

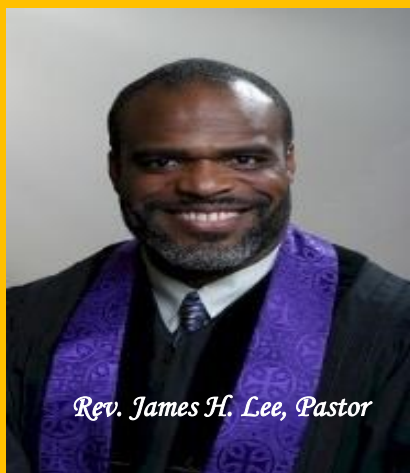
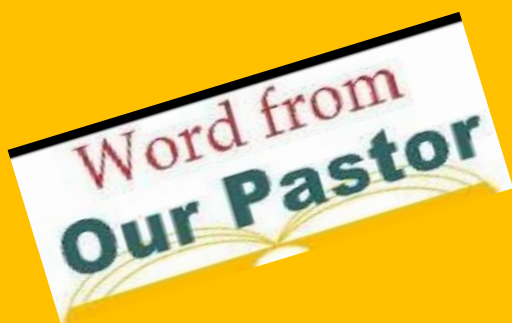
December 11, 2015



NCFA CONNEXION!

WWW.NCFAUSTIN.ORG

Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!



Rev. James H. Lee, Pastor

NCFA Family and Friends:

Each week I try to capture something that is happening in the world and in our church as we prepare for Sunday's worship. We see that once again headlines and politicians move us quickly by tragedies affecting our brothers and sisters. Through our faith we are called to have compassion and to care for others. Right now, it seems like

- "Individuals want to be right";
- "Individuals want it their way or it's the highway";
- "Individuals are saying, "If I can't have it, no one else can have it."

It is easy for us to get consumed by the calamities and complexities of life; however, it is crucial for us not to forget the One who created us and is ultimately in control. In one of our lectionary readings from *Zephaniah 3:17*, we read the words: *¹⁷The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing 18as on a day of festival.* God's presence doesn't stop all destruction and suffering. Out of much suffering and despair, some positive changes are taking place. How do we make lemonade out of lemons?

- Recognize that God is in our midst.
- Remember it is God who vindicates us and is the warrior who gives us ultimate victory.
- Relish in the fact that God loves us so much that God rejoices over us with gladness and loud singing.
- Rely upon God's love to renew, refresh, and reestablish you. We get in the way and are destructive to one another and the purposes of God.

As we prepare for Sunday, we give thanks to God for our Presbyterian Players last week and the wonderful solo by Kathryn Aldas. We give thanks to God for the families lighting the Advent candles and retelling the "ol' stories." We give thanks for the members of Covenant blessing families from our church and the community through the Angel Tree Christmas project. Special thanks to those who serve Mobile Loaves & Fishes, and to Rev. Jeff Saddington who will soon facilitate our class through the *Gospel of Luke*.

We will present our Stewardship Cards on Sunday. Even if you are unable to designate your pledge, please write down your goals and prayers for 2016. (Pledge cards on back table.) We will continue to move forward with our missions in Sudan, Cuba, Chiapas, and our local community. We will be teaching practical skills through our sewing classes and health initiatives. We will continue to look for ways to engage more families inside and outside of the church so that we are all bearing the load like those carrying the paralytic to Jesus. We welcome your continuous support as your investments help us to fulfill our goals and budget of \$250,000.

My prayer for us all comes from *Philippians 1:8-11*: *⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*



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Stewardship Dedication December 13th, 2015



We are using the acronym J O Y, which stands for “Jesus, Others, and You,” to help us focus on the scripture reference, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)*

The cards not only reflect God’s provisions for your family but also allow our Session to discern the best way to match the pledges with the 2016 budget.

Congregational Meeting



December 27th, 2015

During this meeting the Session will present the approved 2016 budget and the congregation will vote to approve Pastor Lee’s terms of call so that he may continue to serve as our pastor.

