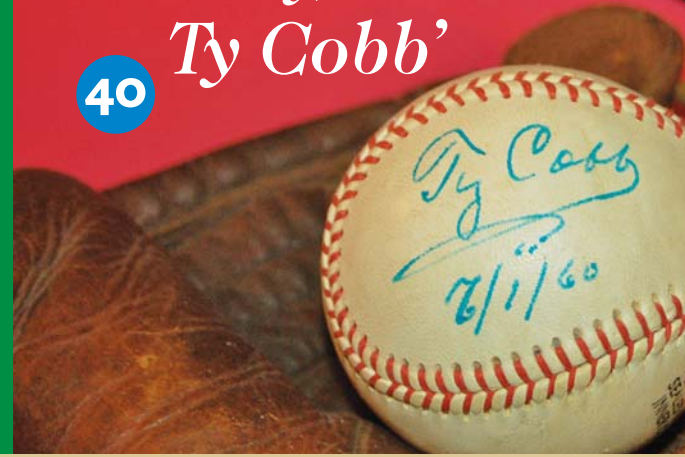


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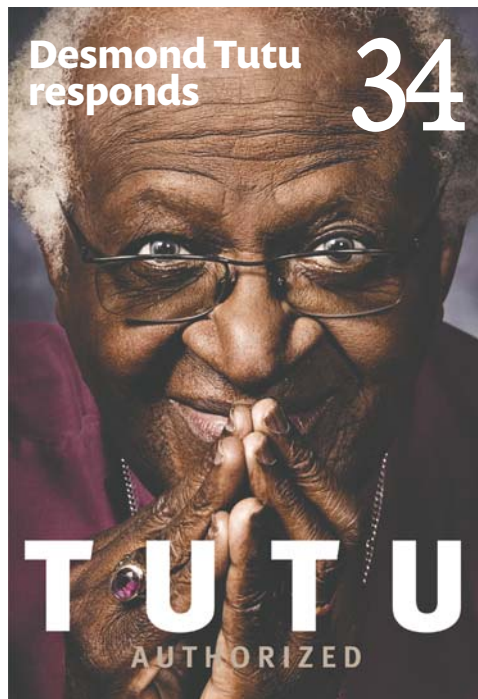
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American Baptist missionary honored by Chinese government 35
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cover photo

Cover photo by Colleen Burroughs. Passport is gearing up for its 20th summer of camps that combine discipleship, worship, missions and fun. **Story on page 4**

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PHOTOS BY
COLLEEN BURROUGHS

The creative young leaders serving on Passport's summer staff are thoroughly trained and often discover their own ministry callings through the experience.

Passport readies *for* 20th summer



A conversation with David and Colleen Burroughs

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Passport, Inc. began quietly as a response to a request to plan and conduct a summer youth camp in Florida in 1993. That spark led David and Colleen Burroughs and friends to grow Passport into a multiple-location summer camping program for youth and then children.

While most people are hunkering down for the coldest months of the year, Passport's creative staff is getting ready for its 20th summer of PASSPORT camps. *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce posed questions to David and Colleen Burroughs who serve as president and vice president of the organization that continues to expand.

BT: How do you explain the mission of Passport when people ask what you do for a living?

David: I usually answer that with Passport's

mission statement: "With Christ as our foundation, Passport empowers students to encounter Christ, embrace community, and extend grace to the world."

Beyond that, I explain that I work for a nonprofit ministry working with students to help them discover more of who they are in Christ, more about the issues facing the world today, and how they can be part of the solution through their words and actions.

BT: Most good things have humble beginnings. What brought Passport into existence, and what vision propelled its growth?

David: In 1993, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida invited a small group of friends to create a pilot project we named “PASSPORT.” This group included Colleen and me, and two dear friends, Nathan Hanson and James Bush.

This first camp hosted 155 campers from eight churches. We had an ecumenical vision for a youth camp with a mission focus.

At that time, in the CBF world, we were the first to bring this kind of Christian camp into the “market.” No one was really offering the mix of discipleship in the morning and hands-on mission service in the afternoon.

That combination turned out to be a strong idea — especially for smaller churches that didn’t have the people power to do a week of camp and manage the details of a mission trip in the same summer.

In our second year, PASSPORT was again sponsored by the CBF of Florida and expanded to three weeks and quadrupled in size, and in our third year we doubled again. We had double-digit growth for our first 10 years!

I think our growth was due to three main factors: First, I think we were simply at the right place at the right time. We had a ready-to-go summer camp right when churches began to join the CBF movement.

Second, we claimed our theology, hiring women to serve as our camp pastors and offering a mission focus — all things that naturally appealed to the growing number of CBF churches.

Third, I think we focused on one thing — summer camp — and we honed the quality and creativity of our programs with care. That is one of the reasons we waited for 12 years before starting our children’s camps. We tried hard to keep the main thing, the main thing.

BT: In what ways has Passport evolved over the last two decades? What have been some of the major transitions or expansions?

David: Passport continued to grow through the years, adding youth camp locations as well as churches. In 2001, Passport received our first major grant from the Lilly Endowment through a partnership with Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

The initiative was called the Samuel Project. This allowed us to do some special camps and events around the theme of vocational ministry calling. That grant helped us launch what has become our online devotional



Afternoon missions service is a unique aspect of Passport’s summer camps.

site, www.d365.org, which now hosts over one million visitors each year.

PASSPORTkids! began in the summer of 2004 with the hope of integrating a strong missions commitment with the fun and excitement of children’s camp. The children’s camp also partners closely with the CBF Global Missions Office, and most summers find CBF field personnel as guest missionaries for each session of camp.

Another place of evolution for us began as I was invited to participate on a youth ministry committee with the National Council of Churches. This led to several ecumenical partnerships including Faith in 3D, an event at Walt Disney World that brings together youth from three different faith groups for a weekend to discover our oneness in Christ.

First held in 2006, then again in 2009, we are poised again in January 2012 to gather hundreds of youth from all over the country to this event held on MLK weekend.

Briefly, there are two other new programs that have come along, PASSPORTchoices and PASSPORTmissions2. The Choices program is designed for churches that already take regular mission trips and are looking for more of a discipleship focus for summer camp.

The Missions2 program, or M2 as we call it, is designed to punch up the camp’s missions service from three to six hours each day. Participants sleep on the floor in inner city churches and do small-group, hands-on mission projects. A small Passport staff helps frame their day with Bible study, worship and an evening party.

BT: You have recently received another Lilly Foundation grant. How is it being used?

Colleen: Through this grant we are launching the Echo Initiative, an extensive five-year project that will produce curricula for children and youth. Everything related to the Echo Initiative will be centered on the idea that no matter what students choose to do with their lives vocationally, God can work through them as ministers in the world.

BT: What programming is Passport offering to churches in 2012? What is distinctive about your camps?

David: I am very excited about our theme for camps this summer: “Life Together.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book of the same title is our inspiration for this theme.

We hope to have serious conversations about what Christian community really looks like. In a world where students will spend more time together in virtual space than in actual space, a new conversation about Christian community is critically important.

As to our different camps and locations, here is a run-down: We will be offering the PASSPORTmissions camp in two locations: Mercer University in Macon, Ga., and a new location for us, Averett College in Danville, Va.

The PASSPORTchoices camp will again be at our long-standing partner Wingate University in Wingate, N.C.

PASSPORTkids! will be taking place this summer in Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Texas.

The PASSPORTmissions2 camp will move from Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, to Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and end up at Third Baptist Church in St. Louis, Mo.



We will also travel internationally with PASSPORTKenya this summer, a cross-cultural experience where youth from Kenya and the United States come together for camp. We do this in partnership with CBF field personnel Melody and Sam Harrell.

BT: Your summer staff has become an important place for young Baptist leaders to gain experience and to make important connections. Please share about how those dynamics both serve your purposes organizationally and also enhance persons and churches beyond Passport.

David: This is a very interesting byproduct of our ministry. One in three of our former staffers is in ministry somewhere.

While we are ecumenical in our approach, in our staff, and in the churches that participate, the majority [of our staffers] are closely related to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We have discovered through the years that many churches don't really talk about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship on a weekly basis.

So we have college students who show up to work camp, and across the summer as they interact with seminary students — most of whom are CBF by choice, and attending the CBF partner theological schools — the light bulbs go off about why the ministry and mission and perspective and theology of Cooperative Baptists [are] so vital.

