



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Starting November 29th, First Free will be returning to ONE SUNDAY SERVICE.

On Sunday, November 29th, we will be pausing and turning the dial back to one single In-Person worship service at 10 am. Here are some questions you might have:

How long will we have only one service?

We will continue to evaluate the situation throughout the Christmas season. If we see an increase of our In-Person attendance numbers we will re-adjust in 2021.

Why?

Although, by God's grace, we have not had an outbreak of COVID-19 in our church, we are seeing an increased number of cases in our city and state. So we want to be wise and cautious. We continue to ask the question, "What is the most loving thing we can do for those who attend First Free and for those who are in our community?" We have enough room in our sanctuary to remain socially separate and still gather with those who want to worship In-Person at this time.

Will the children and youth still meet?

No, Nursery, Preschool, Creekside and Velocity Student Ministries will not be meeting in person on Sunday Mornings. Creekside Clubs will not be meeting on Wednesday nights in December. Velocity will be meeting exclusively online.

Will there be Live-Streaming?

Yes. The Live-streaming will be at 10 am, instead of 9 am on both Facebook and on YouTube. The service will be recorded so those who want to watch the service later can do that.



Christmas Eve Services
DECEMBER 24, 4:30 & 6:00 PM

Due to COVID-19, we ask that you register for Christmas Eve Services. Visit our website, firstfreechurch.org and register under the "Upcoming Events" tab.



The Keeper of Unlikely Promises BY JAY POUND

In Luke 1.5-23, we witness a scene that I find both funny and painfully relatable. As the scene opens, the priest Zechariah is at prayer when the angel Gabriel appears to him, no doubt delighted to be the bearer of joyful news. He tells Zechariah that his prayers have been heard, and that he and his wife Elizabeth will have a son—John. And not only that, this child will be like Elijah, returning the hearts of his people to their God. What great news! But strangely, Zechariah is not overjoyed. Though this is exactly what he has been praying for, though an angel has been sent to tell him his prayer has been heard and answered, he cannot quite believe it. Instead of rejoicing, he asks Gabriel, "How can I be sure?" After all, he adds, we are old (In case Gabriel didn't know).

Now comes the humor—because Gabriel can't quite believe what he is hearing either. I am no expert on angels, but I imagine Gabriel looking quite shocked. How can you be sure? Apparently stunned by this response, Gabriel simply answers: "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news." In other words: How could you not be sure?! What more could God do? How much clearer could he be?

I find it funny because I cannot imagine that Gabriel often gets this kind of response. But I also find it painfully relatable. I have now lost track of the number of times I have come to big

moments or crises in my own life, when I have felt that churning in the pit of my stomach. I know—in my mind—that God is faithful, that he is wise and good and that his plan for creation is without question better than my own. How could it not be? I have seen and experienced his faithfulness - over and over again. But then the next situation crops up and I wonder again, like Zechariah, "How can I be sure?" How can I be certain that God will come through this time? It seems so unlikely.

The good news is that even where our faith is small, God's faithfulness is boundless. Zechariah does not believe the word of Gabriel (1.20), but God keeps his promise just the same (1.57). In the end, whether it looked likely or not didn't actually matter. It never does. What matters is that God promised, and he is faithful.

I know that for many the past year has been full of tragedy, stress and disappointment. If the past 9 months have made you wonder if God is still really still at work, if he is ever going to put the world right, I am sure you are not alone. This year it has been hard not to feel like things are trending the wrong direction; some days God's promises really do seem unlikely.

When you start to feel that way, take a second and do what Zechariah didn't: look back at all the other unlikely promises God has kept. Yes he and

Elizabeth are old, but so were Abraham and Sarah. Yes, some days it is hard for us to see what God is up to, hard to see where this plan is headed. But the Jews too must surely have wondered how God could keep his promises to Abraham and David when they were conquered by Rome. They too must have questioned the direction of God's plan. I bet many, like Zechariah, wondered how they could be sure that God would deliver. It all must have looked very unlikely.

But God had promised, and he is faithful. And so unlikely though it might have been, God kept his promises—all of them. On that first Christmas, Jesus was born, fulfilling God's promises to Mary, Abraham and David—and to all Israel (1.31-33, 54-55). Unlikely though it must have seemed, at many times to many people, God did just what he said he would do.

We are in the habit these days of thinking that we face a uniquely challenging and uncertain future, a future where God's promises and plans appear especially unlikely. But as Luke 1 reminds us, whether they appear likely or not has nothing to do with it: God has promised and he will deliver, just as he always has. This Christmas season as we continue walking through Luke, I hope we will all be encouraged as we remember together that our God has always been a keeper of unlikely promises.

