



READY



WELCOME • WORSHIP • GROW

« VISION GUIDE & JOURNAL »

MAKE YOURSELVES HOLY, BECAUSE TOMORROW
THE LORD WILL DO AMAZING THINGS AMONG YOU.

JOSHUA 3:5

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INTRODUCTION »

Jesus Christ is alive and at work all around us. The challenge each of us faces is to be attentive and open to that work, and ready to respond when God calls us to get involved. The night before they are to enter the Promised Land, Joshua tells God's people, "Make yourselves holy, because tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." He urges to expect something incredible and to be ready for God to act. This scripture is at the heart of our capital campaign theme, which is Ready. We want to be ready for all that God has in store for us as we welcome, worship and grow.

Our mission at First United Methodist Church is to be more like Jesus Christ for our community and beyond. This campaign will help us live into our mission as we:

- » Prepare ourselves to welcome others as Jesus did by creating a new, inviting, easily recognizable entrance into our church and the life of our congregation. It will be a space to welcome and build relationships with one another.
- » Improve our sanctuary, making it a safe, inspiring space for worship, motivating us to give God the very best that we have and the very best that we are in life.
- » Stretch and grow in our relationships with God and with one another, always seeking to know God and love God more and more.

At the heart of our proposals are 1) extensive renovations to our sanctuary, updating its aesthetics and making it safer and more versatile as we expand our worship opportunities; and 2) the construction of a new narthex that will include accessible restrooms, meeting rooms and ample space for gathering. Based on current projections, the estimate for the completion of the project is \$1.8 million.

One of our core values here at FUMC is generosity, and generous, "above and beyond" commitments will be crucial to the success of this project. Every person and every gift is of vital importance if we are to see these dreams become a reality.



My hopes and dreams for this campaign extend well beyond a renovation and construction project. My hope is that as we participate in this campaign we will find our faith stretched so that our spiritual life in Christ is deeper and richer than ever before. This will not require each of us to give equal gifts, but rather equal sacrifice and investment. I trust that as each of us engages in prayerful discernment about our commitments, God's grace will be at work so that none of us is ever the same again.

I invite you to join me in this journey. Pray for First United Methodist Church of Belmont. Pray about your three-year financial commitment that is "above and beyond" your regular giving. Together with God, we can do anything.

God has great things in store for us as a church. Get ready!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George", written in a cursive style.

George Ragsdale, Senior Pastor



A HISTORY OF BEING READY »

We've got a great history of being ready. For over 100 years, our church family has had to make important decisions and investments to be prepared for the future, just as we are today. We have been blessed by the generosity, creativity, and foresight of those who have gone before us. Now it is our turn to be good stewards and make investments that will benefit generations to come.

HISTORY OF CHURCH BUILDING & RENOVATION



The first building was erected on the original tent site, in the 300 block of South Main Street. The first service was held on May 12.

An Educational Building was added.

Two lots were purchased along South Main Street to provide needed space to the church property.

1911

1912

1950

1956

1957

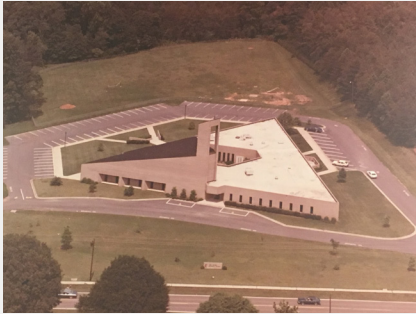
1962

Church was started in a tent during the summer months and in the winter, they moved to Belmont Central School.

A pipe organ was installed and the sanctuary was renovated.

A new parsonage was erected at 700 South Main Street.





Construction on the present sanctuary building began

Two homes were purchased, with one designated for youth ministry.

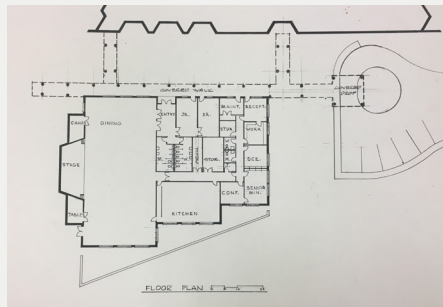
2.86 acres adjacent to the church property were purchased to allow space for our 40-year master plan. The congregation also voted to proceed with a capital campaign for sanctuary renovations and a new narthex.



