

THE SPIRE

Children's
Table

Your Church Magazine

March / April 2025





NURTURE FAITH

by Dr. Doug Hood

Co-Pastor

DESTRUCTIVE REGRETS

“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.’”

John 11:21 (Common English Bible)

Here is an example of the destructive nature of regret. Martha has lost her brother, Lazarus. Rather than accepting that death is inevitable for each of us, that Lazarus’ death was not the result of an unfortunate accident or tragedy, Martha begins to question what could have been done; what might have been executed differently that would have prevented this loss. Martha has engaged in the most common form of grief, the “If only...” cycle of questioning that impedes healing. We are familiar with this form of grief; “If only you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.” “If only I had arranged things differently.” “If only I had made a different choice, taken another turn.” We recognize Martha’s sentiment as our own. It is a response that flows from unnecessary and harmful personal responsibility.

This appearance of grief is usually born on the morning after a loss or crisis. And it sometimes continues until we draw our final breath—holding us in an unwarranted prison of self-blame. It is a sorrow that drains away vital strength, a grief that consumes our life. The crippling result is the loss of an inward peace and the capacity to meaningfully live for others. Others who love us, who look to us for encouragement, strength, and direction are deprived of our friendship. We are simply crushed under needless regret. “If only I had called the doctor earlier.” “If only I had noticed the signs, had paid more attention.” One devastating loss now precipitates another. We may still have breath in our lungs but no longer do we bring value to our homes, our communities, or to our network of relationships.

Suppose for a moment that there was something we could have done. Suppose that we could have made a different choice or might have taken another course of action. What then? The question that presses from this passage of scripture is, who is our God? Martha identifies Jesus as “Lord.” What does the lordship of Jesus mean for us? Martha’s profession of faith, of her belief in Jesus’ capacity as Lord, startles. It is a faith in a lord that has limited ability. She confesses—though unintentionally—a belief that Jesus’ redemptive power is only available while Lazarus remained alive, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.” But her brother has died. Hope in anything more

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THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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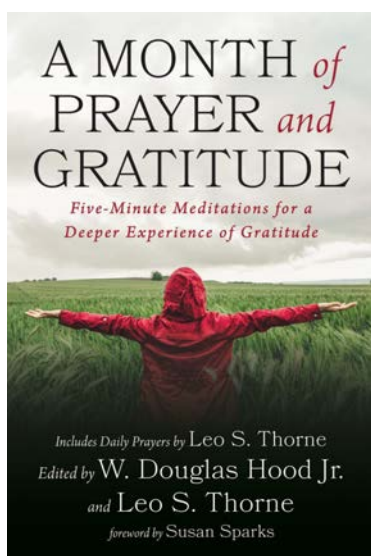
SPECIAL THANKS:
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If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office. Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.

is abandoned. Nothing more can be done, apparently even by Jesus. Jesus didn't arrive in time.

The Bible tells us that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. There has been considerable conjecture as to why Jesus wept. The Bible remains silent on this question. Some have suggested that Jesus simply gave expression to the natural human response to the loss of a dear friend. Others have offered the suggestion that Lazarus' death provided an entrance into paradise, to everlasting life with God, and now, Jesus was about to take that away by bringing Lazarus back to life. Each of these suggestions completely ignore what Jesus heard from the lips of Martha, "if you had been here." Jesus heard an incomplete faith, "if only." The very gospel of Jesus' power is that things that are broken are repaired. If unintentionally we have gone astray, Jesus is the one who makes the crooked straight and gives life where the world only sees death.

Forgive our incomplete faith, O Lord. Remove from us regret that darkens our sorrow and increases the weight of loss. Restore our hope in your power to heal what has been bruised and restore what has been taken away. Amen. ●



“Of all the devotions available on the market, this is a must have to explore a more enriched prayer and faith journey.”

~ Elizabeth Wilson Manahan, Pastor, Chula Vista Presbyterian Church ~ ●

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Palm Sunday Worship Services

in the Sanctuary
Sunday, April 13th
9 a.m. and 11 a.m.

Maundy Thursday Worship Service

in the Sanctuary
Thursday, April 17th
7 p.m.

Easter Sunday Worship Services

in the Sanctuary
Sunday, April 20th
9 a.m. and 11 a.m.





by Grace Cameron Hood

Director of Children and Family Ministry

EASTER EGG EGGSTRAVAGANZA

The annual Easter Egg Eggstravaganza will be on April 13th following the 11 a.m. service. We will start with a pizza luncheon and then on to an egg hunt. You are invited to join the fun, so put this on your calendar now! Please watch the bulletins and website for more information as the time approaches. ●



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Children's Program, *God's Amazing Kids*, is going strong! Nursery, Bible Bunch, Sunday School, and God Squad are growing and learning! ●



Rachel Therrell has joined our staff on a part-time basis to be part of the ministry to Children and Families. She and her girls have been part of the life of First Delray for several years. She comes with many years of experience with children. Be sure to welcome her to the Ministry!

Sunday School continues to grow in an exciting way. Sandy McGilvray and Marianne Darby share the teaching of the 1st-4th graders. Sandy and Marianne have a fun and engaging leadership manner. This year they are continuing to learn more about the life of Jesus.



The God Squad (5th grade and up) has also sustained growth. This group has been using a variety of material, but is now concentrating on going over the Story of the whole Bible. We are still in the Old Testament but making progress!



A special thanks goes to Iva Branscombe and Alice Barrett for their faithfulness to the children of the church as they lead Bible Bunch for the younger children (ages 3 through kindergarten). Alice and Iva are excited to have Allison Potter join them as a leader. Her energy and love for the children is exciting.

