



PresPress

December 2024

Presbyterian Church of Novato, 710 Wilson Ave., Novato, CA 94947

“Freeing Jesus”

‘Who do you say that I am?’ —Matthew 16:15

“My knees hurt. The cushion at the marble altar almost did not matter. I could feel the cold in my legs, the ache of unanswered prayers. “Where are you, God?” I asked.

Silence.

I looked up at Jesus in full triptych glory, surrounded by angels, robed in cobalt blue against a gilt background, shimmering sanctity. The small chapel in the great cathedral was one of my favorite places to pray, mostly because of this Jesus. Today, however, I was restless as I gazed intently at the massive icon of Christ. Usually, the image drew me deeper toward God, and the railing where I knelt was a place of awakening and wisdom. “Where are you, God?” I asked again. Silence.

“God?” A quiet plea, really, the most incomplete of prayers.

“Get me out of here,” a voice replied. Was someone speaking to me? I looked behind, around.

“Get me out of here,” the voice said again.

I stared up at the icon. “Jesus? Is that you?”

“Get me out of here,” I heard again, more insistent now.

“But Lord . . .”

The chapel fell silent, but I know I heard a divine demand for freedom. I was not sure what to think, but I also did not want to tell the priest who was wandering up the aisle. I doubted the Washington National Cathedral would take kindly to the Son of God looking for the exit. And I was not sure what to do. Smuggling an altarpiece out of the building was not going to happen. Instead, I got up and nearly bolted out, all the while envisioning how I might rescue Jesus from the cathedral. I felt bad leaving him behind” (Bass, Diana Butler, [Freeing Jesus](#)).

Jesus is what it’s all about. Jesus is the heart of all that we know and believe about God. Jesus, in some inexplicable way, brings us life.

But it’s no secret in recent years, people have left the church in droves. People, for various reasons, have left institutional religion behind. And one of the strange things about this exodus, is that many people, while leaving behind the institution, still find value and meaning in Jesus.

Why?

Inevitably, organized religion creates boundaries, walls, systematic theologies, orthodoxy all as means to do 2 things: 1) to better understand, know, worship, and serve God, and 2) to do so together as a community. Creating these boundaries is necessary for communal life, but the challenge in doing so is that the mysterious and the inexplicable nature of God is given bounds, walls, and, in a sense, confinement. Language and how we talk about God in affect, confines God. Doctrine and orthodoxy limit God's mysterious nature. The organization of communal life creates bureaucracy & systems of power. The Jesus of tradition, doctrine, and orthodoxy becomes well established, though unique in different traditions. But that 'confined' Jesus is just a shadow of the God of the universe.

For Diana Butler Bass, in her book, "Freeing Jesus," she shares how people who leave organized Christianity are often still drawn to or still seek out Jesus, but not to the shackled, limited God of orthodoxy, rather the Jesus of personal experience; the Jesus that walks with us every day, that we encounter in our personal life stories. The Jesus of experience is often pushed aside or tamed by powers of organized Christianity, because the Jesus of experience causes us to ask too many questions, to challenge long held assumptions and assertions about 'right' understanding and belief. The Jesus of experience can seem like a threat to organized Christianity, a destabilizing factor for community together. It can seem like a hyper individualistic, 'Burger King' model for God; I can have Jesus my own way. And, to an extent, there is some truth to that. We tend to make God in our own image when left alone.

But the Jesus of personal experience cannot simply be discounted. We all experience Jesus in our lives in unique, and yet powerful ways. The Jesus of personal experience is not meant to be confined to one person, but to be shared, through our life stories, with others, and for their life stories and encounters with Jesus to be shared in return. It's in this organic, relational dance of life stories together that broadens our understanding of who Jesus is and who we are, and it does so without erecting walls and without generalized assumptions.

This Advent Season, as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus, I wonder if we might make room in our hearts for the Jesus of experience. Oh, yes, I'm sure many of you are thinking about your close relationship with Jesus, your own experiences with the God of the universe in your lives. You may be thinking about that Jesus at work in the Church, particularly in our community of faith @ PCN. But here's the challenge...what if the God of the universe, the Christ who came into the world defying all assumed bounds of heaven and earth, is also experienced by others in unique and vastly different ways? What if God's love and grace is bigger than we assume? What if millions of people still experience and walk with Jesus but in ways we don't fully know about in the institutional church.

