December 3, 2017

First Sunday of Advent

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Where Are You, God?

How do we know when God is with us? It would be nice to have a glow stick that pulsed more brightly the closer God was, or let us know when prayers were being listened to, and, best of all, a return text that said, “Got it. Help is on the way!” But that isn’t how it works. And, as much we want prayers to be a request for compassionate favors, they are not. Every person who is prayed for doesn’t recover from cancer and everything lost is not always found. So, how do we know that God is present, that Holy possibility is genuine and we’re not alone on this journey of breath and body and consciousness?

Psalm 80 is concerned with ancient Israel and may have been written when Jerusalem was under siege by Babylon. It reflects a nation feeling abandoned. What they want is a little victory. Because, after all, if God is on our side, they would say, wouldn’t we be winning? Is “winning” the box to tick off when ascertaining the presence of God? Maybe not.

Peace United Church of Christ in Duluth, Minnesota, has this quote on their website:

*“A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.”* Dietrich Bonhoeffer

For the people of Peace UCC, prayer has something to do with building shared bonds and nurturing spiritual growth among their congregants as they develop small groups and shared ministries. It opens relationships and transforms them.

Our world could use a little opening up and transforming. If change begins with us then how we pray is a good place to start. Prayer is at work when it changes us. Advent is the season to expect God’s presence and look forward to the birth of something new and long-awaited. Perhaps we could pray for our own transformation. Pray that your own heart is opened to more compassion and let that desire for more love and more understanding fill your days as we anticipate together the Christmas sign—a baby born in the heart of a world longing for release from fear and prejudice. A world where people like us long for a clear path to the heart of justice for all people and love is all in all.

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11

Human Rights Day

It has been a hard year for human rights.

There have been times in our history when it has felt that indeed the arc of the moral universe was bending toward something greater than we were. Human beings built democracies, shared wealth, created opportunities and it seemed that we were progressing toward a new world. Then, racism, long bubbling beneath public discourse, resurfaced with new outfits but wearing the familiar symbols of hate. We saw that bedrock evil of white supremacy reanimating itself and marching on Charlottesville chanting the old loathsome slogans of bigotry. We saw the rebranding of these groups, and the normalizing of hate speech. We saw politics become a tool for leaders to embarrass themselves and all human beings with a fear-filled and bigoted reminder of what too many of our neighbors think. We saw many terrible things and we did not back away. In this awful year for human rights the United Church of Christ stood where it has always stood—with the messengers of hope.

It’s Advent, right now, in the church of Jesus Christ. It is a time to imagine what is possible for human beings. It is a time to anticipate wonder and imagine what justice looks like. It is a time to remember that we ourselves are powerful witnesses. We are not fearful, not withering, not timid but outspoken on behalf of a God who comes to us from the underside, from the marginalized, from a stable in a faraway place and declares that evil will not prevail. Our God is born in hope. A hope that is as real as a chain of human beings putting their bodies on the line for love itself.

We, as a denomination long in the service of human rights, have seen our leadership shine.

Reverend Traci Blackmon, our UCC Executive Minister for Justice and Witness, was present in Charlottesville leading clergy in a peaceful and protesting line against hate. Our President and General Minister John Dorhauer said, "Charlottesville made it very clear that the United Church of Christ has not only something to say, but something transformative and critical for the movement . . . . We will not be silenced, discouraged, and certainly not diminished. And love will win.” Of course, love will win.

Sunday, December 17, 2017

Third Sunday of Advent

Psalm 126 or Luke 1:47-55

Shouts of Joy

We love movies where the downtrodden and beaten and dismissed character in a story finally gets their due and all the evil in the narrative gets punished. The girl who is bullied; the poor family who saves their neighborhood; the basketball team nobody thinks will win does win; the orphan boy forced to live under the stairs who becomes a mighty wizard—these are all the kinds of stories that give us a buzz and engender hope. They reorder expectations about whose likely to have power in this world. This is the story of Jesus. A story that shines a light on the powerless of this world. Jesus, born to a mother who felt lifted-up by her pregnancy and whose expectations were that her child would be remarkable.

