

Herndon UMC Preaching Plans

July 1, 2018 -- March 3, 2019

About these plans

I'm a big believer in planning ahead. I think the Holy Spirit moves through the planning process, and that planning gives us the opportunity to prepare well to be able to provide excellence not only in worship, but in the whole of community life. These plans are a draft meant for this specific season of life in this specific community. There may need to be shifts in what is written here, but on the whole this should serve as a guide for where we will be going and what we will be doing in the time covered within this document.

On the whole, these messages (and their corresponding series) fit into one of five categories:

Fishing Expedition

Attracting and engaging the unchurched

Discipleship

Going deeper in faith [often focused on a book of the Bible]

Pastoral Care

Facing places of brokenness in our personal and communal lives

Equip and Send

Focusing on mission and serving in community

Institutional Development

Strengthening the local church

The plans have been color-coded to which category they seek to serve. Please remember that this is meant to be a draft, not a finished product. Make comments and edits as you see fit, because this document is made stronger by a team, not by fitting only the vision of the person who wrote it.

Thank you for serving Herndon UMC, and for the opportunity to work alongside you!

Blessings, Jonathan

July 1

From and To

Genesis 32:22-32 + 1 Peter 4:7-11

In this opening message, we will consider what it means to run *from* something as opposed to running *to* something. God's gracious invitation to us is one of open arms, giving us the grace to enter in through prayer, community, and mission.

Key verse: Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins. -1 Peter 4:8

Focus statement: God invites us to run toward God's open arms, something we do best as we pray, share, and serve.

Key pieces:

- Forever Reign? Be Thou My Vision?
- Altar design -- might have some special pieces for welcome.
- Visuals -- onion bulb; plane ticket?; emphasis of words "from" and "to"

Let There Be...

July 8 - August 26, 2018

The story of creation is unfolding before our very eyes. How could this be? Didn't the creation story happen thousands, if not millions, of years ago? The truth of creation is that while Genesis and the whole of Scripture speak to God's creative action, they aren't the final word on how God continues to create today and how God will continue to create into the future. Over these 8 weeks, we will look together to see how God's work in Scripture can inspire creation in our midst in the here and now, as well as how God might be calling us to go forth into the world to serve as co-creators, watching for and participating in the unfolding of life before us.

July 8

Intro (Let There Be...)

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

This is an opportunity to set the scene for our coming work. The Genesis creation narrative, while sometimes questioned, paints an initial picture of God as a creator. As we prepare to look at this aspect of God's nature, we do so remembering that God's creative work didn't stop on the seventh day. It continued throughout Scripture. It has continued throughout human history to this day and this moment. And a part of God's call is to take these stories and write them on our hearts so that we might see ourselves not as separate from God's creative nature, but as co-creators with God in the world. This message will invite us to take part in the narrative transition from creation narrative to biblical narrative to past/present story of creation to

enabling us as co-creators. Last but not least, we will remember that God often completes a creative work with the words, “and it was good”. What is the good in our co-creation with God?

Focus statement: God invites to see creation as a both/and endeavor, both having happened and still ongoing; all the while God invites us into the work of creating.

Key pieces:

- Would we want to do a promo video for the series? If so, perhaps a good song for backing music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEoEQ5Z-2bk>
- Think about the concept of blueprints or foundations...there is both something and yet that something is not yet complete.
- Potential tunes...My Hope is Built (traditional); Cornerstone (contemporary)
- Personal story...?

July 15 Be Hope

Psalm 139:7-12 + Genesis 1:1-5

The first creative move of God is to create light and dark. Sometimes the darkness can be frightening. Often, when we encounter dark, our first move is to find light. The Psalmist reminds us that God is in control, even in our darkness, and that nighttime is the same as daytime to God. This means that there is no scenario in which hope is completely absent. How can we be co-creators of hope in the world, even in places where there seems to be no light at all?

Focus statement: When we feel at our lowest or most out of touch, God’s light remains alongside God’s presence, holding us through it all.

