

Shaping the Virtuous Heart

Introduction to the 2025 Lenten Worship Series

The 21st Century has been hard on the church. Long before the pandemic of the 2020s put the church in isolation for a year plus, the church was already weakened by declining numbers, denominational struggles over human sexuality, and increasing division along social and political lines. We wonder how we can go forward without a map.

Might one suggest that we put our faith in a compass, not a map. The points on that compass will be seven ancient Christian virtues. While there may be nothing surprising by any of those markers, there will be a lot to learn as we make new discoveries together.

Aristotle once wrote a book on ethics some 350 years before time of Jesus. Aristotle was seeking to answer the question: How should we best live? He identified four virtues, or dispositions, or as John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist movement called them, tempers ... all essential to living a good and ethical life: **temperance, justice, prudence (or wisdom), and courage**. The church adopted the virtues first identified by Aristotle and added three more – **faith, hope and love**. Our study treats the seven virtues as the starting point for restoring our communities and redeeming our souls.

Please join us as we rely on Scripture. We will look not only to wisdom literature, but also to the parables of Jesus and the letters of the Apostle Paul, for insight into living faithful and beautiful lives.

Who knows? With practice, we may make virtue triumphant again.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, in the years leading up to World War II, is often quoted as having said the church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members. That saying could serve as an epigraph to our study. Making our case for Christian community, the church is where we learn virtues and engage practices with bottom-up power to enrich our lives. These include faith in the goodness of diversity, commitment to serving others, and the habit of mutual respect. Before we try to export these values, however, we must continue to bring them to life in Matthews United Methodist Church.

For the next seven weeks, we're going to dust off these ancient practices of the heart:

March 9: COURAGE [Daniel 3:24-26](#)

March 16: TEMPERANCE [I Corinthians 9:19-23](#)

March 23: PRUDENCE [Proverbs 3:13-18](#)

March 30: JUSTICE [Luke 18:1-8](#)

April 6: FAITH [II Timothy 2:1-7](#)

April 13: HOPE [Matthew 21:8-11](#)

April 20: LOVE [Matthew 28:1-7](#)

***Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
So long as ever you can.
-Attributed to John Wesley***