

# NewsBrief

♥For the members and friends of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford ♥

April, 2004

## From the Pastor's Pen-Cell

Timothy Merrill, editor of Homiletics wrote an op-ed piece entitled, *The Priest, His Passion, and His Problem*. In it he writes:

It's a blood-fest. A cinematic, pathographic panorama of incredibly violent and disturbing images. Impossible to understand without subtitles. And yet, it's a must-see movie event: *The Passion of the Christ*. No film since Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, has generated more controversy and interest than Mel Gibson's interpretation of the last days of the life of Jesus the Christ.

As a work of art, the buzz has been phenomenal. Perhaps there was this kind of culture clatter after Michelangelo chipped the last sliver of marble from his Pieta, or after da Vinci coded the final color on to his Last Supper. It has been the topic at Starbucks and at Bible Study. It feels like people are taking a poll of pastoral types to discover where they come down on the movie. So far, I have resisted the temptation to talk about it on Sunday morning. However, as we approach Holy Week and read through the Passion according to Luke on Palm/Passion Sunday, it is perhaps fitting to take some time and offer a few thoughts on the film in this column.

This is not a film for all ages. Parents should be cautious about having children in the audience. Preteens might get nightmares from all the gore and all the supernatural stuff. Satan is depicted as a sinister, seductive androgynous figure, and demonic images erupt in surprising places throughout the film. As for the grotesque demon-baby that Satan holds at one point in the story we can only ask, "Mel, what's that all about?"

The violence of the movie gives us pause. Another pastor wrote, "I'm not interested in seeing this story depicted graphically outside a context in which the transformative power of that story has at least the possibility of being properly explained." Another says, "I don't have any spiritual need to wallow in blood, sweat, pain and torment for two hours. It isn't necessary to my faith, and I certainly don't understand how it could be faith-affirming or even life-changing."

Despite these caveats, many believe the movie is well worth watching. It gives us a descriptive look at the high personal price that Jesus paid to save us from our sins, and it portrays-more realistically than previous movies - how violent his passion really was. Mr. Gibson has provided some surprisingly touching moments as well, such as the depiction of the relationship between Jesus and his mother which is woven throughout the story of trial and torture and death.

This is not a perfectly biblical or flawless film. Pontius Pilate is shown to be a philosophical fellow, when we know from history that he was inflexible, obstinate, and merciless. The high priest Caiaphas is portrayed as a one-dimensional villain. There is no exploration of why he hated Jesus and wanted him dead. Anti-Jewish charges being leveled at the film are grounded in its simplistic linking of evil to the Jewish high priest, no matter that most, if not all of the people helping and supporting Jesus, are also Jewish.

In fairness to Gibson, he seems to understand that the sins of all people led to the death of Christ, which is why he entered the movie set and used his own hands to drive a spike into Jesus' hands.

Mr. Merrill suggests that Jesus isn't the only person suffering in this ordeal. I hadn't thought of the passion story this way. We could say that the priest was going through a passion of his own, not of the physical kind Jesus experienced, but a passion nonetheless. For him the problem is Jesus.

Perhaps the film would have been more understandable (and less open to charges of being anti-Jewish) if it had suggested that Caiaphas and his followers were acting out of religious conviction instead of out of hatred. The film could have examined the evil that good people sometimes feel compelled to do. As the spiritual custodian of temple worship, wasn't it the responsibility of Caiaphas to preserve, protect, and serve that which was sacred? Is it possible that this priest believed that if Jesus attracted a powerful following, then the Romans would destroy the temple and harm people of faith? He does make the point that "it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50).

In fact, God took this very same approach with the death of Jesus on the cross. God believed that it was better to have one man die for all people, so that all people would not have to be destroyed by sin and death.

Granted, the high priest missed the fact that Jesus was focusing on a very different political order, the kingdom of God, and he did not see or understand what New Testament writers or a Centurion would say about Jesus, that he was "truly the Son of God."

What evil do we do when we are trying to be good? Our approach toward Caiaphas can lead home. Sometimes we focus more on defending the status quo than on opening ourselves to the new things that God is doing in our midst. And we probably don't even want to visit the purity of our motivations. Maybe we will come to the conclusion that God alone is completely good.

In the meantime we are meandering through Lent. Our concern for social stability, religious tradition, and self-righteousness may be preventing us from allowing God to move us in a new direction.

