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**ODAY**  
NEWS JOURNAL

Q&A with  
theologian  
**Harvey  
Cox**

6



MARCH 2012

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**better**  
youth choir

36



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Photo by John Pierce. In its 19th year, Jubilate combines the youth choirs from six Baptist churches for a winter weekend and summer tour filled with fun, friendships and musical excellence.

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# Leonard & Dunn

*Reminding Baptists of their roots and responsibilities*

**W**INSTON-SALEM, N.C. — During the Jan. 24 convocation in historic Wait Chapel on the Wake Forest University campus, the divinity school publicly celebrated the creation of the James and Marilyn Dunn Chair of Baptist Studies and its first occupant, church historian and founding dean Bill Leonard.

But the beginning of the story goes back a ways — far before the divinity school's founding in 1999.

As a 12-year-old boy attending a Royal Ambassador camp in Fort Worth, Texas, Bill recalled hearing James preach. Neither could have imagined then that they would become friends and colleagues — and be linked through the first endowed chair at Wake Forest School of Divinity.

## BAPTIST MARKS

"We are profoundly fortunate to have Bill Leonard as the first 'sittee' in the chair of Baptist studies," said Dunn during a celebratory dinner the evening before the convocation.

Dunn described Leonard as more than a historian, but a "participant/observer" and an interpreter of Baptist life.

"He's going to parse for us the marks of real Baptists," said Dunn.

In response, Leonard called James and Marilyn Dunn "exemplary Baptists" — adding that "James has dissented his way into all kinds of Baptists."

Leonard told of Dunn, while teaching at Wake Forest in 2001, returning to Washington, D.C., where he was longtime director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, to testify in a Senate hearing. Dunn opposed the appointment of John Ashcroft as U.S. Attorney General. The hearings were broadcast.

Leonard said he received a call from a woman who took offense at Dunn's testimony.

"Does that man work at Wake Forest?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Leonard.

"Can you stop him?"

"No, ma'am," replied Leonard. "I'm just the dean; you'll have to talk to Jesus."



*'I hope this is not only a chair you can sit on, but one you can stand on and jump up and down too.'*

## STURDY CHAIR

Wake Forest President Nathan Hatch noted during the convocation that university founder Samuel Wait and his wife Sarah, for whom the chapel was named, were prominent Baptists.

"It's appropriate that the first endowed chair in the Wake Forest divinity school be in Baptist studies," said Hatch. And current Dean Gail O'Day acknowledged: "It is fitting that Bill J. Leonard be the first occupant of the chair."

Leonard said the chair he now occupies "is full of ghosts" — listing the impact of many significant Baptists through the years including Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke at Wake Forest during the civil rights struggle. He added historical figures such as Roger Williams, John Leland, Martha Stearns Marshall and George Liles.

"It's crowded in the Dunn Chair for Baptist Studies," said Leonard

Harvard theologian and Baptist minister Harvey Cox, who has a longtime friendship with Dunn, gave the convocation address. He hinted at Dunn's passionate and, at times,

animated defense of full religious liberty for all persons:

"I hope this is not only a chair you can sit on, but one you can stand on and jump up and down too."

Cox spoke of the "Baptist Motiff" that he described as a combination of Roger Williams' emphasis on "soul liberty" and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "beloved community."

"The test of soul liberty is not whether we insist on it for ourselves, but we insist on it for everyone," said Cox, noting that "even the Baptists were too confining for Williams."

A co-laborer with King, Cox said too many writers fail to see the prominent role that being a Baptist minister played in the civil rights leader's contributions. (See interview on p. 6)

Following the formalities, Leonard and Dunn — two Texans now ensconced at Wake Forest University — headed back to class to teach their popular course titled "God and *The New York Times*."

## HERITAGE

Wake Forest has evolved dramatically over the years since its humble Baptist founding in 1834. But the prestigious university got more than a glimpse of its heritage at the convocation early this year.

"Wake Forest will never again be a Baptist school, but this chair will remind it of its past," said Leonard.

And that reminder will last for more than a day thanks to those who made the ongoing influence of the Dunn Chair possible.

"Marilyn and I believe that recent history demonstrates the urgent need [for this chair]," James told *Baptists Today*.

He expressed appreciation to Dean Gail O'Day and other Wake Forest leaders as well as the generous donors who made the chair possible.

"You know the thrill of teamwork!" said Dunn. "Whether in a basketball game, a family reconciliation, a stupid contest in cards or dominoes, the buzz of shared dedication is even better than the victory." **BT**



# ‘God is there’

## A conversation with Harvey Cox

Harvey G. Cox Jr. is an American Baptist minister and the Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at Harvard University Divinity School where he has taught for more than 40 years. He occupied the oldest endowed chair in the nation, created by a gift from a British Baptist who stipulated that the occupying professor not be subjected to any creedal test.

**A**nother clause, Cox discovered, grants the Hollis Professor the right to graze his cow on Harvard Yard — which Cox decided to do (with a borrowed cow named “Pride”) several years ago, much to the amusement of students.

Cox said he planned to rename the cow for a day since pride is listed among the seven deadly sins. But the late Peter Gomes, a fellow Baptist minister and teaching colleague, reminded him: “At Harvard, we do not consider pride to be a sin.”

Cox, who wore his academic regalia, and his loaned cow were joined by a tuba quartet on that day. The theology professor reminded the growing crowd that the hallowed Harvard ground had rural roots that caused it to be called a “yard” long ago. Interest in reconnecting with such rich tradition led students to create various gardens on the prestigious campus in Cambridge Massachusetts.

*Baptists Today* editor John Pierce caught up with Cox at Wake Forest University in January where he addressed the divinity school convocation celebrating the creation of the James and Marilyn Dunn Chair in Baptist Studies that is occupied by founding dean Bill Leonard. This conversation is adapted from that interview.

**BT: Let’s start with the good stuff. What is your assessment of how religion is playing out in the current U.S. political climate?**

Cox: I would say positive and negative. It’s being horrendously misused and distorted. I

won’t name names, but I think there is a rather cynical misuse of religious imagery and symbolism. The other way it comes up is through the kind of built-in American Christian and civil religious recognition.

A very important point: we are responsible for each other. We can’t go it alone.

So I think [that concern] is there, although I shudder when I hear some people venting and distorting Christian references and imagery. I wish they wouldn’t do that. But they have an emotional appeal. So people are always going to be tempted to do it.

**BT: Your book *The Secular City* has been out for more than 45 years, yet people still talk about it. Are they — and you — still saying the same things about the issues you raised?**

Cox: By the way, there probably is going to be a new edition of *The Secular City*. Princeton University Press wants to print a new edition, not a revised edition. I don’t intend to revise it.

The basic thesis of *Secular City* was that God is present in the secular world. The original title that I intended was *God in the Secular City*. But the publisher said, “That’s too long, let’s just call it *The Secular City*.”

But I wanted to tell people that if you look at the biblical understanding of God, God is not present only in the religious sector but works through families, movements, economies when they are rightly run, policies and in nature.

God is present in the world and meets us there. And we have in the Christian

community a special calling and a special privilege, but we don’t have a monopoly on the presence of God. God is there.

This was the era [mid-1960s] when a lot of churches were fleeing from the city — as the kind of den of evil — out to the nice suburbs. One of the subtexts was that God is present also there “where cross the crowded ways.”

I haven’t changed my view on that at all. Now there are a couple of things I missed. Of course, that was four decades and a half ago.

For example, I was very influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer — still am. But Bonhoeffer had the impression that religion — institutionally and other ways — was going to be declining. He even said we’re going to have to find a nonreligious way of speaking of Christ and God, in his letters from prison.

But that didn’t happen. For bane or for blessing, religion didn’t decline. And I say bane or blessing because of what I said in answering your first question.

So in that particular respect, I was a little too influenced by Bonhoeffer, not his theology but his view of what was happening in history which turned out not to be the case.

**BT: How do you explain being a Baptist to those who are not?**

Cox: [laughter] Well, I’m still a Baptist. I think the combination of the concept of really quite radical religious freedom — not just for me but for you and for the people one disagrees with. That’s the real test — when I don’t agree at all. I’m a stalwart defender [of everyone’s religious rights].

But the other is a vision of [MLK's] "the beloved community." And the fact that you have to draw on that freedom that you have, not just to enjoy the freedom but to use it as a way of what we call in the Baptist tradition "witnessing." Witnessing to the world about the promises of God, the demands of God — the social justice, peace, harmony, healing, compassion and all those things.

So those two, I think, are the two means or poles of the Baptist tradition. That's what I tell people when they say, "You're a Baptist?" Yes, indeed.

My professor at [Yale University] Divinity School, Kenneth Scott Latourette, he was a Baptist and a great historian. He once said, "I'm a Baptist from birth, conviction and inertia."

### **BT: Most Baptists don't pay much attention to Pentecostals...**

Cox: They should.

### **BT: ...but you do. Why does that movement deserve more attention?**

Cox: For one thing, it's the fastest growing wing of the whole worldwide Christian movement. Growing very rapidly, especially among people who are often overlooked or slighted by the more established churches and denominations — especially in what we used to call the Third World or the poor southern hemisphere

I mean they are growing very, very quickly. Knowing who they are and what they are doing is important for us.

The other thing is, I think they have something to tell us. In the early years of the Baptist movement, Baptists and Quakers and others had more of a sense of the indwelling power of the Spirit.

Quakers, for example, used to act the way Pentecostals do now. They had very explosive and embodied forms of worship. So did Baptists — and we've lost some of that. Pentecostals are restoring a sense of the embodiment of praise.

They were also pioneers in reminding us that healing ought to be part of Christian ministry. I think it should be.

When I was a kid, healing was really viewed with some suspicion. That's what Catholics who go to Lourdes do — or something like that. We don't do that sort of thing; we go to doctors.

Now a lot of churches, even Baptist churches, the church I belong to, we have

healing groups and healing prayers. We understand that of course you have doctors and hospitals, but the healing ministry has been restored, I think, in part, because of Pentecostals.

### **BT: What do you think of on the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday?**

Cox: Well, I always weep — because I worked very closely with Dr. King. I was one of the founders of the Boston chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

I was with him in Birmingham, Selma, St. Augustine. He asked me to give the keynote address in 1967 at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Birmingham. So I was pretty close to him.

I don't think a lot of these documentaries get it right. I'm fully exasperated by them. This ridiculous thing is when they say: "His father was a Baptist preacher..."

He was a Baptist minister. Martin Luther King Jr. never left his pulpit. His pulpit went with him.

The other thing that ought to be mentioned is that, at the end, King went far beyond the idea of racial justice. He saw the economic injustice in America.

He was there in Memphis supporting the garbage workers; he organized the Poor People's Campaign. He said, what's the point in getting into a place to buy a hamburger if you don't have the money to pay for the hamburger?

There is an underlying structural injustice that we have to address. Well, that doesn't get much attention on the King holiday.

### **BT: How would you grade Americans on handling the growing religious and cultural diversity across the nation?**

Cox: Pretty well, in general, with some embarrassing and glaring exceptions. Like in Murfreesboro [Tenn., where a local mosque has faced threats and opposition to its relocation plans].

I hope a lot of those people [in opposition] aren't Baptists, but I'm afraid they are.

But I think we've done pretty well given the fact that we're subjected to this heated political rhetoric all of the time — about the Islamic terrorists and all the rest — for political gain, I'm sure.

We share the planet! We're a little over 2 billion Christians. We share this fragile little planet with about a billion Muslims. The

last few years of my life I've spent increasing amounts of time working on Muslim-Christian relations.

I've been now to Egypt, Jordan, Morocco. I spent a week last year in Istanbul conversing with Muslim scholars. I'm going back to Morocco in April. I think it's very, very important.

The way we manage to live in neighborly reciprocity with our Muslim neighbors here in the USA is a very important component of that — of what the whole picture is going to turn out to be. You go around burning Qurans, you're asking for real, real trouble.

You might say the guy has the freedom to do it. OK, there is freedom and there is stupidity — and there is alarming behavior.

I have Muslim students in virtually all of my classes now. They are eager for learning about other religions and for interfaith dialogue and working together on various things — especially economic justice issues. They are very interested in that.

So I'd say we get a B or a B+ ... maybe a B. I'd like to see us bring it up to a B+ or A-.

But we're people who have had to learn to live with a good bit of diversity. I live in a town where in 1834 a mob burned a Catholic convent. We haven't had exactly a flawless record of religious toleration here. The Mormons were hounded across the country.

So our record is not all that good. But I think it's improved over the years and we have more diversity now; it's more visible.

How we deal with that is going to be very important on the world stage. People are watching.

### **BT: What are you hearing from young Christian voices about church and morality and social engagement that church leaders might be missing?**

Cox: I'm very pleased with the recent turn of events among young evangelical Christians who are sort of backing away from that very narrow social agenda that they had for awhile — and are moving into becoming advocates for peace, economic justice and especially for care of the earth. I think it's an enormously welcomed trend. It should be encouraged and nurtured.

The other thing is, these young people live in a world where they know very, very quickly that there are all kinds of alternatives to their own religious systems. They want to ask questions about that, and they don't want to be shushed. They want to be in settings where they can bring up these things. **BT**

# quotation remarks

“When church leaders and members free themselves from the allurements of proximity to political power, they allow themselves space to more easily discern the promptings of the Spirit of God.”

—Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA Connect)

“Unfortunately, the word ‘Puritan’ garnered the same connotations that are adhering to ‘evangelical’ today. Both groups were betrayed by good intentions and the seduction of power.”

—David Neff, editor-in-chief of Christianity Today

“The ceremony was not my suggestion, nor was it my intent to participate in any ritual that is offensive in any manner to the Jewish community.”

—Bishop Eddie Long of Atlanta’s New Birth Baptist Church in a letter to the Anti-Defamation League after a YouTube video showed him being wrapped in a Torah scroll, carried aloft and declared a king (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

“Churches are not building many 3,000-seat auditoriums today. They are going to multiple services and multiple sites — less buildings and more places and times.”

—Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research (The Tennessean)

“I feel every day that I’m preaching the gospel, because I’m bringing good news to people in such a desperate time of life by telling them that we are there for them, that they are not alone.”

—Social worker Viviana Triano, a native of Colombia, who first attended an English as a Second Language program at Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio before earning a bachelor’s degree there and then master’s degrees at Baylor University (Faith & Leadership)

“If you’re a Christian, it’s not because you found Jesus. Not only were you not looking for him, but you couldn’t have looked for him. He came to look for his kids. The good news is: You’re the kind of person Jesus has come to save.”

—Jamus Edwards, a 2008 Southern Baptist Seminary graduate and pastor for preaching and vision at Pleasant Valley Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Owensboro, Ky., that the Louisville Courier-Journal cited as an example of the New Calvinism impacting the denomination

“[A]nyone who thinks we’re all good-looking just needs to meet more Mormons.”

—Joanna Brooks, author of The Book of Mormon Girl (RNS)

“As I’m baptizing 858 people, along around [number] 500, I thought, ‘We’re all fat.’”

—Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren who shed 60 pounds recently and started a health plan for his congregation (CNN)

“Unafraid to speak her mind with clarity and conviction, she was a powerful force within the life and ministry of First Baptist for more than 60 years.”