Key pieces:

- VBS Sunday -- do we need to include a kids element as a part of worship?
- Creating light and dark in worship space...is this a possibility? What does strong light look like and how might that help?
- Music pieces -- Here I am to worship; Spirit Song?; Thy Word (lamp unto my feet and light unto my path)
- Personal story...?

July 22 Be Freedom

Exodus 14:15-29 + Genesis 1:6-8

The second creative move of God is to create water and sky. God shows dominion over the water as the Israelites pass through the Red Sea, moving from slavery in Egypt toward a promised land of freedom (though that is still 40 years away!). God breaks down physical and oppressive boundaries to create freedom for God’s people. How do we allow our freedom to be an invitation to create freedom for others? Note that water is both saving and destructive all at once. What does it mean for God to use something both for good and for challenge?

Focus statement: Freedom is not an isolated experience, but an ongoing pursuit for all.

Key pieces:

- Distinguishing freedom from warring concepts; invitation to both celebrate military folks and work while also creating a vision for God's freedom that may be bigger than our American vision of freedom. (Be careful here to not go political, just theological)
- Water is both a gift and a danger. What does it look like for us to "manage" God's gifts that have potential to both bless and harm?
- Personal story...learning to float. In a moment you can understand both the opportunity for dominion over the water and the ability of water, even a small amount, to make life very difficult!

July 29 Be Connected

John 15:1-8 + Genesis 1:9-13

The third creative move of God is to create the distinction between land and sea. Jesus tells his disciples that he is the vine and they are the branches. In order for us to be fruitful, whether in our efforts to create or to just get by, we must remain connected to the true vine. Now that we are several weeks into this series, this message is a good opportunity for a "check up from the neck up", ensuring that our efforts to create aren't our own, but are born out of the call of God on our lives.

Focus statement: What is your deepest source of connection?

Key pieces:

- Possibility of bringing in a live plant? Visuals to show what happens when branches become disconnected from vines.
- Invitation to re-dedicate and re-connect...potentially begin to pitch some fall opportunities this week?

Aug 5 Be Justice

Joshua 10:8-15 + Genesis 1:14-19

The fourth creative move of God is to create the sun and the moon. We don't think of the sun and moon, typically, as objects of creativity. While we have seen people walk on the moon and we know the sun is the scientific source of life, perhaps these aren't what inspire our creativity, much less a picture of justice. The story of Joshua, his powerful prayer "Sun, stand still", and the justice that comes from that prayer is a reminder that we are co-actors with God in the work of seeking and creating justice in this world.

Focus statement: A bold prayer that aligns with God's vision for God's creation, to include God's justice, has immense power.

Key pieces:

- What is the boldest prayer you've ever prayed? How did it go?
 - Personal story: *Animal Farm* prayer in 9th grade and subsequent failure. Wasn't willing to share with God, just needed a miracle.
- How can prayer be a justice movement? Where are there needs for justice that go beyond spoken prayers?

Aug 12 Be Enough

1 Kings 17:1-7 + Genesis 1:20-23

The fifth creative move of God is to create the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. In 1 Kings, Elijah receives provision from the ravens, a most unlikely source. What does enough look like in our community? How is Herndon being called to be a provision for the surrounding area, even when we may not be the most likely source?

Focus statement: God uses anything God can, even unexpected things and people, to provide for the needs of everyone in our community.

Key pieces:

- Potential opportunity to share some demographic research. Where are the biggest gaps in Herndon ATM? How are we equipped to fill those?

Aug 19 Be Healing

Acts 28:1-10 + Genesis 1:24-31

The sixth creative move of God is to create animals and people. The story of Paul being bitten by the poisonous snake, being healed, and then being empowered to heal others can tell us this very simple truth: what is impossible to us is possible to God. How can we be a sign of God's healing in the world? A possible concept for this day would be to have a service of healing, remembering that healing is bigger than what our eyes can see, and that God is capable of more than our minds can imagine.

