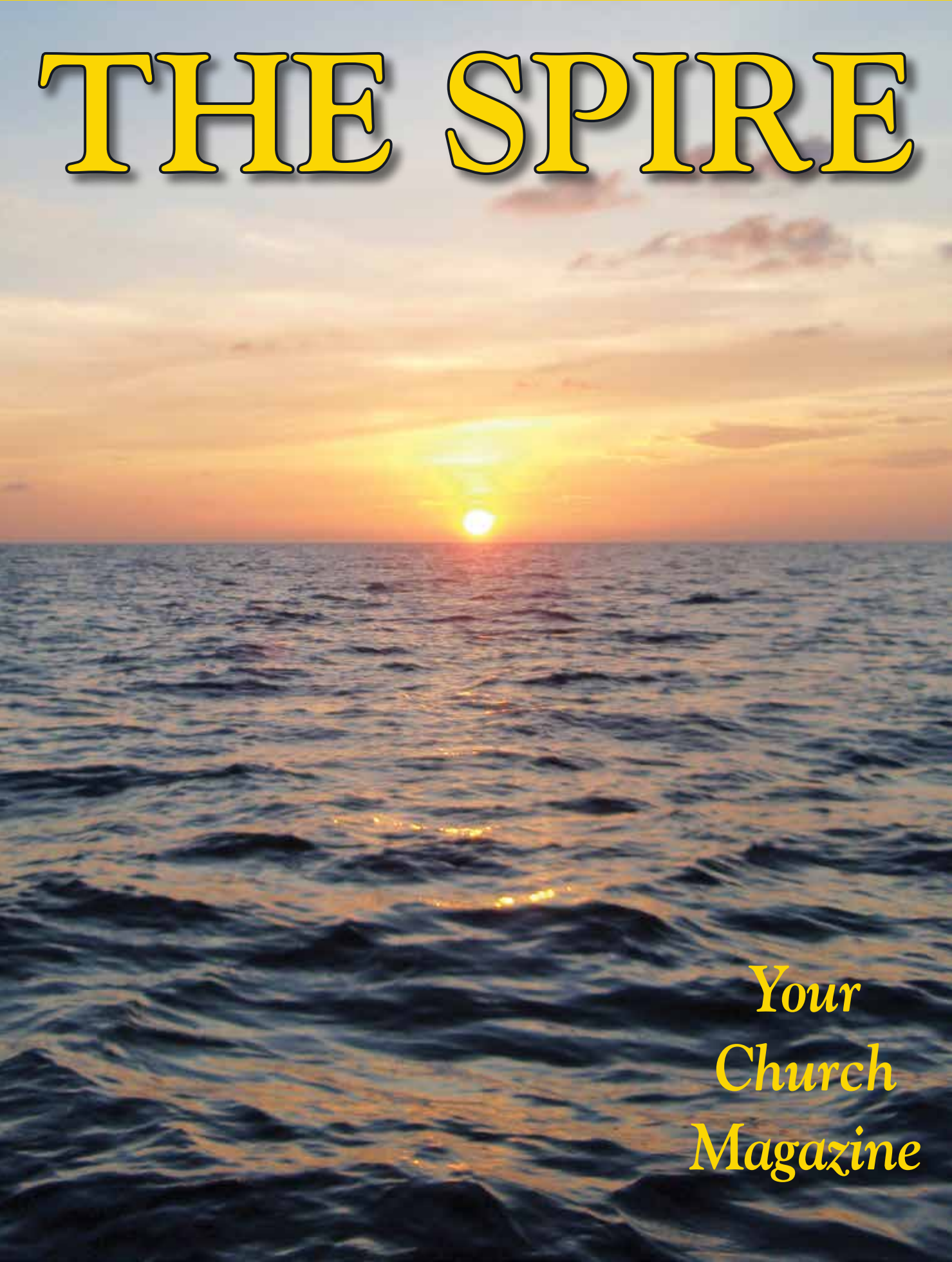


THE SPIRE



*Your
Church
Magazine*

January/February 2021



by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Senior Pastor

NURTURE FAITH

WHERE JOY IS FOUND

“Know this, my dear brothers and sisters: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry. This is because an angry person doesn’t produce God’s righteousness.”

James 1:19, 20 (Common English Bible)

Sydney Harris shares an occasion when he was walking with a friend home from the office. On the way, his friend stopped at a newsstand to purchase the evening paper. Completing the transaction, Harris’ friend thanked the vendor politely. The vendor didn’t even acknowledge. “A sullen fellow, isn’t he?” Harris commented. “Oh, he’s that way every night,” shrugged his friend. “Then why do you continue being so polite to him?” Sydney Harris asked. “Why not?” inquired his friend. “Why should I let him decide how I’m going to act?” Notice that the operative word is “act.” His friend acts toward people. Many of us react toward them.

