

Kairos

*The Voice of Austin Presbyterian
Theological Seminary Students*

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Changes

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Salt and Light, Leavening and Love

by Ann Graham

Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

This **Gospel lesson is about salt and light.** With respect to salt, as avid cook I say, just a little is essential – but too

much is too much. Jesus has another **parable in Matthew about leaven, hidden in bread dough,** again a small amount unnoticeable, but essential to making delicious bread.

So how do we know how to use the gifts we are given, in the right amounts and combinations to do what God asks: **Be the salt of the earth. Be the light of the world. ??**

Here at APTS, with three years down and one to go, **I am diligently listening for the voice of God** regarding my life and my call to serve in ministry.

One night recently, after dinner, I was putting food back in the refrigerator, when I heard **a tiny cry from within the refrigerator.** I searched around and

found nothing that I could identify as the source of this little whining sound.

About **20 seconds later**, however, I heard it again. Making my usual **leap to the worst case scenario**, I thought, "Oh, great! Now there's something wrong with the fridge and we're probably going to have to replace it. That's thousands of dollars."

I tried all the door seals to see if maybe it could just be a leak. No luck with that – and then, I heard the sound again.

I called my husband over to see if he could hear it, too. He did not. What was I thinking? He's a little hard of hearing anyway. "Oh, well," I said. **"Let's just go to bed."**

Later the next day, **my husband told me that he heard the sound**, just a teeny tiny moan. **Not ready to call ghostbusters, I**

started taking things out of the fridge. And there was the **culprit: A small Tupperware container of sourdough starter.** The fermentation was causing just a little air to escape at irregular intervals.

I was **somewhat disappointed not to hear the voice of God in my refrigerator**, but I think we **can find the voice of God here in this space, here in this scripture.**

I have also been studying the writings of St. Teresa of Avila. Her lovely poem/prayer provides both light and warmth for us in these times:

*Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
With patience all
things are possible.
Whoever has God
lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.*

Dear Beloved Community, by Rachel Watson

Well, friends, here we are. It is the beginning of a new school year. I'll be honest, August is one of my favorite times of year. I have been in a classroom community every year since I was four years old. I went straight from high school to college and then back into the classroom as a teacher where I worked up until the summer before I came to seminary. So every August is a new beginning, full of brand new notebooks, new boxes of crayons with pointy tips, freshly sharpened pencils with pristine pink erasers, and, if you are anything like me, several shrink-wrapped packages of index cards waiting to be turned into flashcards!

But more than the things, I love the

community that is born each August. Thrown together mostly by chance, but with a common purpose, we meet each other, each of us with a unique story to tell. We form a family of sorts, sometimes spending as much time with each other as we do with the families at our houses. We learn about each other, our quirks, our fears, our dreams, our stories. We learn with each other, new things, new ways of being, new ideas that never were before our stories intersected to make them possible.

In its perfect form, we are a beloved community, living together as siblings in the family of God. We are called to love as God loves, valuing each other

not because of what we do, but because of whose we are. Like with God, we belong and we can never be unworthy to belong. In this beloved community, we must hear each other. We must value each other. We must trust each other enough to be vulnerable and to look honestly back at ourselves. This is where learning happens. This is where change happens. This is where the light shines in the darkness.

Fred Rogers said that "Listening is a very active awareness of the coming together of at least two lives. Listening, as far as I'm concerned, is certainly a prerequisite of love. One of the most essential ways of saying "I love you" is being a receptive listener." As we begin this year and this task of living together

in beloved community, I'm remembering his words. How do we listen? How do we make sure we hear? How do we solve the conflicts that will inevitably arise? How do we do all that when we are not even in the same space? Working to answer these questions, we become the beloved community and prepare to go out into a new world, a global society, that is together apart and is longing for love.

Friends, I'm ready to listen. Let's talk.

