

THE QUARTERLY Cedar Ridge Newsletter

CONNECTING with GOD JUNE 2019

Welcome to the latest edition of our Quarterly Newsletter. Summer is just around the corner, which for many of us means a change of pace—perhaps the chance to slow down and relax, and more opportunity for time with family and friends. Summer is a great time for engaging in new experiences and for recounting stories from the past.

Recently as a community, we have been looking at some of the treasured ancient stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. In them, we read about a God who is very present and active, emotional and changeable, and even vulnerable to the actions and responses of humanity. This picture of God develops throughout the Hebrew Scriptures as later writers edit, rethink and reinterpret the stories of old. We see in these stories the view that experiencing God is a dynamic interaction rooted in all the joys and sorrows, successes and failures of human life. As such, Scripture is sacred because it tells the stories of God interacting with people in ways that can be adapted and applied in different contexts down through the ages.

Some of this may seem strange to us, as people raised in a very different cultural setting. Like many of the early Christian theologians, we have been strongly influenced by Greek thought.

Drawing on Plato and Aristotle, we tend to view God in more abstract and transcendent terms. This perspective sees God as an "immovable mover"— an eternal, unchanging God who causes things to happen, but who is not significantly affected by events in time and space. Scripture, through this lens, is sacred because it is equally as true today as it was when it was written.

Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek perspective is good or bad. Both have their weaknesses in trying to explain a God who is bigger than our theories and metaphors. And both can be helpful in understanding what it means to experience God. Multiple perspectives challenge our thinking and help us to discover more of the mysterious God of Love.

In this newsletter you can read about how various community members experience God through diverse means. We all have much to learn from each other as we seek to know God more deeply, and experience more of God's loving presence in our every day lives.

And of course, what would summer be without our traditional "God in the Movies" series? Join us for freshly made popcorn as we explore how our culture continues to experience the

Divine through stories about the pain, love and challenges of life. God is present in them all. So this summer, let's look for God in our own story and in the stories of others.

Matthew



Matthew Dyer, Lead Pastor

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Bee-keeping at Cedar Ridge

By: Noel Lloyd



 T o be honest, bees kind of terrified me as a kid. Whether it was the exposure to too many B-movies (no pun intended) of mutated bees taking over the world, or the fact I got stung in the face by an angry hornet

whose hive I was stupid enough to throw rocks at, my fears are well grounded. So, when I decided to volunteer to be part of Cedar Ridge's bee team this spring, you might rightfully question the intelligence of the move.

Luckily for me, becoming an adult combined with an appreciation for the honey bee's vital role in our ecosystem superseded the lingering fears of my childhood. I had long been intriqued by the church's bee colony located in the mysterious hinterlands beyond the church. When a call went out for individuals to join the bee team over the winter, I answered. I quickly learned that there isn't much to being part of the bee-keeping team in the winter, as the bees are dormant until the warmth of spring spurs them into action.

On Easter Sunday in April, I ventured out for the first time to the dual wooden beehive structures that stand in the

aforementioned hinterland. I approached with some trepidation, but secure in my bee-suit (slightly smaller than my XL frame) and my trusty bee-hood and armed with my bee-sedating smoker, I was confident enough to go forward. My job for this day was to replace the sugar water buckets. Sugar water serves as an early season nutrition boost to help get the bees up and running until they have enough honey to sustain themselves. The task was easy enough, and I managed to replace both buckets without a swarm of angry bees chasing me back to my car. In fact, the bees were quite chill. And I might even say, appreciative of the liquid snack I had left them.

Since my Easter Sunday encounter with the hive, I've had other opportunities to go back. It is a delight to watch them in action, flittering in and out of the hive, their legs filled with pollen. As the summer progresses, I look forward to seeing the colonies grow and thrive, as they produce their honey, and on a larger scale, keep the cycle of life going around us.

If you have the time, I encourage you to venture out into the hinterlands sometime and see the colonies for yourself. It will be worth the journey, even if you have an affinity for those angry bee movies. •

Nearer God's Heart in a Garden

By: Ruth Campbell

The kiss of the sun for pardon, The song of the birds for mirth, One is nearer God's heart in a garden Than anywhere else on Earth.