All mothers should feel that joy of expectation for their children. But there is a hard truth in the world as it is – not every child has the same opportunity or privilege. Some children are born in a world of misery and hunger, some have no access to education, some are born with a skin color that will mean that they will to work twice as hard to get what others take for granted. This is a hard truth to digest. We depend on our belief in the basic fairness of the world.

The question for faithful people is how does God work in this world for justice and fairness? One could say that in Genesis God gave us the world and its resources are at our disposal. What we have we done with that gift? How have we loved this world into being?

The young pregnant Mary believes that God will fix and reorder injustice. What can churches do to spread her joy to all children?

It is not necessary to be a big church to spread one’s love of children into the world. Mt. Cavalry Church, in Woodstock, Virginia, has only 5-7 people in worship on a Sunday, but their members share their love by making special small quilts for children in their county’s shelters. Father north, in Gloversville, New York, the First Congregational UCC houses a program called CAPTAIN (Community Action for Parents, Teens and Interested Neighbors). It provides food, life skill training, support, homework help and a place to go for any teen or youth in the area. FCC Gloversville has only 40 in worship.

There is a mission field around your church. In it teenagers languish without support, children need a blanket and all young mothers need hope and joy. What can you do with what you have? What joy can you share, in this season of giving, to a world that longs to show its love for all God’s children?

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:26-38

Birthing a Promise

Is nothing impossible? Clearly Christmas time calls forth flagrant impossibility! Virgins conceive, old ladies are pregnant, angels appear and disappear. Not to mention all those characters—shepherds, sheep, choirs of angels stamped into figurines. Though there probably won’t be a cute porcelain reproduction of a pregnant Elizabeth under your tree. Where is Elizabeth anyway, whose pregnancy is also described as miraculous, in all our Advent and Christmas storytelling?

Elizabeth is described not only as “old” but also barren. It’s in her body that God begins this rhapsody of excitement building to Mary’s song. In her is planted the “seed” of the great announcer of the new age—that realm-of–God-guy, the caller forth of hope—John the Baptist. Does she have a role in our annual Christmas pageants? Probably not. Elizabeth is like many older women in our world. She is invisible and an emblem of decline.

When a congregation gets small enough, it is also sometimes described as “aging.” Did you ever think that older people, especially older women, offer more than a few important ingredients to your congregation? They have time. They have the energy. They have skills and are willing to teach them. They have great stories to tell. They knew everybody when they were twelve. Who else always shows up; and who will make sure the lights are on and the tables set? How many of our churches have a female Treasurer who used to be the finance person for the school board? Who are the retired teachers, nurses and doctors, lawyers and business owners sitting in our pews? Old ladies! None of them is likely to have a budding John the Baptist within them, but some of them may tell you quite plainly, if you are lucky, when the rough ways will be made smooth and the high brought low.

Murphys, California is a small town (population around 2000) in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains. It’s a place people drive to for the weekend or the summer, full of interesting little towns, old Gold Rush stories and beautiful scenery. It also has a UCC church with a membership of under 200 and about 80 in worship. In a conservative part of the state they are open and affirming, progressive and host an LGBT youth group for the county. Its membership is “older” and active, welcoming to all. They make sure everyone who comes is fed. The town of Murphys has a median age near 60. This past summer they hosted a community potluck and discussion of white privilege. Sometimes aging doesn’t mean lifeless. Sometimes it means new life, welcoming the birthday of joy!

Sunday, December 31, 2017

First Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2: 22-40

Long Awaited Gift

Today is the Sunday we remember Jesus being dedicated in the Temple. It’s a big event for the newborn Jesus, even if he’s just a baby and probably won’t remember, his parents will remember. They’ll remember because of the stir this baby causes among the Temple regulars. Though this is a special baby. He is, after all, the baby of the season but he is also all babies. Here he is being presented according to tradition. Babies were dedicated this way, especially first born males.

Babies have always been present in places of worship, even if sitting on a parent’s lap, asleep or squirming. Pews are not always the most comfortable seating to rock and comfort a baby. Wouldn’t it be great if churches took out the last pew and put a row of rocking chairs in its place? Parents could sit with their baby rocking, soothing in comfort–

Less distraction, less discomfort and way more welcoming. It’s not an unusual idea, in fact it’s been done. Old First United Church of Christ in Philadelphia has done just that. Parents no longer must pace in the back and bounce. In the First Congregational Church UCC of Elyria, Ohio and the Ellington Congregational Church of Ellington, Connecticut they simply placed a rocking chair in the rear of the sanctuary.

