

Sermon June 7, 2026

Felipe: Friends, this summer we are approaching the scriptures in a different way by listening to each other's stories. And so I want to invite Jake Brooks, Vince Cochran, and Lisa Porter to come forward to help us share stories and reflection of the scriptures. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to be a part of this different way of us sharing about our faith. So the first thing I would ask you is if you could tell us a little bit about your faith journey. How did you come to know Jesus and how did you come to follow his teaching? So why don't we start with you, Jake?

Jake: Sure. I'm Jake Brooks, just in case you missed that part. But I grew up going to church and mainly in the United Methodist Church. But I would say I probably didn't really mean much to me when you're a kid and you kind of just do what your parents want you to do or tell you to do. I would say... my parents were, like, separated growing up, and so I remember in middle school, my dad started going to church and, like, reading his Bible, and I kind of noticed that. And just seeing him just kind of, like, take that stuff more seriously, you know, outside of just the Sunday morning made me think more about that. And when I was in high school, a church started in town, and it was, like, a new youth group, and some of my friends invited me. When I said I kind of dipped my toes in those evangelical Christian waters a little bit, got involved in Campus Crusade in college. But really, I would say towards the end of my time, through lots of experiences that I'm sure we'll get into, I went through, I would say everybody goes through some sort of like deconstruction process on a regular basis. But I would say I probably went through like a heavier deconstruction process or just rethinking all these things that I... had been told to believe or had just been kind of handed down to me and started to make sense of it on my own. So, yeah, that's kind of like the fast-forward version of that.

Felipe: Thank you. Yeah. Vince.

Vince: Yeah, so I'm Vince Cochran. Like Jake, I grew up in church, started out United Methodist from a very young age, and then my parents also divorced and my mom remarried. My stepdad's family was more of a Baptist tradition, so that was where I probably spent most of my faith journey from a young age up until about a year or two years ago. Became a follower around age nine, was baptized. And I would say my faith journey ebbed and flowed through there. So, I mean, I always was involved in church to some degree, but, you know, the level of which I participated.

kind of changed over the years as I matured. I would say my teenage years kind of went through a phase of kind of, you know, back and forth. But as I... kind of grew closer in my journey. And now, and I'll get into a little bit more of this later, but just some different experiences and kind of went through my own kind of deconstruction in a way. And I would say one of the biggest changes was is that I felt like faith was always rooted in fear. We were always taught to fear God. And I think a lot of people

went through that and different experiences. And so I felt like a lot of what I participated in in faith was it was driven by fear. It was like, if I didn't do this, this was going to happen. If I didn't do such and such, this was going to happen. And that has kind of changed. And I've learned to grow more faith and love versus faith and fear.

Felipe: We'll talk a little bit more about that. Thank you. Lisa, share your ideas of your growing up in the faith.

Lisa: I'm going to read mine because I'm not very good at improv, so forgive me for that.

I was baptized as a baby and grew up identifying as a Christian about as far back as I can

remember. At home, we prayed before every meal, and my parents worked as musicians in a Presbyterian church. So I went every Wednesday to children's choir and every Sunday to two services and Sunday school in between. There I learned that I was loved by God and that Jesus had a place for me no matter what. But also, from about second grade to sixth grade, my mom sent my brother and me to a Bible club, which was taught by a lady in our neighborhood named Mrs. Perry, because my mom didn't think I got enough Bible at church. Yeah. So we memorized Bible verses and learned all the Old Testament and New Testament stories. Mrs. Perry taught us that we needed to believe certain things to be saved. In order to get to heaven. But I think in my heart. I knew that Jesus. That Jesus Mrs. Perry taught us about. Was the same good loving friend. That I learned about at church.

Felipe: Thank you. So today's passages. We've been trying to understand God. From different angles. And we talked about the Trinity. And this time. We used three different images. God a shepherd. God as mother hen, God as advocate. And so how do you experience God's guidance, love, and encouragement if you think about those passages? And I'm going to start with Lisa because we've talked a little bit about your perspective on that mother hen image.

Lisa: Yeah. So I love the image of God as a mother hen, a female image. kind of rare in the Bible, a hen gives her chicks everything they need before they even hatch. She keeps them warm and safe and close until they're ready to go out on their own. She's brave and loving, and in my imagination, God has wings that are wide enough to cover her infinite flock. I think this loving parental image is great for kids. But I also love the mother hen God as an adult. I believe she is present within us and around us, God is. And her body, God is us. We are that mother hen. We are her mouth, her wings, her feet. Together we show up and advocate with those who need protection, hoping that our collective clucking will be eventually loud enough that nobody can ignore us. We use our skills to provide shelter, food, and care for those who need help. We work to overcome our fears and love all our children. Because sometimes it does take overcoming of fears to do that. And we welcome all into her flock. And sometimes we're the chicks. And then we know that we can count on her for

comfort and care. When we are hurting, hungry, or afraid. This church family has helped me a lot with that, to experience God in both these ways, as both chick and hen.