Focus statement: Our wounds can be the foundations for the healing we find God providing for us and for others.

Key pieces:

- UM Service of Healing -- is this something HUMC is familiar with or open to?
- Songs -- There is a Balm in Gilead; God Will Take Care of You
- Take caution to distinguish between healing and curing and how the differentiation can further reveal God's presence and love in our situations.

Aug 26 Be Still and Know

Mark 1:32-39 + Genesis 2:1-4

The seventh creative move of God is to rest. This is not to be confused with laziness – God doesn't rest FROM his creative work; God rests IN ORDER TO continue his creative work. Sometimes our lives can be characterized by so much hustle and movement and investment in ourselves that we fail to slow down, to be still, and to know that God is God and we are not. The final piece of this series will encourage us to remember who we are, and that when we are still for a season, we are enabled to continue forward in our work as co-creators with God.

Focus statement: We rest so that we can continue to journey alongside God; if we are endlessly working, our capacity to create will always diminish.

Key pieces:

- Personal story -- Homeboy Industries Lily and seeing the individual trees. Rest gives us the lens to see each of us for who we were created to be.
- Stillness and silence -- how do we learn to practice this amidst the noise and the hurriedness of our days?
- Potential for one less song and a space for intentional silence/quiet?

Sep 2 Stand-Alone (Sheri Fairchild preaching)

Sheri Fairchild will preach while Jonathan is away for vacation.

Sep 9 Kick-off Sunday 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

When we find our lives centered on Jesus, all things are made new! Because of this great news, this will be a weekend for us to celebrate the new things God is doing all around us. We'll celebrate in our three(!) services this day, and we will think about holding a tailgate-style event following worship in the parking lot (think bouncy houses, grills, family fun).

Focus statement: God launches us into this new season of ministry together not by our own power or ability, but by the ways God is living in and through each of us.

Other elements:

- Wear your jersey to church?
- Opportunity fair, family picnic/tailgate. Possibility of games on an inflatable big screen in parking lot?
- Make sure musicians are prepared for services being back to all three.

Stuff We Wish Jesus Hadn't Said

September 16 - October 7, 2018

Can you remember your parents asking you to do something you didn't really want to do? What was the phrase that would usually accompany such a request? "It's for your own good." Most humans, much less most Christians, can agree that the words of Jesus are instructive and following them offers personal and communal benefits. But what about the things Jesus said that we don't really want to have to act on? For all the great things Jesus offers us, there are a few phrases that are awfully inconvenient. Over these four weeks, we'll look in the Gospel of Matthew at four of these sayings, why Jesus said them, and why it's important for us to live them, no matter how inconvenient that might be.

Sep 16 Turn the Other Cheek Matthew 5:38-42

Matthew 5 starts with one of the most beloved sequences of Jesus' ministry: the sermon on the mount. The beatitudes that come from this scene are revered by faithful people around the world. But later in this chapter, Jesus says something far more troubling. When considering retaliation, getting back on someone who has done you wrong, Jesus overturns the principle of an eye for an eye and instead says that if someone strikes you, you should turn the other cheek, allowing that person to strike you again. In this message we will talk about how this is both a subversive suggestion by Jesus that challenges power dynamics as well as an invitation to diffuse anger and struggle into something a little more holy.

Focus statement: Turning the other cheek is less about inviting more violence, and more about inviting more relationship.

Key pieces:

- Thinking about graphic and altar design for the series as a whole...want to be careful about this aligning with Al Gore's mid-2000's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. How can we distinguish this?
- Would be great to have a volunteer at each service to demonstrate what happens in turning the other cheek and how it challenges the person who is hitting you.
- Music...Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus stands out to me as a potential "theme song" for the series. In contemporary, Chris Tomlin's "Jesus" might be a good one.
- "Angst.com" presentation scheduled for this day. Not sure what exactly this is about or if the timing includes worship or later in the day? (PS -- TOTALLY did not realize this until a later edit of this document...yay God!)

