September 6th 2026

WHEN MONDAY COMES

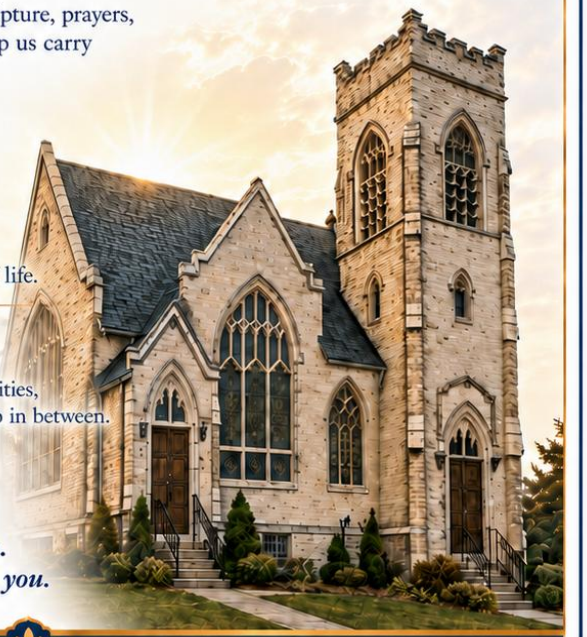
Faith for the Week Ahead

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
The Debt We Never Finish Paying

Most of us spend a good portion of our lives trying to get out of debt. Mortgages, car payments, credit cards, medical bills — there is something wonderfully satisfying about seeing a balance finally reach zero.

PAID IN FULL.

Then Paul comes along in Romans 13 and tells us there is one debt Christians should never expect to finish paying: **"Owe no one anything, except to love one another."**

There is one account that never closes: Love.

We cannot love someone today and decide we have fulfilled our obligation for the week. We cannot help someone once and mark the account paid.

The debt of love comes due again every morning.

But Paul is talking about much more than simply being nice.

Sometimes we Christians trust God enough to take us to heaven someday, but not enough to let Him guide the way we live today.

We can begin to think of salvation almost entirely as something waiting for us after death:

Believe in Christ → Receive salvation → Go to heaven.

Certainly, our hope includes eternal life with God. But God did not save us simply so that someday we could move into heaven. Salvation begins by changing us now.

God is rescuing us from the power of sin and teaching us to live in the freedom and life Christ gives. Paul makes that clear when he tells people who already believe:

"Now is the moment for you to wake from sleep."

He is not speaking to people who have never heard the Gospel. He is speaking to Christians. People who already belong to Christ.

And yet he tells them: Wake up. **“The night is far gone, the day is near.”**

In other words, do not simply wait for the life to come. Begin living now as people who belong to God's coming kingdom.

Christianity is not just waiting for heaven. It is learning to live today in the light of what God has already done and what God is still bringing about.

That is where Psalm 119 fits so beautifully. The psalmist prays:

Teach me.
Give me understanding.
Lead me.
Incline my heart.
Turn my eyes.

Those are not the prayers of someone simply asking for more information. They are the prayers of someone asking God to change the direction of his life.

The psalmist already knows that God's commandments exist. What he wants is help actually living them. And Romans 13 tells us one of the clearest signs of that changed life:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Christian love is not merely a feeling. We will not always feel affectionate toward everyone we meet.

Love is also a decision — made again and again — to seek another person's good, to act with compassion, and to desire their well-being.

We do not make that decision in order to convince God to save us.

We aren't trying to love our neighbor so that God will save us; we try to love our neighbor because God has already shown us what salvation looks like in Jesus Christ.

Grace comes first. Love is our response. And Paul gives us an amazingly simple test:
“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”

That might be worth remembering before we speak, before we post something, before we judge, before we respond to someone who has made us angry, before we celebrate somebody else's failure.

We might ask: **Is what I am about to do seeking this person's good, or am I simply enjoying the opportunity to condemn them?**

How often have we heard someone say: **"Good. They got what they deserved."**
Sometimes we can even make that sound religious.

