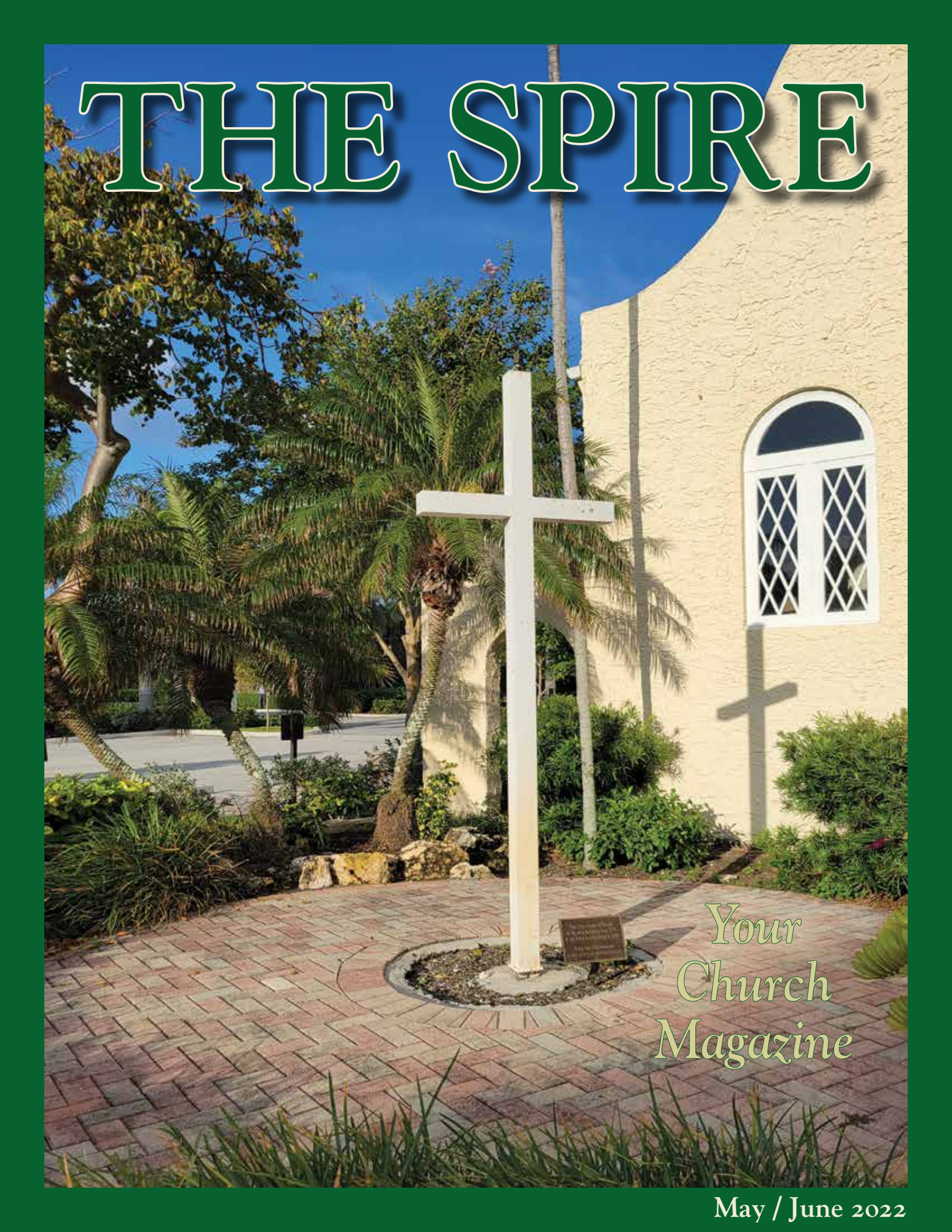


THE SPIRE

The background image is a photograph of a church exterior. A large, white, Latin cross stands on a circular brick-paved area. To the right, a portion of a light-colored stucco church building is visible, featuring a white-framed arched window with a diamond-patterned lattice. A palm tree and other tropical foliage are in the background under a clear blue sky. The title 'THE SPIRE' is at the top in green outlined letters. The subtitle 'Your Church Magazine' is in the lower right in a green script font. The date 'May / June 2022' is at the bottom right in white.

*Your
Church
Magazine*

May / June 2022



NURTURE FAITH

by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

NEVER TIL NOW

"These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ. But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ and be found in him."

Philippians 3:7-9a (Common English Bible)

Saint Augustine writes in his Confessions, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Restlessness is the dominant mood of *Never Til Now*, written by Matt Roy and Ashley Cooke and performed by Ashley Cooke; "I'm a walking definition of unsettled and restless. The needle in my compass points anywhere but home." These lyrics speak to a relatively constant way of living: movement from one place to another, never finding contentment, never finding "home." A bleak and disappointing existence settles in on the voice of the song, "I thought I'd always be alone." And several stanzas later, "Never saw myself with a white picket fence dug into the ground." Suddenly, the narrative shifts, "Never 'til now."

In this teaching from Philippians, Paul's world has been turned upside down. Observance to the law of God had been used as the metric for separating the "clean" and the "unclean" – that is, those who were worthy in God's sight and those who were not. Suddenly, Jesus walks into Paul's life and the cross topples that religious distinction. Every element, every conviction of Paul's former life has been called into question. Paul falls for Jesus; Paul falls hard, and life simply will never be the same again. Former markers of status in Paul's life and ministry are now empty – are "as sewer trash." These prior riches have paled in comparison to Jesus. One thing matters to Paul, "that I might gain Christ and be found in him."

