



# THE SPIRE

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
Pittsburgh, PA

My Friends,

STOP THE PRESSES...SPECIAL EDITION of the *Spire*!

This is the first line of what I had written for the April *Spire*: *When the world said "No" to God's love in Jesus Christ, God said "YES!" Easter celebrates God's love in Jesus Christ, and nothing can take that away.*

I've had to change what came after that because the April we had planned for is not the April we now have. You'll see that this Special Edition is more about connecting with each other than with calendars. Everything is tentative, except our care for one another which is strong and steady.

We are in a time when COVID-19 has said "NO" in a very big way to our world. WPC has had to say "no" to gathering together for worship, the church being opened, activities and programs, pastoral visits, and mission events.

But you have said "YES" to Westminster Presbyterian Church being the church in these strange and difficult times.

The Deacons are making Care Calls...Worship is offered through video recordings...A special offering is being requested for SHIM and their Food Bank...Veritas meets through Zoom...Bridge Worship Jams are live on YouTube on Friday nights...Prayers are being said that keep us in conversation with God and phone calls are being made to keep us in conversation with each other...and I could go on!

In these days when death and defeat seem to surround us, when bad news seems to be the only news, when anxiety breeds anxiety about anything that might be coming around the corner, we need to be reminded that Easter is God's judgment day for fear and despair.

Easter is the day God says "Yes" to our own surprise of resurrection as a day of new beginnings in a dark world, a day of new commitments in a world turned upside down. The resurrection challenges us to live in this place called "Here," in this time called "Now," and do what must be done for the sake of the world God loves so much, to live with the reality of God's "YES" in Jesus Christ!

Thanks and blessings,

Bruce Lancaster



**PASTORS**

DR. BRUCE LANCASTER, *Interim Senior Pastor, Head of Staff*  
 REV. LOUISE ROGERS, *Associate Pastor for Congregational Care*  
 REV. JASON FREYER, *Associate Pastor for the Bridge, Youth & Media*

**ADMINISTRATIVE & BUSINESS SUPPORT**

PEG KINSEY, *Executive Assistant to the Pastors*  
 CINDY BINGHAM, *Church Financial Manager*  
 KIMBERLY DUNKOVICH, *Associate Accountant*  
 MANDY THOMAS, *Project Manager*

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 DEBB EGLI, *Assistant Director of Children's & Family Ministry*  
 ED SUTTER, *Director of Middle School Ministry & Family Counseling*  
 LAURA ECKLIN, *Coordinator of Children's & Youth Ministry*

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 CARA DANIELE, *Kitchen Coordinator*

**WESTMINSTER RECREATION & OUTREACH CENTER (WROC)**

KATHY LONG, *Director*

**NURSERY SCHOOL**

412-835-2906

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

412-835-9450

Staff email addresses and phone extensions are available on our website, [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org).

Read the *Spire* online at: [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)

*The Spire* is published monthly by the church staff from September through June. Contributions can be made by emailing a Word document to *Spire* editor Sara Kyle at [sara@ruhlekyle.org](mailto:sara@ruhlekyle.org). The deadline for submitting an article is the fifth day of every month for the following month's issue. Please include the author's name, telephone number, email address, and a title. All articles are subject to editing.

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**Worship**

In light of the recent Coronavirus developments and advice of public health officials, the church campus is currently closed and all activities are canceled. See below for virtual worship opportunities – socially distant but spiritually connected.

**Video Worship**

	Sundays
	11:00 a.m.
	YouTube*

**Bridge Worship Live Stream**

	Fridays
	6:00 p.m.
	YouTube*

\* Visit the church's YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC](http://www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC) or the church website at [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org) to access these virtual worship opportunities.

# A Message of *Love*



The ominous red sign on the Westminster Church door reads:  
**The Church Is Closed.**

How can we continue to be the church if we cannot gather for worship, meet for Veritas, play in the playground, hold Bible studies, or catch up with coffee between services? Christ's church is not bound by the building. Here are signs of the church that we can all embrace!

