

July 15, 2017



NCFA CONNE~~X~~ION!

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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

*Rev. Jesus Juan Gonzalez
"Jesse"*



Greetings/Saludos, New Covenant Fellowship of Austin!

Stewardship

is heart work



2017 Extra Commitment Stewardship Campaign

With the full support of our NCFA Session, our Finance & Stewardship Committee is putting together a *2017 Extra Commitment Stewardship Campaign*, and it is indeed *heart work!* Members, former members, donors, and benefactors will receive a letter inviting everyone to respond from your heart and generosity to this additional request over the second half of 2017.

NCFA is determined to keep fulfilling its Mission Statement that *"in response to God's love, we are called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encourage seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors, grow in grace, and live by faith."*

I join you all in praying and hoping that everyone would respond in the way the Apostle Paul recommends, *"Each one should give, then, as he has decided, not with regret or out of sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly."* (2 Corinthians 9:7 TEV)

**Peace/Paz/Shalom:
Pastor Jesse**

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- ⇒ Praise that Caly and Saul were not injured when their car was rear-ended on Friday. Praise for the kind, helpful gentleman named Thomas who stopped to assist and comfort them while waiting for the emergency services to arrive. Lift up a quick repair for her car.
- ⇒ Lift up God's miraculous provisions for a family with eight children who are facing eviction since the father lost his job.
- ⇒ Praise for NCF students attending Mo Ranch this weekend. Lift up safe travel home.
- ⇒ Praise for a safe drive to Wisconsin and back when the Mojica's attended the National Gymnastics competition. Three cheers for Christian who placed #1 in the Nation in Tumbling! Praise for Angel placing #3 in Double Mini Trampoline and #8 in Trampoline! Way to go! And for Javin who ranks #1 in patience for attending all his siblings' competitions.
- ⇒ Lift up Rex's friend and caregiver Melissa who had emergency surgery and is experiencing complications.
- ⇒ Praise for the successful removal of a benign brain tumor from Nikkie's father-in-law, Dylan's dad.
- ⇒ Lift up Josh and Gretchen as they grieve the death of their daughter who died in utero two weeks before she was due to be born.
- ⇒ Praise for the successful delivery of healthy twins. Pray for Christian influences in their lives since neither parent is a believer.
- ⇒ Lift up the family and friends grieving the death of the young man from Austin who was beaten to death in Greece by a group of Serbian men.
- ⇒ Praise for the sermon admonishing us to oppose subjugation and discrimination.
- ⇒ Praise for the James Hickson Lee Scholarship which will provide a student with \$850 for the fall semester.
- ⇒ Lift up Derek as he heals from the surgical removal of his toes due to complications of diabetes.
- ⇒ Lift up all caregivers.

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F
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SUNDAY MORNINGS

NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, July 16th

Pastor Jesse Gonzalez



NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:15am

We would love to have you and your family come share in the CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS!

We are worshipping in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church on the Wilshire Campus starting at 10:15 a.m.

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin PC(U.S.A.) is a racially diverse community informed by the Bible, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and motivated to share God's love with all. In response to God's love, we are called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encourage seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors, grow in grace, and live by faith.

JOIN US IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

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Hidden Figures

*Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
and Romans 7:13-25*

*New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
July 9th, 2017: 5th Sunday in Pentecost*

Jenny Saperstein

The thing about a parable is that while it appears to be a straight forward story, it actually reveals the complexity of a situation. The meaning of a parable is often hidden under layers of interpretation, or it is in fact, all those layers at once--a forest hidden among trees. In our Matthew text, Jesus tells a short parable and seems to explain it. But I think the so-called explanation doesn't actually clarify the parable so much as reveal its hidden complexities.

The set up and the scene seems simple enough-- here is my rough translation from the Greek: "To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces calling to others: 'We played the flute for you but you did not dance.' 'We lamented before you but you did not wail.'"

That last phrase and word are especially tricky to translate to carry the force of what it means. Because it really needs to have many different English translations to get the sense of it: some say, "we sang a funeral song and you did not mourn with us." But it has a more immediate and passionate sense than that. It is, "we were crying out in lament -- in deep grief and you were not struck by it" or "it didn't impact you." Most literally, "you were not cut up by it." It implies that the pain was so intense that you SHOULD have hurt with us, but our pain did nothing to you.

