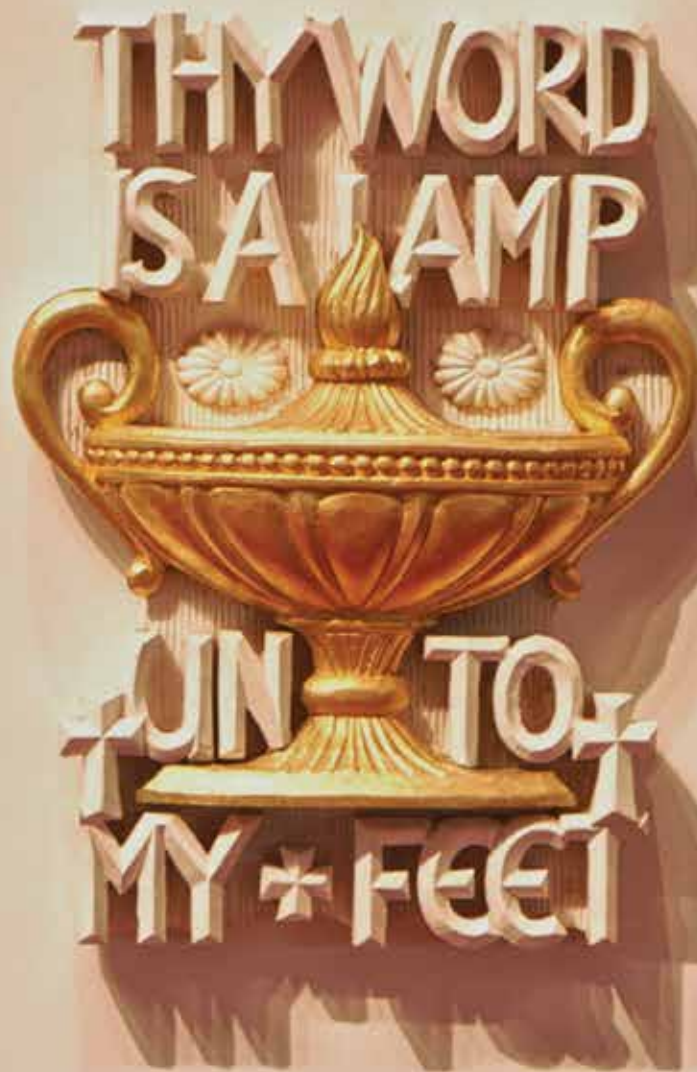


THE SPIRE



*Your
Church
Magazine*

September / October 2021



by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

NURTURE FAITH

A CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH

"I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength."

Philippians 4:13 (Common English Bible)

What is so remarkable about these words is that they are spoken by a man in chains. Paul is a prisoner in Rome. In a life dedicated to serving Christ, Paul has endured much – shipwreck, ridicule, hunger, and excruciating poverty. Now he sits in a Roman prison and writes that whatever the circumstances, Paul has learned the secret of inner strength and contentment. Perhaps even more remarkable, Paul lays aside his own needs and concerns to write a deeply personal letter to the Philippians to encourage them in their faith. Despite his imprisonment and impending trial, Paul's one desire is to share with the church in Philippi that joy and strength does not come from outward circumstances but from an intimate relationship with Jesus. That power is so tremendous and so available that Paul feels he can face anything knowing that nothing can diminish his spirit. His spirit was invulnerable. Paul wants the Philippians to utilize that same power.

The interesting thing about the New Testament is that we find that same power animating most of the early Christians. A profession of faith in Jesus usually pushed people to the margins of their communities. Families were torn apart – mothers and daughters, fathers and sons no longer in relationship with one another because one or the other decided to become a follower of Jesus. Worship services were conducted in secret and often disrupted by Jewish leaders eager to destroy the Jesus movement. The worst tortures that could be imagined were invented and performed to discourage participation in the new Christian faith. There was every reason for ignoring the swelling growth of the Christian Church, keeping your head down and simply avoiding trouble. Yet, for all the compelling reasons to remain separate from those following Jesus, men and women who risked believing in Jesus made one dominating impression wherever they went, the impression of uncommon power.

That power has not been withdrawn. It is not a closely guarded secret. Where men and women continue to take Christ's attitude of loving others

continued on page 3

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THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

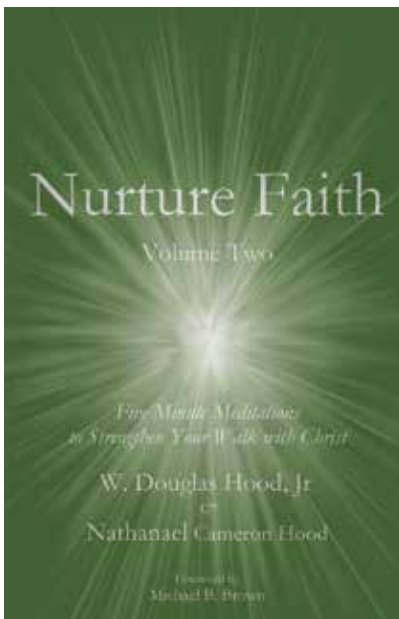
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SPECIAL THANKS:
Printers Choice

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.



Did you enjoy reading the devotions in Dr. Doug Hood's book, *Nurture Faith, Five Minute Meditations to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ*? Recently, volume two was published, containing meditations written by Dr. Hood and his son, Nathanael, a seminary student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Copies are available from your favorite online book retailer or the church office.

"For me personally, the daily devotional readings provided by Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.'s *Nurture Faith* open up a unique dimension to my quiet times of prayer, Bible study, and meditation; I feel like I have colleague walking beside me, showing me wonderful discoveries along a shared journey, his comments and observations full of warmth, wit, humanity, and an authentic sense of wonder." (Rhys L. Williams, JD MBA, Associate VP, Division of Research, Florida Atlantic University, Appointed Director for Eastern Florida, Harvard Alumni Association national board)

"This book is changing my life. Each morning, I open my bible to the daily verse and read the FULL chapter. And then do the daily devotional. Thank you Dr. Hood." ●
(Anonymous)

continued from page 2

A CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH

and serving others that same power is unmistakable. What is troubling is that few would say that the Church today impresses the world with the same power as it once did. Somehow those who claim discipleship to Jesus Christ show little evidence of a changed life, a life of uncommon power. Absent in many Christians today is a sense of adequacy for meeting challenge and adversity. Membership and attendance decline of the Christian Church has been tracked and documented for many years now. This has resulted in the publication of resources to perfect the church's hospitality, increase the vitality of its worship, and harness the power of technology. However valuable these may be, the most urgent need is for followers of Jesus Christ to get back to that power which is possessed by the daily nurture of a personal fellowship with Jesus.

