

Covenant Call

February 2023 Newsletter

From Haunting Words to Hope By Dr. Dan Milford

This April 16th will mark the 60th Anniversary of Dr. King's famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." However, while the title of the letter is well known, the content of the letter is much less remembered, at least in predominantly white churches. In all likelihood, that is because it is too convicting for us to want to read more than every once in a blue moon, if at all.

In this letter in which Dr. King pushes back against the prominent moderate white pastors who critiqued his presence and tactics in Birmingham, he powerfully and repeatedly expresses disappointment in *"the white moderate"* and *"the white church."* Unfortunately, some sixty years later, his words still ring with truth for the present rather than being clearly dated because there has been such a sea change of transformation over the last half-century plus. I suspect that many of our African-American brothers and sisters would tell us that their disappointment in white moderates and the white church persists.

In the letter, Dr. King warns: *"But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust."*

These words were written in 1963. The Presbyterian Church reached its peak membership in 1965 and then began its long and uninterrupted slide in membership and attendance statistics. That very well may be a coincidental correlation. On the other hand, Dr. King may have been a very prescient prophet.

May it be that one of the things the church still desperately needs is to *"recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church"*? May there be ways in which we prefer *"a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice"*? Dr. King bemoaned that *"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of*

ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." Might such words still convict us in the Presbyterian Church in 2023?

My reading and listening over the last two and a half years has created an important foundation of knowledge, understanding, and empathy. And yet there is more to learn and a desperate need to act on behalf of the gospel and for the well-being (shalom) of others even as my own knowledge and understanding is deeply incomplete.

Black History Month is something I always thought of (even if I wouldn't admit it to myself) as *"not-for-me."* I've discovered along the way, though, that Black History is very much a part of American History and my family's and my church's history. The American History I was taught in high school and college that almost completely left out the contributions of African Americans would have been more accurately titled, *"American History from a White Perspective"* or even more candidly *"American History as Told to Justify Most Privilege and Power Being in the Hands of White People"* though that's an admittedly very cumbersome title.

For most of us, myself included, those are hard things to see for the first time... or the second time... or any time. But we are also promised that *"the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32). So Black History Month is for all of us, because Black Americans are our brothers and sisters and our shared history is only complete when their stories are included.

Might you consider reading, watching, or listening to something that will help you learn more about Black American History this month? It could be the full "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" or a full speech from Dr. King, such as "I Have a Dream," "Mountaintop," or "The Other America." See page 2 for some suggestions of books and movies that can be helpful.

I pray that you may discover with me the voices of many who write and speak with resilient hope for a day when we become our best selves—individually, as communities and churches, and as a nation.

Grace & Peace, Pastor Dan



Black History Month

Suggested Books to Read:

Theological/Biblical:

- *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*, Lisa Sharon Harper
- *Race Matters*, Cornel West
- *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, James Cone

Historical

- *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*, Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
- *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent*, Isabel Wilkerson
- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein
- *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, Heather McGhee
- *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, Nikole Hannah-Jones (there is also a 6-part docuseries releasing on Hulu)
- The YouTube series *Crash Course Black American History* with Dr. Clint Smith is a 51-part series of 12-15-minute animated videos highlighting different people and moments in history.

Other

- *How To Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi
- *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin
- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Robin DiAngelo

Suggested Movies to Watch:

- *American Son*
- *Just Mercy*
- *One Night in Miami*
- *Hidden Figures*
- *13th*
- *Malcolm X*
- *Selma*
- *Pursuit of Happyness*
- *42*
- *I Am Not Your Negro*
- *BlacKKKlansman*
- *Ray*
- *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*
- *Invictus*



HABITAT FOR HUMANITY 2023 Build Begins Friday, February 3rd

Habitat for Humanity (H4H) is "Seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope". The Presbyterian Cluster will be building its 28th house in Rancho Carlota.

As a sponsor of a H4H house the Cluster will provide volunteers, lunches for the volunteers and the financial support of \$60,000.00. As of November 2022 the cluster was able to contribute \$35,000.00 from contributions from individuals and churches. The remaining \$25,000.00 was paid from a generous donation of \$100,000.00 from the Pilgrim Allena Trust. The remaining \$75,000.00 was donated to H4H San Antonio to sponsor another house in 2023.

