Human Dignity by Reverend Jes Kast

The stories of Jesus are the stories of this God man restoring people back to human dignity. The woman who grabbed his cloak to be healed is a return to human dignity. The story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is a story of human dignity. The story of Jesus forgiving the thief on the cross is a story of human dignity, even in the most brutal of acts.

To follow Jesus is to be about the actions of human dignity.

As a church we are to be about human dignity.

The acts of human dignity take the form of us Passing the Peace of Christ every Sunday. The acts of human dignity are those who march in the street and sign petitions to secure safety and sanctuary for children at the border. Human dignity is the act of forgiveness and letting the wounds be healed. Human dignity is rest on the Sabbath and reminding us that who we are is not determined by our titles or work accolades, but that we are God’s very own children. Human dignity is fighting for justice, speaking up, and quietly returning to prayer to refuel in the grace of the hands of Jesus.

This summer, be about the way of Jesus. Be the church. Help others restore human dignity and volunteer with organizations charitably serving the needs of others. Restore your human dignity and turn off your cell phone and listen to the sound of your breathing and rest.

Prayer for the Summer:

Dear God – Help me to know that my life matters. Help me to serve others to remind them their life matters. Help me to follow you and be a part of restoring the human dignity for each person. Thank you for Jesus who taught us how important human dignity is. Amen.

— Pastor Jes Kast

SERMONS

July 1 — Surrender
July 8 — Pay Attention!
July 15 — Unbearable Words, guest preacher: Jeff Chu
Jeff Chu is an award-winning journalist, a seminarian at Princeton Theological Seminary, and an ordained elder in the Reformed Church in America. He is the author of the book Does Jesus Really Love Me? He was previously on staff at both Time and Fast Company, and his writing has also appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Modern Farmer, and Travel+Leisure. He belongs to the Reformed Church of Bronxville in Bronxville, New York. He loves rice, he is learning how to be a farmer, and he hates marzipan.

July 22 — Family Feud
July 29 — Creative Resistance in the Midst of Fear

August 5 — Faith’s Anchor
August 12 — Enough for Today
August 19 — Hope
August 26 — New Life in You
Christ at Heart’s Door by Pastor Howard

As a kid, when the sermon was especially boring (frequently), I would study my church’s stained glass windows. I still vividly remember all of them. I learned as much from them about religion as I learned in catechism class.

One of the stained glass windows in our church is based on a famous painting by the 19th century American artist, Warner Sallman, titled Christ at Heart’s Door. The painting is inspired by a verse from the Book of Revelation:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock;
if anyone hears my voice and opens
the door, I will come in to him, and will
eat with him and he with me.”

In the window Jesus is depicted as the Good Shepherd with his crook, seeking the lost and the lonely. He is standing before a wooden door, the entrance to our hearts. Light radiates from Jesus, the light of the world. Weeds and thistles encroach on the doorframe symbolizing human sin and ignorance. The small grilled window set within the door represents our imprisonment within ourselves and the darkness within without the light of Christ. The absence of an outer door handle is a reminder that only we can open our hearts’ doors to God. Neither God nor Jesus will force themselves upon us. If we do open our hearts’ doors, Jesus will enter and share his light and love.

This one window encapsulates the entire Gospel message of sin and salvation; darkness and light; despair and hope. Take a look during my next sermon!

— Pastor Howard

On September 21 at 7 p.m.
THE BOOK CLUB
will discuss
There, There
by Tommy Orange
At last! Summer! Enjoy the change of pace, where everything collectively relaxes, and time is more forgiving. The break-neck pace of fall-winter-spring, with its deadlines and schedules recedes for many, and a chance to reflect and reassess, read, daydream, and disconnect from social media becomes possible. It’s been a hard several months on the political front from all directions, that’s for sure.

If you feel like singing, then mosey on down to the West Village Chorale's Summer Sing, conducted by yours truly, on Monday, July 9, 7:30 p.m. at Judson Memorial Church (just off Washington Sq. Park). We'll be reading through Bernstein's Chichester Psalms in celebration of his 100th birthday! Tix are $15, includes score usage and refreshments.

The West End Choir is on break through the summer. You’ll hear the wonderful soloists in the choir through the months of July and August, with Taisiya Pushkar and Eric Sedgwick, guest pianists.

