

THE SPIRE

*Your
Church
Magazine*



September / October 2022



NURTURE FAITH

by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

HINDERED PRAYERS

“Husbands, likewise, submit by living with your wife in ways that honor her, knowing that she is the weaker partner. Honor her all the more, as she is also a coheir of the gracious care of life. Do this so that your prayers won’t be hindered.”

1 Peter 3:7 (Common English Bible)

During a semester of study in Coventry, England, I was told that a prominent cathedral hosted a guest pastor one particular Sunday. Anticipation of this guest was created by his reputation as a preacher of considerable excellence. The cathedral that morning was packed with worshipers, all eager to hear from a preacher of an unusual caliber. At the beginning of the service, he stepped into the pulpit, looked confidently at the congregation, and spoke the familiar words of the liturgy, “The Lord be with you.” The usual response that followed would be, “And also with you.” However, there seemed to be a glitch with the sound system. No one worshiping could hear the pastor. He grabbed the microphone and adjusted it upward—closer to his voice—and repeated the liturgy. Again, the sound system failed to capture his words. With that second failure, the pastor looked back to the sound technicians, slammed his hand down on the pulpit, and shouted, “There is a problem with the sound system!” The glitch was now corrected, and everyone heard the pastor. They responded, “And also with you!”

In this passage of scripture, Peter turns his attention to the relationship between wife and husband. It is unfortunate that some interpreters of the Bible reflect more on the misogyny of ancient times than the primary thrust of these words. The primary argument here is that one’s conduct must be informed by a new life in Christ for a vital experience of prayer. Peter uses marriage as an interpretive tool. In the ancient time of Peter’s writing, only the husband had privileges. Women had few. William Barclay writes, “If you were to catch your wife in the act of infidelity, you could kill her with impunity without a trial; but, if she were to catch you, she would not venture to touch you with her finger and, indeed, she has no right.”ⁱ The operative moral code of that day placed all responsibility on the wife and all the privilege on the husband. Peter objects to this view and provides a new relationship dynamic shaped by the Gospel of Jesus. Prayers, therefore, must be made from one no longer captive to the old world order. Unless we approach prayer with a Gospel-shaped life, we experience a hindrance in our communion with God.

The privilege of prayer always demands a corresponding obligation. Anyone who prays for recovery from illness must match that prayer with a responsible diet, exercise, and rest. An actor or actress who prays for an opportunity to perform on a Broadway stage must match that prayer with

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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.**

NURTURE FAITH

hard work in acting lessons and rehearsal for auditions. Anyone who aspires to publish begins by writing the first sentence. Ernest Hemingway once commented, “All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.”ⁱⁱ Effort must accompany prayer. Prayer without personal effort is merely wishful thinking or a belief in magic. That person remains captive to a sense of privilege without responsibility. It is a mindset that limits their access to God. Christian growth involves, among other things, getting rid of those attitudes, ways of speaking, and behavior patterns that elevate self above concern for others. Forbid yourself from indulging in thoughts that you deserve better. Those thoughts are self-destructive. Exchange such thoughts with gratitude and begin to affirm that God is active in your life, seeking to bless you.

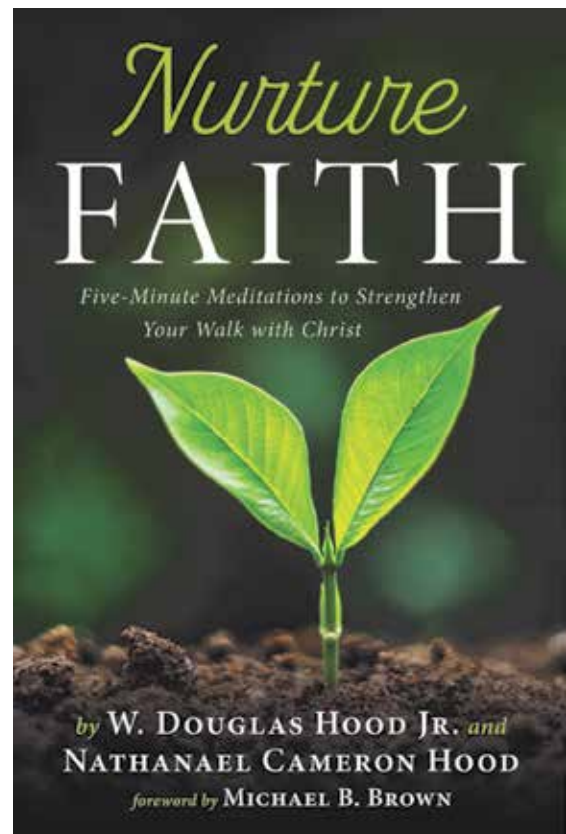
The Gospel of Jesus has changed the moral code of relationships; the relationship of men to slaves and wives. For wives, this submission is one where men are to live with their wives “in ways that honor her.” More, the wife is now “a coheir of the gracious care of life.” The marriage is now hallowed and enriched, an equality of both the husband and wife established as sons and daughters of God. No longer are women inferior to men. This new relationship dynamic will be lived in a world that holds a very different view of the matter. This mutual relationship of honor creates a channel for God’s blessing to flow. Living as God intends, clothing one’s behavior in conduct that is in concert with God’s desire for us reshapes prayers that are made. Alignment of conduct with God’s values results in higher aspirations which experience fulfillment. If there is little room in one’s life for attention to Jesus, there is little room for the participation of God in such a life. If we feel that our prayers are hindered—are ineffective—the trouble may be that there is something wrong with us. ●

ⁱWilliam Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976) 223.

ⁱⁱErnest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition* (New York, London, Toronto, & Sydney: Scribner, 1964) 12.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCE TO NURTURE YOUR FAITH

There is a new resource to strengthen your spiritual life. Last month, Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, released *Nurture Faith: Five Minute Meditations to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ*, written by Dr. Doug Hood and his son, Nathanael. Alicia on Amazon wrote, “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.” This resource is available through Amazon or your favorite electronic bookstore. *Any royalties received will help support the ministry and mission of this church.* ●



by Grace Cameron Hood

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*



FIRST FAMILIES MINISTRIES

Sunday School News

Beginning in November, all Sunday School classes will be held during the second worship service at 11 a.m.

