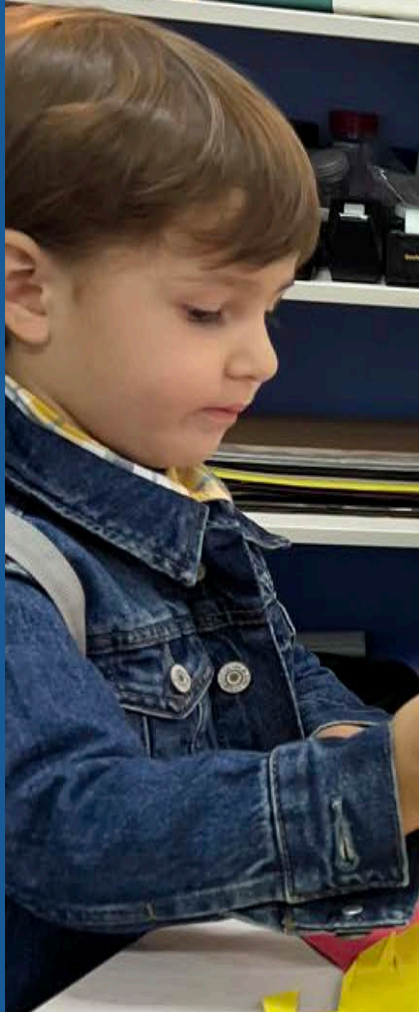


THE SPIRE



Your
Church
Magazine



NURTURE FAITH

by **Dr. Doug Hood**

Senior Pastor

FOUNDATIONS

“The Lord your redeemer who formed you in the womb says: I am the Lord, the maker of all, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.”

Isaiah 44:24 (Common English Bible)

Foundations are important. In the construction of a building, a strong and reliable foundation is a primary consideration. The function of the building and its location are important matters for determining which materials are necessary. Without attending to the matter of a proper foundation, further construction becomes a foolish—and risky—enterprise. Similarly, a meaningful and purposeful life requires a sturdy foundation. The materials for such a foundation include unconditional love, encouragement, and support. But other matters are important, too! These include education or vocational training, a safe environment for failure and learning from that failure, and career guidance or mentoring. Yet, the most important matter is knowing where we come from. Who are our parents? Were we adopted? What can we know of our heritage? Self-concept and identity are forged from this knowledge.

This passage from Isaiah shows that the people of Israel have lost their way. Their home, Jerusalem, has been destroyed and they are a people in exile. Such disorientation is a poor foundation for rebuilding their future as a nation. It is in this disorientation, this emotional and spiritual place of despair and hopelessness, that the prophet Isaiah speaks. He reminds the people that they were formed in the womb by God—the same God who is the maker of all, who alone stretched out the heavens and spread out the earth. Israel, Isaiah cries, has not been left alone! And as a people who were created, fashioned, and formed by such a God, they are a people who belong. Isaiah reaffirms once again their relationship—their foundation—with their God. And it’s this relationship that has continued on throughout the ages unto this very day.

Understand, however, that we shouldn’t make the mistake of assuming that God belongs to us. Allan Hugh Cole, Jr. shares a poignant metaphor he once learned that “acting as if God somehow belongs to us can have a direct effect on prayer and faith. For example, it can lead to our viewing God as a commodity that exists primarily to serve us and our self-interests, rather than leading us to serve God and God’s interest. Moreover, we can begin treating God as ‘a cosmic Coke machine,’ such that we merely need to offer God some sort of payment (i.e., good deeds, the right prayers, acts of kindness, various sacrifices), put in our requests, and expect to receive something in return from God immediately.” This incorrect notion that our relationship with God is purely transactional is a poor foundation for a faith that can navigate life’s discouragements and heartbreaks—it’s a foundation that cannot sustain us.

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Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, B.M., M.A.
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If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office.

Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.

A life of faith and prayer that disappoints may be the product of a poorly laid foundation. Instead of seeking a relationship with God we might pray, “God, I will give you this if you give me that.” Another poor foundation may be casting God in our own image rather than the other way around: we might depict God as an extension of ourselves, our desires, our needs, and our political ideology. We want God to see the world as we see it—we want God to be a certain way. This is a foundation that negatively impacts our prayers and shakes our faith. God does not operate under our control. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, we belong to God. The only foundation for a robust life of prayer and faith is one where we seek to know God, God’s dreams, and God’s aspirations—it is one where we remember that God has created us and not the other way around. ●

i Allan Hugh Cole, Jr., The Life of Prayer: Mind, Body, and Soul. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 15.

OUR 2024 ANNUAL DINNER AND DISTINGUISHED PREACHER

Join us for our 2024 Annual Dinner and Distinguished Preacher program. The dinner is on Friday, January 5th, at Benvenuto Restaurant (1730 N. Federal Hwy, Boynton Beach).

Our guest speaker for the dinner is Rev. Susan Sparks. She is an ex-trial lawyer turned standup comedian and Baptist minister and is America’s only female comedian with a pulpit. Rev. Sparks, a North Carolina native, has been featured in O Magazine, the New York Times, and several television networks.

Our evening includes a social hour, a sit-down dinner, a thought-provoking speaker, and live entertainment coordinated by Don Cannarozzi. The cost to attend this much-anticipated event is \$40 per person. Both the church and Benvenuto Restaurant underwrite this event. We provide scholarships for deserving parishioners who may not otherwise be able to attend. We would be grateful if you could help offset these costs.

Then, on Sunday morning, January 7th, Rev. Sparks will deliver a message from the pulpit. Make sure to mark your calendars and invite your friends and neighbors to hear her sermon on gratitude. ●



THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES PRESENTS DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN

Join us on Sunday, March 10th, as Dr. Michael B. Brown returns to our pulpit as part of our Center for Christian Studies program. Dr. Brown is a favorite of our congregation and will be preaching on gratitude. Make sure to mark this date down on your 2024 calendar. ●





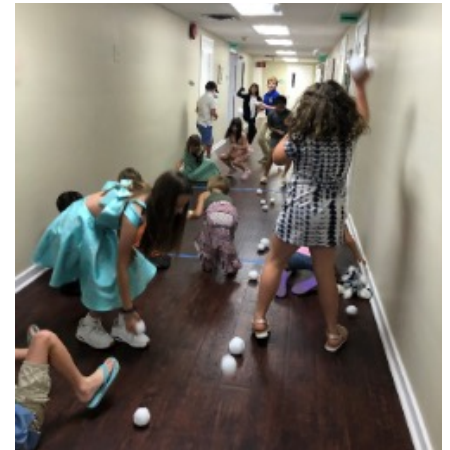
by **Grace Cameron Hood**
Director of Children and Family Ministry

FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

2024 is here! 2023 was a fun-filled year!



