

Waymarks

Plymouth Church | Helena Montana

July 2023

The Nativity (Part 3)



Welcome to the third installment in my series about my mural, *Faith, Hope, & Love*, which is currently on display in the Fireside Room. Last month's article was about the section representing the parting of the Red Sea in the Book of Exodus. The remaining sections of the mural are scenes from the life of Jesus, starting with the Nativity.

Set against a background of black slate, which my friends salvaged out of the school dumpster for me when the slate tiles on the roof were replaced, is the Holy Family: Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph look down at Jesus in Mary's arms, the family forming the shape of a stylized heart. Going up through the center of the family is the ichthys, what is commonly referred to as the Jesus fish in our modern day, a symbol of the church. Jesus, of course, is in the middle of the fish. The swaddling clothes are terra cotta, which I used in several places in the mosaic to depict a vessel that is carrying Jesus. You can find terra cotta in the plate and cup in the Last Supper scene, as well as on the center cross of the three crosses on the hill.

The heavenly host forms an arc over the Holy Family, and I used a quartz crystal for the Star of Bethlehem. It's difficult to tell on the fabric reproduction, but the beams of light coming from the star are made of mirror.

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The word “LOVE” is hidden in the New Testament portion of the mosaic. It’s quite large, and goes across the entire New Testament section. The letter “L” is hidden in the Nativity scene. You can find it by looking at the purple portion of Mary’s robe, which encompasses most of the vertical section of the letter.



One of my favorite stories about this section of the mural comes from the black and white floral tiles in the middle of Joseph’s robe. A friend in seminary, who was a year ahead of me, was delivering her senior sermon. She was preaching about the woman with the alabaster jar, and as part of the sermon, she smashed a little black and white floral vase on the ground. As soon as the service was over, I asked her if I could have the piece for the mosaic, and of course she said yes.

There is one thing that I included in this section that I had completely forgotten about until I started looking at it to write this article. There’s a small field next to the seminary circled by redwood trees. The seminary uses this field for their graduation ceremonies, and we would often go out there at night to stargaze. I was out there with a friend one night, doing just that, when we both saw a UFO fly over our heads. It was a small brown football shape with indistinct edges. It didn’t make any noise, and it didn’t have any lights, and other than the fact that we both saw it and had no idea what it was, it was a completely unremarkable event. I’m not saying that I believe in aliens, but what we saw was the definition of an Unidentified Flying Object. So, I put a polished oval piece of tiger’s eye about five inches to the left of the Star of Bethlehem, as a reminder of that night.

One last thing about this section, and many of you will know this story because I’ve preached about it before. The first section of the mosaic that I completed was the Baptism of Christ, which is to the immediate right of the Nativity scene. I proceeded to work my way towards the right, and when I got to the end, I started working on Genesis, and then continued towards the right, so the Nativity scene is actually the last section of the mosaic that I did. The last portion of the Nativity scene that I completed was the beige section to the lower right of Joseph. As I was working on this section, two of my friends came to look at my work. They were two women from South Korea, and as they pointed at the different tiles and asked me questions about the mosaic, I realized that I hadn’t included anything Korean in the mosaic. This was a huge oversight, because about a quarter of the student body at the time were Korean nationals.

So, I asked Min-Hee and EunJoo, what Korean word I should include in the mosaic. After a very brief discussion, maybe only 20 seconds, they told me I should include the Korean word “jong.” They said that it didn’t really have an English translation, but it describes the incredible closeness and affection that is possible between two people. They told me to imagine 2 pieces of sticky rice that are stuck together. You can’t tell where one rice ends and the other begins. And so, “jong” was one of the last things to go up on the wall.

Next time, we’ll look at the Baptism of Christ, the scene that started it all. ~ Rev. Charles Wei

Moderator's Message

On a Thursday evening, at the Church of Latter Day Saints, I heard the former Dean of Helena College Daniel Bingham, speak about his biking accident in Australia, his struggles living as a paraplegic, and his faith in God. His theme was “what I am” versus “who I am.” “What” he was to me: a supportive boss and like-minded colleague in the world of higher education. Who he sees himself as today, most importantly, is a “son of God.” His vision of heaven is being surrounded by a congregation of friends and family.



I saw a church filled with over 300 people and a sanctuary that opens up into a gym for active youth. I also heard a distinct focus on the afterlife in songs, prayers, and message. The new temple also emphasizes heaven.

I spend a week this month mesmerized by the “climate trial,” Held vs. Montana. The young people yearned for the kind of “heavenly” Montana their parents remembered: long ski seasons, smoke-free air, historic glaciers, adequate precipitation for farming and ranching, cold rivers... They fear a future of climate “hell,” describing how often they couldn’t play sports due to bad air quality, fires, floods, drought, and inadequate snowfall. The young people who escaped danger in Somalia and Ukraine, finding refuge at Carroll College, suffered an even more acute threat. Many refugees in this world have been impacted by climate, and more will come.

