



**“WHAT’S THE BUZZ?”**  
**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 15: 9-17**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**Sunday, May 9, 2021**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

John 15:9-17

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15:15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

15:17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**Video Clip from The Secret Life of Bees (2:14)**

<https://youtu.be/udIvI9s5-wY>

“Every little thing wants to be loved.”

Sounds like a gospel truth to me. And it also sounds like humanity’s steepest learning curve. Jesus spent his three years of ministry trying to convince

anyone who would listen that love--radical, revolutionary, liberating love--that kind of God-given love, is the medicine the world needs to save itself from self-destruction.

Jesus spent his three years of ministry not just talking about love, but embodying it--living and breathing it, sharing it and laying it bare for the whole world to see.

He told humanity that God made us for love. He told humanity that we can only truly be free through love. He told humanity that without love, nothing else matters. And he told humanity that if we love like God loves, then the way we make and keep life together will heal the world.

Love is not simply an emotion or action, love is a way of moving in the world.

Love is a way of life.

The powers that be wouldn't have made such a fuss about Jesus--that is, they wouldn't have taken such violent measures to get rid of him, if his invitation to love was easy, if he was someone who made the powerful rest easy, if he comforted those committed to the Empire.

Jesus' commandment is not about being nice to people. It's about changing the world. It's about changing the way we are together in this world.

The buzz about Jesus back in the day was that he was dangerous--so that means love is dangerous to those who prosper more from hate.

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### **Video - Bees pollinating (0:22) no audio**

A bees' entire anatomy is made for spreading life and growth. They are the world's greatest pollinators--and in a very real sense our lives depend on them.

Their buzzing sound is generated by the 230 beats a second of a bees wings. It is the vibration of purposeful movement, intention, activity.

"It takes a bee 10,000,000 trips to collect enough nectar to make 1 pound of honey."

— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

Their buzz is the sound of their commitment to keep moving for the good of the community.

In Sue Monk Kidd's novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, young Lily's life is consumed with the grief of losing her mother through a tragic course of events and the violence of her father's grief and the barbaric cruelty of the Jim Crow South.

Lily believes she is unlovable.

She embodies a journey we're all on to trust the Divine Mothering force of the universe to truly embrace us and tell us we belong to each other, to the world, to ourselves, and to God.

Ms. August Boatwright told Lily, "You have to find a mother inside yourself. We all do. Even if we already have a mother, we still have to find this part of ourselves inside"

— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

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5 years ago almost to the day today, I got an email from Steve Dykes and Keaton Hill telling me I would be the Pastor Nominating Committee's nominee to be the new Senior Pastor at Grace Covenant.

Of course for several weeks it was confidential as all the presbytery wheels were turning. A few days after the job offer, I got a phone call from a friend who had heard some buzz about GCPC getting ready to call a new pastor. He had known I was in the running, and he was disappointed when the person told him that the next pastor at GCPC would be a man.

This person sharing the buzz also said, "I heard a woman whose husband was an NFL football coach was in the running but she withdrew her name." Who knows where that person had gotten their news--but whatever the source, there was someone out there who was hoping the next pastor of GCPC wouldn't be a woman, and especially a woman like me.

Knowing what I knew to be true, hearing this mistaken buzz was pretty amusing. It certainly threw people off the trail of figuring out who I was before it was announced. But somewhere in that amusing little tidbit, was a remnant

of an energy that can be destructive in churches--that can be stealthy in the way it moves.

Every year since that early May in 2016, around Mother's Day and the church's anniversary, when I got the news that I was being called here to ministry and when the buzz was that the new minister was a man, I've noticed that there is a flare up of destructive energy every year at this time at GCPC. I am not sure why, but it has been consistent every year.

One year it was a hostile note put in the offering plate on Mother's Day--a message for me to stop preaching about GCPC becoming a supporting sanctuary congregation. "That's enough," it said.

Another year it was a person I had to set clear boundaries with who was making this church unsafe with his behavior.

Another year at this time it was outward hostility and hurtful paternalism toward some of our Black and Brown female ministry partners that I had to call someone in on.

Another year it was agitation about GCPC's commitment to dismantling white supremacy--and it was very clear that this person blamed me for the fact that we are doing this work, and they wanted it to stop.

What is consistent is this yearly dust up is what this energy seeks to fuel.

It is an energy that wants confusion, inertia, distrust, anxiety. It is an energy that revels in our energy being diverted from the transforming work we are doing.

Now lest we think we are unique at GCPC, we need to remember that this destructive energy has been trying to destroy and distract communities who seek to center God's revolutionary love since Jesus walked the earth. And often this energy is weaponized to silence women, to silence anyone who is challenging the status quo, the powers that be, the flow of wealth, the way the energy of the collective is being invited to move.

**Image - Twitter shots from misogynist pastor**

Check out this young male seminary professor in Arkansas who actually wrote a book with one of my former parishioners from my first call in Chicago Presbytery. Here's his Mother's Day gift to the church.

