

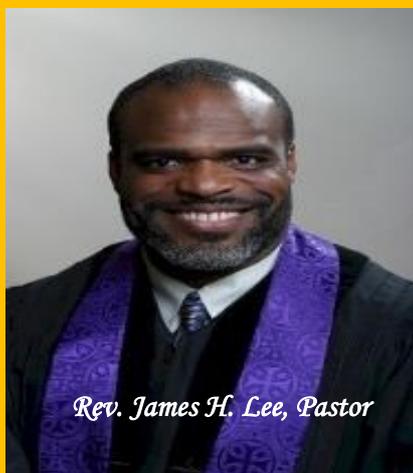
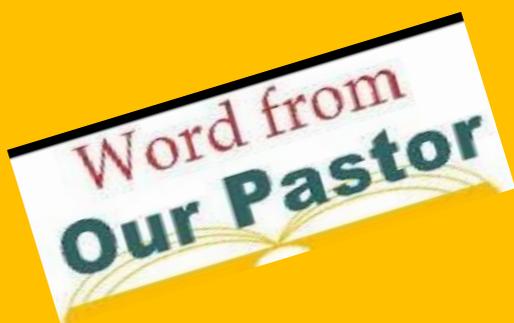
November 25, 2015



NCFA CONNE~~X~~ION!

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***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***



*Rev. James H. Lee, Pastor*

**NCFA Family and Friends:**

As I write to you today, I am grateful for a God who loves us and calls us into relationship. I am grateful for our God who provides and protects us.

This year as so much is happening around the globe and in our nation, I am especially grateful for Thanksgiving. It is too easy to be cynical or apathetic about circumstances in life; but when I shift my perspective, I am able to find ways to be thankful to God. When I am at my best, I have an attitude of gratitude. I realize my limited resources, and I experience my limitless Lord's blessings.

I am thankful for Rev. Bill Harris preaching last week and our church moving forward with the Thanksgiving meal after worship. We were able to bless 13 families with Thanksgiving baskets. *We are blessed to be a blessing.*

Our early morning services are entering a fourth year of blessing folks with an intimate worship experience at 8:15am. Whereas Sunday will be our last day at the chapel in the Perry Estates, we will continue our early worship from 8:15 to 9:15am at our Wilshire campus. I am thankful for all of the leaders and members who began the chapel worship service and who continue to express the value that the service brings to them.

This Sunday will be our Family-Friendly Sunday in which our children will remain in worship. It is also the first Sunday of Advent, and we will have the Hanging of the Greens ceremony embedded in our worship. It is a time in which we tie together the Christmas story and symbols from a faith-filled perspective. Please come join us.

Please find these wonderful words from Philippians 1:3-6 which express my gratitude for you and how you bless the ministries at New Covenant Fellowship of Austin.

*<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> 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.*

**God bless and keep you all.**

*James*



November 25, 2015



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*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*

## Challenge with a Purpose

### 2015 Matching Grant

GOAL \$30,000.00

Current Donor Gift \$15,000.00

GOAL \$15,000.00

NCFA Current Gift \$2,300.00

#### What are the ways I can give?

- ◆ Mail a donation to the church office
- ◆ Leave a donation during one of the services, or events
- ◆ Online <https://ncfaustin.cloverdonations.com/donation>



*Faithfully,  
Pastor James Lee*

## NCF TO STAGE CHRISTMAS TABLEAU

If you would like to appear in the tableau of the manger scene that will be staged in our church on Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, please contact Connie Jones at her e-mail address of [connietheatre150@gmail.com](mailto:connietheatre150@gmail.com) or call her at 512-947-2869 or just tell her when you see her in church. She needs to know by the end of November. You can tell her what character you would like to portray in that still-life picture, and that role will be yours unless it has already been requested by someone else. Costumes will be provided.

Background music for this tableau will be provided by Tiffany Daniels, Kathryn Aldas, and Carol Saddington. Please know that anyone of any age is welcome to notify Connie that he or she would like to participate.

