

THE SPIRE

*Your
Church
Magazine*



December 2020



NURTURE FAITH

by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Senior Pastor

NOT WAITING FOR HAPPINESS

“I’m not saying this because I need anything, for I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor. I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.”

Philippians 4:11-13 (Common English Bible)

Have you noticed how many people have delayed their happiness? They seem to believe that if they can achieve a little more success, acquire a little more wealth, or marry the right person then they will possess happiness. Happiness, they believe, is what follows effort, and time, and, perhaps, a little luck. It is as though happiness is somewhere out in front of everyone who is industrious enough to pursue it. Happiness is something to grasp, they believe, and their minds remain fixed upon it until they have taken ownership of it. Striving day upon day toward the possession of happiness, what they miss is that the secret of happiness is already present in the lives of those who long for it.

Paul’s letter to the Philippian Church provides the secret of happiness – as God’s people, we are to live in humility, looking out for others more than for ourselves. That is a great reversal of the commonly accepted formula for happiness. Essentially, Paul teaches that if we are always chasing after happiness, happiness always remains beyond our grasp. On the other hand, if we occupy ourselves with looking out for others, adding value to other people and promoting their welfare, happiness quietly joins God’s people and takes-up residence in them. Paul is urging God’s people to break free of the tiny little world of themselves and join the great enterprise of God’s work in the world.

Here, in the fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippian Church, Paul further develops the secret to happiness. Having shared the secret of happiness, disclosed in the activity of Jesus who accepted humility to become like us, for the purposes of restoring us to God, Paul points to a mysterious strength that converges in our service to one another. That strength comes not from any one person – or from the community of God’s people – but from the outside. It is God’s strength. There is far more going on when God’s people join with one another for the promotion of the welfare of others. The same Christ who became human to serve now empowers and enables God’s people in their service to one another.

Shortly following the death of his wife, J. R. Carmichael entered a nursing home. Yet, if you inquired about him, you learned that he is never in his room. It seems that each morning Mr. Carmichael would shower, dress, eat breakfast, and then move from one residential room to another. In each room, Mr. Carmichael spoke with the resident about their family, read the Bible to them, prayed with them, and told them that he loved them. Then it was off to the next room to do the same thing. Mr. Carmichael missed his wife every day but he never waited for happiness. Happiness found him, as he loved others deeply. ●

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THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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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.**

LIVING STONES STEWARDSHIP, 2021

“Now you are coming to him as to a living stone.”

1 Peter 2:4a (Common English Bible)

Stones were a common building material in Jesus’ day. It remains a preferred building material for high-end construction. Peter selects this building material to suggest that we are the preferred building material that God uses to build God’s Church – we are living stones.

God remains active in the world, comforting those who have experienced brokenness, providing direction to those who have lost their way, and offering encouragement to the discouraged. Often, when people seek God they seek God in the church. The church is not a brick and mortar structure. Each person who confesses, “Jesus Christ is Lord”, is the church. Each church member a living stone.

A useful stone, a stone that is suitable for building God’s Church, is a stone that has determined a lifestyle of generosity. By financial gifts – according to our ability – God has the resources to welcome positively each person who seeks God in the church. Naturally, that includes the cost of maintaining a building and staffing the ministries of the church so that someone is present for those seeking God.

In the ruins of Pompeii, they found the skeleton of a man with ten pieces of gold in one hand and a key in the other. Obviously, he did not get out in time, and obviously when he died he did not take his wealth with him. No one can. Those who grasp wealth are simply a stone – not useful to God. Those who practice generosity to God’s work are living stones. Moreover, living stones are making a difference in the lives of others every day. ●



by Maryann Rana

Prayer Ministry Team

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

Prayer is an invitation from a loving God who longs for his children to know him and to walk with him. The Prayer Team links hearts and hands to confidently enter the throne room where God’s mercy and grace are waiting to be dispensed. You can bring your requests on behalf of family and friends to our loving Father. We hope to start meeting in person again in the new year. Please check the church website for updates.

All requests are handled confidentially. You may call the church office (561-276-6338) with your request or complete the form on the church website (firstdelray.com/care/prayer-ministry-team). ●

CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING: FROM HUNGER AND ISOLATION TO WONDER AND JOY

Each year we look in our local and international communities to identify people in extreme need that we may assist with our Christmas offering. Not far from our church is a community of seniors struggling to remain in their homes and live independently in the face of Covid-19. The virus struck their community before it was identified and, because it was not well understood, spread through the community, creating an early “hot spot” within Palm Beach County. Lack of accessible testing intensified their fear and isolation. This frail older population lacked much-needed support. Some are forced to make difficult choices between a \$4 copay for needed medicine and a head of cabbage which could nourish them for several days. Others lack the strength to prepare meals. All are increasingly isolated, with few ways to stay in touch with other members of their community.

Previously supported by the Caring Community Center’s Aging in Place program — hands on, direct client home-based essential services, including delivery of fresh vegetables and prepared meals — this community in the Heart of Boynton was left behind after the merger of the Caring Community Center into Feeding South Florida. Former CCC staff members continued their outreach on a volunteer basis to these frail and elderly people, taking frozen meals as possible and working to connect them with love and compassion. Sherry Johnson, former Executive Director of the Community Caring Center, has come out of retirement to restart the Aging in Place program under the Boynton Beach Faith-Based Community Development Organization, Inc. She is responsible for procuring all the funding for Aging in Place and has begun to work with 137 seniors.

Her program has three areas which the CCC had identified as critical to successful aging-in-place to remain happy, healthy, and engaged in life: healthy meals, fresh vegetables in small quantities delivered through their Veggie Mobile, and social activities to help deal with health concerns resulting from senior isolation. While a new Veggie Mobile is still on the wish list, Sherry’s team is working on delivering meals tailored to the individuals they serve. Their focus is on nutritious food which is suited to their physical needs, easy to warm up, and easy to eat. However, their initial funding has run out.