Sunday School is revved up and going well. Liz Landes and Caroline Calder lovingly attend the Nursery (children up to age 3). Bible Bunch (3 years old through Kindergarten) continues with the creative and careful Alice Barrett and Iva Branscombe. Sandy McGilvray leads the Primary Sunday School class (1st through 4th grade), and Grace Hood leads the Secondary Sunday School class (grades 5 and up). Sandy and Grace are currently using the book 13 Very Bad Days and How God Fixed Them. All children are welcome to join!

Children's Music Programs

Children in Kindergarten through 5th grade are invited to join the Children's Choir. We will soon begin rehearsals for this year's Christmas pageant that will be held on Sunday afternoon, December 11th. Our Youth Bells group for older children is learning how to play the chimes. If your child is interested in any of our children's music groups, please contact our Associate Director of Music, Birgit (birgit@firstdelray.com).

An Advent Invitation

What? Talking about Advent already? We haven't even had Halloween or Thanksgiving! The reason for bringing it up now is that we want members to think about and share their favorite or powerful Christmas memories to be published in the November/December Spire and on our website.

Think back to a Christmas that fills your heart with emotions. It might be a Christmas memory, a Christmas you spent away from your family, or perhaps a Christmas spent in another country or with a different culture. Write it up and send it to Grace Hood at gracehood@firstdelray.com. The deadline for submission is October 10th. ●

*Director of Children and
Family Ministry*

FIRST FAMILIES FUN FACTS

Meet the Baum Girls

Hi! I'm Jill Baum. I moved to Florida from Doylestown, PA, in 2004. I worked as a dental assistant and a luxury jewelry sales professional. I love the beach, so on my days off, I could always be found next to South Tower 3 on Delray Beach. That's where I met my husband, Walter.

Walter was born in Weiz, Austria. He was raised in Washington, DC, and went to college at FIU for Hospitality. However, he didn't care much for the industry, so he decided to train hard and become an Ocean Rescue Lifeguard for Delray Beach. He was regularly stationed at South Tower 3, where he stalked me for quite some time before working up the courage to talk to me. A year later, we were married at our Mimi's penthouse in Palm Beach on the Intracoastal overlooking the water.

Miraculously, four years later, I found myself pregnant. Neither of us was spring chickens, so it was quite a shock! We welcomed baby Juliet, and all of our family was in love. I wish I hadn't waited so long because being a mother is the most important, most fulfilling job I've ever had.

I was talking to a friend in PA, and he asked me if we were going to church. He said to me, "You know God's going to hold you accountable for that child knowing Jesus!" I had never thought about it in that way. Walter and I immediately set out to find a church. Since he worked on Delray Beach, he always saw the steeple, so we decided to try First Presbyterian Church Delray. We also knew Jen Buce, which made us more comfortable sending Juliet to Bible Bunch. We loved everything about FPCDB! We particularly liked when Dr. Hood spoke, and we also liked Grace. The music is also amazing!

We bought a little cottage in Gulf Stream, and Juliet started attending the Gulf Stream School. Soon I noticed she was getting very thin and irritable. She was eating so much, so this was strange. She was so thirsty and would vomit a lot. She just wasn't herself. I listed all her symptoms and took her to the doctor. Next thing you know, we were in the ER at Joe Dimaggio hospital, and Juliet was diagnosed with type one diabetes. She had a great time there! Walter and I, not so much. Our lives changed overnight to a world of counting carbs and calculating insulin ratios—lots of finger pricks and injections—thousands.

Juliet adapted quite well. She has never once complained to this day. She wears an insulin pump and continuous glucose monitor, which makes our lives much easier. Juliet is so brave and tough. She always has a smile on her face, and T1D doesn't seem to bother her at all. She has gone to Washington as a Delegate for the JDRF and has given many speeches at fundraisers. We are so proud of her!

In 2017 tragedy struck our happy little family. I had just taken Juliet to VBS and came home to find Walter on the floor with a stroke. He was extremely fit, so this was quite an unexpected shock. Unfortunately, it happened in the nighttime, so they could not use the stroke treatments, and his left brain was completely dead. Walter died five days later.

Not long after his death, our Mimi also passed away, so I decided to move back to PA to be near my sister. I bought a big old stone farmhouse on 5 acres. It was beautiful and peaceful but a lot of work! I loved tooling around on my tractors and mowing the lawn and pastures. Juliet was happy at her new school, and things were going fine until Covid hit. We were very locked down in PA. It was lonely, and Juliet turned into a teenager overnight. Any thought that she would help with the farm flew out the window. I was constantly hurting myself, trying to do things I shouldn't, and forgetting I wasn't 18. Then came the three feet of snow and the gloomy, gray skies—such a contrast from the Florida skies I was used to for the last 25 years.

So, everything seemed to line up for me to sell the beautiful farm and move back to Florida. Thankfully I hadn't sold our Gulf Stream cottage, and we could return to our home here. Juliet is attending Oxbridge Academy this school year.

We have good friends here, and I'm hoping to, perhaps, get a part-time job to keep me busy. I love walking the beach every day with our little dog, Brandy.

Life is good for the Baum Girls back in Florida! ●

family photos on page 6



by **Maria Graham**

MONDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

On September 12th, the Monday Morning Women's Bible Study will begin the five-session video study The Case for Heaven and Hell: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for Life After Death by Lee Strobel. This award-winning journalist and best-selling author goes beyond common misconceptions and delves into what the Bible teaches about the afterlife. Strobel, an atheist, turned Christian, also describes his own close encounter with death. Clips from the documentary adaptation of *The Case for Heaven* are included. (Some may remember when the Deacons showed the movie based on Strobel's previous book, *The Case for Christ*, in Fellowship Hall pre-pandemic!)

On October 17th, we will begin Let. It. Go.: How to Stop Running the Show and Start Walking in Faith by one of our favorite authors, Karen Ehman. Most women are wired to control life's details. In this humorous yet thought-provoking six-session video study, Karen guides us to discover the freedom and reward of an "out of control" life. Armed with relevant biblical and current examples, new thought patterns, and practical tools to implement, Let. It. Go. will enable us to control what we should, trust God with what we can't, and, most importantly, decide which one is which.

