Scribblings from Solitude

Writings from 2021

Jeff Hood

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January 25, 2021

Nonconsensual Touching in Elementary Schools: aka Hugging

I write to address the proliferation and encouragement of intentional nonconsensual touching that is not legally justified that has become pervasive in elementary schools…hugs. Daily, young children are hugged in hallways and classrooms across the country. While you might consider such activity benign, it is far from it under the examination of consent and common law.

Consent is the voluntary, informed and freely given agreement to participate in mutually agreed-upon acts. Modern courts have consistently ruled that young children do not have the ability to consent. Meaning…children do not have the legal ability to consent to a hug (intentional touching). Parents/guardians are left to determine what is appropriate and most of the time parents/guardians are not present to give their children permission for such encounters. I have never seen a permission slip for hugging…although, I would be interested to see how such a slip would hold up in court. Regardless, hugs (intentional

nonconsensual touching) cannot be legally justified. Therefore, the nonconsensual physical encounters that we have long called benign...are often illegal...and universally problematic.

In a world of hidden dangers, elementary schools have a duty to protect young children. In fact, if a school does not protect children it is not a school...protection is that fundamental to what a school is. There is no perfect way to recognize who children need to be protected from. In fact, it's probably impossible...ie a pervert is obviously not going to introduce their self as a pervert. What we don't know

should instruct the precautions that we take. Do you know who is hugging your children? We must assume that hugs (intentional nonconsensual touching that is not legally justified) cannot be safe. It seems reckless to start from any other place.

Amen.

***While this article was written with elementary schools in mind, there are obvious places of a variety of spaces.**

January 27, 2021

The Vaccination Ethic.

In the midst of viral sickness, there is a vaccination ethic...

When God comes in all of God's glory, God will sit upon the highest mountain. All the nations will be gathered below, and God will separate the people one from another. God will put the righteous on one side and the unrighteous on the other.

Then God will say to the righteous, "Come, you who are blessed with love; take your inheritance, for I have prepared a place for you since the creation of the world. For, I had nothing to eat and you fed me and gave me your vaccine. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink and gave me your vaccine. I was a stranger and you invited me in and gave me your vaccine. I was naked and you clothed me and gave me your vaccine. I was sick and you took care of me and gave me your vaccine. I was in prison and you visited me and gave me your vaccine."

Then the righteous will answer, "God, when did we see you hungry and unvaccinated, thirsty and unvaccinated? When did we see you a stranger and unvaccinated or naked and unvaccinated? When did we see you sick and unvaccinated or in prison and unvaccinated?"

Then God will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for any of the unvaccinated least of these, you did for me."

Then God will turn to the unrighteous and say, "Depart from me purveyors of selfishness... For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat and left me unvaccinated, I was

thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink and left me unvaccinated, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in and left me unvaccinated, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me and left me unvaccinated, I was sick and you did not care for me and left me unvaccinated, I was in prison and you did not visit me and left me unvaccinated."

They also will answer, "God, when did we see you hungry and unvaccinated or thirsty and unvaccinated or a stranger and unvaccinated or needing clothes and unvaccinated or sick and unvaccinated or in prison and unvaccinated, and did not help you?"

God will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you didn't do for the unvaccinated least of these, you didn't do for me."

God is waiting to be vaccinated.

How will we respond?

Amen.

January 31, 2021

The Destination of Nothing

Something reminds me of what I've missed...

Can the past change the present? Could something be sent to us? Can the present change the past? Could something be sent back? What would happen? Would it change anything? Can anything be changed? We live in a sort of arrogance with regard to these questions. We assume we know and that is all. However, spirituality has never been about

knowing. There is more than what was. There is more than what is. Something always leads to nothing. Nothing always leads to something. In the something is everything and nothing.

Where you there? The question is pivotal. We assume that absence is ignorance and ignorance is absence. We assume incorrectly. In order to know a secret of the universe, I decided to travel back in time. I was there when Jesus was crucified. It wasn't how I knew it. I was there when Jesus was placed in the tomb. It wasn't how I remembered it. I touched the risen Jesus. It wasn't how I perceived. Then, I traveled back. The journey

made me realize that I believe now far more than I did then. Existence seemed to grow with time...or perhaps it was I that grew with time. The mystery of time might be the greatest salvation. The more of it we have the less we know. The less of it we have the more we know. Time is short. God is not. Time is not God. Only God is God. The further we get from certainty the closer we get to God. Divinity will always be a timeless journey beyond the facts of yesterday.

When I got there...I didn't know where I'd been. When I got there...I didn't know where I was. When I got there...I didn't know where I

was going. When I got there…I was just there…the only place I'd ever wanted to go…nothing.

Amen.

February 2, 2021

Unto all the worlds?!?!

Late last night, I was sitting in our kitchen...and then I wasn't. I arrived at altogether different place. Was it another dimension of where I was? I don't know. I just know that it was somewhere wholly other from where I'd been. I guess such places are the place that we find our place. Nevertheless, I was brought to a small door. I could hear someone inside. There was a sifting going on. When the voice called to me, I answered. I

knew who it was. I guess I hoped for some level of forgiveness. Every step brought me closer to my past. I was asked to sit down. I couldn't. Our last interaction hadn't gone so well. He condemned me for broadening the gospel. For him, God was narrow and growing narrower by the moment. When I looked down, I saw the scriptures opened. I didn't know what he was going to say. I just expected it to be bad. Grace had never been his specialty. However, something drew me to the passage that he was point at. Mark 16:15. I knew these words of Jesus well. "Go into all the world..." When I looked up, I expected to be condemned for my lack of enthusiasm. I

had become less interested in winning souls and more interested in loving them. The closer I looked...the more I realized that he was trying to tell me some thing different. Do you get it? I didn't. Thoughts flooded my mind. It was as if this old fundamentalist knew more than I did. I didn't like the feeling. Finally, I demanded to know what she was trying to tell me. The scriptures must be read as narrowly as possible. I knew I wasn't buying that shit. Jesus said go into all of the world...not go into all the universe. The possibilities exploded. Such words meant that the evangelism task must end where our atmosphere ends. But what does that mean? In an instant, the

fundamentalist disappeared. Translucent creatures from somewhere else appeared before me. They were everywhere. I was literally drowning in them. I could only compare them to mountains upon mountains of snow...except that they were unbelievably warm. I don't necessarily mean temperature. I mean in acceptance. Before I could speak, the snow spoke in unison. You are the beloved. I lay down. Thy buried me. I could feel them all over me. There was no need to evangelize them...for they were evangelizing me. As I drifted off into the abyss of belonging, I reached to pull them further over me. In that moment, I realized I had to pee. As I came

back to bed, I looked outside to see mountains and mountains of snow. The weather had changed.

Amen.

February 4, 2021

Congresswoman Majorie Taylor Greene, My Former Sunday School Teacher

Earlier today, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green delivered remarks on the floor of congress trying to deflect attention away from all of the crazy shit she has said before a vote that ultimately stripped her of her committee seats. One section of her speech particularly stood out…

I believe in God with all my heart and I'm so grateful to be humbled, to be reminded that I'm a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for my sins. And this is something that I absolutely rejoice in today to tell you all and I think it's important for all of us to remember none of us are perfect, none of us are. And none of us can even come close to earning our way into heaven just by our acts and our works but it's only through the grace of God. And this is why I will tell you as a member of this Congress, the 117th Congress, I am a passionate, I'm a competitor, I'm a fighter. I will work with you for good things for the people of this country but the things I will

not stand for is abortion. I think it's the worst thing this country has ever committed.

Why this shit is bullshit (or fake religion)…

Why do people constantly make appeals to their belief in something with all of my heart? Is it not enough to simply believe…or is simple belief not strong enough to convince others that you believe? Why must we convince anyone of anything? Why not just believe and let your life speak to those beliefs? The problem with this situation/speaker is the same problem with many others…this speech is about words when actions would have spoken

much louder than anything that she could have said. Ultimately, her actions are speaking louder and that is why she feels the need to cover them up with words.

"to be humbled, to be reminded that I'm a sinner" is a classic Christian trick. ie If I convince you that you and I are both pieces of shit...then you have no standing to judge me. While it is true that we are all sinners, that doesn't mean that sin is devoid of consequence. You can't cleanse yourself with words... Love is the only power that can cleanse.

Congresswoman Greene is a sinner who keeps on sinning by refusing to see that her words/actions are sinful. Deflecting is fake spirituality/bullshit.

Modern conceptions of the atonement have led to some very dark places. "that Jesus died on the cross to forgive me for my sins" The crucifixion is about grace for the world. The problem with making it so personal/specific is that it quickly leads one to a place of arrogance. The question is not about individual forgiveness as much as it is about the individual's place in universal redemption. To think otherwise, is to think you can get

away with saying/doing whatever the hell you want...because you are forgiven.

Congresswoman Greene didn't apologize to all of the people that she has hurt with her words...because Jesus has already forgiven her of her sins? This is fake spirituality/bullshit.

"none of us are perfect" In life, perfection is not the standard. Decency is.

Congresswoman Greene has treated people like shit...and expects such actions to be forgotten/looked past because nobody is

perfect? There is nothing spiritual about such bullshit.

While grace abounds, grace abused is grace denied. "And none of us can even come close to earning our way into heaven just by our acts and our works but it's only through the grace of God." I have met so many people who think they can talk to/treat people however they want because there is...grace. To those people, let me make something very clear...

Jesus didn't die so that Congresswoman Greene can say whatever she wants with impunity. Such thinking is fake religion/bullshit.

"but the things I will not stand for is abortion. I think it's the worst thing this country has ever committed."

And finally… Let me assure you…abortion don't have a damn thing to do with whether or not Congresswoman Greene should be or is going to be or was punished for treating people like shit. The mention of abortion should let you know that this was not a confession of sin…this was a charade.

Congresswoman Greene's textbook fake spirituality/bullshit makes me think that I had her as a Sunday School teacher growing up.

Amen.

February 10, 2021

Larry Flynt: Scumbag Ethicist

Prepare for a shocking question… Do you remember the first time you heard that people have had sex with animals? Probably not the most pleasant of memories for most people… Regardless, I remember the exact time and place.

I was aimlessly watching television after church. Flipping through the channels, I stopped on an interview with Larry Flynt. To

be honest, I knew very little about him….and what I did know was not good. In fact, I had never heard anyone say anything good about him ever. I guess I just wanted to find out for myself. Over the course of a few minutes, I found him to be somewhat intriguing. I listened to all of his wild pornographic stories and ideas. Then, he truly blew my mind.

With regards to his own sexual development, he talked about growing up on a farm and having sex with chickens as a boy. After I recovered from my initial shock, I garnered up the courage to ask an older relative if they had similar experiences growing up on a farm. I

learned to quit asking when this relative told me about having sex with his goat in their teenage years. In those moments, I realized that such practices were more common than I could have ever imagined…or ever wanted to imagine. For a segment of the population, sex with animals was a thing.

Flynt's/my relative's (strange) admissions got me thinking… If I am so appalled by humans having sex with animals… Why am I so comfortable with humans eating animals? I became a vegetarian not long after that. So, I guess you can say that Flynt (the surprising ethicist) pushed me to a place of taking my

own ethics more seriously. Indeed…this phenomenon occurred widely.

Repeatedly, the disgusting/perverted/disturbing questions that Larry Flynt asked/forced regularly pushed people to confront their hypocrisy and engage their own ethics more honestly.

