

THE MESSENGER



| NEWS FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORT COLLINS |

HITTING PAUSE

**A LITTLE SOAP
AND A LOT
OF HOPE**

**GOOD
NEWS**

**FLAT JESUS
RETURNS**

SUMMER 2020—VOLUME XL—ISSUE 2

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From the Editor | A DIFFERENT SUMMER

Let's be real. 2020 is not the year we thought it would be. We had big plans—graduation celebrations, birthday parties, travel near and far, barbeques, baseball games, concerts and plays and movies, glorious weekly worship, and a fun-filled week of Vacation Bible School. Instead, we have experienced lockdown, cancelations, “shelter in place,” and “safer at home.” We have learned new words and phrases like social distancing, flattening the curve, PPE, and Zoom fatigue. And in the middle of a worldwide pandemic that brought our culture to a halt and our economy to its knees, our communities are also experiencing deep hurt from social and racial injustice, and we are seeing social justice responses and activities occurring at rates not seen since the 1960s.

Yet somehow, life carries on. The sun rises each morning. Spring makes way for summer. And God calls us to his presence. As tired as I am of hand sanitizer, wearing a mask, balancing work and learning-at-home, and hearing the word “unprecedented,” I'm also thankful for the chance to learn new ways of doing things (or not doing them). I worry about the virus, who might get it, and how it will affect my family, our church, and the vulnerable in our community; yet I am grateful for the health of those around me. I mourn lost activities with my 90-year-old mother, our friends, and the FPC congregation, but I cherish every board game and movie watched in my home. I ache for the communities and families experiencing racial injustice, and at the same time I thank God for the people and culture of FPC and Fort Collins. The world is upside down, and it's easy for anxiety and disappointment to take hold.

Recently, I stumbled across a quote from award-winning author L.R. Knost that encouraged me.

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is in you.”

Isn't this what God calls us to do? Despite the current state of affairs—in the face of discouragement, loss, and brokenness—even in the year 2020, our purpose is clear. Love intentionally, extravagantly, and unconditionally. Church is not canceled. Love is not canceled. FPC and its people are a light in the darkness of our broken world.

—Cathy Richardson

THE MESSENGER

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PUBLISHING GUIDELINES | THE MESSENGER is a publication for the people, passions, and mission of First Presbyterian Church Fort Collins. The newsletter seeks to inspire, inform, instruct, challenge, and motivate its readers to become engaged in the ministry of FPC. We pray that adult readers in all life stages will aspire to be faithful disciples for Christ.

Articles that support FPC's vision and mission will be accepted. All articles must be sponsored by one of the church's five Centers and are subject to the approval of the Editor. Submissions will be edited for length and suitability.

Article submissions will be accepted via email to crichardson@firstpresfc.org. Contact Editor Cathy Richardson for more information, (970)482-6107. Check www.firstpresfc.org for specific issue deadlines.



PASTOR'S CORNER

GOOD NEWS

Hello Friends,

In the midst of our month-long exploration of the Psalms, I am compelled to “*give thanks unto the Lord*” for the gift of our faithful congregation and this beloved community. Over the past few months, we have faced unprecedented trials, frenetic news cycles, exponential changes, and unexpected losses. Throughout it all, we have also seen the church, the Body of Christ, at its very best – displaying the strength of our faith and the resilience of our hope.

In this edition of *The Messenger*, you will discover just a few of the inspiring and heart-warming stories of faith in action. For my part, I want to offer a few of the highlights that have blessed and strengthened me:

- Our spectacular worship and music staff, leaders, and so many volunteers who have planned, created, recorded (re-recorded ... re-re-recorded), edited, and live-streamed our creative, comforting, nourishing and thought-provoking worship services for the past three months. A special thank you to our AV Coordinator extraordinaire, the envy of every other church in America, Jaime Peak.
- Our impossibly upbeat and energetic pastoral care staff, Deacons, and so many volunteers who have organized church-wide calling trees, sent hundreds of cards and emails, arranged for meals delivered, yards mowed, and with our Emergency Assistance Fund, helped to make a few ends meet.
- Our hard-working, out-of-the-box thinking operations and communications staff, who have maintained and even enhanced our campus while closed (including a new “Nature in the City” garden along the east side of our sanctuary), who have paid the bills and our mission partners and the payroll (thanks to your generosity!), and have created and launched a brand new FPC website.
- Our dedicated spiritual formation staff, leaders, and volunteers who have continued providing virtual forums for children’s Sunday School, youth group, adult Bible studies, prayer meetings, and just good old fashioned fellowship times.

