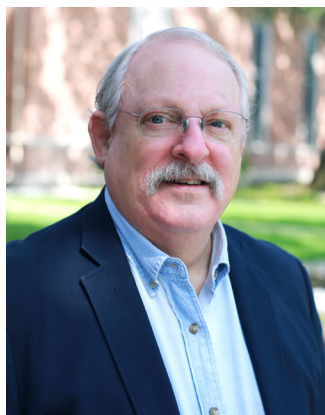


UPUMC

SENIORS

SENIOR *Spotlight*

Vol. IV, Issue 8 | November & December 2020



A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

You may know – in fact, you probably know – that since October 18th we have been conducting in-person, in-sanctuary worship services at University Park UMC for the first time since early March of this year. It was my great privilege and pleasure recently to lead the congregations (both services) responsively in the Call to Worship and to read the biblical text chosen by Rev. Stobaugh for that Sunday's scripture. Because of the Covid pandemic, precautions were taken to severely limit the possibility of the spread of the virus. Masks were required; distancing between individuals and groups-who-came-together was enforced; even the flow of entrance to and exit from the sanctuary was prescribed. One of the most dissatisfying protocols was that the congregation was asked not to sing but instead to read the words while the choir sang and the organ played. Still, it is a start. I know if we can hang on a little longer, vaccines – and maybe even treatment cures – will be perfected and widely available. And one day we will be back in worship: together, unmasked, un-distanced, un-muted and on our own to shake hands, hug, and kiss as we chaotically make our ways in and out of the sanctuary. My experience in Sunday Sanctuary Worship after a long absence reminded me of a passage from a John Updike short story. Since it touches on the joy of worshiping in a sanctuary, and voting, and stewardship, and thankfulness, I thought you might like reading it.

There was a time when I wondered why more people did not go to church. Taken purely as a human recreation, what could be more delightful, more unexpected than to enter a venerable and lavishly scaled building kept warm and clean for use one or two hours a week and to sit and stand in unison and sing and recite creeds and petitions that are like paths worn smooth in the raw terrain of our hearts? To listen, or not listen, as a poorly paid but resplendently robed man strives to console us with scraps of ancient epistles and halting accounts, hopelessly compromised by words, of those intimations of divine joy that are like pain in that, their instant gone, the mind cannot remember or believe them; to witness the windows donated by departed patrons and the altar flowers arranged by withdrawn hands and the whole considered spectacle lustrous beneath its patina of long use; to pay, for all this, no more than we are moved to give – surely in all democracy there is nothing like it. Indeed, it is the most available democratic experience. We vote less than once a year. Only in church and at the polls are we actually given our supposed value, the soul-unit of one, with its noumenal arithmetic of equality: one equals one equals one.

from *The Early Stories, 1953-1975: Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car*, pp 103-104

Be thankful for your blessings this year, including the memories we have that still stir the imaginations of our hearts, and that we are loved by the God of all heaven and earth, who became human once upon a time and dwelt among us.

Season's Greetings of Peace and Joy to you and yours,

- *Stephen*

Poems & Prose

[A Reminder: This section of **The Senior Spotlight** is a place for you to share a poem or passage of prose that has some special meaning to you. Add to it a brief reflection on what it has meant to you and why, and mail submissions to “Senior Spotlight Poems & Prose; 4024 Caruth Blvd.; Dallas TX 75225,” or email “sfleming@upumc.org,” subject line “Senior Spotlight Poems & Prose.” Submissions may be edited for formatting and available space.]

This month we Spotlight a reflection by Maryam Mathis on a whole book. It’s not a review; it’s a commentary on the effect the whole book had on her. Thanks, Maryam!

Confessions of a Myopic Christian, or Why Rabbi Kushner Is a Blessing

Just after I retired, I began to realize that on some level, I was profoundly uncomfortable with Jesus. I was fine with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Jesus, the only one who had shared carnal humanity with me . . . well, He was another story. I called myself a Christian believer; yet more and more, Jesus’s statements and “short stories” left me with a giant yellow cartoon question mark above my head.

I needed to try to get to the bottom of my issue. I decided to read the Gospels more closely, dig into some commentaries, maybe even subtly question my friends who seemed so naturally and comfortably CLOSE to the person of Jesus.

None of my intense and admittedly sporadic New Testament research helped in the least, and it was weird to ask friends why Jesus was such a strong loving force in their lives. (Somehow, it seemed too intimate a question.) I concluded that the source of my discomfort was Jesus Himself. What about Him? Well, he was a rabbi.

Here was at least one thing I could relate to: I had been a teacher for years. But his pedagogical style seemed strange to me. It felt clipped, remote, and even sometimes evasive.

Eventually, I concluded that my discomfort had its roots in culture. Jesus was a Jew. I was born Catholic, saved by Methodism. I did not know any observant Jews, let alone any rabbis. I had read Isaac Bashevis Singer and Martin Buber, but that was decades ago.

I felt the need to see if understanding the context of rabbinic teachings would help me approach Jesus with less diffidence and a more open heart.

Fast forward to one day last year when, on a ramble through the Amazon forest, a book title suddenly reached out and grabbed me. It was ***The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk*** by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. A quote on the back cover sealed the deal: “According to the Hebrew Bible, God made the world with words. God just spoke and the world became reality . . .” And just that quick, the book was in my cart.