There is a chain that develops between our mission focus, the passion of these young Baptist leaders, the bright and motivated college staff all the way to the youth who attend camp from these CBF congregations. It is one

of the pipelines for the continued growth and health of the CBF movement.

One of these young leaders is Sara Hunt, currently serving as the Passport intern — spending a year in our office helping us get ready for camp this summer.

She grew up in a CBF church, attended camp as a youth, has worked on summer staff while in college and after this year will be attending seminary next fall. I asked her to answer this question — to hear directly from that young leader voice:

“As a young Baptist leader, Passport has been a place of empowerment for me; a place where I have both been able to see students empowered through ministry, and have equally been empowered myself. Passport gives college and seminary students the unique experience of serving alongside a team for two months as they are able to invest in a community and minister to thousands of youth and children, while also making valuable connections with churches and ministers. Passport for me has been a place where I have gained further understanding of my calling, discovered new gifts, and been given the opportunity to develop those gifts for future ministry.”

BT: How will you mark the 20th anniversary milestone?

Colleen: Our youth program coordinator Marnie Fisher Ingram has just completed the database of every summer staffer who has worked for us over the last two decades. It's an impressive list of people who now work in offices, firms, communications, churches and non-profits.

We want to see where they all are and what they are up to. Maybe we will have a big

Passport's year-round staff enjoys being together. They are busy during the colder months, however. Reservations for 2012 summer camps opened on Nov. 1. Five sessions sold out within the first hour. A total of 1,000 children and 2,600 youth were registered on the first day. For reservations and other info, visit passportcamps.org.

reunion at our 25th birthday! We hope they are interested in hearing a bit about what we have been doing since they moved on to their careers.

There is actually quite a village of former staffers who got married and have children now. That kind of makes David and me grandparents, right?

BT: What dreams do you have for the next decade or two that you might share?

Colleen: I think Passport needs to continue to reinvent itself over and over again in the next decade. I don't mean that it should stop being what it is, a missions-oriented student ministry and training ground for young leaders.

How does that work in the parts of the world where U.S. students feel called to serve and then discover there is nowhere to plug in their computer? They suddenly understand how far away home really is and begin to discover what it means to trust in God's faithfulness in a much deeper way.

I love how complicated and simple all of that is. Our office looks forward to helping students discover the tools they will need to be effective ministers of the gospel in their rapidly changing world. **BT**



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quotation remarks

“This isn’t a statement of faith now publicly demanded. It is a loyalty oath to a specific subcategory of Christian belief.”

—An editorial in the Rome News-Tribune after the Georgia Baptist Convention-controlled Shorter University imposed a narrow doctrinal statement, new rules and an oath of loyalty on faculty

“We want to be sure that mothers and fathers of students know this is our belief system. We are simply clarifying our core values.”

—President Donald Dowless on Shorter’s new faculty requirements including an affirmation of biblical inerrancy, opposition to homosexuality and a promise of loyalty to the Georgia Baptist Convention school’s mission (Rome News-Tribune)

“Dualistic theology ... ultimately separates and divides humanity into ‘us’ and ‘them’ (pure/impure, saved/lost, righteous/wicked, etc.), and the division is often based on very simplistic, superficial beliefs and perceptions.”

—Chuck Queen, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky., in his book, *A Faith Worth Living: The Dynamics of an Inclusive Gospel* (2011, Resource Publications)

“It is deeply divisive in many situations and is disconcerting in others ... I regularly receive communications from churches who are struggling over this issue.”

—Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee CEO Frank Page writing in his blog about the growing divide over Calvinism (ABP)

“[Humor] humanizes you, and it also reminds people that ... you take your faith seriously, but you don’t take yourself too seriously.”

—James Martin, culture editor of the Jesuit magazine *America* and the unofficial chaplain to Comedy Central’s Colbert Report (RNS)

“Study after study shows what may appear to outside observers to be simple common sense: A major reason people attend religious congregations is to deepen their faith lives and draw closer to God.”

—Religion writer David Briggs (Huffington Post)

“In large part, [conservative Christians] feel he’s not Mormon enough. If he had the same position on life and on marriage the Mormon faith has, there wouldn’t be a question.”

—Southern Baptist ethics leader Richard Land on evangelical support for presidential candidate Mitt Romney (Politico)

“...I continue to be amazed at how easily theological watchdogs fail to watch their own theologies by their belligerent denunciations and mockeries of those who don’t interpret the Bible the way they do, thinking the Gospel is at stake at every turn.”

—Theologian and author Peter Enns (patheos.com)

“That’s a balance every presidential candidate must now make, on a topic that not so long ago was thought too private — and, yes, too sacred — to be displayed and dissected in public.”

—Washington Post writer Melinda Henneberger on the degree to which candidates talk about their faith

“Dr. King was a 20th-century prophet, and so that’s really significant to see that we’ve got a prophet on the National Mall where presidents usually are.”

—Minister Seretta C. McKnight of Hempstead, N.Y., on the new Martin L. King Jr. Memorial (RNS)

“**Poverty** is no longer an **abstract issue**. I think the risk in the current climate is that it becomes politicized. It’s not. It’s **always been bipartisan.**”

—Scott Todd of Compassion International (RNS)

“We have an economy that isn’t working very well for the majority of Americans while piling wealth on a small few. In my home state of Michigan ... nearly one in four [children] live in poverty.”

—Sojourners president Jim Wallis, a member of First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C.

“My students become my children, and so it is especially rewarding today to be here.”

—Paige Patterson, on the numerous Truett-McConnell College administrators and faculty members he influenced as students at Criswell College and Southeastern Seminary, at the public signing of the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message by the Georgia Baptist school faculty Oct. 27 (Baptist Press)

“Anything can happen on the motorcycle or the trampoline. But my job is good because I have Jesus in my heart.”

—Paulo Cesar, a 27-year-old Brazilian dwarf who rides a motorcycle in a death-defying loop-de-loop after availing himself of the sacraments and services provided by the Circus and Traveling Show Ministries of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (RNS)

Faith on the installment plan

Despite online shopping and all the other technological advances of recent years, one throwback to Christmases past has returned this year: layaway.

An uncertain economy and more restrictive, reasonable approaches to credit have led some shoppers and stores to re-embrace the idea of selecting gifts while the shelves are well stocked and paying for them gradually as each paycheck allows.

The era of runaway credit cards — thrown at college students and so easily accessed by many — has buried some consumers in debt and made others more cautious. The culture of “buy now, pay later” also fueled the broader loss of delayed gratification.

Why wait if you don't have to?

The “get-it-now” approach to the material aspects of daily living has surely influenced how many Americans, and therefore many American Christians, relate spiritually as well. Waiting patiently is now an inconvenience rather than a discipline.

The season of Advent reminds us that our faith journeys unfold over time. The absence of this observance in my early Baptist church experience was probably more tied to an over-reaction to Catholicism than anything else. But the emphasis on salvation as instantaneous could have been a factor as well.

To wait, to anticipate and to prepare tend to bring dread rather than hope and promise.

One story always comes to mind this time of year. The summer following college graduation, I worked in youth ministry at the First Baptist Church of Roswell, Ga. Two of the young teens in this suburban Atlanta setting begged me to take them on their first backpacking trip.

Finally relenting, I met them over lunch to emphasize the importance of being prepared — even though it would be a brief hike in and out of the North Georgia mountains and just one night away. I explained

what to take (sleeping bag, extra socks, one small aluminum pan, etc.) and what not to take (radio, emerging electronic games, etc.)

When we unloaded the car at the trailhead, Clay and Mark assured me that they were well prepared. Clay even showed me some of the items — including a heavy glass bottle of ketchup and an iron skillet.

While I lectured him on his lack of comprehension, his buddy Mark rolled on the rocky ground in laughter for several minutes. It took us awhile to hit the trail.



Along the way Mark, as such friends do, kidded Clay mercilessly about his packing failures. After a few miles of hiking, we finally heard the welcoming sound of Jack River Falls and descended the hill into the place where we would spend the night.

As we selected a level spot and removed our backpacks, Mark took one more joking jab about how stupid his friend was to carry an iron skillet on a backpacking trip.

“I didn't,” Clay replied as he unrolled his sleeping bag. “While you were laughing at me at the car, Mark, I put it in your backpack. Thanks for bringing it in for me.”

