



**“A LITTLE FARTHER”**  
**SCRIPTURE: PSALM 23; MARK 1: 14-20**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**Sunday, January 24, 2021, Annual Meeting**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."  
As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Word of the LORD.  
Thanks be to God.

---

Jesus always goes “a little farther.” So often when I read this passage, I focus on the Simons and the Andrews and the James and Johns. And I focus on the fact that they just left everything behind--the family business, their community, their livelihood, their identities, their relationships.

I focus on my wonderment at how compelling and radical such a decision was--and then I look at myself and say, “do you have the courage to lay things down, do you have the courage to walk away from what you have known, do you have the courage to say yes when Jesus says follow me.”

But with the help of the GCPC Wednesday afternoon Bible Study, this time the “a little farther” part about Jesus is what stuck with me.

Jesus always goes “a little farther.” As in, he’s never done with us--and there are always ways to step into new lives and to step out in our own lives differently.

And the thing about Jesus is that he doesn’t apologize for pushing us this way--for believing we can go “a little farther,” for seeing something in us that we don’t want to believe about ourselves.

To be completely honest with you all, this part of who Jesus is has saved my life over and over again. Because just like all of you, I get tired. And I get sad. And I get discouraged. And I get fed up and frustrated. And I get angry. And I can feel like giving up.

And 2020 brought with it repeated cycles through all of those feelings for me. I know from the countless conversations I have had with many of you over the last several months, that you are not a stranger to many of these feelings--if not all of them.

And then Jesus comes along and goes “a little farther” and “a little farther” still and we’re invited to follow. Without him ahead of us on the road, where would we be today?

Would we be stronger? Would we be celebrating? Would we be grateful?  
Would we be doing the hard work? Would we be taking care of each other?  
Would we have been able to find joy and laughter and tears and grief  
together? Would we be in a better place than we were this time last year, even  
with all the losses and grief and sadness and struggle?

Without Jesus' "a little farther" would the Session have been able to generate a  
new Mission Statement for Grace Covenant in the middle of a global pandemic  
when we are not even able to meet face to face?

**(put mission statement on the screen) - this will be side by side!**

At GCPC our faith calls us to practice...

Theological CURIOSITY

Moral COURAGE

Abundant COMPASSION

Beloved COMMUNITY

With God's help, we are seeking our transformation  
and the healing of the world.

A More Light congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
and a Supporting Sanctuary Church in Western North Carolina

(read Mission Statement out loud)

It's simple, and so full of invitation and hard work. And it is full of this Spirit of  
Jesus' "a little farther." It's a statement, but it's also a question, it's also an  
aspiration. This is who God is calling us to be, this is who Jesus shows us how  
to be, this is who the Spirit is equipping us to be.

And we couldn't have gotten to this moment, to this place in 2021 with a  
stronger, deeper, growing faith, without asking each other to go "a little  
farther."

Remember some of the ways we've been asking each other--to go a little  
farther, to dig a little deeper within ourselves, to ask each other hard

questions, to let God ask more of us, to believe that we can keep going “a little farther” and “a little farther” still.

### **Video - Sermon Clips Montage (2:46)**

Following Jesus is full of invitations to "go a little farther" than we ever thought we could. How has the Holy Spirit equipped each of us to stretch. Of course, 2020 has so many examples of that for us as a church, as individuals, as a country, as a planet.

Each of you had to "go a little farther" in 2020 in a way you couldn't have predicted.

***How has faith enabled you to go "a little farther" when you thought you couldn't go any farther or when you weren't looking to go any farther.***

I've invited a few GCPC siblings to join me, to share some about how Jesus' “a little farther” has manifested in their lives this past year.

### **(Invited People Turn On Their Cameras and UNMUTE)**

Thank you all for being willing to share some of your story about 2020 with your church family. Your story is really our story! And I am grateful for your willingness to share about how Jesus' “a little farther” has manifested in your life. I've asked each of you to just share a sentence or two about that “a little farther.”

Let's start with Janice. Janice, what a year you had in 2020!

- **(then Janice Kominski can share her answer)**--seminary during a global pandemic while kids are doing school at home.