We will dedicate our Christmas Eve offering to fund the delivery of two prepared meals twice a week for these 137 senior members of the community. Our goal is to provide funding for six weeks, giving Sherry time to procure more permanent funding for this program. She delivers this healthy and appetizing meal for \$4 apiece, including the fees for the chef and the containers.

Let us come together this Christmas to share with these frail older people, showing them Christ’s love that they may move from hunger and isolation to the Wonder and Joy of the season of his birth. ●



Nutritious meals delivered: shrimp and vegetables on rice, mixed salad, and black bean brownie.

SESSION REPORT

During the months of October and November, the Session approved new members and several baptisms. They approved adding a third worship service on Christmas Eve so that there will be three services (a carol-focused service at 5 p.m.; traditional candlelight with a time for the children at 7 p.m.; and a traditional candlelight service at 9:30 p.m.). Session approved guidelines to allow small groups to meet while following existing protocols of wearing masks, social distancing, limiting the number of people in attendance, and considering outdoor options if appropriate. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, Session voted to cancel the 2021 Annual Dinner and Distinguished Preacher, Dr. Thomas Long. However, Dr. Long will be speaking at a virtual event presented by the Center for Christian Studies on Sunday, January 31, 2021. The Session approved the Christmas Eve Offering recipient as Aging in Place, a Boynton Beach program that provides meals to seniors. ●

CHURCH OPERATIONS SUMMARY THROUGH OCTOBER

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Members' Pledge Payments	\$586,534	\$565,446
Other Operating Receipts	199,450	195,033
Investments Used	339,887	374,865
Operating Reserves	44,060	14,145
Funding Sources	\$1,169,931	\$1,149,490
Operating Disbursements	\$1,169,931	\$1,149,490

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Church Improvement Fund (Holly House) from Dick and Do Ann Falk, in loving memory of Joan Sopp.

General Fund from Gwen (Lucy) Drake, in loving memory of Harrold (Bus) Chaney and her son, Kenneth H. Lelly.

Music Fund from the Puig/Cannarozzi Music Fund.

Remembrance Fund from Tom and Susy Dukes, in loving memory of Bill Earnhart; from Jack Marshall, in loving memory of Gerald and Mary Marshall; and from Mirta Viamontes, in loving memory of Frank Viamontes. ●

MEET BIRGIT FIORAVANTE

Birgit Djupedal Fioravante came to the United States literally “on the boat” as a toddler in the 1950s, a year after her father immigrated to Ohio for an engineering job with a roller bearing company. Her family’s roots go back hundreds of years to Selje, a small village on Norway’s western coast where the first bishopric of western Norway was established over 1,000 years ago during the reign of the country’s first Christian king. “I think this history and the story of my family has everything to do with how I was raised, and has formed me in ways I can’t escape,” Birgit says, laughing.

She comes from generations of church organists and musicians. Her great-grandfather, Zakarias Kvamme, lobbied to bring Selje’s

church its first organ, an instrument from Germany that was already several hundred years old. His son, Torvald, became the organist and taught music to all the local children, including his daughter, Kjellaug, and Birgit’s father, Lars, who became Torvald’s son-in-law. Don Cannarozzi — along with his late husband, Sergio Puig — traveled with Birgit to Norway for concerts in 2007 and played that very same organ. (He pronounced it a fine instrument.)

Birgit was raised in the pragmatism of the Lutheran church with its emphasis on self-control and self-reliance, which her father described as a “muscular Christianity” — muscular in the sense that one doesn’t whine about their lot, takes what comes one’s way



Birgit looks to the Future.

and doesn’t judge — but also looks out for others, doesn’t brag, and speaks the truth, always. How Birgit sees this is “leave the world a better place than you found it.”



Opera Fusion selfie with the cast of *Not In My Town* by Michael Ross.

Birgit had thought she would follow her father into engineering. But after a gap year studying culture and music in Norway, and then seeing her first opera live — it was *La traviata* — she took aim at music, singing and opera. If Birgit admitted today how many years she’s been a working singer and teacher, she would give away her age. Just know, “it’s been a while.” At 19, she took her first church soloist position, and has been in church almost every Sunday since. Nevertheless, First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach is the first church Birgit felt

led to join. The strength, warmth and honesty from the people and the pulpit are what make her feel at home. And of course ... the music. “To be able to sing is to express oneself on a level that is so satisfying, yet hard to describe,” she says. “Singing has brought me such comfort, and I’d probably be a raving lunatic if it weren’t for the gift of music given to all of us by God.”

After raising two “incredible” daughters, Kelly and Casey, Birgit was looking for new adventures. Having taught and mentored many singers over 30-plus years, she had always thought about starting her own opera company, using only local talent. Along with Dean Peterson and a few other brave souls, in 2014 she started Opera Fusion, Inc., as South Florida’s boutique opera company — small but sassy. “I have always known some terrific artists live in this area, and the larger companies didn’t historically take advantage of that opportunity. This is a mission for me: I believe in the healing power of music as well as the importance of serving the community of artists and audiences.”

Reviewing the past six seasons, she says, “When I stop and look at it, it’s really quite remarkable how much we’ve done, sometimes on a ridiculous shoestring.” One highlight was the production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which toured five counties after Christmas last year, arriving at First Presbyterian on January 20th earlier this year. It was Opera Fusion’s last production before the COVID-19 lockdown.



Duelling Divas, The Baroness and Lola

Opera Fusion has managed to stay in business over these difficult months while putting local singers to work through #SongStrong, its online song series. For that she’s relieved — but not relaxing. At the moment, Birgit is heavily into producing COVID-safe live performances in Palm Beach and Broward counties, and is delighted that First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach hosted the first one on

November 20th. The stage for “Over the Moon Divas: Singing that’s out of this World” was on the steps of Fellowship Hall, with the audience in the parking lot. By the time you read this article, Opera Fusion will be putting the final touches on its second live concert, “Opera Fusion is Home for the Holidays,” which will feature many of the singers you have heard on Sunday mornings, with Don at the keyboard. “I hope

(continued on page 8)



Birgit’s first church home in Selje, Norway.

