

# Rooted in Faith

A DEVOTIONAL BOOK CELEBRATING  
SIXTY YEARS AT LANDIS HOMES

Rooted In Faith | A Devotional Book Celebrating Sixty Years At Landis Homes



*So then, just as you received  
Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to  
live your lives in him, rooted and  
built up in him, strengthened in  
the faith as you were taught, and  
overflowing with thankfulness.*

COLOSSIANS 2:6-7 (NIV)



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# Rooted in Faith: *A Devotional Book* *Celebrating Sixty Years at Landis Homes*

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Some authors did not cite a specific Bible translation or version in their sermons.

At Landis Communities, we continue to grow our established reputation for excellence in serving aging adults. The name Landis has value—the history, the legacy, the excellent reputation. We are guided by our values of joy, compassion, integrity, stewardship and community, while staying faithful to the heritage established by our past leaders, and will continue this legacy in the years to come. Landis Communities is one organization with three distinct parts: continuing care retirement communities, home and community-based services, and quality living options.



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*Rooted*  
in Faith



# Preface

Landis Homes is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this year. In 1964, Landis Homes was founded to provide retirement living for senior adults, including offering an affordable retirement option for returning Mennonite missionaries. Today it is home to approximately 845 residents and has expanded its programs to reach beyond its campus to other parts of Lancaster County.

Landis Homes has a rich history, as President Larry Zook points out in his introduction to this book. But this anniversary volume is not intended to be a history book. Rather, it is a collection of devotional contributions that reflect the community Landis Homes is today. For the historically minded, we direct readers to the Landis Homes website and books *The First Thirty Years* and *Growing Community 1994-2014*.

*Rooted in Faith: A Devotional Book Celebrating Sixty Years at Landis Homes* is a collection of sixty contributions, most of which were shared with the Landis Homes community within the last year or so as Sunday morning sermons or weekday devotionals. The seed for this book began with an idea of resident, Paul Zehr, to gather and publish devotional writings from the rich and diverse voices of residents, team members and guest speakers.

Because Landis Homes has roots in the Anabaptist tradition, we structured the book around the core values of Anabaptists, as articulated by Palmer Becker, the author of *What Is an Anabaptist Christian?*. Becker identifies the following as core values of Anabaptist Christians:



1. Jesus is the center of our faith.
2. Community is the center of our life.
3. Reconciliation is the center of our work.

For *Rooted in Faith*, we switched the first and second values, placing Jesus not only at the center of our faith, but at the center of this book as well. The centrality of Christ in faith, life and work sustains and supports the mission of Landis Homes and its core values of Joy, Compassion, Integrity, Stewardship and Community.

When Landis Homes opened in 1964, many of the residents were Mennonites. Today, residents come from a variety of backgrounds and faith perspectives. The portion of residents affiliated with Mennonite or other Anabaptist congregations is now just over 50%. Landis Homes has welcomed an increase in diversity among team members as well. Throughout this demographic shift, Landis Homes continues to be fed by its faith roots and shaped by Anabaptist convictions.

Becker writes, “The problem of Christianity is not necessarily its many denominations, but rather the hesitancy of its parts to learn from each other.” Landis

Homes seeks to build on its Anabaptist foundational values, and also to be a place where Anabaptist Christians and believers from other traditions can be open to the Spirit and learn from each other.

This book arose from a desire to hear not only from one or two voices, but from a more diverse representation of this community. In that way it aligns well with the traditional Anabaptist leaning toward group discernment for scriptural interpretation and how faith is lived out corporately.

As you read *Rooted in Faith*, we invite you to enter an attitude of worship and listening. How do you respond to the call of Jesus, community and reconciliation? We are grateful for all who are part of the Landis Homes community and pray that it may continue to be rooted and grounded in God’s love.

## THE ANNIVERSARY BOOK COMMITTEE:

Eileen Kinch, *Editor*  
Jim Lapp  
Anne Weaver

Audrey Kanagy  
Steve Ness  
Paul Zehr

**As you read *Rooted in Faith*, we invite you to enter an attitude of worship and listening. How do you respond to the call of Jesus, community and reconciliation?**

# Introduction

*The following is an adaptation of a presentation offered by President/CEO Larry Zook, at a gathering in the High Foundation Auditorium on February 16, 2024, celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of Landis Homes.*

Good afternoon. I am very grateful for the ten founders of Landis Homes who, along with George and Grace Leaman, welcomed Henry and Mary Weber, our first residents, to Landis Homes on Tuesday, February 18, 1964. These founders, whom you can read about in our history books, built a strong foundation of community and faith as we have sought to be a community of Christ-like love.

Over the years our Board of Directors, including both current and former members here today, have built on this foundation along with each of our team members, volunteers, residents, family members and many other partners in our mission.

One of the ways that our Board and team have prepared for the future is through an act of servant leadership—listening carefully to those whom we serve. In 2008 our Landis Homes Board engaged in strategic listening and appreciative inquiry, reaching out to over 150 stakeholders in Landis Homes, including current and prospective residents, church and business leaders, and many others. As we listened we heard a call to:

- Keep Landis Homes strong and vital
- Provide new affordable living options
- Provide services in the home
- Be open to partnering creatively and strategically with others in support of these efforts

This led to the creation of Landis Communities in 2011 and the work of Landis Quality Living in Lancaster and New Holland, along with the affiliation with Welsh Mountain Home in New Holland.

Over the years our board and staff have sought to learn and innovate new ways of honoring and enriching the lives of residents through high quality service. This was modeled by our founders, Sanford High, Frank Enck and Mowery Frey, who—working on behalf of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions—traveled to Florida in the early 1960s to visit and learn from several retirement communities.

This learning and innovative spirit was lived out again by our board and team members in 2006 and 2007 as we began planning for the South Campus expansion, including hybrid homes and cottages that began opening in 2010. The hybrid homes helped us live out our guiding value of community in providing a new, small-scale community opportunity for those living in each of six buildings. They also demonstrated our value of stewardship in that we were able to make better use of the land by building up, allowing us to add about three and a half times more homes on the same amount of land.

Another expression of our stewardship value and environmental sustainability was the restoration of our wetlands on campus in 2012. The wetlands remove harmful sediments that pollute our waterways and the Chesapeake Bay, provide financial benefits in allowing use of the wetlands to meet our storm water management needs, and create a natural ecosystem which nurtures wildlife and native plants here on campus. We are deeply grateful for the many resident volunteers who are part of the Friends of the Woods

& Wetlands and other sustainability-focused groups who devote many hours to helping to maintain and support our sustainability efforts, including reducing our greenhouse gas emissions on campus.

The redevelopment in 2018 of the central part of campus was another significant milestone in our story, adding the Crossings building. In addition to its seventy-nine homes, the building provided a new Learning & Wellness Center supported by many donors, including Calvin G. and Janet C. High for whom the center is named, along with other amenities that support community life.

As we celebrate sixty years, I am reminded of the words of A. Grace Wenger, a resident and board member, who also authored the history of our first thirty years from 1964-1994. Grace ended that book by sharing about the opening of our Adult Day Services program in 1989, and said that this service to non-residents is one small step in a new direction, reaching beyond our own campus to give Christ-centered care to retirees in the larger community. She went on to say that, as staff, board and residents discover new ways of sharing compassionate service, they may see—thirty years from now—the fulfillment of one person's vision, “a Landis Homes Community without walls.”

Looking back, we have seen this vision become true as we serve throughout Lancaster County—in New Holland, in Lancaster City, and here in Manheim Township, and through the provision of in-home services throughout Lancaster County and into Lebanon County.

Looking toward the future, likely this vision will not only continue to be fulfilled but also to grow. In addition to adding new homes at Landis Homes in our upcoming East Campus expansion, we are exploring

ways of providing new middle income and affordable housing in surrounding communities like Reading, where we are working on an affordable housing community similar to Mountain View Terrace.

As our board envisioned in 2008, we may find

new ways to collaborate and partner with other senior living organizations in strategic and creative ways in the coming years, with an eye on keeping existing communities strong and vital, as well as providing new services and living options.

Our efforts are rooted in prayer and in our faith and our desire to be a community of Christ-like love wherever

**Together we are fulfilling  
God's call to creatively  
serve the diverse needs  
and interests of older  
adults by developing  
opportunities and  
collaborative relationships.**

we serve. Our beginnings in Eastern Mennonite Missions and our strong connections with local Mennonite conferences and congregations inspire and lead us to reach out and serve others, while ensuring each of these efforts stand on their own financially. Together we are fulfilling God's call to creatively serve the diverse needs and interests of older adults by developing opportunities and collaborative relationships.

I am so grateful for your part in this journey, and for joining others in community here today as we celebrate God's guidance and presence over the years. You are each an important part of our story and journey as we look forward to launching our next sixty years.

*Thank you!*







# 1

# Community

## Is the Center of Our Life

From its formation, Landis Homes was intentionally created to be a community. In community we experience God's presence anew. Despite the continual pull of individualism in our culture, we strive to live out our faith together.

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

HEBREWS 10:24-25 (NIV)



## WHEN CHURCHES OF PEACE EMBRACE SURVIVORS OF WAR

*Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*

Psalm 107:4-9

**W**hen I walk down the halls of Landis Homes, I don't see retirees from life's vocations and callings. I see apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. I see former missionaries, aid and relief workers, peacemakers and Gospel carriers to the ends of the earth. However, for all the residents at Landis Homes who ventured into other countries, cultures and languages to live into ministry, there are many of those who stayed behind in Lancaster County. They raised their families, taught Sunday school classes in their churches. They were also faithful disciples heeding the

call God had on their lives. Many started businesses, tended to their farms, taught in our schools and served in our hospitals. And . . . they welcomed refugees and immigrants to Lancaster County.

During my work at Church World Service Lancaster, I have had the privilege of seeing many churches, fellowships and bodies of believers of Jesus sponsor refugee families coming from all corners of the world. These families could be fleeing violence, persecution or oppression from Syria, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Somalia, Ethiopia, Venezuela, or Burma/Myanmar. Believers have helped set up apartments,

stocked cabinets with new dishes, driven families to medical appointments, enrolled children in school and helped families learn English, all while refugees navigate and build their new lives with us in Lancaster County.

I've come to learn that this is nothing new to Lancaster County churches, whether that be Mennonite or Brethren, Catholic or Lutheran, Evangelical or Episcopal, but something that is ingrained in the soil of who we are as a people. Just speaking to a current Landis Homes resident yesterday, she told me about how her church has been resettling refugees to Lancaster County for almost 70 years! It is a testament of sacrifice and love to welcome the stranger in our midst. It's also a testament to how Landis Homes residents have embodied a Jesus-centered life. And

refugees themselves certainly teach us about community and reconciliation, two aspects that Landis Homes residents know all too well.

One thing that I have learned about reading scripture is that God does not just insert platitudes or quippy one-line verses about the importance of welcoming the foreigner to your homeland. I believe there is so much more than that. From leaving Eden, to the Exodus, to the Exile, Jesus himself fleeing to Egypt, and Apostle Paul sailing from island to island, most of scripture is written through the eyes of those who are displaced from their homes. And it is with this understanding that we see how God decides to tell His story to us today. Is it possible He is still telling His story to us through those same eyes?



Andrew Mashas is a Community Sponsorship Developer at Church World Service in Lancaster, Pa., an organization building bridges between refugee and immigrant families and local faith communities. He lives in Lancaster with his wife Hilary and two young boys, Theodore and Simon.



## TRUE COMMUNITY BEGINS WITH GOD: EPHESIANS 4:4-5

**H**uman communities exist in many forms: class reunions, sporting leagues, clubs of every kind, small groups, church and family. We all know from experience that these communities may come and go, may be close or conflicted—sometimes at the same time! What draws people toward each other and holds a community together? Mutual interests and shared values may bring us together. A joint mission can unify unlikely collaborators in a common purpose. But the staying power the body of Christ runs deeper. “You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness” (Ephesians 4:4-6, MSG).

A strong magnet may attract objects of various shapes and functions. As long as the objects contain

metal, they come together at the point of the magnet. It is no secret that humanity comes with diversity, and communities often feel the tension of it! Yet each one contains the image of God. As Christ is the magnet, he draws all people to the one place true community can exist—in Jesus. And only as we are transformed into “imitators of God as beloved children,” can we live the life of love that makes true community work.

Nowhere are we promised that this kind of community is automatic or easy. Relationships are hard, a shared human reality. Just listen to country music with its flare for heartbreak ballads and break up songs, reminding us that relationships form our lives and the loss of them hurts. From tense explosions to gradual divides, loss of relationships is painful. We were made for the oneness Jesus describes as “you in me and I in you” (John 14:21). The same oneness Jesus experienced with the Father is for and among us as well (John 17:21). No wonder we feel “broken” when relationships fall apart.

Country music ballads may allow us to wallow in regret and pain for a while, but it is not the state in which we are meant to remain. Just as we were created for oneness, Jesus brought the possibility of wholeness through forgiveness offered freely. God in Christ has forgiven us and has made us whole in all ways. That precious gift is meant to be passed on. “Be kind to each other, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32).

Difficult and beautiful, community is that for which we are created and intrinsically desire. As a faith community, we are not random groups of individuals on a solo journey with Jesus. Jesus called us His body and is but one body who draws its life force not from shared interests or even common values, but from one

God and Father who rules over all, works through all and is present in all. “Indeed,” Gilbert Bilezikian said, “community finds its essence and definition deep within the being of God.”

While community is created in Christ, we are called to maintain it. We will know we are functioning well when humility and gentleness characterize our interactions, when patience is prioritized and when love helps us bear each other’s faults. And in this work, we are to make every effort in the way we live with one another, to draw ourselves and each other back to that magnetic center—the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Where are you being drawn today?



Audrey Kanagy is the Spiritual Care Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Mississippi State University and a Master of Arts in Religion from Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She enjoys teaching Bible classes to recent immigrants as part of the SEED program and a variety of creative endeavors. She and her husband, Robert, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.



## TRANSFORMING OUR SAFE SPACES INTO BRAVE SPACES

*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

1 Timothy 1:7, NIV

In my personal life, as well as professional life, I have begun a transition to be braver, to branch out of the perceived “safe spaces” that I have been a part of. This requires that I be more vulnerable and open, and less guarded. And that can be scary and intimidating.

In my life experiences with my church, my work, my schooling, I have a pretty good idea of how things flow and can feel content with the day-to-day cadence of that life. It’s very comfortable and permits me to stay the way I am, but it does not readily provide enough opportunities for me to seek growth or take risks. I don’t want to discourage us from seeking out safe spaces when needed; there is a time and place for this. But as we read in 1 Timothy, we are called to be brave. There

are examples throughout the Bible of this, with Moses, David, Ruth and countless others.

We may not be called to slay actual giants like David, but by being brave and creating these kinds of spaces in our community and lives, we have the opportunity to grow in our capacity for love, to look at one another with softer eyes to build peace with one another when we have or don’t have conversations. Brave spaces create opportunities for us to be transformed, just as our Creator instructs us to be. This transformation does not mean you have to compromise your values but invites you to be open to consider and reconsider. We need to find the balance of knowing when to choose safety and knowing when to be brave.

As a community of faith, as Landis Homes

Retirement *community*, we can find our *Common Unity* in these brave spaces. We need to be open to freely share our lived experiences and be our true authentic selves with one another, while also honoring and actively listening to the alternate voices of those in our community.

I believe we can create Brave Spaces here at Landis Homes, and are called to do so as a “Community of Christ-Like Love.” I’d like to share an invitation to a brave space that I found to be powerful. It is from an untitled poem by Beth Strano that recognizes brave space isn’t perfect, but “it will be our space together.”

*There is no such thing as a “safe space” –  
We exist in the real world.  
We all carry scars and have caused wounds.  
This space  
seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside,*

*and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere.*

*This space will not be perfect.*

*It will not be always be what we wish it to be*

*But*

*It will be our space together,  
and we will work on it side by side.<sup>1</sup>*

Let us pray. *Lord, I have many situations in my life that make me afraid, including my relationships, my job, my family, and personal projects. I have the desire to make things work out well and be happy, but I also fear failure and rejection.*

*Creator, I pray that you give us the strength to pursue whatever it is we need to. Assure us that, for better for worse, you will always be with us. We need your courage; we cannot do it without you. We thank you for the community we have in each other. Amen.*

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1 Untitled poem by Beth Strano. Used with permission.



Moniqua Acosta is director of Volunteer Services for Landis Homes and Champion of the Landis Communities Belonging Council. Moniqua has worked with Landis for 8 years and feels her professional and spiritual values align very well with Landis'. Moniqua is married to her husband Dionicio and together they have three children.



## A COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-LIKE LOVE

**T**he mission of Landis Homes is “to serve aging adults and their families by honoring and enriching their lives in a community of Christ-like love.” The concept of creating community was articulated by Frank Enck as he challenged the founders, “Keep in mind our vision of creating a community rather than a traditional old people’s home facility.” Today’s vision is now stated as a “community of Christ-like love.” I invite you to think with me about the descriptive words “Christ-like love.”

To explore the dynamic of Christ-like love in community, consider and think about the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ. He lived a sacrificial, exemplary life of love for God and love for others. Jesus taught everyone to “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” This teaching is sometimes referred to as the Golden Rule and is generally embraced. It reminds me of a chorus I was taught to sing at an early age, “Be to others, ever kind and ever true, as you’d have them ever faithful be to you.” Further, Jesus said that the

Greatest Commandments are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself.” These teachings are basic understandings for living a fruitful, fulfilling life and for creating a community of Christ-like love.

In our day, love has many varied emphases and meanings. I believe the characteristics needed to create a community of Christ-like love are best described in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the believers in the city of Corinth. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (from 1 Corinthians 13).

At the time Paul wrote these words, Corinthian society was very individualistic and highly competitive. I understand these two characteristics were very pervasive in their government, their free enterprise economic

system, and the athletic games. We can readily draw parallels to our current reality in America. Yet the apostle's teaching was not to diminish the desire for excellence, but a call for the believers to refocus and honor the Lord by excelling in faith, speech, knowledge and complete earnestness in love for others, and in the grace of giving. These teachings practiced collectively will surely grow a community of Christ-like love.

In the early years, Landis Homes was primarily a mono-cultural group of residents from the founding Mennonite Church and missions community. From the beginning, there was a distinct and very special community characteristic at Landis Homes. Later, I observed it personally as I visited friends and relatives in my early ministry, then experienced it when my parents lived their aging years here. I heard about it from team members and vendors. Now I've experienced it as I've

lived here for eight years. The resident community has gradually changed and today has become a very transcultural community. Approximately half the residents are from a variety of Anabaptist Mennonite experiences, and half from other Christian traditions. Yet the uniqueness of a "community of Christ-like love" has been fostered and retained.

I believe a distinguishing characteristic of Landis Homes continues to be a strong emphasis on "honoring and enriching lives in a community of Christ-like love." I continue to recognize it through our leadership, observe it in our team members and experience it among our residents. There remains a strong emphasis on serving one another. May we continue to excel as we continue to emphasize and create an ethos of Christ-like love.



James Martin served as a pastor for many years at South Seventh Street Mennonite Church in Reading, Pa. and for 20 years as ministry staff for Lancaster Mennonite Conference. He has four children, twelve grandchildren, and one great granddaughter. He and his wife, Betty, moved to Landis Homes in 2015. Betty died in May 2022.



## CAN WE WALK TOGETHER THIS YEAR?

**O**n Tuesday, I officiated a funeral at the church where I first was a pastor. It was good to be back and connect with those I have not seen in a while as we celebrated our dear sister Kathleen's life. As we were leaving, I noticed their church sign, which had the message: *God's invitation: Can we walk together this year?*

When I stop and consider what this year holds, particularly thinking about the upcoming elections, presidential and others, it really seems like this could be a difficult year. We have already been seeing attacks from the GOP on each other, and soon it will change to attacks on the other party as they spar to win votes. Unfortunately, that trickles down to us, the people who are watching. This can turn into conflict between each other, even those in the church who are united in Christ.

One of the questions I have been pondering is: *How do we hold tension together while walking with one another?* We have always had differences of opinions

on what we feel is right and wrong, but there is a polarization that has been gripping our nation for the past decade or so that has infiltrated the church in ways that bring division and not unity. 1 Peter 3:8-12 gives us guidance and some encouragement on how we can live together, even amid our differences:

*Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

I want to pull out a few thoughts from this

passage on how we may walk together into this new year. Hopefully these thoughts will provide us with some guidance as we navigate an election year, on top of other challenges.

**Be like-minded.** This is a hard one because we are not all like-minded. I think maybe what Peter is getting at is that we should be like-minded in our faith. In Philippians 2:2, Paul says, “then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.” In Romans 12:18, we read it a little differently: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” One-mindedness is having the same love for Jesus, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**Be sympathetic to one another.** What does this mean? I think we can say that sympathy moves us emotionally. It means that we are sincerely interested in the feelings of others. Peter also commands us to love (being of one mind). I’m sure Peter is remembering Jesus’ words when he said the greatest commandments are to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. How do we gauge our love for one another? We can ask ourselves throughout the year: *How am I loving my neighbor?* I think as we love our neighbor, it is an act of loving God.

**Be compassionate and humble.** Next, we are to be compassionate or kind-hearted. Compassion International describes it like this: “To have compassion

means to empathize with someone who is suffering and to feel compelled to reduce the suffering.” It’s a fuller, truer definition than feelings alone, and it’s a very biblical understanding. How will we show compassion this year?

**Finally, Christians are to be humble in spirit or have a “humble mind.”** I found this expanded definition of humility.<sup>1</sup> Humility can help develop a more profound and evolved outlook of the world and what is going on in it. Humility allows us to consciously be aware that we bring worth to this world, but that there are many others in the world who also have a purpose. Christians are to lift up one another and disappear in our efforts to support each other. Humility is not putting ourselves down or beating ourselves up, but lifting others up as we support one another.

Peter seems to be saying this to Christians. But as Christians, we should carry these things into the world and live out these principles with all people. I have had friends who think very differently about many things, but we lived in a way that showed respect for the other. I continue to connect with these friends from time to time as our schedules allow. Sometimes we are able to bless the other. We do good together, and together we have helped many. And in this way we are pursuing peace.

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1 Tangney JP. Humility: Theoretical perspectives, empirical findings and directions for future research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*. 2000;19(1):70–82. doi:10.1521/jscp.2000.19.1.70



Robert Kanagy is Healthcare Chaplain at Landis Homes as well as a certified End of Life Doula. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Camping and Youth Ministry from Eastern Mennonite University and a master’s degree in School Counseling from Mississippi State University. He enjoys serving and helping people. He and his wife, Audrey, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.



## GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY

**O**n February 14, my husband Todd, his sister Beth, and I will fly from New York City to Amsterdam, and then catch another long flight to Arusha, Tanzania, in East Africa.

Why are we going to Tanzania, you might ask?

In August of 1966, Richard and Ruth Weaver, who live on this campus and are my in-laws, began their alternative service to war with Eastern Mennonite Missions in Shirati, Tanzania. Richard served as a surgeon at Shirati Hospital, and Ruth taught English in the nursing school. Todd was 18 months old when he arrived in Shirati and so his earliest, and most formative experiences, are in Tanzania. His sisters Beth and Valerie were born in East Africa. This little town, two miles from Lake Victoria, shaped their family in profound ways. The kindness and generosity of the people bring tears to Todd's eyes as he remembers them.

And yet, for Todd, it has been almost 40 years since he visited; for Beth it has been 38 years; and I have never been to Shirati, Tanzania. It is hard to describe the holes in our hearts, the gaps in our relationships and the missing connections with the land and people. Imagine your childhood home and then

picture not being there for four decades. Perhaps some of you have had this experience or heard stories of your ancestors who moved from one place to another and did not return. It certainly gives me greater compassion for team members who have moved to the United States from another country and find it insurmountable to return home.

And yet, by the grace of God, we will finally travel together to Tanzania. As we made our travel plans known, Verle Rufenacht, a resident of Landis Homes and a long-time missionary in Shirati, said it would be a good thing if I would be willing to preach in Shirati Mennonite Church on Sunday, February 18. After more discernment, I said yes to this daunting invitation. What do I, a white female chaplain from America, have to say to these Tanzanian brothers and sisters in Christ?

I will be preaching 90 years and 4 days after the first Mennonite missionary, Elam Stauffer, arrived in this little town. So many lives changed in 90 years. So many challenges. So many births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. So many worship services, revival meetings and prayer efforts. So many procedures in the hospital and leprosarium. So many students taught in the

nursing school. So many missionaries who then lived at Landis Homes during their sunset years.

*Oh Lord, I ask, what do you want me to say? And this is where you come in. I invite you to pray that the Holy Spirit graces me with an encouraging message for the worshippers at Shirati Mennonite Church. I would much rather learn from them, listen to their stories and hear their testimonies of God's faithfulness. But I am willing to receive a word from the Lord and offer it to them with respect and love. I want to explore how the Good News of Jesus Christ changes us whether we are American or Tanzanian. And I'm curious how missionaries were changed by the Africans and how the Africans were changed by the missionaries.*

I'm pondering the Apostle Peter during his transformational journey in the book of Acts. He had so much to figure out without Jesus by his side. He had to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide, convict and instruct him on how he should relate to both Jews and Gentiles. I love Acts 10:34-48 (NRSVUE), when Peter finally understands that he is not superior to or separate from his Gentile friends.

*Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day*

*and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

*While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.*

Could God be more clear? God shows no partiality—no favoritism. God yearns for us to get past partiality and to get beyond prejudice. I lament how much still exists. I pray that during our days in Shirati, Tanzania, a greater wholeness comes into our hearts. May we be good guests and allow ourselves to be blessed by our hosts.



Anne Kaufman Weaver is Director of Pastoral Services and the Residential Life Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a Master of Divinity from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and a master's degree in Social Work from Marywood University. She and her husband, Todd, have three young adult children and one son-in-law. They are "rewilding" their four-acre property in Brownstown with native trees and wildflowers.



## WE ARE INVITED TO THE BANQUET: WILL WE GO?

**G**ood morning. The last song we heard was “I Got a Robe.” The lyrics are: “I got a robe, you got a robe, all God’s children got a robe. When I get to Heaven goin’ to put on my robe, Goin’ to shout all over God’s heaven, heaven. Everybody talkin’ bout heaven ain’t goin’ there. Heav’n Heav’n. Goin’ to shout all over God’s heav’n.”

Other verses say, “I’ve got shoes,” “I’ve got a harp,” “I’ve got a crown.” But each verse ends with “Evrybody talkin’ bout heaven ain’t goin’ there Heav’n, heav’n, goin’ to shout all over God’s heav’n.”

When I was growing up, we had a record called *Singing We Go*. It was the Jones Sisters singing many spirituals originally sung by enslaved African people in the United States in the 1700s and 1800s. “I Got a Robe” was my favorite song on that album.

Several years ago, I was preparing to teach the book *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* to my 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at a middle school. This historical fiction is about an African American family, the Logans, who were able to purchase land in Mississippi in the 1930s. This family faced horrific treatment from the white farmers around them who were livid and felt threatened

by the fact that a family of former slaves bought land. The Logan family came up with many strategies to hold on to their land, despite the mental and physical torture they endured.

The title of the book comes from an African spiritual: “Roll of thunder, hear my cry over the water by and by. Ole man comin’ down the line, whip in hand to beat me down. But I ain’t gonna let him turn me around.”

As a way of setting the historical stage for my 8<sup>th</sup> graders, we did some research about sharecropping and Jim Crow laws. But I wanted them to have a richer understanding of the title, so I decided we would do some research about the significance of the spirituals for enslaved people. Because “I Got a Robe” was a favorite of mine, I started with that song. The meaning of the words in the verses are obvious. They provided hope for a day when those who were enslaved would be in heaven and walk as free people. But the meaning of the chorus was cryptic and maybe even subversive.

As they sang, “Everybody talkin’ bout heaven ain’t goin’ there, heaven, heaven, goin’ to shout all over God’s heav’n,” the slaves proclaimed the hypocrisy

of their masters who claimed to follow Jesus, and yet treated some humans as animals. In their life on earth, the slaves did not have freedom, but they had the assurance that someday they would put on a robe, shoes and a crown and they would walk and sing all over God's heaven as free people! But maybe, just maybe, the slaveholders who talked about salvation and heaven might not be there! To us that might sound harsh and judgmental, maybe even heretical. But Frederick Douglass once said that the spirituals sung by the enslaved "breathed the prayer and complaint of souls overflowing with the bitterest anguish. Like tears, they were a relief to aching hearts." As the slaves looked up from their work in the fields towards the large plantation houses, I imagine dreaming of heaven without their masters was a relief to their aching hearts.

This reminds me of a parable Jesus told. In Luke 14, Jesus is at the house of a prominent Pharisee. He was addressing people who thought highly of themselves and expected they would have the places of honor. In response to what Jesus said, one of the guests replied, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Jesus responded with a parable. Starting Luke 14:6, Jesus said:

*A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. 'Sir,' the*

*servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'* (Luke 14:6-24, NIV)

We know that the banquet is a metaphor. Jesus prepared a banquet for Israel, but many people had their own expectations and understandings, so they were not willing to follow Jesus. However, Jesus doesn't cancel the banquet. He invites the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. All of these people would have been looked down on and considered unworthy by the guests who were originally invited.

God's love and God's kingdom here on earth are for all to enjoy and be a part of. The invitation welcomes more and more people on the margins of society as the story develops. People who were considered to be outcasts are now guests of honor. As I have pondered this scripture, some questions arise. Do I embody the welcome and freedom that offers the goodness of God to all? Are there people I feel are unworthy of the banquet, or maybe people I don't want to come to the banquet? Or, like the people invited to the feast, do I resist God's invitation? Do I feel unworthy to attend the banquet, or maybe I am too busy to take time to join the banquet?

Let's pray. *Loving God, let us lay aside our excuses, our prejudices, our correctness so that we may feast at the table you have prepared, sharing the meal with all who choose to come. Give us the grace to respond to the many promptings of your Holy Spirit inviting us to reach out to the lonely, the lost, the sad and the needy. Open our ears that we may hear you, and in the hearing take action. Let us all delight in the extravagant hospitality of Christ. Amen.*



Rhonda Good is Personal Care Chaplain at Landis Homes. She has a B.S. in Secondary Education and taught middle and high school English before becoming a chaplain. She holds a Master of Arts in Christian Leadership and is a certified End of Life Doula. She and her husband, Ed, have three adult children and one grandchild. Rhonda enjoys crocheting, traveling to warm places, and hiking (nothing too strenuous).



## I DO THE LOVING, BUT GOD DOES THE FIXING

**R**ecently I read a prayer by Alisha Headley that introduces the idea of purpose and seeking wisdom. It spoke to me as recently I've had MANY opportunities to seek wisdom and guidance from God. These opportunities have surpassed the usual asking for help in being a kind, loving, and forgiving person following Jesus' example, but deep and introspective discernment that can significantly impact the lives of those I care for, those I serve, and those I love.

