August 9th 2026

WHEN MONDAY COMES

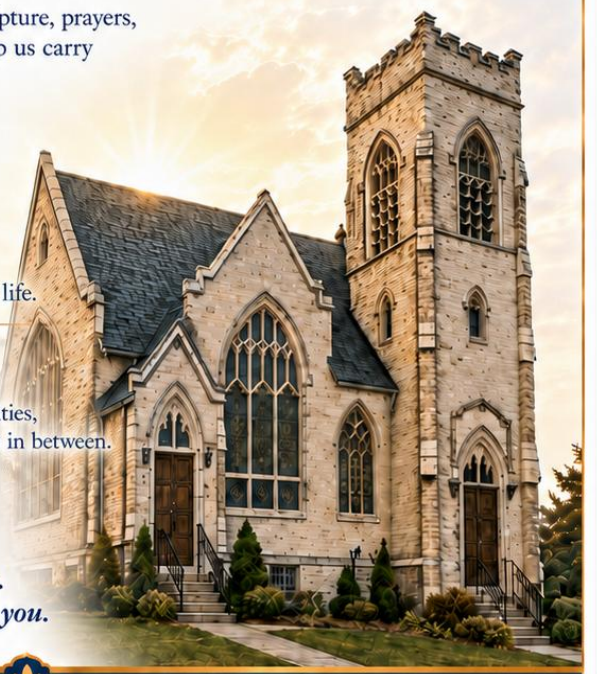
Faith for the Week Ahead

Please take this home and use it during the week.

Sunday worship is not meant to stay in the sanctuary.

Each week, When Monday Comes offers Scripture, prayers, reflections, and simple encouragement to help us carry faith into everyday life.

- Read it with your morning coffee.
- Use a prayer before bed.
- Think about the weekly question.
- Share a thought with someone else.
- Let God speak in the ordinary places of life.



Faith is not only for Sunday morning.
Faith is for Monday decisions, Tuesday worries, Wednesday conversations, Thursday responsibilities, Friday weariness, Saturday hopes, and every step in between.

So please take this home, keep it nearby, and when Monday comes, remember:

God is still with you.
Christ is still calling you.
The Spirit is still working in you.

United Presbyterian Church of Whitinsville

CONNECT WITH US

51 Cottage Street • Whitinsville, MA 01588
Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m. • https://whitinpres.org

Another View
Sent Into the Wind

Many of us carry a quiet expectation about faith: if we are following God, trying to do what is right, and going where Christ directs us, life should become at least a little easier.

The road should grow clearer. The boat should remain steady. The water should stay reasonably calm.

Then we read Matthew 14.

Jesus tells the disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side while He dismisses the crowd and goes up the mountain to pray. The disciples obey Him. They are exactly where Jesus told them to be—and before long they are fighting a strong wind and rough water in the darkness.

They did not sail into trouble because they had ignored Jesus.
They sailed into trouble while obeying Him.

Following Christ is no guarantee of smooth sailing. Sometimes we can be precisely where God has directed us and still encounter circumstances we never would have chosen.

Years ago, I was with a group of divers anchored near Cat Cay in the Bahamas when a storm came up during the night. We lost the bow anchor line, and the boat swung around stern-first into the wind—which is not the direction you want a boat facing when the water begins getting rough.

We were anchored in only about six or eight feet of water. Every so often, a large wave would lift the boat, and when we came down, the keel would strike the bottom.

A young couple on the trip had just been married. They were sitting low in the cockpit, holding tightly to one another and crying because they were convinced they were going to die.

They talked about everything they would never experience.

They would never have time to build a home together. They would never have children. They would never celebrate anniversaries, grow old together, or have the life they had only recently begun imagining.

Between those tearful declarations, they were also yelling at me.

“Do something!”
“How could you bring us out here?”
“Why did you put us in this situation?”

They were not particularly interested in hearing that the beach was only about twenty yards away and that we could practically walk ashore.