(continued from page 7)

you *all* come so we can make this a regular thing,” Birgit says. “And all donations will go to benefit local performers who have been hit so hard during the pandemic.”

Birgit is grateful for her church home at First Presbyterian, and thanks its staff and congregation and her fellow singers. Don Cannarozzi’s friendship and musical collaboration over the years have been especially meaningful to her. His latest gift to Birgit and Opera Fusion is all the sound and lighting equipment for the upcoming outdoor performances. “This means Opera Fusion can keep the music alive,” Birgit says. “So when you see Don, please say thanks for the Puig Cannarozzi Music Fund, which honors our dear friend and his beloved Sergio.” ●



Birgit as The Baroness with Laura León
as Lola in *Duelling Divas*.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



Friday, December 4th at 7:30 p.m.

Come celebrate with us as we present all your holiday favorites! This outdoor concert is free to the public, but donations will be gratefully accepted. Opera Fusion’s **Home for the Holidays** will spotlight beloved melodies we grew up with. Our six singers and pianist Don Cannarozzi will bring you chestnuts roasting while we all dream of a White Christmas. Santa Baby will make an appearance, and we will cap the evening with *O Holy Night*. Please bring your own beach chair *and mask!* for socially distanced seating in the church parking lot. ●

by **Grace Cameron Hood**

Director of Children and
Family Ministry



A BOOK REVIEW- INDESCRIBABLE: 100 DEVOTIONS ABOUT GOD & SCIENCE By Mark and Ethan Schmidt

Did you know that if you shouted at the top of your lungs, if you're in space nobody can hear you?!? That's because there is no atmosphere for sound to bounce out of. Luckily, God doesn't need sound waves to hear us. He can hear us anywhere and everywhere we pray and talk to him.

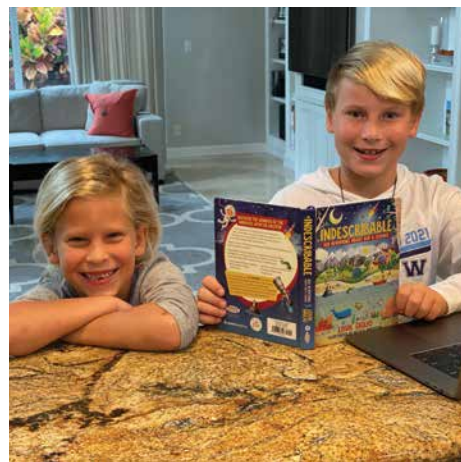
Did you know that tears don't just come from your eyes? When you cry, tears drain into your nose AND Jesus weeps with us too? He cries because he is always with us and we have to believe that after he tears, he has a plan.

Did you know there is a muscle

in your ear? And that the same things you do for your body muscles (rest, exercise and food) are what strengthen your muscles with God?

These are our top three favorite stories about science and God that we learned about in this book, Indescribable: 100 Devotions About God and Science by Louie Giglio. If you are fascinated about science, your body, and the galaxy and want to know how these ideas are the same as how God loves and takes care of us, you will love to read this book! Before we read this, we didn't think about God's connection to things like climbing Mount Everest and seahorses. If you don't either, then we think you should read this.

If you are in first grade like me, Ethan, it's fun to have your brother or parent read it to you. My brother Mark is in 3rd grade and he could read all the stories to me. (And if you want, I can ask him to read them to you, too!) Enjoy... ●



by *Grace Cameron Hood*

FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

As we end this strange and challenging year, let us find ways to celebrate what God has done for us. I have enjoyed finding so much wisdom in the words of the children of the church. As the church is open to in-person worship, Virtual Sunday School will continue at 9 a.m. An email is sent every week to parents with information. Please contact me at gracehood@firstdelray.com if you would like to add your name to the list, or if you would like your name to be removed.

To augment and expand on the Virtual Sunday School, at the 11 a.m. service there is an additional session of Sunday School here at the church. To make the experience as safe as possible, we are meeting outside with masks on and take special care for safety. At this time, we will not have Bible Bunch or Nursery Care available.

Two special mailings will be sent out to First Families. For Thanksgiving, we will be sending out coloring placemats as well as a special activity to do as a family to remember and give thanks to God. For Advent, each First Family household will receive an Advent Calendar as well as a craft for the family to do together.

It is such an honor and privilege to be part of the lives of so many wonderful families. Let us pray that 2021 will bring many wonderful blessings! ●

HOLLY HOUSE

Holly House is still offering in-person sales to church attendees on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings. The last shopping day is Tuesday, December 22nd. We have craft supplies, fabric, sewing notions, and handmade products ready for purchase (cash or check only). In order to follow safety guidelines and limit the number of people gathered, all shoppers are required to make an appointment. Masks are also mandatory. If you would like to shop for Fall and Holiday crafts at Holly House, please make your appointment by contacting Linda Prior (561-702-0245 or linda_prior@hotmail.com). *Thank you!* ●



Cindy is putting final touches on a tree.



Penny is working on a jewelry project. We have custom and costume jewelry.



Merrill is starting another cork wreath. They sell as soon as she makes them.



Bonnie is writing a letter to servicemen for Operation Gratitude.



Gina is decorating the tree.



Mr and Mrs. Santa are Annalee collectibles.



Lots of wreaths to sell.

by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

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 LONELY?"

