

Links for the Recording of the Service from January 17, 2021 and the Upcoming Service of January 24, 2021 are at the end of the News Blast.

Dear Members and Friends of Idylwood Presbyterian Church,

Please keep in your prayers:

- **Bob Osman's** brother Paul, who just turned 65, was hospitalized recently with blood clots in his lungs after a heart attack/surgery in December. Paul is home now but still needs prayers.
- **Linda Dono's** aunt, Marge Dono Neuberger, who died Sunday, 12-20, of COVID-19
- **Julie Tutwiler's** cousin's son, Jon Pope, in a second round of chemotherapy
- **Kate Untiedt** asks for prayers for her right eye, which is still not right
- **Kate Untiedt's** colleague Nancy with cancer and recent heart attack
- **Linda Dono's** friend, Rev. Tom Wade with leukemia
- **George Petras's** cousin Marlene with lung cancer
- **Richard Williams'** uncle Bill Axline with cancer
- **Danielle Moraes** dealing with a difficult work lawsuit
- **All with COVID-19 or at risk:** medical, delivery, teachers and first responders

Devotions/Reflections from the Pastor:

Gen 2:19: And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.

Every living creature is called a *nefesh chayah* (the ch is pronounced like the ch in Bach, not church) in the Bible, literally a living soul. Only the word *nefesh* does not mean soul in the Greek sense of a spiritual organ. It originally meant the gullet or throat and came to mean the life force. It is not immortal, but inextricably part of the animal of which it is associated. All of us, humans and animals, are *nefesh chayah*. Naming is important in many cultures. When Adam named the animals, he was indicating what their character was. It meant that he had an "I-Thou" relationship with them, just as we have with our pets, especially during the pandemic. Some of us have become more aware of the birds outside our homes.

We don't have that kind of relationship with the animals that were killed and end up in Styrofoam at the supermarket. The packaging makes it easier to forget that the meat was once a living, breathing animal, who in most cases these days spent its brief life in inhumane conditions. When people lived on farms and killed their own chickens, it was different. The rabbis believe that we can learn from the animals, by standing under them, by understanding them. Proverbs says "Lazybones, go to the ant, study its ways and learn" (Prov 6:6). I do occasionally eat meat, but I know that it is less than ideal.

Gen 4:9: The LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

The verb in this verse is the same one used in Gen 1: 26, 28, to guard, protect, or keep. The implied answer to the rhetorical question is, "Yes, you are." Rabbi Joseph Ber Sheloveitchik taught this as a core Jewish value: "I am responsible, therefore I am." We are responsible for our actions. And we are responsible for the good fortune that we have experienced during our lives at the expense of others who have experienced the short end of the stick.

When people in minority communities do not have access to decent water, health care, grocery stores within reasonable distance from their homes, good affordable schools, day care, and the ability to live without constant fear of police brutality, society at large is at fault, not the minority communities. What can we do, you may ask? Learn about the problems to become motivated to help. Then become involved in one of the many causes that need money and time and talent. None of us will be able to move mountains, but we can do something.

At this point in the Eco Bible commentary, it lists **Suggested Action Items**.

The first is calculate your ecological footprint by going to <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>

Next, explore any links there for more sustainable living.

Take a walk and notice the birds, the sunshine, the ground, & other animals you encounter. Be grateful for the natural world around us.

Lectionary texts for 1-24-2021:

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

3:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying,

3:2 "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."

3:3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across.

3:4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

3:5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

3:10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Psalm 62:5-12

62:5 For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

62:6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

62:7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

62:8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.
Selah

62:9 Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

62:10 Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

62:11 Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,

62:12 and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

7:29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none,

7:30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions,

7:31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Mark 1:14-20

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

1:16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.