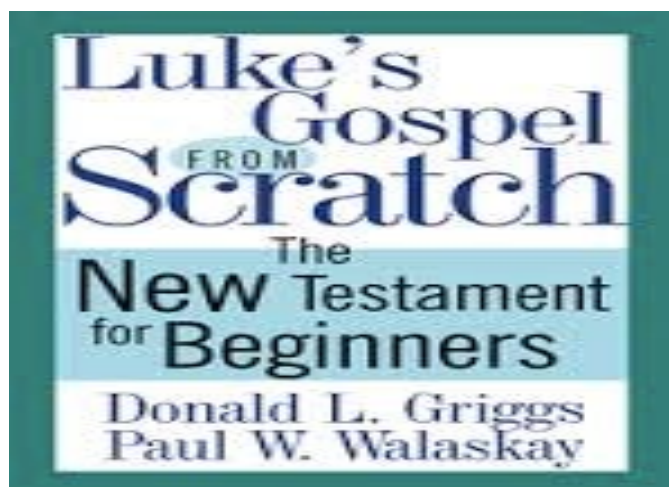
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Study of the Gospel According to Luke, January/February, 2016

Led by Rev. Jeff Saddington, Chaplain, Hospice Austin, 512-426-8805

Luke is the Gospel of focus during the new church year beginning at Advent 2015. Lectionary preachers have nearly 50 opportunities to proclaim the Word using a Lukan text during this coming church year.

Study Text: ***Luke's Gospel from Scratch: The New Testament or Beginners***
by Donald Griggs and Paul Walaskay
ISBN 978-0-664-23499-7

When/Where: **Thursdays, 7-8pm, January 7, 14, 21, 28; February 4, 11, 18, 2016. Fellowship Hall**

Class Format: As with our study of ***Mark***, we will need to pre-read ***Luke*** and be willing to engage in discussion, prayer, and even occasionally end in singing a relevant hymn. We will rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what the Holy Spirit wishes us to see and hear in this great summary of the life and work of Jesus by doctor Luke, a very careful and detailed author.

In anticipation of your interest, a dozen books have been purchased and are for sale for \$13, first come, first served. Please contact Jeff Saddington for purchase and payment.

The Gospel of Luke is a marvelously rich text, uniquely containing so many familiar teachings, such as the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus in a sycamore tree, and a young Jesus conversing with teachers in the temple. It also relates stories of Jesus that are found in other Gospels, such as the Feeding of the 5,000 and a different version of ***Matthew's*** more familiar Beatitudes. It contains the most familiar of the Jesus birth narratives, with a manger, shepherds, angels, and no room at the inn. Food is also a theme, as Jesus in ***Luke*** is often going to a meal, at a meal, or leaving a meal, and each setting presents a wonderful teaching moment for us!

In ***Luke*** men and women serve side by side, and Jesus is very clear about the need to care for the least, the last, and the lost, and anyone who is out on the margins of society.

Come, be immersed in study! It will be a wonderful time to be together in the Word because of what all of you seekers bring to it. ALL ARE WELCOME!!

Until the whole world hears!

