

Keep On Keeping On

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

We're going to continue in Philippians. That's where we've been. I'm excited to kind of unpack a few more verses. So if you'll look there with me, Philippians 4, verse 8.

He says, And heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

That is the Word of God, the clear and sufficient Word of God. Each May, I love reading graduation speeches throughout the country.

I love to read what our nation's best and brightest are saying to the next generation. I don't know if you guys enjoy reading those types of things.

[1 : 2 9] A couple years ago, I came upon, I think, my favorite graduation speech so far. It was by author David Brooks. You may have heard of him.

He begins humorously, this graduation speech, he begins humorously stating the obvious. That most schools, when they think about a graduation speech, they invite somebody who's been successful, and then they ask them to come and give completely garbage advice.

Like, listen to your inner voice. Be true to yourself. Follow your passion. Your future is limitless.

You know, if we've ever graduated from anything, we've heard things similar to this. But he says, I'm going to tell you what's going to happen for the rest of your life. He said, I'm going to give you the ultimate spoiler alert.

I'm going to spoil life for you. And so he's telling these graduates at Dartmouth, he says, life's going to bring many changes. You won't stay in the job you begin in.

[2 : 3 3] I'll say amen to that. You will face unemployment, loneliness, heartbreak. He said, you'll develop in many ways. But you'll also experience numerous failures, and you'll experience numerous successes.

But, he continues, at some point, you'll settle down, and you'll start making commitments. You'll commit to a spouse, perhaps. You'll commit to a job.

You'll commit to a community, to a concern you care about, to something along those lines. You'll commit to these things. Now, he warns, and he's warning these graduates, and he should probably warn us, that our culture does not encourage commitment making.

He said, and I quote, we live in a culture that puts a lot of emphasis upon individual liberty and freedom of choice. Student culture, he writes, is built around keeping your options open and the fear of missing out.

FOMO. Right? The entire internet, he says, is commanding you to sample one thing after another. Our phones are always beckoning for us to shift our attention. So, if we can't focus our attention for 30 seconds, how can we make a commitment for life?

- [3 : 46] But he continues, and this is very insightful. He says, your fulfillment in life will not come from how well you explore your freedom and keep your options open.
- That's the path to a frazzled, scattered life in which you try to please everyone and end up pleasing no one. He says, your fulfillment in life will come from how well you end your freedom.
- You will realize that your primary mission in life is to be really good at making commitments. Your fulfillment in life will find out, or will come from how well you end your freedom.
- You know, I think in so many ways, David Brooks is hitting at some of the things that are at the core of Christianity. Life is not found by gaining it. Life is found by losing it, for Christ's sake.
- You notice what Paul has been saying again and again throughout this letter. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or rivalry. Count others more significant than yourself. I mean, we love these verses. He says, put it all on the line and live for Christ.
- [4 : 50] And it's what he says again in these verses one more time. He says, think about what is good and do it. Commit your life to it. In a way where we're going this morning, commit your life to Christ and to what is truly good.
- Commit your life to Christ and what is truly good. I'm going to break this out like every good preacher in three points. First one is, fill your mind with what is good.
- Fill your mind with what is good. Look back at verse 8. He says, finally, brothers. Again, we see that word of affection. But we first see finally.
- You know, he began chapter 3 finally, but he wasn't even close to done. But now he really means it. You know, he continues through these verses on to the end of the chapter with some kind of final instructions, some final things on his heart.
- In verse 8, if you look down there with me, it's very emphatic. It's direct. He says, whatever is just and pure and lovely and commendable, if there's anything excellent, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
- [5 : 57] You know, often you would think of a sentence saying, think about whatever is true, lovely, and just, and all these things. But he does it in reverse. He says, whatever is true, honorable, just, all these things, think on them.
- It's as if he's trying to say to us, and endeavoring to tell us to think, he doesn't want us to miss what we're told to think about. Do you see? He says, committing our lives to Christ begins in our thoughts.
- A.W. Tozer says it like this, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.
- And I think in so many ways that's so right. You know, Isaiah 55 says, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thought. So let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thought.
- The idea is that forsaking wickedness begins in our minds. Because our thoughts direct our steps. So the same thing is going on with following Christ.
- [7 : 01] Following Christ begins in our minds. Let the righteous man, therefore, hold on to his thoughts so he doesn't forsake God's way.
- He's commanded us to think. Literally, that word means ponder. Dwell on. Let your mind be constantly focused on these things.
- You know, so many ways other religions try to empty the mind. But Christianity says fill the mind. Fill it with what is good in order to live for Christ.