Sep 23 Don't Worry Matthew 6:25-34

Of all the phrases we will cover in this series, this is probably the hardest to live out. In this passage, Jesus covers a lot of things that one could worry about. His overarching point in saying don't worry? What would worry **add** to anything. The truth is that worry doesn't add, it only restricts. This message will offer us an invitation to surrender control and release our whiteknuckle grip on our selves, our families, our stuff, and our lives. In doing so, we will discover that in a release there is freedom for us and those who surround us.

Focus statement: When Jesus invites us to not worry, he is inviting us to surrender control, something that never belonged to us anyway.

Key pieces:

- His Eye is on the Sparrow...I love Audrey Assad's version of this song:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWjwZ_fFKMU

Sep 30 Sell Everything Matthew 19:16-22

Of all the phrases we will cover in this series, this is the one we probably take the least seriously. What is so fascinating is the way Jesus prefaces his command. He says, "If you want to be complete...". It's both ironic and beautiful that in our quest to have completion in our own lives, the way to find that is not through addition, but subtraction. What would it look like to commit to a more simplified life? In doing this, we might find ourselves in places of greater peace, and our community in places of having enough.

Focus statement: Jesus' invitation to sell everything is really an invitation to simplicity, peace, and providing for those in need.

Key pieces:

- Is there a tangible takeaway we could give folks for this? What would it look like to have a shredder at the altar for people to be able to get rid of a credit card? Or maybe an electronic device donation box (but not just for the old stuff you didn't want anyway)?
- Aaron Shust "Give it all away"
- There is a potential to talk about our relationship with money and possessions. Who is really in control here?

Oct 7 Love Your Neighbor Matthew 22:34-40

This may sound like a truth we can get down with. Jesus instructs us to love God and neighbor. That makes sense, right? It does until we read that we can't half-but it. **All** your heart, **all** your being, **all** your mind. The completeness of love is a complexity that has many layers, which only grows when we hear Jesus' command to love your neighbor as you love yourself. There is a challenge in the midst of Jesus' words: how deeply rooted are you to Christ? Not in a

judgmental or accosting way, but in an inviting and welcoming way. Jesus doesn't want to be in a box that you pull out for special occasions or once and a while; the whole of Jesus' ministry points to his lordship. This message invites us to see ourselves with God's eyes so that we might better see the world with God's eyes too.

Focus statement: The kind of love God desires from us and for us isn't divisible or partial -- it is complete, total, and all we will ever need.

Key pieces:

- Communion Sunday
- World communion Sunday
- Music... O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go; Reckless Love; The Love of God (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OH0xLdv4I8)

The Power of Words

October 14 - November 4, 2018

Proverbs 18:21 - "Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit." In our current experience, we are more aware now than ever of the power of words. There is something beautiful about receiving affirmation, gratitude, or love through words. On the other hand, an insult or off-handed remark can be deflating and defeating. Why do our words matter so much, and how can we be more intentional around the kind of words we speak and share in our lives? This four week series will be focused on caring for community through words, both seeking to affirm and to heal spaces where words have been used for good or for something else. In all of this, we remember that Christ serves as the Logos - word made flesh - that we might see a greater power at work in our lives. NOTE: This series is influenced, in part, by a series preached at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in 2016. Graphics and other worship elements are available at sharechurch.com.

Oct 14 In the Beginning John 1:1-14

As we introduce the concept of words and their importance in our lives, we do so by offering a theological foundation of why words really do matter. When God speaks creation into existence, the word God uses to do so is Jesus, logos, co-eternal from the beginning of time to now to forevermore. The key words John uses to highlight this logos are simple yet important: light, grace, and truth. We'll think about how our day-to-day speech might reflect these elements, and where God might be inviting us to be in a space of discernment over this series.

Focus statement: Words have been present from the start, and have the capacity to transform our lives and the lives of others.

Key pieces:

- Songs: Word of God Speak
- Altar design: think about using scrabble boards, bananagrams, words with friends, other games that use wordplay/design?
- How we talk about God influences how we talk about everything else.

