***Embracing the uncertain***

**Lenten Worship Series – Week 5**

***The Uncertainty of Surrender***

**March 29, 2020**

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| **WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINE**S  Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. Sermon manuscripts are included as a *sample* and not to be preached verbatim. |

**Announcements and Offering**

***I Want to Know Christ***

**Call to Worship:**

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11, NRSV).

These words written by the apostle Paul are amazing. If there was such a thing as a Discipleship Hall of Fame, his image would be enshrined there. Yet here he was, saying that he didn’t know Jesus the way he wanted to. That may seem unthinkable, but it is also quite liberating. Maybe Paul actually gives us permission to acknowledge the uncertainty and tentativeness we feel when it comes to knowing and following Jesus. Maybe the key to faith is not being certain, but allowing faith to begin where certainty ends.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 59-60)

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| **SB#509 – O boundless salvation! deep ocean of love** | TB-506 – My Jesus, I love Thee | HTD2-T3 (4 vs.) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#38 – Jehovah is our strength** | TB-200 – Darwalls | HTD1-T7 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#55 – Praise, my soul, the king of Heaven** | TB-406 – Praise, my soul | HTD2-T12 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#507 – My heart is fixed, eternal God** | TB-292 – Christ for me | No CD |

***Zacchaeus and the Uncertainty of Surrender***

**Responsive Scripture:**

**Leader:** 1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

**All:** 5When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

**Leader:** 7All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

**All:** 8But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

**Leader:** 9Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

(Luke 19:1-10, NIV)

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| **SB#565 – All I once held dear**  **HC#89 – Knowing You** | TB-725 – Knowing You  HC-89 | No CD  HCD7-T19 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#79 – I know Thee who Thou art** | TB-199 – Brantwood | HTD7-T4 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#371 – I will offer up my life in spirit and truth** | TB-894 – This thankful heart | No CD |
| **SB#498 – I want the faith of God** | TB-159 – Trentham | HTD8-T17 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#499 – It is Jesus I need** | TB-703 – It is Jesus | HTD12-T9 (2 vs.) |
| **SB#839 – I could not do without Thee** | TB-213 – Aurelia | HTD3-T3 (3 vs.) |

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| **Drama – Climbing to the Top** |

***Being Seen***

**Choric Reading**

**Reader 1:** Many of us know the story of Zacchaeus for either or both of two reasons: we learned this story as children or we heard this story in a stewardship sermon. Let’s pause for a moment to ask a pretty basic question about this story: What exactly was Zacchaeus thinking when he climbed up that tree?

**Reader 2:** The truth is, we don’t really know, even though we know a lot about Zacchaeus. We know his name, his occupation and his reputation. And, of course, we know that Zacchaeus was short. But why did he want to see Jesus?

**Reader 3:** Maybe Zacchaeus was searching for meaning and purpose in life, just like many of us do.

**Reader 4:** Maybe he was overcome with guilt or shame for his past misdeeds, just like many of us are.

**Reader 1:** Maybe he was just curious to get a glimpse of the man he had heard so much about, just like all of us who live in such a celebrity-obsessed culture.

**Reader 2:** Biblically speaking, sight is not just about having use of one of our physical senses. The verb *to see* in Greek contains dimensions of perceiving, knowing, and understanding. Zacchaeus needed help in order to see Jesus in this other sense—in order to *know* Jesus.

**Reader 3:** That desire to know Jesus, to understand Jesus, and to become connected to Jesus was Zacchaeus’s real desire deep down inside. He didn’t just want to get a glimpse of him. He didn’t just want a favor from him. He wanted to *know* who this man was, and he was going to do anything he could to search for him, seek him out, and find him.

**Reader 4:** As soon as he made it to the top of that tree, Zacchaeus immediately realized something…Jesus was already looking at him. He wanted to know Jesus, and found that he was already *known* by Jesus.

**Reader 1:** Get down off that tree, Zacchaeus. Your time has come.

**Reader 2:** For Zacchaeus. Seeing Jesus—and being seen by Jesus—was a chance at a fresh, new start.

**Reader 3:** Just like it can be for you.

**Reader 4:** Jesus is calling you out of your tree. God is inviting you to come down so that you can be lifted up. Jesus is beckoning you into a fresh awareness of God’s love for you and the fact that God has been searching for you, watching you, long before you realized it.