December 11, 2015



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- ⇒ Lift up George and Nekia while she is deployed in Iraq and he waits for her return.
- ⇒ Lift up Doris's hometown folks as they grieve the ninth death this year of loved ones.
- ⇒ Lift up—and Praise—reconciliations that may take place during this Christmas Season!
- ⇒ Praise for a niece receiving grace from home when she found herself homeless. Lift up homeless people who have no place to go and are without direction.
- ⇒ Praise for Oliver and Elizabeth's daughter Natalie running her first marathon in San Antonio today.
- ⇒ Lift up Tracey's mother Cathy as she undergoes further medical testing and hopes to make plans for the future. Lift up energy and expanded time for Tracey who is the primary caregiver.
- ⇒ Praise for Ryan running his first half-marathon today.
- ⇒ Praise for Ben's mother slowly regaining strength now that she at home.
- ⇒ Lift up a longtime friend who has pancreatitis and is facing surgery this week. Lift up strength and energy as he recovers.
- ⇒ Praise for a hometown church finding a fulltime pastor.
- ⇒ Lift up Trish's cousin Jim who is in critical condition in the hospital.
- ⇒ Lift up seminarians who are pushing through the end of the semester work load. Lift up their families as they faithfully support their loved one through this time.
- ⇒ Praise for John and Michelle's wedding on Saturday and Pastor Lee's safe return from the ceremony. Lift up John's new job as a pastor for a church in St. Louis.
- ⇒ Lift up the emerging reconciliation between a mother and daughter (Vicky and Heather) since Heather was diagnosed with cancer.
- ⇒ Praise for Pastor Lee's sermon and the emphasis on our patience to wait on God's timing. Lift up Caly for patience and perseverance with the process of earning a Nursing degree. Praise for a heartwarming text from Illiana.
- ⇒ Lift up Jimmy and Kimberly as they go through the process to become foster parents. Lift up protection for the many neglected and abused children who need help. Lift up families to provide that help.
- ⇒ Praise for Kathryn's beautiful solo!
- ⇒ Lift up students facing difficult life choices.
- ⇒ Lift up Jeff's students as they work their way through a financial management course—may they break the bonds that hold them.
- ⇒ Praise for a family that celebrated when their mother joined the Church Triumphant thereby lifting the spirits of the Hospice volunteers.
- ⇒ Lift up all hurting and needy people.

**HAVE YOU
TALKED
TO GOD
TODAY?**

December 11, 2015



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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!



12-1 Favour Unegbu
12-2 Connie Jones
Sam Okyere-Mireku
12-3 Cathy Angell
12-4 Matthew Grisdale
12-5 Marion Sanchez
12-9 Jennifer Olson
12-9 William Moreno
12-12 Destiny Edwards
12-15 Pat Nemir
12-16 Elizabeth Smith
12-17 Joe Lopez
12-22 Chuck Coffman
12-22 Christian Mojica
12-24 Bill Parrish
John Ayensu
Sherrena Lee
12-28 Randy Mojica

12-10 Matthew and Kathryn Aldas

Session Members

*Rev. James Lee
Pastor/Moderator
*Elder Kathy Smith
Clerk of Session
*Rev. Bill Harris
Administration & Personnel
*Elder Tim Lenz
Buildings & Grounds
*Elder Mary Jo Mojica
Congregational Life
*Elder Randy Mojica
Children and Youth
*Elder Cathy Angell
Discipleship & Women's Ministry
*Elder Caly Fernandez
Evangelism
*Elder Tracey Lenz
Finance & Stewardship
*Elder Robert Booth
Lay Ministry
*Elder Benton Hooks
Men's Ministry
*Elder Vernon Bailey
Missions
*Elder Charles Robinson
Worship & Membership

Deacons

Connie Jones, Chair
Kathryn Aldas
Ulysses Cox
Naomi Jones
Samuel Okyere Mireku
Lucy Oglesby
Ashley Phillips
Carol Saddington
Cathy Trifiro
Roxann Vallejo

DECEMBER 2015

13th 3rd Sunday of Advent
Stewardship Sunday
8:15am 1507 Wilshire Blvd.
Rev. George Holland, preaching
9-10am Adult Sunday School
9:30am Psalm 150 Praise
Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at 1507 Wilshire
Pastor James H. Lee, preaching
Sunday School during worship;
Ages 3-5-Rm 1, Grades 1-5 -Rm 7
Deacons will meet after worship

15th 6:30pm Men's Ministry
Dinner, Study at 7pm

16th Church Fellowship Dinner at
6:30pm; Worship at 7pm.

20th 4th Sunday of Advent
8:15am 1507 Wilshire Blvd.
Pastor James H. Lee, preaching
9-10am Adult Sunday School
9:30am Psalm 150 Praise
Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at 1507 Wilshire
Pastor James H. Lee, preaching
Sunday School during worship;
Ages 3-5-Rm 1, Grades 1-5 -Rm 7

24th Christmas Eve service from 6:30-7:30

25th Merry Christmas-Office closed.
We pray that you and your family
have a blessed day.

Remember Jesus is the reason for the season!

27th Congregational Meeting

December 11, 2015



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N C F A SUNDAY MORNINGS

NCFA Sunday Schedule

8:15am - Worship Service

1507 Wilshire Blvd.
41st St. and Red River

10:15am - Worship Service

1507 Wilshire Blvd.
9am Adult Sunday School
10am Fellowship
10:45am - Children's Church



NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 8:15am -- Wilshire Blvd.