Advent can mean different things depending on where we are in our personal journeys. But it calls for anticipation, preparation and, often, for sharing burdens with one another — hopefully knowingly and willingly.

Concepts such as sacrifice, self-denial and the whole of idea of waiting contrast with the pop version of Americanized Christianity that looks and sounds like an infomercial success story. Faith is sold as quick, easy and instantly complete.

Therefore, we need regular reminders of the reality of faith along our journeys — and Advent is a good one. So is an iron skillet. There is probably one on layaway somewhere right now. **BT**

Many good blessings for the
Advent and Christmas seasons
from *Baptists Today*.

*We are deeply grateful for the many readers, supporters
and those now using the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies.*

*We look forward to continuing our journey of faith
and hope together into the New Year.*



Gallup Poll finds 35 percent oppose death penalty

By Gary Strauss
USA Today

More than one-third of Americans now oppose the death penalty — the highest level in nearly 40 years — according to a new Gallup Poll.

Moreover, those who believe the death penalty is being applied fairly, and those who say it isn't used often enough, are at the lowest levels in a decade, underscoring significant changes in attitudes.

The Gallup Poll released Oct. 13 found that 35 percent oppose the death penalty — the highest opposition since March 1972. That year, the Supreme Court effectively ruled that the death penalty was constitutional unless it was applied unfairly. By 1976, several states had reinstated capital punishment.

Just 40 percent of those polled recently believe the death penalty isn't imposed often enough, the lowest level since May 2001.

The poll was conducted shortly after two controversial cases drew attention: the September execution of Troy Davis and the Supreme Court hearing involving Alabama death row inmate Cory Maples.

Davis was executed despite evidence that he may have been wrongly convicted in the 1989 murder of a Georgia police officer. Maples was convicted of murdering two companions, but his death sentence is being appealed because his court-appointed lawyers failed to present key evidence about his background during the penalty phase of his trial.

Increasingly, death penalty cases are also viewed as being costly and providing little deterrent against serious crimes, says Barry Scheck, a law professor and co-director of the Innocence Project, which, like the American Bar Association, is seeking a moratorium on executions.

"The general public doesn't believe that the death penalty is a deterrent or is making anyone safer," Scheck said.

He added that the Gallup Poll may underestimate opposition to capital punishment because it doesn't ask a key question: whether those polled view life imprisonment as a better alternative. **BT**

Bible verse that is not in the Bible

By Lauren Markoe
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — The White House proved itself Scripturally challenged on Nov. 2 when Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "I believe the phrase from the Bible is, 'The Lord helps those who help themselves.'"

Actually, no.

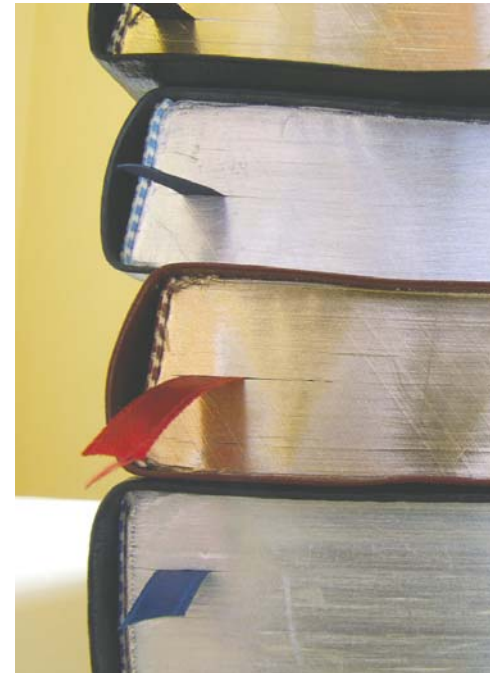
The phrase that's often attributed to the Good Book most likely comes from Benjamin Franklin and possibly the ancient Greeks, and the White House felt obligated to add a note to the transcript of Carney's briefing: "This common phrase does not appear in the Bible."

Embarrassing perhaps, but not uncommon.

It may make Carney feel better to learn that he's got company — a lot of it — with other Americans. Numerous surveys have shown that most Americans believe the phrase is straight from the Bible, if not straight out of the mouth of God.

Christian pollster George Barna has asked Americans repeatedly about the saying, and consistently found that a majority attributes it to the Bible. In 2000, 75 percent of Americans surveyed by Barna attributed the phrase to the Bible.

Comedian Jay Leno once challenged



passersby to name one of the Ten Commandments for *The Tonight Show*. The most popular answer? "God helps those who help themselves."

Dale Martin, professor of religious studies at Yale University, said Carney "certainly deserves a bit of ribbing, because people attribute to the Bible all kinds of stuff." But he added: "Everybody does it," even Bible professors. **BT**

ABC's Roy Medley president-elect of NCC

CHICAGO — A. Roy Medley, general secretary of American Baptist Churches in the USA, was elected and installed as president-elect of the National Council of Churches on Nov. 9. Kathryn Mary Lohre, Director of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is the new president.

The NCC president-elect automatically succeeds to the presidency under the NCC constitution. Lohre and Medley will serve in their new positions from Jan. 1, 2012 to Dec. 31, 2013, when Medley will succeed to the presidency.

Medley will be the third American Baptist

to serve as National Council of Churches president, the others being Edwin Dahlberg (1957-1960) and M. William Howard (1979-1981).

He has represented American Baptists at the National Council of Churches of Christ in the Domestic Hunger and Poverty Working Group and at the World Council of Churches through the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Fund.

Medley, a native of Ringgold, Ga., has been a member of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Freedom and Justice and the Church Renewal Committee and served on the faculty for the American Baptist Churches USA Church Planters Institute. **BT**

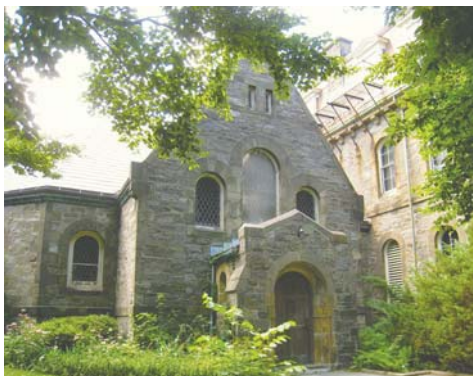


A. Roy Medley

—Based on reporting from the
NCC News Service

Some U.S. seminaries consider radical changes

For more than 200 years, Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS) has trained future pastors to have expertise in biblical studies, pastoral care and preaching. But in today's world, the nation's oldest school of theology has decided that's no longer enough, and other schools are starting to agree.



Andover Newton, the nation's oldest graduate seminary, is affiliated with American Baptist Churches, USA.

Under a recent curriculum overhaul, ANTS students must prove competency in key skills for the 21st-century church, including high-tech communication and interfaith collaboration. They still study theology, but unless they can use it to help others find meaning, they don't graduate.

"This is not a case for fine-tuning the (educational) model," Andover Newton President Nick Carter said at an October regional meeting of the United Church of Christ. "We really have to reinvent it; the profession has totally changed."

Andover Newton's new standards are part of a larger movement to reconsider what future pastors need to learn. Curriculum revisions are underway at about a quarter of the 262 institutions in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), according to ATS Executive Director Daniel Aleshire.

A generation ago, seminaries were less eager for curriculum reform as they felt pastors could learn practical skills on the job, Aleshire said. But now, churches increasingly need pastors to arrive ready to tackle a myriad

of challenges, from addressing alcoholism and domestic violence to creating access for the disabled.

"A lot of schools are rethinking how they educate religious leaders," Aleshire said. "There is a perception that ministry education is not just the accumulation of courses in the old disciplinary patterns. It has to be something more dynamic."

Around the country, schools are testing new approaches to theological education. In California, Claremont School of Theology encourages would-be Christian pastors to take some courses alongside future rabbis and imams at an institution named Claremont Lincoln University.

In Illinois, Meadville Lombard Theological School has reformed its curriculum to help students at the Unitarian Universalist seminary get more hands-on ministry experience early in their educations.

In Catholic seminaries, Aleshire noted, curricula have evolved over the past 20 years to help future priests reflect on issues of identity and "celibacy as a way of life and ministry."

"You might not find a course with that title," Aleshire said, "but if you looked at what they did over seven days (in their studies), you'd find a lot of time spent on those issues."

