

# PILGRIM'S PROGRESS



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PILGRIM CHURCH A UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATION

April 24th, 2022

## BREATHE!

By Pastor Paul Eknes-Tucker

For so long it seems like we have been holding our breath. Two years ago Pilgrim made the decision that we had to find a new way to thrive. We sought divine guidance and weighed possible alternatives, knowing that how we had done things in the past was not going to take us to the future. *We prayed. We searched. We opened ourselves to being different, even when we didn't know what that would mean.* A chance – or should I say “*chance*” – discussion with Pastor JR of Covenant Church blossomed into a new future that looked differently than either of our congregations imagined. We worked through the process of what our partnership could look like, faced all the obstacles that threatened to undo our progress, and both congregations approved moving forward together. In January of 2020, Covenant moved into our shared space at the United Church Center and we collectively *exhaled* at the amazing moment we just lived through with **God's grace**. *We could breathe again... and then the pandemic hit.*

By March of 2020 we were figuring out how to “*do*” and “*be*” church in a pandemic where we could not touch each other or breathe in the space of another. For months we could not be in person for worship or meetings, so we stepped into the unknown of Zoom and Streaming technology. It stretched us in ways we didn't know were possible. We held our breath about whether we could survive COVID. What would church

be like when we couldn't be in the same room or greet each other without social distancing and masks? Through the leadership of John Williams, our technological capabilities multiplied. Volunteers stepped up to learn how to use the technology. We stepped out into this new way of being church and we have been blessed. We have found new expertise among our people, learned new skills, embraced Book Club in the garden and worship through a camera. We could breathe again.

Now, as I write these words, COVID is at its lowest levels in Alabama since the very beginning days of the pandemic. We know that could change at any time or that some other challenges could appear, but this time we are not holding our breath. This time we have more confidence that the grace that surprised us and equipped us in the past is ready to see us through whatever may present itself in this next moment. We just finished Holy Week and Easter worshipping in person and on line, coordinating joint events with our UCC sibling congregations for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, finding our abilities to reach beyond our walls in ways that have introduced the ministry of Pilgrim to hundreds more people than we were ever to reach before the pandemic.

breathe  
deeply

**I am** not one of those Christians who believes that God causes bad things to make us grow. **I believe** God equips us when we need to grow – when we need to change and try new things and risk “*not getting it right but figuring out how to make it work.*” So, this Easter season, I wish you the very best of God's amazing grace in your lives. I encourage you to breathe in this fresh moment of the Spirit. The future is not ours to know, but whatever the future holds we have the “*Breath of Life*” that has taken us to our present moment and is always willing to sustain us through the next adventures life may present.

**Breathe deeply,  
my friends,  
from the Winds of the  
Spirit and let us  
begin our  
next adventure.**

# CRACKERS WITH ANTHONY

By Teresa Moran

***Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2***

Easter morning 2021 could not have been better. Waking up to chocolate eggs and bunnies and a beautiful weather day. The super special part of Easter 2021 was that it was different from Easter 2020. 2020, the year COVID-19 shut down the world. The churches were still figuring out how to keep the body alive when all of a sudden Easter arrived.

Easter doesn't recognize pandemics, I guess. Easter 2021, special in many ways but, especially, in that we met in person with folks we used to see at least every week. For a year we had to settle for meeting remotely with connections (Zoom) that weren't always as faithful as old friends.

So, on Easter 2021, masks on, we met in the beautiful church garden. The lesson was encouraging. And the communion...well, I've had better wine but, never shared with better company. Elbow peace-passing was enough to bring a tear. Yeah...Easter couldn't have been better unless Jesus in the flesh had showed up...

I love trying to do things that I'm not sure I can do so every year I look for an opportunity. It used to be marathons and ultra-marathons and Grand Canyon hikes...alas, the knees....In 2020, I had seen a billboard advertising something called

"Trailblaze Challenge". Hmm...sounds interesting. So, I googled it. The event involves raising money for Make-A-Wish Alabama for the privilege of hiking 26.3 miles in one day at Mt. Cheaha. Right up my alley. In 2020 I decided my knees needed to get better before hiking so far so I backed out. This year, 2021, I decided my knees weren't going to get any better so why not go for it? I committed.