And I have to say, that thinking about it that way, it seems a much harsher and fair criticism than not dancing with someone. But then Jesus complicates the matter. Jesus reveals not one, but two hidden figures in this parable. He brings John the Baptist and himself into the equation. And now I wonder who exactly the generation is that he is talking about? Who are the children in the story and who are the others?

It seems like maybe the children are Jesus and John. John was the one asking us to grieve and repent and Jesus was the one asking us to dance. And if I think about it like that I find myself thinking -- Jesus why weren't you more compassionately concerned? But then I think of the many times that Jesus tells his disciples to rejoice because he is with them! He is the bridegroom among them and the pipers are inviting all to the wedding celebration. And I see where refusing to dance can be a serious spiritual accusation-- it is a refusal to accept the good news that God's love is with us and rejoice in that.

But Jesus speaks of the generation as being like the children. So, in another sense it seems that the children are bickering about who is not being paid attention to -- criticizing the other group for not joining them instead of hearing the request put before them. This refusal to hear the other side is the product of being closed off to God. It stems from limiting God to who we want God to be instead of listening for who God is. John the Baptist was an ascetic -- one who denied himself pleasures and preached the need for repentance -- because his behavior seemed extreme, people tried to discredit him by saying he was possessed by a demon and they closed themselves off to the way in which God was speaking through John.

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Jesus speaks of his own ministry that was in the midst of common life – he comes eating and drinking but he too was dismissed, as a glutton who included the “wrong kind of people” in his ministry. And to most people the reality that God was at work before them, building a new kingdom, remained hidden. So, we see the matter is no longer a question of who is right – John the Baptist or Jesus. Rather, the parable reveals that God’s truth remained hidden to most people.

In the verses immediately following this parable (which we skip over in the reading), Jesus pronounces woes against the unrepentant cities who were unreceptive to his ministry. Both John and Jesus were dismissed by their contemporaries, and Jesus recognizes that there is hypocrisy in this because John and Jesus were counterparts, making a complete spectrum of approaches to repentance and ministry.

Even so, those who criticized one were still unwilling to listen to the other; and so to them, God’s message remained hidden not because it wasn’t presented to them but because they were unwilling to hear it. In Jesus’ account of the way he and John were received, he shows the irony that even presented with what the people said they wanted – a preacher who called for personal morality, or a preacher who seemed more compassionate – the people were unable to recognize either right before them. To them both Jesus and John the Baptist remained hidden figures.

Jesus seems to finish this parable by saying: “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” But again in translation issues, “vindicated” and “righteousness” are the same root. So one might hear instead, “But wisdom is made righteous by her actions.” And Jesus has a lot to say about righteousness. Jesus typically contrasts those who claim to be righteous and those who are truly righteous. This phrase is not as straight forward as it seems; it also has hidden meaning. Jesus addresses those who call themselves wise for denouncing John and Jesus. Jesus challenges them to prove their righteousness not with criticism but with actions that reflect righteousness, that is “rightness with God.” Jesus is daring them to somehow be more righteous than either John or Jesus himself, knowing this to be impossible. This statement is all at once, a defense, a criticism, and a call to action.

And perhaps strangely, Jesus thanks God for all of this. “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.[11:27) Jesus does not seem dismayed that he is being dismissed, but rather, he is affirmed by that dismissal! The wise and the intelligent do not see what is right before them. But the children who are themselves overlooked by the so-called wise and intelligent, are the ones who can recognize the truth of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ proclamation has a taunting sting to it, “oh you think you’re so smart? Well, even little children know more than you!”

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And this reveals yet another way to hear the parable. Maybe in fact, the children are not actually bickering. After all, John and Jesus present a mutual pairing of God's truth: repentance and reconciliation. So maybe the children are not separate groups calling to one another, but one group calling to the other people in the marketplace – the wise and self-righteous who do not pay attention to them. Maybe the children are the disciples crying out for others to come join them, but they are dismissed by the crowds as foolish and naïve.

