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Learning with Grace

Lent 2021
Daily Devotionals
By the Grace Community
The late Representative John Lewis of Georgia talked about stirring up “good trouble” that leads to justice. Jesus stirs up a lot of good trouble in the Lenten Gospels this year; we are called to prepare ourselves and follow.
Holy Saturday, April 3, 2021

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. [Matthew 27:57-61]

And so the women watched and waited, and Joseph of Arimathea waited elsewhere. They were isolated and frightened and bereft. And they believed that Jesus would stir up good trouble one more time!

Creator God,

Help us wait with expectation of the invitation to stir up good trouble in your name. Make us ready to act and invite others to your love, justice and peace.

Amen

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Excerpts from the HuffPost website regarding Ash Wednesday:

Q: I don’t remember reading about Ash Wednesday in the Bible. Where did the practice come from?

A: That’s true; there is no mention of Ash Wednesday in the Bible. But there is a tradition of donning ashes as a sign of penitence that predates Jesus. In the Old Testament, Job repents “in dust and ashes,” and there are other associations of ashes and repentance in Esther, Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Q: When can you wash the dirt off your face?

A: No one is required to keep the ashes on his or her face after the ritual. But some Christians choose to, perhaps as a reminder to themselves that they are mortal and fallible, while others may choose to leave them on as a witness to their faith in the hope others will ask about them and open a door to sharing their faith.

When our actions cause others to ask us about our faith, that is stirring up good trouble!
Thursday, February 18, 2021

Coronavirus – the same virus that gives us the common cold. Covid19 – the newest form of this virus that is becoming a terrifying pandemic.

Those words are from last year’s devotion for the day after Ash Wednesday. And here we are a year later, still in the thick of the pandemic, but with more hope now that there are vaccines.

The person who has been stirring up good trouble since the beginning is Dr. Anthony Fauci. As a leading epidemiologist, he has been the voice of truth about the pandemic that has infected 27 million people in the US and killed over 470,000 Americans. He has spoken out despite derision, written and verbal personal attacks, death threats and the threat of being fired. And yet he consistently spoke truth to power. His faith in science, truth and God allowed him to stir up good trouble in troubling times.

It is hard to speak truth to power...even in small things. However, that is what God calls us to do. We are the voice for God, who is still speaking.

Good Friday, April 2, 2021

By now it was about midday and a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus gave a loud cry and said. “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”; and with these words he died. The centurion saw it all and gave praise to God. “Beyond all doubt,” he said, “this man was innocent.”

The crowd who had assembled for the spectacle, when they say what had happened, went home beating their breasts. – Luke 23:44-48

O Creator God,

Even when we are late to recognize you in the people around us, let us do so and speak out for justice and peace. Amen
Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? 13 You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are correct, for so I am. 14 So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. 16 Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. [John 13:12-17]

Jesus, as Servant of All, shocked his disciples by performing a lowly task of humble hospitality. He requested that they become humble servants of all, and in so doing, stirred up some good trouble. He turned the status quo upside down! That a teacher should serve the disciple was not normal in that society.

O God, show us how to turn someone’s world upside down through our humble hospitality in your name. Amen
The text contains two poems:

**Stewards** – by Russ Green

Though meant to be caretakers,
   We tear asunder.
Though held responsible,
   We pillage and plunder.
War is declared on land and on air,
   On fresh and on salt water everywhere,
   On wolves and on sharks,
   On community parks,
   On baby seals and on whales,
   On Manx cat tails.
Whether real or imagined, helpless or not,
   We will fight it ‘cause it’s there,
   And never even care
   If it’s gone when we’re done.
But we caretakers take no care;
   We only take whatever is there;
   A sad testimonial to such supposed intelligence.
To tear asunder; it makes one wonder
   Where reason resides,
   Or perhaps it hides.
Let’s look while time remains;
   Maybe salvage county lanes
   And lyric strains
   And vast food chains...
   And defenseless friends.

**Borrowed Trouble** – by Russ Green

Some of us live as though we own life,
   But life is only borrowed;
Borrowed for several decades, we hope;
   A 99-year lease sometimes;
   Sometimes so painfully short;
   But always returned.
When we borrow something,
   We try to be more careful with it
   Than we are with what we own.
When returned, it should be in
   The same condition as when we
   Received it.
We receive life in such perfect shape;
   Yet so fragile, so easily spoiled.
Still, we can try to care for
   This borrowed time;
Returning it only slightly dented,
   But also chipped—
Chips of life we have given to others,
   To nature, to the extension of time...
   And life.
Murdale was raised in the southern Reformed Presbyterian tradition which certainly was not accepting of women ministers.

When Murdale was eleven years old she stood in the pulpit of Uncle Boyce’s church asking God “Do you want me to do this?” Suddenly, the response from a powerful voice: “Murdale Cameron! Get out of that pulpit – no female foot has ever defiled it.” Murdale knew that it was not God speaking. It was Uncle Boyce.

