

# The Lamplighter

The United Church  
11 Gibson Street



Canandaigua, NY  
585-394-0503

Worship Service, 9:30 am, Memorial Day through Labor Day

July/August 2024

Rev. Dr. Wade Allen

- July 4 – Office Closed for holiday
- July 7 – Youth BBQ fundraiser
- July 7 – VBS Kickoff, 6:30 pm
- July 8-12 – Vacation Bible School, 9 am - noon
- Aug 9 – Fred Magley’s Memorial Service, 3 pm
- Aug 16-18 – Church Retreat weekend and worship service at Onanda Park
- Aug 23 – Day 1 Youth Mission Experience
- Aug 26 – Day 2 Youth Mission Experience
- Aug 28 – Day 3 Youth Mission Experience
- Aug 30 – Day 4 Youth Mission Experience



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## From Noah to Jacob

As we continue our study in the book of Genesis, the story becomes more specific during the months of July and August. We will move from the story of Noah to Jacob.

After the great flood, Noah's descendants repopulate the earth, leading to the Tower of Babel, where humanity's languages are confused and people are dispersed. God calls Abram to leave his homeland, promising him numerous descendants and a blessed nation, and changes his name to Abraham. Abraham and his wife Sarah eventually have a son, Isaac, through whom the covenant continues. Isaac's twin sons, Esau and Jacob, vie for their father's blessing, with Jacob ultimately receiving it through deception. Jacob's life is marked by divine encounters, struggles, and dreams, including his vision of a ladder reaching to heaven. He marries Leah and Rachel, and his twelve sons, including Joseph, become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is through this family that God will ultimately bring salvation to all nations. As we read the story, we do so through the lens of Jesus. Without this story, we cannot fully comprehend the depth and complexity of the Gospel.

I hope you will join us each week as we move through the story together. I have provided additional readings to supplement your reflection. These are the same readings we will use in worship each week..

*Wade*

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### Worship Schedule and Readings

#### July

- July 07 - Noah (Genesis 6:9-9:17)  
Additional Readings: Hebrews 11:6-10, 2 Peter 2:4-9
- July 14 - The Tower (Genesis 11:1-8)  
Additional Readings: Proverbs 3:5-12, Matthew 6:25-34
- July 21 - Going Not Knowing (Genesis 12:1-8)  
Additional Readings: Psalm 105:7-15, Galatians 3:6-14
- July 28 - A Faithful God (Genesis 21)  
Additional Readings: Romans 9:6-13, Psalm 113



#### August

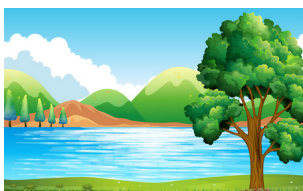
- August 04 - A Wife for Isaac (Genesis 24)  
Additional Readings: Psalm 32:1-8, Romans 8:26-28
- August 11 - Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27)  
Additional Readings: Psalm 52, James 3:13-18
- August 18 - Reaping What You Sow (Genesis 29)  
Additional Readings: Psalm 37:3-7, Colossians 3:23-24
- August 25 - Wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22-31)  
Additional Readings: Psalm 46, Romans 8:26-39



The QR code to the right will also take you to the streaming page

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### Retreat and Lakeside service



Watch the bulletins in the coming weeks for more details about our summer retreats and Sunday service at Onanda Park (August 16-18). We will encourage carpooling and have shuttle service from the upper parking lot (free) to the lakeside.

# Care Ministry

Christy Allen Director

## Happy Birthday to our Special Members:

**July 16 Helen Secret is turning 92!** Helen has been a cherished member of our Church family for 39 years! Over the years, Helen has made significant contributions to our Church family. She has served as a Steward, sang in the Choir alongside her late husband Don, and crafted numerous costumes for Sunday School children and adults. Additionally, Helen has been a dedicated prayer partner for the Youth and faithfully attends a women's Bible Study Group each week. She is also an active member of the Cheerful Service Circle and the Knitters Group. You truly inspire us, Helen!

