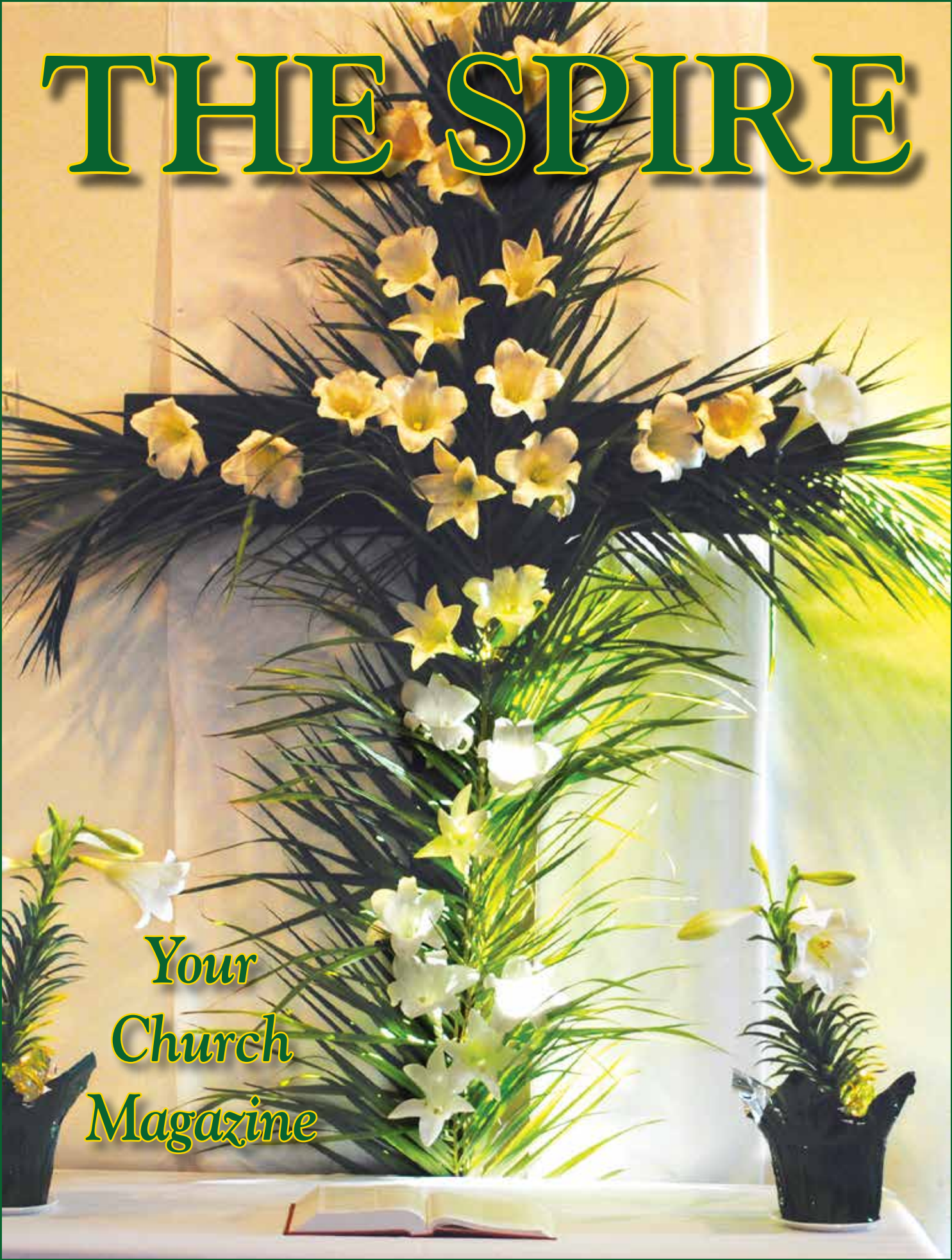


THE SPIRE



Your
Church
Magazine

March/April 2021



by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Senior Pastor

NURTURE FAITH

UNFINISHED DISCIPLESHIP

“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)

There are people in the church who have a favorite hymn but not a favorite scripture. They have picked out a favorite piece of music to feed their soul, but they do not have a favorite selection from the Bible to feed their mind. The soul is well nourished. The mind is not. Why would this be? I recall a woman telling me that she does not need to study the Bible. She studied the Bible formally in college classes. That was forty years ago! Asked what her favorite scripture was, she responded, “To thine own self be true.” That is not from the Bible. It is from the Shakespearean tragedy, Hamlet. Yet, she sings in the church choir each week. Classic, traditional church music feeds her soul, she told me. Nourishing the soul while neglecting the mind.