And so all our thoughts are to focus on what is truly good. And he lists out these six adjectives. I just want to say a couple things up front. Look, notice that all of what is good is positive.

All of what is good is positive. He doesn't say dwell on bad things that could or might happen. He doesn't say mull over what bad things have happened to you.

[8 : 03] He doesn't say give attention to the bad things you've done. He gives no room for meditating on bad things. No room for meditating on negative things.

My mom used to sing accentuate the positive. I'm not going to sing it as Bing Crosby. But accentuate the positive. Eliminate the negative. Latch on to the affirmative.

And don't mess with Mr. In-between. You know, I mean, that's kind of what he's saying in a Bing Crosby sort of way. Think about what is good.

Committing our lives to Christ begins in our thoughts. And this is where we so often stray. You know, in one sense, you can't control what you think. Right? Often what we really think or our thoughts come to us when we're not thinking about them.

You know, when we're not doing anything else. You know, when we go on a walk. And you begin to think about the things you don't intentionally think about. You know, they're kind of the background noise.

[9 : 10] Or we try to quietly read. You ever sit down and try to quietly read a book and your mind is alive? Or you take a shower. And you're thinking. Or you try to lay down in bed.

And then these thoughts come. These worst case scenarios. Or you replay a conversation you had. Or maybe a conflict.

I always love the inside your mind conflict in which you always win and have the best word in the moment. Or maybe we just rehearse our hurts and our failures.

You know, in so many ways, we cannot control what we think about. But we can control how we react. And how we direct these thoughts. You know, Paul's trying to get us to think about our minds a little bit different.

Our minds are kind of like a muscle. We're not meant to just kind of respond to them. We're meant to direct them. So he says, think. Notice also that all of what is good is permissible.

[10 : 08] I find this interesting. You know, this verse begins with a progression of what it means to commit our whole lives to Christ. And he focused on what is permitted. He doesn't say, think about what not to do.

He doesn't say, make sure you remember the bad and the ugly and what offends God. He doesn't say, make sure you stay in line. And I love this because Christianity is not mainly a list of don'ts.

It's a list of do's. Christianity is not mainly about avoiding what is bad. It's about loving what is good. And I just love that. Martin Luther, the reformer and the always quotable.

He used to say, sometimes you have to sin a little to spite the devil. Now, you got to be careful with that. But his point is, if you're so hung up on rules that you must keep and your thoughts are so bothered by them, those rules aren't bringing you any closer to Jesus.

He says, by all means, just break the rule and spite the devil so that you focus on what is truly good. So what is this good that we're to think about?

[11 : 17] You know, all we have in this text is just adjectives. Many of these adjectives are similar to stoic moral philosophy. I know Paul didn't want us to be stoic. So what do these words mean?

We're to think about whatever's true. The idea is whatever's reliable and trustworthy. We're to think about whatever's honorable, whatever's upright and dignified, whatever kind of elicits honor.

Whatever's just. Whatever fulfills all obligations. Whatever's pure. Whatever's undivided and unmixed in any way. Unalloyed. A pure metal.

Whatever's lovely. Whatever's pleasing. Whatever's commendable. This thing that brings forth applause. And then in summary, he says, Whatever's excellent and whatever's worthy of praise.

And I find it interesting to notice what's not on the list. Success. Approval. Power. Attraction.

[12 : 21] Those aren't on the list because those aren't truly good. What he's trying to say is, Focus on the things that we'll endure, that are worthy of praise and worthy of our lives. And I find it interesting that they're intentionally generic.

So that we can find out what's good in our own lives. And so that it can lead us to continually living for Christ.