And this is only some of what has been happening at FPC. To be clear, we are NOT closed! We have been and continue to be, as our vision statement affirms, a Christ-centered, open, and welcoming church on the move.

Of course, all of this good news comes in the midst of both an ongoing pandemic and rising protests in the face of injustice, especially racial injustice. Let me address our church’s response to both.

As I shared in an email to the congregation a couple of weeks ago, our Session, at its virtual meeting in May, carefully deliberated, discerned, and decided that FPC should continue to keep our campus closed for the summer. In late August, we will reevaluate current conditions, guidelines, and potential next steps, including the possibility of in-person worship and other ministries.



While this reality is disappointing, even as some churches are beginning to reopen their doors, we believe it is the best course of action for us. County and State guidelines do allow for smaller gatherings for worship now, but under conditions requiring screening, distancing, cleaning, limitations based on age and health, limited total attendance, etc., that make it untenable, undesirable, and still for many unsafe at this time. In the meantime, I have formed a task force, including staff, Elders, and physicians within our congregation, to resource our church leaders in making future decisions.

In response to the unjust death of George Floyd (and others) and the protests that have followed, we have published a pastoral letter and a list of resources regarding racism and the work of anti-racism on our website. We encourage you to utilize them in order to hear the stories and better understand the experiences and concerns of people of color in our communities.

As a starting place, I invite you to:

- Read Martin Luther King, Jr.’s **Letter from a Birmingham Jail**. Written in 1963, Dr. King’s message is just as relevant today as it was then. You can find the letter many places online with a quick search.
- Listen to the reflections of The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) at <https://vimeo.com/424168164>
- Watch the movie **Just Mercy**, a true story based on the work of Bryan Stevenson, a lawyer and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, streaming free on most online platforms this month – or better yet, read the book!

(Continued on page 4.)

A LITTLE SOAP AND A LOT OF HOPE



It is a challenging summer to be in children's ministries. We haven't had in-person Sunday school since March. After months of online learning, Zoom meetings, and electronic overload, families are burned out. Virtual VBS is not viable. We even packed away our in-person Vacation Bible School for next summer. Then we asked, "But what can we do for and with kids this summer?" Before long, Kelly Regan, our Early Childhood Coordinator, got busy.

Kelly took a VBS curriculum and divided it into 12 one-hour sessions. We decided to spread VBS out over the summer, "gathering" at 10:15 a.m. on Zoom every Sunday except for 4th of July weekend.

While Kelly put together virtual VBS kits full of supplies, puzzles, games, and crafts, I had the fun job of distributing the VBS kits all over town. Armed with a mask and a bucket of super-duper soapy bubble solution, I headed out north and south, and east and west to visit all our FPC families.

We met in front yards and back yards, at safe distances. And while the children made and chased giant bubbles, I was treated to great conversations with parents. Typically, our conversation led to the challenging times in which we live. We spoke of the blessings and curses of COVID-19. Almost every family spoke of cherishing increased time with each other. It makes me wonder what the new normal will look like when COVID-19 is behind us. Hopefully, we will all dole out time spent apart a little more sparingly.

Our conversations also turned to current news stories and events that affect us all. We talked about how the church can partner with parents in their endeavors to raise children who do not need to turn to oppression to build themselves up. I am so impressed with the parents in our congregation and their dedication to instill in their children the values Jesus taught us about loving our world and everyone in it. I was also able to have conversations with some of the youth whose younger siblings are in my program. In the end, my weary heart was lifted as I visited with each family. I left covered in bubbles and filled with hope.

Summer 2020 is a challenge like we've never seen before. COVID-19 is lingering on. Our cities are erupting. Friends are polarized. Still, I believe a little bit of soap and a big dose of hope will help us face that challenge together.

—Pam Armstrong

(PASTOR'S CORNER—from page 3.

Finally, let me return to the Psalms for a passage that I often recount in times of uncertainty and anxiety, Psalm 139:7–10:

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Even as this year has taken us and will take us places we had never imagined and often do not want to go, remember that God's spirit accompanies us always and everywhere – even at the farthest limits of the sea. Thanks be to God.

