

*Fanny Crosby's
unpublished
works recovered*

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COVER PHOTO BY JOHN PIERCE. Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park is the first and largest of its kind in the U.S., commemorating the American Civil War. Participants in an October Nurturing Faith Experience toured the sites — including the Wilder Brigade Monument shown here — and heard historians explore the religious justifications from both sides of the conflict as well as how the war continues to impact society 150 years later.

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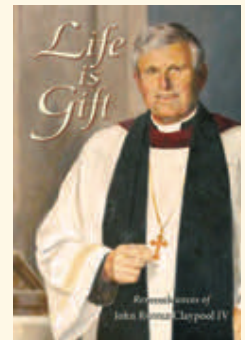
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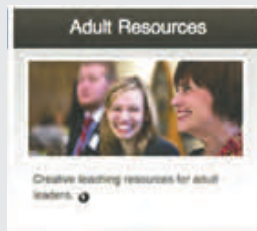
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Treasure Trove

Beloved hymn writer Fanny Crosby's unpublished works recovered

Generations of Christians have long sung — from hymnals and memory — the inspiring hymns of Fanny J. Crosby (1820-1915) such as “To God Be the Glory,” “Jesus Is Tenderly Calling You Home” and “Blessed Assurance.” But very, very few knew that some 2,700 of her unpublished and unfinished compositions were stashed away in a library.

OUT OF SIGHT

These compositions — dictated by the blind poet, lyricist, composer and social worker — had been scribbled out on various sheets and scraps of paper, all with her initials and tucked out of sight at Wheaton College.

They might have remained hidden had Stephen Kelley's mind not wandered during a sermon long ago. The artist/entrepreneur was searching for a unique word to help brand a company he was forming.

The sermon ended with a call to commitment while singing the hymn “To God Be the Glory,” that included the line: “... and opened the lifegate that all may go in.”

“The word (lifegate) sunk into my heart,” said Kelley.

His curiosity led him to note that the hymn writer was Fanny Crosby and to discover her name listed several times in the hymnal index. He didn't stop there, however.

“I can barely hum, but wanted to know more about that songwriter,” said Kelley, who is an avid collector of antique hymnals.

So he began intensive research into the remarkable life of Fanny J. Crosby, one of history's most prolific hymn writers.

THE DISCOVERY

Kelley learned that Hope Publishing had acquired Crosby's catalog from her publisher but that the many unpublished and incomplete writings “languished in their files.” They were then donated to Wheaton College and stored away.

“No one had pursued them at all except two or three students who'd done theses on them,” he said.



Upon a visit to Wheaton in 2000, Kelley was first shown an envelope containing some of Crosby's writings. He insisted on seeing the whole collection — which was wheeled out on 20 library carts.

He offered to pay for having every word digitized — a project that took about two months.

Kelley was sure that something must come from this successful “treasure hunt.” But he wasn't sure what it would be.

“I'm not a hymnologist,” he noted. “... I had a business sense, but had never done a musical project.”



Stephen Kelley

'RESCUE THE PERISHING'

Kelley also discovered that Crosby's old piano was reportedly housed in a New York rescue mission. So he headed to the Bowery from his South Florida home to check it out.

“There sits her Steinway upright,” he said. And a nearby plaque on the wall acknowledged that it was on this instrument that Crosby wrote the hymn, “Rescue the Perishing.”

It reflected much of Crosby's faith as well as her long, deep commitment to serving

Christ in rescue missions.

Crosby, he learned, understood her vocation to be that of a mission worker more than a songwriter — and that hymns such as “Rescue the Perishing” and “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour” were influenced by her work among immigrants, the urban poor and the imprisoned.

Crosby was a member of Brooklyn's Sixth Avenue Baptist Church but felt at home in a variety of congregations. She wrote songs and poetry out of her compassion and faith.

In addition to the thousands of hymns and poems, Crosby wrote some popular and political tunes — especially songs during the American Civil War that reflected her deep moral commitment to the abolition of slavery.

NEW LIFE

Fifteen years passed and still no project. Much of Kelley's attention shifted to care for his wife, Janda, who began cancer treatments shortly after their move to Nashville. She died in 2007.

Nashville was “ground zero” for the music industry, said Kelley. There he met music producer Bobby Blazier, also a drummer for Roy Orbison, Michael Martin Murphey and other popular artists.

Kelley discussed his long-ago discovery with Blazier over dinner and got an unexpected response.

“He grew up on Fanny Crosby,” said Kelley. “He started to cry.”

That which had languished for so long now had a future.

“That's when it became a project,” he confirmed. “Bobby had the music contacts.”

After a failed attempt with one publisher, the project was presented to Integrity Music where a deal was struck.

The challenge was deciding on a first project from such a massive collection. Of the 2,700 discovered compositions, only 200 had been scored, said Kelley.

And Kelley was insistent that whatever happened with these treasures must be respectful of Crosby — and, therefore, “tastefully done.”



NEW/OLD MUSIC: The Blind Boys of Alabama joined other artists including Michael W. Smith and Ricky Skaggs and the Whites to bring to life some unpublished, unrecorded compositions. *Blessed Assurance: The New Hymns of Fanny Crosby* was released in October by Integrity Music. Photo courtesy of Integrity Music.

OLD BECOMES NEW

The resulting first project was released this fall. *Blessed Assurance: The New Hymns of Fanny Crosby* has 15 compositions further crafted by respected songwriters such as Michael Farren and Michael W. Smith.

The involvement of contemporary Christian artists bridged some modern musical preferences. And the timing for that was just right, said Kelley, who remarried and now lives in the mountain town of Tiger, Ga.

“There is a resurgent interest in traditional hymns,” said Kelley.

Adrian Thompson, vice president of song and artist development for Integrity Music, said great care was taken when bringing the new/old music to life.

“We were asking established modern worship songwriters to collaborate with someone who had been dead for 100 years — yet

someone who had inspired each of them — to complete her unfinished songs,” he said.

Thompson said that each work was assessed “to see if it could stand the test of time” — realizing they were “now stewards of some potential great hymns that could, and should, be sung in churches for decades to come.”

THE PROJECT

The collection of 15 songs accomplishes that high goal, Thompson believes.

Collaborating on the recordings are Blind Boys of Alabama, Paul Baloche, Ernie Haase & Signature Sound, Matt Redman, Ricky Skaggs and the Whites, All Sons & Daughters, and others.

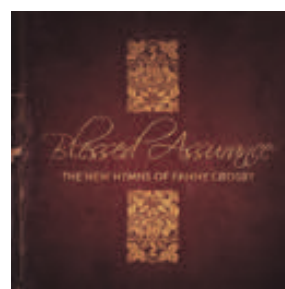
“Musically we have crossed a lot of the

style genres that are present in today’s modern church while simultaneously maintaining the lyrical depth and perspective that Fanny Crosby brought to the church back in the late 1800s and early 1900s,” said Thompson.

With so much more of Fanny Crosby’s recovered music still awaiting the light, what’s next? The answer to that question will take a little time, said both Thompson and Kelley.

“It’s almost unlimited,” said Kelley of the potential projects. But, he added quickly, whatever follows must be done “tastefully.”

Thompson agreed: “We are currently looking at the other works and what we may be able to do for seasonal or specific musical genres. Although for now, we want to see how the church responds to these songs!” **BT**



quotation remarks

“The same Jesus who said ‘go make disciples of all nations’ is the same Jesus who said ‘as you did it to the least of these who are my brothers and sisters you have done it to me.’ They’re all part of the same package. Matthew 25 and 28 are both in the same Gospel.”

—*Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, the first African American to lead the Episcopal Church, when asked whether evangelism or social justice is more important to him (RNS)*

“It’s a revolution going on. But a revolution of love and hope.”

—*Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, who heads an effort by Pope Francis to reform the Vatican that is finding intense opposition from some more conservative Catholic leaders (RNS)*

“I hope that all of it in some way will result in some very practical ways in which the church can move forward with this issue and also help to influence the culture.”

—*President Jerry Young of the National Baptist Convention, USA, on joining Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd for a November event in Mississippi to foster racial unity (RNS)*

“Support for capital punishment among Americans has fallen from a high of 78 percent in the mid-’90s to 55 percent in 2013. While evangelicals are more approving of the death penalty than is the general public, their support has also waned in recent years.”

—*Religion News Service senior columnist Jonathan Merritt responding to the National Association of Evangelicals softening its position on capital punishment (See story on page 10)*

“America’s 13-year church-building slump may soon come to an end.”

—*Wall Street Journal economy writer Ben Leubsdorf*

“I don’t see any reason why women can’t be ordained.”

—*Neurosurgeon and presidential candidate Ben Carson, taking an opposing position to his Seventh-day Adventist denomination (Christian Post)*

“Hairstyles and fashion should avoid extremes.”

—*A new, less-specific statement replacing a page of dress code restrictions for Liberty University students (Washington Post)*

“They might have stolen his zebra carpeting or those types of things, but the actual structure of the building has been literally untouched.”

—*Co-pastor Nick Dejacimo, on the vandalized, neglected former Ohio home of boxer Mike Tyson being transformed into Living Word Sanctuary (USA Today)*

“We estimate that the tree is somewhere between 350 to 500 years old.”

—*Business administrator Cecil Dunham, after weather brought down a massive oak inside First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas (KWTX)*

“I was just glad to be able to do it.”

—*Former Olympic basketball player Jack Robinson, 88, on helping christen the new gym floor Nov. 4 at First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., where he served as pastor from 1953-1974 (Augusta Chronicle)*

“‘God’s Word’ always trumps evidence, no matter how apparently convincing. Just ask Galileo.”

—*Blogger Pete Enns, who teaches biblical studies at Eastern University in St. Davids, Penn. (peteenns.com)*

“We often don’t know what to do with the hard sayings of Jesus, so we spiritualize them, ignore them altogether, or use them to beat each other up in Jesus’ name. At best (or worst) we are selective literalists, and there are plenty of hard sayings to go around.”

—*Church historian Bill Leonard of Wake Forest University School of Divinity (BNG)*

“Now people can say we are the church with the steeple instead of the church behind the Taco Bell.”

—*Student pastor Scott Shelton of First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas, after the congregation decided to replace a leaking cupola with a traditional steeple (BNG)*

“In the New Testament, God’s reign is the alternative governance founded on subversive generosity that stands opposed to Roman oppression. Today, God’s reign provides the moral vision to see through the distortions of consumerism.”

—*Pastor Jason Coker of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Conn. (Christian Reflection)*

“We grown-ups need to be reminded about simple virtues absent of our cynicism and skepticism. Maybe that is why Jesus asked his disciples to enter the kingdom as children.”

—*Jake Hall, pastor of Highland Hills Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., and the father of a 3-year-old son, Logan (Family Matters)*

By John Pierce

The shaping power of fear

My friend Pam Wacter, a longtime educator, shared a story with me recently. Her coworker was enjoying a visit from her two young nieces.

They began running and screaming more than typical for young, screaming little girls so their mother went into the guestroom to check on them. The excited girls shouted that a bug was after them and they were afraid of being bitten.

The false alarm was over a small moth floating lazily around the room. Moths don't bite people, their mom assured them; they only eat clothes.

The next morning the girls were found sleeping peacefully in the guestroom — and naked.

Their clothes had been piled safely into one corner of the room.

They are not the only ones whose behaviors — as well as beliefs — are greatly shaped by fear.

At the Mercer Preaching Consultation this fall, veteran pastor Roger Paynter shared a sermon from a series he had done at First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas, in which he used both holy scripture and the creative writings of Theodor Seuss Geisel.

This sermon featured Dr. Seuss' story, "What Was I Scared Of?" — about a pair of animated empty green trousers that created unnecessary fear and turned out to be equally

fearful as well as friendly.

The story, published in 1961, was inspired by a real-life adult concern, said Roger. The pants represented the unnecessary alarm that electing an Irish Catholic president would put the United States under the control of the Vatican.

Decades later, as has long been the case, many green-pants fears remain — along with legitimate ones. Maturity and wisdom are needed to discern healthy from unhealthy fears.

Fear is addressed throughout the Bible, including the clear calls to "Fear not!" from the angelic proclamation of the birth of the messiah to repeated words from Jesus himself.

Christian ethicist Bill Tillman provided great insight a few years ago when he said he often told his students: "Tell me something about your fears, and I will tell you something of your theology."

Indeed, what one fears is very shaping. And we hear so much fear from those who profess to be Christians — followers of the very one who said, "Fear not!"

Examining our fears can help us to better understand what we believe and how we behave. Much Christian division — as well as

conflict in the larger society — comes from varying sources of fear.

In fact, such fear-inducing factors create defining and often opposing worldviews. One perspective (popular among many Christians) is based on the fear that society is spiraling into hell — one misguided sociological change at a time. The corresponding belief and behavior is that such change must be strongly opposed.

The term "culture war" speaks to the intensity of the opposition to such change — and the great sense of threat felt by those who see their cultural dominance diluted.

Conversely, there are others who fear that deeply rooted attitudes and actions of discrimination and injustice — evils accommodated if not advocated by societal structures including government and church — are not changing as much or as quickly as they should.

As a result, those holding such divergent views actually fear each other. And fear is the fertile ground where hatred grows.

There is much to consider during the Advent and Christmas seasons. But our minds and hearts would do well to ponder how fear shapes our beliefs and behaviors.

We who claim to follow the one at the center of these celebrations might give more serious consideration to what he meant by "Fear not!"

... And perhaps even do something about the fears that shape our very beings. **BT**



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—William E. Hull in his final book,
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Toward a Moderate Approach

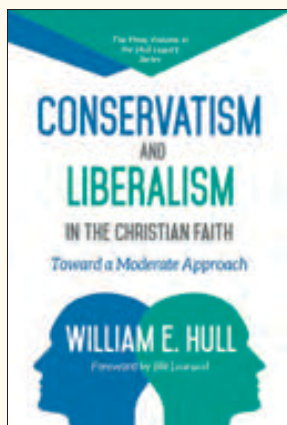
By William E. Hull

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—Novelist
WENDELL BERRY,
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Did you say ‘Merry Clausmas’?

Merry Clausmas, everyone! That’s right. I said “Clausmas.” Like many other people, I have been bothered for a long time about the commercialization of Christmas. All of the selling and buying and giving of gifts to one another has little to do with the Christian meaning of Christmas.

The birth of Jesus is the Christian meaning of Christmas. That meaning often fades into the background with the way that many celebrate the holiday.

From a Christian point of view, would it not be good to do away with the commercialization of Christmas?

But doing away with the commercialization of Christmas would hurt the economy. There are people who have jobs because of Christmas.

We are told that many merchants would not make an annual profit if not for Christmas sales. Surely we do not want to keep people from making a living.

So what should we do? Perhaps we could switch the commercialization of Christmas to Clausmas.

Many people emphasize Santa Claus at least as much as Jesus at Christmas, if not more. The change would simply recognize what many already believe and practice.

The change would leave Christians free to emphasize the religious meaning of Christmas.

And the change would not hurt the merchants.

The celebration of Clausmas would probably expand business because everyone could celebrate Clausmas, if they wished.

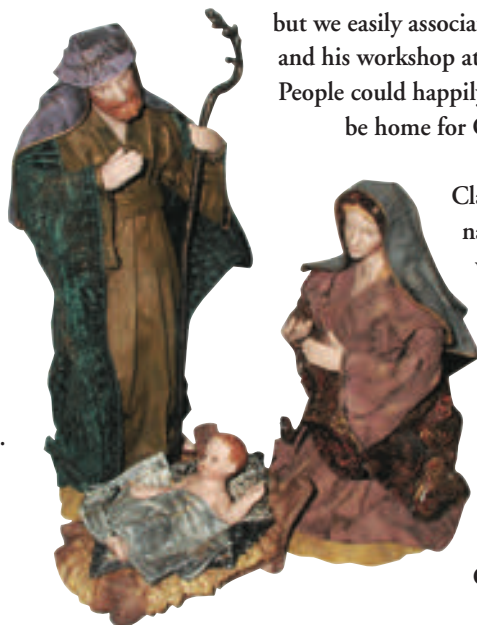
Christians could celebrate both Christmas and Clausmas — but assign the commercialization to Clausmas. We would no longer have to feel sorry for Jewish children at Christmas because they could enjoy Clausmas without any religious meaning.

Muslims might like the giving associated with Clausmas because giving is one of their Five Pillars. There would seem to be no reason why Hindus and Buddhists could not celebrate Clausmas.

People of any religion and of no religion could celebrate Clausmas. There could be a worldwide phenomenon.

Substituting Clausmas for Christmas in many settings should not be too difficult because the words are similar, and much of the celebration of Christmas is already secular. Would it not be easy, for example, to dream of a white Clausmas?

Matthew and Luke say nothing about snow in their accounts of the birth of Jesus, but we easily associate snow with Santa and his workshop at the North Pole. People could happily say that they would be home for Clausmas.



We could give Clausmas gifts. The name of Christmas would still be used whenever it would be religiously appropriate.

What if everyone decided to celebrate Clausmas and greet one another with “Merry Clausmas”?

Then Christians might adjust their own greetings since Merry Christmas has not been an appropriate biblical greeting anyway.