Curriculum reform is rooted in several driving forces, Aleshire said. Since more and more working students are attending seminary part-time, they need courses to be interchangeable and not part of a rigid sequence. And because churchgoers and seminarians come from ever-more diverse religious backgrounds, pastoral training is evolving to help them engage multiple traditions.

Schools are experimenting to figure out what works. At Andover Newton, students learn "interpretation" in a way that covers more than Christian readings of the Bible, such as studying the Old Testament alongside rabbinic students from nearby Hebrew College.

The broader approach helps prepare future pastors to function effectively in a pluralistic world where Christian assumptions can't be taken for granted, Carter said.

"It actually turned out better rabbis and better Christian ministers when we were able to deal with the difficult texts" from each other's traditions, Carter said.


As training takes new forms, benchmarks are evolving as well. To evaluate curriculum reforms, ANTS administrators plan to contact congregations that are led by ANTS alumni.

They'll ask how well pastors are doing in key competency areas, such as "embodiment," which expects pastors to practice what they preach and offer a convincing witness.

Based on what they hear, Carter said the school will continue to tweak the program so that churches get the kinds of ministers they need. **BT**



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‘How am I doing?’

Spiritual preparation for hearing “time’s winged chariot hurrying near”

Editor’s note: These reflections were written by Baptist Theologian Bill Hull on Aug. 11, 2011, three years to the day after he received a diagnosis of ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Ever since I was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), my wife Wylodine and I have been overwhelmed with cards and letters, calls and visits, food and flowers. In this outpouring of love, friends from far and near have offered us their prayers, encouragement and willingness to help as we struggle with a cruel disease that will finally rob my body of everything, even life itself.

For these many gestures of affection, our gratitude is so boundless that to convey it, even in small measure, would be impossible. But there is one request to which I can respond, and this third anniversary of my journey with ALS may be as good a time as any to do it. Lurking in many conversations, particularly with those who seldom if ever see me now that my traveling days are over, is the unspoken desire to know how I am really doing.

Most people know nothing about ALS, a rare disease afflicting only 22,500 in the U.S., thus are unsure about such things as what I can eat, where I can go, or who I can see. Even the folks greeting me every week or two at church want to know more about my needs but do not ask what they are, primarily out of courtesy.

While I honor the wishes of those who go to great lengths to keep their ailments a secret, my policy is one of full disclosure regarding both the physical and spiritual dimensions of my plight. After all, I am still Theologian in Residence at our church, which makes it incumbent on me to dialogue with members regarding the spiritual consequences of bodily disease and death.



Wylodine and Bill Hull with grandson Andrew Hull

Past

In my final sermon at Mountain Brook Baptist on Oct. 19, 2008, I sought to describe the shock of suddenly receiving a death sentence. Since copies of that message are still available, I shall begin here with what happened next. A more practical agenda demanded my immediate attention as I adjusted to a new way of life.

Our downstairs guest bedroom was converted into my hospital-room-at-home, including the construction of a handicap accessible bathroom. After we made one end of our family room into my office/study, I have lived ever since in three rooms of our 11-room house. A lift built in the garage provided an exit without steps. The displaced cars were transferred to family members, since neither of us could ever drive again, and a van purchased that is wheelchair accessible.

Occupational therapists identified the equipment I would need and how to use it, while physical therapists showed me how to maintain enough strength to cope with this strange new environment. With these living

arrangements in place, I next sought to understand the sinister intruder that I knew nothing about. I was fortunate to secure a superb medical team. All share my values regarding the rights and responsibilities of the body; two are active members of our church.

As you might suspect, I also read several books and articles that recounted the experiences of others with ALS. I even watched the old movie on Lou Gehrig, the Yankee first baseman who became the most famous victim of ALS. But I learned the most from my own experiences, especially on the afternoon of Dec. 28, 2009, when, without warning, my legs suddenly collapsed and I went crashing to the floor, breaking my ankle in two places.

As I wore a surgical boot for six weeks, family and friends joined me in the hope that, when I could again put weight on both feet, a program of exercise would restore me to my previous condition. But it was not to be.

Despite the best efforts of therapists at Lakeshore Rehab, plus excruciating attempts on my part to follow their guidance, no progress was made. Gradually the truth dawned: The trouble was not with my ankle that had healed nicely. Rather, the trouble was that the muscles making my legs work had atrophied because the motor neurons in my brain that tell them what to do had mysteriously died! In one fell swoop I lost my mobility, never again to stand, walk, pivot or climb. And yet it had happened silently, painlessly, without warning.

I learned from this ordeal that ALS works by stealth. It sneaks up and blindsides its victim when least expected. Furthermore, it is content to choose one target at a time. When my legs were knocked out from under me, the rest of my body remained largely unchanged. Call it death on the installment plan.

Once a motorized wheelchair became my only means of mobility, I had to learn — quickly! — how to maneuver my mechanical

legs so as to shave at the sink, eat at the table and work at the desk. The hardest part of all this were the transfers, from bed to shower to chair and back again. I soon discovered, again by surprise, that I could no longer comb my hair, button my shirt, or tie my shoes, thus would need someone to dress me.

Since my wife was battling serious health problems of her own and could not meet my rapidly growing needs, our only recourse was to recruit caregivers outside the home. Fortunately, grandson Andrew volunteered for this assignment, at first working part time when not occupied with his church job, but eventually fulltime, coordinating a team of three caregivers providing support to both grandparents on a 24/7 basis.

By now, as I began to understand the ALS story being told by my body, I realized how similar it was to the biblical story I had long ago chosen to make the story of my life. The scriptural telling begins with how tragically flawed we are by our self-centeredness — Adam blaming Eve, Cain bashing Abel — and how slow we are to realize it — Samson with Delilah, David with Bathsheba.

Just so, ALS is a greedy disease, devouring the circuits and sinews that energize the body, doing it so slowly and silently that I did not discover the wreckage until too late. But one day a man named Jesus appeared out of nowhere who was God-centered rather than self-centered. He overflowed with love even for his enemies who unjustly killed him on a cross. That love, and the life that embodied it, could not be destroyed by hatred. When he triumphed over death, his followers began to live out of his spirit in ways they could not live in their own strength.

Similarly, when a part of my body dies, Andrew and his team of caregivers take over that function, literally becoming my arms and legs, fingers and feet. I am able to live physically because of them just as I am able to live spiritually because of Christ.

Present

ALS follows no predictable path in its conquest of the body. For me, it began at the bottom and is traveling upward, while for others it begins at the top and travels downward. After three years, the scourge has done about all the damage it can to my legs and feet, so let us see what it is now doing to my abdomen and arms.

Again the story is one of silent surprises. For example, I never knew that muscles in the torso help to hold the stomach in place.

Living Will and Health Care Proxy

William E. Hull

To be stricken with ALS both simplifies and complicates end-of-life planning. On the one hand, the illness is 100 percent fatal with no known cause or cure, thus eliminating any need for heroic measures to which some terminally ill patients resort as desperate expedients to prolong life.

On the other hand, it often leaves the victim mentally alert even when the body is almost completely paralyzed, thus activating the widespread aversion to ending life when one is still a sentient being.

My own view is that death is an integral part of life, that the body has an inalienable right to die, and that this right should be honored in timely fashion by caregivers who assist in making the event as natural and painless as possible.

In short, precisely because I have ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), I do not need or want ALS (Advanced Life Support). I wish for a DNR (“do not resuscitate”) sign to be both posted and obeyed. Should some medical emergency signal the onset of active dying, I do not want 911 to be called, do not want paramedics to be summoned, do not want an ambulance trip to the emergency room, and do not want to be admitted to the hospital. Instead, I wish palliative care by a hospice team, preferably in our home if one or more family members

are able to function as primary caregivers. While I accept temporary and transitional medical interventions designed to alleviate a treatable condition, I reject any procedure without therapeutic value that only prolongs the process of dying.

In particular as regards my ALS condition, I welcome non-invasive interventions if they are likely to be both temporary and therapeutic. I realize that nutrition and hydration may need to be administered intravenously or by a PEG/RIG feeding tube in connection with pain management and do not view such comfort measures as a violation of my wishes. I also recognize the value of noninvasive ventilation to assist breathing, but do not wish an invasive tracheostomy when dysphagia becomes acute. I accept the doctrine of double effect as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court in the use of narcotics, such as a morphine infusion, to relieve pain.

