

THE SPIRE

*Your Church
Magazine*



January / February 2023



NURTURE FAITH

by **Dr. Doug Hood**

Senior Pastor

A YEAR OF FAITH AND HOPE

*“So what are we going to say about these things?
If God is for us, who is against us?”*
Romans 8:31 (Common English Bible)

It is always possible to dwell on the bright as well as the dark side of life. Yet, for many people, they are inclined to direct their attention to what may go wrong, to anticipate the bitter rather than the sweet, the tears rather than the smiles, and the difficulties rather than the opportunities that may lie in the New Year that stretches out before them. This way of looking at things is probably nothing more than a carryover from how their parents approached life from year to year. Perhaps this is a view fashioned by disappointments and struggles over many years. But it remains a choice that anyone can make—quieting the voice of negativity and grasping the promise of faith that God is for us as we cross from one year to the next.

This is not to be blindly idealistic. People of faith know as much about real trouble as any non-believer, perhaps much more, in fact. Those who don't have faith often need a distraction to push through each day, some measure of artificial stimulation. Having no faith or hope they look to escape from the real challenges that confront every one of us. Alcohol, recreational drugs, or acquiring things of luxury and comfort divert attention from life's challenges and disappointments. Conversely, people of faith are genuine realists. They acknowledge and face real misfortune and then look right through the trouble to something beyond—they see hope in the promises of their faith. That is the real difference.

It should be clear that the Bible never asks that we turn away from the facts, that we deceive ourselves in order to be a people of faith. As Christians, we are aware of our own capacity for greed, cruelty, and selfishness. We know that those who would trample over us care little about our faith and that disillusionment lurks around every moment of every day. Such has always been the case and always will be. Emerson said: “He has not learned the lesson of life who does not every day surmount a fear.”¹ But, in faith, we can look into the dense fog of the New Year without too much uneasiness because God moves forward alongside us, a God that is always struggling with us, always bringing good out of evil.

Life can be a struggle. Not every cloud will have a silver lining and not every wrong will be righted in this life. Ambitions may continue to remain unfulfilled and broken relationships may never be repaired. But that does not diminish the promise of faith that God is for us. Who believed that every round of disappointment, meanness, and heartbreak is the whole story? Life also consists of laughter, moments of happiness, and serendipitous occasions of surprise and delight. Each struggle to be experienced above the loud clamor of negativity. Our own free agency allows us to choose the tone that we attach to our lives. Perhaps all we need in the New Year is to be reminded that if God is for us, who is against us? ●

¹ Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude, Twelve Chapters*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904, 276.

CHURCH STAFF

Doug Hood, D.Min.
Senior Pastor

Greg Rapier, M.Div.
Associate Pastor

Donald J. Cannarozzi, M.M., J.D.
Organist / Director of Music

Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, B.M., M.A.
Associate Director of Music

Grace Cameron Hood, B.C.E.
Director of Children and Family Ministry

Nancy Fine, CCA
Business Administrator

Christine Davis
Finance & HR Manager

Aaron Strippel
Facilities Maintenance Manager

First Presbyterian Church

33 Gleason Street
Delray Beach, FL 33483
phone: 561-276-6338
fax: 561-272-8505
e-mail:
administrator@firstdelray.com
web page: www.firstdelray.com

THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

EDITOR:
Tim Knapp

LAYOUT:
Char Conklin

SPECIAL THANKS:
Printers Choice

**If you or a family member
are hospitalized, please
notify the church office.
Even if you give the
name of the church upon
admission, the hospital
will NOT notify us.**

OUR 2023 ANNUAL DINNER AND DISTINGUISHED PREACHER

Our Annual Dinner and Distinguished Preacher program are coming. On Friday, January 6th, our Annual Dinner is at Benvenuto Restaurant (1730 N. Federal Hwy, Boynton Beach). Dr. Craig Barnes is speaking at this popular event. The cost of the dinner, which includes a social hour, a sit-down dinner, a thought-provoking speaker, and live music coordinated by Don Cannarozzi, is just \$35 per person. Both the church and Benvenuto Restaurant underwrite this event. We provide scholarships for deserving parishioners who may not otherwise be able to attend. We would be grateful if you could help us offset these costs. Reservations are required and can be made by visiting our website under Upcoming Events or contacting Nancy Fine in the church office.

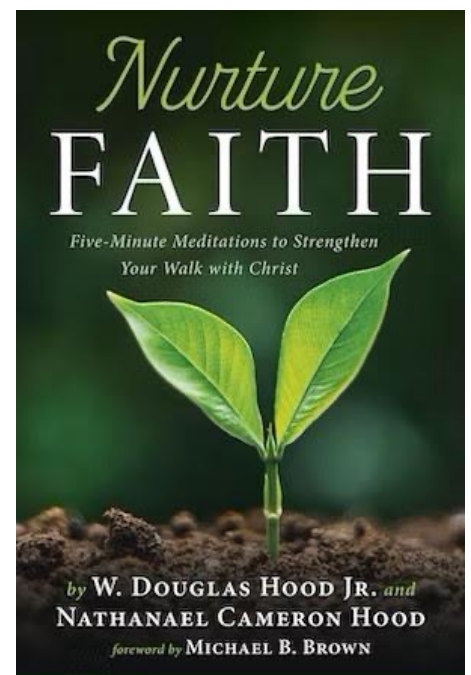


Then, on Sunday, January 8th, Dr. Barnes will deliver a message from the pulpit. He recently retired as President of Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Barnes is an accomplished author, and his writing and academic work reflect his deep commitment to the theological formation of pastors to lead the church in these changing times.