**A sermon by Dr. Doug Hood
Genesis 2:15-18**

Listen for God's Word:

*"Then the Lord God said, 'It's not good that the human is alone.
I will make him a helper that is perfect for him.'"*

Genesis 2:18 (Common English Bible)



In 2018, Cigna, a major health insurer in the United States, paid for a national study that included the participation of physicians, psychologists, and professional therapists. What was learned is that loneliness affects

more than one-third of American adults. The worst affected are young adults of 18-22 and older adults. The study concluded that loneliness is at epidemic levels in the U.S. and ranks alongside smoking and obesity as a major threat to public health. The

physical effects of loneliness include inflammation, a weakened immune system, heart disease, and mental decline. Recently, the United Kingdom appointed a Minister of Loneliness to direct government resources to address loneliness.

This morning, I invite you to an examination of the Bible and what it has to say about loneliness. As early as the second chapter of the Bible, Genesis 2, God declares that, “It’s not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him.” In the Gospel of Mark, we learn that Jesus took steps to end his loneliness: “He appointed them to be with him.”

It is important that we make a clear distinction between solitude and loneliness. Jesus sought solitude often, and so should we. Solitude is the intentional practice of being alone for the purposes of being with God: of listening to God. Loneliness is a relational condition of lacking regular, meaningful connection and fellowship with another. Solitude is important for spiritual health. Loneliness is not God’s intention for us and is detrimental to our physical and emotional well-being.

As I have read and studied the Bible for thirty-one years as a pastor, I have found at least three spiritual lessons that can help us be less lonely this year. For clarity, I have named them: *A Question*, *A Reminder*, and *A Charge*. Each assumes an intentional response by those who may be experiencing loneliness.

A Question. The question that Jesus asks is this, “Could my loneliness be my own fault?” In the fifth chapter of

John’s Gospel, Jesus approaches an invalid who has been lying by the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years. Legend was that the angels would stir the waters of the pool each day and the first person in the pool would be healed of any infirmity or illness.

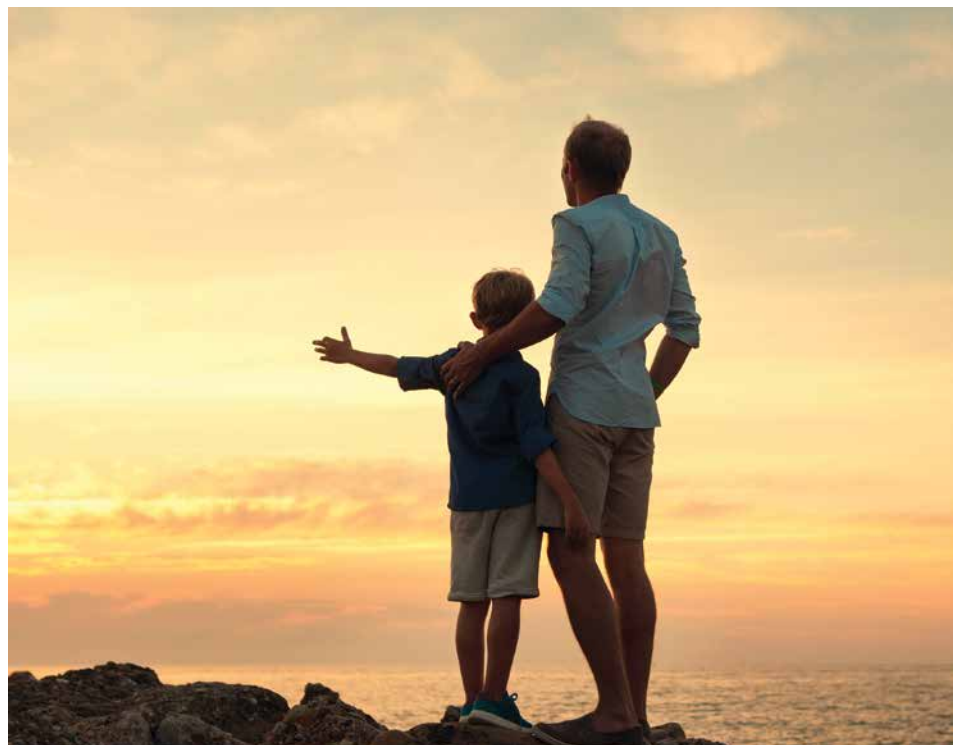
Jesus approaches the man and simply asks, “Do you want to get well?” Notice that the man makes excuses for why he hasn’t been healed. He blames others for “cutting in line” ahead of him and receiving the once a day healing. Jesus interrupts his “pity party” with a command, “Get up! Take your mat and walk.” The crowd was astounded when the man did just that!

Jesus’ question is not as insensitive as we might presume. Jesus knows that we often

prefer to “lame” and “blame” in life rather than take personal responsibility for our difficulty. C. S. Lewis once commented that a familiar difficulty is frequently more desirable than an unfamiliar freedom. It takes courage to accept responsibility that you may be the one to blame for your loneliness.

A Reminder. You belong to God. You belong to Jesus. You belong to the body of Jesus, the Church. In the fifteenth chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus calls us friends. We are no longer called servants or slaves. Jesus desires to have a friendship with us.

Leslie Weatherhead tells a story of a friend who, as a little boy, adored his father. The father’s work required him to be away from home for days at a time, occasionally for weeks at a time.





There was always considerable anticipation for the day the father would return home. Following a two-week absence, mom and son were on tiptoe waiting to hear the father's key in the front door lock. Before the father arrived, the boy misbehaved and was sent to bed early as punishment. Well, you can send a child to bed but you can't make them sleep. That young boy lay on his bed carefully listening for the sound of his father's key in the front door. When he heard it, he leapt out of bed and ran down the stairs to the front door. He was certain he would receive further rebuke from his mother but he didn't care. His father was home. When the front door opened, the father scooped-up his young son in his arms and said, "My very own son! I love you!" That young boy, now

an adult, told his friend, Leslie Weatherhead, that at that moment he was filled with an intense sense that he belonged. That is precisely what God wants each of us to experience when Jesus calls us friends.

