



MARCH 2024

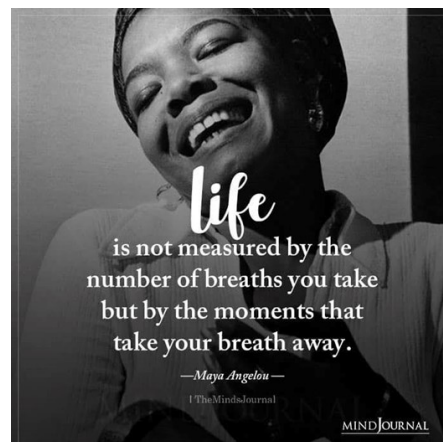
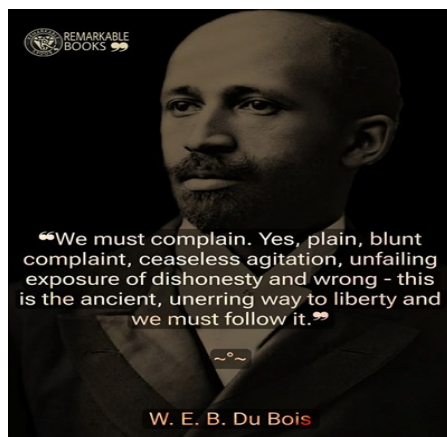
LORD, CAN THINGS GET ANY WORSE?

Our country is now wrestling with what responsibility is all about, and whether we can simply allow the lies to vanquish everything we know to be true. Fear, despotism, watching the time clock swing back and forth even as we know that major decisions will be made, whether influenced by stupidity, bias, the submission and martyrdom of women by men, courts that have no integrity, and clashes that may lead to even more dreadful happenings in our country and the world. Power, wealth, money, and control take away all or most of what we have fought for as a nation for hundreds of years. It is even beyond our understanding, how it is that one faith, Christian Nationalism is to be recognized as **the** religion for our pluralistic society, allowing White supremacists to determine what we do as people and a country even as millions of others believe and live other faiths that separate religion from politics. Incidentally, Christian Nationalists have no faith at all. They simply say that they “believe” and build their system of government that is to be the religion of the United States of America.

Do we give up, or do we fight? With all the discord, what do we fight for? Many of us simply give up, focusing on lesser ills, problems, and complaints, though imperfect, we try to make things better. The highest court in the land is a great supporter and promulgator of the discord. With a current approval level hovering around 30%, it has taken a deep dive in recent years. Taking away human rights, for the first time in history, the Roberts Court shaped by a Republican strategy to load it with jurists with certain backgrounds and intentions, it has forever damaged the credibility of the most important symbol of justice in the land.

One of the most egregious justices, who takes huge sums of money for himself and family while blithely supporting billionaires who shape his positions on legal matters, along with his wife's involvement and support of a former President who implemented an insurrection blocking the transition of power for the first time in U.S. history, has received an offer from a comedian.

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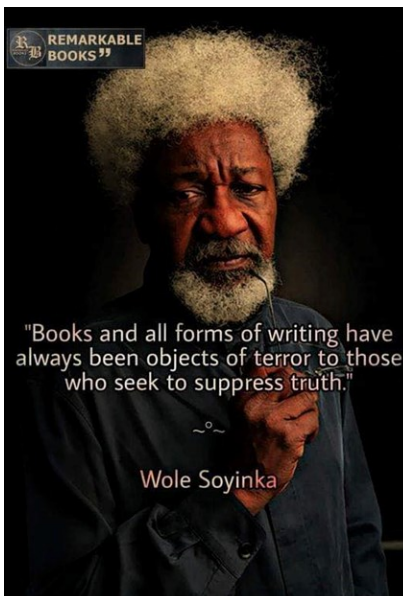


The comedian (John Oliver) has offered Justice Thomas a guarantee of one million dollars a year for life, and a brand new \$2.4 million tour bus so that he would leave the court and go on his way. No word from the justice.

Further, the court has now agreed to take the immunity case, potentially delaying the trial until after the election.

We can't give up now. Let's all get engaged, hold on to our freedom, and fight for the rights of all people. We are a pluralistic society that holds up and values diversity, not one that ends it. We don't kneel to Russia, and we want to be a people of peace in the world, not war. Can we end the sickness that now divides us and ensure that the values of the rights of all may be again the beacon that the Statue of Liberty shows the rest of the world. Trump is disturbed by his own self-delusions. He threatens our country with the potential of playing into Putin's plans for further acquisitions and power.

May we find a way together. May we support one another, so that all may live in harmony, and may we all discover how best to be the best that we can be. This is not to say that we will ever be perfect. But, may we work together for just that. Each and every one of us. Right now, in this place and in this time.



PASTOR'S MESSAGE - A BROKEN PASTOR HEALS – AND A WHOLE CHURCH STRETCHES

Am I doing alright? “Yes.” Am I much better? Yes. Am I well? No. We'll see how I am doing this week. But is Grace doing well? Yes! Are we missing the pastor, hardly. Worship has been excellent, the newest committee is hitting the ball out of the park – the Parish Life Committee, and I truly look forward to a return so that I can catch up with all that is going on.