I also discovered that telling frightened newlyweds that they had SCUBA equipment aboard and could simply put it on and go diving in six feet of water was not especially comforting.

Pastoral care may not have been my strongest gift at that particular moment.

Their fear was real. The boat was pounding. The keel really was striking the bottom. But fear had narrowed their vision until the storm became the whole world.

They could not see the nearby beach. They could not imagine morning coming. They could not picture any future beyond the next wave.

The disciples may have felt something similar.

Jesus had sent them into the boat. Now they were struggling for hours against the wind. I wonder whether any of them thought:

Why did He send us out here?
Did He not know this storm was coming?
Why is He safely on the mountain while we are fighting to keep this boat afloat?

People still ask questions like that.

God, I thought You led me into this.
I was trying to do the right thing.
I prayed before making this decision.
Why did You allow this to happen?

The young couple survived the storm and later said the experience had brought them closer together. They had discovered something about their love for one another that calm water might never have revealed.

They did not, however, appear to trust me quite as much afterward. I think they regarded me as somehow responsible for the storm — as though dangerous weather had been included in the dive package.

Sometimes we respond to God in much the same way. We survive the storm. We may even grow through it. Yet part of us still wonders why God allowed us to enter those waters in the first place.

Matthew does not tell us that Jesus created the storm merely to teach the disciples a lesson. We should be careful not to say that God personally arranges every painful event as a spiritual classroom exercise.

But Jesus knew where He had sent them. He knew what they would encounter. And although the disciples could not see Him, Jesus had not lost sight of them.

While they struggled on the water, He was on the mountain praying.

They could not see Him. They did not know when He would come. They probably felt abandoned.

But God's apparent absence is not the same as God's actual absence.

Sometimes the hardest part of faith is trusting that Christ has not forgotten us during the hours when we cannot see Him.

Jesus does not come at the first gust of wind. The disciples struggle for much of the night before He approaches them. When He finally comes walking across the water, they do not immediately recognize Him.

They think He is another danger.

That may be one of the most honest details in the story. Sometimes God's help approaches us in a form we do not recognize. We are already tired, frightened, and trying desperately to keep the boat upright. When something unexpected appears, our first response is not always:

"Thank God, help has arrived."

Sometimes it is: "What now?"

Jesus does not begin by explaining the storm. He does not call out sailing instructions or provide a detailed reason for why they had to experience it.

He says: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

His first gift is not calm water.
His first gift is His presence.

Jesus did not answer every question about the storm. He answered the deeper question of whether they were facing it alone.

Then Peter does what only Peter seems willing to do. He says, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

There is genuine faith in that request. Peter is the only disciple willing to climb over the side of the boat.

There may also have been a small touch of:

“Here—hold my communion cup and watch this.”

Peter steps onto the water and begins walking toward Jesus. For a moment, he is participating in something impossible.

Then he notices the wind.

His confidence fails. Fear takes over, and he begins to sink.

We often reduce this story to the advice, “Keep your eyes on Jesus.” That is certainly part of it, but Peter learns something deeper.

He does not need greater confidence in Peter.
He needs continuing dependence upon Christ.
Faith is not confidence in our ability to walk on water.

Faith is confidence that Christ’s hand will still reach for us when we begin to sink.

Peter’s prayer may be one of the finest prayers in all of Scripture: “Lord, save me!”
No polished church language. No carefully arranged sentences. No lengthy explanation.

Just need and trust. And Jesus immediately reaches out His hand.

Peter discovers that it was not his courage, balance, or spiritual ability keeping him above the water. It was grace.

We sometimes forget that after God has carried us through a difficult time. At first, we are deeply grateful. Later, we may quietly revise the incident report:

I handled that rather well.
I was stronger than I realized.
I know how to deal with storms now.

Then the next gust comes. The waves appear larger. Our confidence disappears, and we discover that God's grace got us through the last event—not our own strength.

That connects this story with Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

Elijah had witnessed God's astonishing power on Mount Carmel. Yet shortly afterward, he was exhausted, frightened, and hiding in a cave.

