

Dear West Side Family,

This Sunday at worship, we will be exploring the idea of "going viral" as part of Pastor Tim's sermon series, "For Such a Time as This." The corresponding readings invite us to reflect upon Christian witness in both word and deed: how are we prioritizing our faith? How are we demonstrating the reconciling love of God? Are we trusting the Holy Spirit to lead us?

Our first reading from the book of Isaiah (55:1-5, can be found [here](#)) serves as our first call to witness. The feast-centric language of this reading points to the visceral need for spiritual food in the human experience (a metaphor surely even more powerful to the original recipients of this scripture, who certainly knew food scarcity in ways we cannot imagine). The prophet uses these metaphors to tell of the abundance of life, an abundance which is shared so that others may be drawn in. I think it is important to note the generosity at the heart of this passage: God gives freely, and we must give to others with that same freedom.

A musical meditation on this text is the classic hymn "Just As I Am." The text was written in 1835 by the English writer Charlotte Elliot and is usually paired with the tune WOODWORTH. God invites us all, no matter who we are or what we have done, to an abundant life in the Spirit. Enjoy this performance by the incredible singer Mahalia Jackson. The text can be found [here](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw-g4-DTKfU>

Our second reading from 2 Corinthians (found [here](#)) focuses on the importance of reconciliation as part of Christian evangelism. After reading this passage several times, the phrase that leapt out to me was verse 19: "God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation." In these days of tension, anxiety, and polarization, I know I find it extremely difficult to free my vision of that perception of sin and just see people as they are: children of God, plain and simple. The message of "convincing" other people to believe something causes me to overlook the vulnerable work I need to do internally to live out that kind of reconciling love. I find that when I go deep within myself, God is already there, reminding me to see others as God sees us all.

The classic hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father" has, on the surface, not much to do with reconciliation. However, upon further examination, it is exactly the call we need to see people with Godly eyes rather than human ones. Enjoy this stunning performance by the Concordia Choir, René Clausen, director.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Nkvfnz4Tyw>

Finally, the reading from Acts (found [here](#)) reminds us that the source of all Christian witness is the power of God through the Holy Spirit. In order to let the Spirit do its work, we must intentionally cultivate faith and trust as habits (something I fall

short in every day). The power of the Spirit to lead witness is celebrated in one of the iconic works of English choral literature by composer Edward Elgar (1857-1934): "The Spirit of the Lord," an anthem adapted from his 1903 oratorio *The Apostles*. Elgar was a composer of orchestral music; his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches are heard to this day at graduation ceremonies. He also contributed a substantial number of choral works, notably his oratorio *Dream of Gerontius*. *The Apostles* depicts the calling of the disciples and their reactions to the incredible events of Jesus' life. This movement opens the work with quiet awe, inviting listeners to reflect upon apostolic witness. Elgar's style is quintessentially Late Romantic, with lush harmonies, colorful orchestrations (here reproduced faithfully on the organ), and dramatic contrasts.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwV2eDyKZkw>

Text: <https://www.sjcchoir.co.uk/listen/sjc-live/elgar-e-spirit-lord-upon-me>

I will leave you this week with a prayer written by a friend, the former bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas, Dean Wolfe:

Come Holy Spirit and kindle the fire that is in us. Take our lips and speak through them. Take our hearts and see through them. Take our souls and set them on fire. Amen.

Blessings,
Maggie