According to Luke, the angelic announcement to the shepherds of Jesus’ birth was not, “Merry Christmas!” The announcement was of great joy for all people.

Why have Christians (except perhaps the French) not said, “Joyous Christmas”? Christians would be closer to the Bible if they did and then let anyone who wanted to, say: “Merry Clausmas!”

Would there be difficulty in basing a holiday on a fairy tale? Is there really a jolly old man at the North Pole who employs elves in a toy workshop? Do reindeer jump into the air and soar through the sky on one magical night each year?

People around the world love fairy tales — and Santa Claus is one of the greatest. The only big objection that I see to celebrating Clausmas is that it is such a sensible idea.

People are so used to having things muddled that they can be suspicious of anything that sounds reasonable. But there is no trick. Clausmas would absorb the commercialization of Christmas or at least the huge part that has nothing to do with Jesus.

Advertisers could go wild while Christians, along with anyone else who wants to, could focus on the original meaning of Christmas.

In fact, I think that we may be headed for Clausmas whether there is a campaign for it or not. It might take a little while to get used to the word, but it sounds fine to me.

So “Merry Clausmas, everyone!”

And, to my Christian friends, “Joyous Christmas!” **BT**

—E. B. (Ben) Self of Hopkinsville, Ky.,
is the author of *Ways of Thinking About God:
The Bible, Philosophy, and Science*
(*Nurturing Faith*, 2013)

Substituting Clausmas for Christmas in many settings should not be too difficult because the words are similar, and much of the celebration of Christmas is already secular.



Ohio congregation tips Domino's driver more than \$1,000

By Matthew Diebel
USA Today

Holy pepperoni!

A Domino's driver was left in tears when an Ohio church congregation tipped her more than \$1,000 after she delivered a \$5.99 pizza, according to local media.

The sobbing started after the driver, who identified herself as Natasha in a video of the Oct. 4 surprise, brought the pie to the Sycamore Creek Church in Pickerington, a suburb southeast of Columbus, and was asked by pastor Steve Markle to go to the front of the sanctuary, the *Columbus Dispatch* reported.

Markle asked her the biggest tip she'd ever received, and she said it had been about \$10. He gave her \$15, but then told her: "We've been teaching our church this last month about being generous, and so we did something special for you today. We took up a special offering for a tip for you."

It turned out that church members had collected \$1,046 to present to the driver.

According to the newspaper, the congregation was wrapping up a sermon series on "I Was Broke. Now I'm Not" and has a monthly missions emphasis on "Random Acts of Kindness."

As Markle pulled out the thick stack of bills, the driver gasped, covered her mouth and broke into tears, the video shows. She embraced him and said "Thank you so much."

"I hope that this can help you," Markle said. "I don't know what's going on in your life."

"It can help a lot," she replied. "Thank you so much. Thank you everybody." **BT**

Evangelicals group softens its death penalty stance

By Lauren Markoe
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — The largest coalition of U.S. evangelicals has stepped away from its pro-death penalty stance, which it embraced for the past 40 years.

The board of the Washington, D.C.-based National Association of Evangelicals announced in October that evangelicals who both support and oppose the death penalty can legitimately ground their beliefs in Christian ethics.

The decision, made by resolution, reflects a larger societal shift away from the practice, though it does not reverse the earlier support for the death penalty.

"This is a sign of shifting, but not decidedly changing sides, on the death penalty," said Ed Stetzer, a Southern Baptist and executive director of LifeWay Research, an evangelical research firm.

A strong majority of evangelicals are still in favor of the death penalty, but that's moving from an overwhelming majority to a strong one," Stetzer added. "My guess is that shifting will continue; that's why they are called trends; they continue."

The Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, continues to support the death penalty.

In the resolution, the NAE board said: "Evangelical Christians differ in their beliefs about capital punishment, often citing strong biblical and theological reasons either for the just character of the death penalty in extreme cases or for the sacredness of all life, including the lives of those who perpetrate serious crimes and yet have the potential for repentance and reformation.

"We affirm the conscientious commitment of both streams of Christian ethical thought," it continues.

The NAE, which represents more than 10 million Americans and 45,000 congregations, is not the first large evangelical group to adjust its death penalty views. Earlier this year, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, which represents 3,000 congregations, advocated for an end of capital punishment.

The softening of evangelicals' support for the death penalty is particularly significant in



RNS photo

light of their strong support compared with other religious groups.

A report from the Public Religion Research Institute from September 2014 found that 59 percent of white evangelical Protestants — more than any other religious group surveyed — preferred the death penalty to life in prison with no chance of parole for those convicted of murder.

But nonwhite evangelicals part with their white co-religionists on the issue.

"The NAE's decision to change its position on the death penalty is notable because it signals the increasing importance of nonwhite evangelical Christians," said Dan Cox, PRRI's research director.

"Most white evangelical Protestants support capital punishment, but it is decidedly unpopular among black and Hispanic Protestants," he said. "The NAE's policy shift is an acknowledgment that black, Hispanic and Asian evangelicals are going to play a vital part in the future of evangelical Christianity in the U.S."

Most U.S. states, 31, allow the death penalty, though the number rejecting it has increased in recent years. The Supreme Court is set to revisit the issue this session, with several death penalty cases on the docket so far. And though none of the cases directly asks the question, two justices — Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer — have challenged the constitutionality of capital punishment.

NAE president Leith Anderson characterized the move in terms of evangelicals' larger advocacy for respect for life from womb to tomb.

"Life is the gift of God and humans are created in God's image, and this speaks to that core issue. It's important because as evangelical Christians but also as American citizens, we want to engage in how our country lives and the laws of our nation." **BT**

Evangelical Christians and Muslims commit to oppose religious bigotry

WASHINGTON — A majority of evangelical pastors consider Islam to be “spiritually evil,” according to a recent poll. But in late October an evangelical pastor and an imam took turns talking about their friendship and mutual respect.

Texas Pastor Bob Roberts and Virginia Imam Mohamed Magid joined dozens of other religious leaders in prayer at the Washington National Cathedral before signing a pledge to denounce religious bigotry and asking elected officials and presidential candidates to join them.

“I love Muslims as much as I love Christians,” said Pastor Bob Roberts, of Northwood Church in Keller, Texas, before leading a prayer at the “Beyond Tolerance” event.

“Jesus, when you get hold of us, there’s nobody we don’t love,” he prayed.

Although mainline Christians have joined together for years on interfaith initiatives, the work of evangelicals and Muslims is a newer dimension in efforts to foster interreligious understanding.

“I would like each one of us today to spread the news, using evangelical terminology, or to share what we have learned here today,” said Magid, president emeritus of the Islamic Society of North America, as he issued a call to action.

The pledge came as presidential candidates Donald Trump and Ben Carson had questioned each other’s devotion to faith and Carson said he didn’t think a devout Muslim could be president.

The pledge reads: “I pledge and commit to the American people that I will uphold and defend the freedom of conscience and religion of all individuals; and reject and speak out, without reservation, against bigotry, discrimination, harassment, and violence based on religion or belief.”

Many other Muslims and evangelical



Pastor Bob Roberts, who leads the evangelical Northwood Church in Keller, Texas, speaks on Oct. 23 along with other religious leaders who signed a pledge committing to defend religious freedom and reject religious bigotry. Brent Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty stands next to Roberts. The “Beyond Tolerance” event was held at the Washington National Cathedral. Religion News Service photo by Adelle M. Banks

participants joined in the pledge signing after gathering the night before at a suburban Washington church as part of the “Spreading the Peace” meeting attended by 175 evangelical pastors and imams.

“American evangelicals, they want to win the world for Jesus and send missionaries, but they want to be hateful here,” Roberts said. “And they don’t understand they’re shooting themselves in the foot.”

In July, the two men joined other leaders in decrying anti-Muslim comments by evangelist Franklin Graham after the killing of five service members in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Now, Magid and Roberts are planning retreats across the country — including in Washington, Phoenix and Dallas — to continue the bridge-building efforts. Despite the agreements and future plans, a new survey shows that evangelical Protestant pastors view Islam more negatively today than they did five years ago.

Fifty-two percent of evangelical pastors now characterize Islam as spiritually evil, an increase from 44 percent in 2010. About

one-third of mainline pastors (32 percent) agree, a rate that is unchanged from 2010, LifeWay Research reported recently.

Fewer than a quarter of evangelical pastors (24 percent) surveyed said Islam was spiritually good, but a smaller fraction (16 percent) said that five years ago.

Roberts called the survey results “very sad.” “That’s why this work is very crucial,” added Magid in an interview. “We cannot afford hatred, animosity between the two communities.”

Catherine Osborn, director of the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign, an interfaith group that seeks to end anti-Muslim sentiment, said the Washington gathering was part of an evolution in Muslim-evangelical relations that is not “flashy” but has been breaking down barriers.

“I see this event as a step toward relationships between evangelical pastors and imams, and also between evangelical and Muslim communities, becoming a norm rather than an exception,” she said. **BT**

“I pledge and commit to the American people that I will uphold and defend the freedom of conscience and religion of all individuals; and reject and speak out, without reservation, against bigotry, discrimination, harassment, and violence based on religion or belief.”

Dig Deeper

What will your Bible study class learn next year?

The Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge respect the intelligence of those who explore biblical truth so faithfully — week after week and year after year.

Insight and inspiration come from the weekly lessons inside this news journal as well as the abundant teaching resources — video overviews, commentaries, lesson plans and more — that are online for free to subscribers.

Want to learn more — or try the lessons for a month? Email info@baptiststoday.org or call (478) 01-5655.

TEXTS AND TITLES FOR 2016

Season of Christmas

Jan. 3 “A Good Way to Begin”

Psalm 147:12-20

God as the creator of all things, even the new year

Season of Epiphany (Jan. 10-Feb. 7)

THEME

**Jesus: The Curtain Rises
(Jan. 10-31)**

Jan. 10 “Of Water and Fire”

Luke 3:15-22

Jesus’ baptism pulls back the curtain on a world-changing ministry.

Jan. 17 “Of Water and Wine”

John 2:1-11

Jesus’ first recorded miracle sets an important tone.

Jan. 24 “An Old Scroll and a New Mission”

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus’ first sermon got him thrown out of the synagogue.

Jan. 31 “A New Prophet and an Old Response”

Luke 4:21-30

Israel had a history of rejecting the prophets, Jesus included.

Transfiguration Sunday

Feb. 7 “Who Needs a King?”

Psalm 99

God is king of all, and that’s a good thing.

Season of Lent (Feb. 10-March 26)

Feb. 14 “Who Needs a Rescuer?”

Psalm 91

God is a deliverer, and that’s good too.

Feb. 21 “Who Needs a Light?”

Psalm 27

With God as our light and salvation, who could ask for more?

Feb. 28 “Who Needs God?”

Psalm 63

God’s present love is food for the soul.

March 6 “When Old Becomes New”

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Old lives can become new creations in Christ.

March 13 “God’s New Thing”

Isaiah 43:16-21

Isaiah looked at a troubled world and saw God doing a new thing.

March 20 “The Dark Night Before the Dawn”

Luke 23:1-49

Jesus’ crucifixion is distasteful to consider, but essential nevertheless.

Season of Easter (March 27-May 8)

Easter Sunday

March 27 “Ladies First”

Luke 24:1-12

Women were first in love and faithfulness, first to witness Jesus’ resurrection.

THEME

**Close Encounters of the Jesus Kind:
Conversations with Jesus
(April 3-May 8)**

April 3 “A Disciple We Can Like”

John 20:19-31

Thomas was a disciple we can relate to.

April 10 “One Shepherd to Another”

John 21:1-19

Jesus didn’t pass the torch, but handed on a shepherd’s crook.

April 17 “Ask the Sheep”

John 10:22-30

Wondering if Jesus was the Messiah ... Ask his sheep.

April 24 “A Serious Summary”

John 13:31-35

Here’s one commandment with many ramifications.

May 1 “At Home with God”

John 14:23-29

Listen to a different take on the “ideal home.”

May 8 “Make Them One”

John 17:20-26

Hear another “Lord’s prayer” worth repeating.

Season of Pentecost (May 15-Nov. 20)

Pentecost Sunday

May 15 “Someone’s Coming” John 14:8-17

Jesus would never leave his followers alone: enter the Spirit.

Trinity Sunday

May 22 “Trinitarian Roots”

John 16:12-15

God the Son talks about God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

THEME

**Getting on in Galatia:
Paul’s Angriest Letter
(May 29-July 3)**

May 29 “You Did What?”

Galatians 1:1-12

Paul can’t believe the Galatians have deserted grace for works.

June 5 “Training Camp”

Galatians 1:11-24

Paul recounts his long days of preparation to preach.

June 12 “Do You Feel ‘Justified?’”

Galatians 2:15-21

To be justified by faith is to be crucified with Christ.

June 19 “No More Lines – Really?”

Galatians 3:23-29

Dividing lines become meaningless in the shadow of the cross.

June 26 “What Will Prevail?”

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

We have human traits – and spiritual gifts. What do others see?

July 3 “Living Like You Mean It”

Galatians 6:1-16

If we are new creations in Christ, something should be different.

THEME

**Nothing ‘Minor’ About These Prophets
(July 10-31)**

July 10 “The Leaning Tower of Israel”

Amos 7:7-17

A visionary plumb line reveals a crooked people.

July 17 “Full Pockets and Empty Hearts”

Amos 8:1-12

There’s no good news for those who trample the poor.

July 24 “A Seriously Broken Home”

Hosea 1:1-10

Hosea’s broken family spoke to a broken nation.

July 31 “A Love That Won’t Let Go”

Hosea 11:1-11

God’s love is not the traveling kind.

THEME

**Faith Matters: Lessons from Hebrews
(Aug. 7-28)**

Aug. 7 “You’re Not the First”

Hebrews 11:1-16

A parade of Old Testament faithfuls witness to the importance of faith.

Aug. 14 “You’re Not Alone”

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

The parade continues: a “cloud of witnesses” is cheering us on.

Aug. 21 “All Shook Up”

Hebrews 12:14-29

When God shakes up the world, the faithful can remain unmoved.

Aug. 28 “Remember – and Do”

Hebrews 13:1-16

A chain of reminders calls for faithful living.

Sept. 4 “Getting Into Shape”

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Our ideal shape is in the potter’s hands — if we don’t fight them.

THEME

**An Apostle’s Apprentice:
Lessons from Timothy
(Sept. 11-Oct 23)**

Sept. 11 “Bad Starts Can Be Redeemed”

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Paul was “chief of sinners,” but with God’s help, turned it around.

Sept. 18 “It’s Not About You”

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Faithful workers are concerned for others too.

Sept. 25 “Find Contentment Where You Are”

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Can “where you are” bring peace with God?

Oct. 2 “Keep the Faith”

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Faith ethics, like work ethics, often begin at home.

Oct. 9 “Don’t Be Ashamed”

2 Timothy 2:8-15

When we live as we ought, there’s no cause for shame.

Oct. 16 “Read the Instructions”

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

It’s always helpful to start by reading the instructions, including the scriptures.

Oct. 23 “Finish the Race”

2 Timothy 4:6-18

Timothy was challenged to be faithful until the end.

Oct. 30 “Little Big Man”

Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus and the Grinch had a lot in common.

THEME

**A Time for Gratitude:
Songs of Thankful People
(Nov. 6-27)**

Nov. 6 “Justice Always Counts”

Psalms 145:1-5, 17-21

Sing a psalm of praise to a God who is just.

Nov. 13 “A New Song for a Lasting Love”

Psalms 98

We can’t say enough good things about God’s steadfast love and mercy.

Nov. 20 “When All Else Fails”

Psalms 46

God is our refuge and strength — and not only in desperate times.

Season of Advent (Nov. 27-Dec. 18)

Nov. 27 “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Psalms 122

The world’s most strategic real estate still needs our prayers.

Dec. 4 “Starving for Hope”

Matthew 3:1-12

People were feeling desperate. Why else listen to John’s fiery message?

Dec. 11 “The Real McCoy”

Matthew 11:2-11

Was Jesus the Messiah? The proof was in the pudding.

Dec. 18 “The Invisible Man”

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is the forgotten man at Christmas, but he had a story too.

Season of Christmas

Dec. 25 “Why Christmas Matters”

Titus 3:4-7

Witness a short synopsis of Jesus’ mission on earth.



Attractive book flows with tributes to John Claypool's generous life

Carolyn Sloss Ratliff has pulled together a beautiful — in words and appearance — tribute to the late John Claypool. The attractive volume, *Life Is Gift*, was published this year by St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Ala., where Ratliff is a member and Claypool was rector.

The well-designed book is a compilation of 99 essays from both Baptists and Episcopalians touched by Claypool's effective ministry that crossed both denominational traditions.

In the foreword, Ratliff explains the genesis of the book: "The impact John had on people, the abundant love that he communicated, and the fact that his name is regularly spoken in sermons, in conversations, and in my own mind convinced me to begin this book."

Claypool, a widely regarded preacher and author, became rector at St. Luke's after a long career in Baptist ministry. Upon retirement

from the Episcopal Church he moved to Atlanta, where he taught at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology until his death in 2005.

