

## **Growing in the Dark: Faith in an Unfinished World**

**Sunday, August 10, 2025, 10:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**

**The Rev. Jonathan Timothy Stoner**

### **[Opening: Walking in With Questions]**

Good morning.

If you're like me, you've come today carrying a heart full of questions.

Maybe you're in a season of waiting.

Maybe you're uncertain—about your health, your work, your family, or this fragile world we share.

You're asking:

*Where is God in all this?*

*Why hasn't God shown up yet?*

You're not alone.

Today's scriptures are filled with people just like you—waiting, wondering, struggling to hold on to hope.

### **[When the World Feels Heavy]**

These are not ordinary times.

As democracy crumbles and power is being concentrated in the hands of the cruel and heartless,

those of us who believe in human dignity are called not to despair—  
but to wake up.

If you feel overwhelmed, discouraged, angry, or numb—  
you are not alone.

The people in today's scriptures knew this space.

They waited in uncertainty, cried out for justice, and wrestled to keep hoping  
in a world that rewards corruption and mocks compassion.

### **[A Midlife Reckoning]**

This July, on my 44th birthday,

I found myself staring into a future full of unknowns—

for me, my family, my neighbors, our country, our planet.

And in that moment, I stood shoulder to shoulder with those same biblical figures.

Because faith isn't pretending all is fine.

Faith carries us through fire and flood.

Faith names the reality—that dumpster fires rage as far as the eye can see—  
and still shows up, believing a better world is coming.

### **[Faith That Confronts Power]**

Faith gives us courage to stand up to Pharaohs who enslave,  
Caesars who crucify,  
and the wannabe monarchs of our day  
who wear corruption and cruelty like a crown—  
because we serve a different kingdom.  
A different King.

The one the Scriptures call Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, King of Kings.  
As Richard Rohr reminds us,  
unlike the would-be king we have in the Oval Office,  
this humble carpenter from Nazareth never said, “Worship me.”  
But he did say, “Follow me.”

The contrast couldn’t be clearer:  
Christ—the humble King—versus an administration cloaked in Christian piety,  
yet opposing His core message:  
*Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers...*  
Call me crazy, but it’s almost like they’re reading a different Bible—  
or... maybe they’ve never read it at all.

### **[The Beatitudes in My Bones]**

These words of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount have been settling deep inside me lately.  
Because birthdays, for me in this stage of life, are less about cake and more about reflection:  
Looking back, looking ahead, and looking inward.  
In that inward space, voices have spoken—  
helping me wrestle with these questions and the texts before us today.  
One of those voices? Clark Kent. You’re probably more familiar with him as Superman.

### **[Genesis: The Honest Faith of Abram and Sarai]**

In the latest *Superman* film, he tells Lex Luthor:  
*“I’m as human as anyone.  
I love. I get scared.  
I wake up every morning,  
and though I don’t always know what to do,  
I put one foot in front of the other  
and try to make the best choices I can.  
I screw up all the time—  
but that’s being human.  
And that’s my greatest strength.”*

That honest, simple truth echoes the story of Abram and Sarai in Genesis.  
Abram has done everything right—  
he left home,  
he followed God's call,  
he wandered into the unknown.  
But the promise hasn't come—no child, no legacy—only waiting.  
Like Ma and Pa Kent raising Clark with hope amid uncertainty,  
Abram and Sarai embody faithful, human vulnerability.

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### **[Naming the Ache]**

Abram whispers what many of us feel in the dark:  
*"What's the point?  
I'm still empty.  
My only heir is a servant."*  
God doesn't shame him. Instead, God reassures:  
*"Fear not, Abram!  
I am your shield;  
your reward will be great."*  
Then God shows him the night sky:  
*"Count the stars—  
so shall your descendants be."*

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### **[Faith That Steps Into the Unknown]**

This isn't just a promise—  
it's an invitation:  
to imagine beyond what we see,  
to dream past our doubts.  
Scripture says,  
"Abram believed God,  
and it was counted to him as righteousness."  
Not because his faith was perfect,  
but because he chose to trust the Promise-Giver.  
Like Ma and Pa Kent raising Superman—not by shielding him from fear, but urging him  
forward—  
Abram and Sarai show us what faith looks like:  
honest. hopeful. human.  
Faith that returns again and again—  
even in the dark.

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### **[A Word for the Waiting Heart]**

If you're waiting anxiously, unsure where God is—  
remember Abram and Sarai.

Faith isn't about having all the answers;  
it's trusting God enough to take the next step  
even when the path is hidden.

Like Abram, gazing at the stars—  
each one a promise of generations to come,  
their light reflected in his eyes, twinkling with hope.

Like Superman—  
knocked down but never destroyed.

Like you and me—  
still fighting for a better world,  
even when the Dark Side seems to be winning.

One of the best life lessons from Star Wars comes from Han Solo:

Never, ever listen to the naysayers who say your chances are hopeless.  
When his back is against the wall and hope seems lost,  
he says, "Never tell me the odds!"

—and he keeps pressing forward anyway.

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### **[Hebrews: Faith That Looks Forward]**

Hebrews 11 describes this faith well:

"The substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen."

Abraham and Sarah lived without a map,  
dwelling in tents,  
never seeing the promise fully come to life—  
yet they believed.  
They did not give up.

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### [Mister Rogers and Becoming]

You know how much I love Superman,  
but lately I've been thinking about another hero—  
one without superpowers.

Mister Rogers.

He showed us gentleness is strength,  
and courage often whispers instead of roars.

In the film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*,  
Tom Hanks plays Fred Rogers,  
and there's a scene that's stayed with me:

A journalist asks his wife, Joanne,  
"What's it like being married to a living saint?"