Easter Eggstravaganza



Sunday School Snow Ball Fight!



Bowling



VBS



Christmas Pageant 2023



God Squad



Bible Bunch



Primary Sunday School



Nursery



Sunday School in the Kitchen



"Magic School" 5:49



God Squad and Youth Group



God Squad Learning Chimes



Ringing the Bell



Decorating Gingerbread Houses



Children's Choir



Lighting the Candles

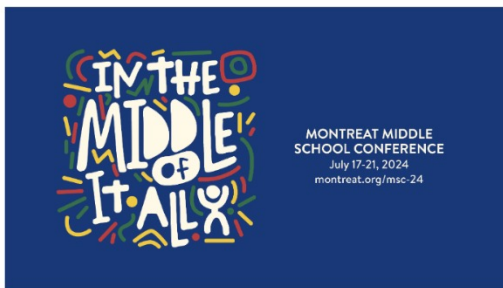
There were so many powerful and fun moments in the last year! As we look to the new year, there are more to come!! Here are a couple of important dates to put on your 2024 calendar:

Montreat Parent Meeting	January 21
Annual Easter Egg Extravaganza	March 24
Vacation Bible School	June 10 - 14
Family Golf Fun	November 3
Children's Christmas Pageant	December 8

There will be additions to this list. Pastor Greg and I will be planning some joint events with the youth, children, and young adults in the church. Those dates to come! ●

MONTREAT is Back on the Calendar!!!

Both the middle schoolers and high schoolers in our Youth Group will be invited to attend Montreat conferences this year! There are two separate events:



Montreat Middle School Conference

Maryville College, Maryville TN

July 7 to 21

\$200.00



Montreat Youth Conference

Montreat, NC

July 21 to 28

\$250.00

There will be an informational meeting on **Sunday, January 21st**, after the 11 a.m. service. Both a guardian and the student must attend. Please RSVP to Grace Hood or Greg Rapier so we can plan pizza for all!

Scholarships are available. ●

DEACONS' CORNER

From Ann Shuman:

For over 50 years, donors from our congregation have supported the Deacons' Christmas Tree Fund. Gift cards were purchased and given to five local charities which in turn distributed them to underserved families. Parents could then buy toys, books, and clothing for their children. It was a pleasure to serve with my co-chair, Araceli Paris, who will lead the 2024 campaign. Sincere thanks to staffers Nancy Fine and Aaron Strippel and to the children who decorated the Deacon Tree. Donna Van Horn is the new moderator of the Deacons.

From Donna Van Horn:

DEACONS' TREE KICKS OFF THE SEASON OF GIVING

Thanks to the expert coordination of Araceli Paris and Ann Shuman, the Annual Deacons' Tree once again graced the church lobby, greeting the congregation with a reminder that Christmas is a time for giving. A major project of the Deacons, the Deacons' Tree provides Christmas gift cards for needy families in our community. This Christmas we supported the following organizations: Achievement Center for Children & Families, Adopt-A-Family, AVDA (Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse), CROS Ministries (The Caring Kitchen), Milagro Center, and Naoma Donnelley Haggin Boys & Girls Club. Three hundred \$25 gift certificates were purchased through the generous contributions of our congregation. Once again, First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach reached out to support the community beyond our church walls.

"Happy are generous people, because they give some of their food to the poor."

Proverbs 22:9 (Common English Bible) ●

All Deacons Bag Lunch Sunday, March 3, 2024 Following the 11 a.m. Worship Service

A Deacon is one who has accepted the call as a servant, and while their term may have expired or they have moved to another church, they are still a servant and can perform as one. They are not serving in the name of the church but in the name of Jesus. As the new year begins, the Deacons are looking to reinvigorate their ministry by building upon the strong foundation of faithful congregational leadership that has long supported the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. This includes a call for input from all Deacons—those currently serving, past Deacons, and those called by other churches.

Thanks to the ongoing service of Robert Paris as Moderator, the Deacons of First Presbyterian continued to serve the congregation and meet via Zoom throughout the pandemic. As the church now returns to more normal activities, the Deacons are looking to the congregation for input in reassessing how they can further support the church's needs.

On Sunday, March 3rd, following the 11 a.m. worship service, all current Deacons, along with all past Deacons and those who have served other congregations, are invited to join in a round table conversation sharing their experience as a Deacon and how they view the role as church spiritual leader. Bring a bag lunch and join in this important conversation. Watch for further information about registering for this very important fellowship opportunity. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Food for the Needy from Chris and Lynn Yates.

Holly House from Bob and Noreen Buss, in loving memory of Marie Buss; and from Heather Dennis, in honor of Merrill Beveridge.

Memorial Garden Fund in loving memory of John J. and Janet M. Loennecker, by daughter Karen and son-in-law Don Carter.

Music Fund from Susan Ambrecht.

Operating Fund from the Lattner Family Foundation, in loving memory of Forrest C. and Frances H. Lattner.

Remembrance Fund from David and Lucille Fannin, in loving memory of Lawrence Betsill, a dedicated member of the Fellowship Team and a great friend to so many of us; from Andrew Melissinos, in loving memory of grandparents, William F. and Margaret H. Mitchell; and from Mirta Viamontes, in loving memory of Frank Viamontes. ●

ETERNAL LIVES

Our Deepest Sympathies as a congregation are extended to the families of the following members upon the death of their loved ones:

- Ellen Dickson –
September 24, 2023
- Luellen Newmann –
November 3, 2023
- Nancy Crell –
December 19, 2023



SESSION REPORT

During October and November, the Session received five new members and approved three baptisms. They also approved the StoryMakers program as the recipient of the Christmas Eve Offering. The Session called a Special Meeting of the Congregation on November 19, 2023, and the Annual Meeting of the Congregation on February 25, 2024. ●

NEW MEMBERS

Raisa Chugunov

Gail Dodge

Eleanor (Randy) Fuller

Cynthia Kunkel

William Kunkel, IV

Judy Meehan

Kathy Merritt

Rachel Therrell



WELCOME!

