

# THE VISITOR

**The Congregational Church of Austin    United Church of Christ**

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**Rev. Thomas J. VandeStadt**



out of the silenced  
 you can make a promise  
 it will kill you to break,

that you will find  
 what is real and what is not...  
 David Whyte

Throughout Lent, I'll be reflecting on some of Jesus' parables, and relating them where possible to the story of Jesus in the wilderness and to our own Lenten spiritual practice. On the first Sunday of Lent, I began with the parable of the merchant and the pearl, because it sets a good foundation for our Lenten spiritual practice.

The English translation of this parable begins with the phrase, "the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant..." But in the original Greek, the kingdom of heaven is like an *anthropos emporos*. The kingdom of

heaven is like a person, a merchant. In Greek, the fundamental identity of this character is "person"—human being. The secondary characteristic of this person is "merchant"—a social, economic, cultural, and professional role. The person is first and foremost a human being—something God created. And then, only secondarily, a merchant—something the human society, economy, and culture created.

The person is a "merchant." *Emporos*. In Greek, *emporos* designates a wholesaler. From *emporos*, we get the word emporium. What product does the wholesaler buy and sell? Pearls—one of that day's most valuable luxury items, one reserved for the conspicuous consumption of the uber-rich, the very people earlier Jewish prophets judged for exploiting the poor and disregarding their needs.

The kingdom of heaven is like a human being, a wholesale merchant of very expensive luxury items, who comes across one pearl that's so extraordinary, so valuable, he sells everything he has in order to buy it. That makes sense, you may think. But think again. The merchant sells everything he has. *Everything*. He now has nothing. *Nothing*. Except for one extremely valuable pearl.

Here's where the parable throws us into a bit of a paradox. The person has discovered something he values more than *everything* else in the world. Something he will not exchange for anything else in the world. Anything else is of lesser value. However, because the *only* thing he has is what he values most, and because he will not exchange it for anything else, it is economically-speaking worthless. And he himself is now economically-speaking poor.

Furthermore, now that he owns only one thing, one thing that he will not sell, he's no longer a merchant. He's no longer buying and selling. He no longer has that secondary social, economic, cultural, or professional identity. He's now simply *anthropos*—the one whom God created. He's no longer *emporos*—the one whom society, the economy, and the culture created.

The kingdom of heaven is like an *anthropos emporos* who discovers something so valuable he gives up everything he has for it. In giving up *everything*, he becomes simply *anthropos*, a human with no secondary identity. Furthermore, he has nothing to buy or sell in a human-made economy so unjust that a few people spend millions for pearls while many others starve.

This parable confronts us with some powerful issues upon which to reflect during the season of Lent:

What do we value the most in our life, and do we honestly believe this is what Christ values most? What have we, and have we not, relinquished for what we (or Christ) values most?

Have we discovered our most fundamental human identity? Have we engaged in deep and sustained inquiry to discover our most fundamental identity? Or do we avoid looking closely at our own life because we're uncomfortable doing so, or we think we're too busy to do so, or we don't see the spiritual value of doing so, or we just aren't that interested in who we are beneath our secondary identities?

How are our identities and values shaped by the marketplace—by the economy of buying and selling, by the commodification of just about everything, by the profit-motive, by the subtle and not so subtle greed, envy, desire, and dissatisfaction that fuels so much market behavior?

All of these issues have something to do with what Jesus called the kingdom of God. I think Jesus himself wrestled with these types of issues in the wilderness. His highest value. His deepest most fundamental identity. The nature of a human-made market that so inequitably distributes what God has created. His place within or outside that market.

In Jesus' day, people had certain cultural expectations regarding who the messiah was supposed to be and what the messiah was supposed to do. They had certain cultural expectations regarding what the kingdom of God was supposed to be like and how it was going to come about. I think Jesus wrestled mightily with these cultural expectations. It was very tempting to try to fulfill them. But in the midst of his internal wrestling, I think he discovered something of higher value than the cultural expectations. Something of highest value. The pearl. He discovered himself. And he discovered the true nature of the kingdom of God. For the rest of his life, he tried to open other people's hearts and minds, spirits and souls, to this reality he called the kingdom of God. He tried to awaken people to how they could receive it, enter it, see it. For the rest of his life, he never exchanged it for anything of lesser value. He chose to die on the cross rather than compromise it.

