

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 4
APRIL 2024

THE NEW CITY JOURNAL

A Publication of First Presbyterian Church Aurora



EASTERTIDE

BY PASTOR DAVID GOETZ

We have completed two sermon series so far in 2024. We began the year with our Rooted & Grounded series, being reminded and reminding one another of what never changes in this mutable and desultory world. Much has changed at First Pres in the last few years, and the last six months have probably felt like one big change after another. What can we hold on to when change swirls around us like an incessant storm? We can depend on, build on, and count on the unchanging God, the gospel of Christ, the gift of the Spirit, the people of God, and the means of grace. Is anything from that series still rattling around in your mind and heart? What truths do you find yourself clinging to and coming back to in this season of life?



We then spent the season of Lent in A Better Country—well, at least looking towards it with the help of Hebrews 11-12. “Our home is warring disobedient history,” as the poet Anne Porter once said, and we—preceded, inspired, and surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—walk by faith and look forward to “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). By faith we look to Jesus, who endured the cross for our sake. This led us into Holy Week, when we meditated on the call to love and serve one another and on the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus for our forgiveness and redemption. How was your heart encouraged and fortified this year as we followed Jesus on the road to Golgotha?

But, as you already know, it is of first importance not only that “Christ died for our sins” but also “that he was raised on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Truly, truly, I say unto you, Jesus is risen from the dead—and death no longer has dominion over him! In April and May, from Easter through Trinity Sunday, we will meditate together on how the risen Christ makes himself known to his people. “Meeting the Risen One” will be the title of this new series, and my prayer is that we will meet with Jesus as we consider his resurrection appearances.

We will begin by meditating on John 20:11-18, which records the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, who struggled to recognize him (a common theme in these texts) until he called her by name. “The sheep hear the shepherd’s voice,” Jesus once said, “and he calls his own sheep by name” (Jn. 10:3). Let us listen to our Lord’s voice!

We will then consider one of my favorite passages, Luke 24:13-35, which records the encounter between the risen One and the two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus. They, too, don’t recognize the Lord at first—not until the breaking of bread! “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?”, they asked one another after Jesus had vanished from their sight. Their hearts did burn, and so might ours.

In week three we will contemplate the first appearance of Jesus to the apostles. He speaks to their hearts both peace and promise—that he will clothe them “with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49). May we know and be filled with this same power!



In week four we will give close attention to the loving appearance of Jesus to Thomas, famous for doubting. When Thomas sees and touches the wounds of Jesus, he cries out, “My Lord and my God” (Jn. 20:28). May his confession of faith be our own!

In week five we will look at seven disciples who had returned to their fishing boats. As Jesus met them in the mundane work of a normal day, so he can and will meet with us.

To conclude the series, we will encounter Jesus in his ascension, in the gift of the Spirit from on high, and in the preaching of the gospel. I’m excited to celebrate Ascension Sunday, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday with you all!

To be totally honest, there’s a good chance you won’t hear anything new in these upcoming sermons: novelty, thank God, has never been the point of preaching or of meditation on Scripture. Think about your relationship with the person you love most in the world, whoever it is: How often do you learn a new fact about that person? Probably not often! I’m sure it happens occasionally, but most of your time with that person is spent deepening your familiarity with him or her—learning and understanding again what you already knew. The same is true with Jesus! By faith we press deeper into communion with the One we’ve already known. The Polish writer Anna Kamienska once said, “I want only with my whole self to reach the heart of obvious truths.” Let that be our aim in these coming weeks and always—to reach, with the whole self, the heart of the risen and reigning Jesus Christ.

STORIES FROM THE MISSION FIELD: VICTORIA DENNIS



Prayers and Praises

- Pray for Ebru as she and her husband seek to grow and walk faithfully in the Lord. Pray also for wisdom for me as I walk with her in this discipleship context.
- Pray that God would guide our church into ever-increasing health and maturity as the body of Christ.

An Invitation to Discipleship

As I walked to a coffee shop to meet with a young woman from church, I rehearsed to myself the best way to invite her to meet with me regularly for discipleship. Somehow in my head, the invitation had become intimidating, and I was worried about coming across too strong. But before long, I was sipping lattes with *Ebru, who was sharing with me how she chose her profession as a nurse in a local hospital.

When I asked Ebru if she would be interested in meeting up regularly to study the Bible and grow in her faith, her response surprised me. Her eyes filled with tears and she said, “I would really love that. No one has ever asked me before, and I just assumed it was because of my irregular work hours at the hospital. But I would really like to meet for this.” When I asked her if there was any area of Christianity in particular that she had questions about, she

expressed that she wants to be able to share the gospel clearly with her coworkers at the hospital, but is not sure how to do that.