Among those paying tribute are Walter Shurden, Emmanuel McCall, Barbara Brown Taylor, Mahan Siler, Fisher Humphreys, Alan Culpepper, Hardy Clemons, Joe Phelps, Reba Cobb, David Hull and Julie Whidden Long. The volume also includes the late William E. Hull's remembrance offered at Claypool's funeral.

Calling Claypool a "Baptistpalian," Shurden concluded: "Some of us will go to our graves talking about what he said and the way he said it — and why in the world we didn't think of saying it the way he said it."

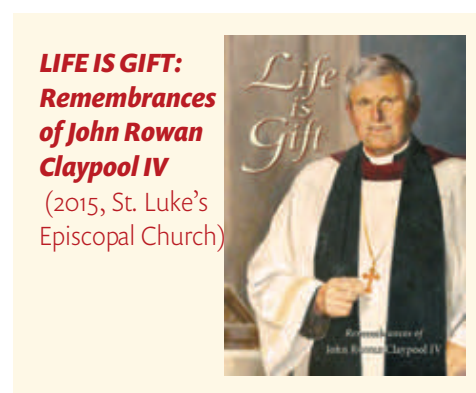
McCall recalled Claypool's role in racial reconciliation — kick-started by a newspaper photo showing Claypool having coffee with Martin Luther King Jr., his friend from earlier years when both were associate pastors in Atlanta.

Episcopal priest and gifted preacher in her own right, Barbara Brown Taylor, recalled

Claypool's invitation to preach at St. Luke's and her instant fear of preaching before him and his congregation. His charge, "Just come tell us what is saving your life now," both relieved her anxieties at the moment and became a guiding mantra.

Joe Phelps said that Claypool "became the North Star for a generation of Baptist ministers."

There are so many more good words in the case-bound, jacketed volume that may be ordered online from St. Luke's Episcopal Church at saint-lukes.com. **BT**



Whatever your Bible study needs, Nurturing Faith has the resources

Many Sunday school classes benefit each week from the scholarly but applicable Nurturing Faith Bible Studies (inside this news journal). Want your class to study these excellent lessons that Tony Cartledge is preparing for next year? Simply order a group subscription to *Baptists Today* — and you get it all at an incredible value!

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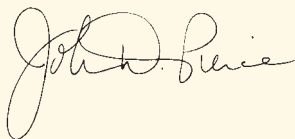
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Changing times can be faced with fear or be seen as fresh opportunities. That is true for communication ministries and for congregations.

We have chosen the latter approach and look to the new year with much excitement. In doing so, it is our prayerful goal that the information and resources we provide will be of value to Christians and congregations facing the changing future with hope and enthusiasm as well.

Thanks to all who support us and collaborate with us. We appreciate you!



John D. Pierce, Executive Editor

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Inspired Creativity

By Brett Younger

Like children

According to an unreliable, unnamed source, a consulting firm — which probably does not exist — has a pre-employment quiz that is helpful in determining whether someone is management material.

1. How do you put a giraffe into a refrigerator? The correct answer is, “Open the refrigerator, put in the giraffe, and close the door.” This question tests whether you do simple things in an overly complicated way.

2. How do you put an elephant into a refrigerator? The wrong answer is, “Open the refrigerator, put in the elephant, and close the door.” The correct answer is, “Open the refrigerator, take out the giraffe, put in the elephant, and close the door.” This tests your ability to think through the repercussions of your actions.

3. The Lion King is hosting an animal conference. All the animals attend except one. Which animal does not attend? The correct answer is “the elephant,” because the elephant is in the refrigerator. This tests your memory.

4. There is a river you must cross, but it is inhabited by crocodiles. How do you cross the river? The correct answer is, “You swim across.” The crocodiles are attending the animal meeting. This tests whether you learn from your mistakes.

According to this completely untrustworthy source, 90 percent of potential managers answer the questions wrong. Preschoolers, however, do well. This disproves the theory that bosses have the brains of 4-year-olds.

We become management material too fast. We spend our days measuring giraffes and refrigerators. We wring our hands when an elephant needs to be refrigerated. We plan conferences and worry that not everyone will attend. We have rivers to cross and crocodiles waiting.

Some of us are too young to feel this old. We are buying more aspirins, coffee and Tums. We are losing, and the competition is getting younger. Noted theologian Garth Brooks put it like this: “All the cards are on the table, no ace left in the hole.”

Every once in a while we need a child to crawl into our lap and remind us what it means to be human.

Jesus is having another long day. The disciples, who have rooms for rent upstairs but they are unfurnished, are not catching on as fast as he hoped. Jesus’ mother and brothers keep trying to take Jesus home to Nazareth to build end tables. Someone from the university is usually waiting with a trick question. Just once Jesus would like to teach something without a legalist with a Windsor knot trying to pick it apart.

Several mothers, grandmothers and aunts have been watching Jesus touch the sick, poor and unnoticed. They bring their children to Jesus to bless them. Jesus never resists a parent who uses the words, “my daughter” or “my son.” Everything is pushed aside for children.

The disciples know that Jesus is having a hard time. He does not need to be bouncing babies on his knees when there are parables to write, people to heal and a world to save. What they do not recognize is that Jesus needs these children.

The disciples begin telling mothers, “This isn’t a good time.”

Jesus says, “Hold on,” with his hand on a child’s shoulder should she try to make a run for it: “You’re always asking, ‘Who’s the greatest?’ Unless you become like children, you’ll never enter the kingdom.”

People scratch their heads: “Become like a child? What could he possibly mean?”

One mother thinks, “If Jesus wants me to become like a child, then he doesn’t know my Tyler.”

What we need to emulate is the way that children laugh, cry, dance and fall asleep almost at the same time. The key to becoming like children is understanding that *we* are children.

Over the last 26 years I have spent a lot of time waiting for my children — not nearly as much time as Carol, but a significant amount of time. I waited for the bus. I waited for basketball practice to end. I waited so we could eat dinner together.

Now my sons are out of the house — one a lawyer and one at college — and I wait for them to respond to texts or answer an email. I wait and wonder: How is work? Did the test go well? Is he having a good time?

When my sons come home they are pumped for information: “How is everything? Who’s your favorite teacher? Are you bringing a girl home for Christmas?”

They roll their eyes on that last one, but it is not that I am nosy. I am a parent, so I want them to have wonderful lives.

When Jesus said, “Become like children,” he meant the children of an interested heavenly parent. God waits for us like a loving parent who wants us to have wonderful lives. We become like children when we see that we are God’s children.

Groucho Marx said: “My mother loved children. She would have given anything if I had been one.”

God feels the same way. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology.



Nurturing FAITH™ BIBLE STUDIES

The Bible Lessons that anchor the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are written by **Tony Cartledge** in a scholarly, yet applicable, style from the wide range of Christian scriptures. A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div) and Duke University (Ph.D.), and with years of experience as a pastor, writer, and professor at Campbell University, he provides deep insight for Christian living without "dumbing down" the richness of the biblical texts for honest learners.



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January lessons in this issue

Season of Christmas

Jan. 3, 2016

A Good Way to Begin

Psalm 147:1-20

Season of Epiphany

Jan. 10, 2016

Of Water and Fire

Luke 3:15-22

Jan. 17, 2016

Of Water and Wine

John 2:1-11

Jan. 24, 2016

An Old Scroll and a New Mission

Luke 4:14-21

Jan. 31, 2016

A New Prophet and an Old Response

Luke 4:21-30



Adult teaching plans by **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina are available at nurturingfaith.net

Thanks, sponsors!

These Bible studies for adults and youth are sponsored through generous gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Organizational Relationships) and from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Thank you!

Bible Study

Psalm 147:1-20

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jan. 3, 2016

A Good Way to Begin

Themes of the Christmas season bring heaven and earth together: the Son of God surrenders heavenly prerogatives to become incarnate on the earth, a new star appears to celebrate his birth and guide the Magi, an angelic chorus sings from the sky to shepherds keeping watch in their fields.

The beginning of a new year is also an appropriate time to remember that the creator of the universe has offered to live in personal relationship with people of the earth, and Psalm 147 provides an effective reminder of that dual reason for daily praise. 📖

God's restorative power (vv. 1-6)

Psalm 147 was probably written at some point after Hebrew exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem, fortified by a decree from King Cyrus authorizing them to rebuild the temple of Yahweh (537 BCE). The early years of the return brought hard times, however: the former exiles found the city in ruins, the people of neighboring towns were hostile, and a period of famine made it difficult to survive, much less prosper.

The excitement of the return soon faded. Governor Sheshbazaar had workers to clear the site of the temple, and priests built an altar that enabled them to reinstitute the cultic practices surrounding sacrifices and annual festivals. Heavy opposition from surrounding provinces and a daily struggle for survival soon brought construction efforts to a halt, however. Residents focused on building houses



Psalm 147:10-11 –
"His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love."

and establishing farms for themselves, leaving the temple unfinished. 📖

When the prophets Haggai and Zechariah came on the scene around 520 BCE, they were appalled at the lack of progress. They lambasted the people for not rebuilding the temple and restoring proper worship as their first priority. Haggai, in fact, claimed that Yahweh had sent the famine as punishment because the people had failed to put God first (Haggai 1). 📖

Urged on by the prophets' preaching, the new governor Zerubbabel corresponded with Persian leaders to overcome legal challenges brought by neighboring governors and renew the Hebrews' authorization to build a new temple. A five-year construction effort culminated with the dedication of the new temple in 515 BCE. 📖

Psalm 147 was probably written during this tumultuous period, and it reinforces the importance of offering praise to God – an activity typically associated with the temple, where a professional order of temple singers

led in worship. After the opening "Hallelujah," a call to worship that literally means "Praise Yahweh," the psalmist declares that singing praises to God is a good and proper response to God's ongoing display of grace (v. 1).

As evidence of Yahweh's beneficence, the psalmist praises Yahweh for building up Jerusalem and gathering those who had been exiled from their home, healing their broken hearts and bandaging their wounds (vv. 2-3). 📖

With v. 4 the psalmist changes gears, amazed that the God who cares for the hard-pressed people of Jerusalem is the same God who could count and name every star (v. 4). One might expect a God of such immense power and immeasurable wisdom to be unconcerned with human struggles, but not so: Yahweh intervenes to lift up the downtrodden – such as the returning exiles – and to cast down wicked folk such as the neighboring officials who had sought to prevent the temple from being built (vv. 5-6).

When you think of your own life and

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perhaps your church, do similar thoughts ever occur to you? How amazing it is to sit outside on a clear night to ponder the stars in their number and magnitude, while imagining that the same God who created the universe also cares for humankind and desires to live in a relationship of covenant love with us.

**God's dependable provision
(vv. 7-11)**

The second strophe of Psalm 147 begins with a renewed call to praise God with song. The word translated as “sing” in the NRSV usually means “to answer” or “to respond.” In this way, the psalmist reminds us that our prayers and songs of praise are a human response of gratitude for God’s goodness to us (v. 7).

And how has God been good? The psalmist considers the gifts of clouds and rain that make the grass to grow on Israel’s fertile hills (v. 8). Like other ancients, he did not consider wind or rain to be the result of global meteorological phenomena, but believed that the seasonal rains were a gift of God’s sustaining grace, not just to humans, but to the animals and birds as well (v. 9).

As God looks upon the earth and considers its inhabitants, what sparks divine pleasure? It is not the impressive beauty of a muscled horse in full gallop or the efficient stride of a human runner (v. 10), the psalmist says, but the response of “those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (v. 11).


Some writers think the reference to strong horses and swift runners could be a military reference to chariots and infantry, but that is not a necessary assumption. The point is that God may find satisfaction in gazing upon the wonders of creation at its best, but what really brings God pleasure is the grateful response of those who have put their hope in the promise of God’s love.

The injunction to “fear the LORD” is especially common in Israel’s Wisdom literature, which insists: “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7, 9:10; see also Ps. 111:10 and Prov. 4:7). “Fear” in this

context does not suggest abject fright, but a sense of reverence and respect for God that goes deep enough to affect one’s behavior in keeping the commands and honoring the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

**God's covenant word
(vv. 12-20)**

With each section, the psalm goes a little deeper into the joys and challenges of an ongoing relationship with God. As in the first two stanzas, the third section begins with a call to praise Yahweh, utilizing two different words for “praise,” two different terms for God, and two different names for Jerusalem: “Praise (*shavach*) the LORD, O Jerusalem,” the psalmist called. “Praise (*halal*) your God, O Zion” (v. 12).

Again, the call to praise God is followed by reasons for why adoration is due. The first cause for praise addresses the renewed Jerusalem specifically: God reinforces the city’s protective gates so children can find safety and people can live in peace, enjoying the earth’s bounty that God provides (vv. 13-14). 

Further divine actions reach beyond Jerusalem to all of nature, including God’s ability to control the seasons by divine command. With delightful imagery, the psalmist declares that “his word runs swiftly” to bring snow, frost, hail, and cold (vv. 15-17). But winter ends.

As God’s word brings on the frozen precipitation of winter, so also “He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind to blow, and the waters flow” (v. 18). Many residents of ancient Jerusalem had farms and family members living outside the city. They understood the importance of the alternating seasons for growing needed crops.

But divine care goes beyond the physical: God has also provided both a covenant of relationship and the instructions needed to follow it: “He declares

his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel” (v. 19; see “The Hardest Question” online for more on this).

In drawing to a close, the psalmist highlighted Israel’s unique place in God’s order: no other nation had been granted the opportunity to live in such a relationship with God, whose ordinances were not demands as much as they were gifts, keys that could open the door to lives of peace and of praise (v. 20).

Now, all of that sounds well and good, you may be thinking, but I don’t live in Jerusalem. I am not an Israelite. Does this psalm still have anything to say to me?

The answer, of course, is *yes*. Followers of Jesus live under a new and different covenant, but it is rooted in the same God who loved and blessed and disciplined and forgave the people of Israel. Our relationship is not based on keeping the law, but in trusting the one who fulfilled the law and did for us what we could not do for ourselves, one who offers grace beyond measure.

This is not to say that our relationship is devoid of demand: as Israel was called to love God and keep the commandments, Jesus challenged his followers to love God and keep his commandments – namely, to love one another as we love ourselves. All of the laws that really matter are bound up in this: when we are guided by love, positive actions will follow.

Followers of Jesus are not promised that the faithful will always prosper or that hardships will not come our way: good behavior is no guarantee of financial freedom, and wrongdoing will not automatically bring punishment. Our motivation in following Jesus goes beyond the selfish desire for personal prosperity: it is a longing to see the world with Christlike compassion and to do our part to bring peace and wholeness to others.

Praising God with our voices and songs is one response to the grace we have received: praising with our love and our lives is even better. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 3:15-22

Jan. 10, 2016

Of Water and Fire

Do you remember your baptism? I can, but just barely. My primary memory is that I had “joined the church” and requested baptism without really intending to. On a Sunday evening our pastor loosened up a bit, included some stories and jokes in his sermon, and kept my 9-year-old self interested the whole time.

I considered that quite an accomplishment, so I went forward during the invitational hymn to congratulate him on doing such a good job. Before I could utter a word, though, he put an arm around my shoulders and asked if I had accepted Jesus as my Savior and wanted to be baptized.

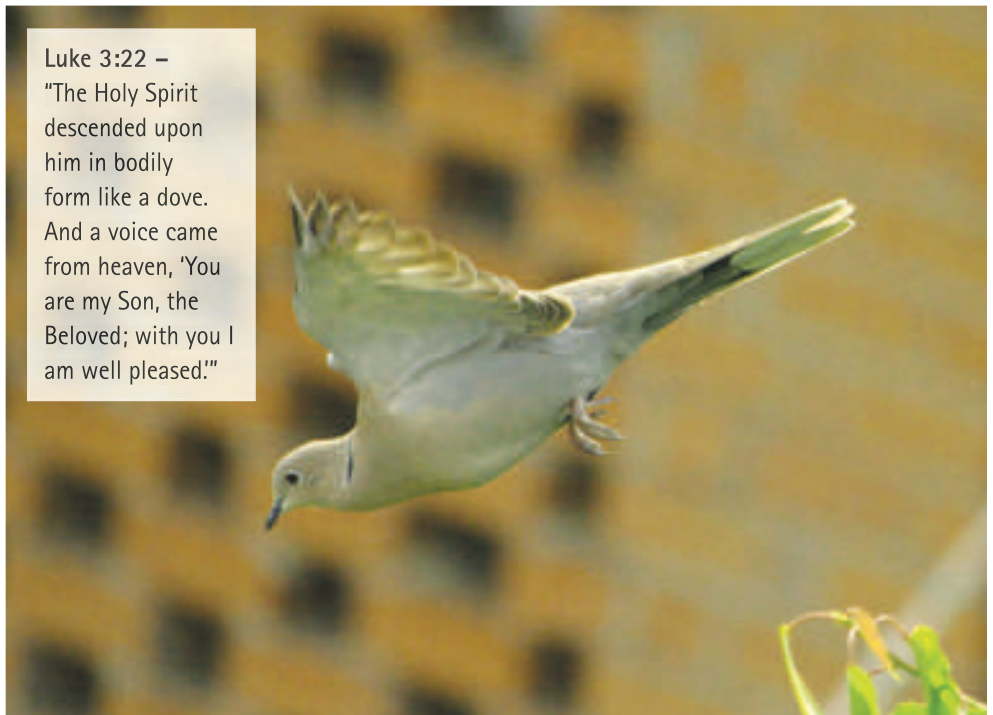
I had grown up in church and never considered *not* trusting Jesus, so I said “sure.” Before the night was over, two other boys followed my unintentional lead, and within weeks we were baptized.