This is the guidance James provides – “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry.” In addition to conforming to the format of a letter, James belongs to the literary genre of Wisdom literature. Such literature was widespread throughout the Middle East during the 1st century CE. Advancing understanding of wise instructions for life in general, sacred Wisdom literature communicates to readers how to live happily as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Various values and actions consistent with discipleship are examined and urged as faithful expressions of fidelity to God. Here, James implores Christians to “act” toward one another rather than “react.”

James knows who he is. He is a disciple of Jesus Christ. This knowledge provides James with an understanding of the behavior that is now expected of him – the understanding that refuses to return anger with anger, incivility with incivility. Each one of us has natural impulses, internal responses to the behavior of others. Yet, failure to harness those impulses, when they would be hurtful to another, is to surrender our command of our conduct. That is slavery to impulses, which make of us mere responders to others. That is when our discipleship stumbles – those occasions when we pour out invective after it has been poured out over us.

Throughout the teachings of Jesus we are enjoined to return good for evil, to turn the other cheek when the hand of another strikes us. That requires uncommon strength, uncommon control of sinful impulses to defend our honor. That requires that we “act” as Jesus demonstrates in his own life and ministry, rather than “respond” as Peter did with the sword the night Jesus was arrested in the garden. Nobody is unhappier than the one who has surrendered command of his or her inner impulses and strikes back when injured – physically or emotionally. Yet, God’s righteousness expands when we return anger with love. That is where joy is found. ●

¹Earl Nightingale, “Be an Actor, Not a Reactor,” *Transformational Living: Positivity, Mindset, and Persistence* (Shippensburg, PA: Sound Wisdom, 2019) 37.

CHURCH STAFF

W. Douglas Hood, Jr., D.Min.
Senior Pastor

Greg Rapier, M.Div.
Associate Pastor

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

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

Nancy Fine, CCA
Business Administrator

Christine Davis
Accountant

Aaron Strippel
Facilities Maintenance Manager

First Presbyterian Church

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

THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

EDITOR:

Tim Knapp

LAYOUT:

Char Conklin

COVER PHOTO:

Tim Knapp

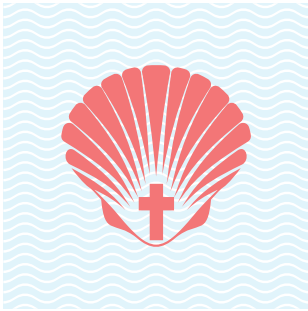
SPECIAL THANKS:

Printers Choice

**If you or a family member
are hospitalized, please
notify the church office.**

**Even if you give the
name of the church upon
admission, the hospital
will NOT notify us.**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS EVENT.



CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES
AT
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH
Explore, Shape & Strengthen Life-Impacting Faith



The Center for Christian Studies Presents
“An evening with Dr. Tom Long”
Sunday, January 31, 2021 at 7 p.m.
Via Zoom

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Memorial Garden Fund, in love and fond remembrance of John and Janet Loennecker, by their daughter and son-in-law, Karen and Don Carter; and from Joyce Sterrett, in loving memory of her parents, John and Jane Sowers Coltman.

General Fund from God’s Grace Charitable Fund, in loving memory of Thomas Purdo.●

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Cesaria Family

We are the Cesarias. We are a small family of four, which includes our furry 'eldest'—a Havanese named Coco. She's 15! God bless her! Our youngest is 9 and her name is Elle. God bless her, too!

We relocated to Florida from New York 14 years ago. We are a very happy and close family with many blessings, and we do almost everything together. I guess time flies when you're enjoying life.

My husband Bob and I were married in the church Dr. Hood mentions frequently, Marble Collegiate Church, 17 years ago. I am a lifelong Presbyterian.

This particular year has been very difficult, challenging, and disappointing. I'm certain it is a mutual feeling that is shared universally. However, I believe a good foundation in the home helps in many ways. We haven't been able to do a lot this year, but we managed to celebrate Elle's 9th birthday in March before it was announced to quarantine or the state officially being locked down. We are also thankful we were able to vacation in Las Vegas in December of 2019. Since then we have been very cautious and keeping our family as safe as possible. We keep our faith at the very top even when life throws us curveballs.

