

Mark and Luke Ehrhardt Present



Jerusalem
The Story of God's Dwelling



AN ALBUM DEVOTIONAL BY

**MARK & LUKE
EHRHARDT**

This book is a companion to the concept album *Jerusalem:
The Story of God's Dwelling* recorded and published in 2021.

*In memory of Brett Neal
& Norma Feori*

*...Awaiting our reunion in the
New Creation...*

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Mark & Luke

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The Storytellers



Rev. Luke Ehrhardt - Songwriter | Vocals | Rhythm Guitar

Luke is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving West Des Moines Christian Church in West Des Moines, Iowa. He and his brother Mark believe everyone has a part to play in telling the stories of the faith. They hope this project will inspire others to enter the story.



Rev. Mark Ehrhardt - Songwriter | Vocals | Bass

Mark is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving West Des Moines Christian Church in West Des Moines, Iowa. He and his brother Luke love to tell the story of Jesus and his love, so they co-created this project to spread Christ's love in and beyond their community.



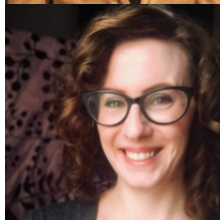
Robert Espe - Violin | Soprano Saxophone

Robert is as professional a musician as they come, playing violin saxophone, and mandolin (and probably other instruments we don't even know about). It isn't hyperbole to say Robert is the kindest man we've ever met. His spirit and work on this project have given the music its character.



Nathan Green - Lead Guitar | Bass | Vocals

In addition to working as a Logistics Coordinator for Electrical Power Products, Nathan serves on the worship band at West Des Moines Christian Church and directs various musical groups in the Des Moines area. His personal mission statement is "to enrich lives through the power of music."



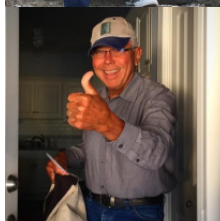
Tracy Mills - Vocals

Tracy was a nurse for 13 years and now enjoys being a full-time mother of four living in Oskaloosa, Iowa. Tracy's vocal parts are the most heart-stirring parts of the whole project because she sings with such conviction and soul that you can't help but believe that what she's saying is true.



Rev. Brian Nixon - Keys | Vocals

Brian is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving First Christian Church of Keokuk, Iowa. Brian's friendship, musical excellence, and eagerness to collaborate brought this project to life. He has a unique gift for drawing congregations into the Story of what God is doing.



Ron Townsend - Harmonica

Ron is as charming and kind a fellow as he is a talented one. In addition to being an accomplished songwriter, Ron is a proud grandfather and grower of flowers, vegetables, and disciples of Christ. He has spent a lifetime passing on the Gospel stories through his music and teaching.

John Cook

If John had been born in the first century, while Quirinius was governor of Syria, the census of the Roman world would have run a lot smoother. When not working his day job with the U.S. Census Bureau, John coaches high school soccer and shares his gifts for the building up of the Church.

Dr. Randy Ehrhardt

Randy is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving West Des Moines Christian Church in West Des Moines, Iowa. He's also our dad. Randy's compassion and excitement to encourage others in their faith—especially youth—are unparalleled.

Dr. Darren Middleton

Darren is a Professor of Religion at Texas Christian University. A master of religion and literature, Darren is not only a storyteller, but is himself a main character in the unfolding story of good overcoming evil. To know Darren is to know something of God's own wisdom, creativity, humility, and grace.

Rev. Kevin Miller

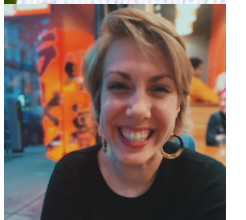
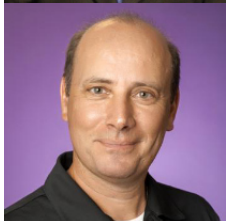
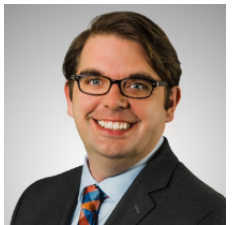
Kevin is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and co-founder of Way in the Wilderness—a church without walls in the mountains of North Carolina. The vision of the New Creation Kevin articulates and works to bring about is the realest, most beautiful thing we've witnessed in this life.

Rev. Alison Nicoll

Alison is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving Ankeny Christian Church in Ankeny, Iowa. A lover of local coffee shops and honest conversation, Alison has an invitational spirit and a gift for connecting the people of God through communion.

Rev. Tiff Williams

Tiff is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving as Associate Regional Minister in the Upper Midwest Region. Tiff's heart for evangelism and longing to see the Good News spread make her a modern day apostle, helping the Church discern the Spirit's movement.



The Story



Introduction

A song is a powerful thing. Is there a song that, when you hear it, reminds you of a certain time or place or person or event? The best songs stay with us for a lifetime, accompanying life's special moments like a well curated playlist. This entanglement of life and song points to one of this project's guiding principles: music and storytelling go hand-in-hand. For centuries God's people have used psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19) to carry the words of scripture, to voice praise, and to pass on the beliefs and traditions of the faith through the ages. Together, story and song have the power to stir longing hearts to remember, to grieve, to rejoice, to hope, to yearn, and to dream.

The aim of this project is to tell the old, old stories in a way that leads people to yearn for Jesus, and every good story develops around a strong sense of place. The same is true of music. Good songs—like good stories—have a way of pulling us in and grounding us in the world of the storyteller. But the *best* stories and the *best* songs have a way of inviting the listener to bring her own placedness—her own ordinary and extraordinary experiences of the divine—to the narrative.

Think about your own life story and the community you call home... the people, places, relationships, and routines that make your story uniquely yours. Do you have a specific place in your life that feels like holy ground? ...someplace special where just being there seems to enhance

your ability to encounter God? Maybe it's a church, a park, a campground, a graveside, or grandma's front porch. For centuries, Jerusalem has held this sort of sacred significance for God's people.

Jerusalem's Old City is the geographic heart of Judaism and Christianity, and arguably the most historic and contested square kilometer of land in the world. The city is divided into four quadrants, each with its own religious and cultural customs: the Christian Quarter; the Jewish Quarter; the Muslim Quarter; and the Armenian Quarter.

One of the most venerated spaces in Old Jerusalem is an area known as the Temple Mount, and for thousands of years this site has held sacred significance for Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. Here's why... at the very heart of the Temple Mount is a large rock formation now known as the "Foundation Stone." Today pilgrims can visit this formation in the Dome of the Rock. But long before any temple—before Jerusalem was ever a city—this rocky peak was revered as a sacred site where God came near. It's the summit of Mount Moriah, a rocky mountaintop where God has been present with God's people time and time again throughout history.

Here are just some of the historic events that have taken place on this particular plot of land over the centuries:

- Here upon the “Foundation Stone”—according to Jewish tradition—God gathered up dust and created the world.
- Here in the land of Moriah atop a mountain, Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac in a dramatic test of faith (Genesis 22).
- The two Jewish Temples once stood upon this rock, the first built by King Solomon ten centuries before Christ but destroyed by the Babylonians a few hundred years later, and the second built by Zerubbabel in 516 BCE but destroyed by the Romans after Christ’s death. The temples were home to the Holy of Holies—the central sacred axis connecting heaven and earth—making this mountaintop what the Celtic tradition calls a “thin place,” a place where heaven and earth draw near enough to touch.

The significance of Mount Moriah doesn’t end with the destruction of the temples, though; the story of God’s dwelling has continued with a *new* foundation stone. In the Gospel of John we read that God became flesh and came to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the new foundation stone, our connection between heaven and earth, the cornerstone on which our lives are built. In him, God was pleased to dwell. And through Christ’s life and death, Jerusalem assumes still greater significance:

- **Palm Sunday** – Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna, save us!”