Return for a moment to the first two words above, "I can." Some years ago I was working with a personal trainer, Michael Bishop. One particular day he had me on my back, bench pressing what seemed to be an incredible weight for me. After pushing the bar above my head several times I did a controlled drop of the bar to my chest. I was depleted. I delivered an eye message to him to remove the bar from my chest. I will never forget his response: "That's not my bar. You place it back on the upright supports." Then he did what his training taught him to do. He placed his hands around the bar with my own. That was simply to ensure that I didn't hurt myself. But the lifting belonged to me. I pushed with everything in me; I summoned all the power I could to lift the bar back onto the supports. As my strength began to fail, he matched the loss of my strength with his own until the bar had returned to rest on the support. Paul writes, "I can, through the power who gives me strength." If you are depressed or in trouble say, "I can in Him" and you will find God's strength come alongside your own. If you struggle with passions or addictions that frighten you, or if you feel that you are losing your grip on life, say, "I can in Him" and you will discover an unseen hand on the bar with your own, matching your strength. The Christian's strength begins with, "I can." ●

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

Thursdays@First

We are excited to introduce a new opportunity for our First Families called **Thursdays@First**. This will be Thursday evenings from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. beginning October 7th through November 18th. We would like to see this program include a meal together, a Bible story, service projects, crafts, and music. One fun element of this evening would be that the youth would also be around and they would participate in the meal but then they would go their own way.

We would like to hear from parents as we do more planning. We want this program to be a wonderful time for the children, as well as a time for parents to go grab a bite to eat up the Ave or do some errands. You can email me your ideas and thoughts at gracehood@firstdelray.com.

Nursery and Bible Bunch

Nursery and Bible Bunch are up and running!! Iva Branscombe and Alice Barrett are back in full steam! They are using the wonderful book Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible. Liz Landes is making our nursery dreams come true. We are presently looking for a second person to help out in the nursery. If you are interested or need more information, please contact me at gracehood@firstdelray.com.

Sunday School

Our Sunday School program continues to grow in person. School has started and children are out and about. Presently, we are no longer offering Zoom Sunday School. As it is now full-on Florida Summer, we are having Sunday School inside and following CDC policies to ensure the safety and comfort of our children and volunteers.

Our children are going on an Awesome Adventure with Awesome Adventures: God's People on Mountains and Seas. These interactive lessons are reminding us of how God has acted for God's people through the Bible. Starting in September, we will be using a curriculum based on the book Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible. We will start with looking at brave women and men of the Old Testament and then we will look at some of the people that Jesus met.

Being with the children of the church is such a blessing to everyone involved. If you would like to be a substitute or helper, please contact me at gracehood@firstdelray.com. Full lessons and support will be provided.

Special Event

First Families, children, and youth will be joining for a joint fun event on September 19th. Be sure to read all about it in Pastor Rapier's news item! ●

by Grace Cameron Hood

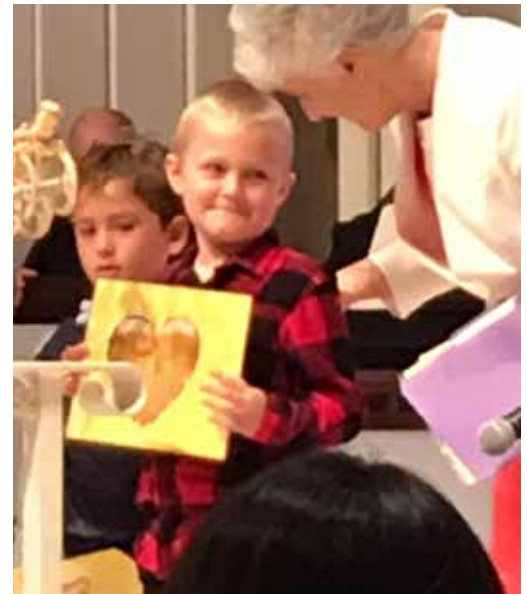
*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*

FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

The Post Family

The Post family has been involved with the church as far back as the late 1960s. Connor's great grandparents and great, great grandparents attended the church when Dr. Morrow was the pastor. Connor's grandpa, Jay, participated in the youth group headed up by Jean Toth in the early 1970s and enjoyed many camping trips. My connection to the church began about 39 years ago with the birth of my first son, Cameron...then my second son, Phil, came along a few years later. Dr. Morrow baptized both children and we attended services and Sunday school for many years together. As the boys got older and became teenagers, as life would have it, we drifted away from church. NOW along comes the light of my life, my grandson, Connor. Connor and I attend church and Sunday school together most Sundays. We have a spiritual bond with God and with each other. Although Connor's parents do not attend with us, they believe attending church is an important part of Connor's life teaching and growth. They can see a difference in Connor when he is actively participating in Sunday School. Connor has participated in many recitals and enjoys seeing his friends every Sunday. Dr. Hood baptized Connor in the church and we hope to continue our participation for years to come.

—Paula Post ●



by Nancy Fine

Business Administrator

NURTURE FAITH WITH DR. DOUG HOOD

How to access this weekly online resource for spiritual growth

Each Friday, Dr. Doug Hood publishes a new post on his blog, [Nurture Faith with Dr. Doug Hood](#). There are three easy ways to read these meditations: on our church website, on the church Facebook page, or via an email sent directly to your inbox each week.

Though all are avenues to read these posts, the best method to not miss any of the meditations is to subscribe to his blog. You can do so by visiting www.firstdelray.blog (note that it is .blog and not .com) or by contacting me in the church office (nancyfine@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338). I will happily sign you up. You will then receive a confirmation email that you will need to respond to in order to complete the subscription process. ●

WELCOME TEAM

The New Welcoming Ministry at First Delray Beach

*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others,
faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”*

1 Peter 4:10

It is mission-oriented and a sign of growth when a church begins a new ministry!

In May of this year, we initiated the Welcome Team ministry. Their purpose is, in essence, to usher – to greet visitors at the Lobby doors and to monitor the Sanctuary to help direct people to available seats.

Ushering was part of the Deacons’ responsibility. This program has been expanded to include those who may feel called to invest their lives in this vital aspect of the church, as well as the currently-serving Deacons who wish to continue ushering. Hence, the Welcome Team. Might we interest you?

Inspiration to expand this program came from a visitor who was greeted at the church door, as shared by Dr. Doug Hood in the May/June edition of this publication. The visitor relayed, “From that moment I realized he was not working from a script. He was sincere that he was glad I was here.” She continued, “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.”

