

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Youth Sunday - Senior Sermons  
Sunday, April 26, 2026

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Let us pray. Our Lord and our God, now as we hear your word, fill us with your spirit. Soften our hearts that we may delight in your presence. Sharpen our minds that we may discern your truth. Shape our wills that we may desire your ways through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we settle into hearing the word of God read and proclaimed, let us take a breath together. Breathe in God mercies to ourselves and breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God mercies to ourselves and breathe out God's mercies to others. Our scripture reading today comes from John 10:verses 1-6.

*Very truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them. And the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

Our second lesson this morning picks up in the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John, starting with verse 15.

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God. After this, he said to him, "Follow me."*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

Samuel Gilreath

Hi, my name is Samuel Gilreath and as someone who has been a part of the church for my entire life, there have been many experiences that have helped me build my faith and shape who I am

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today. One example of this is our church's youth trip to Nicaragua. On this trip, we stayed together in a living community and traveled each day to a nearby village. When we arrived in the village, we spent time praying, playing soccer and other games with the kids, sharing meals, and helping plant plants alongside the locals to support their community. What made this experience so meaningful to me was not just the work we were doing, but the connections we formed. Even though our group and the locals did not speak the same language, we were still able to communicate in ways that went beyond words. Through laughter, smiles, shared meals, and prayer, we built relationships that felt real and lasting. It showed me that faith is not limited by language or culture. Our shared connection to Christ brought us together in a way that nothing else could. In those moments, I realized that the church is so much bigger than just one building or one community. It is alive in people everywhere.

Another experience that impacted my faith was our youth trip to Kentucky for the Appalachian Service Project or ASP. During this trip, we worked with a man whose house had been completely destroyed by flooding in 2022. When we met him, he was in the process of rebuilding a home entirely from scratch. Day by day, he showed up with determination, putting in the work to rebuild not just a house, but a sense of stability and hope for his future. Our role was to help paint walls, install roofing panels, and do whatever we could to support his efforts. But as much as we were there to help him, I think he ended up teaching me even more. His resilience in the face of loss was inspiring. It made me think about what it really means to trust in God during difficult times. Even after losing so much, he did not give up. Instead, he kept moving forward. And I truly believe that Christ was walking with him every step of the way. During that trip, we also connected with other church groups from different parts of the country who would come to serve as well. Even though we came from different places, we came together to pray, talk, and play games together.

The final example I will share is our church's annual youth trips to Montreat for the summer youth conference. So far, I have attended every year of high school, and this year will be my last. Montreat has been an experience unlike any other in my life. It is a place where hundreds of students from all over the country gather with one goal, to grow closer to God. Each year, Montreat has given me something different. Sometimes it has been a message that really stuck with me. Other times, it has been a conversation with a friend or even a quiet moment of reflection. Some of my best memories have come from these trips whether it was singing together during worship, spending time in small groups, or just being surrounded by people who share the same desire to grow in their faith. Through Montreat, I have formed friendships that I truly believe will last a lifetime. More importantly, it has helped me deepen my relationship with Christ year after year. It has shown me that faith is not something that stays the same. It grows,

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changes, and becomes stronger when we continue to seek God and surround ourselves with a supportive community.

In John chapter 10, Jesus uses sheep as a metaphor for us, describing himself as the good shepherd. He tells us that his sheep hear his voice and he calls them to follow him. He gathers them into one flock and leads them to pasture where they are cared for and protected. When I think about this image of the pasture, I think about the kind of community I've experienced through the church. I think about the connections formed in Nicaragua, the teamwork and resilience I witnessed in Kentucky, and the deep sense of belonging I have felt at Montreat. To me, that pasture represents a place of unity, growth, and love brought together by Christ. Without the church and without being a follower of Christ, I would not have had these experiences. I would not have been able to connect with people across the world in Nicaragua, gaining a new perspective on life and faith. I would not have been able to witness and be inspired by the determination of someone rebuilding after losing everything. I would not have had the opportunity to come together with other churches and form meaningful relationships rooted in a shared belief. And I definitely would not have been able to grow in my faith and create lasting memories at Montreat. Each of these experiences has helped me better understand what it means to be part of Jesus's flock. It means listening for his voice, trusting where he leads, and walking alongside others in faith. It means recognizing that we are never alone even when life feels uncertain. My journey of faith has already taken me through so many meaningful moments. But I know that it is only just the beginning. There is still so much more to learn, so many more ways to grow, and so many more opportunities to serve and connect with others. As I look ahead to the future, I carry these experiences with me. They remind me of who I am, who I am called to be, and the importance of staying connected to Christ and to others. I am proud to call myself a part of Jesus's flock. And I am eternally grateful to have been led to this pasture of togetherness.

