

Brent Hampton

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SPEAKERS

Mary Wilson, Brent Hampton

M Mary Wilson 00:02
Hi my name is Mary Wilson and this is October 6th, 2020. I'm interviewing Brent Hampton, he's a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Brenham. Hi Brent, how are you today?

B Brent Hampton 00:14
Good, Mary, how are you?

M Mary Wilson 00:16
I'm good, I'm very happy to be talking with you. We don't get to talk often enough or see each other often enough, but this is good. Brent, I want to just start by kind of getting a feel for your story, how you came to be a minister? And even prior to that, what are some of the formative events that you've had in your life that you think have led you to where you are today?

B Brent Hampton 00:45
To be very honest, it started with me having a bit of a crisis in my life at about 18 when I realized that a career in the military is not what I really wanted. I thought of the Vietnam War for an awful lot of reasons. So, I went to college. Not quite sure

what I wanted to do. I started as an engineer. I've got a mathematics background, though, not a good one, which is to say. I know you're a mathematician, you may appreciate this. I love math, it just doesn't love me. I don't have a mathematical mind. I did take math and differential equations, but I struggled. I was an engineering student at the same time. I'm 18, 19, I began taking courses in history of religions because a good friend of mine that I'd met was very interested in it. The more I took it, the more interested I got. After a year of struggling in the engineering school and doing, at best, mediocre, and I was making A's in my religious studies classes, I transferred majors. I took a degree in history of religions, with specialties in Buddhism and Hinduism. I took Chinese as my basic BA language.

M

Mary Wilson 02:05

Oh, wow. Okay.

B

Brent Hampton 02:06

And then got out of school, of course, in the middle of a mild recession and couldn't do anything with it. I took all the math and I got a business degree in international business. My first career was really in international and multinational banking commercial lending.

M

Mary Wilson 02:21

Oh, wow. I don't think I knew that.

B

Brent Hampton 02:23

Yeah. That was when I started with that. I didn't really have much of a personal faith structure. It was more academic at that point, but I was deeply exploring. And then I wound up visiting churches. And wound up, I couldn't even spell the word Presbyterian, I actually grew up Episcopalian.

M

Mary Wilson 02:45

[laugh] does anyone know how to spell either one of those?

B

Brent Hampton 02:48

That's right. I was out of a Presbyterian Church. And I'll just say, there was a point in my life

when I said, I would never join a mainstream Protestant church. I would never join a church associated with John Calvin, and I would never do it on television. And on television Sunday, at First Presbyterian Church Dallas, the Lord God Almighty said, wanna bet? [laugh] I got very involved at Brenham, I mean, at First Presbyterian Dallas, which is a very socially active church, they run a large stew pot. I went up on the session of elders teaching Sunday school. Then the pastor, who had taught Greek at Union Theological Seminary, offered a class in Greek using the same textbooks. I took Greek at the same time. I'm managing a, I don't know how large, portfolio, walking around at the same time learning Greek paradigms. Then one day, I was in my 40s, my pastor said, "Brent, I think that a bad day at the church is better for you than a good day at work."

M

Mary Wilson 03:54

Ah.

B

Brent Hampton 03:56

And he was right. Then one other thing, I wound up writing and doing credit policy and doing deals for the bank I was working at, for religious institutions, Christian churches and synagogues. I wound up doing a very large deal that was over my authority and wound up bouncing it off somebody in the hierarchy, who happened to be Jewish, who I knew. I did the write up myself, even though I was fairly senior, because it was a complex deal. The guy called me up so I'm going to sign this, but I have a personal question for you, "when are you going to stop looking for truth in a credit package?" "You won't find it there, Brent, shalom, click." 40 something years old, I'll just [you] tell this, I actually left and I actually started a jam tournament, Austin Prez. On a Friday, I said goodbye to the staff, signed off on some deals. On Monday morning, I was in Hebrew class, and on Monday evening, I was sitting in the shower letting the cold water run on me going, "oh my god, what have I done?" I haven't looked back.

M

Mary Wilson 04:57

[laugh] An intensive Hebrew class can do that to you.