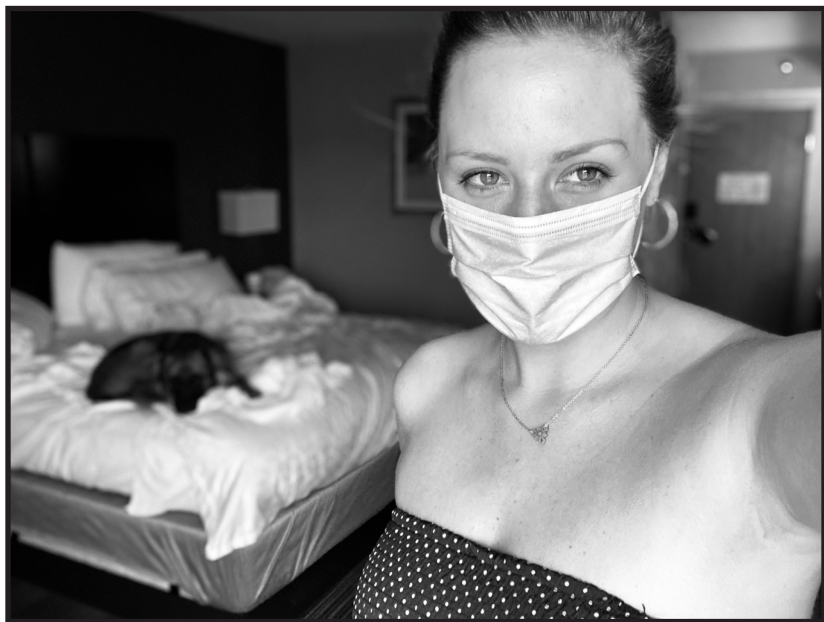
Rachel Watson

Fred Rogers, The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember (New York, NY: Family Communications Inc., 2003), 80, Kindle.

Beginning of a Call

by Ash Brown









New Beginning by Ash Brown



Deconstructed
by Brittany Hicks





Dear Beloved Community, by John Weller

I am pleased to welcome all of you back for another year at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary! What a year it has been! All of you are enduring in these difficult times, and I want to applaud you for stepping out into the world and engaging with it. Whether this is your first year, last year, or one in between, it is an honor to have you in class and on campus in whatever way that will happen.

Our times certainly seem to be troubling for a great many of us. Not only are we in the grip of the Covid 19 Pandemic, we are also experiencing social unrest, and still have a hotly debated election ahead of us. There are so many ways in which we

can choose to become divided. I want to be the first to call us into this Beloved Community, not as a group of people who agree on everything, but as a group of people who are seeking to understand and explore. We are here to learn, to grow, and to allow others to do the same.

It seems that no matter what group of people you gather together, a few end up feeling outside of the group. It happens for a variety of reasons. We divide ourselves into our little groups based upon any number of differences: skin color, race, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, age, wealth, or political affiliation. The list we can use to divide us is

quite long and extensive. Unfortunately, this even extends into the church and other religious institutions. Yes, it even happens here, at this Seminary.

Does this surprise you? Why would it? This Seminary is made up of people. People who are flawed in so many ways. No one here is perfect. No one here will say the right thing at the right time all the time. No, we are far from the masters of oration and narration. Quite honestly, there should be a class solely devoted to the ministry of "shut my mouth." I only say this because I have often found that my open mouth attracts my size 13 shoe. It is a very unpleasant experience. Our words and actions matter. They can be welcoming,

or they can be excluding.

Over this school year I intend to look out for those who are seemingly not part of the group. Those who others seem to ignore. We get into our groups and we often are so thankful to be included that we do not risk reaching out to others. I want to invite you to do just that. Reach out to someone who you do not know. Talk to them. Let them have their worldview, their agenda, their faith, or their political views. It certainly shouldn't hurt you. While life might be easier if we just stick to the people who agree with us, it would also be quite dull and boring. I look forward to this year, to all of you, and sincerely invite you to come say hello!

John Weller

Boundaries

by Rev Sarah Gaventa

Brene Brown, the sociologist, author and podcast host, tells an amazing story about failing to set boundaries. She had gotten talked into being a speaker at an event she really didn't want to do, and then the event coordinators assigned her a roommate to save them money. She REALLY didn't want a roommate, but wanted to be nice so went along with it. Her roommate was . . . a lot. At one point she wiped her dirty hands on a sofa, as if it was a napkin. Brown found her internal temperature rising significantly, was furious with everyone involved—but then ultimately realized that she had gotten herself into the situation by not setting clear boundaries.