Alex Colley

During my freshman and sophomore years of high school, I attended a certain high school that I'm not going to name. I decided to go there for two reasons. They had a fantastic soccer program and a choir. Turns out we didn't actually sing in my choir class. You know, I had a few great friends. Not everyone is my kind of person. And honestly, I...I didn't find most of my classes very engaging or as challenging as I should have. When I came back to school at the start of my sophomore year, school was even worse than boring. I'd walked into my choir classroom just for nobody, no one to talk or walk into the classroom for another 10 minutes until the choir director popped in and said, "Oh, so you are here." I replied with, "Oh, of course I'm here. This is...this is the choir room where...where I'm supposed to be." He then dropped the bomb that there was no longer a choir because I was the only person who had signed up for it who wasn't already in

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band. So, they decided to put me in band, but apparently forgot to tell me. Nothing against my band people. I value you more than most anyone. I...I can't do it. I can't. It's just not for me. I tried in middle school. There was a clear reason why I didn't do it in high school.

This was my first sign from God that this was not the right place for me. I'd get my next sign from God many months later at the very start of my school soccer season. At the time, I was playing club soccer, club and school soccer, and thinking about trying to play college soccer eventually. I'd just gotten over a hip flexor injury, and while stretching my hamstring, I tweaked my sciatic nerve in my back. I continued to try to play through the pain that was constant through any activity, ranging from diving to stop a shot in soccer to sitting in a classroom for more than 20 minutes. Eventually, the trainer at the school decided that because the pain hadn't gotten any better that I should go and get it fully checked for sciatica. Thankfully, the MRI for sciatica came back negative, but the doctor said that the area was the least flexible he had ever seen in anybody under the age of 50. Yeah. He said that I would likely have to stop playing soccer for the rest of the season and that I would probably never be able to have been the same. To this day, he is 2,000% correct.

Both of my motivations for choosing that school were now gone. The school no longer had a choir program. I didn't feel the need to play soccer at the highest level because I no longer wanted to play soccer in college. So, I did it. I made the biggest and hardest decision in my life. I decided to transfer to our rival school, Memphis University School. It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. One reason is that I started hanging out with one of...hanging out more with one of my best friends, Noah Brooks. Noah taught me many things, but most importantly, he taught me how to lead. He taught me that leading by example and by kindness rather than force or punishment is the best way to lead. Noah taught me to lead the same way that God led me to MUS—learning experiences. The exact same way that Jesus tried to teach the Pharisees. Faithfully following God's direction to a new level has opened a whole new world for me. One where I can lead and learn in compassion and kindness. According to my mom, the first time we ever visited Idlewild Presbyterian Church once I'd moved to Memphis was when I was in kindergarten on Youth Sunday. How full circle. She listened to the youth that day and she told me that she thought that if this church had helped create the empathetic, kind, introspective youth that she saw that day, then this would be a church to raise children in. Perhaps she was also following God's direction. And I know that I am grateful and a better person because of it.

Ainsley Gale

As a member of multiple church communities throughout my life, I have felt called by God in many places. I have been a part of a whopping six congregations in my lifetime, though I don't

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remember them all clearly. I was baptized at White Memorial. I learned how to walk at First Presbyterian in Kenston. Then we moved to Kansas. And I went to preschool at Shawnee Mission Presbyterian. and I spent many days running around barefoot in the halls of First Presbyterian Church in Lawrence. However, I would say I've grown the most here at Idlewild. I still remember my first day. I was scared and nervous. That was the day I met a strange little girl who would go on to change my life forever. If you don't know by this point, I'm talking about Izzy. We are pretty much attached at the hip. Izzy and I met in sixth grade and became quickly close friends, bonding over small things at first, but then realizing how much we truly understood and supported each other. Over the years, our friendship has been shaped by shared experiences, countless conversations, and the constant presence of this community around us. We've grown up side by side, navigating school, life, and faith together, always encouraging one another through both the easy and the difficult moments. We eventually ended up at the same high school, and through every stage, Idlewild has been the place that brought us together and helped our friendship grow deeper. For nearly seven years, it hasn't just been church we attended, but a space where our friendship was strengthened, rooted in something much bigger than ourselves, which is a large reason why I made my community here at Idlewild.

Through every transition, every challenge, and every joy, God has been my shepherd, guiding me through it all, both the good and the difficult. I have been fed many times and in many places. And this is one reason that I made my family here because it was an opportunity to not only be fed, but to also feed others. I remember my first days of Sunday school where I learned stories of patience, kindness, forgiveness, and trust in God that were simple at the time, but have stayed with me as I've grown. Those classrooms developed into a place where I began to understand what it means to live out my faith, not just hear about it. It has been a full Oh. Now as I've gotten older, I've had the opportunity to give back by teaching those same lessons to younger children. It has been a full circle experience taking what was once taught to me and passing it on in ways that make sense to them. Just as my teachers once did for me, I love guiding kids as they ask questions, grow in their understanding, and build their own relationship with God, which deepens my own faith and shows me how meaningful the early lessons were.

