

Monday, September 14

Nick and Janeen Cornor

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.
~Acts 4:32-35



After three years of law school, Nick and I took a much-needed vacation to Mexico. It only took a few hours before Nick had slipped and broken his toe. Oddly enough, this new ambulatory restriction became a blessing as we took advantage of the down time to listen to a podcast by the pastors from Nick's former church on tithing.

The pastors quoted an interview from theologian Lauren Winner where she stated:

"I know of nothing that will transform someone's spiritual life more abruptly than beginning to tithe. If we want to learn about dependence on God, tithe. If we want to have our treasure in heaven, tithe. If we want to have any hope of having solidarity with the poor, tithe."

The pastors explained that tithing is not merely a transactional relationship between us and the Church but a deep spiritual practice and act of worship whereby we acknowledge that God is sovereign and that all we have are His.

The head pastor confessed that tithing had stirred up deep fears regarding money stemming from his poor upbringing and that after years of tithing, he had come to a place where he didn't trust his own motives without tithing. He also explained that practicing this spiritual discipline had forced his family to be good stewards of their money. They also explained that tithing was only the beginning point of generosity and that if we were to model the Church in Acts, we were called to be recklessly generous.

Convicted by the Holy Spirit, we made a commitment to tithe and still do so today. We have had many challenges since that day: welcoming a family member into our home, the Covid-19 pandemic, and buying a new home. Throughout this entire time, we have never wavered from our commitment to tithe and believe that it has helped spur spiritual growth that we had never thought possible.

We have also realized that tithing is indeed the beginning point of generosity. As we have tithed, the Lord has further convicted us to give in addition to our tithe and we continue to be amazed that God continues to provide us with the means to do so.

Heavenly Father, we know that you are a giving God. As your image bearers, help us to shine Your light by our giving. Amen.

Tuesday, September 15 Kelly DeVany

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen. ~Ephesians 3:14-21



During this unique time in our lives, one can wonder or doubt about the love of God or the will of God. I know I have questioned it from time to time during various challenges in my life. And then I came across these verses from Ephesians. It helped to renew my faith and love of Christ during those times of disbelief. Current scholars have disputed if Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians while he was being imprisoned in Rome or if it was written by a disciple of Paul to help preserve his ideas. This letter was written to the Gentiles to let them know that he cared for them and remind them that they are part of the Christian family. There are four attributes that were written in these verses that help us to understand the importance of God through our faith and love in Him.

The first one is reminding us of our inner spiritual strength that we can use during our times of joy or struggles. We can lean on God to help us through times in our lives. He can give us the will power to tackle our various tasks in life. Plus our inner being can be rejuvenated by worshipping with other believers and hearing the words that are preached during sermons. The second one is that Christ dwells in our hearts. We are witnesses to love throughout our days and in our church. If we open our hearts to Christ, then we will find love in our hearts. The third one is that we have the power to understand the extent of God's work. There are many stories of generosity that we hear about from other members in our church, or from family and friends, or from the news. And it's a good thing to take the time to listen to these acts of faith because it will help us to see God's work being done by others than just ourselves. Plus it can bring moments of inspiration to take action on a project of our own that would benefit someone in need and help us to understand more about our faith. The fourth one is that we understand the love of Christ is beyond anything that we know. Since He revealed his love for us, we can still learn about the world around us so that we can live a fulfilling life through him.

This prayer that Paul wrote has helped to remind me about the greatness of the love of God that we have to experience. There are many times of joy and hardship in one's life and it is reassuring to be able to read this prayer to help you to persevere through all of it. If I am having trouble being witness to any of these four attributes, I know that I will be able to see them at work in our pastors, staff, and members of Christ the King. We are a family of God and each of us is an important part of this family. We have been brought together through the inner spiritual strength, the faith, the will, and most importantly the love of God. ***Soli Deo Gloria.***

Wednesday, September 16

Logan Faron

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,[a] to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. ~Luke 1:1-4



Sometimes when I get really excited about telling a story I will go into far too much detail for the listener and my wife will lovingly remind me to get to the point by saying “Skip Intro!” and in some cases I can indeed pare things down to just the essentials.