Monday Morning Women's Bible Study meets at 10 a.m. via Zoom. You are welcome to learn, laugh, and share with us in a confidential and supportive atmosphere. Contact Maria Graham (mmg2352@gmail.com) for an email invitation to join! ●

GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

Remembrance Fund from the estate of Noel Copen and from the estate of Suzanne Morris. ●

SESSION REPORT

During June and July, the Session approved baptisms and received new members. ●

ETERNAL LIVES

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

Robert Buddy – June 16, 2022

Hermanus Jan DeGroot – August 8, 2022

NEW MEMBERS

Richard Allen

Loretta Battiloro

Courtney Daniel

Ashley Harper

John Harper

John Ray

Brian Simmel

Judy Simmel

Mehgan Simmel

Shelly Simmel

Melissa Sloane

Connie Talcott Smith

Donna Van Horn

John Van Horn

WELCOME!

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY OCTOBER 2, 2022

World Communion Day is October 2, 2022. Millions of Christians worldwide come to the Lord's Table on this day. God's people gather to remember from before the sun rises to well past the sunset. We remember that God so loved the world that we can come to the Table without fear, as One Body and One People.

God's People meet under tin roofs with wide open windows, cathedrals, country churches, magnificent edifices, hidden rooms, adobe brick buildings, temporary auditoriums or schools, and 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 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 celebrate what brings us together as One Body of Christ. ●



MEET ALEJANDRO VIERA

On July 16th, Alejandro Viera married Jessica Perez in a lovely ceremony in Hialeah. The ceremony and the reception were in both English and Spanish.

Alejandro met Jessica Perez in 2015. He was dropping off some music for his good friend Ignacio, a pianist, and Jessica happened to be there. Feeling a little lonely at the time, Alejandro invited her to a Greek festival, but alas, no fireworks on that first date. About a year later, he bumped into her again with the same friend, and their mutual interest began to develop. Jessica had a degree in musical theater, and they bonded over their love of music and shared sense of humor. The three friends began filming short comedic videos together to post on social media that had musical and theatrical themes. One thing led to another, and Alejandro proposed to Jessica in 2020.



Alejandro was born in Havana, Cuba, into a musical family. His father, a pianist, worked as a professional musician for the opera. When he was a small child, singers would visit their home to “coach” music with his father, and Alejandro would entertain them with his versions of “O Sole Mio” and other Italian classics he had picked up by ear. This encouraged him to sing in programs at school and concerts and begin studying piano. Oddly, Alejandro never had the high voice of a child; he always sang in the tenor range, imitating the adult voices he heard.



Alejandro’s much older sister also became a professional musician, an oboist, who played for a touring orchestra in Cuba. She was the first in her family to flee Cuba, deserting while on tour in Spain. She eventually came to the United States and settled in Rhode Island.

In 1998, his father managed to get a work visa for the Dominican Republic. He moved the family to Santo Domingo, where they stayed until 2005. Alejandro continued to study piano and joined a chorus, which he loved.

After this taste of freedom, Alejandro’s parents decided to begin the process of coming to the States. His mother left first, a year before Alejandro and his father. She took a raft with other refugees to Isla de Mona, a small island belonging to Puerto Rico—a very risky, illegal crossing. Once on shore, she applied for and was granted asylum. Since Alejandro and his father had Spanish citizenship through Alejandro’s paternal grandmother, they could travel with their Spanish passports to join her a year later on August 13, 2005, ironically Fidel Castro’s birthday.

Having taken some English studies in Santo Domingo, Alejandro decided to begin his senior year in high school. It was a rough year; although he could read and write English reasonably well, it was difficult to follow spoken conversations and lectures. After high school, he began his studies at Miami-Dade Community College with two semesters of English. He had been unsure of what to study, but when he heard about the New World School of the Arts attached to the college, he decided to audition for their voice department. His father had a friend who taught voice at another local university, so he helped Alejandro prepare for the audition. In February 2008, he auditioned and was accepted; he began his studies in the fall of that year. The large freshman class included Kyaunnee Richardson. After four years of a challenging program, there were only five of the original class who graduated; Alejandro and Kyaunnee were two of them.

In 2011, Florida Grand Opera was mounting *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini, one of the largest chorus operas. Alejandro, still completing his studies at NWSA, joined the FGO Opera Chorus, where he met and bonded with Fernando Gonzalez, a fellow Cuban. He went on to sing with other companies—St. Petersburg Opera, Naples Opera, and Gulf Shore Opera—where he sang various roles and concerts and continued with FGO in minor roles and the chorus.

In 2015, Alejandro came to an audition for Opera Fusion, founded by Birgit Fioravante. Sergio Puig, Don Cannarozzi's husband, who had connected many of the singers from FGO to First Presbyterian over the years, recommended the young tenor to Don immediately. After seven years, Alejandro says First Presbyterian has become like a second family. "It's a place where I find a religious connection, but I also get my musical skills tested every week with Don and his wrath if a mistake is made. It's a place where I can sing great music with some of the best singers in South Florida."

After graduating from NWSA, Alejandro took a job as a substitute teacher in the Miami-Dade public schools. This allowed him to have the flexibility to continue auditioning and performing. In 2017, he began his master's in music at Florida International University while continuing to teach and perform, which allowed him to graduate debt-free two years later.

In 2017, Alejandro's mother was diagnosed with colon cancer. She received treatment that kept her relatively healthy for three years, but in 2020 she took a turn for the worse. She passed away on May 29, 2021. Facing so many challenges, Alejandro decided to take a different path and accepted a full-time position as an elementary music teacher. "After many years of traveling, doing auditions, and dealing with rejection, I became tired of that life. Living paycheck to paycheck and always wondering about your next gig takes a toll. It gets to a point where you realize that talent and discipline only take you to a certain point. The rest is a mix of knowing the right people and having connections. Creating a family and settling down with a steady job became more important for me. I proposed to Jessica on December 23, 2020. For the first time in my life, I am extremely happy with how things are going."

