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# Murray Presbyterian Messenger

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January 2024



Murray Presbyterian Church

P.O. Box 196, Main Street Murray, NE 68409

[www.murraypresbyterian.org](http://www.murraypresbyterian.org) Tel: (402)235-2754

Featured This Month: Ringing in 2024



**“Indeed, the Lord is the one who will keep on walking in front of you. He’ll be with you and won’t leave you or abandon you, so never be afraid and never be dismayed.”  
(Deuteronomy 31:8)**

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## Upcoming Events

Sundays

10:00 am: Morning Worship

Thank you for your ongoing financial support of Murray Presbyterian! Contributions may be deposited in the offering plates during worship services, mailed to the church at P. O. Box 196, Murray NE 68409 or made online at [www.murraypresbyterian.org](http://www.murraypresbyterian.org). Click on the "Give Now" button at the bottom of the homepage.

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It's no wonder Ronald Reagan was called "the Great Communicator." His rhetorical skills were legendary. And a lot of it had to do with the fact that he was such a masterful storyteller. Some of his stories were inspiring and uplifting (like the one in his first inaugural address about Martin Treptow, a small-town barber who died in World War I). Some of them were funny (like the optimistic little boy shoveling through piles of manure because he was convinced there *must* be a pony in there somewhere). And, quite frankly, some of them were spurious (such as the claims about a notorious welfare queen). One way or the other, Reagan's oratory helped reinvigorate a small-government, laissez-faire philosophy that had fallen out of favor during the Great Depression. It all came across like common sense, and his simple yarns made a set of abstract ideas about governance readily accessible to ordinary people, many of whom embraced it.

But for all his legendary story-telling abilities, Ronald Reagan can't begin to compare with the *greatest* practitioner of that craft, Jesus of Nazareth. One commentator wrote that whatever else one thinks of Jesus, "it is certainly true that he was one of the world's supreme masters of the short story." Jesus took one type of story—the parable—that had been used sporadically in Israel's sacred writings (for example, the tale about the poor man and his ewe lamb that Nathan had told to David) and he elevated it into an art form. It became a signature feature of his teaching style and his manner of engaging with people one-on-one. Depending on how one classifies certain sayings, there are around 50 parables in the gospels. In Luke's gospel, which records the largest number of them, about one-third of the utterances attributed to Jesus are in the form of parables.

Why teach in parables? The simplest explanation would be that it makes things easier to understand. According to the old definition a lot of us learned in Sunday school, a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." It took some feature of everyday life in Bible times (sowing seeds, caring for sheep, dealing with moneylenders) and used it to illustrate spiritual realities. As an old adage puts it, "Truth, embodied in a tale, can enter in at lowly doors."

But not everyone saw it that way. After one such round of story-telling, the disciples of Jesus approached him and said, in effect (this is from a paraphrase version): "Why do you always speak to people in these hard-to-understand parables?" Jesus' response is instructive. Again, using a paraphrase, he said, in essence, "You've been given the intimate experience of insight into the hidden mysteries of the realm of heaven's kingdom, but they have not. For everyone who listens with an open heart will receive progressively more revelation until he has more than enough. But those who don't listen with an open, teachable heart, even the understanding that they think they have will be taken from them. That's why I teach the people using parables, because

## Upcoming Worship Opportunities Sundays After Epiphany Sermon Series



For the Sunday morning messages between Epiphany and the start of Lent, we return to the gospels to look at one of the most distinctive features of Jesus' teaching: the Parables. We'll be looking at six of the most well-known and beloved examples of this classic story-form.