## **L - Lord**

The Lord is with us. Jesus Christ brings us salvation, offers us new and abundant life. He shows us how to live in the kingdom of God. Yes, the Lord is always present, walking beside us and providing strength, comfort, and hope. The love of God is found in Jesus, and the Spirit abides with us even now. We believe and trust in the One who said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

## **O - Others**

Right now we cannot chat at the welcome center or sing together at the Bridge. But we are connected by our care for each other. In this time of uncertainty, new ways to be a community have emerged. YouTube worship, Care phone calls, greeting cards, Zoom, and Facebook bring us together in this new reality. Honestly, nothing feels as good as a hug when you are in need, but we can embrace each other with care from afar. Dear Children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1John 3:18).

## **V - Vision**

How can I help? This comment was echoed over and over by those we contacted on the care calls. Reaching out to show compassion happens by giving funds to SHIM, checking on our elderly neighbors, calling our family and friends.

The saying "Bloom where you are planted" encourages us to acts of kindness even when, or especially when, we are living at home with our loved ones. People are hurting right now – where can you make an impact on someone else? Love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8).

## **E - Exercise**

While we are restricted at home, exercise is encouraged. Yes, we can still get outside for a walk or a bike ride. What about exercising our faith as well? Join the wider community for video worship. Read the Lenten devotions, spend time in God's word and prayer. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6).

The four signs together spell out LOVE, which is the ultimate mission of the church. The building is closed yet **our hearts are open in LOVE**. Even in the middle of a pandemic, even when routines are interrupted, when chaos is ever present, when people are scattered, when the building is filled with only pews and the classrooms are closed, the church is still the church and love is still love. Every day is Easter for those who are willing to see it. There is always life breathing through, always resurrection taking place, always miracles in our midst.

Trust in God, connect with someone, extend love to others, spend time deepening your spiritual life. This virus will pass and one day we will unlock the doors to welcome everyone in. What a joyful day that will be!

Keep hoping, keep praying, and know the church is the people!

Together on the journey,

Louise

# No Foolin!

April Fools' Day feels a bit like a holiday built for a youth pastor, doesn't it?

Once when we were on a camping trip as a group, a youth confided in us that he was a little frightened of Bigfoot. With all the pastoral sensitivity you would anticipate from such a confession, we realized that we A) had a Bigfoot costume in our office and B) one of our volunteers was driving up that very night to be with us. We had them pick up the costume, dress up in it, and hide in the young person's tent. The rest, as they say, is history.

We also once stuffed that very same costume (we get a lot of mileage out of it) with newspaper, and then sat Mr. Foot on the toilet in the senior pastor's office, waiting just outside for the scream. We may or may not have gotten a stern talking to, but you know...worth it!

On another occasion, we played off the rumors that our church is haunted by a bride left at the altar (come back and see us on this one, it's a good story). A friend of mine was joining us as our female chaperone for an overnight here at the church. But it was the first time she'd been in the building with our youth, so they had never seen her before. So, a hand-me-down wedding dress and some zombie make up later, we had the chaos we were looking for.

There is nothing quite like a good prank.

Lately though, I've given some thought to the ways we fool ourselves. I have had many a teenager sit in my office convinced of something their heart was leading them toward, only to find out later that their heart was fooling them. They were convinced that life was headed in one particular direction, and then a few short weeks later came to discover that they were dead wrong. Of course, this isn't limited to teenagers. How many of us have hoped for something, dreamed of something, been convinced of something, only to find out that this something wasn't anything at all?

I know I've been there.

How do we combat our own hearts and souls when we feel like we can so easily lie to ourselves? Well, I think the best thing we can do is center ourselves in Jesus. One of my favorite passages in all of scripture is John 14:6, when Jesus claims himself to be "The way, **the truth**, and the life." While so often this passage is used as a weapon against other religions, I find so much comfort in the reality that Jesus is claiming here. The truth is not merely a collection of facts. The truth is not held hostage by the ways that we lie to ourselves, intentionally or unintentionally. The truth is not the information that we glean from our news network of choice. No, in fact the Truth is a person. The Truth is someone we can pray to on a regular basis. The Truth is someone who meets with us when we aren't sure what to believe any more about the world around us. The Truth isn't *something* we can center ourselves in, but *someone*.