Despite Uncle Boyce’s reprimand, Murdale went on to Stir Up a history of Good Trouble beginning in 1955 by becoming a woman minister in the Congregational Church. She served several small Congregational/UCC churches in Vermont from 1955 to 1977.

As a minister in the United Church of Christ Murdale seriously Stirred Up Good Trouble by counselling Conscientious Objectors during the Viet Nam Conflict, assisting several to successfully serve the United States in alternative peaceful service.

Murdale also Stirred Up Good Trouble by collaborating with local Roman Catholic clergy to organize an Ecumenical Discussion Group for couples as well as an Ecumenical Religious Education Program for local youth. Ultimately both programs positively changed lives.

As the the organizer of the Killington-Pico Area Ecumenical Project (KPAEP) Murdale Stirred Up plenty of Good Trouble among local church leadership in addition to providing a lot of good information regarding Ministry in Leisure and Recreation Settings still in use today as. exampled by the Roman Catholic and UCC communities continuing to share worship space for 50+ years.

Murdale became the first woman appointed to serve as a Conference Minister in the United Church of Christ. She Stirred Up lots of Good Trouble while change-making as Conference Minister for the Minnesota Conference UCC from 1981 to 1989.

Today most of us live quite comfortably with the Good Trouble stirred up by Murdale, but at the time – not so much!

Murdale was a member of Grace Congregational Church United Church of Christ from 1950 to the time of her death in 2013.

—Beverly Anderson

Monday, February 22, 2021

I have made music all my life, starting in the “Cherub” choir at age 5. Then came the piano lessons (not a great experience) and at age 12, my pipes.

I have also stood up for what I feel is right most of my life, starting at about the same age – I saved a frog from being eaten by a garter snake, with my dad’s help. No animals were hurt in that rescue operation.

As I got older my actions focused on social justice – working in the Sanctuary movement in the 1980’s, writing letters to the editor on a variety of justice issues, taking part in peace demonstrations at the local, state and national level, testifying at the state level for education, and being a union leader working for safety in the local schools for 18 years. Each of these actions had a cost, but each was a response to what I felt as a call. I still hear the call and try to respond.

Working for social justice isn’t always easy, but with the support of family and a church home, it is something to celebrate. Stirring up good trouble is better in community, with music to give the soul joy in the good work.

This hat was given to me for my music making and union work.

--Ellen Green
As followers of Jesus the prophet who stood up and told truth to power,

We can stand up and make our voices heard through our actions.

Oh God, let your light and love shine through us as we work to make your world a world of Peace and Justice and Truth.

--Ellen and Russ Green

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**Stirring up Trouble Together** – By Russ Green

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Passover

As Jews, we tell the story of yetziat mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt, to remind ourselves annually that our people were enslaved in a land not our own. The classical Ashkenazi haggadah text goes even further. It declares that:

ְBe'chol dor va’dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo ke’ilu hu yatzah miMitzrayim

“In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt.”

More than just ritual observance, we are directed to feel in our own bodies what it might have been like to escape from slavery to freedom. The Exodus story asserts unapologetically that oppression and injustice can and must end, and it lays the foundation for the Jewish vision of a just society. (from Haggadot.com)

Slavery and human trafficking are still with us - The United Church of Christ has a Justice and Peace Action Network to educate us about current issues. Stir up good trouble with www.ucc.org/jpanet

In John 4: 7-14, Jesus stirs up good trouble at the well:

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” 13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

God, please give to us this life-giving water. Show us how to ripple it through our community for all. Amen
Becky Johnstone, Scripture and Reflection on “Stirring Up Good Trouble”

Luke 19:45-48
Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants from their stalls.
He told them, “The scriptures declare, ‘My temple will be a place of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves.’”
After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading Priests, the teachers of the religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said.

Jesus acted out in the open here for Holy reasons … he didn’t have a behavior problem. Some of the religious leaders were jealous of this, as Jesus exercised true holiness and justice. Biblical history has shown this happens to ALL true believers as they/we represent Jesus in this life. (starting with Abel, son of Adam and Eve).
Paul Robeson stood
on the northern border
of the USA
and sang into Canada
where a vast audience
sat on folding chairs
waiting to hear him.

He sang into Canada.
His voice left the USA
when his body was
not allowed to cross
that line.

Remind us again,
brave friend.
What countries may we
sing into?
What lines should we all
be crossing?
What songs travel toward us
from far away
to deepen our days?

This is who we publicly say we are on our website.
Let us take these words to heart, ponder them,
parse them, and apply them to our moving forward, knowing that following what we say will certainly stir up good trouble.