We are grateful to be members of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach since 2007. And, most of all, we always believe in the Power of God. Thank you, Jenny ●



Vegas December '19



Coco & Elle



Birthday March '20



Coco

SESSION REPORT

During the month of December, the Session called the Annual Congregational Meeting for Sunday, February 7th, immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service. They also received new members and approved a baptism. ●

CHURCH OPERATIONS SUMMARY THROUGH NOVEMBER

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Members' Pledge Payments	\$634,650	\$643,366
Other Operating Receipts	220,307	217,405
Investments Used	339,887	364,063
Operating Reserves	78,419	—
Funding Sources	\$1,273,263	\$1,224,835
Operating Disbursements	\$1,273,263	\$1,224,835

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be on Sunday, February 7th, immediately following the 11 a.m. worship service in the Sanctuary. ●

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

For 2021, Communion will be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month: January 3rd, February 7th, March 7th, April 4th, May 2nd, June 6th, July 4th, August 1st, September 5th, October 3rd, November 7th, and December 5th. Communion will also be served on Maundy Thursday, April 1st. ●

ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday, February 17th, is the beginning of Lent when we ready ourselves for Easter. Visit our website for more information about our Ash Wednesday events. ●

by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



A LETTER FROM GREG AND LISSETTE

Friends,

Lisette and I have been overjoyed by the abundance of love and care this congregation has shown us since we arrived here nearly three years ago. More than the preaching and the music and, yes, even more than the beach, it is the community that makes this church stand apart. Lisette and I have never felt this more poignantly than in the past few months.

We were delighted by your response when we announced earlier this year that we were pregnant. And we were both surprised and honored when, in the middle of a global pandemic, the Fellowship Team offered to throw us a drive-by baby shower. We still can't believe the number of you who showed up that day to share your love and support. It's been a humbling experience to say the least.

You've given us advice, meals, gifts – but most of all, you've given us love. As your pastor, it is my goal to model God's love to you. But it is you who have modeled God's love to me. You've loved me, you've loved my wife, and, even before he drew his first breath, you loved my son, Pierre. If that is not a witness to the power of Christian community and to the expansive love of God, then I don't know what is.

Lisette and I had a lovely time these past few months at home getting to know Pierre, and we look forward to the day you can get to know him too. It is my completely unbiased opinion that he's a fantastic guy. You'll see. Thank you so much again for permitting me this time away to bond with him. Thank you for your gifts. And thank you for your love. I am back from paternity leave with a heart fuller than ever. Parenthood will do that to you. But it's not just parenthood. My heart is full because of this community. And, of course, because of God. Love, Rev. Greg Rapier ●



by **Grace Cameron Hood**

Director of Children and
Family Ministry



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

It is time for the New Year! As the year begins, the schedule for the children will remain the same for now. Virtual Sunday School is at 9 a.m. 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 from the Zoom invitation.

Sunday School at church is at the 11 a.m. service. To make the experience as safe as possible, we are meeting outside with masks on and special care to safety. Until further notice, we will not have Bible Bunch or Nursery Care available.

For both sessions of Sunday School, we are using the PCUSA curriculum, *Growing in Grace and Gratitude*.

As we look to 2021, there are several major events that we want to have you put on your calendars. Please be aware that all these events are subject to change. Flexibility is the name of the game! ●

Annual Easter Egg Extravaganza	March 28
Vacation Bible School	June 14 – 18
Celebrate Advent	November 28

Here's to a calm, beautiful 2021!

by **Maryann Rana**

PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM

W

e have a God who hears and cares! Pray and connect with him. Prayer requires a personal, loving relationship with a living God that becomes a passion and a priority for us. It is not always about making requests for others, we must also give thanks and praise for all he does for us. He is an all-knowing Father to whom we go to through Jesus Christ the Son. There is no end to his mercy and generosity. At all times, and in all places, God is present! ASK!

You can bring your requests on behalf of friends and family to our loving Father. We hope to start meeting in person again soon. 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). ●

THE HOLLY HOUSE WENT VIRTUAL DURING THE PANDEMIC



The pandemic closed the Holly House workshops in March. What were we to do? Just like so many people during the pandemic, a few of us started to clean Holly House. We have collected donations for 50 years so we had a large stash that we never had time to look at. We organized products that we could use and we sorted and priced supplies that we wouldn't need. For example, we had more than 10 bins of lace and 10 feet of shelf space with packages of bias tape.

While the sorting was taking place, some people made

Christmas decorations at home for the Bazaar. For the first time in more than 50 years, the ladies of Holly House didn't know if they would have the large, annual sale of handcrafted holiday items at the church. A virtual model developed.

The marketing went online to Facebook Marketplace where shoppers could find fabric, craft supplies, jewelry, and homemade decorations. Items were posted on Marketplace and shoppers then made appointments to visit Holly House. There were no crowds. Everyone felt safe. The outreach for Holly House products extended from North Palm Beach to Miami.

The clever crafters at Holly House used the pandemic to create a new, successful, virtual model. We were able to donate \$6,000 to restore the piano in the Sanctuary.

If you have Holiday items that you would like to donate to Holly House, please contact Linda Prior (561-702-0245 or linda_prior@hotmail.com) to make an appointment to drop off the items.

