

THE SPIRE

*Your
Church
Magazine*



May/June 2021



by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

NURTURE FAITH

HAPPY PEOPLE

***“Happy are people who are hopeless,
because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”***

Matthew 5:3 (Common English Bible)

Crowds again gathered near to Jesus. Wherever Jesus seemed to travel, word would quickly move among the community and people would drop whatever activity that engaged them to listen for a word from Jesus – any word. Such was the power of the spoken word that fell from the lips of Jesus. That day was no different than today. As the old maxim goes, “Time is money.” If people stopped whatever they were doing to hear a word from Jesus, there was perceived value in that word. The value was simply that Jesus addressed life – life, as we have to live it. Jesus’ words were never dissociated from life. They were deliberate, vital, life-giving. Jesus never spoke to simply capture an ear. Jesus came to solve problems with living.

On this particular day, the first word spoken by Jesus was, “Happy.” It is not possible to overestimate the significance of that beginning. This was not a chance word – a word chosen at random. Jesus could not begin his sermon that day with any other word. It was an inevitable word. The whole point of God coming to God’s people in flesh and blood, to live life as we lived life, was to experience life as we experienced life. Life is difficult. Daily, the determination to be happy, to experience life as God intends, meets with disappointment, inequity, and struggle. Our experience is Jesus’ experience. In the final analysis, Jesus sought to lessen the struggle. So, Jesus chooses this day to offer practical guidance for a happy life.

It is a welcomed word. The world is captive to an instinctive desire for happiness. Many may struggle for happiness, day following day on what seems an endless journey. We might imagine that to be the story for many who gathered that day to listen to Jesus. Yet, the desire remains undiminished. However painful life may become, people cling to the hope – the possibility – that happiness might be claimed. Each of us believes in it, we seek it, the thought of happiness possessing us, demanding to be possessed. It is as though the great verdict of the world is that God intends that we are happy, and Jesus has come to do what is necessary to deliver on God’s intention.

As the people listened that day to Jesus, they heard God’s manifesto – they heard God’s singular concern for the well-being of all people. This would be the driving purpose, the driving force at the center of Jesus’ ministry. The absence of happiness was the cause of the world’s misery. The broken, the listless, the weary gathered at the foot of a mountain that day to be encouraged that hope remained in their grasp. Lives scorched by sin, lives on the cusp of despair nevertheless hoped against hope that there might be another day with beauty available to them. Matthew tells us that such a number gathered that they were a crowd. Looking at them, Jesus sat down and taught them. He began with one word, “Happy.” ●

CHURCH STAFF

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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.**

by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

FAITH CONVERSATIONS

Each of us has an extraordinary story to tell, an extraordinary story of God's work in our lives. And, as Tom Long says, as we tell that story, our own faith is strengthened as well as that of those who hear our story. Nothing holds greater promise of increasing the vitality and impact of the Christian Church than an increasing number of people sharing their extraordinary faith story. The difficulty is, many people have trouble finding the words to adequately tell their stories. *Faith Conversations* is an opportunity to share something of your own story in worship. As stories are heard, people who previously didn't know how to speak of their faith will find words, images, and experiences that parallel their own story. They will find their own means of telling how God is at work in their lives.

You are invited to participate in this great enterprise of sharing your faith story by joining with me in *Faith Conversations* in worship. In five or six minutes you will be asked to respond to three questions: What is your daily practice for spending time with God (your devotional time each day)? What is your favorite Bible verse and why? And, how has this particular church been helpful to you in your own faith and walk with Jesus Christ? Please contact Nancy Fine, the church's Business Administrator, by calling (561-276-6338) or emailing (nancyfine@firstdelray.com) to schedule, and I will call you with further instruction. Join me in this conversation time in worship and become part of some extraordinary moments in our ministry together! ●

by Maryann Rana

PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM

"We all pray ... some. We pray to stay sober, centered, or solvent. When the lump is deemed malignant. When the money runs out before the month does. When the marriage is falling apart. We pray."

Max Lucado

The Prayer Team at First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach, upon receiving your request, then prays for you and with you. We also have the responsibility of being the two or more gathered together in God's name. That does not mean you don't have to pray. God hears all prayer and provides his best for the person or situation. Prayer is a heartfelt conversation between God and his child. Our Father wants to hear from us and speak to us. Let the conversation begin.

Prayer requests that come through the church office are then distributed to each member of the Prayer Ministry Team. Each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer with respect and confidentiality. You are invited to join the Prayer Ministry Team by calling (561-276-6338) or emailing Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com) in the church office for more information. ●

by **Grace Cameron Hood**

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

First Family News!

It is exciting to see that, as more and more people are getting their vaccinations, the church program is opening up more and more. Here are some important changes we want to share. ●

Vacation Bible School

Due to shortened time off for children we are now planning a modified VBS in the FALL. This will be called **Thursdays at First**. This will be **Thursday evenings from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. beginning October 7th through December 16th**. The evening format will start with supper, which will be provided by volunteers. One benefit of this will be that more members of the church will be able to sit and eat with the children and youth of the church. We will also include a Bible story, service projects, a craft or experiment of some sort, and music. This exciting program is designed to involve as many age groups as possible, from little ones to older ones. ●

Nursery and Bible Bunch

We are hoping to start the Nursery and Bible Bunch programs of the church back up again at the beginning of the school year. Keep your eyes open for updates. ●

Sunday School

Our Sunday School program continues to grow in person. As more and more children attend in person, we will review the need to continue the 9 a.m. Zoom Sunday School class. Sunday School is being done in the breezeway by Fellowship Hall. As the weather gets hotter, we will move it inside of Fellowship Hall to take advantage of the cool air, and will keep the doors open to create a breeze as long as it is deemed necessary. We are following all current CDC policies for the safety and comfort of our children and volunteers. As CDC policies change, we will move back toward the normal Sunday School format. ●



FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Singjaidee Family

I would like to introduce the Singjaidee Family: Rod and Pregi and their three children, Nathan, Nilla, and Neo.

Rod is originally from Thailand and Pregi is from Indonesia. They met in New Hampshire at graduate school. Since Rod cannot speak Indonesian, and Pregi cannot speak Thai, they speak English at home. However, they still try to introduce both languages and cultures to their children at home (such as greetings and daily words) since none of the grandparents understand English. They talk with their extended family via FaceTime as much as they can, even prior to the pandemic. This keeps the family ties strong as it is a 36 hour trip to be with them in person. Since they do not have any immediate family in the United States, they like to think of the church as their family here.

Pregi and Rod moved to Florida in 2006 and opened a small restaurant, Furin Sushi and Thai. They have backgrounds in hospitality and business and Rod is very passionate about cooking. After 12 years in business, they lost everything due to an electrical fire and needed to close their first location. They found their new location just one year prior to the pandemic. They feel very blessed with so many prayers and support from the church family and community.

Here, Pregi tells her story in her own words:

"I grew up with many different religions (Buddhism, Catholic, Christian) and beliefs (Chinese culture). My parents always taught me to find a church/religious family that made me feel comfortable and welcome even being a minority. I felt that comfort from the first time I stepped into First Presbyterian Delray in 2007. I didn't feel pushed to be a member immediately but the church still welcomed me with an open hand. I enjoyed just sitting, listening to the music and hearing God's message. I felt the church really became my family once Nathan was born. Since I did not know anyone in the area, I struggled

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by Nathanael Hood



THE WHITE TIGER

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

*“For what shall it profit a man,
if he shall gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul?”*

Mark 8:36 (KJV)

Gangsters aren’t allowed happy endings in movies. In the old days of Hollywood—the bygone yesteryear of Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney—movies literally weren’t allowed to end with villains winning. So, every story of a street punk hoodlum or mafioso needed to end with a bullet in their bellies or police handcuffs on their wrists. After the sixties, when Hollywood relaxed their draconian content rules, new generations of directors were drawn by the allure of organized crime, painting massive cinematic canvases of families both literally and metaphorically eating themselves alive. There may not have been a studio goon breathing down filmmakers’ necks, but the stories of Tony Montana and Henry Hill still ended in tragedy.

Perhaps the Coppolas and Scorseses of the world realized that this was the only logical endpoint for men who sell their souls for power and wealth. Yes, many real-

life gangsters and criminals die peacefully in their sleep in gilded mansions, but somewhere along the way they forfeited their humanity. It’s this self-annihilation that makes gangster films so captivating; it’s why the most shocking scene in *The Godfather* is the climactic baptism sequence where Michael Corleone publicly renounces Satan while his goons ruthlessly slaughter his rivals. The gangster genre is inherently one of inhumanity.

Ramin Bahrani’s *The White Tiger*—recently released streaming on Netflix—may not appear at first glance to have anything to do with this genre. But I’d argue you could draw a direct through-line from old Hollywood gangster movies to this one. An adaptation of Aravind Adiga’s 2008 novel of the same name, the film charts the rise of Balram Halwai (Adarsh Gourav) as he goes from penniless villager to booming businessman. When we first meet him, he’s pulled from school as a boy to work in a tea stall full-time to support his family. But even with his sacrifice his family can’t escape poverty. After his father dies in his arms of tuberculosis while waiting

for a doctor who never comes in a hospital that’s never funded, Balram brute-forces his way into getting a driver’s license and a chauffeur job for his village’s cruel, greedy landlord known as The Stork (Mahesh Manjrekar). With his foot now in the door, Balram slowly starts climbing his way to the top. By the end, he will have blackmailed, bribed, and murdered his way into a new life.

The best gangster movies understand that their antiheroes have to be at least somewhat sympathetic for audiences to emotionally invest in them, and the film takes great pains to show how desperate Balram’s circumstances are. Again and again he likens Indian society—with its stratified caste system, turbulent ethnic strife, and polluted squalor—to a chicken coop, where birds watch quietly and wait their turn as their fellows are butchered. “Men born in the light, like my master, have the choice to be good,” he reasons. “Men born in the coop, like me, we don’t have that choice.” For Balram, the only way to escape the butcher’s knife is to break free from the cage. But the tragedy of his life, beyond the

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The White Tiger

Continued from page 14

lives he destroys and ends, is that he fails to realize that he never left the cage—by gaining power, he *became* the cage for countless others like him.

To me, this is what Jesus meant when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Becoming rich doesn't automatically make one evil or corrupt. Instead, gaining money and power can tempt one into seeing their fellow human beings as lesser and expendable. How many politicians begin their careers with earnest hopes of reform, only to end up indicted in corruption scandals? And how many small business owners dream of changing the world, only to get rich and lower wages, reduce safety requirements, and lay off employees so their stocks can get an insignificant nudge? There are people in the world—good people, honest people—who came from worse circumstances than Balram, yet never found themselves poisoned by his cruel ambition. At some point he chose to turn his back on his fellow man—like Henry Hill, like Tony Montana, like Michael Corleone. The only difference between those gangster movies and this one is that the film ends right before his world inevitably falls apart. But, we know as the final scene cuts to the end credits that the real Balram is long gone. He gained the world and sold his soul. One can only hope it was worth it. ●

NEW MEMBERS

Christine Babini

Andy Balser

Linda Balser

Judy Eber

Warren Eber

Kara Edwards

Paige Eber-Emihovich

James Hyatt

Danielle Peirce

Cathy Royce

Wayne Royce



WELCOME!



ETERNAL LIVES

– Christine Molnar –

December 11, 2020

– Derryl Kasler –

March 29, 2021

– Ben Antal –

April 19, 2021

with just regular daily life. I had to bring Nathan to work every day and night. I felt the resistance to hand him over to strangers (since I mostly worked very late, weekends and holidays). Regular day care didn't help us much. I met the Knapp family and many others through church. They helped me go through many hard days and willingly offered their time, support, input, and all that new parents needed.

We love to eat out and try out different restaurants. We barely have done it since our restaurant is now open seven days a week. When we have the opportunity, we love to travel, have family vacations, and see new things. Being a family of 5, road trips have become our way to do that. In 2020, we managed to go to the west coast of Florida and see a different side of the beaches, even just for a 1.5 day trip."

The Singjaidee family is a beloved part of First Presbyterian Church. We have enjoyed watching the children grow! ●



CONGRATULATIONS

Our congratulations are extended to Courtland and Lauren Weisleder upon the birth of their son, Crew, on March 14, 2021. ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Church Improvement Fund from Carol Bandy, in loving memory of Ben Antal.

Easter Offering from Les and Ann Heilakka, in celebration of the birth of their grandson, Samuel Casey Heilakka.

Food for the Needy from Lucy Drake, in loving memory of Bus Chaney, and her son, Ken H. Lelly, Jr.

Memorial Garden Fund from Karen and Donald Carter, in loving memory of Karen's father and mother, John and Janet Loennecker.