1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

1:19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

1:20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Links for the Recording of the Service from 1-17-2021

Topic: IPC Worship

Date: Jan 17, 2021 10:29 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Meeting Recording:

https://zoom.us/rec/share/_cUpUG2acyKNzO4FNPyA0hyLd9g_vbeI6q-rrtUDa8tEPSUhZmqzZADNUcOxEQ1I.0sq5i0K7rhE-vlQD

Access Passcode: **0JdJV\$hy**

and the Upcoming Service of 1-24-2021:

Topic: IPC Worship

Time: Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Every week on Sun, until Jan 31, 2021, 2 occurrence(s)

Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 31, 2021 10:30 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly: [https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmltyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshMPRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC](https://zoom.us/join/https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmltyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshMPRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/97016933208?pwd=dFo0Z3duMi9sd0RvQ2p2VzY4ZEZBUT09>

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208

Passcode: **pcJY1z**

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,97016933208#,,,,*531963# US (Washington D.C)

+13126266799,,97016933208#,,,,*531963# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington D.C)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 646 876 9923 US (New York)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208

Passcode: 531963

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/aeAlYJfilT>

Sermon from 1-17-2021, MLK weekend, time of prayer for Christian Unity Second Sunday after Epiphany; including Lectionary texts on which it is based:

Umuntu ngumuntu gabantu (I'm a person because you're a person) Zulu

- **John 1:43**

1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

- **1 Cor 6:12-20**

6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

6:14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

6:15 **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?** Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

6:16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For

it is said, "The two shall be one flesh."

6:17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

6:18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.

6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Umuntu Ngumuntu Gabantu (I Am a Person Because You Are a Person)

Tomorrow is the anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth, born ninety-one years ago and murdered fifty-two years ago. He had a dream that all of us, of whatever skin color, ethnicity, or religious faith, would live together in peace and mutual respect. It has been a long time coming, and we have a long way to go. We made some progress last year, the year of the Covid pandemic, in which our lockdown conditions forced us to pay more attention to social media and the disproportionate police brutality to those of darker hues. This sensitivity to the marginalized is one of the silver linings in this year we have just been through and continue to experience though it is now 2021.

This week is also the week of prayer for Christian unity. Not only is 11 o'clock Sunday morning still the most segregated time and place in America, but our disunity is painfully evident in the progressive-evangelical divide. We at IPC are more likely to be comfortable with Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians and even people of other faiths than people on the other side of the progressive-evangelical divide. Even more disturbing is the number of Americans who have opted out of church altogether, calling themselves "spiritual, but not religious." We church folk have turned off much of the Millennial population and need to search our souls, repent, and reorient.

Amid so many serious problems, I have chosen to reflect on a half verse in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians this morning: I wrote a fifty-page academic article last year on a half verse of Song of Songs, aka Song of Solomon. Now I am doing a sermon on a half verse of 1 Corinthians: 6:15a: **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?** In this context, Paul's concern is about decadence in the Corinthian church. He is worried about some members who were having sex with prostitutes and others who were overeating. Paul complains that they do not understand that jointly they are members of the body of Christ. He expands on this concept in chapter 12, where he talks about how our various body parts work together, metaphorically speaking. The Corinthians had the impression that the Gospel had overturned the law; as a result, they could live with abandon. Paul corrects them, saying that in a sense all things are lawful; of more critical importance, however, not everything is helpful. What is useful to our sisters and brothers is the practical ethical guideline.

When we grow up and cease to be children, we no longer have parents telling us what we can do and not do. We would be quite foolish, though, to throw off all restraint, drive down the highway at 100 miles an hour, drink until we are drunk night after night, spend all of our money without putting any away for a rainy day, etc. We could do those things, but it would be stupid, and we wouldn't last long. There is a moral law built into the universe; to violate it is to court disaster. Our human understanding of it may change over time as our historical context changes, but the primary substance of that law stays the same. And we can be glad of that. We would not be happy if the laws of physics were always changing on us, and we never knew which way was up from one day to the next.

