



Joyfully Sharing God's Love without Limitation, Exception, or Condition

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Be Still. It Is Finished.

by Dustin Maddox, Lay Minister & Commissioned Ruling Elder

I've always loved Psalm 46:10: *"Be still and know that I am God."* I used to have it on a rubber bracelet fixed around my wrist. I would run my finger across the grooves of each of the letters imprinted into the rubber as I prayed or felt worried or stressed about something. God's admonition through the Psalmist to stillness, calm, and trust is supremely comforting.



Recently, I have been thinking about this verse. This season of my life--as I wrap up seminary and the ordination process--is anything but still. Besides this, there is so much happening in the world that causes me fear and anxiety about the future. Even as we have slowed down during Lent to intentionally focus on the centrality of Jesus in our lives, I'm still pulled toward the intoxication of busyness and its subtle ability to make me feel like I belong at the center of all things. If we're honest, it is really difficult to do what Psalm 46:10 asks of us.

Reading in Exodus, I came across a verse that completely reoriented my understanding of this particular verse, and my view of God in general. In Exodus 14, after Moses has lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, they find themselves trapped by the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit and closing in quickly. The Israelites, trapped between a rock and a wet place, understandably begin to question Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" (Ex 14:11) It is in Moses' response to the embittered Israelites here that I felt God's exhortation to me: "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today...The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." (Ex 14.13) *Do you see it?* Moses tells the terrified Israelites to trust God to make a way where there was literally no way. When the Israelites could have girded up their loins in a fight, flight, or freeze scenario, Moses encourages them to pick a fourth option: have faith. He says that God will *do it*. If this seems like an impossible task for us modern people to consider, imagine being one of those Israelites with the most powerful military force the world had ever seen to date breathing down your back!

This is the backdrop with which I want to invite you to see Good Friday and Easter. Jesus-- the new Moses--comes to lead us out of our slavery to sin and death. It does not take long after we taste freedom for things to get dicey in our lives. We find ourselves on the banks of the proverbial Red Sea with alarming regularity. Anytime we have a decision to make, a relationship to engage in, a cause to support--or even something as mundane as scrolling through Facebook--we are on the banks of the Red Sea with two options: faith or fear. Will we attempt to take matters into our own hands, or will we trust God to lead the way. With his life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated what it looks like to choose God's way in every situation. Eventually, this lead him to the cross, because Jesus bucked all conventional wisdom in choosing faith over fear--and this terrifies us.

Jesus goes to the cross trusting God. When Jesus is raised up on the cross with arms spread, he

parts the Red Sea of sin and death. In his resurrection, Jesus makes a way for all of humanity to cross into the Promised Land where faith governs life. Jesus' death and resurrection is our invitation to be still and trust God. Jesus' dying words are an invitation to trust: *It is finished*. God has fought the battle for us. God has purchased us out of our bondage to sin and death. Death itself has been dealt a death blow, and will one day be eradicated from God's good world.

It is only with the eyes of faith that we can see this, however, and that is precisely what Lent is preparing us for. It's Moses' exhortation and the Psalmist's admonition: be still in the face of fear and trust God to work out the details and provide the way forward. Trust that death does not, cannot, and will not have the last word. Have faith that when things seem their bleakest, resurrection awaits you. Trust that deliverance is God's job, and that work has been finished, so you can take a day off.

Beloved friends, in whatever challenges are currently facing you, may you trust that God will be who God is: trustworthy and true, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, mighty to save. May this realization come to you like resurrection dawn. May you be still.

