

Jesus came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. God's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what God is building. God used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now God's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.
—Ephesians 2:17-22

*To create is to make something that has never existed before.
There's nothing more vulnerable than that.*
—Brené Brown

Lead Pastor's Report

Brené Brown has been an inspiration to millions, especially through her work on empathy, empowerment, and recovery. And this tidbit sounds like it was written just for Sanctuary—a unique collection of God's beloved who are creating something that has never existed before and who have experienced the deep vulnerability that ensues. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the myriad ways in which you have been creative, considered, courageous, vulnerable and new!

Beloved, God cast a vision within us in 2013 to be a new kind of church and we have followed. The blessed assets of our forebears have allowed us to experiment for five years and the blessed courage of those of you who followed has allowed us to discover, grow, stumble, pick ourselves up and listen to the Holy Spirit's direction for Sanctuary. We have discovered that what we do really well and what we do that is unique to our way of being a church is that we 'go deep'—easily, naturally, and authentically. We believe this is Sanctuary's call – to go deep and transform people's spiritual lives, bringing them into relationship with the Triune God, for transformed lives. We know that there are a lot of people who like that, need that, and want more of it in their lives! Lord knows, in this complex time of political tension, narcissism in the White House, fractured families and lives, consumerism and cultural loss of spiritual values, the environmental crisis, opioid addictions and more... Sanctuary is offering sacred space for actual discourse and a process for spiritual growth and change.

As Joanna Begin noted in her Moderator's Report, God has turned our attention from experimenting to the center of the circle for a time. With God's direction we have turned a corner and we are settling into a way of being Sanctuary that has clarity of purpose, movement within a process, alignment with our purpose and values, and a singular focus on practices which will achieve our purpose (did you see what we did there?). The 2019.2020 Ministry Plan (included in this report) fleshes out a few more of the details but the Leadership Circle and I am invested in a simple plan (with much fewer details and simpler options) that allows not only our mission and purpose (Spiritual Transformation) to also be our process, but it allow our process to also be our practice! And by the time the year end arrives, we will all be able to not only name our purpose and process; but we will also be confident inviting others to join us on the journey – to and through and within and around and back again to the "Five Deeps".

Beloved, the heart of Sanctuary lies deep within us. Ongoing spiritual growth goes deep and circles inward and outward. Spiritual growth begins with Deep Questions—of God, self, others, the world. It moves naturally to Deep Conversations—with God, self, others, the world. From there growth moves to Deep Connections—to God, self, others, the world. Then arise Deep Convictions—about God, self, others, the world. Finally come Deep Commitments—to God, self, others, the world. The circle goes ever onward: Deep Questions begin anew, ad infinitum. (From the Ministry Plan)

Our purpose is Spiritual Transformation. Our Process is to Ask Deep Questions, Have Deep Conversations, Make Deep Connections, Develop Deep Convictions and Share Deep Convictions. I look forward to teaching and preaching and sharing this journey with you so that we all might step onto the spiritual transformation circle and be changed.

Over the next year, the Leadership Circle and I, along with our consultants and staff will assess our ministries and to make sure that the clarity we have about this process is distributed across all of our ministries and that the options we offer within our ministries have an impact on the participants spiritual development and movement along the process, and that they are aligned with and focused on aspects of the process.

I am clear – as a bell – that this is aligned with my call; and that this is Sanctuary’s call. Jesus has kept me for this and I feel called to this next step in Sanctuary’s history deeply. Jesus has kept us for this and I believe we are called to go deep.

As I prepared for yet another Annual Business Meeting with change (and conflict) in the air, our Moderator, Joanna Begin cast this Ephesians passage into our planning and I was struck (slightly dumb) by the language of The Message narration of the text (above): This kin-dom of faith is your HOME. You BELONG here. YOU belong here. With as much right to the name and the place as anyone. God is using ALL of us—irrespective of how (or when) you got here—or what exactly you believe about God—or in what ministry roles you have served—or even what you believe we should be doing as a church. It is GOD calling forth this blessing, GOD building this church, GOD inspiring this transformation—GOD causing this mysterious, unknowable, hard-to-measure, wild, weird Way to unfold—brick by brick, stone by stone, ministry by ministry, partnership by partnership, collaboration by collaboration, circle by circle. And it is Jesus’s Way that is holding us all together.

Beloved, if we take heart and believe that Jesus is holding us together, and that God has called us to this, if we can stop worrying about whether we are doing it right, if we can stop thinking about having our way, if we can stop fighting, if we can see Sanctuary as a sanctuary for others as well as for ourselves, if we can seek God’s will and not our own, if we can measure success on God’s Way and not our old ideas about church—we will see it taking shape—it is already happening but we have had trouble seeing it the past eighteen months.

It is already taking shape--a temple in which God and God’s beloved are at home; a sanctuary into which we are all being built and built anew; a holy place where all are welcomed and beloved, all are being transformed, and God is found—and found again and again and again—in everything that we do—and in each and every one of us. Beloved, God never fails. God is making a way where there seemed to be no way, because that is what God does!

May we step onto the journey and go deep.

Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade