

# IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple  
Sunday, June 28, 2020

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## **Matthew 6:9-13**

Pray then in this way:  
Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

Tyronne called from his car across the parking lot, “Pastor.” I knew he had been in the food bank line since 5:00 am. It was 7:30 and I walked over to his car. He had his Bible open to the prophet, Isaiah. Weeks into the MidSouth FoodBank distribution, I’m beginning to know people by name.

In Tyronne’s Bible, the words, “Fear Not” were highlighted in pink. He held it up above the steering wheel, not quite at a social distance, and said, “Fear not. That’s what the Word says.” He and Elizabeth Alritz, an Idlewild member, have been sharing scripture together for the past few weeks. They have a brief bible study as she collected his forms and marked his windshield. I was getting a preview of this week’s lesson

Tyronne looked at me and said, “You know I’m here, not for me, but for my neighbors because it says here, “Do not fear.” I responded, because it’s been an important passage of scripture for my life, “And when you pass through the waters they shall not overwhelm you, ...” Without pause, he continued, “Because the Almighty says, ‘you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. **You are mine.**”

Pastor Sara often ends her prayers with the phrase, “for the living of these days.” Tyronne and I, strangers becoming neighbors, were sharing words for the living of these days and in reality, in a marginal spot, a food bank parking lot, praying together.

For the living of these days, it is Jesus who teaches us how to pray.

In that parking lot ... we believed it. Strangers becoming neighbors. Connecting us. Binding us. Claiming us. The last week of this series on the Lord’s Prayer, we have the phrase from Matthew, “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” Maybe you are more familiar with the Luke translation, “And lead us not into temptation.” Or the King James translation, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Lead us not into temptation. Rescue us from evil.

Genesis plants language for us of Adam and Eve being tempted and eating of the forbidden fruit. Way beyond temptation, and into the evil of being turned away from God and only towards themselves, God asks, “Where are you? What is this that you have done?”

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God does not lead anyone into temptation, we get there all on our own. It's in our human nature to be led astray. In fact, the Matthew text is better translated from the Aramaic as "don't let us be seduced by the appearance of ... something that leads to ... agitation, diverting us from the purpose of our lives."<sup>1</sup>

Neil Douglas Klotz describes the translation of Jesus' words "lead us not into temptation" as our "failure to look deeper when the situation calls for it."

When we lapse into temptation, we are diverted from God's good purpose for our lives. We fail to look deeply at what God would have us to see. In the gospel of Luke, a lawyer tests Jesus. The lawyer asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with the greatest commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus models this love in his ministry and with the whole of his life. He demonstrates the value of each member of God's family, especially those who have been excluded, objectified, oppressed and systemically dehumanized.

For a man born blind, Jesus smears mud on his eyes, sends him to the pool of Siloam and he sees.

For a sheep that is lost. Jesus tells his disciples, that in a herd of 100, the one who is lost, needs to be found.

For a woman bleeding for years. She reaches out and touches the hem of his garment. He is surprised and she is made well. Restoration begins.

We affirm that Jesus is Lord. Jesus went to the edges, to the margins, to practice his ministry. He intentionally went to places of suffering and pain, to places of exclusion, and advocated for the least of these. Jesus often lifted up specific groups of people – women, the poor, lepers – because they had been deemed inherently less worthy by the dominant culture, and objectified by the religious authorities. By lifting these specific groups up, Jesus stated that each is a beloved child of God, a part of God's family with a God given purpose.

I believe that the greatest temptation we face is creating structures to separate ourselves from others - thus making them invisible as neighbors. I believe that the predominantly white Presbyterian church, our church, is being called to look deeper. When we fail to see prayers pieced together, justice awakened and the seeds of restoration, we do not see where we have been tempted to the greatest evil.

In First Corinthians, Paul reminds the people, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." This week I've heard sarcastic messages stating that "purple lives matter" mocking the sign, "Black Lives Matter" and I've heard through tears, "Thank you, Idlewild, for your sign, Black Lives Matter"

As a church, I know that Idlewild has a long history – at least 55 years – of engagement in human and civil rights in Memphis – because of our mission, as the church, to personify,

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Douglas-Klotz, Prayers of the Cosmos: Reflections on the Original Meaning of Jesus's Words, p.35.

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pursue and practice the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Someone said, "it's in our DNA."

In the story of the Good Samaritan, when a human being is left for dead, the person left in the ditch was invisible to those who were religious. Those passing by did not feel that person's pain, nor suffering - just crossed over, without any action.

Jesus asks, "Who was the neighbor?"

Jesus hears, "The one who showed mercy."

And, Jesus challenges, "Go and do likewise."

All of our churches have a long history for staking a claim in gospel ministry, of showing mercy. We are congregations which "go and do." The going and doing might look differently, but we are a faithful people. At Idlewild, we most frequently point to our legacy of seating African Americans in our sanctuary, our historical and early integrated recreation program, and the More Than a Meal ministry which celebrated 20 years this year. Our legacy includes much more: Pope School, the Half & Half Coffeehouse, and Dorsey Day Care Center.

On June 7th, we invited historian and member, Perre Magness, to speak at our Adult Forum to tell stories of our church from the 1960's. Perre carried a chart to that meeting that she knows by heart. She can tell you that in 1954, the year that Brown versus the Board of Education declared school segregation illegal, Memphis Mayor EH Crump died and when Dr. Paul Tudor Jones came to Idlewild. She told us specifically in this Adult Forum about the Reverend Dr. Bill Aldridge, who came to Idlewild in 1966. He helped rally the community religious leaders to form the Half and Half Coffee house which drew in unexpected folk - those who were experimenting with drugs and those who served the military in Millington.

That organizing spirit led him two years later, in 1968, to march to city hall, and read a letter written on Idlewild stationery confronting Mayor Henry Loeb about the conditions of the garbage workers. Reverend Aldridge pushed the church to look deeper.

Perre mused about the church, that our legacy also includes some stories that we don't always tell. She wondered aloud about the quiet dismissal of Aldridge who'd pushed too hard for the human and civil rights of the striking garbage workers. To this day, Reverend Aldridge is not pictured in the pastoral portrait wall.

It is difficult to learn hard truths about your church. There is an awakening in realizing that you are part of a system that has worked hard, but is imperfect. Perre's suggestion that there was more to our history led me to read a decade's worth of church Session minutes and to speak with Aldridge's widow. In the Session minutes, I found both the positive DNA characteristics of gospel work, and also some clear evidence of systemic racism.

Our integrated recreation program did not happen overnight, nor the first time it was suggested to the Session.

Our Session struggled with the loss of membership and dollars because of the seating of African Americans.

Our Session heatedly debated, and even had a hearing of a letter from the congregations young adults, signed by 75 people, asking for action in the garbage workers strike

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*“The challenge of this crisis must be met within the church and put our concern and compassion into action”*

While hosting a hearing of this letter, and taking no action, the Session sought to censure the action of the Christian Relations Committee of the Presbytery of Memphis, led by Reverend Aldridge. The core of that censure was the public action of Reverend Aldridge on behalf of the garbage workers and that he wrote a letter on Idlewild letterhead.

*The Press Scimitar March 1, 1968, article named Idlewild, and Aldridge’s words about the garbage workers, “Deep moral issues and the dignity of human beings is threatened ...”*

It was a hard time - and in the end, a pastor was dismissed, though some whispered in his ear at his farewell, “we support you.” The truth of hypocrisy.

None of this comes easy. Our greatest temptation is to create structures, systems, cultural norms, which make it easier to not see or feel or hear the pain of our neighbors.

Might God deliver us from this evil.