HOLLY HOUSE STEP-ABOVE RUMMAGE SALE

Drop off Donations

Every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday
January 16th through February 3rd, 9:30 a.m. to Noon

Church Member Shopping

Wednesday, February 7th, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

All Shoppers are Welcome

February 8th, 9th, and 10th, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Step-Above Rummage Sale will be here before we know it. Donations will be received on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. until noon beginning Tuesday, January 16th and ending Saturday, February 3rd. Clothing, shoes, accessories, and books can be dropped off at Fellowship Hall. Holly House is the drop-off site for jewelry, housewares, linen, electronics, toys, tools, and sports equipment.

If you would like to help set up for the Rummage Sale, please come to Fellowship Hall or Holly House on Tuesdays, Thursdays, or Saturdays beginning January 16th from 9:30 a.m. until noon. **To volunteer during the sale dates, please sign up on the church website.**

The sale will be open to church attendees on Wednesday, February 7th from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. All shoppers are welcome during public sale dates: Thursday, February 8th through Saturday, February 10th from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. A hotdog lunch prepared by Men's Fellowship will be available for purchase on sale days.

Check your closets, cubbies, lockers, nooks, and crannies for items you wish to donate. We are looking forward to seeing you at our annual Step Above Rummage Sale. ●



Gail Benson and DoAnn Falk show a top that was available for \$3.



Marsha Bird, Pam Popaca, Gina Logan, Penny Johnson



Holly House is a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach.

by Maryann Rana

Prayer Ministry Team

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

*“Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.
Don’t suppress the Spirit.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 (Common English Bible)

Father God, you know all needs before we speak our prayers, and yet you welcome our concerns for others in Jesus Christ. In praying for others, I honor my time with God and heed the words of the Apostle Paul to pray without ceasing. I focus on others in need of prayer, blessing each one as I read the prayer list. Prayer is the unquenchable language of the spirit and I am grateful to bless others in this way.

Prayer requests come through the church office and are then distributed to team members. Each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer with respect and confidentiality. Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for more information or if you are interested in joining. ●

by Steve Anderson

AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE UNDER-RESOURCED

A few days ago, I was at our local Walgreens. On my way out, I saw a couple sitting and leaning against the wall outside. I assumed they were homeless. I’ve always felt reluctant to give them money since I don’t know if it will be misused. So I ignored them and went to my car. As I drove away, I felt like the priest in the Good Samaritan parable. So I turned around and returned because I had a supply of cards from Christian’s Reaching Out to Society (CROS) Ministries that list all the places people can get food and get in touch with social services for things like employment, housing, counseling, etc. Unfortunately, the couple had left.

We have a supply of these cards at our church, which you can give to the under-resourced when you see them. I keep a supply in my car as an alternative way to help those who need a helping hand. Just ask Nancy. ●

by Maria Graham

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY

The Monday Morning Women’s Bible Study will begin 2024 by completing their Advent Study. On January 8th, we will view the last session of “Arts and Faith: Advent: 2023”, which presents commentary about works of art inspired by the Sunday Scriptures. Featured will be Geertgen tot Sint Jans’ “The Birth of Christ,” circa 1490. Join us as we read Scripture, listen to an Advent hymn, and discuss the painter and his work.

Next, we will resume Rev. Tim Keller’s course, “Discovering the Gospel in Every Book of the Bible.” Starting with Genesis, he shows how each book of the Bible has threads of the story of the gospel—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, and threads of the principal of the gospel—that we are saved by God’s grace alone, not of our own works. We will pick up with the book of Joshua.

Our group meets Monday mornings at 10 a.m. via Zoom. Please join us as we grow our faith and develop bonds of friendship. All are welcome. To receive a Zoom invitation, please contact Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com). ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor

“NEXT PLAY MENTALITY”

A sermon preached on November 26, 2023 by Rev. Rapier

Isaiah 41:10

Philippians 3:12-14

“It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-14 (Common English Bible)

I had a professor once—a national book award winner, kind of a large name in the small world of poetry, one of the few professors for whom it actually made sense when she assigned her own book for class. Day one, this professor, before introductions, before talking us through the syllabus, before anything, she holds up a copy of her book and asks those of us with our own copies to pull ours out.

She says *turn to page 73*, and we do. She raises her copy high, turns to page 73, and then rips the page straight off the book’s spine. Then she tells us to do the same, and she watches to make sure that we do. *Okay, now page 119*, she says. *You see the final line there? Cross that out. Oh, on page 42, you see the word ‘and’—I want you to replace it with the word ‘but’.*

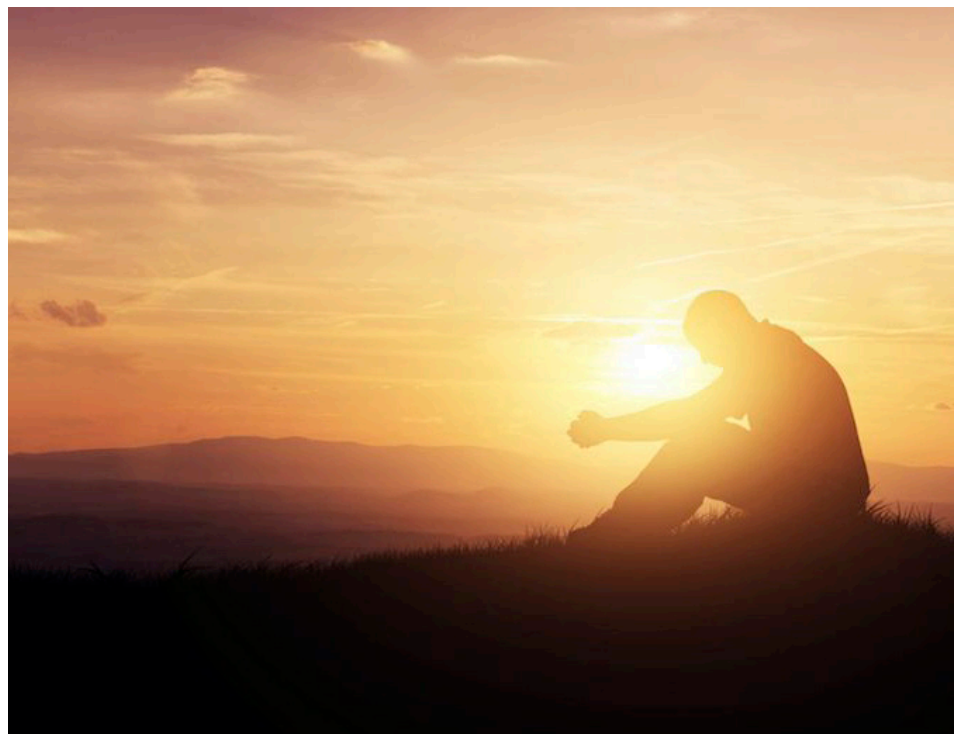
She goes on like this for about ten minutes. And only after we’ve edited together her perfectly published book does she begin to teach the class. She doesn’t address what we’d just done the entire time.