**July 20 Jim Peck is turning 84!** Jim and his wife Ann have been valued members of our Church family for 10 years. They previously owned a large dairy farm in Newark, and Jim has extensive experience in agricultural consulting, with deep knowledge of crops, soil, and animal nutrition from his Degree at Cornell. He is truly a wealth of information! Jim faithfully watches the Sunday service every week and enjoys waving back at us! Hi Jim! Have a fantastic birthday!

**July 31 Larry Hood is turning 94!** He has been a part of our Church family for 16 years. He was married to his late wife, Marge for 69 years! They had a poodle that he bought for their 3 girls. They named her Coquette, which means flirt in French. I think this is so fun! He served in the Marine Corps during the Korean War. He was in the Presidential Guard for Harry Truman in Washington, DC! He was employed at Kodak for 26 years as a design engineer and has a patent for a blood analyzer! Wow! So many contributions. He is still contributing today by sharing his rich, bass voice in song for us in worship!

**August 29 Sandy Cleason is turning 88!** Sandy has been a part of our Church family for 41 years. She was married to her late husband, Jim, for 65 years. She grew up on a farm. She and Jim raised their family in Palmyra where they were active in their Church, especially with the youth group. She was an avid skier, enjoying family skiing vacations. She has always loved antiques, so when she and Jim moved to Canandaigua they opened an antique store. I bet it was great! What a treasure YOU are Sandy!

**July 8 Happy Anniversary to "Mac" and Ernestine McKenzie** Celebrating a remarkable 57 years of marriage! They are a delightful couple. Congratulations!


**Welcome to our NEW Special Member:  
Hiram Bailey**

**Tech Help** If you've never used the Church Center app, here's an easy way to find it and get set up! You can use this link: <https://uccdga.churchcenter.com/setup> or use this QR code to the right and follow the step by step instructions.



We are trying out doing sign ups for volunteer roles online this summer! If you would like to greet or take offering (those 2 jobs will now be split and you can do just one or the other if you prefer!), serve in the nursery or help with the camera/sound/livestream jobs, follow the link below or scan the QR code below. If those jobs don't show up as options for you but you'd like to be put on the teams, let a staff member know and we'll help you! We can also help if you have any difficulty with the app or computer stuff. <https://services.planningcenteronline.com/>



 Confused? Need help? Ask a staff member or look for tech help folks in the Welcome Center on Sundays.

Hugs and a huge **THANK YOU** to our church family who helped us to raise more than **\$5,000 for the Relay for Life, 2024!** It's a record for us. 😊 Our "United Against Cancer" team spent a beautiful day and evening walking along the lovely path next to Seneca Lake. The event began by recognizing all survivors. We had even more survivors to celebrate this year, which is such a blessing. What was especially meaningful was being able to set out early, our luminaries in honor and in memory, and enjoy them for hours before it got dark. A bonus because of the good weather. We truly are grateful for all your support for this special event. With sincere thanks, Sandi and Sue.



**Stampin' Up!** The next Stampin' Up class is scheduled for August 24th from 9 – 12 in the Fellowship Room. If you have any questions or are interested in signing up, contact Sharon Meyer.

**Fred Magley's Memorial Service** A memorial service for Rev. Fred Magley, who passed away on January 21, 2024 at the age of 99, will take place here on **Friday, August 9 at 3 pm**. His son-in-law, Rev. Jim Long, will officiate the service. Please join us to celebrate the life of our much beloved Pastor Emeritus, who served as pastor of the United Church from 1966-1989, and remained a friend and active member of the congregation in all the years since. A reception will follow the service in the church dining room.



