

# NewsBrief

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

## February, 2005

From the Preacher's Pen-Cell

Love is a four-letter word and it certainly is on our mind with Valentine's Day sitting smack dab in the middle of February. I admire the Presidents whose birthdays we join and remember as we take that extra winter day to ski. Their statesmanship, wisdom, and sacrifices for freedom remain a beacon to us all. It almost feels unpatriotic to recall their birthdays with assorted mall sales. I guess that as wonderful as the memories and histories of our founding fathers are, there is something that feels almost more "Christian" about the recollection of St. Valentine's Day. Besides, I own a Valentine's Day tie, but possess no Lincoln or Washington tie for the appropriate day(s).

But as the culture turns to these special days, the church of Jesus Christ is following a different calendar and this year Lent and Easter come early. In 2005 we are facing Ash Wednesday in the middle of February and the words that accompany that day are: repentance, reflection, renewal, and the management of temptation. Temptation is a subject with which I have familiar as I have given in to it, especially during those holiday festivities with the most delightful foods. Here are some principles for us:

ONE: When we see others being tempted we should try to understand more than condemn.

I recall the story of an overzealous preacher who felt it was his calling to aggressively "make" people become Christians, as they would ride on the city bus system. One day a man who was obviously intoxicated stumbled onto the bus that the preacher was riding. The parson sprang into action, shook his Bible in the face of the inebriated man and asked, "Did you know you're headed for Hell?"

And the inebriated man replied, "Oh, no, I'm on the wrong bus again!"

The testimony of Scripture is that except for the grace of God, we are all headed for that place of separation from God. We are all sinners saved by grace. Would it not be much better to try understanding than to condemn, to encourage rather than to criticize, to take helpful action than to ridicule?

TWO: LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT SEEMS AS IF SOME PEOPLE PAY MORE FOR THEIR SINS THAN OTHERS. Have you ever thought about that? It's not fair, but the punishment for sin in this world is rarely proportional to the sin itself.

Jackie Smith played for the St. Louis Cardinals and the Dallas Cowboys football teams in the 1960s and '70s. Smith was one of the best tight ends in the league accumulating awards and honors throughout his professional career. But he is best remembered for a catch he didn't make in the 1976 Super Bowl game between the Cowboys and the Steelers. It is hard to admit as a Steeler's fan, but that one missed catch cost Dallas the Super Bowl title that year. Smith racked up hundreds of impressive plays in his career, but he is still remembered for that one fumble in the 1976 Super Bowl game.

Contrast Jackie Smith to Phil McConkey's football career. McConkey had a stable but unremarkable career in the NFL. But in one Super Bowl game, McConkey made a remarkable catch that won the game for his team, the New York Giants. Instant fame, plus a cover on *Sports Illustrated*, followed this achievement. Years later, Phil McConkey's name is still spoken of with reverence because he made one good catch at one crucial time.

Life is not fair. Let's confess it now. Think of how often in our lifetime we have violated principles that God wants for us and haven't had to pay the price – the time we were driving too fast and didn't cause an accident, the time we got a better grade than we truly deserved. How can it be that God is so gracious that God would make such a sacrifice on our behalf? We are coming to that time when confession to God is for us:

FIRST, CONFESSION MUST BE CONTINUAL. Each day we turn over our sins to God for forgiveness. We may feel foolish or even be unconscious of our sinfulness. But part and parcel of being human is to have weaknesses that only God can make strong.

SECOND, OUR CONFESSION MUST BE COMPLETE. There's no use in trying to hide some sins from God. As long as we live in denial about certain behaviors or thoughts that sin still controls us. As noted author Calvin Miller has said, "When we confess, we do not ask primarily for forgiveness. Once we are saved, our sins are forever forgiven. But once we 'agree with' God that we have committed such and such a sin, our honesty before him reestablishes the communication that was broken."

AND FINALLY, OUR CONFESSION MUST BE CONFIDENT. We can be confident that when we come to God and confess our sins, He will treat us with abundant mercy and grace. May the season of Lent be a time of renewal and trust for us all.

*Bruce*

## Prayerfully Pondering Praying the Psalms...

It is hard to believe that Lent is nearly upon us! Ash Wednesday is February 9<sup>th</sup> this year which means Easter is March 27<sup>th</sup>. If you have yet to discern the gift to yourself of a spiritual discipline for this time of penitence and preparation, allow me to suggest that of Praying the Psalms. Over the course of Lent, our lectionary exposes us to ten Psalms: 22, 23, 31, 32, 51, 95, 116, 118, 121, and 130. One can pray a Psalm simply by finding a time during the week to read through the Psalm and open one's self to what God is trying to say in the reading and experiencing of God's word. Each Sunday, a Psalm is part of our lectionary reading. Ash Wednesday's Psalm is Psalm 51, Maundy Thursday's Psalm is Psalm 116, and Good Friday's Psalm is Psalm 22.

