

Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL



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Art with a ♥



Ellen Heavilon found inspiration and a new mission when she happened upon public art (below) that had been created by persons living in a homeless shelter.

Tipping the balance 'a little toward good'

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Public art abounds downtown following this city's renaissance that began with a riverside aquarium in 1992. Art forms vary as widely as the levels of appreciation.

Rarely does public art, however, have such an impact as one called "Homes" did on Ellen Heavilon.

A few years ago, while walking to dinner, she and her husband Jay came upon an obelisk covered with tiles. They stopped for closer examination.

Each small tile had the creative expression of someone living in a local homeless shelter. Ellen was impressed by the artistic skills and moved to action.

"Something magical happened," she said. "I was compelled to get some art supplies together for the Community Kitchen. It just moved me."

NEW MISSION

Ellen moved quickly, forming a charitable organization that she would lead without a salary. Her entrepreneurial husband provided the startup funds.

Two months from the moment of inspiration, a dilapidated building on resurrecting East Main Street was purchased and renovation began.

"I had always been a stay-at-home mom

and a community volunteer," said Ellen. "This became the empty-nest answer."

The HART Gallery, or Helping Hands Art Gallery, opened in October 2010.

But, of course, a gallery needs artists and art. And Ellen was convinced the talent was out there and the results would be more than good art.

"There was talent on that obelisk," she recalled. "I'd buy that!"

She began providing art supplies to those in homeless shelters — and then to victims of domestic violence, persons with mental and physical challenges, disabled military veterans and political refugees.

Local artists provided classes for these groups. The resulting artistic expression varied greatly in talent, but was seemingly therapeutic for all.

Most importantly, said Ellen, it provided fresh creativity, needed affirmation and the basis for new relationships.

"It was a way to give opportunities to those who might not have opportunities," she said. "Handouts don't work; there's no relationship."

RELATIONSHIPS

Homeless persons feel invisible, said Ellen. That reality hit her when clients at a local shelter were given cameras and sent out to take photographs.

"None came back with pictures of people in them," she noted. "One had just pictures of



cars whizzing by."

Relationships, she added, are the key to success for the gallery's ongoing mission.

Early on, Ellen gave paper and colored pencils to a homeless man named Jim. But he soon disappeared from the shelter.

One day Ellen heard someone on the street calling her name. It was Jim, a Vietnam veteran whose life had been filled with trauma.

He helped Ellen get the gallery open and even reconnected with an estranged daughter. Things were going so well that Ellen and her husband moved Jim into a cottage of theirs.

"Then he disappeared and left everything in the cottage," said Ellen.

Ten months later Jim reappeared. He had gotten his benefits from service in the Navy and the medications he needed.

"I've got something for you," he said to Ellen. He handed her a cashier's check for \$500 payable to the gallery.

DISCOVERY

Various art pieces in the gallery today reveal remarkable talent. Yet these discoveries took awhile.

"Thank God for all the people who bought the refrigerator art," said Ellen smilingly of the earliest pieces sold to keep the gallery going. "... But now the art stands on its own."

Though mostly paintings, the gallery also offers photography and jewelry as well as wood carvings and glass art by a couple of veterans.

Those aspiring artists "whose work doesn't sell," as Ellen puts it, can work at the gallery through a program called "HARTWORKS." One used his earnings to buy a bicycle to get to needed appointments.

"We're just here to be the community — the support group," she added.

That sense of community is seen outside the gallery's doors, too, where an artistically enhanced garden grows vegetables and hope. Pathway bricks honor homeless persons from the city who have died.

And rising high above the vines, stalks and stems is the towering pillar of tiles — titled "Homes" — that started the dream-turned-reality. It was acquired from local artist Frances McDonald.

PRIMARY FOCUS

"HART Housewarming" is a program that encourages supporters to buy art and donate it back. For example, this allows new Habitat for Humanity homeowners to come into the gallery and choose an original art piece as a gift.

"It helps sales for artists too," said Ellen.

The artist is always the primary focus of the gallery. When art sells, the artist gets 60 percent with 30 percent going to the gallery for overhead. The remaining 10 percent goes to the place of the artist's choosing.

"That's so empowering to them," said Ellen. "They are always on the receiving end of generosity. Now they have the power to give. It is huge to artists."

One artist, she said, asked to take the 10-percent check from his sales to an AA group that had helped him.

Does the gallery make a real difference? Ellen said all she knows is that only one of the many artists related to the gallery has been incarcerated — far, far below the average.

FEEDING THE SOUL

Ellen expressed gratitude for the faithful agencies that provide food, housing, clothing and other essentials for those who struggle with homelessness, abuse and other issues. Her mission is to address additional needs.

"I'm going to feed the soul," she said.

Indeed, good can arise from negative life experiences, she added. "And no tragedy should be wasted."

Ellen recalled the lessons learned in her own life when her husband started a business in Atlanta years ago that took their family through some hard times. Now she enjoys seeing and helping others move through their own struggles.

Some of the gallery's artists now have found jobs but continue their creative expressions. Others have gained self-esteem and needed resources through their art gallery connection.

For Ellen, it has been and remains a gratifying experience.

"I have no doubt that I'm doing exactly what I should be doing," she said emotionally. "I feel blessed."

Ellen is also pleased that the gallery's success means that many more budding artists will have the opportunity to discover their talents and more.

"It has a life of its own now," she said of the gallery's wide support. "It gives me great joy to know that this is going to last longer than me."

Her efforts, she said, were only a starting place — with a clear purpose.

"I just want to tip the balance a little toward good." **BT**



Time to Share

"Good art doesn't have to cost thousands of dollars," said Ellen Heavilon of the affordable prices in the HART Gallery. And some really talented artists are yet to be discovered.

So she is eager to assist those interested in a similar opportunity in their own community.

"This can work in any city in America," she said. "And I'll be glad to share anything I know."

Those interested in supporting the mission of the HART Gallery can do so in several ways including online giving — or by collecting and sending art supplies (especially 9x12 acrylic paper and acrylic paints).

Or, visit the gallery that is open Wednesday-Friday 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. and Saturday 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. to buy some art for oneself or others.

HART GALLERY

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quotation remarks

“No chaplain has ever been more aptly named, or lived up to his own name more than [Ed] Christman, who is remembered for his compassion in helping generations of students feel at home at Wake Forest.”

—Kerry M. King, in a tribute to longtime Wake Forest University chaplain Edgar D. Christman, who died Dec. 24, 2014 at age 85 (wfu.edu)

“Religious freedom faces daunting and alarming challenges worldwide ... I will do everything within my abilities and influence to engage every sector of the State Department and the rest of the U.S. government to integrate religious freedom into our nation’s statecraft and foreign policies.”

—Rabbi David Saperstein, U.S. State Department’s ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom and the first non-Christian to hold the job (RNS)

“If the Pageant had any special difficulty with me, it was not so much that I was Jewish but that I had a Jewish social conscience.... I was determined to do something with my year, to make it mean something, to give the crown some real weight.”

—Miss America 1945 Bess Myerson, the only Jewish woman to hold the title, who died Dec. 14 at age 90 (RNS)

“Jesus called those who heard his message, as well as those who continue to hear his message, to a belief that is more than simply mental conformity to God’s rule ... This is why the act of repentance is tied to the act of belief. Repentance is more than a change of one’s mind; it is a continual change in one’s behavior based on hearing from God.”

—Baptist minister Drew Smith, director of international programs at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Ark., who blogs at *Wilderness Preacher* (ethicsdaily.com)

“As a Christian, I am convinced that when we nurture and defend freedom, we work to preserve freedom that is not just our national birthright, but which echoes and imitates the freedom we are given by God — the God who loves us and longs for our deepest well-being, but who never depends upon coercion. That conviction makes those efforts and others we might make to defend the freedom of speech both a spiritual, as well as moral obligation.”

—Frederick W. Schmidt Jr., who holds the Rueben P. Job Chair in Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

“Perhaps a sign of maturity in life and ministry is coming to the point of understanding how little one actually knows and then seeking both divine and human help to remedy that situation.”

—Ircel Harrison, coaching coordinator for Pinnacle Leadership Associates and associate professor of ministry praxis at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, in a blog titled “When I knew everything” (BNG)

“It was very quickly established that the church’s worldview is we don’t look at the world with suspicion but with curiosity and openness to discover the commonalities we have with other humans.”

—Pastor Mitch Randall on how NorthHaven, a Baptist congregation in Norman, Okla., has created a welcoming atmosphere and interfaith experiences (BNG)

“Regardless of motive or rationalization or evidence or excuse, killing 12 innocent people to avenge Prophet Muhammad has no justification and must be condemned without citing any victimhood.”

—Statement from Daisy Khan of the American Society for Muslim Advancement and others serving on the Muslim Advisory Council to the NYPD, issued Jan. 7 following the terrorist attack in Paris

“I just believe that God’s agenda has no gender.”

—Gospel singer Andrae Crouch, who died Jan. 8 at age 72, on the 1998 ordination of his twin sister, Sandra, who served with him as co-pastor of New Christ Memorial Church of God in Christ in suburban Los Angeles (RNS)



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By John Pierce

High on Jesus, low on judgment

When asked in an interview to identify the ugliest word in the English language, the late American writer Carl Sandburg reportedly responded, “exclusive.” Indeed, exclusive attitudes and actions have left a long trail of damage throughout much of human history — and continue to do so today.

Jesus was often in trouble for his brazen inclusivity. He simply refused to follow religiously and socially established rules of exclusion based on gender, ethnicity and reputation — just to name a few evident from his midday encounter with a woman at a well in Sychar (John 4).

The larger biblical story is about the wideness of God’s mercy that extends beyond lines of division that humanity often erects. Yet, also, there are warnings about choosing destructive paths that lead away from God’s constructive purposes in the world.

The dilemma, at least for me, is to affirm the grand way in which God has so loved the world in Jesus while not taking on the role of judge that suggests I can know exactly how sheep and goats or wheat and chaff are divided.

There are those, however, who will eagerly and confidently tell us which persons are “in” and which ones are “out” according to whether one has made a particular “profession of faith” or has embraced other matters considered essential for kingdom membership.

Other honest Bible readers, however, will acknowledge that there’s more than one biblical prescription: from believing/confessing (Rom. 10:9) to “those who have done what is right will receive eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).

More clearly stated is that God alone judges humanity — and needs no help from us. And Jesus’ striking story of a great banquet is a stark reminder that those who think they know who’s in and who’s out — including themselves — may be in for a big surprise.

There was a time when I was quite comfortable believing that those who believe like me are kingdom insiders while those who do not share my faith commitments (and superior doctrinal conclusions) are on the outside. I’m no longer comfortable with such assumptions that through closer observation seem so arrogantly presumptuous.

Who am I to set limits on the grace of God — even when able to string together verses of scripture that suggest my requirements for kingdom inclusion match God’s?

Yet challenges remain. And they are not easily reconciled when embracing both a wide openness to God’s expansive mercy and a strong belief that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God and the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation.



Therefore, there is an ongoing tension that comes with holding a very, very high view of Jesus while rejecting any attitude that implies (or reveals) a sense of superior, exclusive faith resulting in God’s grace extending to only those whose faith closely resembles mine.

It is a tension I’m learning to live with more comfortably than before — simply because it’s more desirable than the other options available.

Affirmations of faith remain strong, if not stronger: Jesus is the incarnation of God, the savior of the world and the model for meaningful living.

This Jesus of the Gospels, however, is far more radical and offensive and difficult than the domesticated version we often adapt for our own comfort. It is rather easy to follow a savior who both forgives freely and agrees with one’s own politics and theology — and shares one of the limited passwords to the kingdom clubhouse.

It is easy and attractive to choose such a chummy, comfortable understanding of faith. In doing so, salvation becomes neatly packaged — propped up by focusing on some aspects of the Bible while ignoring others.

We can create simple, low-demand, step-by-step spiritual prescriptions that end with a prayer and a signature. We can even define salvation in terms of a few spiritual laws.

In fact, Jesus did such — not with four but with merely two:

“Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind — and your neighbor as yourself.”

Is that enough? It’s certainly hard enough. **BT**



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Remembering Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler

For many of us, advocacy and support for Christian missions were synonymous with the name Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler.

Carolyn, who died Jan. 2 at age 84 in Cincinnati, strongly and consistently advocated for the spread of a holistic Gospel rooted in justice, respect and equality. And she did it with such grace.

Her longtime friend and colleague, Catherine Allen of Birmingham, Ala., described Carolyn as “one of the pivotal personalities of missions and denominationalism for more than 56 years, one of the key leaders in creating new ways ‘into all the world,’” and “a true heroine — one who literally has given her all in being true to her calling to missions.”

Widely known and appreciated, Carolyn served faithfully as a respected Christian leader in many settings. Of course, she is best known for her long and effective leadership of Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Her global perspective fueled her engagement with the Baptist World Alliance as well.

Later she assumed important leadership roles within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and several of its partnering organizations



FOCUSED ON MISSIONS

On behalf of the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors, Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler (left) presented the 2004 Judson-Rice Award to her mentor and friend Alma Hunt (center) at a dinner event in Richmond. They are joined by director Nannette Avery of Signal Mountain, Tenn. Photo by John Pierce.



- Born in House, Miss., and raised in Frostproof, Fla.
- Graduated from Florida State University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
- Served as a high school librarian, youth director and Baptist Student Union director before Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) work in Alabama and Florida
- Led national WMU as executive director from 1974-1989
- Married Joe Crumpler Sr. in 1989
- Received honorary doctorates from Campbell, Houston Baptist and Furman universities and Georgetown and William Carey colleges among many honors

including Baptist Women in Ministry (which she helped found), Baptist Center for Ethics and Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

Carolyn often laughingly said that her life course was atypical, retiring at age 59 and getting married. She moved from Birmingham to Cincinnati where her husband Joe was a pastor. There, she said, she gained new appreciation for the many important but often-unrecognized contributions of a ministry spouse.

“I found out who planned all of those events I had enjoyed so much,” she once told me.

Her influence and leadership skills put her in high demand for service on the boards of various organizations including the American Bible Society.

Also, Carolyn served on the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today* that invited me to discuss becoming the publication’s new executive editor 15 years ago. Her presence there made a difference.

Around a conference table at Mercer University’s Atlanta campus, we talked about what the future of the publication might become. My leaning toward not making this career move began to change.

Encouragement from Carolyn and other Baptist heroes of mine present that day was persuasive. I recall saying to myself: “If this thing goes down, these are the Baptists I want to go down with.”

From that moment on, Carolyn was supportive in word and deed as the publication’s mission grew and expanded. She often called or sent notes of encouragement along with financial support.

The first time I visited her and Joe in Cincinnati, more than a dozen years ago, she insisted that I bring along family. So my

then-eight-year-old daughter Meredith (now a senior at the University of Georgia) joined me and spent time with the fine Crumpler clan while I chased stories with Carolyn’s good help.

Carolyn and Joe invited friends to their home one evening to encourage support for *Baptists Today*. And along with other family members, she took Meredith and me to old Riverfront Stadium (Cinergy Field) to watch baseball on as hot of a night as I can remember.

She was acquainted with the late civil rights activist Fred Shuttlesworth, then a pastor in Cincinnati following his dynamic role in the Birmingham struggle for equal rights, and arranged for an interview as he and I were crossing paths at the airport. Carolyn made sure my visit was both enjoyable and productive.

Her graciousness was revealed again and again.

During a more recent visit (2010), Carolyn reflected on her long commitment to missions and her latest role as a diabetes educator. She was always looking for ways to help others improve their lives.

Concerning missions, Carolyn was never satisfied with what had been done. She always saw the challenges and opportunities ahead.

She said during that 2010 interview: “We haven’t gone into all the world; we’ve only gone into the easy places.”

To her, the fields were always “white unto harvest” — calling for more willing workers.

The wonderful mixture of challenge and grace that marked her life will be greatly missed. But the deep and wide influence of Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler continues through the many who were touched by this remarkable woman.

Her life was a gift to us. Thank God. **BT**

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Claude Douglas Bryan

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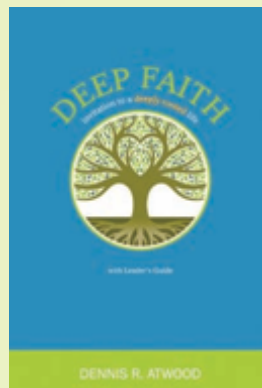


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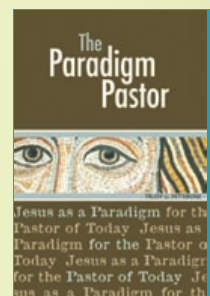


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Looking back

2014 was an unsettling year with religion in a starring role

For most of recorded history, Isis was an Egyptian goddess, a benevolent type who cared for widows and orphans, cured the sick and even brought the dead back to life.

Last year, the world met the other ISIS. The rise of the so-called Islamic State, variously known as ISIS or ISIL, dominated headlines in 2014 as a self-proclaimed caliphate sowed death and destruction across Iraq and Syria.

For some, the group confirmed their worst fears about Muslim extremists, bent on killing religious minorities and subjugating women in a quest for domination that included leveling villages and beheading hostages.

The terror wrought by the Islamic State reflected a sense of turbulence that upended international news in 2014. But it was not the only source of unrest.

CHURCH-STATE ISSUES

A string of court decisions paved a way for greater accommodation of religion in public life, dealing a blow to atheist groups that warned that the separation of church and state was under attack.

In *Greece v. Galloway*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld sectarian prayers at public meetings, and the justices also ruled 5-4 in favor

of the Hobby Lobby arts-and-crafts chain in its bid to refuse a full range of contraceptive services to employees. That ruling also established religious rights for private businesses, a precedent that could have a range of ramifications.

In addition, atheists lost bids to require religious groups to have greater transparency on donors; to remove “In God We Trust” from U.S. currency; and to end a tax break for clergy housing.

A federal appeals court ruled that a cross-shaped relic can remain at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum at Ground Zero.



REFORMIST POPE

Pope Francis hosted a headline-grabbing Synod on the Family at the Vatican that publicly pitted Catholic conservatives against his reformist allies who want to open Communion to divorced and remarried Catholics as well as create more space for LGBT Catholics and their families.

In an unusually public debate, 200 or so bishops talked of acknowledging the “gifts and qualities” of gay Catholics, but later backed down and failed to pass a measure on welcoming them “with respect and delicacy.”