The congregation purchased a new church site on South Point Road.

The administration building and a fellowship hall were completed.

A new organ was installed in the sanctuary.



CONNECTION TO OUR MISSION AND VALUES »

Everything we do at FUMC should be tied to our mission and core values, and this project is no different. Our mission and core values are at the very heart of the sanctuary renovations and narthex addition.



TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS.

John's Gospel begins with a beautiful, poetic prologue about Jesus. John writes that in Jesus, God came to earth and physically dwelt among us. The Greek work is actually something like "tabernacled" or "tented." So, Jesus' very body was a tabernacle, a tent, a dwelling place for God's pure presence, love and grace in this world. To be like Jesus means we will ask ourselves how every part of our lives, how every part of creation, can become a means of grace. How can our church campus and our sanctuary be a means of grace? If that is our goal, then we want a space that is inviting, warm, and beautiful, drawing us into relationship with Christ himself.

FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND.

The narthex addition being proposed is really all about our guests and the community beyond our church family. It's about being welcoming and hospitable in every way.

JOY

Barbara Brown Taylor said it best: "The only requirement for joy is that God is present and people know it." The sanctuary is a space to know and experience God's presence: a beautiful, inviting, sacred and holy space. We want our sanctuary to loudly proclaim what John Wesley said at the end of his life: "The best of all is, God is with us."



GENEROSITY

This is a special time in the life of our church in which we are all being asked to generously help take care of all that we have been given. We must be good stewards of the physical campus we have, taking care of it in ways that honor God faithfully. We must be good stewards of the incredible gift and treasure that is FUMC Belmont.



FOCUSING ON RELATIONSHIPS

The new narthex being proposed is an invitation to gather, to build relationships, to be community. Its very design says, “before you do anything else, be community.” During Vatican 2, which revolutionized our understandings of the church’s life and worship, it was suggested that a congregation’s gathering space is at least as important as its worship space. There are, after all, two great commandments: to love God and to love one another. Space designed to help us do both of those things, and then to propel us out into the community, is at the heart of this project.



CARE AND COMPASSION

Those of us who’ve been around FUMC for a while take for granted lots of little things that could easily make or break a guest’s experience in our church. Where do I park? Which door do I go in? What if I need a restroom during the service? Where do I go to ask questions and learn more? The changes and improvements in the new narthex are an attempt to more caringly welcome and respond to the needs of guests. Even more, space to talk and share and connect with one another can only help us to better care for one another.



ACTIVE, CURIOUS FAITH

There’s a story told about Prince Vladimir of Russia who sent ambassadors out to find a new religion for his country. The ambassadors went all over the world exploring religions. They came back to the Prince and insisted he choose Christianity because, they said, when they got to Constantinople and worshipped in the cathedral there, “they did not know whether they were in heaven or on earth.” That is surely God’s vision for FUMC Belmont: that we’ll be the kind of place and people who so embody God’s grace and love that others are drawn in, compelled to know more and more about our great and wonderful God with us.



PROJECT OVERVIEW »

We know it every time we're together. Our church is a special place of Christ-centered love, acceptance and grace. We meet Jesus, know him, and are growing to be more like him in our life together.

As Belmont grows, we want to help as many people as possible to experience what our church is all about. A new narthex, designed with guests in mind, will help us welcome others and build relationships with one another. Renovations to our sanctuary will help us continue being a joyful church, experiencing God's presence through worship.

We invite you to review more detail behind plans for the narthex and sanctuary, as well as our 40-year master plan, in these sections:

- » Ready to Welcome: Narthex Addition
- » Ready to Worship: Sanctuary Renovations
- » Ready to Grow: 40-year Master Plan

WHY NOW?

Safety concerns in the chancel area have prompted many conversations about renovating our sanctuary through the years. We need to make those improvements as soon as possible. As our church and community continue to grow, we also recognize the importance of creating inviting, functional space that will allow us to continue our mission and ministry.