**All Welcome**

## PSALM 150 PRAISE TEAM REHEARSALS

PSALM 150 PRAISE TEAM REHEARSALS

THIS SUNDAY  
IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL  
9:30AM

**Just one requirement:  
A LOVE OF GLORIFYING GOD  
THROUGH MUSIC!  
Bring your voice and hands to clap!**

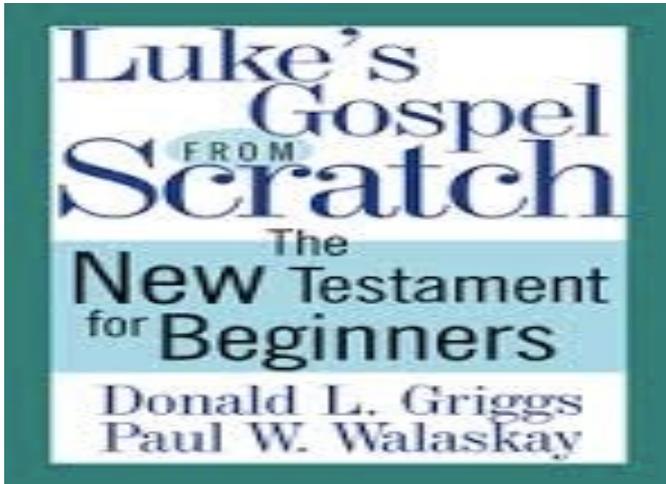
November 25, 2015



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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!

*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*



- ⇒ Lift up Nekia who is serving in Iraq and her husband George who is working here during her deployment.
- ⇒ Praise for Nancy H's college student tenant who is now cancer-free and has hair again!
- ⇒ Praise for little Dejah in Houston who has moved to rehab. Lift up continued recovery of strength and skills.
- ⇒ Praise for Danita's Aunt Jewel visiting us from Georgia.
- ⇒ Continue to lift up Laura as she transitions from being her father's caregiver to resuming her life after his death.
- ⇒ Lift up Tracey's mother Cathy as she begins therapy. Lift up the development of an appropriate health plan for her.
- ⇒ Praise for Reverend Bill's sermon guiding us to focus on God from whom comes all life, light, and love.
- ⇒ Lift up the world's leaders as they strive to deal with the threats of terrorists.
- ⇒ Lift up travel mercies for all travelers during this Thanksgiving holiday week. May we all stay faithful to God as we embrace our blessings.
- ⇒ Praise for Trish and George being able to worship together today.
- ⇒ Praise be to God for getting Nancy T. to the point of removing the chemo port—the last step of a two-year process to get her cancer-free. Thank you to NCF members for praying her through.
- ⇒ Praise and thank you to the many who have made the early worship service at the Waller Creek Chapel possible.
- ⇒ Lift up a friend whose loved one is not expected to live more than a few months.
- ⇒ Praise for the arrival of baby Elliot! Mother Ashley and daughter are doing fine. Scott and Charlie are smiling.
- ⇒ Lift up Roxann and family as Robert receives hospice care in their home. Lift up relief of pain for Robert.
- ⇒ Lift up Roxann as she continues her studies toward a Certified Nursing Assistant degree.
- ⇒ Lift up the elderly in nursing homes who are confused as to their whereabouts and want to go home.
- ⇒ Lift up Caly's coworker whose father died suddenly at age 89. Lift up traveling mercies for Caly's mother as she returns from the Dominican Republic. Praise for new teaching opportunities opening up for Caly.
- ⇒ Praise for a wonderful weekend at MO-Ranch. Thank you to Oliver for his culinary skills that fed everyone for the weekend.
- ⇒ Happy Birthday to Vi! Lift up safe travels for the many family members who gathered to celebrate.
- ⇒ Lift up safety, strength, and energy for Pastor Lee as he juggles the many irons in his fire.
- ⇒ Lift up George W. as he takes Carver and Alex to visit his parents in Jackson, Mississippi for Thanksgiving.