Peace,
Corey

MOMENTS OF JOY

I have received several cards in these last two months, thanking me for “what I do,” but in reality, I should be sending out thank you cards for the wonderful opportunities I have had to see kindness and tenderness in action.

I have frequently visited a gentleman in our church who is residing in a facility right now. His wife is not, but spends most of her days with him there, having meals, visiting, reading, etc. I knew when this virus surfaced, and we were all under stay at home orders, this would change their lives drastically. And I worried about them. I called the wife to chat with her about this “new normal” for her and her husband and expected to hear much sadness in her voice. Yet what I heard was not sadness, but a bit of joy!

She has not let a day pass before creating a “new normal.” She said that early each morning, she drives to Starbucks to get his favorite drink and sweet treat, then drives to the facility. One of the aides meets her at the front door to take the treats to this woman’s husband. Meanwhile, the wife walks around to the window of his room, where it is cracked open, and tells him, “Good morning,” and that she loves him. What a great way to start your day!

She may not be able to spend a full day with him during this virus, but she figured out how to start their day with an exchange of love—and then carry on. I wonder how many of us, even in “normal” times, go the extra mile to start our day with that act of love?

I know that many of you have parents in facilities who you cannot reach out and touch. These situations, too, have brought many tender moments that have touched hearts. A sister, tending to her beloved sister in a facility, stands outside a window, sometimes holding up a sign, talking on an iPad, and every day at least talking on the phone reading to her sister the many cards that were sent to cheer her.

Before this pandemic started, a handwritten card or letter was almost a lost art. Emails and texts have replaced much of that. Then I hear daughters telling me that their mother has 25 cards taped on the wall beside her bed – cards that have been sent from some she doesn’t even know. I think that we might want to rethink that lost art and remember the power of healing we are witnessing in some of these “love cards.”

These are only a few of the countless tender moments of kindness I have witnessed during these exceptionally long weeks. Keep watching. These moments are sprouting up all around us. And I believe that these “moments” will continue to buoy us up and give us hope.

—Marge Rice



HITTING PAUSE

EXPERIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC DOESN'T FEEL LIKE SLOWING DOWN

The spring of 2020 is certainly a season to remember. And, it seems like the summer, fall, etc. will be, too. While the COVID-19 pandemic has rocked each of our worlds in different ways and we found ourselves more distanced from our usual friends and activities, it has also been a uniquely shared and communal experience. Over these last few months, I've heard many people refer to this experience as if someone is pressing a "pause" button on our lives and our world. And, I confess, it really hasn't felt that way to me.

My first major task was to completely redo my courses at Front Range to move them online, which was at least double the work for the semester. And in my work for FPC, I found that rethinking how to connect people and continue to check in on people was another challenge of time and brainpower. As we've settled into a "new normal," I am still finding that nearly everything takes longer and is harder than it was before. So, this season has felt far from a "pause" — and I'm grateful that it hasn't! See, I have been reminded over and over again during this season that First Presbyterian Church, this community that Corey and I love so deeply, has not and will never press "pause" on being the body of Christ.

Many of you have been receiving regular calls, emails, and texts from members of the church. Through this call tree, we've been able not just to sustain, but actually create relationships within our church family. It is so easy to get into a rhythm of coming to church and sitting in the same pew, next to the same people, and then chatting in Shepardson Hall with our closest friends. And, of course, there is nothing wrong with these long-lasting relationships. But, I assigned each caller a group of members based on the alphabet, and this meant people were calling others they had maybe never met before. Over the weeks and months of these contacts, I've heard

extraordinary stories of relationships developing and people finding their greatest joy each week when "so and so" calls. Many callers have asked me if we can arrange a big party when we can gather again so that they can meet their group in person. And to think, we were all sitting in the sanctuary together not that long ago, and just never had the push to chat then!

Worship, too, has been a renewed experience. Though filming and producing worship is a Herculean effort (see Jaime's article), it has also provided a wonderfully intimate view of our community. We've been able to hear from our graduating seniors, talented musicians, moms of all ages. And we've seen living rooms, backyards, even pets! What a wonderful reminder that, indeed, each of our homes is also God's house and that we can share in worship together no matter where we find ourselves!

And, more personally, in the Nelson household, we are finding new ways to grow our faith and experience God together. We are playing more music together, singing songs of praise and lament. We are using Zoom to connect with friends who are pastors and church leaders regularly to share ideas and prayer. We are recreating together: playing board games, taking long walks in nature, working out in our make-shift office/home gym. And we are trying to be intentional to remind ourselves of the good in the world and express gratitude to each other and to God. And as we feel sadness, anxiety, and loss, we also try to give ourselves more grace.