The cluster will not have to provide volunteers or lunches for the second house, but the invitation to volunteer is open all year, every weekend that H4H San Antonio is building.

The work days for the build are Friday and Saturday, beginning February 3rd. The cluster will again work with the Polner Foundation. The foundation will provide the volunteers for Friday and the cluster for Saturday. Landscape/Dedication Day will be on Saturday, April 15th, and children 12+ are welcome.

If you haven't been able to come out on a build day before, please plan on joining us on this build. 14102 Judge Diaz lane, Von Ormy, TX 78073

Questions? Go to <https://www.habitatsa.org/> for application, Where We Build, What is required of a homeowner and more.

If you would like to make a donation please make checks payable to: "Presbyterian Cluster Habitat", and mail to the church, or place in the offering plate. To clarify, only contributions made to the Presbyterian Cluster Habitat will go towards the Presbyterian Cluster build. Donations to Habitat for Humanity will be used by that wonderful ministry, but will not be applied to the Cluster's financial responsibility.

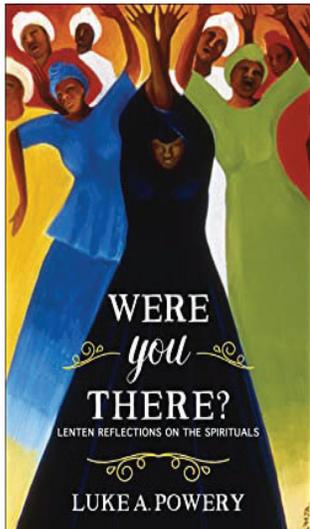
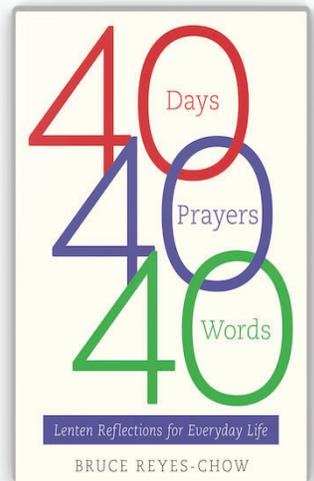
In Christ, Martha G. Flores

Suggested Lenten Devotionals:

Each year, the Christian Education Team at Covenant lifts up several devotionals for our congregation to consider using during the season of Lent. Our hope is that the following devotionals will challenge and strengthen you during your Lenten journey. Each of the following devotionals are available from the PCUSA Store or from your favorite book provider.

40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Word: Lenten Reflections for Everyday Life by Bruce Reyes-Chow

In *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words*, Reyes-Chow encourages readers to pause in the bustle of their daily lives to reflect, engage, and share during the Lenten season. Forty devotions are each framed around a word inspired by the daily lectionary readings and include a short scriptural passage, inspirational prayer, and reflection. Readers who feel too busy for daily engagement with God will appreciate Reyes-Chow's ability to speak to the blessings and burdens of everyday life in a concise, lively manner. Moreover, readers also have the ability to connect with others through interactive elements like QR codes that link to social media and provide access to additional reflections, graphics, and prayers. This unique resource expands the ways we can connect with God, and with each other, both during Lent and at any time along our journeys of faith. Follow along using the hashtag: #40wordprayer.



Were You There?: Lenten Reflections on the Spirituals by Luke A. Powery

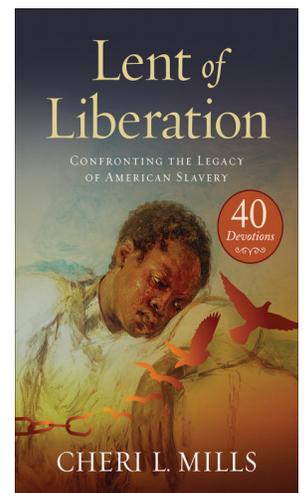
Valuable not only for their sublime musical expression, the African American spirituals provide profound insights into the human condition and Christian life. Many spirituals focus on the climax of the Christian drama, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the ways in which those events bring about the liberation of God's people.