B

Brent Hampton 05:00

That's exactly right. I loved it, frankly, I got into it and I met friends that are still lifetime friends, including you. I would count on us. We got to know each other and others and found just a great panoply of belief systems and I loved every minute of it. That's

how I started my second career. And I've been in the ministry 21 years now, in three different calls. That's a little bit of the background of how I got to be where I am. I met Kristin in seminary, my wife, and she had two daughters, and I have one daughter. They act like sisters and fight like sisters and God help the one from the outside who criticizes because they're sisters.

M Mary Wilson 05:42
Yeah, yeah.

B Brent Hampton 05:44
That's been good. Kristin also graduated from Austin seminary and serves the United Church of Christ, the Disciples and the Presbyterians, as a professional honor at this point. I don't know if that answers your question.

M Mary Wilson 05:56
What is it like to have a two minister household? That's really a unique situation.

B Brent Hampton 06:00
It is. Some married, some clergy, couples never talk about their work. We're not that way. We made the early decision that nothing in this house is proprietary. Anything we say can be used as grist for the mill, with the exception of the kids. We always ask the kids permission. That's very good because my wife is a lot smarter than I am, so I got the better end of that deal. I guarantee you.

M Mary Wilson 06:28
I'm not gonna let you get away with too much of that, I've heard you give lectures.

B Brent Hampton 06:33
Well, I will say, she and I, we love to talk about theology. In terms of our marriage, I'll be frank, we have no church politics zones in the kitchen, the dining room or the bedroom. We did make a joke that we once numbered all the political situations in a church 1 through 10. And I'll come home and go 1, 3, 5, she'll go 7, 6, 8, we're done baby. We do have to be careful, as all clergy couples do, you know. We have other things in our life other

than church, and we've been very intentional about that even outside of raising our children, who were all grown now. I will say, it's been fun because we have very different opinions about some things, although we agree about a lot of things. And so, we will get into theological discussions and that's always fun. It's good. We've enjoyed it.

M

Mary Wilson 07:28

Good. Good. Good. Where did you grow up? In Dallas?

B

Brent Hampton 07:36

Well, no, actually, I did most of my growing up until I was about 16 in Louisiana. My dad worked for Texaco, I lived in central in Louisiana, New Orleans through there. When I was about 16, he moved, was transferred to Houston. I lived in Houston about two years, long enough to finish high school and then ultimately wound up in Dallas, where I lived for the rest of my adult life until I entered seminary at 40. I guess if you say, where am I from, I'm kind of from Dallas, in a way, in terms of length of time.

M

Mary Wilson 08:12

Got it. Okay. Do you have any connections or roots in Louisiana still?

B

Brent Hampton 08:17

I do. I have some family in Lake Charles. I have friends I've reconnected with and stay in touch with by Facebook that I went to high school with, cousins I see rarely. Most of my mom's people, my grandparents, and whoever, have passed on.

M

Mary Wilson 08:34

Sure, yeah. Okay. What prompted you to go to Austin Pres [Presbyterian]? I guess because you were Presbyterian?

B

Brent Hampton 08:46

That was part of it. By the way, I became Presbyterian because I found a place that valued my questions, and everybody else's questions too. Sat in Sunday school classes and learned to teach Sunday school, that everybody's questions are important. When it comes to faith issues, I won't say that had never been my experience, but growing up around an awful lot of folks from different denominations, that isn't always the case. So

that was the first thing, I wanted to go to Presbyterian seminary, I was being sponsored by First Pres Dallas. I did apply to a couple of seminaries. Austin was the one that I really connected with the best. Did you know Eleanor Cherry Holmes by chance? She had been the director of admissions at the time.

M

Mary Wilson 09:34

Okay.

B

Brent Hampton 09:34

She interviewed me at a church and we were talking at the end of it. She said, "well, you got the itch." Six months later, when I'm a new enrollee, I was asked, "why are you here?" I said, "Reverend Holmes said that I have an itch and it turned into a rash and here I am. "

M

Mary Wilson 09:54

That's a good way to describe it. You had it turn into a rash. Well, how's it going now?