**HAVE YOU  
TALKED  
TO GOD  
TODAY?**

November 25, 2015



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- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sam Okyere Mireku
- 5<sup>th</sup> Ellis Oglesby
- 8<sup>th</sup> Francisco Ramirez
- 9<sup>th</sup> Krystal Parsons
- 15<sup>th</sup> Patricia Nemir
- 18<sup>th</sup> Vi Lee
- Koryn Irene Aldas
- 19<sup>th</sup> Charlie Phillips
- 21<sup>st</sup> Comfort Agbahu
- Dylan Shubitz
- 24<sup>th</sup> Vernon Bailey
- 25<sup>th</sup> Isabella Grace Sullivan
- 25<sup>th</sup> Carol Saddington
- 28<sup>th</sup> Matthew Cox
- Tamara Smith
- 30<sup>th</sup> Stephanie Lenz Sullivan

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Doug and Kathy Smith
- 8<sup>th</sup> George and Grace Washington
- 17<sup>th</sup> John and Dorette Ayensu
- 30<sup>th</sup> Jeff and Carol Saddington

**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

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015**

- 25<sup>th</sup> Evening Activities-Cancelled.
- 26<sup>th</sup> Happy Thanksgiving-Office will be closed.
- 29<sup>th</sup>
  - 8:15am Waller Creek Chapel  
*Danita Nelson, preaching*
  - 9-10am Adult Sunday School
  - 9:30am Psalm 150 Praise
  - Team Rehearsal
  - 10:15am Worship at 1507 Wilshire  
*Pastor James Lee, preaching*
  - Sunday School during worship;
  - Ages 3-5-Rm 1, Grades 1-5 -Rm 7
- 1<sup>st</sup> 6:30pm Men's Ministry  
Dinner, Study at 7pm
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Church Fellowship Dinner at 6:30pm;  
First Wednesday Night Committee Meetings.
- 6<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent
  - 8:15am Waller Creek Chapel  
*TBA, 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

November 25, 2015



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*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*

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# SUNDAY MORNINGS

NCFA Sunday Schedule

**8:15am - Worship Service**  
Waller Creek Chapel  
41st St. and Red River

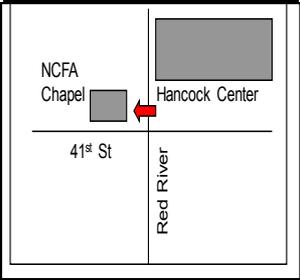
**10:15am - Worship Service**  
1507 Wilshire Blvd.  
9am Adult Sunday School  
10am Fellowship  
10:45am - Children's Church

**NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 8:15am --  
Waller Chapel**

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

41st and Red River, entrance gate on 41st.

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 Waller Creek Chapel — Upcoming Preachers

*November — 29 Danita Nelson*

### 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 encour-  
age 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**

*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)

*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*

## Stewardship Dedication December 13<sup>th</sup>, 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 27<sup>th</sup>, 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.

November 25, 2015



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## Free Thanksgiving Meals 2015



### **Thursday November 19, 2015:**

#### Community Thanksgiving Dinner

November 19 from 5-7 p.m. | Virginia L. Brown Recreation Center, 7500 Blessing Ave., Austin.  
Free and open to the public.

#### Pickle Elementary School

November 19 from 5-7 p.m. | School Cafeteria, 1101 Wheatley, Austin

The school provides an annual Thanksgiving meal for the community. Donations such as sides, drinks, and desserts are accepted but not required.

### **Saturday November 21, 2015:**

#### The Helping Hands Center – Harvest of Hope Thanksgiving Meal and Winter Clothing Giveaway

November 21 from 10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Olivet Baptist Church, 1179 San Bernard St, Austin

Annual Harvest of Hope event offering a Thanksgiving meal to the community, plus adult winter clothing giveaway, including sweatshirts and wool caps at the event.

#### AB Cantu Pan-American Recreation Center Thanksgiving Meal

November 21 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. | 2100 E 3rd St, Austin

Free Thanksgiving meal for the community.

#### Rosewood Zaragosa Neighborhood Center

November 21 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. | 2800 Webberville Rd, Austin

Free and open to the public.

#### Dove Springs Recreation Center's Community Dinner

November 21 from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. | 5801 Ainez Dr., Austin

Free and open to the public.

#### St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Thanksgiving Meal

November 21 from 5:30-8:30 p.m. | 14311 Wells Port Dr, Austin

Free Thanksgiving meal to the community each year. Attendees are asked to call before the event to RSVP (512-251-0698).

