

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
September 6, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION: Jesus did not say that the whole world should go to church, but rather that the church should go to the whole world. — Greg Laurie

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Pastor

O God, this is a day of promise: a day of remembering your faithfulness through the centuries, a time for celebrating your presence with us, a prayer of anticipation for seasons yet to be. We rejoice at the assurance that you take pleasure in us, that we are known to you, called by you, and empowered by you – to live honorably, and humbly, in the Spirit of Christ. Come among us now, that we might exalt your name, and receive the guidance and direction we need to live our days, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Eternal God, to whom we owe all that we have and all that we are,
and whose law of love points us to complete self-fulfillment –
both in this life, and beyond:
Now speak to us through the reading and hearing of your Holy Word,
that we might live honorably
and make choices which are pleasing to you,
and that your church may become a community of caring –
which leads many to lives of quality and commitment.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING Romans 13:8-14

*Our first Scripture Reading comes from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome.
Having charged his readers to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God...." – Chapter 12, Verse 1 –
Paul goes on to describe the activities – and characteristics –
of a life which is holy, and acceptable.
In the verses of chapter 13 immediately preceding our reading,
Paul has taught concerning a Christian's responsibilities to the
government, concluding with the fact that neither taxes –
nor anything else due to an official – should be "owed."*

Owe no one anything, except to love one another,
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.
The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder;
you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and any other commandment,
are summed up in this word,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
Love does no wrong to a neighbor;
therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.
Besides this, you know what time it is,
how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep.
For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;
the night is far gone; the day is near.
Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;
let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness,
not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.
Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 18:15-20

*Earlier in the 18th chapter of Matthew's Gospel,
the mission of Christ – salvation of the lost – is central.*

And, his teaching – and his presence – are clearly related to that mission.

*His teachings concerned "heavenly principles" – and "earthly perils" –
and uncalled for behavior is one of the latter.....*

"If another member of the church sins against you,
go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.
If you are listened to, you have regained that one.

But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you,
so that every word may be confirmed –
by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church,
and – if the offender refuses to listen even to the church –
let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

SERMON

“Called Out vs. Uncalled For”

We all know that **church buildings** can be as small as a house –
or, as large as a cathedral.

And, each size has *its own, distinctive, appeal*.

House churches offer intimate, personal, connections,
and consistent opportunities for spiritual growth.

Neighborhood churches offer public worship services –
and Christian formation classes for all ages.

Cathedrals are the home churches of bishops –
in the Catholic – and Episcopal – traditions.

And, **Protestant mega-churches** feature large congregations –
often with contemporary Christian music.

Sidebar: House Churches >>> Back to Basics.....

But – as different as they are –
these churches all have one thing in common:
They gather people together.

And this – then – is critically important:

Jesus makes clear that it is essential – *for us to come together* –
in order to experience *his presence*, and *his power*.

As he said – in our reading from **Matthew**:
“*For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.*”

Gathering is – indeed – central to the life of the church –
and this has been true since the **first followers of Jesus** came together.

In the **New Testament**, the **Greek** word for church is *ekklesia* --
which literally means "*the called-out ones*" --
a *group of people* who have been called out -- for a meeting.

So -- when you say you are going to church --
you are really saying that you are going to an assembly,
a gathering, a meeting.

And -- when the **book of Acts** says --
that the apostle **Paul** and **Barnabas** "*met with the church,*"
the line could also be translated
"they assembled with the assembly,"
or "they gathered with the gathering,"
or "they met with the meeting."

In other words: No gathering, no church!

So, *what happens* when we gather as a community of faith?

First, we are subject to discipline.

And, this has a specific meaning in the **Gospel of Matthew**,
when **Jesus** says that *sinful* -- that is, *uncalled for* --
behavior among his followers should be dealt with
in a particular way.

For starters -- **Jesus** says --
the person who is the victim should "point out the fault" to the offender --
person to person.

And -- if that does not work -- one or two others should join the conversation --
in an attempt to resolve the problem, and reconcile the parties.

But -- if there is still no reconciliation -- says **Jesus**,
"tell it to the church,
and if the offender refuses to listen -- even to the church --
let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector."

In this process,
discipline is done by *increasingly larger gatherings* of **Christians**.