We are a denomination that has declared ourselves on a journey to incarnate the love of Christ as we work to build a just world for all. Love of children. Love of neighbor and love of creation. These are our three great loves. Churches across the UCC are sharing their stories in this denomination-wide focus on mission. You can find out how other churches are loving children by going to *3greatloves.org*. Share what you do to welcome, empower, include, minister to/for and with children. See what others are doing.

When children and their parents come to your door and enter your sanctuary how are they welcomed? How do they know there is a place for them? If children feel that it is a place built for adults why would they want to come? Welcome is more than a children’s sermon. It’s a place built for welcome. It’s a sanctuary that says this is a place built for you, not that you have to twist yourself to fit into it. This is yours. Come and let us be together as we are,

all of us old and young.

Remember: *“A person’s a person, no matter how small.”* Dr. Seuss

Sunday, January 7, 2018

The Baptism of Christ

Mark 1:4-11

Defining Moments

After John Dorhauer became UCC General Minister and President he went on a journey to listen to the people of this denomination. He and the Board of Directors of the UCC were looking for a way to broadly name our core values.

*"We were hoping to find a phase that would pop, that really captured our essence," Dorhauer said. "When we asked you what you would see if we were successful at our mission, these words appeared:* ***'A just world for all.****' The second I saw those words in print, my heart leapt. This vision calls upon all of us — no matter what our political or theological commitments are; no matter whether we identify as an urban, rural or town setting; no matter whether we are a large, small, pastor-sized or family-sized congregation; whether we are a CHHSM [Council for Health and Human Service Ministries] agency or a conference board of directors — all of us covenantally bear now the same responsibility. We must faithfully answer the question: how do we embody or incarnate a commitment to build* ***a just world for all****?"*

In the Gospel of Mark the story of Jesus does not begin in the Temple or the stable, it begins at the Jordan with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Jesus, newly baptized and blessed by God, moves out from this moment into his world, calling disciples and bringing the good news that God is announcing a new world–a just world.

How, then, do we as members of local churches and disciples of that same Jesus embody that commitment to **A** **Just World For All**? What Reverend Dorhauer found on his trip crisscrossing this country was that local churches were already doing this. We were embodying that mission every day through our love of children, our love of neighbor and our love of this creation. What’s different is not that we will all line up to do something but that our denominational infrastructure will become our megaphone, our social media platform, and our storyteller about what it is we do to further this **just world for all**.

Think about your church and how you express your love for this world. Tell that story so that we all know what we’re doing and how much we mean to our communities and one another. The world is cracked and broken but we are purveyors of hope and how–the–world–might–look one day. This is our call to imagine together what the things we do mean for the all of us. This is our defining moment as the church of Jesus Christ.

Sunday, January 14, 2018

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Known and Loved

It is something to think of ourselves as being knit in our mother’s womb, as if we were put together strand by strand. Sounds a lot like DNA doesn’t it? We are knit by intricate design with given bedrock characteristics, like blue eyes or a “natural” grace. The psalmist wants us to know this: God has intimate knowledge of who we are—a knowledge that is deep and touching as it fills us with awe.

This God who knows each of us this way is continually wanting us to get to know each other. The biblical world is replete with stories about God introducing us to strangers, asking us to know those we don’t know. It’s as if God is introducing us to distant and near cousins born also by that same knitting in gestation. “Here,” the God who knows us all might say, if we imagined a prosy God, “here is your cousin, Ali; he is like you and different from you. I think you should know each other.” It’s a good thing to welcome strangers and provide hospitality to the foreigners among us. Not only a good thing but it is God’s desire for us that we know each other and recognize our shared humanness.