So the only question is, what is truly good to us? I mean, what would God say for us to devote our lives to pursuing? You know, in 1914, not long after the sinking of the Titanic, Congress gathered to discuss what actually happened in another tragedy at sea.

Earlier that year, obscured by the thick fog, the steamship Monroe was rammed by the Nantucket merchant ship and eventually sank. Forty-one sailors lost their lives.

This was a time of crisis in our country, trying to figure out how to navigate the sea and how to protect people. And when the captain of the Nantucket was arraigned and tried, a surprising development occurred.

[13 : 35] During the cross-examination, it was learned that the captain of the Monroe's compass was off. It had deviated as much as two degrees from standard magnetic compass.

It was generally enough, just two degrees, just slightly off. But on that fateful day, his faulty compass led to the costly tragedy.

Forty-one sailors dead because the compass had deviated out. This heart-rending discovery explains the final picture explained by one reporter back then.

He said, The reason I tell that story is because our minds are like that compass.

That's what Paul is trying to help us see. Is it focused on the right thing? Our minds push us into Christ, push us into following. But when they're out of focus, they lead us astray.

[14 : 46] So he's trying to get us to reset our minds by focusing on what is good. You know, and obviously in so many ways, this means filling our mind with the Word of God. There's no substitute to the reading and studying and the praying of God's Word.

And so we want to fill our minds with it so that our minds are saturated by it. Everyone who builds their life on the Word of God will endure. Everybody that builds their life on anything else will not. And we're meant to fill it with the Word of God.

We're also meant to continually redirect our minds to what is good whenever we stray. Now take anxiety. Left unchecked, anxiety leads us away from commitment to protecting ourselves and what we care about.

Left unchecked, it leads us away from Christ. It's incredibly dangerous and destructive. You've got to watch out for an anxious mom. Because it can go astray.

And yet anxiety, if you've ever, I'm sure you're human, so you've walked through it. It's so hard to stop, right? It's so hard to stop these anxious thoughts.

[15 : 56] Psalm 94 says it like this. When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, your consolations delight my soul. And I don't know about you, but I've so often had that feeling of these anxious thoughts multiplying within me.

And left unchecked, they veer me away from Christ. And so I need these consolations to delight my soul. And that's all Paul is saying.

Think about what is good. So what's good? God is with me. God knows my future. God's committed to my good. God is sovereign over everything I'm walking through and over every person in my life.

The heart of the king is a stream of many waters in the hand of the Lord who directs it wherever he wills. And so the idea is that thinking about what is good leads us out of anxiety to a life committed to Christ and costly love.

Secondly, do what is good continually. Do what is good continually. So he's saying, thinking about what is good is not enough.

[17 : 09] We have to do it. You know, similar to the previous verse, if you look down at verse 9, he says, What you've learned, received, heard, and seen in me. Practice these things.

So he doesn't begin with the command again. He begins with defining what that command is talking about, what it's directing to. Say, what you've learned and received and heard in me. Practice the idea that committing our lives to Christ means remembering what we've learned from him.

What you've learned and received and heard and seen. You know, we're seeing again in Philippians that Paul's referencing his example. So we saw a couple weeks ago, he says, Follow me as I follow the Lord.

Imitate me. And so he's kind of saying that again. But he's also defining what this good that he's been talking about is. He says, yes, look to the scriptures. But more than that, remember what I taught you.

So at the end of this compassionate and this wonderful letter, he's saying, Remember what I taught you, all you learned and received. He said, remember how I lived among you.

[18 : 17] All you heard and saw in me. And in these final verses, he's telling them again what he's told them before and what God's telling us now. That it's not enough to know true things about Jesus Christ.

It's not enough to know the facts. It's not enough to know the stories about him. We must know him. Remember? The surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.

My Lord, we must know the distance between knowing about him and knowing him could not be greater. And again and again, this book kind of takes us to these heights, telling us about who Jesus Christ is.

Who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, being found in human form. He humbled himself by becoming obedient even to the point of death.

And he's telling us these heights and this great distance. He's stooped to save us so that we would live for Christ with greater abandon. All of what he's saying is saying, stand firm in him. If he's done all this, have the mind of Christ.