After the synod, Francis demoted Cardinal Raymond Burke, the outspoken American prelate who led the opposition to any changes. Attention now shifts to the synod’s second act, scheduled to be held in October 2015, when final decisions may be made.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Discussions on homosexuality echoed far beyond the Vatican, however. The number of states allowing same-sex marriage doubled, from 17 to 35 in addition to the District of Columbia, after the Supreme Court declined to review a number of pro-marriage rulings from lower courts.

Within major denominations, the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted by wide margins to allow gay clergy, and a number of United Methodist pastors were vindicated after court battles over marrying same-sex couples.

Among evangelicals, the giant relief organization World Vision said it would recognize

the same-sex marriages of employees, but reversed itself within 48 hours after donors revolted.

Southern Baptists held two major conferences on homosexuality, and while they held the line against homosexuality, top ethicist Russell Moore called “ex-gay” therapy harmful and “severely counterproductive.”

NOTABLE NAMES

Among the names that captured the public imagination in 2014:

- Seattle megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll resigned after facing a series of allegations involving plagiarism, bullying and an unhealthy ego.
- Conservative Bible teacher Bill Gothard, an advocate of home-schooling, modest attire and large families, resigned after a series of abuse allegations.
- German Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, whose \$43 million housing renovation earned him the unwelcome nickname “Bishop Bling,” was fired by Pope Francis.
- D.C. pastor Amy Butler became the first woman named senior pastor of New York’s storied Riverside Church, and Libby Lane was appointed the first female bishop in the Church of England.
- Retired Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson, whose election as the first openly gay bishop ruptured the Anglican Communion, announced his divorce from his husband, Mark Andrew.
- Popes John Paul II and John XXIII were proclaimed saints by Pope Francis, and Pope Paul VI was beatified.
- Sudanese Christian Meriam Ibrahim was finally freed after nearly being executed for apostasy, becoming an icon for many Christians.
- Mormon feminist Kate Kelly was excommunicated for advocating for women in the priesthood.



Bishop Robinson



- Rabbi David Saperstein (pictured above) was confirmed as the first non-Christian U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.
- Blase Cupich was installed as the new archbishop of Chicago, Pope Francis' first major appointment to the U.S. hierarchy.
- D.C. Rabbi Barry Freundel was fired after allegedly installing a hidden camera in the mikvah, or ritual bath, used by women at his prominent Georgetown synagogue.

ON EDGE

The Ebola virus in West Africa put the world on edge, and a bloody war between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza, kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria and the slaughter of more than 100 children at a military school in Pakistan added to the mix.

At home, America wrestled with police brutality as grand juries declined to prosecute officers in the deaths of unarmed black men in Ferguson, Mo., and New York City.

From botched prison executions to a stream of desperate migrant children flooding America's southern border, things felt troubled, disorienting, always on the verge of breaking apart.

Religion played a large role in those stories, and in other major headlines from 2014.

MORMONS RESPOND

In a series of online essays, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints tried to carefully debunk popular caricatures of Mormon beliefs, a remarkable exercise in the real-time evolution of a distinctly homegrown American religion.

No, the church said, Mormons don't get their own planet in the afterlife, and no, there's nothing "magical" about sacred temple garments.



Faith Teta with her children outside her home in Dolo Town, which has been hard hit by the Ebola outbreak. Photo by Sheilia Passewe for USA Today.

No, founder Joseph Smith didn't literally translate an ancient Egyptian papyrus scroll as part of LDS scriptures, and yes, Smith practiced plural marriage — as many as 40 wives, the church conceded.

MEET THE SATANISTS

In Oklahoma City, the New York-based Satanic Temple unveiled plans to erect a monument to Satan on the state Capitol grounds (right next to a Ten Commandments monument); in Boston, the group held a controversial "Black Mass" near Harvard despite an outcry from local Catholics.

Filmmaker Roma Downey, however, cut Satan from her biblical epic, *Son of God*, after some viewers pointed out that the actor playing Satan looked too much like President Obama.

PASSAGES

- Kentucky pastor Jamie Coots, a Pentecostal snake-handler and star of the reality show *Snake Salvation*, died of a snakebite at age 42.
- Westboro Baptist Church founder Fred Phelps, infamous for his "God Hates Fags" rallies, died at 84.
- Charismatic evangelist (and friend of Pope Francis) Tony Palmer died in a motorcycle crash.
- Pentecostal preacher Myles Munroe died in a plane crash in the Bahamas at age 60.
- Right-to-die activist Brittany Maynard died at age 29 after a public battle with brain cancer.
- The Alban Institute, which had provided resources and consulting for mainline Protestant churches, closed its doors after 40 years. **BT**

If Supreme Court legalizes gay marriage, how will evangelicals respond?

Ten years after Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian Americans can be wed in 36 states and the District of Columbia. This year, the Supreme Court may put an end to the skirmish by legalizing what progressives call “equality” and conservatives dub a “redefinition” of this cherished social institution.

The court last ruled on gay marriage in 2013 when the justices gutted much of the federal Defense of Marriage Act in *United States v. Windsor* and delivered a massive blow to anti-gay marriage advocates. Since then, the court has acted by not acting — refusing to hear a slew of appeals.

In November, the Cincinnati-based 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld gay marriage bans in four states, which will almost certainly require the high court to decide the issue once and for all.

Conservative Christians have been among the most ardent opponents of gay marriage and rights for decades. How will they respond if the Supreme Court makes gay marriage legal nationwide? The answer depends on which Christian you’re speaking to.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, has become a leading face for the next generation of Christians opposed to gay marriage. He expects the court to take up marriage this year, and is not optimistic about how they’ll rule given the *Windsor* decision.

Even so, he doesn’t think such a ruling will make a whit of difference for most of his fellow evangelicals.

“Evangelicals are, by definition, defined around the Bible and the gospel,” Moore said. “The Scriptures are clear on what marriage is, and clear on the sin of sexual expression outside of the marriage covenant of a man and woman.”

If the court were to “redefine marriage,” Moore said Christians should “be ready to offer an alternative vision of marriage and family” that doesn’t include same-sex unions. Interestingly, his vision would be promoted primarily within the church rather than changing laws through political action.

“We must articulate these truths about marriage in our gospel witness, and we must embody these truths in churches that take marriage seriously,” Moore said. “This means we must start teaching our children a counter-cultural word about what it means to be men and women, about what marriage is, and that must begin not in premarital counseling but in children’s Sunday school.”

He contends that anyone who supports gay marriage is not an evangelical.

Ryan Anderson, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation who co-authored *What is Marriage?* with Princeton scholar Robert P. George, is a powerful voice among young conservatives. Anderson thinks the court is “very likely” to take up same-sex marriage in 2015 given the 6th Circuit decision, and he believes the decision will come down to Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has authored the court’s most significant gay rights decisions.

Anderson (a Roman Catholic, like Kennedy) said the majority of evangelicals will remain opposed to gay marriage regardless of the ruling. But he believes the law can serve a “pedagogical function,” so legalizing gay marriage could “change the public understanding of behavior.”

While Anderson won’t predict how conservative Christians at large would react, he said much depends on the behavior of LGBT advocates.

“We’ll have to see how gracious or vindictive voices within the LGBT community are in their responses,” Anderson said. “Will they become a live-and-let-live movement or a stamp-out-dissent movement? If there’s respect, there’s likely to be less pushback from conservatives.”

Anderson and Moore represent a sizable chunk of the Christian population — a majority of evangelicals and half of practicing Catholics oppose gay marriage — but they are not all of it.

In recent years, many Christians, particularly younger Christians, have changed their minds on the matter. From 2003 to 2013, support for gay marriage among white evangelicals more than doubled, and support among Catholics rose by 22 percentage points.

Brandan Robertson, national spokesman for the group Evangelicals for Marriage Equality, an organization that believes “you can be a devout, Bible-believing evangelical and support the right of same-sex couples to be recognized by the government as married,” also believes the court will take up the issue this year.

“Christians are increasingly saying that they need to stand up for LGBT equality no matter what they believe theologically,” he said, “and they are doing this not because they are American, but because they are followers of Christ.”

Though Robertson is strident in his support of “marriage equality,” he shies away from addressing whether homosexual behavior is moral, or sinful — representing many Christians who draw a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage.

Justin Lee, executive director of the Gay Christian Network and author of *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*, believes a Supreme Court decision in favor of gay marriage is inevitable. While his organization seeks to welcome Christians from a range of perspectives, his comments about marriage mirror Robertson’s.

“There is a distinction between Christian marriage in the eyes of God and civil marriage in the eyes of the state,” Lee said. “My hope is that Christians will continue to see that what the state says marriage is may not line up with what the church or God says.”

Conservatives are changing their minds, albeit slowly, about homosexuality, but are shifting more rapidly on gay marriage.

Even though about half of conservative Christians now believe that gay marriage is inevitable, don’t expect them to slip quietly into the night. Progressives may have the momentum, but conservatives still have a majority. Look to evangelicals to shore up the theology around holy matrimony, and fight to defend their religious liberty rights to oppose same-sex marriage.

“A Supreme Court ruling might be the last word in legal terms,” Moore said, “but it is hardly the last word in cultural or spiritual terms.” **BT**

Seven ways in which religious affiliation has (or hasn't) changed in Congress

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

Republicans took full control of Capitol Hill when the 114th Congress was sworn in on Jan. 6. But even with a political shift, there will be little change in the overall religious makeup of Congress, according to a new analysis from the Pew Research Center.

Here are seven ways the religious makeup of Congress has (and hasn't) changed:

- More than nine-in-10 members of the House and Senate (92 percent) are Christian; about 57 percent are Protestant while 31 percent are Catholic. The new Congress includes at least seven members who are ordained ministers.
- Protestants and Catholics continue to be overrepresented as members of Congress. As of 2013, 49 percent of American adults are Protestant, and 22 percent are Catholic, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis.
- The biggest difference between Congress and other Americans is the number of people who say they are religiously unaffiliated. Just 0.2 percent of Congress say they are religiously unaffiliated, compared with 20 percent of the general public. In fact, the only member of Congress who publicly identifies herself as religiously unaffiliated is sophomore Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.
- Jews continue to have greater representation in Congress (5 percent) than most Americans (2 percent), but there are five



fewer Jewish members in the incoming Congress than there were in 2005-2006. Of the 301 GOP House and Senate members, only one — Rep. Lee Zeldin of New York's 1st District — is a Jew. The 113th Congress also had just one Jewish Republican, former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., who lost his primary race last year.

- Many of the nation's smaller religious groups are more proportionally reflective of the American population. Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus combined represent about 2 percent of Americans and 1 percent of Congress.
- Two-thirds of the Republicans in the incoming Congress (67 percent) are Protestant, about a quarter are Catholic (27 percent) and 5 percent are Mormon.
- Of the 234 Democrats in the 114th Congress, 44 percent are Protestant, 35 percent are Catholic, 12 percent are Jewish, one percent are Mormon, two are Buddhist, two are Muslim, one is Hindu and one does not identify with a particular religion. **BT**

Two Israeli burial societies agree not to segregate men, women at funerals

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

JERUSALEM — Two Jewish burial societies have agreed to not separate women from men during funerals unless the family of the deceased explicitly requests gender separation.

The agreement, reached under the auspices of the Jerusalem District Court, followed a petition filed against the burial societies, known as Chevra Kadisha in Hebrew, in the cities of Jerusalem and Rehovot.

The Human Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Law and the Jerusalem-based Israel Religious Action Center filed the petitions.

Until now, the burial societies in Israel have ignored 2013 directives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the attorney general banning gender segregation in cemeteries.

The burial societies, composed of ultra-Orthodox Jews whose strict interpretations of Jewish law prohibit most interactions between unrelated men and women, said they were following the precepts laid down by their rabbis.

Under the agreement, electronic signs with the words "Men" and "Women" will be brought to the nation's cemeteries but will be turned off unless a family requests a separation.

Orly Erez-Likhovski, head of the Religious Action Center's legal department, said the agreement "is part of a larger effort to ban the segregation or exclusion of women in public places, such as public buses and medical clinics." **BT**

Church of England's first woman bishop calls historic role 'unexpected ... exciting'

By Trevor Grundy
Religion News Service

CANTERBURY, England — The Church of England announced late last year that Libby Lane, a parish priest from Hale, a small village outside Manchester, would become its first woman bishop, ending centuries of all-male leadership in this country's established church.

The announcement from Downing Street, the prime minister's official residence in London, came just a month after changes to canon law

making it possible for women to assume the role of suffragan and diocesan bishops.

Lane, 48, a mother of two and the wife of an Anglican vicar, was consecrated as the eighth bishop of Stockport, in the Diocese of Chester, at a ceremony at York Cathedral on Jan. 26. Her appointment is as a suffragan bishop — a bishop subordinate to a metropolitan or diocesan bishop.

On her surprise appointment, she said: "This is unexpected and very exciting. I'm honored and thankful to be called to serve as

the next bishop of Stockport and not a little daunted to be entrusted with such a ministry."

Congratulations were tweeted by Prime Minister David Cameron, who described the church's decision as "an historic appointment and an important step forward for the Church towards greater equality in its senior positions."

Lane was one of the first women priests to be ordained, in 1992. Only bishops in charge of dioceses — there are 41 in England — sit in the House of Lords, Parliament's Upper Chamber. **BT**

‘Can Jews and Muslims get along?’

60 imams and rabbis gathered in Washington tackled the hard question

Frustrated by dangerously high tensions between Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land, 60 imams and rabbis gathered last November to hatch concrete plans to bridge the gulf between their communities.

The “2014 Summit of Washington Area Imams and Rabbis,” its organizers hope, will be the first of many such gatherings of Jewish and Muslim clergy in cities across the U.S.

After prayers and a kosher-halal lunch at a Washington synagogue, the clergy resolved to limit the feel-good dialogue and spent the afternoon trading ideas both tried and novel.

Among them: joint projects to feed the homeless, basketball games between Muslim and Jewish teens, Judaism 101 courses for Muslims and Islam 101 for Jews.

“Host a Seder in a mosque and hold an iftar dinner at a synagogue,” suggested Rizwan Jaka, who chairs the board at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society in Northern Virginia.

They threw out tough questions: “Do you invite people in your community who

are particularly closed-minded to participate in interfaith dialogue?” asked Dan Spiro, co-founder of the Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society. “Something to think about.”

And when Jews and Muslims meet, several imams and rabbis advised, do not sidestep the focal point of their mutual pain: the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Rage over the ability of both faiths to worship at Temple Mount — a site holy to Muslims and Jews — has heightened tensions with the violence culminating last fall in a Palestinian attack on Jews praying in a Jerusalem synagogue that killed four worshippers and a Druze police officer.

“Discuss things from a spiritual narrative as opposed to a political narrative,” suggested Imam Sultan Abdullah of the New Africa Islamic Community Center in Washington, D.C.

Along spiritual lines, both Jews and Muslims believe they are descended from the sons of Abraham — Jews from Isaac and Muslims from Ishmael — a point both rabbis

and imams repeated.

In practice, they noted, similarities between the faiths abound. Both face toward the Middle East at prayer, for example, and share similar dietary laws.

“In my view we are the closest two religions in the world,” said Rabbi Gerry Serotta, executive director of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, who sees healing between Muslims and Jews as a blessing that will resonate.

“There is something about a Jewish-Muslim rapprochement that is very important for the rest of the world,” Serotta said. “The perception is that Jews and Muslims are irreconcilable, and when people see that we’re not, it gives them hope.”

The event was sponsored by the Greater Washington Muslim-Jewish Forum, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society and Washington Hebrew Congregation, the synagogue where the meeting was held. **BT**

Cardinal Burke: ‘Feminized’ church to blame for priest shortage

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

Cardinal Raymond Burke, a senior American churchman in Rome who has been one of the most outspoken critics of Pope Francis’ push for reform, is roiling the waters yet again, this time arguing that the Catholic Church has become too “feminized.”

Burke, who was demoted from the Vatican’s highest court to a ceremonial philanthropic post, also pointed to the introduction of altar girls for why fewer men are joining the priesthood.

“Young boys don’t want to do things with girls. It’s just natural,” Burke said in an interview published Jan. 5. “I think that this has contributed to a loss of priestly vocations.”

“It requires a certain manly discipline to serve as an altar boy in service at the side of (a) priest, and most priests have their first deep experiences of the liturgy as altar boys,” the former archbishop of St. Louis told Matthew James Christoff, who heads a Catholic men’s ministry called the New Evangelization Project.

“If we are not training young men as altar boys, giving them an experience of serving God in the liturgy, we should not be surprised that vocations have fallen dramatically,” Burke said.

Burke, 66, spoke to Christoff during a visit to La Crosse, Wis., where Burke served as bishop in the 1990s before being named archbishop of St. Louis. In 2008, then-Pope Benedict XVI called Burke to the Vatican to head the church’s top court and made him a cardinal.

That prestigious position lent weight to his increasingly sharp criticisms of Francis, who succeeded Benedict in March 2013.

In an unusual move, Francis effectively demoted Burke in November, shifting him from his job in the Roman Curia to a largely ceremonial post as patron of the Order of Malta, a global Catholic charitable organization based in Rome.

Burke said he recalled “young men telling me that they were, in a certain way, frightened by marriage because of the radicalizing and self-focused attitudes of women that were

emerging at that time. These young men were concerned that entering a marriage would simply not work because of a constant and insistent demanding of rights for women.”

He said that “the radical feminist movement strongly influenced the Church” as well.

The focus on women’s issues, he said, plus “a complete collapse” of teaching the faith and “rampant liturgical experimentation,” led the church to become “very feminized.” That turned off men who “respond to rigor and precision and excellence,” Burke said.

“Apart from the priest, the sanctuary has become full of women,” he said. “The activities in the parish and even the liturgy have been influenced by women and have become so feminine in many places that men do not want to get involved.”

Burke, a liturgical traditionalist as well as a doctrinal conservative who is renowned for wearing elaborate silk and lace vestments while celebrating Mass, also said that “men need to dress and act like men in a way that is respectful to themselves, to women and to children.” **BT**

5

religious Guinness World Records smashed in 2014, and five to shoot for in 2015

Some churches conduct pageants. Some temples host dinners. And others spend weeks or months meticulously planning how to break a Guinness World Record.

Sure, 2014 was the year that set a record for “Most sticky notes on the body in five minutes.” But several faith-based Guinness World Records were set over the course of the year as well.