Grace + Peace, *Dustin*

Holy Week at UPC

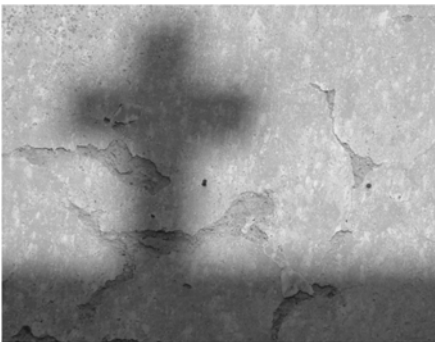
Our focus in Lent has been on choosing to center our lives in Christ and enter more fully into positive connection with our life-giving God who chooses justice and mercy, loving kindness and peace for our world. Holy Week is the time to come together in worship in several meaningful ways to guide us in the solemn journey of Jesus' last week which brings us to the joy of the resurrection dawn of Easter. *Everyone* is invited to be a part of the worship and community these services offer.

PALM SUNDAY

April 9 | *The Road Less Traveled to the Cross*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:13-23 & Matthew 21:1-11

Suggested Practice: Meditating on the Cross (as a contemplative practice)



The Celtic cross places the vertical and horizontal bars within a circle, embracing the suffering of Christ within our own human context and God's eternal love. All is wrapped safely inside a hidden harmony: one world, God's cosmos, a benevolent universe.

Spend some time meditating on an image of the cross. Allow your body, mind, and heart to be completely present to the suffering of Jesus. Welcome your own memories or sensations of pain, sorrow, grief. Hold them gently within the circle of God's presence- God's solidarity with human suffering. See if you can hold the suffering

with God and, at the same time, rest in faith that from every death comes new life; in every wound there is the opportunity for healing and hope.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 13 | *The Last Supper Remembered*

5:45 p.m. Simple Dinner & Worship in the Great Room

The story of Jesus continues as we remember how Jesus, even as he is contemplating his own arrest and death, creates community among his followers. This year we are invited to remember the community that Jesus created by joining in a simple supper and communion worship service around tables in the Great Room. All ages are welcome. Childcare is provided.

GOOD FRIDAY

April 14 | *"Seven Last Words"* by Michael John Trotta | 7 p.m. | A Choral Presentation featuring the UPC Chancel Choir under the direction of Cactus Harris

Taken from the four gospels, *Seven Last Words* refers to the final utterances of Christ from the cross. For centuries, composers have culminated the Passion of Jesus story with powerful settings of these brief phrases. This year, we are pleased to present contemporary composer

Michael John Trotta's long-awaited setting of the *Seven Last Words*. Through music and the solemnity of a tenebrous environment, this choral journey through the Passion of Jesus on the cross tells the powerful and captivating story encompassing a breathtaking palette of emotion, from intimate tenderness to majestic triumph. Childcare is provided.

EASTER SUNDAY

April 16 | *Go and Tell*

9 a.m. Traditional Service | 11 a.m. Contemporary Service | 10:15 a.m. Easter Egg Hunt

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28

Join us at the culmination of the *Centering on Jesus: A Lenten Journey* as we celebrate the resurrection story of Jesus! Each service has guest musicians and special music. The power of the risen Jesus is our invitation to join in the resurrection life today - for us to participate in the life-giving forces through Christ of beauty, truth, goodness, love, wholeness, and deep connection with each other and the beautiful world God created. The resurrection is such good news that we cannot keep it to ourselves; we have to "go and tell" how it works for us and those we care about.

A Look at a Passion Hymn

by Cactus Harris, Director of Music & Arts and Resident Organist

In my opinion, no hymn causes me to tremble, or better captures the pain and suffering on the cross than "Were You There." It is chock full of imagery and emotion, pulling at our heartstrings and making the hair on the back of our neck stand up.

Aside from the importance of the text, there is also the historical importance that comes along with this African American spiritual first published in 1897. This hymn proves beauty can oftentimes be the barrier-breaking force to prejudices. A pioneer in this right, "*Were You There*" broke the history of exclusion by becoming the first African American work to appear in a mainline American hymnal, the Episcopal Hymnal 1940.

