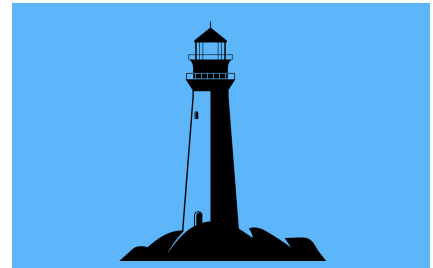




# BETHANY NEWS



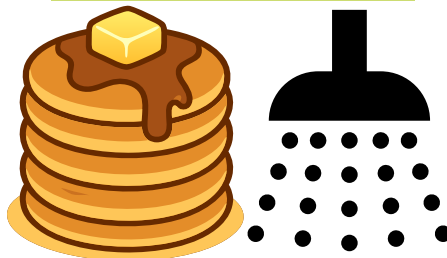
A Reconciling  
and  
Lighthouse  
Congregation



Mother's Day - May 10

## Happenings

Pancakes and Showers  
- May 16



Kim Wiles will be taking orders for her most delicious cookies! They will be delivered on Sunday, May 31, and as always all proceeds will go towards our apportionments.

*Our Mission Statement: Creating community like Jesus for all people (religious & non-religious) to turn hearts toward mutual respect, authenticity & love.*



PASTOR COLE BREIT

## The Pastor's Note

Dear Bethany Church Family,

Summer is hot and humid in the piedmont of North Carolina. Growing up on the coast, I loved Summer because the ocean cooled off the heat but I learned that Summers are much hotter out here. Summer, for me, feels like, well... hell. I've often been told by others that hell is an extremely hot place that you really don't want to go to so be a good boy so you don't go there... but what actually is hell?

Whenever I share about hell with others I usually like to say that hell is not one specific thing as we understand it in today's world. When reading the English translation of Scripture found in the King James Version (KJV), it paints hell as a term that is used throughout the entirety of the Bible. One downside of such a reading of Scripture is that the instances of these uses of the word "hell" are actually a diversity of words in the Hebrew and Greek found in the Bible. In the KJV of the Bible, "hell" is used for words like *Sheol* (31 times in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament), *Hadēs* (10 times in the New Testament), *Gehenna* (12 times in the New Testament), and *Tartaros* (1 time in the New Testament).

My question is: "should one English word encompass four different ancient words?" Personally, I would say that no English word could possibly represent four different ancient words appropriately, especially in relation to the concepts of death and the afterlife. I think we as Christians sometimes confidently assume we know what hell is when Scripture is not entirely in agreement with what it is and modern translations of the Bible certainly are not in agreement. This gets at a central problem with translating an ancient source text like the Bible, there is no simple answer to translating the original intentions of the author's writing, this is why we have hundreds of translations of the Bible with different criteria for translating it.

With that in mind, let's unpack these words to better understand what they might mean in their own contexts. The first word *Sheol* is a Hebrew word found 66 times in the Hebrew Bible and the KJV translates it as "hell" 31 times and the 32 other times it is translated as "the grave" or occasionally "the pit." *Sheol* is the place of the dead. Michael Fishbane, a scholar of Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago, defines *Sheol* as, "a place namely (Gen. 37:35), the underworld where departed spirits go (Prov. 9:18)." He tells of how those in *Sheol* are thought to be shades or "pale reflections of the men and women they had once been (Isa. 14:10; Eccles. 9:10)." *Sheol* really isn't a place of punishment in Scripture. It is the space of death and the grave. In Scripture we do see instances of people claiming to be rescued from *Sheol* (the Psalms often do this). Sometimes *Sheol* can be personified as a force that is swallowing up the living.

The second most commonly used word is *Gehenna*. This is where the idea of hell is most similar to what we have likely heard in church. This Greek word is transliterated from the Hebrew word translated into English as, "valley of Hinnom." This valley is located southwest of Jerusalem and during the Jewish monarchy period it held an infamous high place called *Topheth* (translated "fire place") where some Judean Kings engaged in forbidden religious practices, which included human sacrifice by fire. Jeremiah wrote that this place would receive impending judgment and destruction (see Jer. 7:32; 19:6). In the post-exilic community, likely because of these Jewish traditions and stories, *Gehenna* became a place associated with fiery destruction and judgment and was then used metaphorically as a place of punishment by fire for evil spirits and the wicked dead (as

*Continued on page 5...*

# Money Matters

## NEWS FROM FINANCE

May 2026

Thank you for all  
that you are able to  
give to Bethany!