Oct 21 To Tear Down Proverbs 12:1-28

Guest Preacher: Rev. Lindsey Baynham, Associate Director of Clergy Excellence, VAUMC

Words can cause harm. As much as we would hope that harmful words aren't a part of the church, they can be. This message will focus on the ways that words can be harmful and how we might work to counteract and disarm our own mouths from offering words that could be offensive or harmful to people in the church and town of Herndon.

Focus statement: Words can be destructive, but when we take time to listen and to be intentional about our words, we can see a different kind of outcome.

Key pieces:

- We'll have a guest preacher this Sunday. Lindsey is one of the most gifted preachers in our conference and will crush this! Need to think about an honorarium and hospitality for her. (JP will still be present this week)
- Because of this being a space for a guest preacher, we will need to be flexible about how this plan could adapt or change.

Oct 28 To Build Up Ephesians 4:17-32

Just as words have the capacity to tear down, at the same time they have the capacity to build up. What would it look like for us to be an affirming, grateful church, moreso than the ways we already are? We'll think about a couple of concepts this day, including the importance of being an "and" people over a "but" people, as well as the power of operating with a Thank You Economy in our shared life.

Focus statement: Words can have a positive influence on us and the world around us when we seek to be affirming and gracious to others.

Key pieces:

- This should be a very vibrant, upbeat service as it is sandwiched between two weeks that will be challenging. Think about this from a music and experience perspective.
- In advance, re-look at Gary Vaynerchuk's *Thank You Economy* for some highlights to include.
- Potential takeaway: packs of thank you cards for folks to keep on their person, to be able to quickly write a note to affirm or thank.

Nov 4 When There Are No Words Psalm 46:10 + Romans 8:18-26

As powerful as words can be, there are times in our lives where we are hit with news, tragedy, or the unspeakable and are left with the inability to have words. A couple of pieces we will want to remember on this day. The first is that it is ok to be silent. There is a gift in being still (Psalm reading -- be still and know that I am God). Too often we feel the need to explain away our pain and hardship, instead of sitting with our grief and lament. The other piece is that when we are sharing spaces with people going through a time of grief, we have a gift to share that goes beyond anything we could ever say. Sam Wells -- "The two greatest tools for ministry you will ever have are your presence and your touch. Nothing you could ever say will mean more than simply showing up and putting your hand on someone's shoulder."

Focus Statement: In the spaces that are hardest in this life, we don't have to say anything at all; instead, we are invited to share in the presence of Christ that knows our pain and hardship and loves us through it.

Key pieces:

- What is our rhythm/habit for All Saints? How do we shape that piece alongside Communion?
- Service of healing/anointing?
- Practicing silence in worship -- what could this look like?
- Being sure to leave this space in hope. Proclaiming the resurrection will be an important element of how we move out of this message and series.

Grateful: Living a Thank-filled Life
November 11-25, 2018

As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday and think about our annual stewardship campaign, it's appropriate to think about how powerful gratitude can really be. Gratitude is impactful to our physical and mental health, a key to strengthening relationships (including marriages), and

has the ability to transform our happiness and well-being. Over these three weeks, we will think about what it means to live a completely grateful life, how that impacts our giving, and how we see God show up in the spaces of gratitude we inhabit.

Nov 11 Made for Gratitude Psalm 136:1-9

We've told the story of creation in recent weeks, and now, as we prepare to tell the story of gratitude, we're reminded of creation all over again. The Psalmist re-tells the creation story and, in doing so, reminds us of a command and a truth. The command? Give thanks. The truth? God's faithful love endures forever. These two pieces, our gratitude and God's faithfulness, are a constantly moving cycle. God's faithfulness comes first and endures, and our gratitude is a response to that. And as we respond, God continues to be faithful; we are called, then, to continue to be grateful. This response invites God's faithfulness to continue to be seen throughout the world, something Herndon can attest to specifically through the missional budget-making of the church and the capital campaign that enables the HUMC community to extend that mission into the larger community.