Minister's Discretionary Fund from Ken and Vandy Janson.

Music Fund from James and Judy Elliott; from Bert and Ann Gordon, in honor of Judy Haverkamp's birthday; and from Lydia Petty.

Operating Fund from God's Grace Charitable Fund, in loving memory of Thomas Purdo.

Remembrance Fund from Jack Marshall, in loving memory of Gerald and Mary Marshall. ●

SESSION REPORT

During the month of March, the Session received new members and approved baptisms. They elected Mary Martinéz as Clerk of Session for a one-year term and welcomed new Elders Phillip Aime, Megan Buck, Carl Fedde, and Jeanne Heavilin. ●

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 UGLY

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Listen for God's Word:

"Before I created you in the womb I knew you."

Jeremiah 1:5a

Meryl Streep is widely considered to be the best actress who ever lived. She has a record twenty-one Academy Award acting nominations, achieving a level of excellence at her craft nobody else has come close to matching. She swallows every scene she's in. She wouldn't know it though, because she doesn't watch her own movies. Johnny Depp is the same way. He too can't stand watching himself on screen. It's actually quite common for actors to be totally unable to watch their own performances.



Actor Jesse Eisenberg describes the experience as akin to looking through vacation photographs. He describes a scenario where you've taken a hundred vacation photographs, and you really like two of them, so you use them everywhere. You send them to friends, post them on Facebook, and use them in that year's Christmas card. But, you still

have ninety-eight photographs left that, in Eisenberg's words, "You're totally mortified of." Eisenberg recalls, "The side of your face, the speedo you decided to wear, that's the experience for me. You take those ninety-eight pictures and project them on a massive scale onto something that people not only watch, but critique." You get the idea.

Perhaps Reese Witherspoon explains the feeling most succinctly. The actress says watching herself act makes her spiral into a state of self-hate. "Who feels good looking at themselves?" she asked once during an interview. She answered her own question by saying, "Nobody, right?"

If Reese Witherspoon and Johnny Depp can't look at themselves in the mirror, what does that mean for the rest of us? These are Hollywood's biggest and brightest stars. Individuals who have achieved a level of personal success and physical beauty which most of us can only dream of. If they have a complicated relationship with themselves, then how are we supposed to feel?

Conventional wisdom says that we don't feel all that well, not really. There's a reason that the self-help section at the bookstore keeps growing. There's a reason that mental health counseling and therapy are finally, and thankfully, becoming destigmatized, and that therapy is now used openly by a growing percentage of the population. We often don't feel all that well, and we need all the help we can get.

Studies show that the longer we look in the mirror, the less likely we are to like what we see. There's a lovely thought. So as you look in the mirror, you begin by recognizing, 'Yep, that's me,' then the longer you look, the more you notice all your little imperfections and the gradual changes in your body, the dark circles under your eyes, that mark on your skin, 'Is that new'? Like Moses when he sees God on Mount Sinai, if you

stare at the mirror too long you may start glowing.

Of course, it's not just the mirror. We listen to our voicemail and ask ourselves, "Do I really sound like that?" We say the wrong words in a social interaction only to replay our mistakes internally afterward for hours on end, berating ourselves for not doing better. And that's just the superficial stuff. We haven't yet gotten to the sin, to the ugliness we all harbor within and try our best not to think about, to the endless list of ways we've let others and ourselves down. There's a lot about all of us that's hard to like. Maybe it shouldn't be all that surprising that Reese Witherspoon, Johnny Depp, and Meryl Streep can't look at themselves. Maybe there's no escaping self-doubt. Maybe that nagging inner critic can't be turned off. Maybe that's part of being human, of being broken, this complicated self-image.

I want you to take a moment and check in with yourself. How are you feeling today? How do you feel about yourself? What's your relationship like with your body? With who you are, fundamentally, as a person? What are you proud of? What is it that keeps you up at night? What are your current struggles?

In Jeremiah chapter one, the prophet makes plain his own

struggles: he says he's too young, and he doesn't like the way he talks. God has asked Jeremiah to be a prophet, to be God's mouthpiece and to speak God's word to the people. Jeremiah is afraid God's got the wrong guy. Then Jeremiah lays bare his imperfections. He says, "I'm too young for this, God, and I don't speak all that good."