What will happen to our Annual Rummage Sale in 2021? Stay tuned. We don't know yet. ●

We are not accepting Rummage Sale items at this time.

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.

WHEN YOU FEEL INADEQUATE

A sermon by Rev. Greg Rapier

Acts 2:1-21

Listen for God's Word:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

Acts 2:17, 18

The Reverend Jan Ammon preaches maybe five times a year. She's an incredibly talented worship leader, a seasoned pastor from The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. So talented that Princeton Theological Seminary hired her to organize the chapel services that run every day during the school year. A large portion of her job is partnering with the school president, professors, and students to develop liturgy and prayers to make each service feel unique. But, she doesn't preach all that often. Five times a year, maybe.

Every year she preaches on the same topic: Imposter Syndrome. So, twenty percent of



her sermons or more are about Imposter Syndrome. If you are fortunate enough to be sitting in the pews of Miller Chapel during one of these sermons, you will hear from the student body, as soon as she utters the word "Imposter," a huge smattering of applause and excited gasps. The sermons are that good: the topic is that important.

So what is Imposter Syndrome? Imposter Syndrome is a psychological term describing those who are unable to internalize accomplishments and those who go about their days in constant fear of being found out, of being exposed as a fraud. The idea is that you've gotten where you are in life through luck, and deep down you know you don't really deserve what you have.



The woman who gets a big promotion assumes there weren't any other qualified candidates for the job. The high-powered executive gets nervous before a presentation because she fears her colleagues will discover her inadequacies. The man who marries the girl of his dreams believes himself to be incredibly lucky because, well, what's so special about me? If you have ever heard a young adult use the word "adult" as a verb, as in "I did some real adulting today," that's another sign of Imposter Syndrome. Because the person is implying deep down he is not an adult, but today he passed as one. Or, in the context Jan Ammon was preaching to, for the student body in Princeton, this high-pressure boilerplate, it goes something like this: I got into a really good school full of intimidatingly brilliant people, and if they only knew me, the real me, they'd know I don't belong.

Yes, Imposter Syndrome is prevalent all throughout Princeton. It's not prevalent only in Princeton. Imposter Syndrome affects over seventy percent of us. Imposter Syndrome is not limited to the

professional world, the academic world, the dating world, or the adulting world; it's present in the Church too. Here, in the pews.

If we're honest with ourselves, we all have times in our journeys of faith where we feel inadequate; where we feel guilt and shame centered around not being good enough, not being Christian enough, not being faithful enough, not knowing enough. We feel like imposters.

Maybe this feeling comes to us in a moment of clarity after we've slipped up and fallen prey to our favorite sin. Or, maybe it comes at church. So often, we look at the people one or two pews over: the way they're dressed, the way they smile, the way they pick up their Bibles and effortlessly turn to the right page when reading Scripture. We look at the model-lives of church people, the Sunday morning snapshot, everyone in their Sunday best, and we compare that not to us at our best, but to our worst; to the inner turmoil that gnaws at us, to that little voice that tells us we're less than or not enough.

It goes something like this: Reading the Bible? I have a Bible at home somewhere, but I don't open it as much as I'd like to. Prayer? Yeah, I pray when I remember, but I forget more often than not. Devotionals? I mean I've purchased one or two, but I've never done any with consistency. Christian living? If only these people knew the things I've done, the life I've lived, they'd throw me out of the church.

If only they knew about my marriage, my past, the way I've driven my family away. If only they knew about my addiction,

my impure thoughts, my sexual desires. If only they knew about the people I've wronged. If only they knew about my utter lack of Christian thought outside of Sunday mornings, how irrelevant God can be sometimes in my life, surely they'd kick me out of the church.

And so, we're afraid to ask it, but on some level, we do. We ask ourselves, Am I enough? Am I good enough? Am I Christian enough? Do I belong here? In church? Or, there, in heaven, with God? Am I enough?

There are two traps here with this line of thinking. One is to say, No, I'm not good enough. Everything you've said so far, Greg, is right. If people knew the things I've done, if people knew who I am deep down, they'd see me as a fraud and they'd throw me out. Or, maybe they wouldn't throw me out, but certainly, they'd think less of me. I know I'm inadequate compared to the person sitting next to me. That's one trap.

The other trap is to say you know I actually am doing pretty well. I give generously, I'm here every Sunday, I'm generally a successful person. In fact, I know I'm in better standing with God than the person sitting next to me is. That's the other trap.

So one trap is to look at yourself as a less-than Christian, and another is to go about the world looking at others as less-than Christians. This is something I'm convinced we all do, a lot of the time. It's easy and natural to sort ourselves this way: to put up these sorts of borders and to draw these boundaries. To say I'm

in and you're out, or you're in and I'm out. It's easy, and it's natural, and it's also really unhealthy. It's also really un-Christian.