Throughout Lent, let's pray that one or more of Jesus' parables can open our hearts and minds, spirits and souls, to the reality to which Christ is trying to awaken us. That which is of highest value. That for which Christ gave his life.

TOM

### ***A Joyful Theology*** **Adult Education Sessions** **Begin on April 19th**

Most of you know our own **Rev. Dr. Van Herd**, our shared **Minister of Adult Education**, whom we are sharing with UCC and UBC. Van will be returning to lead a series of classes here at CCA beginning **Sunday, April 19th at 12:30 p.m.** In addition to having pastored UCC churches, Van is now an **Associate Research Scientist** and **Reactor Operator in Nuclear Engineering** at **The University of Texas at Austin**, and also is a Lecturer in Mathematics, as well as in History of Science.

Plan now to be a part of these special sessions exploring the relationships among science, technology, and the Christian faith, using **Sara Maitland's** transformational book, *A Joyful Theology: Creation, Commitment and an Awesome God*. (The book is now available at the **UT Co-op**.) Van has already begun this series with our ecumenical partner, **University Christian Church**, and the study has been received there with great enthusiasm by the adult classes that have been marked by high attendance and great interest.

The author, **Sara Maitland**, is the spouse of a **Church of England** vicar and is rooted in a scientific family. She herself is an artist, poet, and novelist, who writes with

imagination, creativity, and conviction her vision of the awe-inspiring interconnectivity of science and theology. Those interested may visit her website: [http://www.saramaitland.com/about\\_me.html/](http://www.saramaitland.com/about_me.html/).

Make plans now to join us for this transformational study!

### **Church Leadership**

Trustee Co-Chairs	Don Brown & Bill Campbell
Deacons Chair	Janet Parsons
Outreach Team	Reuel Nash & John Goff
Moderator Co-Chairs	Barbara Burnham & Bill Beardall
Treasurer	Gail Christeson
Financial Secretary	Pam Tucker
Christian Education	Rachel Dietz
Coordinators	John Burlinson
Clerk	Betty Bodman
Historian	Pat & Mel Oakes
Web mistress	Sara Ross
Member-At-Large	Bill Beardall

## Personals

by Pat Oakes

In January, **Whit Bodman** led a two week pilgrimage for the **Austin Presbyterian Seminary** to "Lands of the Bible." **Pam Tucker** joined the group of 17 and left Alison and the kids at home. They had a **Palestinian Christian** guide during the trip with an amazing breadth and depth of biblical and historical information. The trip started in **Tel Aviv** and went north along the coast to **Caesarea, Haifa and Akko** (Acre). They visited the underground Crusader city in Akko. Somehow they managed to have a snowball fight at a **Druze** restaurant. They spent several days at a convent hotel at the **Mount of the Beatitudes** at the **Sea of Galilee** and traveled to nearby destinations, including **Capernaum**, home of several apostles including Peter. One day they traveled north into the **Golan Heights** to **Caesarea Phillipi**, the headwaters of the Jordan River, and further north near **Mt. Herman**. They could see cities in **Lebanon** and **Syria**. They traveled to **Nazareth** and enjoyed a wonderful Sunday service at an Anglican church in the city. They took a boat ride on the **Sea of Galilee** and traveled south along the **Jordan** to the **West Bank** and stayed in **Jericho**. Whit has been to Israel/Palestine many times, but he had never been to the monastery about the **Mount of Temptation**, where, according to



Pam Tucker on a camel named Michael Jackson in Bethany, on the back side of the Mount of Olives.