Alejandro enjoys teaching elementary music to the children, whom he says are bright and funny. Jessica is also a music teacher in a private school in Miami, so their lives are filled with music and teaching. The bride and groom are now back from their honeymoon in Spain and have moved out of their parents' homes into their first apartment in Miami. ●



CELEBRATE THE MINISTRY OF HOLLY HOUSE

SAVE THE DATE

Holly House Holiday Gift Shop Open House

Sunday, October 16th, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Come and celebrate the start of the holiday season and over 50 years as a ministry of First Presbyterian Church with Holly House! Enjoy yummy brunch appetizers and beverages, shop, and meet the Holly House volunteers who join weekly in fellowship and friendship to create a fantastic variety of beautiful crafts, gifts, jewelry, florals, stitched fabric items, and decorations for sale.

Meet the Holly House volunteer teams:

The **Jewelry Gems** design unique necklaces, bracelets, and earrings with decorative beads, stones, wood, and pendants, as well as refurbishing a large selection of beautiful costume jewelry.

The **Sew Wonderful** team makes gorgeous fabric table runners, placemats, aprons, table toppers, tree skirts, Raggedy Ann dolls, cozies, and novelties.

The **Coastal Crew** crafts year-round décor using many different kinds and sizes of shells, sea glass, driftwood, air plant sculptures, and glassware with shells.

The **Clever Crafters** fashion cork wreaths, sandscapes on glass, table decorations, glamor pigs, and a wide variety of original design pieces.

The **Fantastic Florals** create holiday, seasonal, and all-occasion wreaths, trees, and floral arrangements.

The **Operation Gratitude Gals** are recognized for writing hundreds of greeting and seasonal cards sent to our military servicemen and women. Their handwritten messages express heartfelt gratitude for serving our country at home and aboard.

Crafted items are for sale, along with many beautiful holiday décor gifts and decorations for Halloween and Fall. Creativity abounds at Holly House, so make several visits to see what's new!

Holly House is happy to receive donated holiday items that can be refreshed and resold for the holiday sale season that continues through December 18th.

The Holly House Gift Shop is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 – 11:30 am. ●

Holly House is a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach.



by Jeanne Heavilin

Mission Outreach Ministry Team

WHY “PENNIES FROM HEAVEN” MATTERS

According to the Palm Beach County Food Bank website, more than 157,000 people are projected to be food insecure in Palm Beach County. They also estimate that:

- 1 in 5 children in Palm Beach County will go to bed hungry tonight.
- 1 in 6 people in Palm Beach County are struggling to put food on the table.

These are startling statistics for a county with so much wealth. For the first time, many of these families are only very recently food insecure: struggling with rising housing costs, gas, food, and just about everything else. They are middle-class families earning decent wages, not just those at or below the poverty level.

“In our communities, individuals or families that do not want to share with their neighbors the fact that they are struggling economically often hide hunger. Sometimes hunger hides behind doors of nice houses with mortgages in default, or the heat turned off, or all the income going to housing costs, leaving little or no money for food. Sometimes it hides behind the stoic faces of parents or grandparents who skip meals to protect their children or grandchildren from hunger. It goes unseen by those not looking for it.”

(from the United Way of Palm Beach County website)

We started Pennies from Heaven ten years ago in September of 2012, asking individuals and families to collect 5 cents for each meal eaten each month and donate it to Pennies from Heaven. Fortunately, many of you have contributed more over the years, and we have collected \$49,386 as of July 31st. All the money collected each month goes directly to funding food programs in our community and to members of our congregation who are experiencing hard times.

Thank you for following Christ’s command: Love your neighbor. ●

by Nancy Fine

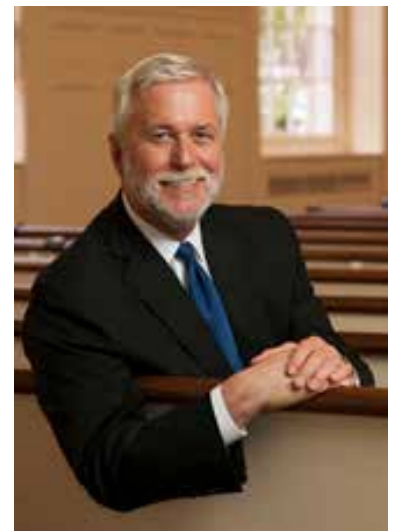
Business Administrator

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

On Sunday, January 8, 2023, we will welcome to our pulpit Dr. Craig Barnes as our Distinguished Preacher. Dr. Barnes is the President of Princeton Theological Seminary as well as a professor of pastoral ministry. He is an accomplished author, and his writing and academic work reflect his deep commitment to the theological formation of pastors to lead the church in changing times.

Last year, I made a note of this comment by one of our church members. “Over the years, our Distinguished Preachers have offered distinct and fresh voices to our worshiping community. Their unique perspectives challenge us to think and act differently as Christ’s Disciples. I look forward to hearing them as they ignite and impact our church’s attendees and me.”

Make sure to put this date on your calendar now and invite a friend or neighbor to join us as we welcome Dr. Barnes to our pulpit on January 8th as our 2023 Distinguished Preacher. ●





by Dr. Doug Hood

Senior Pastor

*The following is from **Confronting Life's Challenges: Sermons on the Struggles We Face**, which features sermons by Doug Hood, Greg Rapier, and John "Skip" Randolph.*

ARE YOU OVERWHELMED?

Acts 12:24

Listen for God's Word:

"God's word continued to grow and increase."

Acts 12:24 (Common English Bible)

The late Pittsburgh astronomer, John Brashear, wrote his own epitaph: "I have loved the stars too fondly to ever be fearful of the night." What a beautiful and encouraging thought! As I have pondered those words over the years since I heard them, it seems to me that Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, could have written them. As Jesus' disciple, Peter did not always live in the sunlight. Peter's ministry was not always filled with the brightness of success and victory. Peter knew days of darkness and despair. He knew times of trouble and tragedy. Here, in the twelfth chapter of Acts, we learn that King Herod has begun to make life difficult for the Christian Church. James, John's brother, is killed with a sword. Then Herod has Peter arrested and placed in prison. What is remarkable is that Herod then places sixteen guards on duty simply to watch Peter! Then, notice what happens next. The Church begins to pray for Peter. In the midst of trouble and difficulty, the Church does what it does best; the Church clings to hope.

