***Embracing the uncertain***

**Lenten Worship Series – Week 3**

***The Uncertainty of Worry***

**March 15, 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. |

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| **Drama – By Any Other Name** |

***Noticing God***

**Call to Worship:**

When Jesus talks about the comfort of God, he actually offers a challenge: to see the condition of the world in such a way that we can notice the presence, activity, and provision of God in the midst of it. We worry about things in our lives we cannot see. Jesus draws our attention to things we *can* see.

*Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* (Luke 12:27, NKJV)

With a few casual but critical references to flowers, Jesus challenges us to shift our attention away from a future that we can’t see to a present that we can see. Instead of worrying about the unknown, he is inviting us to seek the beauty of the known and God’s activity in it.

Essentially, Jesus calls us to exchange our crystal balls for kaleidoscopes—to stop trying to predict the future and start seeing dimensions of today that we are prone to miss. Jesus challenges us to encounter dimensions of God’s love, God’s grace, God’s work in our lives right now in splendid, beautiful Technicolor. It’s more beautiful in fact, than flowers in a field. It’s as beautiful as life itself, in all of its complexity, mystery, and glory.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, p. 41)

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| **SB#361 – Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God** | TB-127 – Ellacombe | HTD1-T9 (3 vs. – band ending) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#1 – A mighty fortress is our God** | TB-605 – Ein’ feste Burg | HTD3-T10 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#25 – God’s love to me is wonderful** | TB-130 – God’s love is wonderful | HTD8-T5 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#27 – Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah**  **HC#231 – Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah** | TB-399 – Cwm Rhondda  TB-397 – Bread of Heaven  HC-231 | HTD3-T7 (4 vs.)  No CD  HCD22-T11 |
| **SB#89 – O for a thousand tongues to sing**  **HC#161 – My Great Redeemer’s Praise** | TB-75 – Grimsby  TB-59 – Azmon  HC-161 | No CD  HTD3-T4 (4 vs.)  HCD15-T11 |
| **SB#93 – The great physician now is near** | TB-311 – The great physician | No CD |
| **SB#244 – Blessèd Lord, in Thee is refuge** | TB-402 – Helmsley | No CD |
| **SB#319 – For the might moving of Thy Spirit** | TB-616 – same | No CD |
| **SB#359 – Eternal God, our song we raise** | TB-439 – Eternal God | HTD12-T5 (4 vs. with final ending) |
| **SB#453 – Amazing grace! how sweet the sound** | TB-57 – Amazing Grace! | HTD3-T2 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#509 – O boundless salvation! deep ocean of love** | TB-506 – My Jesus, I love Thee | HTD2-T3 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#522 – Standing on the promises of Christ my king** | TB-840 – Standing on the promises | HTD5-T21 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#525 – What a work the Lord has done** | TB-743 – Love at home | HTD7-T12 (3 vs.) |

***The Crowd and the Uncertainty of Worry***

**Choric Reading/Scripture**

**Reader 1:** In Luke, chapter 12, Jesus went on the offensive against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; he told the disciples that the world would be out to kill them; he declared the futility of chasing earthly possessions; he reminded his hearers that being unfaithful and not being vigilant might bring about judgment; and he reiterated that he was here to cause division, not peace.

**Reader 2:** And right in the middle of this long discourse, we receive words about God’s comfort and care. To receive the care of God does not mean we are lifted out of this world. Instead, it means learning to perceive God’s presence and power in a new way. It is not about escaping this world. It is about “interpreting the present time” and seeing God right here, with us and among us.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 38-39)

**Reader 3:** 22This is why I keep telling you not to worry about anything in life—about what you’ll eat, about how you’ll clothe your body. 23Life is more than food, and the body is more than fancy clothes. 24Think about those crows flying over there: do they plant and harvest crops? Do they own silos or barns? *Look at them fly.* It looks like God is taking pretty good care of them, doesn’t it? Remember that you are more precious to God than birds! 25Which one of you can add a single hour to your life or 18 inches to your height by worrying really hard? 26If worry can’t change anything, why do you do it so much?

**Reader 4:** 27Think about those beautiful wild lilies growing over there. They don’t work up a sweat toiling for needs or wants—they don’t worry about clothing. Yet the great King Solomon never had an outfit that was half as glorious as theirs!