I am so lucky that I have been able to travel some during the pandemic. The downside is that my

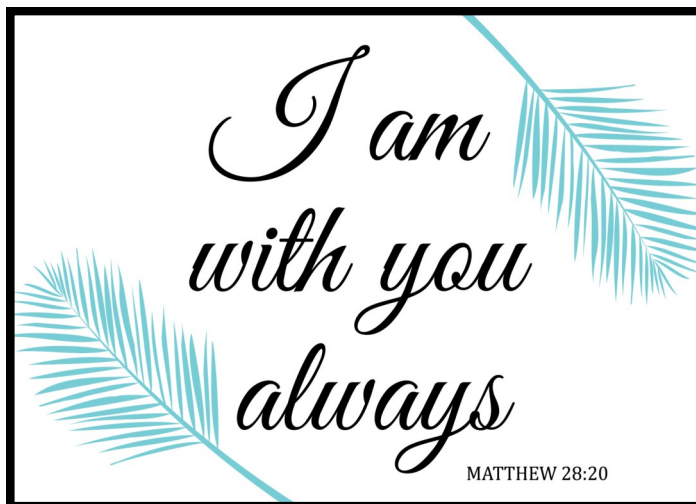
goal on Easter was to walk for a long time.

I set off directly from Easter service to the Rotary trail, RR Park, through UAB, to the Vulcan trail. By the time I reached the east end of the Vulcan trail I decided it was time to sit down and have some of my snacks. I sat on the steps that lead from Richard Arrington Blvd. to the Vulcan. I had thought about going up to the statue, but the gates were still locked. As I sat down and surveyed the place, I saw a young

man standing maybe 20 feet away next to the street. I started eating my orange crackers and peanut butter. As I looked toward the stranger something caught my attention. He was a little "off". (And what I mean by that comment is simply this, 'his movements were jerky and awkward and he kind of looked at me sideways and quickly. The young man seemed uncomfortable. He wasn't raving mad but just

seemed un-typical. ) I spoke to him and asked if he would like to share and he came on over.

He was wearing a jeans outfit-the kind that comes from the store already distressed (read "torn") but the clothes also looked for real worn. He had several necklaces on that had large beads. He accepted half my cracker pack. He sat down. I realized my phone



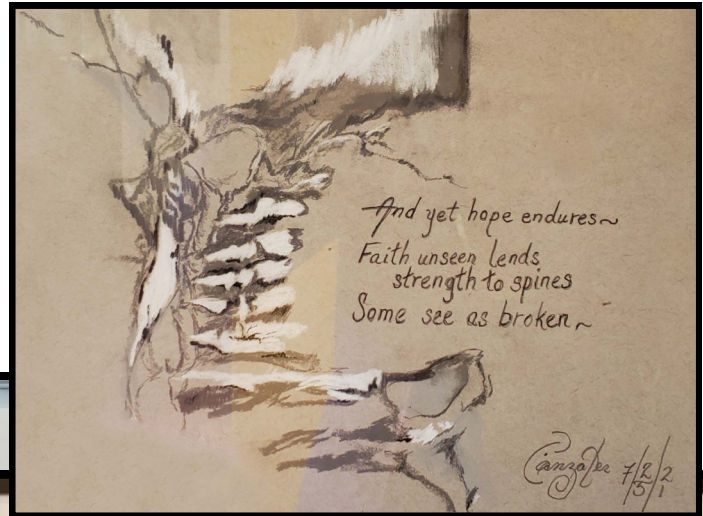
trips made me miss a couple of the organized Make-A-Wish training hikes. So, on Easter 2021, I decided I needed to do my own training hike for as long as I could go. I knew that for the actual event we would have 14 hours to complete the course. The hardest thing about the training so far was that it was kind of monotonous. It required the ability to endure some level of boredom and mostly being alone on a trail. My

*Continued on Page 4...*



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## These are photos from the Art Closing for Rev. Pamela Canzater at Studio 2500 on March 27.