Listen to how God responds. God gently touches Jeremiah's lips. God looks at the young Jeremiah the way a parent looks at a child—tenderly, and with pride. God tells Jeremiah not to fear or to doubt. God declares that God is with Jeremiah, and God always has been. "Even before you were born," God says, "I was there forming you in the womb, looking at you, watching, lovingly watching. I didn't look away then, and I won't look away now."

We may see brokenness the longer we look at ourselves, but when God looks at us, God sees something else. God sees beauty. God sees God's own reflection within each one of us. God sees dignity and value, someone worthy of loving and being loved. God sees someone fearfully and wonderfully made.

In Jeremiah 1:5, we hear the famous line: "Before I created you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you." There's a beautiful echo of that line in Psalm 139. Only in Psalm 139, the word is knit.



“You knit me together in the womb,” the psalmist says. “You created my innermost parts. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.” You can hear God’s claim upon Jeremiah echoed here for each of us—God lovingly, and carefully, and thoughtfully knitting each of us together.

We have a God who knits. It’s an image that reflects a startling amount of intimacy. The God who created the universe and everything in it, the God who created something from nothing, the God who dreamt up snow-capped mountains and arid deserts, the God who looks over the whole world—this all-powerful, all-knowing, vast being took the time to personally knit you together in the womb. To know you and to see you. To stitch you together, and to bless you.

We often think of God as the Father, right? That’s one way we’ve thought about God for centuries—Father, Son,

Holy Spirit. That’s one way we wrap our heads around who God is. In our Scriptures, there is also a rich tradition—it’s less pronounced but it’s there—of Scripture using motherly language to describe God.

In the beginning, Genesis 1:27, God creates humanity in God’s own image, male and female, revealing an essence in all of us reflecting the image of God regardless of gender. There are also a few examples in Isaiah of motherly language being used to describe God, my favorite being in Isaiah 49 where God compares God’s self to a mother nursing her young. In Matthew 23, and again in Luke 13, Jesus describes God as a mother hen who protects her flock by nestling them safely under her wing.

Here, in today’s texts from Jeremiah and the Psalms, God appears almost grandmotherly. ‘Before I knit you together, I knew you.’ You can picture it, can’t you? God sitting there in

a rocking chair by the fire. God covered with a patchwork quilt, sipping on some tea, working her hands together night after night to carefully and beautifully create you. And me. And everybody else. Can you feel the intimacy? The motherly warmth? The way God cares for each one of us?

Often we treat ourselves with coldness and bitterness. Here’s an image of a God who treats us with warmth and compassion. Often our inner dialogue beats us down. Here’s an image of a God who lifts us up. Often we struggle with self-hate, but here’s an image of a God who loves us perfectly.

In the late nineties, sociologist Arthur Aron posited that he could make strangers fall in love. He claimed only to need ninety-four minutes, thirty-six questions, and two willing participants. Here’s what he did: he had two strangers who had never met enter his laboratory through two separate doors. They sat in chairs facing each other, and they were instructed to verbally answer a questionnaire featuring thirty-six questions. The questions would start innocently enough, but become more probing and personal over time. The volunteers had ninety minutes to complete the task, alternating between speaking and listening. Then, when the ninety minutes were up, Arthur Aron had the two participants look at each other directly in the eyes for four consecutive minutes

without looking away or saying anything.

That was it, the entirety of the experiment. Six months after the experiment concluded, Aron's two participants were married. Arthur Aron and his entire lab were invited to the wedding ceremony.

Back in 2015, a journalist by the name of Mandy Len Catron, curious about Arthur Aron's study, decided to try it for herself. Mandy invited an acquaintance from the gym to a bar. This outing was their first time out together, and they went through Arthur's thirty-six questions. By the time they finished, it was late, and the bar was loud, so they moved to a quiet little bridge down the street to complete the experiment with four minutes of direct eye contact.

Here's what Mandy Len Catron had to say about those four minutes: "The real crux of

the moment was not just that I was really seeing someone ... but that I was seeing someone really seeing me."

There's a fragility and a vulnerability in those four minutes, a tenderness; looking into this man's eyes, she could see her own eyes, and behind her eyes, she could see her own brokenness and beauty reflected in him. I like to think that she also saw the image of God there in him behind his eyes; the image of God reflected back to her, just as she bore the image of God for him. I like to think she was reminded, through the eyes of a stranger, of the inherent beauty she holds within; the beauty that maybe she forgot about a long time ago.