Often times we tend to have a conversation in our minds that goes something like this: "I may not be a saint but I am not the worst person I know. I know that I get a few things wrong, but I get a lot more things right. I work hard, make an effort to please God, and I simply want what I deserve." Trust me, when it comes to God, the last thing you want is what you deserve. The good news of our faith is that God doesn't give us what we deserve. God gives us what we need and that is friendship. We belong to God as

people who are deeply loved.

A Charge. God expects us to be in service to one another. In Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus, we are reminded that each person is responsible for the ministry of the Church, not just the clergy of the local congregation. Look around for persons who may be lonely and ask them to coffee or lunch. Make yourself available to them. Invest your life in others.

Shortly after my godfather J. R. Carmichael lost his wife, he entered a nursing home. Several months after he entered the nursing home I paid him a visit. When I inquired at the guest services center for his room number, I was told that he was never in his room. It seems that each morning Mr. Carmichael would shower, dress, eat breakfast, and then move from one residential room to another. In each room, Mr. Carmichael would talk with the resident about their family, read the Bible to them, pray with them, and conclude by telling them that he loved them. Then, it was off to the next room to do the same thing. Mr. Carmichael missed his wife every single day following her death, but he was never lonely. He took seriously God's call to invest himself in the lives of others. By his obedience, Mr. Carmichael redeemed them, and himself, from loneliness.

Some years ago, I heard the story of a young child that was lovingly tucked into bed by his



parents. After his bedroom light was turned out and his parent left the room, the young boy could not sleep because of the crack of the lightning and the rumble of the thunder outside. Only minutes after his parents left his room there was a particularly scary strike of lightning, filling his room with light. He cried out and the parents rushed back to his room. They comforted their son by reminding him that God was right there in the room with him, again kissed him goodnight and left the room. Sometime later, the lightning struck again particularly loud, filling the young child's room with light. Again, the boy cried out. The parents reminded their son once again that God was with him and that he wasn't alone. The boy then said, "I know that God is here with me but I need someone with skin on them!" Don't we all.

We are called "Christians" on purpose. It literally means, "Little Christ." We are called by God to be "Christ" to one another, to be present with one another so that our physical presence may be a visual reminder of the presence of the risen Christ. As we anticipate this new year, it can be less lonely if we embrace the three lessons from this morning: Ask do I want to get well? Remember that I belong to a faith community, and that we are charged by God to look after one another and care for them. May these lessons transform this year for each of us.

Amen. ●

2019 CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING UPDATE

Fifteen months ago, Hurricane Dorian decimated the Bahamas. Marsh Harbour lost 95% of its buildings, and one church remained standing — Kirk of the Pines. Their pastor, Gabe Swing, spoke to our congregation last December about the challenges he was facing there with food insecurity, loss of housing, and lack of tap water and electricity, as well as locating his missing parishioners. Because Marsh Harbour is the commercial hub for many of the Abaco Islands, it is paramount to get the town back up and running.

Our Mission Committee decided to dedicate funds from the 2019 Christmas Eve Offering to help our neighbors who are only 90 miles away. Since nearly every vehicle on the island was destroyed, we decided a box truck was the answer to get tools and supplies delivered for rebuilding. With the generous help of Paul and Andy Miller, we raised enough money to purchase a gently-used box truck, have it painted by local artists, pay for supplies (including a water purification system, solar generators, tents, mattresses, building tools and equipment, etc.), and cover shipping costs from Fort Lauderdale to Marsh Harbour. The leftover funds will be sent to Pastor Gabe to buy more supplies.

Post-hurricane conditions and the pandemic delayed delivery, but at long last the truck has arrived in Marsh Harbour and Pastor Swing is thrilled to finally have his roving workshop. Work has begun with his congregation and Bahama Youth Network, a community based Christian organization that connects adult mentors with local teens.

Once the pandemic is over we hope to take members of our congregation over for a mission trip to help rebuild Marsh Harbour, and then you can see for yourselves how your generosity is making such a big difference. Thank you everyone for your generous donations, love, support, and prayers. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate 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.

READING SERMONS DEVOTIONALLY

"Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (Common English Bible)

I ordered a cookbook once. I was eighteen years old and entering my freshman year of college, where I would cook for myself and do my own laundry for the first time. I knew only how to prepare frozen pizza, simple salads, and cereal. I had no culinary skills. I researched online a few cookbooks for beginners, and I found the perfect book for me. The moment the book arrived in the mail, I cracked open the cover, peeled through its pages, and excitedly looked at all the dishes I'd soon be able to create.

We packed all my belongings into the back of my mom's SUV and drove to my dorm room two hours north of home. I packed my TV, the PlayStation, a chest full of clothes, some odds and ends, and a box of books. After my parents left, I carefully arranged all my books along the bookcase provided by the school, and I gave the new cookbook a prominent place on the shelf. I thought it made me look sophisticated. That first night, I was too tired to cook, so I purchased a sandwich from a local shop up the street. The school hosted the freshmen for an orientation dinner my second night on campus. By my third night, classes were already in session, and I had a mountain of reading before me.

I never did use that cookbook. I prepared plenty of frozen pizza, simple salads, and cereal though. I think I still have the cookbook, somewhere. It's unused. I've purchased other cookbooks since, and I've used about half of them,

maybe. This is what I've learned from my experience with cookbooks: no matter how appetizing the dishes look or how simple the recipes appear, a cookbook is of no use if you do not use it to cook!

What you are holding is a cookbook. Each sermon you just read was designed to teach you about God and equip you with the tools needed to nurture and sustain a life of faith. You have a choice to make. You can read these sermons in a way that keeps God at a distance: you can read the recipes, look at the pictures, then set the book aside and move on with your life. Or, you can bring each sermon to bear upon the kitchen of your heart. You can chew on every word, digest these sermons, and feed your soul.