In these devotions for the season of Lent, Luke A. Powery leads the reader through the spirituals as they confront the mystery of Christ's atoning death and victory over the grave. Each selection includes the lyrics of the spiritual, a reflection by the author on the spiritual's meaning, a Scripture verse related to that meaning, and a brief prayer.

Lent of Liberation: Confronting the Legacy of American Slavery

by Cheri L. Mills

This Lenten devotional invites readers to learn more about the brutal institution of slavery and its impact on Black people in America and recognize how its evolution and legacy continue to harm their descendants in the United States today. Each of the forty devotions includes the testimony of a person who escaped slavery through the Underground Railroad, a Scripture passage, and a reflection connecting biblical and historical themes to challenge modern readers to work for liberation. Reflecting on Lenten themes of exodus, redemption, discipline, and repentance, readers, both Black and white, will be empowered for the work of racial justice.



Help Fight Hunger



Covenant's Youth & Children are inviting the congregation to help fight hunger by collecting non-perishable items thru February 12th.

To participate, simply drop off non-perishable items at the table in the narthex.

All items will be counted on SOUPer Bowl Sunday (Feb. 12th) and will be donated to the San Antonio Food Bank and West Avenue Compassion.

Weekly Small Group Bible Study

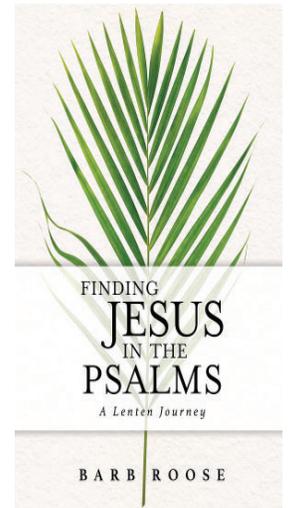
Finding Jesus in the Psalms: A Lenten Journey by Barb Roose

Beginning week of February 19th – the week of April 2nd

“The Psalms provide a perfect framework for experiencing Lent through the verses that were Jesus’s own scriptures, offering both him and us strength and wisdom in a painful and redemptive season. The Book of Psalms hums with the heartbeat of our humanity with divinely inspired words that find purchase in the tenderest places in our hearts when our human words or wisdom fails us.” Barb Roose

Combining an interpretation of the psalms with real life stories, this study moves through the familiar words of Psalm 23 toward the painful cries of Psalm 22 uttered by Jesus on the cross. Join us this Lent as we reflect on the life of King David and the original context of the writings, along with the connections between the psalms and the life and death of Jesus the Messiah.

Covenant has several small groups that meet each week. For this study, we encourage participants to consider purchasing the book, *Finding Jesus in the Psalms: A Lenten Journey* by Barb Roose and reading the corresponding chapter each week. For more information, please contact Chad Bosse (chad@covenantcares.org).



Adult Sunday School

When It's Time to Confess led by Pastor Dan

Beginning February 19th - Emmaus Classroom @ 9:00am

Confessions aren't always about owning what we've done wrong. Sometimes in the Christian church, they're about confessing (or professing) what we believe to be true. When the church faces particularly acute challenges, it sometimes identifies the moment as a "status confessionis" —a time when the church feels the need to clarify something essential about what it means to follow Christ or be the church. In such settings, a statement may be written to share such essential truths the church "confesses" to believe.

Confessions of Faith can take many forms: brief and poetic (Brief Statement of Faith, 1983), long and systematic theology (Westminster Confession of Faith, 2nd Helvetic Confession of Faith, etc.), or relatively brief affirmations and denunciations (Theological Declaration of Barmen). Whatever its form, to become an official confession of the PCUSA, it must go through an arduous and multi-year process, somewhat akin to passing an amendment to the US Constitution. Thus, the confessional statements in our Book of Confessions are ones that have gotten broad support over a broad swath of the church.

This class will draw from the book *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* by Jack Rogers and from Dan's travels to the European cities where seven of our twelve confessional documents were written.