These oft-quoted words by Dorothy Frances Gurney can be seen at any garden center or nursery inscribed on signs, decorative paving stones, and other ornaments. I'm pretty sure my mother's garden contains at least three copies of this verse. (My brothers and I are not the most creative gift givers!) But are these words true?

When I sit in the shade, admiring the flowering plants and ripening fruit, listening to the birdsong, and perhaps sipping on a glass of wine... sure! I feel very close to God and filled with peace and goodwill towards all. But when the weeds have proliferated and eclipsed the seedlings, or when something no-doubt-cute-and-furry has unearthed EVERY. SINGLE. CABBAGE.... hmmm... not so much!

Gardens so often appear to me to be microcosms of life itself. They are full of birth, life, death and



The verse above is actually the penultimate stanza in a longer poem that reflects this understanding. God in a garden: walking in the cool of the day in paradise; but also surrendering to the kiss of betrayal and arrest by armed guards. The poem ends by explaining why we are closer to God's heart in a garden:

are also weeds and pests and blight. And God is there, too.



For He broke it for us in a garden Under the olive-trees Where the angel of strength was the warden And the soul of the world found ease.

I encourage you to come and find God in our garden: the Cedar Ridge Farm. We have replanted some of the unearthed cabbages, and have sugar peas, lettuce, radishes and strawberries ripe for picking. The bean plants and kale are not far behind, and the squash and cucumbers are sprouting, too. Find God in community, service, and celebration over the miracles of nature. Taste a sweet berry and know that God is good and the world God made is good. Join us each Thursday between 6 and 8PM, Sundays at 9AM, or stop by any time and choose a task from the list on the back of the farm shed door.

Questions? Suggestions? Email me at ruthc@crcc.org. •

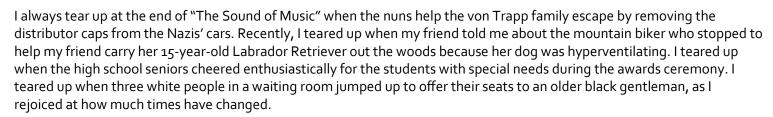
A Letter from Our Board Treasurer

- Alison Pasternak -

'm not much of a crier. To be honest, criers make me cringe.

My Southern in-laws claim (in jest, I think) that it's because I'm a cold Northerner, but I've encountered plenty of criers in my home state of Connecticut. Maybe it's because my heart is two sizes too small.

But you know what does make my eyes well up? Altruism. Self-sacrifice. Random acts of kindness.



Of the five love languages identified by Gary Chapman (i.e., words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, receiving gifts, and physical touch), I most identify with acts of service. That's what makes me feel loved. I see compassion in acts of service. I see Self-sacrifice in acts of service. I see God's love in acts of service.

Anyone can say, "I love you." Celebrities are always yelling "I love you" from the stage. I shout back, "You don't even know me." Now if Taylor Swift came to my house and did my laundry, then I would believe her. Then I would feel loved.

I see love in people's willingness to step outside of their self-absorption and offer a helping hand to a friend or stranger. That's compassion right there. That's love in action.

I am also moved by people's sacrificial giving to Cedar Ridge. It's challenging to give away our hard-earned money. It's difficult to sacrifice. The fact that people are willing to do so is a beautiful thing. I see God's love in people giving to Cedar Ridge.

Our tithes and offerings fund ministry expenses, pay the mortgage, provide scholarships for students in Guatemala, and pay the salaries of our fabulous staff members. It's only because of our financial gifts that Cedar Ridge is able to serve people and show them God's love and compassion. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Spring Day of Service

On Sunday, April 7, Cedar Ridgers gathered for a Day of Service. Offsite projects included stream clean-up at nearby parks, teaching tech skills to seniors at Leisure World, and preparing a meal for residents at Shepherd's Table. Onsite volunteers made dog chew toys out of recycled fabric, cleaned up the property, got the farm ready for the planting season, and even repainted several worn out music stands. Thanks to Cedar Ridge and friends for coming together and serving our community!