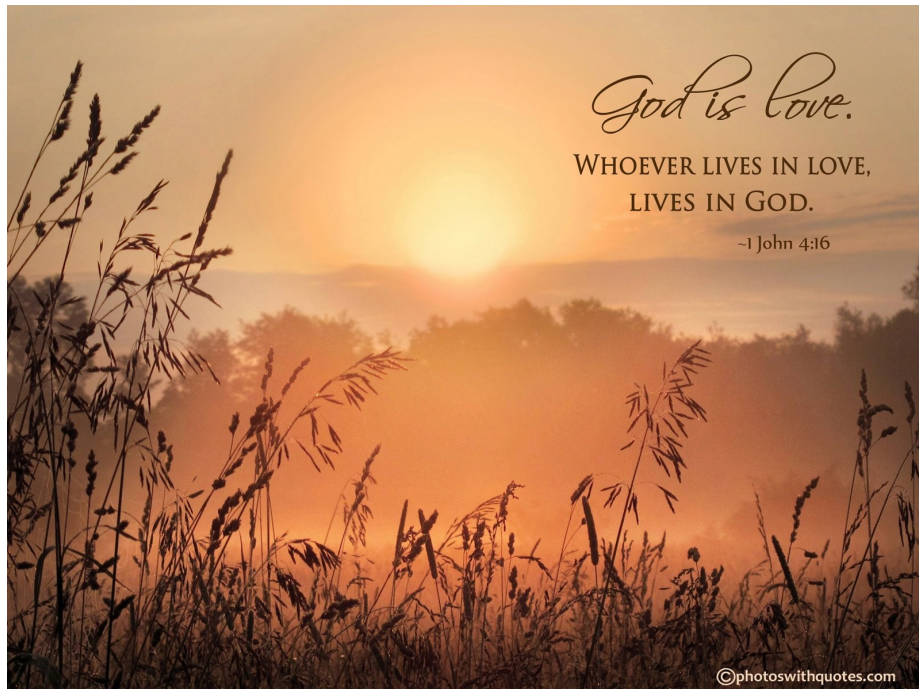
Friday Gathering is serving, our relationship with other churches and organizations are strengthening, Dorothea has been a fantastic pastor, with Betsy, and Barbara Ruhe chipping in. Gladys is finally out of the hospital and getting well and Lee is back home. Paul and Felicite returned from Cameroon, I'm not sure it's OK to say this but Sue will be doing the circuit with her published book about the lives of forty people from the Friday Gathering which should be out in June. We held a successful annual meeting with commitments of a number of people to attend the upcoming Synod Assembly. And, Fresh Start has started the year off well.

This is a time for healing, for hope and for coming together. Grace is doing that, our relationship with FoodShare has taken off, and we have new relationships that we will talk about as our working together is fully defined.

Let's all of us vote, and let's all of us support those who would embrace everyone, not just a few. We are all about embracing and showing love to all; After all, that is what Grace is all about.

Blessings+,

Pastor Rick



RUSSIA'S 2024 ELECTION INTERFERENCE HAS AREADY BEGUN

Dan De Luce and Kevin Collier

Mon, February 26, 2024



Russia is already spreading disinformation in advance of the 2024 election, using fake online accounts and bots to damage President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats, according to former U.S. officials and cyber experts.

The dissemination of attacks on Biden is part of a continuing effort by Moscow to undercut American military aid to Ukraine and U.S. support for and solidarity with NATO, experts said.

A similar effort is underway in Europe. France, Germany and Poland said this month that Russia has launched a barrage of propaganda to try to influence European parliamentary elections in June.

With Donald Trump opposing U.S. aid to Ukraine and claiming that he once warned a NATO leader that he would "encourage" Russia to attack a NATO ally if it didn't pay its share in defense spending, the potential rewards for Russian President Vladimir Putin are high, according to Bret Schafer, a senior fellow at the Alliance for Securing Democracy of the German Marshall Fund.

"Not that they didn't have an incentive to interfere in the last two presidential elections," said Schafer, who tracks disinformation efforts by Russia and other regimes. "But I would say that the incentive to interfere is heightened right now."

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said Sunday on NBC News' "Meet the Press" that there's "plenty of reason to be concerned" about Russia's trying to interfere in the 2024 election but that he couldn't discuss evidence related to it. He added: "We're going to be vigilant about that."

U.S. officials and experts are most concerned that Russia could try to interfere in the election through a "deepfake" audio or video using artificial intelligence tools or through a "hack and leak," such as the politically damaging theft of internal Democratic Party emails by Russian military intelligence operatives in 2016.

The type of pro-Russia online propaganda campaigns that thrived on Twitter and Facebook ahead of the 2016 U.S. presidential election is now routine on every major social media platform, though it's rare for individual accounts to go as viral now as they once did.

Those influence operations often create matching accounts on multiple sites, which vary drastically in their moderation policies. Accounts from one pro-Russia campaign that Meta, the owner of Facebook, cracked down on late last year, an English-language news influencer persona called "People Say," are still live on other platforms, though some are dormant.

