

Agenda Materials for the 153rd meeting of
Classis Lake Erie
of the Christian Reformed Church

to be held in Dearborn, Michigan, October 5, 2019, 9:30 a.m.

I. Reports for the Agenda

1. Stated Clerk (Ben Van Arragon, p. 3)
2. Executive Committee (President Harry Winters, pp. 3-5)

II. Ministry Committees

1. Specialized Ministries
 - a. Committee report (Nathan Gritter, pp. 5-8)
2. Leadership Development/Student Fund
 - a. Committee report (Forthcoming - Matt Ackerman)
 - b. Candidates: Bailey Sarver, Article 6 (Pastor, Campus Chapel); Brad Stolman, Article 6 (Pastor, Dearborn Christian Fellowship).
 - c. Colloquium Doctum: Rev. Sea Ho, Article 8c (Chaplain, All Nations Community Church)
 - d. Article 13c Loan: Rev. John Kim, Ann Arbor Hope CRC (p. 8)
 - e. Candidate Bios (pp. 9-10)
 - f. Candide Sermons (pp. 10-33)
3. Congregational Life
 - a. Committee report (Forthcoming - Chris Lanham)

III. Church Counselor Reports

1. Ann Arbor CRC (Ken Bieber – verbal at Classis)
2. Dearborn Christian Fellowship (Alex Snider – verbal at Classis)

IV. Grant Reports

1. Saginaw/Caring Closet (p. 6)

V. Denominational

1. World Renew (separate attachment)
2. Resonate Global Mission: Mark Van Anandel, Carla Bieber (Veenstra 100th report separate attachment).
3. Synod Report: Matt Ackerman and Alex Snider (verbal at Classis); official release (separate attachment).
4. Council of Delegates: Laurie Harkema

Other significant items will be added!

Covenant for Officebearers

(All first-time delegates to classis will be asked sign this document.)

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God's creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Stated Clerk's Report

1. Prepared and distributed the minutes of the March 3, 2019, meeting of classis.
2. Tended to various items of routine correspondence.
3. Prepared an agenda and minutes for the Executive Committee.
4. Consulted with congregational leaders regarding pastoral searches and transitions, candidate examinations, and other matters of church polity.
5. Prepared materials and made arrangements for the October 5, 2019, meeting of classis—this is a work in progress.

Executive Committee Report

Minutes – August 22, 2019

I. Attendance

Carla Bieber, Eunice Bossenbrook, Paul Bouman, Joe Creech, Alex Snider, Ben Van Arragon, Harry Winters

Ben opens meeting with prayer.

II. Continuing Business

A. Treasurer/Budget. Treasurer Joe Creech reports on latest quarter.

1. Treasurer Joe Creech reports on latest quarter as well as investment strategy for surplus funds. Eunice requests that concise descriptions of some Classis budget line items/funds be added to the budget document, and volunteers to collaborate with the Classis Treasurer to compose these descriptions.
2. Synod Stipend. The Executive Committee received a proposal to provide a stipend for elder and deacon delegates to Synod.

Motion: That Classis Lake Erie automatically provide a stipend of \$500.00 to all elder and deacon delegates to Synod *as an expression of Classis' appreciation for their service*; and that the Treasurer add the line item "Synodical Delegates Stipend" to the 2020 Classis Lake Erie budget in the amount of \$1,000.00/year. **Motion is adopted.**

3. Proposal for investment of Classis surplus. Executive proposes two streams of investment: a. Maintain "All Church Development Fund" specifically to make loans available for congregational building needs (e.g., renovations or mortgage refinancing); b. Adopt a version of the "Classis Lake Erie Mission Fund" to provide one-time grants to congregations for new ministry initiatives.

Motion: That the treasurer transfer \$30,000.00 into the All Church Development Fund to replenish funds recently loaned to All Nations Community Church *and* to maintain the All Church Development Fund using loan repayments from All Nations, Han Bit, and any other Classis loan recipients. **Motion is adopted.**

Motion: That a committee be appointed* to finalize the "Classis Lake Erie Mission Fund" proposal and application for presentation at the October, 2019 meeting.

Motion is adopted.

Motion: That the "Classis Lake Erie Mission Fund" be introduced as a permanent budget line item in the 2020 Classis Lake Erie budget, with an initial amount of \$20,000.00. **Motion is adopted.**

*Carla Bieber, Alex Snider, and Mark Van Andel volunteer to serve on the committee to finalize the Classis Lake Erie Mission Fund.

- B. Classis President/Vice-President. Harry Winters will serve as president at October, 2019 and March, 2020 meetings. Vice President Alex Snider will assume the role of President beginning in April, 2020. Volunteers for Vice President will be solicited during October, 2019 and March, 2020 meetings.
- C. Other CLE roles: Regional Pastors Update. It was agreed that an update is needed regarding Classis Lake Erie's program for Regional Pastors and Church Visitors. Ben will research and present potential models from other Classes.
- D. Congregational Updates. All Nations Community Church: was able to refinance their mortgage using loan fund from CLE. Cleveland Eastside: Harry will schedule a church visit with one of his elders. Cleveland Zion: Harry will schedule a mentor meeting with Rev. Kim. Dearborn: is scheduled to ordain new pastor Brad Stolman in November. Willard: is in pastoral transition, Ben will schedule a meeting with leadership there.

III. New Business

- A. Ecclesiastical Credential Transfers: Rev. Gerald Vander Hoek's credentials (emeritus) were transferred **from** Classis Rocky Mountain (April 2019); Rev. Terence Visser's credentials were transferred **to** Classis Alberta North (August 2019).
- B. Resonate Presentation Topics. Resonate Global Mission provided a list of topics for presentation at Classis. Executive Committee selected "International Ministry Partners" and "Developing Missional Leaders", and will request an additional topic: "Intentionally Multi-cultural Classes". **In addition**, the Executive will seek guidance from Resonate staff, including examples, regarding the kinds of ministry initiatives that could be supported by the new "Classis Lake Erie Mission Fund".
- C. Classis Lake Erie Clerk. Ben requested that Executive Committee members consider nominees to fill the role of Clerk permanently as he adopted the role on an interim basis and hopes to invest more time in the Regional Pastor/Church Visitors project.
- D. Classis Lake Erie Meeting Schedule. The Executive Committee discussed the implications of the recent increase in the frequency of ordination examinations on the scheduling and content of Classis meetings. It was also observed that Classis meetings have become characterized by the desire to complete "business"

as quickly as possible, leaving minimal time and space for fellowship and the celebration of ministry. Therefore:

Motion: That the following proposals be presented to Classis in October: That Classis Lake Erie meetings be scheduled on a weekday rather than Saturday; that, beginning in 2020, examinations be limited to the October meeting of Classis; that, beginning in 2020, the October meeting follow this schedule: Day 1: Classis Contracta for examinations followed by Classis retreat; Day 2: Full meeting of Classis for all other business. **Motion is adopted.**

IV. Preparation for October 2019 meeting of Classis (Oct. 5, 2019, Dearborn Christian Fellowship)

- A. Term renewal, Council of Delegates representative Laurie Harkema. Classis must vote to approve Ms. Harkema for another term.
- B. Examination/interview, Article 8 (Sea Ho); Article 6 (Bailey Sarver, Brad Stolman).
- C. Article 13c Loan (John Kim – Ann Arbor Hope, AACRC, Hebron Presbyterian Church).
- D. Report from Synod 2019 (Mark Van Andel, Alex Snider).
- E. March 7, 2020 meeting: Ann Arbor CRC.

Meeting is adjourned.

Specialized Ministries

Specialized Ministry Recommendations for 2020

<u>Ministry</u>	<u>2019 aid given</u>	<u>2020 request</u>	<u>2020recommended</u>
The Caring Closet	\$2000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Community Assist. Program	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Campus Edge	\$15,000	\$17,000	\$17,000
U-M Campus Ministry	\$15,000	\$17,000	\$17,000
Arab-Amer. Friendship Center	\$17,400	\$17,400	\$17,400
Cohort Detroit	N.A.	\$16,000	\$16,000

(Note: The committee recommends using some of classis' reserves to fund this new ministry Cohort Detroit)

Total:	\$55,400	\$76,400	\$76,400
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The Caring Closet

The Caring Closet is a ministry birthed through the combined efforts of Community CRC in Saginaw and Growing Years Christian Child Care Center in Saginaw. It seeks

to share the love of Jesus Christ with its community by giving away used clothing and food as well as spending time with those in need in the Saginaw area. The ministry prays for, fellowships with, and serves low income people in Saginaw.

2019 Funding: \$2,000 2020 Requested: \$3,000 2020 Recommended: \$3,000

Rationale: The committee sees this fruitfulness and efficient stewardship of funds in this ministry. In 2018, 17,495 clothing/household items and an estimated 23,414 food items were given away, serving 2,211 people (including repeats). The ministry is also integrating the Word through conversation, a prayer table and devotionals. A handful of visitors to the ministry have attended worship services at Community CRC. The increase in support will help the ministry to buy more food items.

Community Assistance Program

CAP expresses Christ's love through a witness of mercy to inner city Detroit by feeding the hungry and providing counseling, advocacy, referrals, emergency help and other acts of mercy to thousands of people every year.

2019 Funding: \$6,000 2020 Requested \$6,000 2020 Recommended \$6,000

Rationale: Classis Lake Erie and 1st Detroit CRC have historically supported this ministry to the poor in Detroit. Based on conversation with a board member, we see it wise to continue. In 2018, over 5,300 individuals received assistance (food, clothing, referrals, counseling). The ministry depends on our support as well as the support of CRC churches and individuals. The leader Michael (full-time position) ministers materially and relationally to people. He is well connected to the neighborhood. His mother helps as she is able.

CampusEdge Fellowship

CampusEdge Fellowship is a ministry to the graduate students, faculty, and staff of Michigan State University. Their mission is to provide a caring, Christian, campus community where passions of faith, learning, career, fellowship, and service come together and flourish. Brenda Kronemeijer Heyink is on staff.

2019 Funding: \$15,000 2020 Requested: \$15,000 2020 Recommended: \$15,000.

Rationale: We have historically supported this ministry and believe we should continue to, based on conversation with the ministry. The ministry has a special niche in ministering to graduate students. There is sufficient need to merit the increase as health

expenses have increased significantly and a part time staff member has been added. River Terrace CRC is very involved in this ministry.

U-M Ann Arbor Campus Chapel Ministry

The Campus Chapel ministry reaches UM students, faculty, staff and other interested persons in the Ann Arbor area. The Chapel hosts worship services, reaches out through discussion groups, lectures and seminars. This ministry also maintains a Christian study center, which is promoted among university faculty and students alike. Matt Ackerman and Bailey Sarver are on staff.

2019 Funding: \$15,000 2020 Request: 15,000 2020 Recommended: \$15,000

Rationale: We have historically supported this ministry and believe we should continue to do so. The chapel has various ministry activities such as worship, fellowship dinners, and one-on-one conversations with the chaplains. The reason for the increase is that the ministry has hired Bailey full time and some grant money will soon be running out.

Arab-American Fellowship Center

The Arab American Friendship Ministry demonstrates Christ's way and love to Arabs living in the US. Through English classes, citizenship classes and GED classes, the AAFC helps Arab immigrants to become acculturated to life in North America while creating opportunity to present Christ to Arabs. It gathers believers and inquirers into worship and Bible Study.

2019 Funding: \$17,400 2020 Request: \$17,400 2020 Recommended: \$17,400

Rationale: We have historically supported this ministry. We continue to see fruitfulness (including conversion stories) under the leadership of Dwight and Jean Billingsley. AAFC plans to use this money to fund Jean's position which is critical for reaching Muslim women. The ministry has significant financial needs. When these needs have not been met in the past, the leaders have received less salary. North Hills CRC is very involved in this ministry (financially and in volunteering).