Our nursery care and leadership has grown and developed. A number of our teenagers are working and volunteering their time in the nursery. Caroline Calder and Ashlyn Strippel have been with our nursery for a number of years. A number of wonderful ladies have also stepped up to be substitutes.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING 2025

Our One Great Hour of Sharing offering this year is being dedicated to the Caridad Center.

Caridad Center in Boynton Beach was founded in 1989 by two educators, with support from First Delray, who saw their students, most from migrant farm families, coming to school hungry and in need of medical assistance. Caridad is now the largest free and charitable clinic in Florida, and one of the largest in the nation. Caridad provides comprehensive medical, vision, dental, behavioral health, and social services to uninsured and underserved children and families of Palm Beach County.

When I joined First Delray in 1991, the Christmas Eve offering was dedicated to help purchase a trailer to house Caridad Center. Today it boasts a large campus with multiple clinics. Years later, we funded the equipping of its vision clinic. Through your giving, we have been able to financially assist the Center annually all these years. One of our Mission Outreach Members, Catherine Barton, visited Caridad Center recently, and I'd like to share her observations:

I visited Caridad Center ... and had a complete tour of the facility.

There was a full but actively rotating waiting room populated by families with young children, senior citizens, and working men and women.

The center provides the very basic yet thorough medical evaluation services—serving as a “Primary Care” facility for folks who cannot afford to go to a private practice. Caridad is akin to a privately funded clinic or facility, it is clean, well organized, respectful, and well-run.

In my tour I saw that the Center was in construction. They were carving out additional patient services areas as they expand both their Vision and their Dental patient treatment areas. They also suffered some flood damage from leaking roofs, so there was an overall “renovation” type of activity throughout the building.



I can't begin to tell you how impressed I was with how professionally Caridad Center operates. Every patient was greeted with a smile from check-in through to treatment services—not only does Caridad deliver valuable medical preventative care and treatment, but their social worker staff is mindful of warning signs (malnutrition, diabetes, other) and provides a counseling feature to the treatment that each patient and caregiver receives.

The vision clinic served over 1,100 patients last year and is experiencing increasing demand for its services, many of them requiring surgery. The increase in cases of diabetes (due to lack of proper nutrition in many cases) has led to a significant need for these eye surgeries, especially for retina attachments.

While the ophthalmologists provide free services, Caridad does not have surgical facilities on campus and must pay to use these facilities.

Our One Great Hour of Sharing Offering on Palm Sunday, April 13th, will help to fund these eye surgeries. The facility costs range from \$50 for one cataract surgery to \$5,000 for a retina attachment or cornea transplant, which can save someone's vision.

We hope you'll help provide the gift of sight to some of the less fortunate in our community. ●



PRAYER ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

When we pray on behalf of others, we allow the needs of others to take preference over our own personal needs.

This is where we stand side by side with one another to pray in strength, courage, and faith in the presence of God and support each other (our prayer partners) on behalf of others in need. When praying for another, one makes a plea and meditates before God on behalf of oneself as needed but most importantly for others desperately in need. The bible says Jesus Christ, our Lord, makes intercession for us at the right hand of God.

“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.”

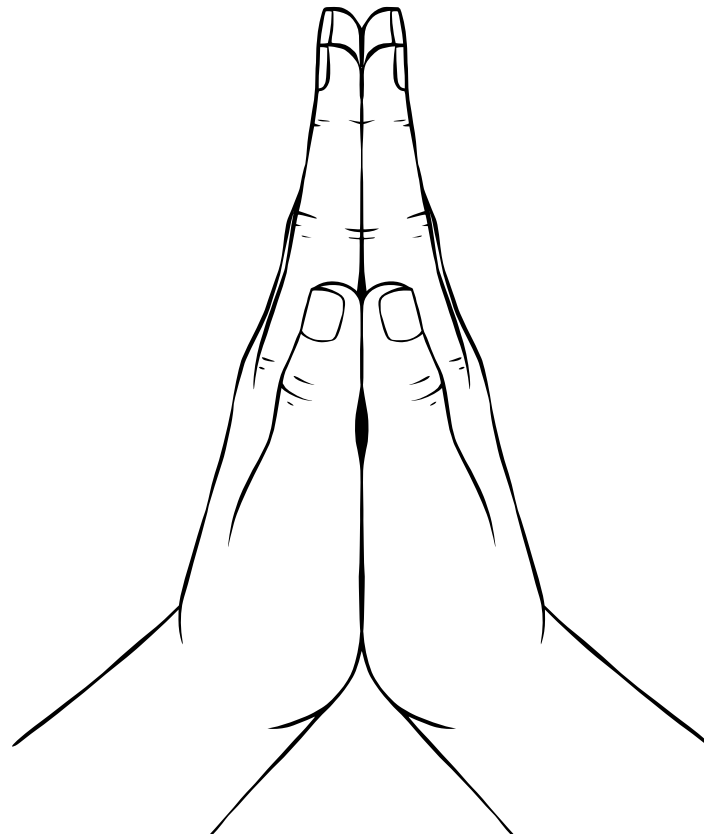
Romans 8:34 (NKJV)

“The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry and save them.”

Psalm 145: 18, 19 (NKJV)

Father, I pray that the Prayer Team and fellow believers will be strengthened in their faith as they pray for healing, wisdom, and guidance for situations and persons in need.

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. ●



GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Food for the Needy from Tom and Lynne Koontz, in memory of Thomas Jeffrey Koontz, Jr.; and from Gail Richter Jessell, in memory of Todd Richter.

Music Fund from Neill Trimble.