### **Sunday November 22, 2015:**

#### Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and Celebration

November 22 at 3 p.m. | 7501 Blessing Ave., Austin

Free, family-friendly, all are welcome. Reception follows the prayer service and all are welcome to bring a dish to share.

### **Tuesday November 24, 2015:**

#### H-E-B Feast of Sharing

November 24 from 4-8 p.m. | Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd., Austin

Join in the festivities and experience the joy with a holiday meal and good cheer at the annual H-E-B Feast of Sharing holiday dinner. The Feast of Sharing is the culmination of a year-round commitment H-E-B makes to fighting hunger. In addition to a holiday meal, you can enjoy music, arts and crafts, kids activities, and even an appearance by Santa.

#### Church Community Thanksgiving Meal (Blanco)

November 24 at 6:30 p.m. | Trinity Lutheran Church, 703 Main St., Blanco

Free and open to the public.

Wednesday November 25, 2015:

#### Baptist Community Center Thanksgiving Dinner

November 25 from 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. | 2000 E 2nd St, Austin

Free Thanksgiving meal for the community.

#### Salvation Army Thanksgiving Meal

November 25 from 12-4 p.m. | Salvation Army's main location, 501 E 8th St, Austin

Free annual Thanksgiving meal for the community.

### **Thursday November 26, 2015:**

#### North Austin Christian Church

November 26 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. | 1734 Rutland Dr, Austin

Free Thanksgiving meal for the community.

#### 12th Annual Feast of Giving

November 26 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. | St. Louis Catholic Church, Wozniak Hall, 7601 Burnet Rd., Austin

Free and open to the public. Twelve years ago, Parish Social Ministries started the tradition of feeding needy brothers and sisters a great Thanksgiving meal on Thanksgiving Day. The last few years, over 800 individuals have been served annually with over 150 volunteers. The act of sharing not only allows volunteers to give of themselves to others, but brings the true meaning of this holiday to those who receive the meals. If you would like to volunteer for this ministry, the Social Ministry team could use at least two and a half hours of your time on Thanksgiving Day or the night before. For additional information on volunteering, please contact Bea Dela Rosa at 512-454-0384 extension 265 or [bea.delarosa@st-louis.org](mailto:bea.delarosa@st-louis.org).

November 25, 2015



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**Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!**

## ***“A Tale of Two Cities”***

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

***Rev. Bill Harris***

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin**

**November 22, 2015**

### ***Isaiah 6:1-8***

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

I thank my pastor for the opportunity to once again stand behind the holy desk as he celebrates his mother’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. In a few days we too will celebrate the bounty of Thanksgiving with friends, family, and too much food. We will perform the traditional rituals—the gathering, the blessing, the feasting. Everything will be fine, unless you fly on a plane, or drive to the airport, or go to a ballgame, or go to the mall. Because when you go to these places, you will see lots of security guards, police, bomb-sniffing dogs, and automatic weapons. When you look at the people there, you may see a lot of nervous glances, some people looking over their shoulders. Because this year there is an uninvited guest at the Thanksgiving table – fear. Fear of attack, fear of others, fear of the future. It’s hard to be thankful when you’re afraid. I like the way John Buchanan puts it, “Fear is the enemy of life. It’s hard to love when you’re afraid. It’s hard to love anything passionately when you’re afraid. It’s impossible to be joyful about anything when you’re afraid.”

The specter of terrorism is hovering in the air. The names of those places which have been touched by this evil are a litany of pain: Paris, Mali, Syria, Kenya, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Nigeria. But there are other cities closer to home which have also been touched by evil: Ferguson, Missouri; Charleston, South Carolina; Chicago; Baltimore; Minneapolis. They also are suffering. And everywhere else, trust has decreased and anxiety has increased. What are Christians to do in such a time? Can we just go on with business as usual? Can we celebrate in our city when we know there are so many people who are suffering? This is not some abstract, metaphysical evil. It is an evil that spills blood and takes lives. Evil causes suffering, and suffering challenges our Christian faith. Why do bad things happen to good people? How can any good come out of suffering? How can we respond to evil? These are the questions that taunt us when we think about terrorism.