Make sure to mark your calendar for Sunday, January 8th, as we welcome Dr. Barnes as our 2023 Distinguished Preacher. ●

SPIRITUAL RESOURCE TO NURTURE YOUR FAITH

Did you know that there is a new resource to strengthen your spiritual life? Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, recently released Nurture Faith: Five Minute Meditations to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ, written by Dr. Doug Hood and his son, Nathanael. Church member, Rhys Williams wrote, “For me personally, the daily devotional readings provided by Nurture Faith open a unique dimension to my quiet times of prayer, Bible study, and meditation. I feel like I have a colleague walking beside me, showing me wonderful discoveries along a shared journey, his comments and observations full of warmth, wit, humanity, and an authentic sense of wonder.” This resource is available through the church office or any electronic bookseller. *Any royalties received will help support the ministry and mission of this church.* ●



by Grace Cameron Hood

Director of Children and Family Ministry



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

2023 is here! Here's a look back at what the children of our church did in 2022.



VBS



Primary Sunday School led by Mrs. Sandy McGilvray



The God Squad Sunday School Class learning how to play the chimes with Ms. Birgit



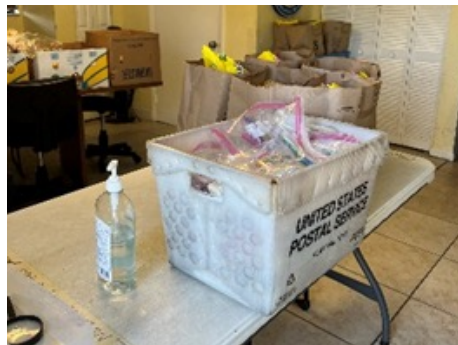
Always ready with a smile!



Participating in Worship!



The God Squad Sunday School Class learned to serve by helping with the Offering and making up hygiene kits



Bible Bunch led by Mrs. Iva and Mrs. Alice



Getting ready for the Christmas Pageant



The Easter Egg Hunt

*Some special events –
Rapids Water Park*



*Some special events –
AMF Bowling*

Church Nursery with Liz Landes and Caroline Calder

As we look to 2023, there are several major events that we want to have you put on your calendars. There will be additions to this list. Pastor Greg and I will be planning some joint events with the youth, children, and young adults in the church. Those dates to come!

Annual Easter Egg Extravaganza
Vacation Bible School
Putt'n Around the Greens

April 2
June 12-16
November 5

by Maryann Rana

Prayer Ministry Team

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Remember why, remember who, remember when and how you last prayed for someone or something. Maybe you knew what was occurring that needed prayer, or perhaps not. The who or what does not matter, it's that you prayed in faith for that person or circumstance that is of importance to our Father God.

There are so few times that we hear the outcome, and the answers are great to hear about, but more often than not we hear nothing. Praying in faith touches our knowing Father, and he will handle whatever the situation is. Remember, God always answers in the best way possible.

Remember, we are Christians doing our duty in caring for one another's needs.

Remember also that, with all the discord that's going on in the world, we need to pray at every opportunity:

“Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve.”

James 5:15, 16 (Common English Bible)

Prayer requests come through the church office and are then distributed to team members. Each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer with respect and confidentiality. Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for more information or if you are interested in joining. ●

by Maria Graham

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

The Monday Morning Women's Bible Study will start 2023 with the study titled *Epic: An Around-the-World Journey through Christian History*, led by Pastor Ted Challies and filmed by Stephen McCaskell. This film, broken into ten sessions, will enable us to see what Pastor Challies discovered as he traveled to some of the most unusual places in the world on a three-year long journey. From pulpits to paintings, the labor of monks to the martyrdom of missionaries, this immersive travelogue presents 33 key objects that tell the history of Christianity. We meet Monday mornings at 10 a.m. via Zoom. Contact Maria Graham at mmg2352@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link. Join us as we learn, laugh and pray together!

Please let the church office know if you are interested in leading an in-person daytime Bible study, or an evening study either in person or on Zoom. Thank you! ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Church Improvement Fund (Holly House) from Bill and Jane Amme, in honor of Linda Prior; and from Marie Claire Ged and Daniel Mallett, in loving memory of Mary F. Ged.

Lighting/Audio/Video Project from Carolyn Helm and from anonymous.

Memorial Garden Fund from Daughter and Son-in-Law, Karen and Don Carter, in loving memory of John and Janet Loennecker.

Music Fund from Susan Ambrecht, in honor of her husband, Kenneth C. Ambrecht.

Operating Fund from Bill and Jane Amme, in honor of Maria Graham; from the Lattner Family Foundation, in honor of Keith Walker; and from Jim Webster, in recognition of Mary Bergquist.

Remembrance Fund from Elisabeth Hammer Marx, in loving memory of her Grandma, Etta Hammer; from Janie Brown, in loving memory of Diane Hopkins; from Daughter and Son-in-Law, Karen and Don Carter, in loving memory of John L. Loennecker; from Leila Meade, in loving memory of Lois Moore; from Debora Moore, in loving memory of her mother, Lois Moore; from Eric and Shelly Perkins, in loving memory of Lois Moore; from Susanna Souder, in loving memory of Lois Moore; and from Gary and Elizabeth Thompson, in loving memory of Mary Anne Thompson. ●

ETERNAL LIVES

Our Deepest Sympathies as a congregation are extended to the families of the following members upon the death of their loved ones:

– Dee Neumeyer –
November 7, 2022

– Genevieve (Jackie) Visser –
December 1, 2022



SESSION REPORT

During October and November, the Session approved new members and a baptism. They also approved the dedication of the Christmas Eve Offering to the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County's Building Better Readers program.

