

Classis Lake Erie

Agenda Supplement

October 8, 2016

STATED CLERK—SUPPLEMENTAL

Regarding the commissioned pastor examination of Brad Stolman, who has accepted a call to the position of Director of Worship and Family Ministry at Dearborn Christian Fellowship:

- a. Synodical deputies Peter Borgdorff (Classis Grand Rapids East), Douglas Fauble (Classis Grandville), and Matthew Palsrok (Classis Georgetown) have concurred with the decision of the Executive Committee that the position fits synodical guidelines.
- b. All documents specified by Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, 1, have been received and are in good order.

NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

REPORT TO CLASSIS -- October 8, 2016

UPDATE on Detroit Kingdom Enterprise Zone

Pastor Jon Beyer (Grace RCA in Canton, MI) and Pastor Dan Jongsma (Dearborn Christian Fellowship) have served as co-leaders for this particular zone since 2011. The purpose of these zones is to foster collaborative work between the CRC and the RCA that intentionally strengthens our existing churches and helps start new churches. The Detroit Lead Team has been meeting for several years now. This team includes a Prayer Coordinator, Pastor Bruce Hunt from Grace RCA in Allen Park; a Communications Coordinator, Regina Reid from Nardin Park RCA; and a Community Development specialist, Mark Van Andel, Ben Van Arragon from First Detroit CRC, as well as Jon and Dan. Here are some of the current things we are celebrating as a KEZ:

- **Hesed Community Church** – this church planting work began near the end of 2015. Pastor Nate Bull (an ordained African-America evangelist in the RCA) has received full endorsement from his denomination and classis for this work. A grant from the Detroit KEZ is also helping to fund this project. A ministry house in the Brightmoor district of Detroit has been purchased. From this central location at 22044 Lyndon St. in Detroit, Nate has been hosting lunches and gathering names of neighbors for his prayer wall. Additionally, the ministry team has been doing work projects in the homes of people in the neighborhood and praying with many of them. Brevin Heers, a young man from Grace Canton, has been instrumental in pulling together teams of volunteers from local RCA/CRCs to paint all the rooms and carpet the bedrooms. There will be

on open house in October to showcase this work and some artwork that Nate has been using as part of his outreach strategy. Nate is available to preach in local CRCs when the need arises. He would welcome the opportunity to share his ministry vision with you. Contact him at: hesedcc@gmail.com.

- **Mark Van Andel** -- Mark is a student at Calvin Seminary with plans to graduate with an M.Div. degree in May 2017. Presently he is licensed to preach and is available as pulpit supply to our churches. In addition to assisting Nate Bull in his work at Hesed Community Church, Mark has been laying the groundwork for a house church movement within his Detroit neighborhood. He has also joined the adjunct teaching team at Grace. The Detroit KEZ has pledged to help fund Mark's house church plant over the next three years. You can contact him at: mvandel3@calvinseminary.edu
- **A Leadership Development Learning Community (LDLC)** has been formed with 5 participating churches. In order to be effective, churches need leaders at all levels, serving in all areas of ministry, inside and outside the walls of the church. With this in mind, a LDLC was launched in August 2016. Over the next two years, this group will gather four times, for two-day retreats (Friday – Saturday). The LDLC is comprised of senior pastors and ministry leaders (a team of 3-5 ministry leaders from each church) who are passionate about developing a leadership pipeline that will work within their specific context. Pastor Eddy Aleman, Director of Leadership Development in the RCA, and Pastor Jon Beyer oversee this learning community. On-going coaching is also provided in between gatherings to encourage and empower teams forward toward execution of their action plans.
- **The Block Party Trailer** was again made available for rent this past summer for RCA and CRC churches in the Detroit Metro area. Several different families from several different churches used its content to meet and serve their neighbors. More information about this effective outreach tool can be found on our website: www.blockpartydetroit.org.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Dan Jongsma
Chairperson of the New Church Development Committee

Classis Lake Erie Leadership Development

Recommendation for Sabbatical Support

Ann Arbor Chapel on behalf of Pastor Rolf Bouma

Background:

On September 21, 2016, I received an application from the board of Ann Arbor Chapel, on behalf their Pastor for Academic Ministries, Rolf Bouma. The application provided detailed plans for a 6-month sabbatical lasting from February 1 through July 31, 2017. The grounds given were:

- that Pastor Bouma has served Ann Arbor Chapel faithfully for 14 years;
- that Pastor Bouma has not take a sabbatical during this tenure;

- that Pastor Bouma's ministry will be enriched by a period of extended reflection and renewal.

Further Details:

Pastor Bouma's sabbatical request comes fully endorsed by the board at AAC. They cite not only his years of valued service, but also a recent season of some professional and personal challenge that lend some urgency to the need for a period of rest. The overall theme of Pastor Bouma's sabbatical study will be an exploration of the idea of "sacred space" (in the spirit of Wendell Berry's quote, "[t]here are no unsacred places; there are only sacred and desecrated places"). This coincides with AAC's 75th anniversary, and supports their shared reflection on the mission of cultivating sacred space in their unique ministry setting.

The application includes the following estimated total costs of the sabbatical, and request for funding (copied from the application and pasted into the current document):

Costs:

Pulpit Supply \$1500 (\$125 x 12 Sundays)

Pastoral Staffing Coverage \$5200 (\$20/hr x 10 hrs/wk x 26 wks)

Total: \$6700

Requested from Classis Lake Erie:

Pulpit supply \$1500 x 75% = \$1125

Pastoral Staffing Coverage \$5200 x 75% = \$3900

Total: \$5025

Recommendation:

I recommend that Classis Lake Erie grant Ann Arbor Chapel's request, and provide **\$5025.00** toward Pastor Bouma's sabbatical. The request falls within the parameters of CLE's Sabbatical Policy, and Classis will do well to support AAC's affirmation of, and commitment to the health of, their pastor.

Ben Van Arragon

Classis Lake Erie Leadership Development

Leadership Development Committee

REVISED Student Funding Report

We request funding for the following seminary students in the amounts detailed below:

1. Jiyong Kim
Jiyong's home congregation is Ann Arbor Hope. He is married to Grace Hwang. Jiyong begins his final semester of study in CTS's MDiv program this fall.
Recommended: **\$ 3,800.00**
2. Seong Jun Kim
Seong Jun's home congregation is Ann Arbor Hope. He and his wife, Young Ja, have one child. Seong Jun begins his first semester of study in CTS's MDiv program this fall.
Recommended: **\$5,000.00**
3. Brad Stolman
Brad is on staff at Dearborn Christian Fellowship. He and his wife, Lisa, have four boys. Brad begins his first semester of MDiv studies by distance education at Reformed Theological Seminary this fall.
Recommended: **\$ 5,745.00**
4. Mark Van Andel
Mark is a church planter and member at First CRC Detroit. He and his wife, Kristin, have three boys. Mark is completing MDiv studies through Moody Theological Seminary, and EPMC requirements through CTS.
Recommended: **\$ 470.00**

Total for 2016/2017: **\$15,015.00**

Disbursements for 2015/2016:	3 Students: \$13,800.00
Disbursements for 2014/2015:	4 Students: \$28,400.00
Disbursements for 2013/2014:	6 students: \$30,000.00

Please note: Cost of tuition for full-time study in Calvin Theological Seminary's MDiv program is approximately **\$15,510.00**

Please recall that at our October, 2012 meeting, Classis decided to return to past precedent and cap all student assistance at 50% of the tuition costs of each student. For the past five years the mandate of Classis has also been to limit the Student Fund's total annual disbursement to approximately \$30,000.00.

Committees and Boards (October 2016)

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(As a general rule, people serve forever!)

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Sermons

On the following pages you will find:

1. Three sermons from minister of the Word candidate Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink. The first is her assigned sermon, on a portion of the Heidelberg Catechism. The second and third are Old Testament and New Testament sermons, respectively.
2. One sermon from commissioned pastor candidate Zongseng Vang. The biblical text was assigned by the Executive Committee. My apologies for the formatting. (Moving from one program to another is rarely seamless!)

Why belief in the Resurrection Matters: Sermon on 1 Cor 15:12-28 and Heidelberg Catechism
LD 17

To be preached at River Terrace Church on September 25, 2016
Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink

[Opening]

One of the conversations I often have with students is about how much we, as Christian communities, argue about what Christians need to believe. Many of them have been told that there is exactly one right way to think about heaven and hell and who will be saved, one right way to think about how the earth came into being, one right way (and party) to vote for, and one right way to think about same-sex marriage. If you have spent any time within Christian circles, you will notice that we don't actually agree. It's confusing and it gets a bit overwhelming. It's also hard not to get cynical – how can all these arguments really be helpful? Does it really matter that much what we believe?