I believe that Creation Care may be our most critical mission, and an issue that could involve more young people in our church. We can start that mission visibly by investing in new roofing and saving for solar panels. Who are we? A congregation that cares about the earth God created for us and for future generations.

~ Jan Clinard



'We only have one planet, and we need to be kind to it. It's obvious when you think about it:

this is the only place where all the people live. By Olliver Jeffers

Creation Care Tips

Glass and Plastic Recycling—Did you know?

Glass and Plastic

- Glass and Plastic is only accepted at the Transfer Station.
- Broken glass can be a safety hazard to the public, and contamination rates in plastic are so high that the City made the decision to only accept these recyclables at this location.
- Mixed Container Glass-Clear, brown and green glass may be mixed. All lids, caps and flow-control inserts must be removed and disposed of:
 - * Rinse containers with water and leave no food residue in the recyclable containers.
 - * Ensure recyclables are clean, dry, and empty after rinse.
- Plastics- #1 Clear Bottles, #1 Clear Trays, #2 Milk Jugs & #2 Colored. Rinsed/No Lids.
- No black plastics accepted.

Glass is currently shipped to Salt Lake City Utah, to be repurposed into insulation, costing the City close to \$38,000 a year. Plastic is bailed and processed by Helena Recycling, costing \$170 a ton, with an average of 60 tons being diverted from the landfill every year.

In order to mitigate these two issues, the City has been working diligently to find a solution. This includes, applying for grants to purchase a plastic bailer, and also partnering with a group of MSU students to reduce the amount of contamination in glass recycling. Glass and plastic are accepted in the city's Curbside Recycling program, through Helena Recycling.

Where to Recycle

- Safeway – 611 N Montana Ave
- Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds – 98 W Custer Ave
- Boeing – 3200 Skyway Dr, just past the Airport.
- Across from Dale Harris Park (279 S Cruse Ave)
- Grub Stake, 1450 Lincoln Rd West
- Canyon Ferry Mini-Basket, 3012 Canyon Ferry Rd
- Former Valley Sand and Gravel Excavation Site- McHugh Drive
- Transfer Station—1975 N Benton Ave

For more information and recycling guides, check out:
<https://www.helenamt.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Solid-Waste/Recycling>

WELCOME—MARK WILSON

While our illustrious leader will be gone for a few weeks this month, we are fortunate to have Mark Wilson willing, able, and delighted to step in to help out and bless us all!



A brief bio in case you have not met Mark:

Mark Wilson will be filling in for Charles Wei on Sunday, July 2nd, 9th and 16th. Mark was one of the co-ministers (along with Steve Brehe) that filled at Plymouth after Pastor Roger retired and moved to Santa Fe. Mark formerly worked for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. He retired in 2013, after a 36-year career involving conservation work in eight states across the country. Mark holds **master's degrees in both biology and theology**. He now teaches community religion classes in Helena and does fill-in preaching and interim ministry work for churches in the western U.S.. Mark also schedules the local pastors, ministers and theologians that contribute religion articles to the Saturday morning edition of the Helena Independent Record Newspaper. Mark's teaching theme for the three Sundays in July are three important things Christians should know, but might not.

Mark and his wife Judy have been married for 41-years and they live in the Montana City area, just south of Helena. Judy worked as an administrator in the School Nutrition Program Division of the Montana Office of Public Instruction prior to her retirement in 2014. They have two sons, Clinton and Travis. Clinton is a nuclear engineer at the Idaho National Energy Laboratory in Idaho Falls, ID. Travis is a graduate student at the University of Oregon studying in the field of communication. The entire family loves outdoor sports such as mountain biking and hiking. Mark is an especially avid fly fisherman.

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is a quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow." ~ Mary Anne Radmacher

The Vision of Helena Area Habitat for Humanity

Habitat has been building homes in the Helena area since 1992



It took Habitat 25 years to build the first 30 homes, 5 years to build the next 30 homes. By 2030 Habitat plans to build at least 30 homes each year, while performing critical home repairs on at least 50 others. We currently have 12 homes under

construction, with an additional 6 homes breaking ground in September. The organization is currently creating a repair program, having completed 35 critical repairs for existing homeowners in the past four years. This growth in the organization comes at a key moment in the history of Helena; a time when the average home price has doubled in the past three years to \$465,000, leaving many families wondering how they will sustain a life where incomes can't match the rising costs of living. The possibility of owning a home is becoming a thing of the past as working families are forced into high rent apartments. Lewis and Clark County was among the top five counties in the United States for highest increase in the average rent. Today it is hard to find a two-bedroom apartment in the Helena area for less than \$1200. Most are going for over \$1500.

