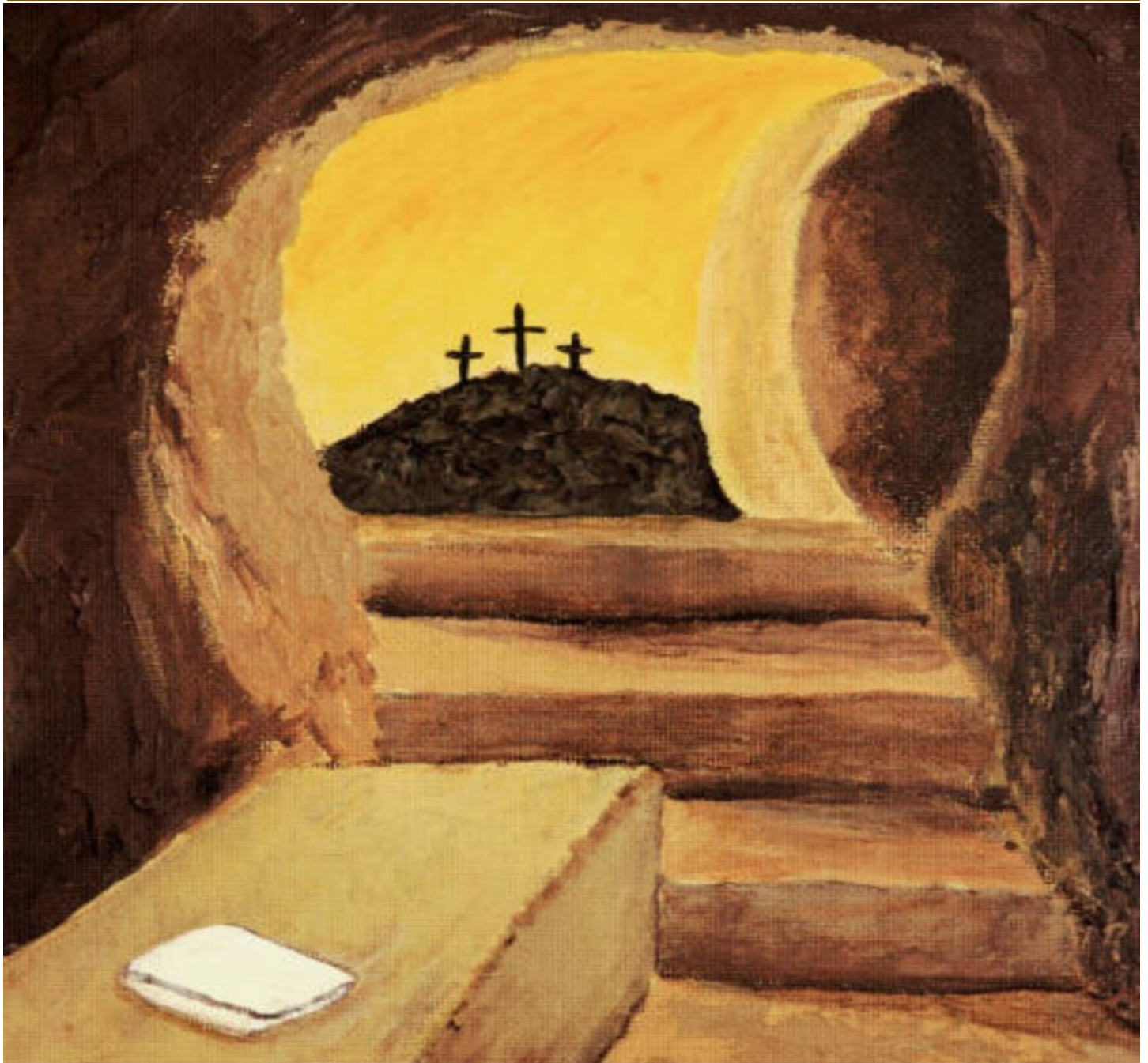




WITTENBERG WAY

April 2024



RISEN INDEED!

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Dear Grace Family,

The cry of Easter has gone out: "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" Easter is, of course, not only a day but an entire season in the life of the church. More importantly than just a season on the church calendar, it is the hope of resurrection victory, for all who are baptized and united to Christ's death and resurrection.

In a short poem called "On Burial," Mary Ruefle writes,

There are only two tombs: the tomb of Jesus and the tomb of Tut. Roll away one stone and you will be given everything: food, clothing, shelter, gems, cloth, seeds, and oil, a replica of the world in pure gold. Roll away the other stone and there's nothing.

