

DECEMBER 2017

GRACE WE CAN HARDLY BEAR

BY ABRAHAM CHO

Out of the vast emptiness of the opening verses of Genesis, we encounter a God who, by contrast, creates out of gratuitous abundance. There is no emptiness, no unmet longing, that compels his work. Instead, he acts out of overflowing delight. C.S. Lewis depicts this beautifully by imagining God creating through song. It is breathtaking to read:

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing ... Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond com-

parison, the most beautiful noise [Digory] had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it

The result is a creation that rings with the song of its Maker at every turn. It is a world that, just like its Maker, teems with abundance, brims with life, eager to give of its fullness.

And yet, the Advent season begins again in darkness, doesn't it? "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," says the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9:2). The Apostle John writes, "The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5) Advent begins by reminding us that all the beauty of creation

has been plunged into ruin and death because of human sin. It reminds us that we daily reject the God who gives us all things because we want the one thing he did not give in the garden: to be free of him so we could be gods unto ourselves. And how does God respond? Covenant College professor Kelly Kopic puts it far better than I could:

This world, God's world, is a mess. Every day the fall darkens everything. God gave his creation everything it needed, but it chose to take the one thing that was not given. One would think that in order to fix this God should take

(Continued on page 5)

THANK YOU FOR GIVING TO HIS TOY STORE!

We at Hope for New York want to thank the hundreds of you who donated to make this Christmas special for your neighbors in need through His Toy Store!

Because of you, we are able to provide 4,060 toys for 1,960 local families this month — from moms and dads in residential recovery programs, to the formerly incarcerated

reconnecting with their families, and the working poor in low-income neighborhoods.

In December, because of your generosity, we'll be able to work with our affiliates and church partners to host 12 pop-up stores from Park Slope to the South Bronx, where parents can choose new toys for their children.

But we don't see this as just

a one-time outreach. Our hope is that, through His Toy Store, parents with limited financial resources will be able to connect with our affiliate and church partners for year-round support and resources.

Parents like Debra. Debra struggled with a 20-year addiction to alcohol and 10-year addiction to heroin. She was not

(Continued on page 8)

CFW EVENING WITH MARIANNE ROBINSON

CFW is excited to announce pre-sale tickets are now on sale for an evening with Pulitzer Prize winning author Marilynne Robinson (*Gilead*, *Home*, *Lila*, and *Housekeeping*), the recipient of CFW's inaugural Commission of Faith & Work. On February 21, 2018, hear this luminary author read from and speak about her forthcoming work, *What Are We Doing Here?*, a collection of essays that explore the mysteries of faith and the climate of American cultural and political life. Mining great thinkers like Tocqueville, Emerson, and Calvin, while investigating how beauty forms daily life, Robinson's unmatched voice finds a new urgency for Americans of faith. An in-depth conversation will follow, touching on the author's

illustrious body of work, her rigorous and scholarly devotion to the humanities, and how it all has intersected with her own personal faith.

Robinson is the author of four novels: *Lila* (2014), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Home* (2008), winner of the Orange Prize and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; *Gilead* (2004), winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *Housekeeping* (1980), winner of PEN/Hemingway Award for Debut Fiction. Her five nonfiction books include *The Givenness of Things: Essays* (2015) and *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (1998).

Her many other honors include the American Academy

of Arts and Letters Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Fund, the National Humanities Medal, and the American Academy of Religion in the Arts Award. Robinson, a longtime faculty member of the University of Iowa Writers Workshop, is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Robinson lives in Iowa City, Iowa, where she is a deacon for the Congregational United Church of Christ. She has received the Library of Congress' Prize for American Fiction.

Further details and registration available at faithandwork.com/events

Register before December 31, 2017 for this event's pre-sale.

Resources and introductions into Robinson's work:

The Givenness of Things: Essays (2016)

Gilead (2004), winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Home (2008), winner of the Orange Prize

Lila (2014), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award

Housekeeping (1980), winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award

The New York Review of Books: President Obama and Marilynne Robinson In Conversation

The Paris Review on Marilynne Robinson and The Art of Fiction

REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke, Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium
E. 69th St.
(btw Park & Lexington)
Services: 10:30 a.m.
and 6 p.m.