Grace Congregational UCC Mission Statement

Striving to follow Jesus, we seek to:
Cultivate a community of intentional & abundant welcome
Celebrate our diversity
Love, support, and care for each other and God’s creation
Serve all humankind, both locally and globally
Advocate for justice, reconciliation and healing

YOU ARE WELCOME
Whoever you are and wherever you are on life’s journey,
YOU are invited to join us at Grace Church! We are an
Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ and we welcome all people without regard to race, age, economic condition, disability or sexual orientation.
Saturday, February 27, 2021

**Good Trouble Reflection**
by Michelle Fountain

Dear Comforter,

Help me to be uncomfortable.
Let me listen
when I yearn to speak.
Push me to learn
when I think I know enough.
Make me speak
when it is easier to remain silent.
Empower me to act against injustice,
rather than rest in my privilege.

Allow me to hear
those who disagree with me.
Help me find
ways to build bridges, not fences.
Teach me to welcome
all abundantly in your name.

Compel me to lean into
the discomfort of good trouble,
and comfort me in doing so.

For, “I can do everything through
Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Amen

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

**Stirring up Trouble**

It seems like trouble is all around us. Between Covid, your children, grandchildren, neighbors, friends, and Grace Church Community, we are being shaken daily by all the trouble in our world! What was before Covid, our lives are permanently shaken. Each person can relate to the many ways they are moving forward and to new beginnings. The mask to keep us safe, the image of the Red Sea parted and the people going forth into a new land. As each of us settles into this new place, God is there with us. We need only to reach out – he is waiting for us!

Take a moment and look out a window at all God has created and trust that we will be safe and with God. Most of all we all have to find that place where we are no longer frightened, scared, feeling loss, or just waiting and accepting where we are at this time. Jesus loves us just the way we are.

--Diana Robinson
We saw this beautiful chandelier (see photo) on the way home from Burlington the other day. It’s called the “Apothecary”, which means “a place to put something up”. I love the design and studied it for a time. The curvaceous bottles are empty but each one is paired with an intense light shining down into them from above. The bottles transmit/reflect/refract the light down and in all directions; they almost seem to shimmer.

What a metaphor for the spiritual life! If we empty ourselves of all our preconceived notions, fears, anxieties and complaints, we become open to receiving “light from above”. Also known as the light of God, wisdom, grace, and mercy. Then we can spread that light out into the world, sharing with others, our families, our friends and with strangers. We can actually become a “conduit of grace” by sharing God’s light and love in our community. What a blessing!

The next time you are feeling anxious, frightened, sad or upset, ask God to remove your fears and replace them with his love and light from above. Notice what happens, imagine His radiance flowing into and through you to those around you. Ephesians 5:8

By Margaret Franklin

P.S. I am trying to live this by: listening to yet standing my ground against a parent who does not like the social justice focus of my high school English curriculum; teaching the White Privilege Course here at Grace; coordinating a 7th-12th grade Martin Luther King Jr. Social Justice Afternoon at Woodstock Union High School despite protests from a couple of colleagues and students who called it a “waste of time” or “the wrong approach”; trying to understand and build bridges through our common humanity to those who feel differently than I do due to their political or belief systems; being the advisor for the Social Justice Club at Woodstock Union High School; and being on the board of Bridge to Rutland, seeking to help asylum seekers. None of us can do everything but everyone can do something. My belief in Christ invites action to live with courage and grace.

Michelle Fountain
In a democracy, our voice is our vote, and it is informed by our faith. It is also informed by our research into the candidates and what they stand for. Remember to vote today and celebrate our ability to give our faith voice as we do so! Let’s stir up some good trouble in our towns and state.

From Janice Prindle

One way we can stir up good trouble:

“Expecting Black people to fix racism is like asking the environment to fix global warming. The solution is that white people need to hold other white people accountable.”

Tabitha Moore, founder of Rutland chapter, NAACP on Vermont Conversation, VT Digger, Feb. 5, 2021
Saturday, March 20, 2021
Spring – Vernal Equinox

Thank you Creator for the Equinox
Equal parts sunshine and starlight
Stirring up new life and energy to spring forth
Equal parts winter and spring
Stirring up good trouble in our re-turning to the light
Equal parts clarity and mud season
Stirring up messiness and purpose
With your guidance and prodding.
Stir us up to be awake, woke and ready to work for you.
Amen

-- Ellen Green

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

In Mark’s gospel, the oldest of the gospels, Jesus stirs up more good trouble. Mark 3:1-6:

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

4 Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

God of good trouble and trouble-makers, show us as a community how to risk for your world. Amen
Thursday, March 4, 2021

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? -Esther 4:14

The book of Esther in the Old Testament is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman. It’s a quick and important read. Spoiler alert: Esther is the superhero!

The King of Persia became angry at his wife and banished her. Then he held the equivalent of the Prince’s Ball in Cinderella and chose Esther to be his new wife. He didn’t realize she was a Jew. The king’s right-hand man, Haman, hated the Jews and plotted to kill all of the ones in the Persian Empire. Esther’s Uncle Mordecai found out, told his niece, the Queen, and challenged her with the words copied above.