I have to believe that Jesus does not mean to insult his followers by calling them children. Yes, we talk about belonging to God as being children of God, but that doesn't seem to be the whole context for this parable. It makes me wonder, what does it mean for a child to be able to perceive something that an adult cannot? And it brings to mind a particular children's story, a Christmas story of all things, a book that has also been made into a movie: *The Polar Express*. The story follows a young boy who is confronting the possibility that maybe Santa Claus isn't real. On Christmas Eve, a magical train appears outside his home heading to the North Pole to see Santa Claus. He climbs aboard the Polar Express and makes friends with the other children who are going on the journey with him. In the book the boy is joyously determined to bring back proof that Santa is real—to defend his belief before those who doubt and he is successful. But in the film version, this boy is the doubting Thomas of Santa stories and he needs to see it for himself before he can believe it. In the film, when they reach the North Pole a crowd is gathered to send Santa on his Christmas Eve flight. But the boy cannot see Santa because there are too many things in the way. Because he cannot see Santa, he cannot hear the things that point to the reality of Santa either. The boy can see the reindeer, but he still does not believe because he cannot hear the jingle bells ringing even as they move. The boy has to move beyond his doubts, which are really fears of appearing foolish, before he can hear the bells ringing. Once he confesses to himself that yes, he does believe in Santa, not only do the bells ring, Santa himself comes to greet the boy personally. The boy is given the first gift of Christmas – his only request is a single silver jingle bell from the sleigh so that he might carry the symbol of his belief with himself and for others. But what he finds when he gets home is that no grown-ups can hear the bell at all, and only children who are willing to believe can hear its wonderful pure tone.

Belief in Santa is the most common way our culture talks openly about belief at all and it also tends to draw the line between the “wise grown-ups” and “naïve children.” I am not equating belief in God to belief in Santa, but I am saying that Jesus sides on matters of faith with the supposedly naïve children. Jesus is saying that children can hear truths that others cannot. Children are always listening, always watching and ready to learn about the world. They are the most receptive to new ideas and perspectives because they don't have to unlearn other ways.

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The children to whom God chooses to reveal things are the ones who are open to seeing God for who God is, not for who they think God should be. Yet we don't remain children forever, and we learn things growing up that are not from God and then we think we are wise for knowing them. So how do we become the metaphoric children who are ready to see God? We can't pretend and make-believe things, but we can work to unpack the things we already believe so we have more room for God's truth to appear to us. To do that, we go around asking "why" of everything, trusting that God will be revealed and God is helping us to remove the things that are in the way.

This leads me to another story that perhaps you were expecting to hear about based on the title of this sermon. Hidden Figures is another film based on a book, Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race. Both were released in 2016. The narrative follows three black women, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn, and Mary Jackson who were mathematicians who worked for NASA in the era of segregation. The women are remarkable for their intelligence and leadership, but have remained hidden figures in history until recently because most of us weren't looking for them.

There is a scene in the film in which the head of the Space Task Group smashes down the segregated bathroom signs. Exercising his privilege, he is literally tearing down the structures of injustice. He does this after hearing Katherine's lament against the daily prejudice she experiences. He realizes how he had perpetuated the system of oppression through his unwillingness to see what was happening right before him. Even working alongside the brilliant Katherine and recognizing her mathematical genius, she had remained a hidden figure to him until that moment.

While this part of the story is not historically accurate but it serves as a powerful metaphor for the work we must do to recognize our complacency and correct our complicity in systems of injustice. The creation of this scene, however, has been criticized for being too simplistic and a feel-good moment where people of privilege can imagine they will always "do the right thing" after they see things for what they are. And that criticism is one we as Christians should take to heart. Recognizing complicity in a system does not end the system and it doesn't end our participation in perpetuating it. Smashing bathroom signs does not end bigotry and hiring female workers does not end misogyny. There is hard work to be done in identifying the things we believe that hide people and hide God from us.

We cannot content ourselves with the wisdom of identifying systems of injustice or even in crying out against our own oppression. Yes, these are necessary, but they are not enough. When we take seriously the need for critical self-reflection, we can start to see that even if we might be oppressed in one way, that does not preclude us from being an oppressor in another way. We see that we are all in deep need of reconciliation. --- And we can start to feel trapped in systems of sin.