Twitter post #1 "Christian, if your church has women preaching, whether occasionally or regularly, hear me very clearly: You need to find a new church."

Twitter post #2: "There is no exception to 1 Timothy 2: 9-15. Not Mother's Day, not when a woman has real gifting, not when the elders endorse women preaching. Based on his creation order, God only calls men to lead, preach, teach & shepherd the flock. Find a church that stands for this truth."

This destructive energy is alive and well now and it has been since Athanasius of Alexandria began his campaign against circles of Jesus followers who were led by women in the 3rd century.

In the 13th century, a women's movement emerged in Christianity as the institutional church became more and more entrenched in the structures and systems of power hoarding, jockeying for political influence, and wealth accumulation. This women's movement saw how the church was being co-opted by wealth and power, and they wanted to follow Jesus not prop up a corrupt and co-opted institution.

The Beguines were a movement of women who didn't want to be cloistered in a convent, but neither did they want to marry. And they wanted to live a life focused on God's love and service.

The Beguines stretched across a couple of centuries, when they were the strongest, it was a time of profound suffering and cultural shift.

They lived in a time of intense trauma and cultural upheaval much like we do today--their COVID19 was the Black Death. Their Afghanistan was the 100 year war. Their #BlackLivesMatter movement was the peasant's revolt. They were pushing back against a culture and systems focused on wealth accumulation and on church structures and teachings that divided people, shamed people, and terrorized people.

Some of the most influential Beguines were brutalized for their desire to live differently--burned at the stake as heretics even though they taught nothing

that was heretical. Heresy was the most potent weapon the church had at its disposal to silence people. So it was trotted out whenever needed to silence those who threatened the powers that be. Their heresy was in their willingness to let God's love transform everything about the way they lived their lives.

The church has always been nervous about women's movements that challenged the power hoarding that patriarchy and whiteness institutionalize.

Did you know that Mother's Day actually began as a peace movement-- a day for communities to work together to end violence in honor of all the women who have fought for peace?

In fact, one of the earliest proponents of a day to embrace the activism of mothers, later became someone who lobbied to end the celebration of Mother's Day when she saw how commercialized it had become. For the earliest adopters of Mother's Day, this day wasn't supposed to be about flowers and a card for our mothers, it was a day about freedom and activism, and coming together to harness the power of all women to birth change in the world.

The day got co-opted by capitalism and patriarchy--and it has been used by the church to shame women who do not have children by presenting motherhood as the only way a woman's life can be truly meaningful. Another lie of patriarchy. Another lie of capitalism.

Mother's Day was intended to be about all of us--all of us as people who have mothers who gave birth to us. All of us who have the capacity to birth something new together.

The power of mothering carries with it an irreducible ambiguity. It always and already walks the razor's edge between life and death, between joy and despair, between powerlessness and impact. And between freedom and captivity.

August Boatwright learned bee keeping from her mother, who told her, "Women made the best beekeepers 'cause they have a special ability built into them to love creatures that sting."— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

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The last several days you may have heard some buzz about our sanctuary and possible changes Session is just beginning to consider for when we return to face to face worship services when it is safe to do so.

Property Council just invited the Session into discernment around possible technological upgrades in the sanctuary that will enable us to keep building on the gifts of our COVID journey with online worship. Session is also considering the possibility of removing the pews from the sanctuary and replacing them with wooden chairs to create more opportunities for flexibility, creativity, and enhanced acoustics.

Many have expressed excitement about these possible changes and some have expressed anxiety and grief about these possible changes as well.

All of these feelings make sense and are valid. And they are opportunities for us to go deeper together in the work that God has been calling this church to for a long time.

The importance of what unfolds from here is less about any particular outcome, than it is about how we grow our muscles and our capacity for revolutionary love in the process.

At the last Session meeting several guests attended. There was a palpable buzz as we all shared space. It was a beautiful testimony to the ways we are growing and transforming as a community of faith.

All the muscles we've been learning to use around dismantling white supremacy culture within ourselves and within our community are being called on as we lean in to these questions about how we create the conditions for this next phase of our life together to blossom.

We are getting better, GCPC, at being uncomfortable, at sitting with tension, at being honest with each other, at noticing what's coming up for us and not weaponizing our feelings, and at prioritizing mutual liberation over our own comfort.

We are getting better at being less patriarchal. We are getting better at being less driven by whiteness.

Those are our collective muscles--and they are empowering growth and change throughout our community--like expert pollinators we are moving with intention and determination to nourish the larger world's capacity for life and growth and transformation.

I've invited the Session to join me today in this online pulpit.

**(All Ruling Elders turn cameras ON)**

**Galleryview**

Because I want you all to feel the buzz that comes from being together, from trusting each other--like the bees do.

Honeybees are community animals--they need contact with each other, they need support, they need companions--if you take a honey bee out of her community, if you separate her from her sisters, she will not survive for long.