These words from the gospel according to Matthew 22:36-40 offer guidance in its clearest practice.

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

The purpose is clear—Jesus is calling us to love God and to love people which, as simple as it seems, is no easy task 24/7, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Seeking wisdom and guidance in more challenging times requires prayer, focus and intention. I appreciate these words from Becky Howe, written on her blog in 2019 as you will hear her reference, in her contemplation of what Jesus asks us to do:

Loving God with all of my heart, soul, and mind means letting go of my way of doing things. It means doing my best to walk in step with the Spirit - all day, every day. The more I grow in loving God and keeping in step with Him, the more He strengthens my character so that I can love others well.

Loving people means loving them exactly as they are. Not the version I agree with or get along with, but the potentially difficult version. It's easy to love lovely people. God asks us to love all people.

For me, this has meant letting go of certain

expectations I have of others. Letting go of some kind of idea that I know what's best for people. I have to remind myself that God does the "fixing" and I do the loving. God works on people from the inside out, which results in changed hearts and motivations over time. Because of this I can always tell when God is working in someone's heart... but I cannot assume when God is not working in someone's heart.

This means I have no right to judge anyone for their beliefs or the decisions they make, which is difficult to do in the year 2019 when we're surrounded by opinions and loud voices. That's not to say I can't disagree with someone. After all, Jesus disagreed with and challenged a lot of people's thinking and actions - including religious leaders, his disciples, and even his own family. This just means I have to constantly check my

motivations and heart behind my thoughts and my words.<sup>1</sup>

Listen to these words again: "For me, this has meant letting go of certain expectations I have of others. Letting go of some kind of idea that I know what's best for people. I have to remind myself that God does the "fixing" and I do the loving."

I do the loving, not the fixing. What wise words. The words of 1 John 4:19 takes it a step further and states, "*We love, because He first loved us.*" The love of God changes **our** hearts in order to make us capable of love, and we can love others because of what God has done in our lives.

Remembering that I don't know what's best for people and to let God lead the changes in the hearts of others has been an important lesson for me to recall. May my journey be a blessing to yours.

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1 Becky Howe, "The Two Most Important Things Jesus Asked Us To Do," September 2, 2019. Personal blog at beckyhowe.com; used with permission.



At the time of this writing, Jenny Sheckells was Director of Risk Management and Compliance at Landis Homes. She now serves as Vice President of Risk Management for Resource Partners. Jenny holds a Master of Arts in Strategic Leadership from Messiah University and a Bachelor of Arts from Susquehanna University.



## EVERYONE HAS A PURPOSE

**N**ine years ago, the Lego movie came out. My children were really into Legos at that time. (Actually, our youngest was still making designs this past summer.) A Lego character named Emmet was the star. He is this ordinary guy with an ordinary life whose daily routine is the same every day. In his song called “Everything is Awesome,” he says things like, “Everything is cool when you’re part of a team,” and “Everything is better when we stick together.” He’s also very optimistic: “Lost my job, there’s a new opportunity / More free time for my awesome community.”

It’s impossible to build anything with just one or two pieces of Lego. You need every piece to be involved to create something.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul was writing to the church of Corinth to restore balance in the church. In chapter 12, Paul talks about the importance of community. Paul has in mind the common needs of the Christian community. One of the main critiques Paul lodges against the Corinthian congregation is their inability to live out the essential claim of a community founded

in the Gospel. He tries to bring them together again by emphasizing the fact that God needs all of them to build His church. Let me read parts of 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 (ESV):

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ .... The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? .... The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” and the head cannot say to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ... But God has so composed the body, ... that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

This morning I chose Legos to illustrate this point. First of all, there is strength in numbers. When the bricks stick together, great things can be accomplished and made, whether from a design or using your own imagination. Alan Smith writes, “Playtime is important. Sometimes it doesn’t matter what you are building, as long as you’re having fun.” Disaster happens. But the pieces can be put back together again. “Every brick has a purpose. Some are made for a specific spot—most can adapt almost anywhere—but everyone will fit somewhere.” Color doesn’t matter. A blue brick will fit in the same space as a red brick. “No one is indispensable. If one brick is unavailable, another can take its place,” and “It doesn’t always turn out as planned. Sometimes it turns out better. If it doesn’t, you can always try again.”

Three weekends ago, Landis Homes held its 51<sup>st</sup> Fellowship Days. This event raises money for the Caring Fund that helps residents who no longer have the resources while living at Landis Homes. Volunteers, business partners, residents and team members came together, proving that Fellowship Days embodies the core values of Landis Homes: joy, compassion, integrity, stewardship and especially community!

Yesterday, 30 people gathered for the blessing of the animals, bringing our residents with pets together, in community. On October 13, there will be

a community walk sponsored by our wellness team. Persons from all over our community will gather to walk. There is even an opportunity to volunteer to help residents stroll along with us in their wheelchairs. Talk to the Wellness Team.

Joy, compassion, integrity, stewardship and community are guiding values here at Landis Homes. We try to live these out together, in community. The Landis Homes value of community says this: “Community is relating with a spirit which is characterized by cooperation, teamwork, encouragement and mutual respect, valuing each person, affirming gifts and abilities, and seeking improvement through learning, creativity and openness to change.”

When we stick together, work together, great things can be accomplished. And it is an important biblical truth that every Christian has a purpose. As Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 12 using the analogy of a human body, some of us are eyes, some are hands and still others are feet. But we all have a purpose and a role as a part of the body of Christ.

*Almighty God, you have created all people and all of creation. We give you thanks for this gift we’re invited to engage with joy, compassion, integrity, stewardship and community as your disciples. Open our hearts and our eyes to see our communities as you would have us to see them. Amen.*



Robert Kanagy is Healthcare Chaplain at Landis Homes as well as a certified End of Life Doula. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Camping and Youth Ministry from Eastern Mennonite University and a master’s degree in School Counseling from Mississippi State University. He enjoys serving and helping people. He and his wife, Audrey, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.



## SINGING AT LANDIS HOMES

*Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

Psalm 147:1

Singing is an important part of the Landis Homes community. In the Mennonite tradition, music provides energy in worship, as well as opportunities to confess a desire for forgiveness and to proclaim reaffirmation, commitment to the way of Jesus, and involvement of one's whole being. This can happen by the beauty of melody and harmony or by the added value of hymn texts that describe the Christian's "words of life."

These words are taken from Scriptures, great writings of theologians and believers through the ages, and from poetry of inspired authors who were moved by the Holy Spirit to express their deepest yearnings and convictions for all to sing. Hymn-sings on campus are organized and directed by residents, using requests of residents as the guide for which hymns are sung.

Life enrichment staff also schedule many events from brass bands to small chamber groups and solo performers, playing sacred and secular music with a

variety of voices and instruments. Some are local, and others are from distant locations, such as the Bradford Family from the Midwest who stopped here on their tour of this area. They presented moving music using their many God-given talents and gifts.

Participation by residents and staff members using their gifts also blesses our community. Residents play piano and organ, lead hymns in chapel services, sing solos, duets or small group offerings. They participate in the men's and women's chorus concerts a few times a year on our campus as well as at other places such as Brethren Village and Pleasant View Community or at Ridgeview Mennonite Church. Often staff members participate in these services vocally and instrumentally. One of our residents is Dick Boshart, a retired elementary school teacher and minister of music in Lebanon Church of the Brethren. Dick has shared his musical gifts in a variety of ways. He writes, "Music is an important part of devotional life here on campus,

and I hope to continue to serve in this way.”

James Martin, a regular song leader in our worship services, writes of the special role music had in his marriage. “Landis Homes honored my wife and me in celebrating our 60th wedding anniversary in the midst of COVID isolation. Music and singing were especially important to my wife due to her Alzheimer’s journey, so the IT Department agreed to record us singing our favorite song, ‘Each for the other and both

for the Lord.’ We were able to send it to our family and friends, and the Life Enrichment team aired it on the Landis Homes TV Channel for all to enjoy.”

He observes that the regular chapel services and devotions are Christ centered and various choruses and special music opportunities promote community. St. Augustine once said, “To sing is to pray twice.” Therefore our campus is drawn together as we sing together.



Mary Bucher has been a resident of Landis Homes for ten years. She has always been involved in church choirs, community choruses, and semi-professional musical activities. At Landis Homes she has founded and directed the Women’s Chorus for nine years and has participated in a variety of musical events on campus, from worship service to talent shows.



## WHERE DOES IT HURT?

A common question to ask hurting people is, “Where does it hurt?” A doctor needs an answer to help a patient. Only hurting persons know where they personally hurt. The doctor asks, “What pain level do you have, on a scale of one to ten?”

People describe all kinds of physical pain. It may be pain in the leg, knee, hip, arm or shoulder. It may be pain in the chest. It may be a headache, earache, eye pain, sore throat or toothache. It may be pain in the feet. Many complain of back pain or neck pain. Kidney stones cause extreme pain. After an accident or a fall, rescuers want to know if it hurts anywhere. Many people suffer from arthritis and lifetime chronic pain without relief.

Scripture speaks encouragingly about the next life to elderly people who get so discouraged from today’s increasing old age ailments: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not

to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Scripture reassures us that better days are coming. “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you” (1 Peter 5:10). I tell my wife in my old age, “Heaven looks better all the time,” because I am worn out from years of trials.

Lent is a reminder that our Savior Jesus Christ suffered the horror of excruciating physical torture on the cross for our salvation. Holy communion reminds believers that Jesus was no stranger to suffering.

Not all pain is physical. A lot of pain is emotional, as a result of stress or loss. Loss of a loved one or of a dear friend, loss of job, a divorce or financial loss can be very painful. Many families have suffered the loss of their home or business in a financial depression, flood, fire, or tornado. Out in the world, millions have lost homes, families and businesses from wartime bombs

or by military evacuation. Grief over the loss of a loved one causes a lot of emotional pain that many never get over. It's painful just to watch on daily television others suffering the fearsome and deadly destructive attacks Russia has been inflicting on people of Ukraine.

Where do you hurt today? You may have more than one answer. Loved ones and good friends care about your pain and want to help you. Your doctor needs to know where you hurt to help you get relief. Some pain can be relieved with medications, surgery or therapy. Some pain can be relieved by support and encouragement from loved ones and friends. Some people just learn to live with pain day after day, year after year.

A person may appear not to be suffering with physical pain but may be suffering greatly from emotional or grieving pain. There is no easy answer to help someone with emotional or grieving pain. Many persons suffer daily for years from the loss of a loved one and never get over it. Many military veterans suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), memories of horrible things they have witnessed in wartime. There is no easy fix for emotional or psychological pain, but comforting family and friends and professional counseling can help a lot.

If you don't suffer pain, you are very fortunate. Count your blessings. There is a lot of pain and suffering in this world. Jesus felt empathy and compassion for people who were suffering. He reached out to people daily who needed relief and comfort.

His followers have continued His concern and healing ministry for suffering humanity down through history. That's empathy, feeling the pain others are suffering. Christians are taught to pray for the sick *and* encourage depressed and discouraged people.

If you suffer pain, be grateful for family caregivers, friends and professionals who surround you with help, comfort and prayers. Thank God for caring people in this world who rise up to pray for you, send you a note or call you on the phone. Some dear friends help you by sitting with you in your ordeal.

As long as we are in this world, we must remember to include sufferers in our prayers.

The Methodist hymn writer and Philadelphia black pastor, Rev. Charles Albert Tindley, describes suffering in his hymn, "Leave it there": "If your body suffers pain, and your health you can't regain, and your soul is almost sinking in despair, Jesus knows the pain you feel, He can save and He can heal, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there."

Let's use the words to a hymn by Fred Green in 1967 as a prayer for healing: *O Christ, the healer, we have come to pray for health, to pray for friends. How can we fail to be restored when reached by love that never ends? From every ailment flesh endures, our bodies clamor to be freed. Amen.*



Gerald Ihle was a United Methodist pastor for 43 years in eastern Pennsylvania. He is the author of four Bible Study books. He grew up in Fountain Hill, a suburb of Bethlehem, Pa. He graduated from Moravian College and the Theological School at Drew University. He died in March 2024. His wife Janet is a resident at Landis Homes. They have three children, four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.



## WISDOM AND HUMILITY

**T**he biblical books of Proverbs and James declare the wisdom of humility and the humility of wisdom. I enjoy setting my musings to verse, as in these lines of reflection on wisdom and humility:

*Worldly folly leads to a fall;  
Divine wisdom summons a call.  
“Listen, my son and daughter,  
Let your faith not falter.  
Choose not foolishness but life;  
Do not give in to human strife.  
Practice wisdom and be humble,  
So that you will not stumble.  
Wisdom begins with the fear of God,  
Which to the worldly wise seems odd.  
Accumulating knowledge puffs one up  
When pride of self fills one’s cup.  
Arrogance goes before a fall;  
Humbleness is God’s holy call.  
Let your attitude be meekness of mind;  
Speak words of understanding that are kind.*

*Trust the Lord, enjoy God’s rest,  
And find your life to be blessed.”*

I contemplate the Landis Homes campus community of more than 800 persons who reside here and consider the approximately 500 team members who work at Landis Homes. And that does not include all the rest of what we call Landis Communities.

These 1,300 persons engage in a lot of inter-relationships and come from a variety of life experiences and convictions. Residents anticipate enjoying a place to live that is fulfilling, friendly and meaningful, and also feels like home.

The Landis Homes administrative team sets vision, implements policy and negotiates a workable budget. Team members provide pastoral care, life enrichment opportunities, health care and food services, as well as manage and care for good facilities, infrastructure and the natural environment.

I propose that all these entities and relationships, in order to successfully embody the campus motto of being “Jesus Christ in street clothes,” are called to

cultivate wisdom in a spirit of humility. That means trusting God and respecting one another.

There are words about wisdom and humility in Proverbs and James, that if lived out, will help us be a community that practices humility and wisdom under the Lordship of our Savior God. Wisdom is the ability to use practical and spiritual knowledge; it is more than mere information. Humility is practicing a proper attitude towards oneself, out of trust in God and respect for others.

I cite selected readings from Proverbs:

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (9:10, NIV)*

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge the Lord, and he will direct your paths. (3:5,6)*

*The Lord gives grace to the humble; the wise inherit honor. (3:34b and 35a)*

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. The integrity of the upright guides them. (3:2 and 3a)*

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (4:23)*

*A wise person listens to advice. A prudent person overlooks an insult. (12:15b and 16b)*

*A patient person has great understanding. (14:29a)*

*Humility comes before honor. (15:33 and 18:12)*

*Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed (16:3); Many are the plans in one's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. (19:21)*

*A wise person's heart guides their mouth (16:23a);*

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. (16:24)*

*Don't boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. (27:1)*

Words about wisdom and humility from James:

*If any of you lacks wisdom, ask of God, who gives generously without finding fault, and it will be given, but when asking, one must believe and not doubt. (1:5,6)*

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let it be shown by good deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. Where you have selfish ambition, there you find disorder. (3:13,14)*

*The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (3:17)*

Receiving God's gift of wisdom grounded in humility and cultivating a humble attitude guided by wisdom help us to live together in peace.

## A PRAYER

*God of wisdom, we worship and honor you. We thank you for the gifts of wisdom and humility you offer us, and we ask for an increase of both.*

*Thank you for a community of residents that desires to live out the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as we carry different perspectives but are centered by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Guide us in living by wise and humble hearts.*

*Thank you for an administrative team who seeks to make good decisions guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Grant them discernment throughout the year and wise vision for the years to come.*

*May we together embody the grace of God, the love of Christ and the peace of the Holy Spirit, to your glory, O Lord! In the name of Jesus, Amen.*



Jim Leaman is a retired pastor, having served in Mennonite churches in Philadelphia and Lancaster County, Pa. He also served as a chaplain for nine years at Landis Homes Retirement Community. He and wife Beth (Kling) Leaman now live at Landis Homes, where she previously worked as a nursing supervisor. They are parents of a son and daughter and have six grandchildren.



## EMBRACED WITH LOVE

**W**e are enriched when we live our lives interwoven with those around us. The ministry of prayer shawls offers a visible reminder to the recipient that they are not alone. The creation of the shawl, whether it is knitted or crocheted, requires that the yarn is interwoven. The strands glide against one another resulting in flexibility. The stitches are done with intentionality so that a beautiful pattern emerges.

*Grace to you and peace from God our  
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,  
who consoles us in all our affliction,  
so that we may be able to console those  
who are in any affliction  
with the consolation with which we  
ourselves are consoled by God.  
2 Corinthians 1:2-4, NRSV*

“You are known and loved by God.” This is a theme statement of the church we attend. We notice

God’s love especially when going through difficult times. Most of us have experienced some kind of difficulty in our lives. When we go through difficulties, we are changed. We notice the God of consolation and the God of mercy present with us. Then we can be there for another who is going through difficult times just as God was present with us.

When we reach out to others, we build connections, and our lives become interwoven like the yarns in a shawl. The yarns are elastic. There is give and take, but the yarns do not break.

When life feels like it is unraveling, it can go into a downward spiral quickly, just as a knitting or crocheting project can quickly be unraveled: illness, death, broken relationships, disappointments. We’ve all been there, and we all need someone to help us pick up the broken pieces. Most crises don’t fix rapidly or easily. We need someone who sticks with us, who lets us be ourselves.

Jesus told the story of a beaten-up man, a priest, a Levite, and a man from Samaria. The priest and Levite had other business to attend to. They had a deadline to

meet. Besides, how does one care for a beaten-up man? Who stops, but the man from Samaria—someone at the bottom of the social ladder.

He takes the risk and the time to stop and bring the man to an inn and pay for his care. The injured man was a stranger. He didn't know him! But he embraced him with love.

The ministry of creating prayer shawls is one of many ways to embrace another and offer comfort, companionship, and love. Lest you think you're off the *hook* because you don't knit or crochet, no one is excluded from the ministry of presence. We all connect with others in different ways. One thing I learned as a pastor is that what is a joy for me is a burden for another, and a task that weighs me down gives joy and fulfillment to someone else. There are also different seasons of life so, as our scripture reading points out, we are sometimes receiving and sometimes giving.

Perhaps you don't enjoy making prayer shawls, but there is something all of us can do: greet others with the gift of a smile. A smile recognizes other people sending love to us.

## WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS TO EMBRACE ANOTHER WITH LOVE?

1. Perhaps you like to send cards. Cards with words of love, encouragement, and prayers build a connection and are a loving embrace.
2. Maybe you have the gift of hospitality or organization and love to give invitations to eat a meal together or play games. Sometimes even when you are surrounded by several hundred people like here at Landis Homes, life can feel

lonely. An invitation to be present with others can transform one's day.

3. Another valued gift of presence is the ministry of the Star comforter volunteers, as they are present with those who have little time left to live.
4. Small, gifted items remind us of another's prayerful presence, such as a crocheted, knitted or quilted prayer square, a small stone or a carved wooden cross.
5. It is a gift of presence to stop, sit down next to someone and talk. Conversations are a special gift when we invite the other person to speak as we carefully listen to them.
6. When someone asks for prayer, stop and pray together at that moment. Follow up later when there is opportunity.
7. Singing together informally brings the joy of connection as well as encouragement from the song's words.
8. Scripture can comfort, embrace, love, and give hope.

In John 6 Jesus asked his disciples to look for food to feed a crowd. When they returned, Jesus asked, "What do you have?"

What do YOU have? Bread in your hand could look different than what bread in someone else's hand looks like. Prayer shawls, cards, hospitality, companionship, prayer, scripture, songs and a smile are only a few of the many ways that we can embrace another with love and with what is in our hands.

What is in your hands? Jesus says to us, "Bring it to me. I will bless and multiply it."



Judy Zook along with her husband, Ron, were co-pastors at Laurel Street Mennonite Church. They retired in April 2023. They enjoy living in Lancaster City and host a community of 2-3 young adults.



## HANDS

**L**ook at your hands. Aren't they marvelous creations? Aren't they amazing gifts? They have the potential of serving the world every single day.

Notice the veins in your hands. Notice your fingers and each joint. Notice the lines in your hands and look at your fingernails.

There are 29 major bones and 29 joints in our hands. There are 48 nerves, 123 ligaments and 30 blood vessels. Indeed, we are fearfully and wonderfully made!

The scriptures admonish us to clap our hands and to lift up our hands and to praise and bless the Lord.

The psalmist wrote, "Clap your hands all you people and praise the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord."

The Bible gives us examples of how Jesus used his hands to bring blessing everywhere.

He blessed children with them. He touched and healed the blind man.

When Peter cut the soldier's ear off with a sword, Jesus placed it back on with his hand. When there was a terrific storm, Jesus stilled it by lifting his hand.

Jesus took a little girl by the hand after she had died and told her to become alive again. He also broke the loaves and fishes with his hands and multiplied them for 5,000 people.

Jesus used his hands to work in the woodshop with Joseph. He touched the lepers with his hands and healed them.

Christ's hands were instruments of God's love and healing. May our hands also be instruments of God's love and healing.

I remember my mother's hands.

My mother was a generous woman. I witnessed God flow through her as she used her hands to cook and clean and farm with my dad. God flowed through her as she used her hands to play with us at the lake and as she physically cared for her mother.

When Mom grew older, I was given the opportunity to be her caregiver. She lived in my home for 12 years.

One cold late night in January, my beloved mother was actively dying. I waited and prayed and mourned at Mom's bedside as she lay unresponsive.

Suddenly, at 2:00 am, Mom opened her eyes and said, "It's time to say the blessing." Her words surprised me.

So there, in the middle of the night in her final hours, Mom took my hands and spoke the blessing from Numbers 6 over me.

*"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."*

When she ended these words, I felt peace in the depths of my soul. Peace seemed to flow from her hands to mine, and I have never forgotten it.

I pray that our hands can always be conduits of peace and comfort and healing.

As we live in community with God and one

another,

*May our hands be instruments of peace and love.*

*For those who hunger and thirst,*

*May our hands provide what is most needed.*

*When a stranger is in our midst*

*May our hands extend a welcome.*

*When injustice is in the world and in our communities,*

*May our hands join others to promote justice and peace.*

*In times of sorrow, sickness, and great suffering,*

*May our hands embrace the broken and offer prayers.*

*Whatever the need, large or small,*

*God is at work in our hands.*

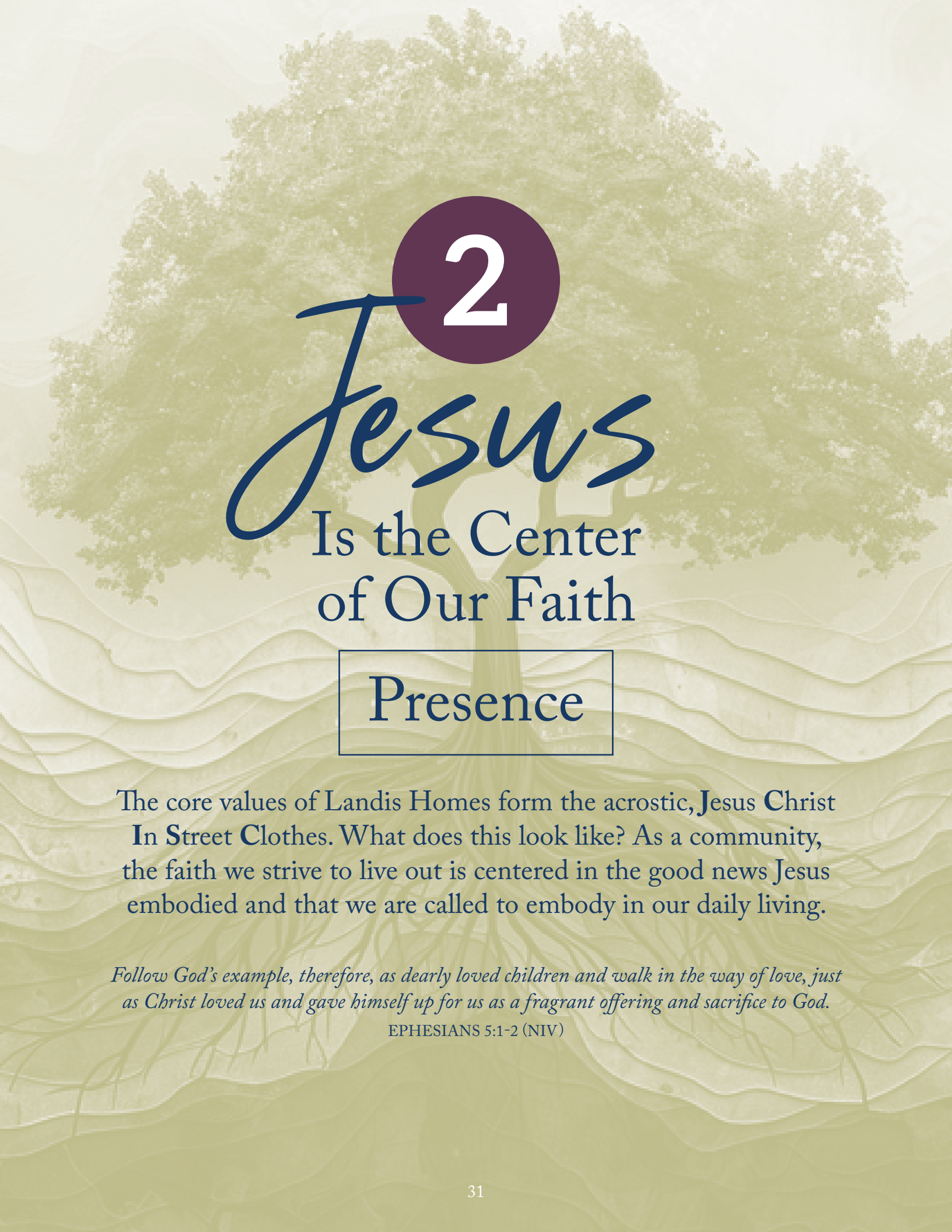
*May we serve generously, lovingly,*

*and faithfully with our hands.*



Ginny Hartman, a Landis Homes resident, thrives on her love of family and friends, nature, drama, writing, pottery, books, music, cooking, hospitality and all living creatures. She served professionally as a nurse for 45 years and as a chaplain for 15 years and offers compassion, listening and presence. Her life-long intention is to help others overcome the fear of being left alone and abandoned. Her essence is sustained by laughter, lament and prayer.





# 2 Jesus

## Is the Center of Our Faith

### Presence

The core values of Landis Homes form the acrostic, **J**esus **C**hrist  
**I**n **S**treet **C**lothes. What does this look like? As a community,  
the faith we strive to live out is centered in the good news Jesus  
embodied and that we are called to embody in our daily living.

*Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just  
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

EPHESIANS 5:1-2 (NIV)



## HOLDING HOPE

**Y**ou have just heard a favorite story of mine in Luke 24:13-35, the Emmaus Road account of two people who struggled with hope in the immediate time after the resurrection of Jesus. But first I would like to share with you a personal story I sometimes call “my little resurrection story.”

While Jim and I were out of town on vacation, a friend, who was unaware I was not at home, had a lovely surprise birthday gift of two white orchids delivered to our home. These fragile, ornate plants wrapped tightly in cellophane were left on our front porch. Not hearing from me, my friend was concerned and asked another friend to retrieve the plants until I returned home. Arriving home four days later, I could hardly wait to see this friendship gift.

Eagerly and gently, I removed the paper around the orchids, and my heart sank. The plants appeared lifeless; one vibrant white flower had fallen, the remaining flower pedals hung back like elephant ears, and the plant leaves completely drooped, slumping to the table.

As I lifted the two plants from the white

pottery, I noticed the roots were an ugly discolored brown, rather than a vibrant green. The plant, ever so light in weight, was definitely dead, or so I thought. I was deeply saddened. I phoned several friends with marvelous plant experience, but repeatedly I heard them say, “Orchids always die for us.”

And then I remembered a greenhouse in our former geographic area that sold exotic plants. I quickly phoned the business. The woman who answered was so present, not anxious as I was. She listened, and she was understanding. “Do you have a cell phone?” the woman asked. “Could you take a picture and text the picture to me; I will take a look and then get back to you.”

With renewed hope I took not one photo but seven or eight, showing the sad, limp leaves of the orchid and the drooping flower petals. I texted the photos to the woman right away. Then I waited, telling myself, “Oh, she is busy closing the shop; she will not return my call.”

My hope wavered. And then my phone rang. “Set the potted orchid in lukewarm water for 10-15 minutes,” the woman said. “You may want to mist those

drooping leaves of the plant.” And then she added, “*The plant will come back. It may take time, but it will come back.*” And so I waited, some days feeling confident, at times not hopeful at all.

These days I’ve been reading Luke 24, noticing Cleopas and the other disciple strolling the road, despondent, deeply disappointed. These “sleepwalkers” (I name them) were joined by a stranger who walked beside them. They were shocked when the stranger asked, “What are you so concerned about?” They replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who has not heard all the things that have happened the last few days.”

“What things?” the stranger asks.

They pour out their hearts. “We had thought he was the Messiah who came to rescue and save Israel. He was a mighty teacher, highly regarded by both God and all the people, but he was arrested, condemned to death. Crucified! Some women from our group were at his tomb early this morning; they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing; the angel told them Jesus is alive; some men checked it out later and sure enough the women were right, the tomb was empty.”

“Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would rise again?” the stranger asked.

Nearing their home in the evening, Cleopas and the other disciple invited the stranger to stay and eat with them. At the table the stranger took a small loaf of bread, blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus. They said to one another, “Didn’t our hearts feel strangely warmed as Jesus talked with us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?” Quickly they returned to Jerusalem as messengers of this remarkable news!

Jesus’ disciples and others who followed had lived with hope, but in their humanness got distracted and

downhearted. It is sometimes hard to hold hope, and it takes an act of faith to trust in God the source of our hope.

I was told by the greenhouse woman that the orchid plant would come back. It would take time, but I was just to wait. I found that hard. I often need people in my life to encourage me and assure me that hope is appropriate and to hold on in faith. Whenever and wherever we lose hope, we are invited to take a bold step of trusting in God, even when circumstances don’t seem to warrant our hope.

In October 2020, a situation arose that tested my hope. I struggled with doubt after I tested positive with COVID-19. This was before any vaccine was available. People were dying with this disease. I was quarantined. But very quickly, friends and people we really didn’t know well started to drop food off on our porch and assure us they were praying for us. Suddenly we experienced hope. We were not alone; the community was with us! God was clearly with us through these acts of kindness, little miracles – and our hearts were strangely warmed in hope. As writer Hans Christian Andersen says, “The whole world is a series of miracles, but we are so used to them that we call them everyday things.”

My two beautiful vibrant white orchid plants thrived for two months after following the recommendations of the greenhouse. Today only one is thriving; one plant is now totally flowerless, all the flowers have dropped, and a tall, stick-like stem remains. But if I look closely, I can see a small bit of green, the formation of new life beginning to push through.

So I am waiting again, holding hope. This orchid little resurrection story is for me a reminder that my timing may not be God’s timing. When my hope wavers, I can make a new act of trust in God knowing that we can count on the faithfulness of God one day at a time.