Come rise and shine with us
at our 8:15am service
where we glorify God
through the Word, Prayer, Hymns,
and Communion.

1507 Wilshire Blvd.

In the words of Phillips, Craig & Dean,
"Come, just as you are, to worship."

All are welcome to this traditional,
intimate style of worshipping our Lord.

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.

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

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

December 11, 2015



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NCFA

Sewing/Craft Class



Sunday, December 20, 2015
1:00 pm (after service)

Classroom 7
1507 Wilshire Blvd.

Ages 7 and up.
Light Snack will be provided

Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

MISSION STATEMENT

New Covenant Fellowship is a racially diverse community informed by the Bible and empowered by the Holy Spirit. 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.

VISION STATEMENT

NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP IMPLEMENTS OUR MISSION BY EQUIPPING INDIVIDUALS TO LIVE FOR CHRIST AND MINISTER THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS FOR 2015

1. **Retain and minister to visitors and members through personal contacts, strengthening families, ministry-driven events, and identifying and utilizing the numerous gifts of our members.**
2. **Better utilize social media and other modes of communication to celebrate our ministry, share resources, and organize ourselves.**
3. **Enhance our Children and Youth ministries through mentoring, attending their extracurricular activities, utilizing their gifts in worship, and assisting in the Nursery and Church School.**
4. **Continue emphasizing Marketplace Ministry, celebrating the various ministries within our church and community, and reaching out into the community like the Community Garden and our Health Fair in November.**

The Six Great Ends of the Church

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (Book of Order G-1.0200)

December 11, 2015



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Café Justo

Good News from the Border:

A letter from the Adams Maldonado family serving in Mexico

NOVEMBER 2015 - BOXES, BAGS AND GRATITUDE

"Muchos de nuestros hijos fueron al norte, y unos regresaron en cajas. Pero ahora gracias a Cafe Justo nuestros hijos estan regresando a cultivar café con nosotros. Many of our children went north (to the U.S.), and some returned in boxes (coffins). But now thanks to Café Justo our children have returned to cultivate coffee with us."



Robert Uribe (right), owner of Galliano's Café, visiting in the home of Lilia Velazquez and her son, David Cifuentes Velazquez. David, a Presbyterian elder, is another of the sons who have been able to return home because of Café Justo.

Reynaldo Cifuentes, founding member of Café Justo, welcomed the delegation of small business owners that we facilitated at the end of September with these words. Café Justo is the farmer-owned coffee roasting and exporting cooperative that we helped start 13 years ago to address root causes of migration.

The delegation shared a common desire to know more about the vision and reality of Café Justo that each of them had been partnering with—some for many years, others for less than a year. The farming families welcomed us, inviting us to share deeply in their joys and sufferings. We spent a wonderful week experiencing life—and abundant life—with an amazing community of coffee farmers who shared with us their love of the land, their families and their community.



Edmindo, Teresa, Soraida, Imelda, and Madelain

We shed tears of joy and of sadness with Samuel Hidalgo and his wife, Evangelina. While Evangelina prepared us one of the many delicious meals we were to have throughout the week, Samuel proudly shared with us his beautiful coffee "fields," but he wanted to make sure we understood that "he was not the owner of the land, only a steward of what is God's." Around the dinner table their 26-year-old son Samuel and only child would come in and out, sometimes awkwardly blurting out, *"bienvenidos gringos."* He had almost drowned in the river when he was a teenager, suffered brain damage, and now was almost completely dependent on the care

of his parents. Giving thanks that they had not had to put their son in a box and bury him, the reality of the sadness of not being able to pass on the legacy of the coffee to the son was palpable.

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We shared a night of bellyaching laughter around the table of Dona Soraida, founding member of Café Justo, together with Edmundo, her son, Imelda, her daughter-in-law, and Teresa and Madelain, her granddaughters. Edmundo, one of the children of the community who had gone to the “*norte*,” had been in Atlanta when Café Justo began. We join Soraida, Imelda, Teresa, and Madelain in giving thanks that he was able to come back in a bus and not a box.