For a while now I have been enamored with the start of the Gospel of Luke – who reaching across time and space has considerably ensured that I am being taken care of in my continuing instruction. I know that this is generally not a verse that holds that much cultural resonance, but I cannot help but feel excitement when I think of it. It is thorough, it is personable, it is captivating. It is the anticipation before a jump ball, the giddiness of when an amusement park ride first lurches forward, or the thrill when a Star Wars opening credits crawl appears. Perhaps it is like when I get excited for a story I am telling. It is many things – but it is also very representative of being a member of Christ the King. Just as Luke has done the work, “all has been prepared” for us in 2020 – decades of work have made something very special.

I came to the church 6 years ago after meeting Pastor Moore at the wedding of two great friends. I enjoyed the peaceful courtyard, the magnificent nave, and the bulletin with so much going on. As a new Houstonian I quickly felt at home; I became a member and Pastor Moore officiated my wedding the next year. Excitement abounded as I started a new life as a husband and a new congregant. As I grew with Christ the King, I was thankful for the contributions of those who built such a wonderful place. I have always felt at home in the classroom and the opportunities to learn and read have been a great source of joy. Now that I have been around for a few years I value the opportunity to contribute as well.

This is a place where we are drawn to continue to meet together and while it is often joyous, we confront problems, injustices, and tragedy often thrust on those who do not get to choose sides knowing that love and grace are always nearby. I am thankful that we can continue to grow and reflect together to meet the challenges of the world that are both familiar and unexpected. Christ the King has gathered people together with enthusiasm in the love of Jesus for many decades. There are so many vibrant aspects of the life of the congregation, that hey, it would make sense that we have an orderly account of them.

Lord, give us the strength to continue the great works that many have pioneered before us and the creativity to share the good news of Jesus in whatever medium is necessary to inspire. Let us be brave and just so that our world is fair and moved by your divine love. Amen.

Thursday, September 17 *Larry Foust*

One of the thirteen judges in the book of Judges was Gideon who, when asked to become the ruler of his people, declined both for himself and his heirs, saying “*I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.*” Judges 8:23. Abimelech, Gideon’s son by a concubine, has other plans. After his father’s death, Abimelech murders 70 of his brothers with the assistance of mercenaries. Abimelech fails, however, to find his youngest brother, Jotham, who escapes. Jotham travels to the top of Mount Gerizim, where he offers the following fable:



The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. ~Judges 9:8-15

The fable is an ancient version of political satire. It juxtaposes the nurturing, generous, and selfless service of the olive tree, fig tree, and grape vines with the ruthless, greedy, and cruel Abimelech. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the grape tree produce nutritious fruit for all to consume. They are altruistic, reflecting the best characteristics of a servant-leader. In contrast, after killing 70 of these brothers and being installed as king, Abimelech embarks on years of ruthless conquests. Far from being a servant leader, he is a selfish and arrogant tyrant.

The 75th year of the founding of Christ the King Lutheran Church is important for another reason: it is a year of national elections. In a few weeks we will choose our leaders. It is, therefore, fitting to reflect on the character we want from our leaders. Will we choose leaders who serve us or leaders who expect us to serve them? Will our leaders be motivated by self-interest and ambition or by a desire for the common good of all people residing in the US? Will our leaders be autocrats who prefer the company of other autocrats or leaders who strive for compromise and consensus?

I hope you vote (safely). I, for one, intend to vote for the olive tree, the fig tree, and the grape vine.

Postscript. At the conclusion of his fable, Jotham curses Abimelech and his conspirators, a curse that is realized a few years thereafter. Abimelech, who executed 70 of these brothers on a single stone, is fatally wounded by a woman striking his head with (fittingly) a millstone. Abimelech’s followers disperse.