B

Brent Hampton 10:00

It's going great. This is my third call if you want some background. I did mine in a truly rural parish. People here in Brenham say it's a rural parish, it is not. It is not a rural Parish unless everybody in town makes their living off of wheat, cattle, corn, or silos or selling farm machinery or selling insurance. I lived there for just under two years, it was a great fit in the church, and a bad fit for the environment. I was a city kid. I learned a lot. But, yeah, they were very kind. Those people were, in my first call, were so patient with someone right out of seminary, they were wonderful.

M

Mary Wilson 10:39

That's always nice.

B

Brent Hampton 10:40

It is.

M Mary Wilson 10:41
We need that.

B Brent Hampton 10:42
I was in Marble Falls in the hill country, and I was in 10 years and I'm in my 11th year here.

M Mary Wilson 10:49
Okay.

B Brent Hampton 10:50
I would say things are going well. I was always in church, they have their ups and downs. But we'll get into the post pandemic. This particular church, when I first came here, if you ask people, what they were, they would say, well, we're very, very, very conservative. I've learned in my life that labels don't mean a lot. It is true. To describe this congregation, I've got a lot of self-styled conservative Republicans. Those very same people are the most vocal people about LGBTQ rights you've ever or I've ever heard. They're willing to put their money where their mouth is. We wanted to bring PFLAG here. Some of those republicans were some of the people that stood up in the session and said, "we want PFLAG." You know what PFLAG is of course?

M Mary Wilson 11:38
Yes. Yeah. Yes.

B Brent Hampton 11:40
People are well beyond I think, you know, what labels say they are. People are complicated. That's what has been really interesting about all my calls at this one in particular. I've enjoyed being here. Brenham's population is about 17,000 in the local area. We're really more a bedroom community for Bryan College Station and say, Katie, than we are anything else, if you will.

M Mary Wilson 12:07
What's the distance or drive time between you and Katy?

B Brent Hampton 12:14
An hour, 60 minutes.

M Mary Wilson 12:15
And Bryan College Station, about the same?

B Brent Hampton 12:18
About 45 minutes.

M Mary Wilson 12:20
Okay. I hadn't really thought about that piece of vocation. I mean, I've driven through Brenham, and on my way to places, and that sort of thing. When you have a daughter who plays soccer, you visit every town in Texas [laughs]. I've been there.

B Brent Hampton 12:42
I will say that this is a pretty highly educated, very Germanic Czech community.

M Mary Wilson 12:49
Uh huh.

B Brent Hampton 12:50
Oddly enough, the title Reverend, the title doctor, means something here, both publicly and no matter what denomination, no matter what, those titles mean something. You go to the doctor, if I go, it's not unusual for the physician to address me as Reverend. It's very different than I have experienced. It's not that I'm personally special, it's just that that particular office, regardless of church, is important here. If we had a synagogue, I have no doubt that the term Rabbi would be used the same way in the community. It's an interesting, interesting community.

M Mary Wilson 13:30

Do you find that opens doors for you at times?

B

Brent Hampton 13:33

Yes.

M

Mary Wilson 13:35

Yeah. Can you give an example, potentially?

B

Brent Hampton 13:37

Hospitals in particular. Places that maybe other than other family, I can say, I'm Reverend Hampton, and people will let me in and that they won't ask much question beyond that. When we talk about open doors, the title Reverend will sometimes get me into places that other people might not get, say in a disaster or something like that. Those kind of doors. They won't get you out of a speeding ticket, however.

M

Mary Wilson 13:53

[laughs] Have you tried that?

B

Brent Hampton 14:10

No, but I have had people that - I say that I've been pulled over and thought the police officer is going to write me. I don't speed much, but we've all probably shared with that. The leader recognized me because I've been at a funeral, I've done plenty of public funerals here, one kind or another. I think they were gonna write me a warning anyway. It is a little disconcerting when people know me, and I don't necessarily recognize them. Because you do a couple of funerals with 200-300 people from the community and you're the public figure, and I won't recognize everybody.

M

Mary Wilson 14:44

Right. . Well, let me talk a little bit about how things have been going for you in the pandemic, personally. Have you found personal challenges during this time that have become part of professional challenges?