The schedule will be as follows:

- 2/19 - Session 1: What is a confession of faith?
- 2/26 - Session 2: The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- 3/5 - Session 3: The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)
- 3/12 - Session 4: The Scots Confession (1560)
- 3/19 - Session 5: The Westminster Confession of Faith & Catechisms (1647)
- 3/26 - Session 6: The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934)
- 4/2 - NO CONFESSIONS CLASS (Palm Sunday Special Event)
- 4/9 - NO CONFESSIONS CLASS (Easter Sunday)
- 4/16 - Session 7: 20th Century Confessions - Confession of 1967, Belhar, Brief Statement of Faith
- 4/23 - Session 8: 20th Century Confessions continued
- 4/30 - NO CONFESSIONS CLASS (Mission Sunday)
- 5/7 - Session 9: Is now a "Status Confessionis"? If so, what does the church most urgently need to say?



More About Trauma, Community and Mental Health

Beautiful Minds: A Mental Health Ministry

By Dr. Michael McMains

I. Examples of Trauma

- a. The psychologist had been on the job about one month when the officer approached her about “anxiety attacks” he had been having for 18 years. Like most anxiety, initially, the officer did not identify what was causing the increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, headaches and light headedness. He found some relief in drinking, He was worried that he was going to put others in danger if he could not focus 100%. After telling the “shrink,” about a few incidents in which he did not live up to what he considered the performance of a “good cop,” he revealed that he thought that the anxiety he was experiencing was not how a good officer should feel and he could not talk to other officers about his feeling because he would not be considered a part of the sub-culture /community that was policing. He could not talk to his family, because, “I don’t want to worry them, besides, they wouldn’t understand.”
- b. The woman was referred to Behavioral Health when the medical testing she had experienced had not shown physical reasons for her lack of energy, fatigue, problems sleeping and loss of weight. She did not understand the bouts of depression that she started having every time she got close to another person in what might develop into a serious relationship. She reported having a “good” home in a home that had adopted her at age 6. Prior to that, she had been in the foster care system because her biological parents had been unreliable, frequently leaving her with neighbors or family members, while they “partied.” It was rarely the same family member.

II. Needless suffering

- a. The cases above illustrate the impact of the loss of community on people’s health, both physical and mental. Both people: suffered alone and unnecessarily; had trouble identifying what is bothering them; needed to address both the physical and the emotional issues that were affecting them; and did not think their emotional issues could be addressed in their community/tribe because it did not understand or accept the reality of trauma.
- b. They did realize that unaddressed trauma frequently contributes to other issues such as: substance abuse changes in the nervous system, physical issues, and/or chronic pain.

III. Researched solution and another

- a. Since its inclusion in the APA’s Diagnostic and Treatment Manual in 1980, many treatment protocols have been shown to be effective in recognizing and managing the impact of trauma on people’s physiology/psychology, including: medications; cognitive behavioral psychotherapy; eye movement desensitization; Internal Family Systems Therapy; even Yoga.
- b. **What has not gotten much attention is the psycho/social aspects of the of trauma.** Both people above reported that they felt they could not talk to others who were important to them about their experiences because they would not understand or needed to be protected from the harsher parts of life. They did not have a community that they thought was a resource.
- c. Anthropologists have suggested that more “primitive” people had cultural, tribal, and community based ways of dealing with wounds, either physical or emotional. Tribal cultures, like “The First Americans” experienced more trauma than we do. They had less medication, knew less about illness and were at war” often. Unlike us, they accepted the warrior and trauma as a valued and needed part of life. They had ceremonies for returning warriors that celebrated the warrior’s role in protecting their community, honored them as valued them They differed from us in that they:
 - i. **Were Willing to Listen** - for 23 years, after 9/11, our country was at war. We thought we had learned from Viet Nam that dishonoring the warrior on their return from war led to what has become known as post-traumatic stress disorders and that trauma applies to more than warriors. We have applied it to a wide range of life-threatening events, including being abandoned as a child. We have also discovered that trauma applies to a wide range of events from those who experience trauma as an adult and those who experience trauma as a child. Adults frequently have a history of abuse by care takers that teaches them that others can not be trusted, experiences that shape the way they see others for their whole life. We do not want to recognize how much trauma occurs in our “civilized” society. Consequently, we avoid talking about trauma in any depth. We are happy with the usual social convention of “Hello. How are you?” “Fine. How are you?” Or,

Audio-visual Aids

By: Dr. Mike Flinn, Elder

“Thank you for your service.” We do not listen because we do not want to hear.