- **Maundy Thursday** – Here in Jerusalem Jesus “*broke the bread and shared the wine*” as signs of God’s life and grace.
- **Good Friday** – Here, outside the city walls, our Messiah was crucified and buried.
- **Easter Sunday** – Here Christ rose from the dead and Mary proclaimed the Good News of his resurrection.
- **Pentecost** – Here in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit descended and stirred hearts to confess belief in the Messiah and to establish the Church on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

These are the stories of our faith, and all these stories are part of a much larger story about God establishing a New Creation in a New Jerusalem where there will be “*no more sorrow, no more pain, no more death, and no more shame.*” Each song on this album is a chapter in the larger story of redemption God is working out. Though Jerusalem is the backdrop of the biblical stories these songs tell, the Apostle Paul reminds us that our lives of faith are the *most sacred* sites of God’s dwelling, far grander spiritual houses than any city, temple, or sanctuary building:

“...you are fellow citizens with God’s people, and you belong to God’s household. As God’s household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple dedicated to

the Lord. Christ is building you together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

Even as we are on our own pilgrimages to travel deeper into the life and love of God, God is also on the move, eager to dwell in and among God’s people. In response to God’s search for a place to dwell, the faithful cry, “*Make my life Your dwelling place!*” Suddenly, this story of God-come-near isn’t just some ancient tale of a far-off land; *IT’S YOUR STORY TOO...* a story so wonderful—the *most* wonderful—it deserves to be told!

The Story of God’s Dwelling is best told and enjoyed *together*. So, we’ve asked some of our dearest friends and co-laborers in ministry to write a reflection for us to pair with each song on the album. We invite you to go through each devotional entry song by song, listening and reading together in order. Throughout the book you’ll find “This Is My Story” boxes containing questions as well as ideas for further action. We all have stories to tell about God’s dwelling in our own lives, so we encourage you to engage these stories—*your* stories—in whatever way is helpful for you.

We pray these songs get stuck in your head, on your lips, and in your heart... that “*this story of God come to dwell in Christ our Lord Emmanuel will stir your longing heart with ancient truths.*” Happy listening!

Deeper into the life and love of God we go!

Mark & Luke

*I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
Of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story,
Because I know it's true;
It satisfies my longings
As nothing else can do.*

An Ancient Story

There's an ancient story people tell
Of a place so hallowed it shines like... well,
It's best you hear the story from the start.
The end has rivers, trees, and gold;
We'll get there soon, then we'll behold
The Lord we've vowed to love with all our hearts.

The setting is a mountaintop
In a land called Moriah on a large outcrop,
A place where faithful people come to pray
To the God so filled with grace and love
That Christ came down from heaven above,
The Church's One Foundation here to stay.

It's an altar for a sacrifice;
The ground on which the temple lies;
The place Christ broke the bread and shared the wine;
It's the hillside where our savior dies;
It's the town in which sweet Mary cries,
"I've seen the Lord with my own eyes,
Once dead, now he's alive!"

So, how'd God's presence come to bide
In every town and countryside
Where gathering in his name proclaims good news?
This story of God come to dwell
In Christ our Lord, Emmanuel
Will stir your longing hearts with ancient truths.

It's an altar for a sacrifice;
The ground on which the temple lies;
The place Christ broke the bread and shared the wine;
It's the hillside where our savior dies;
It's the town in which sweet Mary cries,
"I've seen the Lord with my own eyes,
Once dead, now he's alive!"





by Dr. Darren Middleton

None of us can live without story. And if you read or listen to a *good* story, what happens? If it's *really* good, you become lost in the beguiling narration, the felicitous telling of the tale, and you become caught up with the characters and the plot. Then the story grabs you, way down inside, and it makes you elated or alarmed; it makes you chuckle or weep. We are storied creatures.

The Bible is our Sacred Story. And when Christians read the Bible they, too, are caught up in the action-packed, often poignant worlds of the Old Testament and the New. But there is more than that. We believe this is *our* story and this is *our* song. For us, the Bible is more than just a *good book*; here, somehow, God reveals Godself, and here we are found—however lost we feel—by stories others told. When we listen, truly listen, to the Bible's ancient storytellers, we find that the Word engages us, confronts us, and then transforms as well as overtakes us with the event of God speaking through tales of graced lives moving towards Mystery.

Consider Abraham's decision to bind Isaac, his only son, for sacrifice on Mount Moriah—an episode where conventional laws are set to one side, at least temporarily, because of a higher call of faith. Or think of Jesus Christ our Lord, Emmanuel, whose fealty to God, even to the point of ascending the summit of

sacrifice on Calvary's hill, discloses creation's divine dimension: wherever we go, in life or death, God is there.

So, what's *my* story? Well, the main plot point goes like this. Until November 30th 2004, the day my wife birthed our only son into our broken and needy world, I never *really* knew what it meant to encounter God. I *thought* I did. But it took something spectacularly ordinary—a child's birth, a tale as old as time—for all that to change. It took Jonathan's arrival for *real*, *transcendent joy* to erupt within me. Watching him take center stage took me to a different realm, beyond all the normal categories that we use to narrate and help us grasp our complex world: *this moment reveals the sacred*, I told myself then and teach my students now; and, I never tire of the lesson. The very next day we entered into the Advent season, where we waited to be found by the story of the Incarnation—“*this story of God come to dwell / in Christ our Lord, Emmanuel.*”

May the God who is always there, at the center of life's story, ready to appear when the conditions are right, come and fill *you* with an irreducible, joyous sense of the sacred wrapped in the ordinary.

Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton
John F. Weatherly Professor of Religion
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, TX

This is my story.
This is my song.

“Blessed Assurance”

The Son and the Ram

I am El Shaddai, God on High. I'll promise you the stars
If you walk with me faithfully and keep this vow of ours.
A covenant formed, a child born, conceived by holy might.
The laughing one, a son, Abraham's delight.

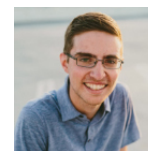
Here I am, where's the ram? Or am I the offering?
Altar-bound on holy ground, our sacrifice we bring!

He said, "Walk with me to the hill country to worship God with fire.
We'll build an altar with this wood in the land they call Moriah."
Isaac led, he ran ahead atop that far off hill,
Where standing brave, upon his grave, he wrestled with God's will.

Here I am, where's the ram? Or am I the offering?
Altar-bound on holy ground, our sacrifice we bring!

His promise kept, Abraham wept, "My son to you I'll give;
But if there's a way, Lord I pray... let him live."
Right then a ram from the Great I AM took Isaac's place, untied.
So Abraham named the rock, "God will provide."

Here I am, where's the ram? Or am I the offering?
Altar-bound on holy ground, our sacrifice we bring!



by Rev. Luke Ehrhardt

Once a year my brother and I meet our friend Andrew in Estes Park, Colorado to hang out and catch up. Staying just outside Rocky Mountain National Park's east entrance, we try to cross another few hikes off the park map each year. If it's a longer hike, we start early before the sun has risen. Straddling the threshold between night's end and daybreak, we walk that first hour on the trail in darkness and—for the most part—in silence. That early in the morning and that deep into undisturbed creation, the stars still fill the sky... more stars than I've seen anytime or anyplace else. The occasional glance back east toward Colorado's front range hints that light is coming, and by the time we reach the summit everything is in full view.