She answers,  
"I'm not fond of that term.  
If you see him as a saint, his way of being feels unattainable."

That's the point.

Fred Rogers wasn't perfect.  
He was intentional, disciplined, devoted—human.

Every day, he practiced the fruits of the Spirit:  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

He had a temper, just like me.  
He had to choose how to respond—  
to channel anger into something constructive, not destructive.

Like a musician practicing scales,  
or a carpenter sanding wood,

Fred realigned himself daily with the message  
he sought to embody for the children of this nation:

You are lovable.  
You are enough.

Your feelings matter.  
Your story matters.

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**[Luke 12: Fear Not, Little Flock]**

When I say I've been thinking about Mister Rogers—  
and Abraham and Sarah—  
and Han Solo—  
and Superman—

I mean a constellation of flawed but noble heroes,  
guiding us like north stars today.

These heroes don't shrink from pain;  
they step into it, carrying hope to the hardest places.

No one is perfect—not even Fred Rogers.  
Thank God.  
Because if the kingdom were only for the perfect, none of us would be invited.

With the same tender love God shows Abram,  
Jesus says:  
"Fear not, little flock,  
for it has pleased your God to give you the kingdom."

Little flock.  
Not "mighty army."  
Not "powerful empire."  
Just a handful of vulnerable sheep.

Jesus doesn't say:  
"Stop whining."  
"Suck it up."  
"Work harder."

He says:  
"Don't be afraid. The kingdom is already yours."  
Not because you earned it,  
but because God delights in giving it.

Then Jesus says:

“Sell what you own and give to the poor.  
Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out.”

Loosen your grip.

Let go of possessions, grudges, illusions of control—  
the things that chain you in fear.

Where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be.

If our treasure is God’s dream for the world,  
our hearts will beat in rhythm with the Holy Spirit—  
breathing with the creative force  
that hovered over the waters at creation,  
calling us to co-create a new world—  
a new way of being human.  
A better world than we’ve ever known.

A kingdom of conscience.

A kingdom of heaven.

Where peace flows freely between every nation, tribe, people, and language.

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### **[Active Readiness]**

Jesus says:

“Be dressed for action and keep your lamps lit.”

Like the Israelites on Passover night—  
sandals on, staff in hand—  
ready for God to move.

The psalmist says, “We wait for God.”

But the Hebrew word here means more than waiting—it means leaning in,  
waiting on the edge of hope.

This is not anxious waiting.

It’s active readiness.

Living every day as if the Kingdom might break in at any moment—because it can.

The surprise twist:  
the master returns,  
finds his servants awake and ready,  
and serves them.

The upside-down Gospel:  
the King of Kings kneeling at the table,  
feeding those meant to feed him.

Jesus doesn't sugarcoat it:  
the Kingdom comes like a thief in the night—  
unexpected, disruptive, impossible to schedule.

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### **[The Light Is How We Keep Becoming]**

The only way to be ready is to live ready—  
awake to grace,  
alive to love,  
alert to where light is needed most.

Maybe you saw that image recently—  
the president's face photoshopped onto Superman's body.

As a lifelong Superman fan and former Catholic,  
that image scandalized me more than the one of him dressed as the Pope.

But here's the truth:  
True heroes don't need to cosplay strength—  
they redefine it.

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### **[Strength That Serves]**

Jesus didn't come wrapped in flags  
or flexing on a podium.

He came wrapped in flesh—  
fragile, human, divine.

He stood with the poor,  
touched the untouchable,



crossed boundaries,  
flipped tables—

not for applause,  
but because justice demanded it.

If Jesus walked among us today,  
he wouldn't be kissing the American flag like a stage prop.

He'd be flipping tables in the White House,  
calling out greed, racism, and spiritual rot  
masquerading as greatness.

Because real power doesn't dominate—  
it defends.

It doesn't strut—  
it serves.

It doesn't hoard—  
it gives itself away in love.

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### **[Look Up]**

So here's to the heroes in my Hall of Faith:  
Superman.  
Mister Rogers.  
Abraham and Sarah—  
and all the imperfect people,  
sinners and saints,  
walking by faith and not by sight.

And here's to each one of you—  
leaning into trust.  
To the kingdom already breaking through.  
To lamps lit in the night.  
To a God who is never ashamed of the dark places  
we're still growing in.

Jesus says:  
"Keep your lamps lit."

Because the work isn't just to grow—  
it's to glow.

To push back the darkness.  
As light-bearers.  
Table-turners.  
Love-multipliers.

This is no time to stand down.  
It's time to rise—  
a sea of torches,  
a thousand suns lighting up the night.

Not waiting for a Savior to swoop down from on high,  
but digging deep, stepping out,  
falling flat on our faces sometimes...  
and rising again.

Because being human means knowing how fragile we are—  
and still showing up.

It means owning our failures and flaws—  
and still walking toward the light.

God's power, as the Apostle Paul says,  
isn't perfected in our strength,  
but in our weakness.

And that weakness?  
It's not a liability.  
It's the doorway.  
The place where grace gets in.  
The space where Christ takes up residence.

So no more hiding.  
No more shame.

Only this beautiful, holy becoming—  
flawed and faithful,  
human and radiant.

Because that is being human.  
And that's our greatest strength.

It's how we become the heroes  
this moment is calling for.

So may we look skyward, as Abraham did—  
not for rescue, but for reminder:

the stars are still shining.  
The promise is still alive.  
Faith is not certainty—  
it's movement.  
Fueled by faith.  
Filled with hope.  
Lifted on wings of love.

In the immortal words of Superman...  
Up, up, and away...

(Pause)  
And all God's people said: Amen.