I have lived a good life, and now I desire to die a good death both for myself and for my family. The positions set forth here are intended to accomplish that purpose, and I thank those caregivers who cooperate fully with my wishes. The directions found here ... have been discussed in detail with members of my immediate family, who have affixed their signatures with mine indicating both concurrence in their acceptance and compliance in their implementation.

As ALS weakens those restraints, the internal organs that they support may tend to protrude more than usual. With the onset of ALS, my weight fell before I regained much of it back by taking nutritional supplements. And yet, when at the lowest weight, my waist expanded while

sitting in the wheelchair.

I can no longer button a single coat or fasten a single pair of pants in my closet — and no tailor can do anything about it. Call it collateral damage if you wish. I told you that ALS was sneaky!

Speaking of collateral damage, this may be a good place to comment on the presence of pain that figures so prominently in most life-threatening diseases. Except for an occasional tremor, ALS does not announce its presence by torturing the body. But the condition it leaves behind may contribute indirectly to an assortment of ills. I now suffer regularly from bladder spasms (think: abdomen-in-agony) and peripheral neuropathy (think: feet-on-fire). As if this were not enough, there is the insatiable itching caused primarily by sitting in one chair in one position for 16 hours every day of my life.

Not to give away the plot prematurely, it is when ALS reaches the throat that the final battle is joined. To prepare for that showdown, I learned to utilize two new procedures:

(1) To assist in eating, a feeding tube was inserted directly into my stomach through which I receive all of my medications in liquid form. Formerly I swallowed some 25 pills a day, but this posed too many hazards of choking and ending up with a pill in my lungs. I also ingest through the tube a medical food supplementing the table food that I continue to eat and enjoy. When I can no longer swallow, increased tube feeding will be able to provide my body with balanced nutrition for an indefinite period.

(2) To assist in breathing, I am now tethered to an oxygen tube for most of my waking hours. In addition, my pulmonologist is guiding some deep breathing exercises calculated to strengthen and utilize the full capacity of my lungs, especially the lower section that can get crowded out by nearby organs. Whenever I sleep, whether at night or during a daytime nap, I wear a facemask connected by a hose to a Bipap machine that supplies the needed amount of air on a consistent basis. Anyone being treated for sleep apnea will be familiar with this arrangement.

The most common thing that friends say to me these days is, “You look good.” While I deeply appreciate this word of encouragement, I must take it with a grain of salt. Appearances can be deceiving with ALS.

For example, you always see me in shirts with long sleeves, even during the long hot summer, because my arms have withered away to the size of a broomstick. Then there is the slowing pace of life. It now takes me three times as long to do one-third as much as I once did. Whereas I used to get ready for church in an hour, it now takes more than three hours

even with the help of the fastest caregiver in town! The most heartbreaking challenge I am facing now is the loss of my ability to communicate. I can barely talk, write or type, and soon these capacities will be gone. Look for me to be experimenting with AAC (augmentative alternative communication) devices such as DynaVox and iPad2 with apps.

Brooding over these physical frustrations is the major plot of ALS, namely, to condemn me to a relentless, remorseless decline from skillfulness to clumsiness to helplessness to uselessness that cannot be reversed or stopped. Right now this is already happening to bits and pieces of my body, but eventually this hit-and-run damage will coalesce and my entire fleshly

“I have never been a fan of foxhole religion. While it is better than nothing, I much prefer a growing faith sturdy enough to see me through the vicissitudes of both life and death.”

framework will become dysfunctional. What will I do then?

The Apostle Paul often found himself battling so many foes that he felt impotent to respond. After cataloging the calamities that had engulfed him, he described his condition as one of “weakness” (2 Cor. 12:7-10) or even “death” (2 Cor. 4:8-12).

Reflecting on why he had been able to transcend these severe limitations, Paul concluded that “by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Even though ALS often leaves me so weak that I feel dead, it cannot destroy “what I am” — my being, my selfhood, my spirit. And by God’s amazing grace I enjoy a wonderful life. God has given me a wonderful wife, wonderful

family, wonderful friends, wonderful church, wonderful physicians and caregivers. I have done nothing to deserve such blessings. Rather, they are all the result of God’s unmerited favor.

When I compare what others have done for me with what I have done for them, my contributions are as nothing. I say this, not to blame ALS, but to thank ALS for making God’s grace so clear and dear to me.

Future

ALS is a 100-percent fatal disease and, if I remember correctly my first course in math, that percentage does not leave any wiggle room. Thus, I am certain that ALS will kill me, and I suspect that it will do so sooner rather than later.

Doctors and nurses refuse to make personal predictions but, if pressed, will cite statistical averages surrounded by disclaimers, a caution that is fully justified. For example, one “average” might include two white males of similar age, one an academic colleague of mine who died from ALS after six weeks; the other a famous physicist, Stephen Hawking, who is still going strong after 48 years with ALS, despite being profoundly handicapped.

As for me, those who are diagnosed with ALS at my age live, on the “average” for three years, which anniversary falls today! This means that, from this point forward, every day I live I am beating the so-called “law of averages.”

Why do I suspect that my exit may be sooner rather than later? For one thing, I entered hospice on March 8, 2011. One Medicare requirement of admittance is that my doctor and the hospice medical director “certify that I am terminally ill and have six months or less to live if my illness runs its normal course.” Regardless of whether or not I beat this prediction, I am content to live with death staring me in the face, for it wonderfully concentrates the mind.

Many of our most painful regrets are caused by procrastination, the daily deferral of doing what matters most because, in the refusal to face death, we suppose there will always be more and better times to complete the highest priorities of life. But one does not dally when death is knocking at the door, for it draws a bottom line that makes all of life accountable, giving it an intensity, even urgency, that is bracing indeed.

When the end does come, the patient,

family and attending physicians walk together through a thicket of knotty moral problems being fiercely debated by both scientists and theologians. So complex are the issues that I could not begin to comment without making this report unduly long. Therefore, I offer an appendix that was prepared as a supplement to my Advance Directive for Health Care (Living Will) in order to be more explicit about how to handle special circumstances presented by ALS.

If you have done your homework on the end-of-life agenda, you will easily spot the choices I have made. I offer this case study, not because my decisions are better than someone else's, but as a reminder that you do have to choose or risk fracturing your family and frustrating your doctors in your dying days. My plea: start early, give it your best thought, decide how you want to die, and work to achieve a consensus with all members of your immediate family.

What am I doing to prepare myself spiritually when, as Andrew Marvell put it, I hear "time's winged chariot hurrying near"?

I have never been a fan of foxhole religion (turn to God now because any minute you may die). While it is better than nothing, I much prefer a growing faith sturdy enough to see me through the vicissitudes of both life and death. So I do what I have always done: read and ponder the scriptures, meditate and pray, worship and fellowship with the people of God.

Because I have never journeyed this way before, I concentrate on the deeper dimensions of death by immersing myself in the great literature, poetry and music that abound in this area. As a result, I am at peace with my impending demise. After all, why should I be exempt from that death that is the destiny of everything that lives?

As for the Great Beyond, I am not particularly interested in the rewards it may offer, having already received far more blessings in this life than I deserve. Nor am I eager to be dazzled by pearly gates and streets of gold, being more concerned about whether I have lived "on earth as it is in heaven," as Jesus taught us to pray.

His guidance for doing that has become my imperatives for living:

- Repent as a radical reorientation of life around the foci of justice and mercy, rather than the issuing of a public relations "apology" for possible "mistakes," which changes nothing.

- Love as unconditional acceptance of friend and foe alike, rather than clinging to those so like ourselves that their affirmation is merely a form of self-congratulation.
- Forgive as the basis for a fresh start in a ruptured relationship, rather than blame the adversary as a way of evading reconciliation.