And, the ultimate act of discipline *seems to be exclusion* from the community.

But here – as **Fr. Benjamin Earl** points out –
we also need to consider **Jesus' example** –
when he, personally, encountered "*gentiles and tax collectors*."

These are his words: [*Emphasis added*]
"Now, before we get carried away – and *start excommunicating* each other,
it is important to note how **Jesus – himself** –
treats those who are '*beyond the pale*' –
the Gentile, and the tax collector.

"Just limiting ourselves to **St Matthew's Gospel**,
we have **Jesus** healing a – *presumably gentile* –
Roman centurion's paralyzed servant,
and *praises the faith* of the centurion himself. (8:5–13)

"Similarly, he heals the daughter of the **Canaanite woman** –
and – then – declares: '*O woman, great is your faith.*' 5:21–28)

"Neither should we forget that **Matthew**, himself, is a *tax collector* –
called by **Jesus** to be an apostle (cf. 9:9–13; 10:1–4),
and that **Jesus** would *sit down* with tax collectors –
and other sinners – *presumably including Matthew*.

So, how *does Jesus* treat gentiles, and tax collectors?

He calls them to conversion;
he heals them;
he spends time with them;
he sends them out to preach the good news....

In short, he loves them – and he calls them, to love him.

Discipline *is* important in the church.

But – fortunately – such *acts of confrontation* are rare.

More common is the work of discipline –
work that is *done every week* in **Christian communities** –
as *people are taught* to be **disciples of Jesus**.

It is no coincidence that the words “disciple” – and “discipline” –
share the same **Latin** root – *discipulus* –
a word which means “learner,” or “pupil.”

It is when we gather– then – that we are shaped as disciples.

Interestingly, this approach *was not* original to **Jesus**,
but began when **God** offered moral – and ethical –
instruction *to a gathering* of **Israelites**.

In the **book of Leviticus**, **God** spoke to the **congregation of Israel** –
through **Moses** – and gave them guidance:

On how they should treat parents,
avoid idolatry,
keep the sabbath,
assist the poor and the alien,
avoid stealing and lying,
and offer just judgments.

That teaching included the command to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*”

The **people of Israel** – like the **followers of Jesus** –
were not shaped as disciples in isolation.

Rather, *their learning* happened in *their gatherings*.

The first **followers of Jesus** also discovered the power of *assembling for prayer*.

James – the brother of **Jesus** –

wrote a letter to a group of **Jewish Christians** outside **Judea**,
and offered them guidance on putting faith into action,
taming the tongue,
and showing patience in suffering.

Near the end of his letter, he asks,

(5:14)

“Are any among you sick?”

They should call for the elders of the church –

and have them pray over them –

anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

James knew that *the power of prayer is best experienced in community* –

when **Christians** gather to ask for help in times of suffering,

to give thanks in times of joy,

and to request healing –

when a person, or someone dear to them, is sick.

And so it was – when we gathered for a **Service of Healing and Wholeness** –
just **last Sunday**!

Also – *when we pray together* –

we are saved from the *feeling of isolation* that afflicts so many today.

Indeed, the *sense of loneliness* – which pervades our society –
has been much in the news.

Both the lingering effects of the **COVID shutdown** –

and the proliferation of **electronic media devices** –

have contributed to our current state.

But – from a **Stephen Ministry** perspective –

it is both a crisis *and* an opportunity.

The **good news** is that we may be *moved toward wholeness*
by **community prayer**.

This **spiritual practice** – and, **form of discipline** –
has the *potential to restore us* to a deep connection –
both with **God**, and with each other.

But that's not all.

When we “meet together” – says the **letter to the Hebrews** – (10:24-25)
we are able to *encourage one another*.

And, we can even “*provoke one another to love, and good deeds.*”

Such gatherings may include services of worship,
small group Bible studies,
mission teams,
musical groups,
committees,
and men's and women's groups.

The point is that *we have opportunities* – more than once a week –
to meet together in ways that *encourage one another*,
and *provoke each other* to love,
and *to do deeds* of service.

Coming together is an essential part of the life of the **Christian community**.

No gathering, no church.

Furthermore – in the **Gospel of Matthew** –
Jesus makes the promise that –
“*where two or three are gathered in my name,*
I am there among them.”