## Treasurer's Report for May

### Treasurer's Financial Summary for May 2024

Description	Jan-May 2024 Actual	Jan-May 2024 Budget
<b>Income</b>		
Total Giving	203,542.42	198,679.48
Other Income	12,420.61	5,611.01
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>215,963.03</b>	<b>204,290.49</b>
<b>Spending</b>		
Education and Ministry	16,277.21	17,095.83
Operating	45,319.81	31,319.45
Personnel & Related	152,255.79	155,875.21
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>213,852.81</b>	<b>204,290.49</b>
<b>Net Income Year to Date</b>	<b>2,110.22</b>	<b>0.00</b>

From January through May, we have taken in \$2,110.22 more than we have spent. Please be sure to keep your giving up to date through the summer months!

Nancy Lamberson  
Treasurer



**Worshiping**  
**Growing**  
**Reaching**  
**Caring**

**Thank you** to everyone who donated items, purchased items, and worked on the Missions Team **silent auction** to help make it a success. We made over **\$2,500** for our trip fund to help our church members go on mission trips. Watch the bulletin for our grand total numbers in the next few weeks.

**Relationship.** God created us and calls into a close relationship with Him.

**Partnership.** In Genesis 2 we learn God created a companion, a partner, for Adam’s joy and success. Together we grow and serve God. We grow, reach, successfully care, and worship in partnership.

**74 YEARS** The number of years Baptist and Presbyterians have been in a defined Canandaigua partnership!

**Rev. Ryan White**, a father and husband in the missionary family we support, stressed partnership when he was with us May 20-22. Alethia and Ryan collaborate with and support PC(USA)’s regional partnerships in the following countries: United Kingdom (England, Wales, and Scotland), the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary with support to some southern European partners (Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Greece). “The Matthew 25 foci and intersecting priorities help guide our conversations with partners discovering together opportunities for collaboration.”

Particular themes of importance for the partners are congregational vitality and the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade in a post-Christendom western Europe context.

**190 Blankets!** In partnership with one another, \$1902 was contributed in May to provide blankets. Church World Service, working with partner agencies, will forward blankets that show God cares and we care.

**Our Silent Auction:** Boat rides, art work, purses, fabric creations, teddy bears, and more (more than 150 items) earned more than \$2500 for our mission trip fund! **Thanks** to each donor and thanks to each buyer. Our short-term mission trips have been in partnership with Presbyterian missions, American Baptist missionaries, and Group Mission Trips.

**Pray** for the counselors and staff at NTS Camp, Miracle Mountain Ranch, LeTourneau Christian Center, and Beaver Camp as they help children grow in **KNOWING, LOVING, AND FOLLOWING JESUS**. Our mission budget, in partnership with families, provides campership assistance. We commissioned the following young adults to work at Beaver Camp this summer: Natalie Cunningham, Summer Cunningham, Grace Payne, and Jen Petracchi.

**Canandaigua Connection:** We partner with multiple Canandaigua agencies when our beliefs and goals are aligned. Food collected in the Welcome Center each week is shared with CCIA and Canandaigua Salvation Army food pantries. Recently, we received this letter:



110 SALTONSTALL STREET - P.O. BOX 510  
 CANANDAIGUA, NY 14424  
 TELEPHONE (585) 394-6968



May 21, 2024

**“We have received the most absolute gracious and thoughtful donation from The United Church, and we can't thank you all enough!**

All of us here at the Canandaigua Salvation Army would like to give our most heartwarming appreciation to you and this amazing organization for not only this donation of \$1000.00 toward our Phoenix Program **but also for your continual support and relationship with us!**

“Contributions such as yours allow children to continue to be able to have a safe, fun and Educational experience everyday afterschool and for having a hand in this, we thank you!

