

August 2020

Sixth Sense From the Pastor

In his famous sociological study, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark makes the compelling case that the way Christians behaved in the great plagues of the early centuries was a significant factor in why the Jesus movement spread like wildfire. Collecting evidence from the plagues of 170AD, which killed Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and the plagues of the 250s AD, Stark builds a case that fledgling Christian communities set themselves apart from their pagan neighbors by the way they gave their lives away for the good of their neighbors.

For example, the emperor Julian in the fourth century complained that the Christians in the empire were much better at looking after the sick, and caring for the needs of the poor, than the rest of the population. While the rich fled to their secluded villas far from urban areas, Christian communities stayed behind and tended to their neighbors, even at the risk of infection and death.

Our task, centuries later, is very much the same. In his recent missive, *God and the Pandemic*, NT Wright argues that our first appropriate response to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 is lament; rather than engage in theological parlor games that address why the plague has happened, or whether or not “God is in control,” our task is to “*take our place humbly among the mourners.*” To do what Paul admonishes: “*to weep with those who weep.*”

Grief is the first part of our expression of love for the world. Then Wright observes, we are to join God in the work of restoring the creation to what it was meant to be. God has always wanted to work in God’s world through loyal human beings; our vocation is to follow our Christian ancestors who rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty. Our task in pandemic is to feed the hungry, tend to the sick, comfort the dying, encourage the faint hearted, support the suffering, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit that is working through us.

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We will continue to keep our building closed due to the ongoing public health concerns. All events and activities, including services of worship, remain temporarily suspended. Session will monitor this situation and in-person worship will resume when deemed feasible.

For continuing updates and to access our online worship experience, visit sixthchurch.org



SIXTH
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August Worship and Preaching

August 2—Rev. Myra Kazanjian preaching

August 9—Ruling Elder Kate Davoli preaching

August 16—Matthew 15:21-28, “Canaanite Women, Dogs, and Gentiles”

August 23—Matthew 16:13-20, “Chip Off the Block”

August 30—Matthew 16:21-28, “It Is Not All About Bliss”

What the Pastor Is Reading

Grace Will Lead Us Home: The Charleston Church Massacre and the Hard, Inspiring Journey to Forgiveness, Jennifer Hawes

Virus: A Summons to Faith, Walter Breuggemann

God and the Pandemic, N.T. Wright

To that end, our Deacons have emptied their coffers twice to get much needed resources to food banks that are trying to meet the overwhelming demands of those who are food insecure. We hosted a massive mask distribution to returning restaurant workers on our church grounds. We distributed benevolence from our capital campaign to augment what we had already promised to partners who are meeting emergency needs, and we have hit the streets to protest racial injustice.

We have no idea when we will be able to return to “normal”: worshipping in our sanctuary, singing sacred music, gathering for fellowship and education. But we are not content with the normal that too often was accepted as normal before COVID-19 struck: injustice, inequity, racial misunderstanding, fouled air and water. So in spite of our fear, uncertainty, and weariness, let’s be who we always have been at Sixth, weeping with those who weep, giving our lives away.

Peace, in spite of it all.

Vincent

Sock Drive for Hot Metal Faith Community

Hi! My name is Elizabeth Sindhi and I'm a member of Sixth and a rising junior at Taylor Allderdice High School. I am collecting clean, new socks for the homeless and the socks will be donated to the Hot Metal Faith Community to help those in need.

Socks are one of the most requested items at homeless shelters. Clean dry socks are important to everyone, especially the homeless who may walk a lot throughout the day. Socks aren't often donated, even when people donate clothes, they don't usually donate socks because they are worn out. Donating even just one pair of socks can make a difference for someone who is struggling.

