

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You



No Matter What

November 3, 2021

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

This Sunday, we will celebrate one of the more sacred Sundays of the year: **All Saints Sunday**. We will read the names and remember those who have died within our community.

Each name carries with it a lifetime of stories far bigger than the moment can hold. This service of worship gives all of us space to reflect, remember, and renew our commitment to living with faithfulness the days that we have on this earth.

It matters that we remember the stories of those who have gone before us.

This Sunday, I will be thinking of my Grandma Bell. On this day three years ago, I kissed her goodbye for the final time. She died a week later at the age of 94.

Her death was the first in a series of incredible and beloved women who passed away, including my Grandma Steger, who died just a few months later.

Each of these women shaped me and helped me to know how dearly beloved I am. All Saints Day will always be a day when I see their faces and feel their love. (You'll probably see me wearing my grandmother's pearls on Sunday!)

Ten years before she died, I had the extraordinary privilege of taking my grandmother home to Panama for one final visit with her family. My siblings and I met all the family we had heard about for years but hadn't seen since we were children.





We saw the places where my grandmother grew up, went to high school, and even where she and my grandfather had met. We walked through the old city and stood on the steps where my grandparents were married.

We ate incredibly delicious homecooked food, danced to my grandmother's favorite music, and

brushed up on our Spanish. It was a window into her world and her life that I will always cherish.

Being the granddaughter of two Hispanic immigrants (my other grandmother immigrated from Chile), I had always assumed some things about my grandmothers and the hardship of life that they had left behind when they married my grandfathers and moved to the United States.

So I confess that I was surprised upon arriving at my Tio Paul's home, when we were greeted by a series of maidservants who took our bags and brought us refreshments out on the back patio.

When I woke up the next morning, they were in the kitchen preparing breakfast and asking me if I needed anything. I was quickly shooed out of the kitchen when I tried to help. My grandmother scolded me a bit, "Let them take care of that. You relax."

I had all kinds of thoughts running through my head.

Do these servants live here?

Wait. Is my Panamanian family rich?

I learned a lot during that time in Panama about the divide between the rich and the poor, and how it played out in a particular way in many Latin American countries. It was evident which side of the fence my family had been on.

I had to do some work re-writing the stories that I had told myself about my ancestors and the places from which they had come.

It matters that we remember the stories of the past in ways that are honest.

Since my grandmother's death, I've done a fair amount of work examining the privilege that I inherited by being a part of generations of families who preserved their wealth and social position.

My grandmothers' experiences as immigrants were greatly aided by the fact that they married successful white American men who had easy access to employment, benefits, and

stable long-term income. There were hardships that they never had to encounter because of the protection this provided.

In the end, it doesn't make me love them any less. I don't admire their courage and fortitude any less than before. I know their lives were far from easy. (My other grandmother's story included far greater trauma in early childhood.) I am so proud to be their granddaughter.

At the same time, I understand more fully that my story and my ancestors have been shaped in particular ways that have included quite a bit of privilege.

Starting on Sunday, I'm grateful to be introducing to our congregation my friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Susan Smith.

Susan and I worked together for years during my time at Summit UMC, and one of the things that I love and appreciate about her is her capacity for telling good, honest, and meaningful stories.

Susan helped bring the stories of our ancestors to life in ways that I hadn't heard. She didn't leave out the hard parts of the stories but helped us to see the whole picture, so that we could continue to learn from the past as we built a new future.



I'm so honored that Susan has agreed to come and spend some time with our church community this Sunday, November 7 — when she will preach at both services, 9 and 11am — on the topic of Unlearning our Anger.

She'll return the following Sunday, November 14th, at 6pm, to give a talk filled with more stories that will help us to consider what it means for us to examine our privilege and use it to be more honest and engaged in the work of anti-racism. (We'll also be livestreaming this event. Details about the Conversations About Anti-Racism series here: <https://hilliardumc.org/pages/conversations-about-anti-racism/>.)



She'll be back again on **December 12th** for some informal time of storytelling.

I hope you'll plan to join us for one or more of these experiences.

Friends... these are hard conversations we have been having, and yet I know the Spirit is continuing to move and to guide our learning, unlearning, and relearning.

I'm so grateful to be on this journey together.

Pastor April



April Blaine
Lead Pastor
ablaine@hilliardumc.org
614.876.2403 (church office)