Early on in the story of God's dwelling, shortly after the Great Flood recedes (Genesis 7-8), God chooses a family to

help bring about God's plan for creation. God makes a sacred covenant with Abraham who, though he was 99 years old, had no descendants: "If you walk with me faithfully, then I will bless you with descendants as numerous as the stars. You, Abraham, will be the ancestor of many nations. For generations your offspring will be my people and I will be their God" (Genesis 17). At nearly 100 years of age, Abraham had all but given up on his prayers to have a child of his own. But sure enough, God makes good on God's promise and delivers to Abraham's wife Sarah a son named Isaac (Genesis 21).

Turn the page in Genesis, though, to chapter 22, and things aren't going exactly as the family had planned:

"After these events, God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' Abraham answered, 'I'm here.' God said, 'Take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him up



as an entirely burned offering there on one of the mountains that I will show you.' Abraham got up early in the morning, harnessed his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, together with his son Isaac. He split the wood for the entirely burned offering, set out, and went to the place God had described to him."

(Genesis 22:1-3)

HOLD UP! REALLY?! It took an entire century for Sarah and Abraham to finally receive what they had always prayed for, and no sooner than God blesses them with a son God is going to take him away? Intending to uphold his side of the covenant, Abraham heeds God's instructions, altar-bound with firewood and a knife in tow and Isaac at his father's side. Tension loomed thick like fog when the two of them set out at first light. And I imagine their hike up the mountain that day started off a lot like those early morning hikes through RMNP with my friends. Darkness. Silence. Stars overhead taunting Abraham, causing him to question the integrity of God's promise: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars" (Genesis 15:5).

The higher they ascend up the mountain, the more Abraham agonizes and the more Isaac's mind wanders: "Dad... explain this again. You said we're going to the altar to make a sacrifice. We've got the wood, but where's the ram?" (Genesis 22:7). Too heartbroken to share the plan, Abraham replies, "God will provide the lamb, my son" (Genesis 22:8). By the time they reach the summit, everything is in full view. The fog lifts, unveiling what Isaac

had grown suspicious of on their way to holy ground: "It's me, isn't it? I'm the sacrifice."

Imagine yourself in Isaac's place, wrestling with God's will atop the mountain. When have you wrestled with God's will and how did it affect your faith? The Church is quick to talk about our human response to God's will using the language of *obedience* and *submission*, but our faith allows us the space and the grace to also *wrestle* with God's will. Centuries after Isaac, Jesus himself would do the very same thing on this very same mountain. We can imagine Isaac on the altar, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and ourselves in our own spaces of struggle praying the same prayer:

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want... If this cannot pass unless I drink it, then let your will be done."

(Matthew 26:39, 42)

Is Isaac a willing participant in the spiritual sacrifices God requires? Are you and I? Just before Abraham carries out the sacrifice, God stops him from following through on God's initial command. A messenger of the Lord unbinds Isaac, and right there—caught in the thicket of a nearby tree—appears a ram sent by God to take Isaac's place, a willing sacrifice. So Abraham names the rock, Jehovah-Jireh, which means "God Will Provide." Though the story of God's dwelling and Abraham's descendants moves on from this place, this mountaintop will again host an only Son,

the Lamb of God who centuries later steps out of the thicket and into the hands of Roman guards so that descendants of Abraham—so that *we*—might walk on together in faith.

Rev. Luke Ehrhardt
Associate Pastor
West Des Moines Christian Church
West Des Moines, IA



This is my story...

1. **Think about a time you struggled with God's will. Does your understanding of faith allow space for such struggling?**
2. **Is Isaac a willing participant in the spiritual sacrifices God requires? Are you and I?**

Take Action: Twice in the Genesis 22 passage the scripture emphasizes "the two of them walked on together." When Abraham and Isaac set out for the altar, walking side by side was an act of trust. After everything that took place on the mountaintop, "walking on together" became an act of reconciliation... a way forward. One day each week for the next month, go on a walk either alone or with a friend. While walking, listen for how God might be calling you into deeper trust and reconciliation in your own relationships.

Your Dwelling Place

Make my life your dwelling place,
My soul a source of constant praise;
Let my heart be turned into
An altar built to worship you.

Make my life your dwelling place,
My soul a source of constant praise;
Let my heart be turned into
An altar built to worship you.

Like living stones of flesh and bone, my life your home and temple;
With Christ alone the cornerstone in me.
And when you move, O Spirit use my heart as your tabernacle.
Abide in me and I'll abide in Thee.

Make my life your dwelling place,
My soul a source of constant praise;
Let my heart be turned into
An altar built to worship you.



by Dr. Randy Ehrhardt

My grandpa was a quiet, gentle, thoughtful man whose reassuring smile in the moment made you feel you were the only one who mattered. He had the gift and ability to help you see the beauty in the simple, the spectacular in the ordinary, and the value and blessing of others and yourself.

Through the years my grandpa and I shared a special ritual that still holds meaning for me today. I was young when it started, and I was still asking him to repeat it before he died when I was in my forties. Over the years I went from sitting on his lap to sitting next to him on the couch, from the chair adjacent to his at the dining room table to the food tray by his nursing home bed. To begin the life-giving ritual, Grandpa would grab a pad of paper and a pen and carefully pull a Hershey's chocolate candy bar out of his shirt pocket (the last time I had to bring the candy bar and paper, but the result was still the same).

As he would take the candy bar out of his shirt pocket, he made sure I noticed it was one of the \$0.25 candy bars and not one of the miniatures you get at Halloween. He would gently place the large candy bar on a sheet of paper, trace all around it, and then return the candy bar to his shirt pocket for safe keeping.

And now, having a picture of a candy bar with appropriate dimensions, he would go

to the end of the pictured candy bar and mark off a tiny little piece. On the short side of that mark, representing a sliver of a candy bar, he would take his pen and write a BIG "R" representing my name, RANDY. And then on the rest of the candy bar, he would put a BIG "G" for GRANDPA. He would let it be known that he had come to the conclusion this was the best way to divide the candy bar.

Of course, I would object and the whole process would start over: take out the candy bar; trace it onto a piece of paper; put the candy bar back in the shirt pocket; use the paper to illustrate again the best way to divide the candy bar, each time making my sliver a little bit bigger.

After half a pad of paper, Grandpa would pull out the original candy bar and an extra candy bar (except the last time I had the joy of providing the candy bars), so we could each have one. We would both smile, laugh, and partake. They were special moments when I received acceptance, love, reassurance, and a glimpse of the holy.

Grandpa had instilled in me a valuable lesson: see the beauty in the simple, the spectacular in the ordinary, and the value and blessing of others and yourself. Something holy had found a dwelling place in my grandpa. I am grateful my grandpa has always been a sacred, encouraging, safe, grace-filled dwelling place for me.

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing.”

(John 15:4-5)

We all know people who have been open to God dwelling in them and have reflected on to us God’s wonder, mystery, love, and grace. Thankfully, for some, God building within them has given them the courage to stand for justice and for what is right. For others, God dwelling within them has inspired them to see and help the broken, lost, hungry, homeless, discouraged, and discriminated.

Then there are those whose spiritual houses are filled with so much compassion, they are constantly having to empty themselves of kindness to make room in their homes and lives for more mercy. Who hasn’t been impacted by those whose spiritual lives are filled with offerings of second chances, encouraging words and actions, unwavering support, the inspiring of dreams, and the sharing of wisdom?

Here is a list of some ways you and I can help build strong, sturdy, storm-resistant homes:

- Make God a priority in our lives
- Find time for study and prayer
- Take a “thankful” inventory often

- Spend time with encouraging, faith-filled family and friends
- Worship
- Inventory our gifts and be open to God using them
- Look for simple yet holy ways you can help others experience God.

So how apparent is it that God is dwelling in you? In what ways is God already building you into a spiritual home? How open are you to allowing God to use you as a living stone to build something beautiful? Who do you know who could use a very special Hershey’s candy bar? May the structure you are helping to build in your life help us all see the beauty in the simple, the spectacular in the ordinary, and the value and blessing of others and ourselves!