Connecting With God

By: Josh Bailes

Born and raised as a Southern Baptist in the heart of evangelical country, I got the impression early on that connection with God was a static thing: meaning God was and is and is the way God's going to be, and either I connected with God or I didn't. There were plenty of counter narratives in my family and the church community I grew up in, but the overwhelming theme of what I learned growing up was that it was my job to connect with God by not sinning. "Sinning" being shorthand for not having sex unless you were married, not drinking or doing drugs, and not cussing, among many other moral obligations that were well known to me at the time. God wasn't changing "his" standards for lowly me.

Although the rules were knowable, I felt I was bound to break most all the rules that were laid out for me; and in doing so, I was separating myself from God. That's a hell of a thing to teach anyone, especially a child. Those early lessons, designed to help me connect to God, deepened the separation between myself and God and myself and others. I spent most of my life grappling with that separation. It is hard to connect with God if you believe God cannot connect with the likes of you.

The good news is that when it comes to being present and connecting with God, God couldn't care less about my behavior. Rain falls on the sinners and saints alike because those labels aren't actually all that helpful. We are all human: beautiful, wonderful, terrifying, twisted, and hilarious. God loves that about us.

Born and raised as a Southern Baptist in the heart of evangelical country, I got the impression early on that connection with God was a static thing: meaning God was and is and is the way God's going to be, and either I connected with God or I didn't. There were plenty of counter narratives in my family and the church community I grew up in, but the overwhelming theme of what I learned growing up was that it was my job to connect with God by not sinning. "Sinning" being shorthand for not having sex unless you were married, not drinking or doing drugs, and not cussing, among many other moral obligations that were well known to me at the time. God wasn't changing "his" standards for lowly me.

There are a lot of people, communities, and thinkers that helped me find a way to connect with God. People, community, and thinkers are where I connect most. Jessi (my wife); Gus, Luci, and Finn (my kids); Cedar Ridge; and

Passport Camps (a summer camp and spiritual family) are all guides and fellow travelers where I found connection with God. A warm embrace and hard conversations, suffering and success,



the dynamic engagement with life is where I've found connection with God. All along the way, it has been less about what I do and more about who I am and my willingness to accept myself and others just as they are. That's where I find connection with God—in acceptance of what is.

Sometimes, I reflect on how full of connection, love, and magic life is, and rarely I experience that—and I have to accept that, too. Part of my nature is to miss life and in doing so learn to miss less. There is God in the missing, too.

Rachel Held Evans¹ has a quote in one of her books, "What a comfort to know that God is a poet." In poetry, meaning is sometimes made from what isn't said, and often more is less, and less is more. Although I can't really explain all the places and people that help me connect with God, the pattern I can detect is that there is no pattern. Sometimes, the rhyme makes sense, and other times I can't even understand the language.

Like a child who is counting to 20 in hide and seek, sometimes, God skips a few numbers and says, "Ready or not, here I come. 1, 2, 6, 18, 20. Ready or Not!" I can't control that any more than I can control most anything else outside of me. I'm trying my best to accept that, too.

¹Rachel Held Evans was a Christian author who reflected openly and honestly about her struggles with evangelicalism and her journey to connection with God. She died in May of 2019 at the age of 37. If you are looking for a guide to help you find a way to something more than rules, she's one of the best. https://rachelheldevans.com/

Josh has been attending Cedar Ridge for nearly 3 years with Jessi, his wife, and their three kids (pictured above), August, Luci, and Finn. A former minister and lawyer, Josh works in federal IT contracting and in his spare time loves to read and is a avid practitioner of Stoicism.

Connecting With God at Work

By: Jeniece Weddington, EdD, CCC-SLP

The following story includes part of a recent email conversation between me, in my role as a speech language pathologist educator/teacher (SLP), and one of my students, Sean. Please note that "Sean" is a fictitious name used to protect the confidentiality of the student.

Sean: I got the interview for the zoo this Sunday at 11am.

Jeniece: Wonderful, you are prepared! Do your best; and be yourself.

Sean: The interview when very and Jill say to me during the interview thanks the speech pathologist for not giving up. And also she love me and I can't wait to work with me. I am so happy that in June I volunteer at the zoo.