Cohort Detroit

The committee interviewed Nathan Groenewold in July. He hopes to be ordained in the CRC very soon and oversee this ministry. This is a discipleship ministry where local and non-local volunteers pair up to serve Detroit in practical ways while growing spiritually along the way. It is an attempt to both learn from local Detroit leaders about ministering in the city and influence the city for God's kingdom. Resonate Global

Missions is behind this start-up. Mark Van Andel will help supervise Nathan Groenewold. The total budget is somewhere around \$100,000.

2019 Funding: N.A. 2020 Request: \$16,000 2020 Recommended: \$16,000

Rationale: The committee believes this is a good opportunity to put some of classis' reserve monies to use. We see it as a way to not only influence Detroit, but connect Detroit better to some of the CRC churches in the Detroit area and beyond. Nathan Groenewold will be the bridge between the churches and this ministry. Resonate Global Missions will provide accountability and oversight.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Gritter,
for CLE Specialized Ministries Committee
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Leadership Development

Article 13c: Rev. John Kim

"A minister of the Word may be loaned temporarily by the calling church to serve as pastor of a congregation outside of the Christian Reformed Church, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with the synodical regulations. Although the specific duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of doctrine and life rests with the calling church." (*Church Order*, Article 13c)

Rev. John Kim graduated Calvin Theological Seminary and was declared a candidate in 2010. After serving on Ann Arbor Hope's pastoral staff for three years, Rev. Kim accepted a call to serve Hebron Church (Presbyterian) in Prospect Heights, Illinois. Ann Arbor Hope agreed to "loan" Rev. Kim to Hebron per Article 13c. Classis Lake Erie's Executive Committee assented to include this matter in its agenda for October, 2013. However, due to some oversight, the matter was not processed at a Classis meeting. In summer, 2019, the Classis Lake Erie Executive Committee received material for an application to formalize the Article 13c loan arrangement from Ann Arbor Hope, Hebron Church, and Rev. John Kim. Should Classis approve this arrangement, and should our synodical deputies concur, the renewed loan arrangement will take effect from October, 2019 to September, 2021.

Candidate Biographies

Sea Ho

*Rev. Sea Ho is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Korea. He intends to transfer his ordination to the CRCNA via **Article 8c**. Rev. Ho is currently serving a Clinical Pastoral Education Residency at Virginia Commonwealth University. He hopes to be ordained as a CRC-endorsed chaplain; All Nations Community Church (Toledo) will hold his credentials.*

I was born and raised in South Korea as a pastor's kid. As a consequence, the church was my home as well as my playground, I spent lot of time in the church unlike any other Jack and Jill kids. My father dedicated me to God as a pastor before I was born without my permission, all my youth age I was struggling and resisting against it because I saw the parish ministry is really hard by seeing my father's ministry. In the high school age, I was doubting God's love and did not want to be involved church matter anymore, rather I wanted to play with other friends afar from the church. It brought out the discord between my parents and me, the relationship with my parents worsened day by day. Indescribably, however, God resolved my anger and restless resist, my eased and relived heart led me to the Christian college. After the graduation of Christian college, I thought I need more academic training in social science area to minister the parish better. It led me to be transferred to the secular college to learn Psychology. It helped me equip with the perspective to see the people in other way I had never thought. In the seminary, I could have a time to combine and integrated what I have learned from Christian college and secular psychology. After ordained from Presbyterian Church in Korea which is the leading denomination in South Korea, I was deployed to the military. The military service is mandatory for all Korean men but I took a test and elected as an officer. As an army chaplain, I could share the love of God to the militaries for three and half years. In the military, as an officer (Rank: Captain) I could develop my leadership skill and practice the psychological human resource management to take care of soldiers in my regiment by teaching, testing, counseling and ministering with the heart of shepherd. The pastoral method I had developed in the military, I applied it to my parish ministry in young adult group in Sarang Church, one of the biggest church in Korea. However, I realized that the parish ministry is not done by the method but by the heart and prayer. I humbly knelt down to the Lord and God restore me and transformed my ministry. Since then, my ministry became Jesus-centered, and it is the deep rooted core of my life. Four and half years later, I felt I need to develop myself, I applied for master degree at Calvin Theological Seminary. While studying at the Calvin, I had a desire to serve the U.S army as a chaplain. However, my visa status would not allow to achieve my aspiration. By the grace of God, I had a chance to obtain the permanent residency, I moved to Dallas for it. In Dallas, I found out the opportunity of CPE Residency, God allowed me this time and I serving patients at Baylor hospital as a hospital chaplain.

Bailey Sarver

*Bailey Sarver has begun serving her call as pastor at Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor. She will be examined via **Article 10**. Her credentials will be held by Ann Arbor CRC.*

Bailey Sarver is a native of Pella, Iowa and a graduate of Dordt College and Calvin Theological Seminary. She felt strongly called to ministry in elementary school, but it was the 90's so it's been a bit of a process. After graduating from Dordt she worked there as an Admissions Counselor and during seminary she also served as an intern in Campus Ministries at Calvin

College. Both of those experiences helped to clarify her sense of call and passion for serving young adults. She began her position at the Campus Chapel at the University of Michigan in the fall of 2018 and though she never expected to leave the wide open fields of Iowa, she is looking forward to continued growth, learning, and service at the Chapel in the years ahead. She also loves flowers, reading, coffee, and much to her surprise her cat.

Brad Stolman

*Brad Stolman has accepted a call to serve as Senior Pastor at Dearborn Christian Fellowship. He will be examined via **Article 10**.*

I was born and raised into a Christian home with two loving Christian parents. I grew up in Farmington Hills where I lived until college. I attended Calvin College where I studied Business Finance and minored in Religion & Theology. It was at Calvin where I met my best friend and beautiful bride. I have been married to my wife Lisa for sixteen years and we have four boys: Isaac (13), Andrew (11), Caleb (8), and Aaron (5). Upon graduating from Calvin in 2003, I began my career at Comerica Bank where I worked my way up through the branch management system until eventually moving over to Commercial Lending. Lisa and I voluntarily led the Youth Ministry at Dearborn Christian Fellowship from 2004 to 2007 until being asked to come on full-time at DCF in the summer of 2007. I worked as the Youth & Worship Director from 2007 to 2017 and added on the role of Family Ministry Direction from 2013-2017 before taking a leave-of-absence in order to continue my seminary studies at a full-time pace. Following the call to pursue pastoral ministry at DCF, I enrolled at Reformed Theological Seminary in August of 2016 and completed my Masters of Divinity in August of 2019. I love the gospel of Jesus Christ and see the local church as the hope for the world, since we are the vessel that carries the message of redemption. I look forward to the work God has set before me to lead a people to fulfill the Great Commission. To God be the glory!

Candidate Sermons

Bailey Sarver

Classis Assigned Sermon: Hebrews 4:14-16

Intro:

Just around this time every fall semester, church youth groups gather to kick-off their year. A staple and well love Youth Group Kick-off game is called Bigger and Better. It's a game that has endured the test of time...a game played in youth groups I've helped to lead as an adult and the youth group of my youth. The excitement at the beginning of the game is electrifying as the anticipation of the journey and adventure of what lies ahead courses through the energetic teens. It's a game that can even extract enthusiasm from the coolest and chilliest of adolescents. To start the game off, the larger youth group is divided into smaller sub-groups, rules and guidelines are established, a time of return is declared, and a small starting trinket is passed out...in my experience this starting item is often a penny or a paperclip. And then they're off. Students rush from house to house, trying to get something bigger and better than what they currently have. From a penny to a potato peeler to a stuffed frog to a framed and creepy painting, to a toaster, to a rocking chair, to a mounted taxidermied deer head. The game progresses and the groups rush to return and decide a victor. A year's worth

of bragging rights and glory are on the line. A youth group that I worked at in Grand Rapids had the prize winning items from up to 15 years back displayed all around their youth room...it was more than a victory, it was a legacy. When I was in high school, I remember members of one youth group reflecting on their previous night of bigger and better in the lunchroom, laughing about the expression of their leaders when they returned with their biggest and best item...a living and breathing chicken. They were clucking about the nutty guy they got it from, Dan Terpstra--who just so happens to be my uncle. Needless to say they won by a landslide. The other two groups old desk and old door didn't stand a chance against an actual critter. The notion of seeking something bigger and better isn't new, wanting the biggest and best is a pretty natural human impulse. And it's an impulse that the author of Hebrews clearly understands and seeks to address.

Page One: Trouble in the Text--Temptation and struggle are a very real and challenging part of the lives of these new Christians. Perseverance and faithfulness are challenging.

There are some things about the book of Hebrews that are shrouded in mystery. For starters, we don't exactly know who the author is. Some think it's Paul, and at the very least it's a pretty good Pauline knockoff. But there are some inconsistencies and some non-Pauline flair, so most scholars speculate that it was a companion, ministry colleague, or friend of Paul. Some believe it to have been written by Apollos, or Clement of Rome, or Luke the evangelist, or Barnabas...some even believe that it could have been written by Priscilla. The other area of mystery is the dating...the possibilities of when this book was written spans from the late 50's to the 90's. There's also the issue of genre, was it a letter or was it a sermon? Though these questions swirl about, one thing is very clear, the audience of the book of Hebrews was losing heart. They are having a difficult time maintaining their Christian faith and resisting temptations--one of the strongest temptation being to fall back into their Jewish way of life. It was familiar and comfortable, predictable and it offered a sense of belonging...it fit like an old sweater. By becoming Christians, these early believers were distancing themselves from their culture, their families, that old familiarity, and they were facing criticism, ostracization, and even persecution. Their lives had been up-ended by the gospel of Jesus Christ and they had endured a huge identity shift. They were beginning to grow weary, and starting to yield to the temptation--to bend under the pressure of it all. I mean, it seems reasonable. In the early season of Christianity struggle seems inevitable and it makes sense that as these new believers were beginning to take their first steps there were some missteps--when most of us take first steps faltering seems natural. These new Christians were getting scared, they were starting to think that life before Jesus looked a whole lot easier, a whole lot safer, and a lot more familiar. Not to mention that many of the pillars and faith leaders they had always looked to, always aspired to be like were Jewish. It felt to them like their traditions and heroes were gone, and the early Christian leaders they needed encouragement from could be kind of hard to track down. They were busy spreading this good news of the gospel to the far ends of the earth, and didn't seem to stay in one place for all that long. These new Hebrew Christians were deeply in need of a morale boost, of community rootedness, of someone to look to as they went through these struggles and felt like they were alone. They needed to know that they were loved by Jesus Christ and that he knew and understood all of their temptations and struggles. Our author seems to sense these struggles and is writing in the hopes that their morale and perseverance will be boosted.

That these new Christians will feel a new sense of solidarity with the one who came to save them.

Page Two: Trouble in the World--We face many forms of temptation and struggle today and can feel isolated and succumb to feelings of despair.

I've recently been invited into a new book group. This past week we had our first meeting, and as this intergenerational group of women sat around the table I felt lifted--being so close to these pillars of their church. As we took time discussing the book and talking about our faith journeys, Clara felt prompted towards a moment of deep reflection and vulnerability. Clara was sitting at the head of our table, her white hair neatly combed and her thin body relaxed comfortably in her wheelchair. Clara is probably between the ages of 75 and 82 and Clara has recently entered hospice care. She is dying of cancer. I was immediately more thankful to be in her presence and the space felt just a little more holy. But as we mulled over the question, "have you ever doubted that you are beloved by God?" Clara began to speak. She told us of a moment not that long ago when she began to weep in church, because she was tempted to believe that Jesus doesn't love her. I mean, she wondered how could Jesus love her...aside from the issue of her very natural and human flaws, she was dying of cancer. Surely Jesus doesn't love her if she's dying of cancer. Surely Jesus had neglected her. The temptation to turn her back on her faith and doubt Jesus and his love was so strong--Clara had grown weary and tired from trying to keep her chin up, from battling to stay well, and from working to maintain her faith. She had been a pillar for so long, and she was starting to crumble from the weight of carrying it all.