We are well positioned at this time to complete this project. Our church is healthy, thriving, growing.

- » Our worship attendance has increased by 23% since 2015, from 210 to 260 persons in worship each Sunday.
- » Our church has had record giving years in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- » Commitments for 2019 increased by 20% over 2018, and we've already had a number of record giving months this year.



Now is the time to take on these challenges. As Belmont grows, God is giving us a unique opportunity to reach people with the good news of God's love. To miss this opportunity—when we have been given so much with so many opportunities on the horizon—would be the ultimate sign of fear and faithlessness. We want to be ready and able to say yes to everything God has in store for us!

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

We estimate the total cost of this project to be \$1.8 million dollars.

HOW WILL WE PAY FOR IT?

One of our church's core values is generosity, and we will pay for this significant investment in our future by growing together in our generosity, living more Christ-like lives together. On **Commitment Sunday, November 3rd**, each family in our church will be given the opportunity to make a three-year commitment over and above their regular giving.



READY TO WELCOME: NARTHEX ADDITION »

The new narthex addition is not for us, as much as it is for others, for guests, for those not yet part of our family and fellowship. Belmont is growing and we want to be in the best possible position to help as many people as possible experience a transforming relationship with Christ through our church. As simple as it sounds, a warm, inviting space with easy-to-find restrooms would be a huge gift to any guest.



NEW NARTHEX: EXTERIOR VIEW

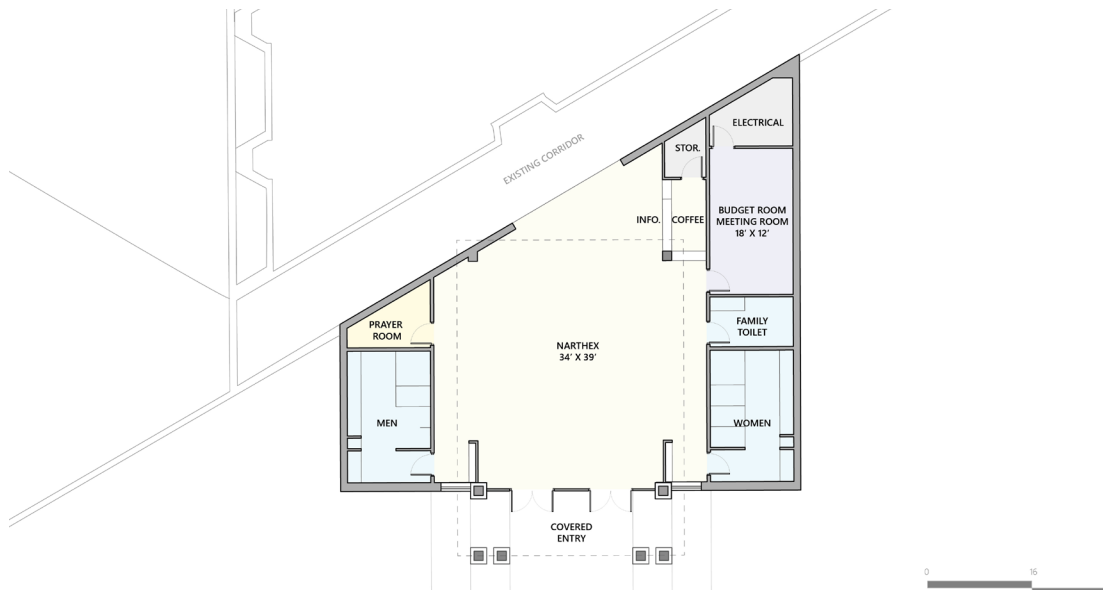
- » This new construction is the first “puzzle piece” of the master plan.
- » Establishes a clear, inviting, welcoming entrance into the main sanctuary.
- » Adds height and natural light to the facility.
- » Open and landscaped outdoor area for gathering.



NEW NARTHEX: EXTERIOR VIEW

- » Clear cohesive connection joining new construction to the existing structure.
- » Aligns with long-term, 40-year master plan as new needs emerge.





NEW NARTHEX: FLOOR PLAN

- » 2,860 Square feet.
- » New men's, women's, and family restrooms are easily identifiable and accessible on entering the space.
- » Prayer room is moved to the narthex making it more accessible, visible and a holy place of prayer and reflection.