He felt like the last firefighter on the hose line, the flames still growing and the water supply almost gone.

From inside that cave, Elijah probably believed God's dramatic victory had not been enough. They had won the battle but lost the war.

Elijah needed rest, food, and time to recover. He also needed a strong dose of truth.

God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God was not asking for Elijah's location. God knew where he was. The question invited Elijah to say aloud the story exhaustion had been telling him:

I have done everything I could.
Nothing has changed.
I am the only one left.

Elijah's answer was honest, but it was not the whole truth.

He was not alone. God's work had not failed. There were still faithful people Elijah could not see. Later Elisha would walk with him. There was still work to do.

Elijah mistook exhaustion for the whole truth.

The disciples mistook distance for abandonment.

Peter briefly mistook borrowed grace for personal ability.

God corrected each of them—not to humiliate them, but to deepen their understanding and move them forward.

The disciples already knew many things about Jesus. They had heard Him teach, watched Him heal, and seen Him feed thousands. But knowing things about Jesus is not the same as knowing Him when the night is dark and the boat is rocking.

After Jesus enters the boat and the wind stops, the disciples worship Him and say:

“Truly you are the Son of God.”

The storm moved their understanding from information to experience, from admiration to dependence, and from watching Jesus perform miracles to worshiping Him.

The storm did not teach them that they were strong enough to survive without Jesus.

It taught them who Jesus was when their own strength was no longer enough.

The storm did not prove they had followed the wrong person.

It revealed more fully who the person they were following truly was.

Following Christ does not guarantee smooth sailing. It does mean that no wind can carry us beyond His reach, no darkness can hide us from His sight, and no water is too deep for His hand to find us.

The young couple at Cat Cay thought their lives were ending, even though the beach was only twenty yards away.

Elijah thought he was the last faithful person remaining, even though God had preserved thousands he could not see.

Peter thought he was going under, yet Christ was close enough to reach him immediately.

Fear tells us that the storm is the whole story.
Grace reminds us that Christ is still present within it.
So, what boat has God asked you to enter?
What storm has caused you to wonder whether you heard Him correctly?
Where have you mistaken God’s delay for God’s absence?

And where are you trying to walk by your own strength instead of reaching for Christ's hand?

Following Jesus does not promise us calm water every day.

But when the boat rocks, the night grows dark, and our confidence begins to sink, we can still pray Peter's simple prayer:

"Lord, save me."

And trust that Christ has not forgotten where we are.

Faith Between Sundays

God in the Storm and in the Silence

Sunday — Sent Into the Wind

Scripture: "Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead." —Matthew 14:22

The disciples were not in the storm because they had disobeyed Jesus. They were in the boat because they had followed His direction. Faithfulness does not guarantee calm water. Sometimes we can be doing the right thing and still encounter resistance, uncertainty, and fear.

A storm does not necessarily mean that we misunderstood God or took the wrong road. It may simply mean that following Christ requires trusting Him even when the journey becomes harder than expected.

Walking It Out: Think of one difficult situation you are facing. Instead of immediately asking, "What did I do wrong?" ask, "How can I remain faithful here?"

Prayer:
Lord, when obedience leads me into rough water, keep me from assuming that You have abandoned me. Help me trust that You still know where I am. Amen.

Monday — When Fear Becomes the Whole Story

Scripture: "But the boat was battered by the waves, for the wind was against them." — Matthew 14:24

Fear has a way of narrowing our vision. The young couple aboard our boat near Cat Cay could see the waves, feel the keel striking bottom, and imagine every part of the future they believed they were about to lose. They could not see that the beach was only about twenty yards away.

Their danger was real, but fear made the danger look like the whole truth.

We do the same thing. A medical result, financial problem, broken relationship, or uncertain future can fill our entire field of vision. We see the next wave but cannot imagine morning coming.

Walking It Out: Name the storm honestly, but then name one thing fear may be preventing you from seeing: a person who can help, a next step, a past example of God's faithfulness, or a possibility you have overlooked.