Received for the  
General Fund

\$17,373.01

Designated gifts to other funds:

Building Fund: \$1,800.00

CROP Walk: \$125.00

Lenten Offering: \$142.00

Miracle Sunday: \$865.00

Native American Ministries: \$165.00

Showers of Blessings: \$200.00

Urban Ministries: \$200.00

### Newsletter

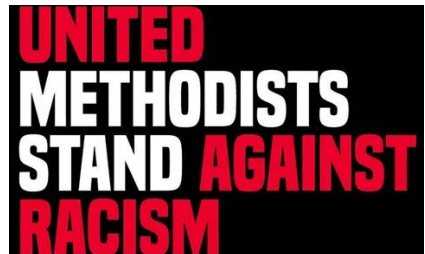
Email your articles,  
pictures and updates  
to us at:

[bethanyumc1@gmail.com](mailto:bethanyumc1@gmail.com)



#### Miracle Sunday - May 17th

A special offering to support theological education in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines with the hope of funding 500 annual scholarships.



#### Vital Conversations

The next meeting of Vital Conversations will happen on May 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. on ZOOM. All are welcome to join!



## TACO TUESDAY - MAY 5

Come and enjoy a Mexican themed dinner along with live music from Pastor Cole Breit, Pastor Jay Locklear, Pastor Jimmy Weaver, and Donald House. It all begins at 6:00 p.m.

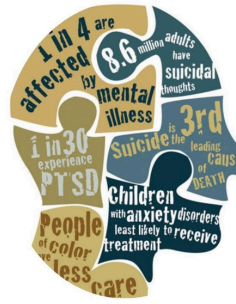
## YOU'RE INVITED

Epworth United Methodist Church presents

### WAYFARING TOGETHER FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH IN COMMUNITY

Inspired by Dr. Warren Kinghorn's book, *Wayfaring: A Christian Approach to Mental Health Care*, this event invites us into deeper reflection on the role of the church in a time of growing need.

Join us for an important and timely conversation bringing together practitioners and faith leaders to explore how we, as a community of faith, can respond with compassion, understanding, and hope.



THE SPEAKERS



**Dr. Warren Kinghorn**  
Duke Psychiatrist & Co-Director of Theology and Medicine Initiative



**Dr. Tonya Armstrong**  
CEO, The Armstrong Center for Hope



**Rev. Amanda Wilson**  
Children's Pastor at Epworth UMC and LCSW



**Rev. Justis Mitchell**  
LSCWA, Trinitas Services

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2026

4:00 - 6:00 PM

EPWORTH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
3002 HOPE VALLEY ROAD DURHAM, NC 27707  
919.489.6557 EPWORTH-UMC.ORG



## United Women in Faith

### United Women in Faith Tuesday Morning Circle

The Tuesday Morning Circle will meet May 12 at 10:30 a.m. If you'd like to join a UWF group and don't like to drive at night, this one is for you. Contact Bobbi Wheeler for more information.



### United Women in Faith Tuesday Evening Circle

The Tuesday Evening circle will meet on May 12 at 7:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Center. All women are invited and Becky House is a contact for this group.

## United Methodist Men

The United Methodist Men will meet on May 12 at 7:00 pm in the fellowship center conference room. All men of the church are invited to attend.

See John Long for additional information.

# The Pastor's Note

...continued from page 2

apocalyptic literature increased in popularity during the post-exilic period, this imagery of fiery judgment in Gehenna became common place in Jewish circles from passages like 1 Enoch 18:11-16; 108:3-7, 15; 2 Esdras 7:36-38). This was a popular idea by the time Jesus began his ministry in the first century.

*Hadēs* is the Greek god of the underworld. As the Jewish faith Hellenized (adopted Greek culture), *Hadēs* became a similar term with the Hebrew word *Sheol*. It became a word to describe the realm of the dead. It was not necessarily a word for the judgment of the wicked but became another way of talking about where dead people go for Hellenized Jews.

*Tartaros* is the deepest depth of *Hadēs* and is the place in Greek mythology where the wicked are judged (this is where the Titans and others were thrown into for punishment). Plato claimed that Tartarus was the place where souls were judged and where the wicked received divine punishment. You can see similarities to our current conception of hell with this Greek mythos.

I read these different words and I find myself seeing that there are differences between them. They all can't be encompassed into our current concept of hell. Parts of each word can but not all of them. They are distinct and diverse. I have also learned through studying Scripture and the ancient world that the concept of hell is a Jewish idea that didn't necessarily come about until after Babylonian exile, after the Israelites had been conquered and exiled by multiple different empires. When the Israelites lost their power as a monarchy, they had to imagine what God could possibly do to make things right for them and what God would do to the ones who abused and sought to destroy God's chosen people.