Miriam Book, a resident of Landis Homes, is a retired pastor and is now involved in ministry as an End of Life Doula. Miriam enjoys nature (including gardening and hummingbirds), travel and walking, and has lived on South Campus for five years with her spouse, Jim Lapp.



## FINDING GOD'S WAY THROUGH LIFE'S MESSINESS

I was 10 years old that summer, and my dad was camp pastor for a week of summer camp at Camp Hebron. My friend and I were straggling at the back of the line and not paying attention as the group got farther and farther ahead and then rounded a bend. We did not see them at all. I, daughter of the camp pastor and prior visitor of Camp Hebron, was far too confident that I knew the correct path. I went left when I should have gone right. Within minutes, the trail began to dwindle until we were probably following a deer trail, not a real trail at all. Finally, at the tearful request of my friend to stop, I had to admit – I was lost. A few more abortive attempts only led to more tears from my friend and my total loss of confidence.

Have you ever found yourself in such a pickle? Whether physically lost or feeling lost, we have all probably found ourselves in a place where we did not expect to be, without a clear way forward. Even on our journey toward God, we may stray from time to time. God is always with us, gently guiding us back – even lost little girls who think they know everything. The

Lenten season invites us to respond to Jesus' call: repent and believe.

What do you think of when you hear the word *repentance*? Perhaps there is a sense of shame or conviction about having done something wrong; perhaps a need to say sorry. I'd like to broaden the definition of repentance. In Mark 1:15, Jesus begins his ministry proclaiming these words, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." The word *repent* or *metanoeo* means to change one's mind or purpose, to think differently afterwards. As we encounter Jesus in our lives, we think differently afterwards – we repent and believe in new ways. This can include times of new learning or times of remorse and confession. It is what helps us make God's way our way in this life.

David the psalmist writes beautifully of finding God's way rather than his own. Psalm 25 speaks of David's yearning to know where God wants him to go – not necessarily physically, but in his thinking, values, judgments. Psalm 25:4-5 tells us, "Make me to

know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me.”The path that David desires for himself and others isn’t separate from life’s challenges and messes, but rather a way through it all. There are external challenges. In Psalm 25:1-3, David comes to God trusting that he will be protected from shame and from those who deal treacherously. He’s feeling the pressure from the outside and doesn’t want it to get him off course.

We all face pressures, challenges and obstacles. Today is the 60th Anniversary of the beginning of Landis Homes. From 10 residents to nearly 900, we have grown a bit. As the number of residents and staff grows, so does the infrastructure and the challenges come with growth. Our guiding value of stewardship states that we devote ourselves to faithful and responsible use of resources entrusted to our care. Technology today enables buildings to be built and heated/cooled with far fewer natural resources or stress on the natural environment than in years past, but is also not the least expensive route. “Make us to know your ways, O Lord, teach us your path.” Because we follow Jesus and want to care for the earth God created and entrusted to us, Landis Homes chose to incorporate green technology as part of its growth plan as a way of acknowledging that the earth is the Lord’s and is for the next generation as much as it is for us. “Lead us in your truth and teach us.”

In 25:8, David switches from a prayer for God’s help to a statement of belief! The Lord is good and upright and because of that, he trusts that God will help all of us, even sinners to walk in God’s way, a way that David describes as steadfast love and faithfulness. Sometimes it is hard to see what is ahead when we are on that path, especially when the way is challenging or when we are struggling. Remember, Jesus’ message was not only to repent but also believe.

On February 14, 1934, Mennonite missionary Elam Stauffer arrived in Shirati, Tanzania, near Lake Victoria, and was welcomed by a local tribal chief.

I wonder if the Mennonite missionaries had any expectations about the years to come. By the summer they were holding outdoor worship services, and by September they were baptizing new believers.

The path of these pioneer missionaries wasn’t perfect, they strayed at times, just as we all do, but God took their mustard seed of faith and the seeds of those who responded to the Good News and grew them. Today the Kanisa Mennonite Church of Tanzania is a largely self-sustaining entity made up of ten dioceses and embedded in key areas in the county. According to Kanisa La Mennonite Tanzania’s website, the current vision is “To see a changed and reconciled society through Jesus Christ; spiritually, mentally and physically for the glory of God.” Their mission is “To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ that brings salvation, love, forgiveness, righteousness and peace to all people and make them disciples of Jesus Christ.” They also have goals. Goal One: “One million new souls are reached, equipped and ministering.” Goal Two: “Empowered and engaged church communities in addressing their socio-economic challenges and realizing sustainable livelihoods.” Our community at Landis Homes cherishes the deep connections we have with this faith community and many such communities around the world.

The story of Landis Homes and the Kanisa Mennonite churches are not simply stories of human achievement but the fruit of what happens when people join with the Spirit of God in the work of the Kingdom of God. These journeys include external challenges and human failings, but Christ is among us and will gently guide us back to God’s way.

*Lord, help us to find YOUR way. Through the maze of life’s challenges, and despite our weaknesses and sin, you are our guide. Teach us humility to learn your way, teach us confidence in who you are and give us courage to allow our encounters with you to transform the way we see you, others and ourselves. To you, O Lord, we lift up our souls and in you, O God we put our trust. Amen.*



Audrey Kanagy is the Spiritual Care Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Mississippi State University and a Master of Arts in Religion from Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She enjoys teaching Bible classes to recent immigrants as part of the SEED program and a variety of creative endeavors. She and her husband, Robert, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.



## FAITH: HOLDING FAST AND MOVING FORWARD

**H**ebrews 11 is familiar to me, and I suspect to many of you as well, but I wanted to go back and really dig into what it might be saying for me, and for us, today.

Before we do that, I think we need to see why it was written originally and to whom it was first intended. While there is not agreement on who initially wrote this letter, there is agreement it was composed in the second half of the first century and seems to have been addressed to Jewish followers of Jesus who were considering returning to their prior religious practices because of intense persecution.

Our text starts out with a very familiar note. “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see” (Hebrews 11:1, NLT). Or, as I learned it in the King James Version: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

I was trying to think of a good example of this in life and one that came to me was the driver in a rally car

race. For those who are not familiar with rally racing, there are usually two people in the car. So, imagine if you will, you are in a small sports car, highly powered and well-tuned. To get to your goal the fastest, you need to steer across miles of hills, sharp turns and different surfaces at a faster time than all the other drivers. To help you, you have a co-driver seated next to you, and that person in that role does NOT have a steering wheel. It is the person’s job to look at something called Pace Notes and tell the driver what is coming but not yet in sight. So, as you keep your eyes on the road at top speeds, your co-driver’s job is to call out something like “40 L5-/Cr 4+.” It is your job to believe that what they are saying is accurate and, in this case, that in 40 yards, you need to take a left-hand turn in fifth gear, and as you crest the hill, to shift into fourth gear to set yourself up for the next corner. YIKES, talk about the evidence of things we cannot see!

Hebrews 11:8 points out how “people in days of old” earned a good reputation by having strong faith.

Abram, soon to be Abraham, left home and all he knew because of faith in God. Sarah believed God's promise of a child to come. A little later, the passage talks about how "All these people died still believing what God had promised them" (11:13, NLT).

And yet, I will admit that after I read this passage the first couple times, I went back and remembered all of the times where these leaders of faith and those who were following with them doubted. Remember all the times where doubt crept in? If it did for those people, why should we be surprised when it creeps into our thinking as well? But then I also remembered how at the deepest times of despair, those people did trust in God.

I again thought of the rally car racer example. If the drivers do not trust their co-driver, they will go too slow, or they will try to remember what might be coming up and make a decision that leads to a crash, taking them out of the race or worse.

Thankfully, our call to have faith is not just about holding fast to God's promises. We have so many scriptures that get at the second part of the sermon title. Not only are we to hold fast, we are to be moving forward with that faith.

The very next chapter in Hebrews spells this out very clearly for us, saying, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us

run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne" (12:1-2, NLT).

I like the word *endured* here and the race champion imagery for Jesus. It clearly implies that faith should not be static, but always moving forward. Or, said another way, faith grows by moving forward.

I encourage you as you (and am challenging myself) as we go from here to do several things. First, let go of our fears and step out in faith. Second, be willing to move beyond our comfort zones. In this I think of both of my parents' families. My mom's family picked up everything and moved from Ontario to Michigan to start from scratch, and my dad's family went to far western Colorado, far from all their family to follow a call from the church. My parents also exemplified stepping out in faith by moving with three rambunctious boys under five years old to a place where they knew literally no one, in order to follow their faith calling by moving to Michigan's upper peninsula.

Finally, be willing to learn from mistakes. Even when missteps and accidents happen, and decisions seem to have gone in directions you don't intend, don't say it is a failure of faith; say it is part of stepping forward and learning what God has for you.



Larry Guengerich is Director of Communications and Engagement for Landis Communities. He is married to Kendra Peifer and they live in East Petersburg with two teenage children and two cats. He has worked in Mennonite-related organizations including Eastern Mennonite University, Ten Thousand Villages, and Mennonite Central Committee. He has worked for Landis Communities since 2011. Larry loves history, reading, genealogy, and everything soccer-related.



## Downsizing

Recently my wife Janet and I have been doing a lot of needed downsizing. We have been donating shelves of books, boxes of books I have authored, boxes of book promotion material used at conferences and boxes and boxes of stuff we no longer need. Thrift shops, here we come. We have been downsizing ever since we were preparing to move to Landis Homes.

We sold houses we would no longer need. Instead of yard sales, we donated to local charities furniture, beds, sofas, chairs, clothing, bikes, canoes, a rowboat, a second car, beach umbrellas, a lawn mower, a mulcher. Our family had no use for most of our stuff. Thrift shops gladly received most of our treasures. None of our family wants our expensive dishes and silverware in our hutch. Our treasures are viewed as unwanted junk by family. We have been throwing away a lot of inferior pictures. When Janet and I are both gone, our family will oversee deciding what is still treasure and what is junk. That is life: “You can’t take it with you.”

Jesus warned against storing up treasures. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matthew 6:19).

Jesus was encouraging lifetime downsizing. The late Harry Emerson Fosdick, pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, said it so well in his hymn, “God of Grace and God of Glory”: “Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.”

It’s amazing how much treasure ordinary people like us store up in a lifetime. We begin to ask ourselves, “How in the world did we accumulate so many treasures?” The answer: One day at a time. The more generous we are with others, the fewer resources we will have for storing up earthly treasures for ourselves.

Downsizing is endless and is not easy. We still have a filing cabinet out in the garage. At my age of 90, why do I need to keep all these files? After I’m gone, someone else will have to throw out the files. Janet keeps after me to empty the filing cabinet. There is always more to downsize. We have emptied many shelves out in the garage, and there are always more boxes to give away or throw away.

Natural disasters ruthlessly downsize families to homelessness. Fires, hurricanes, floods and tornadoes inflict extreme downsizings, leaving families with only

the clothes on their backs. Recovery will be long and difficult.

When we enter heaven, we will enter without all our earthly stuff that we call treasures. Jesus instructed His followers in this life to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:20). Our treasures must be in heaven, for Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also” (Matthew 6:21). That takes away our attachment to this world, which is only passing away. Jesus was trying to distract His followers from focusing on this world.

The Gospel song “This world is not my home”

reminds us of treasures in heaven. “This world is not my home / I’m just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue./ Oh Lord, you know I have no friend like you. If heaven’s not my home / Then Lord, what will I do?”

*Our Father, who art in heaven; Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*



Gerald Ihle was a United Methodist pastor for 43 years in eastern Pennsylvania. He is the author of four Bible Study books. He grew up in Fountain Hill, a suburb of Bethlehem, Pa. He graduated from Moravian College and the Theological School at Drew University. He died in March 2024. His wife Janet is a resident at Landis Homes. They have three children, four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.



## THE TRINITY LIVES IN US: JOHN 14:8-17

**C**an there be anything more amazing than the fact that the triune God lives in us? It seems impossible. We are exceedingly blessed to live after the coming of Jesus. It is much easier for me to identify with God when I realize Jesus is God. John says, “Jesus moved into our neighborhood” (1:14, *The Message*). No other religion has a god who comes to its people. How blessed we are. Jesus understands us since he walked where we walked.

Jesus is not only with us, around us, over us and upon us, but *in* us. Just a few hours before Jesus went to the cross, he said to Philip: “I will send you another comforter, the Spirit of truth, he will be with you forever” (John 14:16).

I cannot begin to imagine what those words must have sounded like to Philip. Jesus promised Philip and the disciples to never leave them as orphans. Philip didn’t understand, but when Pentecost came, he began to realize more of what Jesus meant when he said, “I will be with you.” In the words of a hymn: “So very near

to God, I cannot nearer be, for in the person of his Son, I am as near as he.”

Are you aware that Jesus is *in* you, living through you this very moment and that you are *in* him? You may say, “I have heard that hundreds of times.” But are you conscious of Jesus living *in* you? Have you thought about it today?

Being conscious of Jesus living *in* you will affect your thoughts, your attitude, your speech. It will show in your face. Yes, it will even show in how you walk. You can’t hide it. Jesus in you will transform you! Believing this enables Christians to serve God to the extent of enduring pain and even dying a martyr’s death for Him.

I pray every day for those who are suffering even to the point of death for our Lord. Thousands die each year for our Lord.

Jesus said, “Anyone who loves me will obey me. My Father will love them, and *we* will come to them and make our home *in* them” (John 14:23, emphasis added). Not only is Jesus living in us but God, our

Father, is also living in us. Jesus and his Father are one. Therefore, if one of them is in us, so is the other. If only we would remember that Jesus and God are in us, life would be a constant adventure. Dare I let God and Jesus be to me all that the Scripture says they are to me?

A glove can do nothing. But put your hand in the glove and it can do whatever you can do. We are the glove. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5). When Jesus is in us, we can do whatever Jesus can do. In fact, Jesus said we can do greater things than he did (John 14:12). John writes, “If we live in him, we must live as Jesus lived” (1 John 2:6).

We are told 216 times in the New Testament that we are *in* Jesus and he is *in* us. We still forget. It’s one of the most difficult truths to remember. Colossians 3:3, is one of my favorite scriptures, says: “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

1 John 2:23-25 reminds us that if we abide by what we heard — if we obey his teachings — we will remain *in* the Son and *in* the Father and we will have eternal life. “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives *in* them and they *in* God” (1 John 4:15, emphasis added). Reading these verses, it’s easy to see why John is Jesus’ beloved disciple (John 20:2). Oh, that we would believe as John believed!

Can you imagine anything overcoming you since you are both in Jesus Christ the Messiah and in God our Heavenly Father? Could there be any place more secure? Can you imagine a person worrying about their situation if they know they are hidden in Christ and in God, the Father and Creator of the universe?

Now let God’s promises amaze you even more. Not only are we *in* the Son and *in* the Father but we are

*in* the Holy Spirit. It seems more appropriate to say the Holy Spirit is *in* us, but both are true.

You, as Christians, are not in the flesh, you are in the realm of the Holy Spirit. If anyone does not have the Holy Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is *in* you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Holy Spirit gives life... If the Holy Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is living *in* you, God who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, because of the Holy Spirit who lives *in* you. (Romans 8:9-11, emphasis added)

Most Christians live with a Holy Spirit deficit disorder. It is simpler to understand God the Father and Jesus living in us because we can picture them in our minds. The Holy Spirit is more mystical. I thank God often throughout the day for his Spirit that directs my steps, guiding me to the people I need to meet. I pray often for the Holy Spirit to direct my mind and my tongue. “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words” (1 Corinthians 2:13). Peter says, “If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

May this teaching remind each Christian that they are *in* Jesus and Jesus is *in* them, they are *in* God and God lives *in* them, they are *in* the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit lives *in* them. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus.



David Eshleman, D.Min, was a pastor/church planter for 50 years. His last church, Capital Christian Fellowship near Washington D.C., grew from 45 to 400 with 20 nationalities. He served as a church consultant for Lancaster Mennonite Conference ministering in 70 congregations. He is the author of 14 books.



## AT YOUR ALTAR, O LORD

I want to share briefly from Psalm 84, a text that I've loved for a long time. Some of these words likely bring up lovely music or memories in your minds and hearts.

This Psalm expresses deep longing on the part of the Israelites *for God's house*, especially at the end of a long, hot summer when families leave their scattered villages and make their way to the hills of Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. They travel to the sanctuary to pray for rain upon a parched land and for a blessing on the king and the people, as the cycle of the agricultural year begins again. The people's devotion is to the house of the Lord, where they can come to meet God.

The people set out on this journey of faith to worship in Jerusalem – even as they go through *the valley of Baca* – which may indicate or symbolize a valley of weeping. This implies that for those whose strength is in the Lord, a place of sorrow can become – by divine transformation – a source of energy and encouragement. The pilgrims' strength is *renewed in anticipation*, little by little, as they near Zion.

I especially love verse three:

Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

This will always bring back memories of teaching with SEMILLA (Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Central America) for one year in Panama. Classes were in a small cement block church building that was under construction: no windows yet, or roof, doors or floor, only gravel and dirt.

I stood at a table in front, with students in a semi-circle in front of me. I remember small birds flying in and out behind me as I taught. When I looked later, I discovered there was a hole in the barebones block wall behind me, and a bird had her nest in that hole. The adult birds were flying in and out, feeding the young hidden in that nest in the wall.

Verse four says: "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." It has a lovely hint of what it might be like to *dwell* consistently,

always, near to the heart of God. There is also a lovely reminder of the possibility of living in the house of God, like, for example, the prophetess Anna at the time when Jesus was born. She lived a state of perpetual readiness to receive Someone special.

This reminds me of another story of someone noticing an old man coming into a church, or chapel, to pray, every day: sitting quietly, silently, at noon, *every day*. Finally, a pastor or attendant in the church went to him one day and asked if he wanted help with anything. The old man was surprised, looked up and said simply, "Oh no! I just look at God. And God looks at me!" How lovely!

I want to just sit and look at God, too. I want to look into God's eyes and heart, and see God simply

looking back at me, with a gentle smile. And with joy in God's eyes!

**Let's pray.** Oh God, even as the sparrow comes to your altar and makes a nest for herself where she may lay her young, happy are we when we too can put our trust in you in challenging and joy-filled times. Guide and bless the work of your kingdom within each of us and all of us together as a community here at Landis Homes. Keep drawing us closer to Yourself, for:

*There is a place of quiet rest, near to your heart, oh God,  
a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.*

*O Jesus, bless'd Redeemer, sent from the heart of God,  
Hold us, who wait before thee, near to the heart of God.*

*Amen.*



Janet Breneman lives at Landis Homes with her husband, Wes Newswanger. After serving in Central America with Semilla (Latin American Anabaptist Seminary) until 2004, Janet pastored at Laurel Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster for ten years and then worked one year with Mennonite World Conference.



## IDENTITY MATTERS: LUKE 9:23-27

**W**e drove up in an old, beat-up, gigantic 1970 Ford station wagon. It was 1990, and I was taking the SAT college entrance exam with local high school students. As a 17-year-old dropped off among a crowd of peers in such a monstrosity, it was an embarrassing situation. I doubt anyone else even noticed, but I felt like a spotlight of awkwardness was shining on me. Being the one student from a small Christian school in a mass of public-school seniors, my hope was that they did not know who I was and that I would never see them again!

We've probably all been embarrassed by our family or friends, fervently hoping no one would identify us with them. I expect that there were a few times that Jesus' disciples got red in the face at some of his shocking speeches. Even Jesus felt the sting of rejection as many disciples turned away and deserted him, wondering if his closest disciples would also go away (John 6:67). Would they continue to follow Jesus

or go with the offended crowd who could no longer associate with such crazy talk? With whom would they identify?

Identity matters. Being a fair-weather friend is not sustainable. Jesus is looking for thick and thin followers, whether you are a part of the majority or a minority outsider, whether it benefits you and whether self-sacrifice is required. Jesus said to them, "If any of you is embarrassed with me and the way I'm leading you, know that the Son of Man will be far more embarrassed with you when he arrives in all his splendor in company with the Father and the holy angels" (MSG).

What is the cause of our embarrassment? The boat of a station wagon embarrassed me because I made it of foremost importance how my peers saw me. When being liked, praised and admired becomes important to our identity, preserving that image takes precedent over the image of Christ within us. When being a part of groups others view as successful or respected

by society, it becomes easier to turn away when they no longer reflect popular opinion. Finding acceptance and belonging are real human needs, but it is where we choose to find those things that matter. Jesus calls us to a different identity, one lodged in the viewpoint and values of God's kingdom.

When we identify with Jesus so closely that our eyes tune into what he sees, the vision of the world as God intends it to be will come into focus. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh write, "For the disciple, the simple truth must remain; one cannot bolt down, control or even mediate the essential God-encounter into rituals, priesthoods and theological formulas. We all need to

constantly engage the God who unnerves, destabilizes, and yet enthralls us."<sup>1</sup> Like the Israelites who wanted to store up one day's manna for the next, we must resist the temptation to store up and rely on souvenirs of past spiritual experiences, and instead prepare daily for fresh encounters with Jesus.

It is a journey, a process of discovering what it means to follow Jesus, confronting our discomfort and embarrassment, and digging at the roots of our identity as we seek first the kingdom of God. Then the human need for acceptance and belonging, our core identity, will be met in abundance in Jesus.

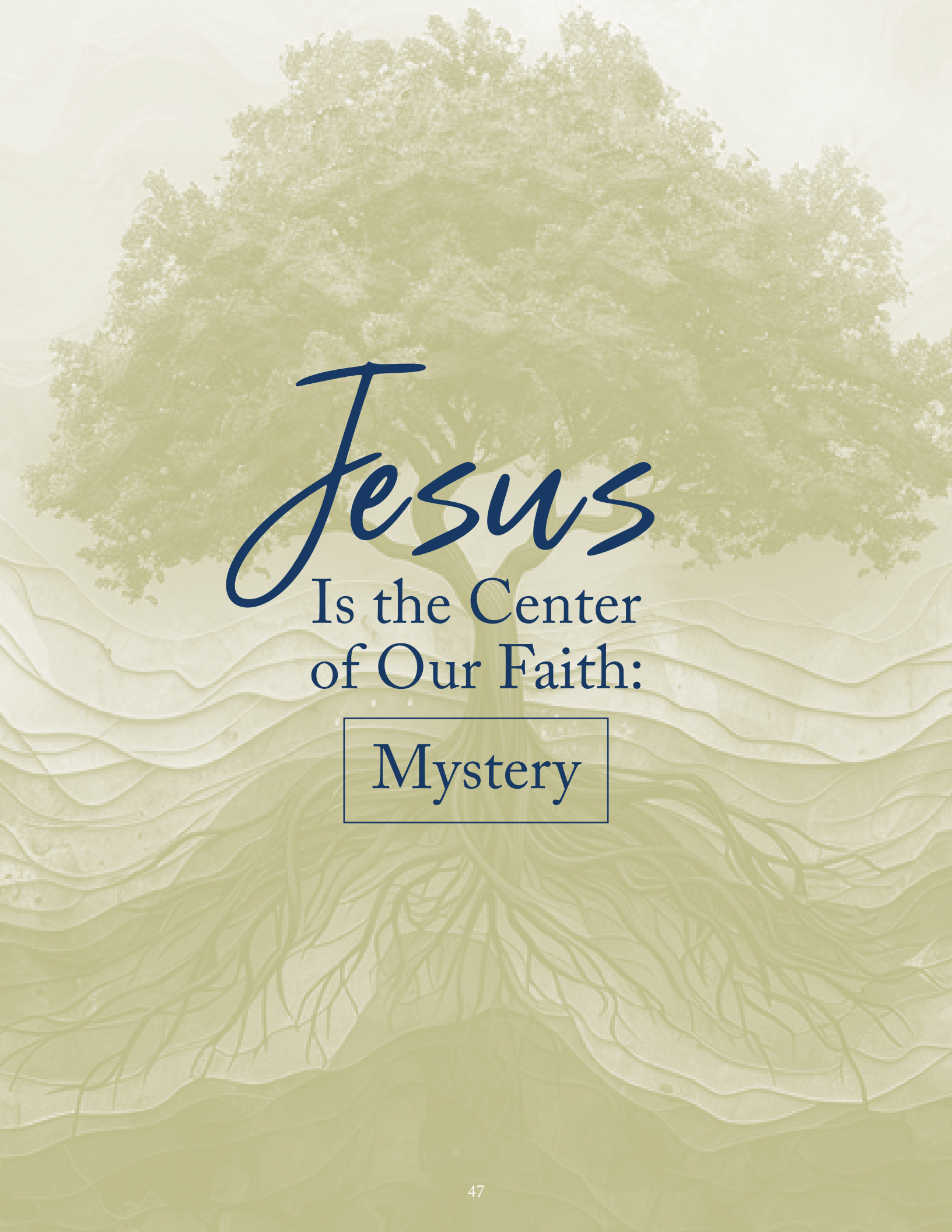
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1 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *Rejesus: a Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009, p. 69-70.



Audrey Kanagy is the Spiritual Care Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Mississippi State University and a Master of Arts in Religion from Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She enjoys teaching Bible classes to recent immigrants as part of the SEED program and a variety of creative endeavors. She and her husband, Robert, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.





# Jesus

Is the Center  
of Our Faith:

Mystery



## PRAYER WHEN TURNING 85

**F**or our devotional this morning, I wish to share with you a prayer I recently wrote as I turned 85. *Creator God*, who formed me in my mother's womb, as I now reach the age of fourscore and five, I want to give thanks for the divine life instilled in me with my first breath that has sustained me these 85 years.

At this moment in time, my heart overflows with gratitude for the life granted me by your grace. The family I enjoyed from my youth and still enjoy, the marriage to Nancy who died at age 62 and left me and our children in grief, for whom we keep giving thanks, and the special grace to find love and acceptance with Mim that enriches and blesses me. What a gift she has become to me!

*Generous God*, I give thanks for the opportunities I enjoy in life that were not due to any special qualities in me, but were the result of parents, a church and a community that allowed me to grow even through my own insecurities. In your mercy, I had jobs for every stage of life that seemed to fit me even when I struggled to know who I was and what I had to offer this world. I feel sad that these same privileges were not always accorded to my sisters and many women, and also to men who lacked the favorable context of life I enjoyed. Forgive me, God, when I took these important gifts for granted and did not realize my indebtedness to you and to others who helped me along the way.

*Hopeful God*, I can't express enough thanks for good health I have enjoyed these 85 years, never spending a night in the hospital, and the special grace of physical and emotional strength for life's challenges. I did not think I could survive after Nancy died, but by your mercy I discovered resources I could not have imagined. You know some of my weaknesses were not seen by others—the anxiety that impacted my sleep and created emotional pain and fear. But at this age, I can only say with the Psalmist, thank you for being our dwelling place in all generations, even in the times when I felt depressed and fearful. I still want to grow in accepting my humanity, the very way you created me, and to trust you with my emotional ups and downs. You provide hope even in the times when the world is in turmoil and hope seems elusive. Thank you for being our refuge and strength even when the scandals of government and the vagaries of climate change cause destruction for so many. In all this, I seek to cling to you in hope.

*Gracious God*, I can't begin to name all the ways your love and grace have kept me over the years, sometimes from foolish actions on my part and other times from communal and global forces that impacted my life. I recall the providence I experienced when as a new driver at age 16, I nearly landed the plumbing truck in a huge ditch due to my inexperience in driving. I recall again and again your care of me in that moment.

I also recall during the recent pandemic, when Mim and I both tested positive for COVID-19, and I remained asymptomatic. Why did so many die while I was spared during this pandemic that took the lives of so many?

*Redeeming God*, your mercy connects to my deepest regrets, when I failed to be the father and the husband I wish I had been. I confess with David the need for mercy for unloving thoughts and passions that arise in my heart. I acknowledge it is only by your grace that I could begin to pastor at age 24 and can now celebrate 61 years as a spiritual leader. It was not my brilliance but your love that allowed me to be a pastor and a church executive, and to now look back on these years with joy. I humbly ask, dear God, for your forgiveness for the people I failed, the times I did not share your word with greater clarity and passion, and the people who experienced hurt from my leadership. I was too reluctant at times to be bold in declaring the truth about important issues of justice and the expansiveness of your love. Forgive my shortcomings in leadership and help me even now at 85 to behave as the prophet Micah instructed us, “to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly” with you, my God.

Now at this age, *God of love*, how do I face the coming years of my life? As you know, longevity has not been part of my lineage. I have lived longer than all my parents and grandparents. I am already past the Psalmist’s word about fourscore. What can I anticipate? How do I approach these final years of life? I am told that we have the finances to live into the future. But you know what concerns me most is not our finances, but the quality of life and health that people my age often experience. How can I live and find meaning and purpose in these last years? I am gifted with a wonderful wife to accompany me on this passage of life. I have children who are concerned for my welfare. But the future is unknown. They say health can change so quickly. How do I face this unknown future?

- What if my health gives way and I am no longer able to move without a walker or wheelchair?

- What if my sight declines and I can no longer drive a car?
- What if my memory fades and I am not able to navigate the challenges of life even in everyday things?
- What if I become dependent on others and they do not respond to my needs and desires as I wish they would?
- What if my church forgets me and our children grew weary of coming to visit me?
- What if the church I served is dismantled or becomes too enmeshed in the culture around us?
- What if . . . what if . . . what if . . .

*God of all wisdom and knowledge*, you understand my “what ifs” and anxieties about what could happen. I know you want me to live in trust and faith, but that is often hard. I have had a relatively easy life. Can I now adapt to a life of depending day by day on you as my good shepherd and the loving parent of my life? I need special grace for that kind of faith.

*Merciful God*, how do I celebrate this birthday? Let my mind and attitude receive the good wishes of others and enjoy this moment in life. Enable me to live in peace, hope and dependence on you, and to rest in your love from which the scripture says nothing can separate us. With the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, I pray, “O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, be thou our guide while troubles last and our eternal home.” When I grow faint of heart in the days or years to come, give me a fresh awareness of your unending faithfulness.

Thank you for hearing my prayer. Let there be mercy for my complaints, grace for all my shortcomings and hope for all my fears. I end this prayer with a doxology to you, O God, written 2000 years ago by Paul in his letter to the Romans, in chapter 11.

*“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are God’s judgments and how inscrutable God’s ways. . . . For from God and through God and to God are all things. To God be the glory forever.” Amen.*



Jim Lapp spent his working years as a pastor and church executive in various communities across the US. He is married to Miriam Book and they are parents of three children in three states, and seven grandchildren also scattered. Jim grew up near Lansdale, Pa., and moved to Landis Homes in 2018. Jim and Mim are members of the East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster.



## HOPE

**1** Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” We often focus our attention on love because it is of greatest importance. And we emphasize faith because it is through faith in Christ that we are saved. But what about hope? Why does the apostle Paul list hope as something that abides, just like faith and love abide?