[Yes, it matters]

Both Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, and the Heidelberg Catechism give a fairly clear answer. YES. Yes, it matters what you believe.

If you look at the text of 1 Corinthians 15, you'll notice a lot of strong statements. The strongest are in verse 14 and verse 17 - Verse 14 says “**if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**” Verse 17 says something similar: **if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.** Paul doesn't mince words here. Either Christ is raised or your faith is useless. Either Christ is raised or you stuck forever with your sins.

Paul proves his point through a sort of logic.

- You have to believe in the resurrection, otherwise Christ didn't rise from the dead.
- You have to believe in Christ's resurrection, otherwise our preaching has been useless – and, in fact, we've been lying about God. If Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile. And all those who've died are lost.
- In fact, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are fools. We of all people are most to be pitied.

Paul keeps repeating himself, as if to convince his audience of the importance of what he's saying: You have to believe this – or else your whole faith falls apart.

Once he has presented the logic of the need to believe in the resurrection, he goes on to speak a bit about why it matters. He doesn't necessarily explain what the resurrection is – for that we need to go back to the gospels, especially John. It's as if he assumes that people understood enough of the bigger picture and are just missing one last piece. It is through Christ's resurrection that Christ has conquered death. And in Christ all would be made alive.

An image for Paul's argument is that of a building. The Bible often talks about Christ being the capstone or cornerstone (Ephesians 2:2). This is the stone in a building that holds everything together. However, most of us don't build that many things of substance – at least, none that will fall down without the cornerstone.

The closest some of us get is through games. Think, for example of the game, Jenga – a

game where you place small blocks in a pile and then try to pull out one of the blocks from the bottom. Imagine that each block represents something that Christianity teaches and/or the Bible says. All of us know that pulling out one of the blocks on the bottom would knock over the whole pile. Christ's resurrection is like one of the bottom blocks. Without it, Christianity falls apart.

So when we ask whether it matters what we believe, the answer is indeed a resounding yes. Yes, you have to believe that Christ rose from the dead.

[Section: But what if I/we don't believe it?]

Some of us are like sure, I believe that Christ rose from the dead. Why wouldn't I believe it? Perhaps we've grown up with the faith, and it simply has made sense to us. Or we've been convicted by our sin and have come to Christ, recognizing our only hope is in Him. We can't imagine not believing in Christ's resurrection – or in Christ's coming, his death, and our deliverance from sin! Our faith has been a gift that we have cherished. To those of us for whom that is the story, Paul's words might seem a bit excessive to us, even if we admire his passion.

Others of us, though, aren't so sure. We question how one can you just believe it? How do you not have questions? Or doubts? Either about the resurrection, God, or faith in general. Paul makes a great logical argument, and this belief seems reasonable, but we're still not sure that Christ has risen. There's no real proof. There's no rigorous scholarship that can guarantee that the events reported in the Bible are true. And Paul's logic is actually depressing: Because if we're not sure that Christ is risen, we're also not sure if our faith is actually useless or if we've just been deceiving ourselves.

The two groups don't get along that well. One side finds the other ignorant for not having questions and the other group finds the questioners to not have enough faith. And we in the church don't really know what to do that, so we often pretend there is no issue.

Nonetheless, my experience with graduate students has taught me otherwise. A lot of people are asking whether the resurrection or even this whole Christianity thing is really true. And they are taught to be ashamed of their questioning and doubt (and be quiet about it already). Or they quietly walk away to places where they are allowed to wonder and doubt. And often those are places where Christianity and Jesus and the resurrection are just one choice among many. Instead of being places where the resurrection of Christ still matters.

[Questioning and Doubting have a place within Christianity]

And yet, the church has a long tradition of questions and doubting. It is, after all, because of the doubts of the Corinthians that Paul has even written this letter. The force of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 makes it obvious that the Corinthians were clearly not sure about the resurrection.

To the Corinthians, resurrection of the dead was simply too strange. The culture around them didn't believe in resurrection, so how could they? Sure, there were rumors that the soul might still exist, but it was probably not a particularly pleasant existence. And there was definitely no bodily resurrection – except maybe in rare occasions – like perhaps with Jesus. In light of

what the culture around them was saying, there's no way they could believe in the resurrection of the body. It didn't matter what Paul might have told them.

These people, who lived close to the actual time of Christ's resurrection, were unsure that it happened. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul he spells out the gospel: verses 3-4 say: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and he appeared to a whole bunch of folks. Look it was real! All these people could verify it. However, even if the Corinthians could begin to believe that Christ arose, it was a lot harder to believe such a strange idea as a general resurrection of the dead.

Today, we are hundreds of years further. We don't have a list of people – people we know or Paul knew– who have seen Christ after his resurrection. We have only Paul's words. And we live in a culture that has put scientific reasoning above so much else – so if you can't prove it, it's not true. Or if you do believe it's true, it's because you just haven't learned to reason well enough.

As for those of us here and in society who have concluded that reason is not always the answer to all our problems, we have instead become tolerant of everything – and any crazy idea is okay to believe. Whether it's true is irrelevant.

In the midst of all of this skepticism, how can one believe in the resurrection?

I wonder if those of us who've grown up in the church truly realize how truly crazy it is to believe in the resurrection. We know Paul's argument about why you need to believe the resurrection – because otherwise your whole faith is useless and you're stuck in your sins. And so we think it makes sense because it has always been a normal part of our lives. However, as Paul says in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians – Christ crucified and thus, by inference also his resurrection – is foolishness to the Greeks. Believing in the resurrection *is* truly absurd.

It is not because we are smart enough – or perhaps even dumb enough not to question – that we believe. Instead it is grace. When you believe something wholeheartedly – something that to the rest of the world makes no sense – that is grace. And growing to believe something that you yourself think makes no sense – that, too, is grace.

[Heidelberg Catechism & why it matters]

This is where the wisdom of the Catechism comes in. The Heidelberg Catechism recognizes that our belief is a gift and a comfort. We don't have to beat ourselves – or each other - up about what we do and do not believe. Or even how much we believe. Instead, it is only by God's grace, through the Holy Spirit, that we can even believe anything at all. And this belief is a gift. A gift that is there to give us comfort.

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 17 is just one example of how our beliefs are meant to give us comfort. Each of the sections is there to provide wisdom for living as people who have been saved by Christ's death and resurrection. As Barnes put it, “in the midst of all the anxieties of contemporary life,” the Catechism provides comfort.

This comfort extends to the questions and anxiety we have here. The comfort is big enough to handle anxiety we have about River Terrace Church and whether we'll still be okay after all

the challenges and changes in the last while.

The comfort is big enough to handle the violence of this last week and our anxiety of how to respond. After another shooting of a black man, it feels like one needs to choose between supporting black lives matter or supporting the good work of the police. How do we talk about racism and fear and safety? In the midst of all these difficulties, how do we get through each day without becoming sorrowful or angry or simply stop caring?

The Catechism provides a small gift in the midst of these anxieties. Not so much direct answers but instead hope and comfort. I thus encourage you to read the Heidelberg Catechism sometime – or even to read a short book by Craig Barnes about the Catechism – (you can access it online – there's a note in the bulletin about it). Barnes notes that the catechism “invites us out of hiding behind our coping devices and calls us to stand again as women and men capable of taking on life with all its volatility. The comfort of the gospel is more than consolation or empathy for our worries. It is redemptive. It restores us to our position as humans made in the image of God, crowned with dignity and honor.”

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 17, which we read at the beginning, explains this further. It tells us what comfort we have from Christ's resurrection. It explains why the gift that we have been given in the resurrection of Christ matters so much.

You'll notice the Catechism doesn't try to prove the resurrection. Commentaries will sometimes try to do that, but the Catechism doesn't. It doesn't seem to be all that concerned about whether people have questions. Instead, it simply says – this belief – it matters so much. Recognize the gift for what it is.

This section in the Catechism is short. It's also fairly simple. It doesn't need a lot of explanation. To sum it up, the resurrection gives us hope, comfort, and enables us to live our lives.

Anyone who has lost a loved one to death or has recognized his or her own imminent death can find hope here. While death can bring anger and deep sadness, we do not need to fear. Because Christ has overcome death. And resurrection has been pledged to us – as his people, we will share in his resurrection.

Thankfully, that is not all – because if we get stuck there, we get stuck with being people who are “so heavenly minded, that they're no earthly good.” Because Christ overcame death, we share in righteousness – and we are raised up to new life now already. Christ's resurrection enables us to live now. Believing in Christ's resurrection is not one more thing we need to do (or believe). It's not one of the boxes we need to check to guarantee that some day we get to heaven. Instead Christ's resurrection is a gift that enables us to live now.