When it arrived, I poured over ***The Book of Words*** and later, another book by Kushner: ***The Book of Letters***. Both proved revelatory and inspiring. Rabbi Kushner turned bits of the Hebrew language into meditations on how the Chosen People understand their place in the world and their relationship with God. This rabbi could serve as translator and interpreter for me. I began to understand why Jews call themselves “the people of the word.” Little by little, I discovered the power of encountering the word of God through a Hebrew lens and the importance of rabbinic interpretations in the ancient tradition of “midrash.”

I hoped that if I did the work, I could eventually get an inkling of what it meant to be a teacher of Hebrew scriptures, and I would finally understand Rabbi Jesus better. Not long after, in a third book by Kushner, I learned about one of his missions in life – sharing his tradition with people of other faiths. He says:

... I invite you to explore with me some of the rich and varied expressions of the Jewish spiritual imagination. It is a tradition that may at times, for Christians, feel strangely familiar. . . . To be sure, you can only have one religion at a time. But you can, from studying another one, even from the outside, learn to see you own spiritual tradition through a new lens.

To be honest, the experience has been less like the instantaneous miracle of cataract surgery, and more like that long, careful process of trying out dozens of lens powers in your optometrist’s office.

These days, I’m seeing Jesus more clearly. So, I am no longer just hopeful; I am optimistic. I know that whatever boost to my vision I will owe to the good rabbi’s new lenses, Jesus will certainly be magnified in my mind and heart. And that is why I say that Rabbi Kushner is a blessing.

Pause & Ponder

Are you thinking or feeling that offering a reflection on a bit of prose or poetry is too much for you? How about, then, just sharing some good words of encouragement you've run across recently. There were no submissions to this space this past month. What's the matter? Out of stamps? Email me! I know you've got something sitting in your kitchen window or held up with a magnet on your refrigerator, or bookmarked with a favorite place-holder. Like this one:

"If we have not learnt to love God with all our minds, then the love of our hearts will often misfire and lead us into practices which deny the truth we hope to affirm, and bring disgrace to the Lord we are so anxious to please." – Oliver Barclay

Keep in Mind

UPUMC PODCASTS: Podcasts continue as Dede Casad and Stephen Fleming take a break from their series "Wisdom of the Sages," and Monica Frazier, Minister of Community Life, begins a series particularly appropriate for Advent and Christmas during the month of December. "Wisdom of the Sages" will return in 2021. A new podcast is offered each week. We encourage you to listen and to get to know some of your fellow church members better, living into our vision of a community where we will know and be known. If you are a regular podcast user, you can find the ones from UPUMC on your internet device's podcast app. If you prefer, you can link to the podcasts via our church website.

CHARLES HOSCH's weekly online video: Enjoy a new Bible teaching with Charles Hosch each week.

MONTHLY STAFF PICKS BOOK CLUB: On December 8th our Staff Picks Book is ***Bright Evening Star*** by Madeleine L'Engle. Monica Frazier is the presenter. There is a new book, presenter, and meeting every second Tuesday of the month at 8 pm. Double-click on the event on our online church calendar (upumc.org/news-events/event-calendar).

CHAIR YOGA: Interested in a Zoom class taught by Cherry Fowler on Tuesdays at 11am? It's all about stress reduction and increased flexibility.

ADVENT – A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER: This Christmas will surely be one we remember for years to come. No matter what our world looks like, we plan to safely celebrate the season of Advent together. Save the dates!

- Advent devotional starting November 29
- Live Nativity: December 13
- Service of Healing and Hope: December 20
- Christmas Eve Lesson and Carols: December 24

LIVE SUNDAY WORSHIP ONLINE: Facebook, Sundays at 11am or at www.upumc.org/onlineworship.

MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY: Wednesdays at noon on our Facebook page.

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: Sign-up at www.upumc.org/newsletter.

PRAYER REQUESTS: www.upumc.org/prayer

SENIOR LIFE CALENDAR: <https://www.upumc.org/our-ministries/seniors/senior-life-thursday-calendar.html>

Church information is available to you 24 hours, 7 days a week at UPUMC.ORG. There are other mailing lists from the church, too, which you can ask to be added to which will suit your individual interests best. Your church staff and many, many volunteers are keeping our church up and running even though the building use is still restricted. Help us address your needs – for fellowship, for education, for spiritual renewal and growth – by letting us know how well, or how poorly, you think we're doing. Honest feedback is most welcome!

Prayers, Condolences, Support

Our support and sympathies are with the families and friends of Toogie Elkins who died October 9th, and of Dorcas Coon who died October 22nd.

Please keep the families and loved ones of these who have been dear to us in your prayers. Prayer is how we invoke the Holy Spirit, who consoles and ministers to us in ways that go beyond our words and understanding, who binds us together in love, and who binds up the wounds and sorrows that life dishes out. Let us always be ready to pray for one another.

A Stewardship Message from Rev. Joe Stobaugh

This is a brief update on our Generosity Campaign for 2020. Right now we are at 60% of our goal and we just celebrated our best Stewardship Sunday in over ten years this past Sunday! To date we have received 120 estimate-of-giving cards, two-thirds of our goal this year. God is good and at work in and through our church!

If you've already filled out a card, thank you so much for helping to underwrite God's work here at University Park UMC. If you haven't yet, I'm still counting on you. If you've misplaced your card and need a new one, call the church and request that one be sent to you. If you are internet savvy, you can fill out a virtual card online by going to <https://www.upumc.org/2021-giving.html>

What a joy it is to me to be in ministry with you! If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me, Constance Harp, or Stephen Fleming. God Bless You!

All Saints Sunday November 1, 2020

Remembering those who have gone before us.

