

Jacob said to Esau, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand, for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, since you have received me with such favor.”
Genesis 33:10

The Power of a Willing Heart

I have not announced that Karen Sapio, pastor and head of staff for Claremont Presbyterian Church for 18 ½ years, has received a call as Executive Presbyter for North Central California Presbytery, which is the merger of Stockton and Sacramento presbyteries. Karen has been such a faithful leader for her church and her presbytery, I have wanted to share the news, but it all happened so fast, I couldn't find the right time to announce the change.

So I apologize that you might miss her, because yesterday was her last Sunday with Claremont, and she starts her new call in November. If you want to reach her in the future, I fully expect that North Central California (or NCCP) will soon list her on their staff page at <https://nccpresby.org/about-us/staff-specialists/>.

In the worship service and at the farewell lunch, folks expressed appreciation for many of Karen's pastoral gifts—her creativity, love of music, preaching, dependability, care, etc. But many people mentioned how their lives were changed thanks to Karen's leadership and the ministry of the Claremont church.

Later that afternoon, I went to Interwoven to hear a member give the message—the first time he did so, at least at Interwoven. He referenced the story of Esau forgiving Jacob as he spoke of the way his family experienced a schism, and what it took for them to reconcile. His willingness to share so openly about a struggle that nearly all of us have experienced was healing and inspiring to everyone. One woman said after worship that she had almost given up on her family until hearing this message.

In both these churches I was struck with the impact of one faithful person, especially in the presence of other willing hearts. Since today is Indigenous People's Day, it is timely to give thanks for Mona Morales Recalde, who tirelessly volunteers to speak her words of truth, faith, and mercy in educating folks about the first peoples of this land. With Mona and others, I have noticed how amazing things can happen through a string of one-to-one communications, often starting with just one person's willing heart. I could see how God put seemingly random people in position to further God's will in marvelous ways, but each individual had to take action for God's plan to work. Some of the folks did extraordinary things, but most simply shared what they heard with others—and God's plan moved forward. They just had to say “yes.” (Actually, God being God, even when we have to say “no,” that can open an opportunity for someone to step up—that's what happened at Interwoven, as Harlan was called away and needed someone to preach.)

I'm sure we've all experienced those moments when we wonder if we should step forward in faith, or speak out a word of hope, or compassion, or justice. There are also moments when the problems of the world seem so huge, we dare not hope for a change, or we think no one will listen. Well, I'm here to say that amazing things can happen, if only all of God's people practice bold obedience in allowing God to work through us. And may we be surrounded with other willing hearts, that we can all take our parts in God's plan. Thanks be to God!

With thanks for your faithfulness,

Wendy