Mordecai stirred up good trouble by talking to someone with power. Esther stirred up good trouble by risking her life to speak truth to power.

Help us, God of power, to each do our part. Amen

--Ellen Green

Friday, March 19, 2021

Becky Johnstone, My Own Meditations on Psalm 111

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

Follow him in all he does and in his righteousness that he can reveal his glory and majesty for us. For his righteousness never fails.

He provides for our physical needs.
He keeps his promises.
He gives wealth.
He is just and good.
What he tells me to do WORKS!
He had paid the debt for our sins for us to enter paradise.

His name is holy and worth following.
We muse revere the Lord to get true wisdom.
We must obey him to get the rewards of true wisdom.
Give thanks as we fellowship.
Be joyful as we ponder his word.

HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS NEVER FAILS!
Thursday, March 18, 2021

“May I become at all times both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of rugs for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.”

The Dalai Lama

Friday, March 5, 2021

FOR SUCH A TIME
From Eve and After: Old Testament Women in Portrait by The Rev. Thomas John Carlisle

Esther was not seduced into forgetting her heritage by winning the Miss Persia contest (for which she was drafted) or by being awarded the throne or by nine years of affluence and success in secrecy and concealment of her race and her religion.

She must have been tempted to save her own beautiful skin but love and loyalty were the keys to her resistance.

Her strength was matched by her charm and her guile by her heroism.

And at the crucial moment she contrived to crush the adversary of her people.
“We have a God who doesn’t say, ‘Ah...Got you!’ No. God says, ‘Get up.’ And God dusts us off and God says, ‘Try again.’”

“We should not be scared with being confrontational, of facing people with the wrong that they have done. Forgiving doesn’t mean turning yourself into a doormat for people to wipe their boots on.

“Apartheid is an evil as immoral and un-Christian in my view as Nazism.”

--Desmond Tutu

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www.cnn.com
Jesus stirs up good trouble in Luke 11: 37-42 speaking truth to power:

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

Monday, March 8, 2021

“Farm Worker Prayer” by Cesar Chavez (1927-1993)

Show me the suffering of the most miserable; so I will know my people’s plight.
Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.
Help me take responsibility for my own life: so I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others; for in service there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration; so that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let the Spirit flourish and grow; so that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.
Help us love even thouse who hate us; so we can change the world.

Amen
Tuesday, March 9, 2021

If a brother or sister is naked
And lacks daily food,
And one of you says to them,
“Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,”
And yet you do not supply
their bodily needs,
what is the good of that?
So faith by itself, if is has no works, is dead.
But someone will say,
“You have faith and I have works.”
Show me your faith apart from your works,
And I by my works will show you my faith.
For just as the body without the spirit is dead,
So faith without works is also dead.
James 2:15-18, 26 NRSV

Monday, March 15, 2021

Muslim Girls Making Change

If you were able to see these young slam poetry artists perform at Grace, you remember the power and grace of these high school students in their defense of being Muslim, female, young, immigrant, of color and caring about the world. They formed their group to have their voices heard, because who listens to teenagers? Or Muslims? Or Girls? Their small beginning of starting in the Young Writer’s Project in VT rippled out to their international fame and national and international awards. They found their voice together and raised their voices as one for justice and understanding and stirring up conversations about race, ethnicity, social status, justice and faith.

Two of their most famous poems are “Wake Up America” and “Chameleon” – you can seem them perform on YouTube.

God of all with many names, We give thanks for the courage and message and challenge from young people in our midst. Amen
Saturday, March 13, 2021

When I moved to DC in 2007, I attended a demonstration against the Iraq War. I went with some college friends from Oberlin who were also living in DC. We marched through the streets to the White House.

Our slogan was, “Support our troops – Bring them home!”

There was a group of counter-protesters that were on the sidewalk lining the street, shouting pro-war slogans that they thought also supported the troops.

The most memorable moment was when we marched past a woman who looked very angry and was shouting, “God is love, God is love!” So I shouted back, “Yes, God is love, and we love you!” The angry counter-protester looked taken aback and gasped and said, “Don’t love us!” It felt surreal. Hoping to help her understand what she had just said, we tried to engage her in constructive conversation, but she wouldn’t engage and continued to shout at us.

So we continued on our way, knowing we’d stirred up a little good trouble and hoping it would ripple out to others.

--Rachel Green Cosgrove

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”
— Plato
Thursday, March 11, 2021

Digna Ochoa was a nun and human rights attorney in Mexico. (1964–2001) She was assassinated for her work for peasants’ rights.

“Anger is energy, it’s a force. If an act of injustice doesn’t provoke anger in me, it could be seen as indifference, passivity. It’s injustice that motivates us to do something, to take risks, knowing that if we don’t, things will remain the same.

Translation: I won’t live with fear. There are others who have suffered more, and their stories must be told.