Jeniece: Congratulations on your new position as a volunteer aide at the zoo. You've worked very hard for the position. I know you will do a good job and they are happy to have you.

As I read these emails from a graduating senior on my caseload, I initially was very happy for the student; however, my internal questioning self was unsettled.

"Look at his spelling and writing," I thought to myself. "Did we give him enough time to practice writing? Could we have done more? How will others perceive this student, a graduate from a highly ranked high school in the area?"

As I re-read the emails, the unsettled feeling left me. I felt thankful that he got a job, joy that he did it, and a peacefulness knowing that he has a position using his natural gift—his love of animals. I even chuckled remembering four years of monthly speech sessions with the student; practicing ways to speak in a way so that others could understand him. We worked together monthly, talking and trying different ways to improve communication skills for school, social situations, and work.

I felt God speak to me: "How wonderful to have had the opportunity to work with Sean. What a blessing to receive emails from a student, expressing thanks, gratitude and appreciation. He's expressing all of this in his way, the way you taught him; to be himself. He's also expressing love, gentleness, and respect for you and the people he met during the interview. What more can you ask for?"

I thanked God for this wonderful miracle in my life; and prayed for Sean's continued success. Before spring break, Sean and I spent time talking about his learning challenges, employment and college. We practiced telling others about work accommodations that he might need in order to be

successful. He developed a plan to volunteer where he wanted to work, and that maybe would eventually result in employment. This is God at work. Sean told me that he planned to



attend community college in the fall.

Every morning, I ask God to help me at work, that He would help me allow His Love to shine through all of my actions; that I would get out of the way of myself and let 'God's will be done.' With all the demands on school staff, it is easy to become distracted by standardized testing, demands on time, and paperwork; forgetting our purpose: teaching. Teaching is a gift that I get to use every day at work. It's amazing how God shows up at school and consistently shows me what is important and how to model goodness for students.

At Cedar Ridge, I've often heard people ask, "How do you know when you are following God's will for your life?" For me, I am following God's will for my life when I feel a strong sense of peace—'the peace that passes all understanding'—calm, love and joy. Sean is graduating as a respectful, thoughtful, responsible, caring, and kind young man. That gives me peace and joy. I'm confident that Sean's 'heart shined brightly' during the interview, surpassing any observation of learning or communication differences.

Sean: I hope you can come to my graduation. That way you can meet all of my family. And thanks You so much for everything you did for me.

Jeniece: Thank you. OK, I would love to meet your family. See you at graduation.

Dear God, Thank you for going to work with me each day. In the name of Jesus, Amen. ●

Jeniece is a licensed and nationally certified speech language pathologist, with experience in human development and behavior across the lifespan. Her philosophy at work is that everyone is gifted and that her calling is to help others embrace, nurture and celebrate their 'natural gift.' Her faith and love of God is deeply rooted in her life. She attributes this to regular Bible Study, prayer, and song in her home as a child; weekly Sunday School; and present church experiences.

Getting to Know . . . Darren Freeman-Coppadge

Can you tell us a little about yourself, your family, and your history with Cedar Ridge?

My name is Darren Freeman-Coppadge. I was born and raised in Maryland, and save for a recent 5-year stint in Massachusetts, I've lived here my entire life. My family and I have been going to Cedar Ridge for some time. My husband first started attending CRCC in 2003 while he was in college, and I started regularly attending in the summer of 2005. We met at CRCC and became good friends. At the time, we were both conflicted in some way about whether our sexuality conflicted with our spirituality, but both felt led by God's Spirit that there was such a thing as gay people who could be faithful followers of Christ. That previous sentence does no justice to the difficult, oftentimes torturous, process we endured to reconcile our sexuality and spirituality. But we were able to do so, in no small part because of the grace, compassion, and willingness to walk beside us exhibited by many in this beautiful church community, including Brian and Grace McLaren, Matthew, the Duncans, and many others.



Even members who disagreed with us theologically were humble in their acceptance of us, and in their demonstration of God's unconditional love. And for that, we are truly grateful.