Here are five that were smashed in 2014:

1. Most living figures in a Nativity scene: More than 1,000 angels, shepherds and worshippers — along with the requisite camel, donkey, sheep and tiny baby Jesus — joined together in Provo, Utah, to set a record for the most living figures in a Nativity scene. The event’s 1,039 participants breaks the previous record of 898, set in the United Kingdom in 2013.

2. Largest gospel choir: Not one, but two, Guinness World Records were set when the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (Church of Christ) hosted its

centennial celebration on July 27, 2014, in the Philippines: largest gospel choir and largest mixed-use indoor theater. It took 4,745 participants singing hymns together in tidy, white sections in a 55,000-seat stadium to break the record once set in February 2014 in New Jersey by the current and former athletes who make up the NFL Players Choir.

3. Most people reading aloud simultaneously (single location):

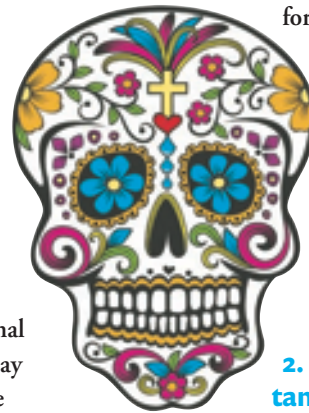
You would need to gather nearly 47,000 to break the record for most people reading aloud simultaneously (single location), set at the Vadakkunnathan Temple in Thrissur, India, last February and organized by the Art of the Living Foundation. Participants recited, in unison, a Hindu devotional poem called “Jnanappana” by the famous Lord Krishna devotee Poonthanam.

4. Largest Day of the Dead offering: Traditional celebrations for Mexico’s Day of the Dead holiday involve constructing altars at gravesides to honor loved ones who have died. Last October,

an altar unveiled at the *Fiesta Cala de Veras* in Mexico City measured 558 meters square, creating the first Guinness World Record for largest Day of the Dead offering.

5. Largest potluck party: Aunt Helen’s annual covered-dish dinner has nothing on Chandler Christian Church’s record-setting potluck party, held on April 6, 2014. Approximately 1,275 people attended the event at the Arizona church, breaking the previous record of 860.

Sad that your church or temple didn’t gain fame through a Guinness World Record last year? Fear not, there are plenty of records ready for the breaking in 2015. Try these on for size:



1. Largest wearable turban: Not for the faint of heart (or necks): To beat this record, your turban will need to be longer than 400 meters when unraveled and weigh more than 77 pounds.

2. Most dreidels spinning simultaneously: You’ve got most of a year to practice for this Hanukkah-inspired record, set in December 2011 as 734 dreidels were spun simultaneously for at least 10 seconds.

3. Largest display of Taoist statues: Here’s one for the collectors among us: If you can gather more than 4,643 Taoist statues in one place, you’ll break the record set by the Beigang Chao Tien Temple in Taiwan in September 2013.

4. Longest marathon church organ playing: Finger calisthenics are in order to top the record set by organist Jacqueline Sadler, who played hymns for 40 hours and 36 minutes straight in June 2011 at the Eastminster United Church in Toronto.

5. Largest gathering of people dressed as nuns: A charity fundraiser was the impetus behind Ireland’s “Nunday” in Listowel that set a record of 1,436 people dressed as nuns in a single gathering, in June 2012. It’s unclear whether this can become an, uh, annual habit. **BT**



By Bill Coates



Malcom Tolbert

Mentor and model

A tribute to Malcolm Tolbert

When I was growing up in South Carolina, Malcolm Tolbert was serving as a missionary in Brazil and later as a professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. At the time I was unaware of him or anything he was doing.

In fact, I would come to know him as his student only for one year, 1979, my final year of Master of Divinity studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Tolbert had left earlier that year from the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Gainesville, Ga., because he was homesick to return to teaching.

Ironically, his homesickness for teaching would become a major steppingstone for my life as a pastor.

First, he would open up the book of Romans for me in a way that would prove transformative and lasting. I remember well his excitement as he entered class each day to talk about this New Testament letter that had turned Martin Luther's world upside down and had been the catalyst for a number of great movements in Christian history.

Second, he would become perhaps the greatest force in the evolution of my understanding of grace. Grace was his theme. Grace was how he lived. And grace was his mantra.

How many times have I heard him say, "In this life we're all going to err either on the side of law or the side of grace. Since we're going to err

anyway, always go with grace."

Malcolm Tolbert put the final nail in the coffin to bury the legalism I had grown up in. For that alone I will be forever grateful.

Third, he revolutionized the meaning of "orthodoxy." Again, he said repeatedly, "If you want to be orthodox, be loving."

What's more, that's how he lived. His words and actions matched perfectly. He thus became not only one of the great mentors of my life, but also one of the great models.

Almost 20 years after I had sat in his classroom and learned from his Christ-like spirit, he would, unknown to me, become the reason for my leaving South Carolina to come to the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Gainesville, Ga.

Not only would I live all these years under the spell of his teaching and influence, but I would also pick up his work at the only church where he had ever served as pastor. In many ways I consider my 17 years here as something of an extension of his three years here.

The people who had loved him so much would extend the same to me. The ministry of caring, which he had begun, would continue to be at the heart of the ministry that I have come

to love so dearly.

His emphasis on the priorities of grace and love would still be significantly present in this congregation that he had served so briefly.

Dr. Tolbert always leaned forward. He literally had a slight lean as he would teach in the classroom or walk across the campus. And he always leaned forward in his thinking characterized by a progressive theology that prized moving beyond anything associated with fundamentalism.

And his work in Gainesville from 1976-1979 would lean all the way into 1998 (and beyond) when I would have the privilege of being brought into this community to take up some of his work — and largely because of his influence with the pastor-search committee.

The last time I saw him in person was a few years ago when I called on him in Baton Rouge and took him to dinner. He was still leaning forward and looking forward; in fact, he was writing another book, having already finished *Shaping the Church* sometime before.

Most lives are forever affected by a handful of key figures. I shall always thank God that Malcolm Tolbert towers among those figures in my life and experiences and pastorates. **BT**

—Bill Coates is pastor of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga. Malcom Tolbert died on Thanksgiving 2014 at age 90.



'His words and actions matched perfectly. He thus became not only one of the great mentors of my life, but also one of the great models.'

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March lessons in this issue

Heavy Days

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Self-Denial
Mark 8:31-38

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Hard Praying
Mark 14:32-42



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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 8:31-38

March 1, 2015

Self-Denial

Have you noticed the popularity of “extreme sports”? It’s not enough to go biking: Dare-devils ride up and down the side of steep mountains with no trails. It’s not enough to parachute from a high mountaintop: “Birdmen” in suits with wings soar along cliff faces for hundreds of yards before deploying their parachutes.

The Discovery Channel once devoted an entire program to one man’s quest to ride his bicycle off of the world’s tallest waterfall and then parachute to the bottom. He never felt more alive than when doing something that scared him to death, he said.

We might be inclined to think such folks are crazy. But they tend to keep their bodies in good shape, their edgy activity keeps their daily stress levels low, and they have more of those good-feeling and health-producing endorphins flowing in one weekend than most of us will see in a year.

If we criticize such risk-takers from the depths of our recliners while binge-watching TV and loading up on junk food, we have to ask who’s really taking the biggest risk.

What does this have to do with following Jesus? Could there be too many believers reposing with an armchair attitude while Jesus calls us to risky discipleship that goes well beyond the comfortable inspiration of Sunday morning worship? Jesus has always looked for “extreme disciples.”

Risky faith (vv. 31-34)

The first part of Jesus’ ministry – the part described in Mark 1:1-8:30 – was

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



Mark 8:34 –

“He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

quite exciting, but also fairly safe. He spent most of that time wandering the hills and valleys of Galilee, visiting villages and healing people and teaching his disciples a new way of living. With the story related in today’s text, though, Jesus turns away from safety and toward extremity: He points his feet toward Jerusalem and turns his mind toward suffering and sacrifice that his disciples cannot begin to comprehend. ↓

That theme makes today’s scripture passage a most appropriate text for the early days of the Lenten season, as we, like Jesus, turn our hearts toward Holy Week.

Imagine the disciples’ response when Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (v. 31).

Can you hear them? “Suffering and dying? What? That isn’t what a messiah does! Don’t you think you’re being a little extreme?”


Peter almost certainly spoke for

the other disciples when he took Jesus to task for such a crazy plan. So, Jesus may have been looking at all the disciples when he returned the rebuke, saying: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (v. 33). ↓

Jesus wasn’t telling his disciples to “Get out of here” or “Get lost,” but to “Get back where you belong – *behind me, following me.*” Jesus dared to use the name “Satan” for the simple reason that Peter was tempting him to choose human desires over God’s way, even as Satan reportedly had done (Mark 1:12-13).

There is something significant about that: Jesus is saying, in effect, that human thought without divine influence will always run the danger of becoming evil. We live in the world, but must remember that we are citizens of God’s kingdom.

Peter’s problem, in part, is that he knew enough to put two and two together. He knew that if the master must suffer and die, then the disciples must follow him. Jesus confirmed that conclusion when he turned to all

who were present – disciples and “the crowd” who followed them – and said: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (v. 34). 

Yikes ... Preachers of the prosperity gospel claim that following Jesus will solve our problems and make us successful, but that’s not the gospel Jesus taught. Jesus wanted his followers to understand that the Messiah’s way would not be the way of power as the world knows it, but the way of service; it would not be the way of self-gratification, but of self-denial.

That is not the way most of us would choose. We prefer to play it safe, to show up at church every now and then, and to avoid any risky business.

Risky living (vv. 35-36)

Jesus knew our penchant for wanting to take the safe way. That’s why he addressed that idea head on, and with no comfort in his words: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (v. 35).

Jesus calls us to deny our selfishness and to follow in the way of the cross, even if it leads to death. *That’s extreme.* That’s also the way it is. Bearing the cross for Jesus is not just dealing with the everyday difficulties that come to everyone. Bearing the cross is about accepting challenges and risks and dangers that come precisely because we choose to take Jesus seriously.

If we think about it, we come to realize that the question isn’t about dying so much as it is about *living* with the right attitude about dying. Taking up the cross means not only to be willing to die, but also willing to live as Jesus called us to live. Loving others as Jesus loved us may call for sacrifice, but that’s what it means to live in the light of the cross. Losing one’s life in this context is surrendering control of our life to Christ.

How we live makes a difference, both to us and to others. Taking the easy


way may keep us alive without really experiencing the life Jesus wants us to know.

The Greek word for “life” in this text (*psuchē*) is the root of our word “psychology.” Jesus was talking not only about our physical life, but also about our inner being – about our true self. In this text from Mark, to *lose one’s life* is not so much about physical death, for sooner or later everyone dies. Rather, it is to miss out on the true life that God wants for us – a life that can only be known through the risky relationship of following Jesus in the way of the cross.

Risky dying (vv. 36-38)

We can work all our lives to gain happiness and security – that is, to “save our lives” – then get to the end of the road and realize we have missed out on what God intends our earthly life to be. Not only that, but the end of the road will be the end of the road.

When we reach that point, we would give every dime in every mutual fund we have for one more chance, but it will be too late. Jesus concluded this frank lesson on discipleship with these words:

“For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (vv. 36-38). 


Those words sound hard. They also sound true. If we are too ashamed to follow Jesus now, how can we expect anything other than for him to be ashamed to claim us later? The text demands that we ask whether we are more inclined to deny self or to deny Christ.

This is not an easy question to answer. We may find it hard even to distinguish between wants and needs, much less to consider giving up either one. Whether it’s a bigger TV or a place at the beach or more days of vacation or a nicer house or a newer car, we have a way of turning our “wants” into “needs.”

There’s an old story about a family who moved into a new house that had been built next door to the humble home of a Quaker family. The simplicity-minded Quakers watched in amazement as two large truckloads of furnishings, appliances, toys, and tools were unloaded and packed into the house and a workshop behind it. After all had been unloaded, the Quaker patriarch walked over to greet the new family. “We welcome thee neighbors,” he said. “And if thee ever need anything, come over to see me, and I will teach thee how to get along without it.” I suspect that many of us could use a teacher like that.

The more we try to “save our life” by following this world’s idea of what life is about, the more we will lose track of what real life is all about. But the more we learn to surrender self-will to God’s will, the more we learn to say “no” to self and “yes” to Jesus, the more we learn to give ourselves in loving service to others, the more we will come to appreciate the true glory and meaning of the abundant and eternal life that God has in store for us.

Truly following Jesus is risky business, but no risk we take for God will separate us from the love of God or the hope of God’s eternity. The biggest risk we can take is that of playing it safe. It was Jesus who said that those who try to save their lives will lose them, while those who surrender themselves to Christ will find their lives not only restored, but also amplified with abundance.

It’s not easy to choose the risky way of the cross, but that is the way of Jesus. The question before us, then, is not whether we *can* do it, but whether we *will*.  **BT**

Bible Study

John 2:13-22

with Tony W. Cartledge

March 8, 2015

Righteous Anger

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild – that’s the way we often think of him: a baby in a manger, a precocious 12-year-old, a smiling teacher who plays with children when he’s not healing the sick or teaching people about God.

The mental image of Jesus creating havoc and chasing people with a whip leaves us feeling downright uncomfortable. Have you ever seen a stained glass window depicting Jesus in adventure-hero mode, going after bad guys with a frown on his face and a flail in his fist?

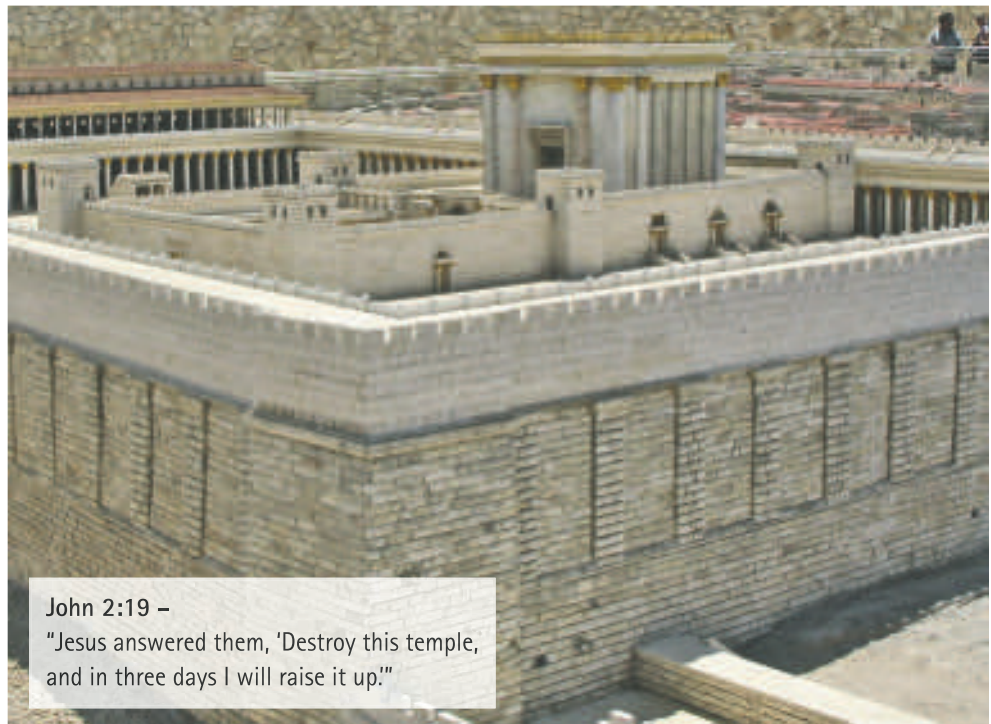
Probably not, but that’s the picture John paints in today’s text. 📌 Gentle Jesus had a temper, and was not afraid to use it.

A shocking action (vv. 13-17)

John is not the only Gospel writer to speak of what we often call “the cleansing of the temple,” but his version of the story is quite different from that of the Synoptic Gospels. 📌 📌

In Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, and Luke 19:45-46, the event occurs near the end of Jesus’ ministry, immediately following the “triumphal entry,” Jesus’ Palm Sunday ride into the city on the back of a donkey. In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, the event is followed by further exhibitions of Jesus’ power, leading the scribes and Pharisees to question by what authority Jesus dared to take such actions.

In contrast, John’s Gospel places the event near the very beginning of Jesus’ active work, immediately after



Jesus called four disciples (Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, 1:35-51) and performed the first miracle recorded by John (the turning of water into wine at a wedding in Cana, 2:1-12).

The story in John, as in the other Gospels, is followed by a question about Jesus’ authority, but it is a different account in which the Jews asked what “sign” Jesus could cite to justify his actions.

Some readers have accounted for the differences by proposing that Jesus roused the temple merchants on two different occasions. That is possible, but it is more likely that the event occurred just once, during the final week of Jesus’ ministry, as described in the other three Gospels. The Fourth Evangelist apparently transposed the shocking act to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in order to set the stage for Jesus’ unfolding work and help readers understand its significance. 📌

The story begins by saying that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Passover, an annual springtime celebration commemorating Israel’s deliverance

from Egypt. That the author calls it “the Passover of the Jews” suggests that the church no longer celebrated Passover when these words were written.

Observant Jews were expected to celebrate Passover in the Jerusalem temple when they could, and the Fourth Gospel speaks as if Jesus went up to Jerusalem at least three times for the Passover (2:13, 6:4, 11:55ff), possibly four if “the festival of the Jews” in 5:1 was also a Passover observance.

When Jesus entered the temple complex, according to the story, he found a bustling marketplace where moneychangers and livestock merchants were doing a booming business (v. 14). 📌 Jews were required to pay a half-shekel temple tax each year (Exod. 30:11-16), but doing so was not straightforward. The Romans forbade the Jews from minting their own coins, while the Jews refused to accept Roman coins for the temple tax, considering the coins’ image of the emperor a violation of the commandment against graven images.

To get around the problem, temple authorities required that taxes be paid

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in an alternate currency, such as coins minted in the nearby kingdom of Tyre. ⚡ Most Jews would not have easy access to Tyrian coins, however. Currency exchanges allowing worshipers to exchange their Roman coins for acceptable ones could have been set up anywhere in the city, but temple officials had allowed vendors to locate their booths inside the temple complex. This would have allowed temple officials to exercise control over exchange rates and presumably to share in the profits.