Whit Bodman on a small balcony at the monastery on the Mount of Temptation, overlooking Jericho.

legend, Jesus was tempted in the desert. Since Whit was in charge of the trip, he got to put that on the itinerary. They took a cable car up to the staircase, and then walked up to the still-operating monastery, which was built into the face of the cliff about 100 years ago. They stopped at a location on the **Jordan** that is reported to be where Jesus was baptized. It was the **Oriental Orthodox Day of Epiphany** (they use a different calendar) and a large troop of Ethiopians came singing and dancing with drums and costumes celebrating their baptisms. They went to the **Dead Sea** and took a "swim/float." Pam reports that it is so salty that it is difficult to get your legs under you to try to right yourself when finished floating. They traveled to the **Qumran** to see where the **Dead Sea Scrolls** were discovered (later they visited the **Shrine of the Book** to get a peek at some of the scrolls) and they visited **Masada**, a Roman fortress that has become a symbol of Jewish perseverance and strength. Finally, they traveled to **Jerusalem** to stay for several days. They toured the city and remembered the stories of Jesus' last days. They went to **Bethlehem** where they could see the wall dividing people from their land, dividing students from their university, dividing families from their loved ones and dividing the Palestinians from



## Brazos Association News

### March

by Liz Nash

**Y**ou are all invited to our **Brazos Association Spring Meeting**, to be held at **Lyons Evangelical UCC**, 320 Silver Maple W. in **Lyons**, on **March 22nd** from 4 pm through dinner. In many ways, this will be a “landmark” meeting of the Brazos Association because we will be celebrating the merger of the **Brazos and South Texas Associations**. Of course, a major part of the agenda will be welcoming the eight churches from South Texas. We will also be considering changes in the ways we do things, such as how our merged Church and Ministry Committees will function, how the Executive Board will function, where our spring and fall meetings will be in the future, how to formulate new bylaws, any financial changes, and what the name of the merged Association will be. Of course, we won’t be ready to deal with all of these items completely, but we certainly will enter the process as much as possible to get the newly merged Association organized.

The work in these areas is starting now as the **Brazos Association Executive Board** meets on **Saturday, February 21st** (will have already met as you read this) and as a smaller group of representatives from the two Church and Ministry Committees gathers for a several hour meeting on **Wednesday, March 4th**. We haven’t merged the two Executive Boards yet, but we will be working very soon to get this done. People are looking at the bylaws of both Associations to begin to think through how to merge, change, streamline, and/or improve them. We will be looking, I believe, at incorporating the best that each group has to offer or the best practices that each group brings, with the aim of being faithful and mutually supportive in our lives

as UCC churches in this expanded area. We will be looking, too, at how to do these things effectively given an even larger “Texas-sized” area than before.

The first ordination service in the merged Association is also coming up this month. **Sabrina Jennings** will be ordained at 2pm on **Saturday, March 28th** at Community UCC in San Antonio. Sabrina has been a member in discernment (in care) through **St. Paul UCC in Lockhart** and graduated from the Master of Divinity program at **Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary** last spring. She has been called as the pastor of Community UCC in San Antonio. Members of both churches will celebrate her ordination together with our Association. All of our Brazos Association members are invited to join us at **Community UCC, 4443 Hunnicut Drive, San Antonio**.

Finally, I will be taking a trip to **Spain** on **April 13th** through **May 17th**. For a little over two weeks of that time, I will be walking part of the *Camino de Santiago*, or the *Way of St. James*. This is a pilgrimage thousands of people make each year across Spain. In order to really “be away” from my work, I have asked our Executive Board for the month off without pay. And, after the walk, my husband and I look forward to visiting some wonderful Spanish sites. I hope to have plenty to share when I return!

Blessings in Christ

Liz Nash

Brazos Association Minister

the Israelis. *Harsh* does not describe it properly. They had wonderful opportunities in Jerusalem. They visited the **Western Wall**, deeply holy to Jews, part of the foundation of the **Temple Mount**. They surveyed the panorama of the city of **Jerusalem** from the **Mount of Olives** and walked down to the ancient olive trees in the **Garden of Gethsemane** and the underground grotto where the **Virgin-Mary** is buried. Whit says, "In many of the holy sites that we visited, we can be quite sure that whatever historical event is claimed for the place didn't happen there, but that is not the point. We are not doing history here; we are doing reverence, contemplation, remembrance and prayer. With this in mind we visited an alternative site of the burial of **Jesus**, the place where he was jailed, the pool of **Bethsaida**, the **Via Dolorosa**, and so forth." They observed classes at the **Yeshiva** and participated in the Shabbat service and dinner following. Whit scheduled incredible lecturers including a very prominent Palestinian professor, a Rabbi who is working toward peace through interfaith dialogue, a Presbyterian "witness" who was in **Gaza** last year during the fighting, and a representative from the **Carter Center** to discuss the political situation between Israel and the Palestinians. Pam says, "It was an incredible experience and the opportunity of a lifetime."