Focus statement: God's faithful love brought everything we know into existence, and our gratitude extends that love beyond ourselves, into the community and world.

Key pieces:

- Consecration Sunday -- give folks a chance to make their pledge to both the church and the capital campaign for the next year.
- The interwoven cycle. God's faithfulness is not dependent on our gratitude, but our gratitude is the response we were designed to offer in response to that faithfulness.
- Veterans Day concert?

Nov 18 Give Thanks in *Everything*? 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

While we might be built for gratitude, there are times where being grateful seems odd at best, or, in reality, antithetical. When you get a flat tire, when you're losing grip at work, or maybe even around a Thanksgiving dinner table, gratitude can be downright hard sometimes. Why is this, and how can we combat this sentiment in the most challenging circumstances? The reality of gratitude is that it is less of an emotion and more of an attitude. As we learn to adopt a grateful perspective, we might begin to see the opportunity to be filled with thanks at every turn, even the hardest ones.

Focus statement: Gratitude, when practiced as an attitude and not an emotional response, is possible in every circumstance.

Key pieces:

- Story of twins at Duke hospital... “Someone else will be blessed”
- Continue to emphasize pledge cards and capital campaign
- Youth choir JAM

Nov 25 Cultivating Gratitude Philippians 4:4-7

Paul offers two significant keys to cultivating an attitude of gratitude: be gentle with people, and always pray. Gentleness and prayer become the spades that turn the dirt of our hearts. As God continues to plant seeds of gratitude in us, the fruit we can be looking for is a sense of peace that surpasses understanding. As we close this series on gratitude, we’ll be looking for the stories of transformation leading to peace that exist all around us.

Focus statement: Gratitude is the seed that God continues to grow in the souls of each of us.

Key pieces:

- Think about looking for testimonies: who can speak to the ways practicing gratitude has created the space for peace in life?
- Thanksgiving weekend

**A Living Nativity
December 2-24, 2018**

The story of Jesus’ birth is a familiar one in our world. People, Christian and otherwise, use this season as a time to join together and celebrate. While the point of Christmas is to celebrate the birth of Christ and the ways in which that changes the world, the season of Advent offers the opportunity to hear the stories that surround the birth of Jesus. As we hear about Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men, we might recognize their stories as the elderly, the teenage parents, the night laborers, and the subversive. In each of these vulnerabilities, there is a gift that is better than anything we might find under the tree, for each of these hard stories points to an incredible story: God so loved the world that he sent his son, that whoever would believe in him would not perish, but would have eternal life. Over the season of Advent, we’ll think about how we might walk alongside those experiencing vulnerability in our community, and dream of the ways that our shared stories will point to the living Christ.

Dec 2 Elizabeth and Zechariah Luke 1:5-20 + 1 Timothy 5:1-2

As we start a series thinking about the characters that surround the story of Jesus' birth, it is perhaps a little ironic that our first characters aren't actually present at the manger. The story of Elizabeth and Zechariah precedes the rest of the story, but within it there is an important truth: the church is called to serve those who are older. What would it look like for us at Herndon to have specific ways of reaching and sharing good news with older folks in the community? To have intentional plans to visit and be with people, members and otherwise, who are in retirement homes or living alone. These people have a lot to teach us, and we are called to be bearers of good news to them.

Focus statement: Elizabeth and Zechariah's story reminds us that the elderly are not people to be boxed off and left alone, but are children of God we are called to be in community with.

Key pieces:

- Music -- as much as possible, especially this early in the season, let's keep it Advent-centered. :)
- Think about inviting an area retirement home to be a part of worship, offer points of connection.