At the end of the lecture, she

asks us if we have any questions. And someone raises his hand. He says, *Why did you do that at the beginning of class? Why did you have us tear out our pages?*

She looks surprised by the question. Kind of embarrassed. She gives it some thought, then, finally she says, *I got it wrong. Those sentences, I mean. It drives me crazy that my name is in print and I just got it wrong.*

Do you ever get in your head about the times you’ve got wrong? The mistakes you’ve made? Things you could have done better, or that you wish you’d done differently? Maybe you think of the right thing to say only hours after the fact. Maybe you feel like even your best isn’t good enough. Or maybe you feel like your best is enough, but you beat yourself up because of all the times you’ve practiced self-care and not given your



best. Maybe as you flip through the pages of your life, you too see nothing but regret.

A few weeks ago, your senior pastor Doug Hood stood in the pulpit and talked about how difficult it can be to perform the liturgical part of worship.

When there's two of us, it's a very streamlined experience for the preacher—you preach, you introduce the final hymn, you say a benediction, and you're done. But for the liturgist, the person not preaching, you're responsible for the logistics of the service. *Introduce the children at 11 but not 9, remember which group is hosting Fellowship by the Sea, and if there is a Minute for Generosity, make sure you don't forget that. Hit every announcement in a way that flows and makes sense.* A lot of moving pieces for the liturgist.

So Doug stood in the pulpit and talked about how the week before, he was a liturgist, and how in his mind, he made mistake after mistake after mistake. And he shared how the mistakes got inside his head, which

of course only led to more mistakes. Then he did a very Doug thing; he took a moment to build me up. I'm incredibly grateful for the ways Doug pours his energy into me week in and week out—he's incredibly selfless. So he stood in the pulpit and built me up by saying, *I, Doug, made all these mistakes last week. It's a very difficult role. Greg has just completed the liturgy for today's service, and I did not hear a single mistake.*

Meanwhile, I was sitting there in my pew thinking, *I stumbled over the Prayers of the People, I forgot to mention QR codes during the Offering, I had the congregation sit too early after the Doxology, I could have made the Ministry of the Church a whole lot livelier...*

All I could think of were my mistakes. I was actively in the process of tearing out pages and crossing out sentences—the same way Doug had done, the same way my professor had done, the same way I am sure you do too.

You do this, don't you? Saddle yourself with negative self-talk. Maybe you spend far too much time

beating yourself up over past or present mistakes, telling yourself you're doing it all wrong, that you're not good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, rich enough, experienced enough, churchy enough, old enough, young enough, disciplined enough. Maybe you sometimes feel as if you, too, are simply not enough. Or maybe you've achieved some success, and you know you're enough, but that negative self-talk just lingers like a habit you can't quit.

Friends, if this describes you or has ever described you, and I believe it describes us all at one point or another, if you have ever felt simply inadequate, not enough, or weighed down by your mistakes, today's scripture has a word for you.

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul describes his own relationship with the past. Now, let me remind you, Paul's past is not exactly spotless. He was once the biggest anti-Christian zealot there was, and he was personally responsible for persecuting and even sentencing those who believed in Jesus Christ. If ever anyone had a compelling case to feel less-than before God, if ever there were a person for whom the self-doubt would be legitimate, Paul would be that person.

By the time Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he has turned his life around, yes, but we know two things. One, that he has this messy past. And two, that he has a present thorn in his side, something that continues to ache and to weigh him down to this day. It only makes sense that someone as thoughtful and reflective as Paul would struggle with this same issue, beating himself up and getting stuck on all the mistakes he's made. Yet, in today's scripture Paul paints a very



different picture. A beautiful picture. In the picture, Paul acknowledges that he is imperfect, then he looks firmly ahead—not behind—ahead—to the life God has called him to.

He says: *Not that I have achieved the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus...This one thing I do: I forget what is behind and reach forward to what is ahead.*

Paul acknowledges his shortcomings but he will not wallow in his failures. Instead, he focuses on what's ahead, because he knows God, and he knows beating yourself up does no good.

So don't.

Don't do it, he says. God doesn't want you to dwell on or in sin. God doesn't want you fixated on inadequacies. God created us and wants us each to thrive. God wants us to carry in our God-given bodies not negativity, but hope, and not darkness, but light. God wants us to be kind to this world, and that begins by being kind to ourselves. God wants us to radiate love from the inside out, to forget about what is behind and focus instead on the opportunity ahead, to live into God's call to do well and to love well.

When it comes to self-doubt, scripture tells us simply to stop. You don't need that. The world doesn't need more hate or bitterness or doubt, and neither do you. The world needs love. So feed yourself that love instead.

You may be thinking to yourself, *that sounds great in theory but real difficult in practice.* Even if we know not to beat ourselves up, that inner voice sometimes still haunts us. We



know not to listen, but sometimes that voice can be so convincing: *you're not good enough, not religious enough, not smart enough. You're unlovable.* Late at night when you shut your eyes and think through all the ways the day could have gone better, the ways you could have been better, that voice can sound so convincing. And so the voice only grows louder.