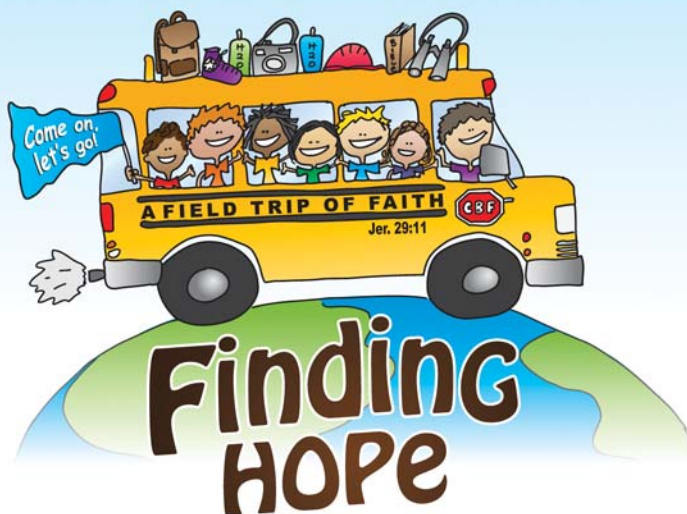
If you think me a moral simpleton for advocating such idealistic guidelines, I invite you to consider what one young man with only

a handful of followers was able to accomplish by following these precepts during two or three years of public life.

As my brief chapter in this unfinished story that began so long ago soon draws to a close, I sing to myself (since I am no longer able to sing aloud):

*When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Bear me thro' the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan's side. BT*

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 

Classifieds

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church in Wilmington, N.C., (fbcwilmington.org) is seeking a full-time senior pastor to lead our mission-minded congregation. We are a moderate, CBF-affiliated church, and have both contemporary and traditional services. Our mission is to honor God by becoming and helping others become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. If interested, please forward your résumé by Jan. 15, 2012, to FBC Wilmington Pastor Search, P.O. Box 1719, Carolina Beach, NC 28428-1719, or to FBCWilmington.pastorsearch@gmail.com.

Senior Pastor: Ardmore Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N.C., (ardmorebaptist.org) is seeking a senior pastor with pastoral experience of at least five years, a doctorate and a servant-leader attitude. Ardmore is known for its worship-centered spirit and passionate missionary heart. It is most closely affiliated with CBF, has ordained women deacons and ministers, and has recently completed a self-study and an exciting strategic ministry map to guide its 1,082 members. Submit résumés to Pastor Search Team, P.O. Box 24983, Winston-Salem, NC 27114 or to ardmorepastorsearch@yahoo.com.

Associate Pastor for Administration and Senior Adults: Morningside Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., a congregation of 1,550+ members and a team of six ministers, is seeking an associate pastor for administration and senior adults. Appropriate college and seminary degrees are required. Candidates must have the ability to coordinate the administrative responsibilities of the church and the senior adult program. This person also needs to be a good communicator. Morningside affirms women in ministry and worships in a traditional form. Send résumés to areggiehill@bellsouth.net or to Associate Pastor for Administration/Senior Adults, c/o Reggie Hill, Morningside Baptist Church, 897 S. Pine St., Spartanburg, S.C. 29302.

Minister of Youth: First Baptist Church, Statesville, N.C., (statesvillefbc.org) is seeking a full-time minister of youth to lead our mission-minded youth group and families. 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 youth and activities ministry. Please forward your résumé by Dec. 15 to FBC Statesville Youth Minister Search, 815 Davie Ave., Statesville, NC 28677, or to maryjane@statesvillefbc.org.

Senior Pastor

Church Profile

- 150 years of serving the Orangeburg community
- Affiliated with CBF, SBC
- Resident membership 1,000
- Family life center

Qualifications

- Ordained Baptist minister
- Degree from accredited seminary
- Pastoral experience

Responsibilities

- Serve as spiritual leader of the church
- Lead the congregation and staff in pursuing the mission of the church
- Provide direction for and coordinate the work of the staff of three ministers

Résumés* by Jan. 15, 2012:
Senior Pastor Search Committee
First Baptist Church
PO Box 637
Orangeburg, SC 29116-0637

*Audio and video recordings are welcome and will be retained.
fbcorangeburg.org

Minister of Music: A small, growing, urban, CBF and Alliance of Baptists congregation having creative, free-church, liturgical worship is seeking a part-time minister of music to serve on a collaborative pastoral staff. Contact Dr. Tim Moore, Sardis Baptist Church, 5811 Sardis Rd., Charlotte, NC 28270, tim@sardisbaptist-charlotte.org, or (704) 362-0811 by Jan. 31, 2012.

They are Christians, too

Editor: I found Cathleen Falsani's article, "Evangelical, fundamentalist and born-again not interchangeable labels" (October issue, page 13), to be thoughtful, concise, and eminently helpful.

But, I was disappointed in the following assertion: "In fact, Christian fundamentalists have more in common with fundamentalists from other religions than they do with other Christians: a siege mentality and distrust of the 'other,' topped with a liberal dose of ardent legalism."

This is one of those statements that definitely feels true, but most certainly isn't. With just a little bit of reflection, one realizes that despite the very problematic trappings of fundamentalist Christianity (which Falsani delineates quite well), they do, in fact, have more in common with

In the Know

Leonard Ballesteros, a retired field representative with the Ministers & Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) of American Baptist Churches USA, died on Oct. 5 at age 84.

David Chandler of Media, Penn., died Oct. 27 at age 53. He was former online managing editor for American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

Susan P. Deal is minister of music and worship at First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga., coming from College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla.

Doug Dortch is pastor of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., after serving First Baptist Church of Tallahassee, Fla., since 1994.

Horace E. Gale, a past treasurer of American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), died Oct. 9 at age 92.

Ben Mott will become president and CEO of Greenlake Conference Center where he has served as vice president of marketing since 2002. He assumes leadership of the conference center in Wisconsin, founded by American Baptists in 1943, in January. He succeeds Ken Giacometto who is retiring after 18 years. **BT**

Reader's Response

fellow Christians than with other religious fundamentalists.

Any group that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and/or upholds the basic elements of Christianity's "Great Tradition" (to borrow Roger Olson's term) has very much in common, indeed. We may want to disown our fundamentalist brothers and sisters, leaving them to fellowship with fundamentalists of other religious persuasions, but the fact is this: they are Christians, too. To suggest they are not, or somehow less Christian than the rest of us, is thoughtless, imprecise and, ultimately, unhelpful.

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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 2:22-40

Jan. 1, 2012

**Welcome, Welcome,
Welcome!**

Parents of every age have responded to their children with love and sacrifice, and Christians are no different. In many church traditions, parents have their infants baptized or “christened” as a way of introducing their children to the larger church and as a sign of trust that God will accept and care for them.

Baptists have historically rejected infant baptism, but many churches offer a “baby dedication service” in which new parents commit their children to God’s benevolent care and commit themselves to rearing their children in a Christian home. At the same time, the congregations welcome new children into the family of faith.

The ancient Hebrews developed several traditions related to the dedication of their children and themselves to God. Today’s study reminds us of three ways in which Jesus was welcomed into the covenant community of his Hebrew family.

Welcoming ceremonies (vv. 22-24)

To properly understand today’s text, we must go back a few verses and pick up the context. Three separate ceremonies are involved here, and readers often fail to see the distinctions.

The first ceremony involves the circumcision and naming of Jesus (2:21). By custom, this took place on the eighth day after birth. A local rabbi would come to the home and perform the circumcision, with family members gathered for



a day of celebration. Luke’s emphasis on Jesus’ circumcision and the other attendant rituals makes it clear that Jesus was fully Jewish, a member of God’s covenant community. ⤵

For boys, naming coincided with their circumcision. The gospels declare that both Mary (Luke 2:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21) had been instructed to name the child “Jesus.” More accurately, the name would have been “Jeshua” (pronounced “Yeh-SHU-ah”), the Aramaic name represented by “Iesous” (pronounced “yay-soos”) in Greek and by “Jesus” in English. Old Testament names such as Joshua, Isaiah, Hoshea and Hosea were similar forms of the same name, which means “Yahweh saves.” ⤵

The second ritual, described in vv. 22-23, has to do with a longstanding Hebrew belief that God had first claim upon all firstborn males, whether human or animal: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal’”

(Exod. 13:1-2, NIV). ⤵

While the firstborn of “clean” animals were given as a sacrifice, firstborn boys were ritually “ransomed” or “redeemed” from the Lord. In this ritual, the child would be presented to God at the temple and a “ransom price” of five shekels would be paid (see Num. 18:15-16). Luke’s account clearly connects the temple visit in 2:22-24 to this ritual, though it does not mention the payment of a redemption price.