[19 : 19] Get low. Look to his interests and walk in the way of Christ. And so here he's saying again what he said before. Practice these things. Look at verse 9.

What you've learned and seen and heard in me, practice these things. Be active. Do them.

Accomplish these things. This is a word that's never used in the scriptures of God. It's only used of man. And it's a very plain, simple word. Practice them. And the emphasis is continual, like keep on practicing them.

So at the close of this letter, he's not opening this command. He's just saying it again. Keep on doing it. Continue in this. Don't quit. Don't give up. Don't give up. I love this.

Practice in this context does not refer to doing something until we get it perfect. You know the phrase, practice makes perfect. That's not what he's talking about. Practice here refers to doing something until it becomes a habit.

[20 : 24] Until it becomes wonderfully predictable. Don't you just love predictable people. Until it becomes second nature.

Until it becomes effortless. You know, there's no more humbling game to me than golf. Amen. Amen.

Yeah, that little white ball can cause some serious turmoil in my little heart. You know, I hate it. And I love it. You know, because every hundred bad shots, I hit one good shot.

And that's the only shot I think about when I leave the golf course. And so that brings me back. And I stink. Both my brothers here this morning can attest to how much I stink.

But you know, the biggest reason I stink, and there's probably a few or a lot. The biggest reason that I stink is because when I wind up the swing and get to the top of it.

[21 : 25] If you don't know what I'm talking about, just nod along. You know, if I wind up my swing and get to the top, the problem is there's no, I have no idea what's happening after that. That's the problem.

Other than that, I'm pretty good. You know, I got the dress down and my approach is okay and my going back is all right. But there's no rhythm to my swing. You know, it may be super slow or I may try to crush it like Tiger Woods.

There's no muscle memory. Right? There's no good swing thoughts. You ever heard that phrase, what's your swing ball? The idea is that you shouldn't have many swing thoughts.

You should have muscle memory that drives that ball. There's nothing predictable about my golf game. I suppose there could be something predictable if I put in 10,000 hours.

It's what Malcolm Gladwell says. But the Christian life is like golf. Often we think what we really need to get things back in order with the Lord is a revival.

[22 : 29] Often we think what we really need is a better understanding. Or we think what we really need is a better experience of God's presence. Or some better resolutions.

But the Bible doesn't talk to us like that. It says what we need, what we really need is to keep on. Keep on being active. Keep on pursuing what is good.

Till it becomes predictable. You know, you might find yourself this morning feeling like you're on the sea and the wind's at your back and everything's in order.

That happens to me about one day a year. So congrats. You may feel as if you're on that sea and you haven't felt wind in a long time.

You feel like you're just going to give up on the wind. Start doggy paddling your way in. And Paul would come along to you very compassionately.

[23 : 32] But one thing he'd definitely say is keep on. What you must not do is give up. So it begs us to ask, what are the habits in our home?

What are the regular, predictable, immovable commitments in our house? Do we get out of bed thinking, what do I want to do today? Or does something pull us out of bed such that we say, what should be done today?

You know, commitment is a four-letter word in our culture. We're allergic to it. Yet we smell commitment a mile off and we run the opposite direction.

We don't commit to anything. I recently read an article entitled, The Golden Age of Bailing. The author wrote, Bailing is one of the defining acts of our current moment.

It's a very humorous article as much as it is convicting. He goes on to talk about when we schedule something several weeks or days out, yet when the event is approaching, something inevitably gets in the way.

[24 : 44] And we bail. And everybody's doing it. Everybody's okay with it. You know, sometimes it's legitimate. My temperature is at 98.7 and it's climbing.

Often it's not. You know, sometimes we bail well. We write a text message. Hey, something's going well. Yeah, I can't do it. Other times we don't bail well.

We just go dark. Radio silence. And this passage challenges us. Essentially it's saying, practice these things such that your life is not like that.

That it's marked by regular, predictable, immovable commitments to what is good. Commitments like this isn't a four-letter word.

It's not a prison. As one pastor said, commitment is escape from a prison. The prison of selfishness. So where does your life need to be marked by practicing what is good?