In 2007, my friendship with Jonathan blossomed into romance, and in August 2010, we became the first gay couple to be married at CRCC. At the time, gay marriage wasn't legal in Maryland, so we, like so many other same-sex couples in that era, had a separate legal ceremony in a state where gay marriage was legal (Vermont for us). Nonetheless, we consider August 14, 2010, our true wedding day because it was there that we made a lifelong vow to one another in the presence of our pastor, our families and friends, and our church home. When you grow up gay in the church as we did, you suffer a lot of attacks and hatred, sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly. So finding a place where you are accepted and loved cannot be taken for granted. That is why we love this church and have devoted ourselves to serving in this community for so long.

You recently returned to Cedar Ridge after a few years away--can you share a little about that and what led you to return to CRCC?

In 2013, I found myself unsatisfied with my work as a psychiatric clinical pharmacist. I wanted to be working with people more closely, walking with them through their toughest trials, not merely managing their symptoms with medications. So I chose to go back to school, and was fortunate to be accepted into a wonderful social justice-oriented doctoral program in counseling psychology at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. It was an incredibly tough decision to leave our home, our community, and, perhaps most of all, our wonderful church. Throughout the five years we were away, we never stopped considering CRCC "our" church, and continued to pay tithes to CRCC. When my program was completed, it was pretty much a no-brainer that we would return to Maryland to be closer to our respective families and to be present again with this great church community.

What are you most passionate about as it relates to Cedar Ridge? What do you appreciate about this community?

What I have always loved about CRCC is the people. Over my many years here, I have invited many people to Cedar Ridge, people from all faiths (and some with none at all), backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities, sexual and gender identities, etc., and I have never once had to worry about whether they would be accepted and embraced as they were. Having grown up in the church (I'm a preacher's kid, or "PK" as we like to call ourselves), I've never experienced that kind of comfort at any other place of worship I've attended. I always had to worry about what so-and-so might say to my gay friend who was visiting, or how much the pastors might forcefully proselytize my agnostic/atheist friends. But not so at Cedar Ridge: My friends have universally felt welcomed and not judged.

I also love the social justice mission that we have as a church. A few years ago, I was part of a visioning process for our church, and what we collectively came up with as the official vision and mission of CRCC was so Christ-centered and beautiful that it continues to captivate and inspire me to this day as I continue to learn and live what it means to be a follower of Christ and a manifestation of his Love for all of creation.

But perhaps what I love most about Cedar Ridge was something articulated by my husband. Several years ago, prior to moving to Massachusetts, it was fairly routine for us to discuss what we loved about CRCC and what we longed for it to become. Anytime we left a service or an event, we would talk about CRCC in the past, present, and future. One evening, we were thinking about what made CRCC special, and out of nowhere, Jonathan stated in what I swear to be divine inspiration:

"Cedar Ridge is a safe place to wrestle with God." Chills went through me in that moment, and I remember it vividly to this day. That is the perfect summary of what this church is all about. It is why we came to the church, why we stayed, and why we were desperate to return.

And for fun--if we stopped by your house on a weekend, what might we learn about you? What would you be up to?

If you came to the Freeman-Coppadge home on the weekend, you would find messy chaos! Our 3-year-old son, Langston, is a very sweet and charming little guy, but he's got energy for days! Jonathan and I try desperately to keep up, but we have determined this is a lost cause. We are both introverts, but we have been blessed with an extroverted child who keeps us in a perpetual state of energy depletion because he demands a constant audience, which is more attention than we have in us to give. So please stop by on the weekend. We will be so happy to pawn off our little guy on you while we get some needed introvert time with our books and Netflix!

Connecting With God at Camp

By: Maddie Stryker

God has given me a lot of strength through my life, and seems to be there whenever I need someone to talk with. As a kid and now a teenager, growing up with muscular dystrophy has been hard. I have gone through a lot of ups and downs in 15 years, but God has always given me a way to get through those hard times.

There is a summer camp that I go to that is sponsored by the Muscular Dystrohy Association (MDA). The camp is available to any kid whose disability falls under the term Muscular Dystrophy, like me. It's probably one of the best weeks of my life! I have met so many wonderful, kind, caring, and awesome people at camp! This year will be my third time going.