Brent Hampton 15:04

Sure. Let me start that we turned on a dawn - maybe you're gonna ask about this later. We were watching the pandemic, and I'd said some things in play. I'm on the Finance Committee of the Presbytery, go figure. That was on a Thursday. I was in Houston, and hosting church there, which is one of our larger churches, was shutting down. Then I came back and we shut down. We talked about it. We talked about the dynamic of that, which was more complicated than I just made it.



Mary Wilson 15:38

Sure.



Brent Hampton 15:39

About the personal challenges, yeah. As we began, I'm going to speak very candidly, so use this however you want. Probably one of the biggest personal challenges that's spilled over into the professional end of this, is how politicized this entire pandemic has become. I was split communities to the point that if you wear a mask, you're a liberal. And if you don't wear a mask, you support Donald Trump. I don't care what side of the fence you're on. That is very often the optics in a community this size.



Mary Wilson 16:14

Yeah.



Brent Hampton 16:15

That's often impacted whether churches and how they're going to do worship. I know colleagues that are under pressure about that. That has brought some significant personal pressures for me for three reasons. One, I'm over 65.



Mary Wilson 16:33

Right.



Brent Hampton 16:33

Two, my wife is an asthmatic.

M Mary Wilson 16:36
Yeah.

B Brent Hampton 16:36
Three, my 94 year old father lives with us and he has COPD. He's hail and hearty otherwise, but you can understand what those risk factors?

M Mary Wilson 16:45
Absolutely.

B Brent Hampton 16:46
Even if I were 25, frankly, I wouldn't want to be doing open air worship services , so that's been a stress. My wife too has felt that stress. To be fair, and feel free to guide this wherever you need to go, Mary, but our session discussed this. My session of elders politically is about 50/50 self-styled conservative republicans and self-styled liberal democrats. But again, as I just mentioned, that's a lot more complicated than the label. I will tell you that they stand solidly united that we will not open this church again for physical worship until there is a readily available vaccine. A part of that is because of the age bracket in my congregation. We have about 230 on the rolls, on a good Sunday, we'll worship 145 something like that one.

M Mary Wilson 17:42
Okay.

B Brent Hampton 17:44
Most of those people are, for one reason or another, right in the danger zone. The second issue is that for me, and for many people in my ruling body, the kind of complications for small children may be statistically low, but no one's willing to take the chance. I've been very, very blessed with that.

M Mary Wilson 18:05
Yeah.

- B** Brent Hampton 18:05
Now, every once in a while something does rear its head to challenge that. I may still face challenges, the longer this goes, but that's not a significant challenge that's kind of spilled over. That's really come up more with things like weddings and funerals.
- M** Mary Wilson 18:21
Right, right.
- B** Brent Hampton 18:23
I have done one wedding. I did an outdoor wedding, where I knew all of the people. There were nine people in three pods that were 12 feet apart, wearing masks, and I was 12 feet from the bride and the groom.
- M** Mary Wilson 18:36
Uh huh.
- B** Brent Hampton 18:37
And I was happy and comfortable doing that.
- M** Mary Wilson 18:40
Yeah.
- B** Brent Hampton 18:40
I just say no to funerals, where people want to pack into here. Wakes are real important in this community and I simply, I won't do it. I'm happy to do something by zoom. I've had some angst about that because I'm not willing to expose myself and frankly, I don't think it's a good idea to expose other people.
- M** Mary Wilson 18:57
There's something about loving your neighbor that is informative right now, I would think, I would hope. Although it doesn't seem to have the impact I would prefer, at times, I guess, to interject that personal preference. How is your congregation doing right now? Especially with the not meeting part?

B

Brent Hampton 19:24

That's a little bit hard to assess, but I'll do the best I can. Some of this is going to come from just knowing these folks and my individual (inaudible audio). On the whole, well, I've heard over and over and over again, we appreciate the fact that the session of elders has made moves to keep us safe. I can also judge that because we shifted on March 15th, we did only audio, and then we quickly shifted over to YouTube. Stated another way, one very experienced preacher became one very inexperienced youtuber. We weren't taught to preach to a camera, but we've learned. I very quickly realized that I upgraded the camera because the acuity of people's eyes are important. These people are watching this on TV. We began traffic tracking what we can of the metrics and we're getting about 100 hits every Sunday. You figure at about, you're the mathematician - tell me, but about, multiply that by 1.5. We're running about 150 people in worship, which is about what we would run on a good worship Sunday.