In discussing the text of the hymn, Carl Daw Jr. writes in a companion to our Glory to God hymnal, "[Were You There] collapses the rational boundaries between then and now, there and here, and focuses on the emotional reality that transcends them." Of course, the emotional climax comes in the great "O!" in the middle of each verse. This wordless response is the opportunity to recall and be present to the question, Were You There? This Eastertide, where might we take a lesson from this spiritual? Perhaps we change the question from "were you there," to where are you?

Musically, *Cactus*

Goals of the UPC Session

by The Reverend Renée Marie Rico, Transitional Pastor and Moderator of Session

This year is one of transition for UPC, but as the Session gathered at its annual weekend retreat in January amid tall piles of snow at Calvin Crest, the dreams and hopes for the future began to emerge. The Session began by reflecting on where the congregation is, and by considering the new Mission Statement adopted last year. It reads:

To joyfully share God's boundless love with all in our
community
without condition, exception, or limitation.



The elders talked about which word or phrase we might emphasize this year - how might we live into this mission from God. The word that came to us for this year is community. We began to talk about how in this time and space being the community of God is the engine that helps to drive all the other parts of the mission. When we have created the Christ-like connections with each other, there is new spiritual energy emanating out to others. We want to become a passionate community for all of God's people, no matter what country they were born in, because our tradition teaches us to welcome the stranger in our midst.

We then began to imagine how this work might be realized for the coming year, and out of those conversations, five goals were established:

1. Growing Young.

We all read a chapter from an excellent book by authors from Fuller Seminary called *Growing Young*, and the elders decided this would be one of their focuses for the year. By growing young, we don't mean ignoring other age groups, but we do mean that by concentrating and focusing on what works for young people and young families, the whole body of the church is strengthened.

The Six Keys (practices) include:

- Empowering others, especially young people;
- Empathizing with today's young people by understanding their stresses and strains;
- Welcoming people into a Jesus-centered way of living;
- Fueling a warm community with warm peer and inter-generational friendships;
- Prioritizing young people (and families) everywhere; and
- Being the best neighbors, enabling young people to neighbor well locally and globally.
- Welcoming Newcomers/On-ramps Development Plan.
- The Session also recognized that we need to refresh our ways of welcoming visitors and new folks to UPC - from basic tangible things like refreshing our Narthex (the entry to the sanctuary), to having information on small groups to join for community.



2. Transition Plan for a New Pastor.

The Session is also planning for the upcoming pastoral transition, as UPC welcomes a talented new pastor into this community. A key investment for the church is to plan for that pastor's entry into the Fresno community to be as positive as possible and to help them meet members and friends in this church, and to start well in their ministry.

3. Develop a Plan for Youth Ministry After June 2017.

The cohort of teenagers at UPC are graduating this June, so the Session is directing the Children and Youth Committee to develop a plan for those youth who do remain to have opportunities for spiritual growth and connection.

4. Promoting Godly Play.

Our Godly Play Sunday School continues to grow and be a safe place for children to express themselves and learn to trust God. But it is a bit of a secret! The Children and Youth Committee has been asked to create a plan to promote Godly Play in our community.

To learn more about who is working on these goals for the year, talk to any Session member - and stay tuned as we begin to implement our work.

In the Spirit, *Renée*

Missions at UPC: The Ability to Change the Story

by Sol Eufracio, Elder of the Ministry of Missions

On February 26, University Presbyterian Church participated in Freedom Sunday - a Sunday when local churches partner with the Central Valley Justice Coalition (CVJC) to shed light on human trafficking locally and globally. Together, we were introduced to Jamelia and her story of being trafficked from Belize to Clovis, CA. It was powerful to hear her story at the service and engage deeply with Jamelia and Jessica, the co-founder of CVJC, during the Sunday School hour.

We witnessed what the partnership of individuals and a congregation can do together: they can save lives. Through our financial support, prayers, and our action, we change the narrative of the stories we are connected to. We change the story. A story that seems like it will only hold desperation and slavery transforms into a story of hope and freedom. Freedom.