I’m reminded of the words of the writer Charles Dickens. He opened his novel “A Tale of Two Cities” with the words “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Dickens used these words to criticize the society in which he lived, a society obsessed with developing its economic and military power at the expense of social justice. This was the time of the Industrial Revolution, a time when the rich were getting richer and the poor were being left behind. His country, England, was a great colonial power; but its cities were polluted, its moral fabric was decaying, and many of its people were living a hand-to-mouth existence. The machine age provided great wealth but at a great cost. Many people worked in dirty, unsafe conditions for slave wages. He said, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

This situation may sound familiar. Last week Pastor Daniel from Covenant Pres. pointed out that Austin itself has more economic inequality than any other city in the county. That means the gap between rich and poor is more extreme in Austin than in any other city, and it is growing. We’ve been riding high in Austin for a while now. We are the fastest-growing city in the country. We add over one hundred people every day. We’ve been on everybody’s “top ten places to live” list for years. Now, you and I will be witnesses to a great social experiment. Does this inequality mean Austin is really two cities, or one? One city for the wealthy, and one for everyone else? We’re proud of what has been accomplished but concerned about what it’s doing to our city. Part of us wants to celebrate, too, but part of us is worried. “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

November 25, 2015



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## ***“A Tale of Two Cities”***

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

***Rev. Bill Harris***

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin**

**November 22, 2015**

In the face of this evil, we are challenged to respond. The theologian James Cone pointed out the relationship between faith and the ability to fight against evil. He said, “The Christian answer to suffering is both practical and spiritual. We solve the mystery of evil’s existence by fighting it. And faith is real only to the degree that it endows us with the courage to fight.” We need courage to fight against fear and evil. Christians are not courageous because we are stronger or meaner or richer or better or smarter than other people. We have courage because of our faith in God’s justice and righteousness. If there is no justice, then there is no hope; and if there is no hope, then our suffering has no meaning and cannot be redeemed. And if suffering has no meaning, then all of us should be cowards.

We want safety for ourselves, for our children. But we who call ourselves Christians are always being called into unsafe situations. Into broken communities, broken relationships. When was Jesus safe? Born to “at-risk” parents, too poor, too young. As a child, hunted by King Herod’s killers and raised as a refugee in Egypt; as an adult, a target for the scribes and Pharisees. Then betrayed and executed. When was Jesus safe? We’re not called to safety, but to service, and that service sometimes puts us at risk. So we need courage to face that fear.

Churches need courage just like people do. Fear affects churches the same way it affects people. It intimidates us, limits us, it makes us neurotic. Churches become afraid of losing their members, afraid that people will stop giving, afraid of other people coming into the church. Everybody wants their church to be big, to be powerful, to have influence...not realizing that it’s not the size of the church that matters, it’s the size of Christ in the church. I think that people want the same thing from a church that they want in their own lives—they want it to have meaning. And the search for meaning in our lives always carries us beyond our own selves into the lives of others. In the same way, the church has to reach beyond itself into the lives of others to find its meaning. Isaiah found that meaning in a critical time—***“the year that King Uzziah died.”***

This Scripture speaks to us from a time almost 3,000 years ago when the Hebrews of the land of Judah might have said “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” The nation of Judah was coming to the end of a long period of prosperity and peace. But the signs of impending danger were all around. They were threatened by the Assyrians to the East and the Egyptians to the West. The great King Uzziah, who had ruled for 52 years, had died. At the beginning of his reign, God was blessing Uzziah and his kingdom. But as the years went by, because of all of his power and success, the King became arrogant. One day he entered the temple and tried to burn incense to the Lord, something that only a priest was allowed to do. Because of his arrogance, the Lord struck him with the most dreaded disease of the ancient world—leprosy—which afflicted him on his forehead so that everyone who saw him would know of his guilt. Under Jewish law anyone with leprosy was unclean and had to be removed from the rest of society and put away. So for the rest of his life, King Uzziah had to live alone outside his own palace. And so the great king was no longer able to sit on his throne, no longer able to go into the house of the Lord, no longer able to worship God with his people. For all of his might and power, King Uzziah ended up as an outcast in his own kingdom. For Uzziah it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. And now, Uzziah was dead, and the kingdom was at risk.