M

Mary Wilson 20:38

Yeah.

B

Brent Hampton 20:39

They seem to be interested. I have been out for 4 weeks because of my surgery. Kristin is getting the same amount of hits as she has filled in. On the worship end of it, I think they're doing pretty well, they're staying plugged in. Our outreach to the community, we have a very large community garden. It's a community donation garden. It's pretty big, it's a pretty good size. We've grown 3 tons of vegetables in 2 years or something like that. Either one of which goes to the local food distribution here.

M

Mary Wilson 21:18

Uh huh.

B

Brent Hampton 21:19

We're continuing to do that because you can do that socially distanced. I'm not a gardener. We're continuing to help people even in the middle of a pandemic, we're

helping people that need food, in the name of Christ. That's been very helpful for them to still feel part of it. My committees are still meeting by zoom. Worship, mission benevolences, finance, you know, all of that, there's a lot of participation. That's at the systemic level. Individually, there are an awful lot of people that are hurting. Widows and widowers who stayed in Brenham because they had a social connection here through their church, they had a spiritual connection too. As part of that, the people that became their family was Brenham Presbyterian Church. They can't touch those people, they can't be hugged by them, they can't have that tactile. And while many of them have learned to use zoom, it isn't the same thing for them. Those are tough. I'll tell you, one professional to another, Mary, it's tough on me because I'm used to being where the pain is. Whether it's in a hospital or a bedside or wherever we were trained to be. We can't do that, we just can't, for everybody's safety. We're touching by phone and any other way that we can. On that level, on the individual level, they're feeling it all the way around the board.

M

Mary Wilson 22:46

Sure. I've heard from other ministers the very same things, we can't do what we would normally do. We're doing as many workarounds as possible, but it's not the same. I think that that's true, probably about meeting for worship. I'm wondering, do you find that worship, Sunday morning worship, has a different focus and emphasis now, than prior to the pandemic, prior to the shutdown? Are their different reasons you worship now too?

B

Brent Hampton 22:49

Different reasons that we worship. Can you tease that out a little bit, what you mean by that?

M

Mary Wilson 23:37

Is part of the worship specifically focused on connecting the congregation to one another, in ways that they would have sort of automatically connected if they were in person? Are you able to figure out ways to do that online?

B

Brent Hampton 23:54

Yeah, okay, now I get it. For the first four or five months or six months of this, Kristin and I actually led this whole thing. Part of that, and we did it all, we filmed it all. I've got one person, the chair, my worship committee, who was technologically able to splice, edit,

and upload. It just made it run smoother. Frankly, because I've been there 10 years, and (inaudible. We've done pulpit exchanges from some of our churches. It provided a level of comfort that I think in the beginning was very necessary, that kind of glue. Then something happened. After I had to step down for four weeks, and Kristin, well, she said, "what do you want me to do?" I said, "far be it for me, Reverend, to tell you what to do." You know, have at it. Well, she did. One of the things that she instituted was - she said, "I want more lay people involved." She did get them involved. She farmed out the children's sermon to a couple of people that loved doing it and they've been videoing it. Now what it looks like is when you tune in, we've got a lot of different faces and voices. That's something I intend to keep doing when I step back in on Monday. Because I think now that they've kind of gotten over the shock and there's a comfort that we're going to be here, we're going to be online, now to be able to involve other people. Now they know they can do it. Having me out of the pulpit gave them an excuse as to why they had to learn how to do it, I think.

M Mary Wilson 25:28
Right. Right.

B Brent Hampton 25:29
I think that's how Kristin arranged it and she's persuasive anyway. It's really been a good pastoral thing. I think that having multiple faces in there, I watched her do that at University Christian Church, but that's a much younger congregation, and it had a lot more technologically savvy people.

M Mary Wilson 25:48
Right, right.