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
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212-808-4460 (T) 212-808-4465 (F) redeemer.com

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(btw Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services: 9:30 & 11:30 a.m.
and 5 & 7 p.m.

West Side Church Plant:
NY Society for Ethical Culture
2 W. 64th St.
(at Central Park West)
Service: 10:30 a.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(btw 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m.
and 5 p.m.

JOIN HFNY TO SEE EVERY NEW YORKER FLOURISH

BY ELISE CHONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HFNY

When was a time when you really experienced flourishing in your life?

Flourishing is a word that is used often around Redeemer, and so there may be different ideas that come to your mind. Maybe when you think of flourishing, you imagine a time excelling in a career you loved, or holding your newborn child, or crossing the finish line of a half marathon.

We know God's intention for the world is to see all people flourish — and that He sent Christ to redeem the world, to restore areas of death and decay to life and flourishing.

At Hope for New York, our vision is to see each person in our city live the way God intended for them to live. We want all New Yorkers to experience the full dignity and humanity of what it means to be made in the image of God, to truly thrive and flourish in every way — spiritually, socially, and economically.

But we know that flourishing is not a reality for many in our city. One of every five New Yorkers live at or below the level of poverty. Over 60,000 individuals are without homes living in shelters or on the streets. 1.5 million New Yorkers are living with food insecurity.

When you read these statistics or see poverty on the streets, it may feel like a never-ending battle to you. You may feel hopeless, indifferent, or just paralyzed.

I can relate. As a lifelong

New Yorker who has been in anti-poverty work for nearly 20 years, I can attest that this work is not easy. Poverty is real, progress is slow, and there are no overnight solutions.

But I can also share with you that I have seen so many stories of hope and transformation and, yes, flourishing over the years — and, as this year comes to a close, I'm more expectant and hopeful than ever about how God is bringing restoration to our city. We at Hope for New York are celebrating his faithfulness in the form of:

- *The **3,500 volunteers**, many of whom are from Redeemer churches, who served on the ground at our non-profit affiliates, doing everything from scrambling eggs to renovating buildings to workshopping resumes.*
- *The **five new non-profit affiliates** (Dream Center NYC, Expect Hope, Prison Fellowship, Thrive Collective, and Urban Hope) we added to our family — including our first-ever affiliate on Staten Island!*
- *Our **three new church partners** — Hope Midtown, Redeemer Lincoln Square, and Renaissance NYC — who join our seven other partner churches as congregations who are committed to prioritizing doing justice and loving mercy.*
- *Our generous supporters who enabled us to give **\$2.1 million in grants** to invest in the areas*

of homelessness, youth programs, workforce development and many more.

In the next 10 years, we want to expand our non-profit partners from 45 to 90 affiliates and increase our church partners from 10 to 30. Just imagine the kind of effect more churches and organizations dedicated to holistic flourishing could have on our city!

We want to make even progress toward that goal in 2018, which is why, this month, we are asking you to prayerfully consider making a year-end gift to support this work. You can make your year-end gift by:

- *Giving online at hfny.org/donate*
- *Sending a check to Hope for New York, 1166 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 1610, New York, NY 10023*
- *Asking your company if they match charitable donations*
- *Becoming a monthly supporter by joining The Hope Exchange at hfny.org/hopeexchange*

We know that overall this work is not easy — Yet, we also know there is a hope that is beyond ourselves.

We trust that God, who loves each and every person in this city, is seeking our flourishing, as individuals, families, communities and neighborhoods. We believe shalom and restoration is possible only because we have hope in a God that loves and redeems the world.

REDEEMER GRACE AND RACE: SPOTLIGHT EVENT

Redeemer Grace and Race seeks to embrace the Gospel call to redeemed relationships across ethnic and racial barriers. Inevitably, such a call requires a commitment to engage in difficult conversations, confront uncomfortable truths, and to embrace radical hospitality. These themes, conversations, and truths were the basis of our most recent event — SPOTLIGHT.