What if we make room in our hearts to hear one another's stories of Jesus at work both from within and outside organized Christianity? What if we again began to embrace a mysterious, inexplicable God, whose love is even more than we can fully know?

Perhaps then, we, who are Church, might listen anew to the voices of the heavenly hosts who continue to cry throughout creation, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom [God] favors!”

With Joy & Peace,
Pastor Adam



Session

Session Highlights – November

At the November 20, 2024, meeting:

- Session approved sponsoring Tonya Church as a Cimmision Ruling Elder student.
- Discuss the youth programs and how they can be improved to serve more youth.
- Received an update on the QPR training session. Sixty-one people have completed the training.
- Session welcomed new Director of Music Ministry, Art Maramba.

Kathy Takemoto, Clerk of Session



PCN honored its veterans during worship on Sunday, November 10th. Thank you to all who have served.

Ray Carlson, Army
 Ramona Chipman, Army
 Bob Douglass, Army Air Corps, Air Force
 Alan Dunham, Naval Reserve
 Jim Emrich, Coast Guard
 Don Erba, National Guard
 Carl Fehring, Army Air Corps
 Garrick Fong, Army
 Jon Hanlein, Navy
 Fred King, Army
 John Marks, Marine Corps
 Janet Morales, Air Force

Michael Moser, Coast Guard
 Gail Penfield, Army
 Art Plumstead, U.S. Public Health Service
 Donald Powell, Air Force
 Mike Robinson, Air Force
 Ray Shanahan, Army
 Greg Smith, Air Force
 Bruce Stahley, Army
 Don Taylor, Naval Reserve, Army
 Bill Walker, Coast Guard
 Bill Wolff, Air Force
 Stan Wood, Air Force

MISSION

Where your treasure is, there your heart will lie also. ~Matthew 6:21

Below you will find evidence of the many places where your hearts, time and money are making a difference, both locally and abroad.

DECEMBER MISSION OPPORTUNITY!

Please visit our Christmas Sharing Tree



in the narthex



& pick up a tag(s) to ***Bring Joy and Hope***

to the Moms and Kids at Gilead House

Please return the gifts by December 15th to church



POINSETTAS FOR CHRISTMAS EVE Help us adorn the sanctuary with Poinsettias for Christmas Eve! We will be collecting \$30 donations to purchase poinsettias to adorn the sanctuary on the 4th Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve. Donations can be turned into the church office. Please submit your donations no later than Sunday, December 15th!



FRIENDSGIVING was held on Saturday, November 16. Over 30 people joined the event this year, which included people from the community. Ann Stahley not only graced us with her presence but opened the event in prayer as well.

Everyone enjoyed the food prepared by the Fellowship Team and we are thankful for all the ways we could connect with each other at the event.





Living Nativity

Please join our church family in this special Advent presentation, open to everyone!

Bring your kids, grandkids, neighbors and friends. Celebrate the season. Live animals will be present, donkeys, sheep, camels.

December 15th, 11:15am - 1pm
Presbyterian Church of Novato
710 Wilson Ave
Novato, CA 94947

Donations
Welcome!



Meditation Garden Fundraiser

A big Thank You to everyone who provided a donation for the plantings in the Meditation Garden. Your very generous hearts have helped revive this very special place on our church campus.

with a grateful heart,
Becky Praun/Property Curb Appeal



Your Property Team continues to maintain and enhance the church site. As Autumn goes into full swing and rains are upon us, our tasks change as well.

Don Erba and Bill Walker installed new hand railings on the chancel platform and choir, greatly enhancing safety. Don has drawn up plans to extend the stage and is consulting with Art to ensure a functional space. Work should begin in the new year. We will try to keep the disruption to a minimum.

Jay Haney and Brad Praun have been tending to our new crepe myrtle trees in the island.

Brad and Becky Praun continue to enhance the appearance and functionality of our spaces through chair management and hole covering in Trevitt Hall, as well as improvements in the Bride's Room and the church office.