Congregations all over the UCC are engaging these kinds of holy endeavors by reaching out to strangers in their community. If you believe that building relationships with strangers is a holy and spiritual practice, then the world today with its wash of refugees and immigrants is both a mission field and a divine imperative. Westmoreland Congregational UCC, in Bethesda, Maryland, is a church of about 400 members. They are diving into the practice of meeting strangers by partnering with Quaker and Presbyterian congregations, to support refugees in their community. The world of refugee support opens us up to the spiritual practice of welcoming the stranger. As God knows us, deeply and intentionally, we are called to know others as God knows us.

In Bethesda, Maryland, they welcome refugees by getting to know them, by helping them start businesses, by sharing meals and gathering things people need to start a new life in a strange country. This UCC congregation even passed a resolution by unanimous vote in January 2017. The Motion was passed in **Support of Extravagant Welcome to Immigrants and Refugees of All Faiths**. Their support included letter-writing to politicians, joining with the Justice and Peace Network of our denomination, and making their support of their Muslim neighbors visible and unmistakable.

Sunday, January 21, 2018

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Follow Me

Mark 1:14-20

Follow Me

Once, in a classified ad for cashiers and store personnel for a food co-op in northern California, the help wanted blurb read: “Wanted, people with a sense of urgency.” Obviously, those words have a backstory we can only imagine. We can see a stereotype of a young clerk who is amiable but takes their time; a worker born in the era of “whatever,” and another one who may take too long cleaning up aisle 7 after a “mishap.” That same call for those with a sense of urgency imbues Mark’s Gospel. John the Baptist is arrested, and Jesus goes on a tear into the Galilean countryside preaching repentance and the Realm of God. He calls disciples who drop everything, leave everything. They don’t look back and head out on the road into the dusty first century. So, the Gospel begins with the same classified ad: “Wanted, people with a sense of urgency.”

What is urgent now? What does that mean for human beings today? What might make you leave everything and head into the unknown? A resolution passed at General Synod 2017 may have an answer for us. It is also a resolution that calls us to express this urgency around one of the great loves of our churches—the love of creation.

The resolution is a clarion call to clergy and laypeople in all our churches to preach and raise awareness about our moral obligation to actively press those in power to do something toward saving our environment. On July 3, 2017, the resolution, "The Earth is the Lord's—Not Ours to Wreck," passed with more than 97% of delegates voting “yes.”

It is a resolution that mainly asks all of us to educate ourselves about the science of climate change, recognizing that it is our moral obligation to protect this world given to us by the one to whom it truly belongs. Its urgency is clear in the science that points us to a future world without the natural resources to sustain life. Its urgency is laid bare in the predictions of sea rise and climate change and temperatures rising. Its urgency could not have been felt more clearly in the words of those at General Synod spoken to all of us to act immediately. “Wanted,” says those voices raised in love of creation, “Wanted. People with a sense of urgency.” What will you do this week to speak your love for creation?

Sunday, January 28, 2018

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Power to Do

Mark 1:21-28

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUNDAY

If you had power to heal and alleviate human suffering where would you begin? Leaving your front door, providing you had a front door, what direction would you go? Would you start with the big evils in our world and tackle racism and that gap between rich and poor? How about the person you see almost every day at the corner with the sign that says they are homeless? Would you give them a home? Probably, if we take this faith we share seriously then that would be the goal of every day—to alleviate suffering, to house the homeless, feed the hungry and make a just world for all. We try to do those things as best we can. One of the great reasons to be religious as well as spiritual is that our churches provide support and a framework to tackle some of those big issues and meet the basic human needs of people in our communities. Our individual reach into healing a broken world can be deeper because we have some institutional power.

Within the United Church of Christ there is the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM), an organization committed to creating a just, caring and compassionate world.

One of things they do is provide affordable housing across the United States. This organization that belongs to us provided more than 20,000 affordable housing units across this country in 2017 through partnerships with CHHSM-member ministries. Some of those partnerships included Archway Housing and Services located in the Rocky Mountain Conference of the UCC. That conference is a main source of support for their low income, affordable housing efforts. Another CHHSM partner that works closely with UCC Conferences is Phoebe Ministries. Headquartered in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Phoebe supports affordable housing units among its many services for underserved older adults in Eastern Pennsylvania.