I suggest you do the latter. This begins by treating each sermon like a conversation with God. In his book *Life with God*, Richard Foster suggests when we approach God, we "bring our whole selves, expectantly, attentively, and humbly." When you approach God expectantly, you open yourself to change. You expect to be changed, because you know who God is, and you know God is in the business of changing people. Foster also suggests we approach God attentively. So often when we pray, all we do is speak, but approaching God attentively means we must listen as well. If I were inattentive to my spouse, our relationship would naturally deteriorate. The same is true of our relationships with God. There is no substitute for time spent

together. Finally, each conversation with God requires a degree of humility. In Isaiah 55, God reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, nor do God's plans always mirror our own. Sometimes we hear very clearly what God wants of us, but unless we are willing to submit to God, we will not change. When we approach God with expectancy, attention, and humility, we allow God's word to transform us from the inside out.

You can begin your conversations with God by asking a few basic questions. These questions do not belong to me; I first heard them from Doug Hood. The first question is, *What, O God, would you have me hear?* The second, *What, O God, would you have me do?* I encourage you to ask these questions of each of the sermons you just read and also of future sermons you may hear.

You likely are familiar with the saying *you are what you eat*. The same is true with faith. By asking these two questions and by spending time with God, you will sustain a healthy spiritual diet. You will experience changes in your body as you slowly begin to transform into the person God made you to be. Your heart will soften. You'll smile more. God will be more alive for you than ever before. You will start to notice God in the most surprising places. And, everywhere you go, life will taste a little bit richer, and a little bit sweeter. **Bon Appétit.** ●

by Nathanael Hood



AMERICAN UTOPIA

A Movie Review by Nathanael Hood, MA, New York University

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching”

- Hebrews 10:25

A couple years ago, former Talking Heads frontman and robotic dork-funk messiah David Byrne invited a group of Detroit art school students to record a version of his song “Everybody’s Coming to My House” from his 2018 solo album “American Utopia.” The song as originally envisioned by Byrne was about the fear of everyone literally coming to his house despite his wish to be left alone. But Byrne was amazed to find that without changing a single lyric or note of the music, the teens transformed his song of paranoia and anxiety into a song of welcome and joy. Truly, these students were ecstatic at the idea of everyone coming to their house. In some inscrutable, intangible way, they had achieved musical transubstantiation.

This is only one of the many stories Byrne tells about his work and career as spoken word asides in Spike Lee’s *American Utopia*, a filmed version of the stage show adaptation of the aforementioned solo album that ran for several months on Broadway in late 2019 and early 2020. From the very first number (“Here”) where Byrne serenades a model of the human brain and marvels at its ability to organize the world’s chaos into something coherent and beautiful, the central idea of the show is one of connections: connections between the soul and the mind, between the self and society, between the individual and other people. To this end, Byrne deliberately stripped away all the bells and whistles from the production. With the exception of a brain, a table, and two chairs in the opening number, the only set or prop is a chain-mail curtain draped around the stage from which Byrne and his eleven musicians emerge barefooted and gray-suited. This is a show of sound and movement, as Byrne & Co. move around the stage with the precision of hand-wound dolls, forming rotating concentric circles here, restless chessboard patterns there. This is choreography as indebted to graphic designer Saul Bass as the populist dance spectacles of Busby Berkeley.

But it’s the music that strikes first and hardest as Byrne presents songs from his solo work and several decades of hits with the Talking Heads as radical

polemics against societal complacency, disengagement, and incuriosity towards the world. A monologue about how “looking at other people is the best” recontextualizes “This Must Be the Place (Naïve Melody),” one of the great love songs of the twentieth century, as a celebration of community in the twenty-first. Byrne’s description of the Dadaist roots of the nonsense lyrics to “I Zimbra” turns what many consider a novelty song into a scream against the politics of nationalism and fascism. “Every Day Is a Miracle” is turned from a meditation on the insignificance of mankind in the grand scheme of things to a celebration of the quotidian and ordinary. And a defiant cover of Janelle Monáe’s “Hell You Talmbout” intercut with shots of the families of police brutality victims holding giant posters of their murdered loved ones reminds us of the unjust, immediate realities of the society we live in and take for granted to treat everyone equally.

Not every song in the show necessarily fits into the overall theme—how could it when Byrne and his producers realized that his mostly baby boomer audience would be expecting as many old radio hits as they were the new stuff? But taken as a whole, the film is a panacea for the hatred and division surrounding us at this historical moment. It’s a glimpse of a musical ecclesia transcending race, gender, and nationalities, transforming pop hits into hymns and rock ballads into sermons. ●

by Grace Cameron Hood

Director of Children and
Family Ministry



FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Cauldwell Family

I am very excited to feature First Families Fun Facts as part of our new church magazine! In this “fun” new series we are asking our wonderful First families to share a little more about themselves with us. I hope you enjoy getting to know them better in the month to come!



I'm **Kelye** Cauldwell, and my family and I became members of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach in 2018. We were drawn to the church because of the intimate size and nature of its children's program and its beautiful music ministry. Since becoming members, we have enjoyed getting to know the many beautiful First families through weekly interaction, young adult events, and through my opportunity to serve as the children's music minister since 2019.

Like yours, our family is a busy one! There are three unique aspects of our lifestyle that make our family brim and bustle with activity. First, we have four children. Normally, this would make for an active home, but our four are split between two different states, soon to be three. **Colin** is our eldest son. He is 18, currently lives in the majestic Colorado Rockies with his mother, and is leaving to study photography in Manhattan at the collegiate level this coming January. **Beckham**, our 15-year-old son, aspires to work as a scientist on Mars farming for a colony of astronauts. In his spare time, he tortures family members and innocent bystanders, far and wide, as he studies for his driver's permit test next month. **Chloé-Anne**, our soon-to-be nine-year-old daughter, loves reading, music, history, geography, all forms of dance, and ice skating. **Lilika**, our soon-to-be eight year old, loves math, science, art, ballet, and ice skating.