And though most of us here sitting in the Chapel haven't battled diseases like cancer personally, all of us have felt temptations in some sort of way. Many of us have probably been powerfully tempted by doubt and despair. Many of us have probably been tempted by greed or jealousy. Temptation is such a strong part of the human experience, and though everyone experiences it at some point and to some degree it can make us feel so alone and isolated. Temptation conceals the truth, it leads us to believe lies. But a sense of temptation is real nonetheless and I don't know a single person who hasn't experienced temptations allure or pull in some capacity. We aren't all tempted to or by the same things, we likely all know the intense pull of some sort of temptation. We can be overcome and tested by our human weaknesses.

Page Three: Grace in the Text--Jesus knows what it's like to be human, to struggle with temptations but Jesus also overcame sin and now advocates on behalf of these new believers.

But in the midst of the audience of Hebrews being tested, in their moments of being tempted away from their faith the author of Hebrews writes a strong encouragement to bolster the faith of their audience. The author wants the audience to know that though their struggles and temptations are powerful, Jesus Christ is more powerful. Jesus himself was tempted and tested, and he overcame. Jesus Christ became fully human, he lived a human life, and experienced very human hurts, struggles, and temptation. Jesus knows what it's like to experience being tested--by glory, vanity, doubt, pain, feelings of abandonment, and trials. But Jesus was more powerful, he didn't fall prey to these temptations but overcame them. So he gets it, he understands it, but he gives hope and power in the midst of it. The author is proclaiming to the audience that they should hold on to hope and to faith--not because of fear or because of tradition, not simply because it's all that they've known and all that their friends and family believe, but because of Jesus, because of the goodness, love, and

mercy of Christ. And not only did Jesus understand it and overcome it, Jesus ascended into heaven. He didn't simply go past the veil in the temple like the High Priest of their old tradition did, Jesus went past the veil and into the heavens and sits enthroned. Jesus didn't just make a sacrifice for atonement, Jesus became the sacrifice. Jesus is not simply of Aaron's priestly line, but Jesus is the son of God, not just available to make a sacrifice on a special day once a year, but he made the sacrifice once and for all and continues to be present and available to those who believe in him. The author of Hebrews is trying to convince their Jewish audience that Jesus is who he says he is. That Jesus is the Son of God, the one who came to seek and save the lost, the one in the line of David, the promised Messiah, the one who fits in at the end of a list of greats as a fulfillment of all of their hopes and prayers. And Jesus promises to be with them, to draw near to them, and to offer them comfort.

Page Four: Grace in the World--Jesus knows our struggles, and is with us in the midst of them...we can turn to him and have confidence in his grace and mercy in our time of need.

And these are promises that Clara was powerfully reminded of. As we sat together in the church basement gathered around a table, Clara was telling her story as her blue eyes sparkling with tears. Clara shared that as she left the sanctuary that Sunday morning, weighed down by temptation and doubt, she was greeted by Mary in the back of church. Mary was another pillar of the church, a peer and a friend, and a cancer survivor. Mary looked at Clara and in that moment, knew what Clara needed. She knew the depths of Clara's grief and despair, of the troubles and temptations. Mary grabbed her dear friend's hands and said, "Clara, I know it hurts. I know it's dark. I know you have so many questions. But I also know that Jesus loves you. You are his beloved and he knows you by name. And to be known by him is the best. You may not always feel his presence, but he is with you. In days of delight and days that are dark. Jesus knows, cares, and loves you. Jesus is the best." And Clara said that was the affirmation and reminder that she needed from a person who knew what her struggle was like. For Mary, a cancer sufferer like Clara, to take the time and proclaim the primacy and love of Jesus Christ, reassured Clara and helped her to fight her temptation. But better than having friends who understand our struggles and temptations, a true and powerful gift, we have a savior who knows our struggles and temptations. A savior who does not walk away when things get hard, but is present with us in the darkness. A savior who suffered loss and experienced death. A savior who knew isolation and fear. And also a savior who is bigger and better than any other human advocate we could know. A savior who is present and available to us, and though he understands and experienced the difficulty of the human condition, he overcame all testing and now is with God sitting before the throne and advocating on our behalf. Even in our most difficult days, we are reminded that we can approach the throne of God with the promise that we will find Christ's mercy and grace to help us in our times of need. Through Jesus Christ we aren't offered forgiveness alone, but forgiveness and help to weather whatever may come our way from a God who understands and knows our struggles and loves us powerfully through them. Jesus is the biggest and the best, a present comfort in our time of need, the high priest of high priests, our companion, friend, and Lord. Thanks be to God.

Bailey Sarver

Old Testament Sermon: Jonah 3

Introduction:

I probably...ok I absolutely watch too much TV. And it's pretty much impossible for me to pick one absolute favorite TV show, there are just too many good ones to choose from. However, I do feel like my taste in television is fairly consistent and if I could choose any genre to pick a show from over and over again, I would likely pick a dramedy. I mean, it's just the perfect fusion of drama and comedy. Like *Jane the Virgin* for example, it's a delightful and popular modern dramedy...I would even dare to bet that there are several folks in this space that also have a fondness for the quirky show. *Jane the Virgin* is a riff off of the telenovela and it is full of unexpected twists and turns--there's a charming, witty, and all knowing narrator, spontaneous and perfectly choreographed dance numbers, light hearted jokes, excruciating losses, romantic bliss, devastating break-ups, vivid daydream montages, diabolical plots gone awry in a good way, pure and good-hearted plans with horrible and unfortunate consequences. There is victory and defeat. It is pure delight and suspense. It's completely over the top and it often feels as though no matter what the characters do or don't do, no matter the maniacal actions or their angelic intentions, there's a plan that's already unfolding. There are forces that are greater than they are. And if ever there was to be a Theo-dramedy of Biblical proportions, I sort of feel like *Jonah* would be it. So, we're going to approach *Jonah* like the divine dramedy that it is, and we need to start off with a quick recap of the previous episodes...errrrr chapters events...

When the word of the Lord first came to Jonah, the son of Amittai the Word gave Jonah a task that he was not willing or prepared to do. So Jonah rebelled, he ran, he boarded a ship headed to Tarshish...essentially the ends of the earth and as far away as he could get (so dramatic). But AH! The plans of the Lord would not be thwarted by this wayward prophet and before Jonah or his travel companions could brace themselves, an epic storm rolled in and overtook their ship. And in a move of desperation, after proclaiming the Lordship and power of the Almighty God, Jonah willing surrendered and was thrown overboard by the crew. He was going to get away from God and God's impossibly difficult task one way or another. But AH! Again, something Jonah did not see coming (though something we might have seen coming--I'm sure few of us have heard this tale a time or twelve). A great fish came and swallowed him whole. And there our prophet wallowed for three days, deep in his fishy pit of despair, sloshing around with other recently consumed fish food. Stinky! While saturated in guts, Jonah forces out words of gratitude, thanking God for his life and acknowledging God's power and providence. The sentiments made the fish nauseous (joking) and he upchucked Jonah onto dry ground and that's where we encounter him today...

Page One: Jonah's minimal effort and resistance to obedience

So here sits our prophet, soaking in fish vomit, tangled in seaweed, and seeing the bright light of the sun for the first time in three days. Yeow! That's bright. He's breathing a heavy and fittingly dramatic sigh of relief, he's so happy to no longer be bouncing around in a fish's belly. But here we go again, the word of the Lord comes to him a second time. Jonah bristles at the sound. "Get up. Up with you! Go to Nineveh, that great city and proclaim to those people the message that I tell you." Mustering all the strength Jonah can find, he gets up and starts off towards Nineveh...concealing his slightly resentful eyeroll. He's tired from his nearly unbelievable journey and he still isn't happy about the task that lies ahead. Jonah approaches the gates of the city and reads the town's welcome sign, "Welcome to Nineveh...what we do here is Nineveh ya business. Population 120,000. Days it takes to journey across the city: 3." "For heaven's sake," Jonah mumbles "That's a waste of time and effort for a whole lot of people I

really don't like. I think a one day stroll should suffice." So Jonah plods his way through less than half of the city, and in five hushed Hebrew words Jonah forces the message out of his mouth, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." He finishes his message and looks around in desperation hoping no one has seen or heard him.

So Jonah, our dear prophet is disobedient and begrudging...and when he does finally relent, he does the bare minimum. He does what he promised God he would do, but he's almost like a child with his fingers crossed behind his back and looking for any loophole imaginable. "I'll do what you want God, but I don't have to like it, and I don't have to do a good job." It kind of reminds me of my seventeen year old sister when my mom asks her to clean the bathroom. "I'll do it, but you're not going to like how I do it, and you might even regret asking me to do it. And you'll probably have to do it yourself in the long run" Jonah wasn't burning with passion stoked by God's instruction, he wasn't willingly obedient or enthusiastically evangelizing. Jonah was compliant...barely. Jonah was stingy and selfish, he didn't want to share God's grace with THESE people. He had heard the word of the Lord...two times, experienced a storm stirred up by the divine, and spent three terrifying days in the belly of a fish...and yet he couldn't make peace with what he was called to do. Jonah was still so focused on his own plan and on his own feelings that he was holding back on God's calling.

Page Two: Our minimal effort and resistance to obedience

Most of us have not been directly addressed by the word of the Lord and told to go and evangelize to our dangerous, blood thirsty enemies. But there are many ways in which we defy the will of God. Ways in which we do not want to be formed and shaped by the heart of Christ. There are times when we can't be bothered to actually engage with our faith or live in the ways the Bible commands. There are days when it feels like what we're saying to God is, "I believe in you, but you're not going to like what I do." Obedience and repentance are hard. They can feel defeating and pointless. Changing our actions, living in ways that feel counter-intuitive, constantly asking for forgiveness even when we don't want to...it's hard. So sometimes we put in the minimal effort, barely scraping by. We pray before meals, we make sure to attend worship from time to time (though we watch the clock tick by the entire time), we throw a few bucks in the offering plate as it passes (out of obligation, not gratitude), we maybe even open our Bible once or twice on our own...We don't necessarily HATE our neighbors but we sure as heck don't love them...in fact we maybe even feel satisfied when unfortunate things happen to them, we don't steal items when we go to the store but we don't use our time wisely or stewardly at work, that piece of gossip we shared wasn't exactly and lie though it was maybe a stretch, I'm not content with the things that I have but I wouldn't say I'm exactly jealous of anyone...this list could go on and on and it isn't meant to make anyone feel bad. We all share in this sin. It's difficult to live into God's call on our lives. It's difficult to give grace to others even though so much grace has been given to us. Some of us aren't guilty of putting forth too little effort, but sometimes we maybe put forth too much. We fall into this false assumption that everything is up to us, that if we just keep the letter of the law and if everything remains in our control, all things will be fine. Sometimes trying to live in ways that seem consistent with the gospel call feels nearly impossible, we feel like too much or too little. We're either overwhelmed with it all or find it impossible to surrender. Living faithfully and obediently is really difficult.