Danny Ortega depulping coffee with Adan Roberto

Soraida has now “retired” and passed on the farming responsibilities to Edmundo. Madelain will receive her R.N. certificate in January and Teresa is studying biochemistry in the university. Edmundo and Imelda are proud of their daughters and thankful that they are the first in the family to not only graduate from high school but also go to college.

Danny Ortega, mayor of Douglas and owner of Ortega's Shoes, reflected on his experience: “I have just experienced one of the most incredible trips of my life, thanks to Café Justo. . . . I left Salvador Urbina a much better person, changed by the families that I had the opportunity to meet. We stayed with Jaime Escobar Castillo and his beautiful family; this family welcomed my wife Anne and me with open arms. . . . The sharing and laughing around the dinner table was the best moment, realizing that we had more in common than I thought. The discussions we had were thought-provoking, funny and very personal. There was joy in the home and a true sense of family.

“I was so impressed with the family’s concern for the environment and the future; they continually worried about the impact of what we were doing to our planet and the effect it will have on our children and grandchildren. . . . I will always cherish my late night talks with Jaime, and consider him a friend.”

A week after we returned, a delegation of 14 folks joined us from Oregon for our weekly prayer and biblical reflection that we facilitate for the staffs of Frontera de Cristo and Café Justo. The 26 persons in the room were born in five different states of Mexico and 10 different states of the United States.

During the time of sharing gratitude Hermano Pedro, the roaster of Café Justo and an elder of the Lirio de los Valles Presbyterian Church, gave thanks to God for the power of the bag of Café Justo and the little seeds that it contains. “*Mira como nos ha unido—gente de muchas diferentes partes buscando un mejor relacion entre nuestros paises.*” Look how it has united us—people from many different parts seeking a better relationship among our countries.\

We are grateful for the opportunity to build relationships and understanding across borders and for the strong bonds that have been created between Frontera de Cristo and Café Justo over the last 13 years that help make possible life-changing encounters between folks from the North and South, coffee producers and those who sell their coffee.

Together we are able to experience a foretaste of God's kingdom where wolves and lambs will live together in harmony and where children are no longer forced to leave home only to be sent back in boxes.

December 11, 2015



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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

“Favor and Fulfillment”

Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:68-79

Pastor James H. Lee

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
December 6, 2015 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

Philippians 1:3-11 ³*I thank my God every time I remember you,* ⁴*constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,* ⁵*because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.* ⁶*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.* ⁷*It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.* ⁸*For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.* ⁹*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight* ¹⁰*to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,* ¹¹*having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*

Luke 1:68-79 *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.* ⁶⁹*He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,* ⁷⁰*as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,* ⁷¹*that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* ⁷²*Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,* ⁷³*the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us* ⁷⁴*that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,* ⁷⁵*in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* ⁷⁶*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,* ⁷⁷*to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.* ⁷⁸*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,* ⁷⁹*to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

We serve an amazing God, and God is doing great and wonderful things. God’s babies aren’t always doing great and wonderful things, but God is. As we consider the second Sunday of Advent and we hear these scripture readings, the sermon title is *“Favor and Fulfillment.”*

When I was growing up, the awesome thing about favor is that it meant you were blessed. And there were times you equated that favor with everything flowing well and everything being great. But if we look at the Gospel reading, it says that God had favor upon the people. And yet, this people who had the favor from Almighty God did not hear from God for over 400 years! These people who had favor from God almost felt as if God was not present. Y’all don’t have to raise your hands, but are there seasons in your life when you know you’re favored by God, but you don’t experience God the way you expect to experience God? Can I get an Amen?! And I wanted in our title to be reminded again that *favor doesn’t always mean success.* It does not always mean profit. It does not always mean blessings. Favor could mean that you belong, that you’re called, that you’re claimed, so that when you go through, you know that God is for you. Amen?

Some will say, “Well, favor isn’t fair,” and it isn’t. Sometimes it works out great, and sometimes it doesn’t. But there were these people who were favored. And as they were favored, something happens. We know that John the Baptist comes. But what it says about God and these favored people is this: ⁶⁹*He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,* ⁷⁰*as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,* ⁷¹*that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* That’s a powerful word.