The film ends with a Gibson's brief glimpse of a resurrected Christ. It is a short, powerful reminder of the hope that we carry. May we, too find that this passiontide marinates us for the glorious festival of resurrection on Easter. A

Bruce

## Prayerfully Pondering the Psalms

As I write this, the seasons are changing and we are being teased with another warm day. I playfully restrain myself from pulling out lighter clothing because I remember last year's ice storm the first weekend in April. I was not pleased with the weather! The ice storm not only destroyed beautiful old trees and knocked out power throughout Monroe County, it threatened the Deacons/Stephen Ministers' Joint Retreat. We ultimately had a successful retreat but I had let God know my frustration. Having read through the Psalms and seeing language like "How long must I bear pain? Consider and answer me O Lord my God!"<sup>1</sup> I knew God could take my fuming.

The Psalms were the hymnbook of the Jewish people. Our English word "psalm" is derived from the Greek word for song. We continue to use the Psalms in our own hymnody. Roughly 30% of our current blue hymnal is based on Psalms. Of the 150 Psalms in our Bible, most are represented in our hymnal: One hundred of the Psalms are grouped together and an additional 71 hymns are based on the Psalms. As we sing these glorious hymns, we are praying the Psalms to God and giving voice to our human emotions, experiences, and desires.

The Psalms can give expression to the various moods and movement in our lives. When we are sometimes overwhelmed by our own circumstances and unable to voice the full range of what we are feeling, we can turn to the Psalms whose language is evocative of universal and individual experience. Giving expression to the events of our lives is a healthy way to process the volume of changes we all encounter. No matter what we are feeling, someone else through the ages has felt something like it. And that camaraderie found in the Psalms helps us to know we are not alone.

Of the many types of Psalms, most can be classified as laments, thanksgiving, or hymns of praise. Roughly a third of the Psalms are laments in which the Psalmist pours out the grief felt by an individual or God's people and concludes the Psalm with confidence in God's merciful presence through the suffering. Examples include individual laments in Psalms 3, 13, 22, 31, 54, 56, and 102; requests for vindication in Psalms 35, 59, 69, 70, 109, 137, and 140; and penitential cries in Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

The main characteristic of the Psalms of thanksgiving is its retrospective character. They recall a lament and the suppliant's cry for help and offer "a new song" responding to God's gracious action and liberating power. Some examples include Psalms 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, and 138. By contrast, hymns of praise generally begin with an imperative call to worship and extol God's greatness. Some examples include Psalms 33, 95, 100, 117, 145, 148, 149, and 150.

Have you ever wanted to say you memorized a whole chapter of the Bible? Here's your chance! In the shortest Psalm's two verses, Psalm 117 models an easy structure for creating our own Psalms to God. Moving from a call to worship to the reason for praising God to a concluding repetition of the call, the Psalm gives voice to our joy.

Praise Ye the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!

For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord!

As we move through the final weeks of Lent, through Holy Week and into Easter, may you find multiple occasions in which to make use of the Psalms. A

Blessings, Carrie

Week of April 4 – You say that I Am King: John 18:28-40

Week of April 11 – I Am the Resurrection and the Life  
John 11:5-27

Week of April 18 – I Am the Alpha and the Omega  
Revelation 1:1-8

Week of April 25 – Acts 9:1-6 (7-20), Ps. 30; Rev. 5:11-14  
John 21:1-19

Bruce is continuing the "I AM" sayings of Jesus for Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. We will resume reading the lectionary texts for the month of April after Easter which we welcome you to study in advance of their being incorporated into the Sunday worship services. We welcome you to Bible Study on Wednesdays at 9:30 AM and again at 7:00 PM to discuss the upcoming Sunday's texts.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 13:2-3.

? ...from Sandy's Desk

"There came a point in my life when I realized the importance of Christ in my life and the need for me to try to walk in the footsteps of Jesus." Phrases like this can easily be dismissed as trite—so common as to have no real meaning. "Trying to live a Christ-like life..." What would that look like? Here I am, a life-long, church going, hymn singing, grace saying, Scripture reading Christian. What else? Then, I got it—"a-hah!" My life was like a three legged stool with one leg missing. My life could crash with just a gentle nudge. Church every Sunday, choir practice every Wednesday, Youth Group, Bible Study and even the daily witness of the adults around me who prayed and discussed Scripture did not give me the third leg I needed to be stable. What was the missing leg? It was that I lived my life aside from all of that. Or maybe it was that all of that was pushed to the side as I lived my life according to the world that surrounded me.