Never Til Now captures the discouragement of a restless heart, a heart that seeks home but never finds it, and celebrates the possibility of arriving at a place of rest brought by the love of another, "Out of all the prayers I've prayed. You're Heaven's answer." The voice of the song initially denies unhappiness, "I never wanted to tap my brakes. I never wanted to settle down." Yet, as though there is a Freudian slip, admits traveling through "hell" until that someone special "walked into that bar" and they danced until closing time. No longer the same person who walked into the bar alone, the voice of the song has become something new because of experiencing something new in another.

This is what Paul wants us to hear in Philippians, that when our restless hearts are nearly consumed in the flames of anguish, an encounter with Jesus becomes Heaven's answer to our deepest longings. Each of us knows people who struggle through life without a deeply satisfying relationship with Jesus. Perhaps we are that person. They deny anything is missing in their life. They make an effort to convince those around them that they don't need a church, don't need to read the Bible, don't need to cultivate a prayer life. Nonetheless, secretly, their hearts remain restless. Paul's life never lacked anything, he claimed, before Christ. The voice of Ashley Cooke's song never thought about a different life. Then a great love walked into their lives. That is when "never" became, "Never 'til now." ●

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Associate Pastor

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Organist / Director of Music

Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, B.M., M.A.
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THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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Printers Choice

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.

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Food for the Needy from Steve and Holly Anderson, in loving memory of Mary Jane Hayes; from David and Nancy Bayless, in loving memory of loved ones; and from Cornella Wilder, in loving memory of loved ones.

Lilies from Steve and Holly Anderson, in loving memory of Phyllis Anderson; and from John and Dee Hopkins, in loving memory of loved ones.

Memorial Garden Fund from Joyce Coltman Sterrett, in loving memory of John and Jane Coltman.

One Great Hour of Sharing from David and Lucille Fannin, in loving memory of their son, Christopher.

Remembrance Fund from Tom and Connie Cigarran, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Susan Cowden, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Len and Leslie Cox, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Mr. and Mrs. James K. Dobbs, III, in loving memory of June Parrish; from David Frey, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Mr. and Mrs. Martin Galt, III, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Barbara Johnston, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Randy Kemper, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Samuel Kinkead, Jr., in loving memory of June Parrish; from Jean Magrella, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Pope and Betty Ann McLean, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Anna Nichols, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Laura Parrish, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Mrs. W. F. Souder, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Edward and Catherine Stopher, in loving memory of June Parrish; from Barbara Whitaker, in loving memory of June Parrish; and from Andrew Melissinos, in loving memory of his grandparents, William F. and Margaret Mitchell. ●

Giving Our Gifts

WHY WEAR RED FOR PENTECOST?

For Christians, Pentecost is a holiday on which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early followers of Jesus. From historical and spiritual points of view, Pentecost is the day on which the church was started, and therefore considered the church's birthday.

Five colors are used to differentiate liturgical seasons: Purple, White, Black, Red, and Green. Red symbolizes the joy and power of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore used on Pentecost since the Spirit brings the church into existence and enlivens it.

Join us on Sunday, June 5th as we celebrate the church's birthday. We encourage you to wear red that morning, whether worshiping in person or online. ●

*Joy
and
Power
of the
Holy Spirit*

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES



CHOOO CHOOO!! Vacation Bible School **Rocky Railway: Jesus' Power Pull Us Through** is rolling from June 13th to 17th! We are presently looking for Railway workers to make sure our train successfully reaches the Station. Positions available are: Preschool Teacher in the Little Kids Depot; Crew leaders for all ages; and Station helpers. Kathy Baldwin and Grace Hood are the Co-Conductors. Birgit Djupedal Fioravante will be leading the crews in music and movement. The leadership team invites you to prayerfully consider how you can make this a wonderful experience for our church and the community. Registration forms can be found online. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com). ●



FIRST FAMILY AND REFUGE JOINT EVENT

On May 15 the children,
youth and young adults
are invited
to get wet!



MISSION OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAM

Pajama and Book Drive a Huge Success!

During the month of March, we held a pajama and book drive specifically to benefit the Early Learning Program at Achievement Centers for Children & Families here in Delray Beach. The generous spirit of the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church was truly evident as pajamas and books came in each week. Instead of giving each child in the program one pair of pajamas and one book, we were able to provide two books and two pairs of pajamas to each child in the program, as well as 305 extra books! Kerry Filippone, Community Impact Manager from Achievement Centers, was overwhelmed with the generosity of our congregation when she arrived to pick up the donations. She shared that the children would receive our gifts on Thursday, April 14th, just in time for Easter!



In addition to the 535 books and 230 pairs of pajamas given to Achievement Centers, we were able to donate 101 pairs of pajamas to Pajama Program, Palm Beach County Chapter, to be distributed to other children in our community. 135 of the books received were a gift from the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County.