US-NEWS-SC-PRIMARY-CROSSOVER-VOTERS-1-MB (Jason Lee / The Sun News/Tribune News Service via Getty Images)

A "People Say" account on X is still visible, but it has only 51 followers and hasn't posted in almost a year. Its counterpart on Telegram, which has become a home for some Americans on the far right, is still actively posting divisive content and has almost 5,000 subscribers.



#FAITH4ERA: BLACK WOMEN ARE LEADING THE MOVEMENT FOR EQUALITY



As we observe Black History Month this February and prepare for Women's History Month in March, I am reminded of the indelible impact that Black women of faith have made on the movement for equality.



From educator Mary McLeod Bethune to womanist theologian Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall and many more, our history is full of Black women who have prophetically channeled their faith into combatting the evils of racial oppression and patriarchy.

As Hall powerfully said:

"God intends us to be free, and assists us, and empowers us in the struggle for freedom."



These legacies of faithful action live on in many contemporary Black leaders who are continuing to press for change. Representatives Ayanna Pressley and Cori Bush, who chair the new Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) Caucus in Congress, are two fierce advocates whom I am continuously inspired by.

Rep. Pressley, Rep. Bush, Nevada State Senator Pat Spearman, and other women of color have been driving the modern movement for constitutional equality. The ERA is especially needed among the communities they represent, as women of color suffer more intense wage discrimination, greater risk of maternal mortality, and other injustices which the ERA will address.

As members of the #Faith4ERA movement, I invite you to join me in learning more about Black female leaders past and present, to listen deeply to their stories and perspectives, and to follow their example by helping create a better society for all.

Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray was another trailblazer who fought to realize the dream of greater justice and true equality. A lawyer, intersectional activist, Episcopal priest, and poet, Murray contributed in critical ways to the struggle for the ERA as well as the civil rights and women's movements.



In recognition of Murray's enduring legacy, the U.S. Mint has put her on a quarter as part of the American Women Quarters Program.

For those in the DC area, an event was held on 2/22 celebrating the release of the quarter and Murray's remarkable life and contributions. Among the event speakers was our friend Christian Nunes, President of the National Organization for Women (NOW), who continues Murray's legacy today through her tireless advocacy.

#FAITH4ERA: BLACK WOMEN ARE LEADING THE MOVEMENT FOR EQUALITY

(continued from page 5)

A definitive step to enshrine the ERA in the U.S. Constitution is for the U.S. Archivist to certify and publish it as the 28th Amendment.

President Biden has shown support for the ERA and sex equality and can build on his legacy by sending guidance to the U.S. Archivist to publish the ERA without delay. Encourage him to take this critical step today!

H.J. Res. 25 is an important bill that affirms the validity of the ERA as the 28th Amendment and removes the arbitrary time limit on its ratification. Rep. Pressley is leading a discharge petition to bring the resolution to the House floor for a vote, and only 12 more signatures are needed!

Urge your Representative to side with equality by adding their name today.

Our diverse faith traditions remind us that every individual is sacred and deserving of equal rights and protections. When we work together and follow the powerful examples of advocates past and present, we can make the dream of justice a reality.

In hope,



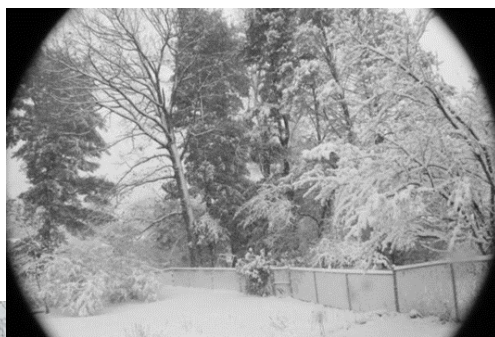
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**Yes, Spring is Really
on the Way!**

Pictures courtesy of
Dale Eberhardt



BLACK HISTORY YEAR



POPE'S MESSAGE



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024

"Jesus, who goes towards wounded humanity, shows us the face of the Father. It may be that within us there is still the idea of a distant, cold God, who is indifferent to our fate. On the contrary, the Gospel shows us that, after teaching in the synagogue, Jesus goes out, so that the Word he has preached may reach, touch and heal people. By doing this, he reveals to us that God is not a detached master who speaks to us from on high. On the contrary, he is a Father filled with love who makes himself close to us, who visits our homes, who wants to save and liberate, heal from every ill of the body and spirit. God is always close to us. God's attitude can be expressed in three words: closeness, compassion and tenderness. God makes himself close to accompany us tenderly, and to forgive us. Do not forget this: closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is God's attitude."

Pope Francis



Grace will be co-hosting GHIAA house meetings this year with our neighbor Trinity Episcopal at 120 Sigourney St, Hartford, CT 06105

Members of Grace, whether members of the core group or not, are encouraged to attend. These house meetings are part of a process that leads to public campaign issues such as the ones that we have been addressing for many years. Now, the house meetings will be held at Trinity Episcopal Church 2:00-4:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 10th.

At the house meeting we will be arranged in small groups and have the opportunity to talk about stories and concerns that have impacted our lives or the lives of family members and others we are engaged with. These concerns will be of the type that can be acted on locally. This may be a story about issues you've had in dealing with the health care industry, with local pollution, with housing, gun violence or other things of this nature. You may invite friends or people that you know have been impacted by such concerns.