**(MMS will see how the flow is going. I may add a few words here and there; when each person shares their sentence, they can invite the next person to share)**

- **Amy Kim Kyremes-Parks**--feeling called to a new ministry and moving during a pandemic
- **Jeff Jones**--how much your job has changed; stretching into technology, new ways of doing ministry.

- **Susan Presson**--Dean and John with prostate cancer at the exact same time.
- **Paul Rogers**--Just Funding and deepening relationships--a lot of growing and learning.
- **Annie Cole**--youth group keeping going; being on Session.
- **Debby Vance**--we both had kids who were abroad--the stress of changed plans for our older kids.
- **Marcy Onieal**--impacted by COVID; being a Deacon
- **Liz Huesemann**--Me and White Supremacy initiative
- **Richard Coble**--new baby!

Thank you all so much for these beautiful and vivid manifestations of Jesus' "a little farther" in 2020. And I know there are so many more in our congregation. Maybe some of you are sharing in the chat about some of your "a little farther" examples.

### Image - Flame

Look GCPC, there's that flame again--remember that the Holy Spirit is changing things, moving things, empowering and equipping us.

All of you have a story about going a little farther or a lot farther.

And of things going too far or not far enough.

The life of being a Jesus follower is about a road that has lots of twists and turns, potholes, and tempting exit ramps. A road that can seem deceptively well traveled, but sometimes can mean you and me forging a new path.

Growing our faith muscles requires stretching--leaving things behind, letting go of our tight grip, ceasing to grasp at the same time that we strive for a more beautiful world.

Having a community of fellow sojourners of people going a little farther down the road--risking, exploring, encountering, trusting--well that is the gift of 2020.

A community of faith willing to go a little farther--to keep doing the work of dismantling white supremacy, to keep doing the work of supporting each other and learning new ways of being together, to keep having hard

conversations, to keep risking being vulnerable with each other, to keep centering our lives on the truth of God's transforming love.

I have confessed to you all before that trusting people can be hard for me. And trusting a church can be especially hard. But God didn't let up on guiding me here--and calling me to trust this church, to trust this place and all of you.

The trials and travail of this past year--in our country, on our planet--the pandemics of COVID and anti-blackness and white supremacy--those have been happening simultaneously with trials in my own life--John's cancer diagnosis, my mother's excruciating health challenges, deaths of people I love, walking with my children through this year in their young lives, and serving this church through uncharted territory on every level of who we are.

The amazing thing is that God has given me more and more clarity this past year that being pastor at GCPC is exactly where I am supposed to be. I know more than ever that this is where I am called to be and who God made me to be. That so much in my life before this moment prepared me for such a time as this, even though I could never have imagined challenges like these.

And all of you teach me so much--even when it's hard, even when something you do hurts me or challenges me in ways I don't think I have the energy to deal with, with all that is going on. That's when Jesus' "a little farther" speaks to me again.

And calls me out of my distraction, my busyness, my habits of doing and being, and Spirit equips me once again, to put down my net, to lay down my habits, to let go of safety and normalcy and comfort and go a little farther in response to Jesus' "follow me."

Remember Christmas Eve 2020--when I preached on staying home and leaving home--and Hettie Lou Garland's gift to our church to equip us for live streaming before we even knew what COVID was and on that song that Master KG and Nomcebo wrote before COVID that connected the world during COVID.

That was one of those "a little farther" moments. God kept nudging me to learn that song by heart--a song new GCPC member Marta Alcala-Williams shared with me because it was helping her feel grounded and inspired, and

God kept nudging me to invite all of you into this song about finding a way together.

Jesus was inviting us to find a way to let our mourning turn to dancing.

It was an incarnation proclamation--a dance that says to this painful and promising world--we're still here and we're willing to go farther, and more than a little farther, we're willing to be at home with each other and with ourselves the way Jesus calls us to be--in a way that embodies mutual liberation and the freedom only God's love can give us.

### **Video - Jerusalema (5:43)**

The incarnation proclamation today, in this GCPC annual meeting, is that we are together and stronger in 2021 than we ever dreamed we could be, thanks to Jesus' follow me and the way he never stops calling us "a little farther."

Thanks be to God.