



December 14, 2022
A Note from Pastor April

Dearest Friends,

As we wind down our journey through the Old Testament and gear up for a year of stories surrounding the life of Jesus, I have been reflecting about so many things that I've learned this year.

Like many people, I once used phrases like "The God of the Old Testament" to describe my view of a harsh and less forgiving version of God... and "The God of the New Testament" to speak of the grace-filled compassion I saw in Jesus.

I found many of the Old Testament stories bizarre and hard to understand, and I wondered what connections, if any, they had to the larger narrative of God's redeeming work in the world.



This year of studying, learning, and preaching on the Old Testament has been among the most invigorating and joy-filled seasons of my life as a preacher.

Something about reading this story in sequence has allowed me to see the arc of the story more fully AND realize how much continuity there is in the Bible.

From Genesis to Malachi, we were discovering the origin story of God's people, as well as the ways that they learned (slowly) what it meant to have a real relationship with God, one that was more than transactional, one that would call them toward love and an understanding of God's ultimate vision for a new world.

For me, what stood out most over the course of this year was the grace of God.

The Israelites were slow learners. (Perhaps we can relate!)

Over and over, God kept showing up among the people. No matter how big the mess, there was always a path home.

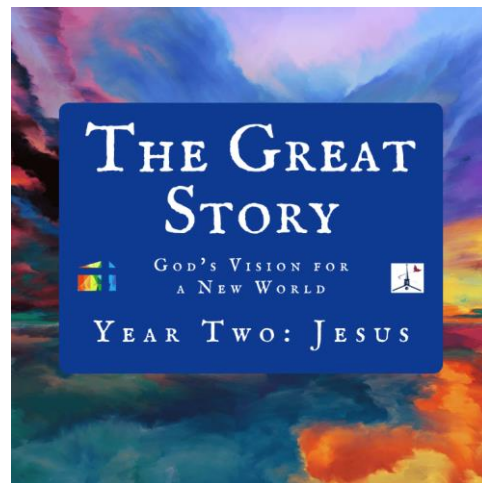
This story we have been reading this year has everything to do with the story we will read next week on Christmas Eve and into Christmas Day — a God who shows up in the most tangible and visible way possible, meeting us right in the middle of our mess and inviting us home... to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

I don't know about you, but **I'm grateful for the reminder right now that God shows up in the mess of our lives.**

I'm glad to know that I join a long lineage of people of faith who haven't gotten it all right, and God was still walking with them... teaching them, guiding them, and giving them chance after chance to try again.

This project that began as a journey through the Old Testament has been so meaningful that we are now extending it to include the entire Great Story of the Bible.

2022 will now be referred to as The Great Story YEAR 1: Israel.



This Sunday will be the final sermon of the year focused on an Old Testament passage, and then we'll make the natural transition into the new year, when we will read the Gospel of Matthew.

2023 will be The Great Story YEAR 2: Jesus.

I can't wait to dive in and discover all the connections to our lives.

I'm so grateful to be on this journey of learning and growing together in the midst of our messy lives.

Blessings!

Pastor April



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P.S. Our **church office will be closed** between Christmas and New Year's, so **please bring financial gifts and pledges** to be credited to 2022 by **Christmas Day** or mail them so we receive them by December 30. Thank you!

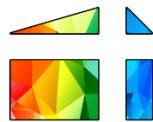




Christmas Day

One Service at 11am
in the Sanctuary

(no livestream, to give our volunteers a break)



Hilliard
United Methodist Church

God Loves You  No Matter What

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