



# FIRST PRESS *EXPRESS*

The newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California Summer 2021 Part Two



Last session meeting we took some time to consider how three of Israel's stories – Abraham's call, Exodus and the stories surrounding

the Davidic monarchy – may have impacted the Israelites' experience of themselves while they were in exile in Babylon. Here's what we discussed:

- How Abraham's story might have reminded the Israelites that they were the descendants of someone who really knew how to trust God and take big risks, to leave home for someplace new and in the process, become a blessing to this world's people.
- How Exodus might have taught them that they had escaped slavery before – and could do so again with God's help.

- How David's dynasty – with all its moral shortcomings – could have brought home to them an important lesson about the degree to which they had contributed to the situation in which they now found themselves, namely, subject to a foreign power.

We then turned to the kinds of stories churches tend to tell about themselves – to themselves – and whether these are helpful or not. In particular, we discussed the impact stories about once glorious pasts can have on churches looking to find new ways of doing ministry during radically different times.

Our sense at the end of this conversation was that we could learn a lot from Israel and the stories it chose to tell as we too wanted to be risk-takers, blessings, and people who know both liberation and responsibility.



## The 2021 FPCC Leadership Retreat

This year's Retreat took place at the church June 11-12. First Press *Express* asked FPCC's leadership team for their thoughts on the Retreat. Future editions of *First Press* and *Express* will contain more information regarding the thoughts and experiences of the participants so stay tuned. Here are some of their thoughts:

### **What was the experience like for you?**

This year's Leadership Retreat brought many blessings and insights. Being able to spend two days with other Leaders (and friends!) gave me the opportunity to get to know so many people better. Pastor Johanna spoke about the way to grow a church. It is not so much about trying to convince people to join, but rather to create programs and activities that draw people to our congregation.

### **During the Retreat what did you learn that was most valuable to you?**

I really came to understand that everyone has a gift within the body of Christ. Also that we are seeking God serving people as part of our ministry.

### **Was there a moment during the Retreat where you reflected on a subject you hadn't previously considered?**

I learned that we can focus on a few key things and stay focused on being a community hub, having committees working together to see this hub is available for the community to bring people here in downtown Concord together.

### **What was your personal best moment?**

I like the idea that we are going to focus on the skills and strengths that we have. We will not be trying to be "all

things to all people." My best moment was getting to know leaders I hadn't really gotten to know.

### **What did you find most meaningful about the Retreat?**

The best part of the retreat was the breakout sessions where we had a chance to brainstorm about ideas for furthering our mission of becoming a community hub. The enthusiasm of our leadership. Also, how insightful Pastor Johanna is. Staff members led the groups well. Each of the groups came up with tangible ways of how we can become a community hub.

### **What would you like to have included in future Leadership Retreats?**

For the future, I would like to see training for future deacons and elders, something like apprenticeship.

### **Based on your experience at the retreat, what steps should we take to fulfill our vision of becoming a hub in the community?**

Our location is an ideal place from which to reach into the community. We need to focus on a few service and outreach opportunities, but keep in mind AT ALL TIMES that we must first meet the needs of our congregation. We cannot burn out our doers and leaders!



**“America the Beautiful,”  
by Katherine Bates and Samuel A. Ward**

Our song feature for the month of July is “America the Beautiful,” a fitting tribute to our nation on Independence Day. We sang it on July 4<sup>th</sup> as a closing hymn, often the tradition in American churches to celebrate. Everyone knows the words, yet not many know its fascinating history. So, here goes!

Katherine Bates, the lyricist, and Samuel A Ward, the songwriter, never actually met! Despite 11 years difference in writing time, they were both inspired by different aspects of the American landscape, and also naturally by God, as they were both very dedicated to their church community. Samuel A. Ward was the organist and choir director at Grace Church in Newark, New Jersey. In 1882, on a trip back from Coney Island to New York City in a ferry, the melody came rushing to him and he hurried to write it down. Ward originally composed the tune to accompany the hymn, “O Mother Dear, Jerusalem.”

Fast forward 11 years and Katherine Bates, an English professor was taking a train trip to Colorado Springs to teach at Colorado College. She was inspired by many sights, including the city of Chicago, the wheat fields of Kansas, and the majestic views of the Great Plains. The words gradually started to come to her and she wrote them down in her hotel room in Colorado Springs. The poem *America* was featured two years later in Bates’ church periodical for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, *The Congregationalist*, much like our very own *First Press*. It soon caught the

public’s eye outside of the local area and gradually became more nationally popular in the next 10 years. As the poem gained popularity, many composers tried their hands at setting it to music. Over 75 tunes were written between 1900 and 1910!

Meanwhile, Samuel A. Ward died in 1903, leaving the legacy of his melody behind for “O Mother Dear, Jerusalem.” Shortly after his death, one of Ward’s publishers decided to try combining his hymn tune with Bates’ poem and the match was a perfect fit! People loved the combination so much that the new tune, *America the Beautiful*, got published in numerous hymn and song books, and by 1920 everyone knew how to sing it. Unfortunately Ward did not have the opportunity to see the song’s national popularity, but Bates certainly did, as she remained alive until 1929.

During the Kennedy administration in the 1960s, there were petitions to make *America the Beautiful* our national anthem, yet they were not successful. That said, it remains an important part of our patriotic celebrations, in churches and in secular settings alike.

Andrew Cardiasmenos  
Worship & Music Director

***Do you ever get up in the morning, look in the mirror and think, “That can’t be accurate.”***



*Summer is here and although the Pandemic is still a concern that can't be ignored, gatherings with family and friends, BBQ's, trips, and so many things that we enjoy may now be a part of our lives again. So each issue of First Press Express is going to - with the help of our readers - publish a recipe for food to accompany the fun.*

### Watermelon Salad

#### Ingredients:

- 1 small watermelon or ½ large watermelon cut into chunks
- ½ cup crumbled feta or goat cheese
- 1-2 tbsp. chopped fresh mint
- Juice of 1 lime

#### Method:

- Combine all ingredients and serve

*This recipe came from a neat little restaurant I used to go to in Davis. It was always one of my favorites. Lisa Justice*

Submissions of favorite goodies that you would like to share with others are encouraged. Please send them to me at [allen\\_nickerson@comcast.net](mailto:allen_nickerson@comcast.net). The more the merrier and please make my selections difficult by sending a lot of ideas. Have a Happy and Safe Summer!!

### FPCC Staff

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**Editor's Note:** First Press Express is a publication of the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California, printing nine times each year. Comments or questions may be directed to Allen Nickerson at [allen\\_nickerson@comcast.net](mailto:allen_nickerson@comcast.net).