The Session approved calling a Special Congregational Meeting to apply for a loan from The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program for the construction and installation of capital improvements for sound, lighting, and video to enhance accessibility, conserve energy, and improve the worship experience for in-person and live streaming worshippers. (The loan was unanimously approved by the congregation on October 30, 2022). The Session called the Annual Congregational Meeting for February 26, 2023, immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service. ●

NEW MEMBERS

Marianne Darby

Craig Matthews

Jean Matthews

Jane Prantl

Pete Thomas

Judy Thomas



WELCOME!

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*

FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Tanner Family

Hello!!! We are the Tanner family and we feel incredibly blessed to have been led to First Presbyterian of Delray this past spring! Some of Shane and Amy's best memories are from Vacation Bible School and we have wanted that for our children as well. However, there aren't many options here in South Florida, and our youngest children were too young prior to Covid, and then of course we lost a couple of summers because of Covid. So, last spring, Amy began her search for some options, and has no doubt that God led her directly into the loving arms of Grace and her team! Our youngest, Margaret, attended VBS this past summer and was sad for a full month afterwards that it had ended! Mid-summer we were able to attend our first service, and we will never forget the feeling of God's presence and the indescribable joy and peace we felt that day.

A little about us:

Shane, a South Florida native, is a proud veteran of the United States Army and also a professional actor. His entertaining story goes like this: In the mid 1990s, while Shane was on a brief leave from the Army, his traveling partner surprised him with tickets to a show in London. Shane assumed it was a concert of sorts but was annoyed to find out his traveling partner had spent so much money on tickets to see a MUSICAL!!! Shane was unfamiliar with musical theatre and had no interest in attending this thing called *LES MISERABLES* in the West End! He went anyway; the first chord of the orchestra played, and he was transfixed. He was mesmerized and glued to the stage. The next few days after the show, he went and spent nearly every dime he had seeing theatre shows in London. During his job placement meeting with his Army superiors, they asked what his career aspirations were upon discharge and he replied "I want to be an actor." They replied "Not much we can help you with on that buddy! Good luck!" After returning to the United States, Shane trained himself as a singer by listening to every cassette tape of a Broadway musical he could get his hands on. Shortly thereafter, he attended an audition for the Broadway tour of *Oliver!* the musical and booked the leading role of Bill Sikes. He has since performed all over the country and on most of South Florida's stages. Shane has also directed many children's theater camps and productions. His most important and most priceless role to date, however, is "Daddy" to his three children.

Amy was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. She spent her Junior year of high school abroad in Germany and then received her degree in Musical Theatre with a minor in German at Birmingham-Southern College. In Fall of 2001, Amy was en route to NYC to begin her graduate studies in acting but was stalled by the tragedy of September 11th. She decided instead to join her brother in Philadelphia for a year where she was a nanny, waitress, and singer on a harbor cruise ship. In 2003, she began her graduate studies in Acting at The Actors Studio and received her MFA in 2006. And as most actors do, she promptly began waiting tables again, nannying and taking any work possible to afford life in NYC as an aspiring actress. One morning in January of 2007, Amy was singing on her way to the dish pit of the restaurant where she worked in Times Square. She was approached by a gentleman who was a Broadway producer ... In a dream-like state, Amy left her restaurant shift early to go meet the director of a new musical and within 2 weeks was performing in her first professional show. Theatre eventually led her to the former Caldwell Theatre in Boca where she met and fell in love with Shane. The two were married onstage at Actors Playhouse in Coral Gables, FL. Amy loves education and has formerly taught at American Heritage and New World School of the Arts. Nowadays, Amy is on faculty in the BFA Department of Theatre at Lynn University and operates Performance Edge 2 Theatre and Voice Academy in Boca. She is a proud voice teacher and vocal coach who loves little more than belting out kids songs in the carpool line!

Wiley (20) lives full time in Morehead, KY where he is studying at Morehead State. Although he has a gift for music, he is undecided on his major, but we know he will do amazing things! He is the most loving and attentive big brother to his little sisters and we cannot wait until we can have him home and introduce him to the church family.

Daisy (6) was homeschooled for Kindergarten and is now a very busy first grader in a brick and mortar school in Delray Beach. She is also in her first year of competitive dance and dances 12+ hours a week. Daisy wants to be a singing veterinarian when she grows up. Her favorite color is blue, favorite food is ramen (the cheap kind from the package), and she has a heart of solid gold into which she has asked Jesus to stay forever.

Margaret (4) is currently in VPK at a small Christian program and she is so full of zest for life! Up until about a month ago, her name was Maggie Rose, but she's now firmly decided to go by her full given name of Margaret! She also loves ballet and tap like her big sister and most recently wants to be "a rescuer" when she grows up. Her favorite color is purple, her most requested meal is charcuterie, and she has us laughing from dawn to dusk!

Rounding out our family are our three pets! Our woofers, Gus and Annie, and Daisy's bearded dragon, JoJo.