—Retired pastor George Tooze of First Baptist Church of Indianapolis, on Effie Behrens who recently left a \$4.2 million bequest to nearby Baptist-related Franklin College

“The barbershop had a big sign out front: ‘Haircuts: \$6.’ The barbershop across the street had a bigger sign out front: ‘We fix \$6 haircuts!’ Some ministries are restorative. They fix bad religion.”

—Mercer University Minister-at-Large Walter B. Shurden in his monthly preaching journal

“We are trying to say that we believe many Baptists, Christians and churches have been avoiding a serious conversation about sexuality and what norms ought to govern the Christian expression of sexuality in our contemporary context. Some have been avoiding the conversation because they are already sure of their answers. Others have been avoiding the conversation because they are afraid of conflict. Perhaps others fear the exposure of what might prove to be an insuperable gap between what they think Christian sexual morality should look like and what Christians are actually doing with their sexuality. We think that avoiding the subject is irresponsible and should not continue.”

—Mercer University ethics professor David Gushee on an upcoming conference on sexuality and covenant ([thefellowship.info/conference](http://thefellowship.info/conference)) to be held April 19-21 at First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga. (ABP)



# A kingdom much bigger than ours

Many years ago a career change took me from daily life in a public university setting to a Baptist denominational headquarters. There I worked with many good, gifted and committed people.

However, the Baptist convention environment was significantly different from the stimulating, academic community where a wide range of ideas, values and personalities merged on a daily basis. Suddenly most everyone was on the same page: promoting a clearly defined program of ministry and missions along with the big mechanism that funded it.

It didn't take me long to notice how denominationalism — unless great efforts are made to overcome it — can lead to a narrow focus. There was, by design, an expected and celebrated sense of sameness that permeated this organizational life.

Soon after moving into denominational headquarters it became apparent that some loyalists saw no further than the program assignments before them. It was as if God's success in the world was tied directly to ours.

While the talk was largely about "ends of the earth" stuff, often the underlying goal was to fulfill a program assignment satisfactorily

that, in turn, helped preserve the denominational system. Allegiance to that system could get equated with faithfulness to the gospel. And well-built parameters of belief and practice became very, very important.

This is not to suggest that the collaborating work of congregations and individual Christians with shared values and beliefs through denominational or denominational-like organizations is ineffective or undeserving of our personal engagement and financial investment. Such voluntary, cooperative efforts allow for important mission and ministry opportunities unavailable on a smaller scale.

In fact, it was that very system that allowed me to take a fulltime ministry into the stimulating, public university setting. For that, I am grateful.

The needed caution within such denominational structures (and individual churches), however, is to always look beyond one's own program assignments and the daily tasks at hand. A bigger God is at work in bigger ways in a bigger world.

The kingdom of God must never get

narrowed down to the goals, structures and plans of any organization.

In recent years, at least in my own hearing, there is more honest talk about sensing and seeking the kingdom of God than ever before in my church-infused life. Even the ongoing debates over exactly what is meant by the kingdom of God suggest its importance.

Such conversations and commitments do not reduce the value of joining hands and compiling resources in order to meet the spiritual and physical needs in the world. In fact, a greater awareness of God's kingdom should drive such efforts.

However, great care should be taken in our churches, church-related organizations and larger denominational groups — so that our understanding of the kingdom of God doesn't get limited to our programs, our political agendas and our narrow visions. If so, it is much too small.

Let us find a church where we fit in — and a church tradition that fits our understandings of faith. Let us work together — yet avoid trying to fit God into our exclusive places.

May we see and seek a kingdom much bigger than our own parameters — and a God who sees and seeks in more places than our own theological and programmatic backyards. **BT**



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# Elephant antidote:

## How to talk about difficult issues in congregational life

By Christopher R. Gambill

Last month I wrote about how most congregations probably have at least one "elephant" — a salient issue that no one dares to talk about — in the sanctuary.

**E**lephants remain ensconced because a prevailing myth that "talking about it makes things worse" protects them. Talking about a thing does not typically make it worse. It does make us feel worse because we are often conflict-avoidant.

Nevertheless, talking about an elephant is often the only way to begin the eviction process. The question is, "How?"

The key is having a *constructive* conversation. Unfortunately, there are lots of ways to approach a conversation that are unhelpful and possibly disastrous.

The failures of most approaches have one thing in common: they lack sufficient planning and structure. A common strategy used to attempt discussion of a difficult issue is to call a big meeting and ask, "What do you think?"

This free-for-all format empowers the extroverts, the emotionally distraught, and those with an axe to grind. The lack of structure means that some of the most thoughtful people may never get a word in edgewise.

Creating structure for a conversation means paying attention to some basic principles:

**Establish ground rules.** Every challenging conversation needs to begin by establishing mutually acceptable ground rules to govern the conversation. This helps create a safe space to talk.

One key ground rule is determining what will be confidential and what that means. Confidentiality should also include matters such as asking participants not to quote one another, and agreeing not to tell other group members' stories without permission.

Other helpful ground rules could include: not interrupting, allowing others to talk before speaking again, and restating others' positions (to their satisfaction) before rebutting them.

**Pre-empt bad behavior.** I have found that it helpful to take time at the beginning of a challenging conversation to identify behaviors the group does *not* want to occur. This usually has the effect of reducing the occurrence of those behaviors.

It is critical to do this before the unwanted behavior occurs. It is much easier to prevent bad behavior than to stop it once it gets started.

**Take personality seriously.** Many attempts to talk about issues in a large group setting fail because leaders do not take the role of personality seriously. Unstructured conversations in a large group disempower introverted group members.

Introverts typically need more time to think before speaking out. The more strongly introverted congregants just will not speak out in front of a large group. Creating a conversational structure that includes small group interaction and discussion is one way to provide a more comfortable, conducive space for introverts to express their thoughts.

Providing breaks in the conversation for prayer, meditation and thinking can also help make a conversation more productive and comfortable to a broad range of people. It can also raise the quality of the conversation.

**Take emotions seriously.** A common mistake groups make in trying to have a challenging conversation is that they skip past emotions and try to go directly to logical arguments. The problem is that human beings are both emotional and rational creatures.

In a challenging conversation, the participants' emotional state often inhibits rational thought. For an emotionally charged issue, some provision needs to be made for

individuals to identify what they are feeling and to better align their emotional state with the conversation that needs to take place. This can be as simple as taking the time to name "What I am feeling" in a small group context or using a guided meditation to help participants center and calm themselves.

**Prevent noisy dissonance.** In the midst of a difficult conversation where lots of heat is generated, one of the casualties — despite the amount of words that are flowing — is real communication. This results because the attempted communication becomes too noisy and dissonant.

Noisy communication looks like this: A thought or idea gets expressed by someone and within a microsecond of when they stop talking (or even before), someone throws out a verbal counterpunch to refute the idea. The back-and-forth, banter then escalates and soon, no one is actually listening to anyone else. Everyone is simply reloading their cannons to fire off the next shot against their opponents.

This process can be prevented with a predetermined structure and a facilitator who allows one idea to be fully explored *before* examining opposing ones.

Getting rid of an elephant infestation is usually not quick or easy. But, like many things in congregational life, the most effective step is usually having a good (constructive) conversation. If it needs pointing out, this kind of thoughtful conversation is also very biblical.

The Book of Acts depicts the early church as often being overrun by elephants. The solution of the early Christians was to do what God's people ought to know how to do best — talk their way through to a solution that is not only a "win" for the group, but also is pleasing to God and the larger community.

If the early church could do it, so can we. A sanctuary is no place for an elephant. **BT**

—Chris Gambill is manager of congregational health services for the Center for Congregational Health.



# Pass the plate

## Most Mormons tithe, but most others don't

When Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney released his federal tax returns for the past two years, he disclosed that he and his wife, Ann, gave about 10 percent of their income to their church, a well-known religious practice called tithing.

In that way, the Romneys are typical Mormons, members of a church that is exceptionally serious about the Old Testament mandate to give away one-tenth of one's income.

But compared to other religious Americans, the Romneys and other Mormons are fairly atypical when it comes to passing the plate. Across the rest of the religious landscape, tithing is often preached but rarely realized.

Research into church donations shows a wide range of giving, with Mormons among the most generous relative to income, followed by conservative Christians, mainline Protestants and Catholics last.

Over the past 34 years, Americans' generosity to all churches has been in steady decline, in good times and in bad, said Sylvia Ronsvalle, whose Illinois-based Empty Tomb Inc. tracks donations to Protestant churches. Ronsvalle's research shows that since 1968, contributions have slowly slumped from 3.11 percent of income to 2.38 percent, despite gains in prosperity.

In her view, churches have failed "to call people to invest in a much larger vision." She believes that explains why giving to missions, distant anti-poverty programs or faraway ministries has sunk faster than giving for the needs of local congregations.

A recent poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that 79 percent of Mormons said they tithed to their church, a much higher percentage than in the Catholic and Protestant world.

The former Massachusetts governor and his wife slightly underpaid their tithe in 2010 but intend to make it up when their final

2011 income becomes clear, a spokesman for Romney's campaign told The Associated Press. Under pressure to disclose, Romney released his federal returns, showing he is likely to pay an effective federal tax rate of about 15 percent



on \$45 million in income over two years.

The returns also showed the Romneys have already donated \$2.6 million to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the 2011 tax year. That brings their church donations to \$4.1 million on two years' estimated income of \$42.6 million.

They made other charitable contributions of \$3 million as well.

Republican presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich's 2010 return showed charitable donations of \$81,000, or about 2.5 percent of his \$3.2 million income. About \$9,500 went to the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington; the balance of his charitable giving was not disclosed.

President Obama's return showed donations of \$245,000, or about 14 percent of his \$1.8 million income. The 36 contributions

went to a wide range of secular and faith-based health, educational and community development groups.

A broad study called the U.S. Congregational Life Survey found that only about a third of Catholics, half of mainline Protestants and two-thirds of conservative Christians reached even the 5 percent level of giving.

Researcher Cynthia Woolever said mainline Protestants in her study gave slightly more than evangelicals in absolute dollars, but less as a percentage of income. Her study did not include Jewish or Muslim congregations because of their smaller numbers.

Ronsvalle and others said generosity tends to be higher among evangelicals because of their regard for the authority of Scripture, where the command is repeatedly found, from Genesis 14, describing Abram's gift to God of "a tenth of everything" to Malachi 3, in which God promises blessings on those who tithe.

Baptist pastor and author Rick Warren has said he "reverse tithes," giving away 90 percent of his income, including all the profits from his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Woolever said Catholics appear at the far end of the spectrum because the Catholic Church does not stress tithing. In addition, she said, Catholic congregations tend to be larger, diluting the sense of individual responsibility for financial support.

No one passes a collection basket at Mormon services. Instead, offerings are mailed or sent in outside of the weekly meeting rite. Mormon leaders keep an accounting, and once a year Mormon families are invited to sit briefly with their bishop, the head of their congregation, and discuss their donations.

It may sound awkward, but it's not to Brenda Grant, a retired nurse from eastern New Orleans who, with her husband, converted from Catholicism more than 30 years ago.

Grant, like many others who follow the biblical mandate, sees tithing as both a command and a voluntary gesture of gratitude to God. **BT**

—Bruce Nolan writes for  
The Times-Picayune in New Orleans.

# Luter likely Southern Baptists' first black president

By Bruce Nolan  
*Religion News Service*

NEW ORLEANS — After months of urging from other Baptists around the country, Fred Luter told his African-American congregation that he will seek to become the first black man to lead the predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention.

Several Baptist leaders said Luter becomes the prohibitive favorite for the post, to be filled in a potentially historic election at the Southern Baptists' annual meeting here in June.

SBC Today, a Baptist-focused website, carried the announcement on Feb. 1. Youth pastor Fred "Chip" Luter III separately confirmed Luter's announcement to his church.

Luter appears to be the first candidate to declare for the post, which will become vacant this summer when Bryant Wright of Marietta, Ga., finishes his second one-year term.

Many began openly promoting Luter for the top job last summer, moments after he was elected the convention's first African-American first vice president.

"If he runs, he'll get elected overwhelmingly. He may be unopposed," said Daniel

Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

No other candidates have announced so far. Akin said other potential candidates were judging their chances on whether Luter decided to run.

"I'd be very surprised if there were any other substantial candidates," said Russell Moore of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The Southern Baptist president has no authority over the denomination's 51,000 autonomous churches and missions, but the president exerts influence by appointing the most important committees in Baptist organizational life.

Akin, Moore and others say they are eager to elect Luter, both for his leadership gifts and to demonstrate Southern Baptist acceptance of the changing face of their work.

Luter is widely known around the convention, having preached in hundreds of pulpits. Moreover, supporters said he is widely admired as a pastor in his own right.



Luter built Franklin Avenue Baptist Church into a major success, then led his congregation in rebuilding after it was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Akin said Luter's stature grew in his decision to remain in New Orleans: "You have to have unbelievable respect for a man who made that kind of commitment."

Growth in traditional white congregations in the 16-million-member Southern Baptist Convention has plateaued. In recent years the denomination has actively sought to reach out to nonwhites, typically Hispanics, African-Americans and Asians.

In 1990, 95 percent of Southern Baptist congregations were white; now the figure is 80 percent, said Scott McConnell of SBC-related LifeWay Research.

"Some critic said of us that the Southern Baptist Convention is as white as a tractor pull," Moore said. "If that remains the case, the Southern Baptist Convention has no future. I think Fred Luter's election will be pioneering; I pray it will not be an anomaly." **BT**

*(Editor's note: The website SBC Today has no connection to this news journal which began and was published for several years under that name.)*

## Christians report lowest growth in Israel

By Judith Sudilovsky  
*RNS/ENInews*

JERUSALEM — Christians have the lowest growth rate among the Israeli population, according to a recent report from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.

According to the Jan. 6 report, the Christian growth rate of 0.9 percent lags behind the Jewish rate of 1.7 percent and the 2.7 percent growth rate among Muslims. Christian Arabs have a growth rate of 1 percent, while the rate among non-Arab Christians is 0.7 percent.

About 154,000 Christians live in Israel, representing about 2 percent of the population, according to the bureau.

The percentage of Christians in Israel has remained relatively stable since the

mid-1980s, noted Wadie Abunassar, director of the International Center for Consultations and a consultant for the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations.

About 80 percent of Christians living in Israel are Arabs, with the remainder mainly Christians who immigrated to Israel with Jewish members of their families under the Law of Return, which allows any proven Jewish person to immigrate to Israel.

The estimated birthrate for Christian women is also the lowest among the religious groups. The average number of children expected to be born to a Christian woman is 2.1, compared to a Muslim woman (3.8), a Jewish woman (3.0) and a Druze woman (2.5).

But though their relative numbers in Israeli society are low, Christian Arab students



consistently have the highest success rates on college-entry examinations compared to other sectors of Israeli society. **BT**

# Daniel Vestal to lead new Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership at Mercer University

**A**TLANTA — Retiring Cooperative Baptist Fellowship executive coordinator Daniel Vestal will lead Mercer University's new Eula Mae and John Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership, which is being endowed with a \$2.5 million grant from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Vestal will also serve as a distinguished university professor.