Careful notes will be taken about these stories and concerns and then sent to a committee of persons that will sort them out and determine public campaign issues that we, as GHIAA members and institutions, will work on in the coming year. Most of you are aware of how successful most of these campaigns have been in intervening on public justice issues.

Co-hosting gives us an opportunity to develop relationships with other people and congregations beyond Grace.

GHIAA will be using a registration process this year. Registering can be done directly by using this path:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdXjHQdBndRcl2oC2l8lw4Fvpy2wdG-ctgDm8h1Wb49meUcHA/viewform>

or you can simply talk to Darrell Urban at 860-416-3818 and he will get you registered.

Darrell Urban
860-416-3818

*We will speak.
We will listen.
The stories we share here will lead us
toward public action for justice.*

SOME NEW BEATITUDES

A Beatitude Benediction by Nadia Bolz-Weber



"Blessed are the agnostics.

Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer.

Blessed are the preschoolers who cut in line at communion.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean.

Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."

Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the forgotten.

Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

SOME NEW BEATITUDES

(continued from page 9)

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms.

Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation.

Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are foster kids and special-ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.

Blessed are the kindhearted football players and the fundraising trophy wives.

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.

Blessed are they who hear that they are forgiven.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it."

I imagine Jesus standing here blessing us all because I believe that is our Lord's nature. Because, after all, it was Jesus who had all the powers of the universe at his disposal but did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited. Instead, he came to us in the most vulnerable of ways, as a powerless, flesh-and-blood newborn. As if to say, "You may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability." This Jesus whom we follow cried at the tomb of his friend and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. Because he **was** God's Beatitude—God's blessing to the weak in a world that admires only the strong. God bless you.

-Nadia Bolz-Weber

Nadia Bolz-Weber is an American author, Lutheran minister and public theologian. She served as the founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Denver, Colorado, until July 8, 2018.



A perfect storm

Moscow and its proxies have long sought to exploit divisions in American society. But experts and former U.S. officials said Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen, the country's deepening political polarization and sharp cuts in disinformation and election integrity teams at X and other platforms provide fertile ground to spread confusion, division and chaos.

"In many ways it's a perfect storm of opportunity for them," said Paul Kolbe, who worked for 25 years in the CIA's Directorate of Operations and is now a fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. "I think, for a lot of reasons, we will see the same approach, but amplified and, I think, with some of the constraints that you might have seen taken off."

In the 2022 midterm elections, Russia primarily targeted the Democratic Party to weaken U.S. support for Ukraine, as it most likely blames Biden for forging a unified Western alliance backing Kyiv, according to a recently released U.S. intelligence assessment.

In what appears to be an effort to deepen divisions, Russia has amplified the political dispute between the Biden administration and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott over security at the Texas border over the past month. Russian politicians, bloggers, state media and bots have promoted the idea that America is headed to a new "civil war."

It was a quintessential move by a Russian regime with a long tradition of trying to manipulate existing political rifts, like immigration, to its advantage, experts said.

But there's so far no sign that Russia's disinformation operation in Texas has had any significant impact, said Emerson Brooking, a senior fellow at the Digital Forensic Research Lab at the Atlantic Council.

"So far, Russian operations targeting the U.S. have been opportunistic. They see whatever narrative is rising to the top, and they try to push it," Brooking said. "Disinformation isn't created in a vacuum. The more polarized a country is, the easier it is for foreign actors to infiltrate and hijack its political processes."

The artificial intelligence threat

The bigger Russian threat to the 2024 election, Brooking and other experts said, could prove to be artificial intelligence-created fake audio.

An orchestrated deepfake or leak may not unfold on the national stage; instead, it could target a particularly crucial swing state or district, experts said. It might aim to discourage some voters from going to the polls or sow distrust about the accuracy of ballot counting.

The most likely disinformation scenario will be "hyper-personalized, localized attacks," said Miles Taylor, a senior Trump administration homeland security official who has warned of the risks of another Trump presidency.

Deepfake audio, which is easy to create and difficult to detect, has been used in recent elections in multiple countries. In the U.S. last month, a fake Joe Biden robocall told New Hampshire Democrats not to vote in the state's primary. In the United Kingdom in November, a fake audio of London Mayor Sadiq Khan called for pro-Palestinian marches.

And two days before Slovakia's parliamentary elections in September, a fake audio clip purported to show the leader of a pro-Western political party discussing how to rig the election. The audio was eventually debunked, and it's unclear what effect it had on the election. But a pro-Russia party opposing aid to Ukraine won the most votes.

TELL PRESIDENT BIDEN WE NEED A CEASEFIRE NOW MORE THAN EVER

WIN WITHOUT WAR

The Israeli government continues to threaten an all-out offensive on Rafah, the last “safe” zone from the incessant bombardment and fighting in Gaza.

The latest reports indicate that such an assault could happen by Ramadan. That’s less than 20 days from now.

Approximately 1.5 million people are sheltering in Rafah, the vast majority of them displaced by the Israeli military’s bombs in northern and central Gaza. They are scared, starving, and desperate.

This assault would be catastrophic.

As one of its strongest allies, the U.S. is likely the only government in the world able to sway the Israeli government away from this disastrous plan — and that’s why we can’t let up our pressure on the Biden administration for one second.



