



# GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 16, 2022

## Grow. Pray. Study

**Second Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Sermon: Covenant**

### **Ephesians 4:1-7; 12-16**

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.

God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift that is given by Christ. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.

### **Monday: Read Genesis 9:8-17**

Today's reading is the conclusion of the Noah story (Genesis 6-9). Here God makes a covenant never to flood the earth again. We think of a covenant as a contract, but contracts usually assume mutual responsibilities on the part of both parties to the contract. But that is not the case here. This covenant is completely one-sided. The thing to note, that gets easily overlooked, is that the bow is not finally for us to see. We can look at it if we like, and it will help us remember the covenant that God has offered, not to mention that it is a lovely sign of the end of nearly every rainstorm. But in fact, the bow is for God to remember! It says that no fewer than three times

in this text. The bow is the string tied around God's divine finger. When God sees the bow, God will be reminded that floods for human sin are no longer an option; God's grace-filled work now becomes sustenance for every creature of God. In short, God loves the cosmos and promises to work for its ongoing success. While the covenant in this passage is not two-sided, we have a part to play as God's workers. We have a roll in the promise as God's stewards on the earth. Part of our mission statement proclaims, "We embrace God's creation." How might FCC be called to partner with God to fulfill God's covenant of protecting creation? In what ways do you see yourself as God's steward of the earth? What signs will help you remember to be a good steward of the earth?

*Prayer: In thankful praise for your creative work in the world, loving God, I covenant to be your steward. Amen.*

### **Tuesday: Read Psalm 133**

This is one of the Psalms of the Ascents, psalms that were songs for pilgrims in worship, either on the way to Jerusalem or returning from there. What does that mean? Well, if this psalm was a pilgrim psalm, and the people were traveling together, sometimes for weeks or more in order to get to Jerusalem, guess who they would be traveling with? Family! And their families would be traveling with extended family, and community members and neighbors and friends. So, it would be like our whole church taking a journey together for several weeks, living together, sharing the same space, the same belongings, the same food, the same facilities... 'good and pleasant' might not be the words that first come to mind for us, and maybe that's why we need this psalm to remind us. How do you experience community with people in your family? Your community? Your church? In what ways do you experience annoyance or frustration living in your community? How do you resolve or reconcile in community?

*Prayer: Lord, place in my heart a song of unity. Amen.*

### **Wednesday: Read Ruth 1: 1-18**

Because of famine, a man from Bethlehem decides to move his family to the foreign land of Moab. This choice of life soon becomes a choice of death as the man and his two sons eventually die leaving his wife, Naomi, and two daughters-in-law (Ruth and Orpah) vulnerable. Naomi knows that Ruth and Orpah have a better chance of survival if they stay in their homeland, Moab, and seek new husbands. This is the context in which Ruth risks her life for another. She speaks the beautiful covenant to Naomi, declaring that she will go wherever Naomi goes. What is striking to me about this covenant is that, out of love and devotion, Ruth willingly changes places with her mother-in-law. In Moab Naomi is the foreign woman with no husband, no sons, no identity. In Bethlehem Ruth will be the foreign woman with no husband, no sons, no identity. Read the covenant again (vv.16-17). These are familiar words that we usually hear, out of context, at weddings. Reading them again in context, can you hear the power in Ruth's

words? Ruth refused to accept the status quo of a male-centered society that said women were nothing without men. Instead, she chose, against all odds, to commit herself totally to another woman. Covenant has the power to cross all kinds of lines (social, cultural, political, geographical, etc.), understanding that love is greater whatever may try to divide us. Covenant means a willingness to place ourselves in another's position, becoming vulnerable for the sake of love. When have you experienced the power of covenant? How might FCC be called to live out this kind of risky, yet life-giving covenant?

*Prayer: "Where you go, I will go" – those words are beautiful, God, but they are much more challenging to live out. Help us commit ourselves to one another in the covenant power of your great love. Amen.*

### **Thursday: Read 1 Corinthians 13:10-12**

This is the ending of a text that is familiar to many of us, a text we will explore more fully next week, but these two verses are often left out when we study the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Corinthians. Read Eugene Peterson's words from these two verses from The Message (a paraphrase translation): "We do not yet see things clearly. We are squinting in a fog, peering through the mist, but it will not be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright. We will see it all then, see as clearly as God sees us, knowing God as directly as God knows us. But for right now, until that completeness comes, we have three things to do. Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly." In what ways do you do these three things? How do trust, hope, and love help you to see more clearly? How might God be inviting you to grow in faith? In hope? In love? How might God be at work in our church to help us grow in faith, hope, and love?

*Prayer: May faith, hope, and love grow abundantly within us. Amen.*

### **Friday: Read John 17:20-26**

As it was for the disciples then, so too is it crucial for us today to return to Jesus' prayer, for it describes his hope, his vision, and his picture of what we, his followers, are to look like and how we are to live our lives together. It is a prayer for community. Jesus prays that, "all may be one." Within that community the prayer is for unity: "that all may be one." Does that mean we all have to get along all the time? Agree all the time? No! Jesus' prayer reminds us that our unity, our "oneness" is to be a sign to the world of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. If you have been a part of a family, a member of a church, or a community, you know that within that love there can be disagreements and squabbling. We are human. But the mystery of the incarnation is that God desired unity with us so much God became one of us. It is with God's help that we can live into that oneness. In what ways have you experienced the unity that Jesus prayed for? How do you, with God's help, live into that oneness?

*Prayer: May we be completely one with you, God, and with one another. Amen.*

## **Saturday: Read Genesis 12: 1-9**

Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) were able to trust in God's guidance because God, when asking them to go forth also made a promise - several in fact. God promised to bless them, to protect them, and to make them the parents of a great nation so they would be a blessing for others. I have to confess that every time I read this passage, all I see are the shocking parts. All the "wait a minute, you want me to do what?" parts. And then I have to read it again to get down to the promise parts - the blessing parts - the covenant parts - where God is promising to create something new in partnership with them. God did some remarkable things through Abraham and Sarah. Do you have the faith to think God can and will still do remarkable things in and through you? Do we as a church have such faith? God's promises are as sure today as they have ever been! God still has some remarkable things to do through your life and the life of FCC. God asked Abraham, "leave everything you know and go forth to the land I will show you" Abraham was willing to go where God led him. Where is God leading you? Are you willing to go there? What holds you back from trusting in God's covenant?

*Prayer: Help us respond faithfully to your call in our lives and in our church, O God. Strengthen us to trust in your promises to bless our work for you. Amen.*