Paul writes to Timothy that God inspires scripture for expanding the mind. The essential value of scripture is to teach, to show mistakes, for correcting, and for training character. Beautiful sacred music inspires and takes a weary soul to a place of rest and nourishment. That is important in the life of a disciple. However, it is not enough. Paul reminds us here, as he does in other places, that God created us for a purpose. God created each person to be useful to God. Scripture makes us useful. Scripture shapes us, forms us, and equips us to be participants in God’s work in the world. Inspired by sacred music while lacking usefulness to God is unfinished discipleship.

We belong to God. Paul is clear on that point. Can you imagine staffing your business with people who lack the basic skill set to get the work done? Christian baptism is Kingdom staffing. Baptism is God’s claim on us. God chooses us and provides the Bible as a training manual for equipping us to be useful. Baptism is also our promise. We promise to make God’s work the very center of our life. That means that we will expand our capacities for accomplishing each task God places in our charge. Done well, God’s Kingdom expands continually affecting positively more and more lives. That results in exponential growth of God’s purposes in the world. That is, if each new baptized disciple is useful.

I am asking that you feed your mind daily on God’s word in the Bible. Memorize passages that seem particularly meaningful. Throughout the day, as you go about other tasks, recall to mind those passages you have memorized. Think deeply about why that particular passage is important to you. That simple process accomplishes a big part of God’s work in each person – reflecting on what God intends for us to hear from a portion of scripture that resonates with us. Prayerfully ask two questions: “What would you have me hear, O Lord?” and “What would you have me do, O Lord?” Day after day, you will discover that God’s Spirit is upon you, equipping you for God’s good purposes in the world. That is what discipleship looks like. ●

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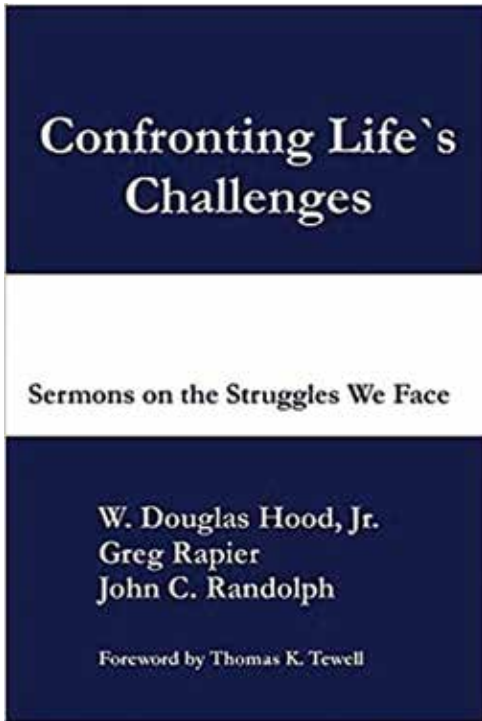
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If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office. Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.

CONFRONTING LIFE'S CHALLENGES: SERMONS ON THE STRUGGLES WE FACE



In these challenging days when we are living through a pandemic that has gripped our world, as well as racial tensions and protests in a divided nation, this is a book whose time is now. Aptly titled, Confronting Life's Challenges: Sermons on the Struggles We Face, these sermons are practical to the core. They do not shy away from the tough questions and perplexing issues which confront us each day. Instead, they urge us to focus on God as we face real-life issues of anxiety and anger, guilt and grief, doubt and despair. Our preachers instruct us to open our eyes, by faith, and see the presence of God in our midst! ●

Tom Tewell

by **Maryann Rana**

PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM

“May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed!

He is the compassionate Father and God of all comfort.

*He’s the one who comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort
other people who are in every kind of trouble.*

We offer the same comfort that we ourselves received from God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 (Common English Bible)

With our servant-like attitude, great love for family, friends, and church, and as those who belong to him, we pray that with God’s purpose and diligence we can benefit those in need, reflecting Christ in our actions.

The Prayer Ministry Team meets separately in our homes for now, but we do meet together daily in our hearts and minds on the behalf of others.