That cold October night in a bar, two relative strangers fell in love because they took the time to notice one another, and now they too are married. Their story was published in the New York Times.

To know and be known, to see and be seen. That's what this experiment was all about, and that's what these couples were able to achieve. There's a beauty and intimacy to fully knowing and seeing another human being, to accessing the world through the eyes of another.

Friends, we too can see the world through the eyes of another. By spending time with God, by praying and talking and listening and studying God's word, we too can see the world through God's eyes, just as God sees the world through ours. Just as God dwells with us, lives with us, and looks at us, so too can we look back at God and see the world through God's eyes. Through God's eyes, we can see this world in all its brokenness and all its beauty. Through God's eyes, we can see the inherent beauty and dignity of all God's people. Through God's eyes, we can look at people from all nationalities, genders, religions, everything, and we can see an essence that can never be taken away; the image of God reflected in them. Through God's eyes, we can see the craftsmanship of all people, and we can witness within every person we meet someone knitted together with care. If only we look through God's eyes, we'll see.

Maybe, just maybe, the next time we look in the mirror, we'll see ourselves through God's eyes too. Loved. Fearfully and wonderfully made. Knit together in the womb. Let it be so for me and also for you.

Amen ●





by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

MEET MICHAEL R. WARD

T

he Trustees have approved pastor and certified stewardship executive Michael R. Ward to partner with your church leadership for the 2022 Stewardship Campaign. Mike Ward is the author of Abundance: Creating A Culture of Generosity, published last year by Fortress Press. 2 Corinthians, chapter 12 speaks of the church as functioning best when people of various gifts are brought together for strengthening our shared ministry. We are presently in a season where a leader seasoned in leading and teaching abundance and generosity will elevate our ministry impact to our members and the local community. Mr. Ward's book sparkles with extraordinary insight on leadership, generosity, and effective ministry. I encourage anyone to purchase his book and read it for a deeper understanding of God's claim upon each of us and how we might be a more effective instrument in God's hands for God's work. The book may be purchased on your favorite electronic bookseller website or at a discount cost from the church office.

It is a joy to be working with your leadership this year to strengthen what I have discovered to be a ministry that is a beacon of light to your community. The depth of teaching and sharing of the Gospel provided by Dr. Hood and Rev. Rapier is inspirational and keeps your community focused on where God is present in your lives and in the life of the congregation.

God has called me to full-time stewardship ministry. I served a parish for about four years before being called to the Lutheran camps in North Carolina as their VP of Advancement. It was during that time that I had the privilege of meeting people who mentored generosity for me. What they clearly taught me is that generosity is a journey. We never arrive at a destination, but rather find new ways to be generous as we live into new realities in our lives. And, they also taught me that being generous is the key to living into the "abundant life" that Jesus teaches.

The person whose generosity story has affected me more than any other is Sarah, a member of the first congregation I served as pastor. She had been married to a pastor, Bob, who had passed away a few years before my arrival. She shared that when Bob began his first call, they could not financially figure out how to tithe 10%. Instead, they made a covenant with one another that they would grow their generosity by 1% per year and never stop. When Bob passed away, they were giving away 38% of their income. I didn't know that was allowed! At age 101, Sarah is still giving away 18%, and credits that with why she doesn't worry about tomorrow but instead feels that she fully understands what abundant life is all about.

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SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

As in years past, we transition to one Sunday morning worship service at 10 a.m. on the first Sunday of May. This summer schedule runs through the end of October.

Several years ago, a member commented to me that they loved that we “split the difference between the two worship services” that we normally have ‘in season’. They said that by holding one worship service, it “allowed the 9 o’clockers and the 11 o’clockers a chance to meet and bond.” I always remember that statement when I witness the joy in the faces of our congregants the first time they see each other during our summer worship schedule.

If you are not comfortable worshipping in person, are returning to your northern residence, or are traveling this summer, remember that you can still join us in worship via our online services. They are available to stream live on the church website, or may be watched at any other time convenient for you for the next several months. ●



Meet Michael R. Ward Continued from page 13

Sarah taught me about the generosity journey. As we work together, I hope you will discern the journey that you are on. It isn't about success or failure. It's about figuring out where you are and working to grow from there. I have met some people who started their journey by increasing their giving \$1 per day. Some have doubled their giving one month per year, while others figured out a way to double their giving for the entire year. Some were unable to feasibly increase their giving during their lifetime, and instead explored ways to give through estate planning. A woman in Michigan just gave \$30,000 at her death to the ministry of her congregation, which represented 25% of her total estate. Her generous spirit is inspiring many in that congregation to join her.