*Every day should be mother's day, but since it just doesn't work that way in the real world, it's nice to have a special day to honor women... and specifically those brave souls who take on the enormous task of motherhood. I can't imagine anything that's quite as intoxicating as watching your newborn baby sleep, the toothy grin of a toddler, or a warm hug from a teenager.*

*The years, days and moments pass so quickly... let's celebrate mother's day with an outpouring of love for all those who have played a maternal role in our lives.*

*Love to ALL! Jennifer & Tammy*



...continued from Page 2.

was lying beside me and tried to keep an eye on it. Maybe this guy would take it. After a few bites of the crackers, he asked if I had water. "Sorry. Only what I've had my mouth on." -in my Camelback.

He was talkative. He tended to run words together and it was difficult to understand all he said. The first thing he said is "A lot of things need to change." I agreed and asked what specifically he was referring to. At this point I realized that the conversation was not an easy give and take. His right eye tended to wander and would often end up pointing to his nose. He kept the same expression. He was serious/intense. I think he said he was going to church. I told him I had been earlier. He told me his grandmother owned a church and when I asked where, he pointed to the southwest. He said it was a Holiness church. My attempt at levity went over his head when I said those holiness folks know how to get down and celebrate. Guess the communication difficulties went both ways.

I think he said he stays in Center Point. He definitely said he does not like Birmingham. He said he was born and raised in Homewood. I heard him say, "Chapman". "Pardon?" I said. "Anthony Chapman. That's my name." I told him my name. Then he asked a question that I don't often get asked...

I had a friend with no filter who once commented when I entered an event, 'Here's Teresa, dressed like a bag lady.' Sometimes when I take bags and pick up trash on my walks I find that passersby won't make eye contact. I guess they think I'm houseless. Anyhow, what Anthony asked was, "Do you live on the street?" It took a second for me to get the question. "No. I have a house...privileged..." I mumbled. I felt awkward knowing how good I have it. I guess I thought he might have some comment about the fairness of the fact that I have a house, but he didn't criticize me.

I had sat long enough and needed to get on with my hiking, so I said I was heading on and we both got up. The Vulcan Park ranger was just opening the gate and I wondered if he thought I had spent the night on the stairs. I thanked An-

thony for sharing my snack. He walked ahead of me going in the same direction. He once went into the middle of the street as a car was passing and sort of postured then returned to the easement. He looked back at me a couple of times and I

thought he might be going to come back but he didn't. I was a little concerned that he might be paranoid and think I was following him. I decided to try not to go the same way as he because I was afraid I might scare him. Our paths parted and he seemed to wave at me.

I kept walking. Botanical gardens, Zoo, a chat with friends at Starbucks, Port-a-potty at the soccer field, Jemison trail, Memory Lane, Montclair road... Five hours after starting I was at my house. My house....Yes, Easter 2021 could not have been better unless...unless...Jesus in the flesh had showed up. I'm telling you this because I think you understand. He showed up. ***Pastor Paul told us he knows Jesus lives because Jesus is us. He was right.***



**FOR EVERY  
MINUTE YOU  
ARE ANGRY,  
YOU LOSE 60  
SECONDS OF  
HAPPINESS**

**TRUST**  
in the  
*Lord*  
**WITH ALL  
your  
heart**  
(Proverbs 3:5)

### **PILGRIM BIRTHDAYS FOR THE MONTH OF MAY**



Bob Greene ~ May 4th  
Austin Eargle ~ May 7th  
Carol Schulz ~ May 10th  
Ron Vander Schaaf ~ May 14th  
Gary Abel ~ May 17th  
Cedric Rudolph ~ May 22nd



### **PILGRIM ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE MONTH OF MAY**

David & Susanna Precise  
May 22nd

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**IF WE HAVE MISSED YOUR BIRTHDAY, WE APOLOGIZE!  
PLEASE LET US KNOW & WE WILL GLADLY ADD IT!**