Primarily because of my "a-hah", LENT has become for me a time of expectation. It was during Lent that I gained the insight of the three legged stool. Simple but very effective for me, I have noticed, and now expect that life changing events in my life usually occur during Lent. This always leads me to some new insight or action or understanding that is a real cause for celebrating the Resurrection at EASTER. This is never planned, and most often sneaks right up on me. But it always begins with a willingness to open my heart and my mind to all the possibilities. And if I haven't been focusing on the Lord's presence in my life, I usually find I have been jolted into re-focusing. Probably, it is because I expect that the Lord has a lesson for me more often in Lent than the rest of the year, I am more open to those possibilities.

This year, we have introduced an opportunity for small groups to meet regularly for the purpose of re-focusing their spiritual life, through Lent and beyond if they choose. These COVENANT GROUPS, several of which have already formed and have begun to meet, gather to try to find ways to stabilize that stool and add that third leg to their lives. Through prayer, Scripture reading and discussion, for just one hour a week, each person gathered seeks ways to strengthen their own spiritual life through the window of the insight of the other members of the group. These gatherings are not intended to be fix-it stations. There is NO problem solving encouraged here. Talking about what a piece of scripture may be saying about our lives today;

praying for each other's discernment about actions to be taken will promote that openness of heart to what the Lord has in mind for our Easter experience 2004. I hope that those of you already in a group will find it a fulfilling, nurturing place to look into your own spiritual journey. And if you are still considering becoming part of a group, or are having difficulty getting one started, please call me. It is not too late. We hope that these groups may choose to carry on after Easter and that new groups may form for the Easter season. 586-5688 ext. 30 (office) 225-4366 (home). A



**Parents of Preschoolers to Preteens**

Would you be interested in mutual support and guidance to actively parent your children? We are considering offering a six-week course entitled "Active Christian Parenting" on Wednesdays between 7-9 PM starting April 21 and ending May 26. Should you be interested, please contact Carrie Mitchell at 586-5688 x32. A



all are welcome!

This Sunday, March 21: MTC is hosting a guest speaker that will be discussing the "Lord of the Rings" books and movies and how they tie into our relationships with Jesus Christ. Please join the high schoolers for this fun and informative discussion! 7:45 – 9:00 PM in the Youth Forum Room. A



**HOLY WEEK WORSHIP**

4/4 Sunday	Palm/Passion Sunday	8:30 & 10:00 AM Worship
4/8 Thursday	Maundy Thursday	7:30 PM Worship Communion
4/9 Friday	Good Friday Sanctuary Open	7:30 PM Worship 12 noon to 7:30 PM
4/11 Sunday	Easter Sunrise at Canal Park	7:00 AM Worship
4/11 Sunday	Easter Celebration	8:30 & 10:30 AM Worship



## Notes from James

### Youth Service

The Youth Service on March 14 was a wonderful worship experience. It was fantastic to see our talented youth leading the service in so many ways. Thanks to our musicians: the Jubilate Singers; our instrumentalists, Diana Peet and Molly Jackson; and the Joyful Noise Bell Choir under the direction of Sharon Peet. Our church is blessed with many fine talents. Our youth stay so active in so many activities, but still find time to devote to their spiritual growth. A

### Music Office Goes Hi-tech!

The music staff and I would like to thank Dan Murray for his generous donation of a computer for our music office. The computer came complete with a free set-up demonstration from Dan, which was most helpful. As summer approaches we will begin to establish a computer database of our choral music. If you haven't seen the resources in the music office, we have many file cabinets full of fantastic music that needs to be organized and catalogued in a database so that the library can be fully utilized. We have similar libraries for all of our ensembles, and hope to organize all of these resources. A

