

*You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:37b-40, NRSV)*

*How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it; and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:16-23, NRSV)*



## BEYOND WORDS

### The Courage of Authentic Ministry

Years ago, at the close of a New Testament class I taught, one student shared that when he first became a Christian, everything he believed about God and Jesus Christ seemed so clear. However, over the years, as he began to become more involved in study of the Bible, there seemed to be more questions than clear answers, more confusion than clarity about his Christian walk. Many in the class shared the same kinds of sentiments. This leads to very serious irony: that Bible study may lead us to ask more *challenging* questions than *resolute* answers; that when it comes to the conscious exercise of faith, embracing the Scripture may lead us to places of more uncertainty than certainty. Uncomfortable, for sure, but is the desire for certainty and the safe ground of doctrine such a good thing when it comes to ministry?

I would like to suggest that the true nature and purpose of the inspired Scripture is to cultivate a life of ministry that extends far beyond the boundaries of the written text. The power of inspired Scripture leads to uncharted places (and spaces) that allow us to hear the voice of God, to see the face of God so that we more effectively serve others. In this vein, inspiration is to be “in-Spirited” in ways that move us to think and act in ways that are authentic to our contemporary challenges of ministry. Anchored to the Scripture that testifies of God’s saving work in past generations, we are yet commissioned to continue

writing God’s Story in the Book of Life by venturing out to engage in our own contemporary ministry. Thus, stepping beyond the text empowers us to live actively, in a way that is both *careful* to pay attention to the witness and testimony of Jesus Christ in the past, but *carefree* to exercise Christ’s ministry to others whom God places in our path today. Such a life compels that we study the Scripture with the desire to understand Christ’s mission and ministry, and it also demands us to ask how the precepts of Jesus’ ministry—justice, mercy, compassion, humility, and forgiveness may be engaged as followers of Him. I characterize this kind of movement, where our tethering to and venturing out from the sacred text is both initiated and sustained by God’s Spirit, as “going beyond ink and paper”. Allow me to share a few thoughts.

#### *The Grace of Ink and Paper*

God has given us the sacred gift of the Bible, but we must remember that God (the Giver), is far above the grace of mere ink and paper. It is easy to forget that, unlike us, Abraham, Moses, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and many others throughout history, did not possess the conveniences of the Bible or sacred texts. Their hearts and minds were inspired by the voice of God. The Bible is God’s sacred gift that chronicles the testimony of faith, hope and trust of others who sought understanding,

meaning and significance in their relationship with God. Today, we continue to find inspiration through the sacred Scriptures contained in the Bible. God uses the written testimony of the Scripture to inspire us; but don't be mistaken: God is never *bound* by it (Isaiah 40:13).

*The Chains of Ink and Paper: Reading the Lines vs. Reading Between the Lines.*

Too many have been taught to think that the secret to the Christian life and effective ministry is found only in reading, memorizing, and quoting the Scriptures. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While there is intellectual value in reading and knowing the Scriptures and this may help in private devotion to God, the authentic Christian witness embraces them as conduits to greater participation in God's plan to serve others. Failure to understand this can lead to individualism, intellectual arrogance and scriptural pomposity. The Pharisees worshiped the vehicles (temple, altar, sacred items) that were used by God to reveal Godself to the nation of Israel. Their blindness led to a stagnant, brittle, and ultimately oppressive theocracy. The modern example of this is the stereotypic Bible-thumping individual who quotes the Scriptures verbatim, yet fails to love his neighbor.

*Life Beyond the Scripture: Where Word Becomes Flesh*

How can we help the Scripture come alive so that ministry occurs? The apostle Paul said it well: "*Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6, NRSV). Competent ministry entails the unique ability to bridge inspiration with authentic witness that imparts life through grace and truth; it is the transformative interplay of tangibles and intangibles for the sake of revealing God's love to others. That's good news! The life and ministry of Jesus illustrated an authentic obedience to Truth that was rooted in a compassionate response to the human condition. And that same (great) commission is placed before us today.