A very active member, Maryann Rana, has offered her own glowing testimony about this new ministry – “Can’t tell you how much it meant to be back in church IN PERSON.... loved greeting. It’s like the good old days of being a Deacon.”

This is an invitation for you to contact Carolyn Kettle (recruiting/scheduling for the Welcome Team) to indicate that you would like to be a part of this new ministry – to welcome people warmly and sincerely into this place of worship. Please reach out to Carolyn (561-504-9550 or carolynskettle@gmail.com) as soon as possible. She is eager to give you more details.

We hope you will join us! ●

SESSION REPORT

During the months of June and July, the Session received new members. They also concurred that “First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach will continue to follow CDC’s guidelines and therefore reinstate an indoor protocol of masks for everyone, regardless of their vaccination status.” ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Easter Offering from Spencer and Ellen Everett, in loving memory of Dan Gimbel.

Member Support Fund from Lou Ruf.

Music Fund from Lois Moore, in loving memory of Janet Howard; from Joel and Elisabeth Kirkpatrick; from the Puig/Cannarozzi Music Fund; and from Gerald and Mirta Valdivia.

Operating Fund from Joanne Hayes, in loving memory of Janet Howard; from God's Grace Charitable Fund, in loving memory of Thomas Purdo; from Frank and Barbara Cook, in loving memory of Lynne Weedling; and from Mary Martínéz, as an additional thanks offering for opportunities she has had to continue her diversity and inclusion practice as a means of doing God's work in the world.

Remembrance Fund from Jason Bunt, in memory of loving husband, father, and grandfather, Frank C. Bunt, Jr., "We miss you and love you immensely"; from Barbara Johnston, from Jerry and Betty Seegers, and from Susanna Souder, in loving memory of Janet Howard; from Edith Bascom-King and from Genevieve Gutzmore, in loving memory of Carolyn Smith; from Ken and Patty Years, in loving memory of Barbara Vanderkay; and from Jason Bunt and Diane Keane, and from Debra Herrlinger, in loving memory of Lynne Weedling.

Robert H. Teninga Scholarship Fund from Ron and Alice Barrett, and from Ron and Alice Barrett in loving memory of Lynne Weedling. ●

*Giving
Our
Gifts*

NEW MEMBERS

Dale Oliver
Sylvia Oliver
Grant Pothast
Kim Pothast
Pamela Stern



ETERNAL LIVES

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

Barbara Holleran – December 8, 2020
Carolyn Doelker – May 11, 2021
Carolyn Smith – June 16, 2021
Gloria Christensen – June 17, 2021
Janet Howard – July 15, 2021
Mary Bush – August 10, 2021

PRAYER MINISTRY TEAM

Understanding the power of prayer and praying beyond Sunday service

“In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don’t know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans.”

Romans 8:26 (Common English Bible)

The Prayer Ministry Team would like to invite you to join us in the power of daily prayer. Why? Be it family, friends or world issues, prayer always works if it lies in God’s will, as expressed in his word (scripture).

For the Christian, prayer is not just an option or a privilege. It is an imperative, a command from God himself. Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” We must remember to be grateful that we have God’s power in prayer, or we will not be heard.

There is purpose in prayer—God’s presence can be felt, and you have the opportunity for personal growth in the word and in life. Prayer on behalf of others is not just a loving gesture, it touches the heart of God and shows the world we care. Pray where you feel most comfortable—at home, in your tree house, in your closet, or with family. Pray for those you love and those you don’t.

Prayer requests come through the church office and are then distributed to team members. Each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer with respect and confidentiality.

Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for more information or if you are interested in joining. ***May God bless you all!*** ●

HUSTLE TO END HUNGER 5K

Join members of our Mission Outreach Committee on Saturday, October 2, 2021 for Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS) Ministries’ Hustle to End Hunger 5K. This annual event increases awareness about hunger in our community and raises needed funds for CROS Ministries’ hunger relief programs. This year, three options are available to those who wish to participate. You can meet at 7:30 a.m. at John Prince Park in Lake Worth for the timed Run/Walk event; participate that morning at 7:30 a.m. for the untimed event; or participate 100% virtually.

The cost to participate is \$40 per person through September 1st, with an increase after that through race day. 100% of the proceeds go to CROS Ministries’ hunger programs. Visit the Upcoming Events page on our website for more information as well as the link to register as a participant, making sure to indicate that you are from First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach.

If you are unable to physically join in, you may send a check to the church office payable to “CROS Ministries” with *Hunger Walk* on the memo line. One thing we can all do is pray for those participating in the event as well as those benefiting from the monies raised. Thank you for caring about our community. ●

THE ROBERT H. TENINGA SCHOLARSHIP FUND

*Supporting Education for the Staff of First Presbyterian
and Their Immediate Families*

This summer, Rev. Greg Rapier began studying for his Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The program is titled Creative Writing and Public Theology, and it is designed to help ministers engage faithfully in a variety of disciplines both inside and outside the church. Upon completion of the four-year program, Greg will produce a manuscript for publication. While he has yet to begin this final project, he has several ideas. He's currently leaning toward a Rob Bell-esque pop theology book about creation, creativity, and the image of God.

Nathanael Hood, our pastor's son, begins the second year of theological studies this fall at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ. Nathanael is enrolled in the three-year Master of Divinity Program preparing for ordination in the Presbyterian Church USA. He is pursuing a sense of call to hospital chaplaincy. He holds a Bachelor's degree from Ursinus College and a Master's degree from New York University – Tisch.

Robert (Bob) Teninga was a beloved member of this congregation. He served as a Deacon, Elder, and Trustee. Bob was very passionate about our staff. He was often on the grounds and always took the time to ask about the staff's families. Bob served as Chair of Personnel, Chair of Property, and was always the first one to volunteer if something needed to get done. Bob passed away on December 26, 2013, just a few days after hosting and cooking for our annual staff Christmas party.

Bob's parents, in loving memory of their son, established the Robert H. Teninga Scholarship to support the staff of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach, and their immediate family, as they pursue higher education. The annual scholarship of \$500 is available for each academic year of study. Presently, only \$193 remains in the fund. Donations to this fund honor the leadership Bob Teninga brought to our church and continue the legacy of Bob's care, concern, and support of our church's staff. ●



MEET LAURA LEÓN

A native of Cuba, Laura León has been one of First Presbyterian's soloists since the beginning of the pandemic. In that time, we have become like family to her.

