

THURSDAY MAILING



National Capital
P R E S B Y T E R Y
MISSIONAL · PASTORAL · PROPHETIC

April 1, 2021



In this edition

(ALL EVENTS ARE VIRTUAL)

April Birthday Greetings

Announcements

From the Desk of

John Molina-Moore, General Presbyter

From the Desk of

Jan Moody, Stated Clerk

From the Desk of

Tara Spuhler McCabe, TDir. Congregational Development & Mission

“Animal Kingdom”

The Rev. Dr. Brian K. Blount

Preached – March 23, 2021 Presbytery Meeting

New McClendon Scholar Webinar

*Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story
with Dr. Susannah Heschel*

April 14 – New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

Global Mission Network

Survey

Community Coalition for Haiti

Walk with Us - 2021

April 17-24

A Virtual Event of EAPCE

Polishing Stones: Nurturing Faith Practice

Keynote: Meg Rift and David Maxwell

April 26-28 – APCE – Eastern Region

Ally Training

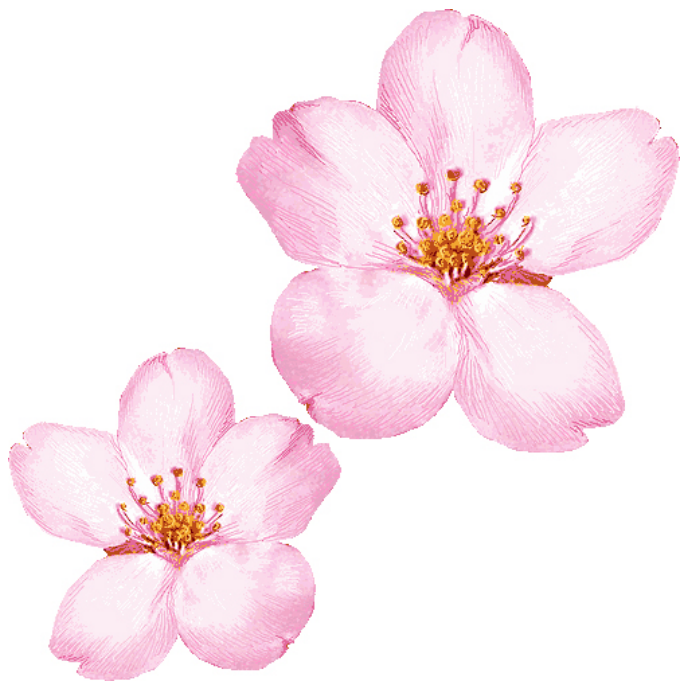
offered in partnership with Service Never Sleeps

for ALL members of NCP Congregations

April 29 & May 1

Sponsored by the Dismantling Racism Team of NCP

Together We Can Make A Difference!
ON-LINE GIVING



Birthday Greetings for the month of **April**

Fay Acker

David Bowerman

Jean Coyle, HR

Christopher Deacon

Lon Dring, HR

Jeri Fields

Katie Francis

Walter Green, HR

Larry Greenslit, HR

Barbara Heck

Jerry Hopkins, HR

Heemoon Lee

Shawn MacDonald

Bob Melone

Carol Morrison

Kathleen Mulvihill, HR

Ted Rosche, HR

Elizabeth Walker, HR

John Wimberly, HR

*From
the staff of
National Capital Presbytery
dina, heather, jan, john,
lajuan, tara*



Announcements:

Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation is holding a **Free Virtual Retreat for Clergy** entitled "Finding Deeper Ground: Living and Leading from the Spiritual Heart." The retreat will be held on Sunday 4/11 beginning at 4pm; and Monday, 4/12 beginning at 4pm. Please go to shalem.org to register and for further details. You must register to attend.

Minister Information Form – ALL NCP CLERGY, especially if you are new to NCP. We have updated the method for submitting your personal information. Please visit [Minister Information Form](#) and submit this document at your earliest convenience. If you are not sure we have your current information, now is the time to update! For more information contact Dina Bickel, dbickel@thepresbytery.org. Form can also be accessed from NCP website, documents-committee on ministry.

Thank you to those installed pastors who have proactively sent their **2021 Salary Report**. If you have not already, please email the 2021 Installed Pastor's Salary Report or Terms of Call to Dina Bickel, the COM Administrator – dbickel@thepresbytery.org no later than February 28, 2021. The form may be found [here](#) under Compensation.