They sinned.
They made bad choices.
They brought it on themselves.
They deserve whatever happens.

Actions certainly have consequences. Justice matters. People sometimes need to be held accountable, and Christian love does not require us to pretend that wrong is right.

Sometimes love requires truth.
Sometimes it requires boundaries.
Sometimes it requires accountability.
Sometimes justice must be done.

But Christian love never requires us to delight in another person's destruction. After all, if Christianity were simply about everyone receiving exactly what they deserved, grace would not be very good news for any of us.

Perhaps our response should sound less like: **"Good. Let them have it."**
And more like: **"God, please help them."**

Not a make-believe prayer where our lips say, *"God, help them,"* while somewhere inside we are secretly hoping God lets them suffer a little longer. A genuine prayer.

"God, I may not understand this person. I may strongly disagree with what they have done. I may even believe they need to face consequences. But You know them. Please help them."

Sometimes prayer may truly be the only thing we can offer. Other times love may require action.

A meal, a ride, a conversation, forgiveness, encouragement, a phone call.
Standing beside someone when everyone else has walked away from them.

And sometimes the only thing we can control is the attitude we carry into the situation.

Paul gives us another wonderful image:
"Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

And a few verses later: **“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Every morning we decide what we are going to wear into the world.

Paul says there is another choice to make. What attitude will we wear?
Compassion or contempt?
Patience or irritation?
Grace or judgment?
Christ — or something else?

I tend to understand things in what I sometimes call “firefighter simple.”

Suppose you just washed your car and it looks great. On the way to church you notice a dirt road. Not just any dirt road, a really good one.

Mud holes, ruts, puddles and curves. The sort of road that makes you think: *That could be fun.* You know exactly what is going to happen if you take it.

You will not arrive at church ten minutes later with mud covering the car and honestly wonder: *How did this happen?*

You chose the road.

Our attitudes can work the same way.

Resentment is a road.
Gossip is a road.
Judgment is a road.
Anger can become a road.
Taking pleasure in someone else's failure is a road.

If we keep driving those roads, sooner or later some of the mud is going to stick to us.

But there is an important caution here. Not every difficult road in life is one we choose.

Sometimes illness puts us somewhere we never intended to be.
Sometimes poverty does. Sometimes injustice does.
Sometimes another person's decisions affect our lives.
Sometimes loss, circumstances, or events completely outside our control change the road beneath us.

We should never look at someone whose life has become difficult and assume:
They must have taken the wrong road.

Sometimes they did. Sometimes they didn't. But wherever we find ourselves, we still have choices about the spirit in which we travel from there.

That is why the prayer of Psalm 119 matters:
"Lead me in the path of your commandments."

In other words: **God, show me which road to take from here.**

And Paul tells us what to wear while we travel: **Put on the armor of light. Put on Christ.** That does not mean Christians never get muddy. We do.

Sometimes we know exactly which road we should take and choose the other one anyway. That is where grace meets us again. God does not look at our mud-covered lives and say: ***You ruined everything. I'm finished with you.***

Grace cleans us up, turns us around, and says: **Now, let's choose a better road.**

That is part of salvation too. Not merely being promised heaven someday, but allowing Christ to change the person we are becoming today.

And perhaps one of the clearest places that change becomes visible is in the way we treat other people.

Especially the difficult ones.
Especially the people we disagree with.
Especially the people who have disappointed us.
Especially the people the world has already decided are not worth much.
Someone will need patience.
Someone will need mercy.
Someone will need forgiveness.
Someone will need encouragement.
Someone may simply need to know that they have been seen.

And tomorrow morning the debt will come due again. We will have another opportunity to decide which road we are going to take and what we are going to wear while traveling it.

Maybe that is why Paul's words remain so challenging:
Wake up - Put on the armor of light - Put on Christ.

And when we are unsure how to do that, perhaps Psalm 119 gives us all the prayer we need:
Teach me, Lord.
Lead me.
Turn my heart.
Help me walk Your way.