Donations will be accepted until August 15. There will be a labeled bin on the porch of 5308 Pocusset St. to leave the socks in. If you have any questions, please contact me at lsindhi21@gmail.com

August Birthdays

August 1 Checkers Delabar
Gregson Vaux
August 3 John Sennott
August 4 Bob Gersch
August 5 Norma Farquhar
August 7 Verna Robinson
August 8 Chris McDonald
August 10 Nora Johnson
August 11 Anna Watt-Morse
August 12 Denise DeJong
Beverly Gaddy

August 14 Paul Watt- Morse
August 15 Kathi Robinson-Dassell
August 17 Dee Hunter
Josh Lowe
August 19 Lesa Rosamond
August 21 Olivia Van Dyke
August 23 Malcolm Juring
August 24 Dante McDonald
August 25 Dex Guyette
August 29 Chris Sennott
Myra Kazanjian
August 30 Robin Bower

Response to July 26 Sermon: Let's Keep Our Eyes on What We Love, Not What We Hate

...An ethical life can be lived without reference to the supernatural...

I am expressing my concern for the future of challenged and poor children if the district goes to all-online learning. We, who actually have time and resources to help our own granddaughter are not necessarily in the majority. It would be an extreme burden for all and perhaps an academic death-sentence for children struggling behind by two or more grade levels or from impoverished households.

Rev. Kolb's sermon spoke about college students missing the "on campus experience." This is not about polishing off the fine examples of educated American youth. It's about education in that tender, short-live period within a child's development...that period in which the seeds are planted. There is no way to measure that against a chance of catching a virus. You can work on safety. Throwing politics into the argument clarifies nothing.

Rev. Kolb advocated online vs live. The American Academy of Pediatrics would make that position less clear and worth studying without bringing in political positions. Their published advice:

"The AAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation."

Update: In-person learning is dependent on local virus containment; current recommendations suggest a 14-day average of positive tests at or below 5%.

The Pediatricians appear to treat our children as whole people...not as political or divine pawns as Rev. Kolb seems to do in this sermon.

Rev. Kolb evoked God against rulers. The God who would ask you to sacrifice your child, as he did of Jephthah and Abraham, is no patriarch. He's a slave master...and a brutal one. Using these stories to support anything—even as insignificant as his opposition to the form our education will take right now—allows Him the whip of the slaver.

The willingness to sacrifice a child, if not inspired by God, then by whom? Just using those stories is always an invocation of power. Let us not sacrifice our children. We must open our eyes to what they need right now. I am not interested in waiting on our tribal and barbaric God to intervene. Nor in hearing him conjured on either side of a very practical discussion about how to educate our children in this time of COVID.

Let us be careful we do not place our own children on the altar of our own political ideas. Let us not threaten each other with drowning. If this is how we respond to complex questions, then I will not wait around for some righteous mob to place the millstone around my neck!

Rob Beswick (Rcbeswick69@gmail.com / 412-337-6045)

The Session has a well-deserved month off in July!

Meeting minutes will resume in the September issue.

Christian Education Update

Hello friends! Just wanted to provide an update on the status of children and youth programs at Sixth Church.

Our church's reopening task force has been meeting and working all summer on plans and protocols for us to resume in-person worship. Additionally, I have drafted a plan for how we can resume in-person programs for kids. At our church, our major challenges include available space for social distancing and room ventilation. The current plan is to begin phasing in in-person Extended Session, nursery care, youth group, and lastly Sunday School at a time designated by the church session after we have resumed in-person worship. And of course, much like worship, these programs will look a little different due to protocols we will put in place to keep everyone safe. For examples, pre-registration will be required, and we will be following the CDC recommendations for schools and childcare centers. Our re-opening plan for Christian Education is being vetted by the Christian Education Committee, the re-opening task force, and will be approved by the church session.

In the meantime, we will continue to offer opportunities online. Youth group will continue meeting weekly via zoom. I will continue to post resources on the Children and Youth Blog (you can find the link to the blog on the church's website).