The poem is as striking as it is brief. In two sentences, we are given two kings from two vastly different kingdoms. Their tombs provide everything we need to know about them.

King Tut's is as good a tomb as anyone in his day could have hoped for, filled with everything one could ever want in the afterlife. Five rooms of treasures including thrones, statues, and arms. The innermost layer of his three-piece sarcophagus was 240 pounds of solid gold. Tut was not only hoarding such ludicrous amounts of wealth for the hereafter but also showing how great a king he was by memorializing himself.

But the fact remains, as glorious as King Tut lived and died, he remains dead.

But then there is the other tomb. Empty. It was not made for its sole occupant, but, rather, borrowed at the very last minute. It was not laid to rest in a valley of kings like old Tut, but in a garden tomb next to Golgatha. Not exactly worthy of a king. The religious leaders made sure to have the tomb guarded just in case Jesus'

followers wanted to steal the body of their rabbi back, but there would not be any gold or gems to steal; nothing but spices covering the already-decomposing corpse. And yet, this vacant tomb has generated far more than the curiosity of a few archeologists.

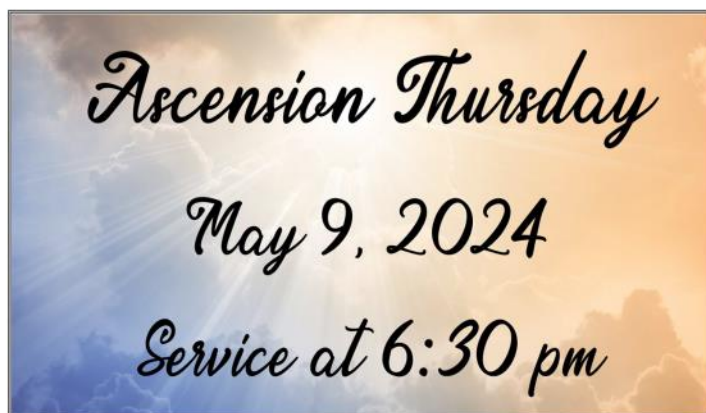
Jesus' tomb may be far less glamorous than King Tut's, but the important fact to remember is that where once a dead body was laid to rest, there is now a vacuum. He was not even there to announce His resurrection. It's a bewildering surprise when the man dressed in white tells the women at the tomb, "He is risen; he is not here." The words themselves sound as casual as a San Diegan describing a fish taco, but the difference between these two kings' tombs makes all the difference for life beyond the grave.

A lot of people are concerned about their legacy after they are dead and gone. Thankfully, Jesus couldn't care about legacy. Legacies, after all, are for dead people. And why do we seek a legacy among the living? Unlike King Tutankhamun (and us, for that matter) Jesus heeds not riches nor man's empty praise. He does not need any drawn-out eulogies or an earnest epitaph to give meaning to His life. Jesus knew all along that there was no need to obsess over his grave knowing that it would only be used for the weekend. But in that empty tomb, we have been given something far better than gold. "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Ever Yours,



Pr. Thomas

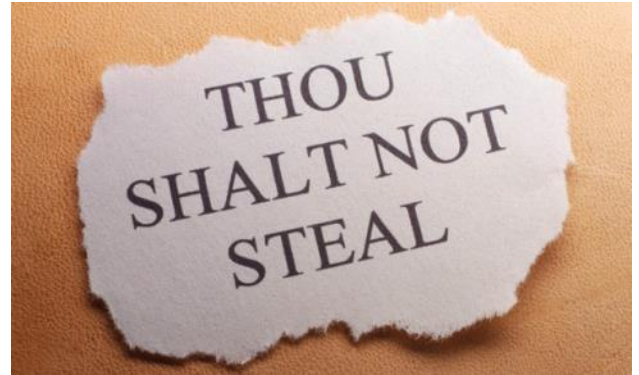


If you have ever bought or sold a house, you are acquainted with the concept of a “title search.” Before you can sell your house, and before anyone else will feel comfortable putting down the money to buy it, you have to prove that you really own it. So a title company looks through the public records to ensure that you bought it from the person who really owned it, who bought it from the person who really owned it before that, all the way back to the earliest records of your state, including when your state was only a territory or colony of England.

Peak into a preschool classroom during playtime and you’ll see a simplified version of this. A child starts playing with a ball, but another child says, “That’s mine: I had it first.”

You can’t understand the Seventh Commandment without understanding this concept of ownership or title. As the Small Catechism puts it:

You shall not steal.