**Reader 1:** That realization will lead to your transformation.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 57-62)

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| **SB#499 – It is Jesus I need** | TB-703 – It is Jesus | HTD12-T9 (2 vs.) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **HC#160 – I Surrender** | HC-160 | HCD14-T20 |
| **HC#179 – Come to Jesus** | HC-179 | HCD16-T19 |

**Prayers of Praise [Prayers from the congregation]**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Testimony of Faith – [Choose someone from the congregation who can testify on this theme.]**

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**[Each week, *Embracing the Uncertain* is a time of silent prayer by the congregation. The leader should walk the congregation through the bullet points below.]**

**Leader:** Spend some moments in prayer considering your desire to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

* Pray that God might reveal that power to you today.
* What are you willing to give up so that you can experience that power?
* How do you feel a need to be seen and known by God?
* How do you think God is seeking you, searching for you, looking at you right now? How do you know?

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| **SB#593 – In my life, Lord** | TB-738 – Lord, be glorified | No CD |

**Prayer**

God, thank you for seeking me out, even as I have longed to see you. Lead me into a deeper experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus, that I might know your power and live the life you wish for me to live. Amen.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 65-66)

**Message – Surrender**

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| **HC#207 – Grace Alone**  **SB#699 – Every promise we can make** | HC-207  TB-640 – Grace alone | HCD19-T17  No CD |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#580 – Dear Lord, I do surrender** | TB-235 – To the uttermost He saves | No CD |
| **SB#636 – All to Jesus I surrender** | TB-333 – I surrender all | HTD5-T9 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#565 – All I once held dear**  **HC#89 – Knowing You** | TB-725 – Knowing You  HC-89 | No CD  HCD7-T19 |
| **HC#110 – He Is Here** | HC-110 | HCD9-T20 |
| **HC#160 – I Surrender** | HC-160 | HCD14-T20 |
| **HC#205 – Closer Still** | HC-205 | HCD19-T15 |
| **HC#213 – In the Presence of Jehovah** | HC-213 | HCD20-T13 |
| **HC#242 – In Your Presence** | HC-242 | HCD23-T12 |
| **HC#245 – Known to You** | HC-245 | HCD23-T15 |
| **SB#506 – Lord, You know that we love You**  **HC#24 – You Know That We Love You!** | TB-950 – You know that we love You!  HC-24 | No CD  HCD2A-T14 |
| **SB#588 – I bring to Thee my heart to fill** | TB-414 – Christ is all | HTD3-T6 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#610 – My life must be Christ’s broken bread** | TB-111 – Spohr | HTD10-T14 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#613 – O Jesus, I have promised** | TB-213 – Aurelia | HTD3-T3 (3 vs.) |

**Benediction:**

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

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| **SB#861 – In Christ alone my hope is found**  **HC#149 – In Christ Alone** | TB-132 – In Christ alone  HC-149 | No CD  HCD13-T19 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#26 – Great is Thy faithfulness** | TB-641 – same | HTD1-T10 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#358 – Crown Him with many crowns**  **HC#241 – Crown Him with Many Crowns** | TB-162 – Diademata  HC-241 | HTD1-T8 (4 vs.)  HCD23-T11 |
| **SB#819 – O Church, arise**  **HC#202 – O Church, Arise** | TB-777 – same  HC-202 | No CD  HCD19-T12 |

DeVega, Magrey R. *Embracing the Uncertain: a Lenten Study for Unsteady Times*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

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| **Lent 2020 – Week #5** | |
| **DRAMA**  **Climbing to the Top**  **By Martyn Scott Thomas**  © Copyright 2019 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission. | |
| **Topic:** | Surrender |
| **Scripture:** | Luke 19:1-10 |
| **Synopsis:** | Zacchaeus tells about the struggles of being short. |
| **Characters:** | Zacchaeus – a short man. |
| **Props/Costumes:** | A step ladder or box to stand on. Biblical or modern dress. |
| **Setting:** | Bare stage |
| **Running time:** | 3 minutes |

[*A step ladder or box is situated center stage. Zacchaeus enters and climbs on top of ladder/box.*]

**Zacchaeus:** So this is what it’s like to be tall. [*looking around*] This really gives me a different perspective. Normally, my view is blocked by all of the other men, most of the other women, and even by some pre-teens. One time, I got lost behind a dog – a really big dog.

[*steps down off of ladder*] But none of that bothers me. I’m short and I know it. I always have been and I always will be. So I’ve learned to adjust and compensate in other areas. When people try to put me down – [*emphasizing*] pun intended – I stand tall(-ish) and hold my head high. [*quickly*] And then I kick them in the shins. [*brief pause*] Just kidding.