We will be hosting weekly virtual Sunday school starting Sept. 13 for all ages until our in-person classes can resume. Kids are invited to join us for a trial run/beta testing Sunday School session via Zoom at **10 am August 23, 2020**. And email with the link to join the session will be sent out to parents prior to the event. If you are not on my email list please contact me at Jennyrunew@gmail.com.

I have been praying for all of you that are making hard decisions concerning school as the fall approaches. Please let me know how we at Sixth can support you along the way! I have heard from a few parents that they are considering homeschooling and I would love to arrange a Zoom gathering for any parents that would like to connect, support each other, and share information. Please email me if this is something you would be interested in!

Peace and blessings,

Jenny

Youth Fellowship: The youth group will continue meeting on Thursdays via Zoom. Links to access the zoom sessions and meeting dates will be sent via email. Contact Jenny Newman at (412) 720-6392 or by email at Jennyrunew@gmail.com for more information.

Adult Education Opportunity: Statement on White Supremacy

Early in 2020, First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh approached our church leadership with a Statement Against White Supremacy that they approved, asking us to consider being a signatory. The Statement was referred to the PIIN Justice Core Team, which has since worked on a draft of a statement, in anticipation of presenting the statement to the Session for approval. Prior to that possibility, however, the Justice Team and Session want to engage the wider congregation on the statement's origins, for the purpose of soliciting comment.

On Sunday, August 16, at 10 am, the Justice Core Team will be holding a zoom educational hour on the document. Come join us, ask questions, and offer your comments. Immediately following this educational event, join us for worship livestreamed at 11 am.

Email the church office for the link or look for it in the weekly worship email.

What We're Reading / Watching / Listening To / Doing

Peter Gilmore: I've been working my way through Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*. I'm too easily distracted by videos though.

Kate Kennedy: Reading Roseanne White and Jody Hedlund

Lori King: Finishing up *The Power* by Naomi Alderman

Sue Koehler: I have read two very fine works of fiction, one long (Adichie, *Americanah*) and one short (Offill, *Dept. of Speculation*). I also read Patrick Keefe's *Say Nothing*, which is, alas, not fiction.

Susan Rothenberg: Watching *Hamilton*, of course. It was right on time.

Heather Vallone: On my week off I burned through an entire virtual bookshelf: *The Institute* by Stephen King, *A Stranger in the House* by Shari Lapena, *The Couple Next Door* by Shari Lapena, *The Girl You Lost* by Kathryn Croft, *The Girl With No Past* by Kathryn Croft, and *While You Were Sleeping* by Kathryn Croft. I just downloaded *How To Be an Antiracist*, but that isn't nearly as fluffy and easy to breeze through.

Amy Whipple: Malakai and I are reading Beverly Cleary's Ralph Mouse books. I've been making the most of my subscription to *The Atlantic* and recently finished re-watching *Murphy Brown* and *30 Rock*. TV, you are a gift.



The Sixth Church Mouse Returns!

For congregants who would like to participate in an email form of prayers of the people, please contact sixthchurchmouse@gmail.com to be added to the list. You can submit prayer requests to the same email address by Thursdays at 5 pm to be included in an email sent each Friday.

Please remember that confidentiality still applies; we want this to be a safe place for both participants and those we love.

We want to suggest that you take a walk this summer – and turn it into a way of fighting hunger! You are probably familiar with the CROP walk that our congregation participates in every autumn. We raise money from friends and family and church members who sponsor our efforts at a group walk in October.

This year we just don't know if it will be safe for a large group to assemble and walk together, so our church will join with others in the East End to encourage many individual or small group walks. We'll ask walkers to set a goal, take a walk, and take a photo. Each walker, or family of walkers, will register on our Sixth Church page.

We hope you will be a walker. You will create your own donor page and can ask friends and family to support you. Don't worry that you'll have to raise a lot of money by yourself. We'll also post on the Sixth website, and we think many people will be proud of what you are doing and will want to support you. You can walk whenever you wish. Make a personal goal, and choose your route.