ii. **Had the Courage to Listen** - hard experiences bring up discomfort in us. It is hard to feel helpless in the face of our and others' pain. We have learned that it is uncomfortable listening to these traumas in others' lives, so, we avoid sitting with our own or others discomfort/traumatic memories, keeping their stories to themselves, fearing the label, “mental illness.” Unlike American Indians, we have pathologized the warriors storied or the stories of others who are victimized or injured by others, because we must face the evil in the world and our own vulnerability. We designated the medical community as the part of our society to listen to their stories. We call them disorders and pathologize veterans and victims of crime or others whose experiences make us uncomfortable or threaten our sense of order.

iii. **Skill to Listen - to Relieve Pain.** One of the reasons we have trouble sitting with others pain is that we do not know what to say to others who have been shuffled from house to house to relieve their pain. Unlike ancient Jews, we have not learned that sometimes the most we can do is stand with others and share their pain” because there are time and experiences that are beyond pain BUT COMMUNITY AND COMPANIONSHIP ARE NOT. What we can do is make it clear that we are available to listen-the door is always open to the officer who does not need to carrying is pain for 18 tears or to the woman who felt abandoned and fearful while shuffled from house to house before she had words to describe her experience, we can stand with them and listen to their stories so they do not , think of themselves mentally ill but do feel welcomed in their community that accepts that there is legitimate issues in early or overwhelming trauma. Or perhaps we can destigmatize mental illness.

iv. **WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT COMPANIONSHIP, COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY?** Or, want to help us build a safe, caring resource for all people?

Look into the companionship course at:

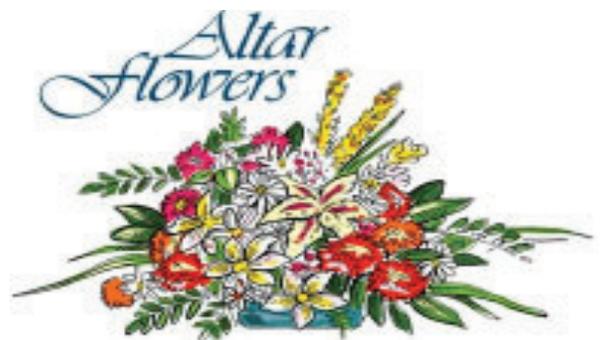
- <https://www.nami-sa.org>
- <https://www.nami-sat.org/bridges-to-care>
- Or contact a member of Beautiful Minds: A Mental Health Ministry here at Covenant Presbyterian Church.

As a young man growing up in the Presbyterian Church, in addition to the church bulletin, the number of the hymns to be sung were posted on either side of the altar. At the appropriate time in the service, we picked up our hymnals and turned to the relevant page to find the notes and words for the hymn. That was the extent of our audio-visual aids. It amazes me how much change I have witnessed since that time (I am starting to remind myself of my Dad).

Now our services are much more comprehensive. We project our services on overhead screens and, while showing our Choir or Praise Team, can overlay the words to the hymns such that hymnals are optional. Who remembers sing-a-longs with Mitch Miller or in the theater between features in which we sang in time with the bouncing ball?

Now, services are transmitted across the Internet worldwide to anyone who wants to watch it on Facebook. Doing all this entails using some exciting technology, and we are fortunate to have two outstanding audio-visual technicians (Adolph and Morrisey) to assist with that effort. Unfortunately, they are not available for events during the week when they work their full-time jobs. During those times, we need to rely on a pool of volunteers from the congregation to fill in.

Several people have stepped up to be audio-visual volunteers, but are sometimes unavailable on short notice. Therefore, I am asking additional congregation members to help in that regard. The work is not hard, but it does require training. If you have a technical bent and are interested in learning more, please contact Bethany, our office manager, to arrange for training on the system.



Sign up in the Narthex to reserve Altar Flowers in 2023. This is a great way to celebrate an anniversary, birthday, or special event. It can be used to honor or remember a loved one. Flowers are \$50. Only one family can sign up per Sunday. If you have questions or would like to sign-up, contact Bethany Borak in the church office 210-342-5253.



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February 19th after Worship

It's time to dust off your boots and spurs, and get out your chili pots and pie pans. Our annual Chili Cook-off and Homemade Pie Contest is February 19th.