B Brent Hampton 25:49
It works here too. I will say, and I'll know after my first worship committee meeting, but my guess is that [it] helps them feel knit together because now they're seeing multiple faces. I will say that the subject of the sermons, which is always the gospel, but it's the gospel that's both transcended and eminent, or to meet some of the transcendent part is all that salvation stuff. The imminent part is what we call social justice part, at least that's the way I put it. One way to look at it - in this time of pandemic, with the Black Lives Matter movement, with everything else going on, that's been intensified. I've not shied away from those in preaching at all.

M

Mary Wilson 26:33

Okay. Let me ask then specifically about Black Lives Matter. How has that been received within your congregation? In the ways you've talked about it?

B

Brent Hampton 26:42

That's a really good question. Again, that's one of the things you give up. People usually talk to you about your sermons. I've gotten a few emails. I will tell you, I preached a sermon where I stood in the pulpit. I said, "I have said before up here, at least once, all lives matter," and I missed the point. I want you to listen that I missed the point. A very good friend of mine, is an African American minister, who was very patient, sat down and explained to me in no uncertain terms why and how I missed the point. It was a bit of a confession. I laid it out, I think, because I could talk about my own feet of clay in this and they know who I am. They know that I'm a White ally, I'm a straight ally. There are a lot of things that we're involved in. I heard that that sermon went over well. I used something that somebody else gave me that said, "To say that all lives matter in this context is like going to the doctor with a broken arm and the doctor is saying, yeah, but all bones matter." Then you say back, "Yeah, but it's this bone that's broken, doc." It seemed to work. Now, I don't know whether there were people that maybe didn't appreciate that and I have not heard. I did very specifically - and I've brought it up, I've written a couple of - sometimes the pulpit isn't the best place. I've written some pretty straightforward liturgies too. I don't know whether people are repeating the liturgies because I'm not there.

M

Mary Wilson 28:18

Right, right.

B

Brent Hampton 28:20

So far, nobody's called for my resignation that I'm aware of. I'll know when I get back. I think not to say something from the pulpit or in liturgy or in prayer or any combination of that in the times of which we live is an abrogation of my responsibility as the voice as the pastor proclamation, proclaiming. I will tell you that the other issue that's been going on in our church, Mary. I brought up PFLAG and that was - we've also had a married gay male couple, who got married in the church. One of them was nominated for elder by a very conservative member of my church, who's on the nominating committee. I don't care

This person, in my judgment, David, is an excellent elder of the church. That changed the dynamic and then the pandemic hit.

M Mary Wilson 29:32
Yeah.

B Brent Hampton 29:35
So far, what we're hearing from, what I can hear and all of that - as an, in some ways, David having to step up being in first time elder in the midst of a pandemic - he's had to be very creative. He's had an opportunity to say, "This is who I am as a church leader." Does that make sense?

M Mary Wilson 29:52
Yeah.

B Brent Hampton 29:52
All that other stuff that shouldn't matter suddenly fed into the background. Maybe the pandemic being here has helped with some of that. Certainly David's own innate talent has. I don't know, maybe I'm babbling but it's -

M Mary Wilson 30:07
Well, no, it reminds me a story I heard from another church that I would say is a rural congregation. One might think of as fairly conservative on a variety of ways - had a gay male couple, part of the church grew up in the town. One of the little old ladies, the blue haired lady said, "well, I don't know about all gay people, but I know these boys, and these are our boys." That personal connection changes things. There's something about theory and then there's something about in person experience that are two very different realities.

B Brent Hampton 30:47
Yeah. I thought that - if you were to ask me before these two guys joined the church, I would've said, "That's what happened here." What I call creative or positive parochialism, may be gay people, but there are gay people.

M Mary Wilson 31:01
Yeah.

B Brent Hampton 31:02
That's not what happened here. These two guys kind of wandered in. They knew who Kristin was because she's done UCC churches. They never met her, but they knew her by rep. They tuned us up on that they were looking for a more local church. They had done MCC, and UCC, and some others. They just began coming and attending. They listened to some of my sermons online, just audio, and they knew that we had PFLAG. They had visited, I got all this later. Sitting down with the two of them, I'll just tell you, they said, "Look, being gay is only part of who we are, frankly." They said, "We're not saying anything negative, we're just not getting enough Jesus at some of the other churches we've been attending. Social justice is fine, but that needs to be only part [of it]. What we want to know is that from the pulpit and church leadership and from your theological background, that we're as entitled to that as any other center." I think is how they put it. Well, that was a breathtaking theological reason for me. I think it was that that came out in them because they weren't really known as being part of this community. I think somehow that actually shone through as they got involved in the church. Does that make sense? That's not something I would have predicted. I don't know, maybe, does that make any sense?

