scott Horne | |

Prayers of thanks for these beautiful lives!

If you see a birthday is missing or we have the wrong date, please let the office know as soon as possible.

Stay Informed on All-Things-Presby!

PC(USA) News

Available in a daily or weekly digest format. www.pcusa.org/newsupdates

Presbytery of Grand Canyon Weekly E-focus Newsletter

News and views from our presbytery. pbygrandcanyon.org/subscribe-to-efocus.

PC(USA) Office of Public Witness

Housed across the street from the U.S. Supreme Court in what is referred to as "the God Box," the OPW is the PC (USA)'s advocacy and information center in Washington, D.C. Sign up for OPW Alerts and be an advocate! www.votervoice.net/pcusa/home. Learn

more about the OPW at:

www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington.

Presbyterian Historical Society

Organized in 1852, the PHS is the oldest denominational archives in the U.S. and serves as the national archives for the PC (USA) and its predecessor denominations. PHS exists to collect, preserve, and share the story of the American Presbyterian and Reformed experience. www.history.pcusa.org.

The Presbyterian Outlook

An independent magazine covering all things Presbyterian — \$19.95/year, 18 issues. pres-outlook.org

Presbyterians Today

Award-winning denominational magazine published by the PC(USA). Also available in a free twice monthly e-newsletter. *Get a free 1 year subscription!*

www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today



Remember prayer...

- ✘ **Homebound:** Evelyn Colby, Elaine Murray, Helen Alderson
- ✘ **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** in the U.S.
- ✘ **Communities** bearing the weight of violence in their streets and neighborhoods
- ✘ **All affected by COVID-19**, especial those who are hospitalized and their families, and the families of those who have died.
- ✘ **Medical personnel** and first responders who continue to be on the front lines of battling COVID-19
- ✘ **Indigenous People** who are especially suffering under the weight of COVID-19 and hundreds of years of subjugation.
- ✘ **Teachers and students** as they continue online and in-person.
- ✘ **All of creation**, and for the strength to stand up for environmental conservation
- ✘ **Elected & community leaders**, that they can bring peace to our nation and world
- ✘ **Military personnel**, stateside and abroad
- ✘ **Peacemakers/Mission Workers**, particularly the Rev. Leslie Vogel and the Rev. Mark Adams, Jocabed Gallego, and all at Frontera de Cristo.
- ✘ **Our nation and world**—praying for peace
- ✘ **Immigrants**, especially those separated from families
- ✘ **UPC Officers:** elders, deacons, trustees
- ✘ Those who are **suffering and are marginalized**
- ✘ Those struggling with **mental illness**

UPC Calendar

Submit corrections, additions, or deletions to the church office at (480) 966-6267 or upc@upctempe.org.

Check online for updates or to subscribe on your computer or device:

www.upctempe.org/calendar

September 2021

Wed, Sep 1

ALL DAY Family Promise (FH, K, L, Rm 2, 4-6)
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)

Thu, Sep 2

ALL DAY Family Promise (FH, K, L, Rm 2, 4-6)
7:00 pm CE Meeting (Zoom-U)

Fri, Sep 3

ALL DAY Family Promise (FH, K, L, Rm 2, 4-6)
8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sat, Sep 4

ALL DAY Family Promise (FH, K, L, Rm 2, 4-6)

Sun, Sep 5

ALL DAY Family Promise (FH, K, L, Rm 2, 4-6)
9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)

Mon, Sep 6

4:30 pm ACE Team (Zoom-P)
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Wed, Sep 8

4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)

Fri, Sep 10

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Sep 12

9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Sep 13

8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Sep 14

7:00 pm Worship Committee (Zoom P)
7:00 pm Finance Committee (S, Zoom-U)

Wed, Sep 15

1:00 pm PW Chinle Circle Bible Study (MR)
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)

Fri, Sep 17

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Sep 19

Kick Off Sunday – Sunday School, Choir
9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Sep 20

7:00 pm Board of Deacons (Zoom-U)
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Sep 21

6:30 pm CIO Committee (Zoom-P)

Wed, Sep 22

4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)

Fri, Sep 24

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Sep 26

9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Sep 27

7:00 pm PW Kayenta Circle (MR)
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Sep 28

7:00 pm Session Meeting (S, Zoom-U)

Wed, Sep 29

4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)

October 2021

Fri, Oct 1

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Oct 3

9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School

Mon, Oct 4

4:30 pm ACE Team (Zoom-P)
7:00 pm Administration Committee
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Wed, Oct 6

4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice

Thu, Oct 7

7:00 pm CE Meeting (Zoom-U)

Fri, Oct 8

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Oct 10

9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Oct 11

8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Oct 12

7:00 pm Worship Committee (Zoom P)
7:00 pm Finance Committee (S, Zoom-U)

Wed, Oct 13

4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice

Thu, Oct 14

7:00 pm MSJP Committee (Zoom-U)

Fri, Oct 15

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Sun, Oct 17

9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Oct 18

7:00 pm Board of Deacons (Zoom-U)
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Oct 19

6:30 pm CIO Committee (Zoom-P)
7:00 pm Board of Trustees

Wed, Oct 20

1:00 pm Chinle Circle Bible Study (MR)
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice

See CALENDAR, page 16

Location/Room References:

(CH)-Choir Room (CR)-Conference Room/Office (COR/Rm7)-Community Room (FH)-Fellowship Hall (HSR)-High School Room (MSR)-Middle School Room (K)-Fellowship Hall Kitchen (L)-Lounge (MR)-Meeting Room (N) Nursery (PO)-Pastor's Office (Rm#)-Room Number Indicated (S)-Sanctuary

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CALENDAR

Continued from page 15

Sun, Oct 24

- 9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

Mon, Oct 25

- 7:00 pm PW Kayenta Circle (MR)
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

Tue, Oct 26

- 7:00 pm Session Meeting (S, Zoom-U)

Wed, Oct 27

- 3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice

Fri, Oct 29

- 3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)
6:00 pm Bell Choir
7:00 pm Chandel Choir Practice

Sun, Oct 31

- 9:30 am Worship Service (S, Zoom-U, YouTube)
11:00 am Sunday School (All Ages)

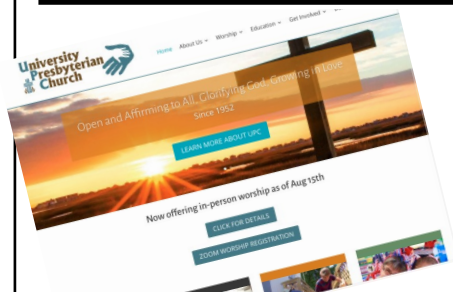


Worship Tech Shout Out

You've done it again!

By SHARLAN PIERCE

I'd like give a thank you shout out to Jim Niemann, Chris Trella, and Sada Reed for the personal hearing assist devices added to the sound system in the sanctuary. I used one at the in-person worship service on Aug. 15th and it is great. I could clearly hear every word spoken or sung into a microphone. Thank you ■



Newly Redesigned Website
www.upctempe.org

Check it out!
New and updated information,
and a new calendar!