So if the response to beating yourself up is to not beat yourself up, and if the response to self-doubt is self-acceptance and self-love, the question becomes *what does self-love actually look like in practice? And how can we get there?*

Friends, the Sacramento Kings have been a prodigiously bad basketball team, whose 17-year streak of missing the playoffs was the longest in American professional sports history. This sad organization had over the years developed a culture of failure and incompetence. Nobody wanted to sign with the Kings. Agents of incoming draft picks routinely withheld vital

medical information from the team, potentially costing their clients millions of dollars, simply to avoid being drafted into an unstable organization. One former player famously called the city of Sacramento "Basketball Hell".

Last year the Kings broke their historic playoff drought, in part because of a new coach, Mike Brown, who was the league's first ever unanimous Coach of the Year award winner. Mike Brown transformed the culture of this Kings team from one of losing to one of winning, from being resigned to mediocrity, to success. Under his tutelage, this historically bad organization developed the single highest scoring offense in NBA history. And Mike Brown achieved this offensive success counterintuitively by caring not one bit about whether or not his team's shots went in.

Mike Brown does not care one bit about results. He cares about the process. If you are a good shooter in Mike Brown's system, you take every single open shot you have. It

does not matter the strategic context of the game. It does not matter if you've missed your last twenty shots. If Mike Brown says you're a good shooter, when shot number twenty-one presents itself, you'd better shoot.

Earlier this year, one of the team's young players, Keegan Murray, was going through a major shooting slump. He was getting in his head, the way we often do. And one play, just once, he passed up an open shot and, as a result, lost the ball. As Keegan ran back down the court to play defense, Coach Mike Brown gave him an earful. Then coach Brown turned to the end of the bench, found a player with no issues being bashful, and said, *you're in next. Keegan Murray sits.*

The way basketball works, you can't sub into the game until there is a whistle, a stoppage of play. So the Kings got the ball again, the very next possession. The ball found itself back in Keegan Murray's hands. He was several feet behind the three-point line,

and he had just a sliver of space. But he'd learned from his mistake, and he trusted his coach, so he shot that ball, zero hesitation, and absolutely nailed the big three-pointer.

On his way back down the court, he turned toward his coach and smirked. Coach Mike Brown smiled back. Then he turned to the bench player waiting to check in, and said, *you can sit back down now.* The bench player started laughing too.

Friends, it's called next-play mentality, and it's a common mindset among the world's top athletes—ignoring the last failure, or success, and living fully into what's next.

God wants us to develop a next-play mentality when it comes to our own mistakes—when it comes to the times we've sinned or missed the mark, when it comes to our shots that didn't fall or the shots we wish we'd taken but didn't, when it comes to our doubts, God calls us not to wallow in the past but to be transfixed on the future, the same way

Paul in Philippians sets his sights not on the rearview, but on the race ahead.

The strength that Paul draws from is the same strength that Keegan Murray draws from, and it is the strength of a great coach—a coach who sets him up to succeed, and who loves him, and who believes in him even when he cannot believe in himself.

In the scripture, Paul says he has been taken ahold of by his coach, by God. So when he feels too weak, too demoralized, too caught up in his own thoughts and thorns, filled with self-doubt, he places his trust not in himself, but in God, *a great coach.* He trusts in God to free him of his inner turmoil. He trusts in the gameplan God has created for him to thrive. And he looks forward to that next play, make or miss, because he knows no matter the result, God will be by his side—coaching him up, lifting him up, and loving him well. Let it be so for you and also for me. Amen. ●



SAVE THE DATE: GLEANNING WITH FIRSTDELRAY SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

On Saturday, March 2nd, join our group of FirstDelray volunteers gleaning local produce for CROS Ministries' Gleaning Program.

Gleaning is a food recovery strategy that allows produce to be harvested and distributed to the food insecure instead of being plowed back into the soil.

Farmers donate the produce they cannot sell to CROS Ministries. Volunteers gather the produce. The food-distributing partners of CROS Ministries then distribute the recovered produce to local agencies with feeding programs for individuals and families with low-incomes, seniors, people with disabilities, and the unhoused. The food is always given away free of charge.

Last year, the FirstDelray team picked over 2,000 pounds of peppers in the western part of Delray Beach. This year we will be gleaning in the western part of Boynton Beach or Delray Beach. The crop varies and we won't know what we'll be gleaning until we arrive at our site.

This is a great family project for children, adults, and senior citizens. To sign up, please contact Jeanne Heavilin (jcheavilin@gmail.com or 561-901-8714).●





FIRST DELRAY CONCERT SERIES PRESENTS
THE LATIN DIVOS IN CONCERT
JANUARY 14, 2024 AT 4 P.M.



The smooth and spicy pop-opera trio, **The Latin Divos**, will open our 2024 concert series on **January 14th at 4 p.m.**, performing a mix of romantic serenades, Latin classics, and opera standards—interspersed with a dash of humor. The widely acclaimed divos are Fernando Gonzales, a featured vocalist at the church, and tenors Ernest Cabrera and Will Corujo.

Of The Latin Divos, one promoter has claimed, rightly, “Bocelli has some serious competition...” This “pop/opera” trio, who have been performing together since 2017, features tenor Ernesto Cabrera, baritone Fernando Gonzalez, and tenor Will Corujo, who is also the director and founder. The Latin Divos take Latin pop, traditional opera, and timeless classics and “Divo-ise” each genre by adding their own Latin flair. Born and raised in Cuba, where music and arts vibrate on every corner, it’s no wonder that The Latin Divos have quickly captured the attention and hearts of audiences around the world. Now based in Miami, the trio has brought their special sound and diverse repertoire to prestigious venues in the United States, Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and Panama and have shared the stage with some of the biggest names in Latin music.

The Divos are gaining worldwide recognition for their exciting concerts and extraordinary vocal and musical skills. Their performances honor the great artists of romantic music—in Spanish, Italian, English, and French—with their signature Latin spark! Tenor Will Corujo adds even more spice with his virtuoso performances of both the violin and saxophone, making their renditions truly unique. In 2020, they released their album *Forever Classics*, containing audience favorites like: “Hallelujah,” “Caruso,” “O Sole Mio,” “Quizas Quizas,” and more.