Praise God that Ebru is so eager to grow in the Lord! We met last week for our first lesson, and Ebru arrived ready to learn with a Bible, notebook, and pencil at the ready. Please pray for her and for me as we embark on this journey, that the Holy Spirit would guide our times together and that Ebru would grow into maturity in Christ. Please also continue to pray for our church as a whole, especially in the area of discipleship and deepening maturity amongst believers. Truly as Jesus said in Matthew 9:37, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few!



Ebru (far right) and I have begun meeting regularly for discipleship.

A VIEW ON NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH

I thank God for our outreach to our neighbors through Thanksgiving gift cards, Spring Break Open Gym, Family Get Together, summer camps, and more.

Our church has always been willing to share the love of God with the needs of our neighbors. God gives us as a church the opportunity to introduce our neighbors to Jesus Christ who is the answer to all their problems, through the years, and building a relationship with some families. I have seen the need and felt the pain of the people who come into our lives, and I have seen how they feel more open to the fundamental need that is Christ.

I pray that our life be a living testimony of the love of God and that every word we share can be a seed of faith in the hearts of those who listen to us.

As many of you know, Summer Camp is one of our neighborhood outreach ministries. As we begin to prepare for it, could you partner with us to continue sharing God's Love for our children, throughout Summer Camp, by praying, donating snacks, candy, or money? Give here: <https://onrealm.org/firstpresaurora/give/SDC>



~ Brenda Bustamante

EASTERTIDE: A WEEK OF WEEKS

Pastor David has given an overview of the sermon series for the season of Eastertide, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. I'd invite you to take time on your own to enter into each of the texts during this season:

April 7: John 20:11-18

April 14: Luke 24:13-35

April 21: Luke 24:36-49

April 28: John 20:19-29

May 5: John 21:1-14

May 12 (Ascension Sunday): Ephesians 1:15-23

May 19 (Pentecost): Acts 2:1-21

May 26 (Trinity Sunday): Acts 2:22-41

I commend to you for your spiritual refreshment the *Sulpician Method* (originating from the Order of St. Sulpicius in 17th century Paris).

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

~ Keith Scherer

The Sulpician Method

This is a Jesus-focused meditation. Select a Jesus -scene from one of the Gospels and do the following:

A. Jesus before the eyes (adoration): *Look upon Jesus and adore him in one of his virtues (humility, love, obedience, etc.). Don't busy self with details and meanings. Just look and try to have a deep appreciation and love.*

B. Jesus in the heart (communion): *The soul draws into itself the virtue or attribute it has seen in the Lord. Make it your own.*

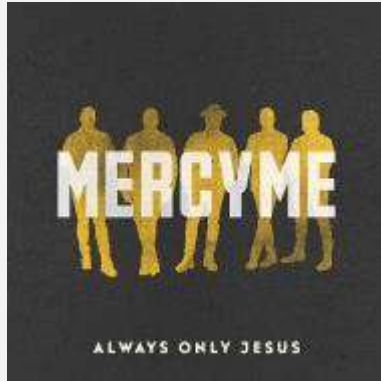
C. Jesus in the hands (co-operation): *A resolution or plan to utilize or manifest that virtue. Try to be specific and concrete.*

During the day, after your meditation, remember Francis de Sales's *Spiritual Nosegay*. *This is a blossom plucked from the garden of your meditation and from time to time throughout the day you lift it to your nose and sniff it and let it be part of the moment. It is a way of keeping your meditation alive throughout the day.*

MEDIA OF THE MONTH

Always Only Jesus
By MercyMe

MercyMe's *Always Only Jesus* Album was released in 2022. Starting out with the song, "Hands Up" to ending with "Nothing But the Blood", this album is filled with positive, uplifting music that focuses on Jesus.



Songs you might be familiar with on the album are "To Not Worship You", "Always Only Jesus", "Nothing But the Blood", and "Then Christ Came". I hope you enjoy it!

Here's the chorus for *Always Only Jesus*:

*Every breath I'm breathing will be
filled with praise
Just for one name, always only Jesus
Let my heart cry holy and
my hands be raised
Just for one name, always only Jesus*

~ Melissa Beneke

STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Average Weekly Need: \$ 14,239.00

Received February 4, 2024 \$ 9,503.00

Total Attendance 225

Received February 11, 2024 \$ 20,115.64

Total Attendance 209

Received February 18, 2024 \$ 11,258.00

Total Attendance 256

Received February 25, 2024 \$ 7,869.00

Total Attendance 247

**Total includes online. Average online worship: 52*

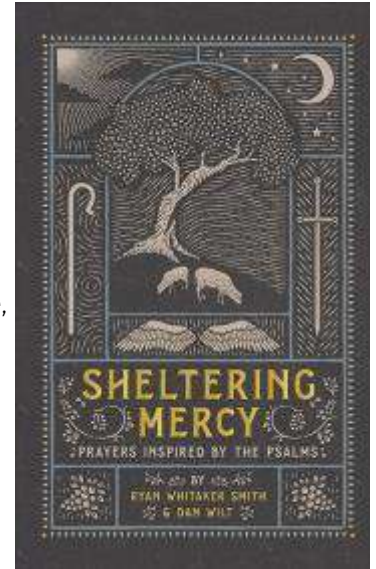
Financial Report - February 2024

Actual income/expenses for year to date, including surplus funds of \$28,276, and "Faith Giving above Pledges" of \$152,280.