On Sunday, Feb. 8th, our cellist **Colin Ferguson** introduced the congregation to his girlfriend **Eli** (pronounced Ellie) **Mateos** who was visiting from **Brenham**. On Sunday, the 15th, Colin announced that he and Eli had gotten engaged the evening before! The wedding plans are moving forward—the date has been set for **September 5, 2015** in **Bertram** with Tom officiating.



Trio cellist Colin Ferguson with his fiancée, Eli.

**Nancy Brown** was delighted to receive a good number of cards from church members and friends far and near wishing her a very happy 95th birthday! She celebrated in fine style by having lunch with friends at **Green Pastures** on February 16th—not just President's Day—but Nancy's special day, too.

**Megan Goff** won a **Silver Key** award at the Scholastic **Arts & Writing Competition** for her watercolor painting 'Melt'. Her proud parents admit that the artistic gene must have skipped many generations.



Megan Goff with her award for her watercolor painting.

Our beloved former choir director, **Marie Saviniemi Scheel**, died on Saturday, Feb. 21, after a brief illness. She had celebrated her 100th birthday with us on October 5, 2014. She was born **October 4, 1914** in **Hancock, Michigan** to Finnish parents. She had a beautiful voice and studied



voice at the **Sherwood School of Music** in Chicago which is where she met her future husband Weldon. They married at the home of her voice teacher on **August 31, 1940**, and the next day left on the train to go back to **Lockhart, Texas**, where Weldon had been raised. After the war they moved to Austin in 1946 and found jobs with AISD, both teaching music. She was

our choir director for nearly 30 years. They moved into their home way out of town in 1948 near what is now IH35 and Congress Avenue and she lived pretty independently in her home until the end. Weldon died some years ago. Her memorial service will be at the church on **Saturday, March 7, at 3 pm** with Tom leading the service and Nodie organizing the music. The Deacons will host a reception after the service.





Anne Holliday Abbott (Frances Alford's sister) with long-time friend, Chuck Jackson.

On **Sunday, Feb. 22**, several members thought that long-ago member **Frances Holliday Alford** had come to church with recent visitor **Chuck Jackson**, a long-time friend of the Holliday family. Instead, it was Frances's look-alike sister **Anne Holliday Abbott** who was visiting from **Portland, Maine**. Frances, an accomplished quilter and designer, was in town from **Grafton, Vermont**, at the Austin Convention Center for the **Quiltcon** convention. They were both going to be in Austin for a few more days before making their way back to the frigid north.

Our own **Michelle Thompson Ulerich** danced the lead role in "**Belle Redux: A Tale of Beauty and the Beast**" for **Ballet Austin** on February 13 and 15. She reports that the performances went well and that every show was nearly sold out. She says they have been very busy with her dance schedule, their two little boys, and Rhys's travel schedule (commuting between here and NYC where he is currently working). They hope to see us in church soon.



Emily and Jim Howicz, with Betty Bodman. Jim was in town to run the Austin Half-Marathon.

It was great to see **Jim Howicz** at coffee hour on Sunday, the February 15th. He had a good reason for not being in church as he was running the **Austin Half-Marathon** with daughter **Emily** cheering him on. Jim reports that his time was just north of three hours and that it was his first race of the season. It has been cold and snowy in **West Chester, Pennsylvania**, so not many races are going on there now.

**Christie Kuhner** moved into her new home around mid-December. The place is still getting organized but she can begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. The address is 3130 Brookdale Ave, Oakland, CA 94602. She has been volunteering in the schools as a reading tutor. She knows we all would appreciate how great the need for that is. None of the kids she works with are native English speakers. Many are Spanish-speaking, but she has a couple of Arabic speakers who struggle to remember which end of the word to start on. There is so much need and so few resources. It breaks her heart, but she has met a number of "grandparent types" who do what they can.