What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor’s money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

Your neighbor’s possessions are his: you don’t have a right to take them. And likewise, your possessions are yours. Ownership and property rights are foundational to any functioning society.

But there is something deeper to know about ownership, and that is the question of who has the title and ownership to you? Paul says, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

If you yourself are owned by God, then of course everything that you own, you really only possess by God’s leave: all of it, at bottom, belongs to Him since you belong to Him. For you were bought with the blood of Christ.

This notion is the foundation of all Christian stewardship. It all belongs to God. It should all be used for things that bring honor to His name, blessings to our neighbors and the extension of His kingdom.

If you are interested in giving of your time and talents, please contact Pastor Brian or Gretchen Jordan in the office. (gjordan@gracesandiego.com) We have opportunities available.

MARCH 2024 GIVING

February Offerings	\$ 20,004
February Budget	<u>\$ 24,565</u>
Shortage	\$ - 4,560
YTD Actual	\$ 52,798
YTD Budget	<u>\$ 63,869</u>
Shortage	\$- 11,071

HOW TO GIVE

- Your offering envelopes or those in the pews
- Online from your bank website
- Scan the QR code here
- Text the amount to 84321
- The Giving Page at grace sandiego.com
- *Time and Talents*



HIS STORY IS YOUR STORY: A HOMILY FOR EASTER VIGIL

by Pr. Brian Thomas

I'll start with a basic premise: *All of human life is shaped by some story.* I'll give you a ridiculous example to demonstrate how particular events receive their meaning in the context of a larger story.

Let's say you are standing out on the street in front of the church tomorrow before Easter service begins, and a stranger approaches you and says, "The name of the common duck is *histrionicus, histrionicus, histrionicus.*" That would be odd, wouldn't it? You understand the meaning of what he said. But why on earth is he saying it to you in the first place?

This particular sentence can only be understood if it is placed in a broader framework of meaning—a story that renders the saying comprehensible. Let's assume the gentleman is not mentally challenged (or under the influence of something). There could be several stories that could render this particular incident meaningful:

1. The man had mistaken you for another person he saw yesterday at the library who asked him: "Do you by any chance know the Latin name of the common duck?" or...
2. He could have just come from a session with his therapist who is helping him deal with a crippling shyness, where she urged him to talk to strangers. The man asked her, "What should I say?" She replied: "Oh, anything at all."

Or even better...he is a sleeper agent—a Russian spy who was told to meet his contact on Easter morning on the corner of Park and Lincoln in San Diego, CA, and it turns out the code that will reveal his identity is the Latin name of the duck.

That's a silly example, but the meaning of the encounter depends on which story shapes it, and which story is true. So too with your lives: How you understand human life depends on your conception of the human story. HISTORY. What is the real story of which your life plays a part?

In his book, *The Gospel for a Pluralist Society*, the missionary Leslie Newbigin writes:

In our contemporary culture...two quite different stories are told. One is the story of evolution, of the development of species through the survival of the strong, and the story of the rise of civilization, our type of civilization, and its success in giving humankind mastery over nature.

The other story is the one embodied in the Bible, the story of creation and fall, of God's election of a people to be the bearers of his purpose for humankind, and of the coming of the one in whom that purpose is to be fulfilled. These are two different and incompatible stories.

The humanist and Biblical stories are contradictory. And if the church is to remain faithful we must acknowledge that there will always be a clash of stories when we present the story of the Bible to the world. This has always been the case—whether in ancient Rome or contemporary America.

Traditionally, on Easter Vigil, the overarching story—the "meta" narrative of scripture—is read chronologically from Genesis to Revelation. The story of creation, the story of our fall into sin, the story of God's promise to Noah, Abraham, and David, and the continuation of those promises in the life of Israel and the prophets leading to the story of the Messiah, Jesus Christ—born of a virgin, suffering and dying upon the cross, and His miraculous resurrection three days later, as well as His coming again in glory at the end of the age.

The divine drama told in Scripture and rehearsed on this holy night is what N.T. Wright calls, "public truth"—truth that is verifiable and can be authenticated in history. Something that cannot be done with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or even Mormonism. It is not just a local tale about a certain ethnic group or religion. The Bible makes a comprehensive claim about the world and everyone in it. It begins with the creation of all things and ends with the renewal of all things. And in between these book ends it offers an interpretation of cosmic history. It, therefore, makes a comprehensive claim; our stories, our reality must find a place in this story if they are going to make any sense at all. Otherwise, we are living falsely in a fairy tale that does not end in a happily ever after.

