



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
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First Word

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The Master Weaver BY JOEL SUTTON

There is a well-known poem about a master weaver, who weaves together a blanket. From the underside, there are random strands and dark threads intertwined seemingly together with no pattern or reason. But when looked at from the upper side, the blanket turns out to be a masterpiece.

It is a picture of the famous verse in Scripture, Romans 8:28 where the Apostle Paul writes, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*

This past year, life has been filled with all kinds of unexpected twists and turns and if we're honest, sometimes life can feel really random. Dark threads appear with no pattern. But if our lives are in God's hands, we can know for certain that God will cause all things to work together for our ultimate good.

One of my favorite Old Testament stories comes from the life of Joseph. Joseph gets sold off as a slave to a traveling caravan by his older brothers. In just a matter of minutes, Joseph's life has been turned upside down. He loses everything dear to him, his father, his family, his food, his financial security, his freedom, and he's crying out not only to his brothers for mercy, but to God for mercy. And heaven seemed silent.

Joseph is next sold to Potiphar, an official in Egypt. But just when things are looking up again for him, he is thrown into prison because of a false accusation made by Potiphar's wife.

Joseph ends up spending ten years in prison. Then one day Pharaoh, the ruler of all of Egypt, has this very vivid and disturbing dream. He hears that Joseph, this guy in prison, has some gift from the gods of being able to understand the meaning of dreams. Joseph, with God's help, is able to interpret the king's dreams and as a result Pharaoh promotes Joseph from prisoner to Prime Minister over all Egypt.

“And despite the pandemic, we can see that God has still been at work.”

But the story does not stop there. Eventually, because of a drought, Joseph's brothers find themselves standing before their brother in Egypt - the one they sold into slavery - but they do not recognize him.

Finally, after putting his brothers through several tests, Joseph can't stand it any longer. He looks at them and says, *“Don't you know who I am? It's me, it's your kid brother, Joseph. I'm your brother.”* His brothers grow white with

fear, they become pale, because they are convinced that now that Joseph has power he's going to take revenge and he's going to kill them all. But Joseph doesn't respond like that. Instead he says, in Genesis 50:20, *“What you meant for evil, God meant it for good, to bring about the saving of many lives.”*

The word “meant” as in “meant for good” literally means “to weave.” Joseph understands that God took all the evil actions of his brothers and weaves them into something good for him, his family, and for the saving of many, many lives.

Joseph understands what the Apostle Paul centuries later would write about in Romans 8 that God can take even evil, and even bad things, like a pandemic, and work them together for our ultimate good so that we are made more like Jesus Christ.

This month of March, we come to the anniversary of COVID-19 shutting down everything here in Minnesota. Likewise here at First Free, it forced us to change everything we do. This month's First Word looks back at this past year. And despite the pandemic, despite the closing of in-person worship for a time, despite the requirement to wear masks and social distance, we can see that God has still been at work. The Weaver's hand is still busy creating masterpieces.



Call for Art

Calling artists of all ages to submit artwork for our 3rd Annual Lent and Easter art gallery.

Want to Receive Weekly Updates?

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

OR

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



WATCH SUNDAY SERMONS ON:

firstfreechurch.org/sermons
or
[firstfreetv on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

- Our condolences to the family of John Clinton Sr, who passed away at the age of 84.
- Our condolences to the family of Grace Elasky, who passed away at the age of 94.

Would you like to receive the newsletter via email?
Contact the office at info@firstfreechurch.org

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

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How COVID-19 Affected...

Sunday Worship



There has never been a time in my life, or in the lives of probably everyone in our church, where the rhythms of the church gathered for worship have been so disrupted by world events as what we have endured this past year. But even in this, **we trust that God works all things for the good of them that love Him and are called according to his purposes** (Romans 8:28), and I have seen that goodness this past year.

Moving to online worship last Lent and then developing a live broadcast option for those who needed to worship from home when we re-gathered in-person last August, pushed us to develop new tools for helping people worship outside the geographic boundaries of 5150 Chicago Ave South. They say that necessity is the mother of invention, and this necessary step we've had to take to keep the community worshipping together even while apart has afforded us the opportunity to be more fruitful in our ever-changing digital age.



The digital world of YouTube, Facebook, podcasting, and streaming television services has become one of the most spiritually influential forces in the lives of every-day Americans. We seem to almost always be "plugged in" to something on our phones, computers, and televisions, and what this past year has done has caused us to think about how **our church can continue to help people be shaped by God's story via these new channels of communication.**

I'm excited about how we've developed the technological infrastructure this past year and are training up servant-leader volunteers & staff to go out into the digital world and amplify God's good news story in these new frontiers via our worship live stream, sermon podcast, and expanding discipleship content on social media.

It has been a hard year in the church's life of worship, but I believe the things we learned will make us more fruitful well beyond the eventual conclusion of this pandemic.

Creekside Children's Ministry



Covid-19 has brought lots of changes to Creekside Kids! Last March we had a virtual Palm Sunday, with pictures and videos of kids at home waving homemade palm branches. In June we had our first ever STAYcation Bible Camp. Families came to the front of church to pick up supplies, snacks, crafts, activities, and Bible stories. Families could watch a video every day with leaders, songs, and that day's important Bible Truth.

In September, Sunday mornings expanded to include Bible Time AT CHURCH as well as Bible Time AT HOME. Kids and parents doing church AT HOME could (and still can) watch a weekly Bible Time video where they learn the same Bible story that is being taught at Bible Time AT CHURCH. Families can even download the Activity Pages at home, helping kids continue to learn great Bible truths.

We've been able to have a partial year of Creekside Clubs on Wednesday nights. In order to keep kids more spaced out, Creekside and Velocity have traded off meeting weeks and gather in person every other Wednesday night.

Of course we have adopted a whole new system of cleaning, temperature checking, social distancing, and mask wearing. If you see kids around the church wearing "I'm Cool" stickers, it means they've been checked in and that their temperatures are cool enough for them to participate in class.

The Creekside leaders have been incredible. They've been flexible, creative, and motivated to be able to spend time with the kids of First Free. And the kids who have been in-person have been resilient. They've adapted to the changes we've made and they seem grateful to be at church. It's been a joy to have new families join us at Creekside this year and we look forward to having many more of our families back together in the future!



Velocity Student Ministry



It hit me as I was sitting at Taqueria La Hacienda where our youth group gathered regularly to grab tacos after youth group—I had just heard the NBA was cancelling the rest of their season. **That's when I realized that this virus I had been reading about in the news was likely going to change our lives.** We pretty quickly moved youth group online. We got YouTube up and running that recreated some games (with students participating in the live chat) and included announcements, prayer and some teaching and then had small groups meet via Zoom.



This past fall we launched a hybrid model where one week we meet in person and the next week we're online. Because our Church has such a robust children's ministry and our building space is limited we haven't been able to meet in-person every week, but I think this has caused our youth group to be more resilient. We have learned to be thankful for what we have. We continue to be small group centric. We have learned how to make online small groups work. Last month one of our leaders was unable to be with us in person so I video chatted him to remotely lead his small group, something I would never have thought to do before.

Whether in person or online, whether sitting 6ft apart or over great distances via video chat, relationships continue. **It is my hope that we can continue to use online video tools to grow the Velocity Student Ministry reach as we seek to propel students right here in Minneapolis towards Jesus together.**