We want to talk about hope and how it intersects with our lives. We often use the term hope for wishful thinking, like when we say, “I hope to see you tomorrow.” Wishful thinking is similar to “the ancient Greeks who used the term hope with an element of uncertainty. But in the Bible the term hope has more of a Hebraic content, meaning expectation of good, closely aligned to trust, hope as confidence in God.”<sup>1</sup> Hope, like faith and love, is something we do. When we hope, we actively place our trust and confidence in God.

In Psalm 42:5 we read, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God” (NRSV). These words are repeated in verse 11 and again in Psalm 43. Psalm 42 was written in the context of the Babylonian exile. The children of Israel found themselves depressed in this exilic setting and longed to return to Jerusalem and worship God in the temple again. Earlier in Psalm 42, the writer says, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall

I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’”

The pagan Babylonians had many gods and huge temples to these pagan gods. Consequently, they harassed the Jewish exiles by asking, “Where is your God?” In this setting, the psalmist responds by saying the answer to his or her despair is hope: “Hope in God: for I shall again praise him my help and my God.” In this context of exile, hope means an inward sense of confidence that God will indeed deliver them, and they will return to Jerusalem and praise the living God. Their hope is centered in God and what God will do for them.

When we come to the New Testament, the term *hope* is expanded. 1 Timothy 6:17 tells us we are not to set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Hope in God is expanded in the New Testament by the person and work of Christ. Our experience of Christ and his effect on us is both now and in the future. Today we live between the now-ness of our life in Christ and its future fullness when Christ returns. The New Testament indicates hope is tied to the present and future of our salvation. We are saved now, and we will be saved. The kingdom or rule of God is both present and future. We enter God’s kingdom now through the new birth. As 1 Peter 1:3 says, “By

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1 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Eerdmans, 1998, p. 387.

his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Peter goes on to say, “Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.”

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the age to come has now been inaugurated with Jesus as its agent and leader. But there is more to come in the future. The age to come will reach its completion with the final resurrection and our eternal home with God. We have hope now, because in the resurrection of Christ our future is guaranteed. Hope centered in God means we have full confidence that God will complete his kingdom in the future, that God will bring our salvation to its completion. Titus 2:13 speaks of “waiting for the blessed hope and manifestation of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” In contrast to reliance on the circumstances of the weather, the economy and the things of this world that rise and fall, our hope rests upon the certainty of who God is, what God has done in the past and what God will do for us in the future.

Further, the New Testament indicates our hope in God is enhanced now by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit guarantees us the hope of righteousness. Paul tells us in Romans 5:2, “We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” By this, Paul means the glory that humankind outside of Christ now lacks will be restored, and we will enter into it. Out of this living hope, grounded in God’s act of raising Jesus, a new faith community arises whose mission begins with becoming a community of hope in the midst of a hostile world, a community of forgiving love in a violent world and a community of witness and service in the midst of those who misunderstand, misinterpret and mistreat them.<sup>2</sup>

The biblical meaning of hope, based on the certainty of God and the work of Christ in our lives, means we can now face suffering with a new perspective.

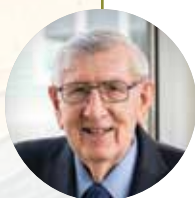
Paul tells us in Romans 5:3-5, “but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Paul also tells us in Romans 8 that the whole creation is groaning for its full restoration. We too experience physical and emotional pain as we wait for the full restoration.

In the midst of suffering, however, we are assured that the Holy Spirit is present to help us. The Holy Spirit expresses to God the deepest things in our hearts that we may not be able to express. It is precisely in the midst of suffering that hope actively turns our attention to the certainty of God. Hope enables us to trust God when the chips are down. Hope enables us to claim the certainty of our future in God. Paul says in Romans 8:24-25: “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

On the firm foundation of the certainty of God’s work and presence in our lives we are assured, as Paul says in Romans 8:37-39: “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Hebrews 6:19 tells us, “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.” The storms of life, including the storms we may face in our old age, cannot destroy our hope in God. Our hope is like a steadfast anchor that holds now and will hold in the days ahead. *And now faith, hope, and love abide.* May we live in active hope today, that come what may, our life in Christ is certain. Hope abides.

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2 Willard Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, Eerdmans, 2006, p. 268.



Paul and Mary Zehr are residents at Landis Homes. Paul is a retired pastor, bishop, and seminary teacher. His wife, Mary, who joined him in devotional presentations, worked many years at Provident Bookstore. They are the parents of four children and enjoy their eight grandchildren.



## THE SOUND OF UNSPEAKABLE BEAUTY

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
Come into his presence with singing.*

Psalm 100:1

**D**id you know that trees sing? Isaiah speaks of the trees: “For you shall go out with joy, ... and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Some German families that made violins knew that certain trees sing, and yes, even before the trees were made into violins. These families stood by the stream rapids as logs from the mountains passed by. They looked and they listened amidst the maelstrom of logs because there are logs that make a lovely sound when hit by other logs. Ah, yes, the singing trees will make a wonderful violin, viola, cello or bass. Stradivari and Guarneri also knew that singing logs would make wonderful instruments when touched by a master’s hand.

In John 4, Jesus speaks to the woman at the well and says to her, “The Father seeks such as you to worship Him!” Along with the woman whom Jesus invited to worship God, we too are invited to become people who worship God with our lips and our lives. More than this, our voices and our lives become the sound of unspeakable beauty for all who hear and see us.

Let me be quick to say that sometimes it is almost impossible to sing, and I’ve been there. Before my open-heart surgery a few years ago, a year later when I was being treated with chemotherapy for a galloping lymphoma, and when I suddenly lost some vision in my left eye were times when family and friends were there to make the music for me. God understands and waits

patiently for us to sing again.

African Americans in the cotton fields understood this and sang their faith into being; they sang about a time when all would be free. The African American national anthem begins: “Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty, let our rejoicing rise, high as the list’ning skies, let it resound as loud as the rolling skies.”

Listen often to the sound of unspeakable beauty

that “is a far-off hymn that hails a new creation.” When we hear this far off hymn, then “no storm can shake our inmost calm.”

John of Revelation wants us all to hear already the unspeakable beauty of the sound of singing that is “before the throne, and before the Lamb, where people from every tribe, language and nation sing ‘Hallelujah, for our God reigneth’” (Revelation 7:9, 19:6).



Richard Weaver is a resident at Landis Homes who spent 35 years of his life doing surgery (in Africa, W. Va., Pa., Haiti, and Nazareth, Israel). After retiring from surgery he completed a Master of Divinity degree at Lancaster Theological Seminary, was ordained, and pastored for 5 years at New Holland Mennonite Church. He did 5 years in Spirituality training and became a Certified Spiritual Director which he practiced for about 20 years. Ruth has been a significant companion for 63 years. They have three children, three in-laws, eight grandchildren, soon to be ten, with two grandchildren getting married this year.



## FROM WHERE WILL OUR HELP COME?

*I lift up my eyes to the hills--from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.*

Psalm 121 (ESV)

**T**he details are blurry in my mind, but I remember the basics: my toddlers were finally rounded up and fastened securely in their car seats. I had the mandatory diaper bag, snack bag, and entertainment bag for wherever it was we were going. We were running slightly behind schedule, as usual. One of the kids probably had mismatched socks and another likely refused to wear socks or shoes, but we were all in the van and ready to go.

I turned the key, but there was nothing but a

whimper from the motor. I tried again. And again. And again. Each time there was a little less response. I put my head down on the steering wheel, overwhelmed by this latest complication to my day. Perhaps I looked like I was praying, but I was only trying to hide my frustration from all the little eyes watching me.

From the back seat my four-year-old said confidently, “God says try three more times!”

*What?* I laughed to myself, realizing that I really was in a desperate situation when I’m getting

theologically based automotive advice from a toddler. But given the circumstances and since no one else was around to help, I played along with this child-like game of faith.

So, I lifted my head, sat up straight with a forced smile and began to turn the key again. I don't remember if I was counting out loud but I was certainly doing it in my head. One try . . . two tries . . . . My heart was thumping, and I felt myself holding my breath as I turned the key a third time.

Nothing but the same weak whirl of the motor.

But rather than feeling defeated, I felt bolstered by the reminder that indeed God was with us! And so, I turned the key a few more times, gently, with some silent prayers. The engine slowly coughed to a start, and we were on our way, giving thanks for God's help!

Twenty years later, I have more questions than answers as I remember that small moment in time. Was it a real word from above or just some playful child's conversation? Where does a four-year-old learn about messages from God? And why would my child be listening for one in the family van with an impatient,

frustrated mother at the wheel? And what does a toddler know about dead batteries, faulty ignition switches or even how a vehicle works?

Faith is a beautiful mystery that defies logical answers, upends our expectations with delightful surprises, and tests our imaginations. God will be reliably responding to our needs. Our task is to keep searching and listening for that response.

From where will our help come?

It will come from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

But the Lord isn't limited by static, expected methods. Our help might come from a breathtaking sunset that soothes our worry. Or God's help may come from a timely song that we hear on the radio, or through a coworker's just-right glance of comfort when we are struggling. It may even come through another person's faith — someone who might be wearing disposable undies and strapped into a car seat.



Gina Burkhart is married to Dan and they have five adult children. She is Associate Pastor at Landisville Mennonite Church. She is especially inspired by sunshine, interesting recipes, and discovering God in everyday moments.



## GOD IS LIKE A WOMB

A story that I've told before here is about a little girl that was drawing a picture. She was asked by her mother what she was drawing. "I'm drawing a picture of God," she said.

Her mother retorted, "But people say that they do not know what God looks like."

The immediate answer was, "They will now."

Probably all our images are all inaccurate when it comes to such ultimate mystery as to what God looks like. But I would offer another image that we have in Scripture.

In 2 Samuel 24, David has sinned when he has taken a census of the mighty men of Israel and Judah. God sent Gad to David, and he offered David punishments from God and from man. *Choose your own medicine*, Gad is saying. David was immediate in his response, "Let us fall into the hands of God, for God is like a womb, but do not let me fall into the hands of men."

Psalm 90 has a heading, "A Prayer of Moses," which is the only Psalm by Moses, incidentally.

Moses says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling

place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

"Mountains were born," and "thou didst give birth to the earth and the world!" It's amazing that I never saw this until very recently. If we go to Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, he says, "For in God we live and move and have our being."

God has always intended that this great womb, which is the entire earth (maybe the cosmos), to be a place where life is born, nourished, supported and loved. We are in one of those times of great travail in our world with wars, famine, disease and death. In Romans 8, Paul tells us that "the whole creation (including us) has been groaning in labor pains until now."

But Paul also says in this passage that "we who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for redemption."

Paul finally invites us to the work of hope for what we do not see and to wait for it with patience.

We need to keep hope alive in these dark times

and to intercede with the Spirit for the future time when we can say, “All things have worked together for good to those who love God.”

The picture of God that I leave you with is the

picture of a woman in great travail whose womb is meant to nurture life. This great God of the universe is in travail with us just now and is awaiting the birth of new creation.



Richard Weaver is a resident at Landis Homes who spent 35 years of his life doing surgery (in Africa, W. Va., Pa., Haiti, and Nazareth, Israel). After retiring from surgery he completed a Master of Divinity degree at Lancaster Theological Seminary, was ordained, and pastored for 5 years at New Holland Mennonite Church. He did 5 years in Spirituality training and became a Certified Spiritual Director which he practiced for about 20 years. Ruth has been a significant companion for 63 years. They have three children, three in-laws, eight grandchildren, soon to be ten, with two grandchildren getting married this year.

# OUR LIVES ARE LIKE AUTUMN LEAVES

(Paul) enjoy the fall season with the colored leaves on the hardwood trees. As a young lad, my father and older brothers taught me the kinds of hardwood trees, either by the kind of bark around the tree or the kind of leaves they shed. By my early teens I could distinguish the difference between ash, beech, birch, maple and cherry trees. Each had a different shape and different colored leaves. In the fall season their colors created a marvelous beauty to behold.

God created the trees and their leaves. Their different shapes and changing colors invite us to meditate on the beauty and power of our creator God. The Bible mentions a few kinds of trees. In Genesis 3, we read about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the fig tree and its leaves. Adam and Eve used leaves from the fig tree to cover themselves after they sinned. In 1 Kings 19:5, Elijah laid down under a broom tree, indicating his loneliness. Isaiah speaks of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord (Isaiah 5:1-7). Jesus gave a parable about the vineyard in Mark 12. When Nathaniel asked Jesus, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you” (John 1:48, NRSV). And Jesus called shorty Zaccheus down from the sycamore tree so they could fellowship together in Zaccheus’s house (Luke 19:1-10).

Trees have a life cycle. They begin as twigs and after many years end with death. Hardwood trees have a yearly cycle of producing leaves. The different shapes and colors of their leaves point us in the direction of God who blessed creation with the beautiful colors and various shapes of leaves. Botanists explain how leaves are formed on each tree in the spring of the year and what goes on in those leaves that makes them change color in the autumn.

Near the end of their life cycle leaves change color and show off their beauty. Could this short period of time of the colored leaves’ marvelous beauty be like our retirement years? We have finished our life work. We are known as Joe the farmer, Molly the nurse, Peter the homebuilder, Jane the teacher, John the counselor,

Jake the preacher. Our children and grandchildren want to hear the stories of our lives. Now as senior citizens, like colored leaves, we exhibit the most beautiful picture of life. Our grandchildren think grandma’s doughnuts are the best. They watch grandpa and grandma walk into church and feel a sense of pride as they whisper to themselves, “That’s my grandpa and grandma.”

Our faith in God has remained over the years and continues strong today. Our grandchildren are attracted to the quality of life we lived, though they may express their growing faith in different ways. They honor us and still want to visit grandpa and grandma. Indeed, we are like colored autumn leaves. We display beauty that others admire during our retirement years. And soon, just like colored leaves fall off the tree, we too will experience death.

Not everyone reaches the colored leaf stage of life. I (Paul) have lost a few family members by death before their retirement years. I (Mary) recently lost a niece in death. She accomplished more in her 44 years than most accomplish. In graduate school at Harvard University, she met a man who became her husband. They have two children, ages 8 and 5. She worked in healthcare for the Bill Gates Foundation. She went on to earn distinction in the field of health finance and developed a healthcare performance measurement framework that is used by the World Bank, the World Health Organization and various countries around the world. Sadly, she died like a green leaf in mid-life.

I (Paul) think of three friends whose lives are beautiful fall leaves. Each has died recently and fallen like autumn leaves. Glen Myers was my roommate during our sophomore year in college. He went on to pastor an integrated church in racially segregated Mississippi. His church was bombed three times. He advocated for blacks to be admitted to the public school where he taught. And because he did so, his teaching contract was not renewed. Glenn’s life ended like a beautiful autumn leaf falling off the tree. David Augsburg and I were classmates in some seminary classes. David was intelligent and went on to be the

speaker for the Mennonite Hour radio program. He earned a doctorate in counseling and taught pastoral counseling at AMBS and for several more years at Fuller Theological Seminary. David taught many people that the way to another person's heart comes through one's listening ear. He wrote several books on counseling. His retirement years were like a beautiful autumn leaf on a tree that now has fallen to the ground. Solomon Gebreyes was a student in classes I taught during two summers in Ethiopia. He was a brilliant man and a former communist. Along the way, he discovered his sinfulness and turned his life over to Christ. He led prison ministry for several years and helped many other persons experience salvation in Christ. Like a beautiful colored leaf on a tree, Solomon has now fallen to the ground.

There is one more biblical passage that speaks about trees and leaves in Revelation 22:2. The apostle John saw a vision of heaven and the Garden of Eden more than restored. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the

healing of the nations." Conflict between people and war between nations will be healed by the leaves on this tree.

The imagery points back to Adam and Eve, who, if they had obeyed God, would have a right to the tree of life. They disobeyed God and covered their bodies with fig leaves. But in the heavenly scene, "God's curse, pronounced over the whole creation because of Adam's disobedience is now abrogated, for the whole creation has been renewed by the re-creating hand of God; and no flaming sword bars the way to the tree of life."<sup>1</sup> Now in the heavenly scene there is access to the tree of life. "Not only does the tree provide food to be eaten, but its leaves are therapeutic and bring about healing of the nations..... The healing leaves indicate the complete absence of physical and spiritual want. The life to come will be a life of abundance and perfection."<sup>2</sup>

*Gracious God, we thank You for the gift of life we have experienced these many years. And now in our retirement years, may others see Your beauty in our lives like colored leaves. Give us patience in these final years of our life. Give us peace as we lose loved ones. Give us love toward each other. And give us joy as we anticipate the day when we will see You face to face. Guide our steps on this day as we walk closer to our eternal home. In Jesus name, Amen.*

1 G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Harper & Row, 1966, p. 280.

2 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*. NICNT Eerdmans, 1977, p. 387.



Paul and Mary Zehr are residents at Landis Homes. Paul is a retired pastor, bishop, and seminary teacher. His wife, Mary, who joined him in devotional presentations, worked many years at Provident Bookstore. They are the parents of four children and enjoy their eight grandchildren.



## THE HOLY SPIRIT AS WILD GEESE

I am still experiencing the joy of Christmas caroling around our newly planted Christmas tree on Crossings Green Monday evening. What a delight to see so many of you braving the chilly, damp winter air to join our voices together and sing about the Christ Child. I was moved by Betty Thompson's words about her and David's desire to see a lighted tree on the Crossings Green from December to March. In the darkness of winter, we need the twinkling of light. David told me later that he hopes the tree will grow so tall that someday it will even be seen by residents on South Campus! I do hope and pray that the new tradition of Christmas caroling, tree lighting, chili eating and carriage riding will be a blessing to our community life for many years to come.

I appreciate all the planning by Jan Nikoloff in Advancement. However, there was one thing that we did not plan and that's what I want to talk about today. During the caroling, I noticed several flocks of geese circling over South Campus and over the farmland. As you know, I love birds, and I'm readily distracted by

them. It looked like three different flocks were coming from several different directions, and they seemed to come together and make new formations. They didn't appear to stay in three distinct groups. They merged and they re-formed. I went back to caroling. At the very end of our time, right after the tree lighting, I heard honking and looked up to see a flock of about 12 Canada Geese flying over Crossings West and heading East right over our heads. They were low and loud. I was still standing at the microphone, and I remember thanking them for their flyover.

It was not until I got home, and my feet thawed, before the significance of the geese struck me. Celtic Christians believe that a goose is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. They think that it's certainly legitimate to think about the Holy Spirit coming to us as a dove. We know that happened when Jesus was baptized Mark 1:9-10 reads,

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus

saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.” (CEB)

I love this image of the Holy Spirit as a gentle dove coming down upon Jesus as a sign of blessing from God. I think we all need these moments of grace, affirmation, nurture, care and certainty.

Yet Christians on the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland, leaned into the image of a wild goose to depict the nature of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was not always acting like a peaceful dove. Sometimes the Holy Spirit stirred things up in unpredictable and loud ways. They highlighted when Peter quoted the prophet Joel at Pentecost. Acts 2:17-21 (CEB) reads:

*In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young will see visions.  
Your elders will dream dreams.  
Even upon my servants, men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.  
The sun will be changed into darkness,  
and the moon will be changed into blood,  
before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.  
And everyone who calls on the name  
of the Lord will be saved.*

In this passage, there are chaos, freedom, diversity, drama and transformation all spurred on by the rush of the Holy Spirit upon those gathered in Jerusalem. So, who is this Holy Spirit? A dove who gently lands on the shoulder of Jesus or a wild wind that stirs up 5,000 people? Both, and so much more. As hard as we try,

we will never be able to completely explain the natures and attributes of God’s Spirit. That is why we search for symbols that attempt to reveal at least part of who the Spirit is in the moment.

In the fourth through sixth centuries, Celtic Christians began to create art depicting the Holy Spirit as a wild goose. It’s not that there are verses in the Bible about the Holy Spirit being a goose. They looked around at their own natural settings and witnessed the behaviors of geese. To them, geese were more like the wild spirit of God. John 3:8 says, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (NIV).

So, let’s go back to Monday evening. There we were, about 200 people gathered to sing and celebrate and then we encountered the unexpected arrival of geese. At first, they were off in the distance and then they came close. They disrupted our gathering. We heard them. We saw them. We stopped what we were doing to acknowledge them. I believe that it is quite possible that the Holy Spirit was blessing us through the wild geese. Honking with us. Smiling for us. Waving at us. Like the geese, earlier in the evening, who came from many different flocks and joined and re-formed in the air, we too came from all across campus and joined and re-formed ourselves on Crossings Green. Our collective desire for Christmas Caroling, Tree Lighting, Chili Eating, and Carriage Riding brought us together into a new formation. We allowed the Spirit of God to move through us and among us. We invited the Spirit of God to create a new tradition and community life experience. And I believe that God’s Spirit said through the geese, “You are my people, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”



Anne Kaufman Weaver is Director of Pastoral Services and the Residential Life Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a Master of Divinity from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and a master’s degree in Social Work from Marywood University. She and her husband, Todd, have three young adult children and one son-in-law. They are “rewilding” their four-acre property in Brownstown with native trees and wildflowers.



## ENCOUNTERING ACACIA: HIDDEN REMINDERS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

In Exodus 25:1-11, God and Moses were having a conversation, not at all unusual for them. God said, “Moses, I want you to do something special for me. I’d like for you, and My people to make a place, a sanctuary, where I can live among you. I want to dwell among my people. I want to make a covenant with them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Moses listened carefully. God had made lots of plans, and Moses wanted to lead the people faithfully. To provide a worship space, an abiding place for the presence of the Holy God? What an awesome responsibility!

God asked for the tabernacle to be constructed with very specific dimensions and materials. Thus began a very significant relationship, established by a covenant with the Holy God. The covenant was symbolized by the most important and impressive piece of furniture

God requested to be made, the Ark of the Covenant.

God said the Ark should be made of a very common wood, acacia, and that it should be covered completely with pure gold, inside and out.

So the supporting structure, hidden away, would be easy to forget!

About 22 years ago, I found myself in Kenya, East Africa. There I heard people talking about “holy trees.” *What’s that? Where? Out here in the bush, the African savanna? What would make a tree “holy” out here?* Then I discovered the tree wasn’t holy, but its function was.

Acacia trees in that region were often flat topped, like the mimosa trees you may be familiar with. They might be only 25 feet tall, but 50 feet in the span of the crown. This provides welcome shade from the hot African sun, for a group of sincere worshipers singing their hearts out, and singing out of their hearts.

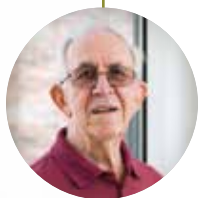
Most of the people we were privileged to worship with under such a holy tree were illiterate people who would gather every Sunday of the year. They gathered under a tree made by God for singing and praising his name, often with tearful petitions for the sick, the persecuted, and lonely among them. These acacia trees are just like the ones Moses found under the hot sun in the wilderness.

Returning to the States after our African safari, I discovered that many visitors to the Biblical Tabernacle Reproduction, here in Lancaster, wished to see real acacia wood. We were able to find acacia wood nearby, imported from Australia, the place where it apparently originated. It now is found in many parts of the world, under various names. I have several pieces of acacia here today. It is known as Tasmanian blackwood.

When we moved to Landis Homes, I discovered that some people were making small pocket-sized or pocketbook-size crosses. The chaplaincy staff asked if I would join in the effort to make small crosses, as several others were doing. These crosses are loved by residents, guests and staff, especially during times of sickness or grief – a reminder of Jesus' victory over death and the grave.

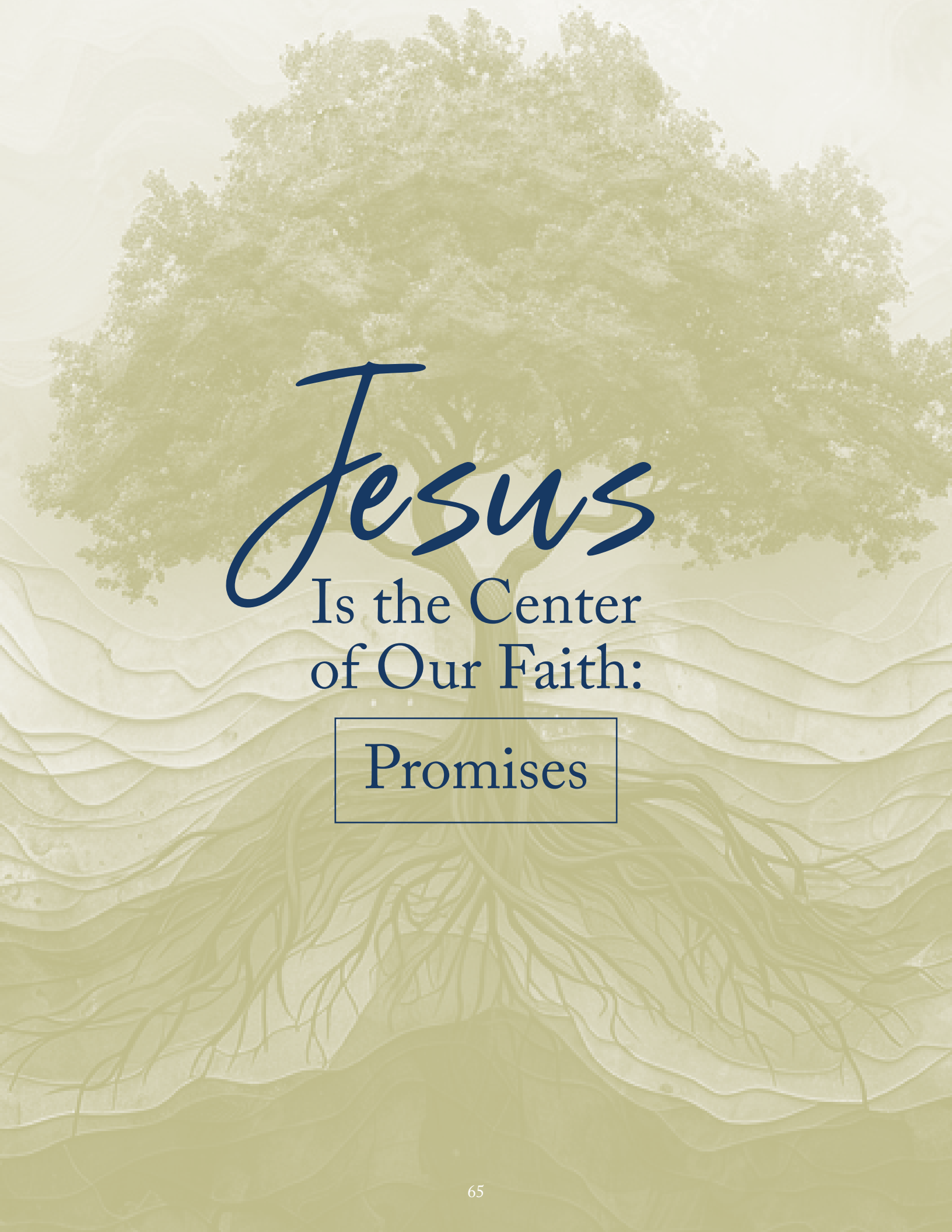
When chaplain Anne Weaver asked if I would make a cross for the front of the chapel here at Landis Homes, I immediately thought of a special piece of acacia I had in my shop that I had kept aside for ... I didn't know what.

I think it found its purpose. This common wood found a special use, in the shape of an empty cross, to remind us of the gift of Life, through Jesus!



Wes Newswanger is a resident at Landis Homes and is married to Janet Breneman. He grew up in Morgantown, Pa., and also claimed Va., New York City, and Kenya as home. He has 3 children and one granddaughter. He lost two spouses to illness. For 20 years Wes was a school teacher. In retirement, he enjoys building furniture, reading and writing.





# Jesus

Is the Center  
of Our Faith:

Promises



## WHEN THE LEAVES BEGIN TO TURN

**H**opefully by now you have seen some brilliant reds on the maple trees, some yellows and a variety of other colors on our campus. What a striking sight nature brings to us this time of the year. Many people enjoy the New England states in the fall for the varied and beautiful colors of the trees.

There is a kind of paradox in the fall of each year. We want the artistic design of colored leaves but without the annoyance of leaves blowing on our lawns or across the landscape. We seek out the landscape with the brilliance of color on the trees but turn away after the leaves inevitably fall to the ground.

Or let me frame the paradox another way. We enjoy the fall colors on the trees, but this means the trees are going into a dormant stage. The trees don't die but they go bare for the winter months. Sometimes the trees do die and need to be removed. So we delight in the color, but not in their dormant season or the death of trees.

Recently I was thinking about the changes fall brings and then I thought of our own lives. As humans we too display color and are full of life in our younger

years, but at some point, we begin to age and enter our personal autumn. Many of us prefer to live in the spring of our lives, our youth or middle age. But of necessity we change and move into the autumn of life. In our case it is not moving into dormancy but moving slowly and gradually toward death. How do we handle this change in our lives, the season of autumn in the human life cycle?

I expect the reason most of us live here is because we realize that autumn is coming to us, and we want to prepare by living safely and with appropriate care as we enter this season of life. Our children live in three different states and so for us Landis Homes seemed like a good place to age and enter into the changes autumn brings. I sense that is also why many of you have come although your children may not be as distant as ours. Or maybe you are single and have no children and choose this as an inviting place to experience the autumn of life.

The Psalmist writes poetically of this change in the human situation in Psalm 90. The Psalmist seems to have a realistic view of life – we are born into the beauty

of this world, and the pattern for humanity is like the rhythm of nature. We live 70 or 80 years or maybe even older, and then we turn back to dust. We are swept away in the records of human history and life goes on without us. A marker somewhere in a cemetery notes the place where our remains were placed.

The Psalmist sums things up in a short word of counsel: take note of our days so that we can live wisely the duration of our life. What does it mean to live wisely throughout our lives? I believe it means we live with full awareness of life's brevity and that our true destiny is to return through death to life with God. Our culture wants us to behave and live as though this life is endless. So much is done to blur the reality of death. We all know that we will die, but various influences make us want to ignore or deny death. The Psalmist invites us to recognize we came from dust and to dust we will return, but that need not be a morbid or fearful idea — not if we know that in death, we return to our creator.

I am reminded of a poem by Joyce Rupp called “Falling Leaves,” which describes poetically the meaning of this autumn season. The poem wonders how the falling leaves seem to face their death so calmly, and the speaker wants to “face that death-dance / and the truth of my own mortality.”

I have been wrestling in recent years with my mortality. I lost my parents in death, my grandparents, several in-laws, two brothers, and my late wife Nancy. Death has not been absent from my experience. But to face my mortality confidently has been a challenge. I wonder how you have faced your mortality.

The same rhythm of the trees and leaves is ours as mortals. Even as the trees do not die, so in Christ we also claim that death is but a gateway to a fuller life. Psalm 90 states it boldly: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations; before mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are

God.” God is the dwelling place of every generation. From the beginning to the end, from everlasting to everlasting, God is the source and the home for all of life. Jesus dramatized this more fully in his death and resurrection. As Jesus comforted Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died, he declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11: 25-26).