To help you enjoy this time of preparation, I invite you to take part in a unique exhibition of one artist's view of these Psalms which will be on display in our church office's breezeway between February 1<sup>st</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>.

This local artist, Kathleen Nicastro, and I met at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1999 and became fast friends. When I graduated in 2002, Kathleen providentially decided to return to her native Rochester to pursue her art full time. She has ambitiously painted her view of each of the 150 Psalms for three exhibitions taking place this year in Rochester (details are on the enclosed postcard). We are privileged to show the ten paintings which coincide with our Lenten lectionary readings but everyone is invited to all three exhibits to see the breadth and depth of this body of work.

Kathleen entitles her exhibition, "Painting the Psalms: Kataphatic Prayer". She reminds us that from church services to funerals and songs to literature, the Psalms have been assimilated into our culture in ways that touch us whether we are aware of them or not. This exhibit seeks to refresh our memory with regard to the Psalms' beauty and their meaning in our lives. In case you are wondering what kataphatic means, fear not! It is a wonderful theological term that means God can be known to humans positively or affirmatively.

The acclaimed theologian, pastor, and translator of *The Message*, Eugene Peterson, describes kataphatic prayer as "praying with your eyes open [using] icons, symbols, rituals [or] incense."<sup>1</sup>

These open-eyed prayers allow each person to experience a conversation with God in a different fashion. Customarily in our rational and Western understanding of praying the Psalms – say for example in our call to worship or in a private devotion – we tend to pray privately and inwardly to God. When we pray the Psalms using a work of art, we are invited to engage the painting and have still a personal interaction, but one that is more outward with God. If this seems difficult to grasp, I invite you to come and experience it for yourself.

And if this kataphatic prayer somehow seems to go against one's Calvinistic, Presbyterian, rational, left-brain comfort zone, be at peace knowing Calvin himself found outward expressions of our connection with God to be important. Calvin said, "no one can well perceive the power of faith unless he feels it by experience in his heart."<sup>2</sup>

To prepare you for Lent and this exhibition, our Adult Education Task Force is offering a series of 8:45am Sunday classes on King David, the reputed author of many of the Psalms. See Sandy's article for dates and themes. All are welcome – no homework necessary! Kathleen will be presenting an artist's overview of her works in this Adult Education forum on Sunday, February 13<sup>th</sup> between 9-9:45am. She will also be sharing a few of her works during our regular Fellowship Hour that day after worship in the Café.

As we progress through winter and our Lenten preparations for the affirmation of Christ's triumph over all limitations, may you find this gift of Praying the Psalms one that expands your experience of God and enlivens your daily spiritual walk.

Go with God, Carrie

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson *The Contemplative Pastor*.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin. *Institutes* 3.20.12.

“These are the lectionary texts for the month of February. Given our Lenten exhibition, you might want to pay particular attention to each week’s Psalm. We welcome you to study in advance of their being incorporated into the Sunday worship services. Please join us for Bible Study on Wednesdays in the Masonic Lodge at 9:30am or in the Library at 7:00pm to discuss the upcoming Sunday’s texts. No preparation is necessary – bring yourself, your Bible and your questions.

Week of Feb. 6 – Exod. 24:12-18; Ps 2 or Ps. 99  
2 Peter 1:16-21; Matt. 17:1-9

Week of Feb. 13 – Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Ps. 32  
Rom. 5:12-19; Matt. 4:1-11

Week of Feb. 20 – Gen. 12:1-4a; Ps. 121  
Rom. 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

Week of Feb. 27 – Exod. 17:1-7; Ps. 95; Rom. 5:1-11  
John 4:5-42

**...from Sandy’s Desk**

*Believe it or not, we are looking directly at LENT. The time of self-examination and drawing nearer to God spiritually, prior to Easter is a tremendous gift for we Christians. This time of forty days and six Sundays is not only a time to look deep into our own soul and listen to God for ways in which we can become closer. It is a time when we can examine how the choices we make and the actions we take effect, and even change all those we come into contact with. And, just as importantly, a time to look back and identify those places in our lives where others have made a difference in us.*

*Who have I influenced on their faith journey?  
Who has influenced my faith journey?  
Who is in my midst who doesn’t know what  
God has done in my life?  
Whose faith walk could be a guide for you?*