Friday, March 12, 2021

What kind of good trouble did Jesus stir up? Well, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 43-45) Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your creator in heaven who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

That caused a lot of good trouble in stirring up the status quo and getting people to think differently about their neighbors. And it’s really relevant for now!
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And one of you says to them,
“Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,”
And yet you do not supply
their bodily needs,
what is the good of that?
So faith by itself, if is has no works, is dead.
But someone will say,
“You have faith and I have works.”
Show me your faith apart from your works,
And I by my works will show you my faith.
For just as the body without the spirit is dead,
So faith without works is also dead.
-James 2:15-18, 26 NRSV

Monday, March 15, 2021

Muslim Girls Making Change

If you were able to see these young slam poetry artists perform at Grace, you remember the power and grace of these high school students in their defense of being Muslim, female, young, immigrant, of color and caring about the world. They formed their group to have their voices heard, because who listens to teenagers? Or Muslims? Or Girls? Their small beginning of starting in the Young Writer’s Project in VT rippled out to their international fame and national and international awards. They found their voice together and raised their voices as one for justice and understanding and stirring up conversations about race, ethnicity, social status, justice and faith.

Two of their most famous poems are “Wake Up America” and “Chameleon” – you can seem them perform on YouTube.

God of all with many names, We give thanks for the courage and message and challenge from young people in our midst. Amen
Jesus stirs up good trouble in Luke 11: 37-42 speaking truth to power:

*When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.*

*Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.*

*“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.*

---

**“Farm Worker Prayer” by Cesar Chavez (1927-1993)**

*Show me the suffering of the most miserable; so I will know my people’s plight.*
*Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.*
*Help me take responsibility for my own life: so I can be free at last.*
*Grant me courage to serve others; for in service there is true life.*
*Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with other workers.*
*Bring forth song and celebration; so that the Spirit will be alive among us.*
*Let the Spirit flourish and grow; so that we will never tire of the struggle.*
*Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.*
*Help us love even thouse who hate us; so we can change the world.*

Amen
“We have a God who doesn’t say, ‘Ah...Got you!’ No. God says, ‘Get up.’ And God dusts us off and God says, ‘Try again.’”

“We should not be scared with being confrontational, of facing people with the wrong that they have done. Forgiving doesn’t mean turning yourself into a doormat for people to wipe their boots on.

“Hate is a cancer that will eat you up if you let it.”

“Apartheid is an evil as immoral and un-Christian in my view as Nazism.”

--Desmond Tutu

[Image]


www.cnn.com

Wednesday, March 17, 2021 (Baptist hymnal)

Once to Every Man and Nation

1. Once to every man and nation
   Comes the moment to decide;
   When he shall stand at the bar
   Of his own works to receive.

2. Then in the strife of truth
   With falsehood, for the good or evil side;
   Ere the base-born foe
   Shall gain the ground of his pride.

3. By the light of burning trains
   Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
   With the cross that turns not back;
   Ere our wrongs extend one track.

4. Tho’ the cause of evil nation
   Comes the moment to decide;
   When he shall stand at the bar
   Of his own works to receive.

Blest is the man who faith unearths
And more than faith, he loves;
With the cross that turns not back;
Ere our wrongs extend one track.

Words: James Russell Lowell
Music: John Zundel

www.cnn.com
“May I become at all times both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of rugs for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.”

The Dalai Lama

FOR SUCH A TIME
From Eve and After: Old Testament Women in Portrait by The Rev. Thomas John Carlisle

Esther was not seduced into forgetting her heritage by winning the Miss Persia contest (for which she was drafted) or by being awarded the throne or by nine years of affluence and success in secrecy and concealment of her race and her religion.

She must have been tempted to save her own beautiful skin but love and loyalty were the keys to her resistance.

Her strength was matched by her charm and her guile by her heroism.

And at the crucial moment she contrived to crush the adversary of her people.
For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? -Esther 4:14

The book of Esther in the Old Testament is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman. It’s a quick and important read. Spoiler alert: Esther is the superhero!

The King of Persia became angry at his wife and banished her. Then he held the equivalent of the Prince’s Ball in Cinderella and chose Esther to be his new wife. He didn’t realize she was a Jew. The king’s right-hand man, Haman, hated the Jews and plotted to kill all of the ones in the Persian Empire. Esther’s Uncle Mordecai found out, told his niece, the Queen, and challenged her with the words copied above.

Mordecai stirred up good trouble by talking to someone with power. Esther stirred up good trouble by risking her life to speak truth to power.

Help us, God of power, to each do our part. Amen

---

Becky Johnstone, My Own Meditations on Psalm 111

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

Follow him in all he does and in his righteousness that he can reveal his glory and majesty for us. For his righteousness never fails.

- He provides for our physical needs.
- He keeps his promises.
- He gives wealth.
- He is just and good.
- What he tells me to do WORKS!
- He had paid the debt for our sins for us to enter paradise.

His name is holy and worth following.
We must reverence the Lord to get true wisdom.
We must obey him to get the rewards of true wisdom.
Give thanks as we fellowship.
Be joyful as we ponder his word.

HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS NEVER FAILS!
Spring – Vernal Equinox

Thank you Creator for the Equinox
Equal parts sunshine and starlight
Stirring up new life and energy to spring forth
Equal parts winter and spring
Stirring up good trouble in our re-turning to the light
Equal parts clarity and mud season
Stirring up messiness and purpose
With your guidance and prodding.
Stir us up to be awake, woke and ready to work for you.
Amen

--Ellen Green

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

In Mark’s gospel, the oldest of the gospels, Jesus stirs up more good trouble. Mark 3:1-6:

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

God of good trouble and trouble-makers, show us as a community how to risk for your world. Amen
VT Town Meeting Day

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

In a democracy, our voice is our vote, and it is informed by our faith. It is also informed by our research into the candidates and what they stand for. Remember to vote today and celebrate our ability to give our faith voice as we do so! Let’s stir up some good trouble in our towns and state.

Monday, March 22, 2021

From Janice Prindle

One way we can stir up good trouble:

“One way we can stir up good trouble:

“Expecting Black people to fix racism is like asking the environment to fix global warming. The solution is that white people need to hold other white people accountable.”

*Tabitha Moore, founder of Rutland chapter, NAACP on Vermont Conversation, VT Digger, Feb.5, 2021*
We saw this beautiful chandelier (see photo) on the way home from Burlington the other day. It’s called the “Apothecary”, which means “a place to put something up”. I love the design and studied it for a time. The curvaceous bottles are empty but each one is paired with an intense light shining down into them from above. The bottles transmit/reflect/refract the light down and in all directions; they almost seem to shimmer.

What a metaphor for the spiritual life! If we empty ourselves of all our preconceived notions, fears, anxieties and complaints, we become open to receiving “light from above”. Also known as the light of God, wisdom, grace, and mercy. Then we can spread that light out into the world, sharing with others, our families, our friends and with strangers. We can actually become a “conduit of grace” by sharing God’s light and love in our community. What a blessing!

The next time you are feeling anxious, frightened, sad or upset, ask God to remove your fears and replace them with his love and light from above. Notice what happens, imagine His radiance flowing into and through you to those around you. Ephesians 5:8

By Margaret Franklin

P.S. I am trying to live this by: listening to yet standing my ground against a parent who does not like the social justice focus of my high school English curriculum; teaching the White Privilege Course here at Grace; coordinating a 7th-12th grade Martin Luther King Jr. Social Justice Afternoon at Woodstock Union High School despite protests from a couple of colleagues and students who called it a “waste of time” or “the wrong approach”; trying to understand and build bridges through our common humanity to those who feel differently than I do due to their political or belief systems; being the advisor for the Social Justice Club at Woodstock Union High School; and being on the board of Bridge to Rutland, seeking to help asylum seekers. None of us can do everything but everyone can do something. My belief in Christ invites action to live with courage and grace.

Michelle Fountain
Saturday, February 27, 2021

**Good Trouble Reflection**
by Michelle Fountain

Dear Comforter,

Help me to be uncomfortable.
Let me listen
when I yearn to speak.
Push me to learn
when I think I know enough.
Make me speak
when it is easier to remain silent.
Empower me to act against injustice,
rather than rest in my privilege.

Allow me to hear
those who disagree with me.
Help me find
ways to build bridges, not fences.
Teach me to welcome
all abundantly in your name.

Compel me to lean into
the discomfort of good trouble,
and comfort me in doing so.

For, “I can do everything through
Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Amen

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

**Stirring up Trouble**

It seems like trouble is all around us. Between Covid, your children, grandchildren, neighbors, friends, and Grace Church Community, we are being shaken daily by all the trouble in our world! What was before Covid, our lives are permanently shaken. Each person can relate to the many ways they are moving forward and to new beginnings. The mask to keep us safe, the image of the Red Sea parted and the people going forth into a new land. As each of us settles into this new place, God is there with us. We need only to reach out – he is waiting for us!

Take a moment and look out a window at all God has created and trust that we will be safe and with God. Most of all we all have to find that place where we are no longer frightened, scared, feeling loss, or just waiting and accepting where we are at this time. Jesus loves us just the way we are.

--Diana Robinson
Cross That Line

Naomi Shihab Nye (2005) – From Janice Prindle

Paul Robeson stood on the northern border of the USA and sang into Canada where a vast audience sat on folding chairs waiting to hear him. He sang into Canada. His voice left the USA when his body was not allowed to cross that line.

Remind us again, brave friend.
What countries may we sing into?
What lines should we all be crossing?
What songs travel toward us from far away to deepen our days?