Hell became a mechanism of hope for a Jewish people who were not seeing abusive power getting their comeuppance. Hellfire and judgment in the afterlife became a source of hope for the Israelites to keep seeking good even when the worldly powers were unjustly taking advantage of people for their own gain. These earthly powers would be judged when they die. I can imagine a post-exilic Israelite proclaiming, "we can't bring about justice right now, but God will someday. We may not see justice come about in our lifetime but God will do it at the end of time."

The concept of hell is of great benefit to a minority group who feels as though evil and injustice are winning. Hell may feel disconnected for us as Christians today because we are technically part of the majority in our society. We may feel wary or unsure about hell because destructive injustices are not coming against the Christian identity in America. Hell doesn't really bring us much comfort because we are not uncomfortable. Hell doesn't resound with us because we are not being abused by the majority, instead we are the majority. Hell is a question of justice and evil getting its comeuppance. Hell should make us ask the deeper question of who is causing injustice and evil in our world and what are we doing in spite of it? How are we pushing back against the forces of darkness even when we know that this injustice won't be solved in our lifetime? Hell should not be used to scare people into belief but instead it should get us to ask who is God against and how are we responding?

Jesus said, "anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell (gehenna)" (Matt. 5:22). If this is true then we are all meant to go there. Even so, may we fight against the passions of injustice and evil that are meant to carry us to such hell.

Pastor Cole

# WORSHIP TEAM

## May 2026

Communion Stewards: Lisa & Gary Kearns



### Acolyte

May 3<sup>rd</sup> - Janice Stone-Mills  
 May 10<sup>th</sup> - April Stone-Mills  
 May 17<sup>th</sup> - Heather Fisher  
 May 24<sup>th</sup> - James/Joshua Stone  
 May 31<sup>st</sup> - Gerhard Mels

### Liturgist

May 3<sup>rd</sup> - Gerhard Mels  
 May 10<sup>th</sup> - Kate Hankins  
 May 17<sup>th</sup> - Lynne Sprague  
 May 24<sup>th</sup> - Casey Breit  
 May 31<sup>st</sup> - Dan Portaro

### Open & Close Church

May 3<sup>rd</sup> - Sharon Stone  
 May 10<sup>th</sup> - John Long  
 May 17<sup>th</sup> - Kim Wiles  
 May 24<sup>th</sup> - Lynne Sprague  
 May 31<sup>st</sup> - Donald House

### Ushers

May 3<sup>rd</sup> - Dan & John Long  
 May 10<sup>th</sup> - Earl & Cheryl  
 May 17<sup>th</sup> - Donald & Pam  
 May 24<sup>th</sup> - Gerhard & Marcia  
 May 31<sup>st</sup> - Gary & Lisa Kearns

### A Note on Switching Dates

If you are unable to do your assigned worship activity, please arrange to switch with someone or find a willing volunteer.

Please let the office know if it involves a liturgist or an acolyte, as those names are always listed in the bulletin.

### Greeters

May 3<sup>rd</sup> - Marian Williams  
 May 10<sup>th</sup> - Maureen Bateman  
 May 17<sup>th</sup> - Donald House  
 May 24<sup>th</sup> - Lynne Sprague  
 May 31<sup>st</sup> - Cathy Portaro

# Holy Week At Bethany



Holy Week began with *All Glory, Laud, and Honor* and ended with a triumphant *Hallelujah Chorus*. On Palm Sunday, the children in Sunday School made a short video of Jesus entering Jerusalem.

On Maundy Thursday, we performed a handwashing ritual, an activity of humble service, and then gathered round the table as Jesus did with his disciples that night.

On Good Friday we retold the story of Jesus' passion through the tradition of tenebrae by extinguishing a single candle every step of Jesus' journey to the cross.

On Easter flowers were placed on the cross, and we celebrated through worship, scripture, songs, and again gathered around the table to share the cup and bread. In each service, the music from the chancel choir, handbells, or Pastor Cole was wonderful. The week concluded with a delicious Easter lunch prepared by Bethany folks and organized by hospitality.