Sign-up sheets will be in the Narthex in a few weeks. Not making chili or pie, you can sign up to make your favorite side dish. Other suggestions include: Salads, Beans, Cornbread, and Tortilla Chips.

Young at Heart Update

2023 is in full swing and "Young at Heart" is excited for our upcoming calendar of events. **Monthly potluck luncheons will begin on Saturday, February 18 at 11:30 am** (potluck dishes to be delivered by 11:20ish) and will be held the second Saturday of every month followed by a special speaker or program. Some events are so special that we want to share them with our Covenant family and the community. **Our guest, Don Braswell will be singing on March 11 at 1:00PM in the Sanctuary following our potluck luncheon.**

Upcoming adventures include webinars, musical programs, and speakers with much to share.

Young at Heart is open to those who are young at heart and spirit. (50 years young and up). **Join us Friday nights for game night in Mission hall.** There's so much to enjoy. We will keep your calendar full!



**Got the winter blahs?
Need some exercise?**

Come Join Us for Pickleball at Covenant!

This is a fun, all-ages game that provides healthy exercise for everyone and will be available weekly. No prior experience needed. Participants urged to bring their own paddles, if available.

Date: Sunday, February 19, 2023

Time: 6:00-8:00 PM in Covenant Gym

If interested, please contact Kathy Simmons:
(210) 787-9789 or Ksimmons1023@gmail.com.



Covenant's Beautiful Minds Team lead the first lesson in the CASEL Framework on Self-Management. Using the classic experiment with baking soda and vinegar, students witnessed how important it is to pay attention to their emotions.

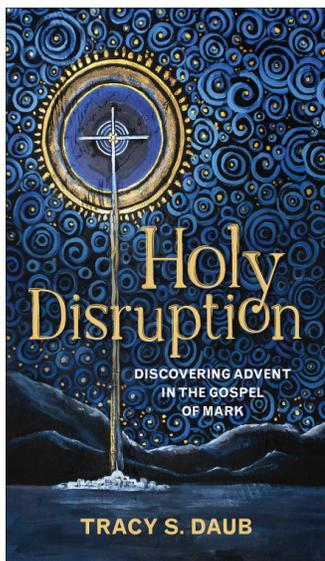
“Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.” – Proverbs 25:28

After witnessing the reaction, students reflected on healthy ways to manage their levels of stress, including the use of prayer.



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL

Holy Disruption: Discovering Advent in the Gospel of Mark by Tracy S. Daub
January 8th – February 12th - Emmaus Classroom @ 9:00am



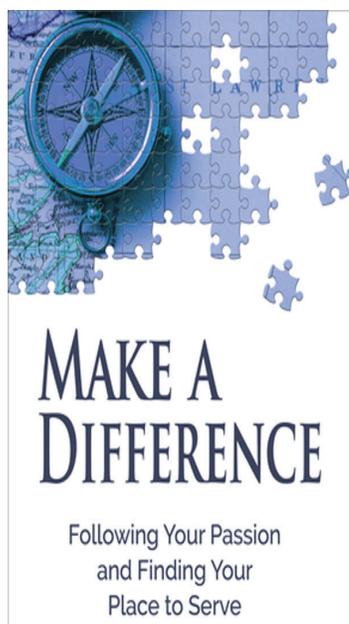
Where's the baby? The Gospel of Mark doesn't have a nativity story--so where's the Advent message? It's in every aspect of Jesus' life, to his death and beyond.

The Incarnation--God come to earth in human form to be baptized, teach, heal, eat, and die--is what we celebrate at Christmas, and Mark shows us just how radical and celebration-worthy it is!

Holy Disruption presents a fresh understanding of the holiness of Christmas grounded, not in a conventional cozy Christmas message, but through Mark's disquieting gospel which invites its readers to experience God's disruptive but transformative love for us and our world.

Weekly Small Group Bible Study

Make a Difference: Following Your Passion and Finding Your Place to Serve by James A. Harnish
Continuing through the week of February 12th



Every day we see that things are not right in our world, and as followers of Jesus Christ, we have an impulse to do something about it. We long to connect our passions and gifts with the world's great needs, making a unique contribution for the healing of the world.