Get ready to let the trio bring a smile to your face and warmth to your heart with their enchanting style. Tickets are \$20, and children under 12 are free. ●



there're hundreds, if not thousands, who slip through the cracks. And those who are canonized often have some pretty ugly blemishes.

Saint Paul, for example.

We know about his thorny past, his road-to-Damascus moment and all that. We also know that he wrote much of the New Testament, and that his words—themselves an act of canonization—have edified Christians for millennia. Yet if we're honest with ourselves and if we read scripture critically, some of Paul's words haven't aged well. I'm thinking specifically of lines like *Slaves, obey your masters* (Ephesians 6:1) or *Wives, submit to your husbands* (Ephesians 5:22). To Paul's credit, he contradicts himself quite beautifully elsewhere: *There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). And scripture as a whole has a beating heart for justice and an integrity that contradicts any one off-color line. But these verses still exist, these moments in scripture, words written by saints that make you want to cringe, kind of like blackface in an old film.

Back to Nadia Bolz-Weber. In *Accidental Saints*, she talks about how her church celebrates All Saints' Day by baking 'saint cookies' then laying them out after worship on

draped white tables commemorating the dead. These tables also hold remembrances of everyone from Joan of Arc to Mary Magdalene to *someone's granddaddy who was a farmer*.¹

She also talks about discovering a local woman lost to history and wrestling with whether or not to include her at a cookie table. The person: a woman (like her) and a church planter (also like her) who created a thriving church over a century ago when attitudes toward women, especially in religion, felt insurmountable. The catch? This woman was also a renowned member of the Ku Klux Klan and famous for her anti-Catholic, antisemitic, and anti-Pentecostal beliefs.

Bolz-Weber doesn't want to canonize this woman with a spot on her cookie table, but she also wants to hold onto the part of her story that's beautiful. She doesn't know what to do. So she calls up an Episcopal friend who tells her, *Email me her name. I'll add her to the Litany of Saints along with all the other broken people of God*.²

And that's that.

Bolz-Weber wrestles with this uncomfortable decision, and she talks about how knowing the difference *between a racist and a saint is kind of important*, yet in the end, she settles into *sticky*

ambiguities around saints who were bad and sinners who were good.³ And she wonders aloud if our need to place people in certain categories—sinner or saint, saved or damned, canonized or ignored—actually gets in the way of our work as the body of Christ, to love others as God first loved us and to recognize that God works even through sinners.

And so as I think back to my film-watching and book-reading experiences, and as I consider art that is both beautiful and horrific, sometimes in the same scene, art that has for whatever reason been deemed canon, perhaps a proper response isn't an outright rejection or veneration. Perhaps our messy, thorny art speaks powerful, uncomfortable truths about what it means to be human, to be part of the broken people of God. Maybe it's okay to like something and not like something at the same time, and to name the flaws in even our most heralded achievements—and people, for that matter. Maybe that's part of being human—living flawed lives, creating flawed art, and holding tight onto the hope of Jesus Christ, that God works with flaws, and God works with us.

¹ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in all the Wrong People* (New York: Convergent Books, 2015), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 6

³ *Ibid.* ●

ALL ARE WELCOME AT THE LORD'S TABLE

For 2024, Communion will be celebrated on the following dates: January 7th; February 4th; March 3rd; Maundy Thursday, March 28th; April 7th, May 5th, June 2nd, July 7th, August 4th, September 1st, October 6th, November 3rd, and December 1st. ●

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

Ash Wednesday, February 14th, is the beginning of Lent when we ready ourselves for Easter. Join us in the Sanctuary at 7 p.m. as we read Scripture, raise our voices in song, and consider the gift of God's grace. ●

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Our Annual Congregational Meeting is on Sunday, February 25, 2024, immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service. ●

CO-PASTOR TOWN HALL

What is co-pastoring? Why do it? What does it mean to me? What will change for me as a congregant? How can I help?

If you have questions like these or others, make sure to attend the Town Hall Meeting on Sunday, February 4, 2024, in the Sanctuary, following the 11 a.m. worship service. The Co-Pastoring Committee of Mary Martínéz, Megan Buck, and Anne Gaudree will be there to answer your questions about the co-pastoring model as the church prepares for Dr. Hood's retirement in approximately four years. ●



STEWARDSHIP ARTICLE

Thank you, Everyone, who generously gave your time, talent and treasure to fuel the growth of our church in 2023. Because of your support we achieved many goals. Two of these achievements have had a particularly great impact.

1. We hosted an outstanding Vacation Bible School (VBS) for the children of First Presbyterian as well as children from the greater community. VBS was truly a highlight of our robust...and growing...Children's Ministry.
2. We upgraded our audio/visual system for the Sanctuary which also serves to improve the quality of our internet streaming broadcasts. Attendees, both those physically present and those connecting remotely, benefit from these significant enhancements.

As we begin this new year, we are excited that our elected church leaders have adopted Initiatives that will have a significant impact on First Delray and beyond and will continue our commitment to Ministry Excellence. These Initiatives will be presented to you in upcoming communications. Among these Initiatives will be the implementation of the Co-Pastor Plan and the re-start of the Stephen Ministry program.

These are exciting times for First Presbyterian Church of Delray. We invite you to join us, be a part of the excitement, and participate in every way you can to ensure our continued success as we "Build Disciples and Transform Lives". ●



SUSTAINING MINISTRY EXCELLENCE

- **Nurturing Our Faith**
- **Enhancing Our Congregational Care**
- **Strengthening Our Pillars of Support**

FILL A BAG, FEED A FAMILY

These days you can't turn on the news or read a news article without hearing about how the economy is impacting people. People like Jane, who is a single mother of an 11-year-old. "My rent almost doubled a month ago. Now, with the cost of everything else going up too like gas and food, it is getting really scary. A friend convinced me that there was no shame in seeking help." Jane found the food pantry run by Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS Ministries) on the internet.

Your food donations to CROS Ministries makes a difference in the lives of people in our local community. February is one of the two months that we concentrate on collecting canned or boxed, unopened, unexpired, and non-perishable food items.