*Often when a parent looks deeply into the eyes of their child, they are overcome by the sweetness, the innate openness, the inquisitiveness of a little one. Granted it may most often be at bedtime when the day’s energies have been spent and sleep is just about to overcome, but there is much to learn from a child if we take an extra moment to just be in their space with them. Their excitement for life, their excitement about the*

*simplest, most mundane thing can be a window into the child within you or indeed into the gentleness and wisdom of Jesus Christ.*

*Being in the presence of someone who has lived several decades longer than you can also be a window into your soul. As you listen to what life’s experience has been for them, quite often you will see that decisions you might have chosen may not be the best and because of their sharing, you find yourself going in another direction. The love of God, through you to them as you listen and hold a hand and offer a nod and a smile can make the difference of a day wondering whether anyone still cares and make it a day filled with the reminder that they too are still a very cherished child of God.*

*May this Lent, starting on February 9, Ash Wednesday, be a time of real growth for you as you look for the evidences of your own heart in your relationship with God, look well for all the ways you bless others just by your presence. God Bless!*

**Save the Dates!** JYF and MTC are back in full swing this term and all 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders are invited to join us at Christ Clarion Presbyterian Church on Thornell Road between 7-8:30pm on the following Sundays: January 23, February 13, March 13 and 20, April 10 and May 15 and 22. All are welcome: bring your friends!

**Confirmation: Come Claim the Creed!**

This is just a reminder to all mentors and confirmands that the time for our February gathering has been changed from 6:30pm to 2:00pm. We’ll still be at Christ Clarion, but we will meet downstairs. See you then to talk about the Holy Spirit and then you can rush home for a spirited Super Bowl.



**Are you over 55 years – sorta? Come join us.**

The Optimists will have their next meeting on Friday, March 4, at the United Church of Pittsford. After a pot-luck dinner, the program will be:

**Our Church burned! Everything that Happened and Everything We’re Doing about it.**

## Christian Education News



We've turned the corner in our program year and January finds us doing well despite the struggles of running so many programs in so many different places. We find that PCNS has 38 three year olds and 43 4 year olds. They are beginning their 2005-06 recruitment efforts and will be holding an Open House on January 18. They will be starting school readiness testing (speech screening) soon and again this year an outside consultant will work with the PCNS teachers to offer ideas for even better teacher outcomes and to answer other questions. They will present a budget for the upcoming year at the next meeting.

The LOGOS program's January 12, event was bowling at the Fairview Lanes in Fairport. The program continues to go well being held at St. Louis and it hard to believe that the LOGOS year is almost over with the "Grand Finale" ending the program on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. This summer the program board is hoping to be able to send some of the Living LOGOS participants to a LOGOS Camp for a week in Estes Park, Co.

Our **Adult Ed.** Task Force is planning for Lent and spring, with some new offerings and continuing others. The 8:45 Sunday morning Basic Bible Study will finish up on January 16. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, a new discussion/study series based on a recent archeological and historical Discovery video will compare the Biblical writer's description of King David. David is the composer attributed to most of the Psalms and our special Lenter speaker, K. Nicastro will illustrate David's Psalms through her stained glass art on February 16. The David series will end on March 6. The Wednesday Morning and Evening study groups continue to thrive and there is always room for one more. And an after Worship Spiritual Direction opportunity, based on the book: **THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE** will be led by Sandy Pacyga during Lent beginning on February 13.

The **Youth Ministry Search Committee** continues to work diligently to find a Youth Minister. Interviews are ongoing and the group feels it is making progress and could use your prayers and support.

A **C.E. Personnel Task Group** will meet prior to next month's meeting.

With Advent (piñatas, pageants and Christmas love well shared) and Christmas now past, we look forward to Heifer Fair, and Souper Bowl on February 6<sup>th</sup>, Ash Wednesday service possibilities on Feb. 9 and the return of our APCE (Feb.2-5) team who is planning an Education Fair for the entire congregation on March 19.

Respectfully submitted by Sandy Pacyga

## LOGOS

Hi - Happy Winter!  
Come join us - It's fun!

January 26 - Bingo Bash -  
The word is winner  
February 2 - Picture Perfect  
The word is collage - Do you have your picture given to Logos? A School picture is a good idea.  
February 9 - Fun in the Sun  
The word is bright. Ash Wednesday  
February 16 - Community Spirit -  
The word is thankful  
February 23 - NO LOGOS - Have a great February Break!

Sylvia

2005 ENVELOPE BOXES ~ are ready for pickup in the lobby at Nazareth. If you don't see a box with your name on it, sign the clipboard and we will put a box out next week.