Vince: When I thought about this question, the first thing that came to mind was more on the advocacy part of things. Some here know my journey. As I had mentioned, I grew up in a kind of more evangelical, very strict kind of tradition. And one of the things that I have struggled with for several years, and I wouldn't say struggle, it's just something I was trying to understand and how I could reconcile, was how I could reconcile being a Christian with my identity. Growing up, I was always taught that you could not be gay, be who you are, because it went against God's will. And a lot of that, again, comes from that faith rooted in fear. Realizing who I was as an individual, I found myself thinking that God wasn't going to love me because of who I was. And that was so much at the forefront of my mind. And I couldn't be myself. I had to try to change who I was. If I prayed hard enough, I would change. If I did these things, I would change. And what I found is the more, the harder I tried to change that, the further I felt away from God or I felt like that I was just, you know, I was being punished for something. When I finally reached a point, I would say the do or die in life of I was either going to have to go one path or because I just had become the shell of existence. And it was in that moment I felt like God really showed up and said, you know, why are you trying to change who I made you to be? I created you to be who you are. And all you've done is spent all these years trying to change who I made you to be. And that was a huge revelation and also scary because it's like, now what do I do? And when I mentioned advocacy, just over a year ago, I found First Presbyterian Church here, and I realized that my identity and being a Christian could coexist. There are people who love me. There are people who support me. And I just have seen God in so many ways through all the different people here in this church and throughout our community. And so when Jen was illustrating the friendship aspect, I would say that's how I've probably seen God the most is through other people and through the love that they express.

Jake: First, I want to say, Vince, I wouldn't say that your identity in Christianity can go exist. I would say that who you are is needed, your full self, and I'm glad that you are there. So I would say I experience... really through other people mainly. I would say my main person is Keek, my wife. And then, you know, Lucy and Alice I would include in that too for the obvious reasons of family. But, you know, I think about, I mentioned I went through like a deconstruction process and a lot of that was really sparked by just being in relationship with others. I remember I had a really close friend who's gay, and he was struggling with his Christianity and reconciling all of that. And he and I just had a lot of conversations about, like, what does it mean to be a Christian and, you know, the nature of God and things like that. And, you know, I mentioned I kind of dipped my toes in those evangelical waters, and a lot of that is

similar to what you were saying, Vince, about what you believed. It's, like, kind of fear-based, right? Your own personal behavior. And I remember, like, having real reflections on, like, should I watch, like, rated R movies even as a Christian, you know what I mean? And it's to a point where it's just, like, like, what are we doing here? You know, like, what is the outcome of this, like, approach to faith? I don't know how else to say that. What's the fruit, if you want to use a biblical term? And just really, in the bigger picture, just realizing that a lot of our struggles today really come from the fact that we are the most isolated from each other we have ever been. And you can point to all the things, our phones, divisions between...political ideas, all kinds of stuff. But the only thing that would get us through is each other, right? If we can just be in relationship and actually dig into the things that we care about and the core values that guide us, have conversations about how we're experiencing God, that is how we're going to get through all this stuff. That's been the most formational stuff for me, just having those real deep conversations and hearing other people's stories and sharing pain, right, and the things we're really struggling with. And even today as a parent, right, parenting is actually incredibly isolating. To even, like, you always talk about, yeah, well, like, watch each other's kids. It's like... can't even find the time to schedule to do that, you know? And then when you do have time, it's like, I just, like, want to, like, chill on the couch or go do something that I just haven't, don't have time to do, you know? And it's just, like, we just have to insist upon being together, right? And I can't see, like, that, to me, like, that is just what the theme we see in, like, Jesus' ministry and the Bible. I mean, even God being, like, three beings in one is a communal thing, right? So, yeah, it's kind of a long-winded way to answer that.

Felipe: Well, I want to thank the three of you for your faithful journeys and for sharing with us. And I want to invite all of us that... have an opportunity to share our stories with one another, or if you journal, to write your own reflections for yourself or for your own reflection. But the opportunity that we have through worship is to... exchange with one another, to talk with one another how we experience God. And worship doesn't just happen on a Sunday morning in the sanctuary. We worship God everywhere and all times. So I want to encourage you to follow the lead of Jake and Vince and Lisa to help share where you experience God and how God impacts your life. So thank you very much. And let's thank them for sharing the word.