

News Brief

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

January, 2005

From the Pastor's Pen-Cell

'Twas week after Christmas and all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring 'cept Dad and his spouse.
Their faces were haggard, all wrinkled with care.
They looked at each other and sighed with despair.
Could they both be enjoying the presents they got?
From the look on their faces, we knew they were not.
It was simple to us what was causing their ills.
They were figuring out how to pay the bills.

As a pastor who has examined contemporary ecclesiology (big word meaning the “study of everything ‘church’”) I am keenly aware that such poetry should not find its way into the church newsletter. Why? Professional fund raisers for hospitals, colleges, and charity organizations tell us that reminding people that there are bills to pay gives them incentive to deny their best intentions of giving of themselves . . . in every way. Buoy people up, don't provide an opportunity for them to feel despair or sense any lurking lack of joy. That is their wisdom. Remind them of this, and they will cocoon into their winter night and the incarnational hope of Christmas and the optimism of a new year will fade into bleak despondency.

This is the wrong poetry to share with those who enthusiastically welcome the interior reconstruction beginning in January but who know full well that there will be some bills that the insurance just won't cover. But, the bills do give us the opportunity to prioritize our lives and some of them fill us with gratitude. I am confident that those from First Presbyterian Church who charged plane tickets to do volunteer clean up and mission work with people who lost their homes from the ravages of 2004 hurricanes, will say to themselves, “Now this was money well spent!” Those who said to themselves, “I just decided that the Salvation Army needed some of my support this Christmas” will also say, “Now that was the right thing to do.” It is rare and out of human character for us to feel that mission or our giving to things beyond ourselves was unimportant or insignificant.

I must admit that over the years I have regretted some of the things that I have purchased. But, I have never regretted the experiences in which I have invested, and that is especially the case when this was related to doing what I believed God wanted me to do.

My less theological side joins with others in asking questions . . . like:

Is it good to call someone who invests your money a broker?

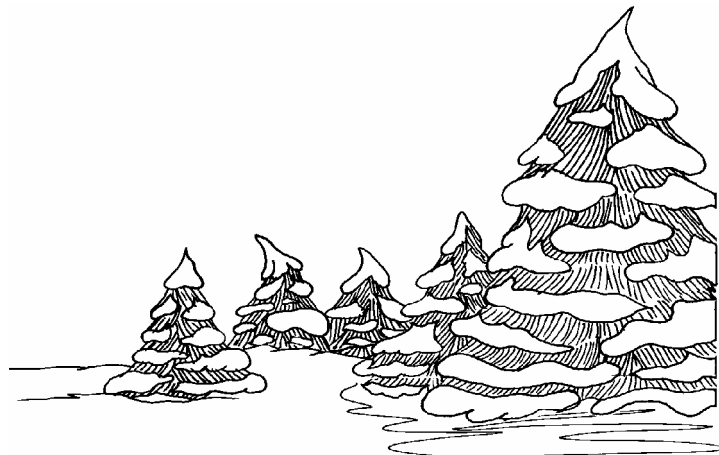
When someone asks you, “A penny for your thoughts,” and you put in your two cents, what happens to the other penny?

Why are wise men and wise guys opposites?

When cheese gets its picture taken, what does it say?

Yes, it is time for the celebration of Epiphany, but here I am stuck with this “‘Twas the Night before Christmas” meter running through my mind. The original was penned by Clement Clarke Moore. Clement’s father, Rev. Benjamin Moore was president of what is now Columbia University in New York and was Bishop of New York. Moore, like his father before him was also a pastor but little is remembered about him despite his service except this poem. Interestingly the poem that appeared in the New York Sentinel in 1822 makes no mention of particular Christian celebration of nativity at Christmas. It is in this similar spirit that these new lines of Moore’s meter are offered at the beginning and now at the end of these thoughts.

'Twas the month after Christmas, and all through the house,
Nothing would fit me, not a shirt or a blouse.
The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste,
At the holiday parties had gone to my waist.
When I got on the scales there arose such a number!
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a lumber).
I'd remember the marvelous meals I'd shared,
The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared.
The wine and the rum balls, the bread and the cheese,
And the way I'd never said, "No thank you, please."
As I dressed myself in a large worn-out shirt,
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt.
I said to myself, as I only can,
"You can't spend this winter disguised, you're a man!"
So--away with the last of the sour cream dip,
Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip.
Every last bit of food that I like must be banished,
'Till all the additional ounces have vanished.
I won't have a cookie--not even a lick,
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.
I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,
I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.
I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore,
But isn't that what January is for?
Unable to giggle, no longer a riot,
Happy New Year to all and to all a good diet!



Prayerfully Pondering

Most of you will receive this *Newsbrief* before Christmas so allow me to wish you and yours a very merry Christmas and a delightful New Year. Bill and I could not be more excited this year to be anticipating the birth of our first child in July. After years of waiting, we knew that this congregation was the family in which we had confidence to grow our own family. This gestational time of waiting is ripe with promise and we pray God grants us a healthy baby.

January is a time of promises: promises we make to ourselves in the form of resolutions and the promise of new beginnings with the turning of a calendar year. For those of us who have promised ourselves positive changes (more exercise, more time with loved ones, less stress, etc...) and not lived up to our own expectations, the thought of a New Year can be daunting. Upon what can we base our conviction in these so-called promises of a New Year?

