

Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Abba to give you the kingdom.

Luke 12:32

Blessings to Come

We are looking ahead to Memorial Day, which represents many things to many people. In fact, Memorial Day was one of the first times I learned that my family church's version of Presbyterianism had a Japanese flavor to it.

We Japanese love our dead people, so Memorial Day was a big deal at First Presbyterian Church, Altadena. When I was a kid, I'm pretty sure we had a separate service on Monday night, when we could honor all our beloved who passed away, especially but not limited to those who died that year.

When I was in seminary, I was living in the Bay Area, and had joined a church up there so I could be more active in church life. It was a large White church in Silicon Valley, and one Memorial Day Sunday, one of the elders spoke about honoring those who died in military service, which is the official purpose of Memorial Day. I said that in my church growing up, Memorial Day was for everyone who had died, not just military. I was told in NO UNCERTAIN TERMS that Memorial Day was for those in the military, and no one else!

Recently, I happened to be at my family church in Altadena on Memorial Day Sunday, and I noticed that they still had much the same kind of remembrance for our ancestors, but Elder Bob Uchida first explained that while they understand that Memorial Day honors those who died while in the military, this church chooses to remember all those who are important to them. They also added a candle for those who died in the military. I was very happy about this, because churches from minority cultures are often told when they are doing the "wrong" thing, and very frequently the people bow to the majority culture folks who are always happy to correct them. What I sensed was that someone tried to correct Altadena, and while the church acknowledged the dominant culture tradition, they explained that in this church, they also honor their own tradition. It was a great example of hearing the correction of the dominant culture, but holding their ground.

"Memorial Day" has come to mean even more things. In Israel, Memorial Day was held at the end of April this year, honoring those who died in defense of the modern state of Israel, and also victims of terrorism. But it has also become the day for an interfaith service that is attended in Israel and Palestine and streamed around the world, and is called the largest Israeli-Palestinian jointly organized peace event in history. You can watch this year's [Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day ceremony](#), a steadfast call for peace from Israeli and Palestinian families who are joined across the battle lines by their common grief for loved ones.

On a much more secular level, Memorial Day is often considered the start of summer, and the occasion for Memorial Day sales.

So as I look ahead to summer, I see it will be a season of transitions. Newly-retired pastors Cyndie and Rob Crowell will be going to Canada, where they intend to spend half of the year while they use Zoom to stay connected with their Presbytery commitments. At our June 14th Presbytery meeting, we expect to welcome two new pastors to our churches and Presbytery, and to close Village Presbyterian Church. We will also welcome back Stated Clerk Rev. Jihyun Oh, who has come to visit us several times in the wake of the Eaton Fire. She will give us context for the future of the church, as we gather to discern the identity of San Gabriel Presbytery as you seek a new executive presbyter.

Indeed, last week the Presbytery Executive Commission approved the job description and nominating committee for the Executive Presbyter. The committee—Pat Martinez-Miller, Bong Bringas, Amy Mendez, Harlan Redmond, and Carl von Bibra—have not met yet, so the process for applying isn't set, but you can read the position description and consider whether you or someone you know might apply. The search committee members will be asked to participate in the June 14th meeting, so they can hear directly your thoughts about the kind of leadership you should be seeking in the near future.

As a lead-up to the June 14th meeting, there will be Zoom-based panels on June 12th and June 13th to prime your memories, hearing about ways that San Gabriel Presbytery and some of our churches have responded to major challenges in a way that became transformative. These panels should be inspiring, and I look forward to hearing folks talk about how they sensed God's will to take a bold new step into a changed future.

It is human nature to worry about change, and what the future will bring. But Jesus came to bring a new future into being, and recent events these last few years have shown us that change will happen, whether we worry about it or not. As people of faith, it is crucial that we remember—and tell others—that in spite of the worries of the world, we are held in the heart of a loving God who delights in offering us a new, blessed life, on earth as it is in heaven. May we live into that promise with confidence, sharing the love we have received with so many who live in fear.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wendy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.