It was so exciting to have the children of our church involved in this project in several ways! The children wore their pajamas to church one Sunday to remind us to shop for pajamas and books, and they shared some of their favorite books with us to give church members ideas for what books they could buy. One of the children, Nilla Febriani, made beautiful origami heart bookmarks that were inserted in some of the books. During Sunday School, the children had the opportunity to select two books and two pairs of pajamas for individual children at Achievement Centers, which were then banded together and tagged, so that each child could receive a special gift. They were enthusiastic about choosing items for other children. We then gathered around the books and pajamas they had selected for a special prayer of blessing given by Grace Hood.



We would like to thank everyone for your generosity and support of this project. We would like to give a special thank you to all the children, Grace Hood, the pastoral staff, and church staff who assisted in a variety of ways to help make this project happen. May we all continue to live out our faith and share it with the next generation.

"But you must continue with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you. Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14, 15) ●



SESSION REPORT

During the months of February and March, the Session received new members and approved baptisms. They also approved the Mission Outreach Ministry Team's request to conduct a Pajama and Book drive in March and designate the One Great Hour of Sharing offering to the new mental health program at the Achievement Centers for Children & Families teen summer camp. In early February, due to the decline in the Covid positivity rate in Palm Beach County, the Session lifted the mandatory mask mandate. The Session also approved serving food at church events, barring any change in the Covid situation. ●

by Nancy Fine

Business Administrator

SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

As in years past, we transition to one Sunday morning worship service at 10 a.m. on the first Sunday of May. This summer schedule runs through the end of October.

Several years ago, a member commented to me that they loved that we "split the difference between the two worship services" that we normally have 'in season'. They said that by holding one worship service, it "allowed the 9 o'clockers and the 11 o'clockers a chance to meet and bond." I always remember that statement when I witness the joy in the faces of our congregants the first time they see each other during our summer worship schedule.

If you are not comfortable worshipping in person, are returning to your northern residence, or are traveling this summer, remember that you can still join us in worship via our online services. They are available to stream live on the church website, or may be watched at any other time convenient for you for the next several months. ●

NEW MEMBERS

Beverly Archer
Carlton Archer
Brie Jones
Robert Jones
Chandler McGilvray
Sandy McGilvray
Tyler McGilvray
Edward Nabhan
Sandra Nabhan
Kay Payne
Ann Pieringer
Gary Pieringer
Pam Popaca



ETERNAL LIVES

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

Harriet Secrest – February 18, 2022

Natalie Freeman – March 20, 2022

Lou Cappiello – April 20, 2022

Noel Copen – April 23, 2022

MEET FERNANDO GONZÁLEZ

Cuban-born Fernando González is truly an American success story that is still being written. One of First Presbyterian's professional singers for nearly seven years, first as a substitute and then as a permanent member of the choir, his journey so far has been rich and interesting.

Fernando was born in Holguín, Cuba to a musical family. His father, Gerardo González, was a professional singer; going back a generation, a composer and a musicologist fill his family tree, as well as many accomplished amateurs. Having a home filled with music allowed Fernando's natural talent to develop early. He received his first professional engagement at fifteen in the chorus of the opera company in his hometown, where he stayed for six years singing zarzuela (a Spanish lyric-dramatic genre that alternates between spoken and sung scenes) and popular operas. When Fernando was sixteen, his father died unexpectedly, which left Fernando to work as the sole breadwinner for his mother, Isabel, and younger brother, Gerardo. At this difficult time, he also resorted to selling things on the black market, from bread and coffee to pencils, risking arrest to support his family.

In his early twenties, Fernando began formal vocal studies at the university in Havana. There, his professional world began to expand. He toured internationally in Italy, Spain, Venezuela, and Mexico. It was during a tour with a troupe from Cuba in Mexico that Fernando took the chance, grabbed his passport, and vanished. He arrived in Miami on Thanksgiving Day in 2006 to begin his new life. He took whatever work he could find—construction, mechanic, carpentry—working several jobs and long hours. After three years, he was able to save enough to bring his wife and later his brother to join him.



Hoping to become a professional singer again, in 2010 Fernando auditioned for the chorus of Florida Grand Opera, and joined the chorus as a permanent member the same year. He was also called to fill in for Palm Beach Opera on several productions. As word got out about the wonderful new baritone in South Florida, he began to get more and more work as a singer.

Nearly five years ago, Fernando was asked to join a new pop-opera group, “The Latin Divos”, as one of the three featured performers, along with tenor Ernesto Cabrera and founder Will Corujo. Besides the bump in the road called Covid, The Latin Divos has been gaining steam and has toured in Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean as well as the USA, bringing a new twist to the classical crossover genre and gaining world-wide recognition for their exciting concerts which feature the group’s extraordinary vocal and musical skills. TV and radio engagements have been helping build the brand, and one of their prompters rightly claims “Bocelli has some serious competition...”

Fernando has grown very fond of his family at First Presbyterian Church and was both surprised and touched when the church kept the professional singers on staff during the pandemic. “I thought we might be sent home without pay like most churches, or at least our numbers reduced. But I was gratefully surprised to be kept on and even to receive some extra as well as Publix gift cards to help us through. During this time, my only relief of stress and depression was coming to church to be with my church family and spend a couple hours doing music with the best church choir in South Florida.”

Fernando and his wife Hebe have been together twenty-two years, since they were teenagers. They live in Pembroke Pines and have two sons, Franco (age 7) and Fabio (age 3). Hebe is a musician as well—a classical guitarist—and owns and operates a music school. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



The following is from Confronting Life's Challenges: Sermons on the Struggles We Face which features sermons by Doug Hood, Greg Rapier, and John "Skip" Randolph.