The other gift of the Catechism is that it helps understand how to ask questions about why and what beliefs we have matters. We believe Christ rose from the dead because it provides hope from God for those who have died, it provides hope for future, and it gives us strength for today – because Christ has already conquered sin and death. This is kind of an ALL CAPITALS sort of answer to why this belief matters to the Christian life. It definitely fits with Paul's words – and force – in 1 Corinthians 15.

To talk about so many other things as if they are absolutely fundamental to belief diminishes Christ's resurrection. It is not just one more thing to believe. It's one of the core things. And not everything is core.

If we go back to the image of the game and the building blocks from before – the resurrection is one bricks you can't remove – otherwise it all falls apart.

And yet there are blocks that can be removed. Perhaps they've added beauty to the building – or perhaps they simply added an ugly addition that we'd like to get rid of.

And it's only when we start pulling on them that we know how close they are to the core – it's kind of like when you do renovations in a house and you discover that a stain in the floor wasn't just a stain but was also evidence of a water leak. So much for a simple, let's replace a few tiles, kind of problem.

Let me give a concrete example. We at Campus Edge have talked quite a bit about the age of the earth and how it came into being. We as a church have had a lot of fights about this because it looks like a simple problem. Kind of the sort of renovation where you'd like to know out a wall. And when you start moving the wall, you realize that it's actually holding up a lot of other things – like how we read the Bible and how we view science and nature. It's not as simple as well, let's just get rid of that and stop talking about it. Or that there's an obvious and simple right answer. Yet, at the same time, we can judge the rightness of our belief through looking at how what we believe matters. Because if our belief that God created the world in exactly 6 days means that we feel that we have every right to destroy creation, then there's something wrong with our belief. Because it goes against the even more clear teaching that God created the creation good and created us to be stewards of it. Or if our belief that the world came about through evolution causes us to question God's ability to do impossible things, then we have a different mess – because God's ability to do the impossible can definitely be seen in the resurrection. And if our conversation about this dismisses everyone else as being an idiot, well, then definitely goes against God's clear command to love your neighbor.

The question of what we believe matters not because we have to have the right answers – or even are not allowed to question. Instead it matters because it makes a difference in how we live our everyday lives. Our beliefs affect how we relate to God, to others, and even to the creation. Our beliefs affect how we see the power of sin and death in our lives. And so we recognize the gift these beliefs are to us. They are a gift that bring us comfort and strength to live our daily lives.

Let's close together by reading the Catechism again. (see page:)

I'll read the question and together we'll read the answers

Closing prayer.

Almighty God,

Move in our hearts and grant us the courage to believe. May our questions help us know You and your word deeper and why it matters what we believe.

Comfort us with the resurrection – may we be filled with hope for those who have died and not be fearful of our own deaths. And may we recognize how your resurrection has conquered sin and death, enabling us to live abundant lives today.

[Introduction]

In *Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul*, Susan Webber tells how a preschool teacher tried to involve her students in the Sunday school lesson on Noah's ark by asking them several questions:

"I'm going to describe something to you. Let's see if you can guess what it is. First: I'm furry with a bushy tail and I like to climb trees."

The children looked at her blankly.

"I also like to eat nuts, especially acorns."

No response. This wasn't going well at all!

"I'm usually brown or gray, but sometimes I can be black or red."

Desperate, the teacher turned to a perky four-year-old who was usually good about coming up with the answers. "Michelle, what do you think?"

Michelle looked hesitantly at her classmates and replied, "Well, I know the answer has to be Jesus - but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me!"

[THE SERVANT - A. JESUS AS THE SERVANT (42:1-4)]

As the joke points out, we expect Jesus to be the answer to any question about the Bible. This is also true when we read this passage out of Isaiah. We can't help but see Jesus in it. Notice all of the New Testament connections:

- verse 1: The Spirit upon his servant. We hear the words at Jesus' baptism: This is my beloved, my Son – as the Holy Spirit descends upon him and he starts his ministry.
- Verse. 4, light to the Gentiles: Simeon in Luke 2 declares that Jesus has come to be a light to the Gentiles;
- Verse 7 sounds like a lot like Jesus' teaching in Luke 4, taken from Isaiah 61:
"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free..."

Jesus himself says that He has come to fulfill these words. So, of course this text is about Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus even says it himself.

But you're bright college students and, as much as it looks like Jesus fulfilled the words, hopefully my story at the beginning makes you wonder if it's really that simple. If Jesus was the servant prophesized about here, then why has the text not been fulfilled more in our day? **How can justice have been established when the world still seems to have so much wrong in it?**

On top of that, this passage was written several thousand years ago, hundred of years before Christ lived, so what did it matter to them then that Jesus would come to bring justice to the earth? The people originally hearing Isaiah's words were in exile – away from Jerusalem, slaves to the Assyrians. They were suffering, and they needed justice and deliverance immediately. What good was a servant coming to bring justice sometime in the future? That's about as useful as one of your professors telling you that he's changing the class you're taking so that it has less reading and fewer papers – but it doesn't take effect until next year!

[B . CYRUS AS THE SERVANT (41:25)]

The people of Israel hearing Isaiah's words wanted justice to happen as soon as possible. Any promise of forthcoming justice would have been interpreted by them as being about setting them, the prisoners, free. That meant a great king who would conquer their captors. Cyrus seemed the likely candidate – 41:25 says one from the north and from the east. Cyrus was from the east, and had conquered peoples in the north, so he fit this seemingly contradictory description. On top of this, Isaiah 45:1 says "Thus says the LORD to *his anointed*, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue

nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him— and the gates shall not be closed.” Cyrus seemed clearly to be the ‘anointed, chosen’ one that the people were looking for. He came to bring justice against their oppressors. He came to set the prisoner free.

However, the servant, as you'll note in v. 6 is also called to be a light to the nations, given as a covenant to the people. That seems a bit too much for one person, even Cyrus, and indeed, Cyrus is never mentioned in common speech today. As much as Cyrus sounds like a possibility for the servant for the people of Israel then, he was a temporary saviour at best. Cyrus could not ultimately fulfill the promise of this text – to bring justice and be a light to the nations.

We today are still longing for that justice in the midst of the messiness of life. Where is justice when those around us think it crazy that I believe that faith should shape all of life? What about classes with too many useless assignments and the unfairness of having to have several jobs just to make ends meet? Where do we find answers to those questions of justice?

[C. ISRAEL AS THE SERVANT (42:1-9, ESP 9)]

Israel looked for the answers to questions of injustice among the gods and their captives. They were ruled by foreigners with foreign gods, and the foreigners seemed to be doing much better than they were: happier, enjoying life more, and above all, free! So why not follow the same things they were doing!?! So Israel forgot about the LORD, and went after other gods. But God points out to them the fault in this logic. Starting in Isaiah 41:21 a court case is presented against Israel's false gods. The gods say nothing to respond to God's mocking them. Only God responds – by pointing out that He is the one who is rescuing them!! He is the one who raised up their immediate saviour – Cyrus. The gods could not control their fate. They could not make justice in the world.

The answer to where justice comes from is in the next verse: 42:1. The bringer of justice is the one whom God has chosen, the one that he upholds and delights in, the one who has God's spirit on him. The servant, in other words, the same servant that we've been trying here to identify and clarify.

The people of Israel were also trying to identify this servant. They were looking for someone, the anointed, chosen, servant to come. Someone to rescue them from the turmoil, to bring justice to happen on the earth. Someone to do it for them. Someone who would punish those who had afflicted the poor (in other words, someone who would punish those who had made them poor and put them in exile). Reflection on their own wrongdoing – any exploitation they might have done – even their having served false gods – was ignored, despite this having led to exile. Instead, the people of Israel saw themselves deserving of rescue.

For whatever reason, the people of Israel had developed some faulty logic: false gods would save them, and they were innocent of all wrongdoing. They had been treated unjustly and now finally a Saviour would come and rescue them. This faulty logic made it so that they had forgotten who they were: people of Abraham, children of the same Abraham called to be a blessing to a nations (Genesis 12:1-3). People of the covenant, not only the covenant with Abraham, but the covenant of the law given to them through Moses.

Isaiah goes even further and says it this way in Isaiah 41:8,9

⁸But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”;

and again in Isaiah 49:3

³And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

Did you notice the word servant in those texts? Israel is the servant, and this means that they had something to do with the justice mentioned multiple times in the text. God was angry at them for serving false gods, not only because they took away the praise that God deserves, but also because they were thwarting justice on earth. They were preventing the nations from being pointed to God. They had failed at their calling to be a blessing to all nations – or a light to the people, as Isaiah 42 puts it.