O God, as we build upon Christ as our foundation, help us support and build upon one another as we become a dwelling place of grace, holiness, sacredness, and love. Help us to trust wherever you place us in the building process and to be open to where you need us most. Please stack us upon the Cornerstone of Christ and build us into a people worthy of your dwelling. Amen!

Dr. Randy Ehrhardt
Senior Pastor
West Des Moines Christian Church
West Des Moines, IA



This is my story...

1. **Among your own family and friends, do you have a simple ritual you share... something simple yet holy that brings you joy?**
2. **What would it take for your soul to be a “source of constant praise?” How would your life look different than it currently does?**

Take Action: Text or write a note of appreciation to someone who has been a dwelling place for you... someone who helps you find the sacred in the ordinary and who you can be yourself around. Then create a simple ritual with a person in your life who could use a comforting, reliable place to dwell.



Jerusalem (Hymn Tune)

*We've recorded this hymn as an instrumental piece. Though the hymn's lyrics reflect William Blake's longing to see England transformed into the New Jerusalem, we hope that as you listen you'll start to imagine the places *you're* familiar with being transformed into heaven on earth. The lyrics come from a poem written by William Blake in 1808. Over a century later (1916), Sir Hubert Parry set the lyrics to the tune you'll hear on Track 4.

Poem written by William Blake

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark satanic mills?*

*Bring me my bow of burning gold;
Bring me my arrows of desire;
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold;
Bring me my chariot of fire!*

*I will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Til we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*



by Rev. Mark Ehrhardt

“Mind the gap.” To Americans, this English phrase is a reminder that our friends across the pond grammar a little differently than we do. To local commuters and tourists alike, “mind the gap” is a welcome warning to be careful when stepping on and off the trains that operate as part of The Underground mass transit system serving Greater London.

Getting caught in the space between the train and the platform wouldn't be desirable, hence the warning to “mind the gap.” More generally, being caught “between” can be disheartening.

I'm willing to bet you've been “between” before. Maybe between jobs or between the text message and the reply; maybe you've been between the exam and the results, or the procedure and the diagnosis; maybe you've found yourself between two friend groups or torn between two choices. Maybe the only “between” you've ever been is between two meals. Whatever the case, between-ness is an inescapable part of life.

But as Christians, we're familiar with the gap... we are gap-dwelling people. We constantly occupy the space between the world as it is, and the world as it ought to be (and by the grace of God *will* be). We live between the already (Christ has died, Christ has risen) and the not yet (Christ will come again).

“In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

(Colossians 1:19)

What do we do when we're in between? What are we supposed to do while we wait on the Lord? The life of Jesus suggests we are to worship and get to work rebuilding what has been ruined. Through the love Jesus pours into the world, all things “on earth and in heaven” are being reconciled to God. And if we want to follow Jesus, we need to participate in this ministry of reconciling the whole world.

God has ordained us to be repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in. If even one street in this world is not safe to live in, then our work is not yet complete. If even one sister or brother in this world is unable to flourish because of a societal gap (e.g., wealth gap, education gap, etc.) then our work must continue.

*“I will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Til we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.”*

I'm more of a plowshare kind of guy than a swordsman, but I can definitely relate with William Blake's longing to dwell with God in the New Jerusalem. I mean, how incredible would it be for heaven to be right here... right where we live?!

The good people of England are crazy about this hymn. There's something exciting about imagining Jesus walked where you walk. As one of the most adored anthems in England, this hymn has been sung at funerals, cricket matches, and perhaps most famously at the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011.

But the brilliance of this hymn has nothing to do with England's mountains and pastures. It actually doesn't have anything to do with sports or royalty either. The brilliance of this hymn is it compels you and me to imagine our local communities transformed by the love and presence of God to such an extent that we start to experience heaven here on earth.

I think we've stumbled upon a definition of heaven—places and moments so transformed by God's love that it's all that exists there. Could your town be such a place? Could your home? Could your life? Could the time you spend with the people you love lead to such a moment? Could your time with enemies?

Throughout our lives, we become aware of certain things, places, and moments that are so full of God's transforming love that we get a foretaste of what heaven will be like...

...the moment two people confess their love for one another

...the birth of a child

...the pleasure of a good meal and good conversation

...the delight of truly knowing someone and being known

...the joy of being with people you love.

The New Creation may well be nearer and more familiar than we often think. To imagine the New Jerusalem can be built right here in the lands we're familiar with requires us to believe God is coming back to dwell with us right here. Norman Wirzba, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Duke University puts it this way: "Scripture [and your and my story] does not end with disembodied souls escaping creation and ascending to some faraway place. It ends with God descending into creation to take up residence with us."

Did God's presence light up the hills of England like it did Mt. Sinai? Did Jesus climb England's mountains like he climbed the mountain with Moses and Elijah? Did Jesus' feet, in ancient times, walk upon England's mountains green? God knows. But if Jesus is present wherever people gather in his name, then in ancient and modern times alike, Jesus' presence has been to every mountaintop and in every valley of this vast universe.

Maybe Jerusalem is anywhere—or everywhere—there are people serving as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. There are people in West Des Moines, Iowa carrying on the work of Jesus; so perhaps Jerusalem is being built there. There are people in Black Mountain, North Carolina who love kindness, seek justice, and in full humility walk with God; perhaps Jerusalem is being built

there too. And there are people in your community whose lives bear the presence of the divine. So perhaps Jerusalem is being built in your town as well.

Rev. Mark Ehrhardt
Associate Pastor
West Des Moines Christian Church
West Des Moines, IA



This is my story...

1. **What gaps need closed in your community and what can you do to help close them?**
2. **How have you seen the hands and feet of Jesus at work in your community?**
3. **Which moments throughout your life have given you a glimpse of the coming joy we'll experience in the New Creation?**

Take Action: Do something simple and kind to build Jerusalem right where you are. In other words, perform a random act of kindness. Examples: buy a friend or stranger lunch; invite someone who you notice often gets left out; write a thank you note to your mail carrier; make a point to be fully present for someone who needs a companion.

The Son Is the Lamb

A man named Jesus walked the hills of Galilee
To heal the blind and set the captives free.
And though his lungs were filled with God's own breath,
The crowd still shouted for his death.

"Crucify him, crucify," they said.
"Give to us Barabbas instead."
"Nail him to a cross and pierce his side."
They wounded him to satisfy their own wounded pride.

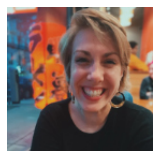
That cross it stood on a hillside far away,
Where all those years before Abraham prayed
For God to save young Isaac with a ram.
Now the Son's the Savior, behold the Lamb.

A sign above read: "Jesus, King of the Jews."
Forgive us, Lord, we know not what we do.
"Abba, it is finished," Jesus cried.
The he bowed his head, breathed his last, and died.

The women visited the tomb at dawn that day,
But to their dismay the stone was rolled away.
Then they remembered all the words that he had said:
Three days and he'd raise up from the dead.

"Mary," came a voice she knew inside.
"Rabbouni! My Lord!" she replied.
Then Jesus said, "Through me now death has died.
Go and tell the others to believe it's me, I'm alive!" [He's alive!]





by Rev. Alison Nicoll

As I listen to this piece, I'm struck by the way it seamlessly tells the most important story to the Christian faith, the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This story sits in the most sacred week of our year—Holy Week. And to be quite frank, this part of the story is *uncomfortable*, isn't it?