Today’s text deals with a baptism story of far greater significance, and it begins with a most unusual preacher.

A prophetic prediction (vv. 15-18)

John the baptizer, a cousin of Jesus and the son of a priest, came out of obscurity to develop quite a reputation as an unorthodox preacher and a prophet. Feeling called of God but eschewing traditional roles of leadership as a priest or scribe, John took to living in the wilderness, dressing in rough garments of woven camel’s hair, and foraging for his food, which notably featured locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4, Mark 1:6).

Luke 3:22 –
“The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased!’”



Whether he ate the big insects fresh, fried, or dried, we don’t know.

John’s notoriety as an odd duck, as well as his stern words of warning, may have contributed to the crowds who came out in droves to hear him preach. If judgment was coming, they wondered, what should they do? John taught a simple ethic of just living in which people do not exploit each other, but share with those in need (vv. 10-14). John’s message sparked a broad response, and many responded to his call to repent of their sins and to mark the beginning of a new life by being baptized.

First century Jews were accustomed to dipping themselves in water as a purification measure after becoming ritually unclean through contact with blood or other reasons. John’s practice of baptism as a sign of repentance would not have been alien, with the obvious difference that, while the rabbinic regulations allowed Jews to use streams or rivers as water for their ablutions, they typically dipped themselves in a small pool called a *mikveh* (plural *mikva’ot*).[↓]

John’s baptism not only took place in the Jordan River, but it also had a different significance: it did not mark a cleansing from ritual uncleanness that had nothing to do with character, but indicated repentance from sin and a desire to change one’s life by following God’s way more faithfully.

John’s authoritative preaching and charismatic appeal created such excitement that some began to follow him as disciples, and many began to wonder if John might actually be the long-awaited Messiah (v. 15, compare John 1:19-28). When they asked him about it, John didn’t disappoint them altogether. He used their questions as a platform to declare that their hopes were not fruitless: the Messiah was indeed living, and he was coming soon.[↓]

John insisted that the Messiah would be far more powerful than he, baptizing not with water, but “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (v. 16; note that Mark 1:8 does not mention fire, nor do the parallels in Acts 1:5 and 11:16). Many different views have been proposed to explain John’s tandem use



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of “Spirit” and “fire.” The best interpretation seems to be that the Spirit of Christ would purify the repentant like a refiner’s fire, while bringing destructive judgment to the wicked.

This image reappears in the metaphor of v. 17, where John says the Messiah would gather wheat (the repentant) into his storehouse, but immolate the chaff (the unrepentant).  John took no joy in the death of the wicked, hoping that more would choose to repent and be among the saved. Thus, Luke could say that even John’s hard words of judgment could be considered “good news” (v. 18), because they were designed to lead persons to salvation rather than destruction, to life rather than death. 

**A parenthetical note
(vv. 19-20)**

Luke interrupts his account of John’s preaching to insert a parenthetical note that often gets skipped over: John’s bold preaching got him thrown into prison. While proclaiming the good news about Jesus, John had also been condemning the wickedness he saw on every side, and fearlessly included the king in his commentary.

The Herod in question is Herod Antipas, who had divorced his Nabatean wife in favor of his sister-in-law Herodias, who in turn divorced his half-brother Herod Phillip so she could marry Antipas. John publicly denounced the sordid affair, along with “all the evil things that Herod had done” (v. 19). Herod then added to his foul deeds, Luke says, by having John arrested and locked in prison. 

Luke does not go on to relate, as Mark and Matthew do, that Herod’s new wife conspired to have John’s head removed from his shoulders and presented on a platter: his main concern is to underscore John’s courage in speaking truth to power, even as he pointed to the Coming One whose power is of real significance.

John’s daring may not inspire us to adopt a locust-and-honey-based diet or move to the wilderness, but his

willingness to stand tall and do what needed to be done is an enduring lesson for all who came after.

**A promising start
(vv. 20-21)**


The part of Jesus’ baptism story told in Luke 3:21-22 also appears in Mark 1:10-11 and Matt. 3:16-17. Readers who are familiar with the stories in Mark and Matthew may be surprised to observe that Luke says nothing about Jesus walking up and asking his cousin John to baptize him, nothing about John’s comment that Jesus should be the one doing the baptizing, and nothing about the baptism itself.

Jesus was sinless and had no need of repentance. Still, he chose to be baptized, probably intending to declare his solidarity with humankind. But, even as Christ declared his humanity, God the Father declared Jesus’ divinity.

Mark tells the story from Jesus’ perspective, but in Luke, we see Jesus’ baptism through the eyes of another dripping postulant standing on the riverbank, or even of a skeptic hanging back in the crowd, wondering at the spectacle. Luke implies that Jesus was the last person to be baptized that day. Like Mark and Matthew, he tells us that the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

Just before the dove’s surprising appearance, however, Luke offers a significant detail: he says not only that Jesus had been baptized, but also that he “was praying” when “the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove” (vv. 21-22). Jesus opened himself to God’s Spirit, and God responded.

Why would God choose the form of a dove to depict the Spirit’s presence? Doves or pigeons were sometimes used in the Old Testament as sacrificial offerings, and also appeared in other contexts. None of them make it clear why God

chose this particular form as a symbol of the Spirit, but it has proven to be a popular and memorable symbol. 

The most important thing about that moment, however, is not what was seen, but what was heard: a voice saying “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (v. 22).

If we understand Luke and Matthew correctly, the others who were present also saw and heard these things. Thus, in one brief act, God validated both the teaching of John the messenger and the identity of Jesus the Messiah.

Do not overlook the significant conjunction of two acts of the Spirit in this text. Through the Spirit, God shows both love for Jesus and an affirmation of his mission – but immediately afterward, the same Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” to face a season of fasting and temptation to foster Jesus’ continued growth and preparation for ministry.

Sometimes we discover that the more familiar a story, the harder it is to really listen to it. As we read this account of what God said to Jesus, what might God be saying to *us*? Several things stand out.

1. God calls us to commitment. As hundreds came out to hear John’s gospel, repent of their sins, and submit to baptism in proclamation of their commitment to God’s way, so we face times of decision that call for public action.

2. Jesus understands our struggles. Although he did not need forgiveness of sins, Jesus chose to be baptized as a declaration of solidarity with humankind. It is no accident that the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness follows the story of his baptism. Jesus was tempted to stray from his commitment just as we are, but set an example of obedience for us to follow.

3. Timing is important. Whether we feel drawn to trust Christ and be baptized, to devote our lives to missions, or to show God’s love in a particular situation, we can trust God’s Spirit to let us know when it is time to express our commitment in specific ways.

What is it time for today? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

John 2:1-11

Jan. 17, 2016

Of Water and Wine

During the age of prohibition, Baptists were in the forefront of the campaign to criminalize the making, sale, or use of intoxicating beverages, including wine. I own a rocking chair that once belonged to Josiah Bailey, who inherited the job as editor of the North Carolina *Biblical Recorder* in 1895 when his pastor/editor father C.T. Bailey died.

Josiah was 22 years old and a recent graduate of Wake Forest University. He became active in the temperance movement, and in 1903 was elected as leader of the “Anti-Saloon League.” He later became a lawyer and served as a U.S. senator from 1930 until his death in 1946. Josiah was so rigidly pious that his Senate colleagues nicknamed him “Holy Joe.” Care to guess how he would have voted on alcohol issues?

During the same period there were no doubt plenty of Baptists running moonshine, even at the risk of having their church membership revoked: alcohol use is one of many areas in which Baptists have differences of opinion. I have known of a few Baptist churches in which a member made homemade wine for communion, while most stick with grape juice. Jesus drank the real thing and even made it for others, as we learn from today’s text. 🇺🇸

But that is not all we learn ...

A poorly planned party (vv.1-3)

John’s Gospel differs in many ways from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, known

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John 2:11 –

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”



as “synoptic Gospels” because they share many similarities. Before we get into the story, we should point out that this is the first in a series of miraculous signs done in Galilee that testified to Jesus’ identity. The signs play a central role in the organization of John’s Gospel (see “The Hardest Question” online for more).

John is the only gospel writer to include the story of Jesus attending a wedding in “Cana of Galilee,” a village not far from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. Today both Nazareth and Cana are substantial Arab towns in the hill country west of the Sea of Galilee. 🇺🇸

The story occurs after Jesus had called Andrew and Simon, Philip and Nathanael to be his disciples: the account of Jesus’ calling of the disciples is also quite different in John. Jesus and his disciples had arrived in Cana “on the third day” after the call of Nathanael. While some see a foreshadowing of the resurrection here, John probably intended only to indicate that the miracle occurred soon after Jesus told

Nathanael he would see amazing things (1:47-51).

The wedding probably involved some of Jesus’ relatives, and his new disciples would have been invited as extensions of the family. Custom dictated that relatives should contribute to the expenses of the wedding, either financially or through bringing food or wine. Jesus would have had an extra burden of contributing on his family’s and the disciples’ behalf – but the traveling ministry they had begun provided no income, depending on others for daily sustenance.

Could this be why Jesus’ mother came straight to Jesus to report that the wine had run out – or why she expected him to do something about it? Jesus and his followers had apparently been partaking of the wine without providing any of it. 🇺🇸 We should not assume that Mary expected Jesus to snap his fingers and turn water into wine: it’s more likely that she expected him to send his disciples to the wine shop with instructions to dig deep.

A most helpful guest (vv. 4-7)

Jesus' curt response has often troubled readers who think he wasn't being very kind to his mother. Actually, "Woman" was not as impolite a form of address as we might expect, and could imply affection.

Jesus typically used the term when addressing women, including the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter he healed (Matt 15:28), a crippled woman he healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:12), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:21), the woman caught in adultery (8:10), and Mary Magdalene following his resurrection (20:15). Jesus again addressed his mother Mary that way from the cross, when commending her to John's care: "Woman, behold your son" (19:26).

Even so, one would not normally address his mother as "Woman," so this likely suggests a shift in their relationship. Mary would never cease to be his mother, but the beginning of Jesus' public ministry was marked by his self-identification with all of humankind as the "Son of Man" (John 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; and others).

"What concern is that to you and to me?" (v. 4a) translates a phrase that literally means "what to me and to you?" Jesus had bigger fish to fry than to worry about whether there was adequate wine at the wedding: "My hour has not yet come" (v. 4b).

In John's Gospel, Jesus' "hour" usually refers to the revelation of his glory through the passion narrative of his arrest, death, and resurrection (see, for example, John 7:30, 8:20, 13:1, and 17:1). That can hardly be the case here, where it is more likely that Jesus has in mind the arrival of his public ministry and the beginning of the mighty works that would bring glory to him as the Messiah. His identity as the Messiah had been revealed in the previous chapter, however, and though Jesus appears to be downplaying his mother's request for more wine, he knew the only way for him to provide it would be through non-traditional means.

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So, while Jesus' remark implies that he is not ready to act with power, that is precisely what he does. Mary, perhaps sensing Jesus' willingness to help, instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus told them (v. 5). Did she assume that he was about to do something unusual?

The conversation must have taken place in an anteroom to the banquet hall: John notes that six stone water jars "for the Jewish rites of purification" were standing nearby (v. 6). Persons attending the banquet would ritually wash their hands before eating, so it was important that the water and the vessels containing it should be ceremonially "clean."

Although carving the large open-mouthed jars from stone was far more labor-intensive than making them from pottery, rabbinic law held that vessels made of stone could not become ritually unclean. Any number of things could contaminate ceramic vessels, however, so they would have to be replaced often. This left stone as the material of choice for the purification jars.

The jars in question were not only made of stone, but also were quite large each with a volume of "two to three *metretes*." A *metretes* was about nine gallons, so each jar would have contained 18-27 gallons of water. Diners used small juglets to dip water from the larger jars and pour it over their hands. ↓

That Jesus had to tell the servants to fill the jars with fresh water may say something about the number of people present for the wedding.

A surprising, miraculous sign (vv. 8-11)

Once the stone jars were filled to the brim with water, Jesus told the servants to dip some out and take it to the "chief steward," one we might call the master of ceremonies (v. 8). Whether this was a family member or a professional host is unclear and unimportant: what matters is that he was so impressed by the excellent quality of the wine that

he called the bridegroom to express surprise that he had saved the best wine for last. For obvious reasons, most people would serve the best wine first, bringing out lower quality wine as guests drank more and their tastes became less sophisticated (vv. 9-10).

No response is recorded from either Jesus or the bridegroom, and we are not told if the wedding guests learned the miraculous origin of the wine or not. In fact, the parenthetical note that the servants knew the source, but the steward did not, implies that very few people were aware of what had happened. What matters to John is that Jesus' disciples knew what Jesus had done, and the experience contributed to their faith: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (v. 11).

Through this miraculous "sign," Jesus manifested his glory and his creative power. Many scholars find it significant that the water used for old Jewish purification rituals became the new wine of the Messianic age. There was clearly a change coming, as Jesus' ministry introduced the coming of the kingdom of God. The Gospels often speak of the coming kingdom through the metaphor of a feast or wedding banquet, as in Matt. 5:6, 8:11-12; Mark 2:19; Luke 22:15-18, 29-30a. In a vision of the eschatological future, the prophet Isaiah described the coming day as "a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear" (Isa. 25:6). ↓

The eschatological age that Isaiah and other prophets foretold was becoming known through the life and ministry of Jesus. John wanted early believers to see evidence of and to understand that the new covenant in Jesus, the Son of God, was superior to the old covenant. Although it is unlikely that the miracle at Cana should be seen as a pointer toward the Lord's Supper, every time the followers of Jesus take the bread and wine of communion, we are reminded of the new wine Jesus brought into the world. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 4:14-21

Jan. 24, 2016

An Old Scroll and a New Mission

Ripley's "Believe It – Or Not!" museums have been staple attractions in resort areas for many years. Humans are naturally fascinated by things that are different – even unbelievably so. The claims Jesus made when he announced the beginning of his ministry were so shocking that some people of his hometown thought he had gone over the edge and become *too* different.

Try to imagine that you had watched Jesus grow up as the ordinary (if polite) son of Joseph and Mary. You noticed something different about him when he did not marry at a young age, as Jewish boys were expected to do. Rather, the young man lived at home with his parents until he was 30 or so. People were curious when he went off on his own for a couple of months. They were flabbergasted, though, when he came back to town, sat down in the synagogue, and claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of a Messiah. What would *you* have thought? 📖

The change in Jesus (vv. 14-15)

Luke is unique in telling us what happened inside the synagogue on Jesus' first trip back home after beginning his public ministry. Mark, who places the story later in Jesus' ministry, tells us that the people of his hometown were offended by his teaching in the synagogue, but doesn't say why (Mark 6:1-6). Luke provides more context for Jesus' hometown "unveiling," quoting

Luke 4:18-19 –
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

both the prophetic text Jesus read and part of what he had to say about it.

Luke may have done this, in part, because Jesus' mission echoed some of his own special interests. Luke was a Gentile by birth and a physician by occupation. He first entered the biblical picture in Acts 16, when he joined Paul and his companions in Macedonia during Paul's second missionary journey. Luke appears to have written primarily for a Gentile audience, even as Matthew wrote with fellow Jews in mind.

Writing to a broader audience, Luke exhibits more universal concerns. More than the other Gospels, Luke gives attention to women, the poor, the outcasts of society, and any others who faced oppression. Today's text speaks to the needs of the downtrodden, which may explain why Luke has telescoped Jesus' early ministry and related this story near the beginning of Jesus' public work.

Today's text, as a whole, offers a capsule portrait of what Jesus' public ministry was like: he constantly focused on those who were rejected by the

religious establishment, and he was consistently resisted and rejected by those who led the faith into which he was born. As such, this text is an appropriate introduction to Jesus' active ministry.

Luke places the story of Jesus' homecoming immediately after his temptation and prior to his call of the disciples. As Jesus was led by the Spirit to his baptism and into the wilderness, so he was "filled with the power of the Spirit" as he traveled back to Galilee, teaching in synagogues along the way. "A report about him spread through all the surrounding country," Luke tells us, and he "was praised by everyone" (vv. 14-15). 📖 Jesus would find similar success in other synagogues (vv. 36-37, 44), but his hometown would be a different story.

Some of the prophets had foreseen a time when God's Spirit would raise up a deliverer who would lift up the oppressed Hebrews and lead them to glory. Early Judaism developed these predictions into the anticipation of a Messiah who would come in power to save Israel from the Romans and lead



A man demonstrates how to use a water filter in Sri Lanka after the 2005 tsunami.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



the nation to renewed prominence on the world scene.

Jesus' words, teachings, and demeanor demonstrated clear evidence that the Spirit of God was with him. Jesus' ideas about redemption were unlike anything the elders of Israel had ever imagined, however, and many were not willing to accept them.