As much as this text is written to Israel and points fingers at the people of Israel, we today do not easily get off the hook. Even if we can show our innocence of worshiping other gods, the calling to do justice still applies to us. We are part of the new covenant, children of Abraham, according to Gal 3:29. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." We, as the children of Abraham, the Israel of God, are being called also to be a light to the nations. Called to do justice.

[CALLED TO JUSTICE: OUR PART]

Being called to do justice and be a light to the nations feels a bit overwhelming and, at the same time, rather unclear. If you're like me, you recognize that justice is a nice vague term. It means a lot to a lot of different people, and it could use some interpretation. Promising to do justice is about as vague a promise as saying well, I'll try to be a better Christian. Tomorrow.

So what does justice mean? It's often seen as making the world a better place by becoming activists of some sort. But the risk in doing that is focusing on only a few or just one issue while neglecting others. Doing justice can mean spending all our time boycotting the bad food in the cafeteria, and not care about people who are starving elsewhere. It can mean complaining about unfair wages on campus or in my job, but care nothing about those elsewhere working for almost nothing. It's not that our culture doesn't understand justice, it's just that it's difficult for it not to become skewed.

Perhaps others' definitions would be helpful. One commentator, Brueggemann, notes that justice "is the reordering of social life and social power so that the weak (widows and orphans) may live a life of dignity, security, and well-being." This sounds a bit different than only focusing on the justice issues that I'm personally affected by or passionate about. What happens when we ask: who are the weak here today? The social outcasts, those failing their classes? The poor folk, those who don't have the right connections? What does it look like to work for a life of dignity, security and well-being for such as these? Wondering about these questions is a beginning of an answer, but we also want to be sure that we're still not simply making justice be only what we want it to be.

The text of Isaiah 42 talks about bringing justice, but it never says exactly what it means – it talks about

opening the eyes that are blind,
bringing out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

But these phrases are spoken in the context of being a light to the nations and a covenant to the people. What does that mean?

The whole creation aspect of vs 5 helps explain it. When we think of creation we often think of the creation/evolution debate, but this is not about that. It's about who is in charge. God was in charge when He set the world in order and still is now. God is still putting things in order. There is a way things ought to be – and the servant has been called to set them in order – to make things just. We

know what that looks like because of God's word and through the Spirit which God has given us, his servants, now.

Going back to the people who originally heard the text: what about the fact that the people to whom Isaiah is writing are in exile? It's hard to do justice when you're oppressed – when you're the one who feels like you deserves justice. But that doesn't deny that there is a way things ought to be. Israel's call to be the servant, acting out justice, remains.

And the call to us, the Israel of God, is still there. We are called to be a light to the nations.

No matter that we are busy, that we get caught up in school.

No matter that it still feels like we are new here, that we're just feeling comfortable here – have no idea where injustice even is. Still the call to justice is there.

No matter if we have messed up in the past. The call, like that to Israel then, is still there.

Being in exile (or deserving of punishment) did not mean that Israel was allowed not to do justice – that they were allowed to take time off and even serve other gods a little bit. In the same way, no matter what our situation, there is no reason good enough to say that it is okay for me not to do justice, or that it might be okay for me reject this teaching of God.

Instead, the text points to a different story, a different reason for which you have been created:

God who created the heavens and stretched them out,

who is still ordering the earth and what comes from it,

who gives breath to the people upon it

who has given you breath and spirit as you walk on it.

⁶ He is the LORD, He has called you in righteousness,

He has taken you by the hand and kept you;

He has given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,

He has given you to be a witness to your friends

And a light to this campus

⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,

to remove the blinders from the eyes from those that can see nothing beyond tomorrow's test and the problems of today.

You are to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, bring out from the prison those who sit in darkness.

You are to bring forth the word to the people, set free those who are imprisoned by injustice, and bring those who know not God out of the darkness of their prisons.

But HOW!!?!!! Is this not too much!?!?

[CHRIST AS THE PERFECT FULFILLMENT]

When it already feels like there's never enough time to do everything, how do we make room for justice, along with everything else we're supposed to do as followers of God? How can we help the bruised reed and smoldering wick, when we are the ones who are broken? When the false gods around us are so appealing? Sure, the gods are not made of stone and wood like Israel's gods were. But the idols of good grades, having the perfect relationship, a safe Christian community, and comfortable life – make it hard to remember that there is a call to anything other than the life we know now.

The answer goes back to the beginning of this sermon – to the squirrel. Or more accurately, to the one who made the squirrel – who created an order, and provided a greater servant for Israel when they didn't bring God's order to the world.

Colossians 1 notes that Jesus is the firstborn of creation, and the gospels confess Jesus as being the ultimate fulfillment of the servant spoken of in Isaiah. He is the one who will do what Israel could not do. Israel failed at their calling to be a light to the nations – though called to be the servant, only Christ could fulfill the task of being the servant to its full completeness. Matthew 12 notes that Jesus healed many, and this was “to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸ “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹ He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

²⁰ He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory.²¹ And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

The servant will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick. When we know that we are broken, we can take great comfort in that. The call for justice is not just one more thing to do but part of the invitation to live according to the creation order and follow Christ. In following Christ, we are invited to participate in the work of the Spirit on earth.

[OUR CALL TO JUSTICE]

It is because of Christ that we are called to be his agents of justice on earth. We don't want to fall into the problem we talked about at the beginning – the problem of having a human saviour that either has nothing to do with when the text was written or with today. Nor should we talk only of Christ being the servant, as justice and actions in response to the created order can too easily become separate from us. These can become things God ought to be doing, and my being a follower is just about going to heaven.

That Christ is the perfect servant is not a right to do nothing – but a call to join in what He has already started. A call away from our questions of the future, being the good Christian, from our relationship questions – not because they are irrelevant but because they are as powerless to save us as the gods that are made fun of in Isaiah chapter 41.

We have been called, as 1 Peter 2:9 puts it: you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We have been called out of darkness so that we might rescue the prisoners of darkness. We have been called to give up our false gods, so that we can serve the true God who is bringing forth justice. To reach out to those who are broken – to those who are weak. To the social outcasts. And the ones barely making it through each day. To the ones who have no home or are imprisoned unfairly, and we have the ability to do something. We are called to do justice in this area – not because justice is so great, but because God is so great – and there is a way that the world is created to be.

[CONCLUSION]

It's hard. Even with Christ as our example and the Spirit's guidance, it is hard. We can get lost in the striving to do justice. We can get lost in the world and pressures and false gods around us. Fortunately, we know that God will not smother us – that he will not crush a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick. Yet, we cannot rest only in this comfort. We are called to restore how things ought to be. Striving because of the work of Jesus, the ultimate servant, and through the help of the Spirit. And we know that others will see the servant in us as we bring justice to the world. Alleluia. Praise the LORD.

Sin, shame, and the gospel proclaimed. Sermon based on John 4:1-26
Preached July 2016 in River Terrace Church
Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink

Read John 4:1-26.

I invite you to keep the text open to John 4, as we'll be walking through the text.

[Introduction]

One of my favourite parts about my work with Campus Edge is leading Bible studies. I find great joy in discovering the surprises in the text – things we've forgotten or things we've never realized. I especially like the surprises where we see how the gospel has been given to people who are imperfect. And the gospel is not just that we, people full of sin and shame, get to be saved, but that Christ uses us to further his kingdom.

Part of the surprise in the story of this morning is how complicated the life of the Samaritan woman probably was. We know from the text that something was obviously wrong in her life: verse 18 says that she was married 5 times and living with a man who was not her husband. We thus assume that her life has been immoral and full of sin. But nowhere is sin or even divorce ever mentioned in this passage, suggesting that there is more going on.

Because we are so removed from the culture of the New Testament, we bring our own assumptions about divorce and the immorality of this woman onto the text. However, the laws of Moses - laws that even the Samaritans would have followed to some degree – suggest that there are other factors that might have played a role in her numerous marriages.

- First, Deuteronomy 25 says that “if a man died without having a son, his widow would marry the brother, in order to have a child that would be considered to be from the dead husband.” It's quite possible that this woman was childless and had been passed on from one brother to another.
- Secondly, while we know Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19 on divorce: “that whatever God has joined together, let no one separate,” we forget the question that prompted Jesus' response: it was the assumption that it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason. That does seem to be what Deuteronomy 24 says, that a man can divorce his wife if she no longer pleases him.

This woman would likely have been widowed or cast off a number of times. That she was now living with someone who didn't have the decency to marry her says a lot less about how sinful *she* was and a lot more about how she has been rejected.