Similarly, worshipers were expected to offer sacrifices during Passover, but the law made provision for people who traveled long distances to bring money rather than driving their livestock, and to purchase the needed animals in Jerusalem. Again, while one might have expected livestock sales to be on the outskirts of the city, temple officials had turned the law's requirement to their own profit, allowing vendors to set up shop within the temple itself.

Imagine what the scene would have been like: animals ranging in size from pigeons to lambs, goats, and full-grown bulls would have been penned in stalls, bringing a cacophony of noise, smells, urine and excrement – sharply diminishing any sort of worshipful atmosphere in the temple courts.

Jesus reacted with such anger, according to John, that he fashioned a whip out of cords and used it to chase both traders and animals from the temple compound after overturning their tables and scattering coins all about (v. 15).

This was not a gentle Jesus. The word translated as “whip” is *phragelion*, a term that could describe a whip made from one or multiple strands, either with or without bits of metal tied to the ends to increase their force. Jesus would have been more interested in expediency than in causing bodily damage, so it's likely that he would have simply tied several small ropes together and used the lash to drive people and animals out of the sacred grounds. ⚡

The version of the story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke says that Jesus quoted

Isa. 56:7 (“my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”) and Jer. 7:11 (“Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your sight?”). John does not have Jesus quoting scripture directly, but saying “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!” (v. 16).

Note Jesus' brashness in referring to the temple complex as “my Father's house,” which is typical in the Fourth Gospel. The question about turning the temple into a market may be a reference to Zech. 14:21, where Zechariah predicted a coming age in which “there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD on that day.”

If this is correct, then Jesus would not have been expressing offense at the desecration of commerce and cow pat-ties in the temple alone, but announcing that his arrival had inaugurated the last days, when merchants in the temple would no longer be tolerated.

Expelling the merchants and their wares from the temple was a prelude to the more serious work of Jesus' suffering and death, in which a heavy whip and worse would be used against him. The eschatological act of Christ's death would bring to an end the need for the temple as a place of sacrifice.

Later, John says, the disciples remembered a quotation from Psalm 69:9: “It is zeal for your house that has consumed me” (v. 17). That psalm was understood as a reference to a coming righteous sufferer, and is quoted at other places in the New Testament in relation to Jesus' death.

A preposterous prediction (vv. 18-22)

Jesus' wrathful display left the Jewish authorities with a mess on the premises and mud on their faces, not to mention the prospect of reduced income. With

some measure of displeasure, no doubt, they asked Jesus “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” (v. 18).

The notion of signs is a central element in John's Gospel, where miracles are often noted as “signs” designed to indicate Jesus' power and authority, culminating with his crucifixion and resurrection as a final sign (see the online “Hardest Question” for more on this).

Jesus' response would have been thoroughly confusing to his inquisitors: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (v. 19). The officials took the words at face value, scoffing at the notion that a massive temple still in its 46th year of renovation could be reassembled in three days (v. 20). ⚡

Jesus' speech and the author's recording of it seem designed to work on two levels. To his interrogators, Jesus' words seemed like so much foolishness, a preposterous claim that avoided the challenge to show them a sign. To later readers, however, the relation between Jesus' words and his later death and resurrection would have been obvious: He was not speaking of the physical temple in which the Jews sought God's presence, but of the sacred dimension of his human body, in which the true glory of God had been revealed (v. 21). Though destroyed, it would be raised again on the third day.

In the moment, Jesus' disciples were just as confused as the temple officials. Only after the resurrection, John says, did they remember Jesus' comments about the temple and connect his death and resurrection with “the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (v. 22).

What kind of connections can we make with this text? Have we ever confused church attendance with personal gain or secular business as usual? Do we preserve a sacred space and time for God, or think of worship only in terms of what we get out of it?

If Jesus were to walk into our church today, would he need to clean house? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

John 3:14-21

March 15, 2015

Light Living

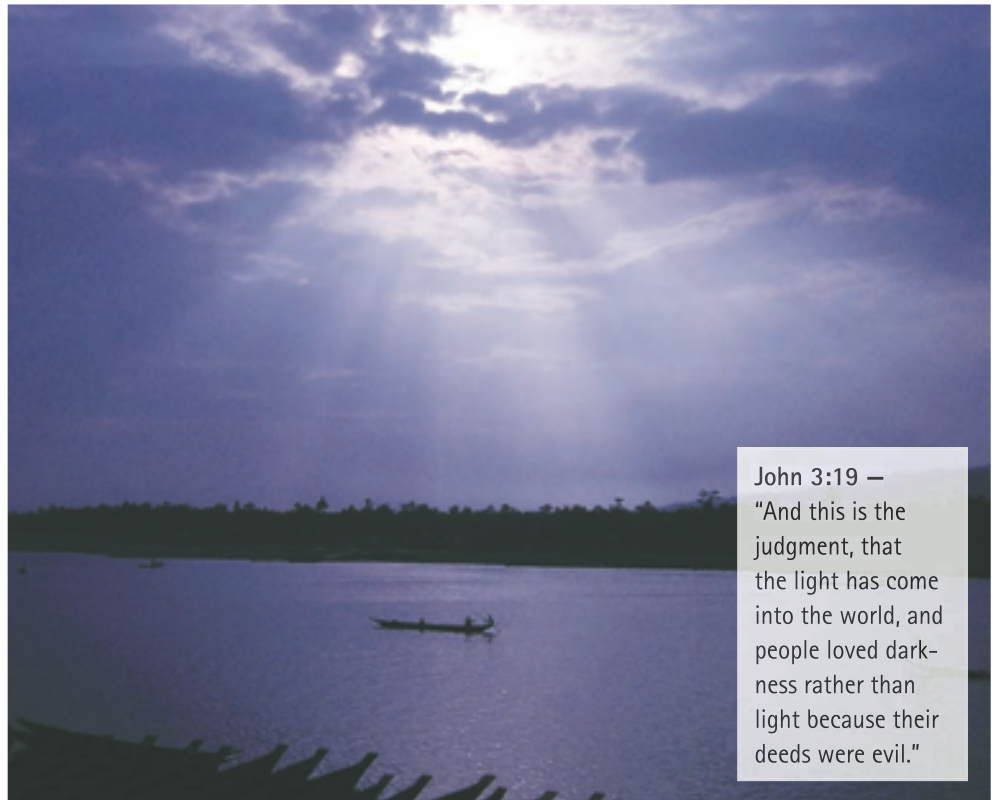
If both children and cable TV have been in your house during the past 20 years, you're probably familiar with a channel called "Nickelodeon." The daytime lineup features children's programming, silly game shows, and cartoons. Nickelodeon's evening lineup, called "Nick at Nite," targets older children with reruns of shows such as "Full House" and "Friends."

Today's text takes us to the original "Nick at Nite," a story that has been rerun so many times that we are in danger of reading it without hearing it. Sometimes, with particularly familiar texts, it's helpful to look at the story from a different angle. To that end, let's imagine how the story of Nicodemus' late night visit to Jesus might have gone during our own day and time. Any scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are paraphrased.

Questions and answers (vv. 1-8)

Nick was one of those religious sorts who lived in a starched white shirt and who carried a Bible everywhere he went. He was a 98th degree Pharisee who served as Worshipful Master in the Jerusalem chapter of the Loyal Order of the Solomonic Temple. That's the only way he knew how to be – but he wasn't sure he wanted to stay that way.

Maybe it was the tight collar that was getting to him. Maybe he had found a question he couldn't answer. Maybe it was just Jesus. We don't know. *Something* moved him to sneak away from his brothers down at the lodge and



John 3:19 –
"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

to go in search of the young teacher who had all Jerusalem in a buzz.

It took a while to find Jesus, but Nick finally spotted him on the outskirts of town. Jesus was sitting alone on the tailgate of an old Toyota pickup that he had parked on a hill so he could watch soccer practice in the park below. Once practice was over, Jesus had stayed there to watch the stars come out. He was dressed in jeans with a nondescript sweatshirt and an old pair of black high-top Converse All-Stars. His long dark hair was tucked behind his ears, but the breeze still toyed with a few strands that were determined to hang over his face.

Nick parked his Cadillac on the opposite side of the hill and walked back, wearing an overcoat with the collar turned up, careful of his reputation. He was a leader, after all, but like others in his group, he had been amazed by the signs and wonders that Jesus was doing – changing water into wine, healing cripples and the blind, overturning the merchants' kiosks at the

temple.

Nick approached Jesus quietly and began with a question thinly disguised as flattery. "Teacher," he said, "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" (v. 2). Jesus had probably heard that from lots of people who were impressed by his works but unwilling to hear his words.

So, Jesus decided to cut to the chase and see if Nick could look past the miracles and deal with the truth. With eyes that could wilt even the starch in Nick's collar, Jesus said "Listen: it's true that I have come from God, but nobody will so much as see God's kingdom unless they are born from above" (v. 3).

Now, Nick was listening very carefully, and he heard what Jesus said, but he was confused because Jesus used a word that can mean either "from above" or "again." Nick understood him to say "born again," and that didn't

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fit with his experience or with the sex education classes he'd taken in high school. Jesus' spiritual meaning flew right over his head, so he asked: "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can a person go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" (v. 4).

Jesus sighed, got up from the tailgate, and said: "Listen, and I will spell it out for you. This is the truth: no one can enter God's kingdom without being born *of water and Spirit*. What happens when a child is born? The mother's water breaks, and the baby follows. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit, so don't be so surprised when I say 'You must be born from above'" (vv. 5-7).

Nick nodded his head and seemed just on the verge of understanding when Jesus added, "I've got just one more thing to say about that: the wind blows where it will" (v. 8). And that took all the wind out of Nick's sails. One minute they were talking about being born of the flesh and born of the Spirit, then out of the blue, Jesus brings up the wind. What has that got to do with it?

Then, perhaps, Nick realized that Jesus was again playing with words that can have double meanings. 📌 So, we can imagine Nick asking, "Wait: are you talking about 'wind' in a physical sense, or 'spirit' in the theological sense?"

And Jesus said, "Yes: you don't control the wind, and you don't control the Spirit. But you can't be born from above without it" (v. 8).

Now it was Nick's turn to jump up from the truck. "*How can these things be?*" he asked. If he had thought about it, Nick would have known that the prophets had spoken of the Spirit as a harbinger of new life. He may even have remembered how Spirit and water were sometimes mentioned together in prophecy, but apparently he did not make the connections.

In frustration, Jesus said "Jeez – you're a teacher of Israel, and you still don't understand these things?" (v. 10).

Answers and questions (vv. 11-17)

Nicodemus doesn't say another word in this story, but Jesus does. We can imagine him pacing back and forth as he spoke. "Nick, if you can't believe what I tell you about earthly things, how can you expect to believe what I tell you about heaven?" (vv. 11-12).

Jesus then reminded his new friend of the story from Numbers 21 in which the wandering Israelites, after a period of rebellion and complaining, were afflicted with a plague of poisonous snakes. Many people felt the fiery bite of the serpents, and many of them died. Moses prayed for God to remove the snakes, but God did not, providing a way of healing instead. God instructed Moses to fashion a serpent out of bronze and lift it up on a pole, promising that those who came and looked upon it would live.

"So God's own Son will be hung up for everyone to see," Jesus said, "and those who go beyond seeing and believe in him will have new life, life in God's kingdom, everlasting life" (vv. 13-15).

Nick's face must have had confusion written all over it as Jesus went on. "Believe this: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. I did not come to this world to condemn the world, but to save it" (vv. 16-17).

Jesus came to save. Nick was still puzzled because eternal salvation hadn't been on his radar. He had come to Jesus as a teacher, wanting to learn how to know God as Jesus did. Nick wanted Jesus to *show* him the way. He never expected Jesus to *be* the way.

How Can I Be Saved?

Everyone wants salvation. We don't want to waste our one and only life. But we have widely different ideas about what it means to make the most of life.

Many of us are like Nick, finding it difficult to see beyond the physical.

Some of us put our faith in physical fitness, devoting endless hours to sculpting a better body or running a faster half-marathon. The gospel of fitness is good for our bodies indeed, but any gospel that applies to our physical lives alone is not good enough.

Others follow the easier and more appealing gospel of materialism. Our culture would lead us to believe that focusing on wealth and things and pleasure is what life should be about. But this physical life is not our only life. There is something that goes beyond. 📌

It is hard for us, in our enlightened world, to comprehend the Spirit's work. Though we may not understand it, we know that our lives are not complete without it. We cannot control God's Spirit any more than we can direct the wind, but we can open the windows of our hearts to receive it. 📌

"No one comes into the kingdom unless they are born from above," Jesus said. Those who come into the kingdom are born of the Spirit, and "the wind (Spirit) blows where it will." We had no part in engineering our conception or bringing about our birth. There is a sense in which we don't do a thing to be born from above except to turn loose of all those things we do in search of physical or emotional or financial salvation, turn our hearts toward Jesus to allow the wind of the Spirit to lift us on gentle arms and carry us to the kingdom.

In this Lenten season, in this windy March, let us remember that every time we feel the wind against our faces, there is a God who loved us enough to send the beloved Son into the world so that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

Our physical life has its roots in the dust, and it returns to the dust, but there is also a spiritual element at the heart of our being. The image of God lives in us, and when the wind of the Spirit blows, that part of us resonates like wind chimes in a gentle breeze, calling us to believe, calling us to live, and not perish. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

John 12:20-33

March 22, 2015

Dead Wheat

As Easter approaches, our thoughts often turn to the happy events of Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey while adoring followers paved the path with their cloaks.

The disciples were so enthused by the popularity of their movement that they hardly noticed how Jesus was weeping over the failure of the people to understand what his mission was all about.

Encouraging signs (vv. 20-22)

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem stirred all sorts of excitement, and shortly after they entered the city, a group of Greek people who worshipped the God of Israel let it be known that they wanted to see Jesus and learn more about him. They told this to Philip, whose name is Greek and who came from the Hellenistic city of Bethsaida. Philip took the message to Andrew, who was famous for introducing people to the teacher, and together they approached Jesus with the good news.

Greeks were not easily impressed, and the disciples saw their interest as an exciting turn of events. The Jesus movement was growing in popularity! They could use a broader base of support. Opposition to Jesus was growing rapidly among the Jewish leaders, and there were dark rumors that they intended to do him harm.

Maybe this was just what they needed: By going to the Greeks, Jesus could avoid the dangers of Jerusalem



John 20:24 –
“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

and widen his sphere of influence at the same time. Philip and Andrew would certainly have been smiling when they approached Jesus to arrange a meeting with the Greeks.

Surprising words (vv. 23-26)

Like the disciples, we would have expected a happy response from Jesus. But did the Lord say “Well done, good and faithful servants”? Did he say “Thanks, boys. I can’t wait to meet them!”?

He did not. According to John, Jesus said: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

It’s not hard to imagine the puzzled expression on the disciples’ faces, or the questions they may have mumbled to each other: “What’s up with that? We talk about growth, and he talks about death ... We talk about opening up to the world, and he talks about turning away ... We talk about live prospects,

and he talks about dead wheat.”

Jesus’ response may seem strange to us, too. Can we understand this interchange any better than his disciples?

The surface meaning of what Jesus said is fairly obvious. To have more wheat for tomorrow, you have to sacrifice some of the wheat you have today. This was a familiar reality in an early agrarian society where people couldn’t just go down to the farm supply store to buy the latest hybrid strain of wheat for their planting needs.

Instead, when harvesting the crop, smart farmers would keep back part of it to use as seed for the next planting. If possible, they would also keep back a reserve supply in case that crop failed, or the next one.

Every planting was a risk. Birds might eat some of the scattered grains. Rain might fail, or fall too heavily. The wheat might produce a bumper crop – but the planter has to give up the seed before he knows.

That made sense. The disciples understood that. But what did that have to do with whether Jesus should be excited about meeting potential Greek

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converts? What was wrong with showing a little optimism about the interest these people had shown?

Evidently, Jesus knew that his disciples were still thinking short term. They called him “Lord.” They believed he was the Messiah. But they still expected him to set up an earthly rule, to conquer Rome, and to usher in the kingdom.

For the disciples, the addition of fresh troops with Greek influence would be a sign of progress.

For Jesus, it was a temptation, because he could have gone that route. He had the power. He had the charisma. He could have ruled the world and saved his own skin in the process. But that was not what we needed most, and Jesus knew it.

Troubled spirits (vv. 27-33)

The disciples weren’t the only ones feeling uneasy, for Jesus admitted that his own soul was troubled (v. 27). He knew what lay ahead: he would have to choose whether to face the hard and painful realities of a cruel death, or to bail out.

When he prayed “Father, glorify your name” (v. 28), it was as if he were asking for the needed strength to stay the path. Jesus knew he had come to save *all* people from eternal death, not just to save *some* people from Roman domination.

That’s what the talk about driving out “the ruler of this world” and being lifted up to “draw all people to myself” was about (vv. 29-33). And in order to accomplish that goal, Jesus had to look down the long road, knowing that death lay ahead, but was not the end.

Somehow, in God’s wisdom, for the church to be birthed, for Christians to be reborn, for the kingdom of God to sprout and take root on the earth, Jesus had to die. In that light, v. 24 begins to make more sense: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

As Jesus came into Jerusalem during the last week of his earthly life, recruiting potential Greek followers was

not as important as committing himself to the road ahead.

As he did so, Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that the story did not end with his death. For his mission to be fully accomplished, for the church to grow, for the world to be reached, Jesus’ disciples would have to follow him down the same path. That’s why he had told them “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (v. 25).

Here we come to the core of the gospel and the central reason we observe the Lenten season: we must learn to die if we want to truly live. And John is not alone in telling us this. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus saying “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24). Paul reflected that reality when he said “I die every day” (1 Cor. 15:31a).

We must die to our old way of living if we are to find a new way of living, and give up our old way of dying in order to discover a new way of dying – and living again. ⬇

We can lose ourselves in ourselves, and be lost to the world *or* we can allow ourselves to be constantly reborn by faith in Christ through the realities of life, and in doing so become new and stronger and somehow more holy because of our experience. ⬇

Jesus called on those who would follow him to throw themselves into the cosmic ground like wheat and to be willing to let themselves die, believing that a new and more productive life would follow. The servant follows the pattern of sacrifice that has been set by the master: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (v. 26a).

Our word “sacrifice” comes from a Latin root that means something like

“to make sacred by setting apart.” Sacrifice is not a dollar here and a volunteer hour there. To sacrifice is to give up anything that rivals our relationship with Jesus, and not just during Lent.