We have loved getting to meet members of this congregation and can't wait to make so many memories here! ●



Our family: Shane, Amy, Wiley (20), Daisy (6), Margaret (4)

HOLLY HOUSE STEP-ABOVE RUMMAGE SALE

Drop off Donations

Every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday
January 17th through February 4th, 9:30 a.m. to Noon

Church Member Shopping

Wednesday, February 8th, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

All Shoppers are Welcome

February 9th, 10th, and 11th, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Step-Above Rummage Sale is just around the corner! Donations will be received on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to noon, beginning Tuesday, January 17th and ending Saturday, February 4th. Clothing, shoes, accessories, and books can be dropped off at Fellowship Hall. Holly House is the drop off site for jewelry, housewares, linen, electronics, luggage, toys, tools, and sports equipment.

If you would like to help set up for the Rummage Sale, please show up in Fellowship Hall or Holly House on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, beginning January 17th, from 9:30 a.m. to noon. **To volunteer during sale dates please sign up on the church website.**

The sale will be open to church members on Wednesday, February 8th from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. All shoppers are welcome during the public sale dates: Thursday, February 9th through Saturday, February 11th from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Lunch will be served by the Men's Fellowship during sale days.

Check your closets and cubby holes for items you wish to donate. We are looking forward to seeing you at our annual Step-Above Rummage Sale. ●



Holly House is a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach.



by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

*The following is from **Confronting Life's Challenges: Sermons on the Struggles We Face** which features sermons by Doug Hood, Greg Rapier, and John "Skip" Randolph.*

ARE YOU HOPEFUL?

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

Listen for God's Word:

"He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve, and then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once—most of them are still alive to this day, though some have died."

1 Corinthians 15:5, 6 (Common English Bible)

Some of you are aware that about two weeks ago my wife and I returned from a Caribbean cruise on the Princess Cruise Lines. On the first morning of our cruise, we met the person who would be our waiter for the entire cruise. His name was Christian. On that first morning, as he was taking our order, he took notice of the cross ring on my right hand. He complimented the ring and I said, "Yes; I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I am a Christian." I looked up at his name badge and saw that his name was Christian. Just below his name, the name of the country he was from was identified: Macedonia. Now if you have ever cruised, I know many of you have, you are aware that many of the cruise lines hire people from all over the world. It is part of the richness of cruising to meet people from various countries that perhaps you will never have the opportunity to visit. And here was a member of our wait staff that morning, Christian, who was from Macedonia.

After I identified myself as a Christian, and taking note that he was from Macedonia, I said, "The Apostle Paul went from Macedonia!" His eyes lit up and he responded, "Yes! And



it's because things didn't work out for him!" "What?" I asked. "You know the story, certainly", he said. "Paul wanted to go to Bithynia and it didn't work out for him. It was closed to the Apostle Paul and he couldn't get in. He waited for God to tell him what was next in his life. And, God sent him to my country, Macedonia. I am a Christian today because God sent Paul to Macedonia." In that brief conversation, I realized the message I would preach for Easter morning.

The message is simply this. Take note of it. Write it on the blackboard of your mind. Pencil it into your worship

bulletin. Remember it all this week. The message that I want you to hear this morning is the message that I believe becomes resoundingly clear to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the message that we need not fear the failures in life. We need not fear the things we lose in life because God has a greater plan for our future. Hear it again: We need not fear the things we lose in life. Because God has a greater plan for our future!

The Apostle Paul felt a deep conviction to go to Bithynia and plant a church for Jesus Christ. It is all laid out for you in the sixteenth chapter in the

Book of Acts. Wanting to be faithful to the Gospel, and wanting to be faithful to God's claim on his life, he strived to go to Bithynia and the doors never opened. So, he went back to Troas. And, when Paul went back to Troas he had two choices, the same choices that you and I have today. When something doesn't work out for you, you have two choices: You can give up. You can recline. You can despair. You can pity yourself. Or, you can keep your eyes fixed on the risen Christ and wait for God's direction for what's next in your life.

Things didn't work out for the Apostle Paul when he tried to get to Bithynia. Christian was absolutely right that morning. Rather than recline and groan and complain that life was not going in the direction that he wanted it to go, the Apostle Paul kept his eyes on

the risen Christ and received a vision: A man from Macedonia came to Paul and said, "Come! Come and help us." In the tenth verse of the sixteenth chapter of Acts, Paul made immediate plans to go to Macedonia. Paul did not need to fear the lost opportunity to go into Bithynia, for God had much bigger plans for Paul.

I want to take a moment and be very honest with you about my own sense of call to ministry. Five years into my ministry, that was twenty-seven years ago, for whatever reason, I felt a certain sense of call from God to serve a church in the City of New York. That call continued to grip me, and embrace me, and I became more and more convicted year after year. I wish I had the time to walk among you and lay out for you what happened in my life that made me convinced that I was

to serve a congregation in New York City. Suffice it to say that I anticipated the day when that call would arrive.

Seventeen years after feeling that call to New York, while serving a congregation in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, I received a phone call. The man identified himself as the chairperson of the Senior Pastor's Search Committee for the Central Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. "Dr. Hood, your name has been given to us as a possible candidate for the next Senior Pastor of our congregation. Our search committee has watched a number of your sermons on Live Stream in the past month. We would like to invite you to New York and have a conversation with us."

I shared with him that just that week, the Trustees of the church I currently was serving in Pennsylvania signed legal papers to begin construction to expand and update our church. We had begun a \$1.5 million capital campaign to pay for the construction. We were renovating and expanding our church and we would be moving the congregation out of its Sanctuary, for at least six months to another space, as the Sanctuary was gutted, reimaged, and rebuilt. I said, "We are just now beginning that process. With all my heart, I cannot believe that God would ask me to leave this congregation just as we take the risk of a major expansion and renovation program." He said that he completely agreed and understood. But, he asked me to understand that they could not stop their process. The chair of the search committee had a responsibility to his own church. He had to move forward in their search for their next pastor. I thanked him for his call and continued my ministry in Bucks County.