Vestal will retire from CBF June 30 and began his Mercer appointments July 1.

"I can think of no two names more synonymous with Baptist leadership than John Baugh and Daniel Vestal," said Mercer University President William D. Underwood during the Feb. 8 announcement. "John Baugh for many decades provided courageous and principled leadership as a Baptist layperson, and Daniel Vestal for more than 15 years has provided courageous and principled leadership for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

Underwood said he was pleased that Vestal will direct the Baugh Center and serve as Mercer's first distinguished university professor of Baptist leadership.

"I am deeply grateful to Babs Baugh and her daughters, Jackie and Julie, for making this investment to prepare future Baptist leaders who will champion the principles and embody the character of their late father and mother and grandfather and grandmother," said Underwood.

The Baugh Center will foster research and learning in Baptist history, theology, ethics and missiology, partnering with Mercer's McAfee School of Theology, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the American Baptist Historical Society, as well as Mercer's Center for Theology and Public Life and other



organizations and programs.

The center will initiate a doctoral program in religion focused on Baptist studies. It will be interdepartmental in nature, engaging faculty from across the university and visiting scholars from outside the university. Graduates from the Ph.D. program are expected to become pastor-scholars, teachers in Baptist universities and seminaries, and leaders in denominational and ministry organizations.

"I am honored by this appointment as well as the generosity of the Baugh Foundation and anticipate being a part of such an historic institution as Mercer University," Vestal said. "Eula Mae and John Baugh embodied integrity and Christian character. This center will be a lasting legacy to their lives and will foster research, learning and community within the Baptist family. It will pursue excellence for both lay and clergy leaders by combining spiritual formation, academic study and caring collegiality."

In addition to teaching, Vestal's

responsibilities will include fostering academic programs and research to draw students, professors, pastors and leaders into collaborative relationships and attract Baptist leaders and emerging leaders from around the world for conferences, sabbatical leaves, and to pursue research and educational programs at Mercer.

"It is with great confidence and anticipation that the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation entrusts Dr. Daniel Vestal and President Bill Underwood with the very important tasks of working with thoughtful and dedicated Baptist students in the field of leadership, as well as in the areas of Baptist principles, ethics, theology, history and integrity," said Babs Baugh. "We are honored to be associated with all of those who will participate in the practice and teaching of these ideals and can think of no better way to honor the legacy of John and Eula Mae Baugh. This was their passion."

Prior to being named CBF executive coordinator in 1996, Vestal served for five years as pastor of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston. He also has served as pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in Atlanta; First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas; Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth; and Meadow Lane Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas.

Vestal, who served as the first moderator of CBF in 1990-1991, earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Baylor University and a master's degree and doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Earlene, have three grown children and five grandchildren. **BT**

—Adapted from a Mercer University press release.



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**Senior Pastor:** First Baptist Church of Monroe, N. C. ([www.monroefirstbaptist.org](http://www.monroefirstbaptist.org)), affiliated with the Union Baptist Association, CBFNC and CBF, is seeking a senior pastor. We are a fellowship of free and faithful Baptist Christians committed to a journey of serious study, intentional worship, loving and compassionate fellowship, and hands-on ministry. We have just completed a 12-month transition process and self-study. A seminary degree is required, and senior pastor experience is preferred. Send résumés, including references, by March 15 to [pastorsearch@monroefirstbaptist.org](mailto:pastorsearch@monroefirstbaptist.org) or to Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 3385, Monroe, NC, 28111.

**Minister of Music:** Broadway Baptist Church in suburban Louisville, Ky., a progressive congregation with traditional worship, is seeking a minister of music. For position description and information, see [broadwaybaptist.org/employment](http://broadwaybaptist.org/employment).

**Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation:** First Baptist Church of Lawrence, Kan., a vibrant American Baptist congregation, is seeking a full-time associate pastor of spiritual formation ready to join our mission as an equipping church in the college community of Lawrence, and ready to serve Christ in the areas of youth, children and small groups. View profile at [firstbaptistlawrence.com](http://firstbaptistlawrence.com). Submit résumés to [openings@firstbaptistlawrence.com](mailto:openings@firstbaptistlawrence.com).

**Minister of Youth and Missions:** Wake Forest Baptist Church, a dynamic CBF-affiliated church of more than 900 members in Wake Forest, N.C., is actively seeking a minister of youth and missions as part of a multi-staff team. This position will primarily oversee a vital, growing youth ministry averaging 50-60 weekly. This position also is responsible for overseeing the church's mission efforts. Candidate must have a seminary/divinity degree with two years experience preferred but not required. Submit résumés to Youth and Missions Minister Search Committee, Wake Forest Baptist Church, 118 E. South Ave., Wake Forest, NC 27587.

**Youth Minister:** Kirkwood Baptist Church in St Louis, Mo., a CBF congregation, has an immediate opening for a youth minister. For position description, see [kirkwoodbaptist.org](http://kirkwoodbaptist.org). Respond to [info@kirkwoodbaptist.org](mailto:info@kirkwoodbaptist.org).

**Minister of Youth:** First Baptist Church of Sanford, N.C., is seeking a full-time minister of youth. FBC is a CBF/SBC congregation of approximately 1,000 members and affirms women in ministerial and church leadership positions. A Master of Divinity degree and previous experience are preferred but not required. Candidates must have strong youth leadership and communication skills and work well with committees and church staff. Questions may be addressed to the senior pastor, Dr. Jeff Clark, at (919) 774-4220 or [pjeffclark@windstream.net](mailto:pjeffclark@windstream.net). Submit résumés to [sanfbc@windstream.net](mailto:sanfbc@windstream.net) or to 202 Summit Dr., Sanford, NC 27330.

**Minister to Children and Families:** A 900-member CBF/SBC-affiliated church in Charlotte, N.C., is seeking a minister to children and their families. This person would oversee birth-5th grade. We seek a creative, energetic, committed minister who will lead our children's spiritual growth and our church's numerical growth while working with our parents to provide the ministry they need. Please send résumés to Search Committee, Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church, 1117 South Blvd., Charlotte, 28203 or to [pmbcsearch@gmail.com](mailto:pmbcsearch@gmail.com).

**Minister of Children:** First Baptist Church, Statesville, N.C. ([www.statesvillefbc.org](http://www.statesvillefbc.org)), is seeking a full-time minister of children. We are a dually aligned, CBF-SBC affiliated church, and have both contemporary and traditional

services. The candidate should preferably be a graduate of a seminary or divinity school and have experience in children's ministry. Please forward your résumé to FBC Statesville Children's Minister Search, 815 Davie Ave., Statesville, NC 28677 or to [maryjane@statesvillefbc.org](mailto:maryjane@statesvillefbc.org)

**Music Ministry Resources:** Choir robes (new and used), handbells, choircimes, custom choral folders, music storage boxes, choral risers and choir chairs for sale. Contact Curtis Murdock, Baptist music minister for 35 years, at [MurdockMusic@yahoo.com](mailto:MurdockMusic@yahoo.com) or (800) 868-0101 or [MurdockMusic.com](http://MurdockMusic.com).

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## In the Know

**Harold Branch** died Jan. 20 in Corpus Christi, Texas, at age 92. The pastor of St. John Baptist Church there from 1956 until his retirement in 1988, Branch was the first African American to serve as an officer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He also served on the Southern Baptist Foreign (now International) Mission Board and the Texas Christian Life Commission.

**Soozi Whitten Ford** is executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky. She has served as associate executive minister for Mid-American Baptist Churches in Iowa and Minnesota, and as a stewardship facilitator with ABC-USA.

**Lloyd T. Householder Jr.** of Brentwood, Tenn., died Jan. 30 at age 82. He spent 32 years with the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). He retired in 1992 as assistant vice president for communication and then became the first coordinator for the Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1994-1995. He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Rose Marie, and other family.

**Paul V. Moore** died Dec. 21 in Columbus, Ohio, at age 94. He was the former deputy executive director and treasurer of the Board of Educational Ministries of American Baptist Churches USA. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy, of 64 years.

**Jim Newton** died Jan. 16 in Clinton, Miss., at age 75. A longtime Baptist journalist, his places of service included Baptist Press, the SBC Brotherhood Commission and the SBC Home (now North American) Mission Board. Following retirement, he also worked with World Vision International, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

**Bridgette Flanagan Poag** is director of ministries to children and their families at First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga. Previously she served as children's minister at Manly Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington, Va.

**David E. Tew** is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Morrow, Ga. He most recently served churches in Alpine, Ala., and Madison, Ala. **BT**

## Chet Edwards fills Baylor chair; donates papers to archives

Former U.S. Congressman Chet Edwards has been appointed the W.R. Poage Distinguished Chair for Public Service at Baylor University. He will be in-residence at Baylor two weeks per semester, providing public and classroom lectures, primarily in the areas of political science and economics, and leadership development training through various programs in the division of student life. He will serve as host for educational events in the nation's capital for Baylor students who participate in the university's longtime Washington internship program. He also will assist in processing the Edwards Archive. Once processed, the collection will be available to scholars and citizens interested in extending their understanding of legislative processes and political history. Edwards and his family attend Calvary Baptist Church in Waco and McLean Baptist Church in McLean, Va. **BT**

## Communication is Key a conference from the Center for Congregational Health

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**Time** 9 am - 3 pm (optional tutorial is available from 3-4 pm)

**Cost** \$125/person (lunch included). Group of 3+ from same congregation/staff, \$100/person.

Led by Natalie Aho, Communications Specialist for the Center. Natalie is also a communications specialist for the Associated Baptist Press and Alabama CBF. She is a coach for SocialPhonics, teaching social media to ministers. She is earning her Masters in Interactive Communication.

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Scary Good News — Mark 16:1-8

One Heart, One Mind, One Pocketbook? — Acts 4:32-35

Why Are You Surprised? — Acts 3:1-21

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#### Teaching the Lessons

After reading Tony Cartledge's weekly Bible study lessons starting on page 18, Sunday school teachers and other Bible leaders can access helpful teaching resources (at no charge) at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). These include:

- \* Tony's video overviews
- \* Adult teaching plans by Rick Jordan
- \* Youth teaching plans by Jeremy Colliver
- \* Tony's "Digging Deeper" notes and "The Hardest Question"
- \* Links to commentaries, multimedia resources and more

#### How to Order

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- \* Orders may be placed at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org) or 1-877-752-5658.
- \* The price is just \$18 each for groups of 25 or more — for a full year — with no additional costs.
- \* All **online** teaching resources are available at no charge and may be printed and used by teachers of the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies.



Popular Bible teacher and writer **Tony W. Cartledge** writes each of the weekly Bible studies in *Baptists Today* (beginning on page 18). Themes are based on selected texts from the Revised Common Lectionary.

These lessons — found exclusively in this Nurturing Faith section of *Baptists Today* — form the foundation for the teaching resources for all age groups. **Each class participant should have a copy of *Baptists Today* with these lessons in hand.**

Christian educator **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina provides a teaching plan for each lesson, available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). His FIT FAITH approach to teaching allows for class engagement with the biblical texts as well as with one another.

The Youth Lessons — found on pages 22-23 — build off of Tony's Bible studies and direct these biblical truths to the daily lives of students. Curriculum developer **David Cassady** writes the youth lessons in the news journal, and student minister **Jeremy Colliver** provides the online teaching guides for each lesson found at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) (or linked from [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org)).

#### Thanks sponsors!

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

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 11:1-11

April 1, 2012

## Triumph and Tears

As we enter the spring of 2012, we remember the “Arab Spring” of 2011, an outbreak of public demonstrations that led to the overthrow of cruel regimes in some countries and to violent repression in others.

In some ways, the throngs who marched with Jesus on the day of his “triumphal entry” were following a similar script. Their demonstration, however, was short-lived. Happy but demanding throngs cheered the hope of a new king, but Jesus had in mind a different kind of kingdom.

### An unriden colt (vv. 1-6)

The story we celebrate on Palm Sunday appears in all four gospels (Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-18). The accounts differ in detail and emphasis, but clearly reflect the same story. Jesus, who had worked so hard to reshape the disciples’ thinking about his proper role, surprised them by accepting the accolades due to a king.

Consider the setting: For some time, Jesus had been traveling toward Jerusalem, teaching along the way, knowing that the road would lead to his death. 🕒 The final leg of the long hike brought him up the steep and rugged road from Jericho and through the villages of Bethany and Bethphage (v. 1) on the way to the Mount of Olives. 🕒

Between the orchard-covered ridge and the hubbub of Jerusalem lay the deep Kidron Valley. To enter the city, Jesus would descend a steep, winding



Photo courtesy of Faris Knight/Wikimedia

path through olive groves and cemeteries before crossing the brook and climbing upward toward the city gates.

Before arriving at the Mount of Olives, however, Jesus made a surprising request, instructing two unnamed disciples to enter the nearest village and find an unbroken colt. 🕒 They were to untie the animal and bring it to him, without bothering to ask permission. If anyone should ask what they were about, Jesus said, they need say only “The Lord has need of it and will send it back immediately” (vv. 2-3).

The disciples must have been highly curious: this is the only time in Mark that Jesus refers to himself as “Lord,” though the word *kurios* can also have the less elevated sense of “master.” Likewise, Jesus had not been known to ride when others walked, or to take things without asking. Without understanding what Jesus was up to, the disciples obeyed (vv. 4-6) and found the colt just as quickly as Jesus had predicted.

The text raises several questions: Was Jesus so popular that any person would have gladly offered his colt if he

knew “the Lord had need of it”? Had Jesus made previous arrangements with its owner, or does the writer intend to emphasize Jesus’ supernatural pre-science? The text does not say, but all four gospels point out that the colt had never been ridden before. Why is that significant?

First, the gospels imply that Jesus always walked with his disciples, sharing their food, lodging and mode of transportation. He expected no special privilege, and spoke of himself as the “Son of Man” to emphasize his own humanity and commonality with all persons. Jesus’ sudden decision to ride must have special meaning.

Secondly, entering the city on a colt and to the accompaniment of public praise was clearly reminiscent of a royal entrance. The story calls to mind how David had called for Solomon to ride his father’s mule during his inaugural procession (1 Kgs. 1:33). Now, a far greater “son of David” would ride into the city of kings.

A conquering king might ride into the city on a prancing war-horse, but Jesus rode on the back of a common

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donkey. Though the crowds might call him king, Jesus emphatically refused to be the military messiah that the people (and even his disciples) wanted. There is no question that this was confusing to the disciples and people alike. Thus, though Jesus accepted the acclaim of a king, there remained an aura of mystery about his intentions.

Finally, Jesus' insistence that the colt had not previously been ridden suggests the sacred aspect of his entry into Jerusalem. Only animals that had never been used as beasts of burden could be considered suitable for sacred purposes (see, for example, Num. 19:2 and 1 Sam. 6:7). Despite the royal overtones, Jesus considered the occasion more sacred than political.

### An unknowing multitude (vv. 7-8)

As the significance of Jesus' actions dawned on the disciples, they appear to have been overcome by messianic fervor, and worked feverishly to put Jesus in a position of honor. First, they draped their own cloaks over the donkey's back to make Jesus' seat more comfortable, and perhaps to make the donkey appear more dignified (v. 7). Although the beast was unbroken, the text says only that Jesus "sat on it," presumably with no bucking or protest from the colt — another sign of power.