The second quirk of our lifestyle is we are one of those crazy families who actually chooses to homeschool! As many families have experienced recently, homeschooling draws families closer, and we have been so blessed by this once-in-a-lifetime experience. While I am a stay-at-home teacher for my two daughters, I also enjoy working and volunteering in numerous other fields. I am an opera singer, pianist, and violinist who performs professionally;



a private music teacher; an avid classical homeschool advocate, tutor and educational consultant; and I appreciate the opportunity to serve in the children's ministry.

Finally, my husband **Scott** is an international pilot for American Airlines. He is our resident vagabond, normally living out of his suitcase for half of each week. In this unusual environment, he travels whenever and wherever he's asked to fly his 737, but he is normally assigned to Central and South America and the Caribbean. We are thankful he still has a job, and that he has recently been able to work more. In his free time he enjoys inventing and engineering, reading, cycling, and sailing.



We are all eager to hug our friends, to work and laugh together, and spend time worshipping as one! We pray for our church to be a strong, united body in such a challenging time and are thankful for our loving church family. Our prayer for each of you is to stay healthy, safe, and resting in the truth that, come what may, ***God has you in his mighty hands!*** ●

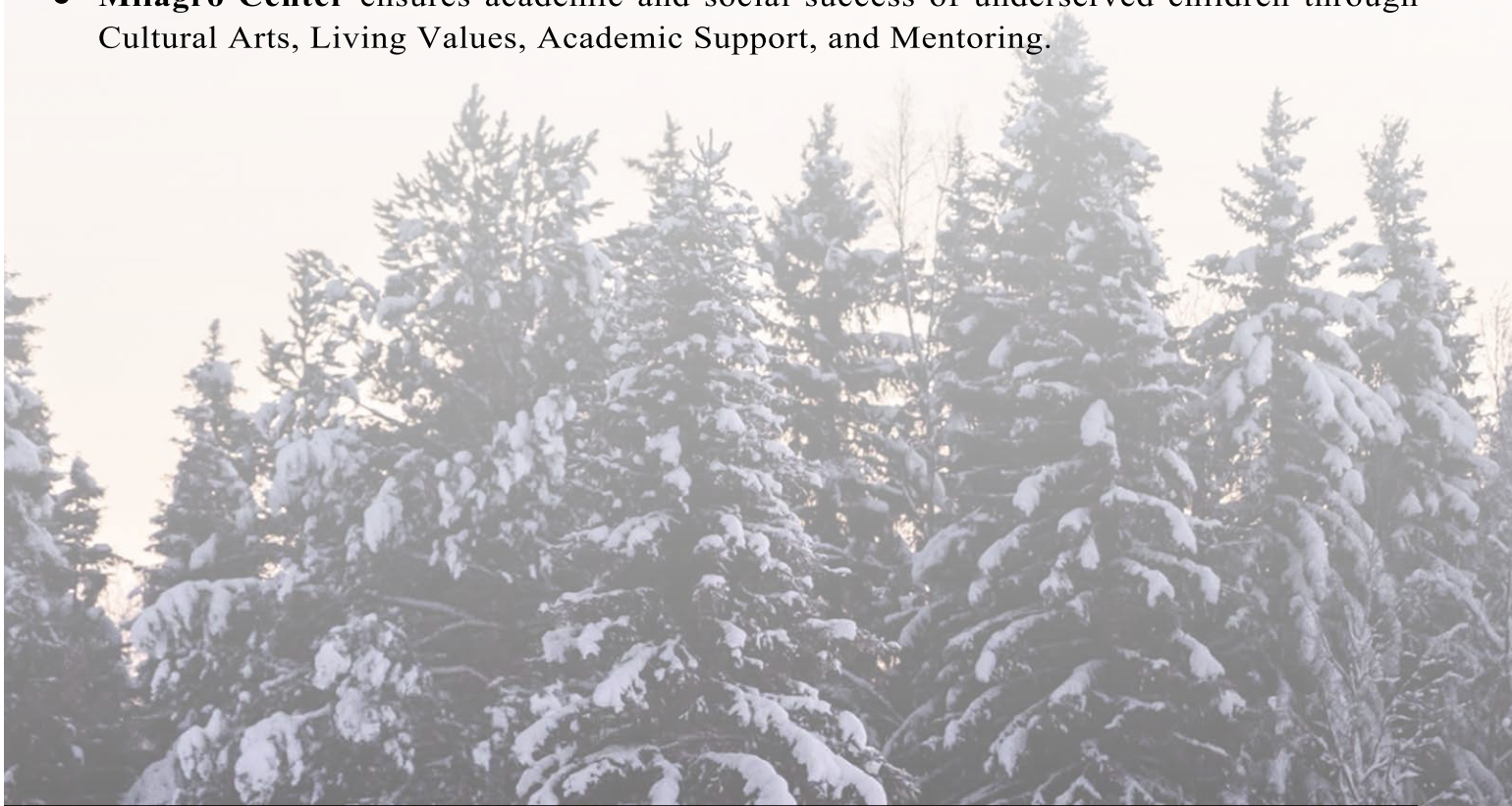


by Ann Shuman

DEACONS' CHRISTMAS TREE

Last year, thanks to the generosity of the congregation, the Deacons provided 300 Christmas presents to some of the neediest children in Delray Beach through five agencies:

- **The Boys and Girls Clubs of Palm Beach County** works to help youth of all backgrounds develop the qualities needed to become responsible citizens and leaders. The Club offers daily access to a broad range of programs in six core program areas including character and leadership development; education and career development; health and life skills; the arts; sports and fitness; and technology.
- **Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (ADVA)** is dedicated to empowering and supporting survivors of domestic violence to live violent-free and self-sufficient lives.
- **Adopt-A-Family** serves homeless and low-income families by strengthening families with children through access to all-encompassing services in order to achieve self-sufficiency and stability.
- **Achievement Center for Children & Families** provides programs for under-resourced children that support educational growth, skill building, and healthy lifestyles.
- **Milagro Center** ensures academic and social success of underserved children through Cultural Arts, Living Values, Academic Support, and Mentoring.