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I think this is where Paul is going when he talks about the law of God and the power of sin. The words Paul uses are confusing to us because we don't think of the world in the same way that Paul does. Flesh is not the body in the same way we think of it. Sin is not merely an action but a powerful force in the world. It is not that our bodies are morally impure or that immorality is a personal choice. Even when we want to do what is right, we seem to be unable to extract ourselves from systems of broken relationships. Paul is not talking about only individual sins but the power - the law of sin that is pervasive in our everyday lives. Even though Paul seems to speak for himself, he is speaking for the universal human experience, that there is something in our existence that keeps us from living how God wants us to live. And Paul calls that force Sin, and it is a reality that cannot be overcome by our best intentions. There is only one power that can conquer Sin, and that is God in Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who can break the power that sin holds over us, and through Christ we can become servants of God instead stuck in the broken relationships of sin.

Paul knows that we can distort the best of what God intends. The power of Sin broke our relationship with God in Eden, so God created the Mosaic Law which was intended to restore relationship with God and keep right relationships between people. But even God's law can be twisted so that it creates oppression. Paul was born Jewish and sought to follow God's law as perfectly as humanly possible. But Paul eventually saw where that desire led his actions to sinfulness in zealously persecuting the Christians he had thought were perverting the faith. We know that Jesus' words in Matthew convict Paul of failing to recognize God. God remained hidden to Paul because when he looked for God to be exactly who he wanted God to be.

When we fail to see God for who God is, we end up using scripture to rationalize all kinds of injustices. Throughout history, we also see how Christian followers can distort scripture to justify oppression and abuse. Yet it is also scripture and God's law that reveals to us the ways by which we fail one another. God's law exists so that we can recognize our sinfulness. God's law reminds us of the ways we tend to obscure God and obstruct justice. Although we cannot liberate ourselves from the power of Sin by following God's law, the law is a gift that enables us to see where Sin still holds power over us. Paul speaks to the restorative power of Christ, who sits both in judgement over us and as our merciful redeemer who reconciles us not only with God but who also opens us up to reconciliation with one another. We need God's law because only when we see our sins for what they are do we have the ability to seek reconciliation. Even when we feel trapped by sin, time and time again, it is always Christ who liberates us. In Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven - we are reconciled with God. Because we have been baptized into the holy body of Christ, we can do the work of reconciliation with one another.

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The holy spirit works in us to tear down the idols of our false wisdom and become like children so that Christ is no longer hidden to us. Presbyterians and other protestants believe the church is reformed and always reforming – it means we are willing to reflect upon our faith and change from time to time. We trust that questioning beliefs does not tear down the church, it builds it up. Because when we engage in critical reflection and ask ourselves why we believe the things we do about God and God’s world, it is like being children again. We have to get rid of some of the learned worldly wisdom so that we are ready to receive Christ anew in every age. And when Christ is revealed to us we also begin to see those whom Christ calls us to love, to protect, to help, and to seek justice for – because when Christ is no longer a hidden figure, we see the hidden figures of this world. We see that sin is not the ultimate power, but God’s love is.

The love that Christ revealed to us on a cross is not wisdom by worldly standards, in fact it can seem foolish. Some may think believing in self-giving love in a broken world is naïve and ignorant. But we know that our “childlike” belief is an ongoing openness to see Christ and to be witnesses to God’s love. And because we are open to God, we can share that love with the world. And that is truly powerful. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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Drive-Through Prayer

Come as you are.
Stay in the car.

Sat. July 29th | 8am - 11am

New Covenant
Fellowship of
Austin

1507 Wilshire
Blvd Austin Tx
78722

You're invited to help us pray for our community!

We need volunteers to pray, make signs, hold signs, pass out water, and direct traffic.

Contact Kimberly Hall if you're able to help with our Drive-Through Prayer event: khall@sc2000.net

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Women's Bible Study

Jane's Circle Bible Study – All Welcome
Saturday, July 22nd, 10:00-12:00pm
Room 7



Noisy Offering

Please collect your change over the next couple weeks for our “noisy offering” that will take place at the end of the month.

At the youth-led worship service on July 30th, the youth will be collecting change in metal buckets.



All change collected will help fund NCF mission projects.



Your change can change lives.