Darnestown Presbyterian has a group of vaccine hunters that has secured appointments for more than 20 people in the last week. One of our team members, Erin Reed, has been especially skilled and diligent. She would like to offer her time and vaccine appointment hunting services beyond our congregation, especially to the most vulnerable members of our Presbytery, people of color, including those who work too many hours to secure an appointment for themselves, or those who have not developed the computer skills to work within the Maryland system. At this point, Erin has honed her skills within the Maryland system, so Maryland residents would benefit first. The hope is that some D.C. and Virginia vaccine hunters within our congregations would make the same offer. Find the group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/884582065668731>

Together We Can Make A Difference!
ON-LINE GIVING



Greetings Partners in Ministry,

One thing that has been made clear during this pandemic is how dedicated the leadership in our churches has been. This past year has been far from easy. Through all the stress of navigating a completely digital way of being the church I have watched so many of our churches thrive. You've called new pastors, started new ministries, made hard decisions about things that need to be let go of, and found an endless list of creative ways to live out the gospel through mission and ministries. This pandemic has shown us how strong our congregations really are. We want to honor that by giving you a respite. Your presbytery leadership and staff have prerecorded an entire worship service, designed to be used in our churches for the Sunday after Easter.

Our hope is that you use this resource in a way that is best suited for your context. We're providing a downloadable recording of an entire service and a downloadable recording of just the scripture reading and sermon for churches who would like to use their own liturgy and music. Some of the text for the liturgy will already be on screen. Also, all of it is provided in a sperate word document for you to use with your congregations. Please feel free to fully exercise your own creative controls with these files. You have permission to split, edit, and splice these recording however you want.

You can access the files here: <https://forms.office.com/r/3PzHmGfZNS>

We will also offer this again for Sunday, May 30th. If there is any feedback after using the service for April 11th that will be helpful in our planning for May 30th please feel free to pass it along to us.

Blessings on the rest of your Holy Week. May it fully prepare you to embrace the beauty that is *The Resurrection*.

John

From the Stated Clerk



The **Thursday** before Easter is known as either **Maundy Thursday**. **Maundy** is derived from the Latin word for "command," and refers to Jesus' commandment to the disciples to "**Love one another as I have loved you.**"

This evening many churches will participate in Maundy Thursday services which often include a foot washing ceremony, a humble ritual that embodies Jesus' servant leadership, and Communion, a breaking of bread that connects us to Christ and to one another.

Jesus' mandate frames the work of the presbytery as we pursue our emphases to proclaim the gospel, aspire to unity in Christ, and celebrate our diversity in service to God's mission.

On March 23 the presbytery gathered in worship and were blessed with the liturgy provided by the Worship and Theology Team, music led by the Oaklands PC Choir, and a powerful sermon, based on Matthew 10:16, preached by Rev. Dr. Brian Blount.

Following worship, we met and welcomed ministers to NCP; approved assignments of ministers and ruling elders to committees and commissions; and after discussion and questions approved a [Divestiture from Fossil Fuels Resolution](#); and a [Dismantling Racism Policy Statement](#). The meeting closed with us affirming our unity with believers in every time and place and rejoicing in grateful prayer that:

Nothing will ever separate us, from the Love that we call God,

Revealed in Christ Jesus, and sustained by the Spirit,

Now and forever, Amen

Easter blessings as we participate in the building of tomorrow's Church,

Jan

April 1, 2021

Greetings People,

We welcome **Rev. Maggie Smith to the “office” of National Capital Presbytery as the New Things Admin** (this is a quarter-time position)! You have already met her at the recent Presbytery meeting. She is the new Stated Supply at Idylwood Presbyterian Church. She is also a Residential Minister at Georgetown University. And, she sits on the New Things Team of the Church Development Commission. Sure, she has a few different titles. These all come together for God’s common purpose, to grow in the Missional, Pastoral, and Prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ!



In this year-plus of the pandemic National Capital Presbytery continues to adapt and grow. New Things starts of National Capital Presbytery have DOUBLED! Rev. Maggie is coming on board to NCP specifically to support and organize this growth of new starts. She has journeyed to DC originally from West Chester, PA, studied at some schools we may know, got ordained, and served in Pittsburg Presbytery at Hot Metal Bridge. She has worked closely with the PCUSA 1001 office of New Worshipping Communities and Congregations. NCP is blessed to join in ministry with Maggie. She may be contacting you to be partners in ministry with these New Starts and New Worshipping Communities of NCP.

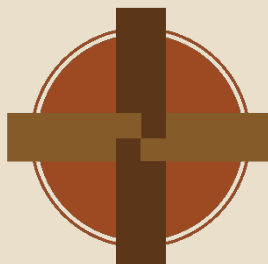
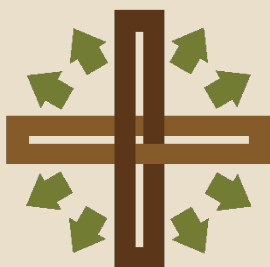
And the gifts just keep coming! Look for the roll out of Learning Labs from NCP and [Convergenceus.org](https://convergenceus.org) to begin in April. These will be tools for Hybrid Ministry, Post-Covid Trends Shaping the Church, Leading without Burnout, Building and Belonging Online, and much more. Once a month, these all access Learning Labs are available for anyone of National Capital Presbytery. Thank you to CDC, Spiritual Formation, and COM for putting together the resources for the work and the joy of ministry!