Page Three: God is gracious beyond our comprehension and accomplishes God's plans

Jonah, however, was not one to put in too much effort...he was going to keep his end of the deal nothing more, and nothing less. And he is quite satisfied with lackluster testimony. Surely no one heard him, and if they did they will absolutely dismiss him...after what he's weathered in the last several days he certainly doesn't look like the most reliable source. He didn't even bother to shake off the seaweed that was wrapped around his ankle. But Jonah is in

for a whole of a surprise. Through this half-hearted evangelism God produces a whole hearted response. The hearts and minds of the people of Nineveh are stirred and transformed. Jonah's revival is one that would make even Billy Graham jealous. Not only had the sailors on the ship Jonah was tossed from been transformed, now an entire city of 120,000 people are coming to know God. And even the King hears the message of our perturbed prophet. The monarch enthusiastically repents-- with a flair for royal drama he rises from his throne, removes his royal garments and covers himself with sackcloth and ashes. And to be sure that his sincerity is known he goes as far as proclaiming a citywide fast--where no human or beast is exempt. Even their animals fasted! That's crazy...and dramatic. I mean, have you ever tried to keep a horse or cow or goat from grazing? It's infuriating! So everyone commits to abstaining from eating and drinking and to be covered in sackcloth and ashes and to cry out in deep remorse with the abiding hope that God would change God's mind and relent. And that's exactly what God does. When God sees their desperate pleas, when God hears their remorseful cries, God decides to spare them and to not bring calamity upon them. However, Nineveh as it was in a sense is destroyed. The radical transformation of the city makes it into something so utterly different than it was before. The grace of God transforms it. Even Jonah's half-hearted, begrudging, defiant, childlike prophecy was used in a way that makes him one of the most effective prophets in the entire biblical canon.

But the Ninevites weren't the only ones that were receiving a second chance. We so often overlook the fact that Jonah too was getting a do-over. That Jonah also had a front row seat to the awesome and powerful work of God, and yet his relationship to God's grace was pelted with a bit more resistance and maybe even more resentment. But God uses him anyway. Jonah was no obstacle, no roadblock for the lavish and surprising grace of God. God's compassion to Nineveh is surprising, but so is God's compassion to Jonah. God's grace can be poured out both on and through broken vessels. God makes the weak strong, and the strong weak. We focus so much on human action, often while forgetting or glossing over divine grace and action.

Page Four: God is gracious today, extending his love and mercy beyond where we can see and sometimes even beyond where we hope

But you see, Jonah isn't the only one who struggles to understand God's grace. We all struggle with it. It doesn't make sense to us. God's grace is so wide and so deep, it's outside of human comprehension. It defies all human logic and understanding. We try to put restrictions on God's grace, we try to earn God's grace, we try to squelch God's grace, and none of it can be done. Because God can and will work both on and through broken vessels. God's all powerful life-giving grace can even be shared in the most lack-luster lifeless of sermons. Which, may I just add that as someone who prepares sermons semi-regularly this is both a humbling and merciful revelation. I, like Jonah, can and will get it wrong, but we know that God is still active and present in the world around us and in our lives. So try as much as I do, whether I put in too much effort or too little, I'm called to be faithful and to trust that God is active, present, and powerfully extending God's grace. Sometimes I wish I had come to grips with this years ago, I maybe would have thrown-up less before preaching some of my early sermons. But all that aside this text is a reminder that God is willing to love everybody, and God will whether we're on board or not. God loves you, and me, God loved Jonah and the historical Nineveh, and God loves our present day Ninevehs. And sometimes there's great difficulty in telling ourselves and accepting that this great grace is true. We need to believe it, and cling to it, and know that it's for us and for everyone else. This text assures us that in our weakness God is strong, in our stubbornness God is patient, when we are selfish and stingy God is generous, when we are tired and running out of steam God is there with us, when we falter and fail God can pick us up and does work through our failures, when we see only a sliver God sees the entire picture. Brothers

and sisters, this divine economy of grace is so far out of our comprehension, that like Jonah we may struggle to make sense of it and sometimes we may not even like it. However we can rest in the assurance that whether we understand it or not, God's grace was real and present to Jonah and it's real and present today-- though the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit God's grace continues to be poured out today and everyday, in our strengths and our weaknesses, in places near and places far. Thanks be to God.

Bailey Sarver

Catechism Sermon: Lord's Day 42; Exodus 20:15

Good morning. We're on the eighth week of our current sermon series called Christ and the commandments. We are journeying through the ten commandments, viewed through the lense of Christ, and aided by one of our traditions most important documents, the Heidelberg Catechism. As we encounter the Ten Commandments it is essential to remember that the commandments were given to the people of God after they had been freed from slavery in Egypt. They received these commandments while they were making their journey through the wilderness on their way to freedom in the Promise Land. These ten commandments were then and are today, signposts guiding the people of God to freedom and fulfillment in God. As we read and work through the ten commandments, it's also important to remember that not only are they our guide to free, godly living, they are also the best way for us to respond with gratefulness for the grace that God has given to us. We are no longer bound to the law like the Israelites were, because Christ fulfilled the law with his life, death, and resurrection. We do, however, keep the law because it is the best way for us to show God our love, and that we are thankful for all that God has done for us. God's grace and forgiveness are a gift, we do not and cannot earn them, but we must live in response to them.

Some of the commandments we've tackled have been long and detailed, others short and seemingly to the point. This is another seemingly "shorter" one. Please read along with me...[read text]

At first glance this commandment seems fairly simple and concise. Now, I don't know about you, but when I think of stealing, I immediately think of the theft of a material object. Seems pretty obvious. Simply put, it is when we take something tangible, an object or good, that does not belong to us from someone or something, and make it our own with no intention of returning it. I'll never forget, when my sister and I were kids...she stole something. There was this bracelet at a store in our small town that she went to visit with my mother. The bracelet had pearls and rhinestones, and as a bright-eyed four year old, my sister already had a strong desire for the finer things in life. But there was no way my mom could or would purchase it for her. While my mom shopped the store for clothing, my sister stared at this bracelet and longed to have it as her own. She was enchanted by it. A few days later...while my sister was at preschool, my mom found the bracelet in a crumpled bag stashed under my sister's bed. I will never forget my mom confronting her and then making her return the bracelet...upon entering the story my humiliated and stubborn sister brought the bracelet back to the counter while she resentfully, and less than sincerely apologised. After they left the store and the whole ordeal was over, my mom was actually somewhat annoyed. The ladies at the store were far too nice, they forgave my sister without instilling an ounce of fear, and told her to come back anytime. My mom was worried that if my sister was let

off the hook too easily, she would eventually have a budding kleptomaniac on her hands. My mom was worried that my sister had not been as convicted of her sin as my mother thought she should have been. I was in first grade and remember being shocked, and quite self-righteous. How could my sister do such a thing? The Bible clearly says that stealing is wrong.

Theft is tempting when it comes to acquiring things that we want, but it can be even more compelling when it's the easiest, or seems to be the only way to get things that we need. I know some of you struggle with finances. When I was growing up my family also struggled financially and sometimes my parents had a difficult time putting food on the table. Theft can be most enticing when our needs are great, when there doesn't seem to be enough simple necessities to get by day to day. In the well known story of Robin Hood, the hero of the tale is idolized for stealing from the rich, the greedy and sniveling Prince John, and distributing the funds to feed and help the poor. Seems innocent enough, even admirable. Some of us, dare I say most of us, steal with far less "benevolent" intentions. We steal because of the high it brings, and the rush that comes from breaking the law. It can be intoxicating and it doesn't seem to harm anyone like drug or alcohol use does. It's a relatively innocent "high." Especially if we are stealing from someone who has a surplus of goods and will never even have a clue anything is missing. But theft, just like any sin, is not and never will be a victimless or innocent crime. When theft is committed it hurts the person, business, or corporation that the object or goods are stolen from. Whether they are wealthy or poor, whether it's a big box store or a ma and pa shop. Whether they're aware of it or will never even notice. Theft is harmful and offensive. And not just to the person or corporation it's committed against. It hurts the individual that is doing the taking. It numbs us to our sin, and makes us think that it's ok...and it's not. It's also hurtful to God and destructive towards our relationship with God. It's rebellion against God and a lack of trust in God and all that God has promised to provide for us. It's saying to God that we don't believe that God will care for our needs, and that God does not satisfy us. It's selfishness, rebellion, and dissatisfaction.

If the Ten Commandments aren't clear enough, The Heidelberg catechism is even more clear, that stealing and theft are wrong, but that they are not limited to the taking of physical objects.

HC:

Q & A 110

Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law. But in God's sight theft also includes all scheming and swindling in order to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves, whether by force or means that appear legitimate,² such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God.

In addition God forbids all greed and pointless squandering of his gifts.

So, not only does God forbid us from unethically taking goods and cheating people out of resources, we are also to abstain from squandering and wasting the goods and gifts that God has given us. This can be physical objects and financial or natural resources, as well as talents and skills he has blessed us with.

Q & A 111

Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

A. That I do whatever I can for my neighbor's good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need. With these two questions and answers, this seemingly simple commandment has just been blown out of the water and made rather complex. This is convicting. It was so easy for me to point my finger at my sister earlier, but this is where I am confronted with many of my own struggles. You shall not steal isn't merely limited to the stealing of physical objects, but it's also meant to root out our selfishness and compel us to use our gifts wisely and seek the wellbeing of others. Not only does it tell us what not to do...it gives us encouragement and guidelines for living and loving well, and caring for others as God has called for us to. As I prepared for this sermon, I thought of the many ways we steal from God in a less obvious manner. Ways that are sneaky and at first glance don't seem so bad. Being lazy and selfish with our time and gifts, actively making the choice NOT to use our talents in service of the kingdom and others. Theft of time, when we milk the clock at work or when we do tasks while on the clock that should be reserved for our personal time. I have been incredibly guilty of this. When I worked at a coffee shop this was a huge problem of mine, I'd stand around and talk to my friends when I should have been bussing tables or making lattes. I was stealing from my boss because I was making money but I was not doing the job I was hired to do, I was harming the customers, they weren't being served as well as they should have been, and I was damaging myself by not honoring God's command to steward time well. I was knowingly being dishonest. And the more I did it, the more numb to my sin I became. Other ways we steal are when we take time that should belong to our friends and family, or our children, and spend that time on our work or with our addictions. Also, taking money that belongs to our God, and using it for our own personal enjoyment and security, by not tithing or spending money selfishly and foolishly. Taking answers off of a friend or classmates test or assignment and using them as our own is an all too common means of stealing. And gossip. Has anyone here ever thought of gossip as theft? It is. It's the taking or thieving of someone's reputation. It's wrong, it's sinful, it's breaking the eighth commandment. Now, I would be hard pressed to find a person in this room who hasn't broken the eighth commandment in some way, shape, or form...myself definitely included. I often think this is one of the more sneaky sins, because the words of the commandment are so simple. But the problem is so complex. However, shining light on these things isn't meant to drive us into a paralyzed state of shame, even though sometimes it does. These words are convicting and they are meant to compel us forward in goodness, truth, and compassion, again guiding us towards holy and grateful living. A way to flourish as followers of Christ. A way to acknowledge that Christ has atoned for all of our sins, so we don't live with the shame of all the ways we fall short, but are guided by gratitude for Christ's mercy and grace. For each of the answers written in the Heidelberg Catechism there are footnotes; scripture references that inform the reader as to how the author formulated the answers. One of the footnotes from today's questions and answers comes from Luke 6:27-36. Please feel free to follow along silently while I read the scripture aloud. The title for this section is called "Love for Enemies."