You might say I’ve been driven to prove myself to those around me, but I don’t think that has anything to do with my height. Sure, if I were taller or stronger, I could be a carpenter, or a farmer, or a fisherman, or anything else that doesn’t require a booster seat. So I gravitated to the one occupation where none of that mattered: finance – more specifically tax collecting. I figured that if people were going to think less of me because of my height, then they could think less of me as a professional as well.

You see, tax collectors are not people that others would admire; or associate with; or let their children near; [*slight pause*] or like. Tax collectors take your money and give it to the government – in this case, the Roman government. You know, the ones occupying Israel. [*points to self*] Not a popular guy.

Anyway, I was going about my business of giving other people the business – taking some for Rome and some for me – when I heard that Jesus was coming to town. Now this was a guy that everybody seemed to love – kind of like my opposite. Wherever he went, crowds followed him. And they ate up every word he said. I figured that if I could even get a bit of the love that people showed to him, I could turn it into a tidy little profit. Whatever it took, I had to meet this guy.

When the day arrived, the crowds were bigger than I could’ve imagined. Under normal circumstances, I would’ve had a hard time seeing, but on that day – forget it. Then I noticed this large tree near where he would be walking. That was it! All I had to do was climb that tree and I’d be set.

[*looking around, as if talking to someone*] Hey, can you give a guy a little boost? [*listening, then responding*] Very funny. Then how about a big boost? [*climbs back up ladder*]

[*back in character*] Now I had the perfect spot to see Jesus. There was no way anybody could block my view now. And then something strange happened – Jesus walked right up to my tree and called me by my name. He said that he wanted to come to my house. He wanted to sit down for a cup of tea and he wanted to talk to me – Zacchaeus. No crowds. No trees. Just a one on one with me and Jesus. I nearly fell out of the tree.

[*steps down off of ladder*] Even before we got to my house, I knew that things had to change. I didn’t know what it was about this guy, but I knew that I couldn’t go on living like I was. I couldn’t do much about my occupation, but I could change the way I went about it. I promised him that I wouldn’t skim any more extra for me. I would only collect what was asked by the Romans. And everyone I cheated, I would pay back – four times the amount taken. As soon as I said it, I realized that that would cost me a lot of my personal wealth, but I didn’t care. I had a new peace about me and I didn’t want anything to get in the way of that; not even money.

In some ways, nothing’s changed. I’m still a tax collector. I’m still not liked much. I’m still short. But these days, I’m walking a little taller – all because I climbed a tree and met a man named Jesus.

[*picks up ladder and heads offstage*] I don’t think I’ll need this anymore.

[*Blackout*]

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**Lenten Sermon – Week 5**

***Surrender***

**March 29, 2020**

by Rev. Magrey deVega

[Based on *Embracing the Uncertain*, by Magrey R. deVega

Chapter 5: *Zacchaeus and the Uncertainty of Surrender*]

**Scripture:** Luke 19:1-10

I have to confess to you this morning that I have been understanding Zacchaeus all wrong for most of my life. I thought I knew him. I thought I knew his story. I grew up with his story, like many of you do, singing the Sunday school songs and hearing countless numbers of sermons about him. But I discovered something that has utterly transformed the way I view Zacchaeus and the story. I’ve had to learn this valuable lesson: Sometimes our preconceived notions about people are proven false.

First I want to introduce to you a woman named Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She was born in Nigeria in 1977. I don’t know what kinds of images come to your mind when you think of people living in Nigeria in the 1970s, but you might be surprised to hear that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie grew up in a conventional middle-class family—not one of poverty. Her father was a professor; her mother was an administrator. In fact, their family was wealthy enough to hire some live-in domestic help (a house servant, if you will). If you are at all surprised to hear that about Chimamanda’s background—given what you might have thought and assumed—then that is precisely the point. Sometimes our preconceived notions about people are proven false.

In her 2009 “TED Talk,” Chimamanda describes the same lesson that she had to learn in a surprising way. Their live-in domestic help (house servant) was a young man named Feday, and

Chimamanda had developed a preconceived notion of house servants and their way of life. She had assumed that Feday was from a poor family where every person in the family was uncultured, unskilled and unproductive. You can imagine her surprise when one day she went over to visit Feday’s family out in the villages, only to discover that in fact every member of Feday’s family were skilled craftsmen, creators of beautiful, handwoven baskets.