WHEN YOU FEEL DOUBT

John 20:24-31

Listen for God's Word:

*"Thomas responded to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!'
Jesus replied, 'Do you believe because you see me?
Happy are those who don't see and yet believe.'"*

John 20:28, 29 (Common English Bible)

You know how explaining a joke makes it less funny? You know how taking apart a joke and analyzing what makes it work seems to render lifeless whatever charm the joke had to begin with? Well, friends, I'm about to ruin a joke for you. The good news is that it's not a particularly good joke.

So, how do you keep a Baptist from drinking all your beer on a fishing trip? Invite two of them.

Now I know plenty of Christians, Baptists, Presbyterians, all varieties, good people who do not drink, many who have never even had a sip of alcohol. I am not one of them, but they absolutely exist. Anyway, the general gist of the joke, and this is where I make an unfunny joke even un-funnier, is that we religious types often do in private what we'd never



admit to doing in public. Put one Baptist on a boat, and again, we're not picking on Baptists, and he'll drink with you. Put two on a boat, and neither one will drink.

Because there's just certain things we're not supposed to do, right? There are certain things we as people of faith sometimes feel bad about admitting, even if at times many of us, or even most of us, find ourselves doing it.

Doubt is kind of like that, isn't it? One of those things most of us have wrestled with, but few of us dare to name. How do you ensure that a Christian won't express any doubt? Invite two of them. Doubt is something we as Christians aren't supposed to do, something we don't like to admit that we do, and something we certainly don't want to reveal about ourselves for fear of looking bad. The truth is, just about everybody doubts:

Christians doubt their Christianity, atheists doubt their atheism, even agnostics, the best doubters of them all, doubt their agnosticism. Because faith, and with atheism and agnosticism, faith in nothing is faith in something, because faith and doubt are as inseparable. They're like yes and no, as heads and tails, one cannot exist without the other.

The wildly popular Netflix series *Stranger Things* is an eighties throwback sci-fi show akin to the type of movies Spielberg used to make – movies like *ET*, *Super 8*, and *The Goonies*, what I affectionately refer to as the “Kids on Bikes” genre. In each one of these movies, kids discover something bigger than them. It inevitably falls upon the kids' shoulders to go out on their bikes, undertake adventures, and restore balance to the world.

In *Stranger Things*, the kids discover something non-human has started sucking people into a realm known as the upside down. The upside down is exactly like our world, it's tethered to our world, except everything's the opposite. To describe the upside-down in the show, the kids pull out a game board, and they show how one side is decorated colorfully with little squares and movement spaces for the game, but if you were to flip that board over, you're left with nothing but black space. It's the same board, but the liveliness of the board has disappeared. The game as you know it has vanished and its shadow side is revealed. That's the upside-down.



It's the same board, the two sides are tethered together, but the two faces couldn't be more different. Where there was light, there is darkness. Where there was once good, there is evil. Where there was once joy, there is sorrow. Where there was once something there is nothing. When people from their town begin getting sucked into the upside down, it's up to the kids on bikes to pull them out.

Doubt is the upside-down of faith. It's faith's shadow side, and it's inextricably bound to faith. One side's light, the other's dark; one's full of joy, the other full of sorrow; one's hopeful, and the other is hopeless. We all, each one of us, slip between these two states of being at one point or another. It's part of the game we play. The theologian Paul Tillich describes this relationship, saying, “Doubt isn't the opposite of faith, it's an element of it.” They're inseparable.

To a certain level, doubt is normal. Those questions you ask yourself at night, or those questions you're too afraid to ask yourself at night, they're normal. They're part of the faith. Let's go ahead and admit to one another that there are times where our faith falters. We can admit that this isn't a Baptist-boat situation. Let's be upfront about our doubts, because at one point or another you and I have both doubted. But also at one point or another, something drew you back, here, to Jesus Christ, to the Church, something bigger and brighter and more life-giving than doubt.

Doubts will come. Doubts have come. Some of you I imagine may be doubting Jesus right now. Some of you may have doubted Jesus for a long while now.

The good news is we have for you today two passages of Scripture that address this

fundamental question of what do you do when you feel yourself begin to doubt. In today's Scripture reading from John, Jesus has appeared to the other disciples, but not to Thomas. The disciples tell Thomas what they have witnessed, and Thomas doesn't believe. He expresses his doubts and is henceforth and forever known as Doubting Thomas. No wonder we don't want to admit when we have doubts. Who wants to be called Doubting Greg or Doubting Doug?

So Thomas expresses his doubts, excuse me, Doubting Thomas expresses his doubts. He says, "Unless I see the scars in his hands and the hole in his side, I won't believe." That's the end of the scene. That's it.

If you read your Bible too quickly, you'll conflate what happens next as part of this scene, but that's not how it went. We know Thomas expresses doubt, and we know Jesus shows him the scars. We know Thomas is moved to belief. But, between those two passages, between the doubt and the scars, between disbelief and belief, eight days pass. Eight days of doubt. Eight days of darkness.

What is often read as one scene is actually two distinct scenes separated by eight dark days. In this first scene, Jesus is nowhere to be found, is he? It's just the disciples. The disciples tell Thomas about Jesus. Thomas tells the disciples he doesn't believe about Jesus. That's it, that's the end of the conversation.