Prayer:
God, my fear is real, but it is not the whole story. Widen my vision and help me see what anxiety has hidden from me. Amen.

Tuesday — What Are You Doing Here?

Scripture: "Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" —1 Kings 19:13

God knew where Elijah was. The question was not about geography. It invited Elijah to say aloud the story he had been telling himself:

I have done everything I can.
Nothing has changed.
I am the only one left.

Elijah's answer was honest, but exhaustion had made his thinking foggy. He felt like the last firefighter on the hose line while the water supply ran out.

God did not shame him for being tired. God gave him rest, food, time, and finally a needed dose of truth.

Walking It Out: Ask yourself, "What story have I been repeating because I am tired, frightened, or disappointed?" Write it down, then ask whether it is the complete truth.

Prayer:
God of truth, show me where exhaustion has distorted my thinking. Help me hear Your voice more clearly than the fearful story I have been telling myself. Amen.

Wednesday — God Is Not Always in the Noise

Scripture: "And after the fire a sound of sheer silence." —1 Kings 19:12

Elijah had seen God work through fire. Perhaps he expected another dramatic display. Instead, God met him in quietness.

This does not mean God always whispers or that every answer comes through silence. It means God is not limited to the methods we expect. We may look for a spectacular solution while God offers a quiet word, a trusted friend, a small opening, or enough strength for the next step.

Sometimes our lives are so full of noise that we cannot recognize the quieter ways God is already speaking.

Walking It Out: Spend five minutes today without television, telephone, music, or conversation. Do not demand an answer. Simply become quiet enough to listen.

Prayer:
Speak, Lord, in whatever way You choose. Quiet the noise within me so I can recognize Your presence in places I might otherwise overlook. Amen.

Thursday — When Help Looks Like Another Problem

Scripture: "When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!'" —Matthew 14:26

The disciples were already frightened when Jesus came toward them. Because they did not recognize Him, they mistook help for another danger.

That still happens. A necessary change may first feel like a loss. An honest conversation may feel threatening. Advice may sound like criticism. A new path may appear frightening simply because it is unfamiliar.

When we are exhausted, our first reaction to anything unexpected may be, "What now?"

Walking It Out: Before rejecting an unfamiliar possibility today, pause and ask, "Could God be approaching me through something I have not yet learned to recognize?"

Prayer:
Jesus, when I am frightened and tired, help me recognize Your presence. Keep me from mistaking every unfamiliar thing for another threat. Amen.

Friday — The Prayer That Needs No Polishing

Scripture: "But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" —Matthew 14:30

Peter's prayer may be one of the finest prayers in Scripture.

There is no polished church language. No carefully constructed explanation. No attempt to sound spiritual.

There is only need and trust:

"Lord, save me!"

Peter did not have time to compose a proper prayer while sinking. He simply called upon the One who could reach him.

God does not require eloquence. When words run out, fear takes over, or life begins moving too quickly, a short and honest prayer is enough.

Walking It Out: When stress rises today, pause and pray only four words: **"Lord, stay with me."** Or use Peter's prayer: **"Lord, save me."**

Prayer:
Lord, save me from fear, pride, despair, and the belief that I must rescue myself. Reach for me when I cannot find the words. Amen.

Saturday — Whose Strength Held You Up?

Scripture: "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him." —Matthew 14:31

Peter walked on water, but he was never meant to become confident in Peter's ability to do impossible things.

Faith is not confidence in our ability to walk on water. Faith is confidence that Christ's hand will still reach for us when we begin to sink.

After surviving a difficult season, we sometimes rewrite the incident report. We begin to think our wisdom, determination, or spiritual strength carried us through.

Then another storm arrives and reminds us that grace got us through the last one—and grace must carry us through this one too.

Walking It Out: Think of something difficult you survived. Thank God for the people, strength, opportunities, and grace that helped carry you. Give credit where it belongs.

Prayer:
Christ, keep me grateful when I stand and trusting when I sink. Remind me that Your grace—not my ability—has carried me farther than I could have gone alone. Amen.