May God bless!  
 Sincerely,  
 Major David Rhodes”

**PRAISE TO GOD. LET US GIVE THANKS AS WE PARTNER WITH OUR MISSIONARIES, WITH OUR CANANDAIGUA COMMUNITY, AND AS WE WELCOME OTHERS INTO OUR FELLOWSHIP.**

**AS PARTNERS WE WORSHIP AND SERVE A LOVING GOD.**

# CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY MINISTRY

## What's happening...

We continue to have our **nursery open all summer long**. Please consider **volunteering in the nursery**, as this gives parents of the youngest in our church family a time to truly **connect with God**. You can sign up to help on the bulletin board outside the nursery or in the new Services app we are using. We need 2 nursery volunteers every Sunday through September 1. If you have questions about serving in the nursery, please contact Louise Van Iseghem.

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Please keep our **campers** in prayer as they head to Christian camp this summer. We **pray their hearts will be open** to all God has for them while they are at camp.

### Beaver Camp

Elise Cunningham, July 7-12 (Bears)

Eva Clark, July 21-26 (Beavers)

Lily Munson, July 21-26 (Bears)

Amelia Cunningham, August 4-9 (Teen Camp)

Anna Zajac, August 4-9 (Teen Camp)

The following young adults are working at Beaver Camp this summer: Natalie Cunningham, Summer Cunningham, Grace Payne, and Jen Petracchi

### LeTourneau Christian Center

Violet Thorman, June 30-July 5 (Baking Champions)

Jesse Cheney, July 15-19 (Wood Working)

Joy Cheney, July 15-19 (Wood Working)

Isabella Harris-Chwiecko, July 15-19 (Arts and Crafts Camp)

Jackson Callard, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Juliana Callard, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Billy Clark, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest, day camp)

Aria Hildebrandt, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Mason Hildebrandt, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Liam Hildebrandt, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Josiah Seeber, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Elijah Seeber, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

Kailynn Stewart, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest Overnight Camp)

David Quimby, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest, day camp)

Sam Quimby, July 22-26 (Adventure Quest, day camp)

Graham Beyrle, Aug 12-15 (Wacky Water 2)

Carter Slomski, Aug 12-15 (Lego Builders)

### Miracle Mountain Ranch

Hannah Aldrich, June 30-July 5 (Wild West Camp)

Adele Marshall, June 30-July 5 (Wild West Camp)

Paige Munson, June 30-July 5 (Wild West Camp)

Sophie Munson, June 30-July 5 (Wild West Camp)

### NTS Camp at Houghton College

Walter Marshall, July 7-11

# CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY MINISTRY

## What's happening (cont'd)...

Attention crew leaders, crew helpers, station leaders, and station helpers. Please mark your calendar for **Scuba VBS training**. Choose **one** of the following *mandatory* trainings to attend:

June 25 at 10am

June 27 at 1pm

July 2 at 7pm

This year for **Operation Kid to Kid**, our VBS mission project, we will be collecting donations for **Living Waters for the World**, an agency the United Church is connected with that helps to provide clean water to people all around the world. **Every donation** provides funds that will be used to provide clean water to a **rural community in Mexico**.

## What's coming up....

On Sunday, August 4, the **Back to School Angel Tree** will be up and loaded with school supply tags for students in our community who need a boost getting ready for school as well as donations for The Spot. Please choose a tag and **return the items with the tag attached to church by Sunday, August 18**. Supplies are needed by this date to give us time to sort and get to the families the week before Labor Day. Last year we were able to help 8 students and we collected many donations for The Spot! **Thanks in advance for your generosity**. Questions? See Deb Marshall. P.S. ***If your children need school supply assistance, please contact Deb.***

## Mark your calendars...

**July 7** – VBS kick-off at 6:30pm

**July 8-12** – VBS, 9am-12noon

**August 16-17** – Youth, Young Adult, and Adult retreats at Onanda Park

**August 18** - Sunday Worship service at Onanda Park

**September 1** – one Sunday service, 9:30am

**September 8** – Return to two services, 8:45am and 11:00am

SS kick-off breakfast for all ages in downstairs dining room at 9:45

**September 15** – Sunday school begins for all ages

Bibles given to children during 11:00 Worship

The Cause begins (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)