Some debts are burdens we spend our lives trying to escape. But the debt of love is different. It is one of the ways the salvation we have already received becomes visible in the life we are living right now.

And it is one debt we should never want marked: **PAID IN FULL.**

Faith Between Sundays

Weekly Reflections: September 6–12, 2026

Put On Christ

It is one thing to trust Christ with our eternity. It is another to trust Him with Monday morning.

Paul reminds us that salvation is not only a promise about where we will someday go. It is a new way of living now. We are called to wake up, lay aside the works of darkness, put on the armor of light, and above all, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Psalm 119 gives us the prayer that makes such a life possible: *Teach me. Lead me. Turn my heart.*

This week, before each decision, conversation, frustration, and encounter, we might ask one simple question: **What would it look like to wear Christ into this moment?**

Prayer for the Week

Gracious God, teach me Your ways and lead me in Your paths. Turn my heart away from resentment, judgment, and selfishness, and toward compassion, mercy, and love. Help me remember that the salvation You have given me is meant to change not only my future, but the life I am living today. Each morning, help me put on Christ so that something of His grace may be visible in me. Amen.

Sunday, September 6 — The Debt Comes Due

Scripture: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." — Romans 13:8

Paul describes love as a debt that never reaches zero.

God does not ask us to earn salvation by loving others. Grace comes first. We love because we have already been loved.

But that means the debt comes due again today.

Someone may need patience. Someone may need encouragement. Someone may need forgiveness. Someone may simply need to know they matter.

We cannot say, "I loved somebody yesterday, so I'm finished." Love remains on the account.

Today's faithful choice: Look for one person you can intentionally encourage, help, or treat with unexpected kindness today.

Prayer:
Lord, thank You for loving me before I ever knew how to love You. Help me pass some of that love along today.
Amen.

Monday, September 7 — Which Road?

Scripture: "Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it." — Psalm 119:35

Every day presents us with roads to choose.
Resentment has a road.
Gossip has a road.
Anger has a road.
Compassion, forgiveness, patience, and mercy have roads too.

Not every difficult road in life is one we chose. Illness, loss, injustice, and the decisions of others can put us somewhere we never expected to be.

But wherever we find ourselves, we can still ask God: **Which road should I take from here?**

The psalmist does not assume he will automatically choose correctly. He asks God to lead him. Perhaps we should too.

Today's faithful choice: Before making one difficult decision today, stop long enough to pray, "God, show me which road leads closer to You."

Prayer:
Lord, when several roads are before me, lead me toward the one that reflects Your love.
Amen.

Tuesday, September 8 — Seek Their Good

Scripture: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." — Romans 13:10

Christian love is more than affection. Sometimes we will not particularly like the person we are called to love.

Love asks a different question: **What seeks this person's good?**

That does not mean ignoring wrongdoing or pretending harmful behavior is acceptable. Love can require honesty, boundaries, accountability, and justice. But love does not delight in another person's pain. Before we speak, post, criticize, or respond, Paul gives us a remarkably practical test:

Will this help, or will it merely hurt?

Today's faithful choice: Before responding to someone who frustrates you, ask, "Am I trying to help this person, or am I simply trying to win?"

Prayer:
God, teach me to seek the good of others, especially when doing so is difficult.
Amen.

Wednesday, September 9 — Pray Like You Mean It

Scripture: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." — Luke 6:27–28

It is easy to say, "I'll pray for them." It is harder to mean it.

Sometimes our prayer can secretly sound like:

God, please help them — preferably by teaching them a lesson.

Jesus asks for something different. Real prayer seeks the other person's good.

We may still disagree with them. We may still believe consequences or accountability are necessary. We may even need to keep our distance.

But we can honestly pray:

"God, You know this person better than I do. Please help them."

Sometimes that may be the only loving thing available to us, but it is still love.

Today's faithful choice: Pray sincerely for someone you find difficult. Ask God to help them without telling God how that help should look.