We begin Holy Week with the fanfare of Palm Sunday—Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey while crowds cheer “Hosanna!” We ride this high moment, but really *only* for a moment. Later in the week we come across Maundy Thursday, a day we remember the events of the Last supper where Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, broke the bread, and shared the wine. It's here where we learn to participate in the sacred act of Communion.

Many of the churches I've been a part of or had the occasion to serve recognize the importance of Maundy Thursday—a good Disciples of Christ thing to do as communion grounds so much of who we are as a denomination. But these same churches often fail to recognize Good Friday—the event sung about in this song. And why is that?

This part of the story is *uncomfortable*. We want to skip over it and jump directly to the events three days from it. Why? Because in looking at this event square on, we realize this man—this man who healed

and taught and showed us what real love was supposed to be, what real *community* was supposed to be—was crucified by the Roman empire... by the people he was teaching and serving. It's uncomfortable because this event causes us to look at ourselves and weigh, “Did *we* do this?”

When do we do this now? When do we let the empire within take control? When do we let our fear take the wheel and drive? When do we dehumanize others and cast them aside in order to save ourselves or make ourselves look better? That is at the heart of what makes Jesus' death so uncomfortable. We are left to look at ourselves in the mirror and reflect on this truth. We may not have personally crucified Jesus, but we are constantly getting in the way of what he teaches.

In Jesus' ministry, he is constantly showing us who needs to be included, and he not only tells us this, but he *shows* us. He shares parables that shine a light on people who are usually in the shadows. He recognizes, embraces, and converses with people in the community who are unwanted—cast aside, unclean, and deemed unworthy of attention, welcome or love. He shows us a new way; he shows us a way of inclusion, a way of welcome, and the way that love is supposed to be. Love to Jesus should be liberating and without abandon and without limitation. Love should always make our tables wider and our circles larger.

Jesus shows us this love even through his death on the cross. And then Jesus shows

us, even in resurrection, that same liberating, ever-expansive love by appearing to Mary, a woman... Women who are usually cast aside are now carrying the most important message in our tradition: “He's alive.”

He's alive!
He's alive!
He's alive!

Rev. Alison Nicoll
Associate Minister
Ankeny Christian Church
Ankeny, IA


This is my story...

1. **What about church or the bible or the stories of your faith makes you uncomfortable?**
2. **Who are the people in your community who are unwanted and unseen? What can you do to be welcoming and invitational to these neighbors? How can you make them feel seen?**

Take Action: Sometimes we are the ones who feel unwanted and unseen. You are the only person on the planet who doesn't see yourself from the outside; you see yourself completely from the inside. Each morning and night after brushing your teeth or washing your face, take 15 seconds to look at yourself in the mirror and say this affirmation aloud: “I am loved by God.”

Pentecost Confession

A sound from heaven like a howling wind
Swept through the city and then right in
To the house where Peter stayed.
The Wind filled the house and apostles full
And fanned holy flames within them all
Til the Spirit that was with them led each one of them to say:

I believe he's the Christ, Son of God and Lord of Life.
I believe; I believe; I believe.

Judah's daughters and Israel's sons
Speaking praise in foreign tongues
To the God of Moses, Jacob, David, Mary, Abraham.
The onlookers, they had their doubts,
But Peter rose and told them 'bout
The time when Jesus asked him, "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter looked at him and said:

I believe you're the Christ, Son of God and Lord of Life.
I believe; I believe; I believe.

Peter stood and said out loud
To the large Jerusalem crowd,
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.
He's seated on the throne beside
Our God who should be glorified,
Coming on the Spirit to baptize and call you when

You believe he's the Christ, Son of God and Lord of Life.
So believe; so believe; so believe.

One by one the Spirit moved,
Stirring hearts with ancient truths
Of prophecies fulfilled through God's own Son.
Like wildfire, news of Jesus spread
To every home where, breaking bread,
The Church it grew in number one by one;
One by one they sang their confession:

I believe he's the Christ, Son of God and Lord of Life. (x5)
I believe; I believe; I believe.



by Rev. Tiff Williams

Pentecost Confession takes the listener on a journey through the day of Pentecost, as told in Chapter 2 of Acts. Most believers consider Pentecost to be the moment when the Christian movement really began. Like that early movement which began among a few Christ followers, the song begins quietly and softly. One voice, accompanied by acoustic guitar and piano, leads us to consider a simple but profound statement of faith: *“I believe He’s the Christ, Son of God and Lord of life/I believe; I believe; I believe.”*

As the story continues, more believers join the movement and make their own confessions of faith. The song begins to build in a similar manner. Voices and instruments gain momentum. A saxophone part comes in on the first confession and grows and changes throughout the tune. The listener might notice that the sax starts slowly and softly and becomes more and more improvisational, perhaps mimicking the growing Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The music, like the Spirit that came in like fire, becomes more difficult to predict. Finally, “Pentecost Confession” builds into a chorus of voices and instruments that cannot contain the joy of the disciples proclaiming their Christ.

These words of confession echo throughout this song and throughout the ages, reminding us of one of the most

basic truths of the Christian faith: *“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of life.”* I invite you to consider these important words and the person who first spoke them.

The first Christ confession in the song comes from Peter, a Christ follower who had been with Jesus for many years. Peter was a disciple with many triumphs and failures. Peter, so zealous to jump out of the boat and greet Jesus as he walked on water, started to doubt and subsequently sunk into the sea. Peter, uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus serving him, initially refuses to have his feet washed. Peter, quick to hide the fact that he is a follower of Jesus to keep himself safe, denies Jesus three times on the night of his arrest. Peter, not knowing what the heck to do after Jesus’ death, goes back to what is comfortable and announces that he’s going fishing.

Yet Peter is also the first Disciple to say out loud in the gospels that this Galilean teacher is no ordinary rabbi, that he is the Messiah, the Christ. He is the Son of God. Peter is the one to start leading and teaching on the day of Pentecost. Peter works tirelessly to build Christ’s Church. Peter, with all his flaws, believes.

Soon the crowd believes, too. Others join in the confession one by one, and the movement builds just like our song. It all started because one person was able to gather the courage to say that they believed.

Thank God for Peter and his flaws. Thanks be to God for his confession and for ours. Because of Peter and other imperfect disciples, I believe.

Rev. Tiff Williams
Associate Regional Minister
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest
Newton, IA



This is my story...

1. **This story is your heritage... your inheritance passed on through the generations from one faithful disciple to the next. Who handed you the baton? Who brought you up in the way of Christ and nurtured in you your belief that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Lord of life?”**
2. **We are links in a chain of storytellers such that without us some stories might die. What stories are you keeping alive?**
3. **Why is it sometimes hard to confess our belief publicly? What makes it difficult to talk about our faith openly with others?**

Take Action: What is your faith elevator pitch? You’re in an elevator with someone who is curious about this Jesus guy and you have 90 seconds to convey the goodness of a life built on Christ. It doesn’t have to be perfect, just genuine. What do you say? Write it down. Then share it with someone.