Back when Jesus walked the earth, the temple in Jerusalem was at the center of Jewish religious life. The temple was holy. The center of the temple was known as the holy of holies. This central area was separated from the rest of the temple by a veil. This wasn't a flimsy veil either. This veil was estimated to be about sixty feet high, and early Jewish tradition says it's four inches thick. On the other side of the veil, in the holy of holies, is where God was believed to dwell.

Only one person was "worthy" to enter the holy of holies: the high priest, and the high priest could only enter once a year. God was contained to one space, accessible to one person, once a year.

But then, Jesus came. And, Jesus died. And, everything changed.

The temple veil, that great structure, sixty feet high, four inches thick, ripped completely in two and things would never be the same. God escaped into the world, permanently. No longer was God only for the high priest. No longer was God only accessible for one person one day a year. No, God made God's self available to all of us, all the time. God could no longer be housed by one people or controlled by one individual. God destroyed all boundaries of religiosity and proved God's self

uninterested in our classifications of who is good enough and who is not. God's work through Jesus Christ was for everyone. Jesus' death on the cross was for everyone. Everyone. EVERYONE.

Jesus died to eliminate boundaries of religiosity. Jesus died to eliminate distinctions between who's in and who's out. Jesus died to eliminate questions of "Am I good enough?", because he was good enough, and he died on your behalf.

Fast-forward to Pentecost, the day we remember today, the birthday of the Church. All God's people are gathered in one place. There are Jews and non-Jews. People who would traditionally be in and people who would traditionally be out. A diverse group of people together, not unlike what we have with us today at church. And, God continues that work of tearing the curtain in two, of not being contained or confined.

On Pentecost, God erupts onto the scene. The Holy Spirit bursts

into the meeting. There's flames, there's fire, there's tongues, there's red, and God speaks to everyone in their own language. God meets them where they're at, exactly as they are. God speaks to them and God works with them.

God doesn't stop them first and ask them about their job title or their qualifications. God doesn't ask them how much money they make a year. God doesn't ask them about their education. God doesn't ask them how they dress, how they smell. God doesn't ask them how old they are or what language they speak. God doesn't ask them about their race or nationality. God doesn't ask them about their level of devotion, about their past successes or past sins. God comes to them and meets them where they're at and fills them with God's spirit. Then God says, Follow me. I have plans for you.

Many of us have heard the Pentecost story before. But remember, for the crowd gathered that day, this was not the status quo. Again, they're used to only one person, the high priest, having



access to God. Here in a glorious, powerful, chaotic, frightening situation it only makes sense that some people in the crowd aren't entirely sure what's going on. What happens next in the text is Peter stands up and interprets for the crowd what exactly is happening. He quotes the Old Testament Book of Joel and says: Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young will see visions, your elders will dream dreams. Even my servants, men and women, everyone will be arrested by the spirit of God.

Did you hear that? Your young. Your elders. Your sons. Your daughters. Your servants. Men and women.

Age doesn't matter. Gender doesn't matter. Ability doesn't matter. Race doesn't matter. How you dress doesn't matter. Whether you smile enough doesn't matter. Whether or not you arrived to church on time doesn't matter. Whether you can quote a bunch of Scripture by heart doesn't matter. Where you come from or where you've been doesn't matter. Whether you're good enough doesn't matter. All that matters is that God is good. And, God chooses you.



Now make no mistake, God will change you and hone you and develop you in ways you could never imagine. God will challenge you to do things you never thought you could. But, when it comes to God's love, there's no such thing as being not good enough. There's an old quote that goes: God loves you just as you are, but too much to leave you that way. God's going to work on you, but make no mistake: God loves you first.

There's a book my mom used to read to me that I hope one day to read to my future children. It's a little book called, *I'd Choose You*. Parents of preschoolers, I know you have plenty of books for your little ones, but I'm telling you *I'd Choose You* is where it's at.

It's about an elephant named Norbert. He's talking to his parents about everything that went wrong that day at school. And, everything went wrong that day at school. Nobody sat with him on the bus; at lunch, he fell face first into his mashed potatoes; and he was the last person picked for baseball during recess.

Then his mom goes through every moment of Norbert's day, and she says: If I were on that bus do you know who I'd sit next to? Norbert says the name of the most popular girl in school. His mom says: No that's not it. Norbert's mom says: If I were picking teams do you know who I'd choose first? Norbert says the name of the star athlete, and his mom says: No that's not it.

The process repeats itself several times, then Norbert's mom says: If I could choose one elephant to sit next to on the bus,

one elephant to be on my team, one elephant to have as my child, I'd choose you.