SCRIPTURE:

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone

slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

I can't help but think, Uhhh...excuse me Jesus, but I don't really like this advice. I can handle stealing being a choice or sin I actively make, actually taking something that does not belong to me or even choosing squandering my gifts. But this takes it to a whole new level. Christ is concerned with justice and caring for others, and as his followers we should be also. We should be actively seeking out to serve and work towards the wellbeing of our neighbors, being agents of peace and restoration for anyone we encounter. And when we don't actively seek the good of others, when we allow fellow image bearers to be marginalized, oppressed, or exploited, when we turn our backs and ignore their troubles, we are breaking the eighth commandment...we allow their identity to be stolen from them and do not giving them the dignity we are called to give to them. As Christians, we should be imitators of Christ, conducting ourselves as much like Christ as possible, this means caring for the poor and the oppressed, and even loving our enemies and those who do us wrong. Luke 6 seems terrifying and impossible, but it's a gift, it's another example of Jesus turning the world upside down, and reinforcing that his kingdom cares about everyone, his love and compassion is not dependent on our wealth or social status. We are called to show love and mercy to our neighbors, just as our heavenly Father has shown love and mercy to us.

Keeping the eighth commandment, or really any of the commandments is difficult, and it's something we cannot do on our own. But God, through the grace of Christ has sent us the Holy Spirit, who enables us to do much more than we could if it were up to us alone. Let's lay our worries and burdens aside, find fulfillment and satisfaction in him, and seek to love and serve our great and merciful God, by depending fully on God and loving and serving those God places in our lives.

Brad Stolman

Classis Assigned Sermon: 1 Timothy 1:12-17 "The Gospel Changes Everything"

[Context] Good morning and thank you for having me with you today. I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of 1 Timothy chapter 1, and as you're turning there, allow me to give you a bit of context for where this letter fits within God's divinely inspired Word. 1 Timothy is part of what is known as the "Pastoral Epistles," a set of three letters written by the Apostle Paul, two of them to Timothy who is serving at Paul's request over the church at Ephesus, and the letter to Titus, who is serving on the island of Crete. These letters were likely written near the end of Paul's ministry and life, possibly even during a fourth missionary journey, which would have followed the events recorded in the book of Acts. The

Pastoral Epistles then, and 1 Timothy in particular, were some of Paul's most seasoned texts, with the greatest amount of his life and ministry experience sitting behind his words, along with his theological and doctrinal convictions having been well solidified. And it is out of that reality that we read these words that Paul wrote to his beloved disciple, Timothy, in verses 12-17, please follow along:

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Let's pray.

Intro:

Arouse Attention: I don't know what it's like in your home, or with whom you do life with, but in my home, my wife and I often joke about how different we are in this one particular way, see if you can relate. When I go into the kitchen to cook dinner, which I love to do, I spend time preparing the food, thinking through the steps of the recipe which I'm making, mixing things together, and waiting for things to cook. If I need something to simmer or boil for 20 minutes, I may use that time to wash some of the dishes I have already dirtied, or I may not, but one thing is for sure: I'm not leaving that kitchen. I've got a task, to prepare the meal, and that's what I'm going to do, until it is complete. My wife, Lisa, on the other hand, she'll start out doing the same exact thing I did, preparing the food, dicing, slicing, and sautéing. But when that 20 minutes of wait time starts, she's on to another task that is weighing on her mind. There's laundry in the family room, the hallway floor needs a good wipe down, the receipts need to be put on the budget sheet, and the boys room, well, that's more than the time allotted. In the middle of one task, her mind races to all the other tasks that call for her attention. Not me. I'm cooking and I'm not stopping until I'm done. The other tasks can wait, and they will, because I won't even think about them, not until this one is done.

Introduce Subject: Compartmentalization...the ability to divide things into sections or categories. For some of us this comes easy and we focus on one task until it's complete, and if we reach the end of our day and there are things that haven't been attended to yet, well another 18 hours of awake time waits for us in the morning. But for others, one task bleeds into another. It's the reason when we lay down at night that my wife can't fall asleep because her mind is racing with all things coming her way, while my head hits the pillow and I'm out, because my task in that moment is sleep, and nothing else. Some of us approach the areas of our life as if they are boxes with solid lines around them. While others of us see dotted lines, with very few 90 degree angles, and intersections everywhere.

Making it personal: Now whether you are someone who compartmentalizes or not, this morning I want us to consider an area of our life that we are tempted to compartmentalize, when in reality, it should permeate, affect, infuse, and transcend every single thought, word, and action: namely, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you think about the person of Jesus Christ, and the good news that through his work of living a perfect life, dying on the cross and rising back to life, so that through faith in Him you might be reconciled to God, what affect does your faith have on the entirety of your life? Does Jesus Christ and his gospel, fit into a nice neat box in your life, with solid black lines surrounding it, separating him from the other things that you spend your time doing and thinking and saying?

Statement of FCF: I think we are tempted at times, or maybe it's just me, to compartmentalize the gospel as something that we need for our justification, to be forgiven and restored to God, but then we move on to another box. We've got our salvation card with Jesus' signature that we slide into our wallet or our purse, ready to pull out the day we need it, but the gospel has by and large served its purpose: it has "saved" us, and now, we can move on.

Bonding to Scripture: In Paul's letter to Timothy, which again, was written near the end of his life and ministry, he cannot get more than twelve verses into the letter before he returns to the reality that everything he has, and everything he does, and everything he will do is because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Paul the good news of what Jesus Christ has accomplished on his behalf and called him into, was not only for the moment in which he was justified, but it continues to sustain him and propel him and shape him for his life and his ministry.

Proposition: And so this morning my hope and prayer is that from this text we will see, that- Because

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, we are called to live gospel-SHAPED lives.

Summary of Main Points: Paul's instructions to Timothy, who he left to pastor the church at Ephesus, are extensive throughout this letter. He charges him to stop false teachers, to guard true doctrine, to instruct both men and women on how to conduct themselves within the church; he exhorts Timothy to lead the church well, and to set an example for his flock by the way in which he conducts his life. But at the outset of these instructions, Paul grounds those commands in the glories of the gospel, because the gospel changes and effects everything. And so this morning we want to look at three things our text reveals are true of a gospel-shaped life: (1) our mission has been redefined, (2) our salvation stands as hope for all people, and (3) Christ has become for us a treasure of increasing value and worth.

[Main Point #1: Explanation] So first this morning, our text shows us that a gospel-shaped life is one that has had its mission redefined.

Look back at verses 12 and 13: *"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **THOUGH FORMERLY I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.**"* Paul's testimony is one of great transformation. Paul was a Jewish man, a member of the Pharisee party, and a violent persecutor of the church. Acts 7 recounts the stoning of Stephen, with Paul (or Saul as he is referred to at that point in the narrative), giving his approval to the execution. Paul had received letters from the high priest that gave him permission to bring back from Damascus to Jerusalem, any followers of Jesus Christ that he found, in order to prosecute them. But on that Damascus road, he encountered more than Christians, he encountered Christ himself, and this encounter redefined everything for Paul. Paul testifies that he was FORMERLY one thing, namely a persecutor, a blasphemer, and a violent opponent of God, but now he is something different, now he has been **APPOINTED** by Christ, unto his service. Notice the **passive** aspect of Paul's appointment. Paul didn't look into a job-posting, thoroughly consider the job description, look through the benefit package, and then decide to sign up. No, Paul was appointed, Paul was chosen, Paul was rescued out of a life of darkness and brought into the light, a path he would never have gotten to on his own, but that which depended upon the grace of God to rescue him. And as Paul grew to understand the gospel through his newly found relationship with Jesus Christ, he began to see that the death and resurrection of Jesus was the means by which he as a sinner, was justified and saved. And as a saved sinner, the mission of his life was now about living for the One who had died in his place. Paul's life mission was now Christ-centered. Notice also, the **gratitude** that flows out of Paul's heart as he reflects upon his transformation and calling. Paul is keenly aware that if it were up to him, he would still be walking in the direction that was completely opposed to God's kingdom, and that it's only because of the kindness, mercy, and compassion of God, that he has been picked up, turned around, and been put down to head in the complete opposite direction. Gratitude flows for the calling but also because he sees that God has **strengthened him** for that which he is now called to do. For those whom God calls, he equips for the task set before them. And so serving God with his life, was not a burden, it was a privilege and one for which Paul expresses deep gratitude.

[Illustration]

When I was in high school, my best friend was a strong Christian guy who knew he was going to be a pastor when he grew up. He always had a sense this was what God was calling him to with his life. There was this one kid in our school, we'll call him John, who was kind of rough, he was a bit of a bully, he struggled with drugs, and wore a lot of black clothing and chains and the like. One day my best friend walked in on John partaking of an illegal substance in the bathroom of our school. This was the low-point of John's life. My friend stayed with him, shared the gospel with him, and through that experience, John came to faith in Christ, and is now a co-Pastor with my friend, out in California, at a multi-site, mega-church, where John faithfully preaches the gospel and disciples people into a life of surrendering everything to Jesus. John encountered the gospel of Jesus Christ and it changed everything for him, redefining the mission of his life.

[Application]

Your testimony may not be like Paul's who encountered the untamed glory of Christ on the Damascus road. You may or may not relate to John's story of total life transformation. But one thing is certain: that when you experience the gospel of Jesus Christ, when you encounter the Creator, who became a creature, so that he might do for you what you could not do for yourself, by living a sinless life and by dying in your place on a cross, only to rise back to life again and bring to life all those who would trust in him for salvation, it changes everything. The gospel changes everything. The mission of your life, has now been redefined. For as Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, "You are not your own, you were bought at a price," a great price, the very life, of the sinless Son of God and the mission of those who have encountered the risen Christ, is now, as Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 10:31: **TO DO WHATEVER YOU DO FOR THE GLORY OF GOD!** And so Christ, and his kingdom mission of proclaiming his gospel to all nations, is not compartmentalized into a box over here in this part of your life, but it is the overarching mission that affects everything. In your careers, as a teacher, as a doctor, as a farmer, a nurse, a mechanic, a counselor, a stay-at-home-parent, an engineer, whatever it is that Christ has called you and appointed you into, whatever it is that Christ has equipped you with the strength to accomplish, will you see that calling as a means by which you might serve Christ, and bring glory to God, through your honest and hard work, and through the way in which you bring the gospel to bear on those areas which are not functioning as God desires them to function as a result of the fall, with love, justice, and mercy? Will you honor Christ through the way in which you build relationships with those around you and prayerfully look for opportunities to share the reason for the hope that is within you. Whether it is our places of work, our relationships with our families, the days we spend at school with teachers and classmates, or hanging out in our yard with the neighbors next door, may we see that our mission is defined by our Lord, to advance his kingdom through the spreading of the gospel, both in word and in deed, so that through us, Christ is exalted and God is glorified.

[Transition]

And so gospel-shaped lives are those which see their mission as being redefined, but are also those which understand that our salvation stands as proof that God's power is able to do anything!