Prayer:
Lord, remove the hidden resentment from my prayers. Teach me to genuinely desire Your grace for others.
Amen.

Thursday, September 10 — Wake Up

Scripture: "You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." — Romans 13:11

Paul says this to people who already believe. Wake up. Perhaps faith can become sleepy. We worship on Sunday, believe the right things, and trust God with heaven — while allowing habit, irritation, fear, or self-interest to guide much of the rest of the week.

Paul reminds us that salvation is meant to be lived now. Today is not merely another day to get through while waiting for eternity.

Today is another opportunity to live as someone who belongs to Christ.

Today's faithful choice: Identify one part of your daily life where your faith tends to "fall asleep." Ask what one small change would wake it up.

Prayer:
God, awaken my faith. Help me live today as someone who truly belongs to You.
Amen.

Friday, September 11 — Wear the Light

Scripture: "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." — Romans 13:12

Before leaving home, most of us give at least some thought to what we are wearing.

Paul asks us to think about something deeper. What attitude are we wearing into the world?

Resentment? Suspicion? Fear? Superiority? Or the armor of light?

We cannot control every situation we enter today.

We cannot control what everyone else says or does. But with God's help, we can choose what we carry into the situation with us.

Today's faithful choice: Before entering a meeting, conversation, store, workplace, or difficult situation today, pause and deliberately choose one Christlike quality you want to carry with you.

Prayer:
Lord, clothe me in Your light so that my attitude reflects You even when the circumstances around me do not.
Amen.

Saturday, September 12 — Put On Christ

Scripture: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." — Romans 13:14

Perhaps this is the simplest description of Christian living in the entire passage.

Put on Christ.

Not only on Sunday. Not only inside the church. Put on Christ at the grocery store, at work, at home, online, in traffic.

When someone disappoints you.
When someone disagrees with you.
When you meet someone the world has already labeled and decided is not worth knowing.

We will not always get it right. Sometimes we will take the wrong road and discover that we have gotten ourselves pretty muddy.

Grace does not abandon us there. God cleans us up, turns us around, and invites us to choose again.

Tomorrow morning we will begin another week.

And once again the debt of love will come due.

Today's faithful choice: Before going to bed tonight, look back over the week. Where did someone see Christ in you? Where would you like to choose differently next time? Give both to God.

Prayer:
Jesus, thank You for Your grace when I get it wrong. Tomorrow, help me rise again, put on Christ, and carry Your love into another week.
Amen.

From the Pew

The View From the Other Seat

Many years ago, I had just finished a very difficult math class.

I had gone back to school in my mid-thirties and was preparing to begin work toward a structural engineering degree. Math had needed some updating, and on this particular day I had just finished the class with an A.

I was feeling pretty good about myself.
No homework, beautiful day, sunroof open – Life was good.

I was driving home and, for reasons I still cannot fully explain, decided to wash my car. I rarely washed my cars, so apparently getting an A in math had temporarily affected my judgment.

There was a full-service car wash right along the way, so I pulled in and decided to go all out.

Complete wash, hot wax, undercarriage wash, vacuum.
Even that mysterious "new car smell" they sprayed inside.

I handed over the car and went inside where customers could watch their vehicles travel through the wash tunnel.

Everything was going wonderfully until someone standing nearby said:

"Hey, some idiot left his sunroof open."

I looked, sure enough there was my car going through the car wash.

With the sunroof wide open.

Water, soap, rinse, wax and whatever chemical produced the "new car smell."

All of it was entering the car through a hole in the roof specifically designed to keep those things outside.

Naturally, I did not announce: **“Yes, that idiot would be me.”**

I quietly moved into the little store area until most of the witnesses had collected their cars and left.

When I finally went outside, I asked the manager how his crew could possibly have vacuumed the car, cleaned the interior, and then sent it through the wash without anyone noticing the open sunroof.

His answer has stayed with me all these years:
“We don’t pay them to think. We pay them to clean cars.”