NEW NARTHEX: INTERIOR VIEW

- » Creates gathering space for fellowship, whether it be between services, or for weddings and funerals.
- » Natural light from the entrance way brightens the space.
- » Multiple seating options available, depending on event or taste.
- » Contains an information desk where guests can be welcomed.
- » Optional coffee/water station offers amenities for fellowship.



READY TO WORSHIP: SANCTUARY RENOVATIONS »

After years of continued use, our sanctuary is in need of significant improvements. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of all that we have been given, including our church building. Renovations to our sanctuary will help us continue being a joyful church, experiencing God's presence through worship. Without being opulent or extravagant, improving the worship space is really about giving God our very best as we share Christ with our community and beyond.

The following will be accomplished through the renovation:

- » A chair lift addition will allow our worship space to be 100% handicap accessible.
- » Wall treatments will cover the existing 8" x 8" block, creating a smooth textured wall.
- » Carpet and pew cushions will be replaced and reupholstered with a softer color. Final color scheme has not been selected.
- » The Chancel area will be extended, removing the center steps, and safer stairways on each side of the Chancel area will be added.
- » The center raised Altar areas will be removed, creating a single level floor, allowing greater flexibility for use of the Chancel area.
- » Choir loft will be centered, improving sound.
- » Lighting, audio, and video will all be updated.



READY TO GROW: 40-YEAR MASTER PLAN »

The renovations proposed are part of a comprehensive 40-year master plan for our campus that will ensure our congregation remains a vibrant, thriving part of Belmont for years to come.

The 40-year master plan anticipates significant growth for our congregation as well as the reality that much of our current facility, built in 1975, will reach the end of its lifespan, requiring significant improvements over the next decades. Designed in multiple phases, the plan includes:

- » A new children's wing, with space for our Child Development Center
- » New adult classrooms, youth and music space
- » Construction of a new sanctuary



The purpose of the plan is to ensure that any construction we undertake now can be incorporated into any future projects as need for them arises. The new narthex space currently being proposed is part of the 40-year master plan.

Earlier this year, by vote of the Charge Conference, we also began readying ourselves for growth by purchasing two properties adjacent to our campus totaling 2.86 acres. While the current building proposal does not incorporate these properties, they are crucial to the 40-year master plan developed by our architects.



LET'S GET READY »

During the Ready campaign, we need everyone in our church to:

1. **Pray.** Prayer really is about the “bending” of our wills and lives to God. Through prayer, we allow God to align our plans and agendas with His. As we seek to make these huge decisions together, all of us must be committed to prayer.
2. **Know as much as possible** about the plans and proposals before us by paying attention to the materials provided. We want everyone to understand why we believe this is such a critical moment for our congregation and be positioned to make informed decisions together.
3. **Use the Ready journal.** It is provided to help guide your spiritual journey and deepen your relationship with God during this time.
4. **Discuss** their commitment to this project with their family members.
5. **Consider** making a sacrificial gift to God and the ministry of FUMC Belmont.

Please also be aware that the Building and Renovation Committee will review commitments in hand and make any necessary adjustments to the present plans and present them for congregational approval in early 2020. We will not move forward with the project without the necessary and appropriate congregational approval and support.

KEY DATES

September 29th: Ready Sermon Series begins
October 20th: Advanced Commitment Event
November 3rd: Commitment Sunday



A commitment card will be mailed to you in mid-October.

GIFT PROFILE GUIDE

This gift profile guide reveals that even with the large task that God has given us, it is possible for us to reach our goal of raising \$1.8 million in three years.

NUMBER OF COMMITMENTS	AMOUNT OF EACH COMMITMENT
1	\$250,000
2	\$100,000
3	\$75,000
5	\$50,000
6	\$36,000
9	\$24,000
10	\$15,000
10	\$10,000
15	\$7,200
20	\$3,600
OTHER COMMITMENTS	UNDER \$3,600



« JOURNAL »

This journal is designed to be a companion throughout the Ready Sermon Series, which begins on September 29, 2019 with Vision Sunday and concludes on November 3, 2019 with Commitment Sunday.