[Main Point #2: Explanation] And so second this morning, we see in our text that since Christ came into the world to save sinners, our salvation shines forth as a light of hope for all people

As Paul continues to recount his salvation by Christ, he emphasizes the first thing that he needed and in fact received, and that was mercy. Mercy is when we do not get what we deserve. If a police officer pulls you over for speeding and lets you off with a warning, you have been shown mercy, in not getting what you deserved. Paul understands so deeply, that what he deserved for the sinful actions of his life, for the way in which he was living opposed to the kingdom of God, was eternal punishment in hell, and yet, God showed him mercy. But not only mercy, but also grace. Because Christ came into the world to die in the place of those who would put their faith in him, we have not only had our sin forgiven and removed, but we have received his perfect righteousness. The life of perfect obedience that Christ attained, is now counted as ours, as if we have obeyed God's law. Not only have we not received what we deserved, mercy, but we have received that which we did not deserve, GRACE. Paul says in verse 14, *"The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."* By being united to Christ through faith, Paul is showing us here that all that is Christ's is ours. The love and faith that are in Christ, now flow freely to us. It is here, as Paul reflects upon what Christ has done for him, and the grace he has received, that he is able to write one of the most significant passages in all of the Scriptures, verse 15: *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* Charles Spurgeon called this "The gospel in a single verse." This is the good news. That Christ came, not simply to be a good teacher, or an example of morality, but to save sinners. And that's good news for Paul, because he knew he was a sinner. That's good news for me, because I know I'm a sinner. And that's good news for you, cause you know, you're a sinner. But not

just a sinner, Paul says, he's the foremost, the worst, the first in rank of all sinners. What does Paul mean by that? Well certainly he looks back to his past and how he literally killed and approved the killing of Christians, which certainly weighed on his conscience. But notice he doesn't use the past tense: "Of whom I WAS the foremost," no he uses the present tense: "Of whom I AM the foremost." Even as a redeemed man, he recognizes the depths of his depravity which highlights that magnitude of the grace of God poured out for him which Paul says is for this purpose: If God can save me, there is hope for you! Verse 16: *"But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."* Paul says, "My life is an example of the abundant grace and mercy that has been made available through the coming, dying, and rising, of Jesus Christ. There is nothing that you have done that cannot be forgiven. There is no one in this world who cannot be redeemed. Do you believe that?" Paul says that the perfect patience of Christ is on display in his very own redemption.

[Illustration]

It is so difficult to grasp the perfect patience of Christ that Paul mentions here. I know in my own life, especially as a dad, I get so upset when my boys do things that go against the instructions that I have given them. A buddy of mine likes to say, "I didn't realize how selfish I was until I got married, and I didn't realize how angry I was until we had children." When he said that I was like, "Amen and amen." I didn't know I had an anger problem, until I witnessed those under my authority rebel against my authority, until I witnessed myself fail time and time again with outbursts of yelling, every time needing to apologize and seek their forgiveness, and in moments of clarity see the great contrast between my lack of patience with others, and God's abundant patience with me. And over the years I have continued to pray for the Holy Spirit's work in changing me to become more like Christ, and by his grace there is fruit, but oh how far away I am from the perfect patience of Christ for us, of which Paul speaks.

[Application]

Do you identify yourself as a great sinner standing in need of a great Savior? Have you fallen into the trap of the compassion game, where you look to your left or your right, and say under your breath, "well, at least I'm not that bad?" In Luke 18 Jesus tells of the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. Only one of those men went away justified, and it wasn't the religious man who mostly had his house in order and who looked down on the tax collector, but it was the one who would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" This is what Paul is crying out in verse 15. He's not comparing himself to everyone else, but to the perfect law of God, revealed in the Word of God, and as he looks into that mirror, he sees a wretched man, unable to save himself or fix his life, a man completely dependent upon the grace of God. And he says to you: "If God can do a mighty work in me, certainly he can do that for you!" There is nobody beyond the reach of God. What family member have you stopped praying for? What neighbor do you deep down believe there is no hope? Maybe you look back on your own past and you're filled with despair. Friends, Paul's salvation, stands as hope that if God can redeem him, there's hope for all people. The core message of our evangelism should be: "If God can save me, there's nothing God can't do!" But not only can God redeem individual hearts, but he can change that which feels unchangeable. At the root of Paul's joy and hope, is the power of God which can overcome the deepest of struggles. What struggle in your life have you stopped praying about because it feels too big to change? Is there an addiction that keeps you enslaved? Maybe you struggle with anger, like me, or depression, or pride, and you feel powerless to overcome that. Maybe you have abuse as part of your story and those wounds are as wide-open today as they were the day you were sinned against and it feels like there could never be real healing for you. Maybe your marriage has reached a tipping point, and it feels too far gone. Friends, Paul's redemption is a testimony to the power of God, to both save the sinner, and to overcome the sin and the effects of sin within our lives. Our God is able to accomplish immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. Do you believe that?

[Transition]

Gospel shaped lives are those who have had their mission changed and who see their own salvation as hope for all people. And finally this morning, gospel shaped lives are those which are marked by and ever increasing treasuring of Christ and seeing him as being of infinite value and worth.

[Main Point #3: Explanation] [DON'T SAY THIS] Because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, Christ becomes a treasure of increasing value and worth.

Paul reaches the end of this section and he cannot help but climb to the peak of the crescendo with a doxology, a hymn of praise, to God Almighty. Verse 17: **"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."** The longer we walk with Christ, the more we grow in knowledge of the holiness and glory of God, the more we become aware of the depths of our own sinfulness, but also the extent to which the grace of God has covered that sinfulness, the more Jesus Christ and his gospel becomes like that treasure in the field, that the man stumbled across, and then reburies, goes and sells everything he has, and returns to buy the field. Why? Cause there's nothing more valuable than the treasure. There's nothing more valuable than the King, than the Lord, than the Christ, than the Redeemer. And the more we become aware of the beauty of the what the gospel is and what it means for sinners like us, the more our hearts simply cry out with praise for God, like Paul did at the end of this section.

[Illustration]

I like to think about it like someone who far off in the distance can see a tall mountain. And from miles away, you can see that this land formation is tall and wide, and magnificent, but because of the distance you think, 'Yeah, I could climb that.' But as you get closer and 5 miles turns into 4 and 4 into 3 and 3 into 2, and as you find yourself at the foot of the mountain, and you look up, you now see even more clearly, just how far away you are from the peak, which from a distance, didn't look nearly so tall. There's this interesting phenomena that happens in our relationship with God, where the more and more we grow to understand the nature and character of God, and the holiness of God, and the closer we get to the heart of God, the more we see the depths of our sin, and our brokenness, and how far away we are from a life of perfect holiness which Christ has achieved. And on the one hand, that's disappointing, because I see all the junk in my life that needs to be conformed into the image of Christ, but on the other hand, what Christ has done for me, becomes even that much more valuable. If my debt is \$100 and you pay that for me I'm thankful, but if my debt is \$1MM, and you pay that, well, I'm speechless.

[Application]

And while Paul isn't speechless, his hymn of praise at the end of this section reflects someone who gets the magnitude of the debt that has been paid, and the payer of the debt has become a treasure of increasing worth and value. In the Heidelberg Catechism, the third and final section teaches us what it looks like to live a life of gratitude in response to the salvation that we have received and it walks through the 10 Commandments and what it looks to obey them. And then it asks, are believers able to obey them perfectly, and the answer is "NO." And so the follow up question then is, "They why preach obedience to the 10 Commandments?" And I love this answer: First, so that the longer we live, the more we may come to know our sinfulness, and the more eagerly look to Christ, for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. And second, so that we never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be conformed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection." There's a direct relationship between on the one hand, our awareness of our sin, and on the other hand, the depths of our love of Christ. Is he to you, a treasure? Is he to you, of such great worth, that you would sell all you had, to just get him?

[Conclusion]

The gospel changes everything. Jesus Christ is not an object that may be compartmentalized to Sunday mornings. He affects your life's mission, your career's focus, your marriage, your singleness, your relationship with your children, the way you see the outcasts of society, the way you engage with unbelievers, the way you spend your money and your leisure, the view you have towards your own

struggles and the struggles of others. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. And since that is our reality, the gospel has changed everything. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray.

Brad Stolman

Old Testament Sermon: 1Kings 8:22-39 "The Covenant Faithfulness of God"

[Context] I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of 1Kings chapter 8, and as you're turning there allow me to give you a little context for where our passage for today fits within the grand story of God's plan of redemption. God's plan from the beginning of creation was to dwell in the midst of his people. We see this in the opening chapter of Genesis as God walks in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. But the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden was that they were removed from the presence of God, they were removed from the Garden and the place in which God's presence dwelt, since the holiness and majesty of God would not and could not dwell in conjunction with a sinful people. Yet already in Genesis chapter 3 we get a glimpse into the redemption plan of God for his people, as we see the gospel in seed form being proclaimed when God says to the serpent: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will crush your head, and you shall strike his heel."* Already in the Garden we see God's promise that through the seed of the woman, sin will be dealt with. And so from that moment forward we see God gathering and assembling a people for himself. A people redeemed and saved by his grace alone; a people marked by the presence of God. And so God starts this building project by calling a man named Abraham, and God makes promises to Abraham through the means of a covenant. Covenants were and are the way in which a holy God exists in relationship with sinful people. The terms of the covenant define the relationship and the responsibilities of each party. And while today's sermon is not on the Abrahamic Covenant, we need to see that this is where it all starts...where God begins his building project of redeeming a people unto himself, a people in which he dwells and lives in glorious relationship, through his accommodating grace. And so to one man, Abraham, God promises that he will make him into a great nation and that through his seed (of which he had no offspring at that point), all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God then continues to develop his covenant with his people through Moses as God redeems the nation of Israel (which remember, began with the one man Abraham), God redeems them from slavery in Egypt, and at Mount Sinai gives them the law which reveals how God's people are to live in God's world. And at that point, God gives Moses instructions for building the tabernacle, an earthly tent, that symbolized God dwelling in the midst of his people, and allowed Israel the opportunity to worship God and to know that God was with them. Fast forward 400 years and Israel has become a great nation, God has fulfilled part of his promises to Abraham and now David, King David, the mighty King of Israel, has passed down the reigns of the throne to his son, Solomon, who has now been able to build the temple in which the presence of God could dwell, because of the peace which Israel is experiencing in Jerusalem. And that's where our passage falls, at the peak of the crescendo, as King Solomon has brought the ark of the covenant from the tabernacle into the temple, the presence of God has filled the temple, and Solomon prays this prayer of dedication, which we will begin to read in verse 22-39: **[Read 1Kings 8:22-39]...LET'S PRAY—ISAIAH40:8- The grass withers, the flower fades...but the Word of our God, stands forever!...**

Intro:

Arouse Attention: Christmas has now come and gone, and you've likely spent time over the past weeks, exchanging gifts and unwrapping presents. And if you have ever been around children opening presents, you've likely witnessed the following scene: a family with three kids was heading to their extended family's Christmas party in which many gifts were going to be exchanged and the kids knew they'd be coming home with lots of new toys to enjoy. As the family drove to the party, mom reminded the kids: "Make sure that after every gift you open, you go up to the person who gave it to you, look them in the eye, and tell them thank you." "Yes, mom we know," all the kids replied. But as the gifts started to flow, all recollection of that conversation was lost, and the oldest son, we'll just call him Timmy, lost all manner of control as his excitement to see what was under the wrapping paper got the best of him. And

so Timmy opened the first gift, a new nerf gun, and immediately tore it from the cardboard, loaded a red MEGA bullet, and launched it across the room at his brother. "What's next, what's next?" Timmy asked. His parents noticed what was going on, but sat quietly, and watched to see if Timmy would remember. Timmy then opened a new Nike football, with matching football gloves to go with it. He ripped open the gloves, put them on, tossed the ball up, and replied with great excitement, "What's next, what's next?" One last present handed to Timmy, and after ripping off the paper, saw that he was now the owner of a 1,400 piece Star Wars Star Destroyer Lego Set, to which he let out a "Woohoo!!!" He jumped to his feet, ran to the other room, opened the box and started to assemble the set. After a couple minutes, Timmy noticed his mom and dad walking towards him and as they sat down at the table, they said to him, "Timmy, the dangerous part of opening gifts, is that you are tempted to love the gift, more than the person who gave you the gift. Gifts are great son, because they tell you that there is someone who truly loves you, but your response when you open a gift, tells that person how you truly feel about them. Timmy the reason we want you to tell people "thank you," is not just to be polite, but to communicate that though you love the gift, you love the giver even more."

Introduce Subject: Life presents us with all kinds of opportunities to presume upon the kindness of others, doesn't it? To receive the blessings of a relationship and to move on without a response of gratitude, communicating that what matters most to us, are the benefits of the relationship, rather than the person themselves.