During our event, hip-hop artists Propaganda and Sho Baraka presented issues which are often difficult to engage. As Propaganda quipped leading up to the event, “Let’s get squirmy, NYC.” Let’s be honest, “squirmy” is a great way to describe how we often feel when we are presented with insightful statements about racial injustice, inequality, lack of diversity, gentrification, power and privilege, hypocrisy, and other issues. To cap off the night, East Side’s senior pastor Abe Cho and City to City’s Denine Blevins joined Prop and Sho for a panel discussion that contextualized the content for Redeemer.

The insights presented at SPOTLIGHT were far too extensive to properly unpack here. However, there are several notable takeaways and questions worth considering:

- An unfortunate reality within the church, and culture more broadly, is we often want to jump to reconciliation without first dealing with truth. In his talk, Sho

Baraka defined this as “flattery,” not reconciliation. We must deal with the uncomfortable truths behind racial injustice, inequality, power and privilege, and lack of diversity. Are we willing to wrestle with and act on the harsh realities surrounding these issues?

- Diversity of race, socio-economics, and culture within the church is a beautiful picture of the Gospel’s power of reconciliation. As Denine noted, “We don’t pursue diversity for optics, but in order to advance the Gospel.”

Interestingly, within the event, there were many churches represented, which created a diverse group. However, though joking, Sho made an astute observation saying, “I look around this room and I am deeply encouraged by the diversity. Although I’m sure none of you guys hang out (together) outside of this building.” To what extent is that statement true of our pursuit of relationships? To what extent are we intentionally pursuing relationships with those different than us? To what extent are we, as a church, seeking to embrace what Abe Cho noted, “If you want a cross-cultural church, you have to be prepared for constant discomfort”?

- Power is blinding. Often times, those with power do not realize the power they

wield. Yet, power dynamics are constantly at play. In his talk, Prop noted it is power that historically drove culture forward. This is both true of macro-culture within societies and micro-culture within our churches and communities. Yet, the example Jesus modeled for us is not to use heavy-handed authority and power. Rather, Jesus laid down ultimate power and moved with compassion and grace toward those with whom he was alienated. As Prop asked, “Why do we have power? To give it.” Are we recognizing our power and laying it down for the benefit of others?

There were so many more truths and insights that we don’t have room to share. This event was a great conversation starter, but it would be a failure if it did not propel us to further evaluation and action. Prayerfully, may that not be so!

May our prayer be, “Father, you are a God of mercy, grace, and justice. May we reflect these characteristics as well by being a people who remember the reconciliation you have accomplished in your Son. As a result of Christ’s work, would you help us see ways we have attempted to rebuild the dividing wall of hostility? Help us embrace being uncomfortable at times. Help us see ways we can leverage our power and privilege for the good of all

(Continued on page 8)

MOVING INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD: UWS

BY DAVID BISGROVE

Advent is a season where Christians celebrate the fact that “the word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14/MSG). One of the practical implications of this wonderful fact is, in the words of J. I. Packer, to reproduce in Christians “the temper of him who for our sakes became poor. ... (to) live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor — to do good to others.” This past Easter the West Side Congregation launched a new site called Redeemer Lincoln Square (LSQ), based on the principle of the incarnation, by sending over 330 congregants to serve a new neighborhood.

This was done for two reasons. First, to make room for people who weren’t currently attending church. For several years prior to the launch we were effectively out of room on Sundays at W83. The launch of

LSQ opened up hundreds of seats, both at W83 and Lincoln Square, so that more people could attend and be exposed to the gospel. Our Agora programming and the recent Open Forum, along with weekly “Question and Response” at LSQ and Redeemer West Side are examples of the ways we are creating new opportunities for those exploring Christianity. Second, by “impoverishing ourselves” of leaders and volunteers there are now more opportunities at both locations for individuals to replicate the incarnation in their lives by serving the church, rather than being served (Mark 10:45).