In all this work, though, I hope you never feel like we are only discussing financial transactions. I hope you feel like you are investing in a ministry that sustains people in their faith. As I have gotten to know your ministry, that is what I feel gifts to First Presbyterian are most certainly doing. As I look at this world we live in, coming out the other side of the pandemic, we desperately need places that sustain faith and lead people to Good News. I look forward to hearing your stories.

Rev. Mike Ward ●

WHY WEAR RED FOR PENTECOST?

For Christians, Pentecost is a holiday on which we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early followers of Jesus. From historical and spiritual points of view, Pentecost is the day on which the church was started, and therefore considered the church's birthday.

Five colors are used to differentiate liturgical seasons: Purple, White, Black, Red, and Green. Red symbolizes the joy and power of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore used on Pentecost since the Spirit brings the church into existence and enlivens it.

Join us on Sunday, May 23rd as we celebrate the church's birthday. We encourage you to wear red that morning, whether worshipping in person or online. ●



A THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE JANUARY PAJAMA AND BOOK DRIVE



Dear Members,

Thank you for helping us support every child's right to a good night for a good day. Your donation of 26 pair of pajamas and 30 books will enable us to give loving, comforting good nights to the children who need us most.

Pajama Program believes that every child, no matter their circumstances, has the inherent right to a loving good night, complete with the comforting bedtime ritual of changing into clean, warm pajamas and enjoying an enchanting story.

Our mission is to promote and support a comforting bedtime routine for children affected by instability to help them thrive. Pajama Program offers at-risk children the unconditional, magical gifts of new pajamas and new books so that they can enjoy the greatest benefit of a loving bedtime and peaceful good night: a fulfilling good day.

After all, good nights are good days.

We appreciate your continuing support. ●

Sincerely,
"sweet dreams"
Bobbi

Bobbi Fierman Rini/President
Pajama Program Palm Beach County Chapter



by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE

THE NEW WELCOMING MINISTRY AT FIRST DELRAY BEACH

Approximately one year ago, prior to the pandemic, a woman came to greet me in the Narthex after worship. She asked if she could speak to me privately for a moment. I agreed, and we stepped aside so that we could speak privately.

She said, "Pastor, my life is a mess right now, and I'm taking personal responsibility to get it fixed. I decided this morning that I will begin by looking for a place to worship. I will look for a church home. This morning I made that decision, and your church is the first church. Pastor, I now know that this is the church I want to call home. This is the congregation I want to be my family."

So I asked her if she would say more about that. And with that question, these are the thoughts that go through every pastor's mind: I wonder if she wants to join because our already strong music ministry was particularly powerful that morning? Or perhaps something I said in my sermon spoke to a particular need of hers? Or perhaps it was an eloquent prayer that Greg offered that spoke words to her unexpressed feelings?

I was imagining the reasons that this would be her next church home. But when she spoke, I realized that I had not guessed it at all.

She said, "I realized this was my home when I walked through the front door of the church. There was a man wearing a nametag who extended a warm handshake, and he looked right into my eyes, and he said 'Welcome, I'm glad you're here.'"

And she said, "From that moment I realized he was not working from a script. He was sincere that he was glad I was here." She said to me, "Do you know it's been years since anyone has been glad to see me? It's been years since anyone has said that they're glad I'm here. The healing I so desperately needed began when those words were spoken. This is the place I want to heal."

Many of you are aware that for years the deacons of our church had the responsibility of doing the ushering on Sunday morning. The deacons who wish to continue will do so, but we have now expanded the ushering ministry to include others who may feel called to invest their lives in this year. Perhaps that might even be you.

This is an invitation for you to contact Nancy Fine and indicate that you would like to be a part of this story I've shared with you, that you would like to be a part of the new welcoming ministry of our church. If you feel compelled to be a part of a story where you welcome people warmly and sincerely into this place of worship, please reach out this week by calling the church office (561-276-6338) or emailing Nancy (nancyfine@firstdelray.com). ●

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Thou shalt not whine. I had that commandment on my office door at the university for a good 15 years. I've never been fond of whiners. But here I am, whining to anyone who will listen: my friends—too often they whine back; my family—they change the subject; and even Governor DeSantis—he does not respond. (But, seriously, why should senior citizens have to play computer roulette with vaccine appointments?)