I suggested that thinking might occasionally be useful in the car-cleaning business.

He asked why I had not closed the sunroof myself.

It became apparent that this conversation was not moving toward reconciliation.

To their credit, the crew did their best to wipe out the inside of the car. One young man even found me a large trash bag to sit on because the driver’s seat was soaked.

And I decided I was not going to let it ruin my day. After all, I had finished the math class.

The sun was shining, I could leave the windows and sunroof open and let everything dry.

So off I went.

A short time later, I was driving through Corporate Woods in Overland Park, Kansas, a large office complex filled with law firms, financial companies, and other businesses.

As I approached a major intersection, I noticed a woman whose car had stopped near the roadway. She was older, nicely dressed, and standing beside what looked like a very expensive foreign car.

From where I was stopped at the light, I called over and asked whether she needed help.

She said she thought she might be out of gas and asked if I could take her to a gas station.

As it happened, I knew the owner of a station just up the road.

“Sure,” I said. “Hop in.” And that is when I forgot one very important detail.

The wet passenger seat. I unlocked the door. She got in.

And immediately she gave me a look that I can still see today: **“This seat is wet.”**

Suddenly I remembered the car wash.

I tried to explain. There had been a math class. I had gotten an A. It was a beautiful day. The sunroof had been open. There had been a carwash tunnel. Water and that new-car-smell stuff had been involved.

At some point I realized none of this information was helping.

She finally said: **“Can we please just get me to the gas station?”**

During the very quiet ride, she explained that she was an attorney, she was already running late, and she had an important presentation to make that day.

I offered her the trash bag I was sitting on. She pointed out, quite reasonably, that it was a little late for that.

When we arrived at the gas station, she climbed out. She was wearing a purple dress. And the back of that purple dress was very noticeably wet.

I asked whether she wanted me to wait and give her a ride back to her car. The expression on her face strongly suggested that she believed I had already contributed enough to her day.

I don’t remember whether she thanked me. Frankly, I considered myself fortunate to still be alive.

I never went back and asked my friend who owned the gas station what happened. I was afraid he might somehow connect me with the woman in the wet purple dress.

The next time I drove through the intersection, her car was gone, so apparently someone eventually got it moving.

I never learned whether she made her presentation.

But over the years I have told that story many times. And once, after hearing it, someone said something I had never really considered:

"That's a funny story from your side. Imagine the story she tells."

That stopped me. Because I knew my story.

I was having a wonderful day.
I had accomplished something difficult.
I had made one ridiculous mistake at the car wash.
Then I saw someone who needed help, stopped, and gave her a ride.

In my version, I was trying to be the good guy.
But from her seat?

Her expensive car had stopped.
She was already late.
She had an important presentation.
A stranger offered her help.

Then she sat down in several gallons of car-wash water. And now she was standing at a gas station in a wet purple dress smelling vaguely like a new automobile.

Same event, very different story. That has made me think about something Paul says in Romans 13: **"Love does no wrong to a neighbor."**

Loving our neighbor begins with good intentions, but perhaps it cannot end there.

Christian love does not only ask whether our intentions were good. It asks us to consider the view from the other seat.

I really was trying to help that woman and I did get her to the gas station. But good intentions did not make her dress any drier.

Maybe that is worth remembering in our everyday relationships. We know our intentions, but other people experience our words and actions.

We may think we were being helpful when someone else experienced us as controlling.
We may think we were being honest when someone else experienced us as cruel.
We may think we were making a harmless joke when the person beside us was already having one of the worst days of their life.

That does not mean we should become afraid to help or afraid to speak. It simply means love asks us to think beyond ourselves.

What is this like for the other person?
How are they hearing what I am saying?
How are they experiencing what I am doing?

That does not mean we will always get it right. We won't.

Sometimes we will try to help and make things awkward.
Sometimes we will say the wrong thing.
Sometimes the person we help will not thank us.

Sometimes we will discover that our perfectly good intentions have left somebody standing at a gas station in a wet purple dress.