But that is not all! **SAVE THE DATE**, and register, for the two-part **Allyship Training (Dismantling-Racism): April 29th, 6-9pm and May 1st, 9am – 12pm** (all Virtual). This is for members of our congregations and communities. You do not have to be an Ordained Elder. You can be but you do not have to be. **Registration link [here](#).**

May we continue to grow with one another into the Easter Tide season!

Peace and Courage,

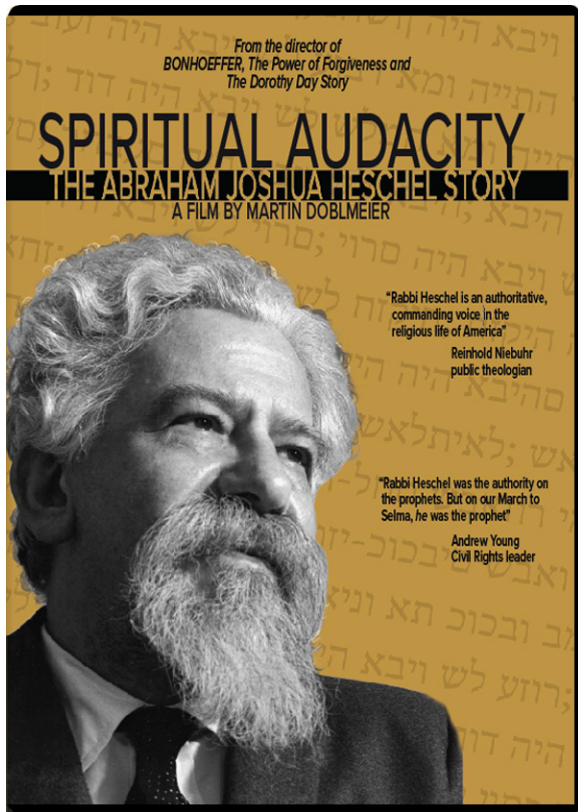
Rev. Tara Spuhler McCabe



You are invited to an online film screening and discussion

Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story

Winner of the Wilbur Award for Best Religious Documentary



Wednesday, April 14, 7:00 pm

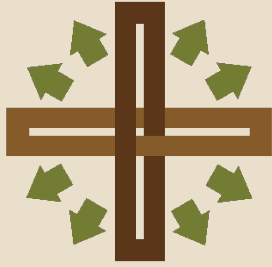
Discussion and question period following the film with Rabbi Heschel's daughter, Dr. Susannah Heschel, Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College.



Register to receive the Zoom link: www.heschelfilm.eventbrite.com



Sponsored by the McClendon Scholar Program. For more information: 240 393-7246 or dialogdays@aol.com



Friends,

*The National Capital Presbytery (NCP) **Global Missions Network** is sending this to you and asking for your help to review the perspective of your Congregation on Global Missions.*

The NCP **Global Missions Network** is a network of congregations with a passion for global ministry. For information about the network, see the Network page on the NCP website:

<https://thepresbytery.org/the-work-of-the-presbytery/committees/mission-coordination/global-mission-network/>.

The NCP **Global Missions Network** funding is from congregational participation in the **Unified Mission Giving**, separate from Per Capita. The only way GMN can offer matching grants, financial support for new global mission partnerships, and staff support in cultivating and connecting **Global Missions Network** with local congregations is funding through **Unified Mission Giving**.



We are asking for congregational input through the short survey at the link below to help the network understand ongoing global mission activities across the Presbytery and how the network can support congregational global mission efforts. The survey should take only ten minutes or less to complete, and the information you provide will be critical in helping us set priorities for action.

You can access the survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GVYD7TG>

If there is someone else in your congregation who is the right person in your congregation to complete the survey, feel free to forward this email to the right person! If possible, we would like responses back by 15 April. Thank you in advance!

If you have question about the survey or the Global Mission network, fee free to contact Judith Dahmann (jdahmann@MITRE.org) or myself (jakmunthali@gmail.com)

Many thanks in advance for your support!

James Munthali, Global Mission Network Leader



National Capital
PRESBYTERY
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Join us! April 17th-24th!

Walk with Us



2021

8 miles. 8 days. *Thousands of lives transformed.*

In the rural mountain community of Lavanneau, CCH works with a local school to provide better quality education for young Haitian students. In nearby Jacmel, we also offer low-to-no-cost healthcare at our CCH Primary Care, Rehab & Surgical Clinics. When families in Lavanneau need to see a doctor, they must take a motorcycle taxi or walk the 8 miles from their home to our Clinics.

This April 17th - 24th, we invite you to *Walk with Us* in support of Haitian families. Participants commit to walk, run, swim, or bike at least 8 miles in 8 days to raise awareness & funds for CCH's education & healthcare work in Haiti. You choose how you log those miles! We provide t-shirts and a fun Facebook Group where you can engage with others, get tips and share your progress. So fun!



COMMUNITY COALITION FOR
HAITI

Learn more & register to participate:

www.cchaiti.org/events

Registration closes 4/16! Questions? Contact Clark at clark@cchaiti.org.