Friday, September 18

Alicia Goodrow

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ~Isaiah 53:6

During the time of Stay At Home in the few weeks preceding Easter and continuing until almost Pentecost, I joined a Self-Isolation Choir out of Bristol England and made a deep dive into the text, word painting, and music of Handel's Messiah with over 4,000 of my new online choir friends. With twice weekly formal YouTube rehearsals and some self-study, I explored both the text and music of more than 20 choruses in much more detail than most ever can.



We started learning the complex mosaic of Chorale 27: All We Like Sheep just about the same time that Texas started “opening up” after weeks of more cautious shut-down. As I tried to stretch my amateur’s skills to meet the challenge of the scattered runs and overlapping entrances, the twists and turns of the little groups of aimless and lost sheep planted themselves firmly in my imagination.

Listen to the musical word painting in the clip below – or on the recording of your choice:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDar_26lnrk

Basses and Sopranos come together briefly ALL WE LIKE SHEEP. Then Tenors: ALL WE LIKE SHEEP. Finally Altos: ALL WE LIKE SHEEP.....each part starts the sentence with one or two other voices. They **confidently** proclaim their unity as SHEEP.

But then each voice drifts off, literally, in a musical wandering trot or skip or run....EVERY ONE TO HIS OWN WAY. For three pages, the little sheepish basses, tenors, altos, and sopranos run away from each other, bump into each other, get lost, turn in circles, and come to complete stops with no warning. They are truly lost. Each drifts and skips in his or her own world with such a narrow field of view. There is no clear plan, direction, or leader.

These sheep haunted me in my dreams waking and sleeping for several days. They were so familiar. Some wore little sheep masks. Others did not. All needed to be shorn. I suspect many could have used a bath.

Then one day, I recognized them. They were my friends, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers at HEB and on the Bike Trail and waiting in line for take-out coffee and sheepishly venturing out into the new and ever-changing world. We were not only sheepish....we had become sheep. Wandering, stopping, turning, peering out from behind masks, spinning, hesitant - without a leader or direction or timeline or agenda. We had truly GONE ASTRAY - EVERY ONE TO HIS OWN WAY.

I like lists. I like plans. I enjoy leading others on clear and sometimes not clear paths. Rules developed by sensible, informed, elected (formally or informally) leaders generally make me feel more empowered, not less empowered. I know where I’m supposed to be headed, so I get packed and head off that

direction. I am a lawyer, a Scout Leader, a Mom. People ask me for directions; and I look them up confidently in whatever rule/info source seems to apply to the problem at hand.

But here I am as sheepish as everyone else. Wandering, chafing a bit, and blinded by the fog in my glasses from my masked breath. Scared. There is no clear path for society much less for me individually. My path and Henry's path at work and home is reasonably well-worn and still visible to provide daily structure- but I still wander. Haley and Zach can't see their daily path at all now that school is finished, and the future is foggy. We don't skip like frolicking sheep with this new freedom. We often stop and stare or change direction suddenly or run away.

Curiously, the music and Isaiah take a sharp tonal turn to cut off the wandering and remind us of both our status and our way out. The sheep come together in a strong, synchronized proclamation:
AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL....

In Christ, the bearer of our sins, we lost sheep have a way out of the fog. We can follow. We can cast off our confusion and the chaos of our lives for clarity. Perhaps in this moment, the INIQUITY OF US ALL is our personal and communal confusion, our wandering each to his or her own way, our sense of helplessness and fear. It is this heavy weight of wandering that is lifted from us and laid on our Lord Jesus Christ.

While this temporary time of collective sheepish wandering will come to something of an end, it is an existential state that underlies our being even when the path seems clear. We each drift to our own way. We need our Savior to lift the burden of wandering aimlessly astray to grant us the peace of wisdom and understanding.

Oh Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.
Oh Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.
Oh Christ, Lamb of God, grant us peace. Amen.