Two years later the renovation of our plant was complete. We had a beautiful church. The Stewardship Campaign was successful. We were debt free. We had raised and collected all \$1.5 million. The congregation had grown and all the staff of the church, except for the secretary, had retired or moved to other opportunities. Things were going brilliantly.

Then, one day, I was walking with my wife as we did each evening around George Bush Park in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. She asked me this question. “Do you sense that God has finished God’s work for us here?” I said yes. It was unmistakable. God had finished what God had intended through me in Pennsylvania. So, I began the process of looking for what was next in my life. I do know that my eyes went immediately to the City of New York.

May I tell you that within the next nine months of beginning the process of looking for what was next in my life, I received an invitation from a congregation in the San Francisco Bay area, an invitation from a lovely congregation on the east coast of Florida, and an invitation from the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Yet, I heard absolutely nothing from New York City.

May I share with you with all honesty and sincerity that I prayed one night and said, “O Lord, you raised Christ from the dead, but you do not know geography very well. The opportunities you are presenting me could not be further from the City of New York!” But, as Grace and I continued to pray about the opportunities that came our way, both

Grace and I felt the strongest call that we had ever felt in our entire ministry together. God’s “next” for us was at the First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. And, that conviction is as strong now as it was seven years ago.

New York City became my Bithynia. I wanted to go into the city, but the doors were closed. I didn’t need to fear the loss of opportunities or failures in my life, because God had something much grander for my future and me. With all my heart, I believe that it is right here in Delray Beach.

Paul did not fear the things that he lost in life because he knew that God had something so much bigger for him. The question that I place in your hearts this morning is this: What is your Bithynia? What are those opportunities that you’ve longed for, worked for, and struggled for, that never came to fruition? Where are the failures in your own life? Where are the disappointments in your life? Those are the Bithynias in your life.

I ask you to ponder, where is your Macedonia? Do not fear the things you’ve lost in life. God has a bigger plan for you. God has for you your own Macedonia. We need not fear the things that we lose in life. For God has a bigger plan for us. Naturally, for us to capture that vision and to move into God’s future for us, we must keep our eyes fixed upon the presence of the risen Christ right here in the midst of our lives. We must pay attention to God’s activity as Paul did in Troas so we can hear the voice calling us to Macedonia, wherever that may be.

N.T. Wright is probably one of the most prominent theologians living today. Many have called him the

modern day C.S. Lewis of the Christian faith. N.T. Wright says that a strange thing happens in Christian churches on Easter morning throughout the world. We see the attendance swell. Among that large gathering of people, N.T. Wright says, there will be a large number of people who are skeptical of the faith. They are skeptical of the teachings of the Christian Church. They are skeptical of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are in church but are present for many other reasons. Maybe it’s important to their spouse. Maybe they feel it’s the right thing for their children. Maybe they are making mom and dad happy. Maybe it is because they live where there continues to be a cultural expectation that Easter is for church and family dinners. But, whatever the motivation, said N.T. Wright, the Church is filled with skeptics. And, they’re the people who want the Church to accept the burden of proving the resurrection of Jesus Christ before they believe. But then, Wright continues, Easter morning turns the tables on them. Rather than having the Church prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the tables have been turned, and now the burden is on the skeptic to prove that the resurrection didn’t happen.

This is what I mean. How many of you this morning can remember what happened on September 11, 2001 in the City of New York? Please raise your hand. Wow! For those of you who were not born, I’m glad you’re here. How many of you remember exactly where you were when you heard the news of 9/11 in New York? How many of you would say that your life was changed in some way because of that attack on New York nearly eighteen years ago?

Then you need to hear this: the resurrection story that I read to you from First Corinthians 15 was the first time the resurrection story was written down. It was written down before the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were ever written. The first time the resurrection story was written down was right here in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. And, it was written down fifteen years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, less time than the time that has passed since the attack on New York City.

Paul says that when Jesus Christ was raised, he appeared to more than five hundred men and women at the same time. They saw Jesus Christ, who was crucified, dead, and buried, placed in the tomb, now standing before them. They saw the risen Christ and they could not stop talking about it. Because they began talking about this unexpected miracle of a dead man coming back to life, the Church began to experience

explosive growth. And, the Church continued to grow until today, where we have over three billion Christians around the world.

N.T. Wright says, the reason that the Church grew so quickly is because when this resurrection story was written down there were some five hundred people who remembered it happening and they couldn't stop talking about it and sharing with others how their life had been changed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. N.T. Wright says if you are a skeptic then you have to prove to the Church why the resurrection didn't happen. The burden is not on the Church to prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The burden is on the skeptic to explain the testimony of five hundred people who, when Paul wrote it down fifteen years later, said, "Yes, this happened. It absolutely did and my life has been changed!"

Friends, we never need to fear the

things that we lose in life, because God has something so much bigger for us. John Ortberg, that wonderful pastor in the San Francisco Bay area, said that the people here in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians are experiencing something of an endless hope. What John Ortberg means to say is that these people have experienced missed opportunities, disappointments, and failures in their lives as we all do. Yet, they never gave up hope because they saw with their eyes the raised Christ in their presence. And, if God could do that, they believed that God had something so much bigger for them as well. Mark it on your minds. Write it on your worship bulletin. Remember this: that the promise of Easter is that we need not fear the things that we lose because of the living Christ who lives among us. God has something so much bigger for us. *Amen.* ●



DEACONS' CORNER

Once again, members and friends of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach opened their hearts and wallets. In just one month, we are very close to reaching our goal of \$7,500 for funding for the Deacons' Christmas Tree project.