Making it personal: Marriages are an easy opportunity for this as both people enter into covenant with one another, possessing all the intention of serving the other person. But over time it becomes pretty easy to sit on that couch a little longer, hoping the other person will take care of what needs to be picked up or put away. Since after all, they're committed to me. And if our spouse is a self-less, servant-hearted person, how much greater the temptation to remain seated. Well, if that's the case with people, how much more is the temptation with our gracious God? If you've heard any more than two sermons in your life, or been a part of any Bible study, you've likely heard over and over again, how our God, and the essence of the Christian faith, is GRACE. The gospel, the good of new of Jesus Christ, is grace. We have received, that which we have not earned. Which is an amazing gift to unwrap, but then what?

Statement of FCF: Because of the overwhelming kindness of God, we are tempted, like Israel was tempted, to presume upon the grace of God, walking in unrepentant sin, and minimizing the importance of, what Paul calls in Romans, "the obedience of faith." We echo the attitudes of Israel, "We have the temple as a sign of God's covenant loyalty, his covenant promises...what else do we need?"

Bonding to Scripture: Well, you need God! You need the giver of the gift. God has provided us access to Solomon's prayer of dedicating the temple in order for us to see that...

Proposition: Because God is always faithful to his covenant promises, we must draw near to Him in worship and obedience.

Summary of Main Points: Solomon's prayer reveals the depths of the glory of God, the very God who has called us into covenant relationship with Himself, and who continues his great building project of assembling a people for himself, in which his presence dwells. And so the call for us today is to respond with worship and obedience since our passage shows us that God is faithful to his covenant promises by first of all fulfilling his promises to David...

[Main Point #1: Explanation] [And so the first reason we are to draw near to God in worship and obedience is because he has fulfilled his promises to David.]

Who is David? Why does David matter? Remember at the beginning as I talked about God's plan of redemption for dwelling with his people and how he does this through the development of his covenant, first with Abraham, then with Moses, but then he turns to David. Having made David king, we then see in 2Samuel 7 God developing his covenant further by adding the Davidic Covenant to it. King David had experienced tremendous blessing at the hand of God and because of his great love for God, expresses his desire and plan to build God a temple. He had looked around at the house in which God had allowed him to live and saw that for God, a portable tent was still the location for his presence and so David declares his plan to build God a house. To which God responds that David will not build him a house, but that in fact God will build David a dynasty. Listen to 2Sam.7:11b: "**Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house (or a "dynasty")**" and how will God do this? Listen to vv12-14: "**When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers (which means, when his life ends), I**

will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. (vs.16) And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." So David says to God, "I want to build you a house," and God responds: "You will not build me a house, but I will build from your line a dynasty. A dynasty of kings that will sit on the throne forever over my people. And not only that, but your offspring will be the one, through whom, I will build my temple, the place where my presence resides...the place where my people can come and commune with me."

Solomon begins his prayer of dedicating the temple, recognizing God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promises he had made to David. **1Kings 8:24:** *"You have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand you have fulfilled it this day."*

Can you image the wonder and awe that would have filled Solomon's heart as he realizes in that moment, that God has done everything he had promised David?!?! And so Solomon prays in *vs.25* that just as God has kept his promise, that he would continue to keep his promise in maintaining a Davidic heir on the throne over God's people. And what gives Solomon the right to ask this of God? God's very Word. God said he would do it!

But Solomon also understands that within the covenant relationship, there are obligations upon the people of God. And so he asks God to keep his promise, (*vs.25b*) *"if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me (God) as you (David) has walked before God."* This was the peak of the crescendo for the development of God's people, as a nation. The people have grown from one man, Abraham, into a nation of families and tribes. They have gone from slaves in Egypt to a powerful people, possessing their own land and experiencing peace. The Davidic kingship has now been established and the temple has been erected and the people were experiencing the blessings of God, as they lived as they people of God, in the presence of God. And what was the expectation for them moving forward? To continue to walk in faith, worshiping God alone, and obeying his commands. What other response would make sense, for a God powerful enough to make sure that every promise he made came to fruition? Draw near in worship and obedience, for our God keeps all of his promises!

[Illustration] At the end of the 2016 National Football League season, the New England Patriots were playing the Atlanta Falcons in the Super Bowl and I had the youth group over watching the game in my basement and most all of the students were rooting for the Falcons while I was rooting for the Patriots, which is my team B (every Lions fan needs a Team B). And early in the 3rd quarter, meaning over half-way through the game, the Patriots were losing 28-3 and it looked bad. But I kept telling the students who were mocking me and telling me my team was going to lose, "Just wait, the Patriots always win (unless they're playing the Giants) but just wait...they're going to come back!" And sure enough, 1 touchdown, 2 touchdowns, and the result was the largest comeback in Super Bowl history, as the Patriots won 34-28 in OT. The Patriots always win...but...my expectations were based off their track record.

[Application] Now admittedly, a football analogy hardly does justice when trying to convey the point that God is worthy of your trust and confidence, but if a football team's track record can speak to your confidence in their future performance, how much more, does the covenantal faithfulness of God throughout history, and specifically in placing David's son, Solomon on the throne and by his son, building a temple in which his presence dwells as he lives with his people...how much more should that settle your soul in the midst of the strife that you experience in this life? When you pray, do you pray in confidence, believing that God will accomplish all of his purposes and plans? Is your vision of God, anything less than one who is sovereignly and totally in control over this world and our lives, such that when he makes promises 100, 400, 1,000 years in advance, there is zero doubt as to his ability to ensure that they come to pass? How big is your confidence in the God of the Scriptures? Might I suggest, that the litmus test is not when we experience smooth sailing in life, but when we go through the potholes and the valleys and in those moments, cry out to the Lord, "As you have kept your promises, continue to keep your promises even now, in the midst of this storm."

[Transition] As we see God continue to develop the means by which He will dwell with his people, we seem him do this first through the tabernacle with Moses and David, and then through the temple with Solomon.

[Main Point #2: Explanation] And so second, our text calls us to draw near to God in worship and

obedience because God dwells with his people **through** his temple.

After praising God for fulfilling his covenant, Solomon moves in vs27 to reflect upon the majesty and glory of God, stating the most obvious of all realities, that this glorious temple that has taken so many manual labor hours, and so many financial resources to build, cannot even begin to contain this God. Solomon combines both the immensity of God and the intimacy of God, both of which the temple communicates by its existence. The temple does not fully contain God, for God dwells in heaven... *vs. 30: "And listen in heaven your dwelling place;" vs.32: "then hear in heaven and act and judge;" vs.34, "then hear in heaven and forgive."* But the immensity of the God who dwells in heaven is accompanied by the intimacy between God and his people, through the temple, provided by the grace of God, as the place where a sinful people can come and approach a holy God. God has caused his name to dwell in the temple so that his people might have access to him and intimacy with him. But this is where I don't think we correctly understand the offense of our own sin against Almighty God. A sinful people, cannot just approach a holy God. What does God do to Adam and Eve after they sin? He covers them...he shows them mercy, but he removes them from the Garden Sanctuary where the presence of God dwells. (PUT DRAWING IN BULLETIN) The temple has three parts to it, each possessing a greater level of holiness as you move inward, and the inner section, the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant resides, representing God's presence, nobody enters, except for the high priest, and he only once a year, on the day of atonement. That's it. Because a sinful people do not come into contact with a holy God. And so, do you see the grace of God in the gift of the temple? God has provided a way, a means by which sinful people may confess sin, repent of their sin, and pray for God's grace, and God will listen. *Vs.29: "That your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, "My name shall be there," that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers towards this place."* As a sinful person you don't get to go directly to God. You don't! But God has provided a way, and he tells Israel, if you will pray in the temple or towards the temple, repenting of your sin, God will hear and he will respond and he will restore. Solomon goes through several scenarios where God's people failed to walk in obedience to his covenant and from their sin, they received the judgement of God upon their lands, upon their battles, upon their bodies...but every time, the promise is held out, if you acknowledge your sin, profess God as your Lord, and pray this towards the temple, God will receive your prayer and God will restore you.

[Illustration] The temple was the means by which Holy God could dwell with a sinful people.

Throughout the Scriptures, the greatest fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises, is this: "I WILL BE YOUR GOD; AND YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE." There is no greater promise than that...not land, not offspring, not wealth, not reputation...but that God is with us, and that we are with God. This promise of God is the bookends of the Scriptures, for it is what we see in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve and God, and it's the picture of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Revelation 21 when John describes for us what the end will look like, and we read this: *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* The book ends, CREATION & RECREATION, are a picture of God with his people. And the temple served as a promise that God was with Israel and that Israel was to draw near to God in worship and obedience.

[Application] / [Transition] But...Israel didn't keep the covenant. Already in chapter 11 of 1 Kings, 2 chapters later, we read this heading: "Solomon turns from the Lord." And king after king, from David's line, walked in the footsteps of Solomon and was described in this way: *"He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."* That's the message of the rest of the Book of Kings and all of 2Kings. God was extremely patient with his people, sending prophet after prophet to them, commanding them to repent and turn back to the Lord. Until finally the people are taken into captivity by both Assyria and Babylon, and the Babylonians sack Jerusalem and destroy the temple in the year 586 B.C. There is no temple; there is no Davidic king. Was God unfaithful to his promises? Well after 70 years of captivity a remnant returns with Ezra and then Nehemiah and rebuilds the temple and the city, but it's not the same. There's a governor, Zerubabel, and though he is from David's line, he's not a king. And there's a temple, but the glory of the Lord has not filled this temple. And the prophets, Haggai, Zacharia, and Malachi, the last three prophets of the OT, all prophecy that the presence of God will return, but it hasn't happened yet and then the Scriptures end and we get silence...and Israel gets silence...400 years of silence...where is

God? Has he abandoned his covenant?

[Main Point #3: Explanation] Finally this morning we want to see that we are called to draw near to God in worship and obedience because in Jesus Christ, God has ultimately fulfilled all that the temple symbolized.

Out of the 400 years of silence, we read the very first words of the New Testament: Matthew 1:1- *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* What happened to the Davidic king? The prophet Isaiah told us 740 years before the king was born: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."* God's promise to David was fulfilled partially with Solomon and those who would come after Solomon but each one of those kings left Israel longing for the true king, the good king, who would reign and rule with perfect righteousness and justice over the people of God. God's promise to David was fulfilled ultimately and finally with the Christ-child, Jesus, who won victory as our true King over sin and death and hell, not with might and a sword, but through suffering, and through the humiliation of laying his body down on a cross, to pay the price of death for the sins of those who would bow the knee in worship and obedience to this King. God answered Solomon's prayer to always fulfill his promise to David, by putting his seed, Jesus Christ, on the throne forever.

But what about the temple? Well in addition to being King, Isaiah also told us this: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."* Jesus is God with us. Listen to Paul's words in Colossians 1:19: *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..."* What was the temple? It was the place in which the presence of God dwelled in order for God's people to have intimacy and access to God. And so after Jesus cleanses the temple in John chapter 2, and the Jews ask him for a sign that validates his authority to do such a thing what does Jesus say? *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* Now the Jews were furious because they thought he was talking about the physical structure they were standing in, but the reality is, that temple was already destroyed because it lacked the very thing it was created to provide: the presence of God and access to God. But Jesus is announcing to the world in this moment, *I am your access to God. I am the one in whom the presence of God dwells fully. "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father but THROUGH me."* Paul continues in Colossians: *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and THROUGH him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross."* At the cross, when Jesus breathed his last breath, we see that the curtain in the temple which kept people out of the Holy of Holies, was torn in two. Why? Because that which separated a Holy God from a sinful people was no longer needed since now, through Christ, we have direct access to God. That which the temple was intended to do, Christ has done, by uniting the immensity and glory of God, with the intimacy of God dwelling with his people. Which is why Jesus can say in Matthew 12:6: *"Someone greater than the temple is here."* YES HE IS!