The journal includes prompts to help guide prayer throughout the week, as well as sermon summaries, scripture readings, reflection questions, and devotionals.

We pray that these materials will be a source of guidance as we make ourselves ready for all the amazing things the Lord has in store—both for our lives and for FUMC Belmont.

Please bring your journal with you each Sunday.

This journal belongs to:



DAILY PRAYER PROMPTS »

SUNDAY

Pray your worship experience will glorify God

- » By continuing to be led by God's Spirit
- » By believing the Good News (John 3:16)
- » By responding to God's grace through loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind (Luke 10:27)
- » By investing in the next generation so their faith will be strengthened
- » Pray as you feel led.....

MONDAY

Pray we will be prepared to welcome others

- » By responding to God's generous hospitality
- » By inviting others to join our community of faith
- » By being willing to answer the call to be more like Jesus for our community and beyond
- » By striving to create a space of belonging for all who enter our doors
- » Pray as you feel led.....

TUESDAY

Pray we will lead disciplined lives...

- » By reflecting upon what it means to live a life of faith
- » By acknowledging the salvation God has given us through Christ
- » By having eyes to see and ears to hear the needs within our community, nation and world
- » By setting time aside each day for God
- » Pray as you feel led.....

WEDNESDAY

Pray we will deepen our relationship with God

- » By learning the story of God through reading the Bible
- » By learning the story of God through praying
- » By participating in small groups
- » By seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)
- » Pray as you feel led.....



THURSDAY

Pray for how we will grow together in our relationship with one another

- » By grasping how wide, long, high and deep the love of Christ is (Ephesians 3:18)
- » By practicing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience and forgiving one another as God has forgiven us (Colossians 3:12-14)
- » By promoting unity and fellowship through worship, Bible study and serving
- » By reaching out to someone you haven't seen in church recently
- » Pray as your feel led.....

FRIDAY

Pray we will serve Christ

- » By lifting up our Care Teams to realize God's gifts in all God's children
- » By using our spiritual gifts, abilities, personalities and experiences to make known Christ's love to others
- » By lifting up our leadership as they seek God's wisdom (James 1:5)
- » By praying for the ministries of our congregation which seek to serve the children in our community
- » Pray as you feel led.....

SATURDAY

Pray we will embody a servant's heart

- » By experiencing the joy and blessings of being generous people
- » By imagining ourselves as the hands and feet of Christ to everyone we meet
- » By reordering our lives so we use more of our resources to honor God and bless others
- » By realizing the joys we receive through serving Christ
- » Pray as you feel led.....

DAILY CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God, thank you for the gift of a relationship with you. Continue to teach us what it means to truly embody a heart of generosity as we embark upon a journey to ready ourselves for the future of FUMC-Belmont. Lead us to welcome, worship and grow through worship, service and intentional study of your Word and life together. Remind us of your presence throughout today so that our actions may glorify and honor you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



WEEK 1: PEOPLE GET READY (SEPT. 29) »

LUKE 12:35-40

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

SERMON SUMMARY

We often think of “being ready” in terms of being ready to die or being ready to go to heaven. But God wants us to be ready for something right here and now. That’s how Methodists have always imagined salvation. It’s not just what God promises in the future, but a brand new life that God offers us today. Salvation is more than forgiveness that gets us into heaven. Salvation is God’s powerful grace transforming our entire self from death to life. A life transformed by grace is a life of generosity.

Christ comes to us every day, several times a day, offering us that grace and power. We want to always be ready to receive him, to live that life, to be who God created us to be. We always want to be ready to answer the call to be more like Jesus Christ for our community and beyond.



SERMON NOTES

“By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the common notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”

John Wesley, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Where do you see signs of God’s saving grace in your life?
How is God saving you right now?

Think of a time when you feel you really responded to a “nudging” from God? What did that feel like? How did grace help you be ready to respond?

John Wesley defines salvation as the restoration of God’s image in us: we begin to reflect the character and nature of who God is in our lives. Does your life reflect God’s generous, giving nature?



HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

Do you remember playing the popular game Hide and Seek with friends when you were growing up? Maybe, for some of us, we played this game quite recently. There's a common phrase that the seeker says before heading out to find the hiders. "Ready or not, here I come!" In the game of Hide and Seek, the seeker won't just count higher until the hiders are good and ready, that's why we get the warning of "ready or not."

Much in the same way, whether we are waiting and anticipating God calling us or frantically distracted by life's tasks, God continues to reveal to us ways in which we are being called to experience God at work in our lives and the transformation that results. Together, discuss ways that your family can leave open some intentional moments throughout the day to share the ways you have experienced God's love and grace. The question is simple: Where have you seen God at work this morning? At school? This evening? Begin now training yourself and family to be expecting God to reveal God's self.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day's prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.



WEEK 2: READY TO WELCOME (OCT. 6) »

MATTHEW 10:40-42

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

SERMON SUMMARY

As he sends the disciples out to do ministry, Jesus instructs them on one of the “core values” of God’s kingdom: radical hospitality and welcome. When we welcome others, especially the “littlest” among us (the most vulnerable, the weak, outcast, and forgotten) Jesus makes the radical claim that we are welcoming him!

Jesus himself modeled radical, invitational hospitality. Have you ever pictured Jesus, or seen an artist’s portrayal of him? What is he doing with his hands. Always, we imagine Jesus’ arms outstretched, hands open to receive and welcome. They are never closed or held in a fist.

To be more like Jesus we must cultivate such a posture in our lives. Our church must have hands outstretched in invitation and welcome to those Christ sends us. Our building and renovation project is designed to better welcome our community guests as Christ would welcome them. Our new narthex is a physical attempt to give our facility outstretched, open arms, to invite and receive others.

If Jesus were to visit our church, how would we want him to feel? How would we treat him? We’d give our very best—generously, extravagantly even—to make him feel at home. The truth is, he shows up every single Sunday.



SERMON NOTES

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

Teresa of Avila

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Think of a time you felt extremely welcomed, and a time you did not. What made the difference?

Is a generous heart a requirement for you (or our church) to be hospitable to others?

How do you treat the gifts God has given you: with clenched fists or open hands?

Think of something you do that mirrors the hospitality of Jesus. What can you change in the way you treat others that would help you mirror the love and welcome of Jesus on a daily basis?



HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

In just two verses, the word welcome is used six times. It must be quite an important word for us to remember and imprint upon our hearts if it has to be reiterated that many times to get the point across. Offering radical hospitality or being welcoming to persons who are different than us can be a challenge though. In these verses, Jesus goes beyond just stressing the importance of welcoming others. He even tells us how! "Give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple..."

Sometimes, living a life in which we offer radical hospitality to one another is done simply by taking one small step. Challenge yourself to be more like Jesus daily. It's okay to begin with little ways. Look for someone who needs a little help and lend a hand. Give someone a drink of water, help to hold a door open for someone whose hands are full, tell someone how much you love them...there are lots and lots of little ways.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day's prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.

"We show hospitality to strangers not merely because they need it, but because we need it, too. The stranger at the door is the living symbol and memory that we are all strangers here. This is not our house, our table, our food, our lodging; this is God's house and table and food and lodging. We were pilgrims and wanderers, aliens and strangers, even enemies of God, but we, too, were welcomed into this place. To show hospitality to the stranger is, as Gordon Lathrop has observed, to say, 'We are beggars here together. Grace will surprise us both.'"

Thomas G. Long



WEEK 3: READY TO WORSHIP (OCT. 13) »

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

MATTHEW 22:36-40

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

SERMON SUMMARY

A huge part of our capital project includes renovations to our sanctuary, the place we gather each week to worship together. We often think of work in terms of what we do on Sundays, but really it is so much more. Put simply, worship is about what’s “worth it” in your life: what gets your time, your money, your energy, your investment. As one pastor put it, “show me where you spend your time and money and I’ll show you the god you really worship.” Or as Martin Luther said, “Whatever you offer up your children’s lives to is really your god.”

The central failure of Israel in being God’s people was their idolatry: their worship of other gods in spite of being called and commanded to love God first and foremost in their lives. We face the same struggles but are called all the same to love God completely with the whole of who we are.