Carry This Into the Week

Elijah mistook exhaustion for the whole truth.
The disciples mistook distance for abandonment.
Peter briefly mistook borrowed grace for personal ability.

God corrected each of them—not to humiliate them, but to deepen their understanding and move them forward. When the wind rises, the cave feels safer, or your strength begins to fail, remember:

The storm may reveal how small our strength is, but it can also reveal how much greater Christ is than anything we fear.

From the Pew

Six Miles Off Course

Years ago, I helped take a group of divers from Fort Lauderdale to Bimini aboard a 42-foot Irwin sailboat. The crossing is only about sixty miles, but an Irwin moving at roughly six knots is not exactly a speedboat.

A sixty-mile trip becomes a long night when the weather is rainy, visibility is poor, and the Gulf Stream is steadily pushing north whether you notice it or not.

We were one of three boats making a night crossing to Bimini for a 10-day SCUBA diving trip. Ordinarily, I would have checked the charts, tides, currents, navigation equipment, and anything else that might help us determine where we were and where the water was trying to take us.

But this trip was different: I had a new Garmin GPS 95.

At the time, a handheld GPS seemed almost miraculous. Turn it on, wait for it to locate the satellites, and it told you where you were. Since I had this wonderful new electronic device, I did not spend nearly enough time checking the other navigation aids or calculating the effects of the Gulf Stream.

That was not a smart move on my part.

Somewhere in the darkness, the GPS was dropped. The battery compartment came open, and the batteries scattered across the cockpit floor.

We began searching.

You would think that among twelve passengers, several cameras, flashlights, radios, and assorted dive equipment, someone would have had spare AA batteries.

No one did.

We found most of the batteries, but not enough to operate the GPS. Without batteries, the Garmin GPS 95 could not tell us where we were. It was also far too light to make a respectable boat anchor.

My next plan was to use the LORAN unit mounted down in the galley. LORAN was an older electronic navigation system, but it should have provided our position.

I reached down, turned on the power switch, and - without exaggeration - a small puff of smoke came out of the back of the unit.

It never powered up.

We later discovered that the porthole above it had been leaking and water had damaged the unit. Our dependable backup had apparently been quietly drowning before we ever left the dock.

So, there we were.

No GPS.
No LORAN.
No stars because of the clouds.
No radar.
No other boats visible through the rain.

We could still talk with the other two boats on the radio, which was reassuring, but hearing them did not tell us where they were. They could not give us a bearing or a distance, and we could not keep their lights in sight.

The Gulf Stream continued doing what the Gulf Stream always does. It flowed north, stronger toward the middle and slower along the edges.

It did not care that our navigation equipment had failed.

My fear was that we would sail east, pass north of Bimini without seeing it, and continue toward Grand Bahama - or possibly somewhere else that had not been included in the dive-trip brochure.

To be fair, we were never truly lost beyond help. We still had a working radio. One call to the Coast Guard, and they could have located us and directed us toward Bimini. But I would not have made that call unless I believed we were actually lost or in danger.

No captain is eager to announce over the radio that he is uncertain where his boat is, especially with twelve passengers listening.

I was not an experienced sailor then, and I still do not claim to be one.

Apparently, however, they will rent a sailboat to almost anyone, provided the credit card clears and you agree to purchase the insurance.

Since I did not believe we had reached the Coast Guard stage of the adventure, I returned to the basics I should have used from the beginning. I estimated our departure time from Fort Lauderdale, checked my watch - thankfully, it still worked - calculated our speed, estimated the average effect of the Gulf Stream, and set a heading that I hoped would compensate for the northward current.

Then we continued through the darkness.

That may have been the most unsettling part.

We were still moving. The engine was running. The compass showed a heading. The boat appeared to be making progress.

But we could not be certain that our progress was taking us toward Bimini.

You do not have to stop moving to become lost. Sometimes you can travel confidently all night in the wrong direction.

Life has currents too.

Fear, pride, exhaustion, impatience, resentment, and the expectations of other people can move us slowly off course.