[The whole world is watching. The Biden administration must act now.](#)

With more than one million people in Rafah at incredible risk, we need a second ceasefire now.

Don’t forget: For seven critical days last November, a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza worked. Lives were saved. 110 hostages taken by Hamas were reunited with their families, and more than 300 Palestinian women and children were released from illegal detention by the Israeli government. Hundreds of aid trucks carrying vital necessities — food, water, medical supplies, fuel, and more — made it into Gaza. Violence across the region decreased, and attacks on U.S. troops in the region ceased.

If it happened before, it can happen again. The good news? Just like we saw in October, our petitions, protests, and phone calls demanding a ceasefire are making an incredible impact.

We’re seeing welcome, crucial changes: The White House has *finally* said the word “ceasefire”. *Reuters* reports that President Biden has recently and repeatedly pushed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to ensure the safety of civilians.

But this rhetoric won’t become reality unless folks like you push to make sure it happens. Right now, lives are on the line, and with the clock ticking, every second counts.

When a whole movement of people fed up with a failed military-first status quo speaks out, decision-makers understand that it’s time to choose a different path. President Biden needs to hear from activists who oppose war and demand peace today.

Thank you for working for peace,
The Win Without War team

THE REV. DR. WILLIAM J. BARBER II COMES TO HARTFORD

An Afternoon of *CHALLENGE* and *HOPE*

with

Renowned Civil Rights Leader
The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II



Sunday, May 5th, 3 pm



10 Woodland Street, Hartford (corner of Woodland St. and Farmington Ave.)

A freewill offering will be collected.

The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II is President and Senior Lecturer of Repairers of the Breach; Co-Chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call For Moral Revival; and most recently, a Professor in the Practice of Public Theology and Public Policy and Founding Director of the Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale Divinity School.

Parking available next door at the Town & County Club and across Woodland Street at the Hartford Medical Building.



I need a theology that can contend with both racial hatred and racial capitalism.

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2024

TO CROSS THE border into Lesotho — a landlocked, mountainous country surrounded entirely by South Africa — my friends and I rented a 4x4 and drove up the icy Sani Pass. We switchbacked up one of the most dangerous roads in the world and almost skidded off the cliff.

Slightly shaken but unscathed, we experienced time stretching as we drove through the pastoral city of Mokhotlong, dotted with thatch-roofed mud-and-stone huts. Herds of sheep, in no hurry to make way, blocked the dirt road.

We walked along the deserted street, admiring handicrafts at a rug shop before popping into a grocery store. I was surprised when a Chinese couple greeted us from behind the counter with a warm, “*Ni hao.*” As my friends and I spoke with them in rudimentary Mandarin (four of us were Chinese American, the fifth was white American), I learned that they had been living in Mokhotlong for many years, raising a family while running the store. We shared a laugh about the unlikelihood of Chinese people finding one another in these hinterlands and, after buying a couple of sodas, went on our way.

Down the road, we discovered another grocery store, staffed by a Chinese couple from a different province in China. What a wild fluke, I thought, that such an isolated town would have two Chinese-owned markets! I soon learned that it wasn’t a fluke at all — Chinese people are present in virtually every nation in Africa, whether as contracted laborers or as informal migrants. Since July 2008, when I visited Lesotho while living in South Africa for two months, the Chinese population in Africa has increased to more than 1 million, including large populations in South Africa, Madagascar, and Zambia but also scattered throughout smaller communities in South Sudan, Togo, and Senegal.

The awe of meeting Chinese people in rural Africa prompted me to examine my family’s migration story and my sense of otherness in the U.S. My parents left Hong Kong to come to the U.S. for college, planting roots here for the freedom and opportunities that didn’t exist back home. Shortly before I was born, they became Christians through a Chinese immigrant

SEARCHING FOR A FAITHFUL RESPONSE TO MY 'PRIVILEGED OTHERNESS'

(continued from page 14)

church in the Bay Area. When I was 3 years old, we resettled near the University of Iowa, where my dad worked as a cardiologist.

Bathed in a white-dominant environment both at school and at church, I subconsciously believed that my differences made me inferior and that white male theologians were the arbiters of true Christianity.

While my parents were members of a small but vibrant Chinese church, by junior high I started attending a large, white, evangelical church where I could fully understand the English language worship service and have peers my age. Bathed in a white-dominant environment both at school and at church, I subconsciously believed that my differences made me inferior and that white male theologians were the arbiters of true Christianity — after all, they were the only people preaching or quoted from the pulpit. This led me to “the misguided belief,” as Grace Ji-Sun Kim writes, “that white knowledge, theology, and spirituality were far greater than anything we had ever possessed.”

As I started wrestling with doubts during and after college, I languished in self-recrimination. I didn't have the language or assertiveness to critique the overconfident dogmatism or the white normativity of the American evangelical church. If I didn't fit the mold, I must be the problem. I never fully belonged in Iowa, despite chameleon-level assimilation, or in the church, which I considered my second home.