Boundaries are incredibly important in any life, but especially a life in ministry. Lines get blurred in church settings and suddenly a pastor is acting more like a parent, or a social worker, or a banker than a pastor. Boundaries in seminary are tricky, too. Seminaries are intense communities full of caretakers who could work 26 hours a day and still not get all the reading done.

So, what do good boundaries look like in seminary? Here are a few of my suggestions—but I bet you have more!

1. Sleep. This is one of the first boundaries I see fall away as students try to cram more and more time to read and write. Here's the problem with that strategy—your brain needs

sleep to retain information. One of sleep's functions is for the brain to process and store information. [**Check out this article \(click me!\)***](#) from *Psychology Today* that gets into it a little! My suggestion? Figure out how much sleep you need to function well—and use that as a starting point for building your daily schedule.

2. Saying No. You are going to be pulled in so many directions in seminary. Your family, church, work, schoolwork, extracurriculars will all be pulling at you. Whenever you have an opportunity to add something new into your life, really consider it carefully. Is there space in your life to add on another church committee? If you take that fifth class, will your wife/child/boyfriend

ever see you? If you're local and have a big family, do you have time to attend every second cousin's baby shower? Do you have the bandwidth to chair that student group? It is easy to get overwhelmed and for things to fall apart quickly. Choose the things that are most necessary and say no to the rest.

3. Minding your business. One year, a few weeks into the school year, a student made an appointment with me and expressed anxiety about the well being of a few of her classmates and said, "I just want to help them!" I asked her, "Has anyone *asked* for your help?" The answer was no. Often students who come to seminary are caretakers by nature. And learning to ask yourself

the question of whether anyone asked for your help is going to be key. There is an ugly flip side to this caretaking, too. If you find yourself feeling “concern” for a student, it may be that the student makes you uncomfortable because they are acting outside of social norms to which you are accustomed. Is the person’s behavior harming you? If not, do your best to stop focusing on it. If they are, speak to them directly.

These are just a start. If you want to read more about boundaries, you can read Brene Brown’s book *Rising Strong*. Cloud and Townsend’s classic book *Boundaries* is a good one, too! And of course, you are always welcome to set up an appointment with me to think about your boundaries!

Blessings,

Sarah Gaventa

*<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ulterior-motives/201611/how-sleep-enhances-studying>

Reflections on Taking Greek in the Summer of 2020 by Susan Kerr

I learned Greek this summer — talk about a big change in my life. After eleven weeks of elementary New Testament Greek under the fine direction of Dr. Margaret Aymer, I can only say, “What a gift!”

The summer Greek intensive here at Austin Seminary was a gift in many ways. Boredom was not an issue and I never had to wonder what to do next. Sheltering in place in the hot Austin summer was not a handicap but a kind of Sabbath space to focus in on something challenging, and oh-so-interesting for a Bible teacher like me. Loneliness was rare as I had my cohort and my neighbor to zoom-struggle with me over translations, IA sessions to bond in the trenches

with my classmates, and an hour each week to hang out with Dr. Aymer and a few others to talk about Greek culture and language, and other things.

A better understanding of English grammar snuck in as part of the package. Do I care if a verb tense tells us the past action is over and completed, or is past but still influencing the present? Apparently the writers of the New Testament did. I had never thought about it. The subtleties and innuendos of language became more apparent and more delightful the further we got into it. This was a priceless side benefit for someone who loves language, cares about rightly handing the Word of God, and who hopes

to write well in her own language. And finally I know the difference between an infinitive and an imperative.

The class had to be re-formatted because of Covid, and we were the lucky recipients of the choices made. Pre-recorded lectures could be watched as many times as needed and open book quizzes throughout forced us to know how to find the things we will need going forward, not to mention eleven weeks instead of six to digest an introduction to an ancient language.