SERMON NOTES

“Worship is “the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by His holiness, the nourishment of the mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose – and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.”

William Temple

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does it look like to worship God wholeheartedly?

How does worship prepare you to love God all week long?

When we worship we give God our very best. What “best” part of your life is God calling you to give right now?

Why do you think idolatry bothers God so much?



Do you have 'idols' that prevent you from giving more generously financially?

Is there an 'idol' that you can give up during the three year giving phase of Ready to allow you to give in a sacrificial way?

HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

The Scripture reading this week from the Gospel of Matthew is central to helping us know how to love God and one another. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Spend time daily committing this verse to memory. You could put the words to the tune of a familiar song. Try alternating different family members saying the words. Write each word on a separate sheet of paper, turn them face down, mix them up, and then put the words back in the right order.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day's prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.

"Idolatry is the practice of ascribing absolute value to things of relative worth. Under certain circumstances, money, patriotism, sexual freedom, moral principles, family loyalty, physical beauty, social or intellectual preeminence, and so on are fine things to have around; but to make them the standard by which all other values are measured, to make them your masters, to look to them to justify your life and save your soul is sheerest folly. They just aren't up to it."

Frederick Buechner



WEEK 4: READY TO GROW (OCT. 20) »

SONG OF SONGS 2:8-13

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



SERMON SUMMARY

Song of Songs imagines our relationship with God to be like that of a lover and her beloved, a relationship of never-ending delight to be sought out, treasured and enjoyed forever. This is a much different way to think about the life of faith. Perhaps it is less about knowledge and understanding, and more about a desire that just keeps pulling you in further and further. The Cappadocian Fathers wrote often of a desire for God within their hearts that only grew stronger the more they learned and experienced.

A famous football coach once said, “In football, if you’re standing still, you’re going backwards fast.” It’s true in football, but also in our relationships—and especially in our relationship with God. We always want to be growing closer to God as a congregation. It’s who we are. Our core value, active and curious faith, means we’ll never be satisfied with where we are in our faith journey, or with the faithfulness of our church to Jesus’ call. We will always seek to be growing, and that includes growing in our generosity and stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us.

SERMON NOTES

*“This truly is the vision of God,
never to be satisfied in the
desire to see God...but always
looking at what [we] can see
and rekindling [our] desire to
see more.”*

Gregory of Nyssa



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is it about God that most delights you?

What would you say about you that most delights God?

What steps are you taking to intentionally grow closer to God?

Do you think the giving of your earthly treasure is connected to your relationship with God? What is the connection between our earthly treasure and our spiritual life?

Have you ever taken an intentional step to grow in your financial giving back to God? If so, how did you see God honor your faithfulness to Him? If not, consider allowing your commitment to the Ready campaign to be a growth opportunity in faith in God.

“‘Make no mistake,’ Christ says. ‘If you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life ... whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect—until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.’”

Frederick Buechner



HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

Think back to the first time you heard about God or started attending church. When was that moment you heard the Gospel and first connected with its message? Who played a significant role in leading you closer to Christ?

The Colossians first learned about the Good News through Paul's friend and beloved co-worker, Epaphras. We read how they devotedly committed to Jesus and His cause. Like a domino effect, Paul wrote that this same news is now going out all over the world, bearing fruit everywhere and changing more lives.

When we talk with a neighbor, friend, or family member who has not yet met Christ or is struggling in their relationship with Christ, it can be tempting to bypass any mention of Jesus and assume someone else will someday share the Gospel with them. But this is a good reminder to us that we are called to spread the Good News. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach others for Him. Like a domino effect, when God's people faithfully share the story of Jesus, it will bear fruit everywhere and change more lives.

Seek a few people this week who might need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and share it with them. Invite them to coffee and dare to bring up Jesus! Tell them how your relationship with Christ has made a difference. Tell them what you know about Jesus. Share some of your own wonderings in faith with them. Create a space in your office or conversation to encourage persons to share prayer requests with you... and then pray over these requests and follow up.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day's prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.



WEEK 5: GETTING READY (OCT. 27) »

EXODUS 12:1-11

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord.