**Reader 1:** 28Look at the grass growing over there. One day it’s thriving in the fields. The next day it’s being used as fuel. *If God takes such good care of such transient things,* how much more you can depend on God to care for you, weak in faith as you are. 29Don’t reduce your life to the pursuit of food and drink; don’t let your mind be filled with anxiety. 30People of the world who don’t know God pursue these things, *but you have a Father caring for you,* a Father who knows all your needs.

**Reader 2:** 31*Since you don’t need to worry—about security and safety, about food and clothing—*then pursue God’s kingdom *first and foremost*, and these other things will come to you as well.

**Reader 3:** 32My little flock, don’t be afraid. *God is your Father, and* your Father’s great joy is to give you His kingdom.

**Reader 4:** 33That means you can sell your possessions and give generously to the poor. You can have a different kind of savings plan: one that never depreciates, one that never defaults, one that can’t be plundered by crooks or destroyed by natural calamities. 34*Your treasure will be stored in the heavens,* and since your treasure is there, your heart will be lodged there as well.

(Luke 12:22-34, *The Voice*)

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| **SB#77 – Fairest Lord Jesus**  **HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus** | TB-206 – Ascalon  HC-151 | HTD5-T1 (3 vs.)  HCD14-T11 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#17 – God moves in a mysterious way** | TB-72 – French | HTD4-T1 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#62 – The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want** | TB-68 – Crimond | HTD6-T6 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#63 – The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want** | TB-863 – The Lord’s my shepherd | No CD |
| **SB#78 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds** | TB-116 – St. Peter  TB-72 – French | No CD  HTD4-T1 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#219 – God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus** | TB-570 – Because He lives | HTD12-T2 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#259 – Like to a lamb who from the fold has strayed** | TB-477 – Hammond | HTD12-T7 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#495 – I bring my heart to Jesus, with its fears** | TB-674 – I bring my heart to Jesus | No CD |
| **SB#613 – O Jesus, I have promised** | TB-213 – Aurelia | HTD3-T3 (3 vs.) |

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| **HC#247 – Still, My Soul, Be Still** | HC-247 | HCD23-T17 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#595 – In this quiet moment**  **HC#173 – In This Quiet Moment** | TB-186  HC-173 | No CD  HCD16-T13 |
| **SB#848 – I’m in His hands (chorus only)**  **HC#167 – I’m in His Hands** | TB-659 – His way is best  HC-167 | No CD  HCD15-T17 |
| **HC#117 – Draw Me Close** | HC-117 | HCD10-T17 |
| **HC#122 – Bow the Knee** | HC-122 | HCD11-T12 |
| **HC#205 – Closer Still** | HC-205 | HCD19-T15 |
| **HC#236 – Lord, I Need You** | HC-236 | HCD22-T16 |
| **HC#245 – Known to You** | HC-245 | HCD23-T15 |

**Prayers of Faith/Trust [Prayers from the congregation]**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Announcements and Offering**

**Testimony of God’s Provision – [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 time in prayer reflecting on the many ways that God has provided for you throughout your life, without your seeing or acknowledging it at the time.

* Begin by thanking God for all the ways you have been cared for.
* What are the ways in which you are beset with worry right now? Give these to God for his care and provision.

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| **HC#110 – He Is Here** | HC-110 | HCD9-T20 |

**Prayer**

God, I thank you that just as your eye is on the sparrow, your watchful, caring gaze is always upon me. Grant to me the ability to see in the middle of my difficulties, that I might not be so fixated on my troubles, but observant of your unfailing grace and love. Amen

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, p. 44)

**Message – Worry**

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| **SB#588 – I bring to Thee my heart to fill** | TB-414 – Christ is all | HTD3-T6 (3 vs.) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#62 – The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want** | TB-68 – Crimond | HTD6-T6 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#259 – Like to a lamb who from the fold has strayed** | TB-477 – Hammond | HTD12-T7 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#503 – Just as I am, without one plea** | TB-424 – Just as thou art | HTD1-T15 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#613 – O Jesus, I have promised** | TB-213 – Aurelia | HTD3-T3 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#848 – I’m in His hands (chorus only)**  **HC#167 – I’m in His Hands** | TB-659 – His way is best  HC-167 | No CD  HCD15-T17 |
| **HC#87 – Passion** | HC-87 | HCD7-T17 |
| **HC#117 – Draw Me Close** | HC-117 | HCD10-T17 |
| **HC#122 – Bow the Knee** | HC-122 | HCD11-T12 |
| **SB#313 – Spirit of the living God**  **HC#159 – Spirit of the Living God** | TB-611 – Fill me anew  HC-159 | No CD  HCD14-T19 |
| **HC#205 – Closer Still** | HC-205 | HCD19-T15 |
| **HC#236 – Lord, I Need You** | HC-236 | HCD22-T16 |
| **HC#245 – Known to You** | HC-245 | HCD23-T15 |
| **HC#247 – Still, My Soul, Be Still** | HC-247 | HCD23-T17 |

