

Letters of EnCOURAGEment

God Loves You  No Matter What

December 18, 2025
A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

I've always loved the Christmas season. The magic of the season was present as a child and became even more joyful and real when I became a parent.

The Christmas before Marcus was born, I was seven months pregnant on Christmas Eve and had a chance to tell the Christmas story to a group of children. I have never felt more connected to Mary and her experience than I did that year.



Even so, it wasn't until this last ten years that the story of Christmas, the heart of the power of the incarnation of Jesus, began to live inside of me in a deeper, more profound way.

As I look back at the series of things that happened over the course of a year or so, there was a theme.

Loss.

Grief.

Letting go of things that were outside of my control — whether it was unprecedented challenges with my children, the deaths of my beloved grandmothers, or simply my ideas about how the world should work — that season was shrouded by a series of painful learnings that gave me no other option than to let go of my illusion of control, and to trust.

What I noticed was something unexpected. **The emotions and pain and fear were all there, but when I stopped trying to control them, there was something else: a**

presence, a deep abiding presence that was much more grounded and spacious and strong than I realized.

I had felt God's presence in my life before, but this was different. What I was experiencing in that season was something I could sense in my *body*... with me all the time, as close as the air that I breathed. **The presence of God's Spirit didn't make the emotions or pain or fear go away, but in my body, I could sense that I wasn't alone through it.**

God's love wasn't just an idea or a momentary experience in my heart. It was as if something much larger than me was holding all of it (and me), with plenty of room for all the mess and the challenge and the beauty that life would bring my way.

Christmas has felt different for me ever since that year.

The incarnation of Jesus that we celebrate during this season is at the heart of our faith as Christians — this incredible gift of a God who comes to be WITH US, in the midst of our pain and struggle, AND who reminds us that humanity and divinity have never been separate but always interwoven.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. He wanted us to know that while we certainly aren't God, we are "like him." We also carry the Spirit of the living God as a part of us. We are both human and born of the Spirit.

This reality isn't an intellectual puzzle to be solved, it's a lived reality that we get to experience in our hearts, souls, and BODIES.

I tend to notice it even more acutely when life gets challenging.

As I prepare for my final month with all of you at HUMC, I feel the grief and sadness of this season of transition. I also feel the depth of the presence of the Spirit. On a given day, I move from places of heartfelt tears to places of deep joy... sometimes in the span of 15 minutes! There is more than enough room for all of it within me, and there is more than enough room for all of our collective responses within our community.



Each day, I feel it inside of my body — just another stitch of grace that moves me toward healing. I have also seen it sprouting up in the body of Christ here at HUMC. I've been utterly in awe of the willingness of so many folks to stay at the table, to reach across aisles and differences to listen and learn, and the vulnerable way I've watched forgiveness and grace be offered in the places of hurt. There is much more work to do, but it is a good start.

It's been a beautiful reminder of how God KEEPS arriving into our world into the places of struggle and darkness. Whether they happen inside a stable, a

community in transition, or a place of hopelessness and longing. (I'm sharing my all-time favorite Christmas picture of me walking outside with a glow stick on Christmas Eve of 2020 to our drive-in service.)

There is space for all of it. The Christ who enters the world in this season made sure of it.

I hope I will see you at one of our five special Christmas Eve services this year. We'll gather for traditional worship at 1pm and 11pm in the Sanctuary, and our Family service will be at 3pm, also in the Sanctuary. Our nontraditional services at Warehouse 839 will be at 5pm & 7pm. Details below.

You are loved, friends... and the Spirit of Christ lives in us...

April



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