Neither is God happy with the kingdom of Judah. The first five chapters of *Isaiah* are an indictment of the Hebrew people. V. 1:13-16

It’s at this critical moment that Isaiah receives a remarkable vision of God sitting on the throne of heaven, high and lifted up, surrounded by these mysterious, fiery creatures called seraphs; and they are shouting so loud that the walls and the doors are shaking. There’s smoke and fire—it’s like a Beyoncé concert. But instead of cheering or applauding, Isaiah is frightened. He realizes this is about judgment, not just God revealing something. To the Hebrews, if you ever saw God, you were dead. So Isaiah is thinking, “Well, this is it. I’ve seen the Lord. I’m a goner.” And he knows his people are just as bad off as he is; they haven’t got a chance. But we can see that the same time God was pulling back from his people in anger, God was preparing a message through God’s prophet, Isaiah—the coming of the Messiah, the one who would defeat death and redeem the suffering of the people of Israel. And then Isaiah was not afraid.

November 25 2015



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## ***“A Tale of Two Cities”***

Isaiah 6:1-8

*Rev. Bill Harris*

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin

November 22, 2015

While I was in seminary, I made a deal with my wife that after (and if!) I graduated, we would go on some kind of vacation. She had always wanted to go on a cruise, so we booked a cruise on a ship. To get on the ship, we had to fly to Miami. We were supposed to fly out on a Thursday. The week of the cruise, on that Tuesday, we were getting dressed, and we got a phone call from a friend of ours who said, “Turn on the TV.” We turned on the TV and we saw these two large buildings, and one of them was on fire. And as we watched the building burning, we saw a huge passenger jet come in the side of the screen and strike the other building. It was 9/11. The next few days were complete chaos. People were scared, all the airports were shut down, and no one at the travel bureau could tell us what was going to happen. People were telling us not to get on a plane, not to get on a ship. The day before the ship sailed, they announced the airports were going to reopen on Thursday. We got to the airport early Thursday morning. There were police and security guards everywhere. Our flight had been cancelled, and we found another airline that said they could get us there on time. We finally made it to Miami, got out to the dock where the ship was. If you’ve never been on one of these ships, it’s hard to describe how big they are. We were standing next to the ship and it’s like standing next to a building. It’s just a solid wall of steel going straight up. The ship itself is huge. It’s like a floating city. Three thousand passengers, swimming pools, gymnasium, bowling alley, casino, library. Even after we got on board, everyone was still nervous. The Coast Guard boats were going back and forth next to the ship because they were afraid someone might attack the boat.

We finally made it out to sea. That night my wife and I are walking around inside the ship. We decided to step out on the deck to see the outside of the ship, so we open the door and step outside—and it was completely dark. I mean, dark dark. No lights anywhere on the ship. The only light was a little tiny light at the very top of the ship. And we asked one of the stewards what was going on, and he said the captain’s orders were that the ship had to run without lights. They were afraid that someone might attack the ship while it was at sea. And I thought how odd it is that this huge, powerful ship with all of its crew, all of its electronic equipment, the biggest thing out there, would try to hide itself by running without lights.

Now is not the time for Christians to be running with our lights off. Afraid that someone might find out we’re a Christian and be offended. Afraid that we will be neglected, rejected, and disrespected. Afraid to stand up or speak out when we see something we know is not right. I can’t tell you that the church is perfect, but we cannot hide our light for fear of darkness. We are the biggest thing out there. We are saved, sealed, and seated in the heavenly places; we have the power of the Holy Spirit. We’re elected, selected, and chosen. We have the greatest religious tradition in the history of the world—a tradition that has shaped history, art, literature, politics, law, music, and architecture for two thousand years. A tradition that has brought us through slavery, civil war, Jim Crow, segregation, discrimination, brutality, (and it’s going to bring us through this mess right now, too); but we act like we’re ashamed for someone to know we’re a Christian...during a time when the world needs us more than ever before. You and I are sailing on the battleship of faith, but we act like we’re on the S.S. Minnow.