Imagine that you had watched Jesus grow up without exhibiting any special leadership interests, and also witnessed the surprising confidence and power in speaking that Jesus adopted after spending some time away from home. What would you have thought?

The claims of Jesus (vv. 16-21)

The verb form used in describing Jesus' return to Nazareth, "where he had been brought up," suggests that Jesus had been away for some time, but not so long that people did not recognize him as Joseph and Mary's son.

Luke's comment that Jesus "went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom," probably refers to his new practice of teaching in the synagogues of Galilee (v. 15), rather than a comment on his life practice of attending synagogue, though we may assume he had done so. 📖

It was common practice in the synagogues for laymen to be asked to read from the scriptures, especially if they were known to be well-spoken or good readers. Perhaps because of his emerging reputation as a laudable teacher (v. 15), or perhaps in acknowledgment that he had come home, Jesus was asked to read from the prophets' scroll. Afterwards, he would have an opportunity to explain the text as he understood it.

In a typical synagogue service, the first reading would be from the Torah, which was divided into 155 lessons, with one to be read each Sabbath. After the Torah reading, someone would translate or paraphrase the text in Aramaic for the benefit of those who no longer understood biblical Hebrew. Then, there would often be a time of teaching. Custom

dictated that one stood (often on a raised dais) while reading the scriptures, then sat down to teach.

After the Torah reading, Jesus was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. We do not know if the particular text was already chosen, or if Jesus did the choosing. It is unlikely that Luke has provided an exact account of what happened: Mark's account of the same experience is much shorter and includes no speeches, so Luke has apparently recreated the story based on whatever information he had.

We presume that Jesus would have read from a Hebrew scroll, but the Isaiah reading in Luke is not from the Hebrew text of Isaiah, but is a rather loose rendering from the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. And, it is not a single passage, but contains most of Isa. 61:1-2 and a snippet of Isa. 58:6. 📖 (see "The Hardest Question" online for more.)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" reflects the prophet's belief that he spoke under the direct inspiration of God's Spirit. In the current text, it also reminds readers of Jesus' baptism story in the previous chapter (where "the Holy Spirit descended upon him," Luke 3:22), and also of the earlier note that Jesus came "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14). The text Jesus read provides a rough outline of his coming ministry: he was empowered by the Spirit; anointed as the Messiah; preached good news to all, including the poor; proclaimed salvation to those who were oppressed or in thrall to sin; brought healing to the blind as well as people with other needs; and proclaimed "the year of the Lord's favor" as the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

All who contributed to the book of Isaiah shared a concern for the oppressed, criticizing the people of Israel for their religious unfaithfulness and their social injustice. The Isaiah scroll often offers hope to the disenfranchised,

promising the arrival of a better day, "the acceptable year of the Lord," or "the year of the Lord's favor."

The text speaks to four groups who had in common their *powerlessness*: the poor, the captives (slaves, prisoners, or exiles), the blind, and the oppressed in general. In Isaiah's time (as in the first century), many people were forced to sell themselves into slavery because of debts they could not pay. The economic system was such that those who had nothing found it virtually impossible to improve their lot.

The blind, like the lame and the mentally handicapped, were often forced to beg for a living. Widows and orphans often went uncared for and thus faced serious oppression. Jesus claimed that his ministry was to such as these. 📖

Many of Jesus' contemporaries interpreted the text differently. They assumed that the reference to the poor, downtrodden, and captive people related only to their own situation as Jews who had long lived under the oppression of foreign powers. They imagined that the one who could say "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" would be a messianic figure who would lead Israel to freedom and greatness. Jesus had already shown strong signs of the Spirit's presence, so there would have been great anticipation in the congregation as Jesus returned the scroll to the attendant and sat down to teach.

We can visualize how still and suspenseful it must have been as Jesus' former neighbors waited to hear how the surprisingly different young man would interpret these words. But can we imagine the shock when he said simply: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21)?

In next week's lesson, we will examine the congregation's response to Jesus' astonishing claim. How do you think you would have responded?

There is a sense in which Jesus claimed this text from Isaiah as his "life verse" or "spiritual motto." Is there a scripture verse or longer passage that you would claim as your own life commandment?

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 4:21-30

Jan. 31, 2016


A New Prophet and an Old Response

Do you like conflict? Probably not. Few of us enjoy heated exchanges, especially with people who are close to us, yet there are probably more disagreements among family members than in any other setting. Fighting within the family always leads to discomfort, and sometimes it leads to danger.

Jesus' visit to his home synagogue in Nazareth wasn't exactly a family setting – only men were allowed, so his mother wouldn't have been there. His adoptive father Joseph was probably dead by then, though some brothers may have still been around. Even so, when Jesus was asked to read from the prophets and offered a chance to teach, he was among friends. Nazareth was an out-of-the-way village that may have had no more than 200 residents in Jesus' day. Most of the men sitting around would have watched Jesus grow up. They had seen him work. They knew how he treated others.

They thought they knew Jesus, but there was much about him that they hadn't seen – and apparently weren't ready to accept. But was there any good reason for wanting to throw him off a cliff?

One misunderstanding (vv. 21-22)

As we learned in last week's lesson, Luke has Jesus returning to his hometown after gaining notoriety as an itinerant teacher and miracle worker.  At the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus was asked to read a text from the prophets and to preach.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Luke 4:24 –

"And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.'"



He confidently unrolled the Isaiah scroll to a section that was probably written during the postexilic period, when life was hard for the Hebrews and hopes for a messianic deliverer were high.


Although Jesus would have read from a Hebrew text, Luke presents a loose reading of Isa. 61:1-2a from the Greek Septuagint, along with a line from Isa. 58:6. The result is this hopeful announcement: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

The words were several hundred years old when Jesus read them aloud, and no one had stepped forward to embody them. The poor still struggled; oppression still reigned. Faithful Hebrews still longed for "the year of the Lord's favor," when they expected God to send a Messiah who would set all things right. It must have come as quite a shock for those who sat in the

synagogue that day to hear Jesus boldly announce: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

Was Jesus claiming to be the longed-for savior they expected to defy Rome and lead the Hebrews to a glorious age? How could they believe such a thing?

Jesus' sermon must have been impressive, for the listeners' initial response seemed positive. "All spoke well of him," Luke says, and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" (v. 22a).

Whether the people were favorably impressed is not so clear as the NRSV suggests,  but the cause for their conversation is. Literally, "they marveled at the words of grace that came out of his mouth." The word translated as "marveled" or "were amazed" appears often as a response to Jesus, but typically to indicate wonder or curiosity that falls short of belief (see 4:36, 5:9, 8:25, 9:43, 11:14, and 20:26, in Luke alone). It's one thing to hear Jesus' teaching or see his mighty works and say "Oh, wow! That's amazing!"

It's another thing to say "I believe: I will follow."

And what was so amazing? It was "the words of grace that came out of his mouth." The people marveled at the embodied grace they perceived in Jesus' presence as well as his teaching, but they were also confused: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (v. 22b). How could such an unassuming young carpenter suddenly morph into a miracle-working teacher who spoke such words of grace?

Could they believe that *Joseph's son*, no matter how well spoken, was really the one sent to bring God's salvation to Israel?

Two proverbs (vv. 23-24)

Jesus heard the congregation's mixed response, and he knew the people better than they knew him. **U** Having heard of Jesus' activities in other places, they wanted him to back up his impressive words with a few mighty works to demonstrate his prophetic power.

Thus, Jesus said: "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!'" (v. 23a). Some think "yourself" should be understood, by extension, to include "your hometown," so the people were asking "Why heal the sick in other towns when there are people who need healing here in Nazareth?" **U**

Others see the challenge as a taunt to a self-proclaimed Messiah who still dressed simply and led a mendicant ministry, depending on others to provide for him: "If you're the one to bring such blessing to the world, why don't you show more evidence of personal blessing?" **U**

Either interpretation suggests that Jesus perceived a desire among the people for him to perform works of power to match his words of grace: "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did in Capernaum" (v. 23b). As Satan had tempted Jesus to win people over by doing mighty works (4:9-12), so Jesus' former neighbors wanted him to perform miracles in order to prove

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himself, but that was not Jesus' way.

Jesus refused the unspoken request by quoting a second proverb: "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." **U** By means of this quotation, Jesus claimed the title of prophet, and made it clear that he had no expectation of being accepted in Nazareth.

This proverb also appears in the other Gospels, though in different contexts (Mark 6:4, Matt. 13:57, John 4:44). Here, as elsewhere, it led to widespread murmuring against Jesus. He refused to mold himself to the people's preconceptions of what a prophet should do. He would not settle down and become the village miracle-worker, attracting visitors from all over to promote the local economy.

Two prophets (vv. 25-27)

Jesus responded to the desire for miracles by citing two Old Testament prophets who were also misunderstood, and whose acts of healing or succor took place outside of their expected circle. Elijah was active during a time of drought when many Israelite widows could have used help, but the one he helped was a Gentile woman who lived near Tyre. There are no stories about Elisha healing lepers in Israel, but he healed Naaman, an enemy general from nearby Syria. **U**

Perhaps it is significant that both the Sidonian widow and the Syrian leper were asked to demonstrate significant faith prior to the miracles done in their behalf. In Matthew's version of this story, the issue of miracles is not a matter of will, but of ability. Matthew claims that Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth precisely because of the people's unbelief (Matt. 13:54-58, compare Mark 6:1-6). Luke is most concerned with the acceptance of Gentiles, so he does not press the faith issue as Matthew does.

Two responses (vv. 28-30)

Is it surprising that the people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus' words? We have a sense that the discussion has now moved beyond the synagogue to an outer venue with a larger crowd. Jesus had impressed them with his speech, but refused to demonstrate his power by doing miracles. He claimed to be the Messiah, but talked about prophets being rejected by their own and reaching out to foreigners.

Mark says the people were offended (Mark 6:4), but Luke says they were "filled with rage." How dare this young upstart turn away from his own people, challenge their traditions, and expose their prejudices? **U**

Not only did the offended people become angry with Jesus, but they also forcibly threw him out of town and tried to throw him off a cliff. Nothing in the law would have called for such a response: the rising tide of anger led to the formation of a lynch mob so determined to stone Jesus that they brought him out to a cliff on the edge of town. **U**

Jesus ruined their plans, however. He managed to melt into the crowd and simply walk away. How could he have done this except by some exercise of supernatural power? It's hard to avoid the irony: the people who wanted to see a miracle had one performed right before their eyes, but were unable to see it.

Today's text demands that we ask ourselves what we expect of Jesus, and whether we also reject him when we don't get what we want out of our relationship. Some people mistakenly think that Jesus promises perfect protection or miracles on call, but that is not the case: Jesus calls us to follow because it is the right thing to do, not as a method for meeting selfish needs.

Those who find the demands of the gospel difficult to accept or to follow sometimes reject Jesus by dropping out of church, or turning their backs on faith altogether – metaphorical ways of throwing Jesus over a cliff so we don't have to be confronted with his challenge. Have you ever found yourself in this picture? **BT**

Classifieds

Associate Minister: Families and Congregational Care:

Second Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., is seeking an individual to fill the newly formed position of associate minister: families and congregational care. This position requires one to possess an awareness of and sensitivity to all ages in the life of the church with particular emphasis on deepening spiritual formation in children, youth, and their families as well as to share in pastoral care and outreach. A full job description may be found at 2ndmemphis.org. Second Baptist is a moderate church highly committed to missions and servant leadership, worshipping in a creative, traditional framework that embraces diversity. Send letters of interest and résumés by Jan. 15, 2016 to John N. Avis, Search Committee Chair, 4680 Walnut Grove Rd., Memphis, TN 38117 or to associatesearch@2ndmemphis.org.

Minister of Children, Families and Outreach:

First Baptist Church of Athens, Ga., affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, seeks a minister of children, families and outreach. This full-time minister will lead our ministries for children and their families, while also seeking to engage these families more deeply in the life of our congregation. This minister will also provide coordination for our outreach endeavors. We seek a minister who will work collaboratively with other members of the church staff, lay leadership and the entire congregation. Résumés and recommendations will be received beginning immediately and continuing until Jan. 15, 2016, and should be sent to Minister of Children, Families and Outreach Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 355 Pulaski St., Athens, GA 30601. Recommendations and résumés may also be submitted to search@firstbaptistathens.org. For more information about our congregation, please visit firstbaptistathens.org

Minister of Contemporary Worship and Young Adults:

The First Baptist Church of Wilmington, N.C., is seeking an individual to provide leadership for contemporary worship and for ministry to/with young adults. All applicants should have experience in leading contemporary worship in a congregational setting. The strongest applicants will also have some combination, though likely not all, of the following elements in their background:

- undergraduate/graduate education in music
- undergraduate/graduate education in ministry
- experience leading a praise band
- experience leading a vocal team
- experience working on a church staff

awareness of the particular challenges and opportunities that arise out of ministry to/with young adults
Please send all inquiries, recommendations and résumés to searchcommittee@fbcwilmington.org with the subject line as “Worship and Young Adult Position.”

In the Know

Bob Ballance is pastor of First Baptist Church of South Boston, Va., coming from Pine Street Church in Boulder, Colo.

Steven Case died Oct. 8 in Washington, D.C. He was retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Mansfield, Penn.

Andrew Gardner is winner of the 2015 Torbet Prize from the American Baptist Historical Society for the best Baptist history essay. Titled “Reversing Roles: Denominational Community Among the American Baptist Churches USA and the Alliance of Baptists,” the essay will appear in *The American Baptist Quarterly*.

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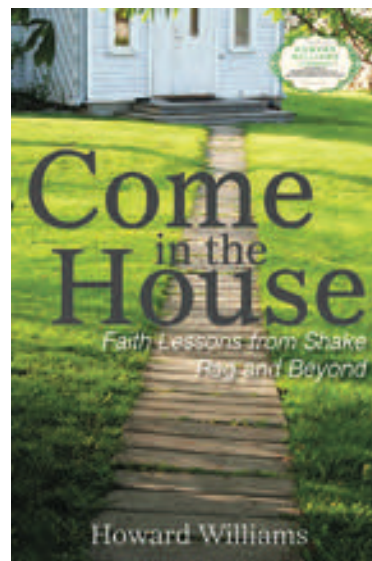
FROM *Nurturing Faith* BOOKS

From a loving but colorful family, Howard Holder Williams Jr. thrived in the carefree days spent visiting grandparents in Shake Rag, Miss. It was there that he learned at an early age the value of a story well told, as evidenced in this collection of inspirational remembrances from simpler times that remind us to celebrate the little things in life and to love one another while doing so.

A gifted writer and minister, Howard died in 2013 at age 56. His wife Jana and friends at Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., where Howard served as minister of spiritual formation, made possible the publication of this reflective and inspiring book.

Howard has been described as a “conduit of grace” and one who demonstrated teaching at its best. His good life is well remembered, and his challenging and encouraging words will continue to touch both minds and hearts.

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Healthy Church

Is advocacy in your church's wheelhouse?

By Chris Sanders

So what is advocacy? In physical terms, it's the Body using its discerning eye and heart and its clear voice to look into and then speak up and speak out, especially for those within and without who lack the clout to effectively speak for themselves. It's justice, in contrast to charity.

Members of a church located by a river heard thrashing in the water and frightened cries. Laying their hymnbooks aside, they ran outside, threw a line and pulled a drowning man out onto the bank.

They looked upstream and saw another flailing and pulled her out as she came downriver, then another and still another.

They spent the entire Sunday morning outside their walls instead of inside at worship, fishing for drowning people. They even formed a river rescue team and raised money for the victims.

But, having had enough of this, an old deacon stomped off upstream.

"Where are you going?" the people called. You know the answer.

The old deacon growled, "To find out who's throwing them in." And, we might add, to stop them.

The Body is used to using its hands and feet and pockets to rescue the perishing poor people in our perishing communities. We provide, give, donate and work. That's in our wheelhouse.

But using the sharpened eye and a rising voice? Not so much. (Isn't that odd? Discerning and speaking are what we do — on comfortable topics.)

We could even discuss whether or not it's a church's business to speak a word about why people are poor. Leaving that for a moment, we can certainly agree that for the most part, advocacy isn't in our wheelhouse or our comfort zone.

But why not? Why not get to the root causes of poverty at home?

In medical terms, advocacy treats the disease while we're easing the symptoms. For any charity your church gives to or provides, there's corresponding advocacy:

- *Food pantry and Christmas baskets?* Ask your city council member to come to the congregation and explain why people are going hungry in your community.
- *After-school reading program for poor kids?* Tell your school board you want the public schools stronger and their teachers (your church members!) to feel supported.
- *Emergency assistance?* Post online to call out the payday lender who dips into bank accounts before the rent is paid and the kids are fed.
- *Pulpit exchange with the black church down the street?* Distribute a list of African-American-owned businesses for your congregation to patronize.



So, any church on mission should be advocating too, right? Or do we get muzzled by the few but vocal critics who frown and say we've crossed the line between preaching and meddling?

It doesn't have to be. For every solo critic, there's a quiet majority who like to see their

church's name in the paper, and many more outside our walls who are glad to see a church standing up for the poor. When the message comes as good news, not controversy, people are attracted and come.