For this reason, I find myself strangely thankful for parts of his life (and of course disgusted by many others)…and mourning his death. Even in the midst of great evil…God always seems to find a way to bring forth some good.

Amen.

February 11, 2021

Missions = Disgusting

"How many souls of savages have you won today?"

"If you love Jesus...more than anything else...you'll be more than willing to get your penis chopped off in the jungle so that others might know Christ..."

"Missions is not about the people that you're evangelizing...it is about God's greater glory."

"You should never let your concern for your own body come between you and someone coming to know Jesus."

"I don't care how forceful you have to be...the most important thing is that you do not leave without a profession of faith."

Growing up, I heard some of the most absurd phrases imaginable concerning missions. When you don't know any better, they can be very motivating. I know. I lived it.

We were always told that God was all that mattered…which most of the time caused us to see the people in front of us as souls to conquer and not people to love. Such thinking can have incredibly disturbing consequences. The missions industrial complex (the innumerable organizations that raise untold amounts of money in the name of missions) exists based on a crusade/exploitation mentality. The entire operation is based on the idea that our entire relationship with the other/unsaved is entirely transactional. ie If you get saved then I will give you what you need/want. Rest assured, there is nothing more important than a profession of faith and once that is

achieved...there is no further need to care for the individual. To be an effective missionary you must close your heart to the personhood of the other so that you might "save" them. Missions is about dividing and conquering...not loving and uniting. In various parts of the world, I've seen it play out.

In the midst of seminary, I took a trip to China with Campus Crusade for Christ. For decades, the organization has been smuggling people into universities there to proselytize young people. In every major metropolitan area, there are underground churches that entice young people with western culture and then

try to push them to make a confession of faith. I saw impressionable young person after young person reject everything they had in order to get saved. The problem is that they didn't have anything to begin with. In turn, these missionaries (who are often only there for a short period of time) become their only means of survival. I don't know that you would be wrong to call it a form of slavery. Campus Crusade consistently bragged about how many people went to jail for their faith...but I never heard them talk about how many people they got out. While I am no fan of the brutal regime in China, I am also no fan of taking a people who are already struggling and transferring

them to hell for no reason. Missions is about increasing/prolonging suffering not alleviating it. A few years ago, Campus Crusade for Christ shortened their name to just CRU…to alleviate any perceived connections to the crusade. The problem is that they are still leading a crusade…with very real victims.

Early this morning, I read an article about how missionaries are encouraging indigenous tribes to not take the vaccine in Brazil. Their reason…one should trust in God and not vaccines. Some of the most vulnerable people on earth are being brutalized because of "missions." This is not an isolated incident.

Extreme and subtle acts of violence take place daily because the here and now is assumed to not matter.

I regret my participation in it all. God is so much bigger than all of that bullshit. The scriptures make it clear. Even the one that missionaries most love to cite...

Matthew 28:19-20

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that

I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The greatest commandment is love...ie teaching love. The missions industrial complex don't teach it like that though. For them...it's spiritual manipulation.

Love is God. Love is truth. Love is the only way. So go love somebody for no other reason but love...and leave all of the disgusting missions behind.

The real reason for all that is will meet you there.

Amen.

February 16, 2021

Eschatology: a Forgotten Theology for Our Perilous Time

Eschatology (the study of the end) still matters.

Matthew 16: 1-3

"The religious leaders wanted a sign. Jesus answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is blue.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is black and

threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you fail to interpret the signs of the times.""

"Right through here. You know what to do. Sit down and keep quiet." Middle School… When we got there early, we had to sit in the cafeteria and wait for the bell to ring. In those moments of waiting, some serious theological conversations took place. Most of my friends and I attended the same youth group. In those days, everybody was talking about the end of the world. There was a sense that Jesus was going to return at any moment. Our young formative minds latched on to the drama of it

all. Basically... The world is so evil that Jesus was going to come back, pick up his followers and then slowly destroy everything left. Ours was a culture of trying to interpret the times. Everybody seemed to think that every significant event was going to be the indicative moment that the skies would split and Jesus would come pick us up. Early one morning, one of my friends came running up to the rest of us. "Just put everything down. You don't need it. Jesus is coming back right now." I freaked out. I didn't know if I was ready. I started praying as hard as I could to make sure that I was going to get picked up. In the midst of it all, somebody had the sense enough to ask,

"How do you know for sure?" My friend replied with deep conviction, "Tammy Wynette just died." There was no hesitation in my response, "Who in the hell is Tammy Wynette?" As my friend explained the eschatological value of country music, my worries of impending doom quickly subsided. Then as now, apocalyptic ideas have often been silly, uninformed and fed by personal fears/hysterias. However, we can't allow such foolishness to keep us from honestly interpreting/responding to what is going on in the world around us. The signs still matter.

We are in the midst of the worst global pandemic ever.

We face some of the most serious weather challenges ever.

We are witnessing some of the greatest humanitarian disasters ever.

We constantly hear of wars and rumors of wars.

The list goes on and on.

The various consequences of our existence/sins/neglect/dispassion are plain to see.

While we are able to name all of these things, we struggle to understand what they mean. As a result, we continue living as if they are not happening. I don't believe these are signs that Jesus is coming back. I gave up on the palm reading foolishness many years ago...but I do believe that we are experiencing a judgment that is being handed down by creation itself. We cannot ignore the signs of the times. Informed eschatology is important...because it is the study of the end that can keep us from

getting there. We have failed to care for our earth. We have fail to care for each other. We have failed to care for ourselves. We have failed. The end is near…but it doesn't have to be. Judgment can be turned into repentance. We can walk back our mistakes. We can choose to love again. We can plainly see the signs of the times…we can turn our hearts toward restoration…and we can be saved. The end is not a question of interpretation…it is one of motivation.

Amen.

February 17, 2021

When a Trailer Park Kid Freezes to Death.

Growing up, I was taught to see trailer parks as the epicenter of trash. While I don't remember exactly who taught me such a thing, I know that I wasn't born with such an idea...therefore...I was taught...right? I'm sure that I'm not the only one who grew up in such a way...looking down on those who we assume are beneath us. Capitalism has a way of destroying our children...it teaches them that a trailer is not the home of intelligence or

success. Thankfully, the heart of the individual can be healed…we can learn to love…I did…but the souls of societies take much longer. There has to be a revelation. There has to be an exorcism. There has to be something much more than politeness. There has to be genuine fully developed love…for the neighbor and the self. Without such a development, we will continue to mistake divisions of class as division of souls. I wonder what people thought about that boy in Houston before he died? I wonder how many people were thinking about the folks in his trailer park before he died? I wonder what the difference would have been for him if he had

lived somewhere else? I wonder...perhaps in our wonderings arise our convictions. In fact...didn't Jesus say something about living in the trailer without heat?

She was trying as hard as she could. The trailer just didn't seem to be enough. Yet...there was nowhere else to go. The temperature kept on dropping. How can you prepare for something like this? She quickly kept gathering clothes. She got all of the blankets that she could. The pile kept growing on top of the kids. How can you know when enough is enough? If you don't know...if you have no experience...you can't...you just do the

best you can to survive. When she laid them down…she put her older son right next to his baby brother…thinking they would keep each other warm. Under the pile of blankets, they fell asleep. Through the night…the blankets proved insufficient. When she went to wake them…11-year-old Christian Pineda was dead…a victim of hypothermia. In wealthier parts of town, people were treating the arctic weather as a vacation. In the trailer park, it proved to be a death sentence. Does anyone care? Make no mistake…Pineda is dead because we didn't give him any heat. We were to worried about our own.

Jesus lives in the places that we loathe. Jesus dies in the places that we loathe. Jesus saves in the places that we loath. Jesus…

Do you hear it?

The trailer park is calling.

Amen.

March 7, 2021

Racist Children Force Child to Drink Urine /

Racist Employees Force Colleague to Drink

Urine

In response to:

‘This Is Beyond Bullying’: Justice Sought For

Plano ISD Boy Allegedly Abused By Haggard

Middle School Students

https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2021/03/05/justice-sought-plano-isd-boy-allegedly-bullied-by-haggard-middle-school-students/

This is the way the world ends.

You wake up. Tears stream down your face. You know it is difficult enough to exist as a black man without all of this other bullshit. You don't want to go to work...but you know that you have to. You pray that today will be better...but after everything you've been through...you struggle to believe in prayer anymore. Hope is dead...yet still you hope.

The car seems to drive its' self. You just die with every mile…until you are there…right out front…hell awaits.

When you open the door…one of your colleagues grabs you by the balls. On your knees in pain, you look up to see all of your colleagues laughing. Once you regain your composure, you pick up your things and get on the elevator. Thinking you might get a second of peace…you close your eyes. Then, another colleague jumps on the elevator and right before you get to your floor…he slaps all of your stuff to the ground. The elevator opens with all of your colleagues laughing again.

Finally, you get to your desk. After you sit down, you realize that there is something sticky on the seat. One of your colleagues proudly tells everyone that it is his semen. The entire office buzzes hysterically about you sitting in semen. The "joke" is on you...all day...everyday.

One day, a colleague comes up and offers their friendship. For the first time, you begin to feel real hope. For over a month, the friendship grows. Eventually, your colleague invites you to a party at his house. You are so excited. This is the first time that you have had any type of social outing in a long time. You get

dressed up...and feel great. Upon your arrival, you are led downstairs. Immediately, all of your colleagues from work and some of their friends grab you. As they shove you to the ground, everybody starts throwing things at you. You are crying for things to stop. You don't know what to do. Everybody has their phones out taking pictures. Nobody offers any help. Then, one of your colleagues comes out and offers you a drink of their piss. Thinking that it's the only way out. You drink it. Eventually, they all get too drunk to notice you leave. Pain is all that you know.

Once you're home…the terror subsides for a moment…at least…until you go back to work on Monday.

Imagine if you were dealing with this on a daily basis…

SeMarion Humphrey was/is dealing with all of this and more at Haggard Middle School in Plano Independent School District (Texas).

…being incessantly bullied within inches of his life.

We would never excuse this type of behavior in adults...so why do we try to excuse it in children?

...kids will be kids.

SeMarion is black and his tormentors were/are white.

...they're a reflection of us.

Evil is evil.

When we forget such a basic principle…we become apologists for hate…and allow the terror to continue.

These bullies should be hit with the full corrective weight of justice.

We will either stand for what is right (regardless of when/where/how/what age we find it) or we will die at the hands of the bullies.

This is the way the world ends.

Amen.

March 15, 2021

School Resource Officers: The School Bullies in Blue

"Few greater dangers face our children today than the police we're putting in their schools..."

"I'm here to keep you safe..."

Strange smells started coming out of the vents. Lights began to flash. Everyone ran to the exits. Sounds bombarded our ears. The

evacuation was anything but orderly. Nobody could breath. Before the day was out, dozens of students received emergency treatment…some of them (especially those with compromised lungs/immune systems in the first place) suffered permanent injuries.

Prior (to the gassing), our School Resource Officer (SRO) had responded to reports of a suspended student in the cafeteria. Instead of waiting for help to deal with the situation, the officer chased the student around the cafeteria. Eventually, the officer tripped and fell. Afraid that the student was going to get away, the officer tried to spray him with

pepper spray. Instead of hitting the student (who actually got away), the officer sprayed pepper spray directly into a fan in the school's ventilation system (which both intensified it and spread it).

