



# CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

500 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101  
CPCStPaul.org ♦ Phone 651-224-4728 ♦ Fax 651-291-1469

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“Jumping Through the Window”  
Sermon Preached by Rev. Evans McGowan  
Central Presbyterian Church  
September 1, 2013  
Scripture: Jeremiah 2: 4-13, Luke 14: 1, 7-14



My mother is a pastor, a former colleague of Dave’s at Westminster Presbyterian Church. She worked there for 19 years, and this past May took a bold step: feeling her work at the church had reached a conclusion of sorts, my mother stepped down from her position as Associate Pastor without knowing what was next. She continues to discern where God might be calling her, as she and my dad take some time to travel and reflect on where they have been, and where they are going. They have a blog ([keithandanne.blogspot.com](http://keithandanne.blogspot.com)) where they describe their Year of Grand Adventure as “jumping through the window” – leaving one place, not sure where they will land on the other side.

I, too, am “jumping through a window.” Recently, I completed a two-year residency, serving as a pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Now I am traveling around the country, visiting family and friends, writing a book about my grandfather, and discerning what I will do next.

Finding work can be a faithful, if not always fruitful, exercise. It can also be quite mundane and tiresome. As the nation celebrates Labor Day tomorrow, not everyone is in the same place when it comes to work. Some are gainfully and gratefully employed, five years after the Great Recession. Some sense of certainty and satisfaction has returned to the economy, yet uncertainty and dissatisfaction remain. Students are saddled with debilitating loans, a trillion dollars and more than the nation’s combined credit card debt. Women continue to struggle for fair pay. Fast food workers are going on strike for a decent, living wage. Blue- and white-collar workers alike have seen their pay, on average this past decade, stagnate. Many people continue



to be unemployed or underemployed. Retirees worry if their pensions will be cut, or if their savings will be wiped out by another crash.

In this time of residual fear and uncertainty, we hear Jeremiah's words come from the street and through our windows. Have we strayed from the Lord? Have we gone after worthless things, and become worthless ourselves?

Something isn't right when our government loans money to banks at less-than-one-percent while our graduates, the future of the nation, are paying off federal loans of at least 3 to 6 percent. Something isn't right when the CEO of McDonald's makes the same amount in one hour as the average McDonald's server makes in three months, a growing inequality of over 500 to 1. Something isn't right when private companies make millions from foreign wars, as well as our own war to lockup minorities in private prisons.

Have we strayed from the Lord? Have we gone after worthless things, and become worthless ourselves?

How can we work, let alone pay taxes or be a patron of certain businesses, when the system is a source of injustice? No wonder we have forsaken the living fountain of the Lord, building cisterns of our own, trying to protect ourselves from one another and just getting by in taking care of our families.

I imagine the Pharisees were saying the same thing. Here they were, their country occupied by an oppressive foreign power, setting up a system of injustice that kept them in a role of privilege. Seeing themselves as descendants of Moses and the prophets, they used Jewish law to maintain their separateness from the Sadducees, the "really privileged" priestly class, as well as the masses, where they enforced their interpretation of the Law of Moses. They used their influence from the time of Jeremiah to be in the halls of power in Persia, and they continued their

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influence under Roman rule, all the while pursuing their own agenda and following worthless things.

And now Jesus confronts their laws and ways of living. He has just healed someone on the Sabbath, right in front of them, challenging their understanding of healing as work that shouldn't be done on the Sabbath. Jesus then talks to them about humility and hospitality, two crucial cultural art forms in the Ancient Near East. If you were a guest, you were to rely on your host to exalt you, rather than seat yourself where you like. And if you were the host of a party, Jesus says to invite those who can never repay you, for the one who exalts you is not another human being, but a gracious God.

I was invited to a party like this once. While I was a volunteer missionary in Kenya, my organization Church World Service funded a water borehole for a Maasai community out in the middle of the savannah. We were invited by the community to come celebrate the opening of the borehole in a dry and thirsty land. We drove a long time to get there. When the road ended we turned off and kept going, using acacia trees as landmarks, as our guide directed us to the site.

We arrived late, well after lunchtime, and the people had been waiting for several hours in the heat. The women greeted us with singing and clapping. The men greeted us with jumping and dance. We were invited to join in, and we did. They slaughtered a goat for us, and we sat at the place of honor under the acacia tree, eating a fabulous feast and overwhelmed by their hospitality. It was then we found out the borehole wasn't working. All this time, we thought they were thanking us for something we had done. My, how we exalted felt humbled! They had every right to be angry and frustrated, holding out on us until we completed our end of the bargain. Yet here we were, celebrated as the guests of honor, for doing absolutely nothing.

We made sure that borehole was soon completed. And I will never forget that display of abundant hospitality to us strangers. We were blessed simply because we came. We were blessed precisely because we weren't able to pay.



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How might our work be a blessing to others? How might we humble ourselves in our work, allowing others to be exalted before ourselves? How might we plan and host activities and feasts where we invite not just the family or friend, but the stranger and the poor? How might we serve those who cannot pay us back? How might we swallow our egos and be served by others?

Recently, I came across a wonderful book called “Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity.” What if we saw our work as a faith pilgrimage, an exploration of our identity in the world? Will we be identified as servants of the living fountain? Or will we follow after worthless things, and become worthless ourselves? It takes tremendous courage to follow the dream, to cross the unknown sea. How will we and our loved ones survive? Maybe a better question is: How might we thrive?

The author David Whyte tells a story of a London druggie caught in a flower bed on a rainy afternoon. The man was trying to get out of the window when he got stuck in the mud and muck of the bed, falling down face-first. The scene would be rather comical except the man was trying to jump out the window to his death. As he lay there, utterly stuck and exhausted, he noticed a stream of water through the desert of the real, where the rain had carved a river in the mud. New plants had sprouted from the ground, and he began to shape the new growth into an organized layout. He eventually got out of that flower bed, got clean (first washing his hands and then checking himself into several months of rehab) and moved to Wales to be a farmer.

All of us long to find fertile ground we can work with. We long to serve others and be served, creating and being a part of the beloved community, the Kingdom of God as Jesus called it; relying on the living fountain of life to sustain us through the worries and necessities of life. Often we find this fertile ground of life by jumping through a window, going through that very place we are most afraid to go, not knowing how we will cross that unknown sea.

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May God grant us the courage to cross the unknown sea, to jump through that window. May we land on fertile soil. May our souls grow in faith, transforming hopes and dreams into resplendent reality as we learn to love, to live, and to work.