It ends in Thomas doubting, and with Jesus nowhere to be found.

Because we're now comfortable admitting when we doubt, we're also comfortable admitting that we've felt this way at one point or another, right? To feel like Jesus is nowhere to be found. You've had the thoughts. What if this isn't true? What if I've got it all wrong? What proof do I have that Jesus is risen? Where have I really seen Jesus? When we doubt, it often feels like Jesus is nowhere to be found.

When you feel distant from Jesus, when you feel Jesus is nowhere to be found, when you feel your faith fading away and doubt creeping in, remember what happens next in the story: The disciples tell Thomas about Jesus, Thomas tells the disciples he doesn't believe, end of scene. Eight days pass. Thomas is left doubting, and we are left doubting too.

Then Jesus comes bursting in. The doors are locked, but Jesus doesn't care about locked doors. He comes in anyway, greets the disciples, and then immediately turns his attention to Thomas. Poor, Doubting Thomas. He turns his attention to Thomas, and he says, "Okay, I'll show you. I'll show you my scars, but in order for you to see them and in order for you to feel them, I need you to take me by the hand. Place your fingers here."

Thomas does as instructed, Doubting Thomas trusts in Jesus

enough; Doubting Thomas has faith enough to take Jesus by the hand. Isn't that ironic, Doubting Thomas has faith in Jesus, and when he takes Jesus by the hand, he feels the scars and realizes whose hand it is he holds.

Friends, the risen Lord Jesus Christ went after Thomas. He burst in through a locked door, and he went after Thomas. He came to Thomas in all his disbelief, he reached out his arm, he asked Thomas to take him by the hand, and he invited Thomas to come and see; see what he had done.

The same is true for each one of us. When you doubt, you'd better believe the risen Lord would come after you, not with fire and brimstone, but with open palms and wounded hands. The risen Lord will come after you and show you his scars. He will show you his hands. And if you have the faith to take Jesus by the hand, that's it, just that much faith, if you have the same amount of faith as Doubting Thomas, you too will find yourself saying the words of Thomas in the Scripture, "my Lord and my God."

Today's other Scripture can be found at the end of Matthew's Gospel. The Scripture is known as the great commission, Jesus' final words to his followers, words of instruction and words of encouragement: Go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and remember I am with you until the end of the age. Most of the time when we hear this

passage, we think about what it is Jesus calls us to do, we think about the essence of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and rightfully so, that's what the passage is about.

What strikes me currently is the stuff around Jesus' words, the very beginning and the very end of this section. The Scripture says, "When the disciples saw Jesus they worshipped him, but some doubted." That's the line we get before Jesus' big speech, but some doubted.

What does Jesus do with the doubters? Well, the exact same thing he does with the rest of his disciples. He appears to them. He proclaims to them good news. He calls them

to participate with him in making disciples of all nations. Friends, Jesus appears to the doubters, loves the doubters, speaks to the doubters, and equips the doubters. Jesus calls the doubters to work alongside the rest of his disciples: therefore, Jesus calls his disciples to work alongside the doubters. Whether you are a believer or a doubter or a sometimes-believer, or a sometimes-doubter, Jesus will appear to you, care for you, and call you to work together with others for something bigger than yourself. That's the promise Jesus makes here.

That's the beginning of this passage: but some doubted. I told you I'm also interested in the end, Jesus' final words to his disciples.

Jesus' final words to his believers, to his non-believers, to his not-yet believers, to his almost believers, to his used-to-be believers, and to his maybe-someday believers. Jesus' final words. Here they are, the ending of Matthew's Gospel: "And remember I am with you until the end of the age."

I am with you until the end of the age. I am with you, loyal and faithful Christian. I am with you, person who doubts. I am with you, loyal and faithful Christian who sometimes doubts. I am with you when the world is right-side up, and I am with you when you feel stuck in the upside-down. I am with you. See my scars. Take my hand. And, remember, I am with you until the end of the age. *Amen.* ●



by **Connie Timmons**

HOLLY HOUSE

“What is Holly House?” a friend asked me as I shared my activities in my new home. That’s not an easy question to answer. To some, it’s the building next to the church where the ladies make things to sell for the benefit of the church. For others, it’s where they have the Christmas Bazaar or the Step-Above Rummage Sale. However, it is so much more.

For a newcomer, Holly House is a place to meet people with common interests who want to make a difference. It’s a place to try something new in a safe environment. It’s an encouraging place—join us, help us, you can do this! It’s also a healing place. As we sew, make jewelry, design floral arrangements, create items from shells, write messages to the military, and so much more, we minister to one another— “How was your move?”; “When will you get your test results?”; “Sorry for your loss.”; “Are you feeling better?”

Holly House has helped me meet people, given me an opportunity to serve, and encouraged me and challenged me to try new things. Holly House has helped answer my daily prayer, “Dear Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be and help me make a difference. *Amen.*” ●

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

by **Maria Graham**

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY

The next two studies of the Monday Morning Women’s Bible Study will continue with two Lenten themes: selflessness and forgiveness.