M Mary Wilson 32:23
A little bit. Yeah. They brought all of who they were. They wanted all of who they were to be able to be engaged in the church.

B Brent Hampton 32:34
Yeah, you just said it better than I could. That's exactly the point.

M Mary Wilson 32:37
They didn't want to be just the gay couple.

B Brent Hampton 32:40
That's exactly why. They didn't want to be the gay poster boys, the way one of them put it. They have attended some classes, one of the husbands is very theologically sophisticated.

He's thought this through. I only bring all that up because, going into a pandemic with this there, I think, and everything else going on in the world, I suspect that a number of people in my congregation have suddenly been given more time than they've ever had to think through some of these issues, to pray through some of these issues. I don't at all mean to imply that this pandemic is good. Don't get me wrong.

M Mary Wilson 33:21
Right.

B Brent Hampton 33:22
Even in the midst of this, I do get the distinct impression that people are thinking some things through in a different life than they would have. Whether it has to do with race or sexual identification or a lot of other things, maybe some of the seeds that have already been planted there by myself, and other church leaders in my congregation, now have some time to be watered and grow a little.

M Mary Wilson 33:47
Yeah.

B Brent Hampton 33:48
At least that's part of it. Now, I have no doubt that there are some people that heard that sermon, and that have made a quick judgment about Black Lives Matter and other things. They may not be there when we come back. I just don't know. I won't until we come back together.

M Mary Wilson 34:03
Well, I am looking at the clock and we're getting close to the 50 minutes. I wanted to ask if there's anything else that I haven't specifically asked about that you think is important to share about your personal journey? Or where you and the church are in the midst of the pandemic? We've talked a lot about the pandemic. Is there any more about your personal journey that you would like to add?

B Brent Hampton 34:37
Kristin managed, she actually did all of her worship from here as well.

In Austin, they've been able to do it even with an associate. We've been together under one roof for a lot longer than ever been before. Now, we're blessed. Our idea of vacation is go get a cabin in the woods for weeks if we can do it, so that's been good.

Mary Wilson 35:03

M

Yeah.

Brent Hampton 35:04

B

Surgery and stuff aside, I will say that one of the things we've had to be very careful of is - because we spend a lot of time in current events, to inform what we preach, that can overwhelm you or it can overwhelm us, I should speak.

Mary Wilson 35:17

M

Yes.

Brent Hampton 35:20

B

We have a hobby together that we have pursued. There are times we simply pursue our hobby and we shut everything else out. We play a very complex card game called Magic the Gathering. We've been playing for a number of years. We're both very much into it, and we have a good time with it. We can even play online with some friends and we just shut it out. That has become incredibly important. The second thing that we did intentionally is that we have a pastoral counselor that we've had for years, and we meet with her once a week by video conference. We think that's really important. We just try to be sensitive to one another. When you're cooped up under one roof, you might not meant the way it was said that way.

Mary Wilson 36:06

M

Well, right.

Brent Hampton 36:09

B

We just think that's important. With the church, I think we had to be very patient, trying to get people to think about a whole new way of doing things. I will tell you, there are people that in the past in this church, who may not have approved of what I did or how I

did it, who turned out to be some of the strongest allies. Suddenly everybody be pulling together as they become what I'm trying to say. I'm not going to attribute that to anything more than the Holy Spirit. That's been helpful. I do know not all churches are blessed with that. We have had a couple of sleights of well - "we can go to the grocery store or the liquor store, Pastor, why can't we open?" There was once I've had to bring science into play. That's one of my, you may know or may not know, but science and faith are one of my big deals. I'll present the evidence of what we have and people will listen. I don't know if that's helpful, but that's - right now, a big one being we don't know how air conditioners affect us, we don't. We do know. There are cases in where pastors have gotten sick where everybody wore masks. The only thing I know that is in common is that we're in poorly ventilated air conditioned rooms. The session has listened. It's not just not just me, I don't want to risk everybody else.