We also don't speak out in the public square because we're used to leaving advocacy to others, usually some local or regional body. In Baptist life, we've excused ourselves from responsibility by defaulting to the denomination. There are pros and cons with that. Size matters, expertise counts, and a national message deserves national messengers.

But the downside is that we delay and miss local crises while waiting to organize critical mass. Messages get diluted down to say little of importance in deference to an unnecessarily broad consensus.

There are plenty of local needs begging for a timely word from the Lord. And they will go begging unless we speak up.

Pastors, find a powerful consensus in your church on a message and speak out. Church members, give your pastor some room to speak the Word without parsing his or her every word.

Why? Because of Luke 4:18. Jesus said, the first time he preached back home in Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to set the oppressed free..."

We should know that verse by heart, as well as we know John 3:16. "Anointed" — the Spirit's very purpose for us is to bring good news, out in public, out among the poor. Advocacy really is in our wheelhouse after all. **BT**

—Chris Sanders is an attorney who consults with churches in matters of law, poverty and advocacy. He recently served as interim coordinator for the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship. He can be reached at csanders@chrissanderslaw.com.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the seventh in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for *Baptists Today* and executive director of the *Baptist History & Heritage Society*. His latest book, *Baptists and the American Civil War: Crucible of Faith and Freedom*, a compilation of articles from the recent series on *Baptists and the American Civil War*, is now available from *Nurturing Faith*.*

Religion and the American Presidents

Andrew Jackson (1829-1837)

The 1828 election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency of the United States shattered the status quo of the nation's highest office.

Thus far the presidential club consisted of men of great wealth, genteel heritage, class privilege and rationalistic intellect. Jackson could claim only one of the four, and even then his great wealth had been earned on the edge of civilization rather than received from familial inheritance.

A son of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian immigrants, Andrew Jackson's 1767 birthplace, somewhere on the unsurveyed remote frontier along the border of North and South Carolina, is unknown. Neither did Jackson know his father, who died of an accident before his birth.

Captured by the British at age 13 and nearly starved to death in captivity, a defiant teenage Jackson refused to clean the boots of a British officer, who as punishment slashed the youngster's head and left hand with a sword, leaving him scarred for life. Months after his release from captivity, Jackson's mother died from cholera, making him an orphan.

Fending for himself, Jackson plunged further into the frontier wilderness in what is now northeastern Tennessee. Largely self-taught, the young man set up shop as a frontier lawyer, focusing on cases of assault and battery, as well as as disputed land claims.

In a land of few attorneys, Jackson made the most of his situation, leading to an appointment as solicitor (prosecutor) in the Southwest Territory. His legal knowledge and government position provided the opportunity for land speculation. When the Southwest Territory became the state of Tennessee in 1796, Jackson prospered financially.

As the frontiersman-turned-prominent citizen inched his way upward in the world, Jackson's personal life evidenced a fair share of



troubles. Falling in love with Rachel Stockley Donelson, he married her while under the impression that she had obtained a divorce from her husband. Mistaken in this matter, the couple lived together in a bigamous relationship for four years before final completion of the divorce and a second, official, wedding held in 1794.

Personal matters aside, Jackson's public persona and business successes led to politics. Elected as Tennessee's first U.S. representative and then as a U.S. senator, Jackson quickly came to dislike Washington, D.C.

Resigning from the Senate and returning to Tennessee, in 1798 he secured an appointment as a judge of the Tennessee Supreme Court. Greater success and prosperity soon followed, first with an 1802 election as major general of the Tennessee militia, followed two years later by the purchase of a 640-acre plantation, the Hermitage, near Nashville.

Soon an elite, albeit unrefined planter, Jackson later enlarged the plantation, owning as many as 150 slaves at one time.

Accomplishments and accolades

continued, the most notable his crucial victory against the British in the Battle of New Orleans in 1814-1815 during the War of 1812. During the war General Jackson willingly suffered alongside his enlisted men, earning their respect and the nickname "Old Hickory."

A national hero, the rough-and-tumble Jackson received a Congressional Gold Medal and remained one of America's foremost military leaders for the next decade, his service including a stint as the military governor of Florida in 1821.

To this point, religion apparently occupied little of Jackson's time and thought, despite Rachel's efforts to impress faith upon her famous husband. The First Presbyterian Church of Nashville claimed the general as one of its own, but although sometimes attending services, he did not formally join the congregation.

Jackson nonetheless deferred to Rachel in the construction of a new church building in 1823 for the Hermitage community. Initially interdenominational, the Ephesus Church (later Hermitage Church) affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the early 1830s.

Despite his refusal to join the church at that time, Jackson during the decade of the 1820s occasionally referred to religion in his writings, perhaps in part due to Rachel's continuing influence until her death in 1828.

Beloved by his adopted state, Jackson returned to the U.S. Senate to represent Tennessee from 1823 to 1825. He also secured a nomination by the Tennessee legislature for the presidential contest of 1824, losing to John Quincy Adams. In a rematch four years later and after helping establish the new Democratic Party, he defeated Adams.

President-elect Jackson, formerly an orphan and frontiersman, acknowledged his affinity for and commitment to common Americans by inviting the public to the White House for his inauguration. A mob scene ensued in the nation's capital, heralding the

arrival of “Jacksonian democracy.”

Jackson’s vision of democracy, however, did not extend beyond the white race. His presidential policies included Indian removal from the Deep South, a view of Manifest Destiny that proved beneficial to his own slaveholdings.

Despite maintaining a limited view of federal rights, President Jackson successfully resisted South Carolina’s threats to nullify federal law and secede from the Union due to federal tariffs deemed a threat to the state’s slave economy. Critical of the federal banking system established by James Madison, Jackson dismantled the institution following his election in 1832 to a second presidential term.

On occasion as president, Andrew Jackson addressed matters related to religion. In those few instances he voiced strong support for church-state separation as written into the First Amendment.

In 1832 President Jackson declined to declare a national day of fasting and prayer in the face of a rapidly spreading cholera epidemic.

Speaking of his refusal, he noted, “I could not do otherwise without transcending the

limits prescribed by the Constitution for the President and without feeling that I might in some degree disturb the security which religion nowadays enjoys in this country in its complete separation from the political concerns of the General Government.”

Jackson also opposed an escalating national campaign by conservative Christian nationalists to force America, founded as a secular nation, to officially embrace Christianity. Advocates of a Christian America targeted Sunday mail delivery, declaring the practice an affront to God and discriminatory of the rights of Christians.

The government, many Congregationalists and other powerful traditional religious interests contended, should honor God by following biblical Sabbath laws. The president, with the support of Baptists foremost, resisted the Christian nationalists and defended church-state separation, evidencing his trademark Jacksonian democracy.

As Jackson later noted in a letter, “let it be remembered ... no established religion can exist under our glorious constitution.”

Following his presidential years the heretofore religiously distant Andrew Jackson

underwent a conversion experience and in 1838 joined the church he earlier built — now the Hermitage Church, renamed in his honor and a Presbyterian congregation.

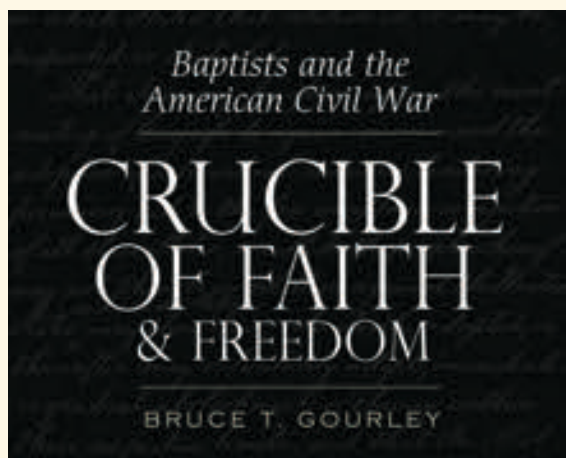
Whether this spiritual turn in his life stemmed from regrets, reflections and loneliness of an aged widower, or emerged as a public expression of a long-evolving but previously private faith, the congregation shortly thereafter elected Jackson a ruling elder, only to have the former president decline the honor.

Now a church member, Jackson regularly attended worship services. Although he neither probed the depths of church doctrine nor philosophically struggled to reconcile faith and reason, as had prior presidents, Old Hickory did evidence a belief in heaven and hell.

Near the time of his death in June 1845, Andrew Jackson allegedly said to his family and slaves: “I am my God’s. I belong to him. I go but a short time before you, and I want to meet you all in heaven, both white & black.”

Following his death, the body of President and General Andrew Jackson came to rest alongside that of his beloved Rachel at his Hermitage plantation. **BT**

Jackson opposed an escalating national campaign by conservative Christian nationalists to force America, founded as a secular nation, to officially embrace Christianity.

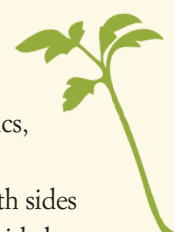


Good reading

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War provides a grand opportunity to consider precisely what Baptists — North and South — were saying from their pulpits, in the press, and through official resolutions from that time. Bruce Gourley brings such perspectives to life by making good use of careful and significant research, creatively taking a chronological approach using primary sources.

He highlights the role of various kinds of Baptists, for example: Robert Smalls, Thomas Hill Watts, Basil Manly Sr., Gov. Joseph Brown, Gov. Sam Houston, Isaac Taylor Tichenor, Crawford H. Toy, and Frank and Jesse James — most of whom went on to great prominence in politics, religion or education.

Gourley’s firsthand accounts of how Baptists on both sides sought and claimed divine favor and righteousness provide lessons as plentiful as the statues and markers that dot the many battlefields where the devastation has given way to peaceful fields and quiet woodlands.



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Loss *and* Legacy

Religious justifications, continuing impact of the American Civil War explored

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. —

The American Civil War ended 150 years ago. Or did it?

“We cannot get away from the Civil War,” said historian Bobby Lovett, retired from Tennessee State University in Nashville. “In one way or another, all of us are still fighting the Civil War. We’re trying to understand it.”

LARGE LOSSES

Lovett was one of two historians to address the Nurturing Faith Experience: Civil War at 150 — a two-day gathering hosted by the First Baptist Church of Chattanooga and sponsored by Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith, Baptist History and Heritage Society, and Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The staggering losses from the war can be both measured and yet remain unmeasured, said Lovett.

Of the estimated 620,000 Americans who perished in the battles on their home turf, he said: “It was the bloodiest war we ever fought.”

Yet the total loss of human life from the war — soldiers, slaves, Native Americans — remains unknown, he added. “We dig up people all the time.”

Outside perspectives can provide Americans with a better understanding of the enormity of the war’s self-destruction, human and otherwise, past and present, said Lovett.

“European visitors want to know about the Civil War,” he said. “They can’t believe it.”

Terry Maples, field coordinator for Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, echoed that observation during a discussion that followed Lovett’s presentation. During a recent visit to Canada, Maples said he explored the differences between Americans and their neighbors to the north.

One Canadian told him: We never killed one another in a war.



POINT PARK — Participants in the Nurturing Faith Experience: Civil War@150 gathered atop Lookout Mountain for the closing session. Interpretative ranger Brian Autry told of the destruction and desertion resulting from the strategic battles in the area. He quoted President Lincoln as saying, “Taking Chattanooga is as important as Richmond.”

BAPTIST ROOTS

Lovett’s own church experience reflects the impact of the Civil War.

“I’ve been a Baptist for 60 years,” said the 72-year-old, who recalled his grandmother leading him at age 12 to a mourners’ bench where he confessed his sins and professed his faith.

The congregation he joined that day was the First Colored Baptist Church of Nashville — now called First Baptist Church Capitol Hill. Lovett is helping lead a yearlong commemoration of the congregation’s 150th year of independence dating back to 1865.

The church’s roots go back to 1834 when the First Baptist Church of Nashville allowed its slave membership along with free blacks to hold Friday night prayer services. In 1848, black members — representing about half of congregation — were allowed to meet separately in an old schoolhouse for services led by the white associate pastor.

“That’s why balconies were built in churches,” said Lovett, noting that white congregants would occupy the lower space while black members would sit above.

White ministers continued to lead the services until 1853, when worshippers educated a freed slave who had been willed to the church earlier. Nelson G. Merry was called the “sexton” — which Lovett said was a fancy word for janitor: “the person who took care of the church and made sure it was ready for Sunday and so on.”

But in 1853, the ministers of Nashville ordained Merry to lead services for the black members. Then, during the Civil War, white church leaders “pretty much left the black congregation alone,” said Lovett.

In March 1865, a month before Robert E. Lee surrendered in Virginia, the black Baptist worshippers in Nashville sent a petition to the white congregation asking for independence and the ownership of a meetinghouse the slaves had erected.



Weeks later, on April 15, Lincoln was assassinated and a march turned into mourning and then mass meetings. One was held in the slave-built church that would gain its independence in August of that year, 1865.

Lovett said the church made its name change during its centennial celebration in 1965, the era of the Civil Rights Movement. The word “colored” was dropped, he said, since several white members had joined including activist and Baptist minister Will Campbell.

“Dec. 13 this year is the final celebration,” said Lovett of the commemoration of the historic congregation’s independence. And he warmly invited guests to attend.

PRESERVATION

“Preservation of the American Union” was a primary result of the Civil War, said Lovett. It was a concern for many including the first U.S. president.

“If there is one thing that is going to destroy this union it’s the question of slavery,” he quoted George Washington, who died in 1799, as saying.

The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution addressed issues of human equality, said Lovett. And, as an example, in his last will and testament Washington freed his own slaves.

“But Martha didn’t!” noted Lovett. However, Washington would be revered in the North and the South, and among free and enslaved blacks.

“He didn’t know that 61 years later we’d have an American Civil War that would nearly destroy the Union,” said Lovett.

Yet at the end of all the destruction of that war would be a tattered but preserved union.

“That was the greatest result, in my opinion, of the Civil War,” said Lovett.

EMANCIPATION

A second significant result of the war was the fulfillment of Lincoln’s vision of a nation free of human enslavement and a permanent establishment of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lovett said.

President Lincoln was worried that the Emancipation Proclamation would cause him to lose reelection in 1864, said Lovett. “There was as much opposition to it in the North as there was in the Confederate States.”

Lincoln called abolitionist Frederick Douglass to the White House to agitate for the escape of so many slaves that the Emancipation Proclamation could not be repealed,” Lovett said.

“Before that a black man had never been called to the White House....”

Douglass agreed to help, but he didn’t have to do so, said Lovett, because Lincoln won reelection handily. After the election, Lincoln worked to make emancipation permanent — through the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution that was ratified by the states in Dec. 1865, months following Lincoln’s death in the spring.

“That was a great result of the Civil War — at least for African Americans,” said Lovett, “that there would be no slavery in the United States, forever again, anywhere.”

Lovett noted that the 150th anniversary of the passage of the 13th amendment will be marked on Dec. 18, 2015.

As a historian, Lovett said he is often asked when the slaves were freed.

“Well, the Emancipation Proclamation didn’t have anything to do with my people in West Tennessee,” he said. And it didn’t apply in some other states such as Louisiana, Missouri, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

“Our date is Dec. 18, 1865.”

REALIZED DREAM

A third result of the Civil War, said Lovett, was the realization of a radical proposal put forth by abolitionists in 1848 that many considered a pipe dream.

“All the presidents before Abraham Lincoln had supported slavery,” said Lovett. “Every one of them.”

Martin Van Buren acquiesced to political pressure, said Lovett. And Tennessean Andrew Jackson packed the Supreme Court in a way that resulted in the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sandford decision in which Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that slaves were not United States citizens.

“It was a powerful case for the South,” said Lovett, adding that it also declared that Congress had no authority to prohibit slavery in any state.

“The North hated the Dred Scott case,” said Lovett. “The South loved it.”

He recalled that when Taney died during the Civil War, some newspapers in the North reported: “Justice Taney has died. He did the nation a favor.”

While Southern states would soon begin declaring their secession from the Union, Northern abolitionists back in 1848 were first to raise the idea of independence from slave-holding states, said Lovett.

“They wanted to secede from the Union and write a slave-free constitution,” he said. But their desire was too costly for other abolitionists to sign on.

“Frederick Douglass and others asked: ‘What about the four million slaves down South? You’ll leave them slaves forever probably.’”

The abolitionists backed off from their call for secession in 1848, but ultimately achieved their goal of a slave-free constitution, said Lovett.

“One of the greatest results of the Civil War is they rewrote the Constitution of 1789-1791.”

The 13th amendment, in particular, brought several important changes, said Lovett, including nullification of the Three-Fifths Compromise that counted only 60 percent of blacks in each state to determine national legislative representation.

“But guess who wins?” asked Lovett. “The South wins because now the South can count all of the blacks. You know, the South picked up almost 30 seats.”

So the struggle for freedom and equality was elusive. President Ulysses S. Grant pushed for the 15th amendment giving African Americans the right to vote — though that right was long restricted in many states.

Interestingly, the U.S. Constitution says nothing about race, Lovett noted. The reason, he added, is that Colonial America had white bondsmen too — those dumped on the colonies by England.

Equality for indentured whites “was what Thomas Jefferson was talking about in the Declaration of Independence,” said Lovett.