**Jan. 7** A Story About Results:  
The Sower  
(Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23)

**Jan. 14** A Story About Patience:  
The Wheat and Tares  
(Matt. 13: 24-30)

**Jan. 21** A Story About Priorities:  
The Hidden Treasure and  
Pearl of Great Price  
(Matt. 13:44-46)

**Jan. 28** A Story About Perceptions:  
The Good Samaritan  
(Luke 10: 25-37)

**Feb. 4** A Story About Welcoming  
Outcasts:  
The Great Banquet  
(Luke 14: 15-24)

**Feb. 11** A Story About Being Lost  
(and Found):  
The Prodigal Son  
(Luke 15: 11-32)

their hearts are unteachable, they never discover it" (Matt. 13: 10-13, paraphrased in the Passion Translation). For some people, the parable is a pathway to greater understanding, for others it leaves them even more dazed and confused than ever.

Part of the reason for an inability (or unwillingness) to comprehend is because the parables are so *subversive*! They fly in the face of conventional wisdom. They're intentionally designed to be provocative. One standard feature is the surprise ending that catches the listener (or reader) off guard and overturns the usual assumptions. The hero is a *Samaritan*! The cautious, risk-adverse servant is *condemned*! The riff-raff and outcasts are *welcomed in* to the great banquet! The shocking finale is supposed to jolt the listener into seeing life and seeing God in a new way.

Unfortunately, we can't really replicate the impact of the stories in our modern times. For starters, we are usually reading them; whereas the original audience heard them being told *orally*. The analogy is imperfect, but you can imagine that reading the transcript of a late-night talk show host's opening monologue would be a far different experience from hearing it as part of the studio audience. Secondly, our very familiarity with the stories makes what was once scandalous and unsettling into something hum-drum and expected. A joke may be funny the first time you hear it; maybe even the second time. But if you've been hearing the same joke all your life, it's not very funny anymore. Lastly, the parables don't always pack the same emotional punch with us because we aren't immersed in the culture in which they were first told. Before we grasp the point being made, we might need a little background information on who Samaritans were, or how money was used in an agrarian economy, or what the wedding practices of the day were. But that, of course, deadens the impact. A joke that needs to be explained also isn't funny anymore.

Nonetheless, even if we can't capture the emotional impact of hearing Jesus' parables for the very first time, in a first century Jewish context, it's *vitally important* for us to engage with them. They form the core of Jesus' teaching. They are an inexhaustible source of spiritual insight. To take but one example, the parable of the prodigal son comprises 22 verses in Luke 15, around 400 words altogether. Yet, it has inspired *entire books* by noteworthy writers, some of which have become spiritual classics. (Examples include Helmut Thielicke's *The Waiting Father*, Kenneth Bailey's *The Cross and the Prodigal*, Henri Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and Tim Keller's *The Prodigal God*.)

That's why, with the start of a new year, we're launching a series of messages called "The Greatest Stories Ever Told." We'll be looking at some of Jesus' most well-known and beloved parables. And we'll be listening to hear what he might be saying to us today through this timeless story form. I hope you will join us, as you are able, online or in person.

## Leadership

### Session

#### Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

#### Clerk of Session

Debra South

#### Class of 2023

Denise Ayers

Melanie Honaker

#### Class of 2024

Kenny Drake

Dave Friedli

#### Class of 2025

Sharlyn Deterding

Debra South

### Deacons

#### Class of 2023

Delaney Deterding

Dana Stahl

Ann Wieringa

#### Class of 2024

Kathy Friedli

Sherrill Konfrst

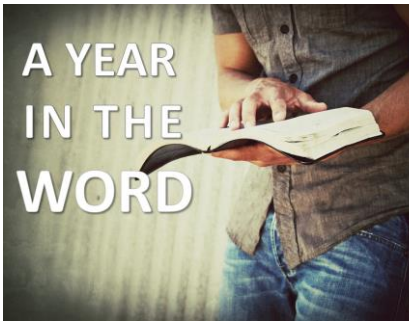
Julie Nickels

#### THANK YOU!

Once again, our family was astounded by another display of your generosity with the gift we were given on Christmas Eve. Thank you for the gift itself and for the sentiments that we know were behind it. And as the Apostle Paul told the church at Phillippi in a "thank you" letter to them: "You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 The Message). We look forward to serving the Lord alongside you in the coming year. Love in Christ,  
Bill, Stacey, and John