Norbert's done nothing to deserve his mom's love. There's nothing special about him. He's not popular, he's not athletic, and he's not particularly talented in any way. None of that matters to his mom, who repeatedly tells him: I'd choose you.

Pentecost is God choosing us, all of us, exactly as we are, without qualification. Pentecost is God saying it doesn't matter if you think you're enough, because you're enough for God.

Wherever you are today, whether you think you belong in the holy of holies or somewhere far outside the temple; whether you're far along in your spiritual journey or just beginning; whether you envy the family in the pew next to you or you think you're doing pretty well more or less; know this: you are enough for God, and God loves you just as you are.

Friends, Jan Ammon ends her Imposter Syndrome sermons at Princeton saying something like this: You were chosen for a reason. You belong in this institution, you belong in this chapel, and it is no fluke. So, friends, I end today's sermon saying the same to you:

God chooses you for a reason. You are in this house of God for a reason. God will meet you exactly where you're at and use you to do magnificent things. You belong, you are a child of God, and you are absolutely enough.

Amen. ●

200 REASONS TO BE THANKFUL

A few weeks before Thanksgiving, Anne Gaudree, one of our active Elders and co-owner of Benvenuto Restaurant in Boynton Beach with her husband, Jean Philipe, called me with an interesting question. Thanksgiving dinner reservations were being cancelled due to the pandemic. She wanted to keep her staff employed for the holiday and was considering preparing Thanksgiving dinners for those in need. Could I suggest a program that might welcome Thanksgiving dinners?

I suggested Aging in Place, a new program serving seniors in Boynton Beach, many of whom are homebound. The Mission Outreach Committee had recently met with the director to learn more about the program and subsequently named Aging in Place as the recipient of our 2020 Christmas Eve offering.

I didn't hear from Anne again, but on the day after Thanksgiving I received a message from Sherry Johnson from Aging in Place: "We delivered 200 meals on Wednesday evening. The food was amazing. Our seniors were so thrilled ... We are all so full of gratitude I can't begin to tell you. I immediately called Anne ... It was a humbling experience for my staff and they were so proud of the amazing quality they were handing out. The meal was so huge it could have fed a Senior for almost a week!"



Working together, reaching out to others in need, sharing resources with each other and building bridges—this is faith in action.

For these 200, Thanksgiving became a special day this year! ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PER CAPITA)

In case you are wondering what the blue envelope near the beginning of your 2021 offering envelope box is for, you are not alone. “Per Capita” is the assessment that each congregation pays for each church member recorded on their membership rolls. It is assessed by our denomination (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) to cover the required administrative expenses to operate the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly offices of each judicatory. These expenses are rounded out to \$35 per member for 2021.

Since the Per Capita is included in calculating our operating budget, not everyone contributes extra to this source. Others prefer to do so in order to help ease a little of the financial burden that this places upon the church budget. A little extra giving does make a difference when our congregation’s total Per Capita assessment for 2021 is \$31,670. Thank you to those who choose to help. ●

EVERYTHING BLUE (PARKING STICKER)

Members of the church are entitled to display a blue church parking sticker. This is mounted on the inside of the front or back window of the car, wherever it is easiest to reach.

Everyone attending worship is allowed to park in the church parking lots on Sunday mornings. A parking sticker is not required for Sunday morning worship attendance.

However, if you are planning to attend an event, program, rehearsal, or meeting at the church at any other time of the week, the sticker is a signal that your car belongs on the church lot. Since the east parking lot is leased to a valet company, this sticker is a visual clue to them that you are a member and entitled to park in the lot.

Our parking lot located west of Gleason Street, across the street from the front of the Sanctuary, is leased to the City of Delray Beach

for their use, other than on Sunday mornings. Our blue parking sticker is not a substitute for paying for metered parking and you will receive a ticket from the city. The visual reminder that this parking lot is reserved for church events is the large Church Parking sign by the entrance.

If you are a member of the church and are in need of a new parking sticker, contact Nancy Fine in the church office. ●

by Ann Gill

Mission Outreach Committee

NEW MEMBERS

Heather Toffel

Philip Toffel



WELCOME!

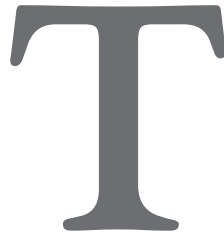


ETERNAL LIVES

Marthajane Kennedy
September 9, 2020

Fred Horenburger
December 12, 2020

PAJAMA AND BOOK DRIVE



he Mission Outreach Committee is hosting a Pajama and Book Drive during January to benefit the Palm Beach County chapter of Pajama Program just in time for Valentine's Day. What a wonderful way to share the love of God with children in our community.