**October 2** - First day of Youth Club

*Questions? Contact Deb Marshall, Family Ministry Coordinator, deb.marshall@uccdga.org, 585-394-0503*

# CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY MINISTRY

## Personal reflection...

I have a confession to make. I am not very good at resting. In fact, if you ask my husband or my kids if I rest (other than sleeping), they might say “not really,” or “I don’t think so.” One thing that I’ve learned as I’ve worked in ministry and as I have become older is that I need rest. I’m not talking about sleep at night. I typically get a good amount of sleep. I’m also not talking about a nap because I’m definitely not a napper, and I don’t plan to become one. I’m talking about the gift of rest that God gives us. Pastor Wade preached about rest on June 2, in case you missed it. This sermon was so pertinent to me that Ryan leaned over and whispered in my ear, “I think this message was meant for you.”

Let me explain a bit about why I don’t rest well. First, I am a perfectionist. So, when I do something, I like to make sure it is done well and done correctly. For example, I rearrange the dishwasher because there is a perfect way to load it, and my family doesn’t seem to do it quite right. I admit this is not a healthy characteristic. I have learned to let some things go. God blessed me with three children for many reasons, but one of them is very clear - to completely and totally disrupt my perfectionism! So, over the years, I have let some things go. My house does not stay as clean as I would like. My kids shove their laundry in their drawers instead of folding it, resulting in most outfits they wear being a wrinkly mess. I have learned other things, too, and my perfectionism has been challenged again and again.

The other reason I have trouble resting is because I LOVE making to do lists and checking them off. It gives me so much pleasure, in fact, that sometimes I write down a task right after I did it - just so that I can cross it off the list! (Crazy, I know). Not only do I have ‘to do’ lists written down digitally on my phone and on paper, but I also have ‘to do’ lists in my head. They sound something like this, “When I have time, I will...” Or, “when I’m done with this, I need to...” So, with these lists constantly bombarding my thoughts, I find it really challenging to sit down and just relax. I’d much rather keep crossing off my list.

God is working and moving in my life and showing me the benefit of rest. I’ve also been able to show myself what happens when I ignore my need to rest. It’s not pretty. God modeled rest for us because He loves us. He designed us to need a ‘work - rest - work - rest’ pattern in our life. When I take time to rest on a weekly basis, God shows me how valuable the rest is. After I rest, I have new energy to tackle my never ending to do lists. And, you know what? During the time I rested, nothing went wrong; nothing horrible happened because I didn’t answer a text, email, or phone call. I got the rest I needed and the world kept turning without me.

I think what is difficult for everyone about resting is that it is counter cultural. Our world, our culture glorifies being busy. How do I know this? Well, many times when I ask someone, ‘how are you?’ the answer I get includes something like, ‘I’m so busy!’ What really breaks my heart is how many parents are teaching their children that they must be busy. Parents often seem to enroll their children in an activity and when that is done, they choose the next one. No rest in between. In fact, often activities overlap. And, typically, children are not just active in one activity, they are involved in 2, 3, 4 or more! So, what often convicts me is that I want to show my children that it is ok to rest. I want to show them that this gift from God should be enjoyed regularly, no matter what the world says. I hope you and your family will join me in a pursuit of rest this summer and maybe even choose a few less activities in the fall.

~ Deb

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

Hebrews 4:9-10



# YOUTH & ADULT MINISTRIES

*Review the monthly memo, weekly bulletin, weekly email and the church calendars for event details*

## Youth

At **The Cause**, we have finished our program year! Our last evening together included an extended reflection time, and a time of “warm and fuzzies” for our seniors (which is a time of sharing positive things about our seniors, to our seniors!). We are grateful for all of the volunteers who worked so hard this year to support another year of youth ministry at the church.