We are mortal. Mortality is not something most of us relish, but it is a transition, a stepping stone into the eternal resting place with God. There is a kind of realism to death that we can face in the autumn of life. None of us know when or how that will come about. Some people long for death because of pain and difficulty in life. I remember when my mother had dementia for five or more years. Her life ceased to have meaning for her. I recall sitting with her and praying she could die. Life had ceased as she knew it or wanted it. Now I am in that generation where death and life are close companions for me. The falling leaves are a reminder of my mortality and the gift of new life with a loving and merciful God that awaits me.

So, we can pray daily, “Teach us to number our days.” Mindful of our transitions in life, we can choose to live with wisdom. We are mortal, but we also live in hope that autumn gives way to new life and eternal love. May it be so for each of us.

*Prayer: Loving creator God, you designed our world to experience passing seasons. Now we delight in autumn, but soon winter will arrive. Meanwhile, keep us in hope as we experience our personal autumn, and remind us that death holds the seeds of new life. Be a source of joy and hope this day to all who live and work in this community. Through Jesus the Christ, the resurrection and the life, we pray. Amen.*



Jim Lapp spent his working years as a pastor and church executive in various communities across the US. He is married to Miriam Book and they are parents of three children in three states, and seven grandchildren also scattered. Jim grew up near Lansdale, Pa. and moved to Landis Homes in 2018. Jim and Mim are members of the East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster.



The Walk of Honor Quilt is part of a sacred practice of gathering as family members, friends, and team members around the body of a resident who has died, to say goodbye.

## SAYING GOODBYE

One of the great philosophers of our time, Winnie the Pooh, once said, “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” Well, maybe he is not the greatest philosopher, but I do like what he has to say. There have been a couple of transitions in my life, which made saying goodbye extra hard. The one I remember most is after spending eight years in Mississippi. It was there Audrey and I found and fostered incredible friendships. So much so, we have made several trips to the camp we served to help and to see many of those friends.

We also are in the stage of parenting where our children are starting to make decisions that move them out of our household and into new spaces of their own choosing. Recently, our oldest son got married and we could not be happier for him and his new bride. That leaves us with one in college and one beginning to look at colleges. It is hard to believe that soon there will just be the two of us. I still recall and hold fast to the words

we affirmed at their child dedications. We were asked, “Do you promise to gladly surrender your child to the ministry God has in mind for him, even if it might involve going to the ends of the earth?” We gladly said, “We do.”

In our text today, Acts 20:17-32, Paul’s farewell to the church in Ephesus also has a layer of saying a hard goodbye. Paul is headed to Jerusalem to probable persecution. He knows that this goodbye will be the last one on this side of heaven. His ministry among them has been long and fruitful. He has taught them all he knows, but is still aware that troubles may come from which he cannot protect them. Therefore, he commends them to God, putting them near and before God, entrusting them to Jesus. “And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself” (Acts 20:32).

Paul knew that his days of caring for, teaching, and encouraging this community were over and his

journey was to Jerusalem, not knowing what would happen to him except that the Holy Spirit was testifying that imprisonment and persecution were waiting for him. No wonder there was weeping at that parting.

There are many times in life when we are called to let go, even if for a time. In those goodbyes, perhaps our season of influence, instruction or supervision will change or cease to be what it was. There is a sense of loss, a grieving that is quite natural. The comfort in

those times is that we have given what we could and for whatever else is needed, we commend our loved ones to God who knows and cares for them even more than we do. As Paul commends those in Ephesus, we too are to be commended:

“So now I put you in God’s hands. I entrust you to the message of God’s grace, a message that has the power to build you up and to give you a rich heritage among all who are set apart for God’s holy purposes.”



Robert Kanagy is Healthcare Chaplain at Landis Homes as well as a certified End of Life Doula. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Camping and Youth Ministry from Eastern Mennonite University and a master’s degree in School Counseling from Mississippi State University. He enjoys serving and helping people. He and his wife, Audrey, have three young adult sons and live in Lancaster.



## WHAT CHILDLIKE CHARACTERISTICS DO WE NEED TO EMBRACE?

Last Sunday I was helping with the young children during church. We walked across the street to our community garden and allowed the children to pick ripe cherry tomatoes. On the way back, I told 3-year-old Everett that I want him to hold my hand while we cross the street. As we walked, little Everett looked up at me with the sweetest smile and said, “Miss Rhonda, guess what?!” With curiosity I responded, “What?” Everett enthusiastically said, “You’re my best friend!” As I am sure you can imagine, my heart just melted like butter.

This encounter led me to remember Jesus’ words to his disciples in Mark 9 and 10. I love the picture Mark creates in chapter 9:33-37. Jesus and all the disciples were settling in at the house where they would be staying. I can imagine them filing in and perhaps figuring out where they would sit. And then Jesus asks them, “What were you discussing out on the road?” If a teenager today were there they might say, “Ooohhh, caught you!,” because the disciples had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.

Of course, Jesus knew what they had been

discussing. The New Living Translation says, “He sat down and called the disciples over to him.” As he talks to them, he calls over a child and takes the child in his arms. Can you imagine how that child must have felt to be called over in the midst of all these men and then to be taken in Jesus’ arms? A child, who had no rights or clout among grown men. Then Jesus says, “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes my Father who sent me.” Jesus uses a child to teach a lesson to the disciples about who is really the greatest in God’s world.

And as we keep reading, in Mark 10, Jesus again uses children to teach the disciples an important lesson. Mark 10:13 (NLT) tells us:

“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.”

When Jesus saw what was happening, he was moved to indignation. He was angry and perhaps even offended that the disciples were giving the false impression that Jesus had no time in his ministry for children or other people considered insignificant in

their society.

Continuing in verse 14, He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. (Mark 10:14–16, NLT)

Again, Jesus is making a point to the disciples that the kingdom of God is not about power and greatness, as people define greatness. The disciples want to exclude people from God’s kingdom. They had already tried to stop a man from driving out demons in Jesus’ name. In Matthew 14, we read that the disciples wanted Jesus to send the crowds away. In Matthew 15, when a gentile woman approaches Jesus asking him to help her daughter who is tormented by a demon, the disciples say, “Tell her to leave. She is bothering us with all her begging.” Now they push away children and their parents who want Jesus to bless the children. They simply are not catching on to what Jesus is trying to teach them about the Kingdom of God.

But what is Jesus saying in verse 15? “I assure you, anyone who doesn’t have their kind of faith will never get into the Kingdom of God.”

As I read those verses, I am sure many of you automatically pictured a scene from a Sunday school book or Bible storybook of Jesus surrounded by children. We tend to romanticize this idea of Jesus with the children and think that Jesus is saying we should have the same innocence as children. However, that society did not romanticize children as sweet and innocent. They were under their father’s authority until they were adults. They were dependent on their fathers for everything, even whether or not they were accepted into the family. Perhaps Jesus wanted to make the point that in order to enter the kingdom of God a person must have the trust and dependence upon Christ which are characteristic of a child. Children receive the

kingdom as a gift. They come with empty hands and trusting hearts. They are totally dependent on God’s grace, and that is the way to receive God’s kingdom.

I recently read a story that beautifully demonstrates a child who welcomes God’s kingdom with her trust in Christ.

In his book, *The Moral Life of Children*, Robert Coles tells the story of Ruby Bridges. Ruby was six years old when a federal judge ordered that an elementary school in New Orleans be integrated. Ruby and three others were the first black children to enter that elementary school. Every morning as she arrived at school and every afternoon as she went home, accompanied by federal marshals, fifty to a hundred people met her at the door. They shouted obscenities, threatened to kill her and they spit at her. Dr. Coles was researching what happens to a child living under stress. Coles was so sure that Ruby would crack under this stress that he asked her teachers to watch for signs. One day a teacher noticed that Ruby was talking to the people who greeted her so angrily at the door of the school. The teacher asked Ruby about what she was saying but Ruby denied talking with them. So the teacher called Dr. Coles to report what might be the first signs of cracking. And when Coles met with Ruby what he discovered was that each morning and each evening as she passed the crowds, she was not speaking to them but praying for them.

The next time you see a child, I hope you will think about the sweetness of my little friend, Everett, and the courage of Ruby Bridges, and stop and ask yourself: What childlike characteristic is my heavenly Father asking me to live out?

Let’s pray. *God, I thank you that you welcome anyone into your kingdom. We do not need to do great things to be accepted by you. Jesus, I thank you for the way you loved and cared for those marginalized by society, including children. Holy Spirit, please show us what it means to have trust and dependence on God, just like a child. Amen.*



Rhonda Good is Personal Care Chaplain at Landis Homes. She has a B.S. in Secondary Education and taught middle and high school English before becoming a chaplain. She holds a Master of Arts in Christian Leadership and is a certified End of Life Doula. She and her husband, Ed, have three adult children and one grandchild. Rhonda enjoys crocheting, traveling to warm places, and hiking (nothing too strenuous).



## THE PROMISES OF GOD

**O**n December 4, 1956, *Time* magazine had an article from Evert R. Storms, a schoolteacher from Kitchener, Ontario. After reading the Bible 27 times, he decided to list the promises of God. It took him one and a half years, and he came up with a list of 8,810 promises from God. Seven thousand, four hundred eighty-seven of these promises are from God to man. A promise comes from the mind and must be spoken or written to become a promise. The promises in the Bible are coming from the mind of God.

*Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirms it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest*

*forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*  
Hebrews 6:17-20, NIV

In verse 17, we read: “Because God wanted to make His unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to His heirs of what was promised, He confirms it with an oath.” We don’t use the word *oath* much except in the courts. We often say that we swear or affirm to tell the truth and raise our right hand. But God confirms his oath by something different.

Verse 18 tells us, “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things we can be encouraged. It is impossible for God to lie. God made an oath, a promise not to lie.” The two unchangeable things are the promise he made to Abraham being the father of many nations and Jesus being the High Priest forever. We, who have fled our old way of life, may take hold of the hope of the promise of God, and be helped in understanding who God is. In John 16:13-15, Jesus shares more on the mind of God. “But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own, He will speak only what he hears, and will

tell you what is to come. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine.” Thank God for the promised Holy Spirit that lives within us.

Verse 19 talks about the hope we have in the promises of God as an anchor for our soul. We think of an anchor as an object to prevent the boat from drifting. The promises of God are the anchor to keep us from drifting. It becomes a lifeline for us to be connected to God. These promises are firm and secure.

When we are faced with difficult times, financial stress, times of sickness or when accidents happen, our lives can go into a spin. In Psalm 37, David was in a cave hiding from the king and his army. God met him there and said, “Fret not and be not envious of evil people.” God gave me a picture of David being like a canary in a cage that is in a house with three cats. The canary is safe and can sing all it wants to. It is safe. David was safe in the cave. In verse three it reads, “Trust in the Lord, do good, dwell in the land, and enjoy safe pastures.” David was doing good, dwelling in the land and enjoying safe pastures when he wrote Psalm 37 as a poem, a gift for us today.

The hope we have is that we can enter the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. The inner sanctuary is

where the high priest went once a year to meet God. This was a restricted area, available only to one priest, once a year. When Jesus was on the cross, the veil was torn from the top to the bottom. Now the veil is opened, so we can enter to meet God at any time. Jesus went before us and made a way for us to follow into the very presence of God.

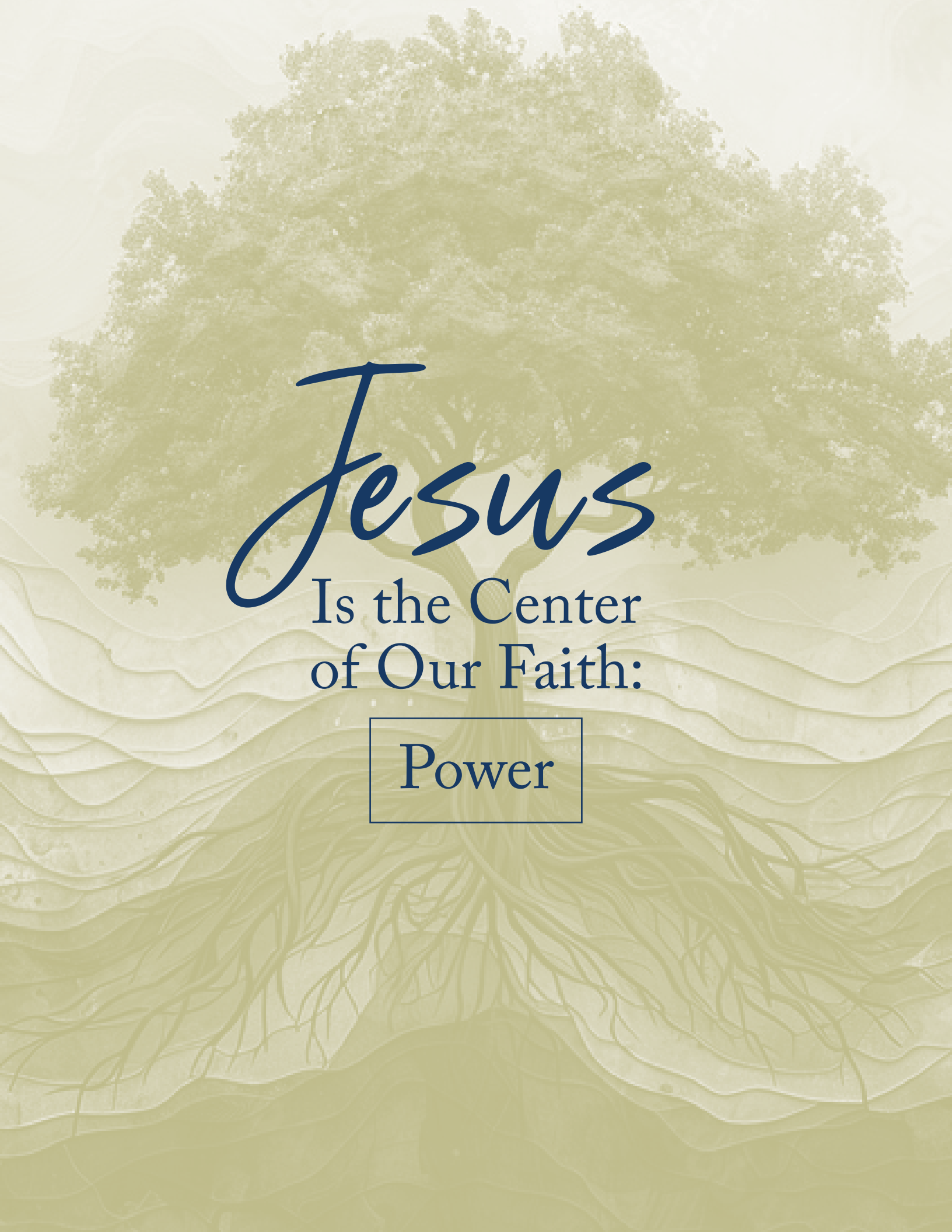
It is behind the curtain that we meet Jesus as our high priest. As we study our Bibles, let us look for His promises. As we study the promises, we learn to know the mind of God. If we read one promise a day, it will take over 24 years to read them all. God’s Word is a treasure and a gift to each of us.

In 2015, I was going through a time of cancer, and God led me to a verse to give me hope. Psalm 92:12 was a promise for me: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.” Why a palm tree instead of an oak tree? I learned that during a storm, a palm tree doesn’t break but instead bends over and sometimes even touches the ground. After the storm, the palm tree comes back up and develops a deeper root system. As I looked at this promise and the trials I have gone through, my head was down. Praise God I didn’t break, and yes, the new truth helped me build a stronger faith. It helped me to realize that God has blessed me abundantly.



Glenn & Ginny Hoover are residents of Landis Homes. Glenn is a retired pastor and has three married children and nine grandchildren. He enjoys woodworking, the pool and ministry. Ginny enjoys being a wife, reading, jigsaw puzzles, cooking, and knitting.

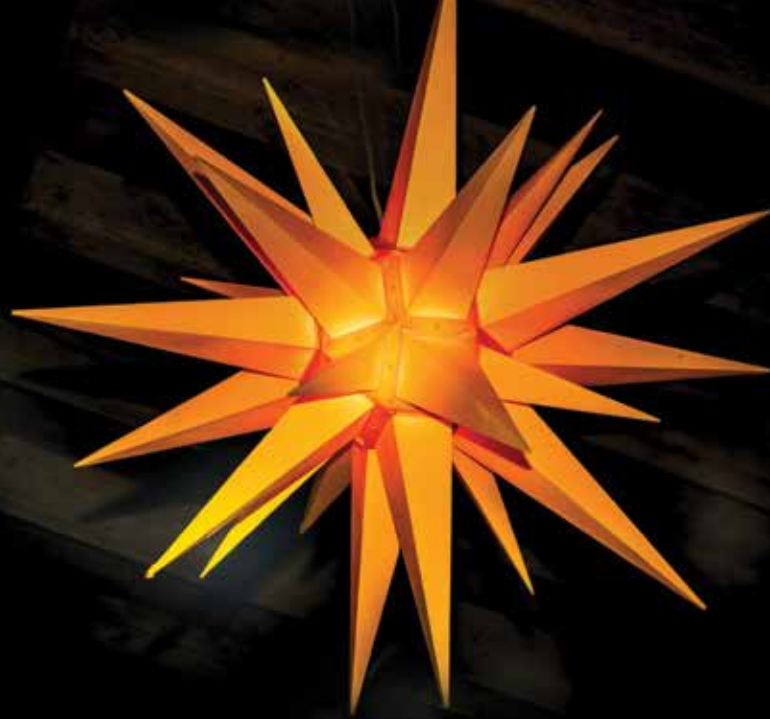




# Jesus

Is the Center  
of Our Faith:

Power



## TO WHOM DO WE PAY HOMAGE?: MATTHEW 2:1-12

**T**he first chapter of Matthew concludes with Joseph and Mary marrying, and Jesus is born and named. It is only when we get to chapter two that we find out he was born in Bethlehem. Matthew never mentions Nazareth until the family returns from Egypt, so if we didn't know the Luke account, we would assume the annunciation took place in Bethlehem. Matthew makes sure his readers are aware of the significance of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. This is where Rachel died and was buried. This is also where Ruth came with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and became the great grandmother of David, the first great king of Israel.

Strangers enter the scene. A group of magi (astrologers/priests) assumedly from the East come asking, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?" Herod is "deeply disturbed" (NLT). He was very paranoid. To protect his position, he had his wife and two of his sons killed so they wouldn't rebel and drive him off the throne. Being half-Jew himself he calls in the religious leaders to find out where the Messiah was to be born. They know the Scripture and guide him

to Micah 5:2. Herod calls the magi before him and interrogates them carefully to find out when Jesus was born, then directs them to go 10 kilometers south to Bethlehem, with the directive that they return to him to give him directions to the exact place to find Jesus — to do what the magi said they had come to do — to worship Him.

The magi see the star and rejoice greatly as it leads them to Jesus. I do not believe they saw the star on their way to Jerusalem. They had seen it rise in the East, and the constellation indicated something special happening among the Jews. They determined it would be the birth of a king. Going to the chief city of the Jews would be natural and that is why they first appear in Jerusalem. Leaving Jerusalem, they see the star and recognize it as the one they had seen back home and this time it is leading them.

What do they do when they first see Jesus? It's what they said back in Jerusalem they had come for: They worship him. They didn't worship Herod back in Jerusalem. They came to worship this special child. While they may not have known the God of the Jews,

they certainly were led by Him to come and find the child. Note that Jesus is called a child, not a baby, in this passage. Now they worship Him. The Amplified Bible says they fall down. NRSV says they kneel. Whatever posture the magi used, it is an act of worship.

Worshiping a young child? Isn't that a strange thing to do? What must have been going through Mary's mind as she took this all in? Strangers come from some far-off place. They find this lowly couple in a house in a remote village and they worship Him? Mary, of course, knew who Jesus was, but how did these men find out who He is?

This passage is the first where we read that anyone worshiped Jesus. The shepherds came, saw the baby and then told everyone the good news. There is no mention of worship on their part. But what is more significant is that it is Gentiles who first worship the Christ child. Matthew makes a point to show that outsiders are a big part of the Jesus story. His genealogy includes four women, three of whom are outsiders. Matthew himself was an outsider as a tax collector. The magi are definitely outsiders, and they are the first to worship Jesus.

When the magi end their worship, they present their gifts, gifts fit for a king – in their minds, the future king of the Jews. Gold was a gift for a king, and Matthew presents Jesus as King. Frankincense is symbolic of a priest. Matthew refers later to the tearing of the veil in the temple, showing that the need for

Jewish priests is over. Jesus is the final sacrifice and also the priest to present us to God. Myrrh is a spice used in embalming and points to His death.

These gifts have significant meaning. We really don't know what use was made of them. Some have suggested that the gifts helped finance their trip to Egypt, which follows the story in today's lesson. The gift-giving tradition at Christmas comes from the story of the gifts of the magi. But key to our lesson is this: To whom do we pay homage? Not to our pastor, not to our governor, not to our president, but to Jesus, the King of Kings, who is worthy of all our honor and praise.

Our pastors sent out an email recently with this story, which fits our lesson.

NBA coach Joe Mazzulla of the Boston Celtics answered questions during a press conference. A reporter asked, "Did you get a chance to meet with the royal family, and if so, what was it like having them there in the building?"

Mazzulla answered with a serious expression, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph?"

The reporter laughed and responded, "No, Prince William and Princess Kate Middleton of Wales."

Mazzulla then said with a smile, "I'm only familiar with one royal family. I don't know too much about that one . . ."

Which royal family am I familiar with? To whom do I pay homage?



Daniel Wenger and his wife, Thelma Erb, are residents at Landis Homes. He was born in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), where his parents worked as missionaries, and lived there for nearly 20 years. After college he taught in the social studies department of Lancaster Mennonite High School for 35 years and three years at the Bible School in Tanzania. Dan has been driving bus for Landis Homes for the past 11 years. His first wife, Erma, passed away in 2015. Dan and Thelma volunteer weekly at the Material Resources Center of MCC in Ephrata, and attend Mellinger Mennonite Church.



## JESUS, SHEPHERDS, AND PSALM 23

**W**hen Jesus was born, common folk, sheep herders sitting out the chilly night on a hillside, were among the first to know.

When did Jesus learn about this miracle? Did Jesus learn of his birth-night from the neighbors, or from his parents? How? When?

What did shepherds have to do with Jesus' life? Practically anybody can be a shepherd. In Jesus' town, every family probably owned several sheep, or a small herd. There was always someone appointed to take care of them. Sheep are particularly ill-informed of dangers around them. They are always having their heads down, searching for the next clump of green grass. Their life is controlled by the one who is looking out for them, finding pasture, water and safety.

Let's use our imagination this morning and try to think about how Psalm 23 might have affected Jesus's life.

When did Jesus first encounter the twenty-third Psalm? Probably most boys learned it at their father's

side, memorizing it by repeating after him.

Joseph: "Now, son, it's time to learn the Shepherds Psalm."

"The Lord is my Shepherd," Joseph sings, remembering his own Papa lining out the now familiar phrases.

And the boy Jesus responds, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all I need."

Jesus: "Papa, I know we are having a lesson now, but I have a question."

"Yes, you always do, go ahead!"

"Papa, how can the Lord be my Shepherd? The Lord is God, right? How can God take time to be *my* shepherd?"

Papa replies, "Isn't God with you all the time?"

"Yes, you said so, but I can't see God!"

"But God sees you. The angels sang to the shepherds when you were born. They sang, *Look, you will find him in a manger in a little barn, just inside the town. Just follow the light!* God knew where you were

then, and God sees you, and me, now.”

“Wow! That’s awesome!”

“Yes, and humbling. Now, go tell your mother what you just learned.”

Did Jesus decide at some point that the “Shepherd’s Psalm” belonged to him?

Did he internalize it, treasure it in his heart, repeat it to himself? Did he say it as he walked along behind his parents as they hurried to catch up with their relatives after discovering the 12-year-old lost in his questions and answers with the temple scholars? Did he realize he must develop his own “paths of righteousness” by going home now, and being subject to his parents?

Did he hum “The Lord’s My Shepherd” while working in his father’s cabinet shop, fitting a cobbler’s bench together for shoe-maker Josiah Benjamin on the other side of town?

Did he check out the “Shepherd” theme with his disciples, like: “I have this idea that the people might like the thought of a leader being a shepherd. What do you guys think?”

Complete silence.

“Sounds sorta dumb to me,” someone mumbles.

“Yeah, sure sounds upside down if you ask me,”

Peter pipes up.

“Shepherds are backward, sweaty and smelly, not smart and not rich, like I’m going to be,” says Judas.

“Hmmm,” murmurs Jesus.

Did he repeat the Psalm’s phrases to himself?

Perhaps: *I wonder if I can help tax-collector Zacchaeus develop some “paths of righteousness for the sake of God” this afternoon?*

During the times he spent alone in the quiet, did Jesus thank his Father God for “restoring my soul,” just like we sometimes do?

The book of John, chapter 10, quotes Jesus: “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep” and “I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.”

Surely, he had many occasions to repeat, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me.”

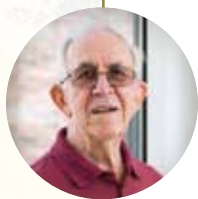
“95, 96, 97, 98, 99.... Hey! Where’s that little lamb named Mosey?! I gotta go find him. Davy, you stay here, at the hedge gate, while I go hunt for Mosey!”

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and...”

... and they hung him there, with two thieves, one on his left, and one on his right. The one said, “Jesus, if you are who you claim to be, remember me.”

“Today you will be with me in Paradise,” Jesus said.

“And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”



Wes Newswanger is a resident at Landis Homes and is married to Janet Breneman. He grew up in Morgantown, Pa., and also claimed Va., New York City, and Kenya as home. He has 3 children and one granddaughter. He lost two spouses to illness. For 20 years Wes was a school teacher. In retirement, he enjoys building furniture, reading and writing.



## THE RECIPE BOOK

**H**ow did it ever happen that I would ever write a recipe book? I never knew anything about cooking or baking. My mom never taught me how to cook. My wife Janet has always done a great job doing the cooking and baking at our house without my help.

It all started when Janet had colon surgery at Shore Memorial Hospital in Sommers Point, New Jersey. She then had to undergo 24 chemo treatments which began in 2014 in New Jersey and continued successfully at Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Center here in Lancaster County until January 2015, when Janet became cancer-free. We moved to Landis Homes in 2016.

I sat with Janet through all her chemo treatments. She got terribly weak, and we borrowed a wheelchair that Highland Presbyterian Church graciously loaned us. I wheeled Janet around the neighborhood, at the malls and to church services. She finally needed help cooking. That meant I had better learn something quickly about cooking if we were going to eat. I didn't know where to start. We were living in Lancaster and had not yet moved to Landis Homes.

There is a hymn that encourages rising up to

the occasion. William Merrill, a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, Chicago and New York City, wrote the words to this hymn in 1911: "Rise up, O men of God! Have done with lesser things. Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings." It was time for me to RISE UP and do what was needed for our situation.

The Bible mentions a time when Jesus was invited to the home of friends in the town of Bethany for dinner. Martha was complaining that her sister Mary was leaving dinner up to Martha alone, while Mary sat and talked with Jesus. Martha expected HELP in the kitchen. She thought it took TWO cooks to prepare and serve dinner. And it would take TWO cooks, Janet and me, to get our meals together. Janet sat down in our kitchen and began to explain cooking to me. I knew nothing.

I had no idea what measures and pots and pans to use. We went through cookbooks for recipes. She would explain which measure and which pot or pan to use. I wrote down every detail Janet told me as I began the first page of a future recipe book. My recipe book would look a lot different from other recipe books. My recipe book would describe in detail which utensils and

measures to use as well as ingredients. My recipe grew from one page to 52 recipes.

I was so proud when I prepared a baked ham dinner along with green bean casserole, finishing up with apple pie.

I hope I never have to use this recipe book again. I've forgotten all I knew about cooking and baking. Even with the cookbook, I would have to start all over again with Janet sitting beside me in the kitchen and explaining where to look for measures and pots. It was a learning experience, starting from no knowledge of cooking to preparing edible meals that Janet and I could enjoy.

Janet, who is a few years younger than I am, is now helping me in my aged infirmities, since I am 90 years old and under heart failure with a pacemaker. I used to do the driving trips. Now she does the driving. I am unable to walk with her anymore for any distance like we used to do. She is now my nurse. She does the cooking but we still go out on dinner dates once a week. We don't go on trips anymore. Marriage is helping one another. We still have each other and our family.

The recipe book is now just an unused memory. It worked when we needed it. The book sits idle in our

computer files, where I hope it stays.

We all approach the time in life when we need a helping hand. Sometimes we can become that helping hand. Janet and I have been able to be helping hands for each other in time of need. The Lord uses our helping hands as His helping hands. There is a hymn called "Take my Life" by Frances Havergal about using our hands: "Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love."

I would like to close these morning devotions with the words to a hymn written by Thomas A Dorsey. Thomas A Dorsey was a black jazz blues pianist and gospel composer. He was the Music Director of Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago for 50 years. He wrote a thousand gospel songs. His best known hymn, "Precious Lord, take my hand" was the result of grieving over the death of his wife Nettie in childbirth followed by the death of their son. Dorsey died in Chicago at 93 in 1933 with Alzheimer's disease.

Let us pray these words from Dorsey's hymn: *"Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; through the storm, though the night, lead me on to the light, take my hand. Precious Lord, lead me home. Amen."*



Gerald Ihle was a United Methodist pastor for 43 years in eastern Pennsylvania. He is the author of four Bible Study books. He grew up in Fountain Hill, a suburb of Bethlehem, Pa. He graduated from Moravian College and the Theological School at Drew University. He died in March 2024. His wife Janet is a resident at Landis Homes. They have three children, four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.



## SINCERE, BUT WRONG

**Y**ears ago, as the pastor of a church in central Maine, I was working with a group of teenage boys. One of the other leaders and I decided to take them on a fishing outing in the remote woods about 40 miles north of where we lived. There was a stream that looked like it would be a great trout fishing stream that ran five or six miles through dense forest. There were no public roads into this area, but there were gravel roads used by lumber companies so that they could access the timber and haul it to market. We could use these roads, so we made our plan.

We took one vehicle to the southern end of our planned trip and left it there by the stream. We then drove around the woods on another road to a spot on the river, where we left that vehicle and started fishing down the brook. It was a nice spring day, and we all had a great time. All the boys caught trout. We stopped at noon and cooked our fish on the side of the stream and enjoyed a feast. We took a loaf of bread and a frying pan with us on this type of outing. Our goal of showing these young men an example of Christian men seemed to be working. I am happy to report that some of these

boys committed their lives to the Lord in the days ahead.

Now, I need to give you a little background info. My wife was raised just north of Philadelphia, so we did not see her parents all that often. This was a week that they had come to Maine to visit. My wife had planned a nice birthday dinner for her dad, so it was important that I get home in time for supper. But our plan was a good one, so we had nothing to worry about. Or so we thought!