Three hundred gift cards from Walmart and Target were given to five local agencies to distribute to families. Representatives from Achievement Centers for Children & Families, Adopt-A-Family, AVDA (Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse), the Milagro Center, and the Boys and Girls Club of Delray Beach stopped by the church office to pick up the cards. Nancy Fine said that "each agency was thrilled to receive the cards. Every representative said that things have been tough this year and that having these gifts will significantly impact the lives of children in our local community."

On behalf of the Deacons, thank you. ●

ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY: WHO TELLS OUR STORY?

STORY plays a vital part of every society. It is in the Bible that we have been given the Story of how God made the world and calls us into relationship. There are many exciting and beloved stories about the men, women, and children whose lives populate the pages of the Old and the New Testament. Through their stories we have learned so much.

What is your story? What would you like to have people know about you? How would you like your story to be heard? There are wonderful things about each of us that no one really knows. One of the joys of our lives is sharing those stories.

For the month of February, from 10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. on Sunday mornings, you are invited to join an Adult Education Opportunity. This class will be led by Greg Rapier, Doug Hood, Connie Talcott Smith, and Grace Hood. We will start with how the story of Jesus came to life. Then, we will be given the chance to ask ourselves how we would like our stories to be spoken in our presence and after we are gone. We will be given a chance to record these. Our class will end with a social time of sharing.

More information will be coming with a chance to sign up for this unconventional and fun opportunity. If you are interested, put this on your calendar! ●

SING WITH US THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Each Christmas season, churches world-wide present pageants retelling the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. Many are elaborate adult productions, often featuring live animals. The 2022 performance presented by the Children's Choir was equally as joyful! The pageant provided the perfect opportunity for our church families to gather, reminding us all that the birth of Jesus Christ is the greatest birthday ever celebrated. Under the direction of Birgit Fioravante, the children wore stunning costumes, made by a team of hard-working volunteers. With the help of shepherd Grace Hood, a herd of lambs and cows delighted the entire congregation. Many weeks were spent rehearsing parts and music, re-telling the Greatest Story Ever Told as only children can tell it. Through the innocence of the children, we are reminded of the innocence of the newborn Christ child, sent to save us all. ●



UPCOMING MISSION OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAM EVENTS

First Delray has long been known for its mission outreach, and our Mission Outreach Ministry Team invites you to participate in a number of activities as we kick off 2023. Put your faith into action:

JANUARY – be part of a work team traveling to Faith Presbyterian Church, Cape Coral, FL. This will be a one day trip to Cape Coral on Saturday, January 14th to help Faith Presbyterian and its members as they recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Ian in September. We will be working on a variety of projects. Designated individuals will drive participants.

FEBRUARY – donate non-perishable items for CROS Ministries' food pantries. This is one of two months each year that we collect food for them, the other month being October.

MARCH – see how Mission funds help our local community. We will tour four agencies in Delray Beach that receive funds from First

Delray. On March 9th we plan to visit the Boys and Girls Club, the Achievement Center, the Drug Abuse Foundation, and Wayside House. Lunch will be provided and we'll be car-pooling.

Help children in our community sleep better. We'll be partnering again with the Pajamas and Books project to benefit one of the agencies (to be determined) that we help support. All you need to do is donate a pair of pajamas and a book for a child. Children sleep better when they know someone cares enough to provide them with new pajamas and a bedtime book to read or have read to them.

“My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it?... As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.” James 2:14, 26 (Common English Bible)

If you are interested in being part of this Ministry, please contact the church office (561-276-6338). ●



FILL A BAG, FEED A FAMILY

These days you can't turn on the news or read a news article without hearing about how the economy is impacting people. People like Jane, who is a single mother of an 11-year-old. "My rent almost doubled a month ago. Now, with the cost of everything else going up too like gas and food, it is getting really scary. A friend convinced me that there was no shame in seeking help." Jane found the food pantry run by Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS Ministries) on the internet.

Your food donations to CROS Ministries make a difference in the lives of people in our local community. February is one of the two months that we concentrate on collecting canned or boxed, unopened, unexpired, and non-perishable food items.



Suggested items include:

- Peanut Butter
- Canned Meat – Tuna, Chicken, Ham
- Boxed Pasta
- Bagged or Boxed Rice
- Dry Beans
- Canned Fruits and Vegetables
- Canned Soup
- Canned Sauces
- Other non-perishable items

Food may be left in the church lobby on Sunday mornings, or on the cart outside of the Sanctuary doors by the covered circle during the workweek. If you prefer not to shop during this time, please consider making a monetary donation in the form of a check payable to "CROS Ministries" and place it in the offering box or mail it to the church office.

Your generosity and compassion can impact individuals and families in our community. Thank you for your support. ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PER CAPITA)

In case you are wondering what the blue envelope near the beginning of your 2023 offering envelope box is for, you are not alone. “Per Capita” is the assessment that each congregation pays for each church member recorded on their membership rolls. It is assessed by our denomination (Presbyterian Church, USA). Per capita enables Presbyterians to mutually and equitably share the eccleastical and administrative costs of sustaining our witness to Christ - as a sign of the covenant that binds us together. These expenses are rounded out to \$40 per member for 2023.