December 11, 2015



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“Favor and Fulfillment”

Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:68-79

Pastor James H. Lee

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
December 6, 2015 – 2nd Sunday of Advent**

Struggles can cause us to question who God is and what God is doing. But then there's the assurance of salvation. We like to focus so much on the “sozo” [Greek for “salvation”] of God, of being saved, of being healed, that we don't always focus on the being free or the deliverance that comes from being a child of the Almighty God. It is something special when you understand the full meaning of our salvation. That's why you hear me talk oftentimes about “We've got the fire insurance—so now what?” It's living out the liberty that we have in our Lord. Paul would say that we can do anything, but it's not expedient, it's not the best thing for us. And so I want us to know as you're going through that even God has provided a way out, even for the things that we're going through, as a way of support, a way of strength that we all need. Amen?

Someone said that you're either going in a storm, going through a storm, or on your way out of a storm. But the sovereign God is with you all the way through the whole process, whether we recognize it or not. The importance of hearing that the prophets of old spoke is that it is important, because if they spoke it and it came to pass, you don't have to question it, do you?! You see God's sovereignty at work. And that part is important because I can tell you when you look at the shootings, look at the deaths, look at the despair, look at the questionings that are going on around the world, you're looking and you say, “My God!!!” But even while all that was happening, the sovereign God was at work. *Know that God is at work.* We can focus on the CIA, NRA, NAACP, FCA—you name an acronym or a group, it doesn't matter! We need to know that the G-O-D, the Sovereign One, is in control.

Sometimes when we deal with things in the here and now, we forget God's promises are so true that even when we're disobedient, they *have* to happen. What? What did the Lord tell Abraham? He said that “*out of your seed is going to come a great nation.*” Well, what happened? When he had relations with Hagar, Ishmael came. When he had relations with his wife Sarah, Isaac came. We have two generations, two different groups going at it in different ways. There's a historical way. But it's still tied to these principles. Now, I know from our Christocentric view that isn't what we want to hear or what we want to talk about; but we want to understand that God is in control, and God is still working things out.

Many times when we're suffering and we're saying “Okay, sovereign God is at work....So okay, sovereign God, you are at work, but how can you allow hate? How can you allow pain? How can you allow this?” But if God doesn't allow us to make choices, to live out those choices, to work within, then we would be robots: “I would do what you say. At your command. Yes. No. Forward, backward, left, right. Now. Later. Yes, Sir. No, Sir. When, Sir? How, Sir?” That isn't what we do! We have a God who gives us choices. So when all of these things are happening, we have a choice, a choice to say, “I will stand for righteousness,” or “I will sit and duck and stay out of the fray because I don't want to be a part of that.” But I will tell you, when you have favor like John the Baptist, you find yourself in a wilderness. And none of us have to worry about eating locusts or putting on fur. But when you're talking to a world that says, “We know it's right” and “This feels right!” and “I want to do it!”...and you say, “No, this isn't the way of the Lord”...then you feel like you're in the wilderness. Can I get an Amen? I used to think it would only impact our babies, when you talk about peer pressure. But it's something when you're grown and you're still facing some of the same pressures and finding yourself making some of the same decisions that children would make, even in our aged times. But again, God is going to be the one to deliver us.

December 11, 2015



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“Favor and Fulfillment”

Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:68-79

Pastor James H. Lee

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
December 6, 2015 – 2nd Sunday of Advent**

But there's another deliverance that comes forth, in a way that we don't always understand. I used it in the cover letter of our Newsletter—that is, Jesus tells us to love our enemies. Huh? What? And then to pray for those who spitefully use us and say all manner of evil against us. That's a wilderness word, a word I'm not ready to act on at all times. But God is saying if you really want to begin seeing transformation in you, then apply these principles. And then if you want to start seeing transformation in others, apply these principles. And you'll watch something special take place.