**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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| **HC#109 – Total Praise** | HC-109 | HCD9-T19 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#26 – Great is Thy faithfulness** | TB-641 – same | HTD1-T10 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#219 – God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus** | TB-570 – Because He lives | HTD12-T2 (3 vs.) |
| **HC#150 – The Lord Bless Thee and Keep Thee** | HC-150 | HCD13-T20 |

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

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| **Lent 2020 – Week #3** | |
| **DRAMA**  **By Any Other Name**  **By Martyn Scott Thomas**  © Copyright 2019 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission. | |
| **Topic:** | Worry, God’s Provision |
| **Scripture:** | Luke 12:22-34 |
| **Synopsis:** | A woman tells why she wears a flower pin on her clothes. |
| **Characters:** | Hope Parsons |
| **Props/Costumes:** | A flower or flower pin on Hope’s dress/blouse. |
| **Setting:** | Bare stage. |
| **Running time:** | 3 minutes |

[*Hope enters and stands center stage.*]

**Hope:** I like to be in control – who doesn’t? It makes life much easier when I can call the shots and everything goes according to my plan. And it’s even better when everybody else sees things my way and we’re all on the same page. But let’s be honest, that rarely, if ever, happens.

In my perfect little world, when problems come up, I can handle them with little or no issue – nice and easy, neat and tidy, on to the next thing. That is, if there were any problems to begin with. But again, that’s not real life.

In real life, I have little or no control of what happens in the world around me. And when problems come, whether big or small, they seem to come in bunches, and they keep coming. So when something comes along that I can’t handle, I pray. And that’s the end of it [*pause*] – I wish.

I actually think that’s how it should work: a problem comes, I pray, and God removes the issue immediately. The funny thing is that God doesn’t think like I think. His ways are not my ways. There is so much more going on than just the limited view and knowledge that I have. While I’d like to think that I’m in control, God actually is in control. He’s sees the whole situation for what it is and acts according to what’s best for his plan; and that’s not necessarily what I think would be best for me.

So when a problem comes and I pray about it, I wait. And sometimes, I wait some more. [*slight* *pause*] And I wait. [*longer* *pause*] And while I’m waiting, I begin to wonder what’s taking God so long to answer. So I begin to create reasons for God’s lack of response: maybe he wants me to suffer; maybe he didn’t hear me; maybe I’ve done something wrong and this is part of his punishment. Then I start worrying and wonder if I should be doing something different. Maybe I’m supposed to handle this one by myself. Maybe I really am in control, and nothing is changing because I’m not making it change. Then I start worrying about whether or not I’m the real problem.

Pretty soon the “worry machine” is spinning out of control, creating problems and possibilities that don’t really exist, taking me down paths of destruction and ruin that all end horribly for me and all those I love. Because I think God is silent, I fill in the blanks for him based on what I think I know, and again, it does not end well.

So my worry leads to doubt, and my doubt leads to despair and hopelessness. I become irritable to those around me and try to blame them for all that is wrong with my life. I become incapacitated: I can’t eat, I can’t sleep, I can’t do much of anything. Is there no end to my suffering? [*pause*]

[*changing tone*] In Luke, Jesus tells us not to worry about everyday life. He tells us that worrying can add nothing to our lives and that it can’t accomplish anything, so why bother? He tells us to look at the ravens, who God cares for even though they don’t plant or harvest. He then tells us to consider the lilies of the field, clothed more beautifully than even King Solomon in all his splendor. If he cares so much for them, how much more he cares for you and for me.

So I wear this flower [*touches flower*] to remind me of that. I know it’s not a lily, but it is a flower and it reminds me that God cares for me much more than any flower that is here today and gone tomorrow. It reminds me that if I seek God and his Kingdom, he will supply me with everything that I need – even if I think I need more. Even if I think he can’t hear me. Even if I have to live with his silence. Even if.

