

We act with great boldness

Kingian Nonviolence Principle 1: “Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.”

Reflecting on today's verses, I write as one who is privileged not to experience systemic harm. I recall the acts of courage and boldness that invite us to witness a truth from which we all too often hide our attention. I am thinking of Malala Yousafzei (who was shot for going to school as a girl and continues to advocate for education for girls), Darnella Frazier (who filmed and posted the murder of George Floyd), Mamie Till (the mother of Emmett Till who insisted on an open casket for her son so that the world could see the brutality of racial violence in the US), and many others who acted to show us the harsh realities of oppression. Jesus could be added to this list.

Could the Corinthian church be us? The predominantly white, affluent people trying to do church with neighbors, people who have been shown God's spirit but need to be reminded to act in the spirit. Are we waiting for “letters of recommendation” (2 Corinthians 3:1) before we react or act as God called us? What if we applied 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 to the unveiling of racism in our midst, as the Standing with People of Color study action team invites us? What if “we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word” and boldly act in the face of injustice and oppression, confess our complicity, work to receive and discover the truth? What if, “by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God,” and become a Beloved Community of faith that repents and repairs and grows in our relationships as siblings in Christ?

We are ministers of a new covenant, a priesthood of all believers. Let us grow in faith so that we may bear witness to the way of Christ.

—Marie Benner-Rhoades
Trumansburg, New York

“Since, then, we have such a hope, *we act with great boldness*” (2 Corinthians 3:12, NRSV). **Today's Bible readings from the lectionary:** Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2; Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a).



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Believe in your heart

On the cover are three house sparrows sitting in a tree. I confess my ambivalence about them. They are rather abundant at my bird feeders. Last year I put up a martin house in hopes of attracting purple martins. But the sparrows arrived first and claimed the space. They are so ordinary-looking, and their song is a repetitive chirp.

I wonder if the early Christians had a similar ambivalence. The apostle Paul seems to hint that they had a preference for people attracted to their house churches. Many came from Jewish backgrounds with all the rich traditions of being a set-apart people. Could they welcome folks into the fold who knew little of the requirements of the Law? Could they trust that a spoken promise of belief in Jesus Christ was enough?

Paul helps them think it through by reminding his Roman friends that believing in the heart is the beginning of discipleship. He assures them that God, the compassionate One, looks on the inside of each person, where the intentions lie. Promises are the beginning. Paul encourages them to trust. These strangers are really friends and have much to offer to the community. Relax, he says. Jews and Greeks are really on the same page. Even Scripture agrees.

Lent is a good season for us to take some time to notice our preferences. Do we unknowingly avoid some folks in our church or community who seem different? Maybe they practice their faith in ways that are unfamiliar. Perhaps they use a different language or have grown up in a different culture. Can we still welcome them and see them as our sisters and brothers? Can we move beyond race and class to find a richer relationship? Just like my house sparrows. How good it is to know that God sees with the heart.

—Ed Poling
Hagerstown, Maryland

“... [B]ecause if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and *believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, *NRSVue*).
Today's Bible readings from the lectionary: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13.

March 9, 2025, First Sunday of Lent. Photo © Jim Miner. Used by permission.
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*Believe in
your heart*

Seek God's face

Call to Worship

from Psalm 27 (NKJV / RVR1960)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
Though an army may encamp against me,
Though war may rise against me,
My heart shall not fear; in this I will be confident.
When you said, "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."
Do not hide Your face from me;
Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help;
Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.
Wait on the Lord; wait, I say, on the Lord!

Jehová es mi luz y mi salvación; ¿de quién temeré?
Jehová es la fortaleza de mi vida; ¿de quién he de atemorizarme?
Aunque un ejército acampe contra mí,
Aunque contra mí se levante guerra,
No temera mi corazón; Yo estaré confiado.
Mi corazón ha dicho de ti: Buscad mi rostro.
Tu rostro buscaré, oh Jehová.
No escondas tu rostro de mí,
No apartes con ira a tu siervo; Mí ayuda has sido.
No me dejes ni me desampares, Dios de mi salvación.
Aguarda a Jehová; Sí, espera a Jehová.

Hymn: "How Great Thou Art"

—Florecita Merlos
Waterford, California

"Come, my heart says, *seek God's face*. LORD, I do seek your face!" (Psalm 27:8, CEB). **Today's Bible readings from the lectionary:** Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36.

March 16, 2025, Second Sunday of Lent. Photo of New and Renew Conference by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford © Church of the Brethren.
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Seek God's face

Among them

Chicago First Church of the Brethren is in a neighborhood that many people consider to be unsafe. There are a lot of locked doors in East Garfield Park.

But First Church has been a presence (and at our best, an open and welcoming one) in this neighborhood for one hundred years. We have strived to "cultivate love, peace, and justice in East Garfield Park, Chicago, and beyond," as our vision statement goes. In the midst of empty lots, our church garden offers a place of respite, beautiful native plants, and tasty fresh veggies. Our building hosts two other congregations for worship and church life, as well as an arts group led by Black women. Not so long ago, hundreds of young people came through the doors every year, young Chicagoans taking part in after-school programming, and out-of-town youth groups visiting to learn more about the city.

On a recent spring Sunday, we noticed with delight that Chris, Sonji, and John were all wearing yellow, and Danielle snapped a photo of these brilliant folks on the church steps. These smiling faces are wonderfully representative of this small but mighty congregation striving to follow Jesus. In a city that, for many, is synonymous with violence, we are working to bring God's peace to the neighborhood, the city, and the world.

—Heidi Gross
Chicago, Illinois

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, '*Peace be with you*'" (John 20:19, *NRSVue*). **Today's Bible readings from the lectionary:** Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31.

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Peace be with you