In *Make a Difference*, author James A. Harnish helps you answer the questions "How can I contribute to God's healing work in this world?"; and "How can I find my place to serve and make a difference?" Drawing upon biblical wisdom and real stories of real people who have found their place to serve, he provides practical guidance to help every disciple make a difference as a participant in God's transformation of the world.

Covenant has several small groups that meet each week. For this study, we encourage participants to consider purchasing the book, *Make a Difference: Following Your Passion and Finding Your Place to Serve* by James A. Harnish and reading the corresponding chapter each week. For more information, please contact Chad Bosse (chad@covenantcares.org).

Children's Sunday School

9:00am - January 8th – February 5th



Each Sunday, Covenant's children gather at 9am to explore faith in a unique way! All children will gather together at 9am to participate in an opening time together. This opening time will feature music and energizers. After this opening time, children will be dismissed into their classes to explore faith in a unique way.

Beginning in January, the older children's class will be led by Covenant's Beautiful Minds Team. Each week's lesson will foster knowledge, skills, and attitudes across five areas of social and emotional competence, using the Bible and the CASEL Framework. Topics include: Self-Management, Responsible Decision Making, Relationship Skills, Social Awareness, and Self-Awareness. As each topic is introduced, children will explore the connection between faith and each competency.

For more information on Covenant's Children's Classes, please contact Chad Bosse (chad@covenantcares.org).



Black History Month Community Event

For Immediate Release

Date: January 23, 2023

Contact: Carol Trono, Communications Elder

Phone: 740-360-0919

Email: stmarkcommunications0@gmail.com

Address: 208 W. Bandera Road, Boerne, TX 78006

Online: www.stmarktx.org



Boerne – Ken Stewart, Archivist for the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM), will speak on “*The impact of African Americans in the San Antonio Region*” at a Black History Month event at St. Mark Presbyterian Church on Wednesday, February 15, at 6 pm in the Sanctuary. A reception will follow in the Hospitality Center. Childcare is available by contacting the church office at 830-816-3000.

SAAACAM’s mission is to collect, preserve and share the cultural heritage of African Americans in the San Antonio region (<https://saaacam.org>). This 501(c)(3) nonprofit is discovering and sharing the untold history of the region’s African American descendants – a rich history that is intricately tied to the stories of Spaniards, Mexicans, Germans and Canary Island populations who helped build the city. SAAACAM is working to uncover a legacy that reaches back to the early days of the colonists and the Texas Republic.



As Archivist, Stewart oversees the collection, maintenance, dissemination, and interpretation of authentic African American artifacts in a community-based digital archive.

Stewart earned his Bachelor of Science from Excelsior College and a Master of Science in Library and Information Science from Drexel University. He worked for the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture supporting efforts to preserve the history of African Americans in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

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St. Mark Presbyterian Church, 208 W. Bandera Road, Boerne, is a member of Mission Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The congregation strives “to glorify God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, provide opportunities for all people to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ.”

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Community Matters By Denise Haley

“Community Matters” this month is about “the bigger story” of all of our lives, what we can learn about and from each other, and about loving conversations.

I have been to many memorial services over the years. I always come away from them thinking something like “Wow, what an interesting life!” Or, “What a great story about (whatever was told about the person)! I’m so glad I got to be here to learn more about (name),” and then, “I wish I’d known (name) better.” While we celebrate the person’s life, I’m always reminded of how much bigger people’s lives are than the sliver of it we see.

What if we “opened the windows” of the lives of the people in our world a little wider and look for the bigger stories now, before we hear about them at their celebrations of life? We can start with a mindset of remembering that everyone always has a bigger story to tell. We can also share our story along the way – we have them, too.

I’ve been reading a book called *The Six Conversations: Pathways to Connecting in an Age of Isolation and Incivility* by Heather Holleman, Ph.D. Dr. Holleman is a writing professor, professional speaker and best-selling author, and she has a passion for connecting people in community. Her book provides ways to help us ask meaningful questions and foster more meaningful connection with others. Conversation comes easier to some of us than others. No matter how easy (or not) it comes to us, we can all get better at asking questions, learn about what people value, and make “loving conversation” part of our lives. We could then say, “It’s what we do.”

Dr. Holleman says it’s time for a conversation revival. What if we join the conversation and be part of that revival as we connect in community? Because now more than ever, Community Matters.