We had the deep gift of hearing Jamelia's story which is one of rescue and redemption. We were able to see Jamelia speaking in front of us. We got to meet her children.

This is what mission is. It is the ability to change the story of a world that seems hopeless, broken and unchanging. We get to see God's goodness in the stories we encounter and delight with those who are now free and accepting the love of Jesus in the best way possible.

Central Valley Justice Coalition is continuing to work, locally, in Fresno to educate, advocate and empower communities. To visit their website, log on to <http://justiceco.org>.

Would you like to join the Mission Committee and help our church participate in changing the story? Want to share ideas you have for our Committee? Let's talk. Email me at sol.eufracio@gmail.com.

You are Enough: The Church and Mental Health

by Micah Qualle, Elder for Spiritual Life

Greetings UPC friends and family! On April 21 and 22, I will be attending a conference called *You are Enough: The Church and Mental Health* at First Presbyterian Church, Fresno. It is put on by the not-for-profit mental health advocacy group called Hope Authentic. As UPC's Elder for Spiritual Growth, I invite you to also come to this fantastic opportunity for us as a church to improve our understanding of how to more skillfully support people in our lives who also struggle with mental health.

The conference features speakers and workshops facilitated by mental health professionals as well as people who have struggled with mental health either personally or in their families. The conference starts at 6 p.m. on Friday, April 21, and runs through Saturday, April 22 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$45 until April 20; \$50 after that.

I hope many of you take this opportunity. If you'd like to coordinate attendance or have more questions, find me between services or email me at texafornian@gmail.com. To purchase tickets in advance, log onto the Eventbrite website at www.eventbrite.com.



Finances at UPC

A Word About Per Capita: The financial support of the Ministries the Presbytery of the San Joaquin, our Synod, and the national office of PCUSA are supported by each congregation by per capita, which is based on the number of active members (Per Capita) within each congregation. This year, the suggested Per Capita gift is \$45. Of course any gift, regardless of size, is welcome.

You can send your contribution to the UPC office or place a designated contribution in the church offering plate on any Sunday; be sure to put "Per Capita" in the memo line of the check and/or designate on the yellow envelope in your pew. Log onto www.upcfresno.org. Click on Online Giving under Quick Links. If you have questions, email Mike Watkins, UPC Treasurer at watkins7082@me.com.

UPC Groups

Sunday Night Youth Group: This group for our teens meets Sunday nights at 6:30 p.m. in the Youth Room for fun, laughs, and Jesus. For more information, email Dustin at dustin@upcfresno.org, or text him at 288-0083.

Contemplative Prayer: Come Mondays at 6:30 p.m. to the Godly Play Room (Rooms 3-4) for Christ-centered meditation. No previous experience is necessary, just a desire to spend quiet, still time with the Divine. For more information, email Cathy Wingert at wingy104@aol.com.

Women's Bible Study: The group meets for study and prayer Wednesdays from 9:30-11 a.m. They are beginning a studying of the Sermon on the Mount and invite you to join them for prayer and study. For more information, email Laura Lindegren at punkin2826@yahoo.com, or call her at 299-1838.

Intercessory Prayer Service: This monthly service, where all are invited to come pray for loved ones, members of our congregation, community, and world, meets Monday, April 10 at 7 p.m. For more information, email Pastor Tedd at teddlyons@gmail.com, or call or text him at 906-1438.

Presbyterian Women (PW): On Tuesday, April 11, PW meets at 9:30 a.m. at the church to carpool to Fresno's Garden of the Sun. After a self-guided tour of the garden, they'll have their sack lunches and a business meeting. Please be sure to bring along a sack lunch. Water and dessert will be provided. Garden of the Sun is a demonstration garden sponsored by the University of



California Cooperative Extension and Master Gardeners located at 1750 N. Winery Avenue, Fresno (on Winery between Clinton and McKinley). All who are interested are welcome. For more information, contact Betty Higdon at 225-4068.