With all this said, however, we must acknowledge that the Bible is a very big book written across thousands of years in several dead languages centered in the ancient Near East, which often makes reading and understanding the story in 2024 rather intimidating. It doesn't help that we have been reared in a culture that tells us that we are the center of the universe—the very thing our selfish and sinful hearts like to hear.

Thus, many Christians today have unintentionally co-opted the Bible's story in ways that have proven to be unfaithful and unhelpful in both interpreting and understanding it. When my little brother was young, he loved to take

HIS STORY IS YOUR STORY: A HOMILY FOR EASTER VIGIL

things apart to figure out how they worked—the phone, television, and toaster. The problem was that he didn't know how to put them back together. And this is what has happened to the Bible today.

The Bible has been fragmented into bits—moral bits here, doctrinal bits there, devotional bits that are good for your quiet times, you have historical bits and end-times bits. When the Bible is broken up in this way there is no comprehensive narrative to withstand the power of the prevailing humanist story that shapes our culture. The Bible-as-bits are accommodated to the more all-embracing cultural story, and it becomes the humanist story that ends up shaping our lives (*even as believers*). Thus, to our culture, the church has lost its voice and sounds like a stranger saying: *histrionicus, histrionicus, histrionicus*.

It is for this reason that I purposefully had the story of scripture read tonight through the lens of Jesus. When we understand that Jesus is the key to unlocking the Bible's mystery, we have read the story correctly; and therefore, we can begin to understand that our personal stories *must* be found in His. The fancy term I created a few years ago for this is a *CHRISTOTELIC* reading of the Bible—*telos* means goal or purpose; therefore, the goal of the Word written is to proclaim the Word enfleshed.

We are not to worship or find our lives in a book; instead, we are to worship and find our lives in the ONE that the book points us to. This is how Jesus Himself understood it. For example, when some so-called "Bible" experts confronted Jesus about healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus told them: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me. . . . If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me."

All the Scriptures are about Jesus Christ, even where there is no explicit prediction. There is a fullness in all the Bible that points to Christ and is satisfied only when He has come and done His saving work. This is why after His resurrection, Jesus held a Bible study to prepare His apostles for their mission. Luke tells us: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Jesus was there at creation, the voice of God calling all things into being. Jesus came to fulfill all that was written in the Law and the Prophets. All of it was pointing to Him—and it all comes to a climax in what we have rehearsed and celebrated during holy week.

Christ accomplishes what the Law required through His perfect life. And all its penalties against sinners like us were poured out on Christ instead. Therefore, the law is not the path to righteousness; Christ is! The ultimate goal of the law is that we would look to Christ, not law-keeping, for our holy status before God. As Paul put it in Romans 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Or as Luther once said: "When you have Christ, you also have everything God promised through Him."

All the types and shadows of the Old Testament—the sacrifices, the temple, the priesthood, the land, etc. have found their reality in Christ and His finished work. For example, the physical temple has ceased to be the geographic center of worship. Now, Christ Himself is the center of our worship, and thus, we can worship Him anywhere because He has ascended to heaven at God's right hand. He is the "place," the "tent," and the "temple" where we meet God. Therefore, Christianity has no geographic center, no Mecca, no Jerusalem (not even St. Louis for those in the LCMS).

God's people are no longer a unified political body or just a particular ethnic group or a nation-state, but are exiles and sojourners among all nations, all peoples and tribes, and all languages. It is for this reason that we remembered our baptisms into Christ tonight as a diverse group of people—to know and confess that our stories have found a place in HIS STORY, which is the true story of the world: One Lord, One Baptism, One people of God.

What does this mean? It means that death no longer signals a loss for those in Christ. The curse has been broken by the Second Adam so that all reborn in and through Him might receive the inheritance of His victory over death. It means that Jesus is the first fruit of a new life where dead bodies are not simply anointed out of respect; they are raised up out of grace and truth... forever. Because our lives are united to death like His, it means our stories are united and will end like His. The angel proclaimed it to the ladies who were the first to hear and verify it: "He is not here; He is risen!"

We anticipate this Good News about the open tomb and risen Jesus here in the darkness of this Easter prelude. His victory for you over all the powers of darkness is already a done deal. It's all over but the shouting. So, let's be done with the Easter prelude and begin the shouting as we proclaim to the world a story worth living for.

FACES OF GRACE



We were sad to say goodbye to member John Barber as he has moved to Arkansas. John faithfully served in several capacities: choir/cantor, altar guild, and council, and was a key part of his Grace Gathering group.