Many people awake each morning with the hope that God will visit them, that God will hear their cries for help, comfort their pain, relieve their anxious souls. People anticipate and desire that God be with them in their frailty. Competent ministers (this means all of us!) are prepared for the uncharted journey that is part and parcel of the human condition. To be in touch with the human condition of

joy, pain, fear, suffering, trial, triumph—is to be alive. This calls us away from being "scripted with Scriptures", to resist sounding like we just came off of an evangelistic assembly line, equipped with a Pavlovian proclamation of the gospel.

In many ways, being grounded in the Scripture allows us to catapult away from it, almost like taking a "bungee jump". We leap off the edges of the Scripture into a new world of unexpected encounters. By jumping, we extend far beyond the Scripture and yet remain connected to it. The voice of God in the Scripture secures and grounds us with truth as each of us extends into a world that awaits the arrival of God. Some of us will be called toward deeper and more challenging leaps into the unknown, where we will discover new modes and methods of ministry in an ever-changing world.

By venturing into the unknown realms of "the world" we will find and impart life to its inhabitants. All of this requires the discipline to listen to others with our head, heart, and ears. Patient listening abolishes the false security of being "scripted", and cultivates the desire to be *inscribed* by God. As walking epistles of God, we enact the weightier matters of *justice, mercy, and faith*, in and by the Spirit of Christ. Going beyond the ink and paper is God's RSVP to introduce the good news to those who yearn to hear from God.

*Conclusion*

Can we envision walking every minute, hour, day with God—looking and listening, watching and waiting for God's voice to call us to action? Abraham, the Prophets, Jesus, and many others lived in this way; they understood the value of sacred conduits and vehicles in the plan of God. The Pharisees became "blind guides" because they placed their hope in the knowledge of the Scriptures and not in the One who inspired its writing (John 5:39-40). Scripture can empower us to venture beyond our comfort zones and embark upon the greater mysteries of ministry. To be sure, faith entails not quite knowing where trust in God will lead us. There may be times of uncertainty and many questions about what awaits us. However, there should be no confusion that we must venture into uninhabited spaces of ministry—where people yearn for God. This is where the seeds of the Kingdom of God are scattered, take root and grow.

I'm excited about whom and what awaits us beyond the horizon. And the only way to get there is to jump.

***Rev. Eric Walters***



## SIGNS OF SPRING

### CHERRY BLOSSOM WATCH

The National Park Service predicts the peak bloom of the cherry trees as **March 17 - March 20**. To coincide with the prediction, the National Cherry Blossom Festival will begin on March 17 with the opening of the Tidal Basin Welcome Area and ANA Performance Stage. The Festival will continue with four full weeks of programming through April 15. Check out all of the Festival's events including the Pink Tie Party (March 15), Opening Ceremony (March 24), Blossom Kite Festival (March 31), Petalpalooza (April 7), National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade (April 14), and much more at [www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org/category/events/](http://www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org/category/events/)



### HOLY WEEK SERVICES

THURSDAY, MARCH 29 at MHBC, 7:30 PM  
*Maundy Thursday*  
*First Baptist Church joins Montgomery Hills Baptist for a combined service.*

FRIDAY, MARCH 30 at MHBC, 7:30 PM  
*Good Friday*  
*"Come to the Cross and Remember"*  
*A cantata presented by the choirs of First Baptist and Montgomery Hills*

SUNDAY, APRIL 1 at TPCC  
*Easter Sunday*  
*10:00 AM Sunday School*  
*11:00 AM Worship Service*

### Annual NCCF Benefit at Toby's

#### Sunday, May 6



Treat yourself to a fabulous dinner and show while supporting a great cause --the National Center for Children and Families' (NCCF) Greentree Adolescent Program. Toby's Dinner Theater in Columbia, MD presents the Disney musical "Newsies". Doors open at 5:00 PM; buffet is served from 5:00 PM-6:20 PM; show begins at 7:00 PM. Tickets include dinner, show and gratuity for \$58 (\$10.00 tax deductible). Make checks payable to the Board of Church Representatives, NCCF and give to Valeria Foster (301-754-1100) or Vernell DeWitty (301-879-0973).