The first study is Listen, Love, Repeat: Other-Centered Living in a Self-Centered World by Karen Ehman. Just as Jesus did not come to seek glory for himself, but to humbly serve others, this video study helps us discover the life-changing joy that comes from putting others first. It provides encouragement and practical ways to reach out to others with both planned and random acts of kindness. Listen, Love, Repeat will continue through May 30, 2022.

On June 6, 2022, we will begin the second study, Forgiving What You Can’t Forget by Lysa Terkeurst. God forgave his wayward people and offered them a second chance through Jesus’ sacrifice, and commands us to forgive each other. But after hurt upon hurt, when your heart has been completely shattered, forgiveness can feel unrealistic. In this video study we will explore practical ways to let go of our bound-up resentment and finally heal.

We meet at 10 a.m. on Monday mornings via Zoom. We would love to have you join us. Contact Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com) to receive a Zoom invitation. ●

FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Dykstra Family

The Dykstra family has been worshipping at First Presbyterian since 2001. The family was a bit smaller then. Dan, Kim, and Taylor, who was 4 years old, moved from Gurnee, IL (a suburb of Chicago) to be closer to Kim's family in Florida. They immediately fell in love with the welcoming atmosphere at First Presbyterian with its caring Senior Pastor, Dr. Ted Bush, and its inspiring music program.

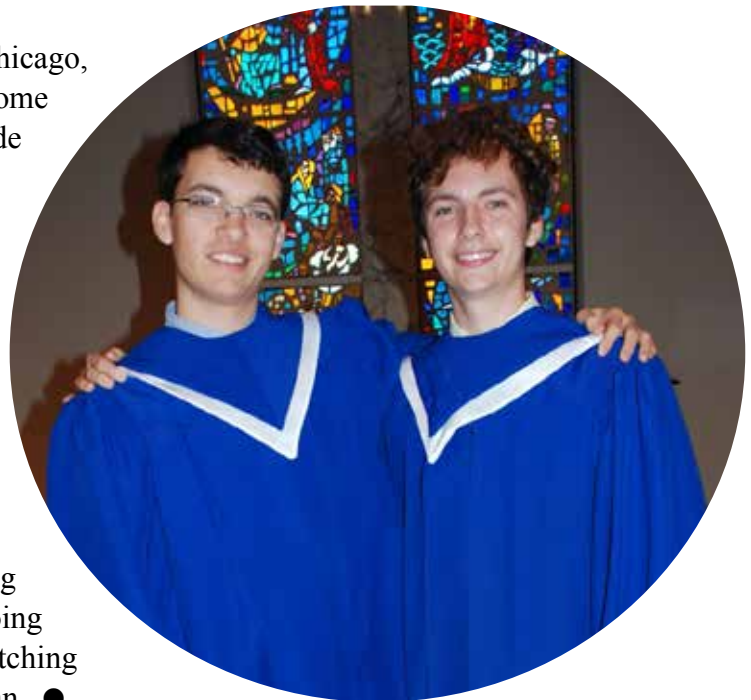
In 2002 Dr. Bush baptized a six-day-old addition to the Dykstra family, Devin. Devin is now a 20-year-old sophomore Computer Science major at the University of Florida. He is delighted to have his first engineering internship this summer in Boynton Beach. At UF, Devin is active in several competitive robotics teams including BattleBots and Vex, and serves as the sensors and control lead programmer for GatorLoop. When Devin graduated from Suncoast Community High School in May 2020, he was grateful to be a recipient of the Deacons' Scholarship. Devin kept attending Youth Group held over Zoom after graduation in an advisory capacity. Some of Devin's favorite memories of growing up in the First Presbyterian Church family include: celebrating his fifth birthday at the Circle F Dude Ranch annual fellowship trip; trips to Montreat Youth Conference and Universal Studios Rock the Universe with the Youth Group; and singing in the children and adult choirs. Over the years, Jim Poch and Don Cannorozzi have both given Devin many opportunities to perform in worship, including the honor of Christmas Eve and Easter solos or duets with his younger brother, Blake.

Blake was born in 2003 and also baptized by Dr. Bush. Blake followed much the same path as Devin of growing up joyfully singing in the children and adult choirs, children's pageants, and special performances at First Presbyterian. In addition to worship services, he has sung at diverse church events including: the Deacon's Talent Show; the Youth Group Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser; the *Amahl and the Night Visitors* Opera, playing the role of Amahl; and *The Grinch who Stole Christmas*, as the Grinch. He is graduating in May from Suncoast Community High School and is awaiting college decisions.

Taylor is now 26 years old and lives in a suburb of Chicago, IL. She works in marketing for a local jewelry company. Some of Taylor's favorite memories of First Presbyterian include singing in the Children's Choir, Youth Group "lock ins" in the former Youth House, delivering the sermon on Youth Sunday, participating in three years of liturgical dance performances during worship, Night of Joy at Disney, Montreat, and the Dude Ranch.

Dan is a sales manager for a medical supply company. He has served as a Deacon and has been a member of the Westminster Ringers bell and the choir.

Kim is a full-time mom. She has enjoyed teaching Sunday School, volunteering at Vacation Bible School, going on the multi-generation mission trip to Key West, and watching her family grow in the light of love that is First Presbyterian. ●



by Nathanael Hood



THE BATMAN

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University

"Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord."