Consider this story, from *Tales of a Magic Monastery* (1981). Recalling the day when he first tried to surrender to God completely, Theophane the Monk wrote: “I had just one desire – to give myself completely to God. So I headed for the monastery. An old monk asked me, ‘What is it you want?’ I said, ‘I just want to give myself to God.’ I expected him to be gentle, fatherly, but he shouted at me. ‘Now!’ I was stunned. He shouted again, ‘Now!’ Then he reached for a club and came after me. I turned and ran. He kept coming after me, brandishing his club and shouting, ‘Now, Now!’ That was years ago. He still follows me, wherever I go. Always that stick, always that ‘Now!’”

God does not chase us with a stick, but God does pursue us – *now*. God does call us – *now*. If you would follow me, Jesus says, you must go where I go. You must walk where I walk. You must give as I give. You must be with me where I am.

And where is Jesus? Some popular writers suggest that we must “find out where God is working” (defined largely as where evangelism is bearing fruit and church planting is easy) and to focus our efforts there, but the Bible does not teach that God’s work is limited to those places where ministry yields quick results.

Rather, if we listen to what Jesus has to say in places such as Matthew 25, we come to understand that Jesus is present and at work where children are hurting, where parents are searching, where people are losing themselves to the broad way of destruction.

Jesus is present in the lowest depths of human misery and the highest reaches of eternal glory. Today he calls us to take with us our scars and go with him into the pain of a hurting world. One day he will call us to come with him into the joy of eternal life, remembering his promise: “My Father will honor the one who serves me” (v. 26b). ⬇ BT

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 14:32-42

March 29, 2015

Hard Praying

Have you ever been in the midst of an important meeting but had difficulty staying awake, or pinched yourself to remain alert while driving late at night, or nodded off in the middle of a dull sermon?

Of course you have.

The results of falling asleep at inappropriate times can range from tragic accidents to embarrassing moments to missing out on important information. Ill-timed sleepiness could also prevent us from responding to another's need.

Today's lesson falls into the latter category. It tells of a sorrowing savior and three sleepy disciples. It is very familiar, but it's not pretty.

A dark road (vv. 32-34)

The story begins in the dark of the night, perhaps even in the wee hours of the early morning. As Mark tells the story, Jesus and the Twelve had had a long day. 🕒 As nightfall came, marking the beginning of Passover, they gathered in an upper room and celebrated the traditional meal, but in a non-traditional way. When Jesus started the bread around, he may have offered a traditional Jewish blessing, but then he added: "Take, this is my body" (Mark 14:22).

The disciples must have wondered what that was supposed to mean, but none of the Gospels suggest that they asked for an explanation.

When Jesus passed the cup, he said: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the



Mark 14:38 –
"Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:24-25).

The disciples knew about Israel's covenant with God, and they knew about blood sacrifices at the temple, but what did Jesus' blood have to do with it? We would expect them to ask Jesus to explain, but there is no record that they did.

We can only imagine how alone Jesus must have felt that night. To make things worse, Jesus knew that one of the Twelve would soon betray him. What an emotionally heavy evening this must have been – but the disciples seemed blind to his pain. 🕒

After dinner, Jesus led his followers down the stairs from the upper room, down the winding streets of Jerusalem, and down through the gate that led into the dark Kidron Valley. From there they climbed partway up the Mount of Olives and sat down beneath the olive trees in the garden called "Gethsemane." 🕒 Random noises and occasional voices floated across the valley and into the gloomy garden.

Jesus bade his disciples to rest,

except for the three who were closest to him, the same three he had taken up the Mount of Transfiguration: Peter, James, and John. Jesus was sorrowful, Mark tells us, and greatly agitated (v. 33). He didn't want to be alone. If we had tried to express a similar depth of personal anguish to close friends, we might say something like "I'm so sad, I feel like I could die of it."

Jesus asked his friends to stay with him and "keep awake" (v. 34, NRSV) or "stay alert" (NET). Knowing what lay ahead, Jesus may have been concerned that the disciples keep watch for those who would be coming to arrest him. His primary concern, however, could have been a very human desire not to be left alone.

A dark garden (vv. 35-42)

Jesus fell to his knees and poured out his heart in prayer, as Mark tells it. Thinking of the agony that lay before him, Jesus prayed for deliverance, prayed for a way out, prayed for God to find another way. The prayer, no doubt, went on far longer and encompassed

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



Resources to teach adult and youth classes

are available at
nurturingfaith.net

more conversation than the brief sentences found in our Bibles. Jesus' pleas, however, were met with silence. The "cup" of suffering did not pass from his hands. Jesus knew he was still staring pain and death in the face.

Naturally desiring companionship, longing for some comfort in his dark hour of need, Jesus turned back to his friends, but found them asleep.

"Simon!" he said, jostling Peter into consciousness. "Could you not keep awake one hour?" (v. 37). With words that would prove prophetic when Peter later denied knowing him, Jesus warned: "Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 38).

Jesus then turned back to his own prayer, to his own grief, to his own dark and bitter confrontation with what was coming – the pain, the shame, the slow agony of the cross. He prayed, Mark says, "saying the same words" (v. 39). He wept. He struggled in such anguish that Luke said his tears and his sweat were like blood (22:44).

A prominent stained glass window in my home church features Jesus kneeling in the garden, looking heavenward with sorrow on his face. I remember how different the image looked at night. With no light behind it, the window was like a puzzle made of all black pieces. Even as a child, I thought of the darkness Jesus must have felt.

Returning to the disciples, he found them sleeping again. Seeking comfort, he tried to rouse them, but "their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to say to him" (v. 40). 🇺

Jesus prayed yet again, asking for some way to avoid the humiliating torment that lay before him, but God was silent, and Jesus resigned himself to the task of facing the darkness. When it seemed that he had nothing left but a terrible task, Jesus turned again to his friends for encouragement and support, and again he found them snoring, blissfully oblivious to the inner torment he was facing.

It's not hard to visualize the hurt

and frustration behind the words Jesus used to rouse them. "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough!" (v. 41a).

Finally, the three friends awoke, but it was too late to offer Jesus any comfort or understanding. The quiet garden gave way to a torch-bearing crowd set on arresting Jesus, with Judas leading the way (vv. 41b-42 and following).

It would be some time before any of them slept again.

A dark present?

Isn't this too often the story of our lives? Sleeping and wakefulness are an apt metaphor for the kind of relationship that many have with Christ. Jesus calls us to be faithful and present with him, and we may *want* to remain spiritually alert, but it is hard to stay focused, and we find ourselves going to sleep on Jesus. He calls us to be faithful, but we just keep nodding off. 🇺

In this story, the disciples' lethargy reminds us that Christ calls us to be close to him, to be open to the invigorating power of the Spirit, to be alert and active in serving him. But we know how easy it is to drift away from Jesus, to ignore the Spirit, and to become wholly passive in our service.

Individually, we can give ourselves to work and play and family and entertainment so completely that Jesus just fades into the background of our daily life and environment. We know that he is there, we are glad for his comforting presence, and we assume we can call upon him whenever we need him, but it's a one-way relationship.

For some of us, our relationship with Christ is like an app on the smart phone of life, just another program that sleeps in extended memory until we need it. When trouble comes, we tap the icon, and we expect the Jesus app to pop up and solve our problems.

But Jesus is more than a helpful app. If we stick with the metaphor, our challenge is to make Jesus the "operating system," the basic program that controls everything else.

Just as we can choose between Android, Apple, or Blackberry operating systems for our mobile phones, Jesus is not the only option for directing our life. We can choose to base our lives on the way of Christ, or the way of some other religious system, or a life that is purely secular.

All too commonly, we try to use secularism or materialism as our operating system while adding Jesus as a peripheral program or app, but that inevitably leads to a crash. Christ does not belong on the edge of our consciousness, but in the center of our lives.

Of course, remaining focused on Christ and alert to his call is not just an individual issue. Churches can also become complacent and satisfied with who they are and what they have. Institutions, like individuals, can fall into a spiritual slumber, failing to be present with Christ or respond to his call.

It is easier for us to enjoy longtime church friends than to reach out to new members. It is easier to repeat the programs we know than to implement new ideas that might be more effective in impacting our community. We find it easier to sleep than to serve.

We can be sure that Jesus will never demand more of us than we are capable of giving, or doing, or being. In the Garden of Gethsemane, all Jesus asked was that his three friends should be true friends, staying with him and supporting him. In various ways, that is what Jesus asks of us: to live as devoted companions, remaining faithful to him and loving others as he has loved us.

At the conclusion of today's text, Jesus said: "Get up, let us be going."

Easter is coming. A world is waiting, crying out in its pain and need. It is a world that Jesus loves, and he is still going to meet it.

Can we stay awake long enough to go with him? **BT**

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church of Mount Airy, N.C., a 135-year-old church with 600+ resident members and supporting missions giving through CBF and SBC, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. The candidate will be a compassionate and caring servant leader who is led by the Holy Spirit, exhibits visionary leadership, is committed to the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and is able to lead the congregation to a deeper understanding of God's Word through worship and Bible study. Applicants should be biblically grounded and mature in their faith and have previous pastoral experience and a seminary degree. Send résumés and references to Pastor Search Team, First Baptist Church, 714 N. Main St., Mount Airy, NC 27030 or fbcmapst@gmail.com.

Church Organist: First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., is receiving résumés for the position of church organist. The position includes the opportunities of providing organ music for all services of the church, accompanying the adult choir in rehearsal and performance, and teaching private lessons in the Academy for the Arts (AFTA) at First Baptist Church. The church's music ministry consists of 13 choirs and instrumental groups involving 400 people, with the 90-voice adult choir serving as the centerpiece. The recently renovated 52-rank Reuter organ is the primary instrument used in the church's rich, ecumenical worship life. The church organist will join three other professionals in comprising the music ministry staff. Interested persons may obtain more information about the church at fbca.net and about the Academy for the Arts at afta-fbca.net. Résumés may be sent to Clark Sorrells, minister of music, at csorrells@fbca.net.



Dean

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Applications: An application should include a letter describing relevant experiences and interest in the position; a curriculum vitae; a statement of leadership vision; and five professional references.

Nominations and application materials must be submitted to: Mercer-Theology@myersmcrac.com
 For best consideration, materials should be submitted by March 13, 2015.

Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting is assisting Mercer University with this search. The consultants are: **Emily Parker Myers**, President and CEO, and **Hunter Godsey**, Vice President.

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Former International Baptist Seminary President John David Hopper dies

John David Hopper, a Louisiana native, died Jan. 10 at age 80. He and his wife JoAnn went to Europe in 1964 as Southern Baptist missionaries. Among their work there he taught at the International Baptist Theological Seminary and worked among Eastern European churches. He became president of

the seminary in 1988 and led the move of the school to Prague in 1995. The later defunding of the seminary by the Southern Baptist Convention fueled the mission enterprise of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the appointment of the Hoppers among the first CBF missionaries. **BT**

J. Bradley Creed will become the fifth president of Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C., on July 1. Currently provost and executive vice president and professor of religion at Samford University, Creed earlier served as dean of Baylor University's Truett Seminary. He succeeds Jerry Wallace, who is retiring from Campbell after 12 years as president.

Zach J. Deal Jr. of Chesapeake, Va., died Jan. 6 at age 95. He and his late wife, Barbara, served as Baptist missionaries in Colombia, South America for 40 years. Retiring to his native Virginia, he worked for many years among Spanish-speaking people while serving with Thalia Lynn Baptist Church, Stevens Memorial Hispanic Church and Mappsville Baptist Church as well as the International Seaman's House of Norfolk and the Chesapeake Regional Jail.

Glen Holt died Jan. 7 in Athens, Ga. He was pastor of First Baptist Church of Fayetteville, N.C., for 30 years (1969-99), during which time he served as president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (1991-93) and was president of the General Board of the BSCNC (1989-91).

Constance McNeill is associate pastor at Second Baptist Church of Liberty, Mo. She held previous positions with Wentworth Military Academy and College, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Lee Sosebee Ritchie is minister with children and families at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. She comes from First Baptist Church of Commerce, Ga.

Ralph C. Storm of Corpus Christi, Texas, died Jan. 7, just shy of his 87th birthday. An influential Baptist layman with a successful career in the oil business, he served in many leadership roles in First Baptist Church of Corpus Christi as well as with Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He and his late wife, Jean, were strong supporters of their alma mater, Baylor University, where they created the endowed Ralph and Jean Storm Chair of Mathematics. He was a regent at Baylor for 27 years and recipient of university awards including the Herbert Reynolds Service Award.

Alec F. Thompson of Forsyth, Ga., died Dec. 18 at age 88. He was a member of First Baptist Church of Forsyth, Ga., following a long career as a pastor in North Carolina and Georgia. His pastorates included First Baptist Church of Beaufort, N.C., Woodland Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta, Grove Level Baptist Church in Dalton, Ga., and Clayton Baptist Church in Clayton, Ga. **BT**

THE ITAWAMBA COUNTY TIMES

“The Only Newspaper in the World That Cares Anything about Itawamba County!”

If I had to choose between *The New York Times* and *The Itawamba County Times*, I would pick my parents’ weekly newspaper.

Before I visit Mantachie, Miss., my mother starts saving *The Times*. If I am there on a Wednesday, we have a quiet competition to see who will get the *ICT* out of the mailbox.

The New York Times consistently fails to report stories *The Itawamba County Times* covers. The *ICT* does a superior job with births, birthdays, school awards, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, retirements, church news and local mischief.

The *NYT* is not as good with high school basketball. In the *ICT*, Sam Farris wrote about the buzzer beater in the Mantachie Lady Mustangs’ thrilling 56-55 win over the Mooreville Troopers. (Full disclosure: my cousin Jan’s husband Jeff is mayor of Mantachie.)

Wagster caught the pass in stride and took three dribbles and in an act of heroism had the presence of mind not to go try for a layup but to stop, pull up, and take the three. The ball left the junior forward’s hand and in mid-trip the horn sounded throughout the building, but all eyes were on the ball that was seemingly hanging in the air. Wagster’s shot fell and the roof nearly blew off of the Mustang Corral. Players were jumping up and down, fans were cheering, and one very proud mother was beaming with pride as tears of joy fell at what her daughter had just done.

Anna’s mom cried again when she cut out the story for the scrapbook.

Mrs. Sumner’s “Charleston Place News” keeps readers informed on the goings-on at the assisted living residence. Jo Ann writes,

“The main problem with most at our facility is one of the residents referred to as Mr. Arthur.” I assume she means arthritis. If there actually is a Mr. Arthur, I hope no one reads her column to him.

Mrs. Dobbs writes the “Mantachie Talker,” which shares the good deeds of citizens like the group from Tombigbee Baptist Church “bringing two months of wood for my fireplace” and Eddy “picking up my medicine at Walmart.” Edna has been through a lot. She suggests, “Use a different caregiver after each stroke so as not to overdo one child.” (Maybe she needs to use a different doctor to keep her from having another stroke.)

In a small-town newspaper your classified ads cannot lie. Under “House for Rent” the description is, “House is very nice.” Bobby knows that if he writes “Exceptional house with exquisite master bedroom overlooking lake,” his friends will laugh at him.

The “Church Page” lists the starting times for Sunday school, worship and Wednesday night services for 123 congregations — 64 of which are Baptist — along with a devotional and Bible Trivia.

The winning entries in the Annual Coloring Contest are printed in full color. Madi Daugherty of Fulton won the four-and-under category. Her work is suspiciously good for a four-year-old.

Terry Allen and Brandon Isbell were arrested for breaking in to Gum Church of Christ. They allegedly took sound equipment, heaters, televisions, a coffee pot and toilet paper. If they had realized it would be listed in the newspaper, they might have skipped that last item.

The *ICT*’s “Law Enforcement Reports” are addictive even to an outsider. Each entry is a chapter title in a mystery — though you need someone from Itawamba to tell you the stories behind these entries.

These three, for instance, leave questions unanswered:

“Suspicious activity, Hwy. 178 West”
“Disturbance, Sunset Dr”
“Scam, Shiloh Rd”

This could be an embarrassing 911 call to make: “Vehicle stuck in field, Dobbs Rd”

Should this be against the law?
“Contributing to a minor, Ryan Rd”

What does this mean? “Secure landing zone, Sandy Springs Rd”

You might think this could be cleared up before the police arrive: “Livestock in the road, Estes Morrow Rd”

You hope this call was from a police officer’s spouse: “Request to speak with officer, Van Buren Rd”

Big city newspapers are landing on fewer driveways each day, but the press is thriving in small towns. While the daily papers are closing up shop, 8,000 weekly newspapers are going strong. 23,434 people live in Itawamba County. The *ICT* has 28,685 readers.

Sandra Newton, the office manager, says the difference between her paper and the big daily newspapers is that “We know the people we’re writing about.” Weekly newspapers are part of the community they serve. They tell the stories of people whose stories are not going to be told anywhere else. The *ICT* proclaims, “Your story is our story.”

Churches should remember this. People love to predict that mega churches will soon swallow up small local churches, but rather than compete to have the biggest, most entertaining church, local churches should tell the story of the people who live next door. The church is there to care for those who are not going to be cared for anywhere else. Our churches need to say, “Your story is our story.” **BT**

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

Religious liberty: then & now

Baptists and the battle over Sunday mail delivery

Christians should be given preferential treatment throughout the United States, from public spaces to privately owned businesses. And to deny the preferential treatment of Christianity is a violation of “religious liberty.”

Such are the message and mission of today’s Christian Right that includes many Baptists. They hold aloft the 2014 Hobby Lobby Supreme Court decision that allows discrimination based on religious values.

Yet, modern frictions over religious liberty are far from being new developments. They have deep roots in American soil.

COLONIAL THEOCRACIES

Efforts by powerful forces to enshrine discrimination under the guise of Christianity and religious liberty formed the philosophical foundation of colonial theocracies.

Under the rubric of religious liberty, church-state alliances punished and persecuted dissenters. Among the persecuted, early Baptists intentionally demanded religious liberty *for all*, an unacceptable position for most Christians.

Given the historical narrative of colonial theocracy, the founding of America as a secular nation did little to quell voices calling for preferential treatment of a select version of Christianity.

Baptists, Quakers, some Presbyterians and non-Christians at large heralded America’s secular national government. Yet many Christian leaders in the late 18th and early 19th centuries remained determined to confine religious liberty to their own faith.