As a small "thank you," I will donate \$10 on behalf of each person or family that signs up. So you'll have a little nest egg to build on.

Here's how to do it. Follow this link:

<https://www.crophungerwalk.org/pittsburghpa/Team/View/131841/Sixth-Presbyterian-Church>.

Click on "Join our Team," and follow instructions from there.

Thank you!

Susan Koehler

sue@koehlernet.us



Mid-Year Stewardship Update

We hope this update finds you safe and healthy during the five months since we have been able to worship together in our beautiful sanctuary at Sixth.

Despite Covid-19, the ministry and fellowship of Sixth continues virtually:

- Our online Worship service has been of tremendous value to our church community. Staff members and the Reopening Task Force continue to adapt the service and make plans for when we can gather safely in public worship again
- Many members participated in the virtual All-Church Potlucks and Happy Hours
- Bible Study continues to meet every Wednesdays at 11 am
- Church & Community (C&C) has met via Zoom to fully allocate the Church's \$28,257 in locally directed mission funds.
- Earth Care, Justice, Gun Safety, and More Light committees are deciding who to support to promote sustainability, public safety, and inclusion
- Lazarus Fund interviews continue to help those ravaged by the pandemic, with a higher maximum grant and conversion to online accessibility.
- The Deacons continue their outreach to members unable to leave home.
- Youth Group is continuing with conversation and games on Thursday nights
- Jenny has had virtual breakfast and lunch with our elementary age children
- Deacons, C&C, and Capital Fund campaign donations to those who are in need of food and other assistance total nearly \$20,000
- Sixth co-hosted David Harris's presentation on *A City Divided: Race, Fear, and the Law in Police Confrontations*, attended by 200 participants via Zoom
- Our church lawn was the site for the distribution of 500 free masks to local restaurant workers

Sixth remains vital because of your enthusiastic participation both within the virtual church, and in the Pittsburgh community.

We invite you to complete a Worship and Connection survey ([click here!](#)) on how you are doing, what you are needing from your spiritual community, and what your response is to gathering again in the future.

We cannot thank you enough for your continued financial support to Sixth. You have been faithful to your 2020 Stewardship pledges and to your Capital Campaign pledges, and we are on target for both.

Your continued financial generosity as well as the ongoing virtual activities help us to live the last sentence of our mission statement: We strive for the grace to love one another as we seek deeper understanding of life in the Spirit, working for justice and serving as stewards of God's wondrous creation.

With Gratitude,

Beth Hazlett, Carol Emerson, Patty Halverson & Peter Kaplan

The Stewardship Committee

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We are an open and affirming community of faith in Jesus Christ. At home in an urban neighborhood of many faiths, we acknowledge that we are not alone on the path to understanding God. In worship, study, and fellowship, we celebrate our Presbyterian roots and find joy in our diversity. We strive for the grace to love one another as we seek a deeper understanding of life in the Spirit, working for justice and serving as stewards of God's wondrous creation.



The deadline for the September newsletter is August 15th. Please email articles and announcements to Amy in the church office (office@sixthchurch.org). You can also put printed copies on her desk. Thank you!

Food for Thought...

“Poetry is for me Eucharistic. You take someone else’s suffering into your body, their passion comes into your body, and in doing that you commune, you take communion, you make a community with others.” —Mary Karr

“To pray you open your whole self / To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon / To one whole voice that is you. / And know there is more / That you can’t see, can’t hear; / Can’t know except in moments / Steadily growing, and in languages / That aren’t always sound but other / Circles of motion.” —Joy Harjo

“You read something which you thought only happened to you, and you discover that it happened 100 years ago to Dostoyevsky. This is a very great liberation for the suffering, struggling person, who always thinks that he is alone. This is why art is important. Art would not be important if life were not important, and life is important.” —James Baldwin

“Some days in late August at home are like this, the air thin and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar...” —William Faulkner