When we had fished down the brook to where it crossed the gravel road, we looked all around and could not find the vehicle that we had parked there earlier that morning. Some kind person happened along and told us that there were two branches of that stream that crossed that area of woodlands and that our vehicle was likely parked where that other branch crossed the gravel road, several miles away.

There was absolutely no way for us to walk those miles, retrieve our vehicle, drive around the highway to where we left the second vehicle and drive the 40 miles home in time for the fancy supper! That was about 40 years ago, and I can still remember the feeling of

hopelessness that I had there on that gravel road with no vehicle in sight! This was long before we had such things as cell phones.

We were so sincere! We just wanted to give the boys a special outing with Christian men! We were so very sincere, but so very wrong. I have heard people say to me, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.” But it does matter if you are fishing on the wrong brook and can’t find your car. We all have examples of things we have learned by mistake, and I can tell you that after that experience I was always careful to recheck my maps when I went into the woods.

My wife and I are new to this area, and we have already found that there are different ways you can go to get to Philadelphia. Some are longer distances but maybe faster; some are more scenic and so forth, but you still end up in Philadelphia. There are different ways of worshiping God — hymns, spiritual songs, quiet meditation, etc. There are different styles of architecture used in church buildings. All good. I learned a principle in missions regarding different cultures. “Different is different neither better nor worse.” This is so very true.

We often want people to do things just the way we do, so we feel comfortable, but they do not have to be just like us.

But there are some things for which being sincere and wrong can be important. One example is if you are hoping to go to heaven, but sincerely trusting in something or someone other than Jesus for your salvation. Proverbs 14:12 says “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Jesus put it quite simply in John 14:6 where He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

It is not Jesus plus our own efforts, not Jesus or good religion; it is simply Jesus. Following the wrong brook downstream meant that we did not arrive at the spot we intended, and we had a long walk back. But relying on human wisdom — the way that seems right to a man — causes more than just a long walk! When I stand before God someday I will not have to say, “But I was so sincere.” I can simply say, “I come by trusting in Jesus’ blood for my salvation.” Are you trusting Jesus alone for your salvation? I trust you know Him today.



Andy Spohrer grew up in rural Maine and returned there after college in Philadelphia and seminary in Colorado to pastor three different churches for a total of 25 years. He and his wife were then called to do church planting in Ireland, followed by 16 years as a regional director for the mission and then ten years on the Board of Directors. They moved to Landis Homes in August 2021 when their daughter became a children’s minister at Lancaster Evangelical Free Church.



## IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, WE FIND A NEW WAY OF LIVING

**E**aster Sunday with its celebration of flowers, Easter eggs and family gatherings has come and gone. The resurrection of Jesus assures us that our bodies will also be raised in the final resurrection when Christ returns. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus also has a present and continuing effect upon our lives. This morning, we want to talk about the significance of the resurrection of Jesus for us now, as well as for our future.

In the resurrection of Christ, we have a new kind of human experience. In Romans 6:3-5 we read, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

In these verses we learn there is more than forgiveness of past sins. There is new life. In Jesus Christ, we experience both an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change within our inner self. As Christians, we have been baptized into Christ and are therefore united with Christ in death and resurrection. That is, we die experientially to the old life of sin and are raised experientially to new life in Christ. In this identification with Christ, an internal change takes place in our inner self that brings about a transformation of our lives. We are changed to

such a degree that we become a new being.<sup>1</sup>

God's grace works a change in our being. In Jesus Christ, we therefore gain a new self-understanding. We no longer are slaves under the controlling power of sin and constantly need to ask God over and over to forgive us. Now through our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the body of sin is rendered powerless. Shall we keep on sinning that grace may abound? No, certainly not (Rom 6:1). Sin no longer rules over us. The resurrection power of Christ sets us free from the power of sin.

Second, in the resurrection of Christ we have a new way of thinking. There is the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1, 2). As we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11), a whole new worldview emerges. We realize that as we identify ourselves with Jesus' resurrection, we are transferred from the dominion and ruling power of the devil into the kingdom and ruling power where Jesus is Lord. Colossians 1:13 says God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son (NIV). In this new dominion, there is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). In this new kingdom Jesus reigns as co-ruler with God and other kingdoms of this world are subject to God. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free---and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Living and walking with the resurrected

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1 Karl Barth, *Shorter Commentary*, p. 66.

Lord means the old social, cultural, and economic ways of thinking are replaced by a new community; the church is the body of Christ where the old distinctions are laid aside. May this be true of us today.

Third, in the resurrection of Christ is a new way of living. As we commit ourselves to God, we put our faith into action by living the Jesus way of life daily. Colossians 3:1 says, “Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Instead of living the old way of sin in constant defeat, we now live in fellowship with the resurrected Lord. As the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century said, we walk in the resurrection. We are called to live by a new ethical standard of behavior based on the life of Jesus the resurrected Lord. We do not live this new way of behavior on our own.

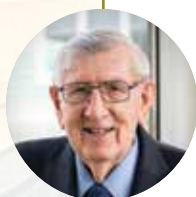
God gives us the divine presence of the Holy Spirit that enables us to walk in the newness of life. Now God the Holy Spirit is present in our lives. We live by the Spirit. We walk with the Spirit. The presence of the Spirit enables us to walk in this new kind of life in fellowship with the risen Christ. Here love replaces hate. Here honesty and integrity replace lying and deceit. Here the fruit of the Spirit expresses itself in our lives. Here the way of peace replaces the way of hostility and war. 1 Peter 2:21-23 says, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.”

In our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, we become new beings and enter into a new order of living according to Christ. We therefore are to yield ourselves to God. Romans 6:13 says, “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life;

and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness” (NIV). As we yield ourselves to God, the Holy Spirit enables us to walk in the newness of life. Where people are walking in the resurrection of Christ, other people are drawn toward Christ. There the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. There sinful people sense the call of the Holy Spirit to turn to Christ. There people turn away from the emptiness of sin to the living Christ, where they discover new life and meaning. May you and I experience the presence of the Holy Spirit today so that we can walk in this newness of life.

Fourth, the resurrection of Christ gives us hope for the future. This hope permeates our thoughts and life now. The living Christ gives us an awareness that our coming physical death will be ultimately defeated by the resurrection of our bodies from the grave. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We know sin, evil and death are not the last word. We know death will ultimately be defeated in the final resurrection. In 1 Cor 15:20-27, Paul says, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” That last enemy will be destroyed in the final resurrection when Jesus returns. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Let us pray.** *Lord, we are reminded, as the hymn writer said, “Made like him, like him we rise. Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Alleluia!” May we walk with our resurrected Lord today. Amen.*



Paul and Mary Zehr are residents at Landis Homes. Paul is a retired pastor, bishop, and seminary teacher. His wife, Mary, who joined him in devotional presentations, worked many years at Provident Bookstore. They are the parents of four children and enjoy their eight grandchildren.



## PENTECOSTAL FIRE

**P**entecost week is a season to meditate on experiencing God's presence up close. We are regularly reminded that God is here and with us. Yet it seems that within each one of us is the desire to experience that for ourselves.

God's people in ancient times longed for a close-up divine presence. The disciples longed for a close-up divine presence after Christ's ascension and, in these present days, many persons are longing to experience God for themselves up close.

There is a story in Exodus of the Hebrew people fleeing Egypt. In their final days in Egypt, Moses was instructed by God to tell the people to kill a lamb and apply the blood on their doorposts. God would spare their household from death. As the people heeded this instruction, their lives were miraculously spared from death in an event that became known as Passover. Eventually, the Hebrews were able to escape Egypt, and the Red Sea parted for them.

All that was wonderful. Yet it seems there was an underlying restlessness with the people, despite these miraculous events. It seems they longed to hear God's voice for themselves.

According to Exodus 19, fifty days after the

people of God left Egypt, God decided to give the people a chance to experience the divine presence for themselves. God instructed Moses to tell the people to get ready to hear the voice of God with their own ears from Mt. Sinai, right there in the wilderness.

These are the words from Exodus 19:

*And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet sounded exceeding loud; so that all the people trembled with holy fear. And Mount Sinai was altogether covered with a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in a fire: and the smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly and the people trembled with holy fear. Thus, God came close as God spoke divine words for the people.*

What an awesome experience. It was so great that God instructed the people to remember this experience by celebrating with a feast each year, fifty days after the Passover of Egypt. The feast was eventually named Pentecost, which means fifty.

So, the people did just that and every year they celebrated with gratitude for this tremendously holy experience of encountering God up close. They

remembered the one who came in the thunder and lightning and trumpet sounds and smoke and fire. They celebrated by bringing the first fruits of their spring harvest and gave it as an offering to the Lord.

When God became incarnate in Jesus, we saw noise and light again when God came close. The shepherds experienced holy fear with all the light and noise at Christ's birth. His short life on earth gave a taste of God up close.

Then Jesus ascended into heaven. The disciples gathered in Jerusalem, waiting as Jesus instructed them to do after His ascension. They were also assembled in Jerusalem because they were celebrating this tremendous experience of when their ancestors encountered God at Mount Sinai — when God came in the lightning and thunder and trumpet noise and smoke and fire — and then the disciples heard God with their own ears.

And as the disciples waited for God to come close, after Christ's ascension, there it was again: fire. Acts 2 reads:

*When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.*

As author Ted Loder describes it, "This gift of the spirit filled the place. It filled the disciples. It filled the world and it now fills us. It brings a truth that burns like fire and a beauty that moves like the wind. It sets

people free to forgive and love and laugh and sing and experience peace."

Through the ages, God, who is pure love, keeps moving closer and closer to the hearts of the people, somewhat like a burning fire moves. The fire keeps moving until at last, in heaven, we will totally be enveloped by God, and we will glow eternally in that divine love.

Let us celebrate this God who desires to come close to us individually. The biblical story of Pentecost invites us to do so.

In ancient times, the Hebrew people brought the first fruits of their farms, gave it unto God, gave thanks and rejoiced that God spoke in the thunder and fire. They would gather the first fruits by looking for a perfect bunch of wheat or fruit, and then they would tie a red string around it. This was called the *bikkurim*, which means the gift unto God.

Today our Jewish friends call this celebration *Shavuot*, and they bring flowers into the synagogue and lay them on the altar for the God who comes close.

As Christians, we can bring our hearts and present them to God as the *bikkurim*, or gift unto the Lord.

Let's rejoice this Pentecost season that the fire of God has descended upon us. Surely all of us can think of one time when we were met by God personally. Let's make some noise and sing or wave our arms or shout. Let's not be afraid to celebrate every encounter we have had with our God. God wants to keep burning in our souls. Yes, indeed.



Ginny Hartman, a Landis Homes resident, thrives on her love of family and friends, nature, drama, writing, pottery, books, music, cooking, hospitality and all living creatures. She served professionally as a nurse for 45 years and as a chaplain for 15 years and offers compassion, listening and presence. Her life-long intention is to help others overcome the fear of being left alone and abandoned. Her essence is sustained by laughter, lament and prayer.



## GET OFF THE LILY PAD

I remember a story of the young boy who came home from school and asked his father this question: *There were five frogs sitting on lily pads. Three decide to jump off. How many are left?* Of course, the father answered two, and the son said, *Wrong.* The father wondered if some new math was being taught to his son, but the son explained that three “decided” to jump off but did not, so the answer is five!

Do you ever decide to do something but don’t get around to doing it? Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” If you are a child of God, you have the Holy Spirit within you, and He will prompt you to do good to those around you. Do you listen to Him? Or do you think, *I should send a note of encouragement to So and So*, but stay on the lily pad — and the note is not sent? Yesterday, I was walking down a hallway — of course, this

devotional was in my mind — and my eye caught a name on a door. It reminded me that some time ago I was prompted to give this person a visit to encourage him. But I still hadn’t done it! I had decided, but had stayed on the lily pad.

There are so many people around us here in Landis Homes, both staff and residents. Many times, a word of encouragement or a hand to help with a task would not only minister to their lives at that moment but encourage their souls! Of course, this can be done in a way that leads someone to mock us as a bunch of “do-gooders,” if we don’t show love or a sweet attitude. And sometimes God makes it clear that we should do a good deed and that our failure to do it is actually a sin! James 4:17 says, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” OUCH! God expects us to not only decide to do good, but to jump off the lily pad and do it.

Our world is so full of hate and corruption.

So many people are suffering in wars and violence, as well as neglect. Maybe we can't directly impact the suffering in Ukraine today, but if we jump off the lily pad and into the pond, perhaps we can start a ripple

that will carry over to many others.

We don't need a new kind of math, but we do need more of the old time application of our faith as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.



Andy Spohrer grew up in rural Maine and returned there after college in Philadelphia and seminary in Colorado to pastor three different churches for a total of 25 years. He and his wife were then called to do church planting in Ireland, followed by 16 years as a regional director for the mission and then ten years on the Board of Directors. They moved to Landis Homes in August 2021 when their daughter became a children's minister at Lancaster Evangelical Free Church.



## LOVING-KINDNESS

**W**e don't know what God looks like. But let me try today to paint a word picture of God. A Hebrew word that is used 246 times in the Jewish scriptures is *chesed*, pronounced with a silent C. It is used about half of the time in the Psalms, and Psalm 136 has 26 occurrences of the word, which means for me "loving-kindness." It is also translated as mercy, compassion, loyal love or steadfast love. I like the King James Version and the New American Standard versions best, which translate it as "loving-kindness." We say *mercy* in Psalm 23, but preferentially it should read, "Surely, goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life..."

Loving-kindness is more than a feeling towards the other; it is also action that comes out of love. So, God's loving-kindness is known best in the giving of His Son, the Lord Jesus, as Savior, Lord, and friend. My friends, loving-kindness is the essential nature of God, and God desires that each of His children (all 7.9 billion of them) receive the rays of His loving-kindness. The best self-care we can give ourselves is to consciously

receive the sunbeams of God's loving-kindness every day.

A young mother with a young child on an airplane in turbulence is to put her oxygen mask on first, and then to take care of her child. So, I believe God wants each of us first to receive these rays of God's loving-kindness, for then we can and will share loving-kindness with all God's children and God's wonderful creation. Mary does just this as she sits at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:40-42). Receiving the loving-kindness of our God will truly "restore our souls" (Psalm 23:2).

Invitation to a practice:

Breathe in God's loving-kindness and then when you breathe out, think of somebody, near or far, enemy or friend, who might need a touch of God's loving-kindness. We can do this practice anywhere and at any time of the day or night. Wouldn't this be a different world if 7.9 billion people received God's rays of loving-kindness from God and through us?

We can know this about God because Jesus was loving-kindness in all he did. As an early Archbishop of Canterbury said, "God is Christlike and in Christ

there is no un-Christlikeness at all.” How could it be otherwise? Jesus came from the heart of God.

This, my friends, is my best picture of God, the God of loving-kindness. At home I have a huge picture on the wall that illustrates God’s loving-kindness. It is Rembrandt’s painting, “Return of the Prodigal Son,” which depicts the father and two sons. The father, with great joy, gratitude and loving-kindness, bends over the

younger son who has just returned home. This son will never forget the loving-kindness of his father. May we never forget God’s loving-kindness to us!

*Prayer: We are aware today, dear God, of your loving-kindness that will heal our souls. May we receive, from you, this wonderful gift so that, through us, our world may also be healed!*



Richard Weaver is a resident at Landis Homes who spent 35 years of his life doing surgery (in Africa, W. Va., Pa., Haiti, and Nazareth, Israel). After retiring from surgery he completed a Master of Divinity degree at Lancaster Theological Seminary, was ordained, and pastored for 5 years at New Holland Mennonite Church. He did 5 years in Spirituality training and became a Certified Spiritual Director which he practiced for about 20 years. Ruth has been a significant companion for 63 years. They have three children, three in-laws, eight grandchildren, soon to be ten, with two grandchildren getting married this year.



## ACEDIA

Throughout our lives, we need divine strength day by day and even more so as we age. It can be especially challenging to hold onto the glorious energy of life when the world around us seems to be unsettled. The reality is that some days, despite our best efforts not to grow weary in well doing, we may find ourselves praying these words: Where, O holy Lord, can we find you in this unholy mess? Our hearts ache in this day-to-day grind of keeping a stiff upper lip.

Are you feeling a bit weary? The Apostle Paul encouraged us to “not become weary in well doing for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” The psalmist prayed, “Put a steadfast spirit within me.” Paul and the Psalmist experienced days like we do. We just don’t know all the details. We don’t know how heart sore they were.

Weariness and fatigue of the soul abound. What do we need to do to ease the weariness and not give up?

The story of Moses and the Hebrew people from the book of Exodus is a good one on which to meditate. It can be summarized in this manner: The Hebrew people were in the desert traveling from Egypt to the promised land, and they were without water and very thirsty. They were in a state of weariness, and because

of that, they said, “Is Jehovah going to take care of us or not?” That is when God told Moses to take his rod, which symbolized God’s presence, and to strike it on the big rock, and water came gushing out.

Following that event, the Amalekites began to threaten the Hebrew people. Moses, remembering the rod that provided water from the rocks, said to the people, “I will take this rod and stand on the top of the hill with it to offer you strength as you resist the Amalekite threats.” So, Moses went with Aaron and Hur to the top of the hill and held up the rod, symbolizing the presence of God.

Then the story reads:

*And as long as Moses held up the rod in his hands, Israel stood steadfast; but whenever he rested his arms at his sides, the people of Amalek got a foothold. Moses’ arms finally became too tired to hold up the rod any longer; so, Aaron and Hur rolled a stone for him to sit on, and they stood on each side, holding up his hands until sunset when the Israelites at last prevailed. Exodus 17:11-12*

This story reminds us that we have the presence of God within us, but there are days when we can barely

acknowledge that because we are so tired. This is when we need an Aaron or a Hur to come along side of us.

In the fourteenth century, the monks in the monastery sometimes became tired of the day-to-day grind of staying steadfast. They referred to this weariness as *acedia*, which meant a sort of apathy, a lack of care or indifference. When *acedia* happened in their community, the monks would come alongside each other and urge the one who was suffering from *acedia*, or this weary apathy, to get up and come to the daily group prayer routine. Sometimes they literally took him by the hands to hold up the weary monk's arms. That spiritual discipline would often eventually move the weary monk from *acedia* into a place of joy, energy and peace.

South Africans refer to this as *ubuntu*, which means "I need you and you need me."

The geese honk and take turns heading against the day-to-day wind so that they don't become heart sore.

The good news is that there are ways to ease weariness and tiredness of soul or *acedia*:

- We need to acknowledge that our upper lip is not always stiff. We need to acknowledge this fact before God, and we need at least one other trusted person with whom we can acknowledge this fact.
- We need to take a rest from trying to figure everything out. We need to take a fast from

searching for all the answers, whether they be political or theological.

- We need a warm cup of tea and a few minutes in the Landis Homes hot tub from time to time.
- We need to think about who the Aarons and the Hurs are in our lives and then make every effort to be with these people as soon as possible.

We need to be these people because men and women who respond like Aaron and Hur will cheer for us and remind us that our lives have not been in vain. They will remind us that we are filled with goodness, and that God is smiling on us with great joy.

Aaron and Hur people will accept us and remind us that God is well pleased with us just as we are: no more, no less. They will hold hope and light and belief for us when we are too tired to do so.

- We must also be mindful that we will need to take a turn at being an Aaron and a Hur, so that the entire community can remain whole and strengthened.
- Apostle Paul reminds us to speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns and sacred songs and to pray for one another.
- Let us hold onto the glorious energy of life amid these chaotic days.



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# 3

## Reconciliation Is the Center of Our Work

Honoring Lives has become a philosophy of service at Landis Homes in which each person is respected and empowered as a part of the whole. Reconciliation with God shows us our own dignity as God's beloved and, in turn, the dignity of others, both in our community and beyond.

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-18 (NRSV)



## A DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION BEFORE A LANDIS HOMES BOARD MEETING

In 1977, I accepted an invitation to be the anthropology consultant to a Wycliffe translator, Gordon Koop, working in the upper Amazon jungle of Brazil. After two years of language learning, Gordon was communicating in the local language, but his administration of a small development project was in shambles. Because I could not speak the language, my work daily was to prepare research questions for him, and then send him out to collect new data from the local villagers. Gordon debriefed me in the evening, and I would analyze his data and send him out in the morning to gather additional information.

This village of 87 people was located in the dense jungle, on the Purus River. It was the rainy season, and flood waters filled every trail. We were eaten alive by gnats by day, and by mosquitoes in the evening and night. People suffered from malaria, tuberculosis, and numerous viral and bacterial infections. I found refuge

in a hammock and mosquito net at night, but a rat visited me faithfully each evening, chewing on my belt hanging from the ceiling over my mosquito net. I was also always on watch for poisonous snakes that might flee the flood waters for the higher ground under the study house where I worked and slept.

While Gordon was doing research during the day, I borrowed the Children's Living Bible that he read to his five children at breakfast, and I passed the long hours waiting by reading this wonderful paraphrase of scripture. As I look back, it was the richest time of my life, dwelling in scripture, and it was also an incredibly rewarding time as I discovered new things daily about God and about the culture and habits of life of these indigenous people. They were so radically different from the Pacific Islanders I had studied for my doctorate.

The text I will share with you today, Romans 5:1-5, is from the Children's Living Bible.

*So now, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 For because of our faith, he has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be. (5:1-2)*

There were three powerful insights for me in that Brazilian jungle. One, because of Christ, there is peace with God. Two, because of faith—the place of highest privilege where we now stand—there I was in the most challenging physical situation on earth, serving a missionary with the gifts and skills God had given me; and three, I found that I was joyfully looking forward to serving. When I returned to Pittsburgh, I met my wife at the door, with a beard, bow and arrows, and joyful smile, because this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life!

Today, the message is the same. Because of Christ, there is peace with God. Because of faith, we together are in the place of highest privilege, as board and leadership—the body of Christ, serving people—often during the most challenging final years of their lives at Landis Communities. We are joyfully looking forward, and planning to enlarge our tent to serve even more, by becoming all that God has in mind for Landis Homes

and Landis Communities!

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. (Romans 5:3-5)

There are further insights here.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient and grow our character. In our visit to Landis on King Street in Lancaster City last week, we learned of the unique challenges of construction on that urban site. In our work as a board and leadership team, whatever plan we agree upon, problems and trials are inevitable.

Working in faith and hope, we can hold our heads high no matter what happens—all is well, for we know God loves us, and moves within us to bring that love to future residents.

May the Lord guide us in this meeting, remembering who we are in Christ, and the privilege of the work of hope, faith, and planning set out before us.



Sherwood Lingenfelter has been a resident at Landis Homes since 2019. Sherwood is Provost Emeritus and Senior Professor of Anthropology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in Pasadena, Calif. He holds a B.A. from Wheaton College and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh. He has served as research and training consultant to the School of International Studies over the last three decades and contributes regularly to mission conferences and to missionary candidate training for other evangelical mission organizations. He has authored a number of books, including *Teaching Cross-Culturally* (co-authored with his wife, Dr. Judith Lingenfelter, in 2003), and *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: Training Leaders for a Church Planting Movement* (with Dr. Paul R. Gupta in 2006).



## RECEIVING AND ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER

**D**id you know that receiving one another is a spiritual discipline that needs to be practiced? Even though God is gathering people in Christ, the Church has struggled to see each other as belonging to God. The Church has struggled to receive each other as God receives us by consuming time rejecting and judging one another.

The catalyst of the pandemic and the public murders by police officers of Black and Brown women and men, including George Floyd on May 25, 2020, moved LMC, a fellowship of Anabaptist churches, to acknowledge the struggle within the church to combat patterns of segregating from one another. LMC committed to the spiritual discipline of receiving, instead of segregating.

Part of this commitment included the formation of the Intercultural Leadership Ministry with the purpose of beginning an ongoing process of helping leaders to address oppression in LMC. Leaders learn together to become increasingly interculturally

competent, including learning how they relate to the cultural differences between them and other people.

Part of my work has been to share about this spiritual discipline, a way of being with one another that is described in the fifty-nine “one another” passages we find in the Christian Bible. The apostles instructed the saints in the congregations in Rome to accept one another, by imitating the way Christ accepted them into God’s glory: to treat each other the way they have been treated by God (Romans 15:7).

Accepting one another is how we enter the experience of walking with God and with one another, to live differently in the land and to do good works, all to please the Creator of all. These very consuming, daily, hour-by-hour and moment-by-moment ways of following Christ with one another require that we receive one another as from God.

However, even as I have been sharing about accepting one another, I noticed my own struggle. It is hard to accept one another when others push

back, arguing that accepting some “sinners” means accepting sin. I’ve had to look closely at what I’m saying, examining it through what Jesus taught us about how to treat one another. For example, Jesus taught us to pray for “one another,” not just for those of whom we approve. Receiving one another as from God is a prerequisite to accepting one another. Before we can accept one another, we must respond to God and what God has done; we must receive God and receive what God gives to us. If we reject one another through judging one another as not from God, we make it impossible to live life together and to accept one another.

When God justified us by faith in Jesus, God empowered us and enabled us to imitate God by receiving one another and accepting one another. All of this—and more—is condensed in a paragraph in Galatians 3:26–29, where the apostle wrote this:

*For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness; because as many of you as were immersed into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one. Also, if you belong to the Messiah, you are seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise.* Galatians 3:26–29, Complete Jewish Bible

Although receiving and accepting one another is not stated explicitly in this chapter, in the descriptions of how God treats people, the apostle implies how

people are to treat one another despite differences in culture, caste or gender, even if one has experienced benefits or abuses. These things no longer divide God’s people. God gives the gift of faith to us. When we receive and respond to God with this faith, we experience God receiving and accepting us and training us how to receive one another.

Faith is the basis God uses to receive people and demonstrates what it means to receive one another as from God. God woos and receives people whose hearts are inclined to do evil but respond to God with faith. God teaches us by example how to live in the world, even as we and our neighbors struggle with evil desires within us and those that control our social structures. God teaches us how to receive one another—a radical discipline that begins with a mindset toward all people, which we first practice among people who may look like us and come from our cultures. God then helps us to expand and learn to receive one another in relationships with those who are from other cultures but with whom we are one in the Messiah.

Receiving one another from God is thinking about our neighbors as from God. Receiving one another is moving toward one another with good intentions that imitate God’s good intentions in our lives. As God brings together people from every tribe, people group and language, how do you need to change your mind about your neighbors, your enemies and one another? What has God done for people that we need to learn from and practice? Who among you can help all of you to learn more about receiving one another? What other mindsets about people do you all believe, that prevent you from receiving one another?



Karl A. McKinney is the Intercultural Leadership Minister of LMC, a Fellowship of Anabaptist Churches. He helps leaders throughout LMC increase their skills to build intercultural relationships. He has followed Christ in intercultural relationships within culturally diverse communities, since 1983. He has lived among and served people without homes and he has managed affordable houses and complexes, both for immigrants to the USA and a diverse clientele. He also has served on teams to form new congregations, pastored existing congregations with long histories, and served leaders in urban, rural, and suburban contexts.



## DESPITE DIVISION, THE TABLE IS STILL WIDE: MATTHEW 9:9-13

I finally had the opportunity to watch the first season of *The Chosen*, which is a multi-season TV Show about the life of Jesus seen through the eyes of the people who knew him. The writers use the Biblical text, holy imagination and historical resources to write the script.

In season one, I find myself drawn to the character of Matthew, the tax collector in Capernaum. He is portrayed as a socially awkward young man who was rejected by his Jewish family and friends because he worked for the Roman government. He is also scorned by the Roman officials who think that he is from a backward group of people who follow a bizarre religion. Matthew's only friends are other tax collectors. Likely, he led a very lonely life in Capernaum. Until, that is, he met Jesus. I invite you to imagine this scene.

*As Jesus continued on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. He said to*

*him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him. As Jesus sat down to eat in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and his disciples at the table. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard it, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-12, CEB)*

So much happens in just a few verses. Jesus sees Matthew in a tax booth. Jesus invites him to be a follower. Matthew accepts this unlikely request. Jesus eats with Matthew, other tax collectors and sinners. Jesus is confronted by some Pharisees about breaking purity laws. Jesus recites ancient words from the book of Hosea that prioritize mercy over purity.

As I read scripture and watch *The Chosen*, I am struck by the deep divisions depicted in the Bible. Who

came up with these divisions, and what purpose did they serve? The Romans, like many conquering nations throughout history, set themselves apart and showed superiority over the oppressed people. Fear tactics, financial schemes, physical assault and psychological bruises were bad enough, but they employed one last strategy; they pitted the Hebrew people against each other. They used Jewish men to collect exorbitant taxes from their own people. It's an age-old plan. If the subjugated people fight among themselves, they won't trouble the oppressor as much.

I'm reading a book entitled *The Lunatic Express* by Charles Miller. He chronicled the ways Portuguese, Persians, Indians, Germans, British, Belgians and others arrived on the shores of Africa to trade and subjugate the continent. They used so many similar tactics as the Romans did in Israel, including pitting African tribes against other African tribes to supply humans for the slave trade for several centuries.

So far, this devotional bends toward a depressing outlook on humankind. We do have much to lament when it comes to the ways that we have historically treated one another and even how we treat each other today.

Yet, Jesus brought Good News to the people in Capernaum, and Jesus brings Good News to us, so let's turn toward that great invitation.

Jesus looked around Capernaum and rounded up outcasts and subjugated people. He welcomed them into God's merciful love. He invited them to form a community of grace. He trained them to widen

their perspectives of holiness. Matthew and other tax collectors found themselves eating a meal with people who had previously despised them for their collusion with the Romans. Can you picture that meal? Can you feel the profound breakthrough and transformation?

On Sunday morning, October 15, we will offer communion in West Bethany Chapel, and for the first time in three and a half years, we will simultaneously offer communion in East Bethany Chapel for residents who live in Personal Care. Praise be to God! I encourage you at Welsh Mountain Home, in your homes around campus, and even those of you who watch the re-broadcast on Monday night, to prepare the bread and cup and receive the blessing of communion. As you receive the blessed bread and juice, connect deeply to your Savior and Lord. And, I invite you to give thanks for this diverse body of believers who live at Landis Homes and Welsh Mountain Home. Pray that we can open ourselves to the great banquet which awaits us in heaven. Pray that we can take steps toward one another instead of away from each other. Pray that you can enjoy the fellowship of God's beloved sons and daughters—even if they act or believe differently than you.

As we prepare for communion in one week, I will close with a poem<sup>1</sup> of Jan Richardson, which I come back to over and over again. It is called *And the Table Will Be Wide*.

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1 For copyright reasons, we cannot reproduce the poem for this volume. But we encourage you to find the poem on your own at Jan Richardson's blog: <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2012/09/30/and-the-table-will-be-wide/>



Anne Kaufman Weaver is Director of Pastoral Services and the Residential Life Chaplain at Landis Homes. She holds a Master of Divinity from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and a master's degree in Social Work from Marywood University. She and her husband, Todd, have three young adult children and one son-in-law. They are "rewilding" their four-acre property in Brownstown with native trees and wildflowers.

