

A Table in the Wilderness

We can experience the wilderness not just as a place but also as a time, and that's a truth we can explore together this year during the season of Lent.

In terms of the wilderness as a place, we can think of the children of Israel leaving Egypt and making their way to the Promised Land. As they journeyed through the wilderness, they often did not know where they could find food or water. They also did not know for sure what life would be like in the Promised Land. In many ways, the wilderness could be a hard place to navigate, and it brought out their dependence on our faithful Lord. And in the one story of salvation, our faithful Lord Jesus was led into the wilderness to embody our Lord's power to overcome evil and begin God's promised new land, even new creation.

In terms of the wilderness as a time, during Lent 2023, we will read stories of biblical characters who found themselves in the wilderness and also found that God provided for them in the wilderness. We can explore these wilderness stories even as we continue to live where we live and work where we work. In other words, we can explore the wilderness not only as a desert in another continent; we can explore the wilderness as times in our lives when we have emerged out of one way of life but not fully entered a new way of life.

During such "wilderness times," we can feel anxious and uncertain wondering if God can really provide for us and we can also grow in trust for our faithful Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. So, let's pray together to learn and grow during our Lenten-Wilderness time.

There are three resources for you to take home with you. One is a bookmark that lists the sermon text and a Psalm for each week of Lent. You might choose to read these texts

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Pastoral Group Dinner Schedule



March 12—Friend/Hibma
March 19—Van Wyk/Van Tol
April 2—Schelhaas/Feikema
April 16—DeWit/DeJong
April 23—Stiemsma/Clark
April 30—Rhoda/Sybesma

Wondering which Pastoral Group you're in?
The Pastoral Group lists
can be found on our website:
[https://covenantcrc.net/directory-
committees/](https://covenantcrc.net/directory-committees/)

Courier

March 2023

COVENANT
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Note from the Pastor

Reflections on “Better Together”

As I navigated my way through 3rd Grade in Key West, Florida, somehow I got into a conversation about “religion” with a friend of my 8th Grade brother. I asked that fellow, “What religion are you?” He replied, “Methodist,” and then asked in return, “What religion are you?” When I answered, “Protestant,” my kind older brother interceded by saying, “You idiot. Don’t you even know you are Christian Reformed?”

Until that time, I did not know that I was Christian Reformed. I had been baptized into my father’s CRC congregation in Seattle, but when I was only age three, my father became a chaplain in the US Air Force. Therefore, wherever we moved, we would attend the “Protestant Chapel” services, and then I would see Roman Catholics entering the same building for their “Catholic Chapel” worship. So, even though at age nine, I was not a complete idiot, I did not know I was Christian Reformed.

Over the years, I came not only to know I was Christian Reformed, I came also to feel grateful for the denomination into which our Lord had placed me. My parents mediated a healthy and biblical faith to me. My professors helped me treasure Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper, and other insightful teachers. Also, my CRC colleagues and fellow members have helped me to grow in faith, hope, and love. And that happens even when we disagree strongly about significant issues.

My gratitude for my CRC background led me to accept the invitation from some colleagues whom I had not yet met to join a group

formed soon after Synod 2022, called “Better Together: A Third Way.” Our hope is that we can help our denomination stay together even when we strongly disagree about significant issues. After our morning worship on February 19, I convened an “Edifying Engagement” session about Better Together in a gathering that included insightful messages from Tom Clark and Rin Goedhart, a bit of further information from me, and a healthy time for engagement by means of questions, answers, and shared thoughts. That Edifying Engagement session gave me another good experience in the Christian Reformed Church.

If you have thoughts or questions about Better Together, please feel free to get in touch with me. Also, you can explore this movement on its website. Simply click on this link, www.thirdway.church, and you can explore this movement.

-Pastor Joel

Softener Salt Sale

We hope you have the upcoming Bridge of Hope/Covenant Water Softener Salt on your calendar! The plan is to have a family order sheet in your mail box in a few weeks. The goal again this year is for each family to try to sell 25 bags of salt—this is more attainable for some of our congregation than others, so all we really ask is that you try to sell as much as you are able. Family, friends, and neighbors are all people you can contact about purchasing salt through our fundraiser. Be sure to mention that we deliver the salt ourselves and put it wherever they would like! Also keep your eyes peeled for a link to a sign up sheet for workers to help deliver salt on April 22.

-Emily Kramer

Stewarding and Celebrating our Worship Space

At the congregational meeting in December, elder Ethan Brue spoke briefly about an ongoing project to refresh the sanctuary and upgrade the sound system and projection system. While the project has started and stopped a couple of times, we have some good momentum right now having decided to work with Eric Oleson from Oleson + Hobbie Architects. Eric has presented us with multiple options for a revised sanctuary floor plan, and we've come away from each meeting energized by potential changes and grateful for Eric's willingness to listen to us, get to know us and adjust. We've gathered insightful feedback on these options from a cross section of Covenant members and are preparing to present two options to council. Once we decide on the floor plan, we will be able to

meet with sound engineers and move toward a project plan and cost estimate to bring before the congregation.