Jesus was not the only one on the road to Jerusalem, for Passover was approaching and thousands of pilgrims would have been streaming into the city. It stands to reason that those who were devout enough to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover were also most likely to harbor hope for the long-awaited messiah to arrive. Jesus' earlier displays of power had already led many to suspect that he was the promised one. So, as the disciples spread the word and Jesus appeared astride a decorated donkey, excitement stirred the crowd like a summer storm. ⤵

Soon the crowds joined the disciples in laying their cloaks on the path to show Jesus honor, and in spreading branches before him to pave the way. ⤵

### An unhindered song (vv. 9-11)

While the use of cloaks and branches raised images of a royal procession, the true intent of the people — as the gospel writers told the story — becomes evident in their words. Did the disciples lead the chants and songs, or were they spontaneous? That we don't know, but the shouts of the crowd clearly echoed prophecies from the Old Testament and hopes common to first-century Judaism.

The gospel writers record these proclamations somewhat differently, but to much the same effect. The word "hosanna" is a Latinized transliteration of the Aramaic version of the Hebrew phrase "*hoshi'a na*," which literally means "please save!" The expression occurs in Ps. 118:25, just before the other phrase used here: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (v. 9). ⤵

Originally, "Hosanna!" was a prayerful plea for help, but over time, it also became an expression of praise and took on strong messianic connotations. Thus, "hosanna" could represent both a request for help and a word of praise — a hopeful celebration of Jesus as the hoped-for messiah, come to deliver his people. We note that Luke avoided the word "hosanna," perhaps because his largely Gentile audience would not have understood its meaning.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" was a common greeting shared between pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the festival. The people who pressed along the Jerusalem road that day may already have used the phrase to greet one another, but with the appearance of Jesus it took on new meaning as a blessing on the one thought to be a new king who had come in the name of the Lord (Ps. 118:26, see Luke 19:38).

The gospels employ royal vocabulary, describing Jesus as a king descended from the house of David. Matthew has the crowd call Jesus the "son of David" (21:9), while in John he is called "the king of Israel" (12:13). Mark does not call Jesus king, but says "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" (11:10). The implication is clear that the crowds expected Jesus to reinstitute that kingdom.

To explain what was happening, Matthew (21:5) and John (12:15) quote parts of Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

While the march into Jerusalem bore signs of a victory march by a conquering king, the motley procession was ironic. Jesus was not taken to the town square or the palace and crowned as king before the cheering masses. Nor did the march end with the execution of political prisoners, as victory marches sometimes did. Instead, the stage was set for Jesus' execution. Jesus was not a king who killed, but a king who would die.

The gospels say little about how the procession ended. Somewhere along the way, probably outside the gates to the city, the parade lost its momentum and the crowd drifted away. Mark says only that Jesus "entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve" (v. 11). Thus, a public demonstration that began with great excitement ends with Jesus walking about the temple, looking around as any other pilgrim or tourist might do.

Jesus would return to Jerusalem, and he would again be proclaimed as king — but his court would be a jeering group of Roman soldiers, and his crown would be made of thorns. The road Jesus walked (and once rode) was not an easy one, but it was the road appointed to him, and the pathway of his obedience. **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 16:1-8

April 8, 2012

## Scary Good News

Lent has passed, Holy Week ends, and Easter has arrived: no day in Christendom is more significant. Our broader culture gives more attention to Christmas, though Christ's birth is often lost amid the holiday trappings. Some would also hide the living fire of Easter behind cheerful bunnies and colorful eggs, but the memory of Christ's resurrection refuses to be veiled. Jesus did not remain in the tomb, and the significance of his resurrection can't be found in a basket, no matter how hard we try to turn boiled eggs into a symbol of rebirth.

We come to Easter — and to church on Easter — from different places in life, and with different motivations. What matters most, however, is not how we have come to Easter, but how we will leave it. Years ago, when William Willimon was the dean of Duke Chapel, he pointed out that there are different doors leading out of a church, more than one way to leave a cemetery, more than one path from the empty tomb.

Today's lesson challenges us to consider what direction we will follow as we move on from Easter.

### An early morning (vv. 1-3)

The four gospels often relate things differently, and the Easter story is no exception. 🛖 There is much they remember in different ways, but there is one matter on which they all agree: it was women who discovered the empty tomb. The 11 remaining disciples were in hiding. Other believers were doing



their best to appear inconspicuous, scrupulously avoiding the tomb where Jesus was buried, going out of their way to keep from drawing any attention to themselves. After all, Roman soldiers were posted at the tomb to provide security — the same Roman soldiers who sometimes crucified people.

But women coming to care for the body would not be perceived as a threat, and their love for Jesus went beyond the fear of soldiers. So, they had bought spices, presumably purchased on the previous evening, after the Sabbath ended at sundown (v. 1). It was a hard thing to do, working with a dead body that might already smell bad and certainly no longer looked like the image burned into their memories.

They would have come sooner, but Jesus had been crucified on a Friday afternoon, and the Sabbath began at sundown, and the law prevented anyone from doing work on the Sabbath, even the work of caring for the dead. So they waited through the Sabbath, and then rose while it was yet dark on the first day of the week, and filled their arms

with aromatic spices commonly used to anoint the dead and to mask the odor of decay.

There were three women, as Mark tells the story: Mary, the mother of James, and Mary Magdalene, and Salome. 🛖 We can imagine them walking quietly through the early dark, stumbling occasionally, whispering among themselves, wondering how they would manage to move the large round stone that sealed off the tomb (vv. 2-3).

Like a large mill wheel on edge, the stone would have fit into a gutter that was carved for it in the hillside, so it could be rolled away from the small entrance to the tomb. The stone was designed to be movable, but generally by several men. Still, the women were certain they would find a way, or else they would not have come.

### An empty tomb (vv. 4-8)

We know what they found, however. As the first fingers of sunlight streamed into the garden, they came to the tomb, and the stone was already


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sitting to the side (v. 4). The shadowy entrance to the tomb was unguarded and uncovered. The women knew that no one friendly to Jesus could have gotten there before them. What did this mean? Had the Romans moved his body? Had grave robbers looted the tomb in search of jewels or gold?

Within the tomb they found “a young man dressed in a white robe” (v. 5).  Mark doesn’t call him an angel, but he doesn’t deny it, either. The man was apparently no one the women knew, and they would have known everyone on earth who was close to Jesus.

It’s hard to imagine how the women’s minds must have raced as they stood there, dumbfounded. When the young man spoke, it was at once the most wonderful and the most frightening thing he could have told them: “Do not be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him” (v. 6).

The speaker’s words form the core of the early credo that Jesus was crucified and buried, but raised again. In traditional Easter morning greetings, we often exclaim to each other “He is risen!” responding with “He is risen indeed!” Mark was careful, however, to use the passive form of the verb, emphasizing the power and the work of God, who raised Jesus from the dead.

The young man instructed the women to go and tell the disciples — and Peter, to emphasize that the one who denied Jesus still had business with him — that Jesus was going ahead of them into Galilee, where they would see him (v. 7).

Can you put yourself in the women’s sandals, just for a moment, and imagine what such news would be like? Could even Jesus rise from the dead and start walking around as before? As Mark tells the story, you can almost hear the women screaming at the thought, fighting to see who can get out of the tomb first, dropping their spices and running away as fast as their legs could carry them.

The angel had told them to tell the others, and Matthew says the women ran in great joy and immediately told the disciples what they had seen and heard (28:8). Luke agrees they ran back and told the good news, but says the disciples didn’t believe them, though Peter went to check out their story (23:9-12). John affirms that Mary Magdalene ran back to tell Peter and “the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved” (20:2).

Mark’s story, however, is sharply different. He says, “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (v. 8).

And that is the end of Mark’s gospel, in the earliest form that we have it (vv. 9-20 were a later addition; see *The Hardest Question* online for a more detailed explanation).

### An unfinished story

The ending of Mark’s gospel leaves the reader hanging. Some scholars believe he intended it that way, while others argue that Mark continued the story, but the original ending has been lost. However Mark’s gospel ends, we have abundant evidence from the other gospels that the women got over their fear and did not remain quiet, or even afraid. They did, in fact, tell the good news and in so doing they became the first preachers, the first evangelists, the first to proclaim the gospel story of the risen lord.

Well-meaning scribes in the second or third century could not bear the unfinished nature of Mark’s gospel, and so they added various endings to it, but it may be that the most effective telling of the Easter story is one that has no ending, one that is unfinished.

Mark draws us a haunting picture of someone who is first confronted with the truth that the teacher they follow is

not a dead saint, but a living Lord. The women came looking for Jesus, only to find that he was already out in Galilee, looking for them. They came expecting to find a dead master, only to find that Jesus would not remain just a sweet memory.

The shock of finding Jesus gone and hearing that “he has been raised” was scary news. For a time, the women were stupefied. There was no way they could calmly explain this to anyone. The only thing they could do was run screaming into the early dawn with hearts pounding and minds uncertain. What do you do with a crucified lord who lives?

Maybe, then, Mark’s gospel provides the most realistic story of all, and the one we most need to hear. We may desire to hold on to Easter as the bedrock of our faith, but Mark’s gospel won’t fill us with certainty and assurance. If we show up on Easter to get a booster shot of orderly and systematic religion, we won’t find it in Mark.

What Jesus offers on Easter is not calm assurance but dumbfounded wonder, not warm comfort but a chilling challenge, not sleepy-headed certainty but an open-ended future.

That, in fact, is the whole point of the story. The tomb is empty. Christ has been raised. As long as there are people to hear the gospel story, the story remains unfinished. In a way, those later scribes who added their own endings to Mark’s gospel were doing precisely what we are called to do. We have to finish the story. We have to go forward into whatever Galilee lies before us and trust that Jesus will meet us there, will walk with us there, will lead us there.

If we are honest, we must acknowledge that it’s more than a little frightening to imagine a life that is always open to the future, serving a lord who will neither stay dead nor within the boxes we create for him.

What are we supposed to do with such a story as this? That’s a question each person has to answer. As we confront the reality of the risen Christ, we have to write our own Easter story. It’s time we started. **BT**

# Youth

April 1 — April 29, 2012



David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

## Dancing in the Street

Beautiful people are waving from their perch atop the rear seats of waxed sports cars. Floats are decorated with bright colors. Bands polish their instruments and march through the streets. Clowns and performers bring out their best to bring life to the crowd. People line the streets hours before the parade begins.

Our passage for today is also about a parade, but there are no sports cars with people waving, brightly decorated floats, bands playing or clowns performing. This parade is about one person — Jesus.

People line the streets, even draping cloaks and branches on the ground "preparing the way for the Lord" — but only after the disciples enter the city yelling out to the people in the surrounding buildings that Jesus is coming. The crowds chant, even

proclaiming "Hosanna" both as a plea for help and as a word of praise.

Jesus trades in the sports car for a donkey that has never been ridden. Although some of the people recognize the power associated with an animal that has not been broken, many of them may be expecting Jesus to ride in on a majestic warhorse revealing himself as a military messiah. Jesus' appearance on a donkey could remind the people of how Solomon rode a mule in his royal entrance.

The parade doesn't end with Jesus being crowned king, but with the crowds dispersing and Jesus walking around the temple. Jesus will receive his crown the next time he enters the city and even as part of a parade. He will be wearing a crown of thorns and burdened with a cross.

APRIL 1

### Think About It:

*When Jesus enters Jerusalem, many people are expecting him to be a military messiah. Instead, Jesus is a messiah who brings life because of his death. How do you deal with expectations people place on you?*

### Make a Choice:

*Jesus could have ridden the wave of power to be a military messiah, but he chose to be a messiah who brought life to the Kingdom of God. Do your decisions lead to things being destroyed or things being given life?*

### Pray:

*Thank God for sending Jesus to be a messiah who brings life by overcoming death.*

## A Story to Tell

When was the last time you were surprised by something? Most surprises leave us feeling excited and with a sense of relief. But when the women showed up at what had been Jesus' tomb, they became afraid.

We walk through Lent and Holy Week knowing the result of Jesus rising from the dead. We know there will be a hopeful ending at the end of this story, but those who walked with and experienced life with Jesus did not know what the end of the story would be.

According to our scripture passage, the women walk to the tomb to care for the body with bundles of spices in their arms. Meanwhile, the 11 disciples are hiding and the other Jesus-followers are attempting to blend in with their surrounding the best they know how. The women have come

because they seem less of a threat to the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb. And, they come on a Sunday because Sabbath law prevents them from working on the Sabbath that starts at sundown Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday.

The women come to prepare Jesus' body, but instead find the stone rolled away and a young man in a white robe sitting on the right side of the tomb. He tells the women not to be afraid, that Jesus has been raised and to go and tell the others that he has gone ahead to Galilee.

The women walk away afraid to tell the disciples and Peter. Maybe we too should walk away from Easter a little bit afraid, but more importantly with a story to tell — the story of a savior who will not stay dead.

APRIL 8

### Think About It:

*Your teacher, your savior, the person you have been living with for the past three years has been crucified. What do you do next? What do you do when life seems to have no direction?*

### Make a Choice:

*We can choose to live in the hope that Easter morning brings or to live with the sin that hung with Jesus on the cross. Will you choose to live with hope that brings life or with sin that brings death?*

### Pray:

*Thank God for saying yes to us even when we have said no to Jesus.*

## Mine?

APRIL 15

**H**ow willing are you to share all that you have? Maybe it is easier to share those things that have been given to you instead of those things you have bought with money you have earned.

In our scripture passage for today we read about a community that graciously shares all of its possessions.

The fear of not finding Jesus in the tomb has been overcome by witnessing a risen Jesus and by receiving the Holy Spirit

on Pentecost. The community is of one heart and one soul functioning as a body in perfect unity. The apostles testify to the risen Lord Jesus, there is grace upon all the community, and not one person is in need. (If they could have tweeted about it, it would have been "#ideal.")

If we read farther than our passage for today, we learn that the ideal does not last. Self-interest becomes king again, and the community is left hoping for the ideal.

### Think About It:

*What would it be like to live in a community where no one has need?*

### Make a Choice:

*How do you use the resources with which you have been blessed?*

### Pray:

*Ask God to give you the wisdom to use your resources to build up the Kingdom of God.*

## Claim It for Christ

APRIL 22

**M**ost of us are creatures of habit; the lame man in our passage is no different. His friends bring him to entrance of the Temple daily so that he might beg. As the man sits with his arm outstretched and his head down, Peter and John walk up to this man and change his routine because they have been changed by their encounter with the resurrected Christ.

Peter and John tell the lame man they have no money for him but can make him walk again in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

The lame man accepts what Peter and John offer him, so they pull him up. He not only walks, but also leaps with praise.

Peter makes sure that no one around assumes it is he and John who cause the healing. He lets the crowd know that the miracle is performed in the name of the risen Jesus. Peter offers to anyone in the crowd what he and John have offered the lame man — a chance to turn to God so that they may walk again.