This is another reason why Idlewild means so much to me. Not only did I get to shepherd others, but I was also fed myself. My faith has been deeply shaped by experiences like my mission trip to Nicaragua and my time spent at Montreat. In Nicaragua. I saw faith in a completely different way through service, humility, and connection with people whose joy and trust in God were unwavering despite so little. It challenged me to step outside myself and understand what it truly means to serve others with love. At Montreat, I found a different kind of growth, one rooted in reflection, worship, and community. Being surrounded by others who shared my beliefs allowed

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me to ask deeper questions, strengthen my relationship with God, and feel supported in my faith journey. Together, these experiences didn't just teach me about faith, they fed it, helping it grow stronger, more personal, and more real in my everyday life.

All these experiences have not only shaped my faith, but also the path I feel called to follow in nursing. The lessons I've learned at Idlewild about compassion, service, patience, and truly caring for others are the same values that guide the kind of nurse I hope to become. Just as I was once fed through Sunday school, mission trips, and this community, I now feel called to care and support others in a different way. Nursing gives me the opportunity to live out my faith daily, showing kindness in difficult moments, offering comfort to those who are hurting, and serving people with the same love that has been poured into me over the years. In many ways, my journey through these church communities has been preparing me all along, not just to believe, but to act, to serve, and to care for others both physically and spiritually. Religion has been ever present in my life, obviously, with two pastor parents. But not just to care for others, but to create the same community that loved me so long ago. Continuing my baptismal promises means striving each day to live out my faith through love, service, and compassion. It calls me to grow in my relationship with God while supporting and encouraging those around me in their own journeys. Through my actions and choices, I hope to reflect the promises made to me by actively sharing God's grace and word. Because of all of this, my faith is no longer something I've just been taught. It is something I now carry with me, and I hope to continue sharing with others whatever God calls me to do next.

Tate Robertson

Hello, my name is Tate Robertson. In the Bible passages we read, we see Jesus as both a shepherd and a teacher who calls his followers to care for others. These scriptures invite us to reflect on how God has been a shepherd in our lives and how we are being called to shepherd. As I think about these questions, I can see how I've been guided, supported, and fed by the shepherd and how I am now being called to share that care with others. First, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who knows his sheep by name and whose voice they recognize. This reminds me of a time when I was in fourth grade sitting in this very church, and Pastor Steve said my name during a sermon. I sat up straight in my pew and it turned out he was talking about our shared love for the musical Hamilton. While it was not some deep spiritual insight, it was me...it meant something to me. Like a sheep to his shepherd, I knew he saw me. He knew me by name and he cared about me. Sometimes that's all we need. This Bible passage also reminds me that God has always been present in my life, even when I did not fully realize it. There have been times when I felt unsure or lost, but looking back, I could see that I was being guided in quiet ways. Sometimes this guidance came through family, friends, or members of Idlewild. I remember the

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time Pastor David called me and said I had been nominated to represent the youth on the Session. That is not something I would normally raise my hand for, and I wasn't sure if I was the right person for it, but Pastor David, my parents, and others helped guide me in that direction, and I'm so glad they did. I stayed quiet in the meetings, but by being there, I gained a new appreciation for how the leaders of the church are always looking for ways to shepherd our flock and take care of our people.

In the second passage, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loves him. And each time he tells Peter to feed my sheep. This shows that loving God is not just about words, it's about action. When I think about how I've been fed, I think about More than a Meal. And I even think more, I think about More than a Meal and it's literally feeding other people. And I know I'm not the only one who feels fed when I volunteer there. It's more than a meal for the guests and it's more than a meal for me. It feels good to serve others.

I remember when I was 10 years old, there was a school shooting at Parkland Memorial High School in Florida. It is the first school shooting that I can remember visibly. Sadly, it was not the last, but I remember at that time I felt deeply sad and scared. I asked my parents if we could go volunteer at More than a Meal, and they immediately said yes. It was comforting to help others during that time, and I realized that More than a Meal is literally and figuratively what Jesus is asking us to do when he says "Feed my sheep."

These experiences are ways that I have been fed by the shepherd and by his church through love and encouragement. This has happened through learning about faith during the confirmation process, listening to sermons, reading scripture, and being a part of a church community through youth group. These experiences have helped shape my understanding of God and who I am called to be. They have given me strength during hard times and helped me grow into a better person. I have learned that I am not alone and that God continues to guide me just like a shepherd tends sheep in his flock. As I move forward into the next chapter of my life, I want to carry forward lessons that I have learned from God, my family, and this church. Am I helping others to feel seen and known as Pastor Steve did for me? Am I helping guide others to make the right decisions and standing up for what's right as Pastor David did for me? And am I finding ways to feed others literally and figuratively as my church does every week at More than a Meal? Am I grateful for the shepherds? I am grateful for the shepherds in my life who have demonstrated that both grand love of God and small acts can make a big difference.