It is to *this* woman that Jesus offers the water of life. Somebody whose life is so messy that we instinctively judge her: she's the kind of person who **obviously** needs Jesus to fix up her life. We, though, have our lives in order. Or at least, we look like we have our lives in order. We're good church people, right?

Yet, there is so much we don't talk about: when I myself see how judgmental I can be, how impatient I often am, how anxious and ashamed I feel, I know how broken and messed up I am. While the messiness of each of our lives is different, and we are ashamed of different things, we can all recognize how we fall short of who we ought to be. We don't deserve to belong to the body of Christ. Because of this we are tempted to reject the water of life, or just try to take a manageable little sip of it. Instead we should see, as this story proclaims, that the water of life overflows, and God uses broken people to become vessels of the water of life.

[Walk through the story]

Let me walk you through the story. Jesus and the Samaritan woman meet at Jacob's well (verse 6-7). There at the well, Jesus and the woman have an odd conversation about water. First Jesus asks for water. Then, when the Samaritan woman questions him, he says *she* should have actually asked *him* for water, and he would have given her living water. Obviously confused, she asks how he's expecting to do that since he just asked for *her* help getting water; yet, her response also suggests that she understands what he says better than we'd expect, because she also asks if he might be greater than Jacob (verse 12).

Jesus' response here is one of Jesus' most profound sayings – we even used at the beginning of the service. Verse 14: Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. **Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**

And she responds: yes, I do, God helping me.

Well, she doesn't quite say that, she says “give me this water, so I won't get thirsty and have to keep drawing water again.” But these words of I do, God helping me, capture how this is becoming a baptism moment. This living water – this abundant, overwhelming, bubbling over water – is the same water of life that we recognize in our baptism.

The imagery of baptism should already have been in our thoughts as we read this passage, not just because of all the references to water here, but because of something found already at the beginning of the chapter. We see there (in verse 1) that Jesus is travelling from Judea to Galilee because the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing all these disciples. Even though the text notes that it's actually the disciples doing all the baptisms, we have been given a clue that baptism is part of what Jesus is about.

The question, then, at this point of the story, is whether she, too will become one of those who are baptized? Does she truly want the water of life, that we learn in John 7:37-39, is the Spirit?

Before we as readers hear the answer to that question, another aspect of baptism enters into the story. Last week, during the baptism here, Pastor Clay pointed to baptism being about belonging – about being accepted into the family of God. Jesus thus invites her to belong, **along with her family**, to the family of God.

And here the tension mounts in the story, because when he invites her to go get her husband, she responds that she has no husband. We then find out (verse 17) that she has had five husbands, and the man she has now is not her husband. Whereas we have a tendency to condemn this woman, Jesus' response was not one of judgment. There is no, go home, get your life in order and then come drink of the water. Instead, he uses words that most of us would not associate with someone whose life is like hers: You are right. What you say is **truth**. You do not have a husband. And in a culture where for a woman, a husband and children, are everything, this means you do not belong, you have not been wanted. Jesus sees her in her shameful situation and acknowledges it.

Not put off by the messiness of her life, he continues his conversation with her, and she recognizes that he must be some kind of prophet, a man of God.

While the conversation doesn't dwell on her situation, it also doesn't return to living water. Instead, they talk about worship. This seems to be a bit off-topic, like the kind of random question that one asks to distract a teacher or parent. Yet, the question of worship is also fundamentally one of belonging. Where and how to worship – this mountain or in Jerusalem (see verse 19) - had been dividing Jews

and Samaritans for centuries. According to the Jews, the Samaritans didn't belong to the people of God. This is despite the Samaritans actually being part Jew! They were the descendants of the Jews of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, who had stayed in the land after the exile – and who had then married captives from other lands were re-settled there.

So her question was one of belonging: whether it was right what the JEWS said – that she and her people didn't belong to God's people. Would Jesus, who was one of these Jews, ultimately agree with the Jews and so condemn her people, or would he be able to tell her that her people, the Samaritans, did really belong, and what they were doing was right – worshipping on the mountain?

Jesus' response was that while the Samaritans worshiped what they didn't know and Jews worship what they did know, neither the Jews nor the Samaritans ultimately had the worship thing right. For as Jesus says in verses 23-24: “ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Because I've heard these words before, these words seem to make sense. Yet, if you'd met someone who knew little about Christianity, talking about “God being Spirit and worshipping him in the spirit and truth” would be confusing and unhelpful. That might be different if you spend a lot of time with the sort of person (like many of the grad students I work with) who loves picking apart complicated and obscure statements. However, most people would respond like the woman: I have no idea what you're talking about. She responds not by trying to figure out what he says, but by pointing to the one who would be able to explain whatever Jesus is talking about. In verse 25, she responds with “When the Messiah comes, He'll explain it all.

And she sets up Jesus' next line so perfectly. Because that's when Jesus makes himself known. 26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I **am he**.” This 'I am' echoes, the 'I am' of Exodus 3 – where the LORD, I am who I am, reveals himself to Moses.

Now that Jesus has made himself known, just as the woman was known, how will the woman respond? Will she receive the living water? Be baptized? Become part of the kingdom of God?

This is where we ended the reading, because this is often where we stop the story – Jesus saw her in her shame and gave her the water of life – isn't that enough?

Except the water of life is an overflowing stream, so it cannot be contained in one person. This is only the first half of the story, the first half of the gospel. Because as the story continues, and the disciples return, the woman leaves. Verse 28: The woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a **man who told me everything I ever did**. Could this be the Messiah?”

Before we find out what happens - whether her proclamation of the gospel is heard - we see in verse 35 Jesus talking about how the fields are ripe for harvest. And the disciples will do the reaping. And because the text has been talking about baptism and making disciples ever since the beginning of the chapter, we know what will happen.

The first harvest comes already in verse 39-42, to the people who didn't belong and who first heard about the water of life through a vessel that was broken.

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him
because of the woman's testimony,

“He told me everything I ever did.”

40 So when the Samaritans came to him,
they urged him to stay with them,
and he stayed two days.

41 And because of his words many more became believers.

42 They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said;
now we have heard for ourselves,
and **we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.**”

The water of life that Jesus has offered has overflowed; it is a spring of life abundant and welling over. It has drawn not only the woman in, but has overflowed into the people around her.

The water of life has the power not only to heal and to forgive but to empower people to be both disciples and apostles. Just like in John 1, the Samaritan woman, like Nathaniel, turns to Christ because He has seen her. The text there says that Nathaniel believed because Jesus saw him under the fig tree.” And then, like Andrew and Philip in John 1, the Samaritan brings others to meet this Jesus.

[So what do we take from this?]

The story shows how Jesus offers the water of life to people whose lives are a mess. People who have been rejected or judged by others – people who do not belong. People whose lives, for whatever reason, are filled with shame. Knowing the messiness of our own lives – or simply just watching the news – we know that we all need this water of life. The question is whether we are willing to drink more than just a sip of it. Or are we tempted to control it, wanting like the Samaritan woman, to hear that how we've always done things is really the right way.

When we see the water of life as being primarily about something we either choose or don't, we have bottled up the message of this passage. The water of life is something that wells over abundantly. It is not just a gift to broken people, it is in broken people that the water of life dwells.

Through this woman who had been cast outside, the Samaritans – a whole people group who didn't belong and were the wrong kind of people – became part of God's kingdom. It was in and through the messiness of her situation that these people came to Jesus. That is how the gospel is proclaimed.

That God uses broken people to be his disciples, to bring forth his kingdom, is not a new message. And yet, it is a startling one. Because it goes against our nature. I don't think I know anyone who wants to be seen as messed up. In academics, we talk about this thing called imposter syndrome – it's a strong sense that you are not good enough for grad school, that you are incompetent and you do not belong. It's debilitating.

Wouldn't it be better to acknowledge that we are all imposters? We are all unsure and making it up as we go along. But we don't want to admit it, because we all want to be seen as competent and good enough. We want to be able to show that we deserve and we belong.

It is one thing to acknowledge my sins to Jesus and be forgiven, it is another thing entirely to acknowledge my brokenness to others.

And then to believe that it is this, through our brokenness, and not through our competence, that Jesus bring others to Him. And this is part of the surprise - the scandal of the gospel – that the water of life flows most abundantly and freely through broken people.

Re-telling the story

That God uses broken people to bring forth his kingdom describes many of the stories of the Old Testament, especially those in Genesis. So, to close, I want to re-tell you a specific story from Genesis – it's found in Genesis 38 – in order that you might hear again the story of how the brokenness of people's lives is used by God to bring forth His Kingdom.

Tamar had been married twice and wasn't currently living with the man she was supposed to marry. Instead she slept with a man who was not her husband.