God would bring destruction upon the United States, advocates of religious discrimination argued, if the nation did not renounce its secular foundations and become a godly nation. Those making such demands were America’s earliest Christian Right.



Demonstrators rallied at the Supreme Court in June 2014 after the justices sided with the evangelical owners of Hobby Lobby Stores Inc., ruling 5-4 that the arts-and-crafts chain does not have to offer insurance for types of birth control that conflict with company owners’ religious beliefs. RNS photo by Heather Adams.

MAILBOX POLITICS

Early Christian Right rhetoric often targeted U.S. President Thomas Jefferson. Although a Deist, Jefferson was a universal hero among Baptists, a people of faith who loved the president because he had effectually embraced their calls for religious liberty for all and church state-separation — Baptist core values that Jefferson helped enact in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

On the other hand, many conservative Christians despised Jefferson for the same reason Baptists adored him. In their minds, religious liberty for all and church-state separation were anti-Christian, and Jefferson was an atheist.

Following Jefferson’s presidency, the early Christian Right needed a larger cause around which to rally for the Christianization of America. By 1815 they had found their cause: Sunday mail delivery.

In 1775 the Second Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin as the nation’s first postmaster general. From its inception the post office delivered mail seven days a week.

There seems to have been little opposition to Sunday mail delivery for the remainder of the century, a time during which only 5 to 10 percent of Americans attended church.

The 1791 passage of the First Amendment, however, transformed America’s religious landscape. Rejecting state-mandated compulsory church membership and government-funded churches, the Constitution transferred religion from the domain of the state to the free marketplace of the general public.

The Baptist principle of voluntary faith had prevailed. In a brave new world where the national government could neither favor any one religion over another nor promote religion in general, religious groups were left to their own devices to attract followers and fill pews.

FREEDOM TO THRIVE

Freed from government control, religion — Christianity and otherwise — thrived (to the surprise of many). The Second Great Awakening, beginning near the turn of the 19th

A common line of argumentation was that since America had always been a Christian nation, Christian beliefs should have authority in legal and political matters.

century, was empowered by the free marketplace of religion.

By 1810, church membership was on the upswing nationally, alcohol consumption and out-of-wedlock pregnancies were trending downward, and the tallest building in America was Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, which held that national title until 1846.

While 1810 represented a turning point in America's religious trajectory, one particular government law enacted that same year angered an ascendant Christian Right: the congressional enshrinement of Sunday mail delivery.

Spearheaded by opposition from well-known Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher, petitions from northern states and cities against Sunday mail delivery flooded government offices. Delivering mail on Sunday, opponents argued, was a violation of Christians' religious liberty, forcing some believers to work on their faith's holy day.

Over the next five years the anti-Sunday mail delivery petition campaign escalated. A showdown came in 1815 when Congress declared in a "report on Sunday mail transportation" that "it is inexpedient to interfere with present laws on the subject matter of these petitions."

Rather than quelling the opposition, Congress' decision resulted in further agitation from the Christian Right. Efforts were made to force Congress to reverse its 1810 decision.

In response, the business community, defending the commercial benefits of daily mail delivery, came to the government's defense. Financial interests prevailed over the wishes of the Christian Right, and by 1817 objections to Sunday mail delivery largely faded from public view.

COMMON ARGUMENTATION

Opponents of Sunday mail delivery, however, were not about to give up their campaign to secure what they considered the rightful benefits of their religious liberty: the forcing of the United States government to observe the Christian holy day.

By the late 1820s the Christian Right, more muscular than a decade earlier, re-entered the fray. In May 1828 two prominent evangelical Christians — Lyman Beecher and businessman Josiah Bissel Jr. — formed the General Union for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath (GUPCS).

This time, opponents of Sunday mail delivery were better prepared. The GUPCS distributed more than 100,000 copies of a Beecher speech against Sunday mail delivery, while Bissel recruited hundreds of religious businessmen to voice opposition to the 1810 mail law.

Couching the mail issue within a larger moral campaign for the soul of America, the GUPCS required members to boycott all businesses involved in Sunday transportation.

In addition, a far larger congressional petition campaign than in the 1810s was launched. By the end of 1828, some 467 petitions for ending Sunday mail delivery had been presented to Congress, more than in the entirety of the previous decade.

Primarily from New England and Mid-Atlantic Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches, the largest of the petitions garnered thousands of signatures. A common line of argumentation was that since America had always been a Christian nation, Christian beliefs should have authority in legal and political matters.

An Ohio petition declared that Sunday mail delivery destroyed public "piety and morality," while another accused the government of violating the religious liberty of Christians by preventing believers from working for the post office. In reality, many

Christians did work for the post office, seeing no threat to their religious liberties.

In addition, the anti-Sunday mail campaign messaging was inherently confusing. Mingling the spheres of government and society and culture, petitions referring to America as a Christian nation were at odds with long-time, common refrains from the Christian Right decrying America's founding as a secular nation.

'GODLESS CONSTITUTION'

Sensing that this second wave of opposition to Sunday mail delivery was more dangerous than the first, Americans supportive of the mail service sent about 250 pro-mail petitions to Congress during the years 1828-1831.

Many agreed with the previous observations of Christian Right leaders that America was a secular nation. Indiana, for example, petitioned Congress in 1830, affirming the nation's godless Constitution.

Some mail proponents charged that a "Christian party" had been formed to take control of the government — an agenda also voiced by many Christian Right leaders.

But whereas the pro-mail party expressed alarm at the prospect of a Christian

Continued on page 32

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government, the anti-mail party embraced theocratic principles, to which the Indiana petition stated: “There are no doctrines or observances inculcated by the Christian religion which require the arm of civil power either to enforce or sustain them: we consider every connection between church and state at all times dangerous to civil and religious liberty.”

In the midst of the hundreds of opposing petitions and the heated rhetoric from 1828-1831, some congressmen wavered on their commitment to Sunday mail delivery. For the first time since the establishment of the First Amendment, national church-state separation was truly endangered.

Baptists, all along having supported Sunday mail delivery as integral to religious liberty for all and church-state separation, had nonetheless remained relatively subdued during the first wave of the pro-Sunday mail movement in the 1810s. During that decade, the opposition had been easily defeated by the coalition of government and business.

The second wave of controversy, however, proved to be another matter. Foundational Baptist and American principles were clearly endangered. The Christian Right evidenced a new level of organizational sophistication and clout.

BAPTISTS ENGAGE

Baptists, having spent more than two centuries fighting against Christian governments, swung into action again. Three Baptists leaders, representing Baptists in the North, Mid-Atlantic and South, quickly rose to the defense of religious liberty for all and church-state separation.

From the North, 76-year-old evangelist John Leland, arguably the most famous Baptist in America, turned to his influential pen.

Obadiah Brown, pastor of Washington’s First Baptist Church, worked alongside friendly legislators. And within Congress, the chairman of the Senate Committee on the Post Office and Roads, Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, a Baptist layman, voiced a stinging rebuke to the Christian Right.

Of the trio, Johnson staged the opening Baptist act on behalf of Sunday mail delivery. A military hero of the Indian War of 1812 and in 1813 the killer of the great Native American warrior Tecumseh, Johnson was first elected to Congress in 1807 and had served in the Senate since 1819.

His political accomplishments included a successful Senate bill to abolish the practice

of debt imprisonment on a national scale; the introduction of legislation to approve the charter of Baptist-supported Columbian College (later George Washington University); and a failed bill to fund a government expedition to the center of the earth (a friend of the senator’s persuaded Johnson that the earth was hollow).

On a personal level, Johnson generated controversy with some due to his common-in-law marriage to an octoroon slave, an arrangement that he publicly defended by declaring, “Unlike Jefferson, Clay, Poindexter and others, I married my wife under the eyes of God, and apparently He has found no objections.”

SPIRITED DEFENSE

Following 10 years of senatorial successes and personal controversy, Jan. 19, 1829 marked a new pinnacle in Johnson’s career. On that day he mounted a spirited defense of Sunday mail delivery, blasting opponents of the historical practice.

Delivering the Senate’s *Report on the Subject of Mails on the Sabbath*, a document co-written with Washington pastor Obadiah Brown, Johnson bypassed economic arguments and drove straight to the point. Voicing his Baptist convictions and those of his forebears that had contributed greatly to the passage of the First Amendment, Johnson declared the cessation of Sunday mail delivery as unconstitutional.

“The Legislature,” Johnson reminded the nation, was not “a proper tribunal to determine what are the laws of God.” In a world in which “eight hundred millions” of humans lived “in religious bondage,” America was unique. The “catastrophe” of theocracy had led America’s founders to produce a governing document that guarded against “the same evil.”

The report continued by charging that religious zealots bent on Christianizing the nation evidenced “the worst passions of our nature under the delusive pretext of doing God’s service.”

Had the many “scenes of persecution” under colonial theocracies already been forgotten? When “man undertakes to be God’s avenger,” does he not “become a demon ... ferocious and unrelenting?”

Christianity “clothed in political power” is perverted, the senator noted. Government has no authority to coerce religious faith upon anyone.

The Constitution’s framers “recognized the eternal principle that man’s relation with God is above human legislation and his rights of conscience inalienable.”

The report of the politician and minister declared that “the line cannot be too strongly drawn between church and state,” as the Constitution “recognizes no other power than that of persuasion, for enforcing religious observances.”

CONTINUED BATTLE

In the weeks following, Congress printed mass copies of the Johnson-Brown document and distributed them throughout the states.

Some copies hailed the senator as author of “the New Declaration of Independence.” Others praised his speech as the “Supplement to our Bill of Rights.”

The popularity of the January speech was such that Johnson was elevated, in the public mind, from war hero to national statesman. Yet despite scoring a victory over the opponents of Sunday mail delivery, the battle continued in the form of petitions, public discourse and congressional debate.

In January 1830 Baptist legend John Leland, the man who arguably more than any other — save Thomas Jefferson and James Madison — led the charge to enact religious liberty for all and church-state separation into the Bill of Rights, joined the fray.

Fearful that Congress might yet capitulate to the opposition, Leland composed a letter to Johnson, now temporarily a congressional representative, having lost his senate seat seemingly due to controversy over his choice of a slave for a wife.

Johnson and Brown had employed Leland’s language of the individual’s “conscience inalienable” in arguing for church-state separation, and now the Baptist evangelist commended Johnson and Congress for their strong stand in the face of opposition.

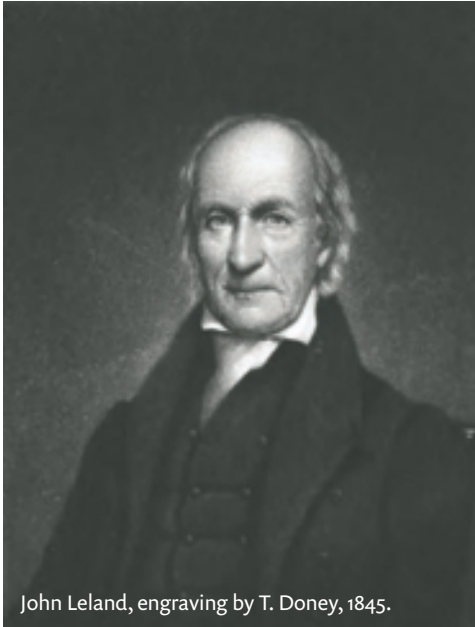
LANGUAGE OF LELAND

Legislating “holy-days, creeds of faith, forms of worship” is a “deadly pill ... rolled in honey,” Leland wrote.

“The honor of religion, the spread of the gospel, the piety and research of the reformers, the good of society, the safety of the state, and the salvation of souls, form the syrup, in which the poisonous pill is hidden. It is from men, high in esteem for holiness and wisdom, that the worst of usages and most cruel laws proceed...”

Always an advocate of full religious liberty, Leland wrote:

“Many plead for an equality of all Christian societies, and plead as strongly that they should become bodies politic, and be



John Leland, engraving by T. Doney, 1845.

supported by the civil law. If this is proper for Christian societies, it is as proper for Jews, Pagan or Mahometan societies; but the liberty contended for, should be guaranteed to each individual, as his inalienable right, which cannot be meddled with, without usurpation in the rulers, which turns them to tyrants.”

Leland, however, was far from finished. Later the same year he penned a sharp essay critical of anti-Sunday mail forces:

“... Transporting the mail on Sunday is contrary to the opinion of the memorialists, but can never pinch their consciences,” he wrote. “The Quakers have the philanthropic opinion that war should never be waged: let them call it pure conscience, and petition Congress to never declare war, would the present petitioners wish that the prayer of the Quakers might be granted? Let them answer the question.”

In a second letter to Johnson, composed on March 30, 1830, Leland continued to praise the Johnson-Brown 1829 Senate report:

“Sir: For forty years, next to the salvation of the soul, the rights of conscience have been articles of my highest solicitude. Not only that all sects and societies should be placed on a level, but that each lonely individual should have equal favor, and not be obliged to join any society to escape disabilities or oppression. Indeed, I stand pledged, that as long as I can use my tongue or pen, I will never lie dormant when religious liberty is in jeopardy.”

The Senate report, said Leland, “breathes the language of John Milton, Roger Williams, William Penn, Thomas Jefferson” and “is in perfect accordance with the letter and spirit of the New Testament.”

Never one to mince words, Leland affirmed his honor for both government and religion, but rejected any efforts of tyranny: “A man cannot give greater evidence that he is destitute of the meek spirit of Christianity, and ignorant of its genius, than when he makes, or urges others to make, laws to coerce his neighbors in matters of religion...”

Christianity, wrote Leland, “is not only a good religion, but, the only religion that ever met the sinner’s wants and relieved his woes — the only religion that ever brought pardon to the guilty, and gave assurance of eternal life...”

He urged, however: “Let Christianity operate in its own natural channel, and it is a blessing of immense worth; but, turn it into a principle of state policy, it fosters pride, hypocrisy, and the worst kind of cruelty.”

HARD PUSHBACK

In the months following, Leland became the target of withering criticism from the Christian Right, as the evangelist acknowledged in an 1831 letter to Obadiah Brown:

“... I have often been represented a Deist; and, for this opinion, contended for in some remarks on the Sunday mail question, I am published in gazettes, as renouncing the faith, and being excluded for it ... Is it possible for man to give greater evidence that he is ignorant of the precepts of Christianity, and destitute of the spirit of it, than he does when he makes use of the arm of the law to force others to believe as he does, or compel them to support what he believes?”

The witness of Johnson, Brown and Leland, while evoking the wrath of many conservative Christians, spoke for the vast majority of Baptists nationwide.

In the broader context, an elderly John Leland had little to gain or lose in staunchly opposing the Christian Right of his day, while Obadiah Brown was secure in his position as pastor of Washington’s First Baptist Church. U.S. Rep. Richard M. Johnson, however, stood at a crossroads in his political career.

As vocal and fierce opposition to Sunday mail delivery continued, Johnson’s fiery defense of the First Amendment proved to be an asset. In March 1833 the congressman was nominated for the vice presidency of the United States.

In nominating Johnson, Rep. Ely Moore from New York spoke glowingly of Johnson’s stand for religious liberty for all and church-state separation, saying: “Colonel Johnson not only proved himself a heroic soldier, but a profound and honest statesman. He has not only won the blood-stained laurel, but the civic

wreath. He not only merits our esteem and admiration for breasting the battle storm ... (but) especially is he entitled to our love and gratitude, and to the love and gratitude of all good men — of all who love their country — for his able, patriotic, and luminous report on the Sunday mail question ...”

Continuing, Moore further affirmed Johnson for his religious liberty efforts:

“Charge him not with hostility to the principles of religion, because he opposed the wishes and thwarted the designs of the clergy — rather say that he has proved himself the friend of pure religion, by guarding it against a contaminating alliance with politics.”

LIBERTY FOR ALL?

In 1836, war hero and national statesman Richard M. Johnson was elected as the ninth vice president of the United States. Serving from 1837-1841, Johnson was the only Baptist to reach such a high position until Warren G. Harding won the presidency in 1920.

The vice presidency, the capstone of Johnson’s political career, was a direct result of his courageous stance, backed by John Leland and Obadiah Brown and other Baptists nationwide, against the first attempt by a Christian Right movement to strike down church-state separation and enact religious liberty for themselves only, legislating religious discrimination against all others.

Sunday mail delivery eventually fell by the wayside, the practice discontinued in 1912 in an era of worker demands for limited working hours and with the approval of many Christians in America.

In 2015, America still struggles with efforts to disassemble church-state separation under the banner of religious liberty for the select.

However, Baptists, having resisted such efforts many times over their four centuries, are now divided, with some demanding the right to religiously discriminate against those with whom they disagree.

The Baptist heritage of religious liberty — for all — now torn and tattered in the 21st century, faces perhaps its most intense challenges since the battle over Sunday mail delivery.

Fortunately, there are still those Baptists who carry on the public legacy of John Leland, Obadiah Brown and Richard M. Johnson. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is online editor/contributing writer for *Baptists Today* and executive director of the *Baptist History and Heritage Society*.

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

150 YEARS AGO

February 1865

As winter chills sweep across a rapidly sinking Confederacy, three more major southern cities fall to Union forces in rapid succession. Within the space of a week, both of South Carolina's major cities — Columbia and Charleston — fall with little resistance, as does Wilmington, N.C.

Black Baptist minister Charles H. Corey describes the scene when the victorious 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment marches into Charleston:

It was the first body of colored men in arms seen in this city. The boys ran, and old men laughed and cried for joy; hats were swung, aprons and handkerchiefs waved. I saw young women dancing, the older ones shouting and praising God. I stood and wept; so did many a rough soldier; so did some of the citizens of Charleston. The negroes shook hands, and clung to the soldiers and seemed almost wild with delight.

The capture of the three cities further consolidates Union control over much of the South. Other than the interior of North Carolina and much of Virginia, the Confederacy is effectively subdued. All that remains is to capture the southern capital of Richmond.

With the end of the Confederacy in sight, last-minute peace talks between the North and South fail. To the surprise of no one, slavery is the sticking point. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, having on Feb. 1 signed the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery, refuses Confederate demands of the continuation of southern slavery as a condition of peace.

Lincoln's approval puts the 13th Amendment to the states for ratification. Eighteen states ratify by the end of the month, while Tennessee moves in that direction as voters enact a new constitution ending slavery.

