



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
5150 CHICAGO AVE S
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55417

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First Word

A CHURCH FAMILY PUBLICATION OF FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
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Irreducible Majesty BY JAY POUND

At the heart of the advent season is a profound tension. Every year at Advent, we celebrate the miracle of the incarnation, when the God of all creation took on flesh, when somehow in Jesus the full majesty of God took up residence in a fully human being. Somehow, Jesus was fully both at once - not half man and half God (like Heracles or Perseus), but fully God and fully man. This is a core tenet of the faith, a truth foundational to the plan of salvation, a glorious miracle, and also a deep and sacred mystery.

The longer I have walked with the Lord, the more comfortable I have become with this tension and others like it. And there are many. Christianity is a faith full of these tensions. Our God is three persons, but only one God. Our God is transcendent, holy, far above and separate from creation, and yet he is also the God who initiates, who seeks and saves, who woos his wayward children with love and mercy. Our God is just, but he is not impartial. Our savior is fully God, and yet fully human.

When I was younger, I found all of this vaguely uncomfortable. I thought the truth should be simpler and more straightforward. I felt the temptation, present from the beginning of the faith, to collapse these complicated tensions in one direction or the other. I wanted to simplify and streamline these messy claims. And I discovered that throughout Christian history, far better minds than mine had already applied themselves to the work. Some argued that the God of the Old Testament was a different God than the one revealed in Jesus. Some argued that Jesus only appeared to be human. Some argued that Jesus never really claimed to be divine. But all of these aesthetic "improvements" eventually ran aground on the shores of scripture, which stubbornly refused to be reduced to less than what it is.

I am not sure what changed inside of me; I like to think I have matured, at least a little. Whatever the reason, I began to see these tensions very differently. Now I wonder if what looks like theological sloppiness from our end

is in reality the only possible way to make an infinite God even remotely comprehensible to finite minds. Today, I am inclined to think that these tensions are exactly what you would expect when our limited mortal minds try to make sense of a God for whom nothing is impossible. Perhaps these tensions are the best we can do when we, mere creatures, try to come to terms with the plans of an all knowing, all wise God. Maybe human minds cannot make sense of the incarnation, not really, not fully—not yet, maybe we can only behold it and worship.

In our sermon series this advent we will be focusing specifically on the significance and implications of the incarnation. Each week we will use a passage from the book of Hebrews to explore one of these great truths. And we will explore the incarnation, this great and central tension, not to flatten or disentangle it, but simply to understand it a little better. And also, so that we might once more fix our eyes on the irreducible majesty of our God - and worship!



Retirement Party

for Pastor Joel Sutton

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DECEMBER 14, 2024

10:00-12:00 P.M.

Thank you for donating to the **CES FOOD DRIVE**

Together we raised 1,326 pounds of food for people in need!



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Our Mission:

TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS BECOME
CHRIST-CENTERED &
CHRIST-SENT TOGETHER

FIRST FREE STAFF

JOEL SUTTON
SENIOR PASTOR
joel.sutton@firstfreechurch.org

JAY POUND
ASSOCIATE PASTOR
jay.pound@firstfreechurch.org

PAUL ANLEITNER
WORSHIP PASTOR
paul.anleitner@firstfreechurch.org

EMMA DELISI
WORSHIP ASSOCIATE
emma.delisi@firstfreechurch.org

JAKE WEIKEL
STUDENT PASTOR
jake.weikel@firstfreechurch.org

DOUG NELSON
MIDDLE SCHOOL DIRECTOR
doug.nelson@firstfreechurch.org

CARRIE BOYUM
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR
carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org

STACEY URBANZ
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY ASSOCIATE
stacey.urbanz@firstfreechurch.org

JEANINE BRUEN & ALLIE DANIELSON
FAITH COMMUNITY NURSES
nurses@firstfreechurch.org

SCOTT BECKETT
FACILITIES TECHNICIAN
scott.beckett@firstfreechurch.org

JOANN BURNS
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR
joann.burns@firstfreechurch.org

DAN FERGUS
TECH DIRECTOR/COMMUNICATIONS
dan.fergus@firstfreechurch.org

ELIANA NORDELL
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
ellie.nordell@firstfreechurch.org



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CREEKSIDE Advent Festival

Saturday, December 7 from 10-12 noon at First Free. Join us for this Creekside family event and begin the Advent season celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus. We'll have a scavenger hunt, nativity craft, cookie decorating, Christmas bingo, family photo op, cider, and snacks.