Former member (late 1980s) **Edith Scott** writes from **Strathven, Scotland**, that her nephew, **Stuart Galbraith**, is coming to Austin in March to play at the **SXSW Music Festival**. She asks if any of the congregation (or their children) are going - look out for **UNITED FRUIT** and try to say hi.

At this writing **Becky Nash** is studying in **Byron Bay, Australia**, just south of **Brisbane**. She reported via Facebook that she and her friends prepared for a recent typhoon by going grocery shopping just before weekend of Feb. 21-22. She says, "We had a pretty crazy amount of wind and rain all weekend, but today it is sunny out and beautiful."



The work crew at Slumber Falls camp with Beth Gleason's dogs, Flower and Milagro. Sarah Darter is on the right.

**Beth Gleason** had a hardworking crew to help with spiffing up the **Slumber Falls Camp** on the weekend of Feb. 21-22. The weather cooperated before a strong cold front moved in on Saturday evening. They managed to clear out lots of brush and logs. In the photo, the teens holding Beth's two dogs, **Flower and Milagro** are from **Faith UCC**. The gentleman (their leader, Leslie) was from **Pilgrim UCC**, and we all know **Sarah Darter** from CCA. Beth took the photo.

**Lisa Kirch** reports from **Sheffield, Alabama**, that the effort to start a new **UCC** church there is going well so far. They are still the beneficiaries of the **Huntsville** church, but now they have their own PO Box and keep moving forward. The UCC church in Huntsville has sent them a missionary. That sounds very funny, but it's true. And, as it happens, there are three folks in the **Shoals** area who have a UCC background and have wanted to see the denomination there. They're working with a retired Disciples minister and the missionary, and they've been meeting in restaurants. Lisa notes that this is not how you get a church to grow. She doesn't know how many drop-ins will stay, and fortunately they haven't had any hecklers yet. This is a distinct possibility, given that the ads express their Open and Affirming direction. They have just found out that they now have a place to meet. It's not much, just an empty apartment, but the owner of the building has wanted some kind of faith organization in there. He won't ask for rent, just a little to help with utilities. It's one block from campus, exactly where they need to be. On Sunday, the 22nd, they were having a fellowship hour and then a Bible study. Lisa was bringing coffee supplies and doughnuts. On March 1. they were hoping to serve communion. Lisa says, "An insight came to me last weekend: the church in Austin can't be duplicated. It's its own unique thing. But maybe I can do for someone else what that church did for me." Thank you, Lisa—and we all wish you and the new church start well.

A number of you remember **Jeri Winter Gradecki** who was here while a student at UT. She and Ray have been married for several years now and have two children—**Wylan** and **Korin**. She is currently teaching Sunday school at her church in **Woodstock, Illinois**. She reports that they have such an amazing program there. Just before **Valentine's Day** they had the local chocolate store come in and make "chocolate pizzas" and dipped strawberries. She helps in the classroom of 5-7 year olds. They start each class with lighting a candle and taking three deep breaths. Jeri thinks it helps the kids leave behind where they come from and be more present to the class. Then they do a sharing rope where everyone gets a chance to share whatever the question is for the day (having something to do with the lesson) and in the end everyone is holding on to the rope in a connected circle and they say a short prayer. She likes that such wonderful lessons for life are taught on the power of thinking positively and taking

responsibility for their own emotions and actions. Jeri stays quite busy with the kids and they are all looking forward to a trip to Disney in March. She is getting back into painting and experimenting with muraling.