The altar is stripped bare on Maundy Thursday. On Good Friday, the beauty of Christ's loving sacrifice shines forth as seven candles are snuffed out to match each gospel passage as it is read to symbolize the death of Christ.



On Palm Sunday we began our service outside and processed in together singing Hosanna's to our Lord. The children enjoyed learning about the significance of palm branches as Pr. Thomas leads the children's message.



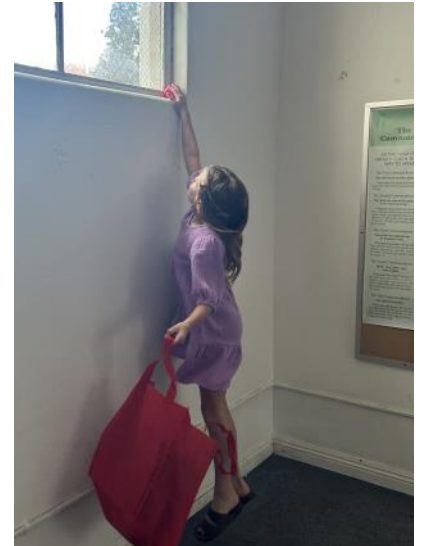
Congratulations Pastor Brian Thomas!

It is my distinct pleasure to inform you that you have been selected to receive an AGO-San Diego Beach Breeze **Clergy Superhero Award** for 2024. You were selected for this award by the Board of the San Diego Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

FACES OF GRACE



Our Wednesday Bible study is always well attended. This entire year has been focused on understanding the book of Revelation.



Due to the weather this year, Rachel Thomas hosted the annual Easter Egg hunt inside the classrooms for the children this year. Inside the eggs were stickers with Christian symbols, little toys, and of course, some candy.



Our Easter breakfast was a great success this year. We are grateful to all who participated and helped provide food and clean-up. Most importantly, we thank our top chef, Harold Nichols, pictured here with his assistant August Lehman.



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CHURCH SECRETARY
Gretchen Jordan
gjordan@gracesandiego.com

SUNDAY DIVINE SERVICE
8:00 am & 10:30 am

SUNDAY SCHOOL
9:30 to 10:15 am
Nursery available

SHANNON CARREIRO
Council President

RICHARD SEGARRA
Treasurer

PAUL HIMMELBERGER
Treasurer Emeritus

DANIEL PAYLOR
Secretary

HEATH RUSSERT
Trustee

KELLEY SCHMIDT
Fellowship/Activities

JOSH MELLOR
Members-at-Large

CARL LEHMAN
Education

TED NILSEN
Head Elder

JEREMY FULLAM
STEVE HOLLMAN
JASON HUNTLEY
DARYL NEWTON
Elders

BIRTHDAYS

APRIL

14- Linnette Hollman
14- Elsy Lehman
20- Barbara Angelo
22- Rev. Yong Mo Lee
26- John Hansen
26- Jack Gruetzmacher

MAY

4- Valda Houts
9- Janice Tseng Lee
12- Sheldon Lee
17- Amy Russert

PRAYERS

PRAYERS FOR STRENGTH AND HEALING

Dave, Bill, Phil, Mike, John, Heidi, Edward, Daniel, Nancy, Jan, Barbara, Karen, and Kelley

PRAYERS AWAITING A CHILD OF GOD

Jordan Gruetzmacher, Rachel Hawthorne, Teagan LeYanna

PRAYERS FOR OUR MISSIONARIES & SEMINARIANS

Rev. Dr. John Bombaro, Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss, and Vicar Rowan Turner

PRAYERS FOR OUR MILITARY MEMBERS

Rev. Mario Ancira, Micah Burge, Tajy George, Daniel Fohey, Nathan Farish, Matthew Morgan, Jeff & Jordan Gruetzmacher

PRAYERS FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND

Joyce Rochester

COMING SOON

OUR
DOORS
ARE OPEN!



**Sat. June 1
5:00 pm**

You are invited for refreshments and open house prior to our worship service at 6:30 pm. This is an opportunity to tour GLC and learn more about our buildings, their upkeep, and future campus projects.

PENTECOST

May 19 @
8:00 & 10:30 am

SUNDAY SCHOOL ENDS

May 26

GLC OPEN HOUSE

June 1 @ 5:00 pm

SATURDAY EVENING

SERVICE

June 1 @ 6:30 pm

NO SUNDAY SERVICES

June 2
Due to the Rock 'n' Roll
Marathon



CONNECT WITH US