But of all the gifts, there is none better than the gift of seeing the scriptures with new eyes and hearing their voice with new ears. I have spent years reading, studying, and teaching

the New Testament, but there were moments this summer as I was trying to read, in Greek, a familiar passage, when the Word of God struck a powerful new resonance deep within me. This wasn't quite "the heavens being torn apart", the "schism" that Karoline Lewis shared in her lecture this August on the verb in Mark 1:10, but kind of — not quite as dramatic, but every bit as real. The heavens were being opened a bit for me this summer by an unseen hand, as I was learning Greek. What a gift!

Dear Beloved Community, by Ashley Cuellar

I am so excited to welcome and meet our incoming students! Austin Seminary is an absolutely incredible place to be. Although this is not the start of the year that we had planned, I am so excited to begin seeing you all again in our various digital platforms as we begin this fall semester.

One thing that I've been thinking a lot about is that we are in a really unique situation to be in seminary during such a time as this. It is challenging to not get to hug your necks, learn with you in person and commune together in our community areas, yet we still get to journey through this pandemic together. I feel SO fortunate to have such loving, kind souls in the faces that make up this community. While the world is chaotic around us,

we get to join in classes to learn things that matter so deeply to our faith, our lives, our ministry. We also get to be in a place where we are nourished spiritually and pastored by those around us. We get to be supported by faculty and staff that are pastoral and tender in their approach. And have the opportunity to deepen our friendships with one another in new and creative ways. I am frequently overwhelmed with gratitude by the ways that this community shows up for one another to nurture and support each other.

I am praying for you all as we begin this semester together. THANK YOU to all of you incredible people who make up this community.

Love and peace,
Ashley Cuellar

2020: In Solidarity "The Story of Us" by Allen J. Roberts Sr. & Sopphey Vance

In the spring semester at Austin Seminary unintentionally and prophetically set the stage for what we have experienced in the year 2020. The African and American American Diaspora Student Group (AAADSG) discussed a way to invite the seminary community to know us; people of color better by telling our stories. During the MidWinters Lecture series, "A Time for Healing & Reconciliation" hosted by Education Beyond the Walls (EBW), the seminary began to unravel the sensitive issues of racial inequality and racism. During the series, they showed a screening of *Emanuel* (2019), where the Reverend Sharon Washington Risher spoke. Set in the 21st century,

the documentary retells the story of the death of 9 African-Americans at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015.

Following the lecture series AAADSG hosted a series of movies in conjunction with EBW to invite the seminarians to join us in reliving our story. In whole, the uniting purpose behind the programming of African and African American Heritage Month was dualistic. First, to invite our Anglo American brothers and sisters to tell their story and for African and African American brothers and sisters to tell their stories in community. We understood that we could not appropriately tell our story without each other because our stories are so intertwined. Together,



we were able to reveal the "Story of Us." During African and African America Heritage Month we hosted the screening of *Roots* (1977) and *James Baldwin I Am Not Your Negro* (2016). In conjunction with the community, the students of the African and African American Diaspora Student Group discussed these films in candid conversations on race and slavery in a faith community context.

As part of the African and African America Heritage Month, hosted at Austin Seminary, the community was invited to appreciate artwork by African American artists, Robert R. Jones and Wardell Picquet. And the community came together

to witness a question and answer session with the artists during Koniana. AAADSG hosted a "Soul-Food" tasting prepared by loving community members, Mrs. Janary Roberts and Mrs. Jonita Hurst at the Stotts Dining Hall. The month-long expository of events concluded with the first ever *Fearless Dialogue* sponsored by Education Beyond the Walls (EBW) and AADSG where Rev. Dr. George V. Clark, Pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church opened the conversations with his lived anecdotal experiences growing up in Austin, Texas for over 90 years. The panel

discussion attempted to bring awareness to the issues of the African American community and the inequities they face not only in Austin, Texas, but the United States of America. The ultimate purpose was to allow a safe space for the seminary community to come together and began to remove the walls that may divide us as children of God.