We invite you to join our Prayer Ministry Team. Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for additional information. ●

by **Grace Cameron Hood**

Director of Children and
Family Ministry



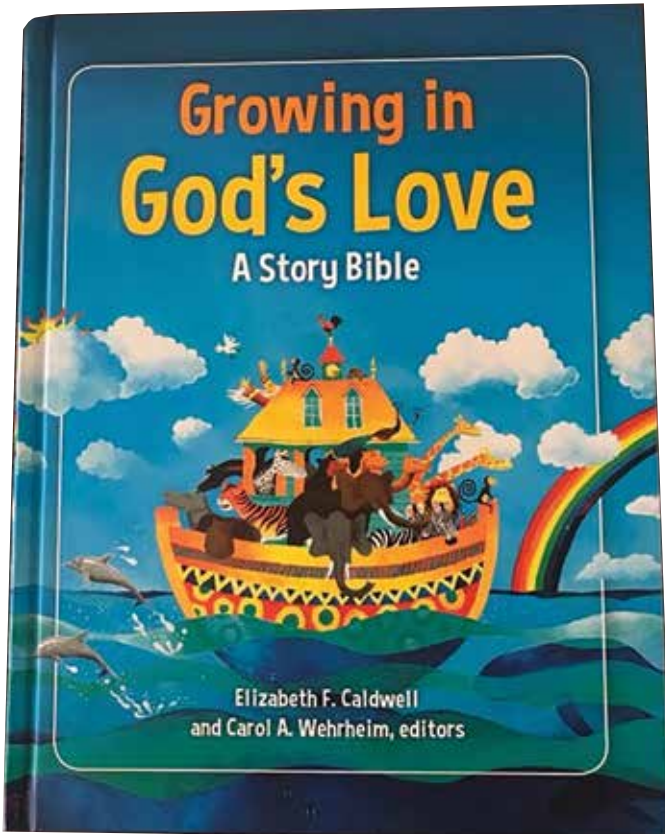
FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

The Journey to Easter

As I have been thinking about Lent and Easter, I wanted to try something different this year. We, as Presbyterians, do not usually celebrate Lent, which is the 40 days before Easter not counting Sundays. We seem to skip from donuts, Mardi Gras, and Ash Wednesday to Holy Week. In some faiths, Lent is a time to give something up to remember Jesus' suffering.

In this year of bouncing balls and pivoting, I would like to try something different. Instead of giving something up, I would like to challenge all First Families to add something. I want to challenge every family to read a Bible Story each day until Easter.

To create a sense of unity, I would like to recommend we all use the same Bible Story Book, Growing in God's Love. A copy of this has been mailed to many families. If you did not receive one and would like a copy, you can order it online or contact Grace Hood (gracehood@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 17) to request a copy.



Growing in God's Love, a Story Bible is available
for purchase on Amazon or pcusastore.com.

Each chapter is short and easily readable to even the youngest child. This Bible Story Book is not necessarily in order of time. It is a book designed to tell the wonderful story of God's love and how God's love changes us. At the end of each story, there are three questions: Hear, See and Act. All of this might take up to 5 minutes.

I would also love to see all the members of the church participate in this challenge. The daily story is posted on the church website, so anyone can read it using their own Bibles. ●

WHAT IS UP!!

As we are planning for the next couple of months, I want to ask that First Families keep several dates on their calendars. All of these activities and dates are subject to modification. Creativity and flexibility are the keywords!

The Church Easter Egg Hunt will be March 28th, Palm Sunday.

Vacation Bible School will be June 7th to 11th.

Puttin' Into Fall TBD.

Celebrate Advent will be November 28th. ●

SESSION REPORT

During the months of January and February, the Session received new members and approved baptisms. They also postponed the Annual Congregational Meeting to Sunday, March 7th. In January, Session approved the metrics for closing and opening for in-person worship (see our website for those specifics). Session elected a new Treasurer, Carl Fedde, effective March 1st. They also approved the request from the Deacons to reduce their number to twenty-four. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Christmas Eve Offering (Aging in Place) in honor of Marge Lanthier, from Judy, Nancy, Peter, John, Anne, and Michelle Lanthier; in honor of her best friends, Tirzah Cohen, Laurel Scheaf, Molly Partridge, Roger Smith, Donna Smith, Linda Zraik, and Nancy Zapolski; and family, Ryan and Nikki Le Gassick, Calvin Le Gassick, Josh Le Gassick, and Greg Le Gassick, from Gale Barnum; and, in loving memory of Dan Gimbel, from Spencer and Ellen Everett.