While I would not call this period a "pause," it has been a helpful reminder of how we orient our lives. It is a reminder that we can take our lives off autopilot and choose how we engage with the world around us. To be clear, many of these are choices we could have made all along, but there is something powerful in an outside jolt

that knocks us off our normal patterns just a little, to reorient our lives to choose these ways to connect with ourselves, with our community and with God.

I imagine, much like you, I've had a roller coaster of emotions during this time. In our shared trauma of this experience, it seems as though our emotions are more raw and transitions between them faster. I've found myself sad to be missing out on the people and experiences of life I love so much. I've been angry to have to rework my classes at Front Range. I've felt lethargic and lazy some days, not wanting to get off my couch and then other days restless and needing to fill every second with activity. I've felt a deep sorrow as I grieve with individuals and groups in our community and world. As I've talked with many of you, with family, with friends around the country, even with my dental hygienist yesterday, I so often hear my own thoughts and emotions coming out of others' mouths. I am struck, over and over again, that we really are in this together, that our shared humanity connects us. But the emotion I've experienced most fully and most often has been deep gratitude to be a part of the FPC family that finds new and creative ways to support, love, and encourage one another through this season of life, just as it has for nearly 150 years.

—Miriam Nelson

THE BUMMER LAMB

Every once in a while, a ewe will give birth to a lamb and reject it. There are many reasons she may do this. If the lamb is returned to the ewe, the mother may even kick the poor animal away. Once a ewe rejects one of her lambs, she will never change her mind.

These little lambs will hang their heads so low that it looks like something is wrong with its neck. Their spirit is broken. These lambs are called “bummer lambs.” Unless the shepherd intervenes, that lamb will die, rejected and alone. So, do you know what the shepherd does?

He takes that rejected little one into his home, hand-feeds it and keep it warm by the fire. He will wrap it up with blankets and hold it to his chest so the bummer can hear his heartbeat. Once the lamb is strong enough, the shepherd will place it back in the field with the rest of the flock.

But that sheep never forgets how the shepherd cared for him when his mother rejected him. When the shepherd calls for the flock, guess who runs to him first?

That is right, the bummer sheep. He knows his voice intimately. It is not that the bummer lamb is loved more; it just knows intimately the one who loves it. It's not that it is loved more; it just believes it because it has experienced that love one on one.

So many of us are bummer lambs, rejected, and broken. But He is the Good Shepherd. He cares for our every need and holds us close to His heart so we can hear His heart beat. We may be broken, but we are deeply loved by the Shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. — Psalm 23

—Author Unknown





COVID-19 Studios at FPC present A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Online Worship



Navigating the production of worship in the time of COVID-19 is a complex experience. You might think it seems simple—but behind the scenes, a lot is going on.



The Perfect Video

First, there's the video. Luckily, we all now carry a pretty decent video camera in our pockets. Each week, Senior Pastor Corey Nelson, Director of Music and Arts Marvin Crawford, and all our other worship assistants and musicians record themselves using their cell phones. If you have ever attempted to film yourself, you know that it takes a great deal of setup and a ton of takes to get that perfect video. You have to think about audio quality, visual aesthetics, stabilizing the camera, and creating intimacy, and connection with an audience that doesn't exist yet. And that's all on top of the stellar sermon content, artistic talent, and spiritual leadership we take for granted.



The Edit Bay

Once filming, or what we in the biz call "production," is finished, post-production begins. Post-production is where everything gets edited together and becomes the magic that is our Sunday service. Post-production always takes more time than production. Even big Hollywood movies spend only a few months in production and 10–14 months in post-production. That's two-three times as long! Our Sunday services are the same. Typically, I dedicate Wednesday–Saturday to Sunday service post-production.





Editing a Sunday Service

No matter how Hollywood or how homegrown a production is, there are a lot of things to think about and address during editing. Number one, we focus on the visual edit, getting each piece placed and creating flow from one cut to the next. After getting things situated, it's time to look at the quality of each part of the video and how it relates to what's around it. Every week, I use color correction to create as cohesive a look as I can from clip to clip and camera to camera. Cell phones are great, but they aren't all created equal. I often address sharpness for cameras that had a softer focus or lower quality. I also go in and apply noise reduction filters to most of the videos that we get in. Cell phone videos often have a bit of visual noise, sort of like the "snow" we used to get on TVs when the signal wasn't quite right. When applied to the correct video, this filter can bring it from good quality to studio quality. Editors use the term "picture lock" to refer to the stage in editing where you have completed all of the visual aspects of an edit.