### Think About It:

*Peter is transformed after his encounter with a resurrected Jesus. How will Jesus transform you?*

### Make a Choice:

*On a daily basis you walk by people whom you can serve. Will you serve like Peter and John or continue to pass on by like the crowds?*

### Pray:

*Ask God for the courage to offer present help and eternal hope.*

## The Name of Jesus

APRIL 29

**"W**hy yes officer, I was doing 75 in a 35 m.p.h. zone." This isn't the typical response when you are questioned by a police officer as to how fast you were going, but it is the type of response Peter gives when the Sanhedrin questions him.

The Sanhedrin is questioning Peter about the lame man that he and John have healed in the name of Jesus. Peter boldly rephrases the charges from the Sanhedrin and states that he did good in the healing of a lame

man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Peter acting in the name of Jesus is exactly what the Sanhedrin wants to hear.

But Peter gives them more than they want to hear. He continues to tell the Sanhedrin that Jesus, the one they crucified, is now the cornerstone and that salvation comes from no one but him. Peter is saying that they and their temple rituals are has-beens; that Jesus did away with rule-bound religion and brought salvation through relationship.

### Think About It:

*When have you had an encounter with Christ that you have not been able to keep to yourself?*

### Make a Choice:

*What will you choose: To be bound by a religion of rules or to be in relationship with Jesus Christ?*

### Pray:

*Thank God for allowing you to focus on the relationship instead of rules that bind.*

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Acts 4:32-35

April 15, 2012

## One Heart, One Mind, One Pocketbook?

The classic musical-turned-movie *West Side Story* includes several memorable songs, including a ballad sung by Tony and Maria, who are devoted to each other despite cultural differences and family opposition. Dreaming together of a wedding and marriage, they celebrate a unity of soul and mind in the song “One Hand, One Heart.” Alas, Tony is murdered and the wedding never happens.

The sentiment of real marital unity remains appealing, but we know that aspiration is easier than actuality. We sometimes use similar language in speaking of unity within the church family as an ideal, but we rarely see it in action — at least for very long.

Today’s text speaks of the first church, the earliest community of faith that grew up in Jerusalem following the resurrection of Christ and the miracle of Pentecost. Twice, Luke speaks of the community as being characterized by unity, generosity and mutual care. The first summary statement is in Acts 2:42-47. The second, our text for today, begins with one heart, one soul.

### A spirit of unity (v. 32)

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul,” Luke said, as the NRSV translates v. 32a. The word rendered as “soul” is *psuche*, the root of our English words “psyche” and “psychology.” While the KJV and NAS95 translations also use “soul,” the NIV, NET and HCSB



translate it as “mind.” The word does not suggest “soul” in the dualistic Greek sense of an inner, immortal being apart from the physical person. Like the Hebrew word *nephesh*, it refers to one’s interior life, the conscious awareness that makes us who we are.

The terms “heart and soul” are metaphorical in any sense. No one literally surrendered possession of heart or mind, but Luke suggests they joined in common cause for the common purpose of loving/serving Christ and loving/serving each other. To truly love is to serve.

That spirit of unity and loving service led the people to such generous sharing that Luke could say “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (v. 32b).

This statement echoes Luke’s earlier claim that “all who believed were together and had all things in common” (2:44).

On the surface, this appears to suggest wholesale communal living in which everyone pooled their possessions and all lived from a common fund. Does Acts, then, teach a socialist

or communist ideology in which no one owns private property or personal wealth? [U](#)

We must be careful not to draw too many inferences from Luke’s summary statement. If, in fact, he intends to reflect a fully communal system, it apparently didn’t work well or last very long. Although v. 34 insists there was not a needy person among them, the church in Jerusalem later became so impoverished that Paul took up a collection to assist it (Rom. 15:25-28, 1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8:1-15).

Luke’s purpose, in any case, is not to make political statements or to endorse an economic ideology, but to show how the people were living out Christ’s call to love and serve one another.

### A spirit of power (v. 33)

In Luke’s mind, the Christian witnesses of word and deed are inseparable. Thus, sandwiched between three verses about social concern, he observes that “with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

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This verse does two things. First, it injects the apostles, who were not mentioned in v. 32, but will become significant players in vv. 33-34 and the two vignettes that follow.

Secondly, it describes a characteristic practice of the newly bold apostles, who spoke “with great power” as they testified to the resurrection of Christ. The word “their” is supplied in the NRSV translation: the text says literally, “they gave testimony.” The testimony they proclaimed, however, grew from their experience as witnesses of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The “great power” that emboldened the apostles, the reader assumes, derives from the Holy Spirit, which had come upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2, cf. 1:8, 3:12).

Thirdly, Luke describes the end result: “great grace was upon them all.” Members of the church had not only experienced grace, but also had learned to express it. Luke’s intent is not simply to remind us that the believers had been saved by grace, but to assert that their lives were now characterized by grace. 📌

### A spirit of community (vv. 34-35)

Luke returns to the theme of communally shared resources. Luke 2:44 and 4:32 make no mention of the apostles or the method by which goods were distributed, but in v. 35 Luke notes that when people sold property for the purpose of aiding the community, they brought the money and “laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as they had need.”

This adds a layer of administration to the mix, along with the element of apostolic authority: to put one’s self or one’s possessions at the feet of another indicated submission to the other’s leadership.

These verses offer more insight into the system of sharing. Though v. 32 might be read to imply that early believers contributed all of their property or funds to a common pool, the verbal tenses in v. 34 suggest that property was sold piecemeal to provide contributions as needs arose or the common fund

grew dry.

The verb for “selling” is a present active participle, and the word for “bringing” is in the imperfect tense. Both suggest a type of continual or progressive action. Thus, instead of “they sold and brought,” as in NRSV, the phrase could be translated “they were selling and bringing.” The NIV gets the same point across by introducing the phrase with “from time to time,” though those words are not in the text: “From time to time those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds . . .”

The text, then, suggests that the ownership of private property or wealth continued, but church members were so filled with grace that they were willing to dispose of it as needed for the common good. As J. Bradley Chance puts it, “the early community can best be described not so much as practicing communal ownership, as generous sharing” (emphasis by Chance, *Acts* [Smyth & Helwys, 2007], 81).

A community in which there are no needy persons reflects a longstanding ideal for Israel (see Deut. 15:1-11). 📌 With the advent of Christ and the power of the Spirit, Luke says the ideal became reality — at least for a time. Evidence suggests it didn’t last.

Though it goes beyond our assigned text, the next few verses offer both positive and negative examples of the spirit of giving. A man named Barnabas sold a field, brought the money he gained, and laid it at the apostles’ feet (4:36-37). Barnabas receives no special praise, but is given as a specific example of one who shared generously and without guile.

The following story, however, has a drastically different ending. A couple named Ananias and Sapphira also sold a field and laid money at the feet of the apostles. They kept back part of the sale price, but claimed they were donating the full amount. When Peter saw

through their subterfuge and confronted them separately, both of them died (5:1-11), causing “great fear” to come over both the church and those who heard about it.

Peter’s charge to Ananias is a reminder that members’ contributions were voluntary: “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?” (5:4a).

We cannot know how long the happy community described by Luke lasted: perhaps no longer than the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira and the fear that followed them. Soon, the distribution of goods to the poor led to quarrels, with some members complaining that Jewish widows were receiving preferential treatment while Gentile widows were being neglected. This led to the appointment of the first deacons, seven men who were appointed to oversee the distribution of food so the apostles could give more attention to preaching (6:1-6).

In time, as mentioned above, the congregation in Jerusalem became so impoverished that Paul solicited an offering for them from the churches in Asia Minor.

Why did the church become so poor? Was it because an avalanche of poor members joined the community so they could sponge off the generosity of others? Because wealthier members ran out of property and became as poor as everyone else? Because the Romans persecuted the church so fiercely that members lost their ability to work? Because the early believers were so certain of Christ’s soon return that they had stopped working in order to await his coming?

We can’t be sure of the answer, but it appears that the early church — like the modern church — was just as subject to self-interest as Israel had been before it. The ideal of a generous community so rich in the Spirit and in grace that it leaves no one in need remains more of a hope than a reality. 📌

Nevertheless, the ideal remains. How does our community measure up? **BT**

# Bible Study

Acts 3:1-21

with Tony W. Cartledge

April 22, 2012

## Why Are You Surprised?

Larry Smith, editor of the online *Smith Magazine* (smithmag.net), recently published a book of short essays in which contributors were asked to reflect on a moment that changed their lives. In *The Moment: Wild, Poignant, Life-Changing Stories from 125 Writers and Artists Famous and Obscure*, writers speak of a kiss, a fire, a serendipitous meeting, an unexpected epiphany — potential-packed moments that opened their lives to something new.

Today's text speaks of moments that changed not only individual lives, but also potentially all peoples' lives. Still in the shadow of Easter's bright sun, we remember how the predicted but still unexpected resurrection of Jesus had an impact that touched the entire world. The impact of the resurrection was especially evident in the first days and weeks after Christ's followers saw him with their own eyes and came to believe that Jesus was indeed all he had claimed to be.

For thousands, the moment that changed their lives happened at Pentecost (Acts 2), when a gathered multitude was overcome by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and no one exhibited a greater change than Peter.

### A lame man is healed (vv. 1-11)

As Jesus suffered before Pilate, Peter had been filled with doubt and fear. After Easter, however, and especially after Pentecost, the stalwart apostle was a changed man. Today's text showcases the "new" Peter.

Luke tells the story with attention



to detail. Acts 3 begins with the story of a crippled man well known to the community. Every afternoon, as Jews gathered for afternoon prayers, his family parked him in a prime panhandling spot near a temple gate that Luke calls "Beautiful." Showing kindness to the poor was a trademark of Jewish piety, and daily visitors to the temple were among the most devout.

There came a day, Luke tells us, when Peter and John paused beside the man as they arrived for the afternoon service. The man with his hand out may have thought they were checking their pockets for pennies, but instead, they were searching their hearts for just the right response.

Beggars often sit with hands outstretched but heads bowed, but Peter would not have it. The text uses an emphatic construction to indicate that he looked closely at the man, caught his attention, and instructed him to look up at them as he spoke. "I have no silver or gold," Peter said, "but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (v. 6).

Instead of money, Peter filled the beggar's hand with his own hand, then tugged him to his feet. Suddenly healed and whole, the man began leaping, dancing and praising God.

The man's happy antics naturally attracted a very curious crowd, and Peter saw it as a perfect opportunity to be a witness for Christ.

### A crowd is surprised (vv. 12-18)

To the spontaneous crowd, Peter gave an extemporaneous sermon. Like all good preachers, he took note of who was listening and tailored his remarks to them. Here by the temple, most people in the crowd were pious Jews on their way to afternoon prayers, so he addressed them as people of Israel, and asked "Why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" (v. 12).


Peter did not want people to misinterpret the miraculous healing or to think he was responsible for it. Peter wanted his Jewish audience to that


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Jesus to be understood within the context of their own religious heritage, and as the fulfillment of Israel's hopes. Thus, he insists "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus" (v. 13a). 

The fiery apostle could not resist reminding his hearers that they had turned against Jesus, however, asserting that Pilate would have released Jesus if not for the influence of certain Jewish leaders. As a result, Peter declared them corporately responsible for Christ's death: "But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (vv. 14-15). 

When Peter said "His name itself has made this man strong" (v. 16a), it is clear that "name" is a referent to Jesus. This does not suggest that Jesus' name can be used as a magic word, like "Abracadabra," or that prayers are more effective if we close with "in Jesus' name." Rather, it is the person of Jesus, made effective through faith in Jesus, who brings healing (v. 16b).

After charging his temporary congregation with murder (vv. 14-15), Peter softened his approach. He speaks to the people as "friends" who "acted in ignorance" (v. 17).

Perhaps Peter's awareness of his own failures and denial of Jesus helped him understand the difficulty that devoted Jews would have in accepting the revolutionary way that Christ would remake their faith. In one sense, Peter seems to suggest, they were only fulfilling earlier prophecies that the messiah would suffer. Thus, even their rejection had played a role in God's plan (v. 18).

### A challenge is delivered (vv. 19-26)

This did not get those who rejected Christ off the hook, however. Peter could not continue turning his back on Jesus, even though the Teacher had predicted his triple denial. Peter had needed to repent, and so did they (v. 19).

Peter called on his hearers to turn from rejection to acceptance, and again put the message into context, promising "times of refreshing" associated with the coming of the messiah. Knowing that most Hebrews had expected the messiah to come as an earthly deliverer, Peter recast the prophecies to indicate that, though Jesus had returned to heaven, he would return again at "the time of universal restoration" announced by the prophets (vv. 20-21).

Connecting Jesus even more strongly to the Old Testament tradition, Peter recalled Moses' prediction that God would raise up another prophet like him, one who would command in God's name, and whom they should follow (Deut. 18:15-18). The author of Deut. 34:10, probably writing just before or during the exile, insisted that no prophet like Moses, who knew God face to face, had yet arisen. Now, however, Peter names Jesus as the one who came to fulfill the prophecies, and insists that those who want to remain in the fold of God's chosen must obey him (vv. 23, cf. Gen. 17:14).

Recalling God's promise to Abraham that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3), Peter called for his audience to recognize two things: that they were the inheritors of that prophetic promise, and that Christ was its fulfillment, the ultimate mediator of God's blessing to all people. As descendants of Abraham, they were privileged to hear that message first, Peter argued, for "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (v. 26).

Contemporary hearers face the same questions. Will we be like Peter, boldly proclaiming our faith in Christ, confidently reaching out to bring health and hope to the downtrodden? Might

we be like John, standing by Peter and supporting him, while not saying much?

Or, do we stand in the sandals of those who belong to the religious establishment, following the rules but with little expectation of being visited by God's Spirit and the "times of refreshing" that God wants us to experience? Do we need to repent?

Peter's words and deeds declare that Jesus is truly the Son of God who came to fulfill all that the prophets had spoken. The resurrection does not necessarily "prove" the existence or deity of Jesus — faith will always be required — but the disciples' changed lives provide encouraging evidence for the truth of our beliefs.

Peter and John had experienced (and were experiencing) a renewed relationship with Christ through the presence of the Spirit, a personal relationship we can also know. As we await the ultimate "times of refreshing" that will accompany Christ's return, we can believe that Christ lives in us, renews us, strengthens us, and guides us through a continuing process of self-revelation.

Peter's example also reminds us that the natural expression of Christ-in-us is a concern for physical well-being as well as spiritual hope. The disciples followed Jesus' example by combining evangelistic zeal with social ministry, offering present help as well as eternal hope. People are sometimes surprised to see Christians act this way: delivering groceries to the hungry, building a house for the homeless, mentoring those who lack jobs or life skills.

But, the real surprise should be that many who claim the name of Christ do not act in this way: they devote their time and resources almost completely to themselves and their families, with little thought for others. Churches may also fall into this trap, expending great sums of energy and money to "grow the church" while neglecting the community.

May we live so that others will wonder at the loving lives we lead, that we might reply "Why are you surprised?" **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Acts 4:1-12

April 29, 2012

## No Other Way

**H**ave you seen the musical/movie *Hairspray*? Characters in the drama face struggles on several levels, but the central one has to do with cultural change as played out against racial tensions in Baltimore during the 1960s. The story illustrates how powerful and relentless change can be. Both relationships between the races and the influence of Rhythm & Blues on popular music faced strong resistance from entrenched and powerful people. Those who embraced the new order could not be deterred, however, as illustrated by the high-energy musical finale called “You Can’t Stop the Beat.”