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NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP

Announcements



www.ncfaustin.org



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Café Justo



Café Justo is a coffee grower cooperative based in Salvador Urbina, Chiapas, Mexico. They market a pure, organic coffee which is grown, harvested and marketed in the spirit of justice. Our goal is to provide incentives for people to remain on their family lands.

Orders will be arranged through NCFA's Evangelism Committee. Please see Caly Fernández to place an order. Coffee is available in 1 and 5 pound bags. The cost of a 1 pound bag is \$10.00 and a 5 pound bag is \$ 40.00. Dark roast, medium roast and decaf are available in ground or whole beans. Coffee will be delivered biweekly to NCFA.

Contact Caly to make your purchase today! (512)228-4712



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WE NEED YOUR HELP!

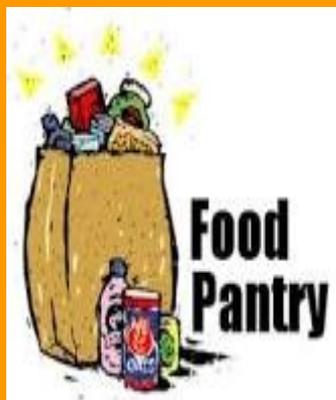
Friends, we need your help. We are our best when we serve together. Please consider ways you can help our ministry leaders and ministries.

**Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success.**

Henry Ford



FOOD PANTRY AVAILABLE TO ALL



The New Covenant Fellowship Deacons are now providing a free to all food pantry each Sunday. This is to help anyone who needs a little help in the obtaining of groceries. The table at the back of the church will have canned goods and other non-perishable food each Sunday. If you or anyone you know needs some help with groceries, please feel free to partake of the items available.

If you are able to donate food items to this table, please feel free to do so and bless you for your contribution. Paper bags with handles are also needed and if you have extra ones of these, please put them on this new food table.



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JULY

- 1st Ausley Trifiro
- Grace Holland
- 3rd Aisha Adjei
- 8th Rev. Bill Harris
- 9th Ireland F. Sullivan
- 11th George Holland
- Genevieve Booth
- 13th Jayvin Mojica
- 15th Chris Unegbu
- 16th Lara Tallman
- Rachel Draper-Marion
- 18th Emily Smith
- Ericson Stumberg
- 20th Naomi Jones
- Uly Cox, Sr.
- 23rd Danita Nelson
- Colton Sullivan
- Ulysses Cox, Jr.
- 29th Bonnie Lew

- 4th Colton and Stephanie Sullivan
- 11th Robert and Genevieve Booth
- 22nd Richard and Nancy Tallman

Session Members

- *Rev. Jesus (Jesse) Gonzalez
Interim Moderator
- *Elder Nikkie Shubitz
Clerk of Session
- *
Administration & Personnel
- * Elder Zaira Amado
Buildings & Grounds
- *Elder Randy Mojica
Children and Youth
- *Elder George Washington IV
Discipleship & Men's/Women's Ministry
- *Elder Mary Jo Mojica
Finance & Stewardship
- *Elder Robert Booth
Congregational Life/
Lay Ministry
- *Elder Kimberly Hall
Missions/Evangelism
- *Elder Viola Lee
Worship & Membership

Deacons

- Ulysses Cox
- Rey Mojica
- Ashley Phillips
- Scott Phillips
- Cathy Trifiro
- Roxann Vallejo

JULY 2017

- 16th 6th Sunday after Pentecost
9-10am Adult Sunday School
9:45am Praise Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.
Pastor Jesse Gonzalez
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages 3-5
(Rm. 1); Grades 1-5 (Rm. 7); and Junior/Senior High (Room 5)
- 18th 6:30pm Fellowship Dinner
7:00pm Prayer and Praise Worship
- 22nd 10-12pm Jane Circle Bible Study
- 23rd 7th Sunday after Pentecost
9-10am Adult Sunday School
9:45am Praise Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.
Pastor Jesse Gonzalez
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages 3-5
(Rm. 1); Grades 1-5 (Rm. 7); and Junior/Senior High (Room 5)
- 25th 6:30pm Men's Bible Study - Dinner
7:00pm Bible Study
- 26th 6:30pm Fellowship Dinner
7:00pm Prayer and Praise Worship