I was searching for purpose amid my privileged otherness. A career in medicine seemed one way to alleviate suffering and be useful in underserved settings — which is how I ended up on a medical student research fellowship in a South African hospital filled with patients dying from drug-resistant tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. I was struck by the absence of barriers between faith, work, and activism, such as when dissidents at an academic conference on tuberculosis held protest signs against government health policies, or when hospital nurses opened each day with a morning hymn. And although I only spent one weekend in Lesotho, the encounters with the Chinese shopkeepers stayed with me as well.

After returning to the United States, I'd occasionally relay the story of the Mokhotlong grocers. Initially, reactions were a mix of surprise and delight: “Wow, Chinese people are everywhere!” my companions of various ethnicities would exclaim, smiling in awe. As years passed, though, there arose a harder edge to the comments about the Chinese diaspora, especially from certain white Americans, a tone of resentment and suspicion peppering the words: “Chinese people are everywhere.” How could we be everywhere yet still struggle to belong?



Kristin T. Lee is a primary care physician who writes at the intersection of faith, identity, and solidarity on Substack at The Embers. She reviews books on Instagram @ktlee.writes.



Wonderings around Dogma and Doctrine in a Post-Secular World

Critiquing or discounting creeds and dogmas is fashionable of late. But today, I will make a case for their value in the spirit that we all seek a mature spiritual life.

First, a little history.

Two thousand years ago, the ancient Near East, from Greece to India, down through Egypt, experienced a plethora of philosophies, religious movements, and cults of all kinds of imaginative thinking. On the one hand, it was a fertile engagement of human consciousness but also utter chaos. When the early followers of Jesus of Nazareth began forming communities, they saw the movement as a reforming of Judaism. This is why they started in synagogues, but this shifted with Paul's missionary travels to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean world. As the decades evolved, a whole variety of Christianities (is that a word?) emerged. Some had varied beliefs and teachings, and in some cases, the ideas were 180 degrees in opposition to one another.

As the early Christian faith was taking shape, it became necessary to clarify the teachings of this new faith. This led to the establishment of various statements of teachings, which became creeds and doctrines over time. (I've been reading a helpful overview by Robert Louis Wilken, [*The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*](#) if you are interested) In brief, these creeds, such as the Apostles, Nicene, and [*Athanasian*](#) Creeds, became the cornerstones of the early church. Looking back on this process from today's vantage point, one might offer critiques, noting who was favored and what ideas became dominant. But that's for another day. But today, it's quite common for even regular church attendees to question aspects of the creeds. 100% affirmation of the Creeds. Seems hard to come by. As I've pointed out previously, 21st-century people often say, "I'm Spiritual but not religious because I don't believe in those creeds and dogmas."



Confession

I'll confess to looking at some aspects of these creeds and thinking, "I'm not sure that makes any sense to me, or Nope, I don't buy that line, or Wait, can we pause the worship service because this part of this Creed doesn't make sense to me."

If you've read to this point and are still getting familiar with any of these Creeds, below are the

ARE THE CREEDS OF ANY VALUE?

(continued from page 16)

earliest and the shortest. It's called the [Apostle's Creed](#) and reads as follows:

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the
Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

**or, "he descended into hell,"*

If you are outside or inside the Christian faith, you might wonder about those questions I mentioned above. What do some of these phrases mean?



How can one embrace these creeds, confessions, and doctrines that come from another point in human history? Here are three movements, approaches, tools, or concepts that have helped me through my years of wrestling with creeds and doctrines.

Movement # 1

"A map is not the actual territory." In 1931, in New Orleans, Louisiana, mathematician Alfred Korzybski used this phrase to describe a particular problem.^[1] (Please don't ask me to explain the math. I'm just glad I filed my taxes successfully last weekend.) But the saying has become a helpful way of capturing our use of metaphor. In this case, we must remember that the Creeds, doctrines, and dogmas are maps, but they are not the thing itself. We are attempting to find language that gets us to view God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

But, we human beings tend to literalize language. Or, as DH Lawrence once said using the same metaphor, "The map appears to us more real than the land."^[2] In other words, we tend to make the Apostle's Creed to be God or a god.

But that is not the purpose of the Creed. *The map is not the territory.*

Movement # 2

Author and professor Ann Ulanov tackled this in a Psychology and Religion course at Union Theological Seminary when she described the creeds as a foundational aspect needing our response. That's not her precise language, but it's close. The idea is that we need something to respond to and wrestle with. The creeds serve that purpose. Without them, we are grasping in thin air. A common refrain I hear from parents of young children regarding their decision not to raise them in a particular faith centers around the sentence, "I'll let them make up their mind as they grow up." While I'm all for people finding their way in life, by providing nothing for the children to engage, you aren't helping them. People, especially children, need a place to put their feet down. Healthy ways to do this include providing flexibility and engagement and encouraging curiosity and wonder.

My point here is the creeds give us something to engage, even argue and fight with. When I taught confirmation to 7th and 8th graders, I often put up a poster of the Creed and said, "ok, find something in here that doesn't make sense to you." This led to some beautiful conversations.

These [yutes](#) learned that faith is not static but demands, even hopes, for a robust engagement. Let's wrestle with this stuff, people! Our lives will be richer.

Movement # 3

Lastly, I'd like to dissect the word 'believe.'