Even though our Per Capita expense is included in our operating budget, we need your help to ease the financial burden this places on the church budget. Paying your per capita does make a difference when our congregation’s total assessment for 2023 is \$30,591. *Thank you to those who choose to help.* ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PARKING STICKER)

One of the benefits of membership at the church is the blue parking sticker. Mounted on the inside of the front or back window of your car, wherever it is easiest to reach, this sticker is a signal that your car belongs on the church lot for non-Sunday events. Since the east parking lot is leased to a valet company, this sticker is a visual clue to them that you are a member and therefore entitled to park in the lot.

Our parking lot, located on the west side of Gleason Street across the street from the front of the Sanctuary, is leased to the City of Delray Beach for their use, other than on Sunday mornings. Our blue parking sticker is not a substitute for paying for metered parking in that lot and you will receive a ticket from the city. The visual reminder that this parking lot is reserved for church events is the large Church Parking sign by the entrance.

Everyone attending worship can park in the church parking lots on Sunday mornings and a parking sticker is not required. If you are a member of the church and are in need of a new parking sticker, contact Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338). ●

RENEW YOUR SPIRIT WITH ART!!

Calling all artists and those who love art and/or just enjoy a great fellowship opportunity! We are gearing up for our first Art + Fellowship event on March 4-5, 2023.

Have you ever stood in front of a painting, sculpture, photograph, or piece of pottery or jewelry and realized as you walked away that you felt lighter, happier – renewed? Even if you have had this realization, you may not have related it to your spiritual health, **but art IS healing and uplifting** – and who can't use a bit of this these days?

What if this experience were coupled with a chance to share the art and enjoyment with artists and friends in our church community? That's what Art + Fellowship is offering.

Take a look at just a small sample of the art being created by those in the First Presbyterian community that is pictured in this article. It's beautiful. It makes you think of the beauty that is in God's world and the gifts given to many in our Congregation. Come and see more works that will lift your spirit, and at the same time, have the chance to get to know people who may be sitting right at the end of the pew you usually occupy!

Artists Please Apply!

This event is to recognize and showcase artists, 18 years of age and older, within the congregation and organizations of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Registration closes on Sunday, February 5th, and a maximum of 20 entries will be accepted. Make sure to fill out your entry form on the church website under "Upcoming Events" as soon as possible.



Everyone!

Put these dates on your calendar now!

- **Saturday, March 4th from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. – Opening Celebration and Reception**
- **Sunday, March 5th from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. and noon to 1 p.m. – Fellowship and Exhibit Viewing**

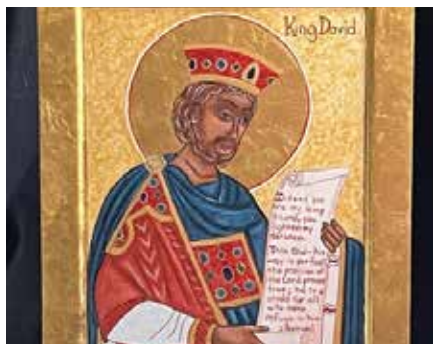
Plan to take part – in whatever way you choose – in this great fellowship-building experience! ●



Photograph by Donna VanHorn



Paintings by Joyce Mauney



Icon by Pat Stern



Jewelry by Mary Ellen Luthy



Painting by Nancy Graham

ALL ARE WELCOME AT THE LORD'S TABLE

For 2023, Communion will be celebrated on the following dates: January 1st, February 5th, March 5th, Maundy Thursday April 6th, May 7th, June 4th, July 2nd, August 6th, September 3rd, October 1st, November 5th, and December 3rd. ●

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR

The Center for Christian Studies
presents
"Can Retirement Be Purposeful?"
With Michael Brown and Rob Tanner
March 19th at 4 p.m.

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

Ash Wednesday, February 22nd, is the beginning of Lent when we ready ourselves for Easter. Join us at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary for our Ash Wednesday service. We will read Scripture, raise our voices in song, and consider the gift of God's grace. ●

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Our Annual Congregational Meeting is on Sunday, February 26, 2023, immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service. ●

WE ARE LOOKING FOR WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY MODERATORS

The search is on for one or more moderators for Women's Bible Study! The Monday Morning Women's Bible Study will continue to meet on Zoom, but there is interest in starting a daytime group that meets in person. There is also interest in starting an evening group for women who are at work during the day that could meet either on Zoom or in person.

No experience is necessary, just a desire to talk, pray, and grow your faith with other women.

To help you get started, the video studies and leader's guides that the Monday Morning Zoom group has used over the past few years are available.

Should the Holy Spirit inspire you to give this a try, please contact Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338 ext. 10, or nancyfine@firstdelray.com) or Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com). ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Seacrest Scrub Nature Preserve.

I have driven past this sign along Seacrest Drive in the heart of Boynton Beach dozens of times on my way back and forth to Bethesda Hospital from our home in Delray Beach. Although always intrigued by this seemingly small wilderness space in the midst of homes and churches, I have never had the time to stop. Today, as this year is nearing its end and a new year is about to begin, my husband and I seek out this place to say a thank you. A thank you to a God who has not only walked with us through several trying months but also given us great joy as the year comes to a close. A thank you for restored health. A thank you for new life.

Once we walk a few yards into the park, all is scrub pine, saw palmettos, cactus, sand, and silence. We leave the paved path for the pine needle coated trail of white sugar sand which winds for more than a mile through these 54 acres of old Florida.