On one level, this of course makes things a bit more challenging. The Truth can be awfully stubborn, refusing to align with the way we see the world, and yet constantly inviting us to see it the way he does, with love and grace and compassion and forgiveness. May we all have eyes to see the Truth in this way.

And may you also see any pranks coming your way before they get there. You have been warned.

– Jason Freyer

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## BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

I've been thinking about growth lately – and not just growth, but what it actually takes to grow. One of my very favorite sections of scripture points to this idea in a way that I think we often overlook. In the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus gives us an analogy. He tells us that we are like sheep, and that he is the Shepherd; that's an image many of us are familiar with. He also tells us that he is the gate to the sheepfold, and those who go in and out through this gate will find abundant life. That's the stuff that gets the most airtime when these verses come up – and for good reason! A lot of really beautiful truth lies in looking at the abundant, full life we can find in Jesus.

A lot between the lines, though, doesn't get mentioned often. What does it mean for us to be led out of the sheepfold by the shepherd? Why would we leave? Well, for one, if we all stay in one place (as safe as it may feel), pretty soon the ground beneath our feet turns from lush green grass to a barren, muddy mess. Sometimes the very place that feels safest needs to change. Growth and life mean that we can't stay in one place.

Sometimes we need to move. That makes sense, but you know what else is beyond the fence? Danger, unknown territory, unfamiliar experiences. Yes, the shepherd leads us to green pasture, and quiet water, but we're not the only ones out there. Life beyond the sheepfold isn't always friendly. Sometimes discomfort is to be expected; growth and life mean that we'll likely bump into unpleasant events.

So we can't stay in one place without facing deterioration, and we can't move on without facing uncertainty. What exactly are we to do, then? For starters, we need to trust the Shepherd. Jesus' leading is not without purpose. He's clear in scripture that the path he leads us on won't always be simple, easy, or comfortable, but it is always with purpose. Second, we'd do well to understand that our growth hinges on some of these moves. As we move through this life, the experiences we face, both hard and fair, shape us to be wiser, more discerning and resilient. I think these shifts may be truly necessary for our growth.

Jesus tells us that those who use "the gate" will come and go freely. He knows that we need safety and shelter as well as challenge, movement, and nourishment. We can't simply remain in the sheepfold, nor can we wander aimlessly. Fortunately for us, we have a Shepherd who provides direction, purpose, and care.

Where do you fit into this analogy? Have you spent too much time in the sheepfold? Are you left standing in a muddy mess with very little to nourish you? Have you been wandering aimlessly out beyond the gate? Do life's pitfalls seem all too present for you? What would it look like for you to seek out the Shepherd's direction over these next days and weeks?

I'd love to hear where you're being led. Feel free to drop me a line!

– Ed Sutter



# So Tell Everyone

Jesus Christ is risen! This is the Easter message. My grandmother experienced these words of spiritual affirmation firsthand 50 years ago on Easter Eve, April 1970. My grandmother who has since passed away, I called Nana. She was a strong believer, but on that very day 50 years ago she experienced a miracle right in her very own kitchen that opened her eyes, confirmed her faith, and changed her life forever.

She was preparing for the Easter Sunday celebration and had many household duties, in addition to caring for three children, but her desire was to dye Easter eggs that evening. She realized she did not have any dye for the eggs, and she felt inadequate trying to fulfill household responsibilities and also find Easter.

My grandmother improvised and used items she had readily available. She boiled water and used coffee to color her eggs, realizing they would be brown, but planning to personalize them for her family. In faith, my Nana asked the Lord to make the eggs beautiful. Do you know what the Lord did? He made each egg come alive with his crucifixion. Nana heard his voice and felt his presence. She described the overwhelming joy of knowing what Jesus did for her. That he died for her, so that she would have eternal life. When she reached to use the vinegar, the Holy Spirit reminded her of how Jesus thirsted as he hung on the cross and was offered the vinegar sponge.

She then lit small candles to use the melted wax to design each of the family members' names. As she was feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit all around her, the light from one of the candles rose high and illuminated the entire kitchen.

My grandmother said, "This next egg will be for Steve." (At the time Steve was my mother's boyfriend who years later became my mother's husband and my father.) As the wax melted and she began to form the letters of his name, S...T...E, she heard the Lord speak to her and say **SO TELL EVERYONE!** She knew at that very moment Jesus gave his life for her and his message was for her to tell everyone this truth. She said, "My desire was to never leave his presence." She began to share her miraculous experience with family and friends.

This is my grandmother's legacy. Now her children and grandchildren share with others what God told her and the message of his love and sacrifice. I am certain my Nana's heartfelt desire to never leave Jesus' presence has been fulfilled. On January 12, 2018, she went to be with our Lord. On her memorial stone, it is written **SO TELL EVERYONE Jesus is Lord and Savior!**

It is my prayer that you will believe and receive this testimony so that you too will have the assurance from our Lord that what he says in the Bible and did on the cross is true. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life...he who believes in me will live" (John 11:25). And when our time on earth is through, Jesus will say to each of us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of thy Master" (Matthew 25:21-23).

Easter Blessings,

Natalie Brown



# Welcome

## New Members

*Colleen Ashbaugh*



*Leslie, Matt, Josephine, and Martha Lazor*



*Nicole, Chas, Reed, and Kendall Morgenstern*



*Amy, Ken, and Ryan Ranalli*



*Carrie, Jim, Owen, Ruby, and Mabel Fick*



*Jen, Adam, and Kayla Lumish*



*DeAnn Waters*



*Town Hall South*

# Violinist Vijay Gupta Uses Music to Connect with Homeless



*As part of Westminster's Town Hall South speaker series, musician, educator, and citizen-artist Vijay Gupta spoke on Tuesday, February 4, in the auditorium of Upper St. Clair High School.*

*Gupta started playing the violin at the age of 3, enrolled in a pre-college program at Juilliard at the age of 7, and performed with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at 11. After graduating from college at 17, he earned an M.M. from Yale. At 19 he won a place in the first violin section of the Los Angeles Philharmonic over 300 other candidates.*

*After joining the Philharmonic, Gupta met Nathaniel Ayers, a Juilliard-trained violinist whose mental illness had left him homeless on Skid Row. Gupta met Ayers through Steve Lopez, a columnist for the Los Angeles Times who did a series on Ayers, which eventually became a book and a movie, The Soloist. The experience of knowing and playing music with Ayers changed Gupta's life. Shortly afterward, he founded Street Symphony, a nonprofit organization providing musical engagement, dialogue, and teaching for homeless and incarcerated populations.*

*In 2018, Gupta was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant."*

*In a phone interview, Vijay Gupta talked about what he's learned from music and from working with those who are often invisible and ignored in society.*

**Q. How did you transition from your music career to your social justice work?**

A. Nathaniel Ayers was very much the catalyst for that connection. The truth is I've always seen music and healing as the same. I feel that music is medicine for our soul in a very real way. Meeting Nathaniel, I felt a real immediate connection to him that I sometimes didn't feel as a so-called professional musician. So Nathaniel was my guide in meeting people to whom I could offer music as a pathway toward healing. I was surprised by how that interaction actually healed me.

**Q. Tell me about Street Symphony.**

A. Street Symphony is a community of about 90 musicians. Many of them are professionals from ensembles like the LA Philharmonic,

many of them are my students, and then some are actually musicians from the Skid Row community, who are either formerly homeless or formerly incarcerated. So Street Symphony is a mixture of all these musicians making music directly for individuals who have or are experiencing homelessness or incarceration. We take these three communities of artists and we perform in Skid Row clinics, shelters, and state prisons throughout southern California. But we also have a robust teaching artist program, where we dedicate musicians from the LA Philharmonic to spend two years in relationship with formerly homeless people and train them to become active musicians in the Street Symphony network, very much like a mentorship program.

Again, this is sort of an exchange. We don't do this work out of charity but out of a place of being in authentic relationship with people who are our neighbors. Our goal is to change the "us & them" narrative and lean into the fact that even homeless people in our community are a part of our community, we are not separated from them, and what's best for them is what's best for us.

We actually have an active process of creating new pieces of music that are informed by the places and people we meet. We have on our staff a composer who was formerly homeless himself. He came from the Midnight Mission, which is one of our venues. Much of our work is about taking down the barriers of what we call professional and really listening to the people whom we engage.

**Q. So what do you consider success in your outreach program?**

A. For us success is in the connection. Success is in the experience, where we have relationships with people that the rest of the world is rather quick to throw away. Because of those experiences we live our lives differently, we consume things differently, we vote differently. And that's rather unexpected in what we think the power of music can accomplish.

Success is that we want to sound good. We want to be amazing artists, but being an amazing artist is also about building an authentic connection with whomever we're playing for. It's not just about the product of the music, it's about the process of listening. It might seem trite, but success for us is in the experience.



**Q. What did you use your MacArthur Foundation grant for?**

A. The MacArthur allowed me to take the risky step of leaving my full-time job and to make Street Symphony my life. It also allowed me to donate back a significant portion of my salary and to hire people like the formerly homeless composer. The MacArthur supports me for five years. My first year was 2019, so I'm in the second year of my fellowship.

I feel like the MacArthur is really a calling for me to be as honest with myself as I can possibly be. That is actually not just about Street Symphony, but also about my physical and mental health and investing in my own artistic practice.

**Q. What do you hope your audiences at your talks come away with?**

A. We live in a world in pain. And I think that when we see our world in pain, we're often at a loss for what to do about that. I hope my message can empower the people that I address to really feel like they can make a difference in their own community. Power really lies with the ability to come together, start conversations, and make change by having those conversations. I hope my talk is an invitation for the Pittsburgh community to identify for itself what it cares about most, not only what the problems are, but what the gifts and assets are. When we think about shifting the lens from problems to possibilities, we can come up with creative solutions for how to make our world a better place.

*Subscriptions to next year's Town Hall South series, an outreach of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Upper St. Clair, are currently available through [www.townhallsouth.org](http://www.townhallsouth.org). Next year's lineup includes veteran news anchor and journalist Dan Rather on October 6; Kevin Surace, a Silicon Valley innovator and visionary, on November 10; global adventurer, inspirational speaker, and host of Netflix's The Kindness Diaries Leon Logothetis on December 8; diplomat, historian, and former TIME editor Richard Stengel, on February 2, 2021; and author and professor of animal science Dr. Temple Grandin, who will discuss her personal journey with autism, on March 16, 2021.*

# What's in Our Church Library?

Probably more than you realize. I am embarrassed to admit that I taught in our nursery school for seven years and never looked into it. I thought that it contained only adult religious books and therefore wouldn't be of any help to me for two year olds. Was I wrong! The library does house books spiritual in nature, but there are also books for children and young adults, fiction, biography, and history. Not to mention magazines, CDs, and DVDs.

Volunteer staff members are on hand on Sunday mornings, but the library is open all the time. In fact, there is no door! Come check it out.

– Julie Krock, Westminster Church Librarian



# Forward in Faith Quarterly Property Update

The decision in December 2019 to move forward with clearing the outstanding IRS debt has allowed Westminster's general financial climate to ease. Now the Property Commission is finally able to move forward with some major delayed improvements to our beautiful building.

- Unfortunately, due to the unavoidable delay of more than a year, the pavement has deteriorated so repairs will take a bit longer and cost a bit more. Contract details were finalized in the month of March so work can begin as soon as it can be placed on the vendor's schedule. We will replace all of the asphalt parking lots and driveways on the property.
- An overall priority is to have water in the building only where it is wanted, so one major project is completing the excavation and water proofing of the downstairs hallways beneath the breezeways. The south breezeway deck pavers will be re-laid where necessary and repointed to enable a water tight seal. This work began the week of March 9.
- In the summer, we will renovate Fellowship Hall, after 25 years of use. We will replace the ceiling, carpet, tables, chairs, and ceiling mounted visual projector on the north wall. We will replace and upgrade the lighting, and paint the whole space. In addition, we will replace the carpet in the rear lobby and staircase up to the north entry, along with the flooring in the serving area leading to the kitchen.
- Our iconic spire is long overdue for restoration and refurbishment. Getting work crews up to the top of the exterior of the steeple is dangerous, so detailed engineering planning is going into determining the best, safest, and most cost-effective path. We are collecting bids and work should begin in the coming months.
- The Property Commission is prioritizing all of the remaining projects on the To Do list, including among many other things: painting the exterior of the building, investigating replacement of a number of exterior doors, and pursuing installation of a building-wide security system in tandem with the Safety and Security Committee.

The Property Commission has \$903,962.76 in Forward in Faith funds as of the end of February. To ensure financial propriety, we have implemented specific controls surrounding the spending of these dollars. For any projects over \$1,000, at least three quotes are required from three separate vendors, and signatory authority is very limited. We are carefully reviewing all projects to ensure only included capital improvements are completed with these dollars and not ongoing maintenance repairs (which should come from the operating budget). We have a small advisory board reviewing all projects, including Jay Galbreath, Property Chair; Cindy Bingham, Church Business Manager; Bruce Lancaster; and Mandy Thomas, Church Project Coordinator. These and other controls are part of a recent church contract policy approved by Session.

Please contact Jay Galbreath or Mandy Thomas if you would like to review the complete list of property projects, and Cindy Bingham if you have questions on any financials. A quarterly financial report for Forward in Faith will be printed in the May issue of the *Spire*. We have built a binder for tracking all Forward in Faith projects, including printed copies of bids, invoices, and notes. Anyone is welcome to review this information at any time.

We continue to welcome pledges and donations to Forward in Faith, so please join us as we keep moving Forward in Faith together!



FORWARD IN FAITH



**South breezeway deck pavers being re-laid and repointed for better waterproofing.**



**All of the asphalt parking lots and driveways on the property will soon be replaced.**

# Financial Report

As of February 29, 2020

Income	
February 2020 Income	\$436,700.98
February 2020 Budget Income	\$213,691.27
YTD Income	\$777,674.06

Expenses	
February Expenses	\$210,292.84
February Budget Expenses	\$230,230.36
YTD 2020 Expenses	\$374,185.61

NOTE: In February the church received special contributions.

We thank you for your generous support through the first couple of months of the year.

## Approved Outreach Expenditures for March 2020

Haiti Technical School Curriculum	\$2,100	Meals on Wheels	\$3,000
Homewood Housing	\$5,000	Pittsburgh Presbytery	\$3,200
Malawi*	\$3,000	Washington City Mission	\$5,000
MBF	\$5,000		

\* denotes wire transfer

# Schedule Updates & Announcements

## Church Office Schedule

Church is currently closed which includes all worship services, activities, and meetings. You can call 412-835-6630 to contact a pastor or speak to someone in the church office. Join us for virtual worship – socially distant but spiritually connected – on the church's YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC](http://www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC) or the church website at [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org).

## Virtual Veritas

As we continue to face new challenges every day, we want to continue to connect in new ways. Many of our youth joined us for "Virtual Veritas" the past few weeks on Zoom, and we hope to keep seeing even more of you. Contact Jason Freyer at [freyer@westminster-church.org](mailto:freyer@westminster-church.org) for more information.

## WECEP

Westminster Early Childhood Education Programs (WECEP) is currently closed. Please visit their website at [www.wecep.org](http://www.wecep.org) for details.

# Deaths

**Richard Heilman**

*March 14*

**Don Thomas**

*March 20*





**WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

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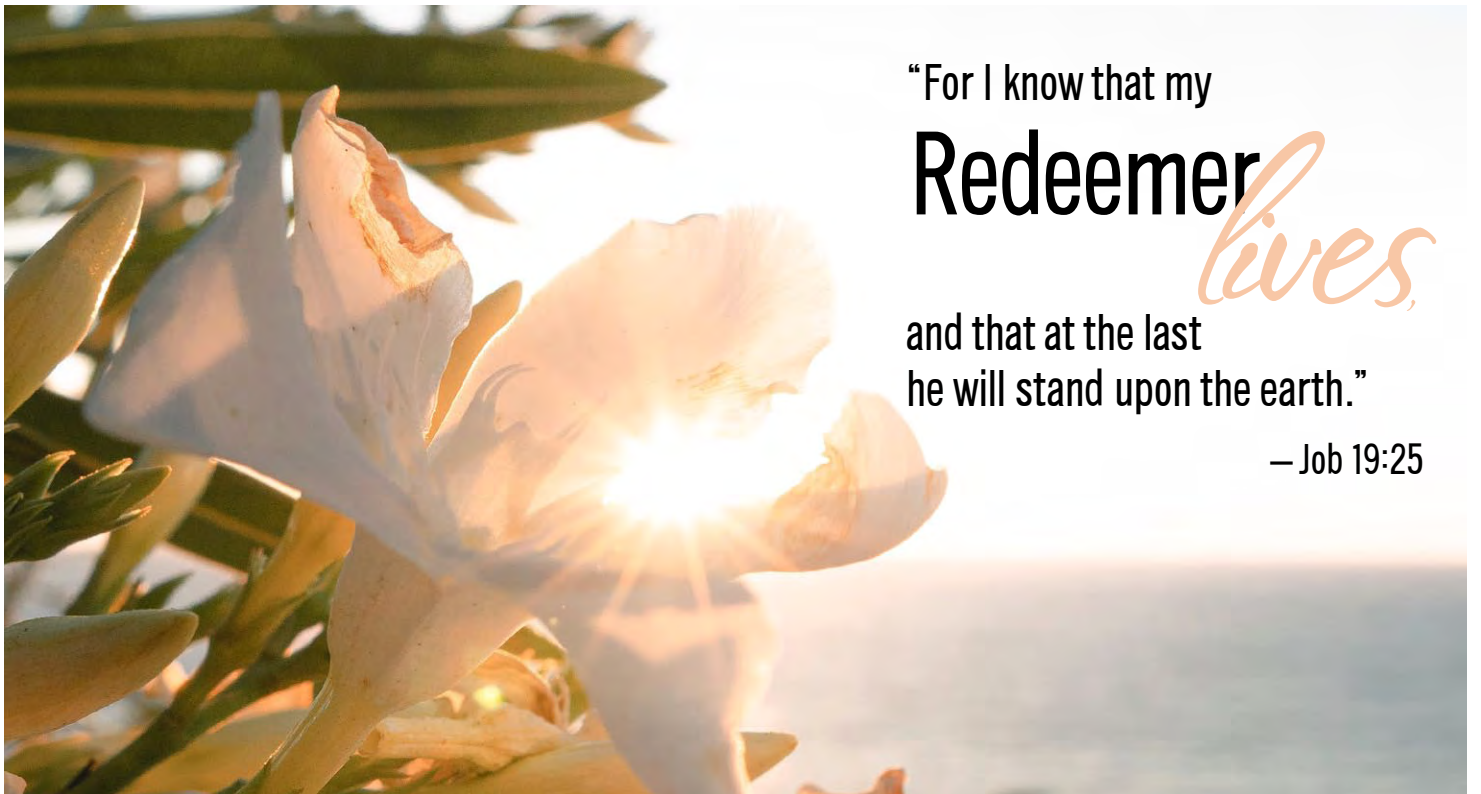
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“For I know that my  
**Redeemer** *lives*

and that at the last  
he will stand upon the earth.”

— Job 19:25