Income	\$ 473,729.92
Expenses	\$ <u>516,422.42</u>
Net Deficit	\$ 42,692.50

BOOK OF THE MONTH

*Sheltering Mercy:
Prayers Inspired
by the Psalms*
by Ryan Whitaker
Smith & Dan Wilt



I found the Psalms in college. I had read them before, of course, but in college they came alive to me and were a place where I met Jesus daily. They were compiled as a prayer book for God's people in exile—for God's people who were uncertain of the future, who longed for God's salvation and rejoiced in his promises—and they continue to be a wonderful prayer book for us.

Sheltering Mercy and its sequel, Endless Grace, together contain prayers inspired by each of the 150 Psalms. The prayers are not direct paraphrases of the Psalms, but respond more freely to the movements and themes of each Psalm, drawing in phrases from throughout scripture. They are beautiful, and express so much of what is in my heart. I highly recommend adding this to your daily prayer routine.

~ Britta Wallbaum

DATES TO REMEMBER

Friendship Bible Club	April	14
Communion Sunday	April	14
Family Get Together	April	20
Communion Sunday	April	21
Forum on Artificial Intelligence	April	28

SESSION MINUTES

Highlights of the February 27, 2024 Session Meeting are:

REPORT OF THE CLERK: ANNE MILLER

Anne Miller shared the draft letters to be used to send to the group of inactive members the Session voted to move to “dismissed” at the February 6th, 2024, Session meeting.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS:

Pastor David Goetz then shared that he had talked with David and Lourie Burmania, head of the Deacons, about changing homebound communion from Sunday, February 18 to another time to allow for all the Elders and Deacons to be present at the meet and greet for Pastor Tony. The Deacons suggested Sunday, March 24. Pastor Tony Hinchliff called a motion to approve the change in date. The motion was seconded, a vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.

James Kinnard and Dale Roberts then shared about a one-time stipend that Personnel Committee is suggesting to be given to Pastor David Goetz due to the extra responsibility, work, and time he has given during this season of transition. Pastor Tony Hinchliff called a motion to approve the proposed one-time stipend of \$3,000 to Pastor David Goetz. The motion was seconded, a vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.

James Kinnard then shared about the next Presbytery Meeting in Aplington, Iowa, from April 26th-27th, 2024.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS: DALE ROBERTS

Dale Roberts shared an update from the Finance Committee on the Stewardship Initiative for the spring of 2024. They had landed on the structure of “Time, Talent, Treasure, Tithe.” The initiative would run from April 14th, 2024, through May 5th, 2024, when members will be encouraged to present their pledges for the new fiscal year.

UPDATE ON THE TRANSITION PROCESS: PASTOR TONY HINCHLIFF

Pastor Tony Hinchliff shared with the Session about the IPM transition process. Pastor Tony sent around a list of possible people for the Transitional Team. Pastor Tony talked about the importance and reason for having a transition process, and his role as the transitional pastor. This process takes about a year but could be more or less. For the sake of time and desire to be able to cover other pertinent topics, it was decided to come back to the Transitional Team list at the next meeting. A motion was made to have Pastor David Goetz and Pastor Tony Hinchliff create a list to be presented. The motion was seconded, a vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.

At this point, James Kinnard assumed the role as moderator, inviting the Session discuss any feedback or concerns from the congregation regarding the ongoing transition process. Items were discussed and appropriate actions were decided upon.

~ Anne Miller, Clerk of Session

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

2024/2025 Fiscal Year

Over the next few weeks, April 14 – May 5, we will be in the midst of our first ever Spring Stewardship campaign, in preparation for our new fiscal year which begins July 1.

For the Finance Commission to have all of the information we need to prepare the operating budget for FY 24/25 in an accurate manner, it would be extremely helpful if we could have all pledges in by the end of May. If you cannot turn in your commitment by May 5, we would appreciate the receipt of it as soon as possible.

We appreciate your faithfulness and generosity in your commitment to giving to the ministries of FPC in this new timing as we always have in the past.

We hope you'll reach out to one of us if you have any questions regarding any matters of our new fiscal year.