Grace covers a lot of imperfect attempts at loving one another. But perhaps love keeps teaching us to notice more, listen better, and think a little more carefully about the person beside us.

Maybe that is one reason Paul calls love a debt we never finish paying. There is always more for us to learn about loving another person well.

Whenever I think I am having a particularly bad day, I still occasionally remember that woman. And I remind myself: My day may be difficult.

But at least I am not late for an important presentation, standing beside a broken-down car, wearing a wet purple dress and smelling like "new car."

And I also remember something a little more important. **Everyone we meet is living the moment from another seat.**

Before I speak, react, judge, or try to help, perhaps I should ask:
What does this look like from the other seat?

Sometimes loving our neighbor begins by trying to see the view from there.

And sometimes that seat is considerably wetter than we realize.

Wisdom from Bird Dog

Labels Work Better From a Distance

Bird Dog has a friend she loves to see when we walk through the park.

He happens to be homeless.

That is probably one of the first things many people would notice about him – Bird Dog doesn't.

She sees him across the park and immediately knows exactly who he is – Her friend.

She doesn't care what he is wearing. She doesn't care where he slept the night before. She doesn't notice whether life outdoors has left him looking a little rough.

She just knows that he has always been kind to her and when Bird Dog sees a friend, the tail starts wagging.

Bird Dog waiting for her friend

I have gotten to know him too.

During the colder months, we have tried to make sure he had gloves, hand warmers, and some of the things that make surviving a New England winter a little easier.

Recently he was having a medical problem and asked my advice because he knows I used to work as a paramedic.

After talking with him, I strongly encouraged him to go to the hospital. He wouldn't go.

From the outside, that decision might seem foolish.

You have a medical problem. Go to the hospital. What's so complicated about that?

Quite a lot, actually.

Going to the hospital meant leaving behind the belongings he depends upon every day. Transportation afterward was uncertain. Cost was a concern. And he had his own experiences and concerns about how someone without a home or money might be treated once he got there.

I still believed he needed medical attention, and I told him plainly that I was concerned.

But I also understood something important: I wasn't making that decision from where he was standing.

Years ago, when I worked as a paramedic, I occasionally saw people become frustrated when a homeless patient refused treatment.

It was easy to look at someone's circumstances and think we understood the person.

But we usually didn't.
We saw what was visible.
And that may be one of our biggest problems with labels.

Labels work best from a distance.

From across the park, someone can become simply *"the homeless person."*

We can decide that person is lazy.
Looking for a handout.
Irresponsible.
Someone to avoid.
Someone else's problem.

But something happens when we walk across the park and start talking.

The label begins to acquire a face. Then a voice. Then a story.

Eventually, if we are willing to listen long enough, the label may disappear altogether and we discover a person.

That can be uncomfortable.

Because sometimes labels help us maintain a comfortable distance between someone else's life and our own.

We can look at another person's visible struggles and quietly convince ourselves that we are different.

But are we as different as we think? All of us have struggles.
Some are easier to see than others.

One person's difficulties may be sitting beside them on a park bench for everyone to observe. Ours may have the courtesy to remain behind the front door.

We may struggle with money, relationships, anger, loneliness, work, pride, fear, unhealthy habits, or decisions we know are not good for us.

Most of the time, we get to choose who sees those things.

A person without a home doesn't always have that luxury.

And life can change remarkably quickly.

A job disappears.
An illness arrives.
A marriage ends.
Someone we depended upon dies.
A financial situation collapses.
A bad decision is followed by another.
A habit we thought we controlled begins controlling us.

None of those things automatically leads to homelessness, and homelessness is far more complicated than any single explanation.

But they should remind us how careful we ought to be when judging someone whose difficulties have become visible.

The person doing the labeling today may someday discover what it feels like to have someone else's label placed on them.

And Christians should understand this especially well.

We know something about being labeled too.