QUESTION ANSWERED

The anti-slavery movement dating back long before the Civil War was based on the question of morality, said Lovett. That question was

finally answered as a result of the great conflict. “It was based on morality, not just that (slavery) was unconstitutional,” he said. “It was simply wrong.”

The first abolitionist movements arose in the South, said Lovett. Quakers in Tennessee were publishing antislavery newsletters by 1819.

The moral question of slavery split Methodists and other Christian bodies, he noted.

“Some historians say the first shot in the Civil War happened long before the battles,” said Lovett. “It was when the question of the morality of slavery was raised: simply, ‘Is it right?’”

Many influences turned Northerner sympathies toward abolition, said Lovett, but none more so than Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. “That was on everybody’s coffee table.”

The moral question grew as songs emerged such as “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” — proclaiming “His truth is marching on” — published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February 1862. The popular marching song was a takeoff on the Negro spiritual, “John Brown’s Body,” said Lovett.

The question of the morality of slavery was answered in the costly war.

CONTINUING IMPACT

The Civil War was more than an event captured in the past, said Lovett. Its influence continues.

The war raised important and ongoing questions about what it means to be human, he noted. And history, a study within what is called the humanities, is about “seeking truth.”

Economic, cultural, political and social differences between the southern and northern regions of the nation resulted in the war, he said. Many of those differences remain today.

The end of the war brought about another great challenge: How do you integrate more than four million people freed from slavery into American society?

“Race and skin color came to have special meaning,” he said.

The Civil War was followed by long and often painful struggles for civil rights, Lovett noted. Progress has been slowed.

“There is something that comes out of history, whether it’s good or bad,” he said, “... that yields some of the progress we human beings make.”

CONNECTIONS

Bruce Gourley, executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society and



contributing writer for *Baptists Today*, said connections between the war a century and a half ago and modern times can be seen in South Carolina today — where a Confederate symbol was removed this year from the state capitol following the murder of nine African-American church members by a young white supremacist.

Charleston’s Emmanuel AME Church, where the June 17 massacre occurred, was active prior to the Civil War, said Gourley. One of its founding members, Denmark Vesey, who had bought his freedom, was part of a slave insurrection plot that was discovered in 1822.

Vesey had stockpiled arms and enlisted some 3,000 freed blacks but mostly slaves to take over plantations, kill whites, commandeer ships and sail to freedom in Haiti. Thirty-five of those participants were executed, said Gourley, and The Citadel arose to prevent future insurrections.

In December of that same year, Richard Furman, president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, penned a public letter to the state’s governor that represented “a tipping point among white Baptists in the South,” said Gourley.

BAPTIST SHIFT

Furman’s “very pro-slavery stance” in the letter affirmed that slavery is never actually condemned in the Bible, and he assured the governor of the state’s Baptist support in preventing future insurrections.

“Prior to 1800, most white Baptists in the South were either opposed to slavery or ambivalent,” said Gourley. “Richard Furman’s letter changed things in the South.”

Socially, Baptists in the mid- to late-18th century were still disadvantaged persons, said Gourley. “They were not the ‘in crowd’; they were outsiders.”

Sermons, especially revival sermons among Baptists and Methodists during the Great Awakening, often opposed slavery. But social change was occurring in the South.

“Baptists [went] from persecuted, poor outsiders to up-and-coming insiders who [benefited] from changes taking place in the South,” Gourley noted.

That shift, he said, could be seen in popular evangelist and religious liberty advocate John Leland who — writing on behalf of Virginia Baptists in 1789 — called for the removal of slavery (deemed “a violent depravation”) from the land.

“Not all white Baptists agreed with that but a significant number did,” said Gourley. “Others were ambivalent on slavery.”

Yet 50 years later, Leland, who died in 1841, called slavery “humane, just and benevolent.” He then argued for the rights of slave owners rather than for slaves, said Gourley.

What caused Baptists to flip on the issue of slavery? Money, said Gourley.

“Baptists changed as they became dependent on the economics based on slave labor,” he noted. And those changes were clearly reflected in those who gathered in Augusta, Ga., in 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention.

Those represented owned more slaves than typical Baptists, said Gourley. He noted that in 1860, on the eve of war, the 10 richest counties in the U.S. were all in the South. And the Baptist presence was strong in all of those areas except Louisiana.

Protecting the economic benefits of slavery was the reason the South sought independence, said Gourley.

“This was a war about slavery,” he said. “... ‘States rights’ was a tool to preserve what at that time was called ‘a peculiar institution.’”

Language at the time had meaning, said Gourley. Southern elitists used terms such as “radical” and “fanatic” to refer to abolitionists. “Rights” was used in reference to their freedom to own slaves.

“When they spoke of liberty or freedom,” said Gourley, “they spoke only of freedom for whites.”

Southern Baptists at this time attributed white supremacy and black slavery to the will of God. Fearful that Lincoln would seek to end slavery, they tagged him as “the black president.”

Lincoln’s background would give them reason for such concern, though he ran on a platform of simply seeking to keep slavery from spreading westward, said Gourley. “Lincoln grew up in a Primitive Baptist abolitionist church.”

ODD 'BLESSINGS'

In January 1861, Pastor Ebenezer W. Warren of First Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., proclaimed from his pulpit: "Slavery forms a vital element of the divine revelation to man."

He offered strong biblical support for this cause and was critical of those not standing in defense of slavery.

"We in the South have been passive, hoping this storm would subside," said Warren. "Our passiveness has been our sin. We've not come to the vindication of God and truth as duty demanded."

Warren preached that slavery, like Christianity, comes from heaven. "Both are blessings to humanity."

It was all part of a divine plan, said Warren: "Their Maker has decreed their bondage."

Politically, Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, spoke of "the proper status of the Negro" as indicated in the Confederate Constitution, during a March 1863 address in Savannah.

The U.S. Constitution, he noted, rested on the equality of races. "This was an error," said Stephens, calling it a sandy foundation.

"Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea," said Stephens. "... Its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man. That slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition."

The government of the Confederacy, he said, is to be based on "this great physical, philosophical and moral truth."

White Baptist leaders of the South raised their voices in support.

Virginia Baptists in June 1863 declared: "We are daily convinced of the righteousness of our cause." Northern Christians who "claim to be followers of the meek and lovely Jesus," they charged, actually embrace an "intolerant fanaticism."

JUSTIFICATIONS

A grandiose vision of an expanding slave empire was set forth by Samuel Boykin, editor of the Georgia Baptist newspaper, *The Christian Index*, who proclaimed: "We will absorb Central America and the contiguous states of Mexico not by bloody war but by the generous attractions of our superior civilization and purer religion."

Boykin assured his readers that a time would come when other nations of the world would "come to woo and worship at the shrine

of our imperial confederacy."

Keeping God on the side of slaveholding required some ongoing theological efforts, said Gourley. One common claim was that slaves were happy and content in their state — even though slaves were risking their lives to escape.

While defending the institution of slavery, some Southern Baptists would criticize certain laws pertaining to slaves such as disallowing slave marriages and Bible reading, he said.

And losses throughout the latter part of the war — despite the South being clearly on God's side — called for justification. For example, the North Carolina Baptist newspaper, *Biblical Recorder*, in December 1864, blamed Confederate losses on the failure of slave owners to evangelize their slaves.

Theological justifications were built on selected literal readings of the Bible, said Gourley, as well as intentional misuses such as the easily debunked "Curse of Ham."

Confederate losses would dampen the aspirations of many Southerners. However, the immorality of slavery was never a reason for so-called setbacks in the minds of white Southern elites, said Gourley. Baptists and others would point to retribution for sins such as greed, alcohol consumption and Sabbath-breaking.

One North Carolina Baptist soldier wrote of profanity, gambling and other iniquities within the army favored by God — and he complained about the lack of "any spiritual counseling."

True to their heritage of church-state separation, most Baptists had not supported government-paid chaplains and missionaries during the war, said Gourley. As a result, there were fewer Baptists serving as Confederate chaplains.

As losses mounted, however, many Baptists went against their religious liberty heritage. They spoke in terms of Christian nationalism — even asking the government to declare days of prayer and fasting for them.

Efforts to keep the presumed holy cause from faltering did not always succeed, said Gourley. Quiet dissent appeared — especially among poor white Baptists in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina.

By the end of the war, he noted, nearly two-thirds of the Confederate soldiers had deserted.

On the other side, white Baptists in the North were heavily abolitionist — sometimes called the more "radically abolitionist" among major Northern denominations, said Gourley.

"Many (Northern) Baptists pushed Lincoln toward emancipation more quickly

than he wanted," taking advantage of the president's open door policy.

Baptist bodies in the North passed various antislavery resolutions, including one from Pennsylvania in November 1862 that called for emancipation.

BLACK BAPTISTS

From the 1820s on, many slaves were forced to attend church and sit in the balconies. Many prayed for a Moses to lead them out of bondage — a role later embodied by Abraham Lincoln.

"They were quite certain that God was a God of freedom and equality for all," said Gourley. This understanding led many slaves to escape, and for black churches to seek some autonomy.

"From 1862 onward they established autonomous Baptist churches in Union-controlled areas of the South especially along the South Carolina coast," said Gourley. "There was very dynamic African-American Baptist presence during the war along the coastal areas of South Carolina."

In and after 1864, escaped slaves fought officially for the Union cause, said Gourley.

The movie, *Glory*, he noted, showed Sgt. William H. Carney, a Baptist deacon, as the flag bearer who survived the Battle of Fort Wagner in 1863. He became the first African American to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

"Many Baptists fought in colored regiments, as they were called back then, for freedom for those yet enslaved," said Gourley.

Great anticipation surrounding the long-awaited Emancipation Proclamation kept black Baptists and other black Christians up late on the night of Dec. 31, 1862. It took awhile for Lincoln to sign it and for word to get out over the wires.

Frederick Douglass spent that day and night at Tremont Baptist Temple in Boston — writing later about the anticipation and anxiety before the formal announcement of freedom was received.

"Watch Night is an African-American church story," said Gourley, although many white Southern Baptists who have prayed in the new year together were unaware of its historical ties to enslaved blacks awaiting the good news of freedom.

But Gourley noted that despite the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation, real freedom for black Americans didn't come for another 100 years. **BT**

Pathway to peace

Labyrinth walking enables mindfulness of God

Many people are searching for peace. They cannot figure out how to unplug from the stress, the constant demands, the running commentary in their heads, the responsibilities and the duties of life in order to find the elusive peace that awaits us all.

One path of peace — that has become an important part of my life and of the lives of my husband and daughters — is to walk a labyrinth.

People often think of a labyrinth as a maze. But a maze is really a puzzle.

Recreational mazes built in cornfields or constructed of hay bales have high walls and dead ends. They can be fun, but they can also instill fear or frustration in those trying to negotiate them.

In 2 Tim. 1:7, we read, "... for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has a clear pathway to a center and then out again. No decisions are made as to which way to turn at any given point.

One may not immediately discern the path ahead. But when you enter the labyrinth, you walk until you reach the center. You may remain there for as long as you like before turning to walk out. At all times you are able to see the next step leading to your destination.

Walking this "pathway to peace" calls for keeping your head down — in an attitude of prayer. You are able to let go of your thoughts and worries and stresses and become open to God. You can sense a lifting of cares and worries as your spirit centers in God. An indescribable peacefulness can follow.

"Mindfully" walking the labyrinth can be separated into three parts: entering and moving toward the center, being in the center, and then walking out. There is symbolism to remind us that life is a journey.

In essence, we walk our own journey alone. Yet there are those who share our lives, those who intersect our lives, those who only brush our lives and those we simply observe in the course of our lives.

In walking the labyrinth, we may stop to wait for someone to move forward before we continue. We might brush by someone as we



FAMILY GIFTS- Carol and Charles Taylor gave a labyrinth to Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., in honor of their three daughters. Blythe Taylor, shown here with her parents, in turn gave a labyrinth in their honor to Wingate University. Photo courtesy of Meredith College.

are heading to the center and they are heading out. We might simply observe others as we are walking, or sitting near the labyrinth lost in contemplation and prayer.

For some, this pathway to peace is an easy trail. For others, it may take several times for distractions to dissipate as they become mindful of God and all the love and guidance offered.

On a trip to France years ago with a group of students, we visited Chartres Cathedral. I could hardly wait to walk this famous labyrinth. To my chagrin, there were chairs all over the beautiful structure.

Our guide dismissed my desire to walk it and shuffled off with our group following behind. I was not to be deterred! If I could not actually walk this beautiful labyrinth, with so much history and spirit associated therein, then I could stand on it and absorb the spirit of God in that place. That's just what I did.

Now I look back and remember that my feet touched the very stones that have been trod by many Christian pilgrims through the ages. That was powerful for me.

So where can you go to find such a place? Online searches will reveal labyrinths in your area. Some churches have permanent labyrinths or temporary ones for certain times.

There are famous labyrinths such as the

one in the Grace Cathedral in California, and lesser-known ones such as at Sardis Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., Athens Regional Medical Center in Athens, Ga., and Grace United Methodist Church in Charleston, S.C.

My husband and I were so moved by walking labyrinths that we decided to give one to Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C. The labyrinth beside Jones Chapel honors our three daughters, all Meredith College graduates: Mary Blythe Taylor, Anna Taylor Freeman and Erin Taylor Rice. Scripture inscribed on two plaques encourage those who walk the labyrinth.

The blessings of that gift caused our daughter, Mary Blythe Taylor, to recently donate a labyrinth in honor of my husband, Charles E. Taylor Jr., and me at Wingate University. The labyrinth, beside Austin Auditorium, is in clear view of Dry Chapel.

Our prayer is that these labyrinths will bless many and bring them closer to God. Should you be near Raleigh or Wingate, please stop by and walk. Perhaps you, too, will find that walking a labyrinth will bring you to a place of peace and possibly healing in your own life. **BT**

—Carol Boseman Taylor lives in Rocky Mount, N.C., and is the author of *I Promise. Rejoice!* (*Nurturing Faith*, 2015).

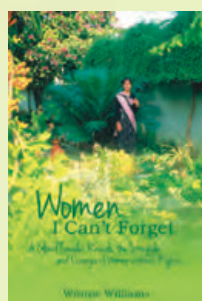
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WOMEN I CAN'T FORGET

Winnie Williams

She has witnessed gender and socio-economic inequality in extremely diverse cultures around the world — and Winnie Williams' heart has been torn by the lives of the women she has met in her travels.



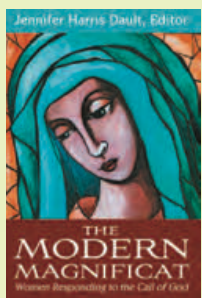
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Now she shares with readers descriptions of the beauty of the places she has seen and the fascination of the cultures, along with insight into the forces that shape the lives of people. She examines the role of hope in fulfilling dreams that can lead to change for the better, especially for women.

THE MODERN MAGNIFICAT: WOMEN RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD

Jennifer Harris Dault, ed.

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The Modern Magnificat chronicles the journey of calling through the stories of 23 women who heard God's call and are committed to being life-long Baptists, although some have found places of service in other denominations.

REMEMBERING MISS ADDIE

Lamar Wadsworth

Miss Addie lived by the adage, "If Moses had waited until everybody was ready, the children of Israel would still be in Egypt." Young Cassie suggested that Moses should have had some grownups like Miss Addie to help him.



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Cassie was 15 when she confided in Miss Addie that God was calling her to preach. Then at 19, Cassie helps conduct her 101-year-old friend's funeral and soon finds herself facing unexpected challenges as the new pastor of Peyton's Chapel Baptist Church.

A GYPSY DREAMING IN JERUSALEM

Amoun Sleem

"Being raised in the Gypsy culture was like a movie with sweet parts mixed with painful times. In my childlike thinking, I had no idea how that drama would continue or how it would end.



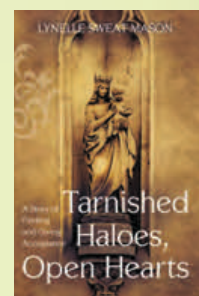
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Readers, and not

By Tony W. Cartledge

As a person who has loved reading from the time I could sound out “See Spot run,” I found a recent Barna survey on adult reading habits to be, well, worth reading.

In a digital world where countless items are posted online every day, it’s good to know that some people still read books: the kind you can hold in your hand, even if they’re on an e-reader.

Not surprisingly, older people read more books than their younger counterparts: almost a quarter of “elders” (people born before 1945) read more than 15 books per year, and another 14 percent read 10-15 books.

Just 10 percent of millennials (born 1984-2002) read more than 15 books per year, and many of those are for school.

Economic status plays a role as well: more than half of the people Barna classifies as “upscale” (income of \$70,000 or more plus a four-year degree) read five or more books

per year, while just 16 percent of “downscale” adults (income of \$20,000 or less and no college) read five or more books per year. Nearly half of all “downscale” folk read no books.

Women are more avid readers than men: 32 percent of men don’t read any books, compared to 18 percent of women. Forty percent of women read five or more books per year, while just 28 percent of men maintain the same pace.

Most adults report reading mainly for pleasure (64 percent), and fiction (53 percent) is slightly preferred over non-fiction. Women show a stronger preference for fiction (63 percent), while men give a slight edge to non-fiction.