The entire chaos happened because the officer couldn't aim pepper spray (and perhaps anything else)...which is probably why they had him working in our school in the first place. After the incident (gassing an entire school of children), the officer was so embarrassed that he never came back.

Don't worry...another clown took his place.

Let's face it...people don't become cops so that they can work in schools...so children become their source of excitement.

This childhood event from my former school is not an isolated occurrence. Innocent students are regularly injured by SROs. When they think about school shootings...everybody wants officers in schools...however...they don't take the time to consider the collateral damage.

"Why is there a mean man with a gun standing outside my school?"

That was the question posed to me by my son (and I'm sure by countless other children). He didn't see the officer at his school as anything but a threat. "A man with a gun..." I didn't know what to say...but deep in my heart in knew the truth...guns/violence always invite more guns/violence.

The SRO slapped a child.

The SRO molested a child.

The SRO slammed at a child.

The SRO punched a child.

The headlines of SRO misdeeds are widely accessible with a simple Google search.

Look for your self.

With so many incidences of police brutality… Do we really want our kids to see officers as their friends? With so much gun violence… Do we really want our kids to become comfortable with guns? With so many possible ramifications… Do we really want our children treated like criminals?

Really?

It seems too great of a cost to me.

What happens if the officer becomes violent/aggressive with the kids? Who is there to stop them? Hell...they might be the one who is going to shoot the school up next...and we are giving them full access to the place.

and... Even if you think my arguments are silly, think about this...the shittiest officers are going to be working with your children...i.e. they ain't pulling people off of the SWAT team

to sit on their asses at the local school. Go and interact with some of these officers...you will leave scared that they might accidently shoot you as you walk back out to your car.

furthermore... How can we end bullying when we invite into our schools the biggest bullies around...those in blue? Surely...our reaction to the constant images of police brutality shouldn't be to send the brutalizers to hang out with our kids?!?!

lastly... Our children (especially those who are marginalized and oppressed) are being jailed

at an alarming rate. The school to prison pipeline begins with your SRO.

Is it just me…or is this shit not obvious?

School is no place for the police…period.

Abolish SROs!

Amen.

March 21, 2021

Context is Salvation: Envisioning Darkness as Light

The End Is Near.

"Fire in the Sky."

"Glaciers Melt."

"Oxygen Depleted."

"Endless Drought."

"Lawlessness."

"Global Suffering."

"Water Evaporates."

"Coast Obliterated."

"Fear Unleashed."

The End Is Here.

Burning light descended.

The ozone was gone. Pollution and multiple nuclear catastrophes had destroyed it. Fire was killing everything that was left. Light was now deadly. To see was to go blind. To breathe was to suffocate. To feel was to burn. It seemed that the light could find millions of ways to guide us to an agonizing death. The

light was now our only enemy…survival our only mission. We had to escape…

Darkness became survival.

We adapted to our reality. We learned to live without the light. We were forced to become a new people. Everything changed…including our faith. The old words had little contextual meaning. We had to find different ones. We needed words that spoke to us. We began to interpret from our space. We began to interpret for our liberation. We began to interpret…

Darkness became the word.

God is my darkness and my salvation…whom shall I fear?

I am the darkness of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness…

God has made darkness to shine upon our hearts.

You are the darkness of the world!

Behold, I will turn light into darkness.

The darkness pushes back against the light…and the light did not overcome it.

Let there be darkness!

For you were once in light, but now you are in the darkness of God.

God is darkness…in God there is no light at all. The people who have escaped from light have seen a great darkness…

Darkness became divine.

I resisted the darkness. I prayed to the darkness. I repented of the light. I turned to darkness forever. I will never turn back to the light.

Amen.

March 22, 2021

The Woman Clothed in Darkness

Sleep eluded me. I'd sat for hours...ever closer to the coldness of the window...looking out into the density of the mountains. Stars were everywhere. I guess they helped my search...although I didn't really know what I was looking for...a search for the unsearchable perhaps. Just when I thought that all hope was lost...I saw a woman clothed in darkness...slowly she crept down from the mountain. I couldn't take my eyes off of her.

The luminosity swayed incessantly in the night breeze. Eventually...she stood directly outside of my window. Though I could see divinity within her...I was afraid to move. Without assumption...but with certainty...she reached out her hand...and declared, "Be not afraid..."

I never stood up...I never opened the window....I never walked outside. I only did one thing... I thought my assent...and there I was...with her. It felt like I'd always been there...in the darkness with her. I didn't know where we were going. I didn't care. I trusted her more with every step. I don't know that I touched the ground. Divinity was holding me

up I guess. I could see that the soil was growing darker…I knew that we were getting closer to the river. I could hear it. For a second, I considered turning back…and then she looked at me and declared, "Be not afraid…"

Water began to flow over me. Everything was rising. The deeper we went…the more things changed…or transformed. I felt different. I heard different. I smelled different. I thought different. I saw different. Then, I was completely immersed. I clung tightly to the woman. Slowly…we became one. There was no recognizable difference between us. It was as

if we had always been that way. Time stopped. No explanation was needed. I wanted to stay there forever. When we started to move...I resisted...and she declared, "Be not afraid..."

We shot out of the water like a rocket. From deep within our person, the woman cried out, "This is my beloved..." There were no more questions. I knew everything that I ever needed to know. We were one. I knew that she would be with me always...even until the end of days.

We walked back up the mountain. Step by step we grew deeper into each other. There was no

difference between us. Eventually…sleep found us. We stayed there forever…in the fullness of creation…and death was no more.

Amen.

March 22, 2021

"Death is Just a Part of Life." WTF?

In the midst of death, people really know how to speak dumbassticity. Who gives a shit about "thoughts and prayers" when someone's child has been murdered? When has "they're in a better place" ever helped the widow of a suicide victim? What does "it was just there time" have to offer to the survivor of a fatal car accident? Where is the "they lived a great life" when a child is mourning their mother? What in the world does "they will never leave

you" even mean? We are so addicted to all of this meaningless gibberish. We use it over and over again with no regard for how it might come across. The core of dumbassticity is a fundamental inability to love your neighbor because you are too busy trying to comfort your self. I am convinced that that's the only reason people say any of this bullshit. With that in mind, there is one statement that is worse than all the others...because it dismisses present and future pain all at once...

"Death is just a part of life."

Growing up, I heard this phrase all the time. People in our family used it as an automatic response to difficult questions about death. The problem with such a response is that it is theologically bankrupt. We are out here claiming to follow Jesus and talking this bullshit. Death is not a part of life. Death is the antithesis of life. The message of Jesus is about the death of death. To preach anything else is to preach falsely…to deny the very message of love…that love never dies. Make no mistake…death is an injustice of the highest order…and the message of Jesus is about destroying it.

We don't understand how much we fuck people up by saying such things.

I lost my grandfather a few months ago. We were very close. I can still hear his silly conversations with my kids. I can still fear warmness of hope when we prayed together. I miss him. Since he lived a long life...people acted like his death was just the way things were supposed to be. Regularly, my grief was treated as an overreaction. Why are you so upset?

"Death is just a part of life."

This response was meant to shut me down. It had the opposite effect. It caused me to cling even tighter to the message of Jesus that love is the great destroyer of death. Love never dies. Death has nothing to do with life.

Last week, a young white man burst into multiple spa locations and gunned down as many people as he could. The victims were mostly of Asian descent. The events unleashed fear of further hate crimes throughout the country. In the midst of so much pain, I heard that bullshit again...

"Death is just a part of life."

So, are we just supposed to act like nothing ever happened...because it's just a part of life? There is no greater evil than to dismiss injustice...especially in the name of compassion. The people in those spas didn't have to die...and love demands that we push back with all that we are...not just casually assume that it is normal. FYI: It is always fucked up to call the murder of others normal.

Today, I've struggled with the death of a family friend from many years ago. Honestly, I hadn't seen or talked to her in decades. Yet, my heart still longed for her to live. I only know of one

way to explain such a longing…it was put there by love in the beginning…my beginning…our beginning.

"Death is not a part of life."

Only love is.

Stop talking all that other bullshit.

Amen.

March 30, 2021

The Liberation of Jack Dillard

"Son of a bitch." Daily, that's what my great-great-grandfather's name was as in those parts. The community intended to make him pay. They hadn't forgotten. Earlier in his life, he'd felt a tug on his conscience and ended up fighting on the winning side of the Civil War. Unfortunately, that was the losing side as far as everyone he knew was concerned. For his entire life, he was reminded that there was a price to be paid for his defiance. He died much

earlier than he had anticipated. His son/my great grandfather did too.

"Don't do it!" Flames upon flames ripped through the sky. Precious seconds disappeared. He had to make a decision. Was he just going to sit there? Those barber tools were the only means that he had to make a living. The flames covered the entire shop. By now, the employees of the neighboring mill had emptied out to watch. Nobody could believe it when they saw him run in. Everybody believed it when he didn't run out. The decision was a crazy one...or maybe it wasn't...maybe it was just the beauty of love.

His son/my grandfather was born a few weeks after his death.

"I lived with the embarrassment of it my whole life. Everybody told me that my father was a great man...and he was...but he was never able to get away from the stigma of being the son of a son of a bitch. I set out early in life to not make that mistake. I wasn't shy about who I hated."

"I carried a gun just for the n****."**

"N***" It was the first time I remember hearing that word. That's not to say that I**

hadn't heard it before...but it is to say that it was the first time I remember hearing it. When my grandmother asked me what I was learning in school, I started to recite some of Dr. King's words. That was a nonstarter for my grandfather. The car exploded in hate. That wouldn't be the last time.

"Don't tell me about the n****! I've worked them all my life. They'll lie you, cheat you and steal everything you have. It's their nature. Trust the n****** at your own risk."**

"Give me all the money motherfucker!" For weeks, they'd been watching his movements.

Now, they were upon him. He tried to resist...but how can you resist a gun. The car sped away with his business' weekly earnings. From then on out, every problem he had was due to the "n****" that robbed him. I grew up listening to it all the time. Though I knew his language/beliefs were wrong, my grandfather loved me dearly...and I him. Sometimes love has to sit in such uncomfortable places.**

"We're being invaded!" Our community experienced radical demographic shifts as I grew up. On more than one occasion, I heard people use a variety of colorful expressions to

describe their new neighbors. I expected my grandfather to join in the chorus...but his heart was changing. For many years, my grandfather cared for my grandmother...whose mind rapidly deteriorated...and it was his neighbors of color who constantly offered to help. Their friendships became like oxygen. There would have been very little emotional survival without them. In the midst of it all, I began to see my grandfather as less of a racist...and more of someone in desperate need of love.

"I've met somebody...and I want you to meet her." One of the great shocks of my life

occurred when my grandfather told me that he'd fallen in love with a black woman named Lilly (a pseudonym). Less than two months before his death, he invited me down to his home for one last visit. While I was in the basement working, he called for me to come up. To my surprise, I met Lilly...the woman that he'd been talking about for so long. For the next thirty minutes, my grandfather gushed over this woman. In fact, he spoke in ways that I'd only heard him previously talk about my grandmother. I didn't say much. I just listened in amazement. When he asked for my silence with regard to the rest of our family, I didn't know what to say. Sensing my

hesitancy, he simply said, "You'll know when it's time."

"I'm dying son." In the last few private conversations I had with my grandfather, he kept telling me about his feelings for Lilly. Unsure of what to say, I just listened. I felt privileged to hear a softer side of his heart.