Grace Congregational UCC Mission Statement

Striving to follow Jesus, we seek to:
Cultivate a community of intentional & abundant welcome
Celebrate our diversity
Love, support, and care for each other and God’s creation
Serve all humankind, both locally and globally
Advocate for justice, reconciliation and healing

YOU ARE WELCOME
Whoever you are and wherever you are on life’s journey, YOU are invited to join us at Grace Church! We are an Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ and we welcome all people without regard to race, age, economic condition, disability or sexual orientation.

Bravely inclusive with open doors
Boldly caring with open hearts
Broadly spiritual with open minds

This is who we publicly say we are on our website.
Let us take these words to heart, ponder them, parse them, and apply them to our moving forward, knowing that following what we say will certainly stir up good trouble.
Thursday, February 25, 2021

Becky Johnstone, Scripture and Reflection on “Stirring Up Good Trouble”

Luke 19:45-48

Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants from their stalls. He told them, “The scriptures declare, ‘My temple will be a place of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves.’”

After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading Priests, the teachers of the religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said.

Jesus acted out in the open here for Holy reasons … he didn’t have a behavior problem. Some of the religious leaders were jealous of this, as Jesus exercised true holiness and justice. Biblical history has shown this happens to ALL true believers as they/we represent Jesus in this life. (starting with Abel, son of Adam and Eve).

Friday, March 26, 2021
Saturday, March 27, 2021

Passover

As Jews, we tell the story of yetziat mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt, to remind ourselves annually that our people were enslaved in a land not our own. The classical Ashkenazi haggadah text goes even further. It declares that:

Be’chol dor va’dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo ke’ilu hu yatzah miMitzrayim

“In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt.”

More than just ritual observance, we are directed to feel in our own bodies what it might have been like to escape from slavery to freedom. The Exodus story asserts unapologetically that oppression and injustice can and must end, and it lays the foundation for the Jewish vision of a just society. (from Haggadot.com)

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

In John 4: 7-14, Jesus stirs up good trouble at the well:

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” 13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

God, please give to us this life-giving water. Show us how to ripple it through our community for all. Amen
Tuesday, February 23, 2021

As followers of Jesus the prophet who stood up and told truth to power,

We can stand up and make our voices heard through our actions.

Oh God, let your light and love shine through us as we work to make your world a world of Peace and Justice and Truth.

--Ellen and Russ Green

Monday, March 29, 2021

**Stirring up Trouble Together** – By Russ Green

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Parallel Entities</th>
<th>Appear Separated By Great Distance When Viewed From Close By</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But</td>
<td>Stand Back And They Become Closer</td>
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<td>Then</td>
<td>Sight Down Their Length And They Merge</td>
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<td>After</td>
<td>Railing Against Each Other They Rally Together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joining</td>
<td>A Common Track Of Strength And Immortality</td>
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Tuesday, March 30, 2021

**Murdale** was raised in the southern Reformed Presbyterian tradition which certainly was not accepting of women ministers.

When Murdale was eleven years old she stood in the pulpit of Uncle Boyce’s church asking God “Do you want me to do this?” Suddenly, the response from a powerful voice: “Murdale Cameron! Get out of that pulpit – no female foot has ever defiled it.” Murdale knew that it was not God speaking. It was Uncle Boyce.

Despite Uncle Boyce’s reprimand, Murdale went on to **Stir Up a history of Good Trouble** beginning in 1955 by becoming a woman minister in the Congregational Church. She served several small Congregational/UCC churches in Vermont from 1955 to 1977.

As a minister in the United Church of Christ Murdale seriously **Stirred Up Good Trouble** by counseling Conscientious Objectors during the Viet Nam Conflict, assisting several to successfully serve the United States in alternative peaceful service.

Murdale also **Stirred Up Good Trouble** by collaborating with local Roman Catholic clergy to organize an Ecumenical Discussion Group for couples as well as an Ecumenical Religious Education Program for local youth. Ultimately both programs positively changed lives.

As the the organizer of the Killington-Pico Area Ecumenical Project (KPAEP) Murdale **Stirred Up plenty of Good Trouble** among local church leadership in addition to providing a lot of good information regarding Ministry in Leisure and Recreation Settings still in use today as:examed by the Roman Catholic and UCC communities continuing to share worship space for 50+ years.

Murdale became the first woman appointed to serve as a Conference Minister in the United Church of Christ. She **Stirred Up lots of Good Trouble** while change-making as Conference Minister for the Minnesota Conference UCC from 1981 to 1989.

Today most of us live quite comfortably with the **Good Trouble stirred up** by Murdale, but at the time – not so much!

*Murdale was a member of Grace Congregational Church United Church of Christ from 1950 to the time of her death in 2013.*

---Beverly Anderson

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Monday, February 22, 2021

I have made music all my life, starting in the “Cherub” choir at age 5. Then came the piano lessons (not a great experience) and at age 12, my pipes.

I have also stood up for what I feel is right most of my life, starting at about the same age – I saved a frog from being eaten by a garter snake, with my dad’s help. No animals were hurt in that rescue operation.