This year, we will continue our support of these same agencies, but with a different approach. Due to the pandemic, we will purchase and donate \$25 gift cards to Target and Walmart that the agencies can use to brighten the lives of whom they serve. Contributions can be made one of three ways:

1. Mail a check to the church office with “Deacons’ Xmas Tree” on the memo line.
2. Drop off a check in the Narthex before or after either church service through December 13th.
3. Use your credit card to donate on the church website (firstdelray.com/give). Please include “Deacons’ Xmas Tree” in the notes section.

DECEMBER 13th is the deadline for all gifts to be received.

This effort is led by Deacons Steve Anderson, Holly Anderson, and Ann Shuman, with great support from the Church Staff. Despite the challenges of this pandemic, the Deacons continue to hope that, with your help, we can make Christmas special for these deserving children. ●



MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S ADVENT BIBLE STUDY

O ur goal this year is to fan the spark of hope and joy that resides inside each

of us, and let it warm and comfort us at Christmastime and throughout the year.

Miracle on 31st Street by Rev. Susan Sparks will be our inspiration. Yes – 31st Street, not 34th Street. Rev. Sparks' church, Madison Avenue Baptist Church, is located on the corner of Madison Avenue and 31st Street in New York City, just three blocks from the Macy's department store featured in the movie *Miracle on 34th Street*.



Rev. Sparks is a preacher, a lawyer, and a stand-up comedian. She is scheduled to be the guest Distinguished Preacher at our church in January 2022.

The book is divided into four parts based on the themes of Advent: hope, peace, love and joy. As you can tell from the subtitle, Christmas Cheer Every Day of the Year; Grinch to Gratitude in 26 Days, the book was intended as a tool for personal meditation, but I've adapted the format for our group. Each week I'll read aloud an entry from each section, and then the group will discuss the questions Rev. Sparks has provided.

It isn't necessary to purchase the book to participate, but if you want to, it is available on Kindle (\$2.99) or as a paperback (\$12.99) on Amazon. You can find a link on her website at susansparks.com/books/miracle-on-31st-street. A link to a download for a free printable journal workbook with questions and a free online Advent Calendar with daily surprises matching each meditation is available on the same page.

We meet on Zoom on Monday mornings at 10 a.m. through December 21st. Contact Maria Graham at mmg2352@gmail.com if you're not already on our mailing list and would like to receive a Zoom invitation.

***Looking forward to enjoying the wit and wisdom of
Rev. Sparks and celebrating the season with you! ●***

NEW MEMBERS

Jeffrey Kruck

Joanne Symes



WELCOME!



ETERNAL LIVES

John Boardman – July 8, 2020

Joy Hogue – September 17, 2020

Elizabeth Bates – November 1, 2020

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

E*noch walked with God.* I have always loved that image. *Enoch walked with God*, Genesis 5:24 tells us. What did they talk about on these walks? The Bible doesn't say, but I've always wondered. Perhaps they argued and wrestled with the problems of the day, then laughed and shared their delight in each other and the beauty around them. Perhaps they traveled in companionable silence.

For the next few months, I'd like to take you with me as I walk along several of my favorite paths and parks in South Florida. As we walk, I'll share some of my thoughts about our journey with God.

This evening I turn off Route 441 onto Lee Road and travel the short distance to the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. To the right, an access road leads to the Visitor Center, with its boardwalk through a bald cypress swamp and its indoor representation of Florida's night sky and wildlife. I continue straight, following Lee Road to its end at a large parking lot. The dike, boat ramp, and kayak and canoe rentals lie directly ahead. I climb the short distance to the dike's viewing area where a handful of people position their cameras. The sun begins to set.

As I get my first glance of the river of grass in front of me, two thoughts spring to mind. The first is a familiar passage of scripture: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* This untamed northernmost point of the Everglades flows as far as the eye can see. It speaks to me of God and his bountiful creation. *How great is our God.* The words of the contemporary hymn play in my head and touch my spirit as I linger to watch the muted colors of the cloudy sunset. The blues and greys and faded pinks and corals spread across the sky and are reflected in the rippling flow of water below me. An alligator, only the tip of its snout and pebbled back above the water, glides noiselessly with the slow current. I turn to the east, where a lopsided man in the moon watches and rises to his rightful place in the sky as the sun descends to the western horizon.

Hundreds of birds, their slightly raucous cries filling the sky, travel from the moon to the setting sun. There they perch on the waving grass directly in front of me.

I turn and walk along the uninhabited dike path to my right. I have always been a walker—just as my mother was before me. She walked four miles a day most of her life. I loved walking with her. We would walk and talk about everything and nothing. My friend Sharie and I do that, too. My husband will ask, "What did you talk about?" or, "What's new with Sharie?"; I struggle to recall the specifics of what was said. The joy is in the companionship, the feeling of loving and being loved.

It's like that with God. We walk and talk about the small things. And the large things. Often, we are silent, and I revel in the warmth of his love. That feeling of closeness to God ... Sometimes it needs a prompt—a nudge. For me, that nudge comes as I walk silently and marvel at the various wonders of his creation. It is then I feel his blessing and listening ear.

May you also. ●



The Community Church by the Sea

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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

Please join us for our Christmas Eve Worship Services!

New this year is a **5 p.m. service**
that will be carol-focused and
fun for the entire family.

Our **7 p.m. service** will be a
traditional candlelight service.

Our **9:30 p.m. service** will be a
traditional candlelight service.

There will only be one worship service at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning, December 27th.

