

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MAY 12, 2019

EASTERTIDE

Litany

Based on Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall want for no other thing.

**You make me to lie down in green pastures,
lead me beside still waters, restore my soul,
and lead me in right paths for the sake of your name.**

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life.

The Scripture

Genesis 28:18-22

So, Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you."

The Message

You're Grounded

...the balloon has a crew chasing on the ground to assist the landing

Nick Larson

Early on in my time at Broadway, I remember glancing out one of the office windows and seeing a brightly-colored hot-air balloon being unrolled in the green space between the fellowship hall and the office wing. This was the first time that I laid eyes on Joseph's Coat, David's bright, rainbow-striped balloon.

As I grew closer to the Holmes family, Drew, David's son, invited me to help crew for a flight. I got to be up-close to a launch. I really knew truly little about ballooning. I had

gotten to fly in one when I was younger, but I certainly didn't understand what it took to fly.

It's a really fascinating process, and one that is a lot more involved than I imagined. From rolling out the balloon itself, to rigging it to the basket, to the burner and tanks in the basket. I remember when we rolled out that stripped balloon. First, its scale was much larger than it seems. We unrolled large sections after large section, several folks working together to unfold and drag it out. Then as we started to inflate the balloon, I stood on one part of the throat (the round opening near the basket) with my arms spread wide, as we used one of those large fans. It was one of those industrial fans that you see in warehouses. As we held the throat open, I remember the first, loud, roaring sound of the flame as the burner leapt to life. It sounds like a jet engine taking off, and I can almost still feel the heat on my cheeks from being near the opening.

As the balloon began to inflate, Drew and I headed down to the very tippy top of the balloon. I never noticed this until I was up close, but one method by which you control the height of the balloon is by having a long control line attached to a vent flap at the very top of the balloon. As the pilot wants to drift back towards the ground, they pull that control line and open the vent releasing the hot air, allowing the balloon to settle.

Think about that for a second and imagine yourself as the balloon. I don't know about you, but finding the way to allow my hot air to escape helps me to settle, too.

As we were inflating the balloon, it was important that someone stood on that end of the control line. I remember feeling, as the envelope (that's the whole cloth part) rose, the lines and ropes we had been using seemed to pass quickly through my fingers. Drew began by coaching me through the process before handing it to me and telling me to hang onto it. I remember the feeling of the pull of the long line as the balloon stood upright. I was really glad that I was wearing gloves.

As the balloon began to lift off, we piled into their Suburban to stay in radio contact with David, literally chasing behind watching which direction they were shifting as the wind carried them. I had no idea that when I see a hot-air balloon dance across my field of vision, that there is a whole crew of people it takes to make it happen.

It is really the same with the life of faith. We like to seem like individuals making courageous choices to help implement the vision of God into the world. Yet, I have learned through my own church involvement that nothing is ever as simple as it seems. Whether it is coordinating music, to printing bulletins, to maintaining prayer lists, to activating our CareLink committees, to planning a simple event, or hosting a potluck meal. All that happens in church takes kitchen helpers, volunteers, editors, photographers, technicians, ushers, deacons, servers, readers, preparation, paper, ink, lights, heat, elders, sound systems, and the ability to run each correctly. Nothing

happens on a Sunday or any day at Broadway or any other church without a tremendous ground crew.

You are invited to be a part of that ground crew.

Our focus this morning turns us once again toward stewardship. As we round the bend together, we can look up and see the way our dreams and God's vision for this community are soaring overhead.

If I use my holy imagination, I would imagine isn't that dissimilar to how Jacob probably felt. Our passage, this morning, is a portion of the story of Jacob. Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebecca, the younger twin brother of Esau, and the future father of Joseph, who had that magnificent multi-colored coat.

Jacob is also the third Hebrew character with whom God made a covenant. Jacob is most famous for being the trickster, who fooled his father and brother for the birthright. Jacob was afraid and left home. We join him up as he is journeying through the wilderness.

He pauses at the river's edge to sleep. Jacob had been using a rock for a pillow. He has a vision of a ladder, in which he sees angels ascending and descending above him, and God promising to be with him wherever he goes, and blessing everyone through Jacob's family. God promises Jacob and his descendants the land upon which he slept.

Then, as Jacob rose, he must have felt a mix of excitement and joy. The God of his ancestors, the God of his father, appeared to him promising to bless the world. In response to this joy, Jacob makes a vow. He pours oil upon the rocks where he slept, and promises that since God will stay with him and provide for him, then the Lord should be his God. And in doing so, he pledges a full tenth of what he has and gives back to God.

