

# Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You



No Matter What

July 16, 2025

A Note from April Blaine

**Dear Friends,**



This summer has been filled with an unusual amount of travel. In the last 50 days, I've only slept in my own bed for 16 nights. Some of the trips have been incredible time with family and a chance to explore a special part of the world.

Nineteen days in Greece left me with so much to reflect and

wonder about! I'm pictured here in deep conversation with our tour guide John!



One of the trips was work-related. Pastor Jon, Lindsay and I were in Massachusetts planning for the Season of Origins with Dr. Kate Common and pastors from all over the country.



Other trips were filled with sacred times with some of my favorite people, including the chance to participate in my dear friend Julia's installation service as a Lutheran pastor in Oregon this past weekend.



While I've been in and out of the office, we've had Beth Palmer on leave and been preparing for Pastor Jon's renewal leave which began this past weekend.

I confess that in early May I was feeling anxious. How is everything going to get done?

As we prayed over Pastor Jon on his last Sunday, I felt my nervous system begin to relax into God's presence, and a powerful sense of peace began to rest in my heart and Spirit.

We talk often about the power and importance of showing up and being present with one another. We rarely reflect on the power that can come in our absence.



Last week in Vacation Bible School, it was my absolute privilege to help lead the storytelling team. Our story for the week was the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus told this parable (recorded in [Luke 10:25-37](#)) as an answer to a question, "Who is my neighbor?" A weary traveler on the road is left for dead after being robbed and beaten. Both the Priest and the Levite see him and choose to walk to the other side of the road and keep going. Only the Samaritan, the despised foreigner, stops to assist... even taking them to an inn and paying for their needed healing.

On the first day, we shared the story in the way most of us have heard it... from the perspective of the traveler. Each day that followed, we told the story again from the perspective of another person in the story. What was the perspective of the priest or the Levite who passed by? Was the Samaritan also nervous about stopping? We wondered together about each of the different people and why they might have chosen to do what they did. We wondered

how they might have chosen to do something different on their trip back. By Thursday, the kids had really begun to understand the power and mystery of this parable and all the expansive ways it invites us to explore something new each time we tell the story.

Then I told them. “I won’t be here on the final day. I’m headed to Oregon to help my friend for a very important service of ordination. But.. all of you know this story now. Tomorrow, you will help be the storytellers.”

As I landed in the airport in Portland, I was smiling at the pictures, texts and emails received from the team of what had happened. In my absence, even more magic had happened in the VBS storytelling room. The story was told and acted out from the perspective of the innkeeper, the robbers, the donkey... even the rocks along the road!



The story had come alive in the imaginations of the young people, and they took full ownership of their role as storytellers.

Sometimes things can happen in our absence that might not have been possible in our presence.

Taking time away, allowing ourselves to be absent... is often easier said than done. Whether we are stepping away from something for a day or for several months, there can be a lot of reasons why we convince ourselves that we can’t be absent.

I wonder for you, as we mark the mid-way point in the summer season, where you may need to allow yourself some space to be absent... to step away from the responsibilities, rhythms, or routines and listen to your heart and body.



Beginning this Sunday, fourteen of our youth will be spending a week at Lakeside Institute. This sacred week away gives them space to be with God, themselves, and each other in a beautiful setting. I’m amazed at how they relish this time to put down their phones, worship, connect

with one another, and deepen their connection to God. Please keep them in prayer this week.

A big thank you to the congregation for all the tremendous generosity that you poured out that made it possible for every youth to have the funds needed to attend Lakeside with a zero balance.

I'm delighted to have very little travel on my calendar for the next four months. It will be good to enter back into a season of presence.

In Pastor Jon's absence, we will learn some things that we might not have been able to learn with him here. We hope this will be a time of healing and rest for him and for his family. It's a beautiful reminder of the gifts that can come in all directions when we choose to prioritize healthy rhythms of presence and absence.

I'm excited to be with you this Sunday as we dive back into the ways our Methodist traditions are rooted in finding healthy and healing ways of being present with others in community. There will even be 18<sup>th</sup>-century newspaper satire cartoons!

Looking forward to being together.

Pastor April



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