Remembrance Fund from Heather Dennis, in honor of Merrill Beveridge; from Dale Pahlke, in memory of Jim Pahlke; from Courtland Weisleder, in memory of Zena Willard; and from Gena Willard, in memory of Zena Willard. ●



ETERNAL LIVES

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

– Jennifer Ambrose –
November 18, 2024

– Robert Koch –
November 28, 2024

– Ron Blubaugh –
January 20, 2025

– Cliff Roberson –
February 20, 2025



SESSION REPORT

During December and January, the Session received nine new members and approved a baptism. ●



NEW MEMBERS

Joe Arvay

Kathy Arvay

Daisy Chin-Lor

Steven Haught

Susan Haught

Kash Kanjanintu

Paula Woodell

WELCOME

by Glenn Barton

The Welcoming Ministry at First Delray

“And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God’s diverse gifts.”

1 Peter 4:10 (Common English Bible)

The WELCOME TEAM began in May 2021. From the first day, it has filled a special purpose—*greeting members and visitors at the Lobby doors*. Serving on the Welcome Team provides the unique opportunity to be the FIRST person to greet a member or visitor when they arrive; *the greeter’s smile might be just what was needed for that individual*.

In January we added seven new people to our team! We welcome the following people to the Welcome Ministry:

Bruce and Laurel Bodie
Gail Carpenter
Cabell Curran and Anne-Randolph Harrell
Wendy Jones
Connie Timmons

Schedules are offered one to two months in advance. Greeters usually serve once every four to six weeks, and we are always looking for new people to join the team. This is a wonderful and enjoyable way to serve with a small commitment.

Please contact Carolyn Kettle (recruiting/scheduling for the Welcome Team) to join this ministry—to welcome people warmly and sincerely into this place of worship. Reach out to Carolyn (561-504-9550 or carolynskettle@gmail.com) for more information or to join the team!

Did you know...

2025 marks the centennial anniversary of our church! First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach was organized in 1925, meeting in different places and using supply ministers. In 1926, Rev. James H. McCormick was the first installed minister, and 66 people joined and became the cornerstone of our congregation. ●

by Jen Buce

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

We The Christmas Eve offering collected for the Montreat Conference Center’s campus will help with the damage from Hurricane Helene. Elated with gratitude and joy, First Delray collected \$17,268 for this special offering.

The Conference Center’s campus has shifted from stabilization to recovery and restoration. In fact, the Montreat Store and the Huckleberry Cafe (the “Huck”) are now both open for business. The Huck, which serves delicious ice cream and snacks, is also a gathering place for the youth to congregate and get to know each other. Other restoration and rebuilding efforts, including eighteen buildings, Lake Susan, and the nature trails, may still take months and years to completely restore. Thanks to all of you, First Delray will assist in this effort. Our youth will continue the tradition of expanding their love for God and one another.

For more information and progress updates, visit the Montreat website (montreat.org/blog). ●

The following is from A Month of Prayer and Gratitude: Five-Minute Meditations for a Deeper Experience of Gratitude.

“FOMO”

“When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.”

Matthew 6:5, 6 (Common English Bible)

“Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened. Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.”

Matthew 7:7–11 (Common English Bible)

I love the story of the five-year-old boy whose parents were having a dinner party one evening. He was on summer vacation, and he was just underfoot. He was so in his mother and father’s way that everything they did to get ready for the dinner party, the boy undid within a few seconds. The last straw was when his mother came down from getting dressed, and she looked at the dining room table, which she had set so beautifully with gorgeous flowers and all the appointments. But when she looked at that dining room table, she saw, to her horror, that the boy had eaten all of the cherries off of all of the fruit salads. That did it! The mother was livid! She grabbed a newspaper, wadded it up, and started to chase the boy around the house to give him a good whack with it! But he bounded around the house and went down the front steps and got on his hands and knees, and crawled under the front porch and he hid way in the back of the porch. The mother was about to get on her hands and knees and chase after him, but just then, the father drove in from doing a few last-minute errands, and the mother was mad and said, “Do you know what this son of yours has done? He’s eaten all the cherries! I want you to

crawl under that porch, and I want you to punish him, do you hear me!” The mother stomped up the steps and into the house. The father got down on his hands and crawled over toward the little boy, and as he crawled over to where his son was, he saw his two eyes way in the back under the porch, and as he crawled over nearer and nearer, he heard his little son say, “Is she after you too?”

The good news of the Gospel is that God is after us . . . but God is not after us to punish us, or to harm us, or to hurt us. The reason God is on his hands and knees is that God wants to find us in the hiding places of our lives and call us out of the darkness and into God’s marvelous light, so we are free to live and love as God meant us to live and love. And the reason God chases after us is that God is



desperate for a relationship with you and with me.

There is an acronym in our culture today that describes the nature of God. We may not see it at first, but I believe it describes the nature of God. It's the acronym FOMO, "fear of missing out." So often, young people in our culture have an appendage attached to their body, and it's their mobile phone. And any time a tweet or a text comes in, or an email or anything comes in on social media, they can't let it alone for even a second or two. They are constantly on their phone looking at it because they have a fear of missing out on this text or this tweet or whatever is going on. Now, here's the surprising news of this text for this morning, which is what Jesus is saying to us. God has FOMO. God has a fear of missing out . . . on us! God doesn't want to miss anything going on in our lives. If we're worried about something, or anxious about something, or afraid of something, God wants to know about it. God already knows about it, but God wants us to tell God about it. And if there's a challenge or a joy or something that we're ecstatic about, or we have hopes or dreams or aspirations, God wants to know about all those things too!

God does not want us to miss his wisdom, his discernment, his guidance for our lives. God sees so many people in our society who run away from God and hide

under the porch, and God comes chasing after us to guide us out of the darkness of ignorance into God's marvelous light of the knowledge of God. And God has given us an amazing vehicle to stay in touch with God every single day of our life. Do you know what that vehicle is? Prayer. Prayer is a gift from God so we may communicate with God and so that God may communicate with us. This morning on this communion Sunday, there are three important things God wants to teach us about prayer. I hope you will write these on the screen saver of your mind so that you can always call them up whenever you need them.