Polishing Stones: Nurturing Faith Practice

A Virtual Event of EAPCE April 26-28

Keynote: Meg Rift and David Maxwell

Worship & Music Leader: Rev. Dr. Jim Morgan

[Click here](#) to register.

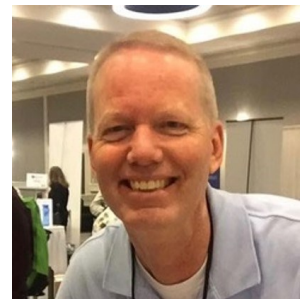


Faith practices, those actions we do as followers of Jesus Christ, have been around since the days of Jesus himself, and before. They have stood the test of time through the ages. In these days of the politicization of Christianity, the questions of “What does it mean to be Christian?” and “How do we live out our faith?” are crucial. We return to the basics. What did Jesus do and embody in his life and by his example, how are we, as followers of Jesus, to live? We practice, and practice again, to put faith and love into action because we follow the one who practiced what he preached!



Meg Rift: Meg Rift is a pastor, parent, and creative soul. She currently serves as the children’s curriculum editor at Presbyterian Publishing Corporation in Louisville, Kentucky. This year, along with her husband Dan, she will celebrate the marriages of her twin daughters (May and October) and continue to train her new rescue dog Honey, along with their still-needs-training dog Zoey.

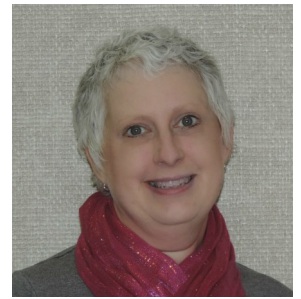
David Maxwell: David Maxwell loves working at Presbyterian Publishing where he can make a living reading and editing brilliant, creative academic and church authors. He thinks he’s growing in discipleship as he works with a team to edit the new curriculum *Follow Me*, based on things Jesus did and told followers to do.



Rev. Dr. Jim Morgan (Worship & Music Leader): Jim Morgan is presently the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Laurinburg, North Carolina. He has spent much of his ministry leading worship and music at youth events around the PCUSA, and maintains a busy schedule playing solo piano concerts of Advent hymns.

EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

EAPCE's 2021 Educator of the Year, Carolyn Leah, CCE from Pittsburgh, PA has served in Christian Education for more than 30 years; she was called to Beulah PC in 2009 where she serves as Director of Christian Discipleship. Carolyn is passionate about intergenerational ministry, and works with adult education, children and families, special needs ministries as well as the environmental ministries of her church. Currently, she is working on certification in Spiritual Formation and a Pennsylvania Naturalist Certification. When able, she enjoys hiking, nature photography, and spending time with her grandchildren.



WORKSHOPS

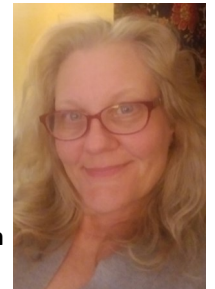
April 27, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm Workshops

#1 - The Inside Scoop: Denominational Resource Panel Discussion

A panel of representatives from across our partner denominations will share cutting edge faith formation resources. Stephanie Fritz from the PC(USA), Jill Benson from the Christian Reformed Church, and Beth Hayes from the Moravian Church will bring their knowledge of resources within their denominations. Come prepared to take home some practical resource ideas!

#2 - Self Care as Spiritual Practice - MJ Junkin, Certified Christian Educator and Spiritual Director

In a culture that is utterly egocentric, it can seem selfish to want to focus on yourself and your deepest longings in life. But God has a deep yearning for you to experience the true depth of Love in which you are being created each day. And in order to experience this Love and therefore become aware of self desires, you must practice self care regularly. In this workshop, participants will be given an introduction to a variety of types of spiritual practices as a way to nurture spiritual growth.



#3 - Intentional and Attentional Faith Practices: Energizing Our Youth - Jimmy Steele, Youth Ministry Coordinator at Palms Presbyterian Church

Youth these days are mentally, physically, and spiritually drained. Want to learn more about how intentionally including and integrating faith practices such as hospitality, sabbath, retreat, prayer, storytelling, and service into our ministry can energize youth and leadership? If you are like me, you may unintentionally be including these important aspects into your programming. Join us for a time of discussion and networking as we share ways we can integrate and weave these faith practices into our ministry.

April 27, 2:00 - 3:30 pm Workshops

#4 - Advocacy as a Spiritual Discipline - Rev. Jimmie Ray Hawkins, Director of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC

The search for justice is a lifelong pursuit and a part of the Christian life. Mission is integral to the life of faith. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for neglecting the "weightier matters" of a life of faith, and he listed "justice" first. Presbyterians, and other denominations, promote mission and charity as vital to the life of congregations. Advocacy is connected to mission outreach as the other side of the coin. We must continue to meet the everyday needs of people, but we must also transform the structures and institutions to provide the resources needed to supplement a deficit of financial resources and opportunities. We will discuss how to talk to people of faith without alienating them accusing you of "just being political." This call comes from a biblical understanding of the role justice plays in the Christian life. Christianity has stood on the side of those impoverished and sought to transform society into a Beloved Kingdom which is just and fair.