It is easy to imagine that this sandy ridge has changed little in the



past several hundred years. Easy to imagine that the Calusa or Calos, those indigenous people who lived here thousands of years ago, once walked where we now walk. That the scrub pine, cactus, and even the occasional scrub day flower blooming beside the path have been here since before the birth of Jesus. Not the same plants. But the same plant families—plants and trees continually replaced by new life.

New life. Today, new life for us is Isla Kathleen Sweeney, our first grandchild. For Mary and Joseph, all those years ago, the new life was their firstborn son, Jesus. Today, I wonder what the future holds for Isla. I am convinced that Mary, although told by the angel Gabriel that Jesus was the Son of God and would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:33,35), still wondered about the particulars of what lay ahead for him. Probably you, like me, have heard many sermons preached speculating on how Mary felt about her pregnancy and the birth of her son. One of my favorite songs, *Mary Did You Know*, purports to question the virgin mother about her knowledge of her son's future. Unlike Mary, I have no idea of even the broad brush strokes of Isla's future life.

Chattering in the tops of the trees alongside the path breaks into my thoughts and causes me to pause. A brown squirrel sits on a branch to our left, then decides to join his neighbor perched in a tree to our right. He races upside down along the branch before leaping effortlessly from tree to tree, his white throat and stomach exposed, his bushy tail spread like a parachute.

Grace and joy. I would wish these for baby Isla.

The squirrels vanish in the canopy of tall, skinny evergreen scrub pine. A few steps farther ahead we follow a curve to the right, and there, blocking our path, is a gopher tortoise. His trademark shovel-like front legs are planted firmly on the ground. His head extended, he stares at us for a moment, then, his gaze never wavering, he quickly draws his head back into his shell. Captivated by this rare sighting, I can only stare back.

I have read that gopher tortoises are an endangered species, tracing their family trees back to land tortoises that walked southeastern North America more than 60 million years ago. Left alone to thrive in this habitat, the fellow in front of me will likely live to be 90 years old. Longevity. I would wish this for Isla, too.

Carefully skirting the now stationary tortoise, my husband and I continue our walk. I thank the God that walks beside us for this place and his steadfast love over the past year. And I realize that the greatest wish I have for our new grandchild Isla is that she, too, knows that her God is ever beside her and that she never walks alone.

I pray for you this same prayer: that in the coming year, no matter where you find yourself—whether in a scrub pine forest, a hospital room, or holding a brand-new life in your arms—you feel God's constant presence as you walk through life's joys and sorrows. ●

by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

REFLECTIONS ON A PILGRIMAGE NOT YET TRAVELED

I yank the cord on my mower then fire up the My Camino podcast. It's a favorite. The host interviews someone each week who has walked the Camino de Santiago, a series of pilgrimages across northern Spain converging at the cathedral where Saint James is rumored to be interred.

I'm planning to walk this 500-mile route during my sabbatical next year. This podcast is part of my training. As I mow, it blocks out the noise, gives me something to do. So I slip on my earbuds and walk. Pretend like I'm there.

Today's podcast is filled with all sorts of platitudes—little nuggets that are deep and spiritual and true—but to tired, cynical ears they can sound a little trite. Think Paulo Coelho.

It's real hot today and I'm wearing black which makes it even hotter. I'm grateful I swapped out my old push mower for something self-propelled, but I'm struggling. It's midday, mid-August, in South Florida, a holy trinity of sweat.

The platitudes keep coming. *Tourists demand; pilgrims are*

grateful... We carry all our fears on our backs... The real Camino doesn't begin until you get home...

I keep on mowing.

We have a mango tree in our backyard. We prune the higher branches and let the lower ones grow so my wife can pick them without a ladder and share them with our son. Mowing around this tree is always a bit of a dance, ducking under low branches and angling the blade so it doesn't clip any roots. I can never get through this part without messing up the lines on my mow. This is where my Zen Garden ideal collapses into something childlike and etched in crayon.

Today's mango tango goes perfectly—until a spiderweb from a lower branch wraps around my forehead and I jerk to get it out, letting go of the latch that keeps the mower running, so I've got to prime and pull it all over again. A few minutes later, I conquer the tree but the mowing lines are all jagged, so I remind myself mowing for perfect lines is stupid. I'm grateful the tree's hidden in the backyard and not out front.

The podcast continues. They're finishing the interview, but I've got a good thirty minutes of mowing

in front of me, so I set the next podcast in the series to autoplay. I try to get lost in northern Spain, reach that trance-state where I'm no longer thinking; just acting.

One more question, the host says. *Any advice for someone walking the Camino for the first time?*

The guest thinks about it. Then she says thoughtfully—another platitude—*remember to turn around. Every once in a while, take a second to appreciate all you've accomplished. The vantage point looking back on the road traveled is always different than it was looking forward.*

I unclench my hands and let the mower die. Wipe away my sweat. And I physically turn around. My mind hasn't escaped to northern Spain; it's here, rooted. My house. My yard. The dirt where my kid plays. The mango tree where he picks fruit. I look back at the tree, at the lawn mowed imperfectly, the scattered patches of overlooked grass, and I'm filled with gratitude. I smile. Take a moment to myself. Then I fire up the mower and keep walking. ●

The Community Church by the Sea

33 Gleason Street, Delray Beach, Florida 33483
(561) 276-6338

This church magazine is available online at www.firstdelray.com. If you are interested in receiving an electronic copy of this publication, please email Nancy Fine at nancyfine@firstdelray.com

Sunday Morning Worship Service

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

*There will be only one worship service
at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning,
January 1st*