Remembrance Fund in loving memory of his grandparents, William F. and Margaret H. Mitchell, from Andrew Melissinos. ●

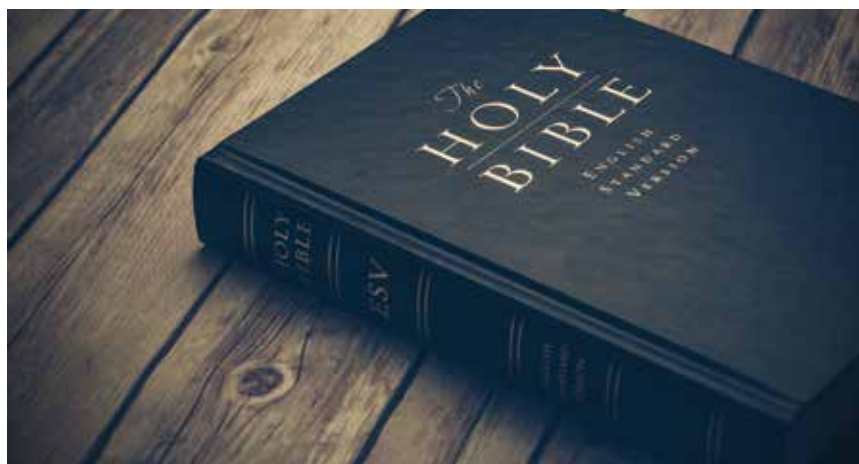
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING HAS BEEN RESCHEDULED

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be on Sunday, March 7th, immediately following the worship service. ●

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

As we approach Easter Sunday, April 4th, make sure to visit our website about our Holy Week Worship Opportunities. ●

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY



The Monday Morning Women's Bible Study is looking at the Lenten season through the lens of sacred art using the series Arts & Faith: Lent. Each week, we watch a short video commentary about a work of art inspired by the Sunday Scriptures. Commentary is by Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, assistant professor of liturgy, catechesis, and evangelization at Loyola University New Orleans. We read the Scriptures together and are provided background on the artists and art styles.

Our group meets via Zoom at 10 a.m. on Monday mornings. Email Maria Graham at mmg2352@gmail.com if you would like to be added to the invitation list. We'd love to have you join us! ●

by Ann Shuman

DEACONS' CHRISTMAS TREE REPORT

I have read that "the generosity of the human spirit can be a light in dark times". We can all agree that Christmas during a pandemic is certainly the darkest of times.

Thanks to the generosity of spirit at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach, the Deacons were able to give 300 children \$25 gift cards to Target or Walmart this Christmas. Each of the five agencies was so grateful for our gifts. A note from the Milagro Center thanked us for "investing in the cultivation of the artists and leaders of tomorrow". The Deacons believe that investing in our children's future is always money well spent.

The agencies and the Deacons of First Presbyterian offer heartfelt thanks for the wonderful donations to help our under-resourced children in our community. ●



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 ANXIOUS?

Matthew 6:25-34

Listen for God's Word:

"Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Matthew 6:34

As I sat down this week to prepare the message that is before you I remembered a story shared with me as a child. Perhaps you heard the same story. The story of a clock that decided to stop ticking. It seems that one day this clock began to think about how many times it would have to tick that year. It added up to over thirty-one million times. The clock became anxious and overwhelmed. Thirty-one million times was a lot, more than the clock could emotionally manage. The clock gave up. It decided to quit, abandoning the profession of being a clock. One day someone reminded the clock that it did not have to tick all thirty-one million times at once. All that was required and expected was that the clock would just tick one tick at a time. That would be enough. Calm restored, the clock reengaged, and began once again to keep time.



How many of us are overwhelmed like that clock? We think about the number of friends and family members that are close to us and that each have their own problems. Their difficulties add up to thirty-one million. We are overwhelmed caring for them. Then there are our own needs. We are overwhelmed. We grow anxious. Just like the clock, we just want to quit. The story of the clock teaches us that we do not have to tackle all thirty-one million

problems at once. Only one difficulty at a time. This morning's message is about anxiety. It is a struggle common to all of us. This week, I looked deeply into this text, reading the reflections from liberal scholars and conservative scholars. Additionally, I listened to over thirty-two years of ministry, of people coming into my office and sharing with me how they faced anxiety positively. I have gathered three things that I want to share with you: three observations

that may help you with the challenges of anxiety. Not one of these may be new to you. The three things that I offer may be tools you have already found. That great Christian thinker C.S. Lewis once said that there are times when the people of God simply need to be reminded rather than instructed, times when we simply need to be reminded of what we already know rather than to be instructed on something new.