The first thing God wants to teach us about prayer is that prayer is an intimate conversation with God. In Palestine, when Jesus lived, the Jews took prayer very seriously. They wanted to pray every hour of the day and night, rain or shine, but there were several times a day that they appointed for prayer. The day began at six o'clock in the morning, so they set aside the third hour, nine o'clock; the sixth hour, twelve noon; the ninth hour, three o'clock; to truly focus on God. And wherever you were at the third, sixth, or the ninth hour, you should stop and pray to God. But what if you're in the marketplace, or right by the synagogue, or in a busy neighborhood street, what do you do then? Jesus said, "Don't be like hypocrites" (Matthew 6:5a) from the Greek word *hypokritos*,

which means "actor." The actors in the plays would hold up a mask in front of them so you couldn't see their face, in other words if you were wearing a mask, you were not being your authentic self. So, he said, beware of the *hypokritos*, those who wear a mask, because they're only acting like they're praying. They like to pray in the synagogue or on the street corner and the busy marketplace. They like to have everybody around when they pray, and then they raise their hands to God and they shout to God, and they may be right in the middle of the marketplace, and when they do that people might say, "Oh, that Doug Hood, isn't he religious? Isn't he righteous? Isn't he holy?" But, Jesus said if you do that you already have your reward. What I want you to do is go into your closet and pray to God in secret, so your prayer is intimate conversation with God. God wants you to tell God the desires of your heart. God wants you to be totally honest with God. What's your motivation for prayer? Is it to call attention to yourself and have people say, "Oh, you're so wonderful," or is it to be in contact with God? Prayer is a vehicle to be in communion, in contact, with the Living God of the universe. Here's the other thing, it's not that public prayer is bad. People might say, "Well then, we should never pray in public, we should never pray in a group." No, it's the motive of prayer that is the key. Is your motive so the people say, "Oh, you are so great!" or is your motive to commune with the Living God? Prayer is communication with God.

The second thing God wants to teach us about prayer is that prayer is not to change God's mind but to receive God's mind. Very important. Jesus teaches us that if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven want to give good gifts to God's children, to all of us? He says this remarkable thing, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7, 8 [KJV]) That's a





remarkable statement, for everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. To everyone who knocks, the door will be open. Now, does that mean God always gives us what we want? No! I hate to say that. See, the purpose of prayer isn't to change God's mind as if we must wrangle out of God some good gift. Jesus says God is more eager to give you good gifts than you are even to receive them. But, the purpose of prayer is to get to know God, not to change God's mind to give us good things—God's inclined to give us good things—but the key to prayer is receiving God's mind, receiving what God wants to do. So, what do we get when we pray? Now listen carefully: when we pray, we will get what we asked for, we will get what we are seeking, we will get what we are hoping to get because the thing we want to get when we pray . . . is God.

Let me illustrate. Some years ago, Suzanne and I were at Princeton Seminary with two of our dearest friends, Gary and Sara. They had a little boy the same age as our little boy Ryan, and they grew up together. They then went on to Texas and we went on to New Jersey to churches, and we heard that Corey, our friend's son, had a rare form of leukemia. Gary and Sara were in Texas, so they took Corey to the hospitals in Austin, Texas, and then they took him to MD Anderson Medical Center in Houston, and then they went to Switzerland to a famous medical center

there. All the while, they and we were all praying that Corey would be healed. We prayed in New Jersey, they prayed in Texas, congregations in California prayed, and congregations in Alabama prayed for Corey, but Corey didn't get any better. And then came the day when Corey died. Now, people all over the world were praying for Corey, so what did they get for all their prayers? Did Corey feel better? No. Was he healed physically? No. Did he come back to life after he died? No. No, no, no . . . they didn't get what they wanted . . . but what they got was the thing we always get when we pray. They got *God!* A God to give them the stamina to face the death of their son. A God to give them perseverance to keep on keepin' on amid the challenges and vicissitudes of life. They didn't want Corey to die, but God gave them the stamina to go on. And God gave them the hope that someday they will see their son alive again in the kingdom of heaven, and they believe that. So, what they realized is the resurrection is God's ultimate healing. See, they didn't get God to change God's mind. Actually . . . they got to receive God's mind, and they realized God loved them and Corey more than they loved themselves. Prayer is a mystery; it isn't just to get what we want; prayer is to receive the mind of God. Prayer is not a problem to be solved, but it's a mystery to be wondered.

Unless I miss my guess, there's

somebody here in this congregation today or watching a streaming video who is angry at God. Unless I miss my guess, there's somebody here who's prayed and prayed and prayed for something . . . college acceptance; prayed and prayed and prayed for an illness to be cured; prayed and prayed and prayed not to get a divorce, that a marriage would work together; prayed and prayed and prayed for something and God didn't seem to give you what you want. But in this text, "Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you," the tense of the verb is an aorist tense, a continuation tense, in other words—keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking and the door will be open to you. Maybe not the door you want, but the doorway to God. I say this very tenderly to some who are in the midst of some real challenges: prayer is a mystery. God does not always give us what we want, but as we keep on praying, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, we find God more faithful, we find God more loving, and we find that God gives us more strength than we ever thought was possible. Prayer is not to change God's mind; God is a good God, he wants to give us the desires of our heart, but we live in a world filled with vicissitudes, and challenges, and illness, and cancer, and leukemia like Corey died of, and actually God can operate through all these things to give us something greater than even physical healing, to give us faith to endure when all else fails. I say it so tenderly to you . . . but we tend to run away from God and crawl under the porch and never want to see God again. But, if we can just stick with God and keep praying and keep seeking and keep knocking, the door to God will always be open. I know that's tough to hear but ultimately it's the only thing that brings us comfort.