### Inventory of Musical Talents

In addition to the organization of our physical resources, we are also hoping to organize our "people resources". The staff and I are well aware that we have many talented musicians of all levels of skill in our congregation. We would like to take an Inventory of Musical Talents of our congregation so that we can utilize all who might wish to be involved in our music ministry. Please complete the form found in this Newsletter. We would like to collect all of our forms by April 1. We would encourage those of you who sing or play an instrument to complete a form or email the information to me. We will include a section on the form for you to identify the level of your skill, so that we can utilize your talent in a manner in which you will feel comfortable. You may mail the form to the church office, or drop the form in a box that will be located on the Welcome Table. A

### Palm Sunday and Easter

The choirs are preparing their music for Holy Week. All of the ensembles are diligently working to make a meaningful contribution to our worship experience. Our musical resources on Palm Sunday and Easter will be augmented by a brass ensemble as we celebrate these two special days on the liturgical calendar. A



### SPRING CHOIR

As our Logos program comes to a close, plans are under way for the Spring Choir. This program will begin on April 21 and run through June 2, with the choir sharing in worship on May 30 and June 6. Rehearsals will be held on Wednesdays in the choir room from 4:30-5:30 PM. This choir will be open to all children from grades 2-6<sup>th</sup>. Consider joining us this spring and making music to glorify our risen Lord! In faith and song, Dede Holmes. A



### William Wisnom in Recital on 3/21

from James Douthit

Where: Downtown United Presbyterian Church  
121 North Fitzhugh Street, Rochester

The Downtown United Presbyterian Church continues its Vespers & Recital Series on Sunday, March 21 at 4:30 PM. The 30-minute candlelight service will be followed at 5:00 with a 40-minute organ recital played by William Wisnom.

#### **Featured on the program:**

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)  
*Toccata in F Major* (BWV 540.i)  
*O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross* (BWV 622)

Julius Reubke (1834-1858)  
*Sonata in C Minor* (The 94<sup>th</sup> Psalm)

William Wisnom began studying piano at the age of eleven in his hometown of Fawn Grove, PA, with the late Nancy Marstellar. Two years later, he was accepted into the Peabody Conservatory where he studied with Corey McVicar and Carol Prochazka. Despite his years of preparation to be a piano major, Bill had to come to terms with the unsure feeling that he ought to be an organist. With a leap of faith, Bill began an intense filled year of organ study with Leo Wanenchak of Baltimore. In the spring of 1998, he auditioned and was accepted into the Eastman School of Music where he has studied organ for the past five years with David Higgs, harpsichord with William Porter, and piano with Vincent Lenti. Bill has also been the recipient of numerous awards including the Miriam Silvers Award in Piano Performance, A

**Do you remember the movie “Four Weddings and a Funeral”?** This madcap romp of several British friends’ frequent gatherings showed how formative life-transition events can be. Here at the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford, we celebrate many of these events throughout the year. We seek individuals like you who would like to reach out, express God’s love, and answer Christ’s call to “follow me.” Please prayerfully consider offering your time and talents to help others through one of two ministries:

**Funeral Stewards** prepare the church for funeral and memorial services. Responsibilities include preparing the Sanctuary, recording the worship service, distributing bulletins, ushering, and closing up the church after guests leave.

**Wedding Stewards** represent the congregation at its most welcoming, by acting as a liaison with the bridal party, assisting with the rehearsal, setting up the Sanctuary, coordinating delivery arrangements, and assisting the pastors with service cues and auxiliary service providers. Weddings occur almost exclusively on weekends.

These are special areas of service. Families have repeatedly told us how meaningful these services have been due to the welcoming atmosphere facilitated by our stewards. Please contact Bruce or Carrie should you feel called to assist in one of these two areas. We would love to add you to the team! A



**Did you know that AIDS claims a life every 8 seconds?** Oscar-nominee documentary filmmaker Robert Bilheimer compassionately asks what history will remember as our part in this disease. Join us for this important event and discussion Tuesday, May 4<sup>th</sup> between 7:30 and 9:00 PM in the Youth Forum room. Questions? Please contact Carrie Mitchell (586-5688 x32) or Lee Fox (385-5996). A

**Interested in making a difference in our community?** The Outreach Committee invites us to hear Nancy Frank, a local coordinator for the Rochester Area Interfaith Hospitality Network, on Sunday March 28<sup>th</sup>. She will share a 10-minute video and speak about the effort her church and many other faith communities in our area are undertaking to provide temporary shelter for homeless families. All are welcome to join us in the Fellowship Hall between 11:30 and 12:15. Questions? Please contact Carrie Mitchell (586-5688 x32) or Lee Fox (385-5996). A



### **From the Stewardship Commission: Time: The First Step of Giving**

Time – just the sound of the word sets off anxious feelings in most of us. If only we had more time. There needs to be more hours in the day. There is never enough time. Time becomes our most valued commodity.