Audio Editing

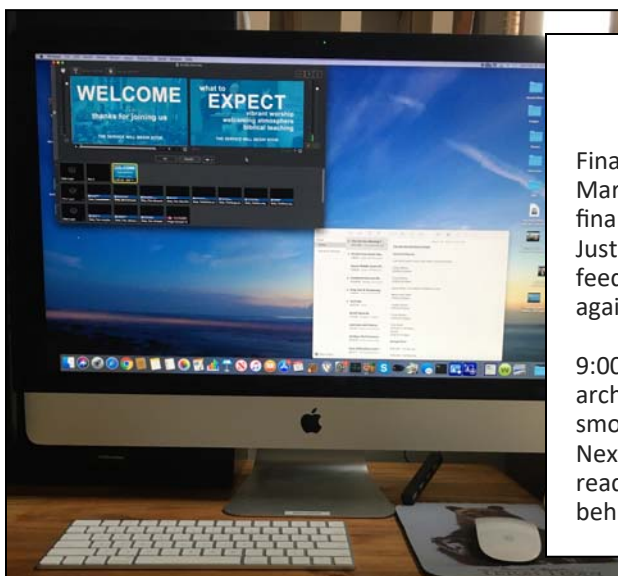
Next, you address the audio. Take a second and listen to your environment. Really listen. Can you hear the fridge running? The dishwasher? The A/C? Traffic outside your house? A fountain in your back yard? Birds? Dogs barking? Microphones amplify all of these sounds that our brains tune out for us. I help remove or tone down those sounds and bring up the voices. I also repair clicks, pops, and pieces of audio that clipped, meaning that it was too loud to be adequately recorded. Then, I go in and make sure that all the various sections of audio have a consistent volume across the board, so ideally our viewers don't have to keep turning up and down the volume.



The Streaming Station

Finally, it's time to render, export, and convert the service for Corey and Marv's final approval. Rendering video converts the edited material into its final form. I often compare it to baking: rendering makes dough into cookies. Just one worship service typically takes 14–30 hours to render! Based on any feedback, I make any final adjustments and then render, export, and convert again for the final version, that we stream on Sunday.

9:00 a.m. Sunday morning comes along; we stream the video live, upload the archive version, and keep an eye on things so that the livestream runs smoothly. So, you can see worship in the time of COVID-19 is no simple task. Next time you're sitting in your PJs, drinking coffee on the couch, getting ready for worship, you'll have a deeper understanding of what's going on behind the scenes. —Jaime Peak



FLAT JESUS RETURNS

SUMMER FUN REMINDS US TO KEEP CHRIST AT THE CENTER

Last summer, we introduced the Adventures of Flat Jesus as a fun way to remember to keep Christ at the center of our lives and to spread the gospel wherever we go. This summer, in the midst of “safer-at-home,” much of our state and nation is closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But Flat Jesus 2020 has his PPE and is ready to share the adventure with you.

WHO IS FLAT JESUS?

The original “flat” character was Flat Stanley, star of a book by Jeff Brown in which a boy has remarkable adventures after waking up one day to discover he is flattened to half-an-inch thick. This was the beginning of the Flat Stanley project in schools to help children with literacy and geography, and from this grew the Flat Jesus Project.

THE FLAT JESUS PROJECT

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age,” Matthew 28:20. Flat Jesus reminds us to keep Christ at the center of our lives even, or especially when we are far from our church home. Whether you enjoy a socially-distanced driveway get-together, camping or hiking in the Colorado mountains, fellowship in the park, or just hanging out “safe at home,” take Flat Jesus along for the adventure. Then document the adventures with pictures you share with your First Presbyterian Church family. Make sure to include your family in the pictures! This project is for EVERYONE, not just families with children.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN FLAT JESUS

Use the Flat Jesus we have printed here or download a copy from our website.