What has been the result of this incarnational strategy? There are now close to 600 people worshipping at LSQ each week and over 40% of the individuals now affiliated with LSQ are new to our database. That means nearly 240 people

who were not previously connected to Redeemer now call Redeemer their church home.. This is why we want to continue planting more and more sites in the next ten years. In addition, we sent 13 Community Groups (CG) to LSQ from WS and now, after seven months, they have over 30 groups. At W83 over 33 new leaders are now serving in our CG ministry and we recently had close to 60 new volunteers sign up to serve in everything from Hope for New York to Children’s Ministry.

So as we head into a season that celebrates God’s great love for us through the sending of his Son, I am grateful for the sacrifice of so many who made this new expression of Jesus a reality, and for the opportunity for us together to be one expression of God’s tangible love for New York City.

GRACE WE CAN HARDLY BEAR ... (CONT’D FROM PAGE 1)

something back. He doesn’t. Instead he comes to give even more away. In fact, he comes to give everything away.

God’s response to our rebellion is stunning. It is to give us even more. No wonder the Apostle John, while writing about the incarnation, exclaims, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). Just when you think God couldn’t possi-

bly give us more, he does. He heaps grace upon grace upon grace on us until we can hardly bear it.

This is why the message of Christmas invariably creates a response of radical generosity. It is because in looking upon the child in the manger, we realize that we are looking on the face of the one who sang the world into existence. We see in the squalor of a stable, the God of unending abundance. We look

out at the world and see a creation teeming with the riches of God. But most importantly, we look at ourselves and see that the way God responds to hostility, ingratitude, and rebellion is to give us even more — even his Son.

So, during this Advent season, reflect on your own generosity. Does it bear witness to the God who, out of his fullness gives sinners grace upon grace?

(Continued on page 8)

2017 YEAR END FINANCIAL UPDATE

In the past year Redeemer has transitioned from one church to three churches. In addition, Redeemer West Side launched a fourth site, Redeemer Lincoln Square. In the next two years, Redeemer East Side and Downtown each plan to launch an additional site, growing the Redeemer family of churches to six locations. God is doing amazing things through Redeemer to renew the city. As we move forward with the vision God has given us, we are incredibly grateful for each of you who support the Redeemer family of churches

and ministries in so many ways, through your prayers, service and financial generosity — Thank you!

In the month of December, Redeemer historically receives over 30% of its total annual giving. Each of the four congregations are working diligently to meet budgeted giving goals for 2017 so that Redeemer will be a family of self-sustaining churches. This year, Redeemer needs to receive \$7.2M or 38% of our annual giving in December to meet our annual goal of \$19.1M.

Redeemer's hope is to see

God grow the gospel movement in New York City to a level where the grace and joy of Christ's love is permeating and renewing every neighborhood in the city.

If you would like to help Redeemer's churches meet their giving goals, you can make a gift at www.redeemer.com/give. We are humbled by all God is doing through your generous support of Redeemer Churches and ministries and look forward with anticipation for what God will do in the coming year as work together to love and serve the city.

A HEARTFELT THANKS FROM THE DIACONATE

During the Diaconate's annual "Inspire Mercy Night," Pastor David Bisgrove shared his reflection on Luke 15, a passage that contains three parables about recovering what is lost. The first parable concerns a stray sheep, the second is about a lost coin and the final parable is the return of the prodigal son. He pointed out that when the lost becomes found, heaven throws a party. Though three very different parables, what they share in common is restoration. And we on the Diaconate get to witness, participate and celebrate restorations over and over when we work with congregants going through hardships, attempting to claim what has been lost to them, whether a job, a relationship, or stability.

As you probably know, the Diaconate is Redeemer's ministry of mercy to those within our church family who are in need. Every November we take our annual special offering for the Mercy Fund. You, our generous donors, make the work of the Diaconate possible.

Through our Mercy Fund, our deacons and deaconesses are able to meet the urgent needs of our congregants. It might surprise you to know many in our church family are wrestling with financial, medical and/or emotional instability. Through the Diaconate's ministry, lives are being changed as God works through this ministry to provide practical and spiritual help to those in the pews next to you when they need it.