The camp is out in Chestertown, Maryland, at Camp Fairlee campground on the Eastern Shore. The camp brings me so much joy and happiness. I am there for a full week, and I do many activities like arts and crafts, pottery, fishing, kayaking, and rock-climbing. I play wiffle ball with my friends, and we go swimming at the pool, and a whole lot more. Every year we have a pinewood derby race, and that is one of my favorite things. I love building model cars and decorating the car based on my favorite things. Just being at camp brings me so much happiness.

When I'm at camp, I seem to find people who have shown me so much love, and God as well. I feel like I am blessed by God to be given this opportunity to spend a week with the most inspiring people ever. I couldn't think of a better thing to be doing over the summer than being at camp.

Living with a disability has made my life difficult at times. I have had hard times at school meeting new people and making friends, and wanting to play sports with other kids who are more able-bodied than me. But if I've learned anything from God, it would be that I can prove people wrong



and show them that, even if you have something that is weighing you down, the best solution is to fight the pain and get stronger.

I would not be the person that I am today if it wasn't for my wonderful family, my mom, my dad, and my brothers Tim and Collin. They have supported me through all the hard times in my life, and they have told me that I can achieve anything I want to in my life even though I have a disability! I also want to thank my wonderful friends at Cedar Ridge, who have been by my side throughout my life. I am so grateful to have you as friends, and I appreciate every single one of you for supporting me, making me happy when I am sad, and lifting my spirits. I also am so grateful for God who has given me hope, courage, happiness, joy, love, strength, and bravery to become stronger every day. I have been blessed by God's love and have been taught to pass his love, faith, peace, hope, service, and inspiration to everyone!

Guat's Up By: Br

By: Bryan Peterson





his July, 12 youth and adults from Cedar Ridge will endure a couple of long days of travel, cold showers, a hot sun, a jam -packed schedule, language barriers, and very little wi-fi! What motivates them to step out of their comfort zone and travel to Ipala, Guatemala? One first-timer says, "Ipala is part of our Cedar Ridge community I have not experienced. I think the experience of serving as a member of this team will help me be a better church member and volunteer." One student thinks "it will open my eyes to what another part of the world looks like," while other students see it as an opportunity to "work with the people of Ipala, especially the students," and do "something valuable with my summer." Those who are returning to Guatemala say, "I have seen and experienced the love of God working in ways I think I would not have if I had not gone on trips." Other trip veterans highlight continuing to "experience community with the people of Ipala and to experience the power of God's love in these relationships."



Our summer trips to Ipala are one aspect of our year-round partnership with the people of this town of 20,000 in eastern Guatemala. These excursions allow us to stay in touch with CIDHER, our agents on the ground in Ipala, and see first-

hand the fruit of this partnership. We get to encourage and be encouraged by the secondary school students who receive scholarship funds to stay in school in spite of some very challenging personal experiences. And, as many participants have noted, we get to build on the relationships that have been established over the past nine years. The experience also helps us learn about some important social justice issues facing Central Americans, issues that often drive people north and into the headlines of our daily news feeds.

Also during this year's trip, several members of our Guatemala team will have a chance to meet more intensely with CIDHER to continue to plan for our future together. Earlier this year, pastoral staff, our Guatemala team, and Cedar Ridge members with expertise in international development met to review our progress so far and suggest some principles and priorities for our future as a partnership. In May, Sal and Bryan traveled to Ipala to begin a similar conversation there, and will continue that discussion in July. Our desire is to work together to find the most effective, sustainable, and empowering ways to reduce poverty in the years ahead.



Would you please pray for this year's team as they go to Ipala from July 6-15? Students are Tyler Prudhomme, Olivia Dixon, Diesel Evans and Daisy Foster-Jewell. Our adults are Salvador Chairez, Mara Lopez, Hubert Dixon, Andrew Peterson, Billy Earles, Gina Richardson, Bryan Peterson, and Suvia Evans. Pray that we might have the openness, humility, courage, compassion, health, strength, patience, and flexibility required to fully experience all that God's Spirit wants to accomplish in and through us. ●



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