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*Kairos: The Voice of Austin
Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Students and Community*

"Gather" *Kairos* November 2021

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Photographs used in *Kairos* are courtesy of Usama Malik and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.



Aging
By Ashley Brown

During the pandemic,
At the first few months. I was the only family member near my aging
Grandparents in North Carolina.
We served as branches, rooted in the same Montreat earth
Separated by 6.7 miles
Glass panes, and necessary fear.

A guard house was built at the entrance
Of Highland Farms Retirement Community.
Employees were screened.
My grandparents sat day after day, isolated
My grandmother's memory faded
And we lost pieces of her we will never retrieve.

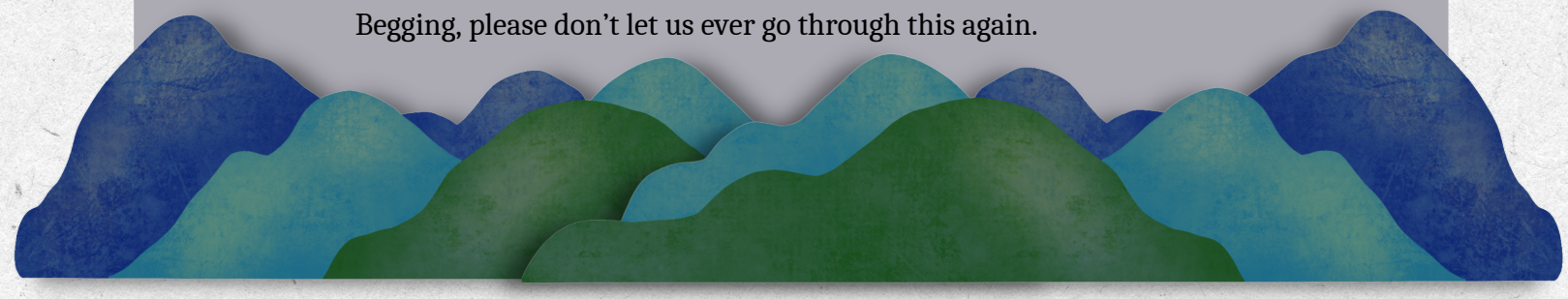
I hold recollections of meeting my grandparents clandestinely
In the parking lot of CVS in Black Mountain.
Exchanging toilet paper, goods, cookies through the car window.
With the same level of discrepancy as a drug deal. Through masks,
We smiled. Never touching. Giving love through space.

Love is not touching.
Love touches us regardless.

We gathered again this summer. After receiving shots.
We took stock of who each other had become.

Now we can hold hands again.
We can shop at stores without wondering if the person next to us
Might kill us
Through a sneeze,
Or uncovered cough.

Now, lipstick sales are sky high.
Our families reunited.
I spent every day I could this summer
Hugging and kissing my grandparents,
My knees soiled by the dirt of the homestead
From where I've bent down, and blessed the Lord
And cried out
Begging, please don't let us ever go through this again.



Gathering

By Taline Manassian

We are supposed to be eager to gather. Aren't we? After nineteen months mostly at home, we should be craving company, connection, and reunions. We should want in-person meetings and regular life activities. But if I peel back the part of me that performs without even thinking, I have to admit that I am not so eager.

For more than a year, I have lived a quiet life at home. I rise without an alarm. I put on my uniform of yoga pants, a t-shirt, a pullover and comfy socks. I do the work and the meetings from the comfort of my home. Throughout the day, I take breaks to run or ride or swim, depending on how I feel. Also throughout the day, I flip the laundry, vacuum the floor, or empty the dishwasher as needed. It is just me and Dave here, and we are living simply and happily together.

The tensions happen when the world enters. When the news and politics enter our sphere. When those not here with us say, "Why are you doing that? Why are you that way? How could you be so dumb?"

Do I have to respond? Do I have to engage with the world? I like my simple, quiet life. I love my husband and my cats and my books and my home.

I love people too, but they often scare me.

When I consider life beyond these walls, I catch myself asking the world the same that it seems to ask of me. Why are you doing that? Why are you that way? How could you be so dumb? I wonder which of us asked those questions of the other first. I wonder which of us will change the conversation first.

Perhaps we are not ready for one another. Not yet.

Do I have to leave this space? Can I invite others here? Can I invite you here? Will you be kind when you come? Will I?

From My Window

By Sarah Dixon

From my window I see new life
I see the wind blowing in the cold front
I see the hawk fly in around 5
I see the rain change from sprinkle to flood

From my window I see gathering
I see the UU's on Friday nights
I see people grilling up food and smiles
I see the MYAM's laugh around the old tables

From my window I see healing
I see people laughing and gathering safely
I see the Afghan children running and playing
I see trust rebuilding after unimaginable trauma

From my window I see community
I see people giving away their belongings
I see Americans attempting to help what We destroyed
I see old toys taped up for new kids

From my window I see the seasons changing
I see trauma being processed through play
I see friendships growing and shifting
I see the Spirit guiding us as the wind carries in the new season



Gather?