The third rite involved has to do with the purification ceremony for Mary. According to the ancient practice prescribed in Lev. 12:1-8, women were considered to be ceremonially unclean for a certain period of time after giving birth (41 days after the birth of a son, and 81 after the birth of a daughter). ⤵

Some time after this waiting period, the mother would go to the temple and present an offering so that the priest could declare her to be ritually clean. The offering normally consisted of a yearling lamb as a “burnt offering” and a young pigeon or dove as a “sin offering.” Those who could not afford a

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lamb were allowed to bring two doves or pigeons instead. Mary's choice of the latter option (Luke 2:24) identifies her family as being among the poor of the land.

We note with interest that, even though this ritual was intended for the mother only, Luke 2:22 says "when the time came for *their* purification." Perhaps this ceremony had evolved into a ritual of dedication for both parents, or for parent and child. Or, the text may reflect an early reluctance to describe Mary as a sinner in need of purification.

A welcoming man (vv. 25-35)

At the temple, Mary and Joseph met an old man who paid a great deal of attention to their child. Luke tells us his name was Simeon, and describes him in glowing terms (vv. 25-26). Simeon was righteous and devout – a perfect model of Jewish piety. His devotion to God was so evident in his personal righteousness, others looked to him as an example.

Simeon was also among a group of Jews who earnestly expected the arrival of the Lord's promised Messiah – "looking forward to the consolation of Israel." Furthermore, Luke adds, "the Holy Spirit rested on him." This statement suggests Simeon was regarded as a prophet (cp. Isa. 61:1), as one who was open to the Spirit's revelation.

We are told, in fact, that the Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would live to see the Messiah (literally, "the Lord's Christ," or "the anointed one of the Lord," v. 26). The Spirit had likewise directed him to come into the temple while Mary, Joseph and Jesus were there (v. 27).

Despite Simeon's forwardness, Mary and Joseph allowed him to take Jesus into his arms and bless him, as the rabbis often did. Simeon's burst of praise, as was common among prophets, takes the form of a song (vv. 29-32). It is sometimes called the "Song of Simeon," or the "*Nunc Dimittis*" (after the first two words in the Latin translation, "Now dismiss ...").

Simeon's prayer praises God and declares he is now ready to die (v. 29), "for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people" (vv. 30-31). God had fulfilled the promise Simeon had long awaited. Simeon's servant attitude (he actually calls himself a slave) and his openness to God's future make him a model for others to follow.

In the infant Jesus, Simeon sees the embodiment of God's earlier promises. He describes Jesus as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (v. 32). Several texts from Isaiah seem to be reflected in Simeon's statement. The public manifestation of a Messiah (v. 31) is suggested by Isa. 52:10: "... all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." Both Isa. 42:6 and 49:6, in the context of the "Servant Songs," describe the ideal servant of God as "a light for the Gentiles."

Christ would become the light that would dispel the darkness in which the Gentiles had lived. Coming as the culmination of Israel's long-awaited redemptive hope, Jesus' life and work would be "glory to your people Israel."

Mary and Joseph, whom Luke simply describes as "the child's father and mother," appear to have been flabbergasted by Simeon's words. The birth narratives of Matthew and Luke tell us that angels had visited both of them, and had told them their son was to be the Messiah, but perhaps they had yet to fully believe or accept it.

Simeon blessed them both, despite their confusion, and addressed a personal word to Mary (vv. 34-35). It was a straightforward prediction of events yet to come in Jesus' life. For Mary, it was a message of great hope, but also of pain.

"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel," Simeon said. The life and work of

Christ confronted his people with the demand for a decision. Those who chose to follow him would be lifted up, while those who rejected him would fall, despite their opposition to him.

Simeon's final word is an unexpected prediction of pain. As he handed the baby back to his mother, perhaps, Simeon addressed Mary: "and a sword will pierce your own soul too." Simeon's prophecy points toward the suffering Mary would endure as she watched her son being misunderstood, mistreated, hunted and ultimately, brutally killed. The sword Simeon mentioned was no thin rapier, but a *hromphia*, a large, two-edged sword that would cause a large and painful wound.

A welcoming woman (vv. 36-40)

Simeon was not the only prophet who was present that day. A woman named Anna was also there, an aged widow Luke unabashedly identifies as a prophet who devoted herself to fasting and prayer in the temple, a clear sign of extreme piety. ↓

While Simeon had apparently limited his remarks to Mary and Joseph, Anna the prophet "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38). Although some ancient texts have "Israel" instead of Jerusalem, the strongest evidence is that the "Jerusalem" is the original reading. In this case, Jerusalem, as the traditional capital of Israel and home of the temple, stands for the nation. ↓

Were Mary and Joseph encouraged by their encounters with Simeon and Anna, or confused? Luke does not say. He tells us only that, when they had completed all the ritual requirements, they returned home to Nazareth.

The final verse of our text builds on the predictions of Simeon and Anna with a thumbnail description of Jesus' growth and development in both strength and wisdom. Most notably, Luke notes, "the favor of God was upon him." **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 1:4-11

Jan. 8, 2012

Taking the Plunge

Outside the North Carolina mountain town of West Jefferson, in a little community called Beaver Creek, one may find a tiny Episcopal church called St. Mary's. During the mid 1970s, the otherwise nondescript church became the home of three exceptional frescoes painted by Benjamin F. Long IV.

Behind the modest altar, a large central fresco depicts Christ on the cross as his spirit departs. To the left, a smaller image portrays Mary great with child. The fresco to the right is a portrait of John the Baptist. John is dressed in a short camel's hair garment. His hair is unkempt. There is a wild look in his eyes, and a big stick in his hand. There is nothing gentle about the picture, because there was nothing particularly gentle about John. When the baptizer came preaching, he meant business.

Today's lesson focuses on the theme of repentance, which was at the heart of the preaching of both John and Jesus. They both knew that it is God's desire to forgive all persons of their sins. They also knew that the gateway to divine forgiveness is human repentance.

The beginning of the gospel (vv. 1-3)


Though the lectionary text begins at v. 4, it is important to set the context, as Mark begins his work with "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (v. 1, NRSV). Most other translations (e.g., KJV, NIV, NASB, NET) use the word "gospel"

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to translate *euangelion*, which literally means "good news." 

The first chapter of Mark describes, in rapid-fire order, Jesus' baptism, his temptation and his initial preaching ministry. Jesus did not just show up one day and start drawing attention to himself: John introduced him. Mark preferred to call John "the Baptizer" rather than "the Baptist" (using a participle rather than the noun form preferred by Matthew and Luke). John himself appeared without introduction, declaring that the kingdom of God was at hand, salvation was near, and all that God had promised was about to come true.

John's appearance and his diet certainly attracted attention, even though he preached in largely unpopulated areas.  His rustic dress, ascetic habits and fiery sermons reminded people of stories they had heard about Elijah the prophet. Such stories were kept alive because there was a common belief that Elijah would reappear to presage the Messiah's coming.

Mark quotes two of those texts in support of that belief (vv. 2-3 = Mal.

3:1a + "ahead of you" + Isa. 40:3). In doing so, he mistakenly attributes both texts to Isaiah, perhaps because they had been preserved together in a familiar collection of messianic prophecies identified mainly with Isaiah.

Mal. 4:5-6 had predicted Elijah's return: "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse."

The oracle's insistence that Elijah would "turn the hearts" of parents and children implies a coming call for repentance, so it is not unexpected that when John stepped onto the stage, he was preaching a message of repentance.

The message of John (vv. 4-8)

According to Mark, John's message was twofold. First, he challenged his hearers to repent of their sins, and to symbolize their penitence through "a baptism of repentance for

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the forgiveness of sins” (v. 4). John’s preaching was so effective and eschatological expectations were so high, “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem” came out to hear John preach. When the altar (or river) call was given, they came forward in droves “and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (v. 5).

John’s baptism was both old and new. It was common for Gentile proselytes to Judaism to undergo immersion as a ritual purification marking entry to the community, and observant Jews practiced frequent lustrations to keep themselves pure. John’s baptism differed, however, in that it was a once-for-all testimony rather than a repeated practice of purification, and it came at the hands of John, not by self-immersion. 📖

For John, the only prerequisite for baptism was the confession of one’s sins, for confession is the beginning of repentance. John preached in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, who commonly called for repentance with the word (*shub*), which means literally “to turn around” or “return.” To confess one’s sins is to admit that one’s life has been going in the wrong direction. Only then can a person turn around in true repentance. 📖

The second purpose of John’s teaching was to focus his new followers’ attention on Jesus, and he hinted at this even before Jesus physically appeared on the scene. “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me,” John predicted. “I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (vv. 7-8).