KIDS Christmas Worship

Sunday, December 15 at 10:30 A.M. Kids from Preschool up to 5th grade will be part of leading worship for our church during the 10:30 a.m. service.

BLUE CHRISTMAS

December 15 at 4:00 P.M. For all who are anticipating a difficult holiday season, we are offering a Blue Christmas service. We will create space in a simple, quiet, and reflective way to acknowledge our heaviness of heart and to focus on and hold onto Hope. Please feel free to invite anyone you think might be helped by attending.

VELOCITY Christmas Party

December 18, 6:30-9:00 P.M. A party for Velocity students including snacks, activities, a White Elephant gift exchange, and an ugly Christmas sweater competition. To end the night, we will sing a few worship songs and read the birth narrative of Jesus, followed by a short message.

Christmas Orchestra

Sunday, December 22. The multi-generational orchestra will lead us in worship. If you have not participated before and are interested in getting involved, contact Cheryl Polland at jpolland@usfamily.net or Pastor Paul at paul.anleitner@firstfreechurch.org.

Christmas Eve Services

December 24 at 3:00 & 4:30 P.M. Join us in celebrating God's coming to earth and dwelling among us, at our annual Christmas Eve worship services.

There will be no nursery or childcare; families are encouraged to worship together.

Thank You, Joel & Becky!



A note from Jay Pound

Though I find it hard to believe, I started attending First Free over 20 years ago when Heidi and I were dating. I eventually interned with Joel for a year, and then served under him as Associate Pastor for twelve. I could not have asked for a better place to learn and to grow as a young pastor, nor could I have found a Senior Pastor more supportive and committed to the success and health of his staff.

Joel has been a a great partner and coach for me, and I have genuinely enjoyed working alongside him. What has impressed me most over all these years is that Joel's best qualities are among those Jesus prizes most highly. Joel is a person of integrity; he lives what he preaches, no matter when or where you run into him. He is humble, he wants Jesus to get the glory, and genuinely enjoys the success of others. And finally, Joel cares deeply for the people of First Free. In all of these things he remains my example. I am grateful to have had him for a pastor, for a boss and co-worker, and also as a friend.

A few words from the congregation

"When my then-boyfriend Luke (now husband) and I were searching for a church in 2008, we found First Free online and listened to an online message from Pastor Joel. I don't recall the message but it really spoke to us and we chose First Free as our new church. When we got engaged, Pastor Joel counseled us and officiated our wedding. Marrying for the first time as an older couple came with different challenges. Pastor Joel had just the gifts we needed. We stayed at First Free for 10 years before moving to the northern suburbs. He played a significant role in helping us make sure Christ was at the center of our marriage."

Katie Bonawitz

"Our hearts are full of gratitude as you enter the next chapter. Thank you for your vision and leadership over the past 22 years to make our church a lamppost on 52nd and Chicago! You're a gifted preacher; equipping each of us to be a residential missionary in our spheres of influence. One of our dreams when we called you as the senior pastor was to see our halls full of children again. Praise God this has come about! We will miss you, but thank God for your leadership, your approachability, and using your gifts to bless our church family!"

Julie Danielson

"We have felt so blessed by Pastor Joel's deep commitment to First Free and to building a congregation of people who are Christ-centered and Christ-sent. His personalized way of communicating with us has let us know that he genuinely sees us and cares about us and helps us strengthen our walk with Jesus. God's divine message has reached us in many ways on many occasions through his sermons that felt as though they were written for and spoken specifically to us. We were recently double blessed to have Pastor Joel officiate both our marriage ceremony and baptism in Montana in the Flathead River. It was a blessing to be his last official wedding ceremony as Pastor of this wonderful church, and to get to know both him and Becky in one of God's most majestic creations as the backdrop. We so appreciate you, Pastor Joel. May God bless you and Becky in your retirement and all it has in store for you!"

George Comb & Nancy Kolb

"Joel & Becky, I remember how excited Rachel and I were to meet you and hear from you during your candidate weekend at First Free back in 2002. My grandpa, Stan Olson, was on the Call Committee, and he told me that he considered the work to bring a young Senior Pastor to our church to be one of his proudest achievements and a capstone to his service to the church. You brought new energy and a sense of purpose to First Free at a time when we needed strong leadership and a renewed vision of what was possible for God's people here at 52nd & Chicago. Thank you for your faithful service!"

Jeff Olson



CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

- Congratulations to Gabrielle & David Hauge on the birth of their son, Evander Ransom Hauge, on November 19!