In her TED Talk she says, “I was startled. It had not even occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were. So, it was impossible for me to see them as anything but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.”

There’s more to Chimamanda’s story. Later, when she turned 19, she came to the United States to go to college, and her roommate had never met anyone from Africa before. So her roommate was shocked that Chimamanda could speak fluent English. Chimamanda had to inform her roommate that in Nigeria, English was the official language. Her roommate didn’t know what to do with that! Later in the semester, her roommate got up the courage to ask Chimamanda if she could listen to some of her (in her words) “tribal music,” and was equally surprised when Chimamanda reached into her backpack and pulled out a CD she was listening to—an album of Mariah Carey!

Sometimes people are not who you first presume them to be.

That gets us back to Zacchaeus. I had been understanding Zacchaeus all wrong. I thought I knew his story. I thought I had labeled him in the right way. But as it turns out, there is more to people than the single story that we use to label them.

The common way that we’ve come to understand Zacchaeus, the thing that Luke would not want us to miss, is that he is a tax collector. Because he is a tax collector, Luke would remind us that everyone hated him. People hated tax collectors. The Judean people developed a “single story,” if you will, about tax collectors such as Zacchaeus, because after all, he was a cheat, a thief and a liar. Tax collectors bilked the common people for their money in order to give it to Rome—the evil empire—so that they could amass great riches, build up militaries and create huge buildings, all for the purpose of oppressing the common people.

Of course, there are other fun little details that you and I know about the Zacchaeus story. We know that he is not only a tax collector; he is also short, so he climbed up a tree as Jesus was passing by. Because the crowds were so thick, he climbed up that tree to see over their heads in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus, only to discover that Jesus, in fact, had been watching him the whole time. And you know that Jesus called out to Zacchaeus, “Come down from that tree. In fact, I’m coming over to your house for dinner tonight” (Luke 19:5). You know those parts of the story very well.

But then we also remember that later that night, it was in Zacchaeus’ house that the crowds were watching, and they were grumbling to themselves. They said out loud, “Jesus has gone to be the guest of this one who is a sinner” (v. 7)—which is a way of asking, “Why on earth would Jesus want to hang out with this scumbag? What is going on here? Why on earth would Jesus want to hang out with him?”

Then comes that point in the story that we always thought was the “twist” in the story, that moment that we’ve always assumed was the turning point in the story. In the New Revised Standard Version and New International Version, this is what Zacchaeus says to Jesus after dinner (v. 8): “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” It’s a remarkable moment, so we think, because it is in this moment that Zacchaeus is so full of remorse, repentance and surrender and has become a changed man. We believe in this moment that he has seen the wickedness of his ways and has turned his life over to Jesus. And because of that, Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this house” (v. 9). That is what I’ve always believed happens in this story. Zacchaeus is changed in this moment. I’ve always thought that this is simply a story of what happens when someone turns their life over to Jesus, and surrenders the fullness of who they are and decides never to go back to their evil ways. That’s why this week is called, “The Uncertainty of Surrender.” We’ve come into this week fully expecting to hear how we must surrender, just like Zacchaeus did, turning your life over to God and experiencing the same dramatic change that we have known Zacchaeus to have made in that story.

But sometimes people are not always who you first presume them to be.

I have recently come across a bit of information that has transformed my view of this story. David Lose is a biblical scholar and a seminary president, and he has concluded to the agreement of many other biblical scholars, that many of the versions and translations that translate Zacchaeus’ words to Jesus are all wrong. Whereas most versions translate his response to Jesus in the *future* tense, Zacchaeus was actually speaking in the *present* tense.

Here’s the difference: If Zacchaeus is speaking in future tense verbs, then when he said, “Lord, I will give half my possessions to the poor, and I will pay back fourfold those whom I have cheated,” then this again is a story about the dramatic change within Zacchaeus—his change of heart and the salvation he has received as a result of that change.

But Zacchaeus is speaking in the present tense. He says, “Lord, I give half my possessions to the poor; and those who are cheated by this wretched, unfair tax system, I already pay them back four times what they have been cheated, right out of my own pocket.” Surprise! Because he is speaking in present tense (the way the Common English Bible renders it), then the great twist in this story is that Zacchaeus—this supposed wretched scum of a man—is much more noble and generous and God-fearing than anyone expected him to be.