The Apostles and Nicene Creeds begin with I believe or We believe. When we read this word, we immediately jump to our default hyper-rationalist understanding of the word believe. It's an intellectual ascent or affirmation of what's written down. "To think that something is true, correct or real," as the Cambridge Dictionary says. But is that the original intent?

Diana Butler Bass did fine work on this subject in the book [Christianity After Religion](#). She traces the language origins of "belief" from the ancient Greek and Latin through the old Germanic and English languages. The various translations of the ancient words came down to us in the English-speaking world, with the word 'believe' understood as making an intellectual determination weighing evidence between multiple factors. Instead, Bass and other scholars help us revisit the intent of biblical literature and ancient creeds. The original language would translate those words more like 'belove' instead of 'believe.' When we 'belove' something or someone, it roots us in a relationship. More appropriate words for our time would substitute belief with trust, value, and love.



This shifts toward something more like a marriage vow. We say "I do" as a pledge of faithfulness and loving service to and with others.

A marriage vow stating, "I believe you exist in a spatial reality standing here in front of me" does not signify the couple's relationship. But, I cherish you, love you, and trust in you is the intent of the vows at a wedding.

This has been helpful for me as I approach the creeds and doctrines of the church. Go back and read the

Apostle's Creed and substitute out the word believe, and in its place, try out trust, cherish, love, and devote. It changes our engagement and moves us toward a relational, experiential dynamic that moves us toward the state and direction of our hearts, souls, and minds.

All three tools have helped me view the Creeds as something akin to poetry. This map of faith gives me a starting point for a conversational relationship with the world; with Life; indeed with God.

I've been hanging out with the Sonnets of Malcolm Guite of late. His book [Soundings the Seasons](#) is now my holy book of this season in life and Lent. Below is his Sonnet on the Holy Trinity, one of the central doctrines reflected in the church's Creeds. We could use his Sonnets instead of Creeds in our liturgy on Sunday. Guite would not endorse that suggestion, but it is a way to expand our relationship with the sacred.

[Trinity](#)

In the Beginning, not in time or space,
But in the quick before both space and time,
In Life, in love, in co-inherent Grace,
In three in one and one in three, in rhyme,
In music, in the whole creation story,
In His own image, His imagination,
The Triune Poet makes us for His glory,
And makes us each the other's inspiration.
He calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance,
To improvise a music of our own,
To sing the chord that calls us to the dance,
Three notes resounding from a single tone,
To sing the End in whom we all begin;
Our God beyond, beside us and within.



The Notebooks of James Hazelwood is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support my work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber.

^[1] Alfred Korzybski, American Mathematical Society December 28, 1931 <http://esgs.free.fr/uk/art/sands-sup3.pdf>

^[2] D.H. Lawrence, From 'Study of Thomas Hardy,' in Edward D. McDonald (ed.), *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence* (1936). Excerpted in *Selected Critical Writings* (1998),

While an emerging cottage industry claims that software can identify whether audio or video is authentic or a deepfake, such programs are often wrong.

The messages were overlaid with text falsely claiming that the celebrities were calling for those leaders to step down. Representatives for Wood and Presley said the celebrities recorded the videos thinking they were helping a fan with addiction. A representative for Tyson said the videos of him were fake.

Past Russian efforts

Alleged Russian information operations against Ukraine over the past two years open a window into some of the Kremlin's tactics.

A study published Wednesday by the Slovakian cybersecurity company ESET found that a pro-Russia campaign has been spamming Ukrainians with false and dispiriting emails about the war with claims of heating and food shortages.

In a coordinated effort near the start of Russia's invasion in 2022, cyberattacks temporarily knocked key Ukrainian websites offline, while residents received spam texts telling them that ATMs in the country were down.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in United States (Ukrainian Presidency / Anadolu via Getty Images)

Other apparent Russian efforts to sow division are much simpler.

Last year, celebrities who sell personalized videos on the website Cameo, including Priscilla Presley, Mike Tyson and Elijah Wood, were tricked into inadvertently recording messages that denigrated two major enemies of the Kremlin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Moldovan President Maia Sandu.

The messages were overlaid with text falsely claiming that the celebrities were calling for those leaders to step down. Representatives for Wood and Presley said the celebrities recorded the videos thinking they were helping a fan with addiction. A representative for Tyson said the videos of him were fake.

In the American mainstream

In the U.S., though, Russia's propaganda themes are now often echoed in comments from some Republican lawmakers and pro-Trump commentators, including the portrayal of Ukraine's government as deeply corrupt.

The adoption of Russian state rhetoric in America's political debate is a victory for Moscow, experts said. Putin's goal is to spread doubt and division among Americans.

"An equally nice outcome for them is just what we had last time, where a third of the country doesn't believe the vote," Schafer said. "Democracy is questioned; the system gets questioned. So they don't necessarily need to see their guy win to have it be a good outcome for them."

It remains extraordinarily difficult for a remote cyberattack to take over voting systems in the U.S. and change vote counts. The American intelligence assessment of the 2022 midterms found no indication that Russia had tried to hack into election systems or ballot counting that year.

But Kolbe, the former CIA directorate of operations official, said the Kremlin would most likely see trying to penetrate U.S. voting systems as a low-risk undertaking.