When Judah, the father of the man she was supposed to marry, heard that she had become pregnant, he condemned her to die.

Except then the story takes a surprising twist. A little background information.

Not only was Judah the father of the man that Tamar was supposed to marry, he was also the father of the two men she had been married to. Judah's first son did was wicked in the LORD's sight, and so the LORD put him to death. Tamar married the second one, and he, too, did what was wicked, and so the LORD also put him to death.

Judah's third son grew up, but Judah was worried that he, too, would die like his brothers. Tamar was thus not given him to as a husband. Instead, she lived in her father's household, as a widow, as Judah had told her to do.

After some time, Judah's wife died. After a period of mourning, he travelled to shear his sheep. When Tamar was told what he was doing and where he was going, she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance of a village on the way.

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."

"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.

"I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said.

"Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked.

He said, "What pledge should I give you?"

"Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him.

So later when Judah condemns her to die, she sent a message to her father-in-law: "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."

Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her to my last son." (Genesis 38, NIV)

So this woman, who had been married twice, and was pregnant by a man who was not her husband, was declared righteous. Definitely not what we expect – but God's kingdom and the vessels he uses are rarely exactly like we expect. God uses broken people to bring forth his kingdom.

Through this child that Tamar bore, she became an ancestor of Jesus, the lion of Judah. Through the brokenness of this situation, God's kingdom is furthered.

In the midst of sin, shame and brokenness, Jesus offers the water of life: water of life that is overflowing and abundant. And through this water of life, He transforms the brokenness of our lives so that we become the vessels by which the water of life is given to others. Take and eat. Take and drink.¹

¹ Communion followed the message. The last sentence or two would be slightly different otherwise.

Christ Alone Can Help Us

Tsuas Yog Tswv Yexus Tibleeg Xwb Thiaj Li Pab Tau Peb

Sermon by Zongseng Vang

[N.B. The Stated Clerk apologizes that the formatting of this message is rough; the move from one program to another was not seamless!]

Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Introduction

-All the events that exist in Christ's ministry, points us clearly see that only Christ can help us.

Txhua qhov xwm txheej thaum Tswv Yexus tau ua Vajtswv txoj haujlwm yog qhia rau peb paub hais tias Tswv Yexus tib leeg xwb thiaj li pab tau peb.

Such as... Healings of all the blind men, casting out demons, healings to all the people with leprosy, a sick man in Bethsaida waiting 38 years to be healed, and so on...

Txhua yam xwm txheej xws li.... Kho cov tibneeg kom pom kev, ntiab dab tawm coob tug, kho cov tibneeg mob rua, tus txiv neej mob tau 38 xyoos... thiab lwm leej lwm tus...

This Event, was one of the many events took place in Christ ministry clearly tell us that "ONLY CHRIST CAN HELP US"

Zaj xwmtxheej no yog ib zaj xwmtxheej ntau ntau zaj uas tau tshawmsim, qhia rau peb paub meej meej hais tias Tswv Yexus tib leeg xwb thiaj li pab tau peb.

These text tell us that no matter who you are, what you are, what you have achieved or what you have accomplished, these things cannot help you or your loved one.

Let us look the Centurion Situation.

The Jewish Leaders well respected him.

Cov thawj coj Yudas los hwm nws heev.

Verses 3-5 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

They speak highly of Him, Jesus listened to them.

Lawv hais lus zoo heev txog nws, Tswv Yexus mloog tej lus uas lawv hais.

The Centurion understood his own power.

Nws tus kheej los kuj paub hais tias nws lub hwjchim meej mom mus txog qhov twg xwb.

Verse 8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

This Centurion has a servant was very sick and he cared a lot about this servant but even with the authority he has, he knows he cannot save his servant.

Tus nom tub rog no nws muaj ib tug tub qhe mob nyav heev thiab nws hlab tshua txog tus tub qhe no tiamsis txawm yog nws muaj siv npaum los nws yeej pab tsis tau tus tub qhe no li.

He humbly asks; he knows he cannot trade anything. He only hopes and believes it.

Verse 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

Application

Sometimes we think, like the Jewish leaders, that we are good and that Jesus owes us something. The Centurion knows this was the wrong way of thinking. His servant was healed only because of Jesus's mercy, and because of the Centurion's faith.

-I am sure you and I know very well of this kind of feeling. We feel hopeless and useless without Christ.

Kuv ntseeg hais tias koj thiab kuv yeej paub txog txoj kev no zoo. Ntau zaug peb yeej pab tsis tau peb tus kheej li thiab cov tibneeg uas peb hlub.

These text tell us that Faith in Christ alone can help us and our loved one.

Verses 6-7 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

The Centurion trust not of himself... Even though he has authority to command all his soldiers and he did not have the authority to heal his servant.

Tus nom no nws yeej tsis tso siab rau nws tus kheej... txawm yog hais tias nws muaj xiv hais kom nws cov tub rog thiab cov tub qhe ua txhua yam, los nws hais tsis tau kho kom nws tus tub qhe mob zoo.

This centurion did not trust on his own achievements.

Tus nom no nws yeej tsis tso siab rau yam uas nws khwv tau.

Verse 7-8 "That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

The Centurion knew only Jesus can heal his servant.

Nws paub thiab ntseeg hais tias tsuas yog Tswv Yexus tibleeg xwb thiaj li pab tau.

Verse 7 "That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

He knew Jesus just said the word, so his servant will be well.

Kuv yog ib tug uas tsis tsim nyog tuaj cuag koj, thov koj hais tib los xwb ces kuv tus tub txib yeej yuav zoo.

Verses 9-10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

By Faith:

Hebrews 11: 1-2 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

They couldn't see, but they believed it.

The Centurion couldn't see, but he believed it.

Jesus has power to heal his servant.

If we to believe, Jesus has promised that our sin, will be forgiven, and that we will live with Him.

The Old Testament heroes like Abraham, Noah, and Moses:

They had faith in God, trusted in, believed in God, obeyed God, and listened to God.

So we are the children in Christ, we must believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

We will be safe, if we put the trust of our hearts, our minds, and our souls in Jesus.

Jesus has the power to healing everything and everyone.

We know the King of King, Jesus Christ, and we will be safe. And Jesus knows us as well.

By Jesus name, Amen!

Sermon Evaluation
for Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink
September 25, 2016

Brenda's sermon and leadership was evaluated for the 11:15 am service on September 25, 2016 at River Terrace Church.

Sermon title: "Why does Christ's Resurrection Matter?"

Questions from the Classis Lake Erie "Guidelines for Sermon Evaluators"

- **Sermon Content**

- The sermon, based on HC Lord's Day 17 and I Corinthians 15:12-34, was theologically sound. Brenda was careful to emphasize the points made in the catechism, and she gave an emphatic YES to the question posed in her sermon title. Using the concrete example of the game Jenga, Brenda explained that the resurrection is a foundational block of our faith. If we pull it out, our faith cannot stand. She provided a helpful summary of the purpose of the Catechism.
- In keeping with our ministry context in a university community, she showed sensitivity to those who question this and struggle with the resurrection. She pointed out that the Corinthians were skeptical people just like many of us today in an age of science. She encouraged us not to be afraid of questions, but rather to welcome those who wonder about the resurrection and encourage them, lest we push them to spend their time with people who do not think the resurrection matters. She listed several questions that are not central to faith, but she emphasized that this one matters.
- Believing in the resurrection, despite the fact that it may not make sense to the world, is a gift of grace and it gives us strength to live today. It is a gift from God.

- **Sermon Delivery**

- Brenda's reading of the passages – from scripture and the Catechism -- was clear. She used notes for her sermon and looked at them frequently, but this was not distracting. Occasionally, it seemed she was reading instead of preaching which sometimes resulted in a lack of adequate change in voice dynamics and pauses for the listener to reflect.
- For the most part, Brenda had good eye contact with appropriate pauses, voice inflections, hand gestures and facial expressions. She was poised, easy to listen to, had clearly practiced her delivery, and chose her words well. She smiled and made us feel comfortable. She presented as being in command and comfortable in front.