The third thing God wants us to know about prayer is that God is desperate to hear from us. In fact, God is so desperate to hear from us that God will get on God's

hands and knees and crawl over to us and seek us to call us out of the darkness into the marvelous light. In a moment, when the elders and the deacons come to your pew to serve you communion, they're going to come right to your pew, and they're going to hand you the elements. When they do, I want you to picture Jesus Christ coming right to you and remembering you and calling you by your name and saying, "Valerie, and Doug, and Kim, and Stacey, and Miller—I haven't forgotten about you, I came right to your pew today to say I'm with you in whatever it is you're facing." I want you to receive those elements remembering that God has brought them right to your pew. God is desperate to hear from you, and during that communion, when you're taking that bread and wine, I hope you will remember to talk to God honestly and openly about whatever is on your heart, and soul, and mind. God is desperate to hear from us.

Some years ago, our son, Ryan, became a plebe at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He was eighteen years old when he started Plebe Summer, and it wasn't easy. It was a six-week grueling time with the initiation into the Naval Academy rituals and Suzanne and I and our other son, Toby, took Ryan to the Naval Academy. We flew from Texas, where we were living at that time, to Philadelphia and got a rental car and we drove over to the Naval Academy. We

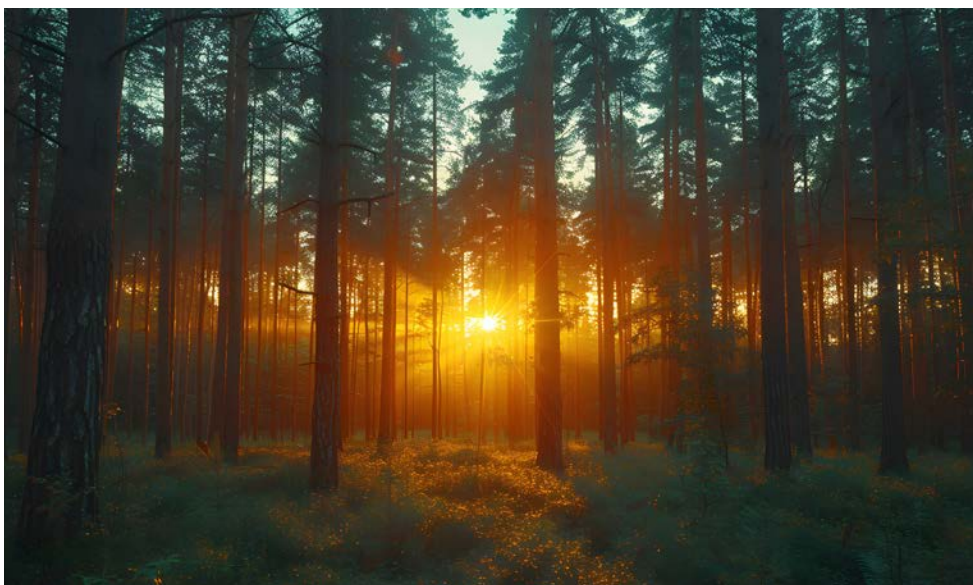
had a meal with him, and in the morning, he had to go into the Navy Yard, get his uniform, get his hair cut, and all that. And then we said goodbye to him, and we cried, and he got a tear in his eye. It wasn't easy to let him go. But we had planned a nice trip with Toby that we would go up through New England and to Boston and see some sights and then Toby would fly back to Texas for a basketball camp. Then, Suzanne and I would drive to North Carolina, where I was going to perform a wedding for the daughter of some of our dearest friends. We were going to go to that wedding and then stay through Sunday, and then we would drive leisurely from North Carolina back to Philadelphia 539 miles. But we had all day Monday to do it, it was an evening flight back to Texas . . . so it was easy to do.

So, the Friday when we got to the Naval Academy and dropped Ryan off, the superintendent said, "In nine days, a week from Sunday, between eleven a.m. and one p.m., these plebes will be able to call home, so please be there to get their phone calls. They are going to be desperate to talk to you." But see, we had planned this vacation, and we were away at the wedding. And Sunday, we're going to see our friends in Charlotte, and then Monday drive leisurely to Philadelphia. But, this call would be Sunday morning, and we wouldn't be in Texas. This was before cell phones, so what do you do? We did the wedding, hugged

the parents and the bride and groom, and we got a new flight out of Philadelphia at six-thirty a.m. on Sunday morning, and we drove all night 539 miles from Charlotte, North Carolina to Philadelphia during the wee hours of the morning from eight p.m. to five a.m. in the morning. We handed in the rental car at the airport, got on the plane, and landed in Houston. Somebody picked us up and we got home at a quarter to eleven. Ryan was supposed to call between eleven a.m. and one p.m. So, I went out to get some breakfast for Suzanne and me. I got home—we were sitting by the phone eating our breakfast and, at about eleven-thirty a.m., the phone rings. Now, we were prepared for the worst, we knew it was going to be terrible—Plebe Summer is not easy, it's particularly hard. The first six weeks are grueling, and we thought he was going to say, "I want to quit the navy, I don't like the navy, I hate the naval academy," we were prepared for the worst. And so, the phone rings, and Suzanne answers the phone, and she says, "Hi Ryan, how are you?" and he says, "I'm fine, I'm great!" and I said, "For this, we drove all night?"

But we wouldn't have missed it. Do you want to know why? Because this kid is our boy, this is our son, and we want to know his hopes, and dreams, and fears, and anxieties, and if he wanted to quit. We just wanted to hear about it; we just wanted to be a part of his life. So, if parents would drive 539 miles in the middle of the night to get to the airport and fly to Houston, Texas, to take a phone call with our son who says, "I'm fine," how much more does God want to hear from us?