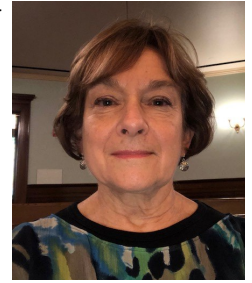
#5 - 99 Mandalas: Creativity Amid Chaos - Bonnie Edwards, Certified Christian Educator

Mandalas are circular designs found in many cultures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one person's attempt to create order and do something joyful each day led to the discovery of nature mandalas. Sometimes spiritual practice, sometimes pure whimsy, these designs--spanning 99 days--reflect the human imagination and marvels of God's Creation.

In this workshop you are invited to:

- SEE a variety of mandalas
- FIND interesting materials near at hand
- CREATE your own unique design
- CELEBRATE the creative spark in yourself and others

No art degree or experience necessary! Bring an open mind and playful spirit.



#6 - When They Stop Coming to Sunday School: Storytelling by Zoom - Rev. Katy Yates Brungraber, Certified Christian Educator



Know someone who can tell a story about traffic jams, or parties? They can tell the story about God and God's people – by Zoom! Long before the “season of COVID-19,” many Sessions had decided to not hold Sunday School because “nobody comes.” In this workshop, we will explore ways for people-in-the-pews-who-care-about-lifelong-discipleship to anticipate (and make the most of) teaching moments with children, teens and adults. Nurturing the faith practice of storytelling by Zoom means adapting our traditional techniques to make theologically meaningful what already goes on in our lives – from unlocking doors, to preparing virtual Communion. We can do this!

EVENT SCHEDULE

Monday, April 26

6:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Welcome Worship with Rev. Jim Morgan

7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Plenary #1

Tuesday, April 27

9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Plenary #2

11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Workshops #1-3

#1 The Inside Scoop: Denominational Resource Panel Discussion

#2 Self-Care as Spiritual Practice

#3 Intentional and Attentional Faith Practices: Energizing Our Youth

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Lunch Break

2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

Workshops #4-6

#4 Advocacy as Spiritual Discipline

#5 99 Mandalas: Creativity Amid Chaos

#6 When They Stop Coming to Sunday School

4:00 – 5:30 p.m.

Plenary #3

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Dinner Break

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Dinner with Byron Borger, Owner of Hearts and Minds Bookstore

7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Social gathering/ Educator of the Year celebration

Wednesday, April 28

8:45 – 9:30 a.m.

EAPCE Meeting

9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Plenary #4

11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Closing Worship

REGISTRATION

[Click here](#) to register.

Please make your \$50* registration check payable to “APCE Eastern Region” and mail to:

Katy Brungraber, EAPCE Treasurer/Registrar
7 Spanish Moss Court
Chambersburg, PA 17202

*If you are unable to afford the \$50 registration fee email EasternRegionAPCE@gmail.com.

The deadline for receipt of payment is April 13, 2021. Your registration is complete when payment is received.

THE DISMANTLING RACISM TEAM
OF NCP INVITE YOU TO

ALLY TRAINING

led by Service Never Sleeps



UNITY · RECONCILIATION · JUSTICE
Dismantling Racism

**When: Thursday, April 29, from 6:00pm to 9:00pm
AND**

Saturday, May 1, from 9:00am to 12:00pm

**(This is a TWO day training. Your registration confirms
you will attend both sessions.)**

Where: Zoom

**Who: ALL (Members of NCP congregations &
communities & friends of our congregations)**

Led by Whitney Parnell, CEO and Founder of Service Never Sleeps, these sessions will provide helpful definitions, invitations to self-mirroring, and active ally education involving the CLAIM acronym: Care, Learn, Act, Influence, and Maintain. The workshops teach individuals about the causes of social injustice, how to be effective allies for marginalized communities, and how to actively influence and educate others. Our time together on Zoom will involve breakouts for practice together in pairs and small groups intermittently throughout our time of learning, so come ready to "try on" the Ally Training strategies of Service Never Sleeps.

[Register HERE](#)

Animal Kingdom
Matthew 10:16-22
Brian K. Blount
Union Presbyterian Seminary

Animal Kingdom.

That's what pops into my head every time I come across this scripture text. A show about animals. My grandmother, I called her Nana, loved that show. When I was with Nana and that show was about to come on, she'd stop whatever she was doing and say, "It's time for me to go watch my animals." Nana loved animals. Even when they were hunting and killing each other for food. The show's producers—they wouldn't intervene. When lions were hunting wildebeasts or wolves were taking down rabbits and mountain goats, they just let it happen. Filmed it. So we could see how vicious as well as how beautiful nature could be.