Western Wall

Tonight the air above the Western Wall is full of prayers and praises
All rising on the wind until there high above the wall
These prayers and praises mix with those from other creatures in other places
Then the cloud of prayers starts rising to the Maker of it all

It rises up like the dawn of a brand new day
Up like the Son rose from the grave
Up like the One who makes a way
It rises up

Like millions past and millions since I made my way up to the wall
To meet the Mystery who dwells deep within the ancient stone
I found some paper and a pen and scrawled my dreams and all my longings
And there between the stones I left a love note for Shalom

God's love came down like Moses from the holy mount
Down like Christ to Bethlehem town
Down like rain on thirsty ground
It all came down

Through the ups and the downs the rise and fall
The prayers from the wall to the Maker of all
We watch and we wait for dreams fulfilled
Our hopes set on Christ and the kingdom he'll build

Then we'll rise up like the dawn of a brand new day
Up like the Son rose from the grave
Up like the One who makes a way
We're rising up

[Down like Moses from the holy mount]
[Down like Christ to Bethlehem town]
[Down like rain on thirsty ground]
[He's coming down]

Then we'll rise up like the dawn of a brand new day
Up like the Son rose from the grave
Up like the One who makes a way
We're rising up

[Down like Moses from the holy mount]
[Down like Christ to Bethlehem town]
[Down like rain on thirsty ground]
[He's coming down]

Through the ups and the downs the rise and fall
We watch and wait... ("How long, O Lord?") ...and we worship at the wall





The Wall

by John Cook

32 meters wide
19 meters high
45 courses
28 above the ground
17 below

Made of limestone quarried nearby.
It's the second temple and was built here by Herod
After Solomon's temple was raised.
Herod, such a complicated and cruel man
And yet his legacy remains
Is this what God is trying to tell us?
"Even cruelty can produce some measure of good"

Limestone blocks
Melekeh limestone
It means "royal stone" in Arabic no less
Jerusalem is surrounded by it
White
Ancient
Full of star-like crystals
Even eons ago when water was forming the rocks,
God was planning.

John Cook
Christian Thinker
Des Moines, Iowa

Christ and Muhammad
Teachers and Tourists
Mourners and Mercenaries
me

All have come to this holy place
All have seen the wall
Some as an obstacle
Some as protection
For me it is a waypoint
It is where its past and my future meet.

I touch the stone and ask.
Opening myself to whatever may come for me
Whatever you want for me.
"Thou will be done."

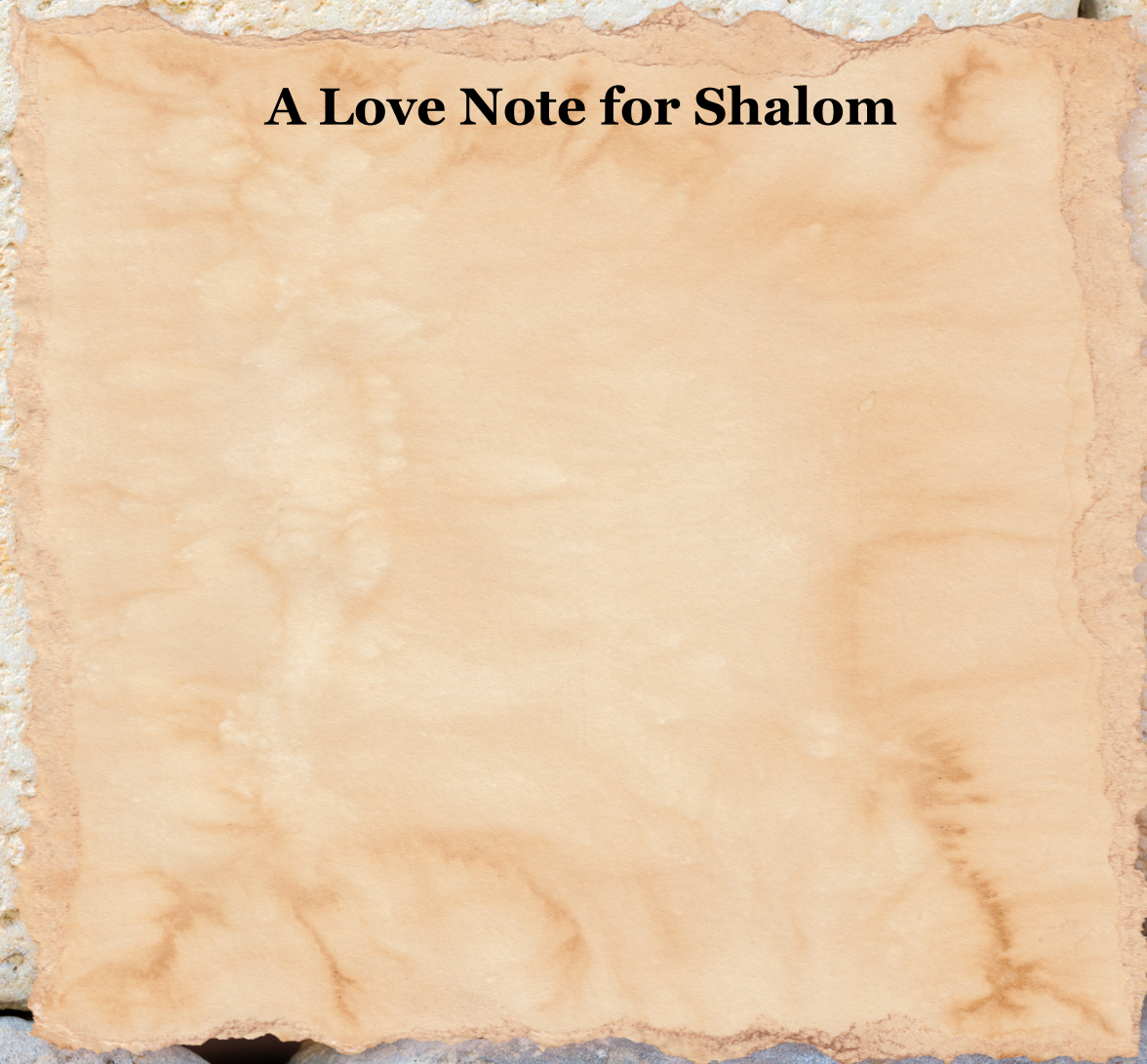
I feel its roughness,
see its golden hue.
I breathe in... and out.
The stone now does what I can not:
It remains in quiet witness.
I now do what the stone can not:
I move forward.



This is my story...

1. What is your special place where you feel closer to God?... your "Western Wall?"
2. What obstacles stand between you and a deeper prayer life?
3. **Take Action:** Every day, more than 100,000 pilgrims visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City to place a note between the cracks of the Temple's ancient stones. Scrawling their dreams and their longings, these pilgrims add their prayers to the prayers of generations past, present, and future. Many of these prayers share the same longing: *shalom*, an ancient Hebrew word meaning wholeness. Using the space below, write a love note for Shalom, the God who turns even brokenness into wholeness. It doesn't need to be anything fancy... just sincere.

A Love Note for Shalom



Next Year in the New Jerusalem

In far-off cities, displaced and banned, we sing our songs in foreign lands,
Dreams of Zion fill our every prayer.
Though here in Babylon we stay, we'll labor on until the day
Thy Kingdom come and swords become plowshares.

Then former things will pass away, a new creation take its place,
And darkness will not veil the rising Son.
No more crying, no more pain, no more death and no more shame;
The Lamb of God is coming back again
To rescue us from brokenness and then
Restored by grace, we'll see God's face; Lord, when's the time and where's the place?
Maybe one day soon we'll meet the bridegroom... Next year in the New Jerusalem.

One holy city, one sacred town, a New Jerusalem coming down
From heaven; God's own presence come to dwell.
The city needs no moon or sun; it knows no dark, its light comes from
The glory of the risen Christ who tells

Of former things to pass away, a new creation in its place,
And darkness will not veil the rising Son.
No more crying, no more pain, no more death and no more shame;
The Lamb of God is coming back again
To rescue us from brokenness and then
Restored by grace, we'll see God's face; Lord, when's the time and where's the place?
Making all things new, he'll come to dwell with you... trustworthy and true in Jerusalem.
Heaven to earth descend, Beginning and the End... Creation sings amen in Jerusalem.



by Rev. Kevin Miller

Each year during Passover, the Seder meal is concluded with the phrase *L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim*, which is translated, "Next year in Jerusalem." While the fullness of this phrase is as much historical as it is theological, it is a powerful, and sometimes painful, reminder that we are not yet where we will one day be.