[25 : 50] If I want to be faithful to God's Word, I've got to ask these questions. Is it to be faithful in certain relationships? Is it to be a man of your Word? I don't know.

Do you bail? Are you reliable? Where do you need to end your freedom and commitment?

Where has not practicing what is good become normal in your life? You know, the people in our lives often accept things in our life as normal that should not be.

But the people in our lives begin to accept things as normal that ought not be normal. You know, is it when mom is in one of her moods and just needs some mom time?

Is it when, instead of thinking about what is true, your thoughts simmer on what's been done to you?

[26 : 53] Is it the way you talk and don't, or don't talk to your spouse? Are there people in your life that can point the finger at things that ought not be normal anymore?

You know, one of the things that I'm so thankful for in my wife is she's not afraid to tell me what she really thinks. And, you know, a couple years ago, I forget all the details of conflict because I just forget things.

But we had a conflict and she brought something to my attention and I responded with some direct, sarcastic response.

And she just said, that's what you do. That's what you do. Essentially, she's saying, that's something you do that you should not do.

A couple minutes later, I went and repented to her. But these verses are asking us to find out what are these things that we do that we ought not do so that we can practice what is good.

[28 : 08] You know, in so many ways, these verses are trying to woo us into what is good. These verses are not, like, condemning and pointing out. All they focus on is what is good. And so he's trying to commend to us good and woo us out into it.

He's trying to just pull us into what is good, saying all the good is right there. You know, essentially what he's saying is that the blessing comes in the doing. Continually.

He said, practice these things so that the blessing might come. In so many ways, I just love this. The blessing does not come in doing things perfectly. That's not what this verse is talking about.

That's not what Paul is after. And that is so freeing. He's saying the blessing comes from receiving what Christ did and practicing it continually. I love this.

He says, don't wait to do what is good until you feel like it. Don't wait to do what is good until you don't feel fake or something like that.

[29 : 11] He's trying to woo us into what is good so that we throw our lives into it, trusting that the blessing would come. You know, C.S. Lewis says this quite well in this quote that we have for you.

He says, don't sit trying to manufacture feelings. Don't waste time bothering what you love, whether you love your neighbor.

Act as if you did. And as soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you're behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him.

I just think that's so true. What the Scripture says is not wait for all this joy to come and then you can love him. What Scripture says is act, walk in obedience and the love will come.

Practice what is good continually. Commit your life to Christ. Finally, wait for peace to come. Wait for peace to come.

[30 : 14] Commit your life to Christ. Fill your mind with what is good. Do what is good continually and wait for peace. Wait for it. Wait for it. Wait for it.

You know, when I was first reading this passage earlier this week, wasn't the first time I ever read it, but it was the first time this week, I first thought, peace? I mean, what about joy?

You know, or grace or power? I mean, that's what I really need. But he concludes this passage, and the God of peace will be with you.

But I think in so many ways, what we ultimately want more than anything else is peace. Scripture says, for those that are straying from Christ, there is no peace. There's no rest, no sense of acceptance, no security.

We may hide behind some degree of success we've attained or possession we've secured, but there's no peace for the wicked. Oh yes, there may sometimes be the appearance of peace, but lurking beneath the surface of that feeling is the absence of true peace.

[31 : 23] You know, I don't know how many times I've sat with people coming clean who've said, I just want to be free of this burden.

I just want to come clean. You know, those secret sins that Chris was talking about earlier, I just want to come out of these things. I just want to cast them.

I just want to be through with this. I just want to be through with the lies. There's no peace in running from the Lord, and that's what he's saying. And then they come, and they come clean, or we come clean, and we realize that we're accepted anyway because of Christ, and that's peace.

In so many ways, it's the sum of all true blessings. It waves the white flag, not merely of our need for God, but it announces that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ.

All the guilt and punishment of our sin has been laid upon him such that there's no anger, or displeasure, or annoyance, or frustration, or disappointment, or hesitation in his heart towards us because of Christ.

[32 : 37] And that peace only comes by trusting Jesus Christ. It's what I offer to you this morning. I don't know where you are in your relationship with the Lord or if that relationship is even there, but what the Scripture would say from 2 Corinthians 5 and other places, it would say be reconciled to God.