I wish we had access to Peter's thoughts while he was chained in prison.



Did Peter ever doubt the ministry that he has now given his life to? Did Peter ever question the existence of God when things became really difficult for the Church and for him? The Church of Jesus Christ is now under a most severe persecution and its continued existence seems doubtful. King Herod is on a rampage to stamp out the Church by destroying its leaders. Disciples are either being killed or placed in prison and the Church is under constant attack and is being scattered everywhere. The night is very dark and it seems that Peter must be feeling overwhelmed.

The day that is described in this chapter of Acts is not unlike one today.

On our streets, in our neighborhoods, and at our places of work, the prevailing mood of the day is overwhelmed. The world today seems to be more complex, more massive, and more unmanageable than our individual and corporate memory can recall. The magnitude of the problems we face as a nation, particularly the gun violence we have seen in the past two years, leaves us exhausted and frightened. It seems that we are up against a new level of massiveness and everything now appears to be beyond the power of ordinary people and governments to solve or control. Confronted with the overwhelming complexities of life today, the question presses against our hearts and spirits—is there hope?

What is disappointing to me is that we have no record in Scripture of Peter asking these questions or doubting his call from God. If Peter ever felt overwhelmed by the circumstances of his day, as we feel overwhelmed by the circumstances of our day, there is simply no record of it. What the Bible does tell us is that after Peter was chained and placed in prison, with sixteen guards watching him, Peter simply went to sleep. And, the Church held onto hope. The Church prayed.

When we are in a dark place on our journey—hurt because we are frightened by the senseless evil we see in our own communities, disappointed by people who don't share our political or religious convictions, or angry at people who don't seem to do what we believe is the right thing—we face a great choice that will determine the rest of our journey. If you choose to remain frightened and angry, you are essentially choosing to always be overwhelmed and to be a victim. It doesn't matter where else you go, or how the news may change from day to day, or what people may do or fail to do. You will continue to position yourself to always be overwhelmed: to always be powerless and helpless. But, look at the Church here in Acts. The Church refuses to give in, to become powerless, to be a victim, and to abandon hope!

In his autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela said that in his twenty-seven long

years in a South African prison, the singing of the prisoners was essential to his ability to survive. That is because as they sang, the prisoners protested that their souls were still free. A prison cell and chains cannot imprison the human spirit. That can only be done when we abandon hope.

When we gather in this beautiful Sanctuary week after week, coming in from an uncertain and dangerous world, and open our hymnbooks and sing, To God Be the Glory, as we did this morning, we are not pretending that everything “out there” is okay. We are making a holy protest against the evil “out there.” We are announcing that there is still God, and that God is present and active in ways we may not always be able to see. And, when we close our worship with the hymn, Called as Partners in Christ's Service, we are stepping forward and announcing that we intend to be used by God in a mighty way to change what is now unacceptable in the world.

Peter is in chains, guarded by sixteen soldiers, and the Church prays. The Church refuses to give in, to give up and to be powerless. In his book, *Facing Death*, Billy Graham shares a story about Donald Grey Barnhouse, one of America's leading Bible teachers in the first half of the 20th century. Cancer took Barnhouse's first wife, leaving him with three children all under twelve. The day of the funeral, Barnhouse and his children were driving to the service when a large truck passed

them, casting a noticeable shadow across their car. Turning to his oldest daughter, who was staring sadly out the window, Barnhouse asked, “Tell me sweetheart, would you rather be run over by that truck or its shadow?” Looking curiously at her father, she replied, “By the shadow, I guess. It can't hurt you.” Speaking to all his children, Barnhouse said, “Your mother has not been overridden by death, but by the shadow of death, that is nothing to fear.”

As a Church, as members of the body of Christ, we have a moral and faithful obligation to reevaluate our mood. Since the world tends to magnify the negative, a Christian mood of hope is vital. When someone asks, “What is this world coming to?” the Church must answer, “Christ has come into the world.” It is that response that changes the prevailing mood. It may not be within our power to control the news or the conditions of life, but we do have a choice for our attitude toward them. The world is hungry today for the witness of the Church in a time like ours. The church's high calling is to strengthen people by our unwavering confidence that, in the midst of unsettling news, God is not absent. *Amen.* ●

CELEBRATE WORLD COMMUNION BY PROVIDING FOOD FOR A FAMILY IN NEED

On October 2nd, we and churches worldwide celebrate the Lord's Supper on World Communion Sunday. Rejoicing in this, we ask that you bring a bag of food so that we can provide supper to those members of our community who are experiencing food insecurity.

Partnering with Christians Reaching Out to Society (CROS) Ministries, the food collected will be distributed to people in our local community awaiting food stamps, families facing unplanned hardships, single mothers with children, and low-income families struggling financially. Your donations will help people like “Walter.” He works two part-time jobs but is not getting enough hours or benefits, and he is struggling to find a full-time job. Your donations allow him to have the food he needs for his family as he works towards finding stable, long-term employment.

Unopened, unexpired, non-perishable items are needed and include:

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



Throughout October, we will collect food bags in the church lobby on Sunday morning. 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 plate or mail it to the church office. You may also leave your donations on the cart outside the church doors in the circle, Mondays through Fridays during the workday.

Your generosity and compassion can positively impact families and individuals in our local community. ●

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

One and All,

With Dr. Hood's return from his sabbatical, I now wish to express thanksgiving for his ten years of service, the faithfulness of the staff and members during Covid, and the days and years ahead.

The church structures and surrounding grounds are a beautiful testimony to the Lord—in a city representing all income classes, from the very poor to the most affluent.

It doesn't take long for a visitor who worships at First Presbyterian to realize that the spiritual atmosphere one feels when viewing the outside is equally served inside!