~ Dan Wegehaupt and Finance Commission
Mary Ann Harkness, John Vincent, Nate Landers,
Butch Watgen, Dale Roberts

LAST WORD FROM PASTOR KAREN—FROM COMMUNION TO COMMUNITY TO MINISTRY

During the season of Eastertide, I often reflect on thoughts expressed by Henri J. M. Nouwen in *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*. The meditation is based on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35, one of the scripture passages in our current sermon series of “Meeting the Risen One”. Here is a short excerpt that I hope both encourages and challenges us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Communion creates community. Christ, living in them, brought them together in a new way. The Spirit of the risen Christ, which entered them through the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, not only made them recognize Christ himself but also each other as members of a new community of faith. Communion makes us look at each other and speak to each other, not about the latest news, but about him who walked with us. We discover each other as people who belong together because each of us now belongs to him. We are alone, because he disappeared from our sight, but we are together because each of us is in communion with him and so has become one body through him.

This new body is a spiritual body, fashioned by the Spirit of love. It manifests itself in very concrete ways: in forgiveness, reconciliation, mutual support, outreach to people in need, and solidarity with all who suffer. Thus communion not only creates community, but community leads to mission.

He sends us out together, two by two. And so we can witness as people who belong to a body of faith. We are sent out to teach, to heal, to inspire, and to offer hope to the world—not as the exercise of our unique skill, but as the expression of our faith that all we have to give comes from him who brought us together.

© 1994 by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Published in the United States by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

FAITH MILESTONES & RETREAT

When I applied for this job last summer, one of the things that drew me most strongly to the position were our “Faith Milestones.” I love the way our children are intentionally introduced to worship, faith, church, and the sacraments, and thereby welcomed as full worshipping members of our church body. We currently have five milestones actively running, and two in development. Each milestone addresses a specific step in a child’s faith formation, and they build on each other.



Baptism | I Belong to God

Age: Any

As a covenantal church, we welcome infants and children into God’s family and celebrate God’s love and faithfulness through baptism.



WeeWorship | I Can Worship God

Age: 4-8

In order to help our youngest worshipers transition into regular worship services, we hold monthly Worship Workshops during the sermon, covering topics such as church year seasons and holidays, what worship is, and beginner intros to the sacraments and elements of worship.



Welcomed to Worship | I Belong in Worship

Age: 1st-2nd Grades

Every other year, we hold a 4 week class for our early readers to explore more thoroughly who God is and why we worship him, how we worship, and what the sacraments are.



Explore the Bible | I Can Meet Jesus in the Bible

Age: 1st-5th Grades

All of our children’s Sunday Classes start with a foundation of the Bible, but our WonderLab is specifically geared toward helping kids meet Jesus there, and guiding them to respond to him through various means of prayer, creativity, study.



Serve the Church | I Have Something to Offer God’s People

Age: 1st-5th Grades (In Development)

We believe that everyone in our church has something valuable to offer the body, and so we’re working on a program/apprenticeship that will welcome kids to use their gifts to serve the church.

If you have any interest in helping me develop this or being a mentor, let me know!



Receive Communion | Jesus Gives Me Himself

Age: 3rd-4th Grades

Baptized kids are welcomed to start taking communion once their parents determine that they have age appropriate faith, and they talk with a minister or elder of the church. Our Communicants’ Retreat and Class (described in more detail below) are intended to help these kids understand more clearly what that faith is, and what the sacraments mean.



Live the Mystery | God Is Big Enough For My Doubts and Wonderings

Age: 5th-6th Grades (In Development)

As children transition into adolescence, we recognize that they are likely to enter a “searching faith” where they question the church and faith, and may deal with some doubt. We’re developing a mentorship program that opens up lines of communication around these questions, and builds a foundation of spiritual practices that they can use to meet with God through this season and their whole lives.

Recent Milestone: Communicants’ Retreat / Class

I had the privilege of leading our 3rd–4th graders and their parents on a retreat February 23-24. The purpose was to give the kids a foundational understanding of God’s story, and to reflect on their own stories and how they are part of God’s story.

This was such a life-giving time. We ate together, played together, and explored our stories together. One of the greatest gifts of working in children’s ministry is hearing kids’ questions and thoughts - I am often surprised and delighted by the insights they share! The gift of this retreat was having one-on-one time, reiterating the love of God to them, and reminding them that they belong here.

Now we’re starting a six week class with the same group of kids, and will explore in-depth topics of God, faith, covenant community, and the sacraments (baptism and communion). We’ll hear testimonies from several of our elders, and the kids will have the opportunity to write their own faith testimonies. I hope you’ll join me in recognizing and celebrating these kids in our upcoming Pentecost service!

~ Britta Wallbaum