I was going to continue the opening of my sermon by telling you all about my Nana and her love for the television show Animal Kingdom. Until I went on the internet and found out I had misremembered the title of the show and therefore mismanaged my Nana's memory. Nana's show was *Wild* Kingdom. Mutual of Omaha's *Wild* Kingdom. It aired on Sunday evenings when I was growing up. I loved sitting with my grandmother when she watched it. I loved watching her love watching her animals.

But, alas, the google search clarified for me that I was wrong. *Wild* Kingdom was the show about animals. *Animal* Kingdom is a show about wild humans. *Animal* Kingdom is a show about humans *acting like* animals. After looking at a few scenes from the show, I decided that saying it was a show about humans acting like animals was maybe an insult to animals. Unlike the humans in animal kingdom, animals don't devour each other for pleasure. The people in that show, at least what I could tell of them from those scene snippets, seemed to enjoy destroying those who disagreed with their views or opposed their family's desires. Carnivores. Carving each other up. For what looked like pleasure. Certainly for power. To keep power for people like themselves. They all seemed to be smiling the most deliciously wicked, beastly smiles.

You know why I'm thinking about animals? And the kingdoms they build? Well, this little Jesus homily. About animals. Sheep and wolves and serpents and doves. But these creatures aren't the ones **acting** wild in Jesus' cautionary tale of a sermonette. No, to hear Jesus tell it, it's the humans who do the hating, the persecuting, the betraying, the dragging, the beating, and the killing.

It's almost as if Jesus is saying, Listen up, you twelve. Before I send you out into the wilderness of human civilization, there is something you ought to know. Animal Kingdom doesn't premiere on Sunday nights. Animal kingdom broadcasts live whenever and where ever human beings gather: state houses, court houses, white houses, houses of parliament, political districts, school districts, financial districts, executive office suites, college campuses, sports arenas, homes, apartments, cafes, . . . churches. Animal Kingdom is broadcasting right here in the Bible, and in the lives of those who would live out Jesus' biblical mandates. What Jesus is saying is, you follow me, you live for me, you live **like** me, you're gonna go from **watching** Animal Kingdom to **starring in** Animal Kingdom. Animal kingdom isn't just gonna be your show; Animal Kingdom is going to be your life.

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves . . .

Biblical scholar and noted preacher, Tom Long, in writing a commentary on this passage, explains the context. "In the volatile religious and cultural situation of the first century, missionaries from Matthew's church had undoubtedly been disciplined by religious councils, called on the carpet before public officials, rejected by members of their own families, and hated by many for their mission labors (Matt. 10:17-22)."¹ Treated like sheep in the midst of wolves.

Matthew is even clearer about the context. To understand what Jesus is saying here in our passage, it is important to know what Jesus said in the passage just before this one. In our passage, Jesus explains what will happen on the mission trip. In the passage before this one, Jesus identifies what kind of mission trip this will be and what kind of people they must trip this mission to.

1. Tom Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 120–1.

The first thing he does? Before Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them out like sheep into the midst of wolves, he identifies the wolves. Read Matthew 10:5-6.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go *nowhere* among the Gentiles, and enter *no* town of the Samaritans . . . ”

So, the Gentiles and the Samaritans are not the wolves. To the people in Matthew’s church, to the people reading Matthew’s gospel, yes, Gentiles and Samaritans are hated. But they are also outsiders. They are the “not you.” The Not “your people.” The people who have it in for your people. These are the people who dislike your people as much as your people dislike them. Don’t go to them. Avoid them. Stay away from them. On this particular missionary journey, don’t evangelize them.

I don’t know, maybe the disciples were happy to receive this command.

We tend to be afraid of people who are not like us. Too many of us fear people who are not like us because we fear that sooner or later they will be devouring us, taking our jobs, taking our opportunities, taking our places, taking our security, and so we are skeptical of them, afraid of them, jealous of them, angry with them, so we find ways to avoid them and if we can annihilate them. But Jesus doesn’t want his 12 disciples worrying about *them*, worrying about how to engage *them*, how to hurt *them* or help *them*. Jesus is not sending the twelve out among *them*. He is not sending them to the immigrants and the expatriates, the racially outcast and the ethnically excluded. They, the people NOT like them, are NOT the people to whom Jesus sends his 12 disciples. Therefore, they, the people NOT like them can NOT be the wolves the 12 disciples need to worry about.

Jesus tells them that he is sending them out to their own people. Therefore, they, their own people, must be the wolves. The wolves are the sheep of their very own flock. The people most likely to devour them are the people who are most like them. Their own ethnic kin. Their own racial group. Their own flesh and blood. Brother angry with brother. Sister tearing apart

sister. Children destroying parents. He sends the 12 out into their own communities with their own people and when he does he tells them, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of ravenous wolves. You are the sheep. Your own people are the wolves. I hope you're not missing this point. The people you most have to worry about, when you start proclaiming Jesus, living Jesus, are YOUR people. The people most like you are the people most likely to destroy you. If you aren't careful. If you aren't as wise as serpents when they attack you; if you aren't as innocent as doves when you fight back. They WILL destroy you. You're worried about THEM. It's US who will destroy us. It's not those people who don't look like you, don't think like you, don't believe like you that Jesus is warning them to worry about. The wolves are the people who look, think, believe, and act like you. Once you start believing what I teach, proclaiming what I proclaim, living like I live, they will try to turn you back to thinking, believing, and acting like them. And when they find they can't turn you, they will turn on you.