I could spend several pages talking about the problems; it's the solutions which are harder to come by. But Habitat has one of the solutions...we must build more homes, and then ensure that the homes we build remain affordable for generations of families. By the end of July, Habitat will purchase over 107 acres in East Helena, with an additional 136 acres under contract. This has been three years in the planning. The total acreage of 243 acres will be transformed in the coming decade into a mixed-income neighborhood with over 1000 homes, of which 600-700 will be permanently affordable homes. We plan to break ground on the first set of homes in that community by the spring of 2025.

When we mention permanent affordability, it means that Habitat caps the amount of equity a homeowner can gain in the home over time to ensure when the home is resold at some point in the future, the home remains affordable to a future family. We are presently in the process with one of these resales. A home constructed in 2019 and sold to the homeowner for less than \$200,000 is now up for sale to a new homeowner for just over \$230,000; but the home appraises on the open market for well over \$450,000. The seller will walk away with over \$40,000 in equity after living in the home for just under 4 years. The new buyer is income-qualified through Habitat and commits to a similar equity restriction going forward. The new homeowner may live in the home for however long they like, but if they ever sell the home, the home remains affordable to a future family.

Permanent affordability, in tandem with land development, is how Habitat proposes to build Helena out of the housing crisis, creating homes and wealth for generations of families. Long into the future, the homes Habitat builds will continue to serve the Helena area.

People will mention the complexity and diversity of factors which have led to the increase of housing costs across Montana. With over 80% of households in the state of Montana currently qualified for our programs, opportunity is slipping away. It is easy to end conversations at the challenges. At Habitat a small, yet dedicated group of staff and volunteers are quietly charting a path to a future for individuals and families, as those with the creativity to contend with the housing realities of the new world struggle to adapt the systems of the old.

To learn how you can join us in this work, visit www.helenahabitat.org. ~Jacob Kuntz,
Executive Director
jacobk@helenahabitat.org

SAVE THE DATE!
Conference-Wide Workshop on Planned Giving
Friday, September 29
11:00 am – 4 pm
First Congregational UCC
Great Falls, MT

The event will be held in-person (preferable) and on Zoom

Facilitator is The Rev. Andrew Warner
UCC Generosity Outreach Officer
Director of Development for the Wisconsin Conference

Who should participate:

Individuals interested in learning more about planned giving
Church stewardship and finance leaders
Church stewardship committees

Registration information will be coming soon.

From the Outreach and Social Justice Committee (OSJ)

Other Than Thoughts and Prayers

“So Sorry for Your Loss”, is the title of a new book by Dina Gachman that explores deep grief with a bit of humor. As members of a church family, we have experienced our share of loss lately; it is difficult to know just what to say or do. While reading the book synopsis, it was not the first time I encountered the suggestion of food as a traditional and meaningful expression of comfort. Perhaps it is worth being reminded that “homemade conveys heartfelt...it’s not the food so much as the gesture of genuine compassion. Casserole unto others as you would have them casserole unto you.” [from Southern Living magazine, January 2014.]

Outreach and Social Justice Committee Work

Meat to God’s Love

Charles and Jennifer delivered meat to God’s Love last week, the second delivery in recognition of the ministry of Dave Donaldson and his late partner, Sava Mathou. The staff and residents at the shelter were very appreciative of the gift. You may remember that the congregation contributed a generous amount for this purpose, which was matched with a grant from Town Pump. There is still an ample amount in the fund for at least one more meat delivery.

Fruit to Tamarack House

Thank you to Carol McKerrow and Don Harriott who delivered fruit to our neighbors at Tamarack House during the month of June. Pat Buell will make the same provision during the month of July. Plymouth, what a wonderful thing you are doing and will continue to do until the end of the year!

English as a Second Language (ESL) to Afghan Women

Due to the generosity of the UCC Ministry for Refugees and Migration Services, Plymouth received a grant for \$6400 in early April. These funds are being used to provide English instruction to four Afghan women currently residing in Helena. In addition to our own Donna Hathey, Britta Binde joined the effort as a full-time ESL teacher. The grant funds will be used to cover costs associated with supplies and materials as well as some compensation for the teachers. I hope you will be thinking about ways we can celebrate the accomplishments of these women who are working hard to adapt into American society.