Pub Theology: Join the discussion Tuesday, April 18 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Sequoia Brewing Company, on the corner of Champlain and Perrin in the Piazza Del Fiore Center. Add your voice to the discussion of a variety of topics concerning faith, religion, and God. Seating is limited so come early to ensure a spot. They meet monthly on the third Tuesday. Listening and discussion are encouraged; drinking is optional. For more

information, email Dustin at dustin@upcfresno.org, or text him at 288-0083.

Meeting at UPC

Sheeper Than Therapy: Enjoy a group of knitters and crocheters whose skills range from beginner to expert. They meet at UPC the first Saturday of the month. Join them Saturday, April 1 from 8:30-11:30 a.m. For information, email Pastor Renée at rrico@aol.com.

Opportunities for the UPC Community

Mother's Day Cards from PW: Mother's Day cards will be made available by the UPC Presbyterian Women after worship on April 23, 30, and May 1. Your donations for these cards benefit PC(USA)'s Healthy Women, Healthy Families program to protect and restore the health of women and children in Africa. What a great way to honor the important women in your life and help women around the world as well.



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Leslie Stephenson
- 3 Carol Doyle
- 5 Eddy Neate
- 8 Robin Allen-Maddox
- Dan Scarbery
- 9 Cyndee Gravette
- 15 Mary Johnson
- Lennox York
- 16 Carlos Cortes
- Stephen Grisez
- 21 Colin Warnes
- 22 Christi Paradise
- 25 Bob Mitchell
- 27 Kathy Scofield
- 28 Amy Evans
- 29 Karen Sutton

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

- 7 Don & Sue Vinicor
- 8 Tim & Julie Buchanan
- 14 Tom & Cyndee Gravette
- Richard & Sandra Pelisari
- 15 Dave & Nancy Youngs
- 19 John & Diane Schafer
- 20 Woodie Rea & Sharon Stanley-Rea

APRIL CALENDAR

- 1 Sheeper Than Therapy
- 8:30 a.m.

APRIL CALENDAR cont.

- 2 5th Sunday in Lent
- New Member Class
- 12:30 p.m.
- Youth Group 6:30 p.m.
- 3 Contemplative Prayer
- 6:30 p.m.
- 4 Deacons Meeting 7 p.m.
- 5 Women's Bible Study
- 9:30 p.m.
- After School Mentoring
- 3:30 p.m.
- Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 6 Bell Choir Rehearsal
- 6:30 p.m.
- Bible Study 7 p.m.
- 9 HOLY WEEK BEGINS
- Palm Sunday
- Youth Group 6:30 p.m.
- 10 Contemplative Prayer
- 6:30 p.m.
- Young Families Potluck
- 6:30 p.m.
- Intercessory Prayer 7 p.m.
- 11 Presbyterian Women
- 9:30 p.m.
- Session 6 p.m.
- 12 Women's Bible Study
- 9:30 p.m.
- After School Mentoring
- 3:30 p.m.
- Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.

APRIL CALENDAR cont.

- 13 Maundy Thursday Supper & Service 5:45 p.m.
- 14 Good Friday Cantata
- 7 p.m.
- 15 Food Distribution 8 a.m.
- 16 EASTER SUNDAY
- 17 Contemplative Prayer
- 6:30 p.m.
- 18 Pub Theology 6:30 p.m.
- 19 Women's Bible Study
- 9:30 p.m.
- After School Mentoring
- 3:30 p.m.
- Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 20 Bell Choir Rehearsal
- 6:30 p.m.
- Bible Study 7 p.m.
- 23 Youth Group 6:30 p.m.
- 24 Contemplative Prayer
- 25 Ministry Meetings - time & dates vary
- 26 Women's Bible Study
- 9:30 p.m.
- After School Mentoring
- 3:30 p.m.
- Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 27 Bell Choir Rehearsal
- 6:30 p.m.
- Bible Study 7 p.m.
- 30 FIFTH SUNDAY