I hope when you think about prayer, you don't think of it as some ethereal thing in the sky, in the clouds, way out there—somewhere. Think of it. It is right here, that God wants to know us. God has FOMO, a fear of missing out on you and me! And God doesn't want to miss us, and once we understand that truth, we understand that prayer is about connecting with God! Jesus doesn't want any of us to miss God . . . do you? ●



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Vacation Bible School is in the planning stages. Put June 9-13, 9 a.m. to noon on your calendars now! We will encourage kids to look closely at the details of God’s amazing world and magnify the greatness of God. The children will learn that God made us, forgives us, loves us, cares about us, and is faithful to keep all promises to us. The children will have their special tent home in the “Backyard”. From there, they will travel to visit Jesus, hear about Missions, and have fun adventures.

If you would like to volunteer, please contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com). ●



THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES PRESENTS

A SCHOOL OF PRAYER WITH **DR. C. CLIFTON BLACK**

On Sunday, April 6th, Dr. C. Clifton Black, the retired Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, will preach at both morning worship services. Then, at 4 p.m., he will present *A School of Prayer* in the Conference Room on the second floor of the Center for Christian Studies. Teacher, preacher, and author of twenty books and more than 200 essays, articles, and reviews, his insight about prayer will be something you won’t want to miss. ●



2025 FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH RUMMAGE SALE

Well, we've been busy! With the holidays barely behind us, the members of Holly House began their preparations for the annual Step-Above Rummage Sale. Thanks to your continued support of the sale through your donations and shopping, we had another successful sale earning almost \$24,000 for the ministry of the church.

At present, things are quiet. Cleanup from the sale is complete. All the sale paraphernalia has been stored, and our post-mortem sale meetings have been completed. Activity returns to Holly House on March 18th.

Thank you again for the continued support of our ministry. All sales proceeds go to the ministry of the church. ●





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

MISSION AGENCY TOUR MISSION AGENCY TOUR

On Thursday, March 20th, there will be an opportunity for members of the congregation to visit and learn about two of the organizations the church's mission outreach supports. We will meet at the church at 8:30 a.m. to carpool to The Soup Kitchen and Caridad Center for tours of the facilities and to hear about the impact each has on our community. Please contact Susie Canada (susancanada1105@gmail.com) by March 16th to sign up. ●



First Delray Concert Series

Music by the Sea

WHEN THINGS JUST KEEP GETTING BETTER AND BETTER...

With the Lord's help and your incredible support, the Concert Series is doing just that! This isn't just the biased view of our Concert Team: Members and friends attending the amazing Gershwin concert on January 26th were saying the same thing as they offered a standing ovation to the Krescendo Orchestra, pianist Heather Colton, pianist and conductor Don Cannarozzi, and our much-loved soloists from the First Delray music family—Mario Arévalo, Birgit Djupedal Fioravante, Neil Nelson, and Kyaunnee Richardson.

If you weren't able to attend the first concert of our second season, *An Afternoon with Gershwin*, you missed something very special. My wise musical teammates turned to two talented local arrangers for several of the afternoon's compositions, including a dazzling medley of "S'Wonderful," "Embraceable You," and "Fascinating Rhythm," played with all the elegance and panache of the 1920s and 1930s by Heather Colton and Don Cannarozzi. This was the exciting warmup for some of George Gershwin's well-known show tunes: "They Can't Take That Away from Me," sung by the full ensemble, accompanied by the Krescendo Orchestra; "Embraceable You," performed beautifully by Birgit; and "Nice Work If You Can Get It," presented with some lively dance steps by the effervescent Mario. Closing this first half of the program were three famous songs from Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess*, originally written for an all African-American cast and rendered with beautiful emotion and stage presence by Kyaunnee and Neil.

This concert was certainly a star vehicle for our two pianists, and Heather and Don led us off after intermission with a rousing two-handed "I've Got Rhythm." Mario treated us to his rendition of "Oh, Lady Be Good" (loved the hat), followed by a heartfelt "The Man I Love" sung by Birgit (after a little aside that he better show up soon!). Kyaunnee and Neil wrapped up the vocal portion of the program with delightful renditions of "I've Got a Crush on You" and "A Foggy Day (in London Town)," reminding us of how well Gershwin's songs have lived on through many decades of singers and audiences.

If I were writing a commercial for late-night TV, this is where I'd have the announcer say, "But wait, there's more!" And what a MORE it was: *Rhapsody in Blue* performed by the Krescendo Orchestra, conducted by Don, with the absolutely incredible Heather at the piano, bringing the audience to its feet to salute their outstanding rendition of what musician and bandleader Paul Whiteman commissioned and premiered at his 1924 concert, "An Experiment in Modern Music." This eclectic piece of music, that Gershwin said he thought of as "a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America," has mesmerized audiences ever since.

As always, we thank our wonderful usher, ticket sales, and sponsorship table volunteers, and make a special shout-out to the multi-talented Donna Van Horn who crafted our beautiful banners for the concert series AND is serving as our own professional photographer

(on this occasion after delivering the sermon at the two Deacon-led worship services earlier that day!).

May 8: *The Latin Divos Return!*
October 26: *The American Spirit*

Luke 6:38 tells us, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap.” Still, I don’t think any of us ever anticipated what would come of the small seed of an idea for a new music mission that we planted back in the summer and fall of 2023! So many people have given their financial help, their time, and their talents to making “Music by the Sea” a success that by the time you read this article, our March concert, *Give My Regards to Broadway*, **is sold out**. This collection of songs, reprising a very popular theme from our first concert series, will trace the evolution of Broadway show tunes through the decades.

Need we say more? If you are “thinking” of getting tickets for the final two shows of the year, please don’t wait!