White voices in the South, many shrill as ever in defending slavery as God's will for the black race and encouraging their white brethren to pray hard and endure in the fight, nonetheless fade into the background. Prominent newspaper editors are

silenced as the South Carolina *Confederate Baptist* and North Carolina *Baptist Biblical Recorder* are both shuttered by the end of the month. Hundreds of church buildings throughout the South now stand abandoned.

Into the vacuum step black Baptist leaders in the South, many recently freed from bondage by advancing Union armies. Most prominent among these new spokesmen for Baptists are freedmen along the Georgia and South Carolina coast, particularly from Savannah to Beaufort.

This new Baptist narrative first flared brightly in the days following the Union capture of Savannah in December 1864. Rev. Garrison Frazier, retired Baptist pastor, and Rev. Ulysses L. Houston, pastor of Savannah's Third African Baptist Church, quickly emerged as leaders of the city's newly-freed black population. The city's black Baptist churches now serve, in addition to Sunday worship, as community centers for freedmen, venues for black-operated schools and headquarters of black political advocacy.

The city's white churches are also utilized by freedmen. This month Union Gen. Rufus Saxton, speaking to an audience of some 1,000 black citizens crowded into Savannah's (white) Second Baptist Church, explains that the government will provide 40 acres of land for free to each black family.

The Beaufort region, designated as a

major area of black resettlement, is already experiencing an influx. Since early January, so many freedmen have arrived from Savannah that Union-operated facilities have been overwhelmed. One volunteer sadly reports of "fifteen hundred wretches without shirts or blankets, huddled like pigs in old cow-sheds, under public buildings, and on the sunny side of any wall or fence they can find, — dying by scores, of cold, and diseases caused by cold."

By some estimates, more than a thousand have already died due to exposure and the squalid conditions. Union military personnel and northern relief workers laboring along the coast struggle to meet the great demands placed upon them as each day a hundred or more newcomers arrive.

Virginia, meanwhile, remains starkly divided. In Union-controlled Portsmouth, black Baptists openly form the Zion Baptist Church. Black Baptists in Richmond, yet enslaved, furtively meet near a trash dump to worship God, fearing beatings if discovered. Their secretive gatherings are the beginnings of the city's Fifth Baptist Church.

In what remains of the Confederacy, the month ends with such national desperation that officials are cognitively resigned to the arming of slaves. Gen. Robert E. Lee, now in charge of the entirety of the South's armies, declares: "I think the measure not only expedient, but necessary." In a gut-wrenching blow to the Confederacy's very identity, military service would earn freedom for slaves.

Finally, northern black Baptists are seemingly inspired by the developments of recent months. Many U.S. cities yet retain racially discriminatory laws. In Chicago, black Baptists play a crucial role in this month's repeal of the city's Black Laws.

The rising crest of victory over southern slavery, to the joy of many black Baptists throughout the North, is softening long-held racism and prejudices in the larger Union. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. For a daily log of "This Day in Civil War History," see civilwarbaptists.com.



Is it time to let go of your church?

By Travis Collins

My friend, Randy Ashcraft, once told me a great story about water-skiing. His sister was trying to ski for the first time.

His brother, the driver of the boat, was giving instructions to her as she bobbed in the water with her two skis pointing skyward.

Among other advice, the brother said, "Whatever happens, don't let go of the rope!"

If you have learned to waterski, you know the wisdom of that advice. If you let go of the rope too quickly, and are unwilling to press on through the wall of water, you never will learn to ski.

So the brother hit the throttle, the rope tightened, and the sister began the difficult task of coming up. After a few seconds, she fell.

But she remembered her brother's advice: "Whatever happens, don't let go of the rope."

So for some painful seconds, with Randy looking on in deep concern, she hung tenaciously onto the rope.

"She's going to drown!" Randy thought, as the water beat her and threw her around.

Then, mercifully, the rope was jerked from her white-knuckled hands.

Randy's moral of the story is that sometimes a refusal to let go of the rope is just crazy.

You could drown. Or the rope could get jerked painfully from your unwilling hands.

Sometimes you've just got to let go of the rope.

I wonder if the same principle might apply to pastors and their call to a local church. Every pastor I know wonders at some level about the timing of his or her coming and going in a free-call system.

Nearly all of us have had moments when we wanted to let go, but didn't. Many of those moments were transformed into better days and a brighter future.

But there are those times when hanging on is dangerous to our spiritual, physical and emotional health.

So how do we know when, or if, it's time to let go? Perhaps these questions will help:

- Is your family hurting?
- Is your physical, spiritual and/or emotional well-being in jeopardy? (Not "Are you disappointed?" — but a long-lasting, deep pain that jeopardizes your soul.)
- Can you look in the mirror and into the eyes of your spouse or close friends and say "God has released me"?
- Have the leaders lost confidence and trust in you, and is that confidence and trust unregainable?
- Are you having to violate your integrity and identity in order to stay?
- Is your heart not in this anymore?
- Is the God-given vision dead? Do you no longer have a vision, or is your clear vision obviously not going to be fulfilled because of insurmountable obstacles?

- Is it simply a bad fit? Do your skill sets, passions and gifts no longer match the needs of the organization? Could it be that the church has outgrown your skill sets, passions and gifts — or that you and the search team just missed on the fit?
- Do those who love you, and whose opinions you trust, say they think you should consider leaving?
- Has God given you a vision that can be fulfilled only if you leave to serve in another place and/or role?

Once when I shared this list with a group of pastors, one of them raised his hand and asked, "So how many of those do you need to check before you know it's time to go?"

It was a great question. I think the answer is two-fold.

First, ask yourself how many of those 10 checkpoints are true for you. The more you find true, the more likely it is that it's time to let go of the rope.

Second, determine the level to which each is true. For example, concerning the question about your family hurting, would you say your family members have expressed their sadness and disappointment? Or, does the pain run deeper? Is at least one family member deeply depressed, significantly afraid or otherwise in great distress?

Concerning the question, "Have the leaders lost their confidence in you," would you say you made a bad decision and they are disappointed, but they trust your heart and you have a good track record so they give you the benefit of the doubt? Or, has it reached the stage that significant leaders are saying, "We can and will no longer support you"?

This is not a scientific survey, but once you start considering how many of the checkpoints apply to you and honestly ask yourself at what level each one applies perhaps an answer about leaving will emerge. **BT**

—Travis Collins is director of mission advancement and Virginia regional coordinator for Fresh Expresses US, and a consultant with the Center for Healthy Churches.



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‘The five core practices of a Faith Positive lifestyle help us to focus on the positive and filter out the negative.’

faith positive

A conversation with Joey Faucette

Joey Faucette is on a mission to encourage and equip Christian business professionals to tap their faith to create a positive way of working in a negative world.

He and Mike Van Vranken, a longtime business executive, created Faith Positive Partners (getpositive.today) to provide resources for companies, corporations, churches and denominational groups to enable employees and members to develop more positive lifestyles. They are co-authors of *Faith Positive in a Negative World*.

Baptists Today editor John Pierce talked with Faucette, the former pastor of First Baptist Church of Danville, Va., about this mission. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

BT: How big of a concern is negativity — and what are its seductive powers?

JF: Negativity is a concern for all of us. Since Adam and Eve’s garden experience with a lying serpent, we have struggled in a negative world.

Its seductive power lies in its pervasiveness. Coffee pot conversations and team meetings at work and even Baptist deacons’ meetings are experiences in which negativity takes expression and redefines our reality.

This pervasiveness has a death grip on today’s media. In our always-on, media-driven culture, we abdicate our editorial license to control what content we consume to those whose mantra is, “If it bleeds, it leads.”

They are in business to monetize negativity. We are complicit in their conspiracy by consuming their “news and entertainment” products with complete disregard to its effects on us mentally, socially, emotionally, physically and ethically.

Now I’m not a Luddite. I am tech savvy,

more than most in my generation. However, when we erase our boundaries with technology and become blind consumers of nine-second sound bytes and videos, we fall prey to the wily ways of the seductive power of negativity.

The great irony is that we as Christians reflect rather than reform the negative world. The Faith Positive movement reverses the negative world’s power — restoring faith, joy and love.

BT: How did your current work develop, and who is your audience?

JF: In 2014 I celebrated 30 years as an ordained minister, 20 of which were invested in the local church as a full-time pastor. Prior to that I enjoyed a career in radio broadcasting both on the production and sales sides.

In 2004, God called me out of the local church and sent me on an undercover mission back into the business world. When the economy recessed in 2008, I realized that we were transitioning into a new business environment.

So I researched the habits of entrepreneurs who started businesses during the Great Depression, focusing on those that thrive today. I found some common patterns, and most of them had roots in scripture.

Intrigued, I discovered what we call the five core practices of a positive lifestyle and began writing and speaking about them. Soon after, *Entrepreneur* magazine and I partnered to do a book, *Work Positive in a Negative World*. I knew we were on to something significant when it hit number one on Amazon in three different business categories on three different occasions.

The book is largely narrative, i.e., strategies supported by stories. I adapted some of Jesus’ parables because of the commonality between the habits of these Great Depression gurus and Scripture. The book became a front-and-center expression of my covert mission.

Faith Positive resources for churches and business professionals are available by visiting baptiststoday.org and clicking the **Faith Positive** link. Also check out our new Faith Positive blog to encourage laypersons.

As I spoke around the U.S. about how to work positive in a negative world, Christian business professionals would take me aside and ask about integrating faith into the five core practices. This happened so many times that I began to pay more and better attention to the Spirit’s leadership around this topic.

Then I received a coaching client who retired from a Fortune 35 financial services company. He sought me out to help him launch a writing/speaking ministry. As we worked together to achieve his goal, it became apparent to both of us we were to pursue a more faith-driven application of the five core practices. That’s when *Faith Positive in a Negative World* was born.

Like its predecessor in the Positive series, it hit number one on Amazon three days after it launched. The *7 Weeks to Faith Positive* and *Faith Positive Master Coaching* programs were born shortly thereafter.

Now we resource churches that desire to disciple every member as a minister at work, specifically Christian business professionals who want to increase their faith with greater joy at work so they love God and others more.

BT: Vocational life is so different than in past decades. People are changing jobs and careers more often, working longer into life and re-equipping with changing technology. How do such dynamics challenge persons in the workplace?

JF: The days of working a lifetime for one company and retiring to a comfortable pension have gone the way of the Edsel, shag carpet and full-service gas stations. We are now, as Dan Pink describes us, a free-agent nation.

Living longer with better health, we pursue encore careers after three decades in one field. Corporations seek top talent daily. The taboo of frequent job changes listed on résumés is no longer relevant.

These dynamics carry one common theme: change. Change is the currency of doing business today.

You are your own corporation, responsible for your lifelong learning to keep skills current, your personal development to stay motivated, and your financial prowess to support yourself and your children who as youngsters want iPads and then return home after college because they can't find a job.

This rapid pace of change is dizzying. Business professionals are searching frantically for effective strategies that work both at work and home. Christian business professionals are no different.

Because change confronts us with the unfamiliar, and we are more comfortable with

the familiar, we label much of this change as negative.

"Things aren't the way they used to be," we say. The mantra of many churches today is, "We've never done it that way before."

And it's true. The challenge then becomes to engage one's faith in a rapidly changing world so that work is joyful and love of God and others is primary.

The five core practices of a Faith Positive lifestyle are anchoring strategies that do just that.

BT: Can one be realistic about the many negative factors to be faced and still be positive each day?

JF: Yes. Unlike Hindus who deny the existence of evil and negativity in the world, we Christians find our faith rooted in a God who brings life out of death. The resurrection story that is at the heart of our belief system acknowledges that death is real, that the tomb is real, that pain and suffering are endemic to our journey from the cradle to the grave.

Our significant, transforming principle is that the negative world isn't the final chapter. That the Kingdom of God, which is here but not all of it just yet, peeks through even the

darkest of seasons.

The five core practices of a Faith Positive lifestyle help us to focus on the positive and filter out the negative, discover positive people with whom to journey, believe that life still emerges from death, act strategically with the Spirit's coaching, and then to serve others in gratitude to God.

BT: What is a good conversation to have with oneself in the mirror each morning?

JF: First, realize that you currently are having conversations with yourself each morning. For some of us, those are patterned after morning TV shows. For others of us, they begin with scripture and asking God, "What do you have for me today?" or "What's on your mind today that I need to know?"

Second, you have control over these conversations. You choose your thoughts, feelings, and the expression of those in words.

Third, pick a favorite scripture verse in which to root your day. Make it one that carries a promise of hope that's deliverable to you today. Read it to yourself.

Continued on page 38

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BT: What is a process one might use to — as you write in your book — “focus on the positive and filter out the negative”?

JF: My co-author, Mike Van Vranken, and I teach the Perceive (mental core practice) strategy of “Mow and Sow.”

First, mow the negative thoughts that assault and creep into your mind each morning. See them for what they are: thoughts capable of shaping your attitude that determine your actions.

Rather than resist them, acknowledge them as negative thoughts. Avoid dwelling on them. Just see them for what they are: negative thoughts to be mown like weeds from your mental landscape.

When you mow, you filter. You stop the negative thoughts from passing through your mind into the playground of your attitude and actions.

Negative thoughts do exist for all of us. The question is, “How do we deal with them?” You mow them down.

Second, sow. Once the weedy negative thoughts are mown, your positive thoughts have less competition for the nutrients of your success. Like sunlight, water and fertilizer, your attitude and actions nourish your positive thoughts.

Success begets success. As we discussed earlier, you sow scripture and other positive literature into your mind’s conversation to begin the day. We find music particularly helpful as well.

BT: Why is worry so powerful — and what can be done about it?

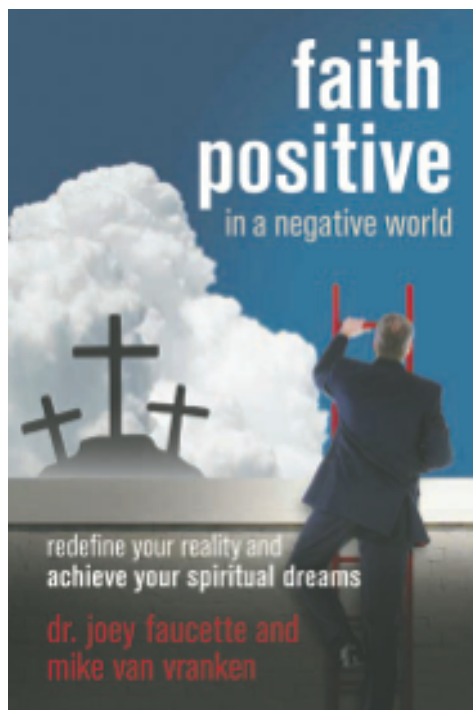
JF: Norman Vincent Peale, author of *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), helped me understand worry, our imagination, and the way our minds work.

The mental ability to imagine positive outcomes is the same as the capacity to worry. Imagination and worry are opposite sides of the same mental coin.

So we have a choice: to imagine positive results or worry.

Paul puts it this way: “Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life” (Phil. 4:6-7, MSG).

Worry has a negative effect on our entire lives — professional and personal — because it



occupies the space Christ is to have in our spirits.

Paul’s solution is one we coach around in our book and coaching programs: pray instead of worry. We walk you through how to do that effectively.

BT: What do you mean by “What you resist, persists?”

JF: My friend Bob Nicoll, in his book *Remember the Ice*, offers the most striking example of this truth.

Bob walked into a convenience store in Phoenix on a hot, August day. He noticed the clerk had a sign up that read, “Don’t forget the ice.”

“How are ice sales?” Bob said.

“Miserable,” the clerk replied. “You’d think with all of this heat, bags would be flying out of here.”

Bob offered to help the clerk sell more ice, and asked for a magic marker and piece of paper. He wrote, “Remember the Ice.”

Ice sales tripled. Why?

When we read, “Don’t forget the ice,” our minds look past “don’t” and read it as “Forget the ice.” In fact, any word of resistance like that — “can’t” or “won’t” — is ignored by our minds and we miss the intended meaning.

It’s a negative expression. What you resist, persists.

If I tell you, “Don’t think about a dancing elephant wearing a pink tutu” what flashes in your mind?

Similarly, when we tell ourselves, “I’m not going to think negative thoughts” or “I’m not going to smoke” or “I’m not going to sin,” we

resist the change and focus on doing the familiar. Think of it as a negative reinforcement.

Substitute positive language for the change and watch the resistance disappear.

Embrace the emergence of a negative thought — “There it is. I’m doing it again!” Then replace the thought with a positive one. Replacement thoughts supplant resistance.

“Don’t forget the ice” becomes “Remember the ice” — and sales triple.

Jesus’ most striking example of this reality was when he reinterpreted so many pharisaical teachings with “You have heard it said ... but I say to you.”

The “don’t” religion of [the pharisaical code] became “do.” That’s how a naked, adulterous woman lying in the street was forgiven and told to “Go.”

BT: Negativity in the workplace, you’ve noted, is often tied to competition based on the idea of scarcity. Isn’t it a dog-eat-dog world where only a few are winners?

JF: It sure seems like it. Or, as we like to say, “It’s a dog-eat-dog world and I must be wearing Milkbone underwear!”

When you don’t trust God, you buy the lie that it’s all up to you to provide — as if you can create out of nothing like God.

Our favorite commandment to break is the first one: “Have no other gods before me” — and our favorite god is ourselves.

Competition rooted in scarcity assumes there’s only so much to go around — a finite number of slices of apple pie. So you better get yours and someone else’s too so you don’t run out. In order for me to win, you have to lose.

Jesus teaches the better way of abundance. Like the Hebrews receiving manna and quail on time, Jesus reminds us that wildflowers and birds benefit from God’s provision and we matter more to God. There is an infinite number of apple pies!

Once an abundance mentality is adopted and God is trusted, we work together — collaborate — to create a win for everyone.

BT: Businesses and businesspersons can and do fail. Is there a positive way to handle failure?

JF: If anyone understands failure, it must be Christians — personally and professionally. Our redemption theology forms our business practices, right?

Maybe.

In *Faith Positive*, we teach that “failure is an experience, not a person.”

Too often, failure becomes personal. We see ourselves as failures rather than having an unsuccessful experience.

The exact opposite is true when you examine the track records of numerous business ventures.

Harland Sanders filed for bankruptcy at age 66, then went on the road in a station wagon to teach others how to fry chicken his way.