The first thing that I want to share with those wrestling with anxiety is that you need to travel lightly. I learned this when I went to serve a congregation in Texas in 1994. Shortly after my arrival at a congregation in Irving, Texas, a member of that congregation took me aside and shared with me that he had three daughters. He would introduce me to two of his daughters, but he could not introduce me to his third daughter. That is because she had died at a young age. He shared that this daughter was so alive, so loving, and so caring. She embraced everyone that she met warmly. Then she became very ill. Doctors could do little, and in a short time she was gone.

He shared with me that, prior to his daughter's illness, he was anxious about many things. The company he had worked with for over twenty years was now in the midst of a major restructuring. He was against every one of the changes. He went to management, and he



let management know that he was against all the restructuring. They listened, but demonstrated that they were not interested in his ideas. The restructuring proceeded as planned. His residential community was under the authority of a Homeowner's Association. Major changes were placed before the homeowners for consideration. He found himself in the minority opposing the changes. His neighbor, only two homes from his own, began making some landscaping decisions that he disagreed with. He shared his concerns with his neighbor, that he felt the changes in landscaping did not fit the community. The neighbor listened respectfully. Finally, the neighbor ignored the helpful suggestions and proceeded as planned. The anxiety only increased. The church also contributed to his anxiety. It is 1990, and the Presbyterian Church has published a new Hymnal. The red hymnbook that had been in service to the church for decades

was replaced. This man simply did not like the new hymnbook. You may remember that *Readers Digest* even commented on the new hymnal with a very unhelpful article. The article stirred resistance to the hymnal by pointing out that it no longer had the hymn, Onward Christian Soldiers. Naturally, he voiced his concern to the governing board of the church, but to no avail. The blue hymnal was now in the church.

Anxiety over his workplace, his residential community, his neighbors' landscaping decisions, and the new church hymnal consumed him. Then, his daughter became ill. Suddenly, that was all that mattered. He poured all of his energy into helping her overcome her illness, only to see her die.

Remarkably, over time, he began to appreciate the landscaping changes his neighbor made and began to borrow some of his ideas. He also decided to trust the leadership board of the church and the decision to replace the church hymnal. In fact, he simply decided

to stop fighting every change in his life, and to travel the road of life lightly. His concerns were now limited to loving his daughters and his wife. He stopped carrying a suitcase of concerns and reduced his baggage to a carryon.

The second thing that I share with you is to listen deeply to the words of Christ here in Matthew. Christ teaches us to worry about today only and let tomorrow take care of itself. That is Christ teaching us to balance our mental budget. Many of us are going into mental and emotional overdraft. That is because we are gathering all the problems of tomorrow, and next week, and next month, and next year, and we are placing them before us today. That is precisely what the clock did, counted all the times it would tick in one year and worried about all of them at once. None of us has sufficient funds to cover it all. We go into overdraft when we pay attention to today's problems and tomorrow's. Matthew tells us to let tomorrow's problems take care of themselves tomorrow. I have a pastor friend who has two adult sons, both married. Both have children. One son is an alcoholic. When he realized that his drinking problem threatened to cost him his marriage and his relationship with his children, he sought help. As is common with people in Alcoholics Anonymous, some experience multiple failures before a

sustained period of sobriety. They fall down and get back up. Finally, the day came when he took his last drink. On the second anniversary of his sobriety, he received a call from his father. His father congratulated the son for beating alcoholism. If you have struggled with alcoholism or you have a family member or friend who struggles with alcoholism, you can imagine the son's response. "Thank you, dad, for your love and support. Moreover, thank you for remembering that this is the second anniversary of my sobriety. However, I do not know if I have beat this disease, and neither do you. What I ask for, dad, is that you pray with me right now, over the phone, that I will go to bed tonight and fall asleep without taking a drink. My only concern is for today. Tomorrow I will fight tomorrow." We must balance our mental budget and fight today what is before us today. Let tomorrow fight tomorrow's difficulties.

The third thing that I would share with you from the reading of Scripture and listening to congregations for thirty-two years is that we need to learn to rest our souls in God: to take those things that trouble our minds and make us anxious and to bring them to God and rest in the power of God.

I heard a wonderful story some years ago of a mother that trusted her little daughter

to walk to the grocery store for a loaf of bread. The store was close to home and a short walk. The mother gave her daughter some money and reminded her that they had walked there together many times. "Would you walk to the store and purchase a loaf of bread before dinner?" The daughter was so pleased her mother trusted her to go to the store by herself. With money in hand, the little girl left the house for the store. The mother knew how long a walk to the store should be. When the little girl did not return in a reasonable period, the mother grew anxious. After looking out the window multiple times, the mother was just about to call the police when her daughter appeared at the door. The mother asked her daughter what took so long. She simply answered, "I was helping my friend, Debbie, from down the street". Seems that Debbie had accidentally broken her doll. "She loved that doll so much. So I helped her." "You helped her? What could you have possibly done to help Debbie with her broken doll?" asked the mother. "I helped her cry". Do not ever minimize the power of simply sitting with someone who is broken, crying with them. This is what Scriptures calls us to do: to take our brokenness and place it in the care of Almighty God, who cries with us and embraces us with God's love.