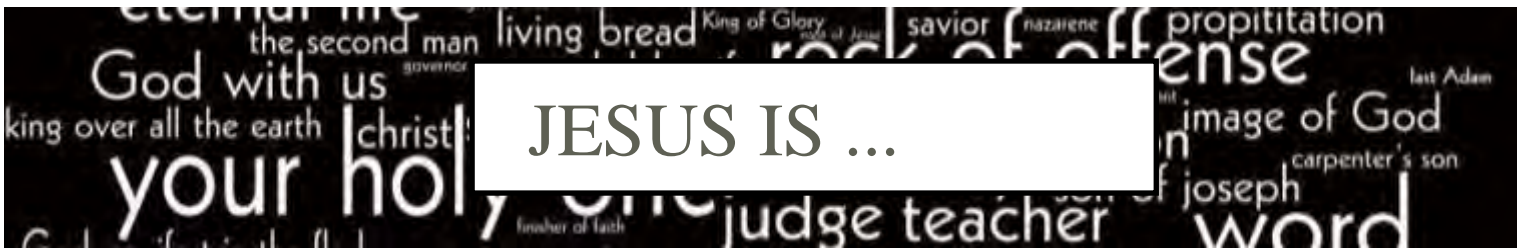
Hurry, the last day to reserve your space is Sunday, March 18.

# Ladies Brunch

SATURDAY, MAY 19  
11:00 A.M.

*Ladies, this event is planned especially for you.*  
*More details will be coming soon. SAVE THE DATE.*





The Bible is filled with many references to who Jesus is, His life, His Lordship, and what He came to do. Here's just some of those names, titles, and verses from God's Word. As you read through, you can't help but give Him thanks and praise, Our Savior and Lord who sets us free...

1. **Almighty One** – "...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Rev. 1:8
2. **Alpha and Omega** – "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Rev. 22:13
3. **Advocate** – "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." 1 John 2:1
4. **Author and Perfecter of Our Faith** – "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. 12:2
5. **Authority** – "Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" Matt. 28:18
6. **Bread of Life** – "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" John 6:35
7. **Beloved Son of God** – "And behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" Matt. 3:17
8. **Bridegroom** – "And Jesus said to them, 'Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" Matt. 9:15
9. **Chief Cornerstone** – "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone." Ps. 118:22
10. **Deliverer** – "And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." 1 Thess. 1:10
11. **Good Shepherd** - "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11
12. **Great High Priest** – "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." Heb. 4:14
13. **Head of the Church** – "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church." Eph. 1:22
14. **Holy Servant** – "...and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." Acts 4:29-30
15. **I Am** – "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" John 8:58
16. **Immanuel** – "...She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'" Is. 7:14
17. **Judge** – "...he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." Acts 10:42

18. **King of Kings** – "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." Rev. 17:14
19. **Lamb of God** – "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" John 1:29
20. **Light of the World** – "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12
21. **Lord of All** – "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:9-11
22. **Mediator** – "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2:5
23. **Messiah** – "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ)." John 1:41
24. **Mighty One** – "Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Is. 60:16
25. **Redeemer** – "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth." Job 19:25
26. **Risen Lord** – "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." 1 Cor. 15:3-4
27. **Rock** – "For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." 1 Cor. 10:4
28. **Savior** – "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11
29. **Son of Man** – "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:10
30. **Son of the Most High** – "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David." Luke 1:32
31. **Resurrection and the Life** – "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'" John 11:25
32. **The Way** – "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" John 14:6
33. **The Word** – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1
34. **True Vine** - "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." John 15:1
35. **Truth** – "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32
36. - 39. **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace** – "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Is. 9:6

**All this...and so much more. He alone is worthy.** *Debbie McDaniel, Author  
Crosswalk*

Come worship with us on Sundays at @ Takoma Park Community Center  
10:00 a.m. Adult Sunday School ■ 11:00 a.m. Worship Service ■ 11:30 a.m. Children's Bible Study