- 1) Get creative! Decorate Flat Jesus - what color hair does he have? What color skin tone? How should his robes be decorated? How do you see Jesus?
- 2) Make one for yourself and one for a friend.
- 3) If you have access to a laminating machine, cut out and laminate your Flat Jesus. This way, if he attempts to walk on water or spills a lot of wine, he'll be protected!
- 4) Take your Flat Jesus everywhere with you and take plenty of pictures.
- 5) Share your photos with us. Upload pictures to the FPC Flat Jesus Facebook page at facebook.com/FlatJesusFPCFC, upload pictures to your social media account using the hashtag #FlatJesusFPCFC or email pictures to FlatJesus@firstpresfc.org.
- 6) Talk with family and friends about what you and Flat Jesus experienced.
- 7) Have fun!

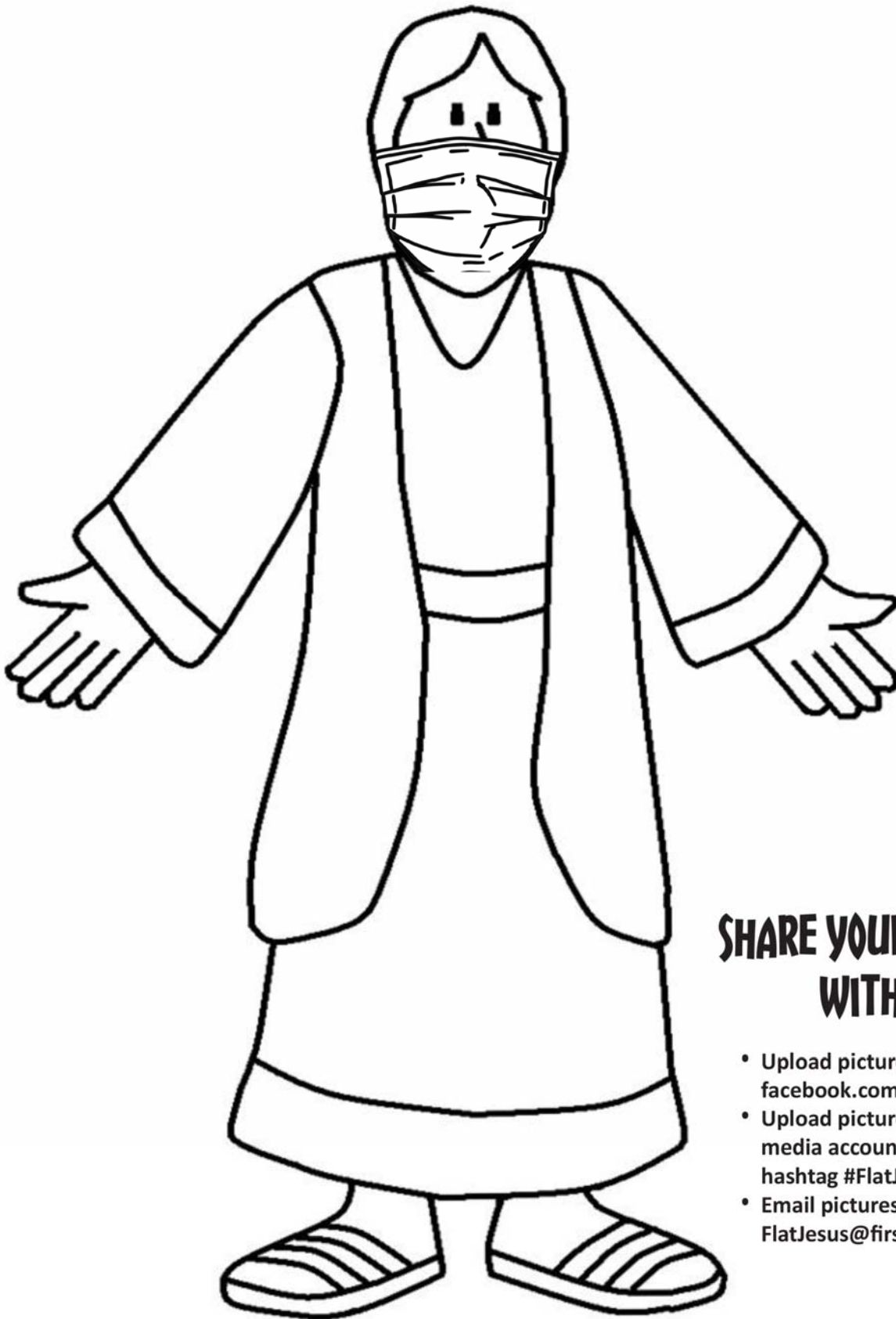


What do you do when you are on lockdown? You refresh your website! Our shiny new website is now live. The new site brings us up-to-date and makes us mobile-friendly. Visit the "Our Staff" page (under "About Us") and read a bit more about our amazing staff members.