"I've been changed." Love slowly became more important to my grandfather than hate. But how is such transformation even possible? Surely, the answer is as brief as the question...

"Love never fails."

Even in death…Jack Dillard lives because love lives…because…

"Love never fails."

Love found my grandfather in a broken place…and that love still lives…in fact, it can never be denied.

Amen.

March 31, 2021

Rape Was/Is Never a Joke. (T/W A Good Friday Recollection)

For many years, I haven't thought about that morning. I guess one tends to block things like that out. However, nightmares always seem to find their way back to the surface.

The other night, I was talking to the kids about boundaries. I didn't grow up in a world where we ever talked about such things. I certainly would've been better off if I had.

As the conversation continued, the kids could tell that I was growing increasingly uncomfortable. For a moment, I closed my eyes. Then, it all came flooding back.

We were trying to save as much money as possible. That meant we would all be sleeping in the same room. I was so exhausted that I didn't care. I quickly fell asleep.

The next morning, I was awoken to rowdy laughter. Everybody else was already up. I was very groggy...and I couldn't figure out what was going on. In time, I realized that

someone was on top of me. I repeatedly heard the same sound...that of a bomber dropping their payload over and over. "Oh my God, he actually just went in." That's when it became apparent that one of my friends was trying to shove his erect dick into my asshole as the rest of our friends cheered. He was holding me down. I couldn't move. Repeatedly, I demanded that he stop. Nobody listened. "I think he likes it!" Then, it was over. Everyone just went about their day. The sheets were moist with his cum as I got up. My friend was still laughing...and assured me that he was just playing. "I'm not gay you know."

I got up and acted like nothing happened. In fact, I was very successful at it. I even remained friends with this guy for many years after. I just chalked the whole thing up to ignorance. Now, I realize it was much more than that.

Sensing that I had left and come back, the kids wanted to know what I'd been thinking about. Considering their innocence, I simply said...

"I was thinking about a time when a lack of boundaries really hurt."

In the vessel of my memories, death paid me

an unexpected visit.

It's allowed me the chance to ponder the

meaning of this holy hour.

"It is finished."

Good Friday is only good if we will ourselves to

remember that we are not defined by

death...for love has overcome such things.

Amen.

April 4, 2021

The Resurrection of George Floyd: On the Fullness of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ

***The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most pivotal moment in the history of the cosmos…not because it is static and unchanging…but because it never stops. The brilliance of the resurrection beckons to think about all sorts of resurrections. Jesus said that he would always be incarnate in the least of these amongst us. I can think of few more helpless senseless atrocious images than that**

of George Floyd being murdered by Derek Chauvin. In those moments, I don't just believe that Jesus was with George…I believe that he was in him…one with him. As such, I have engaged with the Gospel of Luke to illuminate the wider meaning of the resurrection of Jesus using his incarnation in the person of George Floyd. Surely, this is what the promise of Easter is all about. Jesus lives because George lives. George lives because Jesus lives. The sting of death is gone…for love never dies.

Early on the morning after the burial, a group of activists went to the tomb of George Floyd

and found the casket dug up and opened. While they were confused, a couple of angels appeared and said, "Do not look for the living amongst the dead. George is not here. George has risen!" Immediately, the activists remembered God's promises. The group of activists ran back to tell all the others. Nobody believed them. So, they all ran to the tomb and saw for themselves. Amazed, the activists grew more excited with each passing second.

While they were protesting, George Floyd came up from behind and started talking with three activists. Not realizing who he was, the activists started to talk about their pain and

heartbreak over George's death, "There was no reason for any of this. Some people say there is a message of hope to be found in his death. We find such things difficult to believe." When they got to the end of the protest, the three disciples urged George to have dinner with them. After they started eating, the activists recognized George and he disappeared. Speaking to one another, they said, "How did we not recognize him? Were our hearts not burning within us?" The activists ran to the others and told them, "George has risen!"

While they were still talking, George Floyd appeared and greeted them all warmly.

Everyone was terrified and thought he was a ghost. One even shit in her pants. Sensing their fear, George invited them to come and feel were the knee pressed down on his neck. Everyone touched and knew that it was him. While they sat there stunned, George asked, "Do you have anything to eat?" Since there was no food in the house, the disciples ordered some pizzas and had them delivered. Later, munching on a slice of pizza, George said, "I told you justice can never die. You are witnesses of what has happened. Feel the power of God come over you. Go...tell the world...tell them that justice lives."

Then, George Floyd led them back outside. As he slowly disappeared, he promised that his spirit would remain with them forever. Immediately, they knew that he was telling the truth…for they could feel love burning eternally in their hearts.

Amen.

April 11, 2021

Judas.

nights are lonely

i'm cut off

such movements

did something

you called me

to be your disciple

i watched the money we took in

together

we walked the world

i saw things

others can only dream of

you transcended boundaries

i never thought would fall

you freed the oppressed

you gave dignity to us all

eyes were opened

they saw justice too

everyone was healed

you made all things new

the dead arose

i was amazed

you went to sleep

without even a peep

the temple was stormed

hearts reformed

justice was served

the arc of history curved

the waters got rough

we were terrified

then you appeared

in the corner of my eye

thousands hungry

without any money

i was scared

you knew

what to do

five thousand fed with a fish or two

women arrived

to cook and to bless

one poured perfume

an expensive mess

palms started waving

i knew the plan

i was the one

to put you

in their hands

darkness fell

time was right

to save the world

on this chosen night

i couldn't believe

you choose me

to be the one

to set the world free

i took the money

i did the deed

i brought the soldiers

along with me

i kissed you softly

i love you so much

i remembered the nights

that our bodies clutched

you

were

snatched

beaten

violated

tortured

i couldn’t

take it anymore

but you said this was

what my life was for

now

here i stand

right at this tree

a rope in my hand

so i can finally be free

everyone thinks

what i did was a betrayal

but without me

the rescue fails

so tonight

as the rope grows tight

i hope that someone

will get my story right

i loved a man

he loved me back

together

we saved a world

that was under attack

revelation continues

love lives

and dreams never die

Amen.

April 14, 2021

The Revolution: F* the Police, Abolish the Police & Love Kim Potter**

Fuck the police. Surely, this is not an unreasonable statement in light of the circumstances we find ourselves in. There seems to be no end to the brutality. We have reached a point where one cannot love their neighbor and shout anything else. Yet, there still is that space of neighbor. That place where God sits. So, yes…fuck the police…but what comes after that.

Duante Wright should not have been profiled.

Duante Wright should have never been stopped.

Duante Wright should not have been manhandled.

Duante Wright should not have been threatened.

Duante Wright should not have been murdered.

There should be no denying that a crime was committed.

There should be no denying that an arrest should be forthcoming

There should be no denying that a conviction should be handed down.

There should be no denying that a severe punishment should follow.

These are facts.

However, the affirmation of such facts only speaks clearly to this particular tragedy. Repeatedly, we've seen these tragedies play out and nothing changes on a wider scale. In a few weeks...sometimes even a few days...the tragedy plays out all over again. Why are we always so shocked? We didn't do anything to correct it the first time. Make no mistake, there will be many more Duante Wrights into

we are prepared to do something different. Surely, it is beyond time for us to join each other in a vast movement of revolutionary change. Surely, it is time for us to shout, "Fuck the police." Surely, it's time to abolish policing as we know it and do something completely different. If we continue down the same path, there will be more Duante Wrights.

So, yes...fuck the police...abolish the police...but that is still not enough...

Hate cannot destroy injustice...hate cannot reform policing...hate cannot create a

sustainable future…only love can do any of these things.

So, the last task is of course the hardest. There is no such thing as lasting reform without Kim Potter. We have to find a way to meet the Potters of the world in love and proceed forth as a community. That doesn't mean that Potter shouldn't be punished…but it does mean that we have to get to a place where we earnestly believe that no one is expendable. If we leave Kim Potter behind, there will be more Duante Wrights.

So, yes…fuck the police…abolish the

police…and love Kim Potter.

The revolution will not always be simple.

The revolution will not always be clear.

The revolution will not always be televised.

Thus is the path of love.

Amen.

April 20, 2021

Pray for Derek Chauvin

For years, I've given my body to the struggle against police brutality. On multiple occasions, I came within feet of giving my life. When George Floyd was murdered, I was horrified. For months and months, I've been demanding justice...praying with my feet if you will. Thus, I expected to be overjoyed if a guilty verdict was reached. I wasn't.

Let there be no doubt, Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd. The verdicts are correct. Yet, the outcome didn't feel like progress...it felt sad. As people started to celebrate, my eyes remained glued to the man being led away in handcuffs. I couldn't figure out why. I prayed for God to release me from whatever was going on with my soul. The reply was clearer than anything I've ever heard in my life. Pray for Derek Chauvin.

I was overwhelmed. I didn't have enough strength for such things. I just wanted to be done with all of it. I didn't really want to give another second of my life to Derek Chauvin. In

my moments of resistance, I remembered the words

"...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

Jesus couldn't have been clearer.

"...love Derek Chauvin and pray for Derek Chauvin..."

I realized anew that the journey to true justice was always going to flow through the redemption of those who perpetuate injustice. You can't hate your way to wholeness. In fact...

"...hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you and you hit me and I hit you back and you hit me back and go on, you see, that goes on ad infinitum. It just never ends. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that's the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil. And that is the tragedy of hate, that it doesn't cut it off. It only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within

the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love."

-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

November 17, 1957

This is no time to celebrate the destruction of an enemy. This is a time to press into the work of revolution...one in which love will finally break the cycle of hate. Let's end police brutality now. Pray for Derek Chauvin.

Amen.

April 30, 2021

Blue Lives Matter: Blinding Slogans, Dehumanization and Further Tragedy in Boone, North Carolina

Two officers/deputies approached a home last week. Inside, there was a man that had killed his parents. Before the day was out, all of them would be dead.

In the midst of great tragedy, people run to what they consider to be great answers. The

problem is that such answers are often not so great and dehumanize all parties involved.

Blue Lives Matter. This language is not just incorrect. It's bullshit.

Deputies.

Chris Ward and Logan Fox gave their lives to help their neighbor...not to glorify law enforcement. In smothering these guys in blue, we are minimizing their sacrifice...not enhancing it. These guys are humans...who attempted to love...isn't that enough to mourn them? Do we have to lionize them with

meaningless slogans...and colors? The greatest thing about Chris and Logan is that they were children of God and that is why their death should be mourned by all. It seems to me that we should learn to check on our neighbors so that folks like Chris and Logan don't have to. If we had, maybe Chris and Logan would still be with us.

Those poor parents were just done in by a child they must have hated. This language is not just incorrect. It's bullshit.

Parents.

Michelle and George Ligon might be the greatest unsung heroes of this entire situation. Knowing that their son had major problems, they went down loving him. Is there any greater form of love? Desperately, trying to reach your child until the very end. Truly, in their hearts...the greatest of these was love. Can you imagine seeing the deathblow coming and choosing to forgive/love the perpetrator? Love is more than slogans...love is choosing to believe that love is enough.

That guy was just plain evil. This language is not just incorrect. It's bullshit.

Perpetrator.