In June, our **Special Event** is an **Ice Cream Social Night** (Tuesday, June 25, 6:30 PM, at The United Church) where all are invited to enjoy some ice cream and then plan for themselves various “summer activity groups” with other church members during the summer months. Looking further, our **Summer Youth Retreat** will be held August 16-17 at Onanda Park. Also, we are moving forward with our **Summer Missions Experiences**, which includes the following dates: August 23, August 26, August 28, and August 30. More details to be provided as plans get ironed out.

Our **monthly school district connects** (including Victor, Canandaigua, and Marcus Whitman school districts) have concluded for another year. We are grateful for the opportunity to build relationships with our students outside the four walls of the church during the mid-week!

Our **Youth Ministry Team** is helping with the summer missions experiences, summer youth retreat, and making plans for the 2024/2025 program year.

## Young Adult

The **Young Adult lunch** will move to monthly (June 23, July 21, and August 18), with spontaneous connections sprinkled in between. The **Young Adult Women’s small group** (led by Stephanie Wall) continues to meet at our church every other week or so.

The **Young Adult Ministry discernment team** has finished their work. Now work begins with formulating a permanent **Youth Adult Ministry Team** (in response to the faithful work of the discernment team) for the coming program year.

Our **Young Adult Retreat** will be held at Onanda Park, August 17-18, at The Gorham Lodge.

## Adult

For our **Adult Education Sunday School**, efforts continue to prepare for our Genesis series and the Parenting Coffee Hour. Other program year activities are being prayerfully discerned.

For **Special Events**, we are planning to host the **Adult Education Retreat** at Onanda Park, August 17 (Wally Fleming is the speaker). On November 2, we are hosting our first **United Church Seminar**, with our guest lecturer being Dr. Richard Middleton. He will be speaking on the Abraham & Isaac story, the suffering of Job, and the importance of the lament Psalms. This will be a public event.

The **Adult Education Ministry Team** continues to meet periodically to plan for the Fall program semester, our special events, and other ministry matters.



Mark Slomski | Pastor of Youth & Adult Ministry | [Mark.Slomski@uccdga.org](mailto:Mark.Slomski@uccdga.org) | 585-455-7491

# PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In lieu of a Bible & Theology article, I have written a reflection for this summer edition of the Lamplighter. The last 30 days (or so) have included the end of many of our regular programs, including Sunday school, Youth Club, The Cause, and ministry team meetings (among others). I have individual reflections for each of the items listed, but have yet to tie all of those reflections together. Looking forward, my work pivots toward special events and preparation for the Fall for the next 60 days. Sprinkled in between this work includes increased “breathing space” in my calendar. I plan to use those quieter moments like a professional athlete uses their off-season - *seek rest, increase strength* (physically, mentally, spiritually...), and *hone skills*.

## Program Year Reflection

*1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. - Ephesians 4:1-6*

Pastor Wade prayerfully selected this as a verse for a prayer group last summer. It has been a focus in many of the ministries since then. This verse proved to be relevant for the journey we’ve been on. All aspects of my particular ministry experienced sensitive and difficult conversations that demanded careful and wise handling (refer to verse 1-3 above). If navigated poorly, there was potential for unnecessary divisions (refer to verses 4–6).

Now here we are, on the other side of those intentional conversations, and I am *grateful*. I’m *appreciative* of all the adults in our church family that joined me in our Sunday School classes. Our group represented a variety of deeply held convictions. Those differences were not insignificant. With those differences present, we maintained a loving relationship with one another, in Christ. I’m *proud* of our high school students, who journeyed in the same (and more!) sensitive conversations with one another. Their handling of these topics was *inspiring*. I’m *thankful* for the various ministry teams and co-workers on staff that participated in discernment and planning of these conversations. Their participation and presence was vital in making it all happen.

During all of this, I learned much about myself, both as a pastor and a person. I have much to improve, and I hope the following approach to my “off-season” will - with the Lord’s help - mold me more into the person I ought to be.