Just click on their names. Find out who can speak Mandarin. Who is a missionary's kid? Who's the biggest Bronco fan? And, who has been at FPC the longest? We created the site with visitors and seekers in mind, so we encourage you to share firstpresfc.org with your friends!



THE 2020 ADVENTURES OF FLAT JESUS



SHARE YOUR PICTURES WITH US!

- Upload pictures to facebook.com/FlatJesusFPCFC
- Upload pictures to your social media account using the hashtag #FlatJesusFPCFC
- Email pictures to FlatJesus@firstpresfc.org

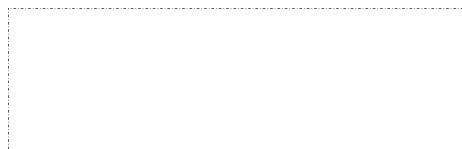


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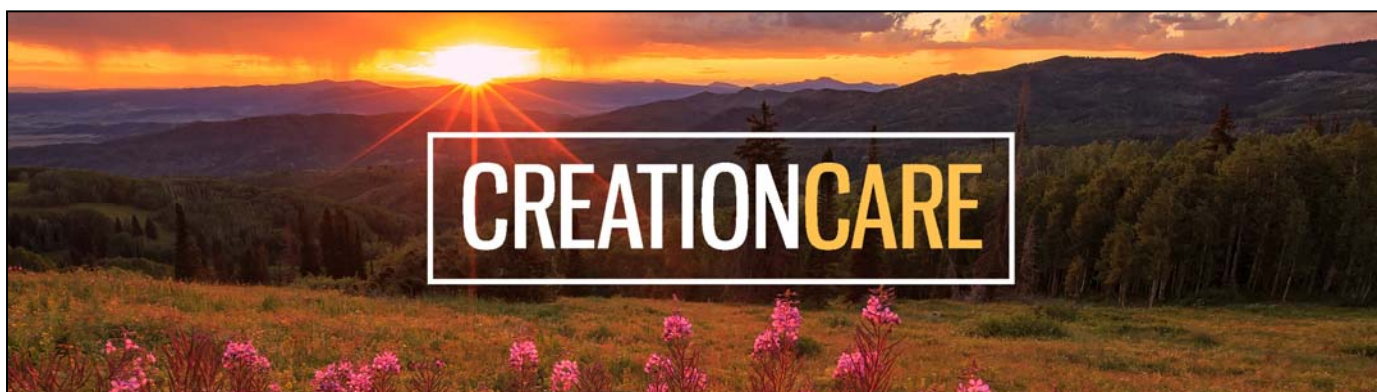
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Our worship and sermon series for the month of July will be a return to the theme of **Creation Care**. As stewards of God's creation, a part of our calling as a community of faith is to serve and protect (a better translation of Genesis 2:15) all of God's created world. This year we will celebrate some of the ways the First Presbyterian has been living into this commitment since our last series two years ago and give thanks for the creatures that accompany us on the journey of life. Here are the themes, and a couple of invitations for each Sunday.

- **July 5** - Our series begins with part of Pastor Corey's personal journey into a deeper understanding of and commitment to the stewardship of creation. As this is also the weekend we celebrate the Fourth of July, the service includes our Music Ministry's traditional rendition of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. You won't want to miss it.
- **July 12** - Our service will include a dedication of the new **Nature in the City Garden** on the east side of the Sanctuary. We will hear from some of the city and church leaders who have led this initiative and dedicate this beautiful new church and community resource. You will be invited down to the church in the afternoon for a hands-on visit—details to follow.
- **July 19** - Our service will include a traditional **Blessing of the Animals** in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi as we give thanks for the many blessings we receive from the animals in our lives. You will be invited down to the church in the afternoon to bring your pet(s) to receive a blessing as well. Again, details to follow.
- **July 26** - On this final week in the series, we will celebrate the **Earth Care Congregation Certification** that First Presbyterian earned this past year. We will hear from church leaders who have led this effort and explore ways that we can continue, both individually and communally, to be good stewards of the Earth God created.