Dec 9 Mary and Joseph

Luke 1:26-38 + Matthew 1:18-25

Mary and Joseph will be the parents of Jesus. A holy and wonderful piece of news, right? The reality is they are teenagers. They may have different dreams for their life, and now there is a new reality they will live in. This reality brings with it some baggage. There is the scorn of their community, the danger of pregnancy in this time, and the ways they will have to adapt their lives to accommodate this new, unexpected, beautiful life that is coming through them. Mary and Joseph may not have been the first unwed, teenage parents, but their story is one we might still find in our community today. As we begin this series, we'll think about what it would be like to serve teenage parents in our community. Not to judge or belittle them, but to help them and love them. For the kids they are bringing into this world are children of God, as are they, as are we.

Focus statement: Mary and Joseph's story reminds us that teenage pregnancy, a harsh and uncomfortable reality, carries with it the gift of new life, and the hope of changed lives.

Key pieces:

- Connecting with Herndon High School and FCPS. How can we plan to implement an initiative surrounding this day to serve teenage parents in the Herndon area?
 - Potential ideas: parenting classes, free childcare, support groups? Others?
- Toeing a careful line here -- not celebrating this, but offering hope and love instead of judgment.

- Think about ways we can say thank you to first responders, other laborers who put themselves in spaces of danger for the sake of the community.

Dec 24 Jesus

Luke 2:1-7 + Matthew 25:31-40

The good news of God’s love is woven in throughout this series. We find that good news is there for both old and young. We find that good news is there for both people seeking change and people keeping order. Good news is all around us, even in a world where it can be hard to distinguish between good news and bad news, real news and fake news. The best news of all is that Christ lives and moves and breathes through the people we are surrounded by every day. The question is not whether or not Christ is present, but how are we practicing the presence of Christ, believing that, as Martin Luther once wrote, we are all called to be “little Christs” to one another? As we share in the joy of Christmas, we will discover that there is real joy in serving our neighbors, believing that each of us holds something holy within us, and living the Christmas story -- good news of great joy -- in every moment of this life.

Focus Statement: Jesus is the story that holds all our stories together, transforming those stories into good news of great joy in every moment of every day.

Key pieces:

- Special offering for Christmas Eve
- Four services?

Dec 30 Stand-Alone

Guest Preacher: ? (Elsie Blough? Shannon Wise?)

We will have a guest preacher as Jonathan and Kelly will be away this Sunday.

Key pieces:

- Do we need to condense down to one service this day?

Jan 6 Wesley Covenant Renewal Jeremiah 31:31-34

As we begin the new year, we will do so by sharing in the Wesley Covenant Renewal service (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/covenant-renewal-service>). This will offer us a chance to commit to following Jesus in community in the year to come.

Focus statement: In 2019, let’s make following Jesus a top priority.

Key pieces:

- Do we need to condense down to one service this day?

Fixer Upper: Stories of Restoration, Repurposing, and Redemption

January 13 - February 10, 2019

Human beings aren't perfect. We make mistakes, we mess up, and we hurt ourselves and others.

We sometimes end up feeling unlovable, broken, and worthless - like a piece of discarded furniture set out on the curb. But just like that ugly sofa, all we need is for someone to see our potential and give us a second chance. The message of God's love is that no matter where we are or what we've done, God sees beyond our imperfections, loves us, forgives us, and offers us new life. This five week series will be an opportunity for us to hear how God has been on the move in the lives of characters throughout Scripture, and for us to see the redemption God offers each of us in our lives.

Jan 13 The Unfinished Jar Jeremiah 18:1-6

"Have thine own way Lord, have thine own way, you are the potter, I am the clay." This song was sung as my mom went down the aisle of a Baptist church to profess her faith for the first time. One of the most popular bands of Christian music is called Jars of Clay. These come from the idea spoken to Jeremiah: all of Israel is like clay in the hands of God the potter. What does this mean for us? God is **constantly** shaping and forming us. We are never "done". We are always becoming who we are going to be. Our job is not to do the shaping, it is to stay moldable. In this opening message, we'll think about what it looks like to stay flexible to the will of God, by being saturated with God's word, prayer, and community.

Focus statement: God continues to work on you, in you, and through you.