Romans 12:17-19 (Common English Bible)

Not including early Hollywood serials, animated films, and guest appearances in ensemble crossover movies, Matt Reeves' *The Batman* is, incredibly, the ninth movie to feature DC Comics' caped crusader. Few characters have survived for so long through so many permutations, from candy-coated camp curio in the Sixties to abrasive post-9/11 avenger in the Aughts. Reeves had his work cut out for him—how can you make an original take on a character that has been pushed, pulled, stretched, and distorted in every way imaginable? His answer wasn't to attempt anything new with the Batman character itself. Instead, Reeves sought to interrogate the very purpose of the character, poking and prodding at the inherent moral murkiness of a billionaire who devotes his life to exacting brutal extrajudicial violence on poor and desperate criminals. Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy occasionally

flirted with these ideas, but it's here in *The Batman* where they take center stage.

The film begins two years into Bruce Wayne's (Robert Pattinson) reign as Batman, and in that short time he has already become a fearsome figure of legend among Gotham City's underworld. In an astonishing opening sequence, we see how criminals all over the city are more cowed by the sight of the Bat-Signal than any number of Gotham's police officers. But Wayne is privately despondent—for every criminal he puts away, it seems two more take their place. In these two years, Gotham has somehow become even more violent and dangerous, best exemplified by the sudden appearance of a serial killer named the Riddler (Paul Dano) who begins his terrible reign by murdering the mayor. One by one the Riddler picks apart Gotham's elite, kidnapping high-

ranking government officials and livestreaming their murders. At each crime scene he leaves cryptic clues detailing his victims' place in a web of corruption reaching into every corner of Gotham. Who is the Riddler? How does he know so much about Gotham's corruption? And why leave riddles and puzzles instead of sending his evidence straight to the press?

These are questions that haunt Batman as he seeks to stop the Riddler's reign of terror, finding aid along the way by Lieutenant James Gordon (Jeffrey Wright), the one clean cop in Gotham, and Selina Kyle, nightclub waitress and infamous cat burglar Catwoman with a very personal vendetta against the city's criminal underground. Though their means vary, all three are desperate for justice. But as they dive deeper into the city's labyrinthine corruption, it becomes apparent that the Riddler considers himself

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one of their number. Unlike previous iterations of the Riddler as a criminal madman who leaves riddles to prove his intellectual superiority, Dano's Riddler wants to clean Gotham of crime. How, then, is he any different from Batman, the film asks? Does the fact that the Riddler kills and Batman doesn't make one more righteous than the other if they're both working outside the law? And even more insidiously, is the Riddler helping Gotham more by preying on the kingpins at the top instead of on the desperate pawns at the bottom like Batman?

Such questions have biblical precedence, as issues of good and evil, of justice delayed and denied despite the power of an all-loving, all-knowing God can be found throughout scripture. They're so prevalent, in fact, that they form an entire branch of theology known as "theodicy." Such questions are particularly prevalent in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament where figures like King David, King Solomon, and Job rage against the unjust suffering of the righteous. But one of the most famous verses addressing this issue can be found in the twelfth chapter of Romans where the Apostle Paul quotes the Book of Deuteronomy to remind readers that revenge and justice ultimately belong to God. Famously translated in the King James Version as "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the

Lord," the passage isn't a macabre warning about the destructiveness of a wrathful God. Instead, it's a key to free ourselves from the shackles of resentment and hatred. As Christians, we are supposed to fight for justice wherever we see suffering, but vengeance is the Lord's because only God can repay the wicked without being corrupted. Or, to put it another way, only God can punish evil without becoming the Riddler.

There are many reasons to recommend *The Batman*. Its careful pacing and expressionist cinematography don't just make it the most thrilling Batman film since *The Dark Knight* (2008), it's a veritable breath of fresh air in an industry glutted with visually banal superhero films with plots that feel written by committee. There are sequences here that are seared into my brain: the Batmobile emerging from a wall of fire, pitch-black hallways illuminated by gunfire, Batman leading a cobweb of humanity to safety through chest-high waters. Is it too long at nearly three hours? Almost certainly. But unlike many modern bloated blockbusters, *The Batman* earns every minute of its length. And even more importantly, unlike many of its peers, *The Batman* is a superhero film with something crucially important to say. ●



by Maryann Rana

Prayer Ministry Team

I AM PRAYING FOR YOU

“I am praying for you...” These words bring a sense of reassurance, strength, and faith to the one on the receiving end. As the Prayer Ministry Team, we welcome every opportunity to pray for others, through prayer requests as well as by asking those in need, “What can I do for you?” We can feel the warm sense of action of God’s love bringing peace and giving hope to those we hold in prayer.

In faith we go to Christ with the one with whom we are praying for. He is waiting for us to come to him with those in need. “Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn’t ended; certainly God’s compassion isn’t through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22, 23)

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 Carolyn Kettle

Welcome Team

WELCOMING MINISTRY

As a newborn breaks out of its shell, we all have that feeling as we recover from the Covid restrictions the past months. We salute our church staff, who faithfully ministered to the congregation in person and via livestream, and applaud those members and visitors whose presence each Sunday in the pews inspired each other and the church staff.

In May 2021 (in the middle of Covid!), the new ministry of the Welcome Team began. This small group committed to each serve at least once a month, greeting and ushering. The prayers of the Prayer Team and others have produced a growing ministry, continuing as we feel more comfortable gathering together in fellowship. We give thanks to the staff for their vision of this program!