**Eunice Paul** (she and her late husband Bob were active in the church here in the 1980s) writes from **England**, "Christmas and New Year for the whole family in **Austria** for 2014 sounded like a good idea just after Christmas 2013 and, miraculously, we managed it. My total family is only 17 adults and 5 children, ranging in age from 10 months to 93 (no prizes for guessing which one that is) and they live in **Pittsburgh, Connecticut, New Jersey, Chicago, Florida, Austria, and England**. Grandson **Joshua** lives in **Graz** with his Austrian wife and three children, but Graz is not exactly a winter holiday destination. By searching online, **Lydia** (Eunice's daughter) found a former monastery, now converted into four apartments, in **Zedlitzdorf in Carinthia**. We rented all the apartments so we also had the use of a large hall with dining-table for all of us and lots of comfortable seating. There was also a party cellar with fireplace. The snow came at the right time; just a little on Christmas evening and more a couple of days later. We had an Austrian Christmas - no Father Christmas or **Santa Claus** but a visit from the **Christkind**, with Christmas tree and gifts, on **Christmas Eve**. On **New Year's Eve** there was fortune-telling with molten lead and a traditional meal of pig's snout! One day we found an outdoor cafe which served mulled wine, coffee etc. and roasted chestnuts and provided sheltered seating and kneerugs. Sleds were to be found in the attic of the monastery, so good use was made of them. "



Beth Oakes with Tommie and Doyal Pinkard.

**Mel and Pat Oakes** enjoyed a five-day visit from their daughter Beth. She taught a master class for the **Austin Chamber Music Center** at the **Blackerby Violin Shop** after church on Sunday, Feb. 15th and then coached orchestra students at **Austin High** (her alma mater) for one day and **Westlake High School** another day. She loved being outside walking along **Lady Bird Lake** instead of enduring the ice cold temperatures and snow of **Iowa City**.



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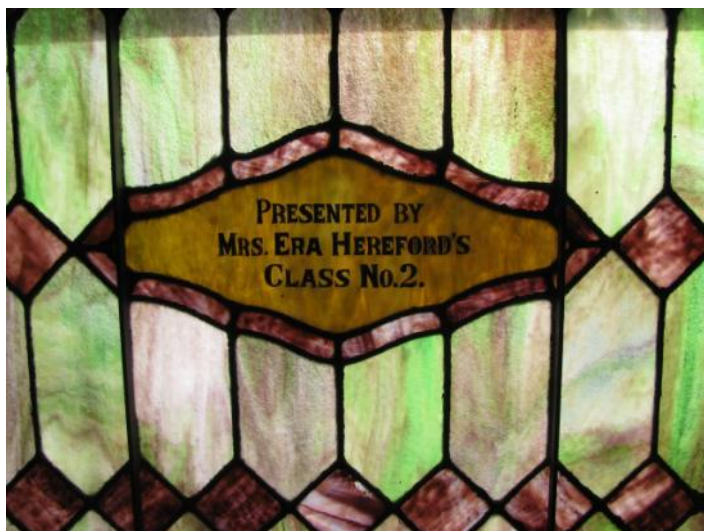
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## Deadline April Visitor—March 23, 2015

### History Corner

**M**rs. Era Jones Hereford was born **July 16, 1855**, in **St. Clair County, Alabama**. She died July 30, 1919, in Austin, Texas, and is buried in **Oakwood Cemetery**. Her mother, also buried at Oakwood, was **Barbara A. Catherine Fuller Jones** (1825-1918). Era's husband was **Charles A. Hereford**, a farm laborer. Charles was born June 10, 1849, in **Washington, Franklin County, Missouri**. He died October 28, 1888, in **Columbus, Colorado County, Texas**. In 1903, the widowed Mrs. Hereford was the proprietress of **Millett Mansion** at **900 Brazos Street** (our original church building was built at 9th and Colorado—just a few blocks away). The mansion was constructed in 1880 as a boarding house by **C. F. Millett**, a successful lumberman and furniture

builder. He also constructed the **Millett Opera House** next door. Era, with her sister, ran several apparently upscale boarding houses in Austin in the early 1900s. In 1909, Mrs. Era Hereford was part of a city-wide fundraising effort on behalf of the **Women's Cooperative Building Fund**. Contributors were "tagged." Those without tags were threatened with arrest in the *Austin Statesman*. Mrs. Hereford was assigned to solicit tags at the **Driskill Hotel**. Researched by Mel Oakes.



Medallion on the choir side--presented by Mrs. Era Hereford's class No. 2.

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Gail Christeson, Treasurer  
Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