Have a wonderful summer, everyone, and see you in church!
Cynthia Powell
Director of Music Ministries

Make a Joyful Noise! by Rebecca Stevens-Walter

What is Vacation Bible School anyway? It seems a strange title given that it’s not a vacation, it’s a lot more than just learning about the Bible, and it’s definitely not school. Well, you might be delighted (or surprised) to know that Vacation Bible School has its roots in New York City, when in 1898 a Baptist children’s religious educator name Eliza Hawes began having religious school for children in the summertime in a rented beer hall. The idea of early summer religious schools was that teachers needed work in the summer and children needed to stay out of trouble. So churches provided space for both of those needs.

These days, children have many summer opportunities to stay occupied and stimulated and just like Sunday morning, church activities have become one of many activities in which children participate. In our modern era, Vacation Bible School has evolved into more of a summer camp. All over the country from June through August, children will be tie dying t-shirts, singing silly songs, eating snack, listening to stories, making crafts, and spending time in church, outside of the bounds of worship. This, I believe is the heart and value of Vacation Bible School today - that children can come to church in the summer and experience “church” as a place of creativity, play, curiosity, and fellowship. While the goal is indeed to learn more about God and Jesus and yes, the Bible, there is something in Vacation Bible School that allows children to learn in a capacity that truly meets children where they are. This year, our theme is Make a Joyful Noise! Through movement and music and other artistic expressions, we will be exploring the moments in the Bible when music and/or noise-making was an essential part of the story. We will dance, sing, listen, snack, play, and we will learn.

The dates for West End VBS are August 27-30 from 9 a.m.—12:30 p.m. Space is limited, so please sign up as soon as possible by emailing Rebecca and providing your name, your child(ren)’s name/age, and any dietary or allergy needs. I will also be looking for volunteers to help manage stations and serve snacks. If you are interested in volunteering (you don’t have to be a parent!), please let Rebecca know via email. RStevens-Walter@westendchurch.org

Vacation Bible School has certainly changed in the last 100+ years. I am grateful for the evolution from a traditional school-like structure to something more liberative and energetic. It is a testament to the church’s ability to understand and respond to the changing needs of congregants. With a new pastor coming in and so many wonderful shifts in our community, West End is in a unique and exciting position to use our creative and loving spirit to hone opportunities for children to freely express themselves, ask questions, and learn of the grace, forgiveness, and love of Jesus Christ. If you are an adult, please pray for the fun and safety of the children at West End as they embark on all their summer activities. If you are a child, I can’t wait to see you and hear about all your adventures and to create some new ones at Vacation Bible School!
It is with great joy I write to announce that the search committee has completed its work and the Reverend William Critzman has been called to be the next Senior Minister of West End Collegiate Church.

Pastor Will is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, ordained in the United Church of Christ. He joins us from First Presbyterian Church of the City of New York where he currently serves as the Minister of Discipleship and is responsible for educational and learning programs for all ages (spanning seniors, youth, and early childhood), fellowship, and hospitality, as well as fundraising and revenue generation. Pastor Will has a background in the arts (he’s a trained cellist himself) and considers music a “huge” part of worship. “It’s the thing we hold onto the longest.” He also has a strong background in fundraising and executive management.

The search committee was impressed by his combination of spiritual depth, an artist’s heart, leadership skills, and commitment to personal connection and relationships; we are thrilled that through the search process he came to love West End as much as we came to love him.

Pastor Will’s official start date will likely be sometime in late September to allow for an effective transition out of his current role. We will keep you posted as more details are solidified.

We are grateful for all the prayers and support and words of encouragement you shared with us over these past several months. We felt your love and the love and guidance of God as we worked to discern our next Senior Minister. Thank you for continuing to demonstrate the strength of our community during this period of transition.

With excitement and anticipation for our next chapter together,
Andrea Steinkamp on Behalf of the Search Committee and the Deacons and Elders of West End Collegiate Church

Another Way to Give to West End

We are pleased to announce that you can now make donations to West End via your mobile phone. It’s very simple to do. Just text “Give” to 917-259-3001 and then follow the instructions for the one time registration process. After you’ve registered your account and card, you can then make donations at anytime by texting the amount, with the dollar sign, and what it’s for. For example, you can text “$100 offering” or “$50 talent show.” You will receive immediate verification and a receipt will be emailed to you. That’s all there is to it! Thank you for your continued support of our ministries.