While the beautiful facilities are genuinely appreciated, it is undoubtedly the faithful staff, members, and friends who, through the years, have given their talent and time for the church to remain faithful today in serving the Lord—both inside and outside the church.

We don't need to wait for Thanksgiving to be reminded of our blessings at First Presbyterian. Too numerous to count—too mention a few:

The Staff — dedication, and quality

Messages from the pulpit

Music quality and commitment of those delivering

Members — dedication of service and attendance

Children's ministry — dedication of those serving

Resources for enrichment — sermons, devotionals, newsletter, Livestream

Outreach — via budget for nonprofits and cash donations for the needy

Holly House — dedication of those serving to provide items at low cost while an excellent resource for the church budget

Founding members — who had the foresight in those early years to purchase the church property and improve the facilities over time, ever-mindful of the importance of dedicated spiritual leaders. As a result, the physical structure/surrounding grounds and staff/members' dedication probably would rank among the most outstanding in the country.

How fortunate are those members and friends who choose to worship in this house of the Lord! It is only fitting that we thank him every day for these blessings!

"And now, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name."

1 Chronicle 29:13 (Common English Bible) ●

SAVE THE DATE!

CROS MINISTRIES HUSTLE TO END HUNGER 5K

OCTOBER 1, 2022 | 7:30 A.M. | JOHN PRINCE PARK, LAKE WORTH

Be part of our First Presbyterian Church Delray Team, in person or virtually, and help support Christians Reaching Out to Society Ministries' various food programs. All proceeds go directly to purchase food.

EVENTS

- 5K Timed Run – In-person event on October 1, 2022, in John Prince Park (start 7:30 a.m.)
- 5K Walk (untimed) – In-person event on October 1, 2022, in John Prince Park (start 7:35 a.m.)
- 5K Virtual Event – Run/Walk a 5K at your own pace between September 27 and October 4, 2022

Each event has a \$45 registration fee, and all pledge monies collected go toward CROS Ministries' hunger programs.

Check our website for more information or contact Jeanne Heavilin (561-901-8714 or jcheavilin@gmail.com). ●



by Maryann Rana

Prayer Ministry Team

PRAYING ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

God listens, and God acts. What else can we ask for? He is a holy God, a righteous God; he is a perfect God. It is wonderful that we have a God who wants us to speak with him. Praying for others is not only a blessing for us to do for others, but it is a large part of the Christian life. We are told to carry each other's burdens and can do this with prayer. Prayer on behalf of someone else strengthens our relationship with them and our relationship with the Lord.

There are many reasons to pray: comfort, healing, safety, salvation, and so on. God uses prayer to align our hearts to his will, and he is waiting for us to come to him with those in need.

“I cry out to you because you answer me. So tilt your ears toward me now—listen to what I’m saying!”
Psalm 17:6 (Common English Bible)

Prayer requests come through the church office and are distributed to team members. With respect and confidentiality, each request is carefully and thoughtfully lifted up in prayer. Please call Nancy Fine in the church office (561-276-6338) for more information or if you are interested in joining the Prayer Ministry Team. ●

EXTENSIVE RENEWAL OF AUDIO AND LIGHTING EQUIPMENT IS UNDERWAY

What do you notice most about the audio and visual aspects of Sunday worship, both in person and on the Livestream? If all of our equipment is working well, you should not notice anything at all. Everything should just ‘work’ and not get in the way of the full enjoyment of the music, the time with children, and the minister’s message. If you notice anything at all, it usually means that something is not working as it should. Lately, there have been too many times when worshipers have ‘noticed’ the audio or video because of problems.

Can you believe that some components of our audio, video, and lighting systems are more than fifty years old – and are showing their age! When microphones cut out, or distortion occurs in the sound system, it clearly detracts from the impact of the worship experience. When lighting components are being used well beyond their expected useful lives, we are living on borrowed time so to speak.

Help is on the way. Early this year, the Trustees engaged consultants to advise on needed upgrades to our audio, lighting, and video systems. Several months ago, after obtaining recommendations from a representative for Bose Church Audio Solutions, a division of Bose Corporation, the Church entered into a contract with Sound Stage, Inc., an audio/video integration company based in Winter Park, Florida, to oversee the upgrades to our systems. Sound

Stage has designed, installed, and maintains audio systems in performance theaters, auditoriums, and places of worship throughout the United States. Using computer-based analytics, Sound Stage made several trips to our church to take measurements, create simulated solutions, and meet with Church leaders, Church staff, and our Director of Music.

Over the next several months, Sound Stage will be installing new speakers in the Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, Lobby and Welcome Center, Courtyard, Covered Patio, and Chancel area. New wireless handheld and lavalier microphones will ensure that annoying glitches such as audio dropouts, feedback, and other problems are eliminated. Particular attention has been given to the microphones for the Choir area so that ensembles, soloists, and piano are in proper balance and can be heard at their best. The improvements will be evident both for in-person worshipers and those attending via the Livestream.

Many aspects of our lighting systems are original to the building and thus are fifty-plus years old. As most people know, the past few years have seen enormous improvements in lighting technology, resulting in LED-based systems that run substantially cooler, require much less maintenance, and feature much longer-lived components. Existing high-intensity incandescent and halogen lighting will be replaced

with new LED fixtures, along with new controllers, dimmers, and other components. Upgrades to the audio/video control booth will help ensure a seamless worship experience. New television monitors in the Sanctuary and Covered Patio, as well as cabling improvements, will enhance the experience for those who rely on the monitors for full enjoyment of worship.

The extensive upgrades and enhancements to our audio, video, and lighting systems require a substantial investment in our facilities. As a leading church in our community and throughout South Florida, our lighting, sound, and video should be among the very best, and the work that is underway will ensure that this is the case.