When I found myself whining to God more often than sending up prayers of thanksgiving, I decided to take a walk.

Unfortunately, I chose this place: Pondhawk Natural Area. Desolate is the word that springs to mind. Accessible from the Spanish River library parking lot, this 79-acre nature area boasts more than two miles of walking trails. The trails wind through stands of Florida slash pine and scrub. On this unseasonably hot, dry afternoon, the scrub habitat resembles a desert. The landscape, filled with blooming wildflowers in November, now sports

dead tree stumps intermingled with short, brittle cabbage palm bushes and grey sand. Lots of sand. The only animal making an appearance is an occasional brown iguana with bright orange spikes.

Following a short boardwalk, I come to a pavilion over what was, only five months ago, a wetland filled with birds. Now, there are no mating cries or flapping wings. The ground is devoid of standing water. The sawgrass waving in the breeze resembles the autumn prairie grass of my home of over 60 years: Illinois. Here, as on my beloved prairie, I find a subtle beauty as the sun shines through hundreds of shades of brown, tan, and bronze.

My mood lightening, I continue along the trail until I arrive at an area filled with shady pond apple trees and giant ferns. The ferns, taller than I, stand packed so tightly together that they resemble nothing so much as a brilliant jade green sea.

I find myself humming a hymn that never fails to touch my heart

and draw me into conversation with God: *Here I am, Lord.* I am not sure why the hymn always reminds me of Jeremiah—Jeremiah, the weepy whiner. Remember him? His prolonged whine in Jeremiah 20 ends with, “Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?”

He whined throughout the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. But God still loved him. Loved him with an unconditional love that all of us need and none of us deserve. God didn't give up on Jeremiah. Over his whining, God kept calling to him. In the end, Jeremiah quit whining and surrendered himself to God.

Here I am, Lord. I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

Sometimes, I need to be reminded that even when I'm whining, God doesn't give up on me but continues to call. Here in Pondhawk, I take a step out of my daily routine to walk with God. My spirits lift as I let him take the lead. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

I recently asked a few members of our choir how many different musical notes there were, and after a little bit of discussion and more information about music than I could have possibly imagined, the number the group decided upon was twelve. That's it. Twelve notes.

Eighty-eight keys on a piano, over 1,500 different instruments, and an infinite number of octaves – though humans can only hear about ten – and it all comes back to the same twelve notes. When you step back to think about it, it's rather remarkable, isn't it? Every song you've ever heard, every melody, every vocal performance can be distilled into just twelve notes.

I think about this when I listen to jazz. Sometimes jazz feels less like music and more like flying. There's something acrobatic about the way jazz musicians riff and improvise, something forceful

and urgent but also delicate. The ever-evolving pulse and rhythm gives each song a life of its own. Breath, bones, and muscle. Those songs reach me in a way few things can. There's something kinetic and pulsing about jazz. The unexpected turns, soulful notes, and playful melodies feel true to life.

The ten commandments are kind of like jazz. Most people don't think of them that way, but I do. A lot of people find the commandments to be oppressive. The bible too – nothing but a big book of rules. Such people would argue they don't need the bible to be a good person, and I agree with that, but distilling the bible down to a set of rules misses the point. Setting aside everything else about the bible – setting aside the history of God and humanity, setting aside the story of the world as we know it, setting aside all the hope and the joy and the love – setting aside all that, focusing just on the rules, I get how someone

might see the bible as oppressive.

I disagree.

Personally, I believe such people lack imagination.

The rules set boundaries – that's it. Don't steal, don't murder, don't worship false idols ... that sort of thing. Within those boundaries, there are an infinite number of melodies you can play and tunes you can make, each song as unique as a fingerprint. The only limit is your imagination.

Everything needs structure. Even Jazz. Even us. The ten commandments provide that structure, as does the rest of scripture. Ten commandments, twelve notes, it's the same thing. The structure doesn't prohibit us from making music; it gives our music a form. And then it's up to us to make sweet, sweet jazz. ●

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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Sunday Morning Worship Services

10 a.m.