After my friend in Texas lost his daughter, he began to travel lightly. He had difficulty understanding why a God of love would allow his little girl to die.

We all share this difficulty. However, he did not stop his wife and his two daughters from going to church. Moreover, they did so every week. However, he was unable to go. After his wife and his two daughters dressed and went to church, he would work around the house. This continued for almost a year when one day, on a Friday, the mother dressed the two daughters for church. As they were heading out the door, he said, "Sweetheart this is Friday. Where are you going?" His wife answered, "This is Good Friday. We are going to the Good Friday services". After his family walked out the door, he began to remember the significance of Good Friday. It is the day when God watched a world inflict unimaginable cruelty upon his boy. It is a day when God watched this world nail his

boy to a cross and simply left him there to die. "It was then I realized, for the first time, that though I don't understand the cross, and I certainly don't understand at all how God could let my little girl die, at least God knows the pain to lose a child. I also realized that the best way to honor the legacy of my little girl was to love as deeply as she did. I started going back to church. I still did not understand why God allowed my little girl to die. Yet, I now understand that God had suffered as I did. God also had a child taken from him. More, three days later God raised that boy back up to life once again. It was then I realized that God is not yet done here on earth. Therefore, I have returned to church and returned to being useful to God. I do not understand much about God and my faith. I have many

questions. Perhaps, just perhaps, somewhere along the journey of life, the answers will come to me."

As we were sitting together talking, I noticed on his coffee table the blue Presbyterian Hymnal, the new hymnal that was causing him so much anxiety. I did not say anything but he clearly knew what was on my mind. My curiosity was unmistakable. "I'm still angry they took out Onward Christian Soldiers," he told me. "However, there are some new hymns in that hymnbook that I really like. I found some new favorite ones. I purchased a copy so that my two girls and my wife and I can sing one of the new hymns together at night before we go to bed. I guess it was not such a bad decision after all, the publishing of a new hymnbook. Moreover, I now trust God more, particularly in those times I simply do not understand". May it be so for you and for me. *Amen* ●



CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING: FROM HUNGER AND ISOLATION...

At Christmas, you shared Christ's love with 137 seniors in our community, helping them move from hunger and isolation to the wonder and joy of his love.

Our Christmas Eve offering was dedicated to Aging in Place, a program of the Boynton Beach Faith Based Community Development Corporation (CDC) which focuses on providing healthy meals, fresh vegetables, and social activities to deal with health concerns resulting from senior isolation. This program had previously been under the direction of the Community Caring Center (CCC), which closed last June and was restarted late last summer under the CDC.



Our goal was to provide funding to provide the 137 seniors in the program with two meals a week for six weeks at the cost of \$4 per meal. This will provide Aging in Place the time needed for the program to secure more sustainable funding.

This is from Sherry Johnson, the program's director:

We are so excited about the amazing opportunity the Congregation has given us to get our Healthy Senior Meals up and running. This will give us the track record needed to request grants ... Just an amazing JUMP START to a program we know improves nutritional health and promotes "Aging in Place" efforts we have already documented as successful with CCC. Our Honey Do's are in place, the Chef has returned, God's in his heaven and all is right with the world ... these seniors will be getting a hearty soup, healthy meal, full frittata, and sandwich with cutie (small orange) each week.

Thanks to your love, your generosity and your caring, these seniors will be served for sixteen weeks and the program will be well established to continue serving these seniors.

God Bless you all! ●

by Nathanael Hood



SOUL

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

One of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible is the twenty-sixth verse of the second chapter of Genesis. It happens immediately after God reaches into Adam, plucks a rib, and makes the first woman, Eve, with it. In this wonderful verse, all is well in God's creation. Man and Woman live together with God in perfect harmony in the Garden—naked, unashamed, innocent. The very next verse introduces the Serpent, and with it a disruption of the Garden's peace. From there, all things rush inevitably towards the Fall. But here, in the twenty-sixth verse, everything is As It Should Be.

There is, of course, no twenty-sixth verse.