Jerry Seinfeld forgot all of his lines the first time he stood up to do his comedy routine and was actually fired from his first TV show.

Abraham Lincoln's country store failed, and he lost more elections than he won on the way to becoming president.

Thomas Edison discovered thousands of ways for not making a light bulb before he found *the* one.

Craig Wayne Boyd played Nashville dives and honky tonks where no one came for 10 years and was about to quit and go back home. He won *The Voice* singing competition, and a lucrative contract recently.

You know the success of each of these persons. But did you know the failures?

The list goes on and on.

As Christians, our theology of hope informs our experiences of failure. We pray for a “do over” and persevere.

BT: The late Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity International and the Fuller Center for Housing, once told me of a homeowner saying of a well-known “Christian” businessman in town: “He prays on Sunday and then preys on the community the rest of the week.” It’s one thing to have a positive attitude, but what about connecting that perspective to behavior?

JF: One of the strategic strengths of the five core practices of a Faith Positive lifestyle is that it increases faith with greater joy at work so you love God and others more. You grow a consistency of godly purpose across all areas of your life: mentally, socially, emotionally, physically and ethically.

Hypocrisy, or inconsistency between a Christian business professional’s walk and talk, is one of the leading reasons non-churchgoers cite for not participating. They see no tangible benefit based on the evidence presented by churchgoers.

I had a business owner tell me once, “I no longer accept checks that have the sign of the fish symbol on them. They all bounce.”

The fourth core practice, “Achieve the Positive in Faith at Work,” focuses on action,

specifically strategic activity that produces results. It’s rooted in Jesus’ statements like, “Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you’ll find. Knock and the door will open.”

Such actions are in response to God’s activity in your work while seeking the Spirit’s guidance with the mind of Christ. Paying attention to God is the first step in taking such actions. Aligning your intentions with God’s is next. The third step is acting under God’s leadership.

The praying/preying hypocrisy fails to connect a Sunday faith with Monday work. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for such behavior. There is a better way. The “Achieve” core practice is it.

BT: What is the role of gratitude in being faith positive?

JF: The fifth core practice, “Receive the Positive in Faith at Work,” focuses your work on the recognition that God gave you all you are and all you have — your talents and gifts, your material possessions, and your calling to a vocation.

Just as faith is our response to grace in Christ, so gratitude is our response to God’s generous provision.

It is out of gratitude that we say “thank you” to God and to everyone else from whose generosity we benefit.

We thank our customers and clients who keep the lights on and pay the mortgage. We thank our vendors and suppliers for getting us the products and services we require. We thank our supervisors for a job. We thank our shareholders for investing in our company — and the list goes.

Such gratitude takes on tangible expression in a multitude of ways. In our Faith Positive coaching programs, we help individuals, teams and companies to find ways of expressing gratitude through volunteering with a non-profit, joining a mission trip, sponsoring camps for inner city children, and so on.

The universal, biblical reality is that we reap what we sow. If we would fulfill our spiritual dream of increasing faith with greater joy at work so we love God and others more, we would serve others, especially the least of our brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ.

Gratitude is the fuel that drives our work in this way. **BT**

— Faith Positive resources for churches and business professionals available by visiting baptiststoday.org and clicking the Faith Positive button.

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The biggest find of every year

By Tony W. Cartledge

Christianity Today and *Biblical Archaeology Review* posted competing year-end “Top Ten” discoveries from archaeology related to the Bible in 2014.

Surprisingly, only two finds made both lists: an Old Babylonian tablet describing an early flood story in which the ark was round, and the discovery of a monumental royal entranceway to the inner courtyard of the Herodium, Herod the Great’s narcissistic monument to himself.

Those postings had hardly cooled before the *Washington Post* chimed in with the first major biblical archaeology story of 2015, an article supporting the view that ongoing excavations near the “Tower of David” may have uncovered the site of Jesus’ trial.

The story, by Jerusalem-based correspondent Ruth Eglash, describes excavations on the western edge of the Old City that have been in process for more than 15 years.

The misnamed “Tower of David” — so called by Byzantine Christians who mistook it for David’s palace — is in an area of fortifications that go back to the eighth century BCE.

Herod the Great remodeled and expanded a Hasmonean structure containing three towers in order to fortify his palace, which was located nearby. One of Herod’s towers remains standing — the one known alternately as the Tower of David or the Jerusalem Citadel.

Archaeologists working with the Tower of David Museum, located in southwest Jerusalem near the Jaffa Gate, discovered what they believe to be the site of Herod’s palace while excavating beneath an abandoned building adjacent to the museum they hoped to expand. Not unexpectedly, they dug through layers representing periods of occupation by Muslims, Byzantine Christians and Romans — including the remains of what may have been Herod’s palace.

While many scholars agree that the identification of the site as Herod’s palace is accurate, it remains uncertain whether it was the site of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, which the Gospels say took place at the Praetorium — typically



Many have long considered the Lithostrotos as the site of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. The ancient pavement, now below street level, is the traditional starting point of the Via Dolorosa, a pilgrim pathway marking Jesus’ journey from his trial to place of his crucifixion. Photos by John Pierce.



identified as the Antonia fortress located at the northwest corner of the temple complex.

A floor and street from the Roman period — now located beneath a school — have long been suggested as a possible site for Jesus’ trial. Called “*Ecce Homo*,” Latin for Pilate’s charge for onlookers to “Behold the man,” the site has long served as the traditional starting point of the Via Dolorosa, a pilgrim pathway marking Jesus’ journey from his trial to the place of his crucifixion.

That hasn’t always been the case, though. In the Byzantine period, according to some scholars, pilgrims traced Jesus’ steps from a location near the Tower of David, a path that didn’t change until after the 13th century.

Christian visitors to Jerusalem, whether modern or ancient, find special meaning in standing or kneeling on the same stone floor where Jesus may have stood before Pilate.

But was it in the military-oriented Antonia, or was it in the courtyard of Herod’s formal palace?

It is possible that both could have some claim to it: Luke’s gospel states that Pilate first

judged Jesus in the Praetorium, then sent him to appear before Herod, who was happy to meet Jesus but promptly sent him back (Luke 23).

It is unlikely that archaeologists will ever uncover a first-century stone inscription that marks the exact spot of Jesus’ trial, or of his crucifixion, or of his tomb. There will always be differences of opinion on the precise location of those events, and that’s just as well: it’s too easy for believers to idolize a place while ignoring the person of Jesus.

While we can’t pinpoint the places, we can be sure that, somewhere in Jerusalem, Jesus was tried — and Jesus died — and that he did it for us. Christians likewise believe that Jesus rose again and continues to dwell in the hearts and lives of those who seek his presence, wherever they happen to be standing.

That, as always, remains the top religious news story of the year. **BT**

Adventure and Inspiration



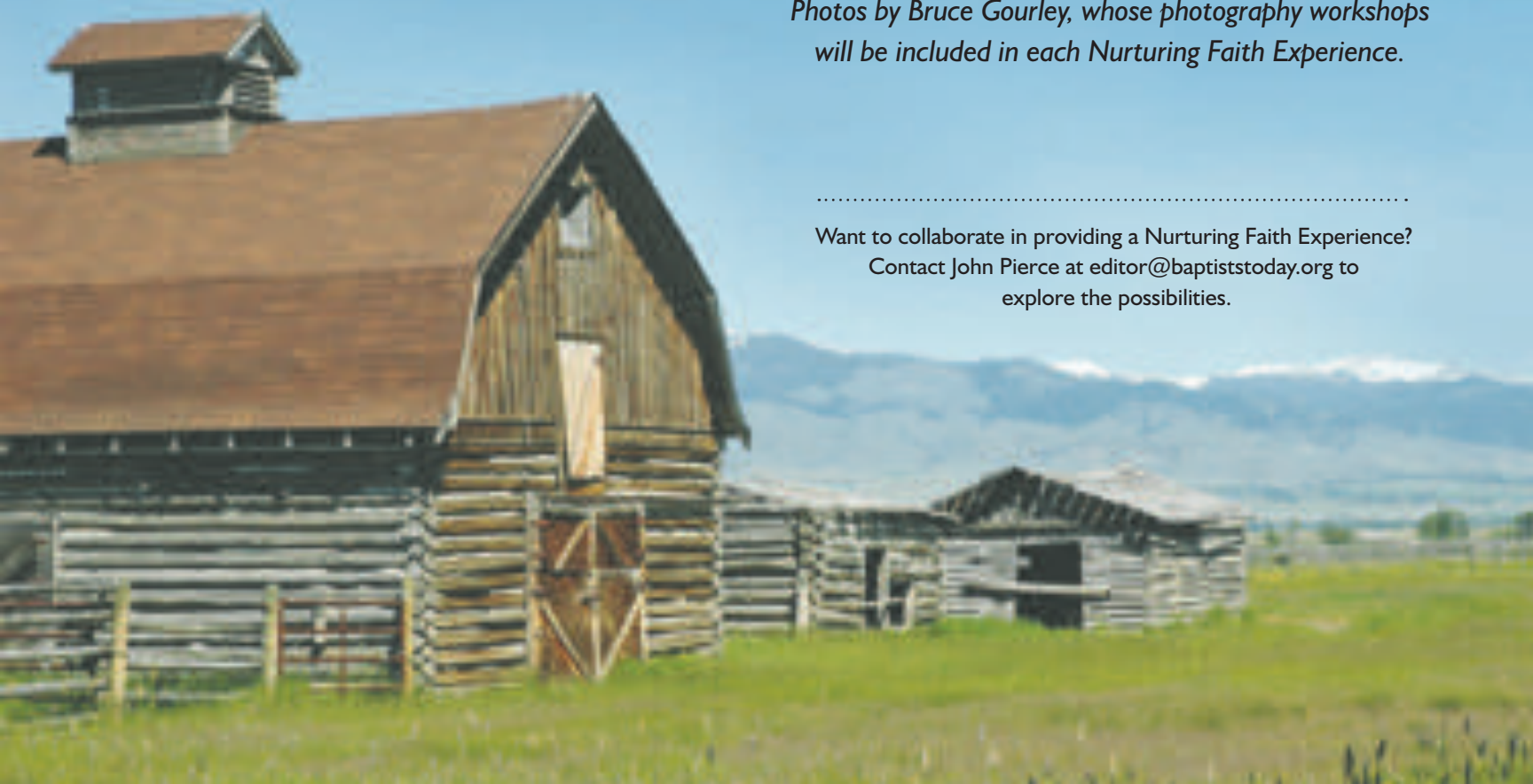
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Nurturing Faith: *Texts and Themes for 2015*

BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

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Season of Epiphany

January 6-February 15
One Step More

Jan. 6 – Matt. 2:1-12
“Meaningful Gifts”

What wise folk do when knowledge is not enough

Jan. 13 – Acts 19:1-7
“Powerful Hands”

What the Spirit does when water is not enough

Jan. 20 – 1 Samuel 3:1-20
“Listening Ears”

What followers do when eyes are not enough

Jan. 27 – Jonah 3:1-10
“Surprising Acts”

What penitents do when words are not enough

Feb. 1 – Psalm 111
“Inspiring Deeds”

What believers do when awe is not enough

Feb. 8 – Mark 1:29-39
“Missional Plans”

What Jesus did when our efforts were not enough

Feb. 15 – Mark 9:2-8
“Mountaintop Moments”

What to do when human perception is not enough

Season of Lent

February 22-March 29
Heavy Days

Feb. 22 – Psalm 25:1-10
“Healthy Regret”

Penitent tears are a good start for the season of Lent

Mar. 1 – Mark 8:31-38
“Self Denial”

Matching two words that don't like each other

Mar. 8 – John 2:13-22

“Righteous Anger”

Jesus had a temper, and was not afraid to use it.

Mar. 15 – John 3:14-21

“Light Living”

Darkness may be familiar, but life is in the light.

Mar. 22 – John 12:20-33

“Dead Wheat”

Some things have to die before they can live.

Mar. 29 – Mark 14:32-42

“Hard Praying”

Sometimes it's easier not to know what's next.

Season of Easter

Apr. 5 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

“Of First Importance”

Paul knew that everything hangs on the resurrection.

April 12-May 17

The Book of Love

Apr. 12 – 1 John 1:2-2:2

“Walking in the Sunshine”

John speaks of truth, light and the Christian way.

Apr. 19 – 1 John 3:1-7

“Children of God”

God knows, children can turn out good or bad.

Apr. 26 – 1 John 3:16-24

“Real Love”

Jesus' kind of love involves much more than words.

May 3 – 1 John 4:7-21

“Deep Love”

Knowing deep love means knowing God, too.

May 10 – 1 John 5:1-6

“Water and Blood”

Can believers really conquer the world?

May 17 – 1 John 5:7-13

“Testimony”

These could be the original “wonderful words of life.”

Season of Pentecost

May 24-July 5

Spiritual Matters, OT Style

May 24 – Ezekiel 37:1-14

“Can These Bones Live?”

With God, our driest days are not beyond hope.

May 31 – Isaiah 6:1-13

“You Want Me To Do What?”

Did God really want Isaiah to encourage bad judgment?

June 7 – Genesis 3:1-19

“The Inevitable Apple”

Can we really put the blame on Adam and Eve?

June 14 – Ezekiel 17:1-24

“Cedar Mountain High”

Could fallen humanity really climb a holy mountain?

June 21 – Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

“Gratitude Squared”

Being lost and found calls for a special kind of thanks.

June 28 – Lamentations 3:22-33

“Goodness – and Grief”

Troubled people need a God who won't give up.

July 5 – Ezekiel 2:1-3:11

“Eat My Words!”

God's command puts a sweet twist on a common saying.

July 12-July 26

Mind-Stretching Matters

July 12 – Ephesians 1:1-14

“An Amazing Inheritance”

Paul leaks a mysterious secret, and it boggles the mind.

July 19 – Ephesians 2:1-22

“A Sacred Trio”

Grace, faith and reconciliation: what's not to like?

July 26 – Ephesians 3:14-21

“It's All Beyond Me”

God's riches are above understanding – but not beyond imagining.

August 2-August 23

The Trouble with Kings

Aug. 2 – 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

“You're the Man!”

Nathan sets a trap for a royal miscreant, and bags his prey.

Aug. 9 – 2 Samuel 18:1-33

“Paying the Price”

Sin happens, trouble follows, and no one is immune.

Aug. 16 – 1 Kings 2:1-3:15

“Redeeming a Shaky Start”

Solomon's prayer for wisdom was badly needed.

Aug. 23 – 1 Kings 8:1-61

“Prayers for Now and Later”

A dedication prayer designed for people who weren't there

August 30-September 27

Serious Church

Aug. 30 – James 1:17-27

“Real Religion”

“Religion” doesn't sound so unsavory when it's done right.

Sept. 6 – James 2:1-26

“True Faith”

Faith understands that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sept. 13 – James 3:1-12

“Pure Speech”

James unleashes a tongue-lashing about tongue-taming.

Sept. 20 – James 3:13-4:10

“Highborn Wisdom”

Wise believers understand that selfishness is a dead end.

Sept. 27 – James 5:13-20

“Fervent Prayer”

The true power of prayer goes deeper than the surface.

October 4-October 25
Following Jesus on Highway 10

Oct. 4 – Mark 10:1-16

“Hard Words and a Soft Heart”

Jesus speaks about marriage, adultery and children.

Oct. 11 – Mark 10:17-31

“Of Treasures and Troubles”

Wealth and discipleship can make for a difficult combination.

Oct. 18 – Mark 10:32-45

“First and Last”

When cherished notions are turned upside down and inside out

Oct. 25 – Mark 10:46-52

“What Do We Really Want?”

Jesus’ question to a blind man sparks helpful introspection.

November 1-November 22

A Time for Gratitude

Nov. 1 – Ruth 1:1-2:23

“You’re All I Have”

The book of Ruth is really about Naomi, who should be grateful.

Nov. 8 – Ruth 3:1-4:21

“An Odd Road to a Happy Ending”

Naomi’s scheme was risky, but Ruth made it work.

Nov. 15 – 1 Samuel 1:1-28

“Transformational Tears”

A painful prayer, a baby boy, a promise kept

Nov. 22 – 2 Samuel 23:1-7

“Thanks for the Promises”

Not really David’s last words, but maybe the last happy ones

Season of Advent

November 29-December 20

Hope Waits

Nov. 29 – 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

“A Time for Anticipation”

A reunion with friends is a foretaste of future things.

Dec. 6 – Luke 1:68-79

“A Time for Praise”

When a mute man speaks, it’s good to listen.

Dec. 13 – Zephaniah 3:14-20

“A Time for Joy”

Patience pays: long waits do come to an end.

Dec. 20 – Micah 5:2-5a

“A Time for Peace”

Big things can come from small towns.

Season of Christmas

Dec. 27 – 1 Samuel 2:18-26

“A Time for Growth”

Good growth can happen, even in bad company.



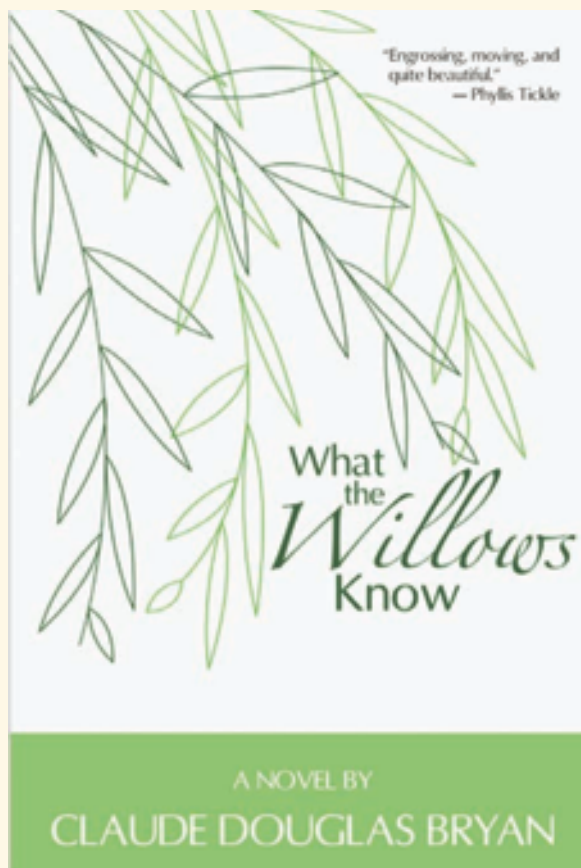
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