We may remain busy and productive. We may believe we are headed exactly where we intended to go. Yet unseen pressures can carry us farther from God, farther from other people, and farther from the person we hoped to become.

Sometimes we also treat prayer the way I treated that Coast Guard radio.

We keep trying to navigate on our own. We tell ourselves that the situation is not serious enough yet, that we ought to be able to figure it out, or that we will ask for help after every other option has failed.

But we do not need a radio, the proper frequency, or polished religious words to call upon God. Sometimes the most honest prayer we can offer is simply, "God, I am lost. Help me."

That prayer does not bring God from some distant place. God already knows where we are. It simply means that we have stopped pretending we can navigate everything alone

and have opened ourselves to God's guidance - often through the people God sends to help us.

That is why the ordinary practices of faith matter.

Prayer, Scripture, worship, wise counsel, trusted friends, and honest self-examination may seem old-fashioned when life is going well. They may not feel as exciting as the newest solution or the easiest answer. But they help us check our position.

They remind us where we are, where we are headed, and what currents may be acting upon us.

Morning finally began to break. According to my calculations, we should have been near enough to Bimini to see something.

We brought out the binoculars and began searching the horizon.

Then I saw three small shapes rising from the water.

They were the Three Sisters - three coral heads near the north end of Bimini. I had dived that area enough times to recognize them.

The moment I saw them, I knew where we were.

We were about six miles off course.

Six miles was not perfect navigation, but it was considerably better than sailing past Bimini toward certain death, which was how the twelve passengers later described the situation.

We stopped near the Three Sisters and had breakfast.

I listened while everyone explained how fortunate they were that we had not disappeared forever into the Atlantic Ocean. Apparently, my calculations, steady leadership, and calm

demeanor received less attention than the possibility that they had nearly died because someone had trusted me with a boat.

After breakfast, we snorkeled around the Three Sisters before continuing south toward Alice Town.

Technically, we were supposed to clear customs before doing anything else. The passengers reasoned that since we had survived being lost at sea, perhaps we could bend the rules just a little.

Besides, if the Bahamian authorities questioned us, I could truthfully say that we had become temporarily uncertain of our location.

I am not sure "We were lost" is the strongest legal defense for entering another country and stopping for recreational snorkeling, but fortunately no one asked.

When we reached Alice Town, we met the other boats, and I had another opportunity to hear the story of how we had gotten lost. Over the next several days, the distance we had wandered seemed to grow with each retelling.

Something else had changed, however. The uncertainty of that night had brought our little group together in a way I had not seen before.

We had worried together, searched together, watched the horizon together, and then celebrated over breakfast when the Three Sisters appeared.

For the rest of the ten-day trip, the twelve people aboard our boat did nearly everything together more easily. We were no longer simply passengers assigned to the same boat. We had become a crew.

They even assigned everyone a character from Gilligan's Island. I wanted to be the Professor, but the group appointed me the Skipper because I had gotten them lost and,

they claimed, looked like Alan Hale Jr. The Skipper's actual name was Jonas Grumby, although almost everyone simply called him Skipper. Apparently, once the passengers vote, the captain does not get to appeal the casting decision.

Ten days later, after returning to Fort Lauderdale, we were cleaning the boat when we finally found the missing AA battery.

It had fallen into a narrow crack in the cockpit floor. It was exactly the right size and nearly the right color to look like part of the wood. We had probably looked directly at it several times without recognizing it.

The battery had never left the boat.

What we needed had been nearby all along, hidden in plain sight.

Elijah believed he was the only faithful person left, but God told him there were thousands he could not see. The disciples believed they were alone in the storm, but Jesus knew exactly where they were.

We believed the battery was gone, but it had been under our feet for the entire trip.

Fear often tells us that we have lost everything, that help is nowhere near, and that there is no way forward.

God's truth may be much larger than what we can presently see.

The Three Sisters did not instantly put us into Alice Town. They simply gave us a recognizable landmark. Once we knew where we were, we knew which direction to go next.