### Bible Reading



At the start of a new year, some folks in our congregation are embarking on a systematic plan of Bible reading. One option Andrew Dolven has challenged us to join him in using is the YouVersion Bible reading plan, which takes you through the entire Bible in a year. It can be read online or accessed in audio form. Check it out at: <http://bible.com/r/7>

### Mission and Outreach

Melanie Honaker, team lead

#### Salvation Army Bell Ringing



In keeping with a practice that has continued for several years now, members of our congregation took turns ringing bells and manning the Salvation Army kettle outside the Plattsmouth Hy-Vee store on December 16. At one point, there was even music! Ninety percent of the money collected stays right here in Cass County and is directed to needy families in our area through SENCA. Thank you to everyone who participated (or donated)!



### Leadership Teams

#### Worship and Family Life

Sharlyn Deterding, Team Leader  
Deb South, Session Rep.  
Linnea Hill  
Sherrill Konfrst  
Laraine Young

#### Mission and Outreach

Melanie Honaker, Team Leader  
George Collins  
Sydney Honaker  
John McConnell  
Stacey McConnell  
Dana Stahl  
Ann Wieringa

#### Christian Education

Denise Ayers, Team Leader.  
Sharlyn Deterding  
Kathy Friedli  
Julie Nickels  
Linnea Hill

#### Properties and Finance

Kenny Drake, Team Leader  
Sharlyn Deterding, Session Rep.  
Dave Friedli  
Norm Koester  
Gary Reike



## Nicaragua School Uniform Project



Children in La Concepción, Nicaragua who would otherwise not be able to attend school received their required uniforms, along with a backpack of supplies, in December. Our presbytery supports this ministry of our partner churches in that city.

## Nicaragua Fellowship Hour Meal (January 14)



Be sure to stay following worship (or come following worship) on **January 14** for a very special Fellowship Hour. It will feature a traditional Nicaraguan-style meal, consisting of a walking taco bar (with Gallo pinto rice & beans, beef, chicken, guacamole pico salsa, and queso fresco), tropical fruit salad, tres leche cake, and Nicaraguan coffee. A free-will offering will be received to support the school uniform project shown above.

## Nicaragua Partnership Fund-raiser



Our presbytery's Nicaragua Partnership Committee has launched a fund-raiser to support a meal program for children that our partner churches in La Concepción operate in an especially impoverished area of their municipality. Products—including knives, kitchenware and food mixes—are being sold from Rada Cutlery, with 40% of each order going to the Nicaragua project. You can pick up a catalog on the back table in the sanctuary, go this unique shopping link:

<https://radafundraising.com/?rfsn=7698487.681a821>, or scan the QR code below:



Any questions can be directed to Ann Wieringa.



## Christmas in the Marty McDaniel Chapel



The year at Clinica Salvatore in El Cortijo, Guatemala ended with a Christmas program. The chapel named in memory of our former pastor, Rev. Marty McDaniel, was filled to overflowing with local children and their moms and dads.

## Keep Filling the SENCA Cart!

A good breakfast is one way to start your day off right. And helping hungry neighbors enjoy a good breakfast is one way to start the year off right. So breakfast foods are this month's SENCA theme. Any non-perishable food items are welcomed, but this month, we encouraging donations of items such as oatmeal, pop tarts, and breakfast cereals. Thank you to everyone who faithfully contributes and keeps the SENCA cart overflowing each month!



## ANNUAL MEETING

The session has scheduled the annual congregational meeting to take place in the sanctuary immediately following worship on Sunday, January 28, 2024. This meeting is called for the purpose of receiving year-end reports from officers and committees of the church, reviewing the 2023 treasurers report on income and expenditures, receiving (for informational purposes only) the 2024 budget adopted by the session, and electing members of the session, board of deacons and nominating committee. All regular worshipers at Murray Presbyterian Church are welcome to attend. In keeping with Presbyterian polity, only members of the congregation are permitted to vote. Come out and celebrate what God is doing in the life of our congregation!