Saturday, September 19

Haley Goodrow

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. ~Mathew 25:40

For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, ongoing away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ~James 1:23-25

God teaches us how to love for he embodies selfless parental love. She shows us that true love resembles a flame needing eternal attention and action. Jesus commands us to love one another and showed us through his actions that there is no truer act of faith than to serve another, to wash their feet, especially those who have been cast out by society. The Holy Spirit empowers each of us to go out and love setting each of our hearts aflame. They teach us to overcome our prejudice and anything that may stop us from serving another. They show us that everyone as a child of God is beloved, and as Christians our truest faith is the act of loving each other and all of creation. Therefore now more than ever, I see God in our world working through medical providers, Black Lives Matter activists and those working to end systemic violence and oppression, and all those loving their neighbors as themselves.

God grant me the strength to examine how I am living your love in my life, and fill me with the courage to stand with those lending their voices to freedom and justice in our world. Amen.



Sunday, September 20

Vicki Gorman

*Your love, O LORD, forever will I sing; from age to age
my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness. ~Psalm 89:1*

Singing is what I do. Early on I tried to follow other paths, but eventually I gave up and accepted my vocation. I have been richly blessed. If singing is praying twice, I have prayed for hours and hours a day; not a bad way to spend my time! I cherish my memories of soloing with the Honolulu Symphony and performing intimate chamber music with dear colleagues but singing hymns has always been my passion. The texts move me and connect me with all of those who have gone before and all of those who will carry on.



*And I sing: Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine, we feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine. Alleluia! ELW 422, verse 3*

As the angel said, “Fear not,” are words I have often sung, so much so that I now truly believe them. Those two words are my litmus test for a leader. I am incapable of viewing anyone peddling fear as a faithful servant of my Lord. In responding to that two-word command I have learned to walk with God through the difficult days: in 2010, when the financial collapse of 2008 resulted in the demise of the Honolulu Symphony, uprooting twenty years of island living and propelling us to follow thin prospects to abundance in Houston; in 2016, when my son was in a terrible car accident; in 2020, when a global pandemic imposed a social distance keeping me from family in need of my care. That incomplete list will increase.

*And I sing: In you alone, O God, we hope, and not in our own merit.
We rest our fears in your good Word and trust your Holy Spirit.
Your promise keeps us strong and sure;
we trust the cross, your signature, inscribed upon our temples. ELW 600, verse 3*

My prayerful answer to this command is always the same, Thy will be done. That’s a tough one. I like being in control. I like believing that my choices, my commitments, and my actions will result in security and well-being. But people disappoint, health care is retroactively cancelled without notice, accidents happen. Yet as part of the body of Christ, I am never alone in good times or in trying times. I can kneel hopelessly at the rail during the Longest Night Vespers, pray, “Thy will be done,” and witness the miracle of healing. Yes, it’s pretty incredible, but it is real.

*And I sing: Our Father, God in heav’n above, we pray, united in your love;
Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord, in faithfulness to keep your word.
Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as there before your throne. ELW 746, verse 1*

Raising my voice in songs of lamentation or praise, thankfulness or supplication, with the community of Christ sustains me. Leaving my Hawaiian family, my ‘ohana with whom I worshipped, feasted, and served, reconnected me with my extended biological Texan family and introduced me to my new faith family. I collect and carry my beloved ones in my heart. My first year of teaching at Punahou School in Honolulu, a student invited me to join her family in celebrating her birthday. Like many families in the

islands, just about every nationality and religion was represented. As we joined hands in prayer, her father offered thanks in all the holy names of God.

And I sing: *Join hands, disciplines of the faith, whate'er your race may be.
All children of the living God are surely kin to me. ELW 650, verse 3*

And so I fear not, I pray that God's will be done,
and I sing: *This is my prayer, O God of all earth's kingdoms, your kingdom come; on earth your will be done.
O God, be lifted up till all shall serve you, and hearts united learn to live as one.
So hear my prayer, O God of all the nations; myself I give you; let your will be done.
ELW 887, verse 3*