I want you to pay careful attention to the words Jesus is using. Beware of THEM. THEY will hand you over and beat you, and have you dragged before rulers. THEY will betray you. They, them are the wolves. They, them are the people to whom the 12 are sent. They, them are their own people. Their own Animal Kingdom. If it's not clear when Jesus starts the sermon, it is crystal in clarity by the time he finishes it. Brother will betray brother to death. You are the sheep. The wolf is your brother. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death. You are the sheep. The wolf is your child. You will be hated by all because of my name. You are the sheep bleating out the name of Jesus. The wolf is the people of your very own flock who don't want to hear the name of Jesus come out of your mouth. They certainly don't want to see the ministry of Jesus lived out of your life.

I think here of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his letter from a Birmingham Jail. He had been beaten by segregationists. Assailed by racists. Set upon by lawless crowds. Locked up by officers of the law. And yet the humans who at that moment frightened him the most were the preachers, educators, lawyers, business folks, and lay folks of his own people. Christians. The wolves of his own pack. All good Christian men and women proclaiming personal relationship

with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But turning against him, turning on him when he proclaimed the Jesus who proclaimed the Reign of God breaking in to break the bonds of racial injustice and build equality and freedom for women and men of every race, every color, every creed. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw that when he lived like Jesus, lived the full reality of Jesus' full Reign of God busting into this human world to transform it, he was, among his own white Christian brothers and sisters, like a sheep in the midst of wolves.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.

I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"

So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are.

When you ask your own people to demand racial justice, whether it is for black people or brown people or native people or Asian people, to demand gender inclusivity, to speak out against discrimination around sexual orientation, to argue for inclusion of immigrants, to protest for the voting rights of all citizens, particularly in this time when there are many who are seeking ways to make it more difficult for the people most abused in the world to go vote for change in the world, you start pushing agendas that make it impossible for things to remain as they have always been. At that point, I think Jesus is counseling his disciples, at that point, you'll be like a sheep in the midst of wolves. In the midst of your own.

Make no mistake. Jesus' Reign of God agenda is a world changing agenda. Back up there in the text just before this one, when Jesus introduces this missionary journey, he tells the 12 to go tell folk that the Reign of God is at hand, because Jesus is at hand. The Reign of God is troublesome because the Reign of God represents the future. And God's future does not look like the human present. So, to proclaim God's future in the human present means the humans who want the present to stay present, to stay the way it has always been, will turn on you like ravenous wolves.

Again, remember the context. Matthew's context for this troublesome text. Just a few verses before this one, verses 7 and 8, Jesus tells these disciples whom he is sending out as sheep in the midst of wolves just how they can represent the Reign of God future in the midst of the human present. This is what he says:

⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The Reign of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. (Matt. 10:7-8 NRS)

Are there sick people? Cure them. That sounds like a reasonable thing. We do that in our present world, don't we? We do if they can afford it. In 2020, 31.5 million Americans did not have health insurance. How do they get cured? In the first half of 2020, 43.4 percent of people ages 16-64 were inadequately insured. Almost half that population of people. How do they get cured? Cure the sick, Jesus says. Fight to make sure the sick have the resources to have access to a cure, I say. Go fight for universal health care. You'll be like a sheep in the midst of wolves.

Are there lepers? Cleanse them. The people who are outcast. Before you cleanse them, you've got to touch them. Welcome them. Embrace them. We spend much more time and effort leper-fying than we do leper cleansing today. Discrimination against people not my race. If not perpetuating it; allowing it. Inequality based on gender. Inhospitality based on country of origin. Abuse based on sexual orientation. You don't get to vote like me, be paid like me, have societal rights like me because you are not like me. Jesus sends the 12 out to challenge such leper-phobic attitudes and actions. And he's warning them that when they make that challenge, they will find themselves sheep in the midst of wolves.

Are there demons? Cast them out. The people who are possessed by mental illness, drug abuse, caught up in all manner of addiction, unable to break free, treat them not as other, but as someone you love, to whom you'd give your resources and life to help. You do that, you do it for the wrong people addicted to the wrong things and you will find yourself like a sheep in the midst of wolves.

Raise the dead, Jesus says. This one seems not so relevant to us. We don't have a lot of resurrection potential popping up in 2021. And yet, this discipleship command is still relevant today, too. Raise not just dead people. Raise dead hopes of equality for people put down day in and day out. Raise 'em. The educational opportunities that children, especially children of color, are often denied day in and day out. Raise 'em. Regular people drowned daily in debt and poverty, strangled to death by a wealth gap that grows wider and deeper every day. Raise 'em. Wherever there is death and dying: people, communities, ideals, possibilities,

promises . . . Raise ‘em. Wherever you see a dead idea, a dead possibility, a dead principle, a dead opportunity that you know ought to be alive, Raise it. ***Even if the people who killed it are your people.*** Because I send you out as a sheep in the midst of wolves.