God has done everything you need to be reconciled to him, and so he just offers this to you so that peace might flow to you in Jesus Christ.

And this verse tells us that peace sturdies us with never leaving confidence of our acceptance in Christ. It says in verse 7 that peace races into our hearts to protect us.

It says, yes, you'll have trouble, but you will walk forward with peace knowing there's nothing but good that can reach you. And Paul closes this section, beginning to close this wonderful letter, promising peace in a most wonderful way.

Look down there with me again. Get your eyes on those words. He says, and the God of peace will be with you. Yeah, it's a benediction. Can we end our meetings with a may God bless you in a certain way?

[33 : 57] It's a parting word, but it's also a promise. He's saying, bank your life on this. In many ways, Paul's just re-saying the central promise of all of Scripture.

I will be with you. It's a promise we just read. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I'm your God. I'll strengthen you. I'll help you. I'll uphold you in my right hand.

He's just saying that again, but he says, the God of peace will be with you. Not merely the peace of God, but the God of peace. I just love that. Not merely the fruit of peace, the feeling of peace, but the source of it.

And this is the truth. The God and his peace will be with you and will pursue you to the end. John Piper illustrates this very well in one of his sermons, talking about God pursuing us like a highway patrol chases us with good.

You know, chasing is something, sometimes thrilling. As a dad, it's thrilling to watch a little child run from their father.

[35 : 12] But being chased by someone you're uncertain about or fearful of is terrifying. You imagine yourself driving nonchalantly down the interstate.

Piper says, when all of a sudden you see a red light flashing in your rear view mirror. I'm sure none of you have experienced that feeling, but I have. And for some crazy reason, when those red lights are flashing behind you, you make the absurd decision to push the gas pedal instead of push the brake pedal.

And you roar down the interstate, perhaps reaching even 100 miles per hour, which my car probably wouldn't go, but you're trying to get away from this highway patrol.

And it's fun for a while, right? Right? Bobbing and weaving cars, finally getting to drive your car to the limit. And all those times, though, begin to catch up with you, where you realize you've gone over the speed limit so many times, and your sense of guilt begins to mount.

Imagine yourself in that scenario where you've been cruising at 100. Then that guilt begins to mount. You remember that if you get one more ticket, your license will be revoked.

[36 : 36] And you won't be able to take that vacation with the family. Eventually, your car simply does not have the power of that highway patrol car, V8 engine, and he forces you over.

And you're sitting in your car trembling with fear as he walks to the window. You know that feeling.

And yet he has a big smile on his face. He pulls a wallet out of his pocket, and he says, I'm so glad I finally caught up with you. The hotel you just left asked me to catch you.

You left your wallet on the counter, and they wanted me to give it back to you. And you feel like a complete idiot, you know, this guy trying to help you.

And then he goes, oh, oh, there's one more thing. They had a drawing this morning at the hotel for the sweepstakes you registered for last night. And you won a free trip for four to the vacation of your choice.

[37 : 42] All you have to do is call. What this verse is saying is God's just like that. We may peer into the future, which seems so uncertain to us, so cloudy, so dim, and so easy to misunderstand.

But what this text is saying is that God, when he peers into the future, he's just waiting. He's just pumped. He just can't wait to see the unfolding of more and more blessing and peace.

Don't fear. These verses together in that benediction wonderfully situates us in today. The future is not ours to worry about.

And so we commit our lives to Christ and to what is good, to end our freedom, to lose our lives, to commit to what is good, and to let God handle the rest.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your mercy towards us in Jesus Christ. We cast ourselves onto you. We confess our need for you.

[38 : 59] Lord, we want our lives to be shaped by the things you care about. We want our lives to be adorned with what is good.

Lord, we pray that you would help us now. Lord, we pray that you would help us to conform our lives into that which is pleasing in your sight. Let the thoughts and meditation of our mind always be acceptable to you through Jesus Christ.

Lord, we pray that anything helpful would be remembered. Lord, anything unhelpful would be forgotten as we seek to walk in a way that's pleasing to you.

And we seek to walk in what is good. Lord, we need your help. We ask for it. In Christ's name. Amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.