We anticipate that the total cost will exceed \$250,000. Fortunately, we have existing funds left from our most recent Capital Campaign in 2016 to fund at least a portion of the cost. In addition, the ladies of Holly House, members of our Men’s Ministry, and several members of our congregation have already graciously made gifts earmarked for improvements to our audio, lighting, and video systems. Additional funds are needed, and you are encouraged to consider whether you may wish to make a gift to help underwrite what we hope is a once-in-a-generation overhaul of these crucial systems to enhance everyone’s worship experience. ●

SUMMER SALAD SOCIAL POTLUCK

What a treat it was to once again gather in fellowship “in person” for our Summer Salad Social after our service on Backpack Sunday, August 7th. The room was set for 108 attendees, and there weren’t many empty places at the tables where members of the First Presbyterian family gathered for delicious food and wonderful fellowship...at long last!

A sincere “thank you”...

- to Linda Prior (member of the Fellowship Team and Holly House) for organizing this special event;
- to the members of the Fellowship Team and volunteers;
- to the ladies of Holly House who provided the lovely table decorations;
- to all who brought such delicious and varied dishes;
- to Nancy Fine and Aaron Strippel for their help and support;
- and most importantly, thank you to all the members of the church family who participated.

There was such joy in Fellowship Hall throughout the event. A lucky attendee won the free raffle/door prize and was able to select one of the unique table decorations to take home. All certainly had a good time! We can’t wait for our next Fellowship get-together. Please be on the lookout for news of when it will be. ●



WON'T YOU JOIN US?

We are blessed with a warm and welcoming congregation, the outstanding preaching of Dr. Doug Hood and Rev. Greg Rapier, a growing educational program for children, and one of the finest church music programs in South Florida. In addition, our worship services impact the ever-growing number of Sunday morning in-person attendees and the national and international reach of our live-streaming and social media presence. Yet, we continue to hear from people who are unsure how to formalize their relationship with our church community.

We just need to know that you want to become a member of First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach. Becoming a member of this flagship faith community is quite simple. If attending in person, you can complete the “Connect” card in the pews and hand it to a pastor or put it in one of the red or black boxes in the church lobby as you exit the building. If you attend our services virtually, you can complete the “I Want to Connect” form on our website. After indicating your interest in joining, one of our pastoral staff will contact you to answer any questions you may have and arrange for you to become a member.

There are four ways that you can join:

- **Letter of Transfer:** If you are currently a member of another church, you may join by letter of transfer. We will ask for the name and address of the church where you are considered an active 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 to Christ before, but it has been a while, or there is no active church 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. If you have not been baptized, we will join you in celebrating your baptism into the family of God.
- **Affiliate:** If you are a resident in the area only for 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 the rights and privileges of active members except for the right to vote and hold office.

This congregation significantly impacts 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. We invite you to join us in our mission to positively impact our community and share our vision of ***Building Disciples, Transforming Lives.*** ●



JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

SEPTEMBER 4–14, 2023

Join Dr. Doug and Grace Hood with Rev. Greg and Lissette Rapier on a “Journey Through the Bible” to the Holy Land in September 2023. This trip will open your eyes to a fresh understanding of the Bible and deepen your faith experience.

The trip includes a tour and guided sightseeing of multiple cities in Israel with historical and biblical significance. It also includes round-trip international airfare, first-class hotels, daily breakfasts and dinners, and more. Contact church members Robert and Araceli Paris at 561-563-8636 for more information. ●

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legalistic, moralistic enmeshment. While pre-Victorian values have roots in Christianity, they do not themselves point to Christ. To suggest they do is to suggest Michael Myers and Jason Voorhees are agents of God’s bidding. That’s problematic theology.

It’s also problematic morality. Recent horror films (*Scream*, *Cabin in the Woods*, *It Follows*) have called into question tropes about morality, and for good reason. I don’t think I’d want my child to be terrified of sex. And I certainly don’t want him to think God will punish him for every poor decision he makes. His relationship with God should be one of love, not fear. Scripture speaks often of “fear of the Lord,” but that phrase is more about reverence than horror.

No, if you want to find God in a movie like *The Exorcist*,

you’ll have to look elsewhere. It’s about monsters, not morals. Moral grandstanding had its moment, but people today aren’t searching for rules; they’re looking for God. And by depicting supernatural evil, horror carves out the possibility for its opposite. It makes room for the divine.

More than any other genre of film, horror movies are profoundly spiritual. And that feeling you get after watching particularly effective horror? That ridiculous sensation that has you checking your reflection in the bathroom mirror and sleeping with the lights on? Those thoughts you can’t shake are the lingering effects of the age-old question: *Is it true?* Karl Barth says this same question fills worshippers’ minds each Sunday when sitting to hear a sermon. Horror films force us to look beyond ourselves and confront big-picture questions

that otherwise may only be answered on Sundays. Alyssa Wilkinson, film critic at Vox, says horror movies are perhaps the only channel outside the church that invites our increasingly secular culture to consider the supernatural. Horror is a gateway into the realm of spirituality. By forcing us to confront evil, horror draws us closer to God.

Horror films are not particularly Christian—though I would argue *The Exorcist* is. Nor are they worshipful, and they’re certainly not holy. But they are spiritual, and in a secular age, maybe that’s enough. They scare. They hint at forces beyond our control. And maybe—late at night, with all the lights turned on—they’ll bring us to prayer. ●

This article was originally published online at Fathom Magazine on November 03, 2020.

JOIN THE BELL RINGERS

Have you ever wished you could ring bells?

Bell choir is a wonderful opportunity to make music. Our director, Birgit, is very kind and patient, and she works to make it as easy and rewarding as possible. I look forward to each Thursday evening when we rehearse from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in the Bell Room on the second floor of the Center for Christian Studies.

Readng music is a plus, and counting is a must! But you don't have to be a pro at either. Help is readily available.

We could use more ringers. We have two snowbirds who are in and out and one ringer who can only use one hand right now, but that does not stop us. If you've ever wished you could ring bells, give it a try. We have many bells we cannot use because there are not enough ringers. It is also a nice group of people who make up the ensemble. Give us a try!

Contact Birgit (birgit@firstdelray.com) for more information. She will be happy to hear from you. ●

WHAT IS THAT FUNNY-LOOKING SQUARE IN THE BULLETIN?

That funny-looking square on the back cover of the bulletin is called a QR code. QR codes are designed to be scanned using a camera, such as your smartphone or tablet, and are most often used to store a link for a particular web address. Once you position the camera on your smart device on the QR code, your device will present you with a web address for you to visit.