[Illustration]

[Application] Jesus is the NT temple in his function of bringing sinners to God and the church is the temple in its being the product of Christ's work. When God told David, your son would build me a house, yes, Solomon built a physical house, but the true Son, Jesus Christ, is building God's spiritual house, the church, as the place, the temple, in which the presence of God dwells. And we have the promise of Christ, that he will continue to build his church, and the gates of hell will not stand against it! Further, you are a temple, if you are in Christ, for in you the Holy Spirit dwells. And so from the beginning we see God building a covenant assembly of people, from Abraham, to Moses, to David, to the church, all through the true King, the true temple, Jesus Christ, where brick by brick, living stone by living stone (as 1 Peter 2:5 refers to us as), as dead hearts become alive, as those who were once far off come near and see Christ as the glorious king, who has won victory on our behalf, so that we might receive grace, grace that which we have not earned, but that which we respond to with worship and obedience. Why? Because Christ has brought you to God!

[Conclusion] This morning as you sit here, is your heart stirred for Christ. Do you see him in a way that maybe you didn't before? He invites you this morning, to place your faith and your trust in him, and

through him, to be adopted as God's child, with unlimited access to the Father. For those who are trusting in Christ, is he everything to you? For some of us we need to believe the gospel for the first time, but for others of us we need to believe the gospel more deeply than we ever have. You need to understand that God is for you...look what he has orchestrated so that you could be redeemed. And you need to see that the gospel calls you to a life of worship and obedience, not just some cheap grace. For we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, and when that is your reality, then you can rejoice knowing that God is speaking this promise over you: I AM YOUR GOD, YOU ARE MY PEOPLE. Amen.

Let's pray.

Brad Stolman

Catechism Sermon: Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1, Philippians 1:18b-26

"Choosing the Necessary over the Desired "

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Philippians, and this morning we are going to be reading from the first chapter, verses 18b-26... The Apostle Paul, from a prison cell (likely in Rome) writes this to the church at Philippi: **(READ PASSAGE)**... Let's pray...

A few weeks ago my oldest son, Isaac, came up to me in the kitchen at 8:30pm on a Monday night, after I had just put his younger three brothers to bed and asked me, "Daddy, can we watch the Patriot vs. Dolphins game?" Now in our family, from September through December, we love to watch professional football, which unfortunately for us, usually ends in December, since the Detroit Lions rarely make it into the playoffs and if they do, never make it very far. My son's request was nothing out of the ordinary that night except that I knew the next morning he had an important Social Studies test which could either bring his grade down to a B+ or cement his grade as an A. So I asked him the question: is there anything else that you should be doing? I remember as a kid, hearing my dad ask that question, and now I realize that it isn't really a question, but more of a statement that means: of course there is something else you should be doing, why are you even asking me! After thinking about it for a few seconds, Isaac remembered that he had a Social Studies test the next day and was now forced into a choice: should I try to persuade dad to let me do the thing that I would much rather do, the more "**desirable**" thing, or should I simply go into my room and study, the more "**necessary**" thing? Well, as an eleven year old boy who doesn't yet understand the long-term implications of short-term decisions, he proceeded to plead with me to watch the game. He chose the more "**desirable**" thing, over the more "**necessary**" thing. What do you do when you are forced to choose between the more desirable, and the more necessary? For Christian men and women, this can be a tricky decision. For we have, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, been given so many spiritual blessings and promises both now and for eternity! So what is more **desirable** than to rest in our present and future security in Christ? Yet, God has not removed his church from this world, but has given her a clear and **necessary** commission, a call to action. *But at times aren't we tempted to rest in all of the benefits of belonging to Christ, thereby choosing the desirable, while neglecting the more necessary call, of being devoted to the progress of the gospel?* [FallenConditionFocus] We are tempted to stop running before we reach the finish line. The Apostle Paul felt this tension as he sat in his jail cell writing to the church at Philippi, not knowing if this day would be his earthly **body's** last, and he confesses to his friends: "My **desire** is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." Yet Paul commends us in this passage that...

[Proposition] Because we belong body and soul, in life and in death to Jesus Christ, we must be fully **devoted** to the **progress** of the **gospel**, until God calls us home!

Paul writes that he is confident that God will cause him to be released from prison precisely because it is more **necessary** that his gospel ministry continues. Though our 21st Century American culture will tempt us to believe that comfort, as she defines it, is our greatest pursuit in life, and therefore the gospel promises are an invitation to kick our feet up in a lazy-boy until the Lord calls us home, we must realize that we were bought at a great price, that we are not our own but belong to our Lord in body and soul, and that daily we must chose to be devoted to the progress of the gospel through each and every

circumstance that God has put into our lives.

[Main Point] [Because we belong body and soul, in life and in death to Jesus Christ, we must be fully devoted to the progress of the gospel in every circumstance.]

God makes no promises to his children that life will be easy and comfortable. Paul's letter from a prison cell should challenge the heart of every follower of Christ that if our pursuit is material comfort in this life, we have missed the message of the gospel. If anyone had reason to be frustrated over his circumstances it was the Apostle Paul and yet, he shows us that God's calling on our life is not to seek material comfort, but to find our comfort in belonging to Christ and in honoring Christ by seeking the advancement of his gospel in two ways: first, in how we live, and second, in how we view death.

[Sub point 1] How can we honor Christ in how we live? We should seek other's progress and joy in the faith.

Paul is sitting in a prison cell all alone with his thoughts. His thoughts give us insight into his heart, and we get to see into his heart because he decided to write a letter to his friends in Philippi from his jail cell. What his heart reveals to us is that his concern is not for his own physical condition, but about his love and desire for the faith of others, whom he preached the gospel to initially. He must have been thinking about Lydia, the wealthy convert to the faith, and wondered if she was still using her resources as a tool to honor Christ? He must have thought about the young girl from whom they cast out the demon, and whether she was being cared for well by the church. He must have thought about the jailer whose entire family put their faith in Jesus and was baptized, and how the kids were maturing in the faith. He must have thought about the government officials and the townspeople who rejected his message and whether there had been any more people who had come to faith in Christ. Paul's primary concern is not about his release from prison, but about building the kingdom of God through the progress and joy of other's faith. *Paul is able to have this perspective because his comfort resides in knowing that he belongs to Christ, both in his physical existence, in his body, and in his spiritual life hereafter, his soul, so that his vision is for beyond today, and able to see past his momentary troubles.* Paul says in verse 22: "If I am to live in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me." He then says in verse 24 that his "remaining in the flesh" is more "necessary" for them, and because it is more necessary, we see in verse 25 that Paul is convinced that he will remain and continue to live, "for their progress and joy in the faith." Though Paul was not tempted to seek his own prosperity, he was tempted to resign himself to the benefits of the gospel, namely, leaving this hard and troublesome life and going to be with Christ, and who can blame him? And yet, he had a bigger vision and a deeper motive, namely, the honoring of Christ, through the progress and joy of other's faith. Paul teaches us that as Christians, our lives are not our own, but as people who have been purchased at a price, we live to the glory of another!

The second way we can honor Christ and advance the gospel is how we view death.

[Sub point 2] How can we honor Christ through our view of death? We reveal to others our delight for what is to come.

As Paul sat in his cell unsure if this would be the end of his earthly life, his attitude almost seems flippant, like death is of no consequence. In verse 23 he proclaims: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." To a world that views this life as "the end," Paul's words would have sounded absurd. How can someone desire death? Paul answers that by pointing to the purpose of his life, which is the glory of Christ. Again verse 20 says that his hope is that "Christ will be honored in his body, whether by life or by death." And in verse 21 he states: "For me to live is Christ..." In death, Paul will get exactly what he has been living for, which is why he calls it "gain." For the Christian, if we are seeking to honor Christ in our life, death is actually the fulfillment of our life's mission, as we get to be with Christ. Our calling then is to live with hope in the face of suffering, trial and even death *since we belong to Christ in both life AND in death*, and therefore we know that what is coming, surpasses what we have. If the unbelieving world sees this hope in us, they will see a hope that they do not possess, but likely desire to possess.

Because we belong body and soul to Christ, we must be devoted to the progress of the gospel, by living for the progress of other's faith and proclaiming our hope in what is yet to come.

[Illustration]

There was a man who spent his entire career working in the business world, specifically the automotive sector, beginning with General Motors, then moving to Hewlett Packard, before ending his career at

General Motors for a second stint. His career began as most do, seeking to learn and better his craft, hoping to please his boss, in an attempt to succeed and earn promotions with the possibility of earning a greater income. He worked his plan perfectly. Day after day, week after week, year after year, faithfully doing his job, working at it with all that he had. There wasn't a specific day that he could point to where things changed, but over time as he grew in his understanding and love for his Savior and for the gospel of Christ, he began to view his job differently. He began to view his co-workers differently, as people who needed to know about the hope and joy which he possessed in Christ. One day he got up enough courage to ask a co-worker about starting a Bible study before the work day began. The pair grew to three, then four, then five. For over 20 years he has been leading various Bible studies at his work, no longer viewing his career as simply a place to make money, but with a passion to see the gospel advance through that place. He saw this as a necessary venture since his circumstances had greater purpose than his own gain.

[Application]

Like Paul in that prison cell, who was tempted to choose the desirable over the necessary, we too are daily put to the test, though there may be a difference in what we consider "more desirable." If someone was allowed access to view the movie of your life and see into the motives of our hearts, would they hear you say like Paul, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." For some of you that would absolutely be your confession. Yet at times we are tempted to relax in the assurance of our salvation instead of buying into how necessary it is to live as an agent of the gospel. We affirm that "to die is gain," but our heart's need to be captured by the urgency of the mission of Christ.

But I wonder if for others, you might say something else, namely that: "for me, to live is gain, and to die is Christ?" Meaning, the true desire of my heart is to enjoy this life to the fullest. To eat of the best foods and the choicest drinks. To travel to the most beautiful destinations. To ensure that my kids succeed, and that my accounts rise, and that my leisure remains. And when my time has come, then I'll go to where Christ is, for that is the moment that I need him. Brother and sisters is this not an easy trap for us living at this time and in this place to fall into? But this is not the Christian life as Paul understood it. To live is Christ. To live is to be devoted to the progress of the gospel. Maybe we need to take off the current lenses that we are viewing this life through and have them replaced with the lenses of Philippians 1. To see your home, your marriage, your relationship with your kids as an opportunity to work toward other's progress and joy in the faith. To view your neighborhood and your workplace, not as an opportunity to build status and wealth, but as a mission field to live out the gospel, seeking to bring restoration to all facets of life, while living out the hope of your salvation.

[Conclusion]

As the Heidelberg Catechism states in its answer to the very first question regarding what it is that gives us comfort, whether we live or whether we die, it says this: *That I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ.* Comfort for the believer comes in understanding that we are no longer our own, we do not live for ourselves, but we belong to and live for another. The paradox of the gospel is that those who try to hold onto their life will lose it, but those who lose it for the sake of the gospel, will find it. This is why Paul continued to rejoice, even in a prison cell, because his life's mission was still being accomplished, even there, in what we would consider to be the least likely of places! For some of us, maybe we need to pray that the Lord would reorient our lives to view our possessions, our time, our relationships, our employment, not as something to bring glory to ourselves, but as opportunities to see God's kingdom come more fully now. Let us examine our hearts and ask, "What am I living for?" "What truly brings me comfort?" May you believe that it's in living a life devoted to the progress of the gospel, so that Christ is honored through your life and through your death, that your heart will find all that it truly desires!