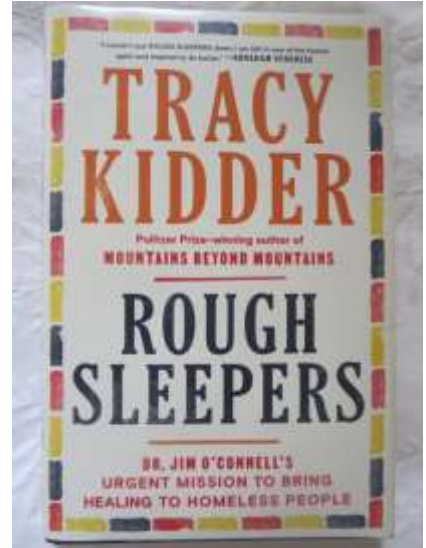


Pastor Charles buying meat and butter for God’s Love

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Rough Talk

“Rough Sleepers” by Tracy Kidder is the OSJ’s suggested reading this summer. We have described this book in other Waymarks issues. Now we hope you will mark your calendars for upcoming discussions relating to it. Beginning Wednesday, August 30 at 12 noon and continuing for the next four Wednesday’s in September, Plymouth (along with the Lewis and Clark Library and five other co-sponsors from the Clergy Advocates group) will host important discussions: medical concerns including mental health and opiate addictions; not in my back-yard opinions; and introductions to the unsheltered people about whom we have concerns. Next time, we will report on the panelists selected to discuss the topics. Until then, save the dates! You will want to be part of this very important discussion.



Plymouth purchased an additional five copies of the book that are available for you to borrow or purchase for \$30. The Lewis and Clark Library also has many copies that you can borrow. For more information, contact Jennifer or Charles.

Meeting Anyone?

The Outreach and Social Justice Committee will meet Friday July 21 at 10:00 a.m. at the church. Current members of the committee are Frank Kromkowski, Gus Byrom, Patti Burke, Suzanne Nybo, Brenda Senne, Susan and Chuck Butler, Florence Mayer, and Jennifer Thompson (Chair). All are welcome to attend the meeting. We always have a very full agenda, but somehow manage to conclude our discussion by 11:15 AM. ~ Jennifer Jeffries Thompson

UPCOMING EVENTS AT PLYMOUTH!

Breakfast by the Lake—August 20, 2023. Breakfast at 9:00 a.m. followed by the service at 10:00 a.m.
More details coming soon.

Tai Chi meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 5:30 in the Fireside Room. All are invited and welcome to join.

Table Tennis “PingPong” - Come and play with us. Sundays at 3pm and Thursdays at 6pm (Fellowship Hall). Contact Norm Mullen (406.459.5243) for more information.



Women's Fellowship Brunch—June 2023

Thanks to all who contributed to beautiful floral displays lining Plymouth's front entrance. There is also another pot located to the left of the lower entrance. Linda and Richard Burns, Susan Maki, Lynn Bolin, and Lucinda Shelden made generous donations in memory of loved ones. Dick and Florence Mayer, Dewey and Rosana Skelton also selected and planted flowers in two of the



large containers.



There are also garden fairies flitting about who see to watering and dead-heading when needed. I think the head fairy is Jean Goetz, but sightings are fleeting. If you happen to be around and notice that the pots are dry (especially the one at the lower level because it is not attached to the drip system), feel free to lend a hand and give our friends the water they need. Water jugs should be close by.



Thank you Florence and Dick Mayer—filling in for Carol McKerrow



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In Our Prayers Today

At Home: Giles Walker, Margy Kohl, Gus and Brenda Byrom, Greg Bolin, and Nathan Schreder as they go through cancer treatment. Loraine Hopgood, for continued recovery.

Touchmark: Evelyn Nelson and Art Gilreath.

Edgewood: Ed Canty / **Hunter's Point:** Marlyce Taylor; Jim and Doris Powell.

Special Request: For Sharon Paasche's family as they mourn her passing.

Prayers for us and the families of Clara Gilreath and Jim Tompkins, and the victims of gun violence, as we mourn the loss of our loved ones.

To add someone to the prayer list, please call the church office at 442-9883 or email pccofficemgr@gmail.com.

Plymouth Church, U.C.C.

400 S. Oakes St.

Helena, MT 59601

Plymouth's Mission is to nurture our congregation and the wider community with acts of love and a vision of God's image in all things.



400 S. Oakes St.
Helena, MT 59601

Office Hours

- Pastor Charles Wei: 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m. (Tues. & Thurs.), and by appointment.
- Office Manager Alane Dallas: 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. (Tues.-Thurs.)

Contact Us

Church Office: 406.442.9883

Web: www.plymouthmontanaucc.org

Email: pccofficemgr@gmail.com

Also: www.facebook.com/plymouthcongregational

Sundays
10:00 a.m. Worship Service
In Person and Online