To succeed, you need the wisdom of a serpent and the innocence of a dove. You need the wisdom of a serpent because your insight must be cold blooded and calculated if you are to see clearly. You want to be loyal to your wolf pack, you want to feel its warm embrace. But when the pack is running in a direction away from the Reign of God, you must be wise enough to perceive the difference between human rule and God’s Reign, cool enough to step aside and stand where you know Jesus’ life and Jesus’ message commands you to stand. Such wisdom will help you make the right choices; it will also help you understand what happens to you as a result. A sheep in the midst of wolves.

To survive, you’ll also need innocence. Innocence like a dove. I turn once again to King and the Civil Rights Movement he led. Tom Long is right in his commentary to note that the nonviolence of the Civil Rights movement represented dove like innocence. These sheep who were marching for justice in the midst of wolves remained innocent of violence and bloodshed even as violence was rained down upon them and their blood was spilled. Long writes: “One thinks of the nonviolent approach of the civil rights movement in the American South. Drawing upon the resources of the gospel, the movement, in terms of submitting to the violent actions of the hostile culture, was ‘innocent as doves,’ but, in terms of being effective against the evil of segregation, the movement was ‘wise as serpents.’”²

At the end of our passage, when Jesus talks with deep appreciation for the one who endures, he uses a particular Greek word. Often translated endurance, I have come to translate it as nonviolent resistance. John of Patmos uses a form of this word in his Book of Revelation. He, too, wants his people to resist living in a world that refuses to live the way God wants the world to live. John there, like Jesus here, calls for nonviolent resistance.

2. Tom Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 120.

Living out such resistance will often elicit a carnivorous response. A contemporary case in point. I am an avid football fan. Have loved watching it all my life. Grew up watching it with my father and brothers. I tried to play it in high school. But I didn't have enough height and I didn't have *any* athletic ability. So, I sat on the bench for few years and then surrendered my hope ever to play the game. But I continued watching the game. I was intrigued, and I must say, proud, when players of late began to use their platform as respected athletes and communal role models to stand up for issues related to social justice. And I was saddened by the price many of the athletes paid for speaking out on issues that they believed in. For witnessing to something important for them. In their actions, speaking, kneeling, standing, protesting, they were going out like disciples for justice into the midst of their own. Walking into their stadiums, where their fans, the people who adored them for their prowess on the football field assembled by the tens of thousands. Those people adored those players. And so very many of them turned on those players when it became clear that the players witnessed to something they disagreed with. It got to the point that even the most innocuous of demonstrations by a player got the player in trouble. So, this year, at a football game, only a few thousand people in the stands, people who loved football and the men who play it so much that they would risk exposure to Covid-19 to come sit in the stands and watch them play. That's how much they loved those players and the game they played. And the players, from both teams, came out before the game, and held hands with each other. They didn't kneel. They didn't protest. They just linked arms with their fellow players in what the stadium announcer proclaimed was a show of unity and equality. And their fans, their people, booed them. One of the players, a white player so gifted that he will one day be in the hall of fame, said he was surprised by the booing because they were just standing for unity. A few days later, I saw a black former football player, who is now a television figure, speak to the matter. He said, I heard that such and such said he was surprised by the booing because they were just standing for unity and equality. He said he didn't understand it. "Well," this young analyst replied, "I'm going to help him out." In other words, "I'm going to wise him up." He went on to say: I've been part of those moments before the game when we link hands together

and people don't boo, they cheer. When you stand with other players for cancer, they cheer. When you stand with players in support of children's hospitals, they cheer. When you stand in support of the many charities that football teams support, they cheer. But when you stand for the idea that people should live in unity and equality, which means that all people, rich and poor, young and old, male and female, but especially black and white should be treated equally, then, all of a sudden, people have a problem. Then people, your own people, your own fans, turn on you. Because by standing together you stand in support of people who have been historically denied equal support and equal opportunity. What that young black analyst was saying to that confused future hall of fame white football player was this: standing up makes you stand out, like a sheep in the midst of wolves.

Be as wise as a serpent. Recognize what is happening in our world. Figure out a way to do something about it. But be as innocent as a dove. Doves aren't hawks. Be nonviolent. But don't be passive. Don't stop talking for Jesus. Don't stop walking with Jesus. Don't stop living like Jesus. When push comes to shove—and if you're living like Jesus, you will be pushed, you will be shoved—know that God will educate you, God will talk for you, God will talk through you. Resist the urge to give in to those who would boo you, berate you, and betray you. Stay on mission. Bleat loudly and proudly for Jesus. Like a sheep in the midst of wolves.