Tickets can be reserved via the church website (firstdelray.com/concerts/reserve-concert-tickets) and paid for with cash, check or credit card on the day of the concert. They can also be purchased any Sunday morning at the Welcome Center (until they run out!), where you’ll also find a brochure describing the 2025 season and sponsorship information.

We hope to see you at the upcoming concerts—and bring your friends! Concertgoers who are not members gape in amazement when we tell them we get to listen to these soloists every Sunday... and we follow up with an invitation to share this blessing by joining us then too! ●

RENEW & REJOICE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN CREATIVE GIVING SEMINARS

Join us on **Sunday, March 16th at 10 a.m.** and **Tuesday, March 25th at 7 p.m.** for our Creative Giving Seminars to find out ways to creatively give to our *Renew & Rejoice* Capital Campaign. The events are in the Conference Room on the second floor of the Center for Christian Studies. Contact Henry Hagan (henry@henryhagan.com) for more information.



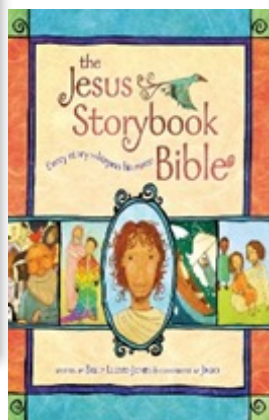
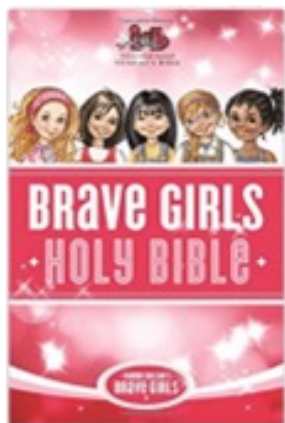
by Maria Graham

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

The start of the Lenten season is fast approaching. On March 10th, the Monday Morning Women's Bible Study will begin a six-week video study *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week* led by author, professor, and biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine.

Jesus' final days were full of risk. Every move he made was filled with anticipation, danger, and the potential for great loss or great reward. Jesus risked his reputation when he entered Jerusalem in a victory parade. He risked his life when he dared to teach in the Temple. His followers risked everything when they left behind their homes, or anointed him with costly perfume. We take risks as we read and re-read these stories, finding new meanings and new challenges.

We meet on Zoom at 10 a.m. on Monday mornings. Please contact Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com) for an email invitation to join us as we pray, learn, and laugh together. Newcomers are always welcome! ●



THE CHILDREN'S TABLE

Worship Kits are available for little worshippers. The Children's Table is also a resource for the entire family. Many times parents ask about appropriate Bibles for their child. A variety of Bibles are on the Children's Table. Feel free to stop by and browse! ●

by Donna Van Horn

MEET YOUR DEACON SUNDAY

Sunday, March 23rd, will be your next chance to Meet Your Deacon and share some breakfast goodies. Come to Fellowship Hall at 10 a.m., between services, and share in deacon-led fellowship. Stay after the 9 a.m. service, or come early before the 11 a.m. service. The Deacons will be ready to welcome you. ●



by Nathanael Hood



CONCLAVE

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University;
MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary

The What is it about the Vatican City and the inner workings of the Catholic Church that so inspires secular art? There have been no shortages of films set in the holy city, from the dignified (e.g. *The Two Popes* [2019]) to the ludicrous (e.g. *Angels & Demons* [2009]). It's been the subject of television shows, miniseries, and even video games such as the recently released *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle* which sees players punch and pummel their way through the Vatican's nooks and crannies as Harrison Ford. Is it the pageantry? The weight, knowledge, and secrets of nearly two thousand years of history? Perhaps there's an irresistible hunger for intrigue among religious outsiders, a belief that an institution as ancient and powerful as the Vatican must have its secrets and intrigues. Edward Berger's *Conclave*, a stirring thriller based on Robert Harris' 2016 novel, is the latest addition to this line of entertainments. And while the film isn't necessarily religious—indeed, the film has come under fire from several official Catholic

publications—it is nonetheless sincere in its treatment of religion and its depiction of those who shoulder the faith for nearly 1.4 billion Catholics around the world.

The film keeps the political machinations and inner workings of the Vatican mercifully simple for non-Catholics. A pope dies. A conclave of cardinals must assemble to elect a new one. The man tasked with running the show is one Thomas Lawrence (Ralph Fiennes), a man of solemn devotion to duty and very human doubts about his faith. As voting begins, favorites emerge among the pack of candidates. There's a blowhard traditionalist from Italy who resents all the social progress the Church has made since the reforms of Vatican II. There's an American liberal who wants to expand the role of women in the Church. There's a Nigerian conservative vying to become the first African pope. And there's a Canadian moderate who's not above a little wheeling and dealing with his fellow cardinals. As vote after vote

leads to deadlock, Lawrence finds himself untangling conspiracies that might make or break the most popular candidates.

What makes *Conclave* unique is how seriously and earnestly it considers the theological implications of its intrigues. Time and again the point is made that the cardinals are fallible human beings, each with their own flaws and shortcomings. There can be no perfectly moral candidate, so how much sin is too much to disqualify someone from becoming pope? Can decades of penance and devoted ministry wash away scandals that are decades old? Is Machiavellian politicking among voters justifiable if it means the “right” candidate gets elected? Are the burdens of the Holy See too great for any one man at all? These are the questions that bubble beneath the surface of the film, keeping it from becoming nakedly sensationalist despite several shocking twists and turns. The result is a tense thriller with a heart, a brain, and a soul. ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Speeding down I-95 after spending a few days with friends at Jensen Beach, I watch a motorcycle wait until the last split-second to weave across three lanes of traffic and exit. Speeds of 90 miles an hour are common here. However, ahead, the driver of a gray sedan putzes along at the posted minimum speed of 40.