# Stories To Tell

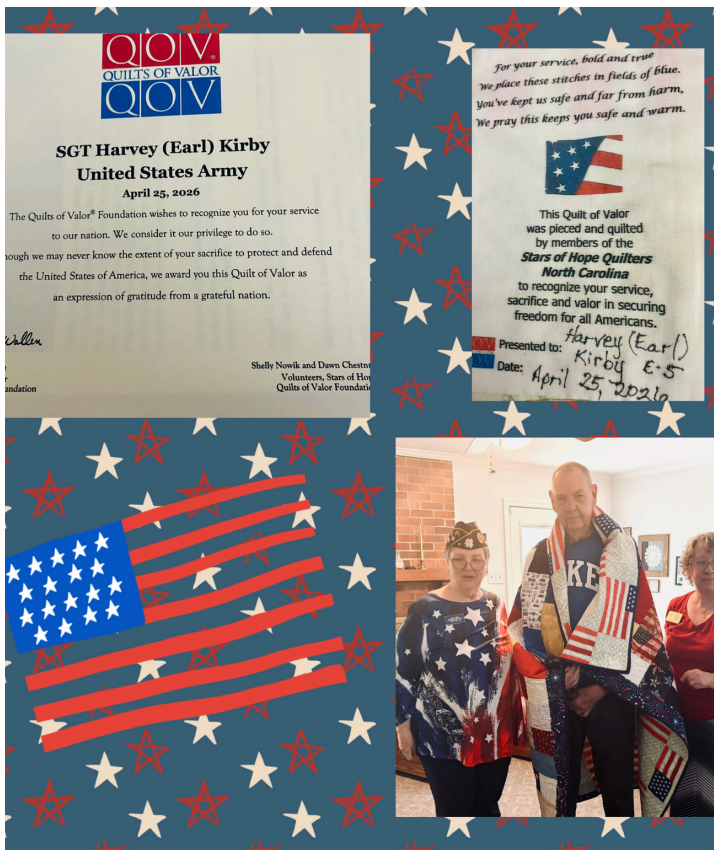
## A Safe Space to Meet - Lynne Sprague

One morning last week I answered a call from a guy in Wichita, Kansas. He, his husband, and their 26 year old son were traveling to Durham, NC, for their son to meet his biological sister. Their need was a space to gather for this meeting along with an interpreter. After discussing it with Cole, I called him back and told him we'd be glad to help. Being curious, I asked if he would mind sharing how he had found us.

He replied that he had googled UMC near his hotel and our name came up, and we were also in close proximity to the sister. As he continued his search, he visited our web site and saw that we are a Reconciling Congregation (as is his church in Kansas).

"I knew then that you would be a safe space for my family as well as my son's sister." They were set up in the church parlor and met for about 2 hours. We received this note along with a donation. *Thank you so much for helping our adopted son meet his biological sister. As a gay couple we needed a safe place to meet. You are living the mission of Jesus in small ways that matter hugely! Our deepest gratitude...*

### Memorial Day is May 25th



## Quilts of Valor - Connie Kirby



On Saturday afternoon, Shelly Nowik and Dawn Chestnut, members of the Quilts of Valor group, Stars of Hope, from Chapel Hill presented and wrapped Earl Kirby with this lovely quilt. These ladies represent more than 10,000 Quilts of Valor members and volunteers from 667 groups across the country. This Foundation was founded in 2003, and thousands of quilters have been involved in the last 23 years with more than 443,000 quilts being awarded to active personnel and veterans. That is over 19,000 per year. Their mission is to cover service members and veterans touched by war with comforting and healing quilts to honor them for all they have done to preserve our freedom. This quilt is to say "thank you for your service, sacrifice, and valor in serving our nation in combat and during peace time.

Quilters believe that every quilt tells a story. SGT Harvey (Earl) Kirby's story began with a quilter in NC who shares his love of country. They journeyed through his tour of duty in the US Army from 1967-1970 during the Viet Nam conflict, stated his assignments and awards, and wrapped him in the quilt as a gesture of appreciation.

Congratulations, Earl!

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# Happy BIRTHDAY

6th Ryan Walter  
7th Earl Kirby  
9th Gary Kearns  
12th Danny Robinson

13th Debi Ann Steeley  
20th Connie Kirby  
27th Julie Dowdee  
30th Michael Roberts

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May 26th  
Jimmy & Elaine  
Truckner



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## Church Contacts

Sanctuary Address: 2809 Guess Rd  
Office Mailing Address: 2903 Guess Rd  
Office Phone: 919-477-6659  
Church Email: bethanyumc1@gmail.com

## Online Links

[Google Calendar](#)  
[Bethany Website](#)  
[ZOOM Meetings](#)  
[Live Online Worship](#)