Someone sees us heading into church on Sunday morning and may immediately think:

Church person.
Religious.
Probably judgmental.
Probably thinks they're better than me.
Probably going to tell me everything I'm doing wrong.

And sometimes people keep their distance from us before they ever know us.

We may not like that. We may even think it is unfair.

But perhaps before becoming too offended, we should ask whether we have ever done exactly the same thing to somebody else.

Maybe someone avoids the homeless person in the park because they have already decided who that person is.

And maybe someone avoids the Christian in the church because they have already decided who that person is.

Neither one has crossed the distance necessary to discover whether the label is true.

That raises another question for those of us who call ourselves Christians.

When someone finally gets close enough to know us, what do they discover?

Do they find the judgmental “church person” they feared?

Or do they discover kindness?

Humility?

Someone willing to listen?

Someone who remembers that Jesus spent an enormous amount of time with people "respectable society" had already categorized and dismissed?

We also need to remember that what we have is not evidence that we are better than someone who has less.

It is reason to be grateful.

If today we have a roof over our heads, food to eat, people who care about us, enough money to meet our needs, and resources available when something goes wrong, then we should thank God.

But gratitude should make us humble.

It should never become: *Thank God I'm not like that person.*

Jesus once told a story about a very religious man who prayed almost exactly that prayer.

The problem wasn't that he thanked God.

The problem was that he used his blessings and religious life to convince himself that he stood above the person beside him.

Grace should never make us feel superior.

Grace should make us grateful enough to look around and ask who else might need some.

There are certainly real problems associated with homelessness. Communities have legitimate concerns about safety, sanitation, public spaces, mental health, poverty, and many other complicated issues.

Recognizing those problems is not wrong.

But there is a difference between recognizing a problem and deciding that **a person is the problem.**

While I was having that serious conversation about hospitals, health, transportation, and difficult choices, Bird Dog wasn't solving any of those problems.

She couldn't provide housing.
She couldn't arrange transportation.
She couldn't change the health-care system.
She certainly couldn't offer medical advice.

She just sat beside her friend.

He scratched her ears. She leaned against him.

And for a few minutes, he smiled.

Maybe there is ministry in that too.

We don't always have to solve someone's life.

Sometimes we can provide gloves and hand warmers.
Sometimes we can offer knowledge.
Sometimes we can listen.
Sometimes we can say, “I don't agree with the decision you're making, but I still care about you.”

And sometimes we simply need to get close enough to another human being that the label falls off.

Bird Dog figured that part out a long time ago.

She doesn't know what “homeless” means.
She doesn't know what “church person” means either.
She knows something much simpler.

There are strangers. And then, if you get close enough, sometimes there are friends.

Bird Dog Says:

“Labels tell you what somebody looks like from far away. Friendship tells you who they are up close.”

God Isn’t Finished Yet

Change has visited our church quite a bit lately.

Some changes we chose. Others arrived before we were ready. Some have brought uncertainty, while others have opened doors we might never have considered on our own.

And now another change comes as Andy completes his time preaching and serving with us.

It would be easy to look at another ending and ask: **What are we losing?**

That is a natural question.

Andy has brought energy, thoughtful preaching, challenging questions, and a fresh perspective to our congregation. He has helped us look at familiar Scriptures in new ways and encouraged us to think seriously about what it means to live our faith beyond Sunday morning.

We should be grateful for that. But perhaps faith invites us to ask another question too: **What might God be preparing next?**

Paul once wrote to the church in Corinth:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6)

Paul understood something churches sometimes forget. Different people come into our lives at different times.

One person plants.
Another waters.
Another encourages.
Another challenges.
Another sees possibilities that nobody else had noticed.

But ultimately, the future of the church does not depend upon any one person.

God gives the growth.

Andy came to us for a particular season, and we have been blessed by the gifts he brought.

But the best way to honor a good season is not to try to freeze it in place.

It is to carry forward what we learned from it.

Perhaps something Andy said caused us to look at Scripture differently.

Perhaps his energy reminded us that church can still be exciting.