The biggest surprise to me is where readers obtain their books. I would have thought online booksellers would dominate by now, but only 10 percent of books are bought online, while 33 percent come from brick-and-mortar bookstores.

Eleven percent of books are borrowed from friends, and 24 percent from libraries.



Hardbacks and paperbacks are still the favorite, though 15 percent of books are now read in an e-reader format.

The article notes that reading expands the mind, not only with new ideas, but also by actually increasing our intellectual abilities and giving us insight to understand others. We may enjoy the social interaction of Facebook, but for personal development, there’s nothing like a real book. **BT**

God’s design

By John Pierce

Years ago a congregation placed a classified ad in a Baptist newspaper to assist the church’s search for a new pastor. Among the qualities and qualifications they sought was someone with “the mind of God.”

My guess (and hope!) is that the ad writer meant that the congregation wanted a spiritual leader with a “heart for God.” Too often, however, there are those who assume and proclaim to know the mind of God.

Such claims should come with a loud warning. While we may seek to know God and to know God’s will, it is a humble experience that should acknowledge our great capacity to see God as we want God to be rather than to move toward becoming the persons God desires us to be.

Therefore, my skepticism is kicked up a notch whenever someone claims to know precisely “God’s design” for humanity.

During the American Civil War (as noted in the feature story on page 32) it was common for leading Baptist preachers and editors to claim with great assurance that African slavery was not only a white right, but also the fulfillment of God’s original design.

Male dominance, in many church circles — past and present — has been promoted as God’s design clearly expressed in the biblical revelation. The racial superiority of whites has been sold as God’s original intent as well as European settlers forcing Native Americans off of their land.

A recent and extensive report from CNN told of the ongoing challenges coming out of the Supreme Court decision regarding same-sex marriage. A focus of the story was on an Iowa couple who shut down their wedding chapel after receiving negative responses to their denying a gay couple use of the facilities.

Legal issues and conflicting understandings of individual freedom arose. Those conflicts will likely continue for a while. But one irony was unmistakable.

According to the report, the Christian owners of the wedding chapel — who married several years ago after their first marriages ended in divorce — sold the facilities to a church and started a non-profit organization called none other than “God’s Original Design.”

Its sole purpose is to promote “traditional marriage.”

It may take a bit of head scratching to figure this one out: Divorcees are erecting billboards in the name of “God’s Original Design” to promote “traditional (biblical) marriage” in opposition to same-sex couples being allowed to marry.

And the Bible (or parts of it) is the backing for this understanding of God’s original design. It must be hard to see those billboards with such a large log in one’s eye. **BT**



THANKS, FAITHFUL CONGREGATIONS!

Congregational life is always in focus as Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith seeks to provide helpful, informative, inspiring resources from this news journal with excellent Bible studies to books, experiences and a daily web presence.

In turn, many congregations are faithful in providing group subscriptions and helping support this ongoing mission through annual gifts.

Director David Hull is leading an effort to encourage more congregations to become “Freedom Churches” that provide annual support through budgeted or mission gifts.

We want to take this moment to say “THANKS!” to the congregations who’ve made significant gifts to Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith thus far in 2015. We are grateful for your shared ministry.

- Christ Church, Cairo, Ga.
- First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.
- First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.
- First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.
- First Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C.
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Fewer, firmer

Study shows more Americans reject religion, but believers firm in faith

Americans as a whole are growing less religious, but those who still consider themselves to belong to a religion are, on average, just as committed to their faiths as they were in the past — in certain respects even more so.

The 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, released in November by the Pew Research Center, also shows that nearly all major religious groups have become more accepting of homosexuality since the first landscape study in 2007.

The new study may provide some solace to those who bemoan the undeniable rise in America of the “nones” — people who claim no religious affiliation.

“People who say they have a religion — which is still the vast majority of the population — show no discernible dip in levels of observance,” said Alan Cooperman, director of religion research at Pew.

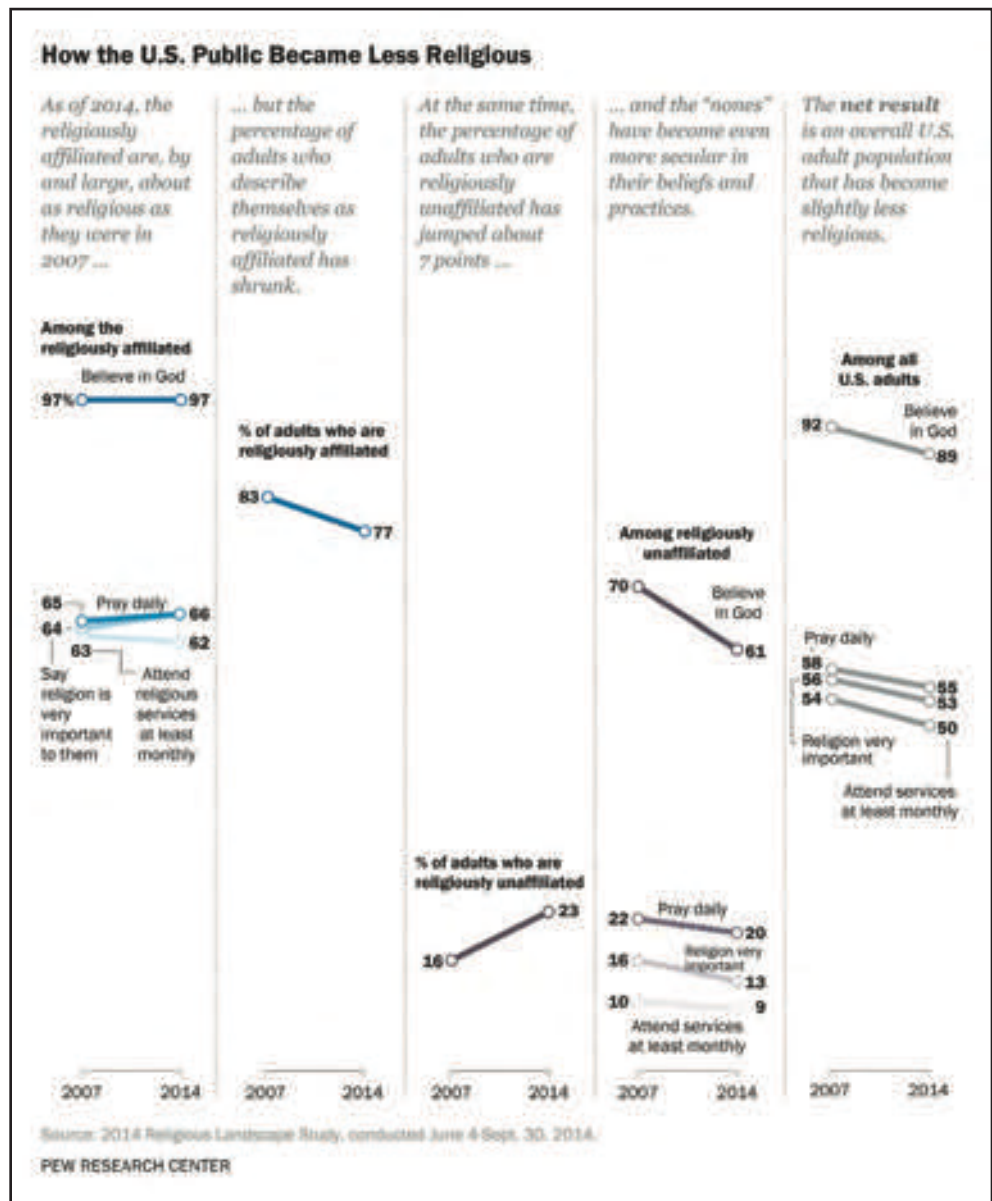
“They report attending religious services as often as they did a few years ago. They pray as often as they did before, and they are just as likely to say that religion plays a very important role in their lives,” he continued. “On some measures there are even small increases in their levels of religious practice.”

More religiously affiliated adults, for example, read Scripture regularly and participate in small religious groups than did so seven years ago, according to the survey. And 88 percent of religiously affiliated adults said they prayed daily, weekly or monthly — the same percentage that reported such regular prayer in the 2007 study.

“We should remember that the United States remains a nation of believers,” said Gregory A. Smith, Pew’s associate director of research, “with nearly 9 in 10 adults saying they believe in God.”

That said, overall, belief in God has ticked down by about 3 percentage points in recent years, driven mainly by growth in the share of “nones” who say they don’t believe in God.

But even among Christians — 98 percent of whom say they believe in God — fewer believe with absolute certainty: 80 percent in



2007 compared to 76 percent in 2014.

And now 77 percent of adults surveyed describe themselves as religiously affiliated, a decline from the 83 percent who did so in Pew’s 2007 landscape study.

Pew researchers attribute these drops to the dying off of older believers, and a growing number of millennials — those born between 1981 and 1996 — who claim no religious affiliation.

The researchers also found that as religiosity in America wanes, a more general spirituality is on the rise, with 6 in 10 adults saying they regularly feel a “deep sense of

spiritual peace and well-being,” up 7 percentage points since 2007.

Also increasing: the number of people who experienced a “deep sense of wonder” about the universe, which also jumped 7 percentage points.

These trends make sense, said Andrew Walsh, a historian of American religion at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., in that religious affiliation in America today is “increasingly shaped by individual choice and less by inheritance from a family or community.”

Though the current social climate, especially for young adults, allows Americans to choose not to affiliate with a religious institution, Walsh said, many “are still spiritual in some ways.”

One sign: the proliferation of yoga studios throughout the nation. Most enthusiasts of the meditative practice, which combines breathing and physical postures, are not looking to convert to Hinduism, Walsh said, but they may nevertheless find the activity spiritually gratifying.

Cooperman cautioned, however, against concluding that such spirituality is replacing more traditional kinds of religious experiences, such as attending religious services.

“On the contrary, the people in the survey who express the most spirituality are the people who are the most religious in conventional ways,” he said, “and the respondents who are the least attached to traditional religion, including the ‘nones,’ report much lower levels of spiritual experiences.”

More striking numbers in the study describe changing Christian attitudes toward gay Americans. Though the new landscape survey is not the first to document such change, it shows in detail how dramatically members of a broad swath of denominations — even those that officially oppose homosexuality — have shifted in their views.

The number of evangelical Protestants,

for example, who said they agreed that “homosexuality should be accepted by society” jumped 10 percentage points between the 2007 and 2014 studies — from 26 percent to 36 percent. The increase for Catholics was even steeper, from 58 percent to 70 percent. For historically black Protestant churches, acceptance jumped from 39 percent to 51 percent.

“Despite attempts to paint religious people as monolithically opposed to LGBT rights, that’s just not the case and these numbers prove that,” said Jay Brown, head of research and education at the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the national gay rights group.

“There’s growing support of LGBT people and our families, often not in spite of people’s religions but because the very foundation of their faith encourages love, acceptance and support for their fellow human beings,” he said.

The religiously unaffiliated, however, showed the highest rate of acceptance of gay Americans: 83 percent.

On abortion, attitudes held steady, as has been the case since the Supreme Court made abortion a constitutional right in 1973. The study shows that 53 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases, with views within denominations shifting little since the first landscape study.

Other findings from the study include: A minority of Jews — 40 percent — and the vast

majority of Muslims — 90 percent — say they do not eat pork, the consumption of which is forbidden by Jewish and Islamic law. Hinduism does not allow beef to be eaten, and nearly 7 in 10 Hindus (67 percent) say they do not eat it.

Nearly 9 in 10 Americans say religious institutions bring people together and strengthen community bonds, and 87 percent say they play an important role in helping the poor and needy.

Women are more prayerful than men, with 64 percent saying they pray every day, compared with 46 percent of men.

On evolution, more than 62 percent of Americans say humans have evolved over time, while about a third (34 percent) say humans always existed in their present form.

Six in 10 adults, and three-quarters of Christians, believe the Bible or other holy Scripture is the Word of God. About 31 percent — and 39 percent of Christians — believe it should be interpreted literally.

The 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study interviewed 35,071 Americans, and has a margin of error of plus or minus less than 1 percentage point. The portion of the survey released in November, which focuses on beliefs and practices, is the second of two parts. The first part, released in May, found that the nation is significantly less Christian than it was seven years ago. **BT**

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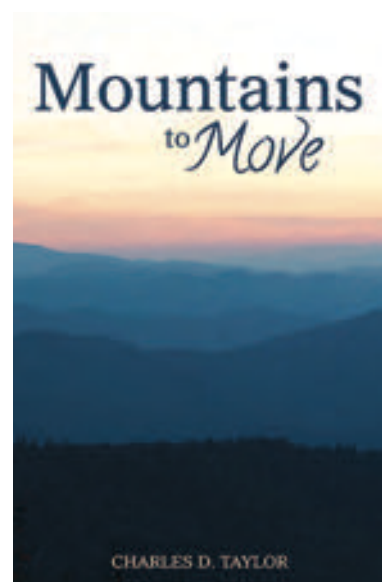
Jesus told the apostles that if they had faith as great as a mustard seed, they could say to a mountain, “Get up and be cast into the sea,” and it would be done. What did Jesus mean by this?

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Do science and religion conflict?

It's all in how you 'see' it

Most Americans see a conflict between the findings of science and the teachings of religion. But “see” is the operative word in a Pew Research Center report issued this fall

Examining perceptions leads to some unexpected findings.

While 59 percent of U.S. adults say they saw science and religion in conflict, that drops to 30 percent when people are asked about their own religious beliefs.

It turns out that the most highly religious were least likely to see conflict.

And those who said they saw the most conflict between the two worldviews in society are people who personally claimed no religious brand, the “nones,” according to the report.

“Our perceptions of others are often different than our perceptions of ourselves and this plays out here. It’s the most striking finding,” said Cary Funk, associate director of research and co-author of the report.

The report is an analysis of several surveys but chiefly relies on a 2014 survey of 2,002 U.S. adults conducted in collaboration with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In that survey:

- * 40 percent of evangelical Protestants said their personal religious beliefs conflicted with science.
- * 50 percent of highly religious adults (people who said they attend religious services at least weekly) saw science and religion often in conflict.
- * 76 percent of religiously unaffiliated said they saw such conflict in society. But when asked about their personal beliefs, just 16 percent saw such conflict.

The analysis looked at 20 science issues and found that on most — including climate change, genetically modified foods and space exploration — religious differences were part of a matrix of influences that include age, gender, education, political affiliation and ideology.

Funk said the analysis found “only a handful of areas where people’s religious beliefs and practices have a strong connection to their views about science.”

The hot topics were views on the creation of the universe, on evolution and on whether religious congregations should take positions in debates over public policies on scientific issues.

Overall, half of Americans (50 percent) said congregations should express their views on policy decisions about scientific issues and 46 percent said they should not.

Catholics were the most divided, with 49 percent saying churches should not express their views and 45 percent calling for churches to speak up.

The main survey relied on an August 2014 analysis, one year before Pope Francis issued a powerful teaching document on the environment citing scientific voices calling for action on climate change.

About 2 in 3 white evangelicals (69 percent) and black Protestants (66 percent) supported churches’ expressing views. But most of those with no religious affiliation (66 percent) were firmly against it.

On evolution, 31 percent of U.S. adults said humans and other living things “have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.” Most (65 percent overall) said that “humans and other living things have evolved over time.” This includes:

- * 86 percent of the religiously unaffiliated
- * 73 percent of non-Hispanic white Catholics and 59 percent of Hispanic Catholics
- * 71 percent of white mainline Protestants
- * 49 percent of black Protestants
- * 36 percent of white evangelicals.

The margin of error was plus or minus 3.1 percentage points for overall findings but higher for subgroups, ruling out analysis of Jews, Muslims, Hindu and other small religious groups.

The Pew analysis found wide differences among major religious groups when it came

to perceptions of scientists. People were asked whether they saw scientists as divided or united on the creation of the universe.

The nones were the only major group in which a majority (61 percent) said scientists were unanimous that “the universe was created in a single, violent event.”

That Big Bang theory doesn’t resound for most others, however.

Overall, 42 percent of U.S. adults perceived scientific consensus about the creation of the universe.

Most (52 percent) see scientists as divided, including nearly 7 in 10 (69 percent) of white evangelicals and 62 percent of Hispanics Catholics.

Americans did come together on one issue — strong public support for government investment in science. Overall, 71 percent of adults said government investment in basic science research “pays off in the long run,” while 24 percent said such investments are not worth it, the report says.

The AAAS, mindful of how attitudes toward science can influence society, just finished a three-year “Perceptions Project” through its Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion to engage religious communities, particularly evangelicals, in conversation with scientists.

The perception gap highlighted by the Pew analysis can be addressed by building bridges between both groups so that they don’t rely on “media stereotypes,” said Jennifer Wiseman, an astronomer and program director for DoSer.

“We found that everyone from the least to the most religious seems fundamentally interested and positive about science,” she said.

Although there were “a few areas where people stand apart,” Wiseman said, “we found a lot of shared desire to use science and technology for the betterment of the world and the human condition. There’s a lot of common ground.” **BT**

“We found that everyone from the least to the most religious seems fundamentally interested and positive about science.”



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