Pajama Program has been caring for children in shelters and foster care and through other local organizations in our community that serve families who struggle to make ends meet through gifts of pajamas and books. These gifts help provide an opportunity for a loving bedtime routine, which leads to a peaceful good night and a positive good day. A good day simply isn't possible without a good night. That is why Pajama Program believes the 24-hour day starts at the most critical time of day: bedtime. Together we can help close the 24-hour Good Day Loop for all children.

Please help share the love of God to children in our community by bringing new books or pajamas in sizes from infant to Adult XXL for teenagers. You can drop off your donations in the Narthex on Sunday mornings in January or call the church office to make arrangements to drop items off in a safe manner. You can also choose to donate in the form of a check payable to *Pajama Program, Palm Beach County Chapter* and mail it to the church office. ●



Pajama Program
Good Nights Are Good Days

FILL A BAG, FEED A FAMILY

February is one of two months a year that our church family collects food for those in our community who don't have enough to eat. We are asking once again for your help in meeting the very real, very basic needs of those who are the hungriest in our larger community.



Unopened, non-perishable items are needed and include:

- Peanut Butter
- Canned Meat – Tuna, Chicken, Ham
- Boxed Pasta
- Bagged or Boxed Rice
- Dry Beans
- Canned Vegetables
- Canned Fruit
- Canned Soup
- Canned Spaghetti Sauce
- Canned Tomato Sauce

If you prefer not to shop during this time, you can donate in the form of a check, payable to *CROS Ministries*, and place it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office. The suggested cost of a bag of food is \$30.

Throughout February we will continue to receive bags of food on Sunday mornings. Thank you for caring about the under-resourced in our community. ●

by Nathanael Hood



TIME

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

The saying goes that the punishment must fit the crime. But anyone with any knowledge of or experience with the American prison system knows how rarely that can actually be the case. From the horrors of post-Civil War convict leasing, to ties between politicians and the for-profit prison industrial complex, to the establishment of mandatory minimum sentences, the American justice system has long cared more about incarcerating criminals and exploiting their labor than in reforming them and making society safer. Tens of millions of Americans are inured to these injustices, and why not? After all, one of America's central adages is don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

But Garrett Bradley's documentary *Time* reminds us that the people who suffer from imprisonment are rarely just the incarcerated themselves. Indeed, the loss of individuals to the prison system ripples throughout families and communities, leaving gaping chasms of absence and pain. The film examines the life of Sibil Fox Richardson, a Louisiana entrepreneur and mother of six who spent twenty years fighting to get her husband Rob exonerated from a sixty-year prison sentence for robbing a credit union. Many viewers may be surprised to learn that the film never questions Rob's guilt: he's 100% guilty and so, from a purely legalistic perspective,

he earned his sentence. So did Sibil, who served three years herself for her role as her husband's getaway driver. The question the film asks, then, is whether or not Rob's de facto life sentence was itself just, particularly when it means Sibil would be left to raise six children by herself.

Bradley's answer is a stirring work of cinematic empathy. Much of the film is drawn from approximately 100 hours of home movies Sibil filmed during her two-decade-long legal battle. We watch an entire family grow up before our eyes: baby bumps turn to children, children to teenagers, teenagers to adults. We watch Sibil climb out of poverty through sheer force of will, instilling similar virtues of hard work and perseverance in her kids. (Statistically, the children of incarcerated parents rarely graduate high school. Not only do her babies graduate, we see them go on to study dentistry and political science.) We also see a woman transformed by Christ's love—she becomes a devout Christian and in one heart-breaking scene filmed a few years after her incarceration asks her congregation for forgiveness for her crimes.

But no strength, no willpower, no resolve can take the place of a father, and the film slowly transforms into a devastating portrait of loss, loneliness, and emptiness. Much of the footage feels haunted by

Rob's absence, as if someone who should be there is just offscreen. Despite their brave, defiant faces, the exhaustion of perpetually navigating the court and prison bureaucracy shines through. It becomes apparent that Rob and Sibil are trapped in a system that has perfected the art of efficient inefficiency: they wait on hold on the phone seemingly for hours to hear about simple hearing and sentencing updates; they struggle with callously indifferent court clerks and secretaries who treat their case like an afterthought. Even Rob and Sibil's rare phone calls are mediated by predatory phone companies that charge them astronomic rates for calls that are cut off mid-sentence.

On a certain level, it's easy for us to forgive Sibil and Rob and root for their victory. They are, to put it mildly, the "good ones," prisoners who actually reformed and made good with their lives. We tell ourselves that they at least deserve their exoneration. But it's our Christian duty to ask about the prisoners who don't deserve it. What do we do or say about petty, nonviolent criminals locked up for decades because of Three Strikes rules? What do we say about violent felons who try to remake themselves in prison? What do we say about the violent felons who don't? The film offers no answers. Instead it only gives us a portrait of one family and the terrible effect time—endless, dreary time—can take. ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Tired and achy and cross from the constant barrage of news of COVID-19 and the election, hours spent at the computer, and months spent away from my children and extended family, I told myself last night that I needed to recalibrate. I was not fit company for my husband or my neighbors. I promised myself a walk on the beach at dawn.