## Off-Season Strategy

- **Seek Rest** - The volume and weight of this year’s workload has left me drained (and that’s O.K.!). Aside from my work, I look forward to increased family time, friend time, gardening time, and kayaking time.
- **Increase Strength** - Physical & spiritual formation/discipline are on my summer agenda. Physically, my focuses include weight lifting and running. Spiritually, my efforts are reserved for prayer, scripture reading, and spiritually-focused relationships.
- **Hone Skills** - There are plenty of pastoral/theology books and online classes for me to dive into. I don’t have space to list them in detail, but my general focus is developing a Christian worldview and living out a life of faith.



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# PASTORAL MINISTRY

This month's article is the **third** of a series of reflections on my personal preparations for the 2024 election. As part of my preparations, I am reading through a list of books from trusted authors that I believe will challenge me to be the person I should be (the full list can be found in April's Lamplighter).

The **third** book I read was **Strange Religion**, written by my (favorite) professor, Nijay Gupta (a New Testament scholar). He is a professor at Northern Seminary, where Pastor Wade completed his Doctor in Ministry degree (and where I hope to as well, some day!). I believe this book is a good "next step" after reading the previous two books I've reflected on, as it gets into the distinguishing marks of a Christian and the faith community. It is evident to me that Christian formation into Christ-likeness is *upstream* of politics. If we want to see improvements in our political environment (I certainly do!), then the focus must first be on continuously transforming ourselves into the faith community God calls us to be. Dr. Gupta's book gives us a glimpse into first century Christians and what this faithful community lived like, surrounded by their own broken world.

I start this short article on my takeaways with the last paragraph of the book:

*The first Jesus followers were okay with being different, deviating from the status quo, following Jesus and His way wherever they went. Perhaps there is a need today for the modern church to pick up a bottle [this is in reference to a coconut water metaphor he used in the book] of their religion and say, "Hey, that looks different, but good and refreshing things sometimes come from weird places".*

This resonated with me. In America's political sphere, I feel out of place. This quote reminds me that historically, I'm not the only Christian who didn't fit the societal norms of the day. To use a couple of Gupta's words here, that "strangeness" or "weirdness" is fertile ground for God to do His work. "Deviating from the status quo" can be difficult, but the following distinctions that Dr. Gupta shares about first-century Christians (which were neatly organized in the last chapter of his book) provides encouragement and calibration for me this election season:

- **Obsessed with Jesus** - While most in the ancient world were religious, it seemed that Christians took it to a whole other level. Christians claimed Jesus was supreme. [*Obsess over Jesus, not our presidents*].
- **Mind on the Future** - Christians behaved in accordance with the promises they believed in (that Jesus was coming back and will make things right). This didn't mean disengagement from the world around them, but rather committing to daily labor and contributions in society in a peaceable and Christ-like manner - one that would direct other's attention to that same hope of fulfilled promises through Jesus.
- **A Religion of the Heart** - Gupta shares that Christianity was distinctive for the emphasis on belief, trust, love, genuine action, and the inner life. I love the following quote: "*Jesus often taught on this notion that real and lasting change can come only from inner transformation, because behavior follows belief and the intentions of the heart*". [*Christian preparation for the election starts in the heart*].
- **A "God-with-Us" Religion** - Ancient gods did not roam freely on earth, but Christians believed in a God that wanted to be with people on earth. Jesus "*ascended to rule earth from heaven, and the Spirit was sent to spread the presence of God across the whole world*". God wanted to be *with us* because God *loved us*. [I appreciate the cosmic scope of "God with us" - God is bigger than any political realm].
- **The "Love of God", not "Peace with the gods"** - God loves us, and we love God. This concept would have been *weird* for other ancient people. *Christians were a household of love and belonging*.
- **The Church as a Utopian Community** - Christians are not and were not perfect. "But in their best moments, you see a beautiful family of faith". They lived with the mindset that it was possible - with the Lord's help - to have a world transformed toward goodness, charity, peace, joy and prosperity.



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