"I don't see any reason why they wouldn't," he said. "You'd be hard-pressed to find where they would see the risk part of the equation. It gets close to zero."

Such interference could come with plausible deniability. On the day of the 2022 midterm elections, the Mississippi secretary of state's website, which hosts the official polling place finder for voters in Mississippi, was knocked offline most of the day after pro-Kremlin hackers on Telegram called for supporters to join in a low-level cyberattack against it.

Still, U.S. officials and disinformation analysts say Russia's ability to manipulate voters shouldn't be overstated. When it comes to spreading disinformation and fueling distrust in election authorities and election results, the biggest threat comes from within America's fractured, polarized society, not from the outside.

"I am very skeptical, whether it's 2016 or 2024, that the United States political and media culture needs any push from Russia," said Gavin Wilde, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who specializes in Russia and information warfare.

"The Kremlin has every interest in seeing an American public, or American leadership, that's less inclined to support Ukraine, that's less inclined to punish Russia. Those incentives are certainly there," he said. "But we're already doing a pretty good job of that at home. I don't know how much of a nudge the Kremlin thinks it needs to lend it."

This article was originally published on NBCNews.com

SOLAR PANEL REPORT— January 2024



☀️ Produced

810.4 kWh

4% lower*

22 Jan :70.0 kWh

Maximum production day

🏠 Consumed

1.7 MWh

16% lower*

26 Jan :100.3 kWh

Maximum consumption day

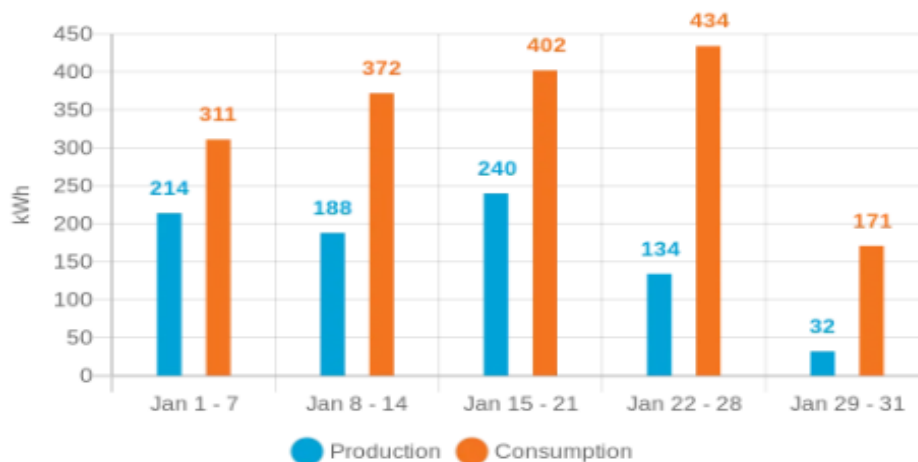
⚡ Grid energy

1.2 MWh

Imported

365.3 kWh

Exported



🌳 CO2 reduction

1,297 lb

Offset equivalent to 10

Trees

⚡ Grid
Dependence

74%

For this month, 74% of your energy consumption is supplied by the utility grid.

Get grid independence with Enphase

[Add Storage](#)

Year-to-date production

810 kWh

* As compared to last month's records

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MARCH 2024 BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES!



Happy Birthday!
May you all be blessed as you celebrate your special days!

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?
 Contact the office at 860-527-7792 or
 email office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com
 to update our records.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER!

March 10 - Daylight Savings starts - turn your clock ahead!
2 to 4 p.m. GHIAA House Meetings at Trinity
March 24 - Passion/Palm Sunday - 10 a.m. Worship
March 28 - Maundy Thursday - 7 p.m. Worship
March 29 - Good Friday - 7 p.m. Worship
March 31 - Easter Sunday - Breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and Worship at 10 a.m.



Grace Lutheran Church – Readers for March 2024

Note: If you are unable to read on your assigned Sunday, please switch with someone else.

Date	Reading #	Reading	Reader
3/3	1	Exodus 20: 1-17	Betsy DeRoma
	2	1 Corinthians 1: 18-25	Nina Kretschmer
	Psalm	Psalm 19	Unison
3/10	1	Numbers 21: 4-9	Barbara Calogero
	2	Ephesians 2: 1-10	David Eberly
	Psalm	Psalm 107: 1-3; 17-22	Alternating - men, then women
3/17	1	Jeremiah 31: 31-34	Marty Holmeen
	2	Hebrews 5: 5-10	Dale Eberhardt
	Psalm	Psalm 51: 1-12	Rodney Carr
3/24	1	Isaiah 50: 4-9a	Kasumi Campbell
	2	Philippians 2: 5-11	Lou Oliver
	Psalm	Psalm 31: 9-16	Judy Butterworth-Kremer
3/28 – Maundy Thursday	1	Exodus 12: 1-14	Betsy DeRoma
	2	1 Corinthians 11: 23-26	Judy Butterworth-Kremer
	Psalm	Psalm 116: 1-2; 12-19	Unison



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Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer

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Janice Potter, Financial Assistant

Dale Eberhardt, Organist

Emma Coleman-Carr, Altar Guild

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