Following the African and African America Heritage Month celebration, the LatinX



student group and the African and American American Diaspora Student Group (AAADSG) coordinated the annual HESED lecture series with the central theme of "Intersections of Power." The student groups led by Rev. Dr. Gregory Cuéllar and Rev. Dr. Margaret Aymer were empowered by the brilliant faculty to invite the people on the margins of society into the plan and space God has created for all humanity. The lecture series addressed the church's mission, gentrification and the school-to-prison pipeline. Subsequently, after the lecture series, a mass pandemic hit globally. The coronavirus also known as COVID-19 has brought to life the the social political issues we face in America. It has exposed the racial inequalities of healthcare in America for the communities of color, gender inequalities and poverty issues that affect the marginalized.

Seminarians, friends



and family, Black Lives Matter (BLM). This is not to impress upon you that ALL lives don't matter. Nevertheless, the truth still remains that the Black and Brown communities are affected more than other communities by over policing, heavier judicial penalties, systemic racial inequalities and injustices. This must stop; am I my brothers keeper? The answer is a resounding Yes I AM!

As the world continues to mourn and slowly reopen, the events of COVID-19 and systemic racism are still before us, requiring us to take action. The deaths and murders of Breonna Taylor,

Ahmaud Arbery, and

George Floyd and so many more are crying out for us to take action. The voices are crying out for a revolution, a nonviolent protest, Liberty, Justice and the Pursuit of Happiness for ALL humanity. The death and murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 has reignited the new Civil Rights Movement known as Black Lives Matters.

The United States may not have been ready for a revolution, but the empire of colonialism never asked Africans or Indigenous Americans if they were ready for hostile takeover. The facts are that, after 400 years of oppression in the form of slavery

and after 400 years of systemic racism, the black and brown communities are ready for an uprising due to centuries of oppression, marginalization and colonization.

Black and brown lives matter and we cannot let this moment slip away. We must say the names of those that perished in the TransAtlantic Slave Trade. We must say the names of those that died as slaves and those who were lynched and burned. We must say the names of the black and brown lives stuck in the school to prison pipeline. We must say their names.

We are so elated that 2020 has brought to reality the truth of our lives. However, it's no longer the time to take pictures of protest or even blackout your Facebook or I.G. page, rather it is time to built true community and stand in solidarity as one. It is time to take action, stay present,

remain vigilant, and to be in community with each other. Our founding fathers had the right wording, "that all are created equal". Our founding fathers knew us well, that we all have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Friends, as we walk towards the next steps of our seminary journey in this socially distant way, we implore you to remember the names of the victims of COVID-1619 and now COVID-19 and say their names. We are all children of God called to be the hands and feet of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the Peace of Christ fall fresh on you morning by morning and may the wind of the Holy Spirit guide you and may the Glory of God give you favor. Remember it's been a long time coming but, a change is going to come. Stay together; in solidarity and Love under one God. Amen.

Letter from the Editor by Sopphey Vance



Dearest Reader:

Historically, I always designed the letter from the editor on the back of the cover. I am trying something new with *Kairos*. Using the presedence by last year's editor and designer, my letter will reside on this "last page". I want to thank them for their work last year and the opportunity to learn from them.

My foray into literary editing, let alone magazine

work began with my work as a "news" writer for *Reporter* at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I left news writing for creative writing and learned the art of literary magazines with *Signatures*. After I finished my degree I was honored to publish books, magazines, and websites in various literary genres. I bring those skills to the beautiful community of Austin Seminary in hopes to continue to build community.

I hope that you, dear reader, get to learn about yourself as much as you learn about our comrades. I hope that you get to immerse yourself in your seminary journey as well as the journey of others. But mostly, I hope you enjoy this issue, as it was a joy to bring it together.

xV

Kairos Events

Issue 347 Release Party
September 10, 2020

Issue 348 Submissions Deadline
September 28, 2020

Issue 348 Release Party
October 8, 2020

Issue 349 Submissions Deadline
October 28, 2020

Issue 349 Release Party
November 12, 2020

Issue 350 Submissions Deadline
November 28, 2020

***Check out Community Announcements for current
information about Austin Seminary events!***