The team continues to keep apace of regular lighting and plumbing issues with efficiency. We hope to tap into Art's experience as we continue to troubleshoot the Sanctuary light flickering issue. In addition to the upcoming stage extension, we have plans for further property enhancements in 2025.

We look forward to the decorations of our beautiful church for the blessings of the Advent Season.
-James Wood



Troop 200 Annual Luminaria Event



- \$15 /Flat (10 Luminarias)
- Cash, Check or PayPal
- Pre-Sale Orders
- Delivered to Your Home

Important Dates

Sales after Worship

- November 24th
- December 1st

Volunteer Opportunity

You're invited to help assemble luminarias with Scouts & Families

December 14th, PCN 10-2



Prepared. For Life.™

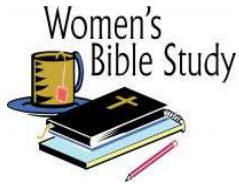
It's time for Troop 200's Annual Luminaria Fundraiser

A luminaria is a small paper bag with a votive candle and sand, for stability. Traditionally, they are set out on entry ways, driveways and sidewalks on Christmas Eve to welcome Christ into the world.

The Scouts will have a table outside of PCN after Worship on November 24th and December 1st. for taking pre-sale orders for Novato residents. They will accept Cash, Check or PayPal. Then, the Scouts will deliver orders to your home prior to the Christmas Holiday.

The Scouts would also like to invite members of the PCN community to help assemble the luminaria at PCN on Saturday, December 14th anytime between 10:00 and 2:00. More hands make little work! Lunch is provided. Any support is appreciated!

BSA Troop 200 is a non-profit organization. This event helps to fund activities and outings that build character and prepare Scouts to actively engage and serve their community.



WBS will not meet Thanksgiving week. Our last class will be December 5 and will recess for the holidays December 12 and resume January 2, 2025.

Spies, Jericho walls tumbling down, trumpets and shouts, battles. Women's Bible Study's first day back is only weeks away. Class meets on zoom on Thursdays from 10-11:30am. Carol Dacquisto invites all the ladies of PCN to this "not to be missed" study of the Old Testament Book of Joshua. Carol has spent her summer researching Joshua and is raring to share her discoveries. Did you know Joshua was commanded by God, face-to-face and considered second to Moses?

If you have questions, contact Margaret Franz-Costello at 415-806-8849 or Karen Carlson at 415-382-9616. New members are always welcome! And keep collecting tabs to raise money for the Shriners Children's Hospital, which has been our faithful project for more than 35 years and helps house visiting families.

Grace and Peace,
Carol Dacquisto, Margaret Franz-Costello and Karen Carlson

Here is the Zoom link and passcode:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81284025735?pwd=VTY4cWFJQWtDTlpUVE9MT0jL1dHdz09>

Meeting ID: 812 8402 5735 Passcode: pcnovato



Join our lively discussion as the Sunday Morning Adult Study Group continues meeting via Zoom at 8:00 a.m. We will be using the David Cook curriculum focusing this fall on Psalms. For information, please call Doris Dooley (415-895-5104) or Karen Carlson (415-382-9616).

Your study leaders are Carol Dacquisto, Larry Dacquisto (415-577-2115), Karen Carlson and Doris Dooley.

Link for the Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82970812537?pwd=eGZESUo3dzQ4NXh3WFFNT3AvQmpDdz09>

Meeting ID: 829 7081 2537 Passcode: pcnovato



REQUESTING A PRAYER BLANKET is easy. Email Tonya Church or Becky Praun. Give us the recipient's first and last name, address, phone number, and what colors they like. We try to send a prayer blanket that is meaningful for the recipient. Questions? Contact Tonya at tonya.church@comcast.net or Becky at beckypraun@yahoo.com.



MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

Come join us for study and fellowship. We meet every **Wednesday at 7:15 a.m.** via Zoom. All men are welcome. To be added to the Zoom contact list, contact Walt Campbell at (415) 497-5157 or email walterlcampbell@aol.com.



Here's an important number to jot down: (415) 472-0911. This is the **non-injury** lift assist phone number from the Novato Fire Department. If you or someone you know has fallen and you can't lift him/her, the fire department will come help!