But I want us also to hear this powerful word. As you see in Luke he says, ⁷²*Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,* ⁷³*the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us* ⁷⁴*that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,* ⁷⁵*in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* Whew! I'm hoping that we won't look for the political groups or the theological groups to define what we just heard. And we know that we are called to be sacred servants of the Almighty—to live holy before God, and to serve...to serve. You may say, "I don't want to serve." But I bet when you do, you'll see something special happen.

Y'all have heard me say that I love being around people with the gift of hospitality. They seem to pull things together, and I'm like, "I didn't even think about that!" "Oh no, it's got to have a tablecloth; it's got to have a runner; has to have this; has to have that..." They're excited! "And we need to call folks! We need to arrange the RSVP!" And I'm just amazed. But then when you're there, and you see it as a finished product...you're blown away. And those type of people get energy doing that, while the rest of us want to go take a nap!

When God calls us to serve, God calls us to serve where our passion is. I want you to start discerning where is your passion. Where do you feel called? I could tell you there's not a first Friday in a month that I know Jeff, if he isn't there, isn't thinking about Mobile Loaves & Fishes. I don't know if you drink decaf or caffeinated coffee, but I know there's not a month in the year that Caly isn't talking about Café Justo. Don't even have to worry about whether or not we're going to have a Christmas play or song or something happening for the celebration of Christ's coming, because Connie and the Presbyterian Players come right around the corner.

See, you serve where your passion is. And also you find it's a righteous experience. It's a sacred experience. And it's holy unto God. It is HOLY unto God. Are you saying, "Now, James, you're saying "holy," so I have to do this and I can't do that, or I must do this and I must do that?" No...and Yes. If God moves it upon your heart and it's what is necessary for you to do, then yes! If not, no. See, you can put Brussels sprouts in front of me all day long and you don't have to worry about gluttony there! Ah, but put a steak, some catfish, fajitas, some peach cobbler....you do that, then gluttony is right around the corner, right?! So "No" on the Brussels sprouts and "Yes" for the other stuff—know what I'm sayin'?! So I can live holy and sanctified unto the Lord and serve God in that way.

But I also want us to hear something that I love as it's coming out of Isaiah. It begins to tell us how will we will know who this savior is, and what the savior is going to do, and I'm glad you asked....There's a sign and some names that will come. He says that this child will be called 'The Prophet of the Most High.' That's Jesus, the Prophet of the Most High.

December 11, 2015



NCFA CONNEXION!

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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

“Favor and Fulfillment”

Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:68-79

Pastor James H. Lee

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin
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Then what it says is, ⁷⁶...*for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,* ⁷⁷*to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.* We're so used to being Christians and not having to worry about killing a turtle dove, or a pigeon, or a cow, or a calf. And we struggle when we have to drop green and not coins. And offerings. Oh, but when you fully understand that you have been forgiven of your sins and you didn't have to pay for your indulgences or your mess-ups, aha! That should bring joy to you, Amen?! I know I'm in the church and everyone in here has been perfect all your lives—but I wasn't, and I haven't been. I'd be broke if I had to try to pay indulgences! And there are times when something sinful comes to mind; it can be one of those things when you're driving down I-35 or MoPac and you're thinking "Okay, Lord, here it goes, here's another one...." But we have this gift in Christ Jesus who made it possible. And by the tender mercies of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us to give light to those who sit in the shadow of death to guide our feet in ways of peace. That's the shalom of God.

When I was speaking with Matt Shubitz, who is Dylan's father, I used the word "Shalom" and "Peace" as I was talking to my Jewish brother. He said, "James, I appreciate what you're saying, and I appreciate the sentiments. Oh, but if you really understand the depth of what "shalom" means....It's as if everything is in right standing, in its right place, and everything is together! That's the Shalom of God. That's the peace of God." And as we say, that's the "Peace of Christ" that we offer, so that someone who is troubled on the inside may experience the 'Shalom' of the Almighty God! Amen? So sometimes we say it, but what I really want us to hear is that word which is alive and active being received on the inside. The peace of Christ be with you. May everything that feels as if it's out of place, not in right standing, be established in you. And you can say, "And also with you." Let's redefine these things, and we start identifying these things.