LUKE 9:1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

SERMON SUMMARY

Jesus instructs the disciples to "travel light" as they go out in ministry. What does "traveling light" mean for us and how are we ready to follow Jesus? The Israelites ate the Passover, the most important meal of their lives—the meal of liberation—as God was about to set them free from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. And they ate it, at God's instructions, with their shoes on, ready to go! God is always ready and waiting to do a new thing in our midst. We must "travel light" in order to be ready to answer. God doesn't need our abilities as much as our availability. A generous life prepares us to be ready for all the good and wonderful things God has in store for us, in this life and in the life to come.



SERMON NOTES

"God is always trying to give good things to us. But our hands are too full to receive them."

Augustine

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How has God "set you free"? How do you celebrate that freedom in Christ each day?

What keeps you from being available to God right now? How can you be ready when God calls you next?

How could your sacrificial commitment to the Ready campaign be a spiritual discipline that helps you experience God's grace?

What is the commitment conversation like in your house as you "get ready" to make your three year, over and above commitment on November 3?



HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

In Luke's Gospel reading, the disciples are instructed by Jesus to take nothing with them as they go out to proclaim the kingdom of God. This instruction may have been uncomfortable for the disciples but it certainly would be for us today. There are many distractions in our houses that occupy our thoughts and time pulling us away from God. When we leave our homes, the distractions do not lessen. Many of us are listening to the radio in the car, playing on our phones while we wait for an appointment, or wearing earbuds as we walk and exercise. It seems as though we have lost the ability to do just one thing at a time.

These distractions may not be cluttering our lives in the sense that they take up physical space. But these interferences are preventing us from being available to God and the people in our midst. This week, look at your life and find ways that you can simplify. What can you clear out of your house, your calendar or your routine making you more accessible to answer God's call when it comes? Silencing the radio might allow you to hear the voice of God offering comfort and hope. Putting the phone down while you are in a waiting room could open you up to meeting a new friend or offering friendship to someone in need. Cleaning out a closet could free up five more minutes each morning that would have otherwise been spent sorting through today's options of attire so that you can pray and spend time with God.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day's prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.



WEEK 6: GETTING READY (OCT. 27) »

JOSHUA 3:1-6

Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it." Then Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." To the priests Joshua said, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.

SERMON SUMMARY

It's All Saints Sunday, when we remember the saints of our church who, in their own ways, practiced a "ready faith" that has laid the foundation for our church's mission and ministry today. We give thanks for them, and celebrate the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! Christians have often spoken of death as "crossing over the Jordan," and so we turn to Joshua's words to the people of Israel just before they cross into the Promised Land. "Consecrate yourselves," he urges, "for tomorrow God will work wonders among you!"

The future of First United Methodist Church is bright. God has great wonders in store for us as we commit and consecrate ourselves to generous giving. We are building on the strong foundation the saints have laid before us. We will be ready for all that God will call us to be and to do as Christ's presence for Belmont and beyond.



SERMON NOTES

"I want to be ready! I want to be ready! I want to be ready, to walk in Jerusalem just like John!"

African American Spiritual

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you imagine the future, what wonders do you imagine God has in store for you? For our church?

What do you think it means to "consecrate" yourself, dedicating your life to God's purposes? How is living a generous life a part of that?

Who is the most generous person you have ever known? What made you think of this person as generous? Is it the amount of money they gave or something deeper?



HOUSEHOLD DEVOTIONAL

Spend time remembering the saints who have impacted your faith. Share those stories. How did they introduce you to Christ? What might life be like today if they had not been present in your life? How did you witness these persons being the Church for you and others? What can you learn from the lives they led and cultivate in your own life so that you can practice a “ready faith”?

For persons who have passed away, include a time of thanks by naming them in prayers. For any who have impacted your life and are still living, take a moment to call them or send a card sharing how they have impacted your life.

PRAYER

As you begin to pray, join in praying together for the prayer prompts listed each day. At the end of each day’s prayer points there is an opening for you to name your own prayer concerns. Allow time for all gathered to share their concerns. Then, pray the weekly prayer together.



NOTES





FIRST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH OF BELMONT

TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS

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