Born and raised in Havana by her mother and her grandparents in a one-bedroom apartment, Laura remembers a loving home with very little in the way of material comforts. Having the dream to become a pianist, she took lessons as a young child, but the money wasn't there to continue. However, that short exposure taught her basic note reading and allowed her to join a choir, where her love of singing began. Having had the experience of singing in the children's choir in Bizet's *Carmen* at the Gran Teatro de La Habana, the light was lit. However, without the necessary connections to study music, Laura decided to focus on computer programming instead.

Learning about the rest of the world through chat rooms, Laura urged her mother to try chatting as well. Her mother met a Cuban-American writer based in Miami, and a romance began. When Laura was 17, she and her mother immigrated to the USA, arriving in Miami to meet her new stepfather. She began her junior year of American high school with little English but a strong will to succeed. She took jobs as a server, teeth-whitening, working at an ice-cream shop, at Victoria's Secret, two years working at a hotel, and singing anytime she could. Within ten years she obtained both a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in music, putting herself through both programs. Immediately after graduating, Laura was accepted into the two-year Young Artist Program at Florida Grand Opera as a very promising young coloratura singer.

Within a few years, Laura made her professional debut as the Four Heroines in *Tales of Hoffman* (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*) with Opera Orlando. A theater critic for the Orlando Sentinel called her "the heart of the





show” and elaborated that, “As the various heroines, she sparkles, seduces, and languishes. There’s a clear characterization to each role, whether it’s a mechanical doll played for laughter or a dying girl evoking tears. And her voice sounds just as lovely on the notorious high notes as on the lower, emotional ones. Brava.”

Just a few of her recent performances include the fiendishly difficult Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*) in three different productions, Frasquita in *Carmen*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Susana in *Figaro 90210!* and Calavera 1 in *Frida*. This season she will be singing Adina in *L’elisir d’amore* with Williamsburg Opera, Cristina Kahlo in *Frida* (in two different productions with Opera Southwest and El Paso Opera), and will reprise the roles of Antonia, Olympia, and Giulietta in Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffmann* with Opera Louisiane.

The future looks bright for Laura León, but the last eighteen months have not been easy for her, since all opera came to a halt during the pandemic. When asked about what First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach means to her, this is what she said:



*“First Presbyterian Church has become my home church. They opened their arms to me at the beginning of Covid when I had just moved back to Miami from New York. During these tough times, this incredibly nurturing church became not only my primary financial sustenance but the only place where I was allowed to do what I love most in the world, to sing. I don’t know how many times I felt defeated as I saw all my musical engagements canceling one by one until I was confined to complete silence. How many times it was hard to get out of bed knowing that my career, which I had built slowly over the course of ten years, was suddenly gone in what felt like a second. Through this amazing church, I was able to perform during the entire pandemic with all the necessary care to keep my colleagues and me safe and healthy. Every day I am allowed to sing with the chorus I feel so grateful, so incredibly filled with joy and peace. I would like to thank Doug Hood and Greg Rapier for the incredible support; Don Cannarozzi for all his faith in me and for the opportunity to be part of this beautiful singing and church family; and to the rest of the staff, including my colleagues and the congregation. I owe you all so much. From the bottom of my heart. **Thank you.**” ●*

FILL A BAG ... FEED A FAMILY

Each year in October, our congregation collects food for Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS) Ministries' food pantries. With your gift of any canned or boxed, unopened, non-perishable food items, you can help families and individuals in our local community who are not necessarily without food all the time, but often need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

This problem of meeting the basic food needs of those in our community who are under-resourced is real. Won't you consider purchasing basic items to *Fill a Bag ... Feed a Family*?

Suggested list of items:

- 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
- Other non-perishable items



Food may be left in the church lobby on Sunday mornings, or on the cart outside the Sanctuary doors by the covered circle during the workweek. If you prefer not to shop, please consider making a monetary donation in the form of a check payable to “CROS Ministries” and place it in the offering box or mail it to the church office.

“Two years ago, I was in between jobs and running out of money. I am not ashamed to say that I visited the CROS food pantry more than once to feed my family during the months I was unemployed and while waiting for my first paycheck once I found a new job. Now having been laid off due to my employer’s loss of business because of the pandemic, I am grateful that CROS is still distributing food and once again a blessing for my family and me.”

Your generosity and compassion can impact individuals and families in our community. ***Thank you for your support! ●***

by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



UP THE DOWN ESCALATOR

A sermon preached on August 1, 2021 by Rev. Greg Rapier

Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah 4:1-5

“But Jonah thought this was utterly wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, ‘Come on, Lord! Wasn’t this precisely my point when I was back in my own land? This is why I fled to Tarshish earlier! I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, very patient, full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy. At this point, Lord, you may as well take my life from me, because it would be better for me to die than to live.’ The Lord responded, ‘Is your anger a good thing?’ But Jonah went out from the city and sat down east of the city. There he made himself a hut and sat under it, in the shade, to see what would happen to the city.”

Jonah 4:1-5 (Common English Bible)

Sacramento’s Downtown Plaza was torn down about five years ago in order to build a new arena for the Sacramento Kings, which is a fantastic tradeoff if you ask me. Growing up, I loved that shopping mall. Just about every Friday night in high school, my parents would drop me off, and my friends and I would go to the movies. Often, we’d even see two in one night. I remember the taste of salted pretzels and the grease of Sbarro pizza that could only be found in a food court. I remember getting my first ‘nice’ haircut at a fancy salon there tucked into the corner of the mall. And I remember every October the way some of the abandoned storefronts downstairs would transform into a haunted house.



I remember when I was a kid going to the mall with my friend Clay. Sometimes his mom would drive us, sometimes mine would drive. We would park our car in the parking structure which was recessed about two levels underground. Then we had a choice. We could take the elevator

or the escalator. We always took the escalator. It was more fun.

And on a good day, a day when we were at the mall early and there wasn’t much of a crowd, on a day when people were entering the mall but no one was leaving yet, Clay and I would race as fast



as we could up the down escalator. Sometimes I would ride up the proper escalator and Clay would try to beat me to the top. And other times he would ride the proper way and I would try to beat him to the top.

Clay and I loved running up the down escalator. But boy, did our parents hate it. Especially when we were running up and about halfway through someone would begin to go down. Especially when someone was going down and we kept running up anyway. But that never happened. Maybe.

Clay and I eventually stopped running up the down escalator, as most children do. We stopped because, well, it's stupid! We stopped because it's rude. Tiring. Hard on your body. Inefficient. You exert all this energy, willpower, and stubbornness trying to move up, but really you're like a hamster running

in one place. We stopped for all the reasons our parents wanted. If the current is taking you one way, why fight it? If everything around you, if the ground beneath your feet is pulling you in one direction, why on earth would you try to run the other way?

There's a reason you never see adults running up the down escalator. Or do you?

The book of Jonah is an account of a man who spent his whole life running up the down escalator. At the beginning of the story, the prophet Jonah receives a call to travel to that great city of Nineveh. Picture a sprawling metropolis with the ethos of Las Vegas. Picture New York City as painted by Martin Scorsese. The prophet Nahum once called Nineveh a bloody city full of lies and robbery. It was the place to be and the place to sin. Let your hair down a little,

get into some trouble, and hope God is looking the other way.

God calls Jonah to go into Nineveh and to warn the city that God has not looked the other way, and that bad things will happen if those in the city do not change. God tells Jonah to go there and to preach the word of God so those in the city may have their hearts changed.

And Jonah says no. Jonah goes as far as he can as fast as he can in the exact opposite direction. He boards a ship not toward Nineveh but toward Tarshish. And Tarshish is on the opposite side of the known world. He literally travels against the current. If that's not an image of going up the down escalator, I don't know what is.

There are areas in many of our lives where we're right there alongside Jonah. Running up the down escalator. Swimming against the current. Ignoring God's call. We know what God wants of us, but we choose to do something different. We fall back on what's easier. What's comfortable. Old habits. Favorite sins. We sense God's call that we could be doing more, giving more, loving differently, living differently, or for some of us, even slowing down. We sense God's call to start something new or to recommit to where we are now, or to do the hard work of justice and love.

God has a unique desire for each one of us at different times in our lives. Sometimes we're right in line with God; other times we fight. Other times we run. We're afraid

to trust in God, so we don't. We're afraid of change, so we won't. We don't like where this escalator is taking us so we run to Tarshish. We run the other way like little kids on an escalator. God's escalator moves toward love, toward justice, toward kindness and compassion and mercy and forgiveness. God's escalator moves toward wholeness and wellness and beauty and life. And instead of submitting to that current, we run the other way.

Jonah runs the other way, and it works out about as well as you'd expect. The sea rages against Jonah. The crew throws him overboard. He's swallowed by a mighty fish. And then he gets spat up on the beach, not in the direction he was headed, but on the shore of the very place he was running from. Nineveh.

Jonah reluctantly does preach to this great city. He warns the Ninevites of what will happen if they do not change, and for a brief moment, Jonah is finally flowing with God. He's with the current. On the right escalator. He's no longer fighting God, but accepting God and working with God.

The Ninevites change their minds because of what God does through Jonah. They change their minds and they change their ways. The city begins to reform and recommit itself to God, the city's inhabitants stop fighting God's call for them, and instead they allow God to direct them where they need to go. The entire city stops running the wrong way.

Friends, when you ride the escalator the right way, others will follow. When you are faithfully following God's current, and when you are following God's call, it will absolutely change not only your life, but the lives of those around you. Maybe not everyone, maybe not on the timetable you'd like, but make no mistake: The Gospel is contagious. And when you live into that good news, when you embody it, that current can't help but flow through you and into those around you as well.

At the risk of mixing my metaphors, I want to talk about elevators for a second. I heard in a sermon once about an episode of the 1960s hidden camera show *Candid Camera*. The showrunners replicated a famous psychological experiment. They set up cameras in an elevator and had a business-looking man walk into the elevator, and instead of facing the front like any sane person would do, he confidently walked toward the rear of the elevator and faced the back wall.

And as other people came into that elevator, instead of facing the front doors, each person would push the button for their floor, and then turn toward that same back wall for the duration of the ride. The camera would catch people looking startled, maybe a little confused, but just about always giving in and turning around in the direction of the others.

Friends, which way will you be facing when those elevator doors open? I want you to think about the

others on that elevator with you. Your family, neighbors, friends. Which way do you want them to face?

When Jonah accepts God's call, when Jonah listens to God and faces the right way, the Ninevites begin to turn too and face the right direction. Jonah dares to stop facing the back of the elevator, to turn around and face the front. And one by one, the others begin to turn with him. To face the right way. And as those around Jonah begin to turn, it becomes easier and easier for the rest of the Ninevites to give in to that current. To turn toward the front.

When Jonah submits himself to God, the entire city of Nineveh gets saved. It's a glorious ending. A fantastic conclusion. If only that was the ending of Jonah's story. The story continues, and depending on who you ask, it can be rather bleak. The book of Jonah ends with Jonah sitting outside the city, under a tree, upset with God. Jonah's upset that God brought him to Nineveh to warn the city of its destruction, and then upset with God all over again that God did not destroy Nineveh as God said God would do. Here at the end of the story, Jonah is upset that Nineveh changed. He's upset that the city has stopped facing the wrong direction and running the wrong way.

At this moment, Jonah reveals himself as a man who's relapsed. He reveals himself as a man whose change was real, but who couldn't help himself, and who is once again swimming against God's current,

facing the back of the elevator, running up the down escalator – pick your favorite metaphor, that’s Jonah here. Instead of submitting to God, Jonah wants God to submit to him. Instead of being yoked alongside God, he’s trying to drag God the other way or to break free of God entirely. He’s angry and he’s lonely and he’s isolated and he’s mad at God, and he’s relapsed, and he’s running up the down escalator.

And then the story just ends. God gives a speech about God’s power, God’s ways, God’s current, but you never hear from Jonah again.

You’re left wondering how it ends for Jonah. Left wondering what happens after. You’re left wondering if Jonah is still running – up that escalator, away from God – or if Jonah was able to finally, fully, get out of his own way and submit himself to God’s work in his life. The story lets each one of us fill in the final chapters ourselves.

Friends, the last chapters in your life are also yet to be written. When your story ends, where do you want to be? I’m not talking about heaven and hell. I’m talking about earth. I’m talking about legacy. I’m talking about life. When your final chapters are written, where do you want to be?

Alone, outside of the city, angry at God and maybe yourself too, running up the escalator like a little kid, running up the escalator but not going anywhere, running up the escalator and so, so tired? Or, would you rather be in that great city? At one with yourself, with your neighbors, and with God. At peace. Moving to God’s current, riding the waves of life wherever God takes you, and encouraging others to do the same.

Let it be so for you and also for me. *Amen.* ●



by Nathanael Hood



MISSION: JOY (FINDING HAPPINESS IN TROUBLED TIMES)

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

On the surface, it seems difficult to find two men more different than the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. One is a Christian, the other a Buddhist. The first was born and raised in desperate poverty in apartheid-era South Africa. The second was raised as royalty in a lavish Tibetan palace. Tutu's upbringing was heavily influenced by his loving mother and abusive father; Gyatso was taken from his parents at two years old and raised by monks. Desmond has spent his life in his native country; Gyatso has lived in exile for fifty-six years. Finally, one has given his life to God, while the other is literally considered one by his followers. That both men have been instrumental figures in modern human rights struggles, each winning the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts, isn't surprising. That the two diametric opposites are dear friends, is.

First meeting at a museum in New Jersey in 1990, the two holy men hit it off right away. One of Tutu's daughters describes the two octogenarians' energy together as being similar to that of "eight year old boys." Indeed, when the two reunite for the first time in years for the filming of Louis Psihoyos and Peggy Callahan's *Mission: Joy (Finding Happiness in Troubled Times)*, not even the strictures of age can keep the two from giggling and joking like schoolchildren. As the wizened Tutu departs his plane in Dharamsala, India and reunites with Gyatso on the tarmac, their years positively melt away as they tease and embrace each other. In this moment, the two are young again.

It seems appropriate then that the topic for Psihoyos and Callahan's documentary is, as the title suggests, the nature of joy and whether or not it's feasible

in today's world. The film is predominately an interview with the two holy men as they're asked various questions about it as well as questions concerning hope and despair. Animated interludes recreating scenes from their childhoods demonstrate their familiarity with all three: Tutu with his experiences with poverty, abuse, and racist violence under apartheid; Gyatso with losing his family, home, and homeland at the hand of Chinese invaders.

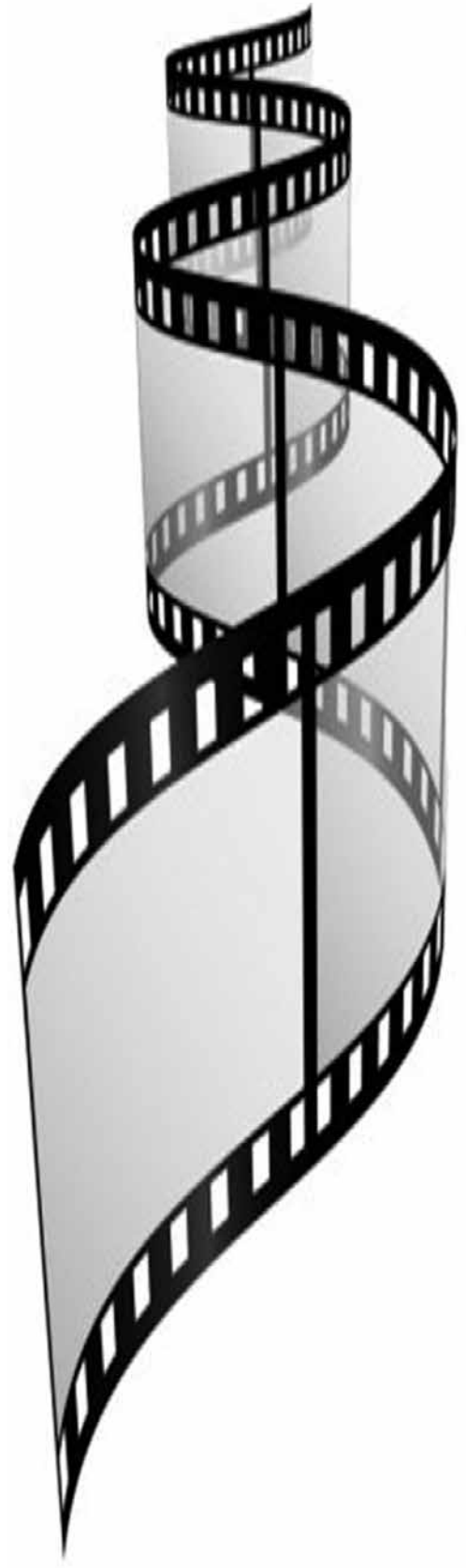
Yet their answers are astonishingly similar: happiness and joy come from two places. The first is from within. "The ultimate source of a meaningful life is within ourselves," Gyatso explains. One can choose to wallow in despair over one's circumstances or one can choose—the key word here being "choose"—to recontextualize one's life. Gyatso uses his own life as an example. Instead of

continued on page 18

viewing his life in exile as a tragedy, he's deliberately reframed his experiences in his mind as a unique opportunity to escape the "Golden Cage" that trapped generations of Dalai Lamas in their monastic estates. Unlike other Lamas, he's been afforded the chance to travel the world and learn about things he otherwise couldn't. To reevaluate one's life as a refugee in political exile as a blessing in disguise takes a superhuman level of mindfulness, and I sincerely doubt Gyatso would be so cruel as to suggest other people going through intense trauma should merely seek the silver lining. But I am reminded of the ending of Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* (1997), a biopic of Gyatso that ends with him answering the question of whether or not he's the Lord Buddha by saying: "I believe I am a reflection, like the moon on water. When you see me, and I try to be a good man, you see yourself."

The second source of joy comes from helping others. Here the film turns more emphatically towards Tutu's struggles as an anti-apartheid civil rights leader, risking life and limb to help free his fellow Africans from the last bastion of politically legalized white supremacy in Africa. Through acts of service, he was able to find compassion not just

for his fellow persecuted blacks but for the white police officers and soldiers who terrorized them. At several points in the film, scientists and clinical experts are brought in to comment on Tutu and Gyatso's teachings, and one of the most astonishing of these comes when Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky of UC Riverside is asked to corroborate Tutu's claim that acts of kindness can change someone. She answers in the complete affirmative, explaining that medical trials have demonstrated that people who consistently perform acts of kindness see their blood and RNA transform on a biological level to better match a healthy immune profile. Helping others, being compassionate, acting kindly... all these things literally rewrite our bodies to live stronger, longer lives. It would seem the Most Reverend Archbishop Desmond Tutu has a point. But then, so too does His Holiness the Dalai Lama about personal mindfulness. Indeed, the film seems to argue that the Buddhist notion of interior cultivation and the Christian emphasis on acts of service are two halves of the same coin. It is by combining both that one can find the same kind of joy, the same kind of happiness, that these two old men share in each others' presence during their twilight years. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



FIRST FAMILY FUN EVENT SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH

First Families are invited to join forces (children, families, and REFUGE youth group) in a combined event on Sunday, September 19th at 1 p.m. at Boomers in Boca Raton. Go-Karts? Check. Mini-golf? Check. Laser tag? You betcha! Whether you're looking for good food, good games, or good people, we've got you covered. The cost is heavily subsidized at \$10 per person, with a maximum cost of \$25 per family. Scholarships are available. To register for this fun event, please email Rev. Greg Rapier (gregrapier@firstdelray.com) no later than September 12th. ●

by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

World Communion Sunday is October 3, 2021. On this day, millions of Christians around the world come to the Lord's table together. From before the sun rises to well past the sunset, God's people gather to remember, singing praises for what God has done.

God's people meet under tin roofs with wide open windows, in cathedrals, in country churches, in magnificent edifices, in hidden rooms, in adobe brick buildings, in temporary auditoriums or schools, in mud brick churches with thatch roofs. The Invitation to the Table is given in hundreds of different languages. Different types of bread are used that reflect each country. There are so many differences in faces, languages, cultures, and clothes. What brings us together is that we come to the Table of Christ, the elements are blessed, and we consume together. We are the Body of Jesus Christ. On this World Communion Sunday, we will be celebrating what brings us together as One Body of Christ. ●

DEACONS' CORNER

In 2020, you responded with overwhelming generosity to the Deacons' Christmas Tree project. You opened your hearts and wallets to provide three hundred \$25 gift cards to children in our community, distributed through five local agencies, making a difference to many affected by the pandemic. As Deacon Ann Shuman stated in the March/April 2021 edition of this publication, "The Deacons believe that investing in our children's future is always money well spent."

Not only did you raise the \$7,500 needed for the children at Christmas, you donated additional funds. After a discussion, the Deacons thought that there may be a need for local families during the summer. After all, with the uncertainty of the pandemic, they didn't want any child to go without necessary supplies for the 2021-2022 school year.

With the additional \$1,440 donated, thirty-six \$40 gift cards from Walmart and Target were purchased. They were recently donated to the Achievement Center for Children & Families to distribute to families who needed them most.

Jessica Gregoire from the Achievement Center shared the experience of one of the parents who received a gift card, and said that "she was extremely grateful for the much needed money for supplies so that her son could be prepared for school." Jessica also said, "As always, we appreciate the long-standing partnership with First Presbyterian and this recent generous donation of gift cards to our families."

Thank you for opening your hearts and wallets to support others in our community. ***You truly do make a difference! ●***



OUR UPCOMING DISTINGUISHED PREACHERS



November 14, 2021

DR. MICHAEL BROWN

Pastor, Blowing Rock Methodist Church, North Carolina

Retired Senior Pastor, Marble Collegiate Church, New York City

January 23, 2022

REV. SUSAN SPARKS

Senior Pastor,

Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York City



January 8, 2023

DR. CRAIG BARNES

President,

Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey

“Our Distinguished Preacher Series programming over the years has brought to our congregation some of the finest Christian ministers of our time. Each of them bring a new voice from our pulpit; a new confidence spoken about our faith that allows us to hear God’s word filtered by their incredible knowledge and experience that challenges us to be better disciples of Christ. Each time we welcome them is always a joyful experience creating the wonderful opportunity for new spiritual growth and development.”

(Rob Tanner, member and Elder)

Visit our website’s Distinguished Preacher page under the sidebar category “Grow” to read more about these guest preachers. Remember to mark these dates on your calendars and to invite your family and friends to church on those days. These guest preachers are sure to impact your lives and deepen your spiritual growth. ●

HOLLY HOUSE

A MINISTRY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Have you visited the Holly House recently? This ministry of our church is a beehive of activity on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Often, you can hear the hum of sewing machines as handmade creations are fashioned, or smell the heat from a glue gun as unique items are assembled. In the middle of this large building, located on the northeast corner of the church campus, you find displays of housewares available for sale to help support the ministry and mission of the church. You will also find beautiful displays of costume jewelry and holiday decorations.

This ministry not only provides fellowship to a dedicated group of “Holly House ladies”, but also a welcoming community of support for one another. They help each other when a helping hand is needed, pray when prayers need to be lifted, and laugh and cry with each other’s joys and sorrows. Stop by on any Tuesday or Thursday morning to see how this ministry truly is a blessing to members and friends of the church community. To find out more about this church ministry, call the Holly House directly at 561-274-9597. ●



Bonnie is writing a letter to servicemen for Operation Gratitude.



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



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

PATHWAY TO MEMBERSHIP

We are blessed with a beautiful Sanctuary, a warm and welcoming congregation, and educational programming for all ages. Our Sunday morning worship services combine the outstanding preaching of Dr. Doug Hood and Rev. Greg Rapier with one of the finest choirs in South Florida, led by Don Cannarozzi. In addition, the number of attendees, both in-person and virtually, continues to rise. Yet, we hear of people who are unsure of how to formalize their relationship with the church.

It is quite simple. All we need to know is that you are interested in becoming a member of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. If attending worship in person, you can complete the card in the pew and put it in the offering box, or you can speak directly to one of the pastors or to me before or after the service. If you are attending our online worship services, you can complete the “Membership Interest Form” on our website. After indicating your interest in joining, one of our staff will contact you to answer any questions you may have, and will arrange to receive you as a member. This can be performed either in person or virtually.

There are four ways through which you can join:

- **Letter of Transfer:** If you are currently a member of another church, you may join via letter of transfer. We will ask for the name and address of the church where you are currently a member, and we will contact them and inform them of your desire to unite with us.
- **Reaffirmation of Faith:** If you have professed your faith before and joined a church, but it has been a while or there is no membership to transfer, you may join by reaffirmation of faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Profession of Faith:** If you have never professed your faith in Jesus Christ and never joined a church, you may join by profession of faith in Jesus Christ. If you have never been baptized, we will join with you in celebration of your baptism into the family of God.
- **Affiliate:** If you are a resident in the area only part of the year and wish to maintain your membership in your other church community, you may join as an affiliate member. You are entitled to all of the rights and privileges of active members except for the right to vote and hold office.

This congregation makes a significant impact in the ministry and mission of individuals locally, nationally, and internationally. We change lives by committing over \$100k of our annual budget to support nonprofits that provide ministry to the homeless, the hungry, victims of domestic abuse, and medical care for those without access to such care. You are invited to join with us in our mission to positively impact our community. ●

by Don Cannarozzi

Organist/Director of Music



MUSIC NOTES

Some people have asked whether volunteers are welcome to sing in the choir. Yes, anyone may sing with us on Sunday mornings; I promise you will be blessed if you join us. We already have a few volunteers singing with us, and we rehearse after the service. Sunday rehearsals allow the professionals to be at rehearsals which makes the rehearsals more productive. There is such joy at rehearsals that we sometimes hate to call it a day and head home.

Covid is, unfortunately, still a concern. We are all fully vaccinated; however, feel free to join only if you are comfortable doing so. We all look forward to the day when Covid is history. Until then, we push forward, and take all necessary precautions to keep us safe. ●



by Don Cannarozzi

Organist/Director of Music



WHY I GIVE

I have no family, so when I eventually “quit this house of clay,” anything I have left will go to help young singers trying to make a career in opera. Of course, there will be a donation to this church. I call any donations a gift from the Puig/Cannarozzi Music Fund, named after my beloved love-long partner and husband, Sergio Puig, who died in 2016. This year, the Puig/Cannarozzi Music Fund will pay for Mario Arevalo’s salary; next year, it will be for Birgit Fioravante. All of the soloists are wonderful, so I am going in alphabetical order.

Next year, the Puig/Cannarozzi Music Fund will present an all-Mozart concert with a full orchestra. My college roommate, Thomas Bachtell, will join me to perform Mozart’s concerto for two pianos; the remainder of the program will be vocal solos and ensembles. The concert will be free, the date TBA. I will wait until Covid is no longer a concern, which will make it a truly joyous event.

I give, in small part, as a way to thank this church for being “my savior.” I also give, in small part, to help continue providing quality music. In my years here, there have been many generous donors to this church’s music ministry. These donations have funded our soloists, added pipes to the organ, provided our grand piano, and allowed us to provide the high-quality music we present every Sunday. We hear that “God blesses a generous donor.” But how? This church’s donors have taught me that donations bring smiles and joy to others. The greatest gift I can give is to make someone’s life a little happier. When I make someone smile, I know I have truly received God’s blessing. ●



WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

The El Rio Trail parallels the canal of the same name for approximately five miles from Congress Avenue on the Delray/Boca Raton border to Glades Road at Florida Atlantic University in Boca. This paved multi-use trail was originally a rail bed. My husband and I often enjoy early morning bike rides over the entire length of the trail. However, this morning, after parking at the Boca Raton Tri-Rail station, I walk the stretch of the trail under I-95, across Spanish River Road, towards Glades Road. The trail along this stretch is a dichotomy of cityscape and wilderness.

To my left is the canal where native cabbage palms and scrub grasses are interspersed with a few patches of blooming yellow tickweed. To my right, the dormitories and academic halls of Florida Atlantic University lie just beyond a landscaped ribbon of grasses, trees, and flowers. Here, native Florida plants mingle with foreign interlopers. A Royal Poinciana, its ancestors originally from Madagascar, nears the end of its seasonal crimson blaze. These exotic trees are joined by others with

family histories from Central and South America: pale pink and white plumeria (some call it frangipani), deep purple bougainvillea, and white and lilac petrea (tropical wisteria). Although sparse, these flowering trees and plantings of blue daze, yellow buttons, and blue porterweed add bursts of color to the otherwise green landscape. A shaded bench offers a welcome reprieve from the escalating heat of the morning sunshine. A blue heron sits on the bank of the canal opposite. Butterflies of all colors and sizes flit from blossom to blossom. Signs warn of alligators, although I have yet to see one this morning. Two iguanas skitter away as I rest here for a moment.

There is something appealing about the diversity here. Yes, even the pesky iguanas add an interesting element to the landscape. Variety is the spice of life, my mother taught me. Isn't this so with people, too?

Jesus commanded, "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). By now, most of us know that "love thy neighbor" doesn't mean "love thy third generation American neighbor,

and not thy Haitian, Bahamian, Syrian, Mexican, or Cuban neighbor." It also doesn't mean "love thy Christian neighbor and not thy Jewish, Muslim, Hindi, Buddhist, or atheist neighbor." All those folks are our neighbors—every one of them. Every one of them was created in the image of God (just like you and I). God loves them and calls us to love them, too.

A closer look at the trail reveals that some of the trees and wildflowers from the landscaped areas to my right have "jumped the trail" and now grow wild, adding color and beauty amongst the native scrub along the canal. This intermingling reminds me that loving those whose religions and appearances are different from mine is easier when living in the midst of diversity. Stereotyping those of different cultural and religious backgrounds and experiences from my own is difficult once a personal connection happens. How many of us "jump the trail" by going out of our way to connect with people of other faiths and races? Here on the El Rio Trail, I feel God's summons to follow the way of Jesus, a way that calls me to love, not judge, those who don't. ●



by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

I listened to a rap album this week. I'm not going to name the rapper or the album because there was plenty in it to not warrant a recommendation from your pastor. There's also enough in this article that, if you chose to veer down that rabbit-hole, I wouldn't be able to stop you. But be warned, the album has blatant misogyny, rampant materialism, and harsh, harsh language. It's filled with the type of stuff you'd expect from your stereotypical rap album. Not all rap is this way, I promise, but this one is. This particular rapper has always struck me as a talented guy, creative in the way he can turn a phrase, but somewhat of a wasted talent because his songs had nothing to say.

Near the end, the album veers into surprising, adult territory. Consider this your trigger warning. On a track named after a family member, this hyper-masculine rapper reflects on his childhood and, we discover near the end of the song, the way his mother turned a blind eye to some inappropriate behavior by her family. The rapper begins the next track angry with his mother, but by the end of it, he's broken-down crying in church. The song ends with a lullaby and

a prayer, "Father God, I am just learning how to pray, so bear with me..." This song seamlessly bleeds into the final track on the album, Closure, in which the rapper leaves a voicemail for his mother:

"You [tried] to bring me closer to God through church and religion...but I think that before you understand religion, we should all focus on understanding something that most of us can agree on, and that's the want for love. I wish you would've put the same amount of emphasis you put in religion and learning that and following God with the love you gave me, you know? I think maybe with that, maybe I would've treated women a little better. Maybe I would've had a little bit more trust for other people. Maybe I wouldn't feel the need to use my success as armor...The most important thing though is I'm not mad at you and I'm okay with some of the things we've been through... I love you mom."

Just to be clear, none of this absolves him of his sins, which are boldly celebrated throughout the album. His faults at the beginning are foregrounded just as much as

the prayer at the end, and it creates an interesting juxtaposition: A man at war with himself. Someone who mostly stays surface-level because to go below is too painful. A grown man in public, but a child of God. Confident on the outside but crying within. I think there's a lot here we can relate to, even if our contexts and life experiences are vastly different.

The man just wants love.

And he tells his mom as much at the end. He tells her he wishes she spent as much time teaching him about love as she did telling him about God. I picture his mom laying out freshly ironed clothes every Saturday night, so he'll be ready Sunday morning. I picture his mom warning him don't slouch, and nudging him with her elbow to smile for the pastor. I picture a strict disciplinarian so focused on the rules of what it means to be a Christian that she misses the greatest rule of all.

And that rule is love. Love your neighbor, love yourself, and love your God. This rapper, just learning how to pray, is tapping into something his mom maybe never did. God is love. Not rules. Not appearances. Love. ●

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

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Sunday Morning Worship Services

10 a.m.