One of the things when I was working with 12 Steps was that you first have to imagine and come to a point of realizing your life is out of control and you can't manage it, and second to recognize that there is a Source. We recognize that source is God, who can help put things in order. But then comes the choice (robot!) to say, "No, I choose to take this mess, this stuff that's unmanageable, and invite the Source to help me put it into order." And the fourth step—ugh, this is the nasty step: the inventory. We have to go through and identify those areas. It's for that #4 that I want us to keep inviting the Shalom of God to come on in. "Lord, may your peace abide in my finances. Lord, may your peace abide in my relationships on the job. Lord, may your peace abide in my home. Lord, may your peace abide in our church. Lord, may your peace abide in the community. Lord, may your peace abound in our world." Amen?

We are called to be the Jonahs and the Johns and the Joannas who are in the wilderness, crying out, ***“Prepare ye the way of the Lord!”*** I also want to encourage you—I love *Philippians* so much—and I need you to know when I hear these words from Paul, they help me: ***“I want you to know that there are prayers being constantly made for you. I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you for your sharing the gospel from the first day to now.” (Philippians 1:3-5)*** I get to see growth in you and how you live out your faith. And that's a privilege that I do not carry lightly. We write down the prayers and praises, but God gives me other things to pray for and about you guys.

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But the other piece that was so very important for me, and I want to keep reminding ourselves over and over again: ***This is not the finished product. God who has begun a work in us will complete it. Did you hear that?*** We may think, “Well, why can’t I do that? Why do I still struggle with this?” If you didn’t, then you’d be coasting, and you wouldn’t be calling on the Lord. But when you’re going through, it keeps you humble and keeps you in a place where you’re ever before the Lord. And more importantly, it teaches you how to have compassion and mercy and grace for someone else. Without compassion, you’d be saying or thinking, “I just can’t understand how you could have that problem. I just can’t understand why you would struggle so much.” But if you have your area that God is working in you, perfecting in you, sanctifying in you, then you can have compassion. Completion: God began it, God will complete it. And then the compassion. You say, “What? James what did that come from?” I’m glad you asked: ***“⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, (and I pray that you will hear these words right now) that your love may overflow.”*** If your tank is a little empty, the love of God will overflow in you. Love for God, and love for others, that it may overflow, ***“and more with knowledge and full insight.”*** So it’s not about what you can get or what God is doing but just for who you are. *For who you are.* You don’t have to do another thing in this world, and the love that God has for you will not change. Did you get it? *You don’t have to do another thing in this world, and the love of God for you will not change!* And then, ***¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*** Produce the harvest—as if we’re producing it, but where does it come from? *Christ Jesus, working in us and through us.* So all we have to do is be the available vessels, right? And choose to say, “Yes, Lord, I will be your instrument of glory here on earth.” Recognize the sovereignty of God at work in and through us. Favor doesn’t mean we won’t suffer, and we won’t struggle. But we need to know that even in the struggle, it is God who is with us. Salvation is more than just fire insurance. We already know we’re not going to hell, now what? Can we live the liberated life here on this earth and be a blessing to someone else as God is doing a work in us?

Let us pray.

God, for your people, for this day, we give you thanks: For the struggles that we do not want to go through and the ways that you will use them for your glory and to teach us how to be compassionate with one another. For ways in which you are perfecting us, for completing us, because you began the work in us. Whereas we get a little frustrated and wish that it would move along a little quicker, there are times also in life where we’re asking “Can you slow it up a little bit?” And so we’re just going to trust you to be God. God, I pray that your shalom would abound in our world that is struggling so very much as to find its place, to find its purpose, to understand how to use its power...but ultimately needs your peace. Lord, grant us your peace, and help us know that we don’t need a gun or a piece to have that peace, but that we have peace that comes from a God who loves us, who knows us, and who’s caring for us and keeping us. Thank you for the blood of the Lamb; thank you for washing us and cleansing us. And God, thank you for the people who are here right now who are waiting as the Scripture said, for their breakthrough...for their breakthrough. I pray for the breakthrough that is going from the darkest moments of their life, they may experience the brightness of your light. And that in living out their faith, they may be also able to bring forth light to others in this world. We ask this humbly through Christ our Lord. Amen.