In Genesis, the Story of everything begins with a creation made in love and called good. In the Book of Revelation, we are left with the hope and promise of a no-longer-crumbling creation, restored in love and more perfect than our human minds can fully imagine. It is a place where we will find "God's own presence come to dwell," and where darkness will no longer "veil the rising Son." A new heaven and a new earth. A New Creation. The New Jerusalem.

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

(Revelation 21:3b-4)

And yet, we know all too well that we are not there. We have experienced pain, we have seen suffering, we have been

crippled by death. Our hearts and minds long for a place of peace, yet "we sing our songs in foreign lands." Tears continue to fall, and, with nothing to stop them, tears continue to flood the ground beneath our feet.

I sometimes wonder if future hope in a future promise is really enough to sustain us. It may be for some, but not for all. Jesus, in his many earthly travels, reminds us that we are made for more than waiting around for something better. There are people to love and God's creation to care for. Salvation is still a trail we are to travel on towards the Promised Land.

The incarnation, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, and the outpouring of Christ's Spirit are about so much more than a ticket into heaven or a gate code into a safer city. Through the power of a living, resurrected God at work in our life and in our world, we have the gear we need to begin navigating towards the place where all of creation is headed. "For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21b).

When we say, "Next year in the New Jerusalem," we speak of not only future hopes for ourselves, but of our commitment to become like the feet of Jesus that will go out to meet people and creatures in their places of pain and suffering. We commit to become like the hands of Jesus to wipe away tears from one another's eyes. We commit to become the body of Christ, broken and poured out

in love for the entire creation. We commit to a pilgrimage towards that Holy Place.

Don't get me wrong. We cannot build our way to God. We have tried, and we have failed. Instead, our God comes to us in Jesus, and fills us with "dreams of Zion" and of a coming Kingdom where "swords become plowshares." These dreams are not to distract us from reality, but to inspire us to set out on a journey towards that place where we cannot wait to one day be. Next year in the New Jerusalem!

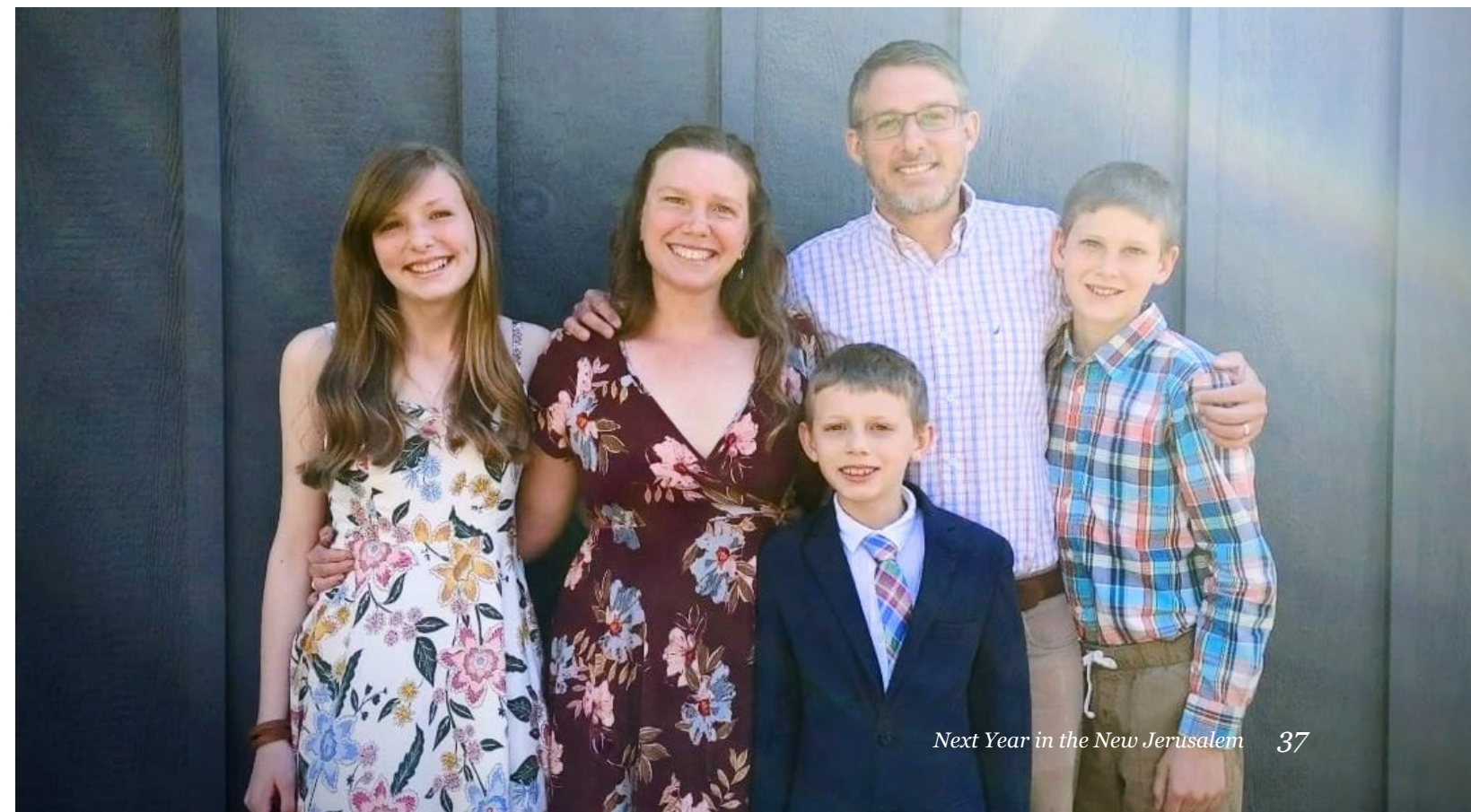
Rev. Kevin C. Miller
Way in the Wilderness: A Church Without Walls
Black Mountain, NC



This is my story...

1. **Jesus reminds us we are made for more than waiting around for something better. There are people and places to care for. How are you serving people? How are you serving creation?**

Take Action: Go on a pilgrimage—a sacred journey—to a quiet, holy place outdoors. Maybe it's a park or a cemetery, a riverbank or a field. On your way, take note of the signs of resurrection life around you.





A Not So Ancient Story

It's an altar for a sacrifice;
 The ground on which the temple lies;
 The place Christ broke the bread and shared the wine;
 It's the hillside where our savior dies;
 It's the town in which sweet Mary cries,
 "I've seen the Lord with my own eyes,
 Once dead, now he's alive!"

And so that's how God came to bide
 In every town and countryside;
 Go gather in his name, proclaim good news.
 This story of God come to dwell
 In Christ our Lord, Emmanuel
 Still stirs our longing hearts with ancient truths.