Paul said, ***“God does not give us the spirit of fear but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-control.”*** Boy, do we need that right now. That night on the ship we were running with our lights off, when we should have turned on every light on the ship. We missed a chance to make a statement, “Here we are, and we are not afraid.” Not because we’re so brave, but because the world needs us so badly.

Now is not the time for us to be afraid or ashamed. We must recognize terrorism and call it what it is—evil. Some people want to call it other names: religious war, a culture clash....But if evil isn’t a bad enough name for you, then none of those other names will matter much. Make no mistake, terrorism is evil, and evil must always be fought. But let’s be careful how we fight. If we bow to the temptation to hate, then we give the terrorists what they desire most—our anger, our suspicion, and our fear. But we must do more than simply withhold our anger. We must be about the things that build up God’s Kingdom. We already have the only weapon we need to utterly destroy terrorism, which is the love of God. And so we do not return evil for evil, but we overcome evil with good. The real problem for Christians is not that we will demand blood but that we will go into a shell, pull back from engaging with people of other religions and other cultures, become suspicious of our neighbors and afraid of the stranger. The season of the coming of Christ is almost here. Let’s not miss it because we were hiding in the bunker with the lights turned off.

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## ***“A Tale of Two Cities”***

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

***Rev. Bill Harris***

**New Covenant Fellowship of Austin**

**November 22, 2015**

I was watching the CBS Evening News, and they ran a story from a French TV network that showed an interview with a young boy and his father. They were at the site the day after one of the terrorist attacks in Paris, at a nightclub called the Bataclan, where 89 people were killed by terrorists. And hundreds of people had brought flowers and lit candles, and laid them on the ground in front of the building. Some people were praying, some people were talking, some were crying. And the interviewer is kneeling down; the boy is maybe 6 years old. The interviewer asked the boy, “Do you understand what happened here?” It’s in French, so you’re reading the subtitles, and the little boy says, “Yes, they’re really, really mean. Bad guys are not very nice. And we have to be careful because we might have to change houses.” And the father pats the boy on the head and says, “No, don’t worry, we won’t have to move away. Paris is our home.” His son says, “But there’s bad guys, Daddy.” And the father says, “There are bad guys everywhere.” The boy says, “They have guns, they can shoot us, and they’re really mean, Daddy.” The father says, “It’s OK, they may have guns, but we have flowers.” And the boy says, “But flowers don’t do anything.” And the father says, “Of course they do. Look at all these people putting down flowers. It’s to fight against guns.” And the little boy looks at the flowers and says, “It’s to protect?” The father says, “Exactly.” And he says, “The candles, too?” The father says, “It’s to remember the people who were gone yesterday.” The little boy turns to the interviewer and says, “The flowers and candles are here to protect us.” The interviewer asked, “Do you feel better now?” And the boy said, “Yes, I feel better.”

And I thought about my old pastor, Rev. James E. Obey, who said the best definition of God he ever heard is that “God is life, and light, and love.” And I thought, the flowers = life. And the candles = light. And the love that bound the father and child together, the love that covered the father and protected the child, the love that brought the flowers and the candles together to create an altar of anguish, the love that is poured out on all who are suffering in every corner of the world = the same love that is poured out over you and over me, on their country and my country, and even the ones who did this terrible deed. The love that allows us to say, “We will not be afraid. We will not run away. We will stand and fight with the spiritual weapons that God has provided. With forgiveness, with mercy, with love. The child in us is afraid, and the adult in us wants to reassure; but the love that they share and share with others, that is the love that shatters every fear and redeems the world. Our lives are like the flowers that grow and blossom and then return to the earth. Our light can shine into all the dark places of this world. We need protection, but we need love more. I believe that whenever people choose love over hate, and wherever people stand up for justice and mercy and healing, God is working in that place. And we should help that, and nurture that, and help it to grow. Pray for it, plan for it, pay for it, if you have to. It’s worth it. The kingdom of God is always worth investing in.

It is our choice which city we want to live in. A city torn by strife and hatred, or a city held together by grace and mercy. When evil comes, when the child in me is afraid and the adult tries to be rational, I remember the love that binds the parent and the child and the world together. And then, like the little boy, I feel better. “It’s OK, they have guns, but we have flowers.” Because of that, we all give thanks.

Amen.