Time is also the first step in our stewardship journey. If we are to freely give of ourselves to Christ and his mission, we need to give of our time. We need time to sit quietly and feel God’s presence. We need time to pray and time to read the Bible and reflect. We need time to attend services. We need time to participate in activities of the church. We need time to do the work for which God calls us.

Can we open our lives to giving our time to God? A



### **Inquirer’s Class**

Pam Murray, Membership Chairman

Are you interested in joining the Church? An Inquirer’s class is scheduled for April 18, beginning at 4:30 PM and ending at 7:30 PM. A light supper will be included. April 25 at noon, prospective members will enjoy a luncheon with Session members. New members will be received into the congregation on May 2 during the 10:00 AM Worship service. If you are interested, please call Janet in the church office at 586-5688. A



SAVE the DATE –  
Friday April 30, 2004 at  
St. Louis Catholic  
Church – for an evening  
of fun and financial  
support for our next  
Habitat house to be built  
later this year. Come and  
enjoy

a wonderful buffet dinner prepared by Mario’s Via  
Abruzzi, followed by a silent auction and much  
more! Joining in this event will be members from all  
the congregations participating in this year’s Habitat  
Interfaith Partnership coalition – First Presbyterian  
Church, St. Louis Catholic, Christ Episcopal, Mt.  
Olive Baptist, Temple B’rith Kodesh, and the Islamic  
Center of Rochester. Tickets will go on sale Sunday  
March 28 in the Fellowship Hall. Seating is limited,  
so you will want to purchase yours quickly. A

**OPTIMISTS** will meet again Friday April 2 at  
6:15 PM in the Fellowship Hall. Our program will  
be “19<sup>th</sup> Century Vintage Baseball” presented by  
staff from the Genesee Country Museum.

We welcome all visitors and newcomers –  
singles and couples 50 and over in age, who  
enjoy good fellowship, potluck suppers, and  
interesting programs. For more information,  
please call Sue Suter at 381-5297. A



**STEPHEN  
MINISTRIES AT  
FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH**

Over the next few  
weeks we will be  
telling you a little  
about the Stephen  
Ministry Program.  
There are Stephen

Ministers at First Presbyterian Church who are  
trained listeners. A phone call to Rev. Boak or Rev.  
Mitchell will put you in touch with one of these  
special helpers when you face the burdens of stress,  
pressure, loneliness, recovery, grief, emptiness, and  
the pile-up of every day living. (585) 586-5688

This week we tell you about the Mission of  
Stephen Ministries:

The Mission of Stephen Ministries

To help congregations equip God's people for  
spiritual growth and Christ-centered, practical  
ministry in today's world.

**NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE IN OUR  
CHURCH LIBRARY**

from Bev Reeve

What is the secret of the fastest-growing Baptist  
Church in America? Dr. Rick Warren, founding  
pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest,  
California, emphasizes church health, not church  
growth in his popular book, *The Purpose Driven  
Church*. “If your church is healthy, growth will  
occur naturally”, he states. Discover the New  
Testament purposes given to the church by Jesus  
that Dr. Warren feels are necessary to become a  
*purpose driven church*.

Dr. Warren has more recently written another  
best seller, *The Purpose Driven Life*, a 40-day  
spiritual journey to answer the question, “What  
on earth am I here for?” Why did God create me,  
and what is the meaning and purpose of my life?  
Several churches in our area, including some of  
our own members, are using the 40 chapters in  
*The Purpose Driven Life* as a study guide  
throughout Lent. A



**We Need  
YOU!**

Your Nominating committee is actively  
seeking members to fill the Deacon,  
Session and Trustee boards. Most of  
these positions will not begin until  
January 2005! Membership on these  
boards is a great way to serve our  
Lord and enjoy wonderful fellowship.

We may be calling you soon, but if the  
Spirit has been nudging you – find  
one of the pink nominating cards in  
the pews, give us your name and  
number and place the card in the  
offering plate.