“I can’t stand any more of this traffic right now!” I tell my husband. “Let’s get off the interstate and take a break. I know just the place.”

We exit I-95 at Okeechobee Boulevard, take the Royal Park Bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway, then immediately turn left into the Society of the Four Arts parking lot. Friends of ours call this place their secret garden and claim that once you step through these gates, the frenzy of daily life evaporates. It’s true for me as I enter the narrow pathway into these secluded grounds.

The Chinese garden to my left is a quiet, tranquil space. A cross-legged Buddha overlooks a pond dotted with

water lilies. Exotic bamboos, flowers, and ferns grace the sides of the pond. A red plaque on the garden wall reminds me that the Chinese created gardens as retreats, quiet spaces to find relief from tension. The lone occupant of this quiet space, I sit and tell God of my day so far. Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. The wind whispers in my ear and I feel his presence surround me. I love you, Lord, I respond as I softly sing the contemporary hymn. I feel his love for me and draw strength from him to face the trying rush hour traffic I know is still ahead.

I rise and step through a pair of red doors into the Moonlight Garden, where the sweet, almost musky odor of jasmine wafts through the air. Here, a path leads me past clusters of fishtail sword ferns and golden cane palms. Winding through the other subtropical gardens here, I encounter a myriad of familiar and unknown plants. Purple and white bougainvillea bushes and bright pink begonias vie for attention with wild banana plants and the gigantic leaves

of golden elephant ear. These gardens were originally planted in the 1940s by the Garden Club of Palm Beach to demonstrate to transplanted northerners the diversity of flora that thrive here in south Florida.

I turn east and approach the large fountain where David Turner’s centerpiece sculpture captures the grace of a leaping dolphin and her calf. Ahead to my left lies my favorite sculpture: Sir Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt sit informally on a bench in smiling conversation. Sculptor Lawrence Holofcener left just enough space between the two allies for me to sit and rest a moment. Here, I gaze about the Philip Hultar Sculpture Garden, an approximately three-acre space with such diverse works as Anna Hyatt Huntington’s *Passing the Torch* and Philip Jackson’s *Sior Maschera*.

Leaving Churchill and Roosevelt to resume their interrupted conversation, I walk the short distance to the north side of the sculpture garden, where the noise from Poinciana Boulevard competes with Neptune’s soothing fountain. The sound nudges me to return to my car and the road home. As I walk toward the exit under one of the beautiful ironwood pergolas ablaze with deep purple bougainvillea, I resolve to drive leisurely home along the ocean via A1A.

Looking back over my shoulder as I exit, I imagine what it would be like to live near here—to walk these peaceful gardens every day. Perhaps you live near here and can commune with God every day in this lovely private space. If not, I encourage you to travel to this secret garden. Let the frenzied pace of South Florida’s season slip away as you walk and talk with your God. ●





by Rev. Greg Rapier

Co-Pastor

IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

In early 2020 I curated a watchlist for myself. It's titled *100 years, 100 movies*, and in it, I covered as many of my cinematic blind spots as possible, working through the list chronologically with ten films from each decade. The whole experience was an absolute delight. I cannot express enough how satisfying—and how fascinating—it was to watch cinematic language evolve over time.

The earliest films had this wonderful spirit of playfulness as people were learning how to use cameras for the first time. A few hours at a time, I watched this fledgling artform take shape, moving from short films to sprawling epics, black and white to color, and silent films to sound. I watched storytelling grow more sophisticated, from simple setups to intricate narratives. I watched special effects progress from quaint camera tricks to practical effects to CGI. And I watched the world evolve too.

This was most evident in the war movies—everything from *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) to *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) to *The Deer Hunter* (1978). You could feel the effects of the two world wars and their aftermath, the weight of economic recessions, and the pulse of

shifting cultural trends. What was taboo in the fifties was celebrated in the sixties. The technology of the eighties was archaic by the nineties. Changing fashion, changing attitudes—everything is change.

But what about God? Does God change? Does God evolve with us too?

The Psalms tell us that God's steadfast love endures forever, and most of our theology tells us that God is unchanging. After all, if you're perfect, what would you need to improve? And yet, scripture also gives us these striking moments—moments like Genesis 9, where God after the great flood seems to learn a lesson and promises to protect all of creation. Moments like Exodus 32, where Moses pleads with God, and God changes God's mind. Moments like the Gospels, where God, through Jesus Christ, chooses to reveal God's self in a new and unexpected way.

I don't know if God changes. But I know this: our perception of God changes all the time. You see it play out in scripture. Peter first sees Jesus as a teacher but later calls him *Messiah*. The disciples panic during a raging storm, wondering if Jesus even cares, only to marvel moments later as he

calms the sea. Thomas demands proof of the resurrection, then, moments later, falls to his knees, shouting out God's name.

Again and again, people encounter God, and their understanding shifts. Their faith deepens. Their eyes open. And if that's true for them, why wouldn't it be true for us? Shouldn't our faith progress just like everything else? Shifting faith doesn't mean that God has changed, only that we are open to being changed ourselves. Shifting faith is a sign of health, of a dynamic relationship with God—not a sign of failure, but of a living, growing faith.

The first filmmakers saw the world through a fixed frame—black and white, silent, limited by the technology of their time. But even then, there was a spirit of play. Of curiosity. And with that play and curiosity, the medium grew—the frame widened, the colors deepened, and new dimensions of storytelling emerged. What would it mean if we treated God the same? If we read the Bible curiously? If we treated our devotions with both reverence and play? Maybe we too can widen our frames, add color to our lives, and catch a glimpse of something we could have never imagined. ●

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Sunday Morning Worship Services

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