Perhaps a sermon challenged an assumption we had carried for years.

Perhaps his presence helped us realize that change does not always have to mean loss.

Those things do not disappear simply because the season changes.

They become part of what God is growing next.

The next chapter of our church will almost certainly be different.

And maybe that is not something we need to fear.

Different does not automatically mean worse.

The next person God brings into our life as a congregation may have gifts we do not yet know we need.

The next ministry idea may come from someone already sitting in one of our pews.

The next opportunity may arrive in a form we would never have chosen for ourselves.

Someone may ask a question that leads us somewhere unexpected.

Someone may suggest something we have never tried before.

And somewhere in all of that, God may be planting again.

Isaiah records God saying:

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”(Isaiah 43:19)

Sometimes the difficult part is not whether God is doing something new.

It is whether we are willing to notice it.

Churches can become comfortable with what they know.

A familiar pastor.

A familiar way of worship.

A familiar program.

A familiar way of doing things.

There is nothing wrong with familiarity.

But familiarity can become a problem when we begin believing that because God blessed something yesterday, God must do exactly the same thing tomorrow.

God is much more creative than that.

The Gospel remains.

Christ remains.

The call to love God and neighbor remains.

But the people God sends, the opportunities that appear, and the ways we live out that calling may continue changing.

And perhaps that is exactly how growth happens.

Paul planted.

Apollos watered.

Neither one owned the field.

God did.

That may be worth remembering whenever someone important to a particular season moves on.

We can say thank you without becoming afraid.

We can appreciate what has been without believing that the best is behind us.

We can miss someone and still look forward.

We can be grateful for what God has already done while remaining curious about what God might do next.

And perhaps one of the most important things we can remember is this:

The church's future is not waiting for the right person to arrive.

God is already at work among the people who are here.

At the same time, God may be preparing people, opportunities, ministries, and possibilities we have not even imagined yet.

There may be other people ahead who bring the kind of energy and fresh perspective Andy brought.

They will not be Andy.

They should not be.

They will bring their own gifts.

And perhaps one day we will look back and realize that God used several different people, several different seasons, and even several unexpected changes to move us somewhere we could not have reached any other way.

So, this week we can say thank you.

Thank you, Andy, for sharing this season with us.

Thank you for the energy, thoughtfulness, questions, preaching, and perspective you brought.

And thank You, God, for bringing him when You did.

Then we can turn toward what comes next.

Not because we know exactly what the future will look like.

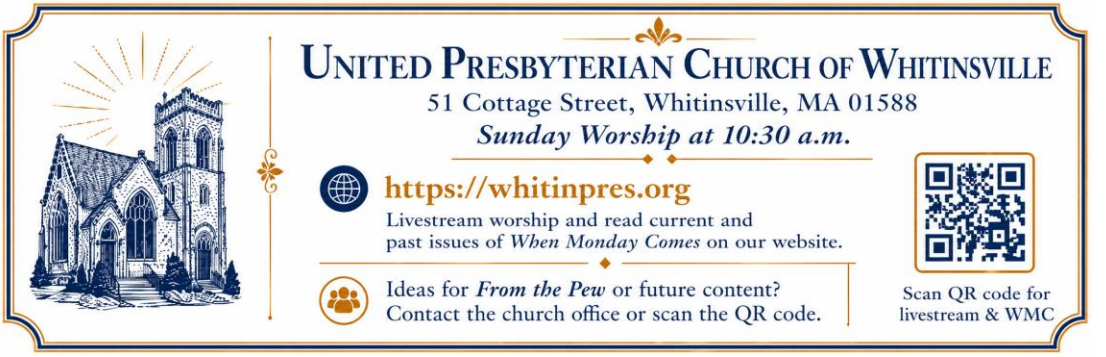
We do not.

But because we know the One who will be there.

We may not know who will plant next.

We may not know who will water.

We may not know what new thing is already beginning to spring up among us.

But we do know who gives the growth.

God isn't finished yet.