If there was a time of perfect contentment between God and God's Creation, when all of our needs were met and satisfied, the Bible's writers thought them irrelevant to the story they sought to tell. I suspect a certain pragmatism on their part, a need to jump straight to the roots of humanity's current misery and loneliness, our lingering sense of misdirection, which so often seems distant from the hand of a loving God. There's too much sorrow and too little sense in these lives of ours to dwell on a pre-historic time when everything

was new and fresh and perfect.

The rest of Genesis—the rest of the entire Bible, even—is the search for this twenty-sixth verse. Humanity has many names for it: the meaning of life, one's *raison d'être*, our "purpose." But whatever we call it, it's the intangible *something* we hope will fill the meaning-sized hole in our lives. Some are lucky enough to find it. Some find their life's purpose in ministry or helping others. Some teach. Some heal. Some build. Some parent. But Joe Gardner? His twenty-sixth verse is music. Ever since the day his dad dragged him into a murky Manhattan jazz club, he knew the sole reason he was put on this earth was to play the piano. It's what makes him feel complete, like he's found his center in this universe, his Peace in the Garden. So he toils away at a thankless job teaching middle school band, gigging and auditioning, hoping he can make it as a musician and finally feel whole.

And then, on the day he gets his dream gig at the legendary Half-Note Club, he falls down an open manhole and dies. This is how Pete Docter's *Soul*, the latest film from Disney's Pixar Animation Studios, opens. From there, we watch as Joe's disembodied spirit struggles to get back to his body in time for

his performance. After ducking the line to the Great Beyond, he finds himself stuck in the Great Before, a strange land where pre-born souls are molded and readied for life. Through a series of very odd circumstances, he finds himself back on earth trapped in the body of a cat while his actual body is possessed by 22, a rebellious unborn soul he met in the Great Before who has spent literal millennia trying to avoid being born. All you need to know about 22—who is voiced by Tina Fey—is that she chooses to sound like a middle aged white lady because she believes it's the most annoying voice a person can have, and she loves tormenting others with it.

Joe and 22's odyssey is one of the stranger ones in recent Pixar movies, due in no small part to the involvement of Docter, who's been responsible for some of the studio's riskiest and most introspective films. He was the filmmaker who gave us *Up* (2009), with its opening montage that somehow crammed the entire life of a married couple—from their meeting as children to the man's lonely widowerhood—in five heartbreaking minutes. He also directed *Inside Out* (2015), which dived into the landscape of a young girl's emotions for a story which argued that negative feelings are just as important as positive



ones, as they're all part of what makes a person a person. Docter's protagonists seldom seek a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow or a princess to rescue from a tower. Instead, they find themselves on journeys of self-discovery. They all seek their twenty-sixth verse.

Soul is one of the best Pixar movies in recent years, barely missing the herculean heights of the studio's golden age in the 00s. There are a couple of reasons for this, from its overcomplicated mythos of extra-dimensional zones and intra-dimensional beings to a reliance on slapstick humor that feels like a loss of nerve on the filmmakers' part, almost like they were afraid their high-concept material would fly over their audience's head if they didn't jangle keys in front of them every now and then. And, as many black critics have pointed out, it's the latest in a depressingly long line of children's animated films where a black protagonist spends the majority of the film in an animal's body.

But when *Soul* is good, it's not just good, it's great. I won't give away what happens in the film, but I will linger for a moment on a scene near the end after Joe returns to his apartment after getting his body back. He's ostensibly gotten his life back in order, attaining the

one thing he thought he wanted more than anything else. And yet he still feels unsatisfied. So he puts all the knickknacks and mementos of his whirlwind day on his piano and just... plays. Slowly, memories start to wash over him. Good ones. Bad ones. Memories shared with loved ones. Memories spent alone. Memories of boredom and emptiness, of simple contentment in simple things. Light through tree branches. New York City's skyline. A bite of warm pie. All the things that make Joe a very small part in a very big universe, but one nonetheless so important, so necessary, so loved that his absence caused it to grind to a halt to find him. In that moment Joe realizes that life isn't our hopes and dreams. Life isn't our failures or successes. Life is all the moments in between, no matter how insignificant. The meaning of life is found in its living, and this living is in itself sacred and holy.

I like to think Joe discovered that there is no twenty-sixth verse. We're all too busy living it. ●

NEW MEMBERS

Chip Dickson

Ellen Dickson

Judy Eber

Warren Eber

Paige Eber-Emihovich

Doug Kennedy

Lauren Kennedy

Lolly Prince



WELCOME!