Sometimes that is how God guides us.

We may not receive the whole route. We may not get a glowing electronic line showing every turn.

God may give us one familiar landmark: a passage of Scripture, the voice of a trusted friend, a lesson learned years earlier, or the memory of another time grace carried us through.

Sometimes one landmark is enough.

A church can find itself in a similar place. It may be without a permanent pastor, caring for sick members, trying to maintain aging buildings, and wondering how to keep moving forward with fewer people and limited resources.

It can feel as though the familiar navigation equipment has stopped working and the currents are carrying everyone somewhere they did not intend to go.

But being off course is not the same as being abandoned.

A congregation is not truly alone or beyond help. God is still present, and help may be closer than we realize. The first step may be the same simple prayer: "God, we are not sure of the way. Help us."

Then people must be open enough to admit what they cannot do alone, ask for help, listen to one another, and work together to figure out the next heading.

Shared difficulty can pull people apart, but it can also draw them together. Like the twelve people on that sailboat, a collection of passengers became a crew.

Looking back, I would not say that reaching Bimini proved our preparation was adequate. Grace brought us through, but grace did not declare my planning acceptable.

The lesson was not that technology was bad.

The Garmin worked wonderfully - when it had batteries.

The lesson was that no convenient tool should replace preparation, sound judgment, or the basic practices that keep us oriented when something fails.

We reached Bimini about six miles off course - close enough for me to call it navigation and far enough for everyone else to call it a miracle.

Either way, on the next trip I carried spare batteries. I also understood a little better that asking for help is not an admission that the journey has failed.

Sometimes it is how God turns frightened passengers into a faithful crew.

Wisdom from Gyp Dog

There Is Room on the Couch

When Becca and I were married, she brought two cats into the household.

Gyp Dog was already there.

Gyp was a large dog with definite opinions about how our home should be organized. As far as she was concerned, the arrangement had been working perfectly well: she lived there, I lived there, and everyone understood who was in charge.

Then the cats arrived.

I imagine Gyp's first thoughts went something like this:
"Excuse me. What are those, and how long will they be staying?"

Had I been a betting man, I would not have wagered heavily on the cats becoming permanent residents. Gyp did not greet them as new members of the family. She inspected them more like a security officer who had discovered two suspicious packages left unattended in the living room.

The cats, on the other hand, seemed interested in becoming friends. They were also understandably cautious. Gyp was considerably larger than they were, and one enthusiastic movement from her could have turned a friendly introduction into an unscheduled flight across the room.

The cats would move a little closer, watch her carefully, and then reconsider.

Gyp would stare back as though saying:
"I see you. I do not understand you. Your residency application remains under review."

But something changed over time.

No peace conference was held. There was no formal treaty between the Canine Republic and the United Federation of Cats. They simply spent time together. They learned one another's habits. The cats discovered that Gyp was not planning to eat them, and Gyp gradually accepted that the cats were apparently not leaving.

Eventually, they became friends.

The photograph proves it. Gyp is stretched across the couch while the cats are curled up on and beside her, all of them enjoying a peaceful nap. The animals that once regarded one another with suspicion had learned not merely to tolerate each other, but to feel safe enough to sleep together.

Gyp's expression seems to say:
"I never agreed to this, but they are warm, and moving would require effort."

Someone recently told me that they were not interested in hearing anything about another religion because their own was the only right religion.

I understand the desire to remain faithful to what we believe. Christians should take their faith seriously. Different religions do not all teach the same things, and we do not have to pretend that they do. We may disagree deeply about God, salvation, worship, Scripture, and how life should be lived.

But disagreement does not require hostility.

If dogs and cats can learn to share a couch, perhaps people of different faiths can learn to share a community.

Jesus encountered people whose beliefs, customs, and backgrounds were different from those of his own community. He spoke with Samaritans when many others avoided them. He responded with grace to Gentiles. When he wanted to teach what it meant to love our

neighbor, he made a Samaritan—the sort of person many of his listeners would have distrusted—the one who stopped to help.