This is where Christians get the word and concept of "tithe." Tithing is about giving our first fruits, the first tenth of what we have back to God, because we recognize that all we have, the bread to eat, the clothes to wear, and our comfort, comes from God. Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew, says that tithing must be done in conjunction with a deep concern for justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

A tithe literally references to a tenth within the Hebrew Scriptures and then again reiterated by Jesus. There was a whole festival system within ancient Israel where farmers would bring the literal first part of their harvest to the temple to offer to God and the Levites.

Many, within Christianity, use this ten percent tithe as a giving goal, or some even consider it a minimum. It's an invitation to recognize that what we have, each of us, all of what we have is ultimately from and belongs to God. As Mike Crews so eloquently shared in his stewardship moment, why do we always like to pretend that it's our money?

Just like ballooning requires preparation and a launch; so, too, does thoughtful, faithful giving. It takes desire and faith to launch, to go up in a hot-air balloon. If, or when, you ever have a chance to float above the earth, I can promise you that in the launching and soaring, there will be some hesitation and some fear. None of us want to go up without being assured that there will be a safe and even soft landing.

That's our job as Christians together. That's the role of the community of Christ, to assure one another and aid one another to launch and land safely back into the arms of Mother Earth.

It's probably the only time you ever want to hear your mother, or anyone else, shout, "You're grounded!"

We, as a community of Christ, can choose to stay grounded, to never launch into the unknown of the air. And yet, if we don't launch, we would miss all God has in store for us.

The view, after launching out onto faith, is one that will wow you! Like Coach said last week, we have a chance to chase after the dream together, to build up the desire within each of us, to accomplish our goal. To shout **Woo!** as his high jumper did and then to get up from that challenge wanting to stretch even higher.

How many hungry people can we feed? How many more friends experiencing homelessness can we shelter during the coldest months? How many youth can we send on mission trips and offer transformational retreats? How many Bible studies, free meals, and opportunities can we create?

As many as we are willing! Each year, pledging gives us an opportunity to stretch a little more. My own personal experience with giving in this way, stretching towards or beyond ten percent, helps me to commit a little more.

Broadway, I have seen this community rise again and again to clear and present challenges that are presented to us. I have seen generosity spring forth. Can we respond like Jacob and awaken from our slumber, trusting that God will bless the world through us? Can we take that upon which we rest and transform it and name it "Bethel," or literally translated, "God's house?"

If we show up to be the ground crew, if we must do the little things behind the scenes, we can soar together to those new heights.

Giving and stewardship with God is about more than just responding to a need as it arises. It's about equipping yourself to prepare for the launch, so we can soar together.

Ballooning is not a hobby you can take lightly. It takes hours of preparations, flight logs, fuel, and even a chase car to follow you and help you pack it all back up on the other end.

That's what happens when you pledge and strive towards tithing ten percent of your financial resources. If each of us were to do that, we would be able to make all the repairs that we need to this large balloon, this envelope of a building.

If each of us were able to do that, we could train, equip, and compensate our pastors, including the new one we'll soon call to join our team, to pilot our craft; to use their skills to show us new heights; to help us gently pull the control line and open the vent allowing the hot air out that lets us settle gently.

If each of us were to tithe, then we collectively could provide extravagant pleasure and joy to those who come calling or knocking upon our doors.

We need to respond to the dreams God has already given this community. I have heard dreams of a creating a resource building that would allow for us to host mission trips. I have heard dreams of larger and more resourced plots for the community garden, so that we might be able to set up a farmer's stand and provide fresh produce for free. I have heard of dreams of funds that can help battle systemic racism in our community. I have heard dreams of state-of-the-art classrooms for children, youth, and adults to better encounter a living God through Christ and his message. I've heard dreams of a new, extensive playground that could be open to neighborhood children to give them a safe and excellent place to play, as well as resource our families. I've heard dreams of teams of Uber drivers, mothers, who would join together to help provide safe transportation home for the many college students who regularly make mistakes and are at risk at 2 a.m. trying to walk home.

Life in the world is hard. For some more than others, but for all of us more than we admit. We deploy lots of different strategies to protect ourselves from the hardness. We make our world smaller, so we can control it. We make our world simpler, so we can keep out that which we don't understand. We reduce ourselves and our vision, because we see the danger. Yet lurking within each of us is also the majesty, the freedom to see things as they really are, which is blessed and belonging to God.

If you listen closely, you can hear God's dreams are all around us at Broadway, and our pledged giving is our ground crew. It is the method and how we can assure a successful flight, so we can help God's Spirit to soar here in Columbia, so that we can gain new perspective on the world around us.

Our goal is to bring wonder back into our ordinary daily life, to start by recognizing that it's not ordinary even if you do want it to be, that in fact the whole earth, to the rocks themselves, can open your eyes to really see what God is already doing and inviting you into doing with Christ.

That's giving within the Christian tradition. It's not about paying bills. It is ordinary to pay bills, even paying bills can be about capturing the dream of God and working to accomplish it together.

Amen.