- **Worship Leading**

- Brenda did an acceptable job leading the children's message. She asked children "How do you know your parents love you?" and let them give answers. Then she asked "How do you know God loves you?" but the answer to this was somewhat unclear to the adult audience.
 - Brenda did well connecting the various parts of worship. There was one moment of confusion in reading the text of the Catechism, since it was discovered that it is not included in all of the hymnals. This could have been avoided by either having it printed on a slide for projection or by having an insert with the text in the bulletin.
 - Brenda showed flexibility in that when she was summing up about the comfort that comes through faith in the resurrection, she made reference to the Safe Church announcement that had been made earlier in the service.
 - Two of the songs, in particular, fit well into the theme of the sermon. "Mighty to Save" proclaims that Jesus conquered the grave and thus is able to save us. "You are my King," which was sung after the sermon, included the concepts of being forgiven and accepted by God because Jesus died and rose again.
- **Strengths and Weaknesses**
 - All three of the sermons Brenda wrote were theologically sound in the Reformed tradition, well-written and organized, proclaimed the gospel message, and spoke to the listeners.
 - Brenda did a good job connecting each passage to the rest of scripture, referring to both Testaments and meaningfully linking the Old with the New. She effectively tied the John 4 passage with the sacraments allowing for a smooth transition to Communion, which was administered in the same worship service.
 - She presented fresh material that connected the texts with the context of the times in which they were written as well as today's context. Each sermon either presented something new or served as a reminder of an important point. She was aware of her audience and effectively addressed their situation.
 - As mentioned above, Brenda occasionally sounded as though she were reading rather than speaking. This is something that should improve with practice and more preaching opportunities.
 - We encourage Brenda to continue to seek opportunities to preach. Overall she did a great job. We are thankful for the opportunity to participate in this evaluation.

We enthusiastically recommend that Brenda proceed to the next step in her examination and proceed toward ordination as a Minister of the Word.

Mike VandeHaar
Susan Berends Medendorp

Classis Lake Erie: Sermon Evaluation for Zongseng Vang

Time and Date: 10 AM, Sunday, September 25, 2016

Sermon: “**Christ Alone Can Help Us,**” based on Luke 7:1-10

Evaluators:

Ruth Lemmen, River Terrace Church member

Rev. Ken Bieber, River Terrace Church (evaluated from video)

Candidate for Commissioned Pastor Zongseng Vang preached on Luke 7:1-10 in the worship service of Hmong Christian Ministries in Lansing on Sunday, September 25, 2016.

Working from the Text

Zongseng put his hearers in the position of the centurion, telling us that we are to put ourselves under Jesus’ mercy. Drawing from the understanding of faith in Hebrews 11, Zongseng moved his listeners’ need from that of physical healing to that of having faith in Christ for salvation.

While he followed the narrative development of the story, his sermon would have benefitted from bringing out more of the contextual matters, such as offering information about a centurion’s role and status in the Roman Empire, as well as his relationship with his servant.

Delivery

During both the portions of the service which Zongseng led, and in his preaching, he spoke confidently with earnest conviction. His entire sermon treated Scripture reverently, demonstrating its authority over believers’ lives. His sermon offered the one main point that we are to put our faith in Christ alone, and that point was clear throughout the sermon.

In the area of delivery, we encourage Zongseng to be less tied to his manuscript and make more eye contact with the congregation, as well as vary his vocal expressions. It should be noted that Zongseng preached in English, but would normally do so in Hmong. We do commend him that, throughout his preaching, he employed a clear voice and volume.

In the future, just as Zongseng might work to bring out more of the background matters of the text, he should also focus on crafting specific applications for both the life and the church and for the individual hearer.

Recommendation

In recognizing that Zongseng’s preaching is suitable for the context of the Hmong Christian Ministries, we recommend that Classis Lake Erie proceed with the theological portion of his exam.

Sabbatical Report

Harry Winters

(I'm sorry for the rambling nature of this report. Please don't feel obligated to read it. It's probably boring to most of you. I'm sorry that I cannot be at Classis today because when you changed the date you moved it to a time when I'm returning from vacation to perform a wedding. Anyhow, I'm sorry for the rambling nature of this report.)

2015 was a difficult year. In February, my Father in-law suddenly died in Portland Oregon. We didn't see it coming. In March, a 45 year old woman from our congregation died of AIDS. We didn't know that she had that disease. In April, my best friend, a man who was like a brother to me, had a stroke and after lingering for a week, the family and I decided to take him off life support and he too died. I officiated at all three of these highly emotional funerals.

Even before all of these deaths, my elders were urging me to take a Sabbatical in 2016. In fact, they so strongly encouraged me, that I finally asked them if they were sick of me and wanted me to go away. One elder, with very wide, startled eyes, said, "No Harry. We love you and are trying to help you stay." I accepted that assessment and I started to make plans to go away.

I received a very generous grant from you, CLE, and as I was preparing to leave, my congregation also gave me a very generous gift, which meant I could complete my Sabbatical plans. I planned on spending some time in Oregon, near my wife's family and where I could work on some projects. My housing would be free. Then I planned on a 30 day silent, guided retreat. Probably in Colorado. Then later go to Spain with my wife and walk the Camino de Santiago, or, The Way. (Martin Sheen has a very nice movie about this pilgrimage. It's call *The Way*.) I planned to be gone from our church for 16 Sundays, while coming home for Easter Sunday.

The elders created a preaching schedule and asked eight people from within our congregation to preach two times each while I was gone. All eight readily agreed. The elders then committed to organizing and leading the worship services. We celebrate communion every Sunday so they had to lead that aspect of worship as well, which also included blessing the children every week. By the beginning of June everything was set in place and I began to wait.

On November 30, my sister, who had lived with us for 18 years, suddenly died from a heart attack. I was finishing my application for the 30 day silent retreat, that was due the next day, when I discovered her. I knew immediately that I couldn't sit silent for 30 days with my head as messed up as it was. Additionally, my mother in law, back in Oregon had become very sick and my wife said that she wouldn't be able to go to Spain in 2016 because all of her vacation time was going to be consumed going back and forth to Oregon.

So, on December 1, 2015, my Sabbatical plans were shredded. I was scheduled to leave on January 18. But now, two large pieces of my Sabbatical seemed out of reach. My elders kept urging me to go. When I mentioned that I didn't know what I could accomplish anymore, they said, "You don't have to accomplish anything. We don't care. Just take time off. Sit at home for the whole time if you want."

On the morning of January 18, my Sabbatical officially began. I spent the first couple weeks finishing a couple of Spiritual Direction projects that I needed to complete and in creating some kind of new plan because I was still a bit lost.

On February 4 I left home, alone, heading towards Oregon. I had decided to spend a few weeks in one of my in-law's homes that were both sitting vacant. Maybe I could write something, but I wasn't exactly filled with hope.

For some reason, I decided to head south in order to go west. I also decided to drive as much as possible on two lane roads, avoiding the freeways. I dropped straight south through Ohio, then I hit West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri and Oklahoma. I stopped at a few surprising places like a Shaker Village just 20 miles from where my mother grew up in Kentucky, and just down the road I stopped at an obelisk dedicated to Jefferson Davis, also just a few miles from my mother's home town.

Somewhere between Texas and New Mexico I fell apart in a McDonald's parking lot. I couldn't go any farther. I felt shattered. I instinctively knew that I needed to stop traveling for a few days and find a place to pray. I called a couple retreat centers in Texas but didn't get anywhere. Then I called Christ in the Desert Monastery in Abiquiu NM. They had a vacancy.

I cut across country in New Mexico on desolate and straight roads. I was driving pretty fast. At one point I was stopped for some construction and I saw a Road Runner. The New Mexico landscape was beautiful. Wonderful. Enchanting even. I daydreamed about moving out to one of the remote Mesas that were everywhere. I was pulled over in Logan NM and talked for a while about my trip with a very friendly police officer who didn't give me a ticket.

I finally found the entrance to the Monastery. It's an unassuming gravel driveway with a small run-down sign by it. I turned in.

The Monastery, as it turns out, is 13 miles from the main road, at the end of this single lane, red clay, "road." It kept deteriorating as I progressed into a desert canyon. The "road" was rutted and wet and in many places it seemed like only a four-wheel drive could make it – but I kept going – until I got stuck at mile 12. Fortunately, I was able to back out of my predicament, park my car in a turn out, and hike the rest of the way in. My room was a small cell in a guest house a quarter of a mile from the chapel. There were two other men staying in the guest house. It was perfect.

I arrived at the Monastery on February 10, six days after leaving Akron. It was Shrove Tuesday, so I settled into the silence and prepared to pray for a few days.

The Chapel is the most beautiful sanctuary that I've ever been in. It's tucked tight against the red cliffs of the valley. It's small and laid out as a cross. It has large windows, set very high in the walls, so that as you sit in the chapel you may watch the colors change on the canyon walls.

That Tuesday night the monks had a party as they prepared for the beginning of Lent and all of the guests were invited to it. There were about six of us. (There's two guest cottages too.) That night the monks were free to talk to us, and we sat there for a few hours, eating chocolate, drinking wine and talking about who we were. It was quite nice.