We are very aware that making changes to a space that we love can be hard. We all have opinions, memories, sensitivities. We strive to proceed pastorally, patiently, and frugally. Speaking on behalf of the Worship Committee (Sanctuary Refresh Team), I can say that we are excited about the changes we are envisioning. And we hope and pray they will equip us to steward and celebrate our worship space and the worship life of our congregation for years to come.

-Rebecca De Vries

and members of the Worship Committee



Good food, fun, and fellowship at the Warm Winter Wednesday Pizza & Pinewood Derby event.

March Birthdays & Anniversaries

1	Caleb Smit	11	Benjamin Ploegstra Del Vander Zee	23	Richard Eggebeen Victoria Eggebeen Mike Janssen
4	Brian Mellema Lee Rhoda	14	Mike & Laura Janssen Roger & Linda Vanden Hoek		Tricia Van Dyk Beth Vanden Berg
5	Ben Bailey			24	Channon Visscher
6	Mark McCarthy	15	Matt & Juliet Jewett	25	Emma Haan
7	Emma Mercado Castelan Lincoln Rylaarsdam	17	Sean Hannigan Claire Van Schouwen	31	Brandon Hummel
8	Sara Ploegstra Brooklyn Rylaarsdam	19	Benjamin Groenewold Cheri Horstman		
10	Jeff Ploegstra Lila Sybesma	20	Carol Apol Mark Tazelaar		
		21	Wil & Jo Alberda		



"Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer."

—Maya Angelou

Join us for a WE service on **March 26** (note the date change!) following our morning service. We will focus on Faith Practices, and this month we will learn together about the practice of Gratitude. Following a meal together we will spend time around the table, young and old together, learning together about what it means to practice gratitude. We hope you are able to participate!



Some of our regularly attending Dordt students were making good use of the supply of colors and kids' bulletins before a recent church service.

March Scheduling



Greeters

Tricia K, Rachel L, Merrill MC



Nursery

Nursery Monitor: Kris VP

March 5

AM Lee & Jenni M, Chris & Rin G

March 12

AM Rob & Megan H, Marcy H

March 19

AM Bob & Rebecca DS, Ryan & Angela H

March 26

AM Kurt & Sharon V, Steve & Pat C

April 2



Ushers

Jo A, Bernie DW, Jake VW



Coffee Servers

Sharon D, Chris G, Daryl H,
Sally J, Sharon V

Substitutes

If you are unable to serve on your assigned date for coffee, usher, or greeter, contact:

Bob DS, Marcy H, Jeremy H,
Cal J, Carol O, Beth VB



Thanks for serving!

Courier Copy—It's up to you!

The *Courier* is issued monthly at Covenant church. If you have copy that you wish to be included, send it to the church office. Each issue is distributed on the last Sunday of the month. Copy deadline is Monday, March 20 for the April issue.

Formation Sunday Evenings

Join us for our 6:00 PM Sunday evening gatherings this month:

March 5: Vespers

March 12: GEMS Sunday at Faith CRC

March 19: Vespers

March 26: WE Service following Morning Worship

Notes from the Deacons

Hi Covenant Family,

For those who are interested, our Christian Education Fund has a remaining amount of \$85,295 of our \$190,305 commitment for the 2022-2023 school year! We have reached 55% of our fiscal goal. Thanks for your giving and generosity.

As your deacon liaison, I am also attending meetings in the upcoming weeks regarding the ESA bill and how this will affect the Legacy Plan (SCCS) and the Fair Share plan (Western, Unity, OCCS) moving forward. I do not have any answers now, but I wanted to let you know that conversations are happening. We ask for continued prayers for us, as deacons, as we make decisions. Also, thanks for your patience as we anticipate and process these changes.

-Ruth Clark

on behalf of the deacons,

(Ruth Clark, Pam De Jong,

Ross Feikema, Dane Hilona, Mike Janssen,

Les Syberma, Dwight Van Tol, John Visser)

Serving at Covenant

This is part of an ongoing series about the many ways Covenant members serve in our church, our community, and beyond.

Most of you know the missionaries that Covenant supports directly through our offerings—their pictures are hanging on the wall in the fellowship hall. But did you know that we also support another Resonate missionary family through our Classis Iakota ministry shares? The Klompien family; Rev. Mark, his wife JinHee and their children Elizabeth and Timothy, are in their second year as missionaries in Nepal. They serve in the Kathmandu Valley where Mark teaches in the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary to train local leaders and leads Bible studies for leaders already in churches. JinHee serves a counselor at Kathmandu International Study Center. If you would like to know more about their ministry you can read their latest letter below.

-Dwight Van Tol

Our hymns and praise songs regularly refer to the wonder of Jesus' name. How exciting as we personally experience it—the power in the name of Christ incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and exalted. In the step back into

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Giving Graph

Fund	Budgeted	Received	Difference
General	(1/1/23-2/19/23) \$49,457	\$55,643	+\$6,186
Christian Education	(8/1/22-2/19/23) \$106,132	\$109,252	+\$3,120

Serving at Covenant

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the busyness of a new year, prayers for the hope that comes with sustained focus on Christ—‘The Alpha and Omega... Him who was, is, and is to come.’