As I got older my actions focused on social justice – working in the Sanctuary movement in the 1980’s, writing letters to the editor on a variety of justice issues, taking part in peace demonstrations at the local, state and national level, testifying at the state level for education, and being a union leader working for safety in the local schools for 18 years. Each of these actions had a cost, but each was a response to what I felt as a call. I still hear the call and try to respond.

Working for social justice isn’t always easy, but with the support of family and a church home, it is something to celebrate. **Stirring up good trouble** is better in community, with music to give the soul joy in the good work.

This hat was given to me for my music making and union work.

--Ellen Green
Saturday, February 20, 2021

Stewards – by Russ Green

Though meant to be caretakers,
   We tear asunder.
Though held responsible,
   We pillage and plunder.
War is declared on land and on air,
   On fresh and on salt water everywhere,
   On wolves and on sharks,
   On community parks,
   On baby seals and on whales,
   On Manx cat tails.
Whether real or imagined, helpless or not,
   We will fight it ‘cause it’s there,
   And never even care
   If it’s gone when we’re done.
But we caretakers take no care;
   We only take whatever is there;
   A sad testimonial to such supposed intelligence.
To tear asunder; it makes one wonder
   Where reason resides,
   Or perhaps it hides.
Let’s look while time remains;
   Maybe salvage county lanes
   And lyric strains
   And vast food chains...
   And defenseless friends.

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Borrowed Trouble – by Russ Green

Some of us live as though we own life,
   But life is only borrowed;
   Borrowed for several decades, we hope;
   A 99-year lease sometimes;
   Sometimes so painfully short;
   But always returned.

When we borrow something,
   We try to be more careful with it
   Than we are with what we own.
   When returned, it should be in
   The same condition as when we
   Received it.

We receive life in such perfect shape;
   Yet so fragile, so easily spoiled.
   Still, we can try to care for
   This borrowed time;
   Returning it only slightly dented,
   But also chipped—

Chips of life we have given to others,
   To nature, to the extension of time...
   And life.
Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021

12 Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? 13 You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are correct, for so I am. 14 So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. 16 Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. [John 13:12-17]

Jesus, as Servant of All, shocked his disciples by performing a lowly task of humble hospitality. He requested that they become humble servants of all, and in so doing, stirred up some good trouble. He turned the status quo upside down! That a teacher should serve the disciple was not normal in that society.

O God, show us how to turn someone’s world upside down through our humble hospitality in your name. Amen
Thursday, February 18, 2021

Coronavirus – the same virus that gives us the common cold.
Covid19 – the newest form of this virus that is becoming a terrifying pandemic.

Those words are from last year’s devotion for the day after Ash Wednesday. And here we are a year later, still in the thick of the pandemic, but with more hope now that there are vaccines.

The person who has been stirring up good trouble since the beginning is Dr. Anthony Fauci. As a leading epidemiologist, he has been the voice of truth about the pandemic that has infected 27 million people in the US and killed over 470,000 Americans. He has spoken out despite derision, written and verbal personal attacks, death threats and the threat of being fired. And yet he consistently spoke truth to power. His faith in science, truth and God allowed him to stir up good trouble in troubling times.

It is hard to speak truth to power…even in small things. However, that is what God calls us to do. We are the voice for God, who is still speaking.

Good Friday, April 2, 2021

By now it was about midday and a darkness fell over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus gave a loud cry and said. “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”; and with these words he died. The centurion saw it all and gave praise to God. “Beyond all doubt,” he said, “this man was innocent.”

The crowd who had assembled for the spectacle, when they say what had happened, went home beating their breasts. – Luke 23:44-48

O Creator God,

Even when we are late to recognize you in the people around us, let us do so and speak out for justice and peace. Amen
Holy Saturday, April 3, 2021

57 As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. 58 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. 59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. [Matthew 27:57-61]

And so the women watched and waited, and Joseph of Arimathea waited elsewhere. They were isolated and frightened and bereft. And they believed that Jesus would stir up good trouble one more time!

Creator God,

Help us wait with expectation of the invitation to stir up good trouble in your name. Make us ready to act and invite others to your love, justice and peace.

Amen

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Excerpts from the HuffPost website regarding Ash Wednesday:

Q: I don’t remember reading about Ash Wednesday in the Bible. Where did the practice come from?

A: That’s true; there is no mention of Ash Wednesday in the Bible. But there is a tradition of donning ashes as a sign of penitence that predates Jesus. In the Old Testament, Job repents “in dust and ashes,” and there are other associations of ashes and repentance in Esther, Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Q: When can you wash the dirt off your face?

A: No one is required to keep the ashes on his or her face after the ritual. But some Christians choose to, perhaps as a reminder to themselves that they are mortal and fallible, while others may choose to leave them on as a witness to their faith in the hope others will ask about them and open a door to sharing their faith.

When our actions cause others to ask us about our faith, that is stirring up good trouble!
Lent 2021
Daily Devotionals
By the Grace Community