With funding for HUD currently frozen, developing more units has been hampered by a lack of funds. Are there CHHSM partners in your conference that could use your support? It is our nature to grow old and many of us someday will need support. Sometimes helping the world means securing the foundation for services to be available when we need them. Our congregations are organized together to heal and love this world. One of the ways we can do that is by supporting those groups that partner with us to help the world right outside our front door.

Sunday, February 4, 2018

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Mark 1:29-39

Source of Strength

Jesus didn’t have to look far to find people in need of healing. They came to him. Mission opportunities can come like that to churches as well. Sometimes a person simply takes a trip home and returns with an opportunity for people to respond to human need. In 2005, Felix Molokwu, a member of Faith UCC in Union, NJ, went to visit an orphanage in his hometown of Awka, Nigeria. At the orphanage, he found great hardship and returned to his church with its story. From his trip grew many trips, support from more churches and a relationship between people across continents and cultures. A relationship and mission that has come to be called “Bridge of Faith.”

Many trips across the Atlantic have been realized since 2005, and new churches have signed on to help. In New Jersey, the UCC churches supporting this mission are Faith United Church of Christ in Union, and First Congregational Church of Verona. In Pennsylvania, St. John UCC in Riegelsville. Over the years, much has been brought to the people in Awka, like books, mosquito netting, and mattresses. Beyond books and school supplies they have installed a generator, visited lepers and been emissaries of love from American churches. A current project is the collecting of used sewing machines that will be sent to help start a sewing class.

This is a mission project that has grown and succeeded because of the indefatigable work of individuals who have worked with congregations to make it happen. If you’ve been to any General Synod in the last few years and you went to visit the vendors you would have seen a booth selling African crafts with a sign that reads “Bridge of Faith.” The couple at the booth would be Doug Taylor and Marge Royle, long-time UCC members. They are the human battery pack that provides energy for this growing ministry, and selling these crafts is their main funding support for all the trips and materials they have gathered for Awka.

We might think that it takes a big organization or a lot of money to cross such a long bridge between peoples, but that’s why this is called a “Bridge of Faith.” It is a bridge built by faith that what can be done will be done. Sometimes mission begins with a denominational effort like a General Synod resolution. Sometimes it begins with a committee in a congregation and sometimes it begins with the efforts of a person who looks at the world and asks, “What can we do?” If you want to find out more about Bridge of Faith go to: <http://bridgeoffaithawka.wixsite.com/awka>.

Sunday, February 11, 2018

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Transfiguration Sunday

Mark 9:2-9

Racial Justice Sunday

Most of the people who sit in the pews of the congregations of the United Church of Christ would be identified as white. This is a fact of who we are. We are also a denomination that very much believes the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said that the problem of race is indeed America’s greatest moral dilemma. Many of our leaders and clergy stood with King in his non-violent movement. We have been advocates for anti-racism work for as long as we have existed as a denomination, but the world has yet to be transformed or transfigured into God’s best hope for humankind. We do not live in a just world . . . not yet. Parsing through that truth and finding out how our world works to keep us racially divided is an ongoing and painful task. In 1963, that giant of American authors, black and gay, James Baldwin wrote:

*Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot*

*live without and know we cannot live within.*

To speak of racism, simply to speak that word, can be uncomfortable for many of us who think of ourselves as liberal and justice-minded. But this work of building **A Just World for All** requires most of us to just keep still and listen to those whose skin color is different from ours and whose experience is not ours. Justice is not something we own and gift to others. Justice is the world as God intended, revealed in Jesus Christ. Our work as Christians is to make that world visible. This work requires humility and deep love. Begin by observing in yourself what these quotes mean to you:

Reverend Yvonne Delk, First African American woman ordained in the UCC

*I am clear that before we can have healing and renewal in the land we have*

*to engage in truth-telling and truth-facing. Facing the truth that can set us*

*free can be seen as a call for a new way of being, a new way of speaking and*

*a new way of acting and witnessing.*

Audre Lorde, American Poet

*It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize,*

*accept, and celebrate those differences.*

Toni Morrison, American Novelist and Pulitzer Prize winner

*In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian Author

*Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier.*

*Black folks don't have that choice.*

Sunday, February 18, 2018

First Sunday in Lent

Psalm 25:1-10

God’s Loving Paths

How hard it is to untangle our mistakes without wanting to justify ourselves and explain why we did what we did, or how we misunderstood something or how others misunderstood us. But sometimes the only path forward is to simply say, “I was wrong,” or to be able to see ourselves as we are with compassion. Sometimes, opening ourselves to the deep truths of our imperfect world is the only way forward.