The cultural shift was not so different from that facing the religious establishment that tried to squelch the message of Jesus, both before and after his death and resurrection. The leaders of the temple sought to silence the newly invigorated apostles, but nothing they tried could stop the gospel beat.

### A rude interruption (vv. 1-4)

The conflict story we find in ch. 4 continues the narrative trajectory that began in the previous chapter, which we studied last week. Peter and John had met a lame man near the temple and offered him healing in the name of Christ. When the well-known panhandler started dancing and praising God, a crowd of curious onlookers gathered, giving Peter a perfect opportunity to preach. 📖

Peter’s sermon challenged his Jewish audience to recognize Christ as



the fulfillment of the messianic hopes arising from the Hebrew Scriptures. That message, naturally, was not music to the ears of the religious authorities in charge of the temple, so they came out to put a stop to it.

Luke names three individuals or groups of people who showed up to shut down Peter’s preaching: “the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees” (v. 1). The “captain of the temple” was responsible for maintaining order. Many of the priests would also have been members of the Sadducees. 📖

Theologically, the Sadducees were very conservative, accepting only the Torah as Scripture and opposing the emerging belief, popular among the Pharisees, in the resurrection of the dead. Thus, it is only natural that Sadducees would be “much annoyed” with Peter and John, “because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus is resurrection of the dead” (v. 2).

Angered at both the fact and the subject matter of Peter’s teaching, the temple leaders arrested them (v. 3), continuing the contentious relationship with Jesus’ followers that they had developed

with Jesus, who had also taught in the temple, had spoken about resurrection (Luke 19:47-48, 20:27-40, 21:37-38), and had been arrested by “chief priests and officers of the temple” (Luke 22:52).

The temple leaders had sufficient authority to arrest and hold other Jews accused of violating religious laws, so they were within their power when they commanded Peter to desist and led them off to a holding cell.

Luke carefully notes where the real power lay, however. As the authorities sought to silence the resurrection message, many of those who had heard their message came to believe it, he wrote, so that the number of believers reached about 5,000 men, apparently not counting women and children (v. 4). 📖

### A loaded question (vv. 5-7)

After holding the two disciples overnight, their captors marched them before a gathering of “rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem” (v. 5), an apparent reference to the Supreme Sanhedrin, the official ruling body of the Jews. Individual towns had local sanhedrins,

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but the one in Jerusalem had supreme authority. 📌

The head of the Supreme Sanhedrin was the High Priest, whom Luke names as Annas, even though Annas' son-in-law Caiaphas was actually High Priest at the time (Matt. 26:3, 57; John 18:13). Annas had served from 6-15 A.D., and Caiaphas served from 18-37. But, former high priests could still be called "High Priest," even as former presidents in America are referred to as "President" long after they are out of office. To avoid the difficulty of Luke's miscue, some commentators argue that Annas remained the real "power behind the throne" even though Caiaphas officially held the seat.

Luke also names "John and Alexander" as being present. We presume they must have been notables among "all who were related to the high priestly family" (v. 6). Luke's intent is to emphasize that the highest officials in early first-century Judaism were all arrayed against Peter and John, who were set in their midst and called to account for daring to teach something contrary to the official position of the temple. 📌

One might have expected the questioning to begin with the disciples' teaching about the resurrection. Instead, their accusers brought out the man whose healing had drawn the crowd to whom Peter had preached on the previous day, and they asked "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (v. 7).

### A bold answer (vv. 8-12)

Peter could have given a straightforward answer: he had told the man to rise up and walk "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (3:6). But the savvy apostle — who Luke reminds us was filled with the Holy Spirit — began by reframing the complaints against them. Politely addressing the "rulers of the people and elders," he asked if they were being charged with doing good, with bringing a sick man to health (v. 9). The clear implication would have been "Is it wrong to do good by healing someone?"

Peter's reference to the man's healing is double-edged: the word translated "healed" is the same verb that can mean "saved" (*σῶζω*). Whether the religious authorities caught it or not, Peter's phrasing suggested that the man had been healed spiritually as well as physically.

Having thus turned the question in a more positive direction, Peter gave his accusers the name they wanted: "This man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ..." (v. 10a).

Without pausing, Peter then gave them more than they wanted, identifying Jesus Christ as the one "whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (v. 10b). In these few words, Peter proclaimed the heart of the gospel: though rejected and killed by humans, Christ was accepted and raised from the dead by God.

To shore up his claim, Peter called on scripture, quoting Ps. 118:22 in a way that clearly identified Jesus as a stone that was rejected by builders before later becoming the cornerstone upon which the remainder of the building rests.

In citing this text, Peter was following the example of Jesus, who had quoted the same words when the same authorities had questioned him about teaching on the temple grounds (Luke 20:2). Jesus told them a parable in which the greedy tenants of a vineyard wanted the property for themselves, so they beat the messengers sent to collect the owner's share and then killed his son in hopes that they would inherit the vineyard.

Jesus declared that the owner would take the vineyard away from the unworthy tenants and give it to others, then concluded the parable with the same reference to the rejected stone that became the cornerstone (Luke 20:17). 📌

With amazing boldness for a village fisherman called before the highest court

in Judaism, Peter drew out the double meaning of the word he had used earlier for healing/salvation. "There is salvation in no one else," he said, "for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (4:12).

The meaning of Peter's words was clear. With the coming of Christ, the old way of relating to God through temple ritual and keeping the law belonged to the past. Any who sought the healing of salvation and the hope of resurrection would find it upon the cornerstone of Christ alone.

Our text stops here, though the story continues. With the well-known and newly-healed paralytic standing strong and happy before them, members of the Sanhedrin knew they could not afford to punish the disciples, who had become profoundly popular with the people. So, they discussed the matter among themselves and rather lamely instructed Peter and John to stop preaching or teaching in the name of Jesus (vv. 13-18).

Peter, of course, refused to promise any such thing, despite further threats (vv. 19-22). "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard," he proclaimed (v. 20).

On one level, we may think this story no longer applies to us. Do we know anyone who feels threatened by the religious authorities of Judaism? No — but there is always the possibility of confrontation between those who trust the rule-bound religion taught by authorities who think they are in charge of Christ's church, and those whose experience with the fresh wind of Christ's Spirit leads them to push for a more relevant understanding of both faith and practice.

Have you ever had such an experience with Christ that you could not keep from speaking about what you had seen and heard?

Despite the resistance of entrenched authorities in any age, can anyone ultimately "stop the beat" of the good news we have in Christ?

If not, is there any good reason not to sing along? **BT**

# Adventures with LULER the Hound



Kelly Belcher



Luler the Hound can follow a scent. Using her nose and her instinct she can tell there's a rabbit, squirrel or opossum nearby. Even when we can't see or hear anything, when the yard and trees and bushes look still, silent and empty, Luler's ears will perk up. She will shove her snout into the air, her nose will twitch to get the scent, and suddenly she will race off toward the little animal she knows by instinct is there. She will stand with her paws on a tree, barking at an invisible squirrel. Or, she will prance around a hole in the ground because she knows a chipmunk is in there. She is excited! Her tail wags all the way around.

On Easter we know the same thing Luler knows: When things seem still, silent and empty, we feel excitement, sensing that Jesus is alive. Easter Day is the most important day for Jesus-followers because we carry inside us the spirit of Jesus that is holy, alive and real. We can tell by instinct that God's invisible love is alive in us!

## The Bow-Wow

The Bow-Wow: Luler says to spend Easter Day noticing how you and people around you feel joyful and alive. What do you notice about Jesus-followers that day?

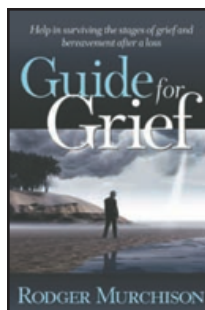


## The Question Box

*Tradition* means "a meaningful idea handed down from one to another." What are your Easter traditions?



More Online: Jump online at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) to discover weekly ideas for children's leaders.



Rodger Murchison

Guide for Grief

A review by Jackie B. Riley, Managing Editor

## After a loss: Surviving the stages of grief and bereavement

“If you don’t let your loved one die, your loved one won’t let you live,” said Rodger Murchison, author of *Guide for Grief*, during a recent preaching consultation. Those words have replayed themselves numerous times ever since I heard them.

Although his larger topic was “Preaching Can Be Painful,” the universal challenge of dealing with death surfaced prominently as the associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., explored various dimensions of pain and loss that ministers must address.

Murchison spoke with candor and insight on a subject he has experienced on personal and professional levels. That same straightforward but compassionate message is evident in his book.

*Guide for Grief* is relevant not only for those suffering loss but also for fellow church members, friends, relatives and other caregivers such as ministers, funeral home directors, chaplains and hospital professionals. And, although it is written from a clear Christian pastoral perspective, it offers families with little faith connection a greater understanding of the natural and essential act of grieving.

Murchison has conducted more than 500 funerals in his 20-plus years of ministry and also conducts grief ministry workshops twice a year as a community outreach from the church. He specialized in ministry with grieving families during his doctoral work at Princeton Theological Seminary, and has done further research into grief counseling at Oxford University. His dissertation on the connection between grief and faith inspired the writing of *Guide for Grief*.

As a writer, Murchison engages his audience early on, identifying himself as one who

has grieved and asked the usual questions.

He dedicates the book to the memory of his parents: “In their living, they taught me valuable lessons about life. And in their dying, they taught me valuable lessons about grief.”

Murchison sets the background for necessary grief work by introducing readers to the first of several real-life persons with whom he has worked. He cites various reactions to grief: from feeling guilty for allowing new relationships and sometimes even sabotaging or avoiding them, to lashing out in anger at God, to turning anger into woe that affects all areas of life.

Murchison does not discount practices such as visiting the gravesite of or talking to the deceased as initial steps in the grief journey, but he explains how such behaviors can become unhealthy and detrimental to the recovery process.

While he allows for fluid timetables and processes, he does identify predictable patterns that must be completed — although they may not follow the five phases popularized by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.

Murchison’s goal is to help readers focus on their losses from a fresh perspective. He calls for reframing “Why?” questions — that cannot be controlled but must be asked — as “What?” questions that can help grieving persons to re-orient their lives and move on.

A part of the reframing process, Murchison writes, involves dealing with changing views of faith.

To help grieving “travelers” move in more healthy directions, he offers the following 10 questions people have asked him over the years, along with addressing the different kinds of grief that come with different kinds of death:

1. “What happens when we die?”
2. “How do I live without my loved one?”
3. “Are there healthy and unhealthy ways to grieve?”

4. “Why did my loved one die?”
5. “Did God take my loved one?”
6. “How long will my grief hurt?”
7. “How do we deal with loneliness, abandonment and fear?”
8. “How do special circumstances affect grief?”
9. “What about those who mourn children and children mourning?”
10. “Is ultimate good possible from this loss?”

For each question, Murchison suggests coping techniques based on well-tested scholarship and practice along with helpful scripture references. His compassionate tone continues in the closing prayers and serene original watercolor sketches in the book.

These segments are intentionally short and to the point — sometimes just four pages long — since grieving persons are often unable to focus for long periods of time. More information, however, including a list of recommended readings and other resources are being developed for the website [GuideForGrief.info](http://GuideForGrief.info). These include a small-group study guide to use with grief ministry support groups and suggestions of helpful organizations and websites.

With the help found in *Guide for Grief* and these other resources, Murchison affirms that “Grief is not the enemy. . . . The issue isn’t how do you get rid of grief — the issue is how do you deal with it, because if you don’t deal with grief, grief will deal with you.” **BT**



# BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Spring arrives, and with it Union hopes for a reversal of fortune. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, sensing the impatience of the northern public, relieves Gen. George McClellan of supreme command of the Union Army. McClellan's new responsibility is the Army of the Potomac, with orders to attack Richmond, the Confederate capital. Thus begin preparations for the Peninsular Campaign.

Meanwhile, the Confederate and United States elevate naval warfare as the first clash of ironclad ships occurs. After the *C.S. Virginia* sinks two wooden warships off the coast of Virginia, the *U.S.S. Monitor* and the *Virginia* fight to a draw.

White Baptists of the South continue their defense of the Confederacy — on the battlefield, on the home front, in the Baptist press, in the world of politics, and sometimes in church services. Confederate president Jefferson Davis, in his recent inauguration as the Confederate States president, during the ceremony kissed a Bible previously given to him by *Tennessee Baptist* editor J.R. Graves.

Bibles are on the minds of Southern Baptists, or more precisely, the lack of scriptures among Confederate soldiers. This month in Augusta, Ga., Christian leaders from across denominational lines gather for the Bible Convention of the Confederate States of America. Determined to move beyond current fragmented and ineffective Bible publishing and distribution efforts in the South, delegates create the Confederate Bible Society. W.D. Rice, General Superintendent of the Baptist Colportage Board, is chosen to represent the Bible Society among Southern Baptists.

In addition to Bibles, Baptists contribute bells to the Confederate cause. One such instance is noted by the *Richmond Dispatch*:

*The congregation of the Second Baptist Church in this city have set an example that may challenge emulation, but for self-sacrificing patriotism cannot be excelled. They met not long since and by unanimous vote gave their church bell to be cast into cannon to be used in the public defence. To show that this was not an empty promise made for effect, they immediately had it taken down to be put to the use indicated. At the same*



150 YEARS AGO

March 1862

*meeting at which the resolution above stated was passed, it was determined to subscribe a sum sufficient to purchase enough metal to add to that in the bell to form into a battery to be called the Second Baptist Church battery.*

Not to be outdone, Northern Baptists contribute to the Union cause in ways similar — and unique. Perhaps the most notable moment this month among Baptists of the North occurs on a Wednesday night at the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia. A guest speaker, 28-year-old Joseph Gilmore, a graduate of Brown University and Newton Theological Seminary, preaches on Psalm 23, focusing on the sentence, “He leadeth me beside the still waters.” As Gilmore later recounted:

*Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significance and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.*

*It was the darkest hour of the Civil War. I did not refer to that fact — that is, I don't think I did — but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God's leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whither we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.*

*At the close of the meeting a few of us in the parlor of my host, good Deacon Wattson, kept on talking about the*

*thought which I had emphasized; and then and there, on a blank page of the brief from which I had intended to speak, I penciled the hymn, talking and writing at the same time, then handed it to my wife and thought no more about it. She sent it to the Watchman and Reflector, a paper published in Boston, where it was first printed. I did not know until 1865 that my hymn had been set to music by William B. Bradbury. I went to Rochester [New York] to preach as a candidate before the Second Baptist Church. Going into their chapel on arrival in the city, I picked up a hymnal to see what they were singing, and opened it at my own hymn, He Leadeth Me:*

*He leadeth me: O blessed thought!  
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

*Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,  
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,  
by waters still, o'er troubled sea,  
still 'tis his hand that leadeth me.*

[Refrain]

*He leadeth me, he leadeth me,  
by his own hand he leadeth me;  
his faithful follower I would be,  
for by his hand he leadeth me.*

The gloom of these times is all too real, and Baptists North and South hope and pray that God is leading their respective nations. **BT**

—For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit [civilwarbaptists.org](http://civilwarbaptists.org).