# RECONCILIATION'S HARD WORK

In 1962, I was working at New York University's University Hospital, in lower Manhattan. As a member of the hospital's Messenger Department, I enjoyed good working relationships with the four other guys on the team. We got along well, lots of joking and jostling, though we came from vastly different cultural backgrounds.

One afternoon, Roger, one of the team, walked quickly up to my desk in the hospital lobby and blurted out: "Wes, you got the three o'clock drug round!" and dropped a heavy wire delivery basket down on the desk where I was working.

This ticked me off. Roger wasn't really my boss; that was Malcom, who was off that day. Roger was just throwing his weight around. He was being his usual bad self, abrupt, too quick, impulsive and unpredictable.

It's not my turn to take the three o'clock, I fumed inwardly. I hate the three o'clock round. The specimens I need to carry to the labs are smelly, sticky, detestable.

I erupted. "No! I'm not doing it!"

Roger, surprised, backed away, turned and stomped off.

I sat at the information desk alone and stewed. It was not fair. I did the round yesterday. It was not my turn. Let Jackson do it. Or Roger himself!

I boiled several minutes more. Then I began to get uncomfortable with what I had said, and what my tone of voice and body language must have communicated.

This is no way to act, I admitted to myself. I'm a Christian. I'm in Voluntary Service, the program the Mennonite Church has established with the United States government for conscientious objectors to fulfill the draft requirements of the Selective Service system. I'm supposed to be a witness to the peace of Christ. What am I doing? I felt irresponsible, ashamed, caught off guard, off balance.

I cooled off and repented inwardly. Then I grabbed the basket, and walked down the hall to the mailroom where Roger was working and said, "Roger, I'm sorry, I was wrong to refuse. I'll take the three o'clock." Then I headed for the elevators.

Roger's attitude toward me changed that day. He was gentler in speaking to me. A respectful, peaceful spirit began growing between us.

In one of Jesus's short parables in Matthew chapter 21, he told a story about the father who had two sons. He said to the first, "Son, go and work in my vineyard today." The son replied: "No, I won't go," but later he changed his mind, and went.

The father went to the second son, and told him to work in the vineyard. The son replied, "I will, sir," but didn't go. Jesus asked his listeners which of the sons did what his father asked. The first, they replied. Yes, Jesus agreed.

In Jesus' story, obviously, to be obedient right away would be the best response. But God is good at giving us second chances when we are caught off guard, lose our balance or mess up.

In the early 1980s I was working at Camp Deerpark in New York state for the summer. One evening we were treating the campers to a hayride, something we all enjoyed. The slow ride in the refreshing cool of the evening, over the campgrounds and through the woods, was fun.

But this time was not as enjoyable for me. Little nine-year-old Angela was being anything but angelic. Gripping and snippy, she was making the other campers, and me, uncomfortable. I was getting tired of her bad attitude, which I had been aware of for several days. I decided that it was time to act. I would take her aside as soon as the ride ended, and give her a good talking to, shake up her world a bit.

The ride ended at the wagon shed beside the trail. Angela jumped off the wagon, with me immediately behind her. I reached out and grabbed her little shoulder and steered her away from the crowd. But when I opened my mouth to bite at her with sharp words, I was overcome with empathy for this little girl. The words I had planned suddenly changed. I asked, "What's the matter, Angela? Tell me what's wrong."

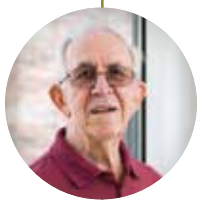
Angela started sobbing, and over the next few minutes spilled out a litany of pain, uncertainty,

and loneliness. I don't remember all her words, or mine. Angela seemed mostly to be suffering from homesickness, missing her mom, and feeling friendless in her cabin. I listened to her pour out her heart, and once again, caught off guard, I felt ashamed of my attitude and actions. How could I be so cold and quick to judge, even this little one, whose story I didn't know?

Angela and I began a friendship that night. In

the remaining days we would smile at each other across the room. But we never had time to grow close. She left camp at the end of the week, as campers always do, and I never saw her again. But first, she changed my heart.

Let's pray. *Lord, help us to be more aware of those things that push us off balance, catch us off guard. Help us to hear your voice before we use ours. To wait, listen, and then to say, OK, I'll go . . . and do it!*



Wes Newswanger is a resident at Landis Homes and is married to Janet Breneman. He grew up in Morgantown, Pa., and also claimed Va., New York City, and Kenya as home. He has 3 children and one granddaughter. He lost two spouses to illness. For 20 years Wes was a school teacher. In retirement, he enjoys building furniture, reading and writing.



## MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE: A MENNONITE EMULSIFIER

In John 17:20-24, we read of an intimate conversation of Jesus praying to his Father and a repetitive theme:

*v. 21: "That all of them may be one"*

*v. 22: "That they may be one as we are one"*

*v. 23: "So that they may be brought to complete unity"*

I want to talk about emulsification—and about Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers as emulsifiers.

First of all, what is an emulsifier? It's a unique word.

An emulsifier is an outside agent that is used to bring two opposing elements together, elements like oil and water. The agent that brings them together is called an emulsifier. In cooking, things like hollandaise sauce, mayonnaise, and salad dressings are emulsifiers.

Emulsification happens in my house when I occasionally make baked oatmeal or pancakes from scratch. These require water and vegetable oil, which

don't mix well. But if you add oatmeal, eggs, baking powder, sugar and salt—emulsifiers—now you have batter you can use.

Jesus prays in verse 21 "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Down through history, somehow God has been able to speak to and communicate with us fallen human beings. And Jesus, despite being God the Son, could walk and talk with sinful human beings.

I would venture that we all are to be emulsifiers.

In my line of work with MDS, I see this every day. As we work throughout Canada and the United States, our mission is for volunteers to respond, rebuild and restore homes after a disaster. But a very happy byproduct of that mission is how it brings together volunteers from different countries, states, provinces, regions, ages, occupations, genders, political views, churches, conferences and theological beliefs. It brings them together for one common purpose: to help people

get back home. These volunteers arrive weekly on a Sunday night at one of our many locations throughout the U.S. to rebuild after a disaster. These volunteers are emulsifiers. As Jesus prays, “that the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

In some cases, these volunteers may see the world in totally different ways. They may vote differently, read the Bible differently and do church differently. They may disagree on who stands behind the pulpit, the type of church house, or if worship is even in a church house. Sometimes they do that in ways that would prevent them from mixing with each other outside of MDS.

But through MDS they have a chance to serve together, talk to each other, get to know one another, exchange points of view and, hopefully, find commonalities despite those differences. For Jesus prays “that the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

As executive director of MDS, I have experienced MDS as an emulsifier for the past two decades.

For example, on the eastern shore of Maryland, is a small town called Crisfield. It is literally at the end of the road along the waterfront. This is a crab and shrimping community. The elevation is four to ten feet above sea level. There are many houses that experience repetitive flooding and also were hit hard by Hurricane Sandy a decade ago. MDS was there rebuilding new homes—elevating them above the flood zone. I think of homeowners Ed and Nicole Gillespie and their three children. They lived in a two-story ramshackle of a house. When you walked across the kitchen floor the lights would flicker or—when it rained—Ed said you could hear sizzling. They couldn’t sleep much at night for fear of fire. They also lived in fear of losing custody of their children if the wrong person saw the condition of their flood-impacted home and reported it to Child Protective Services. Our MDS volunteers

stepped in and built them a new home. Working side by side, Amish, Brethren in Christ, Lutherans, Methodists and Mennonites built the house. At the time of this writing, we have built ten new homes. When we had the dedication of Ed’s new home, he cried, saying he now can sleep at night and doesn’t have to fear Child Protective Services coming for his children.

MDS takes people who might not always easily mix and combines them to help people get back home.

MDS invites Mennonites and others from all walks of life, of any skill level and from any congregation or conference, and any form of theology to serve.

But divisions in the church threaten MDS, too. Because the truth is this: At a time when the church in North America is becoming more divided, polarized and siloed, it needs an emulsifier like MDS more than ever.

It needs the oatmeal and sugar of service that MDS provides to bring together people from different theological points of view, mixing them together to help bring hope and healing to others—and through that service, to ourselves as well.

What about you? Do you see yourselves as emulsifiers? We are called to be part of God’s provision of love for the world. To be the oatmeal, sugar and salt in a polarized world of oil and water that won’t mix.

*Jesus, you prayed that your followers would be one, as you are one with the Father, so that the world may believe in you. We pray for that as well, both for the wider church and also for MDS—that by serving those impacted by natural disasters we may grow in love and understanding for each other, and then show that love to others. God of peace and of justice, rain down upon us your peace. God of peace and of justice, fill every heart with your peace. Make us your emulsifiers of peace. Amen.*



Kevin King is Executive Director of Mennonite Disaster Service in Lititz, Pa. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Eastern Mennonite University in International Agricultural Development and a master’s degree from Eastern College in International Economic Development. He served for six years as a board member of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). Kevin and his wife, Karen, an elementary school teacher, have two children: Justin (married to Heidi Bauman) and Andrea.



Original artwork by Ahmed Baban. Published with the artist's permission.

## WHEN GRIEF BECOMES A CALL FOR JUSTICE

**T**he narrative of Esther takes place during the Jewish exile in the kingdom of Persia. Both Mordecai and Esther are Jews serving the Persian king, and the story develops in the royal court, during the reign of king Xerxes I. These two courageous Jewish characters belong to the Jewish diaspora community, taken in exile by the Persian empire. The political strategy of the conquering empires was to bring into exile the elite portion of the nations they conquered. It was better to keep the enemy closer than far away. Mordecai lived inside the capital city of Susa “inside the fortress,” like many leaders of other nations taken to serve the palace, where the empire’s power can use their abilities. The book of Esther is a salvation story, where the Jews are threatened to be eliminated.

The Jewish nation in exile is dealing with its identity after generations of living as exiles and ethnic minorities in a foreign land. In Esther 4, the announcement from the palace proclaims that if the

Jewish population does not submit to the king, then the Jews, including Mordecai, shall be killed. Here we find Mordecai outside the gates of the palace lamenting the decree of Haman. Notice this type of chaos.

We find Mordecai “in sackcloth and ashes,” his torn clothes making a clear manifestation/statement of mourning. These actions of lament were a common Hebrew practice. Religious expressions like fasting are done to call attention to God. Although these actions could be found in other religions, the reader knows these are actions that come from Mordecai’s faith tradition. He moved like a loudspeaker in the city, and at the square public notice, drawing attention to his affliction. He stopped at the entrance gates of the palace, where this type of expression is not welcomed. Mordecai used his body and voice to express a communal lament regarding the decree of Haman. But not only is Mordecai displaying his lament in public, the text mentions how all the Jews in every province are doing the same manifestation of grief, what can be

defined as a communal call for justice.

Esther's first response to her cousin's public display of mourning was to cover him up with garments. Her second response aims to understand Mordecai's anguish. Esther, living safely within the walls of the palace, is not aware of this political action. The evidence of the decree is sent back to her as proof of the action to be taken against Mordecai and the Jews. A clear charge is given to her to go to the king and advocate for her people. Mordecai expected his cousin to act fast and address those in power for the salvation of her people.

Grief is a natural response to death or loss. The grieving process is an opportunity to appropriately mourn a loss and then heal. The process is helped when you acknowledge grief, find support and allow time for grief to work.

Within grief there is lament. We can say Mordecai was lamenting the decree that was sent to all the regions of the Persian kingdom. Marginalized communities often miss the most important stage of grief, which is "finding meaning and making something out of this pain." Marginalized communities and parents who have lost their children to street violence or the police force find their voice in that pain and speak out for justice. Mordecai was using this public display of grief to obtain attention and send a message to Esther that lamenting is trusting God for the way forward. Lament is a form of grief; in the Hebrew language "demonstrate deep sorrow or regret, literally "to wail." Every culture has a different comfort level with open demonstrations of grief or sadness. Grief varies in different persons and personalities on what it looks like

to lament. The biblical concept of lamentation is not an end to itself, but a path forward.

Grief and lament can be used as tools to lift our voice against others that want to hurt us. Vulnerable populations utilize lament in public spaces to call for justice. Mordecai's position at the gates of the palace as well as a copy of the edict sent to Esther demonstrated that he acted not only out of his grief but also against the edict.

Like Esther, our first response in addressing the distress of a dear one is to cover it up, but Mordecai did not want that. He knew clearly what he and his people needed from Esther. The call for justice was "use your position of privilege and power to refuse the edict of death. Because if they kill us, you too will not be spared." She was not told how to intervene, but to stop the edict. "I can't do anything" is not the right answer at times of such crisis. Mordecai, as that older wise person, reminds Esther that she too would face the consequences of death.

Eventually we will all face death, but our response should not come from fear. Mordecai's lament is no longer a private matter. He calls out to Esther to act. God's justice makes its way through human history in shy and outrageous ways. It shines and smiles at us and tells us, "You can do this." And we can. History has shown us it is possible to grieve together and do what is right, coming from our faith in a just and God-like-matter.

Let us remember grief is a form of lament, and a call for justice.



Elizabeth Soto Albrecht is Professor of Practice at Lancaster Theological Seminary and a Community and Diversity Consultant for Landis Communities. Her skills and gifts include cross-cultural communication and systems analysis, teaching and training, as well as experience with crisis intervention. Elizabeth's passion in life is to be effective at addressing the root causes of racism and sexism. She has served many years in South America as well as in the marginalized community of southeast Lancaster City, Pa.



## HOW SHALL WE PRAY?

Last year, the Landis Homes pastoral team invited me to preach on a Sunday morning service in Bethany Chapel. I chose December 17 (third Sunday in Advent) and was encouraged to use a text from the lectionary. I looked at the various options and then chose Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11. After having done some preliminary study, I sent the sermon title and text to the worship leader, then did more study of the text.

As the day for the sermon drew near, I spent more hours in study, looking for a word or words around which I might build the sermon. Many words in the text looked promising. Others looked disturbing and didn't seem to be the best possibilities. I was not sure what word or words around which to develop my sermon.

In the days that followed, I continued to study. But no word in particular stood out for me. As the day for the sermon drew near, I still could not settle on what seemed to be the most suitable word or words. My anxiety began to build. Although I did more thinking and studying and praying, clarity did not come.

Several days before I was to give the sermon, I woke from my sleep at 4:30 a.m. I thought about the

sermon, and my anxiety hit the ceiling. I acknowledged my weakness and asked myself, Why did I ever consent to give the sermon? And then I prayed, "Lord, please get me out of this mess!" I stayed in bed for several more minutes, then clarity began to come. I felt led to focus on what seemed an unlikely word: devastation. As I began to ponder on that word, I thought of the tragic war in Gaza.

I got out of bed and jotted some notes. Anxiety lifted, and peace pervaded my mind and heart. Later that day as I looked outside at a layer of freshly fallen snow and thanked God for the beauty, I soon again began thinking about the devastating war in Gaza.

The war began on October 7, 2023 when Hamas militants from Gaza attacked Israel, killing over 1,000 innocent people. Israel then declared war on Gaza and dropped explosives, equivalent to the two nuclear bombs that were dropped on Japan in World War II.

As of this writing, a total of 25,000 tons of explosives had been dropped on densely populated areas, including hospitals and schools. Over 160,000 buildings have been destroyed and 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, including 12,000 women and children. Roughly 90% of the population has been displaced.

Disease, such as influenza and chickenpox, is spreading. People are starving. With each passing day, the devastating impact of the war is getting worse.

It is not by accident that I chose January 16, 2024 to write this meditation. I had asked myself, what is being done to end that war? On this day there was a special gathering in Washington, D.C., calling for an end to the war in Gaza. I thought about the 350 people who converged there on this very day, calling for an end to the war. Over 30 people from the Lancaster area were in D.C. participating in this witness for peace, including some residents from Landis Homes.

This call for an end to the war is being carried out by Mennonite Action, a Christologically based organization of people that see Jesus Christ as the primary model for peacemaking. Although Mennonite

Action was started and is being implemented by visionary Mennonite young people, all ages and cultures and interfaith allies have participated, including both Jews and Palestinians.

The following verse has been a favorite of mine for many years: The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:26). I'm grateful for the help of the Spirit in praying, particularly in times of weakness. The Spirit was guiding me when I prayed for clarity in preparing the sermon, and for an end to the war in Gaza.

I don't always have the best words when I pray. But I greatly appreciate having the Spirit as a prayer partner, interceding with sighs too deep for words.



Glen Roth is a resident of Landis Homes. He attended Eastern Mennonite University and did graduate studies at Penn State University, Union Institute and University, and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. He was a pastor at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in the 1980s. He is married to Annabelle Shirk from East Earl, Pa. They have four children and ten grandchildren.



## ARE OUR PRAYERS TOO SMALL?

**R**ecently, in thinking on Psalm 23 about mercy and truth following us, I was reminded that the root verb, *to follow*, means to pursue! This is no namby-pamby, wishy-washy sauntering along behind; rather, with diligent love God is hot on our trail because God longs to be in relationship with every person He created.

That same day I read about Rachel weeping for her children because they'd been murdered by a cruel King Herod. Having lived in East Africa for an extended time, my thoughts went there next, remembering a terrorist group that periodically set explosions, killing hundreds of people each time and maiming many more.

So, I've begun praying that God will *pursue* these terrorists with mercy and truth until they all come under the lordship of Jesus Christ. What a huge difference that will make for God's kingdom and civil society in the horn of Africa.

Jesus said, "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). Do we believe that? Centuries

ago, Jesus appeared to another terrorist, Saul, on his way to Damascus. Surely God can do the same today. But for reasons we may not understand, God needs our prayers.

As year turns to year, do you wonder why you are still here? Let me assure you that God has purpose for your life, and God needs you to pray—fervently! You may not feel called to pray for the same people as I do. But, important as family, friends and oneself are, I challenge you to also pray further afield from your home base. It is no secret that our world needs help big-time, and we retirees have discretionary time that can be directed to large points of need.

In Isaiah 66:7-8 (NRSV), the prophet asked, "Who has heard of such a thing as birth happening before a woman is in labor, that before pain she delivered a son? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children."

Just a few weeks ago, a close acquaintance met a Christian who used to be a terrorist! God does answer

prayer! Praise the Lord and remember: “When Zion travailed, she brought forth children.” Let not our prayers be too small.

*Lord God, thank you for pursuing us with mercy and truth and for bringing that one terrorist from darkness to light. In the name of Jesus, we come boldly for his former*

*buddies, besieging the courts of heaven to bring these wanderers home to the Father. Pull out all the stops, Jesus, until every terrorist discovers your truth, receives your mercy and becomes a peacemaker. Thank you for all you have done and will yet do, and forbid that our prayers ever be too small! Amen.*



Barbara Keener Reed learned about other cultures at nursing school at Lancaster General Hospital. Larger cultural learning awaited during Barbara and her husband Harold's fourteen-year assignment in Somalia. She is blessed with a family of four children, a granddaughter and two great granddaughters. She has published a memoir, *Standing on Holy Ground – and Some Not So Holy*.



## A TREASURE IN HEAVEN

*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Luke 12:32-34, NIV

**T**he biblical context helps us understand these verses better. Just before, Jesus instructed His followers not to worry, using ravens and wildflowers as examples of God's care for things of much less value than people. Because our heavenly Father knows our needs, we can "seek first his kingdom and these things will be given to [us] as well" (Luke 12:31).

How can we seek first God's kingdom in our lives? We can follow His instruction to reach the lost. Thirty-two percent of the global population identifies as Christian. However, Christians are not evenly dispersed among all people groups. Some peoples are identified as least reached because they do not have enough local believers, churches, or Bibles in their own languages

for most of them to have the opportunity to hear about and choose to follow Jesus. If there are evangelical Christians in those cultures, they are less than two percent, and so they need help from Christians of other cultures to evangelize their people group. According to the Joshua Project, there are 17,281 people groups on the earth. 7,246 of those groups, with 42.4% of the global population, are least reached.

As a people called to seek first God's kingdom, Christians participate in cross-cultural missions in two ways: They go, and they support others to go!

How might God be calling us to invest in heavenly treasure? Consider the ways we use our money, a part of our earthly treasures. Researchers tell us that Christians worldwide give less than two percent of

their income to Christian causes. Out of that, only six percent goes to international missions, but only two percent of money given for missions goes to reach those without access to the Gospel.

I have been inspired by Dave Matthews' story. After struggling to find a sending agency for Christians from Central America, he founded Reflejo, a Latino sending agency mobilizing Latinos mostly to Central Asia. Reflejo encourages local churches to invest in kingdom expansion, even when it is financially difficult. Yet they mobilize over 200 volunteers for local education and prayer in the Americas and missionaries to six countries. If they can do that with their limited resources, imagine how much more we can do!

## WILL GOD DO IT AGAIN?

Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) has sent thousands of missionaries around the world. We've done ministry in more than 100 countries. Through God's faithfulness, we've helped to multiply more than 20 mission movements. Now, we're looking to the future and asking, "Will God do it again?" We believe that God is doing it again, and He's calling us to share the good news with some of the three billion least-reached people around the world. The question is whether we're ready to join Him in this work ahead or not.

## EMM'S KINGDOM MULTIPLICATION VISION

In 2022, EMM set a strategic focus to identify, equip, and send missional leaders who invite people to follow Jesus and nurture communities of worship. We primarily focus on least-reached people groups of Central Asia, Central Europe, Southeast Asia, West Africa, and refugees in Lancaster, Pa. We count on our supporters to stand alongside us with their prayers and finances. We pray to God daily for more workers in his fields.

*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*Luke 12:32-34*

This Scripture invites us to remember that we have been blessed beyond our capacity to understand why. By getting on board with God's heart for the nations, we are indeed building a treasure in heaven that will never fail, not be stolen, not get rotten. Let's make sure our hearts are in sync with God's heart: that's where our treasure also will be!



Marvin Lorenzana is President of Eastern Mennonite Missions in Lancaster, Pa. Born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, he responded to a call, in 1994, to become a missionary in the United States. He has served as a youth pastor, associate pastor, senior pastor, and church planter in four states. He is an ordained minister of LMC. He now lives in Lancaster, Pa., with his wife, Mariana. They have two children.



## ABIGAIL: BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WITH A BEAUTIFUL MIND

**Y**ou will find Abigail's captivating story in 1 Samuel 25:1-44, NLT.

Abigail is unusually wise, winsome and beautiful in contrast to her arrogant husband, Nabal, who is crude and mean in all his dealings. His name means "fool." In southern Judah's region of Moan, Nabal has huge flocks of livestock including 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats tended by an untold number of servants. Being a wealthy Calebite, Nabal is loyal to the house of King Saul.

Abigail's world is shaken by the death of Samuel the prophet, which leaves a deep spiritual vacuum among the tribes of Israel. With Samuel's death, King Saul is unrestrained in his attempt to remove all imagined threats to his throne, namely David.

David is forced to flee with his 600 men to the wilderness of Moan near Carmel. He instructs his men to protect the shepherds and flocks of Nabal, thus

safeguarding Nabal's wealth. As the sheep shearing festivities approach, David chooses ten young men to convey a respectful message of peace and prosperity, while requesting that Nabal share his celebration provisions with David's army.

Sneering at the young men, Nabal shouts, "Why should I share my bread and my meat that I've slaughtered for my men and give it to some men, from who knows where?" In that instant, Nabal breaks two important cultural norms. He doesn't honor his guests, and he refuses to repay a debt to David's men for sheltering his flocks. He violates every form of Middle Eastern hospitality.

In the meantime, Nabal's servant reports to Abigail: "David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he screamed insults at them. These men have been very good to us, we never suffered any harm from them. . . . In fact, day and night they

were like a wall of protection to us and the sheep. You need to know this and figure out what to do, for there is going to be trouble for our master and his whole family.”

David is livid. Being an army general, he operates under the ensign of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” He instructs his men, “Get your swords,” as he straps on his own, vowing, “May God strike me dead if even one man of Nabal’s is alive by morning.”

Abigail wastes no time. Now thoroughly frightened, she supervises a huge wilderness picnic barbeque, packs it on donkeys and tells her servants, “I will follow shortly.” Slipping into her quarters, she likely donned her most elegant outfit to meet this warrior king-in-waiting, before galloping away on her donkey, bent on averting a bloodbath. She breathes not a word to drunken Nabal.

Abigail reaches the head of the pack animals in the nick of time as she catches a glimpse of David and his ominous army riding into the ravine. Sliding off her donkey and bowing to the ground before David, she gently speaks his language, referring to his conquest of Goliath: “Even when you are chased by those who seek to kill you, your life is safe in the care of the Lord your God, secure in His treasure pouch! But the lives of your

enemies will disappear like stones shot from a sling.”

For those of us who are Jesus’ followers, we can say with confidence that we are safe in the care of Christ’s love. Romans 8:35 promises that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from Christ’s love. Our inner being is secure in His treasure pouch.

You and I must not shrink from delivering God’s message of love. It is the most powerful weapon this world has ever seen, and the only one that heals instead of wounds. Sometimes we are prompted to speak by the Holy Spirit, and we must not waver when we have some wisdom to give, faith to share or help to offer.

Abigail displays the ornament “of a meek and quiet spirit,” yet does not hesitate to speak when needed. She pours oil on troubled waters and calms David’s anger, thus sparing him from the burden of guilt and revenge. He is forever grateful to her. If she had not intervened, a needless massacre would have occurred. In this scenario, physical lives were at stake, but if we don’t speak Christ’s love into the lives of others, eternal lives can be lost.

Questions for your consideration: What truth or insight has the Holy Spirit whispered to your heart through Abigail’s life? How will you live it out?



Idella Otto is an author and teacher of women’s Bible studies at Landis Homes. She is the wife of Dr. Emory Otto and the mother of two adults. She enjoys writing and reading historical Christian fiction as well as helping Emory tend their flower beds at Harvest View 001.

# PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED

**A**n old hymn speaks of “joys flowing like a river since the Comforter . . . abides with us forever and makes the trusting heart a home.”

As Jesus’ crucifixion neared, He was preparing the disciples that he would not always be present in person, but his absence would really be to their advantage. Also, he had much to teach them, but to tell all now would be overload!

John 16 records his words: “I did not say [everything] to you from the beginning, because I was [present]. But now I am going to him who sent me . . . Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go . . . , the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . . Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!”<sup>1</sup>

I believe we have much to learn about life in the Spirit. God’s voice may be experienced as still or small, but I think not always. When I am slow to respond, His voice may be rather loud – certainly, it is clear and oh, so important, that Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit to teach and be with his followers forever holds true for us to this day. The Holy Spirit also searches out those who are not yet believers in Jesus, a prime example of which I learned recently.

While reading the revered writings of the Hadith, a Muslim man took note that the prophet Jesus was very important and highly regarded, and also that he healed people and raised some from the dead. (The Hadith are written reports of what the Islamic prophet Mohammad said and did. They are not the Quran, the

Muslims’ most sacred text, but are, nonetheless, held in very high regard by Muslims.)

This man’s curiosity piqued, he searched the internet to learn more and, without the presence of any human helper by his side, came to faith in Jesus! That, my friends, is a classic illustration of the Holy Spirit at work in a place where there was no Christian to share the Gospel. It does not excuse us from sharing God’s good news where we are.

Just as Jesus promised, this man’s acceptance of salvation through Jesus brought him great joy and he thought, “Why keep this good news to myself?” So he told his family. They did not receive his message as the good news it is. He is alienated from his family, considered to be an apostate who left the true faith while we, with him, understand just the opposite. He has found Living Food and Water that satisfies our deepest hunger and thirst.

I can only imagine how difficult his experience must have been, but, again, the Holy Spirit was there and will continue to comfort and direct him. God knows his name and the struggles he faces

Jesus predicted such things happening, having told his disciples, “I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them” (John 16:2-4).

Join in praying for this man and his family, as well as countless others paying a big price to follow Jesus. God knows his name and the report is clear.<sup>2</sup> I’ve also read the biography of a man who is the lone survivor of

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1 All scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version.

2 This account is from my son, who has directly heard the man share his extended testimony.

a house fellowship in a predominantly Islamic country.<sup>3</sup> One of the 14 died a natural death, the other 12 were all martyred. Surely God invites us to bring for prayer our aches and pains, but let us also have a heart for brothers and sisters around the world—from Asia, the Middle East and certain African countries, and in particular, who suffer difficulties of which we know nothing.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, how blessed we have been from early years to learn of God's great love and Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation. We also praise you for your Holy Spirit, ever present and, with the hymn writer, invite your light and comfort to envelop us from above, to be our guardian and our guide and to preside over our every thought and step.*

*We confess that our thoughts may fixate on personal needs to the exclusion of prayers for your children suffering persecution. Bring them to mind for our prayers so they may*

*be comforted, strengthened and the body of Christ built up. For this man whose name we do not know, provide for his needs. Comfort him in this tribulation and reveal Jesus to his loved ones so they also may experience your great joy and peace. For your glory, work beyond what we even think to ask.*

*May your blessing also be upon our nation and world to pursue the shalom of God instead of war's destruction. Lead us as a community of residents and team members ever deeper into the way of Christ by listening for and obeying the Holy Spirit's still, small voice. Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly Dove. Without hesitation, may we obey your prompts. With gratitude, we pray in the strong name of Jesus for whom there is no east or west, no south or north, but one great fellowship of saints the world around. Amen.*

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### 3 A friend of my son.



Barbara Keener Reed learned about other cultures at nursing school at Lancaster General Hospital. Larger cultural learning awaited during Barbara and her husband Harold's fourteen-year assignment in Somalia. She is blessed with a family of four children, a granddaughter and two great granddaughters. She has published a memoir, *Standing on Holy Ground – and Some Not So Holy*.



## A CIRCLE OF BLESSING AROUND A CAN OF BEEF

**S**ixty-five years passed before the specific blessing cycled back to the volunteers in the butcher shop west of New Holland, Pennsylvania. Jesus expressed no time limits when he offered his comments on the twin “greatest commandments” in Matthew 22. In short form, Jesus invites his followers to love God and to love others. Embracing this ideal can yield blessings to all involved, sometimes many decades later.

Global tensions after World War II produced the Cold War, aligning the Soviet Union and the United States on opposite sides of a great ideological divide. Smaller nations sometimes served as surrogate combatants in hot war exchanges during this period. The Korean peninsula erupted into one such conflict within five years after the end of World War II.

Adults make the decisions to wage war. Children often pay a heavy price for such adult wars. The Korean War produced many children who lost one or both parents in the conflict. Workers with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Korea witnessed the

loneliness of many children who needed care. A school seemed to be part of the answer to the dilemma of displaced children. By 1953, the Mennonite Vocational School opened. Korean boys learned vocational skills in woodworking, metalworking, agriculture and other pursuits.