By Julia Burkley

The church doors
are locked with a
click
louder than the organ
sanctuary becoming
solitary
with only
select few holding a
key

The silence holds the
echoes
of children's squeals
and Peter's laugh
and off key melodies
and

and

and

The building
grieves for our
presence
just as we grieve
for the smell of polished
the itch of the pews
the kaleidoscope of
colors where
we see

God?



2021 National Coming Out Day

By Frank Vasquez

"In honor of those who came out in TRUTH... Echoes of
passion and pain... We all have pain but if we persevere we
can see how beautiful life can be!"

Lifeguarding Through a Camera Lens

By Taylor Sexton

There I was floating on a paddle board in the middle of Arkansas. As the summer morning sun beamed down on Ferncliff's Belden Pond, I was tasked with lifeguarding for a group of high schoolers. However, as most things tend to be in this season of life, nothing fully goes as planned. A combination of vacations and quarantines meant that we were grossly understaffed that week and I was tasked with trying to fill in some of the cracks. This meant that not only was I lifeguarding but also serving meals, cleaning dishes, leading all-camp activities and (most importantly for this story) taking pictures.

Now, maybe I was a little too confident for my own good but I had gotten accustomed to bringing my phone out on the pond with me. It was a win-win situation. Lives were guarded and photos were taken. Little did I know, however, that lifeguarding through a camera lens would teach me one of the most significant spiritual lessons that I have learned in quite some time.

You see, one can lifeguard through a camera lens. I might even be able to convince you that I did a pretty good job at it. Everyone followed the rules and no one drowned. However, I don't believe that I could convince you that I did my best job at either task. It would be impossible. My focus was split. I was never going to be able to experience the fullness of the moment worrying about both things at the same time.

Taking pictures while lifeguarding was something that I had been doing all week and had thought nothing of it. The panic of such a crazy week had me doing without fully thinking. However, on this particular Friday morning, I just couldn't get the thought out of my mind. Am I being fully present? No, I wasn't. In this realization, I put my phone down, picked my paddle up, took my phone to shore and paddled back out to join the rest of the group. Enough photos had been taken.

We have this tendency to worry about what's next instead of what's now. As life ramps back up and the "return to normal" starts to occur, it would be very easy for us to fall back into old habits. It would be very easy for us, once again, to take for granted the gift of community. We might someday forget the time when loving our neighbor meant to be separated. Gathering for potlucks or cocktail parties may once again feel like a burden because all we will be able to think about are the other things we could be doing. Let us resist that urge. Let us be intentional to not think that, just because more can be done, we haven't done enough. We are always going to be able to think of things that can be done. Maybe we should ask what should be done?

One can easily be consumed by doing tasks and neglect the spiritual restoration that occurs by coming together. We can even be physically present and still have our mind on what needs to be done next. My prayer is that we don't put that metaphorical camera lens between us and our opportunities to gather.

Rainbow Gathering, 1991

By Rachel Creager Ireland

I closed my eyes and turned my face to the sun.
Butt to earth and hip to hip with
three hundred grimy wild-haired hippies
in fraying handwovens and tie-dyes
on the dry grass in a meadow.
Before the meal everyone stood in circle
and shouted WE LOOOOOOVE YOU
as a prayer. We were young,
a handful of friends for a summer
whose names I no longer remember,
who didn't yet know the importance
of carrying a bowl and cup in one's backpack.
When the communal-size pot of brown rice
came around, the man in purple shirt and faded jeans
stood over us with his long spoon
glopped some rice sticky and still steaming
into our bare empty hands.
Hand food is the best food he said,
and no rice has ever been so nourishing:
it tasted of sunshine and mountain air
and strong hearts. Of rich earth
and freshly cut cedars. And every person there
was fed. Since then I know these things:
the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes
is true. Really true.
And *hand food is the best food*.



Gather

Frieda Mottonen

Triptych, acrylic, 5'x25'

A Brief Poem on Gathering

By Marta Pumroy

Gather my body to my soul,
 The one that dances and moves,
Gather my body to my soul,
 The one that has been vilified and shamed
Gather my body to my soul,
 The one that escapes me when the trauma is too much
Gather my body to my soul,
 So, I can feel what peace is intended to be
Let me love it,
 Let me live it,
 Let it grow.
Grow old,
 Grow out,
 Grow wise.



Kairos' theme for December will be: Arrival

Please send submissions to kairos@student.austinseminary.edu by November 15th for your work to be included in our upcoming publication. Submissions can be as closely or loosely related to the theme as you would like.

Students, faculty, staff, family, and other community members are all welcome to submit art, poetry, and writing to *Kairos*.

Langley Hoyt, a Junior MDiv student at APTS, is the editor of *Kairos*. Please reach out to her using the *Kairos* email with any questions or comments!

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