The singer of Psalm 25 hopes in God and wants instruction on God’s loving paths. Lent is the time for instruction and repentance. Can we sometimes participate in an evil we don’t recognize and still be lovable? How do we morph into God’s best hope for us and invite the world into that same hope?

One way, the Psalmist exclaims, is to ask to see the truth. Our world is full of hard truths, and the pervasive reality of white privilege is one of them. “White Privilege” is a term that can make some people bristle and feel assaulted. “After all,” one might say, “I wasn’t handed anything in life. I’ve worked hard for what I have. I am not privileged.” However, privilege can be a subtle thing and hard to see. For example, people with white skin do not, during a normal day, consciously think about the fact that they are white. People with brown skin think about it many times during a day because it can’t be avoided. There is a privilege in not having to think about one’s skin color. A privilege born in the culture we have inherited.

We may not have personally participated in making the social order but we move in it without noticing how our assumptions have been created by it. And, if we are white, we benefit from that order in ways we don’t see. God’s truth for us may be that we must open our eyes to what we have unconsciously inherited so that we can dismantle racism, even if we don’t feel racist. We must do that with all people in service of the ideal, “A Just World for All.” The first step is simply admitting there’s a problem. We can’t fix something if we don’t think it’s broken. And, the truth is that our world, especially regarding race, is broken.

Lent is both about brokenness and about hope. There is always hope to be found in the truth. As people of faith, we believe that. We have a curriculum, available online, thoughtfully and sensitively crafted to begin a conversation in our communities about race and America, and the hard truth of white privilege. Go to *ucc.org* and search “white privilege.” You will find printed materials and videos to help you on this journey. What better time than Lent to walk this path?

Sunday, February 25, 2018

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9

Always Close

Have you ever had a difficult choice to make? Perhaps you have been offered a job but it meant moving, or you met the love of your life at the Philadelphia airport only they were heading for Baltimore on Delta and you were boarding Southwest going to Phoenix. Have you ever experienced one of those moments when you know that whatever choice you make it will change your life? For followers of Jesus this should probably be what every minute of our lives feels like. He’s that guy who tells us he’s going to be killed and we should follow him. He’s that guy who says give up everything, sell your smart phone and follow me. He’s that guy who has a claim on our moral universe in a way that no one else has. He’s Jesus the Christ and this is the liturgical season of “follow him.” It is Lent, after all.

At General Synod in Baltimore last summer, Reverend Traci Blackmon, Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ, told the delegates a great true story. It’s a story particularly perfect for preachers and perfect for that moment and perfect for Lent, and she told it to call us all to faithful and compelling witness. It’s the story of an invitation made to a crowd long ago by a gentleman standing high on a wire stretched over the Niagara Falls.

The tightrope walker’s name was Charles Blondin. On June 30,1859, he amazed a huge crowd by walking across 1,100 feet on a wire over Niagara Falls. He walked back and forth several times, upping the ante with each crossing. He did it blindfolded, on stilts, carrying somebody and stupefied the crowd by sitting down on the wire and cooking an omelet. While crossing with a wheelbarrow he stopped and asked the crowd if they believed he could push a person in the wheelbarrow across the wire. The crowd screamed, “Yes!.” Then he asked for a volunteer to climb in the wheelbarrow. No one volunteered.

That’s it, isn’t it? That’s the crux of Lent, of our faith, of all that’s possible for our churches, for our discipleship, for our denomination. Reverend Blackmon asked us to climb in the wheelbarrow and announce to the world our faith—that God is present even today. Is there a wheelbarrow in your faith story right now? In the Gospels, Jesus never ceases to amaze the crowds with his feats, and not everyone climbed in the wheelbarrow with him, either. What is calling you, right now, or your congregation? Are we ready to leave our comfortable spot looking up, and climb into the wheelbarrow? Can we trust that much?