I walked the quarter mile back to the guest house in the dark. It was black, black, black. No light from any human thing. The stars were so commanding that I kept stopping and looking at them even

though the night temperatures were well below freezing and my winter coat was in the car. I still can't quite get over the darkness and the stillness of that place. I didn't hear a human sound during the walk home.

The next morning marked the beginning of Lent and all talking and partying stopped. The food was very plain vegetarian fare, but the bread was stunningly good and served in large slices at both lunch and supper. The leader, not the Abbot who was away, ate his food at a breakneck speed, and so it was often difficult to finish eating before he was impatiently waiting for us.

I spent five quiet days at the monastery. It was a very restful time of reading, writing, praying and singing the psalms. It was exactly the break that I needed.

When I left the monastery I turned north towards Colorado. I had been looking forward to the Rocky Mountains for many months. I wasn't disappointed. I traversed them on narrow roads and there were times I wondered how people drove them day after day. I went through Utah and visited Bryce and Zion Canyons, then turned towards Nevada.

On my first day in Nevada I got lost a couple of times but eventually made it to the "loneliest road in America," heading towards Reno. That road is four hours of straight, straight two lane highway, with a few small mountain patches thrown in to slow you down. There's only one town on that stretch of the road.

Two hours into the four I received a phone call from back home. A six month old baby had died and the elders wanted to know what to do. I told one to go to the hospital and to pray with the family. She later expressed surprise that the family was waiting for her and that they were grateful for her presence.

I headed to Reno to fly home for the funeral. Now, even my amended Sabbatical plans were being shredded.

I spent that night at, The Nugget, a Casino in Reno, because it was the cheapest room in town. I ate supper there but I didn't even gamble a quarter. The next morning, Thursday, I left my car in their parking lot and flew back home. I visited with the family Friday morning. We made arrangements for a visitation on Saturday, a Sunday funeral and a Monday burial.

The three hours of visiting on Saturday were brutal and so very sad. The funeral, after a Sunday morning service was likewise very sad. By the time we buried the little guy on Monday everyone was numb and just needed to go on with life.

That Friday evening my wife received the call that her mother was dying in Oregon. So on Saturday she flew out to be with her family.

I then returned to Reno on Tuesday. Wednesday I headed towards Oregon via California. I stopped in Weed CA near Mount Shasta. It was really nice to be in green forests of CA after the dryness of OK, TX, NM, UT, NV.

I arrived in Eugene on Thursday. I went to my mother in-law's bedside and told her I was there. She opened her eyes for just a moment, moaned, then closed them. (I wasn't sure if she moaned

because I was there, or if she was saying “hi.” Just kidding. Sorta.) She never made any sound again. A few days later she died in her bed with her children all around her.

We didn’t have a memorial service for my mother in-law since we had had a big one just a year earlier for dad. The family stayed together for another week and then dispersed. I didn’t come home though. I went to the cottage in the mountains of Oregon and sat there alone for a week writing and packing up the things that needed to be removed.

After that, I headed back to Eugene to visit family. But I also stopped to see a young woman from our church who is an ordained pastor in the UCC and who had just moved to Ashland OR. As I was leaving she blessed me and prayed for me. I tried to avoid these things, but she wouldn’t let me out of the house. I was shattered all over again. I left her shaking and afraid that I wasn’t going to heal, that the Sabbatical would be a big waste of time.

I then spent a few weeks in the home in Portland. Again, I wrote and kicked around town. I visited with my niece a couple times because her two year old son was in the children’s hospital being treated for leukemia.

While in Portland, I was surprised one day when I suddenly realized that I had completed writing my novel. The ending just kinda snuck up on me. The first draft was finished. I was relieved. I had accomplished something.

I drove home for Easter and led that service. Then I left that week for Massachusetts to begin a 7 day silent, guided retreat at the Campion Renewal Center. My spiritual director was a great man who seemed to see over the walls I threw up. I loved those days of praying, sleeping, writing and meeting with him. I think that I could have stayed for 30 days.

I spent all of May on our deck with our two sons. They were both out of school and work, as was I. So we spent hours just talking and laughing and planning. It was a glorious way to end my Sabbatical.

I returned to church on June 5. I ended up being gone for most of 19 weeks and in taking off 18 Sundays. I drove nearly 13,000 miles.

I buried my sister in May in Grand Rapids. It was a lonely affair but it felt right that it was just the two of us. In June we had a memorial gathering when her son was home from India.

We went out to Oregon in August and scattered my father and mother in-law’s ashes in a deserted campground near Crater Lake next to the Rogue River where their family used to camp. We all mourned that day in a way that we hadn’t earlier.

My in-law’s dying has helped us to reconnect with my wife’s family. We have learned to love the nieces and nephews and their children. They all live in Oregon and so I suspect that our days of traveling west aren’t over yet. They are so very different than us, and yet the amount of love that flows from them makes me happy.

I’m back in the thick of things at church. It does feel like I’ve healed. I haven’t felt shattered again since that blessing and prayer. My elders met with me during the first week back. It was clear that they had been thinking about my role. They created boundaries for me so that I won’t burn out in

the future. They want me to concentrate on worship and on my other writing, and let them and the deacons take care of many of the other duties. It's a difficult adjustment to make but I'm trying.

It's odd to me how time away from the normal and the sitting alone in great silence, is healing, but it is. My mind had a chance to process all of the loss and to contemplate who I am as a pastor. I encourage every congregation to push their reluctant pastors towards a sabbatical. They really don't have to accomplish a great deal in order to experience healing.

Thank you for generously supporting me on my Sabbatical. You were more than kind. I am also able to return \$3000 that I didn't need because we didn't go to Spain. Again, thank you, and please forgive the rambling mess of a report.

Sincerely,

Harry Winters

CLASSIS LAKE ERIE BUDGET 2017

	2016	2017	CHANGE
	BUDGET	BUDGET	2016 vs 2017
<u>CLASSICAL EXPENSE</u>			
Meetings	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -
Miscellaneous (Mentoring, Counselors etc.)	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
Church Visiting	500.00	500.00	0.00
Clerk	4,250.00	4,250.00	0.00
Treasurer	4,250.00	4,250.00	0.00
CLASSICAL EXPENSE TOTAL	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ -
<u>COMMITTEES EXPENSE</u>			
Executive	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ -
Congregation Life	250.00	250.00	0.00
New Church Development	750.00	750.00	0.00
Leadership Development	250.00	250.00	0.00
Specialized Ministries	250.00	250.00	0.00
COMMITTEES EXPENSE TOTAL	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ -
<u>CONGREGATIONAL LIFE</u>			
Jackson - Congregational Youth Leader	\$ 5,200.00	\$ 5,200.00	\$ -
Web Page			0.00
CONGREGATIONAL LIFE TOTAL	\$ 5,200.00	\$ 5,200.00	\$ -
<u>LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</u>			
Retreats			0.00
Student Assistance	\$ 16,300.00	\$ 15,015.00	\$ (1,285.00)
Safe Church Team	1,000.00	1,000.00	0.00
Sabbatical Fund	1,000.00	5,025.00	4,025.00
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TOTAL	\$ 18,300.00	\$ 21,040.00	\$ 2,740.00
<u>NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT</u>			
Midland - Trinity Grace (Shawn May)	\$ -	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 4,000.00
Detroit Church Plant (CRC & RCA)	3,000.00	0.00	(3,000.00)
NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT TOTAL	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 1,000.00
<u>SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES</u>			
Ann Arbor Campus Chapel - Classical Support	\$ 11,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 4,000.00
Saginaw - Caring Closet	1,750.00	2,000.00	250.00
Dearborn - Arab-American Friendship Center	11,000.00	17,400.00	6,400.00
Detroit - Community Assistance Program	5,250.00	6,000.00	750.00
River Terrace - Campus Edge Fellowship - MSU	11,000.00	15,000.00	4,000.00
SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES TOTAL	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 55,400.00	\$ 15,400.00
TOTAL	\$ 84,500.00	\$ 103,640.00	\$ 19,140.00
PERCENT CHANGE			22.65%
TOTAL NUMBER OF MEMBERS 18 YEARS AND OLDER	N/A	N/A	
SHARE AMOUNT PER MEMBER	\$ 75.00	\$ 75.00	

<u>CHURCH DEVELOPMENT FUND</u>			
Jackson - Cascades Fellowship - Sound System			
CHURCH DEVELOPMENT FUND TOTAL	\$ -	\$ -	

<u>SMALL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT FUND</u>			
CLE Michigan Ministers Peer Group	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 1,500.00	
CLE Ohio Ministers Peer Group	4,000.00	2,000.00	
SMALL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT FUND TOTAL	\$ 8,000.00	\$ 3,500.00	