Our ever-faithful Facilities Maintenance Manager, Aaron Strippel, commented recently: “It is so nice to see the congregation back – and hugging each other!” It is these meaningful gestures that are an important part of our Church.

As Coordinator for the Welcome Team, I would like to invite you to become a part of this group of hospitality. And, just as importantly, I hope you will thank all those who have committed to be a warm and welcoming presence on Sunday mornings, and remember their ministry in your prayers. For more information, please contact Carolyn Kettle (561-504-9550 or carolynskettle@gmail.com). ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

It's the most wonderful time of the year. No, not Christmas. Not even late summer, when the kids return to school. It's Lent, with its lead up to Easter—my favorite holiday. Less hectic and commercialized than Christmas, Easter has always been a time of joyous yet relatively quiet celebration.

What better walk to take during this season of Lent than an exploration of the town of Celebration? Bear with me. I know it's not South Florida, but it is only a 2 ½ hour trip north to this lovely, peaceful small town in Central Florida. Founded as a planned community to support Walt Disney World, the town boasts several miles of boardwalks and off-road paths through conservation areas, which connect quiet compact neighborhoods with wide sidewalks and little traffic.

Parking in the center of downtown, a friend and I walk north to join the boardwalk just beyond the

Bohemian Hotel Celebration. Cabbage palms, cypress, and, yes, even maple trees rise on both sides of us. In a few minutes, the boardwalk opens to a wide concrete path along a small lake. To our right, a small alligator glides through the water. Ahead, another boardwalk winds its way through an area of marsh and scrubland. A mile or so later, we enter a quiet tree-lined neighborhood. Round trip, this journey is seven miles. Seven miles allows time not only for conversation, but also for reflection.

The past three months have been difficult ones, with several surgeries and illnesses in my family. In this quiet space, with blue herons sitting at the edge of the pond ahead, it seems natural to talk with God about my anxieties and concerns. God in the person of Jesus Christ feels especially close. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." (John 3:16)—gave him not just to the world in general, but to you and me personally.

Mrs. Lehman, my kindergarten Sunday School teacher, taught me that. Just as she taught me to sing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. Today, much as on countless other days, I am comforted as I unburden myself to my friend, Jesus.

It may seem simplistic, but from the age of five, when I graduated from Mrs. Lehman's Sunday School class, I have had the firm belief that Jesus always walked beside me. His help was there for the asking and he loved me—regardless of how I behaved. Certainly, I have had others support and strengthen my faith. However, if you ask me even today who has had the most profound effect on my faith, my mind always turns immediately to Mrs. Lehman and the gift she gave me and the others in her Sunday School class.

Are there ways that you, like Mrs. Lehman, can share your own walk with God with the children in your life? Ways that you can help them learn the love of God through Jesus Christ? Help them realize that they are never alone? That Jesus is there beside them—there to share in their joys as well as their troubles? To help them know that they are loved—no matter what.

Come explore the town of Celebration as you rejoice in the risen Lord in the days ahead. After you do, don't forget to take time to share your own walk with God with the little ones around you. You could be sowing the seeds of a life-long faith. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

I used to attend church in flip-flops. The church didn't mind—this was California after all. The congregation was probably just happy to have another teenager willingly attend worship, whatever he was wearing, and for me, that meant flip-flops. I wasn't the only one, either. Of the kids in youth group who attended church, I'd say about half of us wore flip-flops and shorts, and some of the adults did too.

Back in 2015, Lissette and I got married and drove across the country to Princeton, New Jersey where I would attend seminary for the next three years. A few days after arriving, I began a summer language course learning ancient Greek. Summers in California were always hot, but the sticky humidity here in the East was new to me. This was textbook flip-flops weather.

So I went to church. I dressed up—by California definition—pairing my shorts and sandals with a nice button-up shirt with sleeves I could roll up when it got too hot. Lissette was effortlessly

beautiful in a nice summer dress. The greeter at the front door welcomed Lissette, then paused just a beat before shaking my hand, the gold cufflinks sticking out from his seersucker suit.

We had trouble finding parking, so the service was already underway when we walked in, and this was a flagship church of the denomination, and the service was absolutely packed, so we had to walk past rows and rows of immaculately dressed Princetonians before finding a pew with enough room for us to squeeze in. I was so out of place—forget flip-flops, I was the only one in shorts!

As the service went on, I felt the weight of the congregation's eyes on me. Silently judging me. The visitor. The fraud. We made it through the service intact, and when it ended, Lissette wanted to hang around and meet people, maybe find someone else from the seminary, but I was looking for a quick escape. If I could just cross the threshold of the church doors, I'd suddenly blend in a whole lot better. I held her

hand and tugged gently, and she was sweet enough to follow, and just as we were about to leave the Narthex, someone stopped us. I recognized his cufflinks instantly.

I half-expected the greeter to lecture me on church etiquette or to hand me a visitor's manual with a not-so-subtle hint about church dress. Instead, he asked me my name. I told him. Shook his hand. He smiled back at both of us. Talked some more. And he said, "Greg, Lissette, I am so happy that you are here."

* * *

Friends, Youth Sunday is on May 15th. Our youth will be leading the service, and they have also chosen a theme for the service. That theme is *acceptance*. We ask that you come as you are. And we will be so, so happy to see you. ●

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Sunday Morning Worship Service

10 a.m.