I’d like to say that because of this flower, I never worry – I do. More than I should. But it does help me to remember God’s promise. And as difficult as it may be sometimes, I’m learning to let go – to give up control – and wait for God. Because like the lilies of the field, my problems will be here today and gone tomorrow. And that’s a promise I can believe in.

[*Blackout*]

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**Lenten Sermon – Week 3**

***Worry***

**March 24, 2020**

by Rev. Magrey deVega

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

Chapter 3: *The Crowd and the Uncertainty of Worry*]

**Scripture:** Luke 12:13-34

What in the world do we do with Luke 12? It’s one of the hardest and most poignant passages in the Scriptures! One thing we can do is chalk it up on a long list of texts that we might headline with the words, “Easier said than done.” Jesus said, “Do not worry about anything,” to which all of God’s people said, “Yeah, right!”

My guess is that we all come here today with a whole laundry list of things we are worried or anxious about. Hardly any of us are immune to this particular theme of uncertainty—the one of worry. I suppose it’s possible that there are some of you here who aren’t worried about anything today, but it’s likely you know someone who is.

In this particular episode in Luke 12, the scene is set up prompted by worries about money and possessions, as is often the case when it comes to worry. Jesus is talking to a large crowd of people, giving them lessons about integrity and hypocrisy and conviction and commitment to the way of Jesus. All of a sudden a man from the crowd shouts out to Jesus, “Hey Jesus! I need you to be Judge Judy for a second. I need you to settle this dispute I’m having with my brother. Tell my brother, Jesus, to give me my share of the family inheritance. Would you tell him that, Jesus? Tell him he’s being unfair. Tell him he is not giving me what I deserve. Would you tell him that?”

I can image Jesus, at that very moment, breathing a deep breath and sighing a deep sigh, and looking up to heaven with the recognition that this is what the human condition is all about. Just one source of worry after another. Another person coming to him with a deep anxiety-filled conflict. If you think about it, that is recurrent throughout the gospels. Jesus is recognizing that so many people are in a long waiting line, just waiting to tell Him what their deep anxiety-filled moment is:

* “Jesus, my child is possessed by a demon—please heal him.”
* “Jesus, there’s a storm brewing out here on the sea and we’re going to get killed—please save us.”
* “Jesus, my loved one has just died—where have you been?”
* “Jesus, I want to be Your right-hand man—please promote me.”
* “Jesus, this crowd is filled with hungry people—please feed them.”

And you know what? You and I are in that waiting line too:

* “Jesus, I have no idea what I’m supposed to do with my life—please tell me.”
* “Jesus, I am so gripped with grief over the sudden tragic loss of a loved one—please comfort me.”
* “Jesus, I have no idea what to do after my divorce and I feel so lonely—please comfort me.”
* “Jesus, I have no idea what to do about my children who seem so lost—please give me guidance.”
* And the list goes on and on…

You and I have that long laundry list of worries and anxieties, to which Jesus takes that deep breath and sighs up to heaven, and in this particular moment in Luke 12, chooses to give the plainest, clearest, most succinct answer to worry that He would give anywhere in the gospels. He said to that man, the crowd and us today, “Do not worry about anything—not about what you’ll eat, not about what you’ll wear, not about anything” (Luke 12:22).

What’s interesting about that is that Jesus doesn’t stop there. Jesus keeps on talking after he says those words. He could have easily said, “Don’t worry about it—God’s got this,” and then stopped right then and there and moved on to another topic (in which case this sermon would be over now and we’d get out of our worship service early—wouldn’t that have been nice?). But Jesus has something else to say, a twist that we’re not expecting. Not just a word of comfort to His disciples, but a word of challenge—a tough word for us to hear. Think about it. If Jesus had just stopped with a word of comfort, saying that God will be there to give you what you need so don’t worry about it, then it would be easy for us to simply consider God to be nothing more than a “cosmic vending machine” that is there to dispense blessings for us if we simply ask for it; if we just do the right thing and ask for it in the right way and push all the right buttons, then God would give us the comfort we need. That could have been the end of the story in verse 22.

But Jesus keeps going. He dares to challenge us with a word that is hard for us to hear but that we desperately need to hear. He says, “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven—not treasures here on earth where moth can consume or rust can destroy or thieves can steal. Get your priorities straight. Remember the things that are most important in light of the kingdom and focus on eternity” (Luke 12:33). That’s not a word we’re expecting to hear, but one we need to hear if we’re going to address the worry in our life.