Nutrition for the children became a primary task. MCC supporters in the United States knew Jesus’ descriptions of the two greatest commandments. Surely, Korean children provided an avenue to love God and to love others. MCC’s portable canner functioned as a pathway between North America and Asia. The USDA-inspected canning factory on wheels invited many communities to donate meat and to volunteer to process and can the meat. Volunteers churned out thousands of cans of beef for use in Korea. Many Korean children enjoyed the protein coming from rural American communities.

Kwang Suh was one such child. The North Korean army whisked away Kwang’s father, a physician. Kwang never saw his father again. His

mother encouraged Kwang to seek an education. The Mennonite Vocational School provided such an opportunity. Kwang took the name David, finished school and eventually moved to the United States.

He worked in accounting and retail business for many years. As retirement approached, David and his Korean wife, Esther, decided to retire among the Mennonites in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. David never forgot the education he received at Mennonite Vocational School in Korea. Memories lingered of the savory beef he enjoyed coming from the cans wrapped in yellow labels bearing the message “In the Name of Christ.”

Sixty-five years after enrolling at the Mennonite Vocational School in Korea, David realized he was close to the administrative center of MCC in Akron, Pennsylvania. He sought an opportunity to witness the process of canning meat for MCC’s international

aid programs. So, one March day in 2023, David labored among the Amish and Old Order Mennonites to can meat just west of New Holland, Pennsylvania. Handling the cans produced a flood of childhood memories. He told stories to the other volunteers about the difference the canned meat made in the life trajectory of one Korean lad.

Neither David Suh nor any of the local volunteers he encountered knows who will receive the canned meat prepared on the portable canner in 2023. Everyone is aware that the two greatest commandments, loving God and loving others, can be contained in a tin can with a yellow label. They also now have encountered a direct witness of the difference such cans of meat can make.

Only God knows what stories may arise from current canning efforts, years from now, of this demonstration of loving God and loving others.



Ken Sensenig served as Church Relations Associate for Mennonite Central Committee East Coast. Before retiring, Ken served with MCC for over thirty-five years, including service in Swaziland and Sudan with his family. Ken displays a keen interest in the work of the church, having served on boards of several Lancaster Mennonite Conference institutions. Storytelling activities and projects on his little farm near Akron, Pa., occupy significant portions of Ken’s spare time. Ken and his wife, Karen, are parents to three adult children scattered across the globe.



## RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION

**A**s a pastor, I listened to people sharing hurts and pain. As a retiree, I still do! Phone, email and text make it so easy to communicate. Sometimes people just need a word of encouragement and a word of prayer on the phone. I listen and silently ask God to bring to my mind an appropriate scripture text that I can share and pray.

A couple of weeks ago, a friend was heavy hearted. As I listened to him, I thought of Psalm 51:12: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” But let me set the scene for you. In Psalm 51, King David sinned badly, and this Psalm is his recorded confession. In verses 7-13, David was overwhelmed with guilt. In Psalm 32 he talks about his guilt feelings and sadness. Certainly, unconfessed sin will rob Christians of their joy!

Going back to the conversation I mentioned earlier, it wasn’t about overt or unconfessed sin. It was the weight of the daily burdens of serving God, the

fatigue of spiritual warfare and the fatigue of being weary in well-doing. Have you ever been there? Serving God, and feeling like you are in a rut with no way out? That’s where this person was: fatigued, drained, sad.

But I believe David’s prayer in Psalm 51:12 fits this situation as well. Life is not easy. When our children are hurting badly, it is hard to have the joy of the Lord, even when the children are old. Family, church, pain or conflict can rob us of our joy. In such cases it is very appropriate to pray, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” Nehemiah said that the joy of the Lord is our strength. But if my body hurts, if my family hurts or if I have lost my spouse, how does God answer the prayer to restore my joy?

One way is that God the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind what you need. You may have seen me wearing an eye patch; I suddenly got double vision. It is hard to read, and I like to read. I wanted to be sad! God reminded me of some of His many, many blessings in my life, and my joy was restored.

I have a friend in a rehab facility near Philadelphia. When I texted him, I told him that my wife and I went to a Warwick High School marching band competition that our granddaughter was in. He replied with a joy-filled text, remembering his experiences with his family in marching bands. God gave him joy in the rehab facility as he remembered!

Paul told Timothy that God gives us a spirit of

self-discipline, and we need to exercise our minds with the help of the Holy Spirit and remember blessings. This is a major way God answers the prayer to restore the joy of our salvation. Of course, there are other ways He restores our joy, like looking forward to seeing Him in person! For whom can you pray Psalm 51:12 today? It might be yourself.



Andy Spohrer grew up in rural Maine and returned there after college in Philadelphia and seminary in Colorado to pastor three different churches for a total of 25 years. He and his wife were then called to do church planting in Ireland, followed by 16 years as a regional director for the mission and then ten years on the Board of Directors. They moved to Landis Homes in August 2021 when their daughter became a children's minister at Lancaster Evangelical Free Church.



## PLAYING MONOPOLY

**Y**ou would have to be hidden in a cave to miss the fact that we will soon have an election in this country.

We are discussing what kind of country we want, and who can lead us in that direction.

The way we interact prior to the election and afterward is a chance to reflect Landis Homes' commitment to Honor Lives. I list just four of the phrases which describe what Landis Homes is committed to:

- Embracing diversity and unique life experiences
- Creating an atmosphere of community
- Supporting individual choice and decision-making
- Genuine respect for each person

God hasn't told me to tell you which candidates God supports, but God has clearly told us the direction God wants our society and our world to go. God cannot be identified with the political system of any country nor with any political party, not even mine. God works through the kingdom of God that transcends and can transform all of our systems.

Micah 6:8 says:

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Let me begin with a parable I wrote that might put some legs under the concept of justice.

Playing Monopoly, the Parker Brothers kind, is fun. Besides throwing the dice, collecting the rent, and building hotels on boardwalk, we get to decide which risks to take and which to avoid. On the one hand, there is suspense and intrigue, and on the other, a safe predictability.

No matter who plays, male or female, old or young, bright, or dumb, selfish, or generous, if the rules are followed, every Monopoly game turns out the same. One player gets rich, and the others go broke. If one player is given more than their fair share of cash to start the game, that player most always wins.

As a game, Monopoly is a simplification of reality, and it focuses only on economics. But economic issues are incredibly important, and, along with race and gender, have a lot to do with determining who gets what and how much in society.

## HOW WOULD YOU PLAY MONOPOLY AS A CHRISTIAN WITH JUSTICE AS YOUR GOAL?

One approach would be to focus on issues of personal morality. Don't smoke or drink too much. Be honest. Don't weight the dice. Count the money correctly. Don't gloat as you collect rent or buy hotels. Try hard, but don't be greedy. Pause to pray as you pass "Go." Try hard even when you are losing. Maybe even forgive a rent payment now and then.

All of these things that reflect honesty and personal integrity are important but doing them is not enough to change the game. One player still gets rich, and the others go broke. Many of these values are actually necessary for the game to work. Cheating upsets the structure. And it is no fun if the people going broke quit and, like I would do when I was losing, push the board off the table and scatter everything on the floor.

Every parable must be interpreted. Playing Monopoly justly must include personal integrity for sure. But it must go beyond that. It must affect the rules. The rules reward accumulation, not sharing. The rules call for charging high rents even if doing so drives a player into bankruptcy. To be just, Monopoly would have to have rules that encourage sharing and more equitable ways to gain and distribute wealth.

Justice would require different rules to determine how money is earned and distributed. In the game of life, we are the players. The rules are the social, political and economic structures that affect everything: what quality education children get, where people live, what pay they receive for the work they do, whether they face discrimination, whether the legal structure is fair, what medical care they can afford, what jobs are available, and even whether they could live at Landis Homes.

The rules include government policies and laws as well as customs and culture. These can be and often are arranged to benefit those at the top. Or they can be made to serve the common good or even to give special help to people on the margins. There is something wrong with the rule that allows Lower Marion school district to spend \$17,409 on each student while Mount Union area spends \$6,324. Or with the rule that determines what an excellent elementary school teacher is paid compared to what a good professional athlete receives.

The social patterns we inherited from history affect where people live and what wealth and culture they have inherited. Patterns that benefit some and discriminate against others existed in history and still exist. We still suffer from the impact of slavery and voter suppression based on class and race.

Both sides of my family got land from William Penn and benefitted from unfair exchanges that pushed Native Americans off the land to make room for us. Where we live now at Landis Homes was once the home and hunting grounds of Native Americans. Forcing Native Americans to live on reservations was a huge injustice and is a dramatic example of how decisions in history still affect certain people today (actually, all of us).

Racism still exists on both personal and structural levels, as do injustices related to gender and religion.

I don't think feeling personally guilty for the past is particularly helpful, but it is wrong to refuse to acknowledge the way we as white people have benefitted from injustices of the past. And it is wrong to perpetuate the inequalities and injustices and racism that history has structured into our society. We must find ways to compensate for injustice and erase the structures that keep it alive.

God calls us to live justly and righteously. To do so begins with personal integrity and honesty. In our society, justice often requires living by different rules and changing those that do not promote justice. God calls us to find a way for everyone to win.

God's justice applies to all people, not just to those who believe as I do. Justice requires respecting the perspectives and rights of people of all religions and of people with none. If this parable is applied to the decision to vote, it would put the personal integrity and honesty of the candidates and advocacy of policies that promote social justice for everyone at the top of the criteria we use to make our choice.

Here are a few samples of how the Bible describes the kind of justice God wants.

Psalm 82:3 (NIV):

*Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold  
the cause of the poor and the oppressed.*

Deuteronomy 10:18:

*God defends the cause of the fatherless and the  
widow and loves the foreigner residing among*

*you, giving them food and clothing.*

Are those the refugees seeking a safe life among us?

Jesus began his ministry by quoting Isaiah. What he said is recorded in Luke 4:16-18:

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:  
"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me*

*to proclaim good news to the poor.*

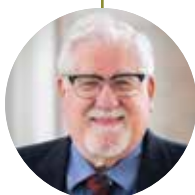
*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

It is the structuring of Jubilee, if you will.

Amos 6:8 says:

*But let justice roll on like a river,  
Righteousness, like a never-failing stream!*

The vision for what God wants is captured in the Lord's prayer. Let us pray.



John W. Eby has been a third-generation resident of Landis Homes since 2014. He served several terms and as chair of the Landis Homes Board and is currently on the Board of Landis Communities and Welsh Mountain Home. He has worked in mission and service programs in the U.S. and overseas and has taught at Eastern Mennonite College, served as Academic Dean at Goshen College, and taught Sociology at Messiah College. He attends the East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church. He was married to Joyce Rutt until she died of cancer in November 2012.

# HUMILITY AS A FRAME FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of the lectionary readings for today in Luke 14 includes a story in the New Testament that has often intrigued me. It catches Jesus playing sociologist, and of course that interests me since it relates to my study and teaching of sociology. He observes and comments on one of the organizing structures of society, social stratification.

The setting is a dinner party, apparently a prestigious one, at the house of a Pharisee. We don't know why Jesus and his disciples were invited given the many run-ins Jesus had with Pharisees. Apparently, Jesus and his disciples had strong relationships in the community.

The dinner was on a sabbath. Of course, no food could be cooked on the sabbath, and if food were kept warm, it had to be done in a way that it did not cook more. William Barclay comments that to keep the food warm it must not be put into oil dregs, manure, salt, chalk or sand whether moist or dry, or into straw, grape skins, flock or vegetables if they were damp. It may be put into clothes amidst fruits and pigeon feathers and flax tow.

The part of the story we will look at is preceded by an event that must have disturbed the host. It had the potential of ruining a good party. A man with dropsy appeared among the finely dressed guests. Dropsy would have caused grotesque swelling of his arms and legs.

I am sure most looked the other way because responding would be uncomfortable, and more significantly would likely violate Sabbath law. Not Jesus. He asked a loaded question. If an ox fell into a well, would they rescue them on the sabbath even though it would violate the law?

They recognized a trap, so remained silent. Jesus healed the man. Violating Sabbath law was not a great way to begin what was to have been a festive dinner.

But we want to look at what happened next. Here is the way Luke 14:7-14 records the event:

*When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the*

*place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

Jesus saw a problem with what others accepted as natural: a system of social stratification.

Not only then, but even today, people do all kinds of things to show that they are of a higher social class than others by all kinds of conspicuous consumption. I cannot understand why a person needs a multimillion-dollar house.

I think Jesus was showing his sense of humor by commenting (I think with a twinkle in His eye), If you really want the best place, start out by showing your humility and you might be elevated.

The disciples themselves were not immune from the temptation to seek prestige and honor. Luke records an incident in chapter 9 when the disciples were arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom Jesus would establish. Matthew and Mark report in their gospels that James and John asked to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus. Apparently, their mother was involved in that scheme too.

The desire for power and prestige is rampant in individuals and built into the structure of society. We know it well. Sociologists identify race, economic class and gender as key components of status systems. We all know the signs and where we fit.

Jesus' response to what he saw is countercultural. He says persons who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Furthermore, he advises the host to restructure his guest list not to have dinners that reinforce his high status but dinners that provide for the real needs of the least prestigious in society.

Luke himself would have had reason to emphasize his status. In contrast to the Jewish fishermen disciples, he was likely a Gentile physician who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys.

This simple story links with much other Biblical teaching which you know well. The Sermon on the Mount says, Blessed are the meek, and one of the fruits of the spirit is gentleness. Paul says that Jesus "though he was in the very nature of God made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant."

C. S. Lewis has an elegant sermon on humility and its opposite, pride. He writes:

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil:

Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.<sup>1</sup>

If this sounds like an exaggeration, it will help us to know that Lewis is not simply giving us his private opinion but summarizing the thinking of great saints through the ages.

Augustine and Aquinas both taught that pride was the root of sin. Likewise, Calvin, Luther and many others suggest that pride is the great sin and is the devil's most effective and destructive tool.

There are many ways to describe what humility is.

The Bible often links humility to trust in God and not relying only on our own understanding. It is considering the needs and interests of others along with our own and sometimes ahead of our own. It is said of Jesus that he humbled himself and became a servant. Paul lists humility along with compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience as virtues.

Solomon wrote, "Pride goes before destruction and

a haughty spirit before a fall."

Humility is not weakness, easy agreement or acquiescence. The Bible often uses the term meekness to describe the trait of humility. Both Jesus and Moses were strong powerful leaders, and both are described as being meek.

I would suggest that the lack of humility is at the root of the deep divisions in our country and in our church.

The title I've chosen for my comments this morning is, "Humility, As A Frame for Righteousness." A frame sets the perspective for the way we see things and the way we respond to them. We talk about "framing an argument." Art galleries put a lot of emphasis on choosing frames that enhance their paintings.

I think humility sets the kind of frame that Jesus used to approach issues and would want us to use to deal with the issues we face. It is a frame that helps us see how to work with each other to work at the complex issues that face our church and world.

I borrow extensively from a recent meditation written by Richard Rohr. He borrows from Bruce McClaren. I will suggest six characteristics of the kind of humility that sets a frame for dealing with the complex and troubling issues we face.

Humility is a frame for developing a sane understanding of ourselves

Paul writes in Romans 12:3, "Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought." J. B. Phillips translates that in a way that I like. "Have a sane estimate of your own capabilities."

I think that captures better a recognition of the gifts God has given us and the strengths and weaknesses we have, but warns against pride and the temptation to think we are self-sufficient and by ourselves know all that we need to know. Rick Warren said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

Humility is a frame for listening and learning.

Niels Bohr, the Nobel physicist, said, "We should believe so deeply in something that we would be willing to die for it yet be open to learn and change."

I think an appropriate sense of humility gives us the confidence to live by our beliefs and commitments, yet be open to learn and grow and respect others who have different beliefs and commitments. A humble

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1 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), pp. 109-112.

person will recognize that their understanding of truth is to some extent related to their experiences and to their culture. Another person might have different understandings. We might be warned by the fact that Jesus was particularly critical of the scribes and Pharisees.

Humility provides a helpful stance for change. The community and church I live in now is dramatically different from the one in which I grew up. Realizing that makes me more open to changes we face today. Our understandings change over time, and humility allows us to work with that.

It takes a gracious person to admit things have changed and to accept and support new ways of doing things, particularly in the church.

Humility is a frame for dealing with mistakes.

All of us make mistakes, small ones and big ones. A proud person will not acknowledge their mistakes and will develop elaborate excuses for why they are not responsible or accountable. They will lie about what they did and distort what they said to try to hide their errors.

It is a gift to be able to acknowledge past mistakes and accept the consequences and move on.

Because of mistakes they made, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land, and David was not allowed to build the temple. Both accepted this, and both supported those who followed them to accomplish what they couldn't.

A person who admits they make mistakes often finds they can more easily forgive others.

Humility is a frame for reaching out to others to find unity amid diversity.

Unity does not require uniformity. Humility makes space for dealing with a range of perceptions and different ways of understanding things. I wish there were some way for those of us with different perceptions and convictions on current controversial issues to work together. We need each other. The divisions in many denominations including my Mennonite Church are unfortunate. I wish there were a way for us to stay in relationship and respect our differences and learn from

each other. It is too easy and not reflective of Jesus' prayer for unity to separate when we disagree.

I have been around long enough to wonder if divisions really accomplish what is intended. I've seen groups who divide on one issue then divide again and again on other issues.

Humility is a frame for taking courageous action, even though chances of success are not high.

Jesus and Moses were both examples of this. Both are characterized as among the meekest persons who ever lived, yet both were powerful leaders and examples of courageous action. Not everything they advocated met with great success.

If we are honest, we will admit sometimes it is pride that prevents us from taking courageous action, if success is doubtful.

Humility leads to caring about the rights of others.

Rights are important and often come into conflict. A truly humble person will recognize the rights of others and often relinquish their rights to respect those of others.

I do mediations of community disputes. Often it is a stubborn insistence of perceived rights that causes the dispute and the animosity and hurtful actions that go with it. It is often the offer of one or both parties to relinquish rights that allows a resolution.

We began with the intriguing vignette of Jesus observing the guests vying for the best seats at a dinner party. At first glance that would seem trivial. It happens all the time. Seeking prestige and advantage is a common personal temptation and as social stratification is structured into our social systems to great harm.

Jesus saw in that incident the absence of a characteristic of the kingdom He came to establish. Humility is a characteristic we could practice more faithfully today.

He summed it up this way: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Amen.



John W. Eby has been a third-generation resident of Landis Homes since 2014. He served several terms and as chair of the Landis Homes Board and is currently on the Board of Landis Communities and Welsh Mountain Home. He has worked in mission and service programs in the U.S. and overseas and has taught at Eastern Mennonite College, served as Academic Dean at Goshen College, and taught Sociology at Messiah College. He attends the East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church. He was married to Joyce Rutt until she died of cancer in November 2012.



## WHEN DOORS ARE LOCKED IN FEAR

**J**ohn 20:19-31 tells the story of the disciples behind locked doors after Jesus is killed. This is a story about fear.

When I was a young adult, I lived with a group of friends after college. The house always had friends coming and going. When I moved to be closer to my work at Bridge of Hope, I rented an apartment by myself and for the first time in my life, I lived alone.

I struggled with fear. Some nights I was sure I heard someone coming into the apartment. I was locked inside my own apartment, with double locks on the door, and I knew fear.

Despite knowing I should trust God's presence with me, my fears seemed to get worse. One weekend I was with two dear friends, and I shared my struggles with fear. They placed their hands on me and prayed. That has been the only time in my life that I experienced immediate healing. I experienced the healing power of the prayers of friends that evening.

I understand fear behind locked doors!

In John 20, it is the evening of the first Easter.

And they are behind locked doors – in complete fear. There's no victory lap or joyous hallelujahs. There is just fear and locked doors. If the resurrection is such a big deal, why are they locked up in a room, full of fear?

What difference has Jesus' resurrection made for our world? Families I work with at Bridge of Hope are still homeless. Women are still locked with fear in violent relationships. Children are still experiencing intense fear as they flee their homes in war-torn areas of our world. The world is still hurting.

In John 20, the disciples are hiding out, in their time of intense fear. Jesus has died, they are starting to believe that this revolution of love has been lost in a hideous execution. They don't know who to trust so they huddle together and lock the door.

Consider for a moment: What do you fear?

We all have fears. Perhaps your fear is one of these:

Fear of losing a loved one

Fear of dying

Financial fears

Fears for God's beautiful creation  
Fear of being lonely  
Fears for your children and grandchildren  
I think of Amanda, a single mom in Bridge of Hope. She had plenty of fears:  
Fear of unemployment  
Fear of losing her housing and not having food to put on the table for her boys.

These fears had a grip on Amanda. Bridge of Hope was the fifth place she had called one day, pleading her case for help for herself and her two sons. She was living in a shelter and her oldest son, age 7, had changed schools three times in six months. She was pleading for something better for her children. Fear had almost immobilized her. She was experiencing panic attacks and struggled to breathe.

The first invitation in this gospel story, I believe, is to recognize and name our fear.

And the second invitation is to recognize Christ beside us.

In John 20, suddenly, Jesus is there, speaking gentle words of beloved-ness. Words like "peace be with you," and then breathing on them the breath of God, carry and sustain the disciples in the days ahead.

When Jesus says, "Peace be with you," He is offering peace to replace fear. He is offering shalom or wholeness. And He's offering peace at the same time he is showing them His pain - His hands and His side.

Peace in the midst of pain. Jesus knows our fears, our pain, our trauma. And Jesus is offering us something more than simple platitudes. Jesus is WITH US. Present.

Amanda tells the next part of her story this way: "When Bridge of Hope told me they would help me, I almost felt light-headed. It seemed too good to be

true. For months I had called everywhere for help. And now, suddenly, I felt a small glimmer of hope again. My Neighboring Volunteers from New Life Church surrounded me and just started pitching in. They drove me around looking for housing; they helped me move my bags from the shelter to our new apartment. They found me furniture and kitchen supplies and so much more. They were amazing. I felt like I belonged. And I felt loved for the first time in years."

Amanda's Bridge of Hope Neighboring Volunteers demonstrated Christ's living presence in the midst of her fears and pain.

What might Jesus be saying to you today, in response to the fear you might be experiencing? What is Jesus offering you when He says these words, "Peace be with you"?

The third invitation of this scripture is an invitation to unlock and open the door.

When the room we are in has doors that are locked in fear, what does this scripture say to us?

I think it is telling us that the locked door is the starting point. Opening the door can be the rest of our life, like it was for Thomas. If illness or disability or uncertainty are facts of your life, that's your locked door. And it's the place where Jesus has already shown up. The locked door is not the whole story. Jesus is present, and the door can be unlocked.

This gospel reading from John isn't just about a one-time event where the disciples recognize the risen Lord. It's also a vivid reminder that our Easter journey from fear to wholeness is a journey we take day by day.

In the days ahead, may we find ourselves free of fear and able to offer shalom and wholeness to those around us, our neighbors, and to all God's people everywhere. Amen.



Edith Yoder is the Chief Executive Officer of Bridge of Hope National. After thirty years with Bridge of Hope, she is more passionate than ever about demonstrating Christ's love to families facing homelessness. Edith holds a master's degree in Adult and Organizational Development from Temple University and a bachelor's degree from Eastern Mennonite University. She and her husband, Garth, attend Frazer Mennonite Church.



## LAUGHTER

*Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day!*

It seems appropriate to meditate about melting sadness, as the words of the hymn suggests, because sadness can hang over our heads like a cloud.

One way to melt sadness is to enter into the spiritual practice of laughter.

It seems that the act of laughing is equal to practicing love and peace and patience, and all the other fruits of the spirit because laughter is simply the physical expression of the fruit of the spirit called joy.

When was the last time we laughed a solid hearty belly laugh? Research shows that adults need 18 laughs a day for the well-being of their body, mind and spirit.

The Bible records that as Job was experiencing many days of distress, one of his friends shared these words with him, “God will once again fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy.”

Also, when God brought the Hebrews back

to Zion, after being captive and out of their normal routine, the psalmist wrote, “Then our mouths were filled with laughter, and on our lips, there were songs of joy.”

When we become distressed and out of our normal routine as happened to Job and the Hebrew people, may God also fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with shouts of joy.

It seems like it is time for a good laugh.

The function of laughter is not to make light of serious things. Laughter does not minimize the important work of grief and suffering. It becomes a tool to tend to that work more fully.

One writer says: “The function of laughter is to enable us to see life differently than we ordinarily do. It sometimes even helps topple the mighty from their thrones so that all of us become equal again.”

The Sojourners community in Washington, DC shared a story that reminds us of the importance of laughter for our spiritual survival.

It reads like this:

I remember Yvonne Dilling, a U.S. church worker who spent two years with Salvadoran refugees in Honduras, telling me about the structure in the refugee camps. As soon as the refugees began to make a new camp, they set up three committees. There was the committee of education and the committee of construction. And there was the comite de alegria, the 'committee of joy.' Celebration was as basic to the life of the refugees as teaching their children to read or building a latrine.

One refugee woman once asked Yvonne why she was so serious all the time, why she walked around looking so burdened down. Yvonne talked - as I am sure any of us would have - about the tremendous suffering of the people, the grief that she felt every day, and her commitment to give all of herself to the struggle of the refugees. And this woman looked at her and just said, "You're not serious about our struggle. Only people who expect to go back to North America in a year work the way you do. You cannot be serious about the struggle unless you play and celebrate and do those things that make it possible to give a lifetime to it."<sup>1</sup>

It seems difficult to imagine Jesus not laughing a bit when he picked up little children, when he went to

the wedding of Cana, when he told the stories of trying to take the speck out of someone's eye while one had a log in one's own eye or when he talked about a camel going through the eye of a needle.

One author writes, "Joy, humor and laughter are underappreciated values in the spiritual life. They are an essential element in one's own relationship with God."

How does melting sadness happen? It begins first by envisioning God as a God who smiles at us, one who delights in us, one who sings over us and even laughs with us.

Let us never confuse holiness with rigidity. Let us also never confuse humor and ridicule. Healthy humor and laughter cleanse the soul of tension; ridicule creates tension.

Throughout my professional life, I have been at the bedside with many families as their loved ones are dying and have often witnessed families telling stories that generate wholesome laughter. I've noticed how laughter becomes a balm for the soul in that moment. It melts some of the sadness and gives strength.

Let's consider making laughter a priority for the next week. It is not incidental to our spiritual journey. It is vital!

Hafiz imagined laughter as "a polestar that is held in the sky by our beloved God who eternally says, 'Yes dear ones, come this way toward me and my love.'"

*God, we pray that you will once again fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with shouts of joy. Amen.*

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1 Joyce Hollyday, "Gratitude." *Sojourners*, vol. 16, no. 6, 1987. Used with permission.



Ginny Hartman, a Landis Homes resident, thrives on her love of family and friends, nature, drama, writing, pottery, books, music, cooking, hospitality and all living creatures. She served professionally as a nurse for 45 years and as a chaplain for 15 years and offers compassion, listening and presence. Her life-long intention is to help others overcome the fear of being left alone and abandoned. Her essence is sustained by laughter, lament and prayer.



## *Closing Meditation*

# THE PRIESTLY BLESSING

*“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ‘the Lord bless you and protect you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.’ So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”*

Numbers 6:22-27<sup>1</sup>

**T**he prayer above was translated by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks from two tiny silver scrolls found in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1979. Written in the ancient paleo-Hebrew script (today’s Hebrew alphabet dates to the Babylonian exile), these scrolls are the oldest known biblical text, now on exhibit in the Israel Museum.

The first line of the prayer reads: “The Lord bless you and protect you.” Rabbi Sacks notes that *bless you* refers to “material blessings” from the physical world; and *protect you* is to prevent such blessing from becoming a curse. Moses clarifies (Deut. 8:11-17)

that material blessings may lead us to proud hearts that say, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth.” When we resort to such deception, God warns them and us that those who forget the Lord will surely be destroyed (Deut. 8:19).

As we reflect on our four years in Landis Homes, it is clear that we are here because of a lifetime of material blessing by our Lord Jesus Christ. As we look back, wise people in our work and church communities taught us to save, invest and trust God to provide our needs at each step in our journey. Living in Landis Homes is possible because those who founded it had

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Jonathan Sacks. *Covenant and Conversation – Numbers: the Wilderness Years*. New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2017. Other quotations by Sacks come from this book.

the same values, and founders have used those values wisely to create a place of safety and security accessible to us and so many like us who have given their lives for the work of the kingdom of God.

The second line of the prayer reads: “The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.” Sacks comments that Judaism is a religion of the intellect—debate and argument characterize Jewish spiritual leaders. They have debated the meaning and fine points of the Torah for a thousand generations, seeking to understand its truth. He concludes that we should “pray for spiritual leaders who have grace, loving kindness, and compassion.” Grace takes precedence over intellect; grace seeks the best in others, and seeks the best for others.

The leaders of Landis Homes from its founding, and in the present, have been spiritual leaders who show grace, loving kindness and compassion. Leaders at every level—executive, residential living, volunteer services, health care, maintenance, and many others—have sought the best for all who reside here and for those who are co-workers with them. At the same time, this community is one in which the leaders and the residents may debate and disagree without acrimony and toward understanding that is both intellectually and spiritually gratifying.

The final line of the prayer reads: “The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Rabbi Sacks interprets “the Lord turn his face” as may His presence be evident to you, and leave a visible trace of His Being that shows on “the face you show to others.” When God gives us peace (*shalom*), this peace is first “at peace with ourselves”—knowing that we are unconditionally

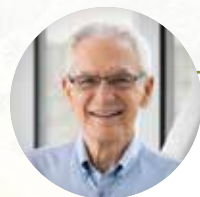
valued, and then showing that same peace and acceptance toward others.

Judith and I feel valued in this community, and we value others as we feel valued. We have been welcomed in spiritually nurturing fellowship groups. We have been invited to serve and have thrived in our service to others. We see the grace and love of Christ in the faces of those who offer loving service, and in those with whom we serve.

But there is more! Rabbi Sacks suggests that God’s intent for *shalom* in Israel and for all humanity is the “harmonious working of a complex system, integrated diversity, everything is in its proper place, and to which God’s law is antidote to chaos.” *Shalom* is “the thread of grace issuing from God, underlying and sustaining all things created by Him.”

Landis Homes is indeed a place of *shalom*—a complex system of integrated diversity, everything in its proper place, and to which the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the antidote to chaos which assaults individuals and the community in various times and ways. We marvel at how well the leaders and staff serve us residents and at how well we residents work together to serve one another.

“The Lord turn his face upon you and give you *shalom*” is God’s intent for all humanity, and God has made that possible through his beloved only son, Jesus of Nazareth—born of Mary, baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit, rejected and crucified by Jewish and Roman leaders, raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of the Father. We pray this prayer of priestly blessing upon the whole community of residents, leaders and staff of Landis Homes.



Sherwood and Judith Lingenfelter have been residents at Landis Homes since 2019. Sherwood is Provost Emeritus, and Senior Professor of Anthropology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., and Judith is Professor Emeritus of Intercultural Education at Biola University, La Mirada, Calif. Together they authored *Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching* (2003).