That means that the great indictment in this story is not on Zacchaeus. The great indictment in this story is on the *crowds* and it’s on us. It’s on the crowds who cast judgment on Zacchaeus because of who they thought he was. It’s cast on the crowds who thought they could label Zacchaeus with the way they had presumed him to be. It’s on any of us who lump people into a category and assign upon them a single story, one that we use to cast judgment on people without even getting to know them first.

That brings us back to Chimamanda Adichie. Do you want to know the title of her 2009 TED Talk? It’s called “The Danger of a Single Story.” Just like the family of Chimamanda’s houseboy who was a lot more skilled, a lot more cultured and a lot more productive than she assumed they were; just like Chimamanda herself was a lot more cultured and fluent in English than her roommate presumed her to be.

We are as guilty as the crowds in this story in the way that we fail to see an individual’s worth and dignity and value, because we are blinded by the labels we have assigned them. If today is about surrender—if there is anything we are compelled to surrender today—it is the single labels that we assign to people without actually acknowledging the possibility that they are people of worth, people of value, and that they may have virtues that we may not have expected.

Of course, the central metaphor in this story of Zacchaeus is that he was a tax collector, the label that people put on him. But what if this story was from modern times? What if, for example, Zacchaeus was Muslim? What if Zacchaeus was homeless? What if Zacchaeus was gay? What if Zacchaeus was an undocumented immigrant? What if Zacchaeus was a right-wing Republican? What if Zacchaeus was a left-wing Democrat? The list could go on and on. You could fill in the blank yourself with the kinds of labels we assume about people. Because then it would get downright difficult. Because if we were to really translate the perception that people back then had of tax collectors into the similar kinds of guttural responses we have against certain kinds of people today, then what if Zacchaeus was from a family of white supremacists? What if Zacchaeus was a convicted sex offender? Well then, we’d be asking the same question the crowds did, wouldn’t we? “Why on earth would Jesus hang out with him?”

Luke loves doing this to us, by the way. The Gospel of Luke loves to push these buttons on us whether we like it or not. More than any of the other gospels, he’s the one who is always tweaking us in this way to challenging us in this way. Luke alone asks this question. He says, “You want someone to be the mother of our Messiah? How about an unwed teenage girl. You want someone to receive a blessing from Jesus? How about a Samaritan—a despised foreigner—and to compound it, a Samaritan *woman* at the well in broad daylight. Do you want someone whose faith impresses Jesus like nobody else in the entire story? How about a Canaanite—not just a foreigner, the sworn enemy of the Jews.” Over and over again, Luke reminds us that people have more value than the categories we lump them into. There is no single story that we can use to describe them all.

You know how the story ends, right? It ends by Jesus saying, “Today salvation has come to this household” (v. 9). If you look at the original Greek word for “household,” you will discover that Jesus is not just saying that salvation has not just come to Zacchaeus, but the word can also be translated as: community; a social group; an economy; a social structure. In other words, Jesus is saying that in this moment, salvation has come to *everyone*—not just to this tax collector—but to every single person watching as their preconceived notions of people have evaporated. To every person who watched as their single story that they had assumed about Zacchaeus disappeared, salvation has come to them!

In other words, don’t assign your single story to judge someone else, except for one single story. Jesus reminds us that there is only one label that applies to all of us, because at that moment, Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this household because he [Zacchaeus] is a child of Abraham” (v. 9), just like you. He is a child of God, a child of the promise, just like you. That is the one and only single story that we can apply to all people—that all of us are children of God, loved by God all the same.

At the end of the day, this sermon is in fact after and about surrender. It is about yielding our perspectives, our priorities and our prejudices over to a God whose grace is wide enough and deep enough to love us all, and to challenge us to love people in the same way (as hard as it might be). After all, all of us are children of the promise.

Let us pray:

Oh God, we hear you. You are calling us to surrender the deep-seated and well-harbored prejudices and labels that we have used to characterize others. Not just in general terms, but even those whose harm has inflicted us in deeply personal ways. You’ve challenged us today to see the worth of individual people, to expand our vision of your love and your care for all people. And you remind us that there is no person outside the reach of your love. Help us, God, to love others, and to find in each person their sacred value and worth. As we round the corner and enter the home stretch of Lent and journey into Holy Week, every day we confess to you all that holds us back, and surrender to you every narrow-minded way we see each other and even see ourselves. Teach us to trust you. Teach us to believe your love is wide and deep enough to love each one of us, and empower us to do the same. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Recorded: March 18, 2018

Hyde Park United Methodist Church

500 W. Platte St., Tampa, FL 33606