## Root beer, Fritos, and tennis balls

I was heading out of the grocery store with my health food. Like everyone else, I had to make a quick judgment call as to which line would move fastest. No one wants to endure the pain of being in line 30 seconds longer than necessary.

I was proud of my decision to get in a line with three people who looked like they were in a hurry to buy seven items. The seemingly shorter line of two customers not only had at least 15 items, but one of the customers also had what looked suspiciously like coupons sticking out of her purse.

I had just settled into my swiftly moving line when I realized with horror that my cashier was talking to the customers. This could only be trouble. I strained to hear if our teen-aged cashier was calling for someone to replace the register tape, unjam the number seven, or decide whether Cajun style black-eyed peas cost the same as regular black-eyed peas.

What I heard was far more surprising. My cashier was talking to the customers as if we were people.

"These are the best microwave pizzas. I bet you just got off work and you're in a hurry."

"Yes, that's right."

"It must be hard to work all day and then have to go home to make dinner. What do you do?"

"I'm a legal secretary."

"Is it like *Law and Order* or *Harry's Law*? Tell me it's not as dull as *Judge Judy*."

I couldn't decide if it were more amazing that the cashier was talking to the customers or that the customers were enjoying it.

"These are pretty flowers. If you don't mind me asking, who are they for?"

"They're for my wife."

"How long have you been married?"

"Thirty years."

"I can't imagine me staying three weeks



with the same girl. Neither can any girl I know."

When it was my turn, I wondered what comments my purchases would evoke:

"Root beer, Fritos and tennis balls. You must be on a fitness kick."

"I'm glad to hear it shows."

This cashier doesn't know the rules. Cashiers are supposed to be nothing but efficient. Friendliness is supposed to be limited to "Did you find everything you need?" Customers are supposed to answer "Yes" and keep the line moving.

Cashiers aren't supposed to say anything that might be interpreted as treating a customer as an individual. Most cashiers and customers have learned to keep their heads down, make no eye contact, and transact their business as impersonally as possible.

Why was this cashier interested enough in people to ask questions? Why was he having fun? Why was it fun for all of us? Maybe he was new or poorly trained or didn't know any better. Maybe in a month he will keep

his head down and make no eye contact. Or maybe he has learned something important. Could it be that he had found there is a connection between our attitude toward strangers and our level of happiness? Maybe he has discovered that he can choose to be more joyful.

This is not to suggest that we need to wear smiley faces and pretend to be friendlier than we feel, but if we are not careful we can begin to think of strangers as enemies. In a world that grows colder every day, kindness seems out of place. In hearts that grow cold, love seems naïve. Being clever becomes more important than being compassionate.

God is the origin of every act of kindness. God helps cynical people live with the love God has given us. God replaces apathy with kindness. God gives us new, caring hearts.

I imagine that my favorite cashier would suggest that if we think of strangers as more like us, look them in the eye and speak with interest, it will make a joyful difference for all of us. **BT**

# What do you get out of Church?

Reblog

By Tony W. Cartledge

The Barna Group has released a new study on what church attendees say they get out of the experience — and those who plan worship could profit from giving it a look.

Church should be about relating to God, right? The survey found that 66 percent of respondents said they had “connected with God” at some point in their church experience, but that means one-third of those who’ve attended church claim they’ve never met God there.

Among those who attend weekly, 44 percent said they felt connected with God every week, while 18 percent said they felt the connection about once per month.

Church attendance is also social interaction, and 68 percent of all respondents said

they experienced church as “part of a group of people who are united in their beliefs and who take care of each other in practical ways.”

Surprisingly, church size has little impact on that figure. Age, however, does: the youngest group (18-27) was substantially less likely to say they felt like part of a united and supportive group (just 47 percent, as opposed to 71 percent for boomers [age 47-65] and busters [age 28-46] and 70 percent for the 66-and-up group).

We preacher types like to think that church attendees take home helpful insights from our extraordinary sermons, but 61 percent of respondents said they couldn’t remember gaining a single new insight the last time they attended church.

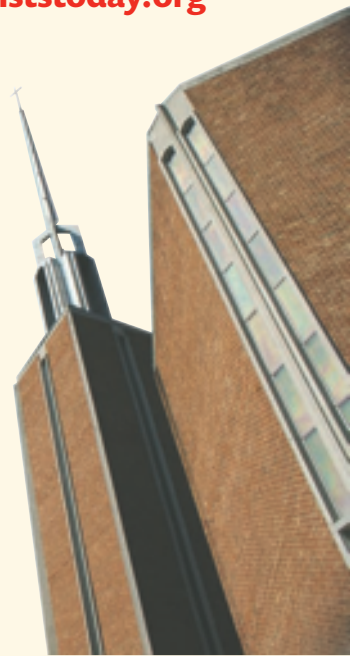
Does this mean that the sermons are lacking in significance, or failing to communicate, or that congregants just aren’t paying

Selections from recent blogs at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org)

attention? In either case, it should gain the attention of those who plan worship and deliver sermons.

It is always a good question to ask what more can be done to make worship really count for the people in the pews. **BT**

*(More on the Barna study can be found at [barna.org/congregations-articles/556-what-people-experience-in-churches](http://barna.org/congregations-articles/556-what-people-experience-in-churches).)*



## Truth beyond the literal

By John Pierce

“I literally laughed my head off.” “I literally died laughing.”

No, you didn’t. No decapitation, nor death in any form by cachinnation. But, truthfully, you still laughed very hard.

However, literal means, well, literal. And literal is not the only route to truth.

It is interesting that those who talk so much about taking the Bible literally are often unwilling to take Jesus literally. The radical, selfless and widely merciful words of Jesus — quoted by firsthand witnesses in the Gospels — usually get softened by prefaces such as, “What Jesus really meant was...”

Few would say that Jesus was just kidding when he emphatically called for turning cheeks, walking the second mile, giving away another garment if someone takes the first, not judging others, and loving enemies. But even (or especially) those who claim to take the Bible “just like it is” often balk at taking some of Jesus’ strongest words literally.

Another handy qualifier is, “Well, our times are different from Jesus...” — as if that gets us off the hook.

Debates over biblical authority are some of the least constructive discussions

some of us have ever had — especially with those who:

1. Claim to take the Bible literally (although we know they do not)
2. Equate only “literal” with “true”
3. Apply the “inerrancy” or “infallibility” that they claim for scripture to their own particular interpretations of selected biblical texts — and even to subjects that are not specifically addressed in the Bible.

Both deceptive and well-meaning souls will claim to take the Bible literally and insist that such a reading of the holy text is the only option for discerning its truth.

Harvard theologian and American Baptist minister Harvey Cox recently told about the student leader of Harvard’s atheist group taking one of his theology classes. The otherwise bright student wrote a weak paper in which he sought to discredit the Bible and therefore the God of the Jewish and Christian faiths by dismantling a literal interpretation of the Flood Story. He argued that the animals could not have been rounded up as such and placed on Noah’s Ark and so on.

“Don’t you not know a story when you read one?” Dr. Cox responded, shaking his head in disbelief (pun intended) that the truth of the ancient account — passed along

through generations — could only be valid (truthful) if taken literally.

There are good reasons, from a biblical scholarship perspective, for not taking an exclusively literal approach to the Bible. There are simply too many different types of literature in there — some such as poetry, parable and myth that are clearly designed for conveying truth in non-literal ways.

But, again, having that kind of discussion with someone who fears the whole Christian faith would fall apart with any inconsistency or scientific misunderstanding within the biblical canon is fruitless. So I don’t have those discussions now unless there is some honest inquiry.

However, my main reasons for approaching the Bible in ways other than strict literal interpretations are not based on such scholarly grounds. Rather they come from an amazement at how many “literal” interpretations have been wrong in the past and how unloving, fearful and judgmental so many of those who make those claims can be.

Such characteristics are in stark contrast to the very essence of the Gospels — the heart of the biblical revelation. That’s just not the way Jesus said we are to live. Literally. **BT**

Pastor, congregation  
'have loved each other'  
through changing times

**P**INTLALA, Ala. — “Long pastorates are few and far between, but vital long pastorates are rare in our culture,” wrote Susan Diamond, pastor of First Christian Church in Montgomery, Ala.

Diamond penned these words to her friend, Gary P. Burton, whose 40 years as pastor of Pintlala Baptist Church in the small, rural community outside Montgomery were celebrated recently.

The church was only 11 years old when Burton became the fourth pastor on Jan. 9, 1972. However, he had preached revivals in Pintlala earlier, including one in 1965 when he was just 17.

So past and present church members, community leaders and others gathered on Jan. 8 of this year to celebrate the significant anniversary. Others, like Diamond, sent tributes.

She praised her friend and fellow pastor for his support of ecumenical and interfaith endeavors, and concluded: “Gary truly lives the call to love God with all that he is and to love neighbor as he loves himself.”

Another letter came from Rabbi Stephen Listfield, who served the Jewish community in Montgomery before moving to Congregation Beth-El in Massapequa, N.Y. He wrote:

“When a pastor and the church grow together — as a unit, in continuity through the highs and lows, and going through a fairly large chunk of a lifespan together, such that they now celebrate 40 years of shared progress — can it be doubted that they have together attained not merely intelligence, not merely ‘smarts,’ but have attained the wisdom that comes from striving and maturing together in service to the One Whose love embraces all?”

Indeed the Pintlala congregation and pastor have spent a large chunk of their lifespan together. Just think of how many baptisms, weddings, funerals, baby presentations, potluck dinners, revivals, prayer services and budget discussions have occurred over the course of 40 years. Boys and girls Burton baptized in the early 1970s are now adults, and he has baptized some of their children and even their grandchildren.

# 40 years at Pintlala



Michele Creel is among those whom Burton baptized. She wrote, “My earliest memory of you is when I was 5 or 6 years old, sitting on the front row of the old sanctuary with red carpet watching you baptize my dad and mom.” Burton later baptized her, officiated at her wedding, and spoke words of comfort at the funerals of her friends.

Frank Ellis, current chair of deacons, called Burton an exemplary “shepherd of our flock,” and marveled that “he stood by me on the happiest days of my life — my wedding and the birth of my children — and he was there, too, at my mother’s funeral.”

When Burton moved to Pintlala in 1972, the congregation was small and struggling financially. Soon, membership increased and finances stabilized. During the next 20 years, needed facilities were built including a new sanctuary completed in 1992.

That building campaign was funded, in part, by professional fishing tournaments organized by Bassmaster founder Ray Scott.

One non-professional fisherman who came to Pintlala for the tournaments in 1991 and 1992 was sitting President George H.W. Bush. After leaving office, he returned for the 1993 tournament. For the '92 tournament he brought along his son, the future president.

Visits from the Bush family were a highlight for Burton. But for his members those brief presidential visits are not nearly as significant as the long-term commitment, excellent preaching and courageous leadership of their pastor.

Chad Eggleston and Mandy McMichael, a young couple in the church, wrote: “So often we Baptists exhibit our strong anti-intellectual streak. Thank you, Gary, for standing against this way of being in the world by your witness.”

They also expressed appreciation to their pastor “for taking some courageous positions in the church that have allowed it to become what it is today. We know the journey hasn’t been without obstacles, but we are thankful for your gentle and persuasive leadership in this place.”

Burton said that people often ask him about the secret for a long tenure in the pastorate. “It is quite simple,” he said. “We have loved each other.”

He concluded his expressions of appreciation by saying: “You have given me a sense of purpose, a sense of place, a sense of community, and I am holding you responsible for giving me a sense of humor.

“You have allowed me to grow and to learn and to change. You have permitted me to march to the beat of a different Baptist drummer. You have permitted me to participate in many civic engagements, which I think have strengthened the mission and purpose of this church. You have allowed me to emphasize that the education of the mind is as important as the openness of the heart.

“You have allowed me to love the history of this place, and most importantly you have unfettered me to preach the whole counsel of God and to declare the good news of Jesus Christ who saves and transforms human life. Thank you for letting me communicate the values of faith and reason and kindness. So we celebrate today; we go back to work tomorrow.” **BT**

—Pam Durso is executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry based in Atlanta. She is currently writing the history of Pintlala Baptist Church.



**Above: These five music ministers (standing, left to right)** — Robert Gammon, Stanley Roberts, Kadar Jones, Mark Green and James Bennett, along with Cass DuCharme (not pictured) — share music selection, event planning, choral directing and many other tasks that make Jubilate a memorable experience each year. Seated is Rob Smith, band director at Pendleton High School and a member of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C. For 12 years he has been a valued bus driver and chaperone who plays several musical instruments to accompany the choir. Below: Youthful musicians Cameron Clamp (left) from Aiken and Conner Burton from Clemson, S.C., add their unique talents to the Jubilate experience.



# Jubilate!

## A bigger, better youth choir

AVONDALE ESTATES, Ga. — On the Sunday morning of Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, those who form the latest version of Jubilate assembled for their first concert of the year. They had spent Friday night and much of Saturday learning challenging choral music selections from, not one, but six directors.

**N**ow it was time for the 120-voice youth choir to lead worship for the First Baptist Church of Avondale Estates, the Atlanta congregation that had hosted the rehearsal retreat. Then bags, buses and music stands were packed for the drive to Aiken, S.C. The First Baptist Church there hosted the Sunday evening concert.

Then the young singers and chaperones from these two churches and four others hugged and said good-byes with plans to see each other when the school term ends. The spring green shirts they had worn on this crisp January day will be brought out again for the annual summer tour.

In its 19th year, Jubilate is going strong.

### BRIGHT IDEA

The multiple-church youth choir was the brainchild of Stanley Roberts, minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., and professor of choral conducting at Mercer University's Townsend School of Music.

"The idea came about in the summer of

### STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN PIERCE

1993, my first year at First Baptist Church in Macon," said Roberts. "I had a small youth choir of 12 singers, and I wanted them to have a mass-choir choral experience and have the opportunity to sing some anthem literature they could not ordinarily prepare and sing because of our small size."

So Roberts bounced his idea off some seminary friends and other church musicians with similar worship styles. The directors agreed to bring their youth choirs to a North Georgia retreat center in the winter of 1994 to learn choral pieces together and then sing at the First Baptist Church of Clayton, Ga., where Mark Green (currently at Avondale Estates) was minister of music.

Since the retreat was not budgeted by churches as it is now, Roberts said they tried to save money by grabbing pizzas and other food from nearby Clayton rather than using the retreat center's food service. However, they did not plan for a Saturday snowstorm and a high temperature of 10 degrees.

"Thanks to some of the good folks in Mark's church, we didn't go hungry," said Stanley. "But after that, we came up with the money for food service."

### CONSISTENCY

Cass DuCharme of Highland Hills Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., and James Bennett (who was at Clemson First Baptist Church at the time and now serves First Baptist Church

of Aiken, S.C.) have been with Roberts and Green since the beginning. Rick Baumgarner of First Baptist Easley, S.C., was part of the original group that first year only.

Over nearly two decades, Jubilate has changed its rehearsal locations and some youth choirs have come in and out of the program — particularly as directors have moved on. But there has been a rather consistent formula that seems to work well.