So...here I am on the beach in Delray at the ridiculously early hour of 6 a.m. I walk through the dunes and seagrasses down to the shore just as the dawn is breaking over the ocean. Not the beautiful full-colored dawn of a cloudless horizon. No, this is a grey, solemn dawn covered with billowy clouds broken by one lone amber hint of sun. The constant breaking of waves along the shore is the only sound. Even the birds have abandoned the beach this morning.

The wind whips at my face as my feet revel in the warm waves washing over them. I laugh as a fierce wave catches me unawares and soaks me to the waist.

Born on the breath of dawn. Today, the breaking light and warm waves seem to be a promise. Not a promise of a cloudless sky and clear sailing. The darkening sky and wall of mist forming out over the ocean warn of storms ahead. Rather, today's dawn echoes the promise found in Isaiah 40:31—a rebirth, a renewal of strength. *They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

In his book *Front Porch Tales*, Philip Gulley tells of a beloved grandmother who always had time for him—except when she was saying her daily rosary. As a small boy, he resented that time, during which he was not allowed

to disturb her. As he grew older, he came to understand that her time spent in prayer was the secret to her warmth and strength the rest of the day.

I pause in my walk to turn and stare directly out over the ocean. Three large gulls, their wings flapping furiously, appear overhead. As I watch, the frantic flapping stills and their wings open wide; they catch a wind current and glide effortlessly across the beach. Born on the breath of dawn. I say a small prayer of thanksgiving and turn away from the shore to face the new day.

Where do you find your strength to face the day and shine like the sun? To warm and light up the lives of those around you? Today, I find mine here on the beach in Delray at dawn, walking with the Lord. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

As a result of theaters being closed nationally, Warner Brothers studios recently cut a deal to release all their 2021 movies onto the streaming service HBO Max. The studio's films will be available online – not after the theatrical run, as is tradition, but alongside it. So in order to see tentpole films like *Wonder Woman 1984*, *Dune*, and *The Conjuring 3*, you no longer have to drive to a theater. You need only sit on your couch, wait for the clock to strike midnight, and click play.

Some have called this a death knell for the theater industry. Pre-pandemic, theaters were already contracting, with venues closing, numbers dwindling, and staff laid off nationwide. Director Christopher Nolan – an advocate for the traditional, theatrical experience – denounced Warner Brothers' move in a publicly issued statement. Sean Fennessey, host of *The Ringer's Big Picture* podcast, speculated this as the beginning of the end for theatrical distribution. This day, Fennessey claims, has been coming for a long time, with so many people afraid to meet indoors. The pandemic has only catalyzed the timeline.

I do not need to tell you the similarities between the film industry and the mainline church in America. I do not need to point out how the in-person nature of worship parallels that of the movie theater. The two experiences are so similar that startup churches often rent out theaters for Sunday morning worship. I do not need to tell you that the church has slowly lost its grip on society. Our houses of worship are emptier than ever, all while more people are incorporating digital church into their way of life. Churches, like theaters, have been contracting. Pastors and support staff laid off. This past Christmas Eve, many faithful Christians chose to worship either at home or not at all.

Does the Christian church need to panic too? Should we channel our inner Christopher Nolan and protect the sanctity of the worship experience? Or should we instead embrace new forms of worship in a changing world?

I believe we should do the latter. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, there is a debate centered around circumcision. On one side is the old guard who believes that to follow God, any Christian, like any good Jew, ought to be circumcised. Paul,

on the other hand, recommends something else – a circumcision of the heart. Paul argues for flexibility when translating the gospel into new cultures. And when it comes to translating the gospel into new cultures, there is no one better than Paul.

God is unchanging, Paul argues, but in order to translate the gospel anew, we need to be willing to change the way we worship and honor God. We need to be flexible, not legalistic; inclusive rather than exclusive; and instead of reminiscing only of how things used to be, we ought to embrace what God is doing now and into the future.

Do not let anyone trick you into believing the church is dying. The church is evolving. Growing. Learning to meet the needs of a new culture in a new day. Hollywood's death knell may or may not be on the horizon, but for the church, the future is as bright as ever. We have a bright future because we have a bright God. A God who loves us, and who surprises us, and whose steadfast love endures forever. ●

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
West Palm Beach, FL
Permit #3064

The Community Church by the Sea

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

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

Sunday Morning Worship Services

9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