This is a bold – and perhaps surprising – statement;
one that assures us that the **risen Jesus** is *always present* –
in any assembly –
that is doing the work of reconciliation,
prayer, and loving service.

And, the place where **Jesus** *most often shows up* is in the *midst of a community* –
called the church.

Indeed, it is *in these gatherings* that the mission – and ministry –
of **Jesus** is advanced.

So **Jesus** – seated at the right hand of **God the Father** –
is not looking down on us; he is *working through us*.

He *is not* judging us; rather, he is *encouraging us*.

In fact – says **Christian ethics professor Ada María Isasi-Díaz** –
God actually “*ratifies the decisions of the community.*”

And in this regard – as I recall – **Oswald Chambers** writes that –
when we are *in a right relationship* with **God** –
our *common sense decisions* are the **will of God!**

This happens – of course – *not* because the church is perfect,
but because **Jesus** – in the person of the **Holy Spirit** –
is in the midst of all such gatherings.

This promise of Jesus reminds us that the church
is nothing less than the **body of Christ** –
the physical **presence of Jesus** in the world today –
continuing his work of advancing the **kingdom of God**.

And – when he speaks to his disciples in **Matthew** –
Jesus gives them *enormous power*.

*"Truly I tell you," he says,
"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

*"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."*

So, it is in our assembling that we are given earthly access to heavenly power.

All it takes is for us to get *together*, and *agree*.

An affordable housing project – called "**Glebe View**" –
has been underway – in **Fairfax, Virginia**, since 2017.

And, it has experienced a number of "*God moments*" –
these were call "*God sightings*,"
on my several mission trips with the **Group organization**.

Regardless of terminology, these events are the *unexpected surprises* –
in which **God** effectively "winks" at people – and says, "I've got this."

The **first God moment** was *experienced in the enthusiasm*
of members of **Fairfax Presbyterian Church**.

It *was not* just two or three church members –
who gathered to do the work of **Glebe View** – *but dozens*.

Sensing that providing affordable housing was a critical intervention –
in the lives of their needy neighbors –
a team quickly came together,
and began to contribute time, energy, and expertise.

And, they have been *working together* for almost a decade.

A **second God moment** came when the pastor received a call –
from an attorney, who had been a friend for 30 years.

The friend said,

"I need some pro bono work.

*Do you know of any project in the Presbyterian world
that could benefit from a real estate attorney?"*

The pastor said, *"Have I got a project for you!"*

Another God moment.

This attorney has *provided excellent counsel* for **Glebe View**,
offering help that would have cost the church **\$200,000** over several years.

The **Glebe View** team originally reached out –
to *three potential partners* in the affordable housing industry –
and asked them to come up with separate proposals.

Early in the process, they said,
"Let's not do separate proposals; let's work together!"

Another God moment.

Then, *two other congregations* joined the project –
contributing volunteers to the **Glebe View** team,
and making *significant monetary gifts*.

So – when **Jesus** promises to be with us –
saying, *"where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them"* –
he assures us that *he will* work through us.

And – when **Jesus** says that,
*"if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven"* –
he *does not* want us to worry about completing his ministry –
and mission – on our own.

In fact – he seems to be saying – *“I’ve got this.”*

And, **God moments** – or **God sightings** –
will be experienced – *whenever we gather* –
so that we may enjoy **Jesus’ company**;
especially, as *we join* in his work in the world.

Friends, we have been *“called out,”*
and we now know how to respond to *“uncalled for”* behavior.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

*** AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)**

The Nicene Creed – Traditional

**I believe in one God, the Father Almighty
Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds;
God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,
by Whom all things were made:
Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man:
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried:
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures:
And ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father:
And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead:
Whose Kingdom will have no end:**

**And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son.
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified,
Who spake by the Prophets.
And I believe in One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.
And I look for the Resurrection of the Dead:
And the Life of the world to come. Amen.**

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Jesus said,

*"Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there with them."*

He guaranteed his presence – in any gathering, that is devoted to him.

And he called his followers to be a caring, compassionate, community –
that others may experience his presence – as well.

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....

BENEDICTION RESPONSE

God Be with You

**God be with you till we meet again;
Let the Lord direct your labors,
Sharing grace, and loving neighbors:
God be with you till we meet again.**