A review of 2022 brings memories of the special opportunity that Mark had to visit the spring classis meeting at Inspiration Hills. It also reminds us of several opportunities Mark had to visit Classis Iakota churches. We write to say thank you to Classis Iakota for the support this past year. Your prayers and financial support made possible the beginning of a work the shape and scope of which continues to develop. Along with preaching and teaching opportunities within congregations of the Nepali Reformed Churches network and churches of staff members affiliated with Reformed Presbyterian Seminary, we are also busy with:

Bible Studies: Pandemic restrictions are now over, but Zoom on-line technology is still alive and well. This allows Mark to connect with morning studies of local pastors and evangelists in various locations on this side. Along with one-time ‘visits,’ Mark is 12 weeks into a 15-week study with the Crossway Church’s elders/deacons on this side. The Spirit comes faithfully as promised, as we celebrate the gospel of Christ through a historical-redemptive study of the 10 Commandments. We’ll finish up after return from Christmas break. At present, the leaders from the study are returning from villages outside of Kathmandu where they have been busy with Christmas and New Year’s season evangelism. Pastor Santosh and I plan to complete the study with an in-person celebration at Crossway Church.

Reformed Presbyterian Seminary: From

what we can tell, Dr. Birendra was the most educated Old Testament scholar (PhD-ACTS Seminary-Seoul) in the Kathmandu Valley. When he passed away last year from an aneurysm at the age of 53, there were holes left open both in teaching and administration. Mark works through talks, assignments and evaluations for the Old Testament, M.Div class he will be teaching this February. The current principal asks for a class taught from a ‘worldview perspective,’ so Mark re-studies Newbigen, Wolters, and Goheen toward guidance in increasing the material’s personal engagement. Mark has also been asked to serve as RPS’s academic dean. Mark feels called to preach and teach. Administration, not so much. What is clear. The present principal needs space toward returning to a more healthy place. Concern about being public institutionally means Mark sensing the need to use his new Nepali name on minutes and for writing. Much discernment is needed.

Language Study: Mark takes conversation-focused language classes from an organization that trains mostly like-minded students. It’s an honor to regularly rub shoulders with the men and women who are so important to the Kingdom movement going on in Nepal. The ‘graduation’ is not ceremony, caps and gowns. Rather, students give their testimony before the rest of the community. The aim of the exercise is equipping, toward a presentation that the student can use later in the city or the Himal (mountain) village.

Community Comfort: JinHee and the children remain busy at Kathmandu International Study Center. They jumped right in upon arrival. Most of the students served by the community are “M” families. As counselor, JinHee daily cheers, dries tears, and explores unhelpful behaviors. Elizabeth and Timothy

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provide encouragement to—as they are encouraged by—peers from England, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Singapore, South Korea, and of course, India and Nepal. We give thanks for this community of worker-pilgrims. Because of comfort provided in Christian community, we can bring solace to others.

Resonate Team: We are tasked with helping to provide the support network for six fellow couples, engaged in varying degrees of closeness with Resonate Global. A highlight this fall was gathering the entire Kathmandu-area team during the week of Thanksgiving for fellowship and prayer. All couples participated, and most children. Resonate-Kathmandu consists of (including us): four Nepali families, one Korean family, two American families.

The self-awareness that comes with our short time of service makes something clear. What we have to offer is faith, expressed with a Reformed, covenant accent. This is not to say that we are anything other than a regular family saved by grace. But, we do approach life and community, needs and problems, from the theological grounding that we inherited back home. What a gift to be learning from all that the burgeoning Nepal movement has to offer while bringing wealth from the tradition that we cherish.

As we praise the Lord for the obvious miracle happening in the Nepal church, we give thanks for His faithfulness in miracles taking place in lakota. He uses simple stuff for miracles—preaching and the sacraments, ‘normal means’ for eternal life. May Christ be honored as we—communities of faith in North America and Nepal—reflect the wonder of life in Him.

If your congregation would like suggestions about drawing closer to the Acts-like, church planting phenomenon taking place here, we could make some suggestions. There are congregations here interested to learn in-kind from established, covenant church families like yours in Classis lakota.

Strength to you on that side, as we continue to answer the Kingdom call together—to make Christ known, even as we are known. We all know and it’s good to verbalize—His return is soon. How good to labor together toward that end.

A Classis lakota Ministry in Nepal,

-The Klompiens

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before Sunday, when we will feed on them together. (You’ll find one in your mailbox.) The second is a Lenten playlist for you to listen to. (Click [here](#) for a link to the music on Spotify or use the QR code below). We will sing some of these songs during our worship services; others might be useful to you in other ways you observe Lent. Another resource you might find useful during this season is a beautiful devotional booklet Anna Westfall put together for us in 2021. Pull out the copy we gave you then, or click [here](#) for a digital copy (or use the QR code below).

Spotify Playlist:



A Lenten Path:



-Pastor Joel & Rebecca DeVries