Isaac Barnes is just as much a victim of this situation as anyone else. He was a victim of deteriorating mental health. He was a victim of substance abuse. He was a victim of a community that was unable to reach him. He was a victim of reckless gun laws. Make no mistake…Isaac is a victim too. I doubt you will hear many slogans for him…but without learning to love Isaac…the community will continue to face many more tragedies like this.

The message of Jesus is all about flipping the narrative when situations like this. In pointing

to the least of these amongst us, Jesus encourages us to listen to the slogans so that we might completely love those for whom no slogans are being chanted. If we begin with Isaac, perhaps we will better learn how to love/mourn Chris, Logan, Michelle and George. But if we start with Blue Lives Matter…we will never get to Isaac and…in turn…will be stuck in a constant cycle of tragedy. Such sloganeering isn't just rude or unhelpful…it is evil…for it erases the bodies of children of God…and any chance we might have for a better tomorrow.

Amen.

May 9, 2021

A Message to Pastors in Boone, North Carolina:

How Many More People Will Have to Die

Before You Will Engage the Mentally Ill?

Just over a week ago, two officers/deputies (Chris Ward and Logan Fox) approached a home. Inside, there was a mentally ill man (Isaac Barnes) that had killed his parents (George and Michelle Ligon). Before the day was out, all of them would be dead.

Since the tragedy, the focus has been primarily on the officers/deputies. "Back the Blue" bullshit is everywhere. Nobody is talking about the mental illness that propelled the tragedy. I wrote this letter to demand that the church/my local clergy colleagues do better.

.....

***Perhaps, you might believe that this letter doesn't apply to you. You might even have done more than most. Unfortunately, the recent tragedy proves that whatever anyone**

did wasn't enough...which is why this letter is ultimately a letter for us all.

Dear Colleague,

For over a week now, I have watched you declare your unwavering intent to, "Back the Blue." Honestly, I have found such displays to be disgusting...though not surprising. Of course, ministers are in the business of supporting things that they believe will wash away their sins. Surely, this time is no different. Slogans like "Back the Blue" distract from the fact that you did little to protect the

lives of Chris Ward and Logan Fox before they were killed. When faced with the ongoing mental health crisis in this area, you have most often chosen indifference.

One is left to wonder, what would have happened to Chris Ward and Logan Fox if you had stepped up and cared for the least of these prior to this event. Loving Isaac Barnes was the initial test of whether or not you were serious about supporting police. By failing to support the mentally ill, you failed miserably…and no amount of pro-police sentiment will be able to wash the blood of Chris Ward and Logan Fox from your hands.

I would like to think that you've learned a lesson...but forgive me if I am a little pessimistic. Sadly, I have seen you harden your heart too many times before. I fear that you will continue to fill your worship services with the idolatry of "Back the Blue." But you know as well as I do, idolatry doesn't wash away sins...only love does. So, where are you going to stand? Will you stand with the mentally ill or continue your indifference? Hesitation already proved deadly.

There are countless Isaac Barnes out there in desperate need of help. If you choose to do

nothing, then a tragedy might visit you/your church and reveal the truth of my admonition. Standing with the mentally ill is an exercise of love…not just for the least of these…but also for the wholeness and health of our communities.

Make no mistake…this is a warning. I doubt there will be many more to come. We have seen acts of violence come closer and closer. The hour of salvation is now. Do not turn your head. Colleague…please let us turn from your wicked indifference to the mentally ill…and follow Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Zionville, NC

https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jeffhood/me/

May 15, 2021

Boone, North Carolina: DEFUND THE POLICE

The following letter went out to hundreds of clergy on the morning of May 16, 2021.

Dear Colleagues.

Greetings. I have been amazed at your responses over the last week. From the Baptists to the Methodists to the Presbyterians and everyone in between, you are dedicated to making sure that we all join together to do

everything in our power to make sure that tragedies involving mental health become a thing of the past.. Repeatedly, I have listened to your complaints about local law enforcement not having the training that they need to deal with these situations (which was unfortunately magnified in the last few weeks). Make no mistake...we are not the only community having these problems. Our colleagues around the country are demanding movement/action to "DEFUND THE POLICE." While such a phrase can sometimes be scary, it need not be. What most of our colleagues mean by such statements is that they want funding for public safety to be

directed to areas that are about preventing tragedies instead of combating tragedies. There is no question that our local law enforcement does not budget/spend enough money with regards to engaging mental illness. No law enforcement officers should be put in the position of responding to a mental health call without a qualified mental health professional right next to them. Obviously, this takes money. "DEFUNDING THE POLICE" is about making sure that securing that money is a priority. So, let's join together with our colleagues around the country and find a way to "DEFUND THE POLICE." Surely, we deserve

more than being afraid to call law enforcement because we are not sure they can handle these types of situations. I look forward to hearing from you this week….and planning our next steps.

Keep the faith.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Zionville, North Carolina

https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jeffhood/me/

June 5, 2021

The Holy Trinity: A Wedding Story

"The TRINITY is the most crucial doctrine of our faith. For Jesus cannot be God without it. If Jesus is not God...we our damned forever." Immediately, I freaked out. Who wouldn't? I'd never been real sure I believed in...or even completely understood...the concept of the TRINITY. I thought it was enough to love God and know that we are loved. Well, apparently not...apparently there was this added construct...one that was

nowhere to be found in scripture or any other early manuscripts for that matter...one that was supposed to be obvious. I knew better. Hell, I believed better. I didn't want anything to do with the TRINITY. "I've got to find a way to move beyond this bullshit. I've got to find a way to God." I thought I was done with the TRINITY forever. I was wrong.

"If we can get marriage...there will be no going back." It would be an understatement to say that everyone's hopes were high. For the first time, courts were widely beginning to affirm LGBTQ equality. For years, I was at the forefront of the movement to push

harder...wider...faster. Eventually, we won...or at least that's what everyone said. On the night of our biggest victory, the place to be was at a local monument. Everyone was so joyous. I remember declaring as loud as I could..."Who wants to get married?" I was one of the last to leave that night. I wanted to soak in every last ounce. When I finally decided to go home, I realized I wasn't alone.

On a bench, I could see three people in tears. When I asked what was wrong...and if there was anything I could do to help...one of them replied, "It's just hard when everyone is excited...and you know you're supposed to be

excited...but you can't be...because you're one of the ones that got left out." Initially, I didn't know what they were talking about. Then, I realized...they were all together.

"If love is love..." The phrase kept ringing in my ears. So, I started to write. Quickly, it became clear that this was not a conversation that most people were willing to have...especially church folk. In fact, most responded with violent condemnations. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Love has a way of unsettling things. I didn't care. I knew what was right.

Alex was one of the first people to contact me. I'll never forget that moment. .It was my first encounter with a deeply loving committed polyamorous relationship. With deep pride, Alex told me of his deep love for his wife Emily and her new partner Frankie. The love was contagious. I was amazed. In time, I also got to know Emily and Frankie. Slowly, I watched them all collide. I watched them grow. They learned to be together...to love together. The three became one. For the first time, I started to understand the TRINITY. I was seeing it take place right before my eyes.

In just a few short hours, I will preside over a marriage ceremony that unites Alex, Emily and Frankie. For some, such a ceremony is out of bounds…a step too far…a slippery slope. I guess they don't understand the beauty of the TRINITY.

Amen.

June 23, 2021

7 Years Ago // Don't You Dare Turn Your Head:

The Self-Immolation of The Rev. Charles Moore

The Rev. Charles Moore visits me often. For over 7 years now, I've closed my eyes and felt the pull of his flame. The media attention is long over. Too much time has passed for most. Our memories are so frail. I won't ever be able to forget. I still see the flames. To commemorate the passion, I've decided to repost the blog that I wrote after hearing about

Moore's self-immolation. I encourage you to sit for a moment with the great martyr of Grand Saline:

Don't You Dare Turn Your Head: The Self-Immolation of The Rev. Charles Moore

The fiery passion of 79-year-old retired United Methodist pastor The Rev. Charles Moore is raging in my soul right now. On June 23 around 5:30pm, Moore exited his vehicle in Grand Saline, Texas, doused his body with gasoline and set himself on fire. After rescue efforts by bystanders, Moore was taken by

helicopter to Parkland Hospital in Dallas and eventually died late last night. Based on notes left behind, Moore chose to self-immolate based on his frustration with the United Methodist Church's position on human sexuality, opposition to the death penalty, disdain for racism (especially in his hometown of Grand Saline) and his deep anger at Southern Methodist University's decision to house the George W. Bush Presidential Center.

Rev. Moore knew how we would react. On June 22, the day before he self-immolated, Moore wrote, "I know that some will judge me insane." When I first shared Moore's story

with a table full of people at a Dallas restaurant, everyone immediately declared him insane. I know different.

While a graduate student in history at the University of Alabama, I spent six months studying self-immolations that took place in both the United States and in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. With stark consistency, the persons who self-immolated that I studied were remarkably sane and unquestionably persons of deep conviction. The temptation of the hour will be to turn our heads and call The Rev. Charles Moore insane. If we do…we should also turn our heads from Jesus and call

him insane too. For we must not forget, Jesus sat in the Garden of Gethsemane and made a conscious clear decision to step out into death…just like Moore.

Instead of judging Rev. Moore, maybe we should try to ignite the passion for justice that burned so brightly in his life in ours. When Texas tries to execute Manuel Vasquez on August 6, maybe we should do something more than simply turn our heads and protect our dignity. When our churches and societies ignore racial segregation and discrimination, maybe we should do something more than simply turn our heads and protect our pride.

When we are asked to perform a same-sex wedding ceremony or ordain a same-gender loving person, maybe we should do something more than turn our heads and protect our salaries/pensions. When institutional injustices occur all around us, maybe we should do something more that turn our heads and bless them with our silence. I will go to bed this evening thankful for the public witness of The Rev. Charles Moore and pray that the church would garner even an ounce of his passion and courage.

On a personal note, I serve on the Board of Directors of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the

Death Penalty. Rev. Moore helped found the organization. Because Moore lived, I am able to do the work that I do. My respect for Moore is unwavering and I am proud to follow in his footsteps. Jesus asks us to give our lives and Moore did.

Tonight my passion for Jesus burns as intensely as ever. When I look straight ahead into the dark, I see Moore's bespectacled image burning. I see Moore giving his life so that others might live. I refuse to turn my head. I know that Jesus is speaking to me from there. The courage of a passionate follower of Jesus can set the world afire with love. May the

great martyrdom of The Rev. Charles Moore

make it so.

Amen.

more:

https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/man-on-fire/

July 11, 2021

The Crosses: A Heretical Reconciliatory

Theology of Liberation

I closed my eyes.

I left time and space.

I'd asked for intervention, divine intervention to understand the cross. It is such a confusing event. We have. Jesus…the very incarnation of

God…being crucified…bled out…treated like shit…murdered. And we are told that this is the way of God.

For thousands of years, the focus has been on Jesus and Jesus alone. Now, occasionally we will allow ourselves to drift over to a thief on the cross, but rarely do we allow ourselves to stay there. And it seems like the thief on the cross is placed in such a space, just for the sake of the complexity of the narrative. The church has never theologically dealt with such folk, but yet here I am in the darkness looking for light and I hear the voice of all voices say, come.

So, I proceed in faith, not knowing where I am to go, but knowing that it is the voice beyond voices that is leading me there.