ETERNAL LIVES

Laura Cote

March 26, 2020

Ruth Lindblad

April 20, 2020

Dorothy Hasson

June 6, 2020

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

“Tis the season.” No, not the Christmas holiday season—the tourist season. Some call it the snowbird season, but to many of us it is simply *The Season*. The season of crawling, snarling traffic; parking lot fender benders; and impatient, blaring horns. The *vroom-vrooms* of motorcycles, the roars of Ferraris, and the high-pitched exhaustive shrieks of Lamborghinis. Of sirens: police, fire, and ambulance sirens.

This morning, just as the landscapers’ mowers and ear-piercing blowers grow quiet, shuffleboard discs collide with a loud CLANG on the court below and a dozen or so boaters duel with music, stereos blasting at full volume as they pass by on the intracoastal.

TIME FOR A WALK.

My husband and I seek our escape on a little-known path: the boardwalk at Ocean Ridge Natural Area. After leaving the car on a side street off A1A (the nature area has no parking lot), we walk three blocks to this beautiful 12 1/2 -acre mangrove swamp. We are alone here today—well, perhaps not

truly alone. Crabs scuttle across the boardwalk, and herons land silently in distant trees. We cross bridges over rippling indigo water. The softly flowing current below begins to wash away the tenseness of the morning. *Peace like a river...* I don’t remember all the words to my father’s favorite hymn, but those I do remember seem to resemble a prayer of thankfulness. Thankfulness for God’s constant presence in our lives. That presence is abundantly clear in this wild, hidden area—so near, and yet seemingly so removed from the bustle of *The Season*.

Jesus’s words in John 14:27 play in my mind. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto to you... Do not let your hearts be troubled...* I feel his comforting presence wrap itself around me.

We continue our walk. Ahead lies the observation tower, a large tree house surrounded by overgrown mangroves and cactus palms and an endless blue sky. The path ends at a boat dock. From here, our vista includes the intracoastal waterway to the west and a small pristine lagoon to our north.

What is it about water that so calms the soul? Perhaps it’s the sound of the rippling of the river current, the burbling laughter as the water dances over stones, or the soft lapping of small waves along the shore. Or, maybe, it’s the puddles of brilliant sunbeams sparkling on the surface of a quiet lagoon. Peace. I send a prayer out over the water to my God who blesses me today, a prayer of thanksgiving for the calming peace of his presence here in the quiet woodlands and the rippling water.

As we return to A1A and the bustle of *The Season*, I find I am still smiling. After all, *The Season* isn’t just about noise and snarling traffic. It’s a time of relief from Florida’s heat and humidity—a time of cool nights and perfect days. A season of renewed friendships as snowbirds return from up north and childhood friends join us for a day or two with socially-distanced visits at the beach. A season of companionship and laughter and love. *It is well with my soul.* ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

New Ushering Ministry Opportunity

Have you been itching to become more involved in the church? Maybe you've sensed a call somewhere deep within to serve God and others, but you've been unsure how to answer. Maybe you're already serving the church, and you know the value it adds to your life. Maybe you're just looking for new friends and an opportunity to meet new people.

Friends, these are all totally legitimate reasons to join the new ushering ministry at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. You've seen ushers here before. They're the people opening doors, greeting and interacting with guests, passing out bulletins, collecting the offering, and more. They're more than just the hands and feet of the church. On Sunday mornings, they're the smile of the church as well.

In the past, this role was staffed exclusively by deacons. Many deacons find this a meaningful part of their ministry and, despite the busyness of their position, will continue to serve. This is a testament to the strength of this ministry.

Whether you're here seasonally or year-round, this is a ministry that can fit into your schedule. We will have a minimal number of meetings per year – four or less (preferably just one). Your time spent ushering should add very little to your workload, since you would normally be at church on Sunday anyway. Ushers who are available during the week will also have an opportunity to usher during memorial services. This is a wonderful form of outreach, and also a way to embody the steadfast love of God to those navigating grief.

If you are uncomfortable serving due to Covid, please note

that the church has modified usher responsibilities for the pandemic, and that the church would never call upon you for a particular Sunday if you are uncomfortable attending in person for any reason.

All participants in this ministry will agree to a background check – these are strictly confidential. We are looking only for major red flags regarding the handling of money or other aggressions. All participants will also attend a brief training session, scheduled TBD during a regular Sunday morning. The first meeting is also at a time TBD, depending on the number of volunteers and also the pandemic. **We will make big decisions regarding our uniforms at this meeting.**

If you would like to be a part of this ministry, you can call the church office (561-276-6338) or contact Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com). ●

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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Sunday Morning Worship Services

10 a.m.