Bees know they need each other. And everything they do is for and with each other. The buzz we hear when we come close to the collective of bees is from their commitment to keep moving in the world in a way that strengthens the collective--no one individual or small subset of the community--but everyone.

- Anna Hamel
- Anne Raustol (traveling)
- Blake Martin
- Bill Neeriemer
- Christi Mobley
- Jessica Graham
- John Legerton
- Keith Prince (traveling)
- Kelley Griffith (Clerk)
- Margaret Tierney
- Martha Seddon (ill family member)
- Mary Elizabeth Shoop
- Melissa Hicks
- Roger Meade
- Sheryl Aikman (not available)
- Tim Moe

Session embodies our shared belief in how the Spirit moves in the collective. Session is called by this congregation into intentional discernment in and for this community--3 year terms, youth elder is a 1 year term.

They are at the center of our hive, they are energized by intentional love infused into this community. They are entrusted with paying attention to details and with dreaming together of how GCPC can do our part to nourish a better world, God's creation healed.

You, Grace Covenant, called these people into leadership for such a time as this. You said yes to this particular collective within our larger collective giving their energy, creativity, wisdom, and love to the task of nurturing this community of faith into an uncertain future. And they are serving you well in these times of deep cultural shifts.

The force that fuels the work of this collective is love.

Love and leadership

**How is your role as Elder informing the way you live out/embody/practice Christ's revolutionary love?**

**Anna Hamel:**

Quote #1: John 15: 11-14

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

**(Anna will unmute and share her words)**

Quote #1

Last night I gathered with dear friends from Grace Covenant outside to celebrate being together for the first time since the pandemic now that we are fully vaccinated. I experienced the love we hold for one another as we shared the joys and pains of the last year. We sat around a

campfire and caught up. At some point during the evening we FaceTimed parents of those gathered who are also members of GCPC and felt again the joy of connection through technology. A very special moment during the evening was felt when one person was struggling and the others propped her up and we sang together. We all shared in her struggle, even though it is not ours and tried to help her through it with love and compassion. The joy of loving one another through all of life's tribulations is something I strive to share with everyone who walks into GCPC or gathers with us on line. It is by loving one another that we experience Christ's love.

### **Christi Mobley:**

Quote #2: From Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

"And when you get down to it, Lily, that's the only purpose grand enough for a human life. Not just to love – but to persist in love."

### **(Christi will unmute and share her words)**

My family would tell you that I have always exhibited lots of love. I was taught to love "everyone", and so I did. For many years I loved "everyone." But for all those years, "everyone" in my life looked just like me. I have to admit that I did not originally intend to follow a path of opening my eyes to new perspectives and worldviews, but that's the path that God laid out for me. As I have matured, I have struggled to love everyone... and not just everyone else, but the everyone that includes me. It's hard to love me when I am silent. It's hard to love me when I judge. It's hard to love me when I lack the courage to show that love back. And yet, Christ has that infinite, all-encompassing, revolutionary love for me. Christ continues to present opportunities to stretch myself, stretch my understanding, and stretch my love. As an Elder, and the Chair of the Serve Council, I am often stretched and challenged to re-envision the boundaries of my love. Because to say that you love is just empty words without the persistence of the revolutionary, radical kind of love that Jesus Christ teaches us.

### **Margaret Tierney**

I see more places where love is needed than I saw before I was an elder. In myself. In others. In our culture. For our church. The more I learn

about what is needed to dismantle white supremacy, the more I realize that the radical love of Jesus is the only way.

## **Jessica Graham**

Love is anything but passive. God calls us to love actively and radically—stretching ourselves to love and care for others in a way that is truly revolutionary. The least of these. The marginalized. Those hurting and harmed. As an elder, as a school counselor, as a mother and a friend and a disciple of the greatest Radical there is, I feel most full of my life's purpose and God's calling when I fully love others— embracing them and creating a domino effect of love that allows each person to shine their own light of greatness upon the world. This is the revolution for which we were made.

We are called to a way of life that is defined in every way by a love that transforms us and the world. Dismantling white supremacy is LOVE. Laying down our own comfort for the good of the collective is LOVE. Learning new ways to move, to breathe, to work, to dream, to buzz is LOVE.

The buzz of bees is the sound of their thriving--it is the sound of them living the way they were made to live.

Because every little thing wants to be loved.

### **Audio from Bees Buzzing (on A bus, then off A bus)**

Lily is finally fully alive when she embraces the joy of the bees' secrets. Just listen to the buzz:

“From a distance,” she says, “[the collective of bee hives] will look like a big painting you might see in a museum, but museums can't capture the sound. Fifty feet away you will hear it, a humming that sounds like it came from another planet. At 30 feet your skin will start to vibrate. The hair will lift on your neck. Your head will say, don't go any farther, but your heart will send you straight into the hum, where you will be swallowed by it. You will stand there and think, I am in the center of the universe, where everything is sung to life.” (Secret Life of Bees)

Thanks be to God.