As John’s baptism differed from Jewish baptisms, so Jesus’ baptism would differ from John’s. John baptized with water as a symbol of repentance and forgiveness, a metaphor of cleansing. Jesus’ baptism would be no metaphor, but rather an exercise of power, involving the Holy Spirit. It would become a metaphor of death and

resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1-4), of new and eternal life, of the presence of God in the heart of the believer.

Matthew and Luke quote John as saying Jesus would baptize “with water and with fire” (Matt. 3:11 and Lk. 3:16). Since both Greek and Hebrew can use the same word for “wind” and “spirit,” some scholars postulate that the word “Holy” was a secondary addition to “spirit,” and that the original intent of John’s saying was that Jesus would baptize with “wind and fire.” The combination may be an indication of judgment, but is particularly reminiscent of Pentecost, at which the coming of the Spirit was marked by the sound of wind and by “tongues of fire” above the heads of the disciples (Acts 2:1-4). Pentecostal believers often speak of a baptism in the Spirit as a second baptism.

The Messiah of God (vv. 9-11)

We don’t know how long John’s work continued, but it was long enough for him to develop quite a reputation and to collect a band of disciples. At some point, as John was baptizing, Jesus came and presented himself for baptism. Mark does not mention, as Matthew does, that John initially objected – not surprising, given John’s claim that he was unworthy to untie the coming one’s sandals. John submitted to Jesus’ wish, however, even as Jesus submitted to the baptismal waters. Later believers believed that Jesus was sinless and had no need of repentance. Still, Jesus chose to be baptized, probably as a means of signaling his solidarity with humankind.

Even as Christ proclaimed his humanity, God the Father declared Jesus’ divinity. Notice that Mark recounts this event from Jesus’ perspective, telling us what Jesus saw and heard. In contrast, Matthew and Luke

describe the divine annunciation from the standpoint of an observer.

As Mark tells the story, just as Jesus came up from the water, he saw the heavens opened and God’s spirit descending in the form of a dove. Modern Baptists sometimes use this text to support the mode of baptism by immersion, since Jesus “came up out of the water.” The phrase could also mean that Jesus was walking from the water to the shore, but the most natural sense is that of immersion.

The imagery of the dove is somewhat obscure. Doves were used in the Old Testament as sacrificial offerings, and a dove assisted Noah in finding dry land, but neither of those seems to relate here. There was a rabbinic tradition that when God “brooded over the waters” (Gen. 1:2), it was in the form of a dove, and we have some small evidence of another tradition that likened the voice of God to the cooing of a dove.

For whatever reason, the gospels insist that God chose the dove as a means of self-revelation. The most important thing, however, is not what was seen, but what was heard. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (v. 11). Since Matthew and Luke relate the story from an observer’s perspective, it appears that not only Jesus, but also others who were present saw and heard these things. Thus, in one brief act, God validated both the teaching of John the messenger and the identity of Jesus the Messiah.

Although it stretches beyond today’s text, we should not overlook the significant conjunction of vv. 11 and 12. Through the Spirit, God declared love for and approval for Jesus. Immediately afterward, however, the same Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” to be tempted by Satan. God’s love for Jesus did not preclude doing what was necessary for Jesus’ continued growth and preparation for ministry.

Jesus’ experience reminds us that baptism is an important step in the life of faith. Today’s text challenges us to ponder the significance of baptism – whether it is long past or yet to come. **BT**

YOUTH



David Cassidy and Jeremy Colliver

January 1 — January 29, 2012

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

Normal, Yet Special

Most of us live fairly “normal” lives. We, and millions like us, get up, shower, eat similar meals, wear similar clothes and follow similar schedules. Yet, we are also unique and different — even special.

When Jesus was just an infant, his family observed several rituals. These rituals were the same ones followed by thousands of other Jewish families with newborn babies. Since Jesus was a baby boy, he was circumcised. Because he was a first-born son, it was understood that God had “first claim” on his life.

In today’s passage, we see the family arrive at the temple for the traditional purification ritual, bringing with them a small sacrifice.

While there, they unexpectedly meet two people who welcome Jesus and seem to

realize he is special and unique. The first is Simeon, an elderly man who has long awaited the coming of the Messiah. The Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would live to see the Messiah. When he sees the baby Jesus, he knows that promise has been fulfilled.

Mary and Joseph allow him to hold Jesus, and listen while Simeon says, “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32).

The second stranger to approach them is the prophet Anna, an elderly widow. She too offers a welcome to Jesus, praising God and telling those around her about the child.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus are following the normal traditions of their faith. Yet, the infant Jesus is quickly seen as special and blessed by God.

JANUARY 1

Think About It:

What parts of your life seem normal? How do you also feel special and unique? Can you imagine Jesus, as he grew, having similar feelings about himself?

Make a Choice:

Jesus was indeed special — he was the Messiah! Yet, God has also created each of us with unique gifts, and God knows the difference we can make. How has God gifted you in a unique way?

Pray:

Ask God to bless both the normal parts and the unique parts of your life. Pray that God will help your faith grow and mature.

When You are Sorry

“I’m sorry.” Those are usually pretty tough words to say. We all do, say or think things that we know are wrong, but how often do we stop to recognize that we have flaws? Which shows more maturity: hiding from our sins, or admitting them and finding forgiveness?

John the Baptist lived outside of town, in the wilderness. He called people to come away from their normal lives to the wilderness, where he offered a baptism of “repentance” for the forgiveness of sins. John dressed oddly, wearing camel’s hair, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was a strange character. Yet people came to him to be baptized, to say “I’m sorry” for many things, and to get a fresh start through baptism.

The last person we expect to appear in line for baptism with John the Baptist is

Jesus. After all, why would he need to repent? Where would he need to say “I’m sorry”? And yet, today’s passage describes Jesus being baptized by John, and the heavens opening up to hear God say, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (v 11).

While it is hard to know the full meaning of Jesus’ baptism, it is clear that God was pleased with both Jesus and John the Baptist. Both were working to help people be honest about themselves and to find forgiveness and new hope.

The fact that crowds of people went out of town to be baptized by the crazy-looking and crazy-sounding John the Baptist shows the hunger people have for repentance and forgiveness. Have you tried it?

JANUARY 8

Think About It:

When was the last time you felt sorry for something you did or said? What did you do about it? If you admitted your error, did you find forgiveness?

Make a Choice:

How honest are you willing to be with yourself, with those you love and with God? Will you “repent” when you do wrong and seek to make things right again?

Pray:

Spend time in prayer with God, admitting your sins openly. Accept God’s forgiveness, and thank God for sending John and Jesus to show your love. Ask for the strength to forgive others too.

The Great 'Introducer'

JANUARY 15

Some people are naturals at getting to know others and making new friends. Philip seemed to be one of those people. In fact, some have given Philip the nickname, "the great introducer" because of the reputation he earned introducing others to Jesus.

In today's passage (John 1:43-51), Jesus finds Philip and invites him to become a disciple. Philip immediately accepts and wastes no time finding Nathanael, whom he brings to Jesus for an introduction. Nathanael quickly realizes that Jesus is the Messiah, and he too chooses to follow him. We do not know if Philip was naturally outgoing, or if

he was so excited about following Jesus that he could not resist sharing. You might understand that feeling — the eagerness you feel to share exciting news.

One of the ways we learn about God is through the lives and faith of others. In the same way, others can learn about God from the way you live out your faith. As Philip followed Jesus, it seemed natural for him to share his excitement and his faith with others. For Nathanael and others like him, Philip's tendency to "introduce" made a real difference in their lives.

Think About It:

How were you introduced to Jesus? What does it mean to make such an introduction today?

Make a Choice:

Will you choose to live in a way that helps introduce others to Jesus?

Pray:

Thank God for those who helped introduce you to Jesus. Ask for the wisdom to be an "introducer" for others.

Come with Me

JANUARY 22

Your teenage years can be a wonderful, yet sometimes mixed-up time. There are parts of your life that you have brought from your childhood years — friends, habits, favorite traditions, and perhaps beliefs too. Yet, part of maturing is choosing for yourself where you will place your trust and make commitments.

Who are your most important friends? Where will you go to college? What role will God have in your life?

In today's text (Mark 1:14-20), we are reading the well-known passage where Jesus

calls his first disciples: James, John, Andrew and Simon. What is it about Jesus that causes these men to give up their jