

1. It was Ash Wednesday and I was the preacher at Cunningham UMC. It had been a particularly hard week and I was pretty exhausted by the time I preached my sermon that day. Then a child Walks up at the end of my sermon. Every eye in the sanctuary was on him. This boy I baptized in this sanctuary on Easter Day a few short years before. Hands me a card on which he has spelled out in his own writing: "I love you Pastor." I went back to my seat and I wept for the love in that boy's heart. I wept for Jesus' uncanny ability to put a child into our midst to teach us. Sometimes we get so caught up in telling others God loves them. We forget the simple song "Jesus loves me. His love isn't just for others. It is for me. Powerful stuff.
2. A recent Healing Prayer service. I'm Used to laying hands on others. This occasion the first time the person being prayed for lifted their arms and placed them on me. And immediately power coursed through my body, and I wonder if that was similar to what Jesus and the woman felt when she touched the hem of his garment and was healed. The power and energy in healing touch. Touch is a powerful tool In God's arsenal when used appropriately.
3. The grandson of one of our members was helping her put a few things in the kitchen over the summer of 2012 a few weeks prior to the church dedication. And he asked his grandmother "what is it going to be? A soup kitchen." No, she replied. "A —kitchen? No came another quick answer. And the boy pondered it a moment and said: "well what are you going to use it for?" That young man reminded me that everything we think is ours is really God's. And it is up to figure out how to use everything we have on behalf of God's work. Otherwise what purpose does it really serve?
4. There was some level of consternation when we were looking at the long list of needs to furnish the worship center. Well, one day a gorgeous set of handbells arrived at our office. Nobody knew where they came from. Nobody! Not the music director. Not the pastor. Not the congregation president. Everybody had their guess, but nobody knew. And the mystery of that anonymous gift made it all the more joyful to play. Wondering who the giver was who might be enjoying the fruits of their gift which fostered a handbell choir. And it was not until After his death that his widow shared with us that it was her husband who had taken such delight in giving that anonymous gift. That experience taught me the value of truly anonymous giving. Jesus said—when you give do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing, and you will receive the reward of the righteous.
5. I learned what it means to really be in fellowship with others in Hurley with our youth. We went down to help people with their houses in disrepair. Painting. Replacing rotten floors. Building additions to tiny mountain homes so a little girl could have her own bedroom. But when we truly became one with Hurley folks was when one woman brought out some venison her son had "caught" and one of our youth didn't cringe. Didn't turn up her nose. But welcomed it and ate it and was grateful for it. And at another home another year the family didn't have much at all, but at lunch as we ate our PBJ sandwiches the wife in the young family came out with a plate full of fried green tomatoes. And our work team scarfed them down like ravenous wolves. And that is when we bonded. When we ate the cooking of those poor country people. Reminds me of the wisdom Jesus had when he sat down to eat with tax collectors and sinners. They bonded. They became friends. He ate their cooking.

6. When Scott Scudamore had a mountain biking accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down no one would have faltered him for being discouraged. For being down or wrestling with “why me” feelings with what happened. But that was not the case with Scott. He quickly learned how to communicate without use of his voice. He went 100 percent at everything he was asked to do. Things that would have discouraged others, he met as a challenge. Before his accident I had worked with him to train him as an assisting minister in worship. On one visit while they were experimenting with possible advanced wheelchairs for his use he expressed to me—I am looking forward to the day when I can be Assisting Minister again. Can we get this chair up to the altar? I assured him we would. Scott did not get to realize that goal in the way he had envisioned. But he is at this altar table with us each Sunday—Part of the communion of saints. Nothing is impossible with God.
7. Grace and Glory worked hard every Sunday to set up the worship space. Their weekly task was to take a middle school cafeteria and turn it into a warm, welcoming environment for worship. Everything from putting a banner along route 15 in front of the school, to setting up the instruments, the altar and communion elements, banners, everything you take for granted will stay put from week to week in your established church sanctuary. One Christmas Eve GG had quite an obstacle. It was Christmas Eve. When everyone arrived to set up for this night of nights, the doors normally unlocked by Lewis the custodian were locked tight. He was nowhere to be found. He was not answering his phone. The assistant principal was not available either. It was a perfect storm. Yet everyone waited patiently. And troubleshooted. And when the doors were finally unlocked about 10 minutes before the scheduled service time—it was like the SWAT team descended on that cafeteria. It was teamwork like I had never seen. Everybody worked together. And a few minutes later we were worshiping like we had been set up hours before. When Paul writes “you are the body of Christ—and each is an indispensable part of it” GG that Christmas Eve was a near perfect expression of it.
8. When a catastrophic earthquake hit the already poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti. Grace and Glory Lutheran once again worked in ecumenical partnership with Baptists, Methodists and Roman Catholics to go down under the organization of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board and put the finishing touches on the Source Of Light orphanage in Port Au Prince. When Jesus prayed for those who would follow him: “Father May they be one as we are one” this May have been pretty close to what he had in mind. We prayed together. We ate together. We shlepped buckets of cement together. We taught VBS on the fly together to children who didn’t speak English, but nonetheless knew the language of love. And we communed together. With this chalice—which was given to me at the end of the week. It’s your chalice. It’s your reminder. I leave it with you. A symbol that we are one church in the blood of our Savior. One bread. One body. One cup of blessing which we bless.
9. The miracle of food that keeps on giving, growing. For quite some time Elisheva Klegg left messages on my voicemail, relayed messages through Justin, and emailed me about a ministry she had begun called IHS. Interfaith Humanitarian Sanctum. It really was not on my radar...until one day Elisheva walked into my office and shared her story, of observing the great needs of poor people who came to UVA Medical Center for treatment. And in the course of her work there, when she found people living in their car while their family member underwent chemo treatments, she knew she must make a

difference. Now most months we are making 60 meal packets for distribution by the hospital social workers. And Jan applied for and got a domestic hunger grant from the ELCA that has helped the cause. Our ELCA world hunger appeal offerings coming right back around full circle and blessing our nearby neighbors. That passion to feed our neighbors has spilled over into Feeding Fluvanna with a second community day in 2 years coming in a couple short weeks. Amazing things happen when we lend Jesus our lunch!

10. I have learned that sacred spaces are important. Many of you have commented on the peace that abides with you in this sanctuary. Josephine Martin came from a long line of pastors in her family tree. She was in her 80's and she had been in and out of the hospital a few times. It was her death that precipitated a seminary scholarship at GG, which her husband continued to support until his death. Jo was determined to live long enough to walk through the doors of this sanctuary. When we could first gained occupancy and were able to let everyone in, we made a grand procession from the middle school wilderness wandering, up route 15, left onto 53, and then into the church parking lot, headlights on and horns a beeping, it was quite a parade. Then I was the first one in, opening the doors and getting into the sanctuary first, I could watch each person as they entered the sanctuary for the first time. And I will never forget the face of Josephine Martin. The look of awe and joy that came over her as she entered this space. It reminds me of two Scriptures at once. The psalm of ascent that says "I was glad when they said to me let us go up to the house of the Lord." And when Simeon in the temple held Jesus in his arms and said —Lord now let your servant depart in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation. "
11. I learned something about death and resurrection. There is a hymn that talks about the reality that the church keeps on rising from the dead. In that sense, death is ongoing, yet so is resurrection. We felt it in a pronounced way as we were constructing this church building. Even as the excitement grew as plans solidified and ground was broken, and walls were erected—we were stung by the deaths of a number of the faithful folks who had walked that journey with us. So real was that felt loss that on the night of our dedication of the new sanctuary we ran a slide show of all the saints who had accompanied us. And yet with that loss came resurrection as we took in sizable groups of new members in the year that followed—many of whom are serving faithfully now. Again in the past year we have felt the loss of members, the loss of staff, and now the loss of the church's first full time pastor. But remember, the reality of resurrection is deep in the dna of Grace and Glory. God has this way of taking loss and making it gain. Of taking sorrow and making it joy. Of taking death, and making it abundant life for all.
12. Finally, I have learned from Grace and Glory what it means to be a caring community of Christians. When my family arrived at 5 Birch Court in 2006 and our furniture didn't for days, you gave my family your own chairs, your own plates, your good cooking. You have driven one another to town for treatments. You have ushered at the funerals of your friends. You have passed around the babies to give their parents a break in worship. You have given of your personal resources to support people you won't ever meet and some you greet unawares. You have built Habitat houses so your neighbors can sleep in security. You have exemplified for me what Jesus meant when he said "Love one another as I have loved you." And Christ does and I do love you. Amen.