Suggested items include:

- Peanut Butter
- Canned Meat – Tuna, Chicken, Ham
- Boxed Pasta
- Bagged or Boxed Rice
- Dry Beans
- Canned Fruits and Vegetables
- Canned Soup
- Canned Sauces
- Other non-perishable items

Food may be left in the church lobby on Sunday mornings, or on the cart outside of the Sanctuary doors by the covered circle during the workweek. If you prefer not to shop, consider making a monetary donation in the form of a check payable to “*CROS Ministries*” and place it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office.

Your generosity and compassion can impact families in our community. Thank you for caring and sharing. ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PER CAPITA)

In case you are wondering what the blue envelope near the beginning of your 2024 offering envelope box is for, you are not alone. “Per Capita” is the assessment that each congregation pays for each church member recorded on their membership rolls. It is assessed by our denomination (Presbyterian Church, USA). Per capita enables Presbyterians to mutually and equitably share the eccleastical and administrative costs of sustaining our witness to Christ - as a sign of the covenant that binds us together. These expenses are rounded out to \$40 per member for 2024.

Even though our Per Capita expense is included in our operating budget, we need your help to ease the financial burden this places on the church budget. Paying your per capita does make a difference when our congregation’s total assessment for 2024 is \$30,991. *Thank you to those who choose to help.* ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PARKING STICKER)

One of the benefits of membership at the church is the blue parking sticker. Mounted on the inside of the front or back window of your car, wherever it is easiest to reach, this sticker is a signal that your car belongs on the church lot for non-Sunday events. Since the east parking lot is leased to a valet company, this sticker is a visual clue to them that you are a member and therefore entitled to park in the lot.

Our parking lot, located on the west side of Gleason Street across the street from the front of the Sanctuary, is leased to the City of Delray Beach for their use, other than on Sunday mornings. Our blue parking sticker is not a substitute for paying for metered parking in that lot and you will receive a ticket from the city. The visual reminder that this parking lot is reserved for church events is the large Church Parking sign by the entrance.

Everyone attending worship can park in the church parking lots on Sunday mornings and a parking sticker is not required. If you are a member of the church and are in need of a new parking sticker, contact Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338). ●

PAJAMA AND BOOK DRIVE COMING!

The Mission Outreach Ministry Team will be hosting a Pajama and Book Drive for the children and youth of Milagro Center in March. Milagro Center serves 150 underserved students in Delray Beach, Boynton Beach, and Boca Raton.

New pajamas in children’s sizes 6-16 and adult sizes S, M, and L will be collected. New books for elementary, middle school, and high school students will also be collected.



by Nathanael Hood



THE HOLDOVERS

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University;
MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary

Considering his filmography, it's unlikely that director Alexander Payne began production on his new film *The Holdovers* hoping it might become a beloved Christmas classic. As streaming services and billion dollar superhero films devoured Hollywood from the inside out, Payne has stood his ground since the 90s as one of America's last great auteurs specializing in the kind of mid-budget prestige dramas that used to be the industry's bread-and-butter. (Excluding, of course, his bizarre 2017 sci-fi bomb *Downsizing*, but hey, nobody bats a thousand.) His films frequently focus on erratic, neurotic outsiders adrift or trapped in middle America. One could scarcely accuse his films of the kind of sentimentality common to holiday classics—certainly not his breakthrough film *Election* (1999), a black comedy about, among other things, inappropriate “relationships” between teachers and students in a Nebraska high school. Certainly not *Nebraska*

(2013), a bleak dramedy about a senile old man whose life is ruined when he seemingly wins the lottery. And though his characters might at times find some manner of meaning or redemption à la *About Schmidt* (2002), to be in an Alexander Payne movie is to suffer.

Imagine his surprise when *The Holdovers* was not only a hit with critics and audiences but has already gathered buzz as one of the best Christmas movies in years. I know several critics personally who've said they plan to add it to their holiday rotation alongside classics like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965) and *A Christmas Story* (1983). Having now seen the film, not only do I agree, but I personally think that with a few minor edits for language and a few brief discussions about sex *The Holdovers* could easily become a perennial network television classic like *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). I'm quite serious—I want

this film to become as ingrained a part of American Christmas culture as *A Christmas Carol* or *The Nutcracker Suite*.

Set in the fictitious New England boarding school of Barton Academy in the year 1970, the film follows a trio of lonely souls who find themselves trapped together at the school over winter break. The first, Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti), is a brilliant but curmudgeonly classics professor resented by both staff and students for his condescending demeanor and vicious academic standards. He's not a cruel man—at least not intentionally—he just never found much use in life for warmth or gentleness. Consider an early scene where he's surprised with a plate of holiday cookies by a coworker. He doesn't roll his eyes and snarl like Ebenezer Scrooge might at such unsolicited kindness, he instead seems genuinely confused as to how

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he should respond. In any case, as punishment for refusing to inflate the grades of an important donor's son, Hunham was placed on holiday duty to supervise the students who couldn't go home for Christmas break. The group of "holdovers" eventually dwindles to just one boy—Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa), an academically promising but emotionally troubled young man whose Christmas plans were unexpectedly canceled when his mother decided to spend the holiday season on a belated honeymoon with his new stepfather. And finally, there's Mary Lamb (Da'Vine Joy Randolph), the school's head cook struggling with the recent death of her son overseas fighting in Vietnam.

Trapped together in their wintry prison, the three bicker, fight, and, incredibly, come to care for one another. It happens slowly, gradually. Payne doesn't try to rush things along—there are no "Christmas miracles" or the kind of unexpected coincidences common to these kinds of stories that help tear their guards down around each other. Instead, Payne's approach is as measured and gradual as the snowfalls that blanket the New

England countryside. Some have criticized the movie as overlong and, indeed, over the course of the film's 133-minute runtime there are many stretches where not much seems to happen: we watch them share meals, visit dive bars, discuss their lives, hopes, and sorrows.

Take, for example, their trip to a faculty Christmas party. It climaxes with Mary getting drunk and having a nervous breakdown listening to her dead son's favorite jazz records in the living room, but notice how Payne gives equal attention to Hunham letting his guard down to chat with a female colleague and Tully finger-painting with the faculty's kids in the basement. Many screenwriters might have cut these moments and focused entirely on Mary's breakdown since it's the most relevant part of the scene for advancing "the plot." But Payne understands that they're just as essential, not just for the film's overall texture but because, well, they give us an excuse to spend more time with the characters themselves.