**OUR MISSION:
TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS
BECOME
CHRIST-CENTERED
& CHRIST-SENT
TOGETHER**

WANT MORE INFO?

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SEE MORE INFO AT:
www.firstfreechurch.org

AND WAIT EXPECTANTLY...PSALM 5:3

by Jeanine Bruen

Advent season is a time of preparing our hearts for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. I can imagine that Mary had planned for how her baby was to be born. In modern times she would likely have had her birth plan all ready. Plans for a midwife, her female relatives to be able to support and help her. And then came the census. Being pregnant and traveling for hours on a donkey? Not part of the plan. Traveling to a city far from her relatives with her new husband? Not part of the plan. I'm sure that cows and mangers were not part of the birthing plan either. However, the place and circumstance of our Saviour's birth were part of God's plan. He knew how the birth would all unfold and it certainly would be very different from the expectations many had of how the Messiah would come to earth.

The year of 2020 has definitely provided many unexpected twists and turns. Last Christmas none of us could have predicted the changes that the year would bring. Many expectations and plans were discarded or changed when Covid came. Then changed again with the unrest following George Floyd's death, the fires in the West, or for my mother who had not one but two hurricanes hit her town this summer. There were graduations, proms, vacations, weddings and funerals that did not happen as we expected. For many that struggle with mental wellness issues, the changes were an additional challenge. Summer brought some relief for many to be able to get outside. As Covid cases and restrictions increase once again we are faced with more changes from our normal. Christmas family traditions may look different. Instead of dreading the holidays how can we look forward to them?

1. Acknowledge that there is grief and sorrow over the situation. God is not surprised by our circumstances and may even have unexpected miracles waiting for us in these different times.

2. Make a plan for something different over the holidays (online group games for instance) Be on guard—make a plan ahead for when the down days come. Years ago when I was overseas for the holidays, several of us got together and had \$1-2 gifts for each other to open. It wasn't grand but getting mint toothpaste was a treat and certainly the hemorrhoid cream was unexpected and provided lots of laughter. Our holiday was not as it had been in the states but it was memorable and fun in a different way.



3. Remember you are not alone. There are others in your neighborhood, in your family, in the church who struggle with not having the holidays as they have in the past. Mary and Joseph weren't able to be with family that first Christmas. And yet God had a plan that they couldn't see. Imagine their surprise when angels and shepherds came to worship the Lord Jesus. A special star over the birthplace of Jesus. The Best Gift came in an unexpected way.

4. Embrace the joy when it comes. The emotions still may be up and down but we can be peaceful in unexpected moments of God showing off. Expect the Miracle and give thanks for the Unexpected Gift that God is sending your way. "In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." Psalm 5:3

CALL FOR ADVENT ART



Visual artists of all ages and skill levels are invited to participate in our annual Advent and Christmas Art Gallery.

Works of art and photography can be submitted to the church office or digitally to:

paul.anleitner@firstfreechurch.org

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

- Our condolences to the family of Mark Holman, who passed away at the age of 66.

If you are not receiving our weekly email updates from Pastor Joel, please email the church office at office@firstfreechurch.org.

If your information has changed recently (address/email/phone number) please contact the office so we can update it in our system.

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY SERVICES

2020 summary

Thank you to everyone who donated to our Community Emergency Services (CES) drive this November.

In total we raised 76 bags of supplies!



THE ONE FUND

Typically during the Christmas season we spend. We spend time shopping, spend energy getting everything ready, and spend our money on gifts.

This year we invite you instead of thinking from spending to giving. Spending focuses on what I lose, while giving focuses on who or what the gift is for. I spend money, but I give to people. I give for a purpose.

This Christmas, as a church, we are collecting donations for the One Fund. The One Fund is a Minneapolis based organization that exists to support the work of local African American churches and ministries that—due to historic inequities—have been disproportionately affected by the recent crisis in our Twin Cities. The One Fund offers grant dollars to front-line, African American churches and ministries as they proclaim the truth of the Gospel and demonstrate God's love to those in our city.

"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality."
2 Corinthians 8:13-14

Our goal at First Free, is to collectively raise \$10,000 during this Christmas season. Will you help us reach our goal? You can make a financial gift electronically by going to www.firstfreechurch.org/give and choose "Give to the One Fund" in the sidebar. You can also give by mailing a check to First Free Church and mark your gift, "One Fund".

For more information visit: www.bethechurchmn.com/onefund