But I digress. Paul's point is simple. God's spirit does not reside in us individually; no, it binds us together in communities. That truth is why he says, "Do you not know that your bodies are **members** of Christ? We don't each carry the spirit around with us individually as if we were pots and the spirit, water. Instead, we are part of a community, members of a larger whole. I felt this the most acutely several years ago. The Gospel singer and later HUSD alumnus, Richard Smallwood, whose music I have played for you as special music, gave a benefit concert for the Divinity School at the Tabernacle of Praise in Landover, MD. This huge sanctuary holds 10,000 people and shares the humongous parking lot of the Washington Football Club. We filled it at least to half capacity. We are not a large school, so this was a feat in itself. Multiple choirs backed up Richard and his group. It is hard to describe the spirit in that room, but it was high. I was sitting with the faculty, so I had to contain myself. I am usually a quite sedate worshipper, not given to Amens and Hallelujahs. Even in a Black worship service, the most you will get out of me is my hands raised silently and an occasional Amen blending in with everyone else's. But that night there were lots of people dancing in the aisles, and I very much wanted to join them. It was one of the most intense spiritual experiences I've ever had. I've felt similar moments at outdoor vesper services. I did have one powerful experience alone, but even then, I was waiting for my prayer group to show up at any moment.

Things happen when we gather, even on zoom. Powerful things happen, even in my classes at school. One day this fall, we were talking about King Saul. As I always do, I used his story as an opportunity to speak about the problems of mental health because I believe that Saul was emotionally unstable, whether depressed, paranoid or some combination of those. Especially in the Black community, but also in the larger society, this sort of problem is stigmatized, so I encourage my students as future faith leaders to take care of their emotional health. I encourage them not to be afraid to seek help when they or their families need it. I talk about my saga and my family's history in this area. Anyway, my class this year has been incredible, and as they spoke, one of the students came forward to share that he was on the edge. He was unemployed, split from his wife, the mother of his two young sons, who had cheated on him. The class rallied around him. We raised money for him, helped him find a job, supported him, and helped turn the situation around. It was transformative. The spirit moved that night. We could all feel it and talked about it afterward.

A Zulu saying, *Umntu ngumuntu gabantu*, roughly translated “I am a person because you are a person,” well expresses the reality that we are who we are because of our community. Traditional African culture is very community-oriented; biblical culture was also very community-oriented. Modern western society is individualistically oriented, but one of the things we have learned during the pandemic is that isolation is murderous. We do need each other, desperately. And that is what church is all about.

We come together to study the wisdom of a group of sages whose thoughts have stood the test of time. We join together in finding something good to be glad about, even when that’s not easy. We come together to examine ourselves honestly, discover where we have gone wrong, repent, and try to make amends. And we come together to celebrate. All of this is powerful stuff.

Being a community and working through the wrinkles that develop is not always easy. We are human but dealing with the problems that arise helps us grow as individuals and groups. It is so much richer than going it alone as spiritual, but not religious. Admittedly, you have to find the kind of group that you are compatible with, just like you have to find the right spouse if you are the marrying sort. Still, if you can discover that kind of group and participate fully, I defy you to find a more satisfying experience of personal growth.

The importance of church participation was not where I expected this sermon to go, but speeches have a life of their own. They sometimes lead the writer to go in a direction that surprises the writer as much as those who will ultimately receive the message. As I sit back and survey this message, I realize that what I’m asking you all to do is take advantage of the resource you have in Idylwood Presbyterian Church. By this, I mean not only the current structures that exist within it, but the possibilities that you can make happen in the future.

What do you want your church to be? The area could use many missions. The church where my parents were members for 70 years runs a furniture-refinishing ministry. People bring old furnishings to them, which they refinish and then provide free of charge to the needy in their community. My parents taught the Young Adults Sunday School class until the members were no longer young adults but were quite elderly. They still called it the Young Adult Class!

For many years, they ran a monthly luncheon for the old folks. What do you love to do that could be helpful to others but also be fun and rewarding? The possibilities are determined by what you feel a gentle urging to do. Perhaps most importantly, do you know isolated, lonely people looking for a community to join? Urge them to come and check us out. Yes, we are in an interim situation at the moment. But the church is more than the pastor. The church is the people who come here and make it happen. And believe me, that is a lot more than just the pastor

As Paul said, “our bodies are members of Christ” or put the Zulu way, *Umntu ngumuntu gabantu. Amen.*