Every step draws me closer to something…something…something I know not of. There in the distance…I see three objects, the crosses, not the cross, but the crosses. And as I look to the crosses, I am reminded of the pain…the fear…the hesitancy that inhibit me…draw me back…and make me want to turn away. But I know that unless I keep going…I will not know…I will not be fully known. I will have no understanding of yesterday or

tomorrow. So in courage, determination and boldness, I follow the voice. I proceed. I hear the torments. I feel the pain. I'm scared. Yet, I refuse to stop. Closer, I move to the movement of the voice.

Look widely. I take in the panorama. The hill grows steeper...and steeper still. The weight is unbearable. It feels like a cross...maybe even three. The voice whispers...louder and louder. Don't stop. Don't stop. Please, don't stop. The revelation was in the distance. I knew it deep within my soul. I clung to what was. I clung to what is. I clung to what could

be. I clung…to the dirt. The Holy Trinity was at the top.

The foot of the crosses seemed to be an eternity away…yet…ever present along the journey. From side to side, I drug my face through the dirt. I didn't know what else to do to show my respect for this holy place. Somehow, I made it to my knees. I cried out. Remember me. Remember me. Oh God. Remember me.

Then, I heard it. The words were clear. Lo, I am with you always…even until the end of the age. Despite the reassurance, I was filled with

trepidation, fear, angst…even pain. Looking at the crosses, I felt like there was something missing from it all. Jesus seemed to be holding back. Something was inhibiting him from being the fullness that he was created to be. The voice was gone.

In that moment of isolation…Jesus became fully God…Jesus was the least of these…yet, Jesus was not alone.

The voice returned…as the dialogue commenced.

I was shocked to hear the voice in another. I was so concentrated on Jesus…that I was unable to hear the voice in anyone else. Then, it grew louder. I wanted to stay at the cross…but I knew there was another cross…and divinity seemed to be flowing in that direction. So, I moved.

I cried out to the voice. Then, I heard something weaker…maybe even lesser. With great effort, I hear the lesser cry out for salvation. I remembered the words of Jesus…I am the way…I am the truth…I am the light. In those moments, I heard it over and over again. Remember me?!?! The thief became

something more than more. The revelation was there. Deep within his pain and humility…his status as the least of these…Jesus flowed up the feet and into his entire being…the thief became God.

Today, you will be with me in paradise…you will become paradise…you will be made like God…and so it was…as it was in the beginning and in the end. In the midst of death, the thief was more alive then he'd ever been. He was the incarnation of God.

God became the thief…the thief became God.

Two Gods looked down on me from the crosses. I was so overwhelmed...that I forgot...there was another. I didn't want to go there. I'd always been told that was where evil resided. Yet, I heard the voice calling me on. So, I drug my face across the ground. I arrived at a space more frightening than anywhere I'd ever been. There was such isolation. There was such pain. There was such God.

The thief had already rejected divinity...but divinity had never rejected the thief.

The voice told me to listen closely. I raised my ear to the heavens. I went there.

The thief was angry…hateful…rude. The thief was rejected…scared…lonely. The thief was in a prison of his circumstances. No one cared about him. Why should they? He was the epitome of the absence of God. Yet, the voice rang out through the heavens. This is my body. How could it be so? Then I remembered…what you have done to the prisoner…the condemned…the executed…you have done to me. Immediately, I knew. Divinity had flowed through the first two crosses and arrived at him. The crosses were a trinity of divinity. In the marginalization and

oppression of his guilt, the thief was made whole.

I fell backwards. I didn't want to accept it. I had known otherwise. I was told that this guy was the furthest thing imaginable from God. Yet, I saw it with my own eyes. I felt it in my soul. I'd been changed.

The revelation continued to flow...those who are on death row are the very presence of God. I did not want to receive it. Yet, I knew that God would be absent from my life if i did not will myself to believe in the miracle of it all. Slowly, love began to win.

I realized in those moments of rejection…from the thief…from Jesus. The thief becomes God. Rejection from the world is what makes us whole. The least is the most. God is a bottom up kind of God. God is always were we are least likely to find God. Thus, is the gospel.. The least are the way…the truth…and the light. The third cross is where God was hiding in plain sight.

I knew why I had been brought here…to bear witness to it all.

Before it was over, the voice told me to look further. In the distance, I watched the thief open the door of paradise for the thief and Jesus. I watched the three become one. I saw them gather the entire cosmos to themselves. There was no barrier to the love of God…the love of the least. Love was complete.

The thief looked at me and declared…

Lo, I am with you always…even until the end of the age.

The third cross will never leave us nor forsake us.

The good news just keeps getting better.

Amen.

September 6, 2021

A Beautiful Birth: The New Theology School

There is profound beauty in the pursuit of God. Perhaps, there is nothing more beautiful. When I decided to pursue theological education, I don't think I ever really knew what I was pursuing. I just pursued. I guess I pursued as I had been pursued. The love of God is relentless. I wanted to be just as relentless. I knew where I was going. I just didn't know

exactly what was driving me. It was confusingly clear. I guess theology always is. There was no shortage of advice. Everyone wants to leave their mark on the budding theologian. Perhaps that's their way of speaking into the future. Or perhaps they were just arrogant assholes. I guess one can never be sure. Words are often fickle things.

In the midst of it all, I met an old pastor. I guess she was actually more of a wizard. Her magic remains. "Never be a student of theology…be a theologian…a great liberator of worlds." Though there have been more than a few times that I remembered the phrasing

more clearly than others…the words consistently draw me back.

Over the last few years, I started to consider what the future might hold. I guess we all stumble upon such times of reflection. For years, I'd placed the entirety of my body into the fight for justice. I wrote. I spoke. I dreamed. I marched. I bled. I guess I died too. Through it all, I became a theologian…a great liberator of worlds. In the dream world, I realized that it wasn't my six graduate degrees that got me there…it was the freedom to write…to speak…to be exactly who and what God created me to be. I realized that one of the great desires of my heart was to help others

find such liberation. It was in those exact hours that I started to gather other theologians.

For months, we pushed into each other so that we might eventually birth a new tomorrow. I have no doubt that we have…a space for the empowerment of theologians…for the empowerment of great liberators of the world.

Come and see…

The New Theology School

thenewtheologyschool.com

inquiries: thenewtheologyschool@gmail.com

Amen.

October 5, 2021

The Gospel of Frances Haugen: Jesus Just Deleted His Facebook Account

Over the last few days, I've been captivated by the words of corporate whistleblower Frances Haugen, a former employee of Facebook. Repeatedly, Haugen's stirring witness has caused me to think deeply about my/our collective engagement with social media. Haugen's testimony...and the documents that she was able to smuggle out of Facebook...leave no doubt that these companies have created an

addictive product that monetizes the pain and suffering of others. I don't know of anything more evil. These revelations/interactions have forced me to engage a difficult question...

Would Jesus use Facebook? I used to answer that he would use it purely for communicative purposes and not spend too much time on it otherwise. Now, I'm not so sure. The quotes from Haugen below illustrate that any time on Facebook contributes to the suffering of others. The Jesus I know has always been about eliminating suffering.

"The thing I saw at Facebook over and over again was there were conflicts of interest between what was good for the public and

what was good for Facebook. And Facebook, over and over again, chose to optimize for its own interests, like making more money."

“I’m here today because I believe Facebook’s products harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy.”

"The company's leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer, but won't make the necessary changes because they put their astronomical profits before people."

"When we live in an information environment that is full of angry, hateful, polarizing content it erodes our civic trust, it erodes our faith in

each other, it erodes our ability to want to care for each other, the version of Facebook that exists today is tearing our societies apart and causing ethnic violence around the world."

"Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, they'll make less money."

"And what's super tragic is Facebook's own research says, as these young women begin to consume this-- this eating disorder content, they get more and more depressed. And it actually makes them use the app more. And so, they end up in this feedback cycle where they

hate their bodies more and more. Facebook's own research says it is not just that Instagram is dangerous for teenagers, that it harms teenagers, it's that it is distinctly worse than other forms of social media."

"Facebook has demonstrated they cannot act independently Facebook, over and over again, has shown it chooses profit over safety."

In the light of Frances Haugen's testimony, how shall we now live?

Amen.

***quotes from Haugen's interview with 60 Minutes and her testimony to a subcommittee of the United States Senate.**

October 13, 2021

Dropped

Something dropped from the sky. Something dropped right next to me. Something...

The day was clear...clearer than I'd seen in a long time. I wasn't expecting any visitors...but visitors often unexpectedly find me. This one just dropped in. I guess I would call it rude...but then again beauty often is.

To describe it would be an injustice. It was an experience...that's all I really know.

From somewhere else...entirely somewhere else...I felt something coming out of me. It wasn't something that you could hear...touch...smell...or even speak to. In fact, it wasn't something at all...it was everything.

Ecstasy filled the depths of my depths. I was no longer alone. Furthermore...I knew that I never would be again. Life was different now...or maybe this was no longer life...perhaps it was life beyond life. I knew that I had to stop talking or I would miss it.

The world exploded. This something and I stood there alone. I never wanted to part. We haven't.

Forsaking all somethings...I've remained in you...nothing...

Amen.

October 28, 2021

Theology of Future Past: Past Thoughts on Certainty

***I came across this article this morning. I wrote it 12 years ago. Though the terms/definitions have changed (and my relation to them/i.e. I don't hold to all of the specifics of the article any more), the central theme still loudly speaks...CERTAINTY is always the GOD KILLER.**

“If you will not listen to us, our souls will continue to sob in secret for such pride; and our eyes will bitterly weep and flow down with tears, because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive.” (Jer. 13:17)

Brothers and Sisters, we are a people overly confident and blissfully distracted. Yet we have no peace within: we invest ourselves in endless infighting, petty bickering, and merciless judgmentalism. And yet our churches are shrinking? Young people are hemorrhaging from our pews in astounding numbers.

Wonder why? I look around and see nothing but the tragedy of certainty.

Our churches peddle certainty like a drug. We have assured people that we have the answers and used these assumptions to construct litmus tests for salvation. I am very aware of the dangers of such tests…my own evangelical tradition has been quick to exclude anyone who disagrees with their often narrow understandings of orthodoxy. Now, I look around and see no one left to challenge such assumed certainty. In the midst of such purgings, our hearts have grown cold towards our neighbors and to the groans of our ailing planet.

My mainline brothers and sisters have not escaped this phenomenon either. The only difference is their exchange of orthodoxy for a secular and modernistic thought that is just as narrow in its demands. They have banished all who disagree from their midst terming them “backwards,” “closed-minded,” "uneducated"— or perhaps even worse— “conservative.” In their churches I sought refuge from the sting of a narrow fundamentalism, only to find a secular orthodoxy that is no less strident in its excessive stipulations on my thinking. They champion a love of neighbor yet their love does not extend to their more conservative neighbors who have either purged them or left

their denominations. The body of Christ has been broken dear brothers and sisters, but not in fellowship.

Make no mistake; all sides have their own agendas and most point away from Christ towards a greater power in this present age. Your certainty is blatant and speaks quite loudly of what your chief concerns entail. God is not mocked and nor are we.

Young people are not fooled by such charades. You have denied us a place to ask our questions and so we remain silent. You have denied us community, so we stay at home. You have denied us a place to be active in the genuine restoration of the planet and so we

wait. In the midst of your certainty you have denied us the church and the love of Jesus Christ.

Your purgings and demands for your certainty have been quite effective don't you think…

On your watch, the church has been seduced by power, and has lost its way. You have claimed to be a people of peace yet wars rage on every horizon with your blessing. You claim to care so much about life yet premature death occurs daily for many throughout the world due to your perpetual greed. You love to speak of your hope yet you have so often completely dashed all of ours.

We cannot hear Jesus over your continual shouts at one another.

Perhaps it is time that you show us who Jesus is by tearing down your walls of assumptions and seeking to live like Him. Perhaps it is time that you truly become known by your love and not your agenda.

Choose to deafen your ears to such urgency if you desire, but as to save energy for my generation, at least cut off the lights when you are the last one to leave the sanctuary…

Amen.

December 2, 2021

On the Assassination of White Folk: The Case of Richard Lee Richards

Picture this. Late last Monday night, there was a crusty old white dude in a motorized wheelchair named Richard Lee Richards in a Tucson, Arizona Wal-Mart. The store suspected him of stealing something and notified police. When confronted by an Officer Ryan Remmington, Richards flippantly pulled out a knife, uttered some fleeting threats (that he would have physically been unable to carry

out) and kept rolling through the parking lot. As he rolls, Officer Remmington walks next to him and commands him to stop. Richards just ignores the officer and keeps on rolling. Eventually, he reaches the entrance of a Lowe's across the parking lot. Officer Remmington continues to yell for him to stop. Then, seemingly out of nowhere (when he could have just easily disabled the wheelchair or tried a whole host of other actions)…the officer fired nine shots…hitting Richard Lee Richards in the back and the side. Seconds after the shots were fired, Richards falls out of his wheelchair dead. Officer Remmington put handcuffs on the man before he provided any

sort of aid. Videos of the incident end with the officer looking like he had just accomplished something. Make no mistake, Richard Lee Richards was assassinated.

Though the response in Tucson has been meaningful…the officer was fired, a diversity of city officials expressed their collective outrage and the case was referred to the District Attorney's office for potential prosecution…the response from our wider society has been limited in comparison to other significant instances of police brutality committed against black folk (few hashtags,

few protests and limited media coverage).

Why?

Recently, someone asked me why I couldn't get more white people to be involved in the movement against police brutality. After some thought, I replied that white folk don't think that the movement cares enough about white victims of police brutality…and that is a space of much needed growth. I had no idea that the assassination of Richard Lee Richards would so brutally prove my point.

Imagine. What if Richard Lee Richards were black? Marches. Protests. Extensive coverage.

Constant replays of the video footage. Hashtags. Post after post. Famous attorneys. On and on. We have seen it play out over and over again. Unfortunately, Richards is not black and his assassination will do little to move the national movement forward…not because it isn't heinous…but because he isn't black.

Until the assassination of white folks matters as much as the assassination of black folks, it is going to be hard to get white folks more involved in the wider movement.

I hope that we will soon be able to realize that police brutality is the enemy and not each other…before more black and white bodies are laid down in our streets.

May we heed the words of the great revolutionary Fred Hampton…

“We’re going to fight racism not with racism, but we’re going to fight with solidarity.”

Amen.

December 13, 2021

Destroying in the Name of the Jesus of Color…

The Real One.

Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ ”

Matthew 21:12-13 (NKJV)

Then Jesus went into the local white church and drove out all of those who put images of a white Jesus on the walls, and destroyed paintings and smashed stained glass windows. And Jesus said to them, “It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of racism.’”

Matthew 21:12-13 (Modern Paraphrase)

Growing up, I was taught that Jesus was white. Nobody had to explicitly say it like that (although a few actually did) it was written on the walls. You see, in every room of our church hung images of a white Jesus. When someone pointed to Jesus they pointed at an image of w white Jesus. When we pondered the love of Jesus…he was white. When we pondered Jesus in prayer…he was white. When we were encouraged to look to Jesus…he was white. When we were told that Jesus loved the little children…he was white. In our most intimate moments of prayer…Jesus was white. No matter how we thought about or taught about Jesus…he was white. The images

reinforced every ounce of racism that we carried as a church. So when we went out into the world, we carried a racist Jesus with us.

It wasn't just our church. Everyone I knew thought that Jesus was white as well (including many friends of color who had these same images of Jesus hanging on the walls of their churches). It wasn't until I got to college that I began to question white images of Jesus. Slowly, I started to realize that Jesus descended from a long line of persons of color…Jesus' parents were persons of color… Jesus was born in an area of persons of color… Jesus was by situation a person of color…in

every definable way…Jesus was a person of color. Initially, I found such thoughts to be particularly disturbing. Everything I knew about Jesus seemed to crash down. I read text after text to try and figure all of this out. I talked to preacher after preacher. I constructed thought after thought. Ultimately, none of that really seemed to help. Then, one day…

In seminary, I was participating in a conference at an old wealthy white church. I stepped out of the session to go to the bathroom. Along the way, I found myself stopping in a classroom to look around. High

on the wall at the front of the room hung an image of a white Jesus. As I looked at the image, I heard the words of the real Jesus (a person of color) say, "Follow me." I didn't hesitate. I went to the front of the room and ripped that image in half. In those moments, I received a call from God to an evangelism that has remained hidden until now…destroyer of images of the white Jesus. Ever since then, I haven't stopped…

I would estimate that since graduate school, I have destroyed close to a thousand images of the white Jesus (mostly those silly mass-produced images that hang in room after room

of old churches). Taking my cues from a Jesus of color that destroyed the temple, I am committed to destroying more. I am sharing all of this now because I hope others will join me. We need more evangelists of the real Jesus…the Jesus of color. Honestly, I can't destroy all of the images…but together we can…

There is no reason for more children to grow up thinking that Jesus is white. Racism has lived and thrived in our churches for generations…due often (at least in part) to the fact that we keep passing along these

blasphemous images of Jesus. For the sake of the gospel, may we destroy them all.

Amen.

+I want to make it clear that I am not talking about priceless works of art. I am talking about the senseless images that hang in so many of our churches.

++The attached image is a recent acquisition that I painted the words “Not White” over… which now hangs in our home.

December 17, 2021

The Embodiment of Christmas: Broader Lessons from the Text

Putting on my suspenders and bowtie…I prepared for my big night…I was only five years old…and I don't remember much from back then…but I do remember confidently standing up and walking to the microphone at the Christmas program at my school…after clearing my throat…I flawlessly recited Luke's account of the birth of Jesus…though those words have festered in my soul ever since…

there are truths to be embodied that are less explicit than the plain reading of the text.

Joseph and Mary were forced to travel an incredibly long distance. For what? To pay taxes. The poor are always forced to do more.

There were no medical professionals to help Mary in her final days of her pregnancy. Prenatal care is still nonexistent for most women.

There is often no hospitality at the places that people are from. LGBT persons (and a variety of other marginalized and oppressed people)

are expected to travel to inhospitable places over the holidays.

These folks didn't have a place to sleep. Homelessness remains a pandemic.

The inn keeper provided Mary and Joseph with the worst possible place to stay and called it charity. This is how most of our society thinks about helping people…doing the absolute minimum.

A variety of animals were being kept tied up as property. Creation still yearns to be free.

Child birth is a dangerous event…and remains so for women throughout the world.

Like most accounts of birth…there is no mention made of the sacrifices that the woman has made to bring this child into the world.

Marginalized and oppressed people brought the world salvation. This birth was a miracle long before anybody realized that this was God.

Love is always homeless in a world of inequality.

Jesus was placed in a feeding trough…

surrounded by animal shit.

There are angels amongst us.

God's path can be scary…but that doesn't mean it's not right. Sometimes we must press into the fear in order to witness the enormity of the magic of it all.

Joy.

The angels needed to say that the presence of God was for all people because they were

aware that our first inclination is to always declare who is in and who is out.

The Spirit of Christ lives.

Poverty was the first descriptor of God.

Glorifaction, peacification and goodwillification are the primary purposes of Christ.
Though God can be found in nature, sometimes you have to go into the city to see God.

The revelation of God is never complete without the action of the hearer. Hearing and

doing are intrinsically connected. Our eyes are opened for us to see.

God calls us to run.

The stinky shepherds were part of the family. When our hearts are open to what might come…we will never be put off by what arrives.

Prophetic words were showered upon the child. Perhaps such words made Christ more Christ than passing words ever could.

The shepherds saw God.

Wonder was always present in the midst of Christ. Nobody had it all figured out. The truly wise cling to such truths.

Mary pondered the meaning of love. She kept such ponderings within to fuel her journey of love without.

The shepherds told everybody. Sometimes holy secrets need to be given holy voice….even holy shouts. To be silent is to be selfish.

These folks were faithful…and because they were…God is with us.

If they hadn't been faithful… there would be no God.

Ultimately though, Jesus couldn't be born in Bethlehem today. Due to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, there would physically be no possible way for Mary and Joseph to get there.

There are broader lessons beyond the text. Such lessons can't simply be memorized. They must be embodied. Ultimately, truth comes from within.

Amen.

December 18, 2021

The Other Christmas Story: A Vision/Revision of Revelation 12

Deep in meditation, I was transported to another place. In the distance, I saw a family gathered around a table. The earth began to shake. Immediately, the family ran for refuge. Bombs started to explode everywhere. I was terrified…but I couldn't close my eyes. I was here to watch. Not long after the bombs, I heard bullets slicing through the air. Screams rang out at all of the

neighboring houses until the door to our house swung open. I tried to scream…but nobody could hear me. In horror, I watched as the soldiers brutalized the family. They wanted something that the family did not have… information. When one of the soldiers placed a gun to the temple of one of the children, I screamed…but still nobody could hear me. After a brief countdown amidst audible screaming, the soldier pulled the trigger. In that moment, everything changed. The heavens opened up in protest…and the door opened. Clothed with the sun and with the moon at her feet, a glorious radiant pregnant woman stood at the door. Time stopped.

In her womb, the woman carried Justice. Fearful of losing their power, the nations came together to await the birth of the child so that they might devour it. Then, she gave birth to Justice. Before the nations were unable to grab the child, for God had hidden it. Desperate to cling to their power, the nations rose up to perpetuate as much injustice as they could. War raged.

Until Justice was able to grow to fruition, the partial fought injustice with all of their might. Then, the perfect rose up. Justice flung

the nations to the ground and declared them

defeated. Loudly, the heavens declared,

“Now Justice has come…

the realm of God is at hand,

and the authority of our God is everlasting.

As for the nations,

the ones who perpetuate injustice day and

night,

they have been hurled down.

Justice has triumphed over them

by the power of love

and by the word of truth;

Therefore rejoice, you heavens

and all who dwell throughout creation!

But woe to the nations,

because Justice has been unleashed!”

When the nations saw that Justice would not stop until injustice was eradicated, they pursued the woman who had given birth. Justice saved her and together they work to finish the work that Justice has started. God is with them. Injustice cannot win. The nations will be turned to right and all will be complete. Those who join the woman and her child will know Justice forever.

In the doorway, the woman gave birth to Justice. Immediately, the child destroyed all of

the guns…sat the souls of the oppressed at ease…and changed the hearts of the soldiers. Justice destroyed the conflict…all was made right…creation was whole. The nations were no match for the creator of all things. The family was saved. I was amazed.

Then, I woke up. Outwardly, everything seemed to be no different than it was. Inwardly, everything had changed. Justice had taken root in my spirit. The vision was real. The struggle continues. I stand with the woman and the child. I am becoming like them. Justice lives through me. The meditation never ends.

Amen.