Watching *The Holdovers* feels like pulling on a warm blanket next to a roaring fire on a chilly winter day. It can be sad,

yes, as it doesn't shy away from topics of grief, loss, anger, and fear. One scene where we learn the fate of Tully's biological father is downright devastating. But it's the melancholy kind of sadness we associate with the end of the year and the turning of the seasons. After all, life has great sadness in it. But also like life, there is much joy, much love, much healing, and much hope in *The Holdovers*. It helps that it can also be disarmingly funny—Randolph's Mary might subtly emerge as the film's heart and soul, but Giamatti's Hunham is a superb comedic creation whose arrogant, self-absorbed bluster reminds one of Kelsey Grammer's Frasier Crane. (That both Hunham and Crane have similar emotional depths is testimony to both Giamatti's performance and David Hemingson's excellent screenplay.) And I haven't even mentioned the film's incredible period-accurate production design and soundtrack! *The Holdovers* is a wealth of riches, a true Christmas treat for those who might like a shot of something bittersweet in their eggnog. Make the time to see it. ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

The crisp morning air, the wreaths in the sanctuary, downtown Delray's 100 foot tree with its 217,980 lights and 18,000 ornaments, Atlantic Avenue street lights decorated in silver and red all remind me that the celebration of Christ's birth is approaching. Fast approaching.

Today as I think of putting up my own tree, buying and wrapping presents for family and friends, gathering the baking supplies I need for the dozens of cookies to be baked and shared, finding boxes and old newspaper for shipping packages to those I will not see this holiday season, and making appointments for the RSV and flu shots needed before holiday travel, I lose a little of my happy anticipation for the holiday. I admit to myself that the month ahead seems overwhelming.

Time for recentering. Time for a walk.

I head for the quiet neighborhood on the eastern shore of Lake Ida. This scenic area with its small parks and

quiet streets is one of my favorite decompression zones. Formerly part of the Everglades, the water here at one time stretched almost to Atlantic Avenue, periodically overflowing into that area of the city termed Frog Alley. Years ago a series of canals drained the land and created this lovely neighborhood.

I begin at Lake Ida East Park, home to the Delray Playhouse. Parking is plentiful here. I walk toward the paved path which follows the eastern shore of the lake. A large observation platform reaches out over the lake, and I pause here to view the opposite shoreline, where I spot an anhinga, wings spread to well over three feet as it dries off in the trees to my right. My mood begins to lighten. I again join the shaded path, following it to 9th Street where I head east for several blocks to Cornell Park at the corner of 9th Street and 4th Avenue. This small neighborhood park with its beautiful natural landscaping draws me in. As I walk its winding pathway, I realize the tension has left

my body and I stop to send up a prayer of thanks. Then quickly add a prayer for discernment. *God, please help me focus on those things that matter the most this season. Help me take the time to reflect on Jesus' birth. Time to celebrate not only family and friends, but Jesus himself. His selflessness, his love.*

Standing here, surrounded by Jesus' love, I remember that Jesus himself needed time alone with his Father. Time away from the crowds. Even time away from the disciples. *He often withdrew to lonely places and prayed* (Luke 5:16). How fortunate we are that here in South Florida, amidst the holiday uproar, you and I can still find quiet spaces like this park to walk and talk with our God.

Before returning to my car, I continue north on 4th Avenue, then turn left on 11th Street. Three blocks later, I am at Lake Ida again—this time at Lake View Park. A crowd of parents talk, laugh, and sip coffee while their children climb and slide on the playground equipment. I join them for a moment before walking over to the park's small dock to watch as a grinning man reels a large floppy fish into his small rocking boat.

Then, I retrace my footsteps to Lake Ida East Park. I take one last look at the shining peaceful lake that surrounds me. Take one last breath of the fresh, crisp air, blowing across the peninsula from one side of the lake to the other. And I smile. *Thank you, God, for sending me—for sending us all—your son, Jesus.* ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

During the pandemic, I created a list of 100 movies spanning 100 years, and I watched them all—my way of covering some cinematic blind spots. I chose ten per decade and watched, chronologically, as technologies evolved, and the world evolved too. I travelled through history. Watching in this way, I could really *feel* the invention of sound and the explosion of color. I watched as acting styles slowly became more natural, while camera movements became more sophisticated. And I watched the world grow old, navigating its various wars and trying to make sense of the aftermath. I watched changes in fashion, furniture, presidents.

I also watched a whole lot of racism.

Uncomfortable impressions. Actors wearing blackface. Odes to the confederacy. Some of the most well-regarded films get really uncomfortable at times. And this got me thinking about all sorts of things, many of which you probably don't need your pastor to speak

about. It got me thinking about the books we give our kids in schools, bona fide classics with some words you'd rather not hear your kids read aloud (*Huckleberry Finn*, I'm looking at you). It got me thinking about cancel culture, and how some content or voices really do deserve to be cancelled, while others may not. And it got me thinking about that ambiguous grey area in between.

But mostly, it got me thinking about canonization. The way certain art gets heralded, anointed, and the messy power dynamics at play. I was an English major in undergrad, which meant most of what I read from ages 18 to 22 was part of the literary canon, and with the notable exception of your James Baldwins and Jane Austens, just about everything I read was written by dead white men and canonized by the same group. When I graduated from college, all the books I'd read were relegated to a small section, just a couple shelves at the back of Barnes & Noble. I understood nothing of current literary trends, or the pace of modern writing, and I recognized very few of the names in

bold print in the front of the store.

I guess what I'm saying is canonization is messy. It's inherently flawed, by definition behind the times, and rarely representative of the larger culture. And so when I come across a classic with some really uncomfortable elements, I'm not sure what to do.

In her book *Accidental Saints*, pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber talks about saints in the church, canonization, and sin. She comes from a Christian tradition where the word Saint is prefixed to many names found in your Bible. So, it's not Paul, but Saint Paul, for example. These days, in the Catholic church, saints go through an official process of canonization, which you better believe is just as fraught as any other canonization, well-intentioned as it may be. It seems unlikely to me—given what we know about Jesus' heart, and his concern for the meek and the poor and the least of these—that the most famous believers are the only ones deserving of sainthood. For every saint officially canonized, I imagine

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Sunday Morning Worship Service

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