"The basic concept is that we have a retreat to learn music that the average small choir could never learn on their own," said Roberts.

Each year, the directors select eight anthems to give the young singers broad learning and to create worship that is rich and varied.

"We look for things with substance — musically and textually," said Roberts. "Each year we have a 'world music piece' (usually African), a language piece (often Latin, but also German and various African dialects), an anthem based on a traditional hymn, a gospel/spiritual anthem, a contemporary youth anthem, classical anthem literature, and all in between."

Roberts said the directors seek a variety of styles and tempos to challenge the singers — including some pieces that each smaller choir can do on its own once the members have learned them in the larger setting.

"Another advantage is that many of these pieces can be sung by our adult choirs, so it gives us a chance to combine our youth and adult choirs at home and sing together," he said. "But, in essence, it provides us a way to do some things musically that we cannot do on our own."



**Sonny Nodine**, a high school senior and member of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C., is in his third and final year as a soloist for Jubilate.

## COOPERATION

“The [winter retreat] and subsequent summer tour have become the real catalyst around which we have built our entire middle school and senior high school youth choir ministries at Aiken’s First Baptist,” said Bennett.

Connecting his own ministry with colleagues, he said, brings an important dimension to his work.

“Being able to collaborate with good musicians who are also good friends to help shape a program that exposes youth to quality sacred music in a festival setting has been a real joy for me,” said Bennett. Watching the choral techniques of colleagues as they take turns directing the choir is helpful and encouraging, he said.

“And seeing the other leaders’ unwavering commitment to Christ through their calling as church musicians has been a real inspiration for me as well,” he said. “As my friends, they have helped see me through some very difficult times, serving as a real source of encouragement that has sustained and strengthened me.”

Robert Gammon of Clemson First Baptist is still the new director on the block, although he’s been involved for 12 years. He values both the collegiality and the spiritual impact on the young people who participate.

“I have had several youth choir members tell me that their experiences with Jubilate have been some of the most memorable times of their spiritual journey,” he said. “In addition, a few of our youth choir members were able to feel more accepted within our smaller group because of their positive experiences with the Jubilate choir. It helped them develop more musical and personal confidence — and

they established friendships that have benefited them along their journey of faith.”

## CHANGES

The biggest format change came when the multi-church choir was invited to sing for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship national assembly in Louisville, Ky., in the summer of 1997.

“We put together a tour to get us there and back,” said Roberts. “It stuck! We have toured each summer since then.”

Three of those tours have included singing at CBF assemblies along with one concert at a church music conference in Birmingham.

“The winter retreat is a great time of learning,” said Roberts of the balanced schedule. “Then the summer is a great time to experience traveling as a group.”

He said the summer itinerary has included churches of all sizes, ministries to senior adults and hospice patients, youth detention facilities and many other settings.

The various venues for ministry have provided many meaningful ministry opportunities over the years, said Gammon. He particularly recalled the time the large youth choir arrived at a church that had just received the news of two beloved members being killed during a home invasion.

“Of course, we had no idea until we arrived for the concert that morning what had occurred,” he said. “However, in God’s mercy and grace, all the texts to the anthems we sang were about peace, mercy, comfort and hope. With each passing song, it became obvious that our Jubilate singers were ministering to this grieving congregation through the gift of music. It was a sacred moment.”

## BEING JOYFUL

While Roberts was planning the first retreat, his eyes fell on a book by one of his seminary professors, Don Hustad, who was a longtime organist for evangelist Billy Graham. The title, in bold gold lettering on a burgundy background, read: *Jubilate! Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*.

“I thought, ‘Jubilate!’ — which in Latin means, ‘Be joyful!’ — that would be a good name for our retreat. We have kept it ever since.”

Indeed, a lot of joy has been shared among the generations of young musicians who have passed through the Jubilate experience. In addition to singing together, some talented youth have contributed in other ways musically — such as playing wind, brass or percussion instruments or singing solos. Directors try to make good use of the exceptional talent in their midst.

“At one point we were up to around 160 singers, which was too large for our purposes of singing in churches,” said Roberts. “We now sing around 115 in the winter, then tour with about 90 in the summer.”

While the directors have a healthy respect for one another and work closely together, Green sees a similar closeness that builds among the youthful singers. And the influence of Jubilate is lasting, he said.

His two sons often speak of their Jubilate years “with the highest regard and fondness.” Another of his singers created a Facebook page so the spread-about choir can stay in touch. And an elementary school music teacher, Natasha Cash Mazarky, attributes much of her love for music to being a part of Jubilate for the first five years of its existence, he said.

## RIGHT KEY

Preparing musically is just one aspect of the ongoing success of Jubilate, said Roberts. Planning and collaboration are essential keys too.

“One key element is having directors who can work together and leave their egos in another zip code,” he said. “We share in selecting the music, rehearsing, conducting, playing, accompanying, securing facilities, getting shirts and food, tour itinerary, rehearsal scheduling... It is a major undertaking when you step back and think about it.”

Choosing good quality choral music, paired with well-crafted, theologically-sound texts, that represents a wide range of musical styles, implements vocal ranges and rhythms that are appropriate for sixth through 12th grade youth,

and is neither too easy nor too difficult; and then providing opportunities for the youth to perform that music in church worship services as well as in community missions settings is the biggest challenge, said Bennett.

“Trust me, it’s just as tricky as it sounds, and we’ve certainly had our hits and misses over the years!”

Mount Zion Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., joined Jubilate in 2000, said Kadar Jones, associate pastor for music and adult discipleship.

“It gives our smaller group a chance to perform a level of music that we would not otherwise attempt,” he said. “The experience strengthens our students’ musical ability and, in turn, strengthens our choir at home.”

He, too, values the camaraderie of the directors.

“We enjoy each other and work well together,” said Jones, who enjoys directing and accompanying the choir on piano. “We are all on the same page with regard to music and ministry, yet we each bring something unique to the group.”

## MEMORIES

Roberts said he has many good memories from Jubilate. They range from the simple fun of recreation together to seeing the youthful surprise the first time the choir sang for a 10,000-strong gathering to packing 120 hungry travelers into a restaurant.

Some singers have passed out, he said. Then there was the time he hit his hand on a ceiling fan while conducting. And he can’t forget when some middle-school students called him to say they had found whiskey in their room.

“Sure enough, in the micro-fridge was an unopened bottle.”

And best-laid plans don’t always work out. Like the time their hotel reservations in Lexington, Ky., had been canceled — and when someone familiar with open whiskey bottles heartily joined in the singing at one tour stop.

On the other hand, Bennett recalls the time the Jubilate choir sang for a large group of teenagers at a juvenile detention center.

“As the detainees marched into the auditorium in their orange jump suits, escorted by

armed guards, I could see that our kids were visibly shaken,” he said. “Nevertheless, they sang as beautifully as I’ve ever heard them sing and the inmates were clearly moved — as was I. Many of those singers have now graduated college, and they still tell me what a holy moment that was for them.”

## ENCORE

“These kids develop some deep relationships with kids from other churches,” said Roberts, noting that even a few marriages have blossomed out of Jubilate.

“I constantly get messages from folks who sang 10 to 15 years ago saying how much it meant to them,” he added. “It is great to see the interaction within our individual groups and between the choirs.”

So despite the hard work over the years, these directors see a bright future for Jubilate. Their combined bigger, better choir will tour through parts of South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama this summer.

And when it’s over?

“We’ll plan for Jubilate 20,” said Roberts. **BT**



**Cass DuCharme of Highland Hills Baptist Church in Macon, Ga.,** takes his turn directing the six youth choirs that comprise Jubilate! Festival Singers. He has not missed a single Jubilate retreat or tour, now into its 19th year. “It has been a wonderful musical experience,” he said. “Jubilate is about music, but it’s also about relationships.”

Now all glory to God, who is able... to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Eph. 3:20

# What can God do through you?

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Daniel Vestal



Carrie Newcomer

#### Highlights:

- Daniel Vestal's final sermon as the Fellowship's Executive Coordinator
- Significant report from 2012 Task Force on the Fellowship's future
- Carrie Newcomer in Concert
- Leadership Institute - *First Church: Finding a Way Forward in Crazy Times*
- Prayer Retreat - *The Questions God Asks*
- Commissioning Service of mission field personnel
- Worship, Workshops and Mission Committees
- Auxiliary Events and Fellowship Opportunities
- Hispanic Network Gathering and so much more



# Heretic no more

*Vatican promotes science in Galileo's hometown*

**V**ATICAN CITY — Nearly four centuries after the Roman Catholic Church branded Galileo Galilei a heretic for positing that the sun was the center of the universe, the Vatican is co-hosting a major science exhibition in his hometown.

The Vatican is teaming with Italy's main physics research center to host "Stories from Another World. The Universe Inside and Outside of Us," in Pisa.

The exhibit will illustrate the progress of knowledge of the physical universe, from pre-historic times to recent discoveries. The exhibit is organized by the Specola Vaticana — the Vatican-supported observatory — and Italy's National Institute for Nuclear Physics, together with Pisa University's physics department.

The exhibition aims to tell "the history of the universe, from the particles which make up the atoms in our bodies to distant galaxies," Jose Funes, director of the observatory, told reporters in February.

It is aimed particularly at young people and great care has been taken "to make complex and difficult knowledge accessible, while at the same time avoiding the risk of superficiality."

Cosimo Bracci Torsi, president of the exhibit's venue, the Palazzo Blu Foundation, stressed that the placement of the exhibit in Galileo's hometown reflects the progress made between secular science and religion since Galileo was "first condemned then cleared up."

Galileo was condemned by the Vatican in 1633 for his astronomical theories and spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest. The late Pope John Paul II apologized

in 1992, saying the church was wrong to convict Galileo.

Objects on display include rock fragments from the moon and Mars, and original copies of the books of Isaac Newton. The exhibition runs from March 10 to July 1. **BT**

**At right:** Portrait of Galileo Galilei by Justus Sustermans painted in 1636. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



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BY TERRI BYRD  
Contributing Writer

## ‘What matters’ Birmingham congregation acts neighborly in its urban setting

**B**IRMINGHAM, Ala. — From the corner of University Boulevard and 22nd Street South, the bustling downtown of Birmingham can be seen in every direction. This is the location of Baptist Church of the Covenant, a fellowship of believers very much at home in the city.

Those who join are aware of the church’s mission and are asked to make personal commitments to active ministry in the city and to the larger world. That includes Southtown.

Just two blocks away and visible from the front steps of the sanctuary is the Southtown neighborhood. Some consider the public housing community to be one of the highest crime areas in the city. But BCOC members see something other than statistics.

“What matters is that it’s home to those kids,” says Jack Brymer, a former Baptist newspaper editor and a church member. “When they get off the school bus in the afternoon, it’s simply their home.”

Jack and his wife, Shirley, are part of a team of volunteers from the church that meets every Thursday night with middle school and high school teens for Leadership Southtown. Their mission is to help students acquire and develop leadership skills to compete at every level in life — family, community, school and career.

Weekly, the volunteers provide a meal, mentors for every table, and a speaker from within the community.

On a recent Thursday, 16 students gathered for lasagna and to hear Janae Perry, a recent graduate from Samford University’s pharmacy

school, who delivered a message on the importance of being a good student early on so more opportunities for college will be possible.

An ongoing activity over this semester has been a robot-making project led by retired teacher, John Hollis.

“They’ve created the robots,” said Hollis. “Now we just have to learn to program them since we made them each with a computer chip.”

Leadership Southtown is just one of the ministries that BCOC is engaged in at Southtown. On Tuesdays, church volunteers go to the Southtown Community Center for Storytime with elementary school children.

“Storytime is a program that grew out of a desire to focus on literacy and to encourage a love of books,” said church member Carol Dean. “For several years, BCOC held a beginning-of-school event in Perry County (Ala.) with ‘Sowing Seeds of Hope’ and also for the residents of the Southtown community.

“We read stories and gave backpacks and school supplies. However, we felt a commitment to build a deeper relationship with our neighbors in the Southtown community and to foster literacy in more meaningful ways.”

Last spring they began with weekly stories and activities that focused on creative dramatics. Then in June of last year, BCOC members started bringing a weekly story on Tuesdays — with games and activities that extended the story’s message.

Children made gingerbread houses, dressed up as characters in the story, created a mural, and played circle and relay games. Each week,

each child was given a book to take home.

The books were supplied by BCOC members through a book fair held at the church.

Then in July, the congregation held a weeklong arts camp at the gym in Southtown. The camp concluded with a Friday performance by the children — with their art as a backdrop. Parents and friends came for the performance. The children acted out the stories and sang songs they had learned.

Now, during the school year, the Tuesday Storytime is provided when the children come to the neighborhood gym in the afternoons.

“Every week we are greeted with hugs and laughter as the children come into the gym, see us, and realize, ‘Oh, it’s Tuesday!’” said Carol. “They are eager to take books from the shelf to read to us and show us their honor roll medals. We feel that we are building a relationship and establishing a bond.”

Sarah Shelton, pastor of Baptist Church of the Covenant, said a few Southtown residents have become members of their church.

“It’s certainly not why we do ministry at Southtown,” she said. “But I once asked one of the ladies who comes why she joined us and she said, ‘I feel at peace here — and in Sunday school my words are appreciated just like anyone else.’”

That is how this inner-city congregation understands its ministry of being a community of faith within its own community. **BT**

—Photo by Carol Dean, who contributed to this story.

# Two centuries of missionary movement celebrated

**S**ALEM, Mass. — When America's first ordained missionaries sailed from here to India 200 years ago, they kicked off a movement to spread the faith and created America's most potent export: Christianity.

That message reverberated across nine separate Judson 200 commemorative events held in and around Salem in February. Speakers recalled how the course of history changed when Adoniram Judson and four others were commissioned as missionaries in 1812.

Christian groups across theological and denominational lines lay claim to Judson's legacy. The 1812 departure of the first American overseas missionaries marked the start of a new era of American and Christian influence.

To support them, the first of many missionary-sending agencies was born: the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABC FM). Similar organizations soon took root, sending thousands of

missionaries to all corners of the globe. By the mid-20th century, America was sending more missionaries than any other country.

America still sends the most: 127,000 of the 400,000 foreign missionaries sent in 2010 came from America, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which is based outside of Boston.

Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson were denied admission to British India, but continued on to Burma (modern-day Myanmar), where they created a grammar system, translated the Bible into Burmese and won converts to the faith. Now Burmese churches celebrate Judson Sunday every July. The Judsons started out as Congregationalists, but they became Baptists en route to Asia.

The bicentennial events kicked off Feb. 5 at Tabernacle Congregational Church, the United Church of Christ congregation that was the site of the original commissioning. The UCC's Wider Church Ministries division traces its roots to the ABCFM.

The various events in Salem, reflecting just how many strains of Protestantism claim the Judson heritage, included the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Evangelical Alliance and American Baptist Churches-USA. (For more on the Atlanta-based American Baptist Historical Society, with significant Judson artifacts, visit [absarchives.org](http://absarchives.org) or [judson200.org](http://judson200.org).) **BT**



'Upon this seat' — On Feb. 6, 1812, Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice and three others were commissioned for mission service on this bench at Tabernacle Church in Salem, Mass. Photo by John Pierce

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