It's an altar for a sacrifice;
 The ground on which the temple lies;
 The place Christ broke the bread and shared the wine;
 It's the hillside where our savior dies;
 It's the town in which sweet Mary cries,
 "I've seen the Lord with my own eyes,
 Once dead, now he's alive!"



by Dr. Darren Middleton

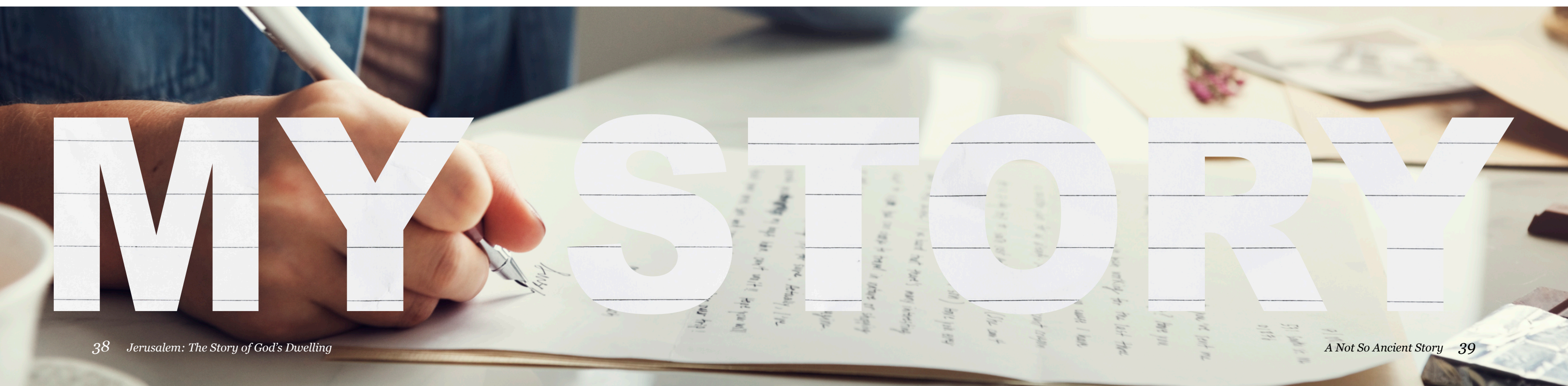
An internationally-recognized biblical scholar, N. T. Wright thinks scripture may best be viewed as a five act play, produced by God and with the following dramatic arc: Creation, Fall, the Formation of Israel, Incarnation, and the Church. On this view, we are somewhere in the fifth act, the age of the Church, where countless Christians since Pentecost have gathered to work out their salvation. We are part of this ongoing assembly, the Church, and when we invite Christ to “*stir our longing hearts with ancient truths,*” we become, through the ever-unfolding power of the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints across the centuries.

We would do well to remember that the Church is a theo-drama, to paraphrase the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, and not an ego-drama. We are

not here for *our* histrionics. It's not all about *us*. Life is God's theater. And Christians are on creation's stage to follow the script that God is writing—a libretto of love for the loveless.

God's great master act in this cosmic drama, Jesus, extends His incarnational reach into the world through the Church, which is under the Holy Spirit's aegis, and this means the drama of the divine dwelling is as modern as it is ancient. The Greatest Story Ever Told remains unfinished. Act now. Complete it...

Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton
 John F. Weatherly Professor of Religion
 Texas Christian University
 Fort Worth, TX





The Church's One Foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord;
We are his new creation by water and the Word;
From heaven he came and sought us to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought us, and for our life he died.

Called forth from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth;
Our charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name professing and at one table fed,
To one hope always pressing, by Christ's own Spirit led.

We now on earth have union with God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
Oh, happy ones, and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.



by Rev. Brian Nixon

*"...Oh, happy ones, and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee..."*

*"For no one can lay any foundation other
than the one that has been laid; that
foundation is Jesus Christ."*

(1 Corinthians 3:11)

We have one sure and steady foundation, though I think we can sometimes start to test our weight on some lesser and shakier ground. As we go through the years and witness the significant changes taking place in the world, it is often on the minds of those who love the Church, "What's the Church going to look like in 10, 20 years?" It seems we may even be wondering what next year holds at this point. And we may wonder with hope, or perhaps some anxiety. But I can hear the old hymn telling us the truth, calling us back, and pointing the way forward all at once. The Church has a steady foundation, and it is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Years ago I had some conflict from time to time with a guy I was working with. And it was wearing on me to where sometimes I would start to dwell on it rather than on what I ought to dwell on. I remember a night or two lying awake thinking through these fantastic theological arguments about why I was right and he was wrong. Oh man, was I right! And how sound and

well-articulated my arguments would be! Or more importantly, how good it would feel for him to know how wrong he is! I was on shaky ground.

Usually at the point of exhaustion I was finally nudged to try something else rather than remain stuck in my grievances. Perhaps a little prayer? It was just too obvious for me to try first, I guess. But in going to God instead, when I take a step past the unsteady ground of my own making, it only takes a minute of dwelling in that space with God for the anxiety to wash away, to catch the reminder that there is a better way than mine. And I would find a little more strength to come with kindness, patience, and humility. I was hearing God calling me to dwell on steady ground again with Christ and into the way of Jesus.

Alongside the great saints who have gone before us, Christ shows us a better way forward. It is the way of the happy ones and holy, the meek and lowly. It was in Jerusalem, when Jesus was facing His final days of His physical dwelling with us here on earth, that Jesus broke bread with His disciples, trying to show us just how far He would go for love's sake. Meanwhile the disciples thought that would be the right time to make their well-thought-out theological arguments for why they were the best. Jesus responds with the question, "Who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves?" And the answer is made visible in John's account where Jesus gets a bowl

of water and a towel and begins to wash their feet. He shows us our way forward.

Jesus Christ our Lord is our sure and steady foundation. And that is no small thing. The old hymn calls us back to the old, old story and shows us the way all at once. He has built us a rock to stand on, and on His life, with Him as our cornerstone, our foundation for living has been set forth. And we have a way forward in this world as His disciples even now.

Rev. Brian Nixon
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This is my story...

- 1. In what ways have you tried to build your life on something other than Christ?**
- 2. With great societal and political division in these days we're living in, how might Jesus inform our response?**
- 3. In practice, what has been most effective for you to "dwell" with Christ? What roadblocks need removed, and what might you need to do differently to build your life on Christ?**

Benediction

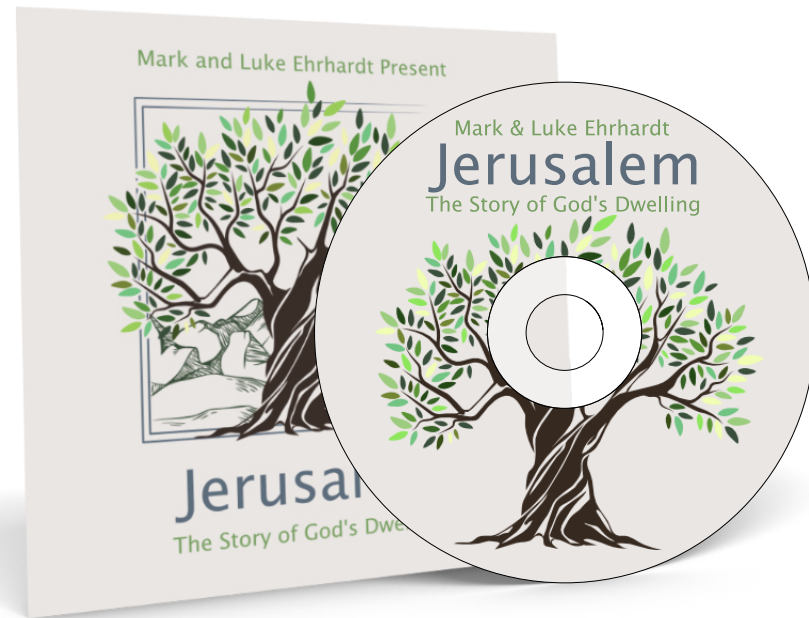
“We are the temple of the living God. Just as God said, ‘I live with them, and I will move among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”
(2 Corinthians 6:16b)

“So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”
(Ephesians 2:19-22)

Through Christ, God is building you and all of creation into a spiritual home where God will dwell with the Spirit forever. In the meantime, Jesus has promised to be with you whenever and wherever you gather and break bread in his name. So go and be the Church together, proclaiming the good news of God’s indwelling love until the day Christ comes again to make all things new! Amen.

Creation Sings “Amen”

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