December 22, 2021

The Helsinki Interfaith Peacemaking Initiative

Fellow inhabitants of earth,

For almost two years now, I have served as the Dean of the blossoming, The New Theology School. Our goal is to help people of faith develop platforms to become public theologians in their particular contexts. In the midst of this work, I received an email from a Lutheran pastor in Latvia named, The Rev. Pavel Levushkan. For multiple months, we have had the opportunity to get to know each

other. In each of our interactions, Rev. Levushkan has urged me to pray for his country and the wider region as they struggle with living between growing conflict between the West and Russia…especially in Ukraine. As war drums begin to beat in Eastern Europe, I am determined to stand with my student Rev. Levushkan for peace. To this end, it is my pleasure to join The Helsinki Interfaith Peacemaking Initiative…so that ours might be a world that knows more than constant rumors and actualizations of wars.

I'd like to share some of the founding words of the group…

The Initiative sees it as our task to awaken responsibility in people, both ordinary citizens and those in authority. The standard of conduct in these difficult times must be responsibility for the fate of our planet, for what we will leave of the world to our children and grandchildren. And this is impossible if one is deprived of a moral, spiritual core.

Our initiative is addressed to all people of good will, regardless of religion. Our goal is to awaken the peacemaking potential inherent in every religion. Believers must say "No!" to the impending catastrophe, which is the fault of

politicians who are short-sighted and obsessed with personal ambitions.

It is time to build bridges of friendship and understanding between divided nations, ideologies, and religions. Before it is too late. Judging by the reckless statements of those responsible (or rather irresponsible), the shadow of nuclear Armageddon is already looming over humanity.

In this situation, the voice of the religious community is more important than ever. Our Lord and Savior has called us to be peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers:

they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Believers seek peace because God calls us to it, not for political or other ends. We can afford to speak the truth openly and without regard to faces, for "there is only one Lawgiver and Judge over us, who decides whom to save and whom to punish" (James 4:12)

Our call to Christian believers and all people of good will of every religion and worldview is to turn to their deepest roots of wisdom to seek solutions to the civilization crisis together and to prevent another cold or even hot war and to

stop the existing conflicts on the European continent.

Our method is the golden rule of compassion, which we find in the Gospel: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Luke 6:31 BTI)

Our practice is to offer prayers, meditations, roundtables, and conferences together where believers will collectively seek guidance from God and offer this wisdom as a peacemaking response to society.

The best response to a military threat is to

avoid killing people at all costs. "Shun evil and do good, seek peace and strive for it" (Psalms 33:15)

Our participants are leading experts, religious figures, writers, journalists, political scientists from Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Western and Eastern Europe.

On January 1, the Day of Global Peace Prayers, an international holiday during which believers call upon God to end all wars and send people peace on Earth, the presentation of the Helsinki Interfaith Peacemaking Initiative (HIMI) will take place.

In the coming days, there will be further opportunities to be involved in the Initiative. I will keep you updated. For now, I ask that you join me in prayer so that Eastern Europe and the rest of the world might know peace. At this particularly holy time of the year, may we stand with the angels of Bethlehem and declare with all of our might…

“Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace…”

Truly…may we be found faithful to such a call…

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

December 24, 2021

The Hood Creed: Queer Thoughts from a Queer Believer

Often, folks who disagree with my open interpretations of God will declare that I don't really believe in anything. Yesterday, I had someone tell me that I shouldn't celebrate Christmas because I really don't believe in all of that. These statements are coming from political perspectives rather than spiritual ones. Conservative evangelicals think that

they have a monopoly on God and moral thought. I can't even begin to deconstruct the absurdity of such thinking. However, I can state unequivocally what I believe. Honestly, I am a fairly orthodox Christian…and always have been. In the midst of such, I firmly believe with the rest of the church that God is beyond our wildest imagination. The word "QUEER" has always helped me speak of such a place. That place where words start to fall short. So in the spirit of the season, I offer you the beautiful conviction that …God is the Queer, Jesus is the Queerest and the Spirit is the Queerer. Such affirmation speaks of both

the now and the not yet...that which has always

been and that which will forever be.

I believe in...

The Queer,

The God Beyond God,

Maker of heaven and earth and all that is

beyond,

Maker of us in the Queer's image,

And of all things visible and invisible:

And in Jesus Christ,

The Queerest of God,

The Queerest of All Creation

Begotten of the Queer,

God before all creation,

God of God,

Light of Light,

Very God of very God,

Begotten, not made,

Being of one substance with the Queer,

By whom all things were made;

Who for all creation, and for our salvation

dwelt amongst us,

And was incarnate by the Queerer in the womb

of Mary,

And was made the Queerest,

And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.

The Queerest suffered and was buried,

And the third day the Queerest rose again,

And ascended into heaven,

And sits at the right hand of the Queer.

And the Queerest shall come again with glory,

To judge both the quick and the dead:

Such judgment will draw all into the Queer for life eternal

The realm of Queer reconciliation shall have no end.

And I believe in the Queerer,

The Spirit eternal and giver of life,

Who proceeds from the Queer and the Queerest,

Who with the Queer and the Queerest together is worshipped and glorified,

Who speaks through the Prophets,

Those who dare to speak honestly of the Queer.

And I believe in one Queer Church,

Hidden amongst the religious and nonreligious alike,

That grows Queerer and Queerer,

I acknowledge one Baptism as symbolic for the remission of all sins.

And I believe in the revelation of the Queer,

Passed from Queer to Queer throughout time and space.

And I look for the Resurrection of the dead,

And the Queer life of the world to come.

The return to the beginning.

The just restoration of all things.

World without end.

The God beyond God.

The Queer.

Amen.

December 26, 2021

Unbelievable Love: Christ in Us

***This theological reflection is loosely based on 1 John 3.**

BELOVED.

God has lavished unbelievable love on us. We are the children of God. In fact, God is our inheritance forever. We are what we are. We are what we have always been. We are.

The world forgets where it came from. Wake up, we come from God. Those who remain asleep need not worry for they will be awakened. God will not let us sleep forever. We were born to be awake…to journey with our eyes wide open.

We are awakened. We are learning more each day. We are becoming. We are becoming known as God is known. Christ has shown us. We will be made like God. We will see God as God is. God is Hope. We are Hope. Let us be as we are. Our Hope is in Hope. Our God is in

God. Pureness of thought is pureness of being. Let us be pure as God is pure.

The sinner is the one who fails to look within. Christ has come so that we might know who we are and where we are going. There is no sin in God. There will be no sin in us. God will destroy all sin forever. In God, we will abide forever.

Don't look for God in all the wrong places. Cling to the righteousness of love…for God is Love. The devil is the one who cannot see the love within…the one who refuses to know the God within…the one who refuses to go within.

However, God is not finished with the devil. Though the devil has sinned since the beginning, God's love cannot be overcome. Christ has come so that all might know the victory of love…including the devil. All are born of God. All will come to know love. Sin will cease…because the seed of God that is in all will come to fruition in all. There is no one that is not a child of God. Anyone who does right has come to a knowledge of their origin. Those who do evil are unaware of their origin. We all come from the same place and we are all going to the same place.

Those who love know God. Those who hate do not…they are still searching. Love is always found in the end.

Love one another. Those who love are focused on God and do not have time to focus on anyone else. The world hates love…because it distracts from the obsession with self. Pay no attention to such energies…we are passing from death to life to death to life. Those who love will not remain in death. Christ has come to abolish death. Life eternal is waiting for us all…some will just take a little longer to get there than others. Love has destroyed death. Live for life not death.

We have eternity within us. We have love within us. We have God within us. We have everything that we need within.

We know such things for sure…because Christ died so that we might all live in love forever. To share love with others, we should give our lives to others. Christ has come to help us give ourselves to all who are in need…to give the most precious thing that we have…our love. Let us not love with only words…but let us love with our actions and in truth.

We can rest in the God within. We can know Love's presence. The God who created us all lives within us all. We know this because Christ has told us so. We can exist in great confidence…because God has chosen to love us…to call us into love eternal by name.

May we live in love…so that we might keep the commandments of love…and live forever now.

May we cling to the Spirit within…the God whose name is Love.

Amen.

December 29, 2021

Southern Baptist Distinctives: A New Publication from Ellin Jimmerson & Jeff Hood

At the dawn of new ways of thinking about about God…and perhaps most often not thinking about God at all…leading Southern intellectuals Ellin Jimmerson and Jeff Hood come together to discuss what it means to be Baptist in their particular context and beyond.

INTRODUCTION:

Jeff Hood and I have been friends ever since we discovered each other. He knew me as an immigrant rights advocate and film maker. I knew him as an idiosyncratic, unpredictable wild man of a Baptist minister, a peacemaker and lgbtq ally. Over the years our friendship has deepened in no small part because each of us is curious about the other's ideas, especially, about the interaction of faith with politics. Or, maybe I should say about the fullness of what it means to be a person of faith in a world that is both beautiful and terrifying. Of how to speak of a faith oriented to life in a context of bodily and spiritual faith-sponsored deaths on so many fronts.

The following discussion is about how we understood what are called “Baptist distinctives” in the past and how we understand them today. Jeff and I come from very different faith backgrounds. His family were old school Baptists comfortable with their church and their culture. My family were the opposite—uncomfortable to the point of overt conflict with their church, their families, and their culture. How we both evolved in our thinking about what it means to be a Baptist here in the South and beyond is what this book is about.

The Rev. Dr. Ellin Jimmerson

December 28, 2021

Bios:

The Rev. Dr. Ellin Jimmerson is a Baptist pastor (ordained in a Southern Baptist Church), filmmaker, public theologian and activist living and working in Huntsville, Alabama. Dr. Jimmerson serves as the Professor of Liberation Theology at The New Theology School. Dr. Jimmerson wrote and directed the award-winning migrant advocacy documentary, The Second Cooler, narrated by Martin Sheen. Dr. Jimmerson gained

international attention when she officiated at the first same sex wedding in Madison County, Alabama. Following the wedding, she was forced to resign her position as Minister to the Community at her home church…after they were disfellowshipped by the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Jimmerson is a brilliant liberation activist and strategist.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood is a Baptist pastor (ordained in a Southern Baptist Church), public theologian and activist living and working in Little Rock, Arkansas. Educated at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

(MDiv) amongst other institutions, Dr. Hood serves as the founding Dean of The New Theology School. The author of over 50 books, Dr. Hood's work has also appeared extensively in the media, including in the Dallas Morning News, Huffington Post, Fort Worth Star Telegram, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Los Angeles Times, WIRED magazine and on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, NPR amongst a whole host of other outlets. Dr. Hood is a radical mystic and prophetic voice to our closed society.

Excerpt (from conclusion):

EJ: You know, Jeff, it's so obvious to me that you've thought about these things much more than I have. You really have which I think is a good thing. We compliment each other. I mean, our experiences are similar in some ways, yet very different in other ways. And I think that's what creates the, the beauty of this text we've created. I grew up blissfully uninvolved in whether I was going to heaven or hell or whether I had to get baptized, didn't have to get baptized. There was just basically, as Mama said, Jesus is about freedom. And that was about the end of it. But you grew up on the seriousness, even the life or death consequences of these things.

JH: I hope that my children can grow up in a world in which there is no heaven or hell, there's only heaven. And that whatever hell there is, it’s here amongst us. If we vanquish evil, then we vanquish hell.

EJ: Amen, Jeff. Beautiful way to wrap this up.