Key pieces:

- Think about the concept of "throwing" a pot from upfront OR having a sculptor/potter doing that work while preaching.
- Even hardened clay can be shattered and become something new.
- Music -- Have Thine Own Way

Jan 20 Getting Past Our Past John 4:1-30; 39-42

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, it is very clear that there is an understanding of her past, to include her flaws. The thing about Jesus is that while he is honest with her about where she's been, he is also open with her about where she can be. How often do we inhibit our own possibilities for the future because we are so hung up on the past? Jesus' invitation to this

woman and to us is to get past our past, to believe that just because “we haven’t done it that way before” it still can be done, and to see the preferred future God has in store for us.

Focus statement: Our past is a part of who we are, but it’s never the whole of our existence.

Key pieces:

- Forever Reign?
- Approaching a good time to talk about vision and direction for church community

Jan 27 The Craziest Story Luke 8:26-39

Sometimes life feels utterly chaotic. We struggle to find balance or a grip or anything that gives us a sense of peace or control. This chaos, at times, can cause us to actively resist engaging Christ in our lives. Most often this happens because we don’t want to surrender any kind of control. We think we have to have it all together and that we have to be in charge. The truth is that we’ve never been in control. Our stories have always been God’s stories. God’s invitation to us is to surrender our tight grips and to invite the holy to transform our chaos into peace.

Focus statement: God can breathe peace amidst our chaos.

Key pieces:

- I Surrender All?

Feb 3 Dinner Parties Luke 7:36-50

We’ve talked about getting past our personal past. This week we’re going to think about what it looks like to get past the past of others. Forgive as you’ve been forgiven. The truth is that all of us have experienced radical forgiveness. Sometimes it is easier said than done to extend that same kind of forgiveness to others. Our job, however, is not to judge the sinfulness of others, even if their sin has hurt us. Our job is to love Jesus, which calls us into the love of our neighbor.

Focus statement: Forgive others as you have been forgiven.

Key pieces:

- Matthew West “Forgiveness” and story behind it?
- Communion Sunday -- maybe think about a response of what person/situation we haven’t been able to forgive or let go of just yet?
- Think about potential for launching dinner parties as a part of model to do home groups. “How is it with your soul”

Feb 10 My Way or the Highway Jonah 3:1-4:10

Sometimes, even when we know we need to forgive ourselves and others, we remain stubborn. We still have to have it our way. We think we know what's right, after all. So we subject others to our own perspective and have the audacity to expect God to operate on our terms instead of the other way around. The story of Jonah teaches us that sometimes God sees the world differently than we do, and we don't have to be the mitigators of justice. Jonah is famous for hanging out in the belly of a fish because of his refusal to listen to God. But at the end of the story, he still doesn't have the listening part down. His story teaches us that we just need to do as we are called by God to do, speak as we are called to speak, and, most importantly, love as we are called to love.

Focus statement: Forgiveness isn't meant only for individuals, it's meant for communities, and it's meant for us to give freely.

Key pieces:

- Hillsong "Trust"

Feb 17 Fixing Up the Church Acts 2:1-21

It isn't Pentecost Sunday, but the church is facing a pivotal moment. Starting Saturday, the special General Conference will begin to meet and discuss how the United Methodist Church might stay together, or how it might not. As we approach this important time in the life of our church, we look back to how the church began. It didn't begin with legislative committees or boards; it began with a movement of the Holy Spirit. We'll do well to remember that the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, that we are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to do anything, and that God works through broken vessels all the time, even us.

Focus statement: Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won. O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we, like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee. ("Foundation", verse 6)

Key pieces:

- The Church's One Foundation
- Other activities? Q+A session about General Conference?

Feb 24 Prayer Service
Guest Preacher: Sarah Calvert

We'll take a Sunday to pray for the United Methodist Church and for the General Conference taking place during this time.

Mar 3 Report from General Conference

Jonathan will report back from General Conference and discuss potential impacts on HUMC.