

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

January 26, 2022

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

I remember the first time I ever saw an iPhone — this was early, when they first came out, nearly 15 years ago.

I, like many of you, was in awe.

There was such a wow factor. Many of the technologies that they were using weren't entirely new, but they had put them together in such a beautiful, sleek, accessible way that was also practical and functional.

It was an engineering marvel, and it would forever change the rhythms of our daily life. Because now, smartphones were able to do much more than just communicate with other people. They became our gateway to the web, our cameras, our GPS, our exercise and sleep trackers, and even our personal assistants.

Now, most of us cannot imagine our lives without them. For many of us, our phones are with us at all times, the first thing we look at in the morning and the last thing we see before we go to bed.

And everything in between.

This innovative technology can do extraordinary things that we never thought possible — and in itself, it is neither good nor bad.

It's also new. In the scope of human history, it's very new. We as human beings are still very early in the process of understanding all the implications and how to properly integrate this technology into our lives.



Interestingly, the ancient story of the Tower of Babel, which we will encounter this week, also finds humanity wrestling with a new technology. It's written less as a historical record and more as a cautionary tale.

We were told in Genesis chapter 1 that all of humankind was made in the image of God and said to be good. That one of the great purposes for which humans were made is to continue the creative work of God. To go forth and multiply. To use our creative drive to continue God's purposes in the world.



Last week, in our shared journey through **The Great Story** with Fairmont Presbyterian Church, we arrived at the story of Noah's Ark, a kind of Creation 2.0 story. We see the introduction of a basic sense of morality for all humankind... one that honors the sacredness of life and invites us to see the world from another's perspective.

Once again, God prioritizes the relationship with humanity and makes the first covenant with us.

This first universal covenant is God's commitment to remain with us and to continue showing us a better way to live — a way that will preserve life — and invite us to do the same.

By Chapter 11, humanity has increased again, and now, human ingenuity and creativity have come together to create a new marvel in technology — one that would greatly improve human capacity and efficiency.

And the new technology is **BRICKS**.

The old way of building things would have been to take various shaped stones that were either carved or cut or gathered and to put them together to build various structures. You don't have to be an architect to understand that this isn't a very efficient way to build and that there is a limit to how large and how high such structures can become.

But bricks — in their uniformity and capacity to create large volumes — this made all kinds of things possible that had never been possible before.

The people are enamored with what they will be able to now do:

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."
(Genesis 11:4)

Here's a bit more background on how the early Hebrew people might have heard this story: In the chapter before, we read of a ruthless dictator named Nimrod, who is organizing and

creating an empire, constructing cities, consolidating power, and subjugating others, starting in Babel.

If you read ahead, the next time bricks are mentioned is in the first chapter of Exodus, when the Hebrew people are enslaved in Egypt. They know where this inclination to build bigger, higher, and taller is headed.

I appreciate the many biblical scholars who write from a marginalized point of view and remind us how often language has been used to subjugate and oppress people.

Forcing groups of people to assimilate to the dominant language has been a common practice throughout history, including the history of our own country. This is part of how empires were built. When they read this chapter in Genesis, they see the dangers that can come with “all the world speaking the same language.” In this case, the coming together and the building that these bricks facilitate isn’t the kind of unity that is about the sanctity and preservation of life.

God chooses to disrupt the efforts of the people. First, the tower is disrupted, and the people are scattered. The second and perhaps more significant disruption comes in the chapter we will read in the first week of February. God chooses to disrupt the efforts by creating a tribe of people who will live in a new way, a way that honors the sanctity of life and becomes a blessing to the whole world. But... we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

The stories in Genesis continue to ask us questions about the kind of world we want to build. How will we do this in ways that honor and preserve life?

When new technologies arrive, how will we use them?

Will they create further isolation and violence between ourselves and God?

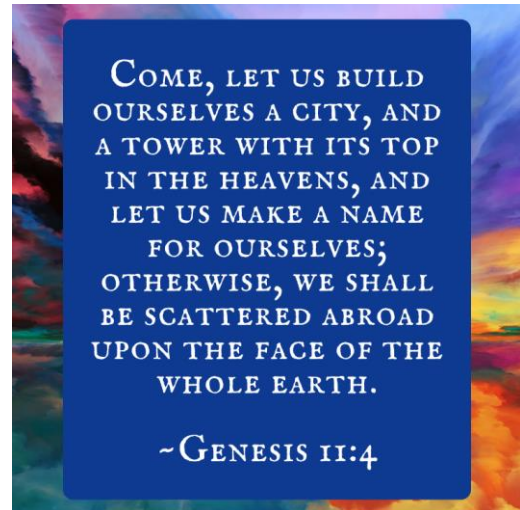
Can we continue to listen, learn, and create in ways that prioritize relationship over power?

Can our creative drive be used in ways that further the purposes of God in the world?

I’m grateful to be on this journey together across two churches exploring and listening to one another as we ask these challenging questions. **God doesn’t give us simple answers but invites us to use our agency, creativity, and capacity to engage the complexity of these moments... with one another and with the movement of the Spirit.**

And so we keep listening and learning... together.

With gratitude,



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