Jesus did not say that every belief was equally true. He did show that every person should be treated with dignity, compassion, and grace.

I saw an example of that while serving as an emergency manager in Missouri. On August 6, 2012, during Ramadan, the Islamic Society of Joplin mosque was completely destroyed by arson.

In the aftermath, local Christians, Jews, and other members of the community reached out to their Muslim neighbors. Churches offered assistance and space where members of the mosque could gather, observe Ramadan, and pray.

Those Christians did not become Muslims. The Jewish participants did not abandon their faith. No one had to settle every theological disagreement before offering help.

They simply recognized that their neighbors had suffered a terrible loss.

Hatred had tried to divide the community, but compassion brought people together. Relationships formed among the local faith communities that continued long after the fire was extinguished and the mosque was rebuilt.

Perhaps Gyp Dog would have understood.
"I still do not know why cats climb where they should not climb, knock things off tables, or stare at walls as though they can see into another dimension. But they live here, and apparently they are mine now."

Loving people of another faith does not mean approving of every belief or practice. Some teachings may trouble us. Some actions must be questioned or opposed. There may also be individuals or groups—religious, political, or otherwise—whose conduct makes a close relationship unwise or unsafe.

We can love people while maintaining good judgment and healthy boundaries.
Grace does not require gullibility.

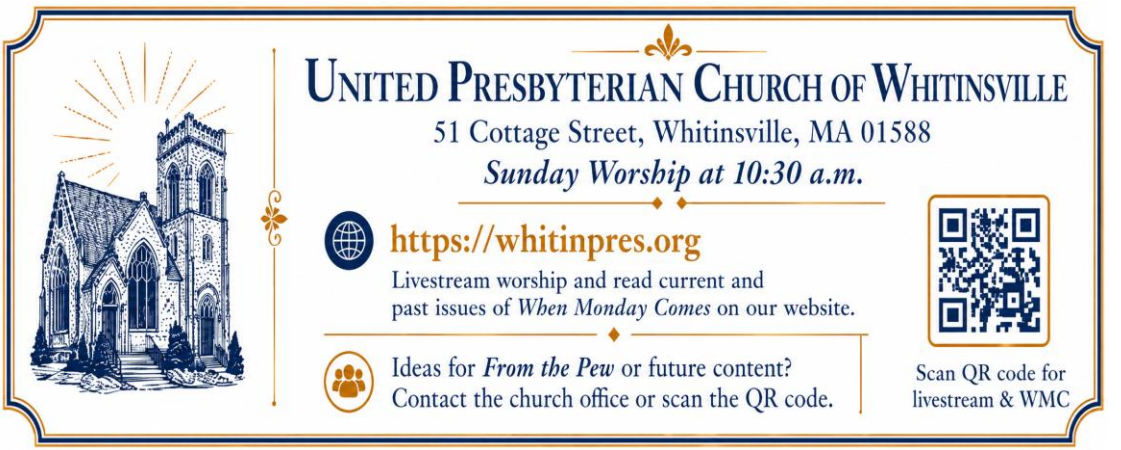
But neither does faith give us permission to assume that everyone who believes differently is our enemy.

This lesson reaches beyond religion. We will meet people whose politics, culture, experiences, and understanding of the world are very different from our own. We do not have to abandon our convictions or pretend that every idea is equally wise. But we can listen, show kindness, offer help, and refuse to treat every disagreement as a declaration of war.

Gyp Dog might have put it this way:
"I did not agree with the cats about much of anything. They climbed where they should not climb, stared at things no one else could see, and apparently believed the furniture belonged to them. But eventually I learned that different does not automatically mean dangerous, wrong in every way, or our enemy."

Gyp did not become a cat, and the cats did not become dogs. They remained different. But over time, fear gave way to familiarity, familiarity made room for trust, and trust eventually made room on the couch.

Christ did not command us to agree with every neighbor.

He commanded us to love them.

And sometimes love begins when we stop growling, move over a little, and make room on the couch.