Scripture is full of one answer: our conviction for promise in any new day is based on our hope in the Lord.¹ The Psalms declare God's steadfast love for God's children and tell of God's redeeming action in humanity's wayward and often painful life. When we recognize our struggle with or distance from God, our desire to return to God is based on the hope of God's continuing love, healing, and forgiveness.

Joan Chittister, a Sister of Saint Benedict and religious author, claims you cannot write about hope without first considering the struggle from which hope is born.² Chittister uses the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with God to illustrate the struggle that she says is part of every life, pointing out how such encounters can lead to growth and new direction. But even as she writes of the "gifts" of struggle, she is candid about its dark side and lasting impact. After all, she notes, Jacob got up limping from his night of wrestling with God.

Her work has been particularly helpful to me in my first trimester as I struggled with severe nausea and persistent migraines. I had never known such debilitating pain and it caused me to question my so-called "Christian outlook" on life; after all, it is easy

¹ See for example Psalms 130:5, 7; 131:3, 146:5, 147:11; Isaiah 8:17; Lamentations 3:24; Philippians 2:19; 1 Peter 3:15.

² Joan Chittister, OSB. *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*. 2003.

to be optimistic when one is healthy. Chittister's analysis builds upon C.S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain* in which Lewis argues that pain is a by-product of God granting humanity free will. We make choices that might cause pain and in that pain we are to find a lesson.³ Chittister's frankness about the dark side of pain made it easier for me to not feel guilty about feeling horrible in the grip of physical agony. I did not have to piously be superhuman in my struggle with pain. I needed only to maintain my hope in the Lord that the pain would pass.

My spiritual director offered the practical steps I needed for maintaining that hope. First, she gave me permission to accept the pain. There was no glossing over it. Next, she instructed me to recall all the time in my past and in our collective past as recorded in Scripture when God had been with me in my pain and ultimately transformed, redeemed or healed me from the pain. Finally, I needed to exercise my faith that God would be with me in this struggle and in future struggles. Only then was I able to accept many of the lessons God seemed to want to teach me. I have a much deeper empathy for those who struggle with chronic pain or debilitating disease. I have had to learn greater humility, patience, and acceptance of others' helping me. Most of all, I have come to appreciate the absolute bliss present when pain is absent. Life is such a gift! I am quite certain that these lessons will fade as the pain fades and I will need to relearn them as time goes on; however, just like Jacob's hip, they have made an impression upon me.

Each of us goes through times of pain and sorrow, depression and darkness, stress and suffering. We struggle, Chittister says, against change, isolation, darkness, fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, exhaustion, and scarring; and while these struggles sometimes seem insurmountable, we can emerge from them with the gifts of conversion, detachment, faith, courage, surrender, limitations, endurance, transformation, and (perhaps most important) hope.

As we embark upon this New Year together, confident in God's promises to be with us and to transform our lives for the good, let us look to this

³ While I agree with Lewis about God granting us free will and our making choices, knowing that I was supposed to learn something from the pain while I was still in the pain was not terribly cheering.

year of promise with hope in our hearts and a song of praise on our tongues. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Go with God, Carrie

These are the lectionary texts for the month of January. We welcome you to study in advance of their being incorporated into the Sunday worship services. Please join us for Bible Study on Wednesdays beginning January 5th 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 Jan. 2 – Jer. 31:7-14; Ps. 147:12-20; Eph. 1:3-14
John 1: (1-9) 10-18

Week of Jan. 9 – Isa. 42:1-9; Ps. 29; Acts 10:34-43
Matt. 3:13-17

Week of Jan. 16 – Isa. 49:1-7; Ps. 40:1-11; 1 Cor. 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

Week of Jan. 23 – Isa. 9:1-4; Ps. 27:1, 1-9; 1 Cor. 1:10-18
Matt. 4:12-23

Week of Jan. 30 – Micah 6:1-8; Ps. 15; 1 Cor. 1:18-31
Matt. 5:1-12

PRESBYTERY ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. **Resource Saturdays.** Resource Saturdays offer opportunities to take a mini-course on a different topic each month, and also the opportunity to visit and peruse the Resource Center. Classes run for 90-120 minutes. There is no registration fee, but we do request an RSVP so we can have enough coffee and goodies on hand for all.
2. **Church Leader Development Day.** Saturday, February 12, 2005. Featuring courses of interest for Elders, Deacons, Clerks of Session, Treasurers, Trustees, Christian Educators, Pastors, and others.
3. **An Ongoing Announcement.** A list of recently acquired resources is available as a downloadable document off the Resource Center page on the Presbytery's website. Go to www.pbygenval.org. Also, there is a 24-hour drop box for the return of Resource Center materials

located in the door facing Winton Road at the Presbytery Office.

WEB CLUB NEWS

Wednesday Evening Book Club
Discussion begins at 7:30 PM

January 12 - "Lucy" by Ellen Feldman.
Home of Dianne Brown, 40 Copper Woods.
381-4298

Upcoming

February 9 - "Anna Karenina" by Leo Tolstoy
March 9 - "The Amateur Marriage" by Anne Tyler

THANKS FROM THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Thanks to all the members of our church family who came forth with an estimate of giving for 2005. If you wish to make a commitment for the support of our church's missions in 2005, please contact Janet Travis in the Church office.

STEPHEN MINISTRIES AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Over the next few months we will continue to tell 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. (586-5688)

We outline the Stephen Ministry Program this way:

The Vision of Stephen Ministries

That each congregation would embody and express Jesus' command, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

The Mission of Stephen Ministries

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