M

Mary Wilson 37:29

Right.

B

Brent Hampton 37:30

I do worry a little bit that with the politicization of all of this as it grows bigger and stronger, people are impacted by folks around them. I don't quite know sometimes how to address that, but that's just there. That's been probably one of the biggest challenges for me, Mary.

M

Mary Wilson 37:50

Yeah, it seems like that's only going to get worse between now and November 3rd. Given the week that we have had. I would like to think that maybe after the election, some of that will settle down, that part of it is election jargon, but I'm not sure. I guess no one is. It makes it hard when something this serious is politicized in the way it has been. Communities work together to come up with solutions for what works for their community. Well, I hope for your congregation that they are able to continue to work together and trust one another. Maybe that's a big word. Do you do you feel like they trust still trust one another?

B

Brent Hampton 38:50

I do. I'll be frank, I do. And I think that trust has been really important.



Mary Wilson 38:56

Yeah.



Brent Hampton 38:57

They're learning already. I can tell you, there are several people say, "when COVID is over, we're going to live stream. We're picking up people on YouTube, from across the nation." People are saying, "hey this is a good outreach." People are learning. You don't learn if you're not in a trusting environment, I guess is what I'm trying to say. I think that is a symbol of that. As far as I know, people are still trusting one another. They trusted enough not to give me, I mean, stepping out for four weeks. This was not easy for me, but absolutely necessary. Then they turned around and said, "we'd be real comfortable [if] Kristin was between contracts." That wasn't an issue of nepotism, that was an issue of trust. As far as, you know, so yeah.



Mary Wilson 39:43

There's something about a known quantity right now that is helpful.



Brent Hampton 39:46

It is. I will also say, it is my hope and prayer that when all this is over, that the normal that we return to, which isn't going to be the normal that was before I suspect, but we'll have some positives. That we will have learned to trust each other even more. That we'll be given a new view of the world around us and people around us, whether those are people of color and what they live in and through every day, or others or even ourselves. It's my hope that - and I guess I look at [if] they're still coming to church on Sunday, they're still getting something out of the music. The way we did music [is] unbeknownst to us. I'll tell you, one of our congregants has been recording the hymns on her cell phone for two years because her mother plays the organ and because she loves the choir. She's a flutist. Well, every single one of those is public domain hymns. The other issue of having the artists aren't there, we have a library. I do get notes from congregants who go, "wow, we hit a lot of sour notes, but they're our sour notes, Pastor." It makes them feel at home right? Well, that's why I've been dialing in the hymns. I'm hoping that people will be able to laugh at that and maybe even be a little more grateful, I know I am. What we actually had before COVID put us in a different place - makes us more grateful for the gifts that we've had and that God has given us.

M

Mary Wilson 41:14

Yeah. Well, very good. Brent, it's been fascinating to learn about you a little bit more. I didn't know you came from Louisiana. I don't remember that finance background. I'm sure it's something we talked about. I didn't really know anything about your congregation, so I appreciate the time today. I hope you are healing and are ready to go back to work next week.

B

Brent Hampton 41:43

I feel like I am, for sure for sure. I have to say, Mary, I appreciate what you're doing here. The other thing I didn't bring up real quick, Church is important. I do stay in contact with my Presbytery. We have meetings, whatever. Reverend Hargrove might have been a classmate, he was a classmate of Kristin's - is our general Presbyter. We do stay in contact. That's been supporting to hear what other ministers are going through. One of the things that Linda's been saying that I haven't been able to do is record how you're handling the pandemic. Well, I've been too busy doing it to record it.

M

Mary Wilson 42:16

Exactly.

B

Brent Hampton 42:18

This project could be really important. I don't know if anything I've said is of any help, but certainly out of 15 people you interviewed, something for the future, I hope, will come out of it that will benefit our colleagues and ministers.

M

Mary Wilson 42:29

Yeah. That's the hope and next year when I get to do a presentation about these conversations, I think it'd be interesting to look back over the year in between, to see how things have changed, so. Well listen, I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording and then we'll sign off.