The QR code in our bulletin takes you to our online giving portal, where you can contribute to our church's ministry and mission. ●



Scan the QR code using your phone to give to FPC online.

WALKS WITH THOUGHTS

Mid-summer in South Florida. The weather app reads 86 degrees, feels like 97 degrees. At 8 a.m., the only escape from the oppressive South Florida heat is the breeze blowing in off the Atlantic Ocean. I hop in my air-conditioned car and drive along A1A to Spanish River Park in Boca Raton.

Located just south of Spanish River Boulevard, this 90-plus acre park is remarkable. It sports a two-mile ocean beach, spacious shaded nature trails, playgrounds, primitive campsites, picnic areas, and parking. Lots and lots of parking! The city of Boca Raton does want \$25 for a day-long parking pass; however, pedestrian and bike entries require no fee.

I drive to the spacious central parking lot and approach the tunnel to my east. Paved and decorated with



a colorful mural of wading birds (I spot a spoonbill and a yellow-billed stork), the short tunnel path opens to an expansive empty beach. Here, the ocean breeze cools. Here, the blue of the ocean melds with the powder blue of the sky. Here, a few white clouds—those puffy Florida ones with character—skim across the sky. How can anyone stand here on the beach and look at such a sky and not believe in a power greater than themselves?

Leaving the beach, I retrace my footsteps through the tunnel and across the parking lot until I come upon a sign with two arrows: campsites to the right, nature trail to the left. Choosing to follow the arrow pointing left, I walk a shady, spacious, five to six foot-wide mulched trail bordered by cabbage palms and seagrape trees with clusters of ripening fruit. Sprinkled underfoot are bright red egg-shaped fruit. I have no idea what these are called. However, they remind me that God expects not only plants and trees but also each one of us to bear fruit. In Galatians 5:22, Paul defines fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and SELF-CONTROL. (Capital letters here because the Fruits of the Spirit Vacation Bible School song my girls learned always ended with a shout.) Quite a list! I'm afraid that my branch's fruit is often sparser than I would like. What about yours?

Back to the trail. I find a side path that leads to an empty campsite along the park's western shoreline. Crystal-clear water exposes wrinkles in the sandy bottom of the old Spanish River bed, now part of the Intracoastal Waterway. The breeze off the water coolly caresses my skin. Returning to the main trail, I continue south until I happen upon a canoe and kayak launch site. From there, I follow a paved path back to a large playground, picnic tables, a parking lot, and the main road through the park.

Later, at home on my computer, I discover that those little red eggs are the berries of *Synsepalum dulcificum*, a small tree or bush. And that egg-shaped fruit? It's called miracle fruit. Miracle fruit because it contains a glycoprotein named miraculin, which binds to taste bud receptors and causes any sour food to seem sweet. Scientists believe miraculin may restore the appetites of chemotherapy patients. A miracle indeed.

So...this summer, why not visit Spanish River Park to escape the heat and experience the miracles that abound there? Swim in the ocean, walk with the Spirit on the nature trails, and listen to the whisper of the Intracoastal as it laps the shore. And, finally, remember that you, like the *Synsepalum dulcificum*, can bear miracle fruit. ●

by Rev. Greg Rapier

Associate Pastor



IN THE WORLD ... CONNECTING CHURCH AND CULTURE

THE GOD OF HORROR

Can *The Exorcist* deepen your faith? Is God somewhere lurking behind all the split-pea soup, bloody crucifixes, desecrated statues, and faithless priests? These questions lingered in my mind during a recent re-watch of the film. To this day, it remains the scariest movie I've seen.

William Friedkin's R-rated, 1973 horror classic tells the story of a twelve-year-old girl struggling with psychosis and of a local priest who, while grappling with his own faith, believes the young girl to be possessed by the devil. The priest seeks to perform her exorcism. The demon-possessed child commits vile acts both with her body and with Catholic iconography. During the climax (it doesn't count as spoiling if it's a forty-seven-year-old movie), the priest's faith cracks. He frees the child, but the demon enters him and kills him, throwing him through a window.

The Exorcist is, above all, a morality play in the vein of Faust or Everyman. These religious plays date as far back as the twelfth century and they follow a simple formula where personified,

evil forces test the hero. In morality plays, the protagonist may encounter Fame or Gluttony or the Devil himself. If he (and it's always he, unfortunately) stays faithful, he lives. But if he fails? Well, he gets thrown through a window. You can picture *The Exorcist's* screenwriter William Peter Blatty waving his finger at you, saying, "You better shape up, or this may happen to you."

The Boy Who Cried Wolf, *The Fox and The Hen*, even Jesus's parables are morality tales as old as storytelling itself, and their formula can be mapped onto horror films from every era. In fact, Christianity itself is bound to most horror.

Early monster films like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) follow the morality tale formula, confronting hubris in surprising, graphic detail. *Jekyll and Hyde* capture scenes of abuse and murder, and *Frankenstein's* monster drowns a little girl in a lake.

Then in 1934, Presbyterian elder William Hays along with the help of a few Catholic friends implemented the Motion Picture Production Code (also known as the Hays code). They created

moral guidelines to dictate what Hollywood could show on screen. Acts such as lustful kissing, nudity, ridicule of clergy, and blasphemy were all strictly prohibited. The scientist in the 1931 pre-code *Frankenstein* claims, "Now I know what it feels like to be God," but in the 1935 sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, the scientist's God-complex is sanitized. Likewise, the 1941 remake of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* sacrifices story in favor of chastity. With a few very notable exceptions (such as *Psycho*), the horror films of this era were pure—they just weren't very good.

In 1968 the production code was lifted. Five years later came *The Exorcist*. The slasher flicks of the eighties and nineties came in the next wave of horror films. They followed a similar morality tale format with their own spin on purity: teen sex equals death. The trend led to the establishment of the "final girl" trope, where, at the end of a horror movie, a morally and sexually pure heroine either escapes or overcomes the evil forces at play.

Thus played out the relationship of horror movies and Christianity for decades —

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Sunday Morning Worship Service

10 a.m.