The Diaconate ministry is completely donor supported and every gift matters. For examples, your gift of \$80 underwrites one counseling session for a church member in crisis, and your gift of \$121 translates to a monthly metro card that enables a congregant to get to work everyday.

So during this holiday season, we are thankful for you, dear ministry partners, for sharing the resources you have in order to help bring the tender love of Jesus to the needy brothers and sisters in our midst. Please accept our gratitude and our invitation to continue your giving toward our work of restoration through the Diaconate ministry.

Give to our Mercy Fund, at redeemer.com/mercygift.

2017 ADVENT WORSHIP SCHEDULE

DOWNTOWN

- December 3 Advent I:** Redeemer Downtown Folk Band at 9:30 a.m. service; No 5 p.m. service
- December 10 Advent II:** Brass quintet: Handel's Fireworks at 9:30 a.m. service
PM band with brass at 5 p.m. service
- December 17 Advent III:** Baroque orchestra and choir: Vivaldi's Gloria at 9:30 a.m. service
PM band with strings at 5 p.m. service
- December 24 Advent IV:** Lessons and Carols at 9:30 a.m. service with string quartet and vocal soloists:
Raymon Geis, Melanie Penn, Rachel Zevita
Lessons and Carols at 5 p.m. service; PM band with strings and brass

EAST SIDE

- December 17 Advent III:** Lessons and carols at 10:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Only one a.m. service)
- December 24 Advent IV:** Regular 10:30 a.m. service; 5 p.m. Christmas Eve service
- December 31:** Regular 10:30 a.m. service; No 5 p.m. service.

LINCOLN SQUARE

- December 17 Advent III:** Lessons and Carols
- December 24:** Christmas Eve

WEST SIDE

- December 3 Advent I:** Regular service schedule. Communion at all services
- December 10 Advent II:** Regular service schedule
- December 17 Advent III:** Services of Lessons and Carols at 9:30 and 11:30 a.m.
Readings of the account of Jesus' birth
Music by String Orchestra and soloists
Nursery provided (no classes for K-5)
Regular service a 5 p.m.
- December 24 Advent IV:** No 9:30 a.m. service; Regular service at 11:30 a.m.
Services of Lessons and Carols at 5 and 7 p.m.
Readings of the account of Jesus' birth
Music by evening band, string quartet, and soloists
No classes for K-5, limited children's program for infants to 4 years old
- December 31:** Regular service schedule
No classes for K-5, limited children's program for infants to 4 years old



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GRACE WE CAN HARDLY BEAR ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

Does it look different from the generosity of the world, extending far beyond the giving of consumer goods? Do you live as though you believe that the world is God's creation, and therefore place of abundance, not scarcity? Are you increasingly becoming a person who can respond to hostility and rejection with even more generosity? Do you give liberally and sacrificially to the poor and vulnerable? Because if Christmas is true, it means that as the image-bearers of a radically generous God, we are most human when we give.

HIS TOY STORE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

allowed to have contact with her three children. But His Toy Store gave her a chance to reconnect with her family. "His Toy Store holds a very special place in my heart because it was the vehicle that God used to begin the process of restoration with my children," Debra, who now works at HFNY affiliate Brooklyn Teen Challenge, said. "And it is my prayer each year that it would be used in the same manner for another to begin the restoration process with their children."

Please pray for the stores on December 2 and 9, that the affiliates and volunteers hosting

each store would show love and encourage the families who come. Pray for the families, that they would experience the love of Jesus and be connected to a caring community year-round.

Follow *@hopefornewyork* on Twitter and *@hfnny* on Instagram to stay in the loop about our ongoing work across the city.

SPOTLIGHT EVENT ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

people in our city. Make this be true for your church, for your glory. Amen".

Grace and Race is a group within Redeemer who seek to

embrace the Gospel call to re-deemed relationships across ethnic/racial barriers. We do so by providing events and spaces for prayer, conversation, and the sharing of

cultural goods across racial/ethnic lines. For information on upcoming events, join our mailing list at redeemer.com/graceandrace.