In his book *It All Goes Back in the Box*, author John Ortberg offers this compelling thought exercise for anybody who is dealing with anxiety or worry in their life. He says,

Imagine that you have in your hands two stacks of Post-It notes. On one set of Post-It notes, each is printed the word, “Temporary.” Printed on the other stack is the word, Forever.” When you get up in the morning, as part of your daily routine, walk around your house—perhaps literally or figuratively—and as you walk by each object in your house, what Post-It note would you place on that item? Temporary or Forever? Big screen TV. Coffee-maker. Smart phone. Clothes. Food. Temporary or Forever?

Then when you go about the busyness of your day, what Post-It note would you use on your briefcase? Computer? Vending machine? Timecard punch clock? Temporary or Forever?

By the end of the day you will have realized something: hopefully you will have used way more Temporary Post-It notes than Forever Post-It notes, and that you would have realized that the things you put the Forever Post-It notes on (the things that have eternal impact and forever significance) have been people, relationships, the things that really matter the most. In fact, you might have even put a Forever sticker on the person you see in the mirror, in terms of your own health, dignity and integrity.

Jesus said it very clearly: Don’t confuse the temporal with the eternal; the things that are earthly with the things that are heavenly. Yes, do not worry about anything, but also get your priorities straight and pay attention to the things that matter most. In Jesus’ mind it’s all about what you’re watching and what you’re listening for in your life that dictates your priorities.

There’s a classic sermon illustration that’s told about a Native American and his businessman friend who were walking down the busy city streets of New York City during lunch hour one day. As you can image, the scene is filled with all sorts of chaotic noise around them with honking horns and crowds of people and busy sounds from the city.

As the two are walking, the Native American paused for a moment and said to his friend, “Shhhhh… I hear a cricket.”

His friend said, “What?”

“Shhhhh… I hear a cricket.”

“A cricket? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Shhhhh… Listen.”

The friend said, “You’ve got to be kidding me. In the midst of all this metropolitan noise you can hear a cricket? That’s impossible!”

“Yeah. Here, I’ll show you.” When they got to the next very busy intersection they crossed the street. When they got to the other side they walked in front of a store and stopped where there was a planter box filled with shrubbery and bushes. The guide pulled back the bushes to reveal the leaves beneath the surface, and there, tucked among the branches, was a tiny, happy, chirping little cricket.

The friends said, “That’s amazing! How in the world were you able to hear that cricket in the midst of this city noise?”

The Native American said, “It all depends on what you’re listening for…”

“Yeah, right. Are you kidding me?”

“It’s true. It all depends on what you’re listening for. I’ll show you.” The Native American reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of coins, and waited for a big crowd to walk by the crowded sidewalk, then threw the coins on the ground to make a jingling, crinkling noise. At that moment, every single person within at least 20 feet of that planter box stopped, froze, turned around to make sure it wasn’t one of their coins that fell out of their pocket. He said, “You see, friend, it all depends on what you’re listening for.”

Jesus was very clear: Don’t worry, don’t worry about anything. God is there to provide for your every need. At the same time, get your priorities straight. Pay attention to the things that really matter, because even in the midst of your worry and your anxiety, God is present giving you glimpses of God’s grace and reminders of God’s strength and presence in your life, and you are too busy to even realize it. So yes, God is there to comfort you, but you need to pay attention to what God is doing and take note of it.

That is a very hard lesson. When the swirls of chaos are drifting around us and within us, it is hard to open our eyes and unstop our ears to notice the activity of God in our life. But if you can learn that lesson, it can help to change the trajectory of your life.

God is there to give you comfort at any given moment. The question is, will you perceive it? Will you notice the glimpses of God’s grace that are with you every single moment? With that comfort comes great challenge. With that strength comes great responsibility to keep your priorities straight, focus on the things that really matter, and notice God’s activity in your life. It’s hard—the winds of chaos and conflict are always around us—but God is there. Will you sense it?

Worrying won’t stop the bad from happening; it just stops you from enjoying the good.

Stop everything you are doing the next time you feel worried, and do four things:

1. Pray
2. Breathe
3. Walk
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Fill in the blank with one thing that works for you amid your episodes of worry—ie. a song that helps, calling a friend, talking to a therapist, a walk in nature, etc.)

Today is a new day and the start of a new journey for you and me, where we’ll be more diligent in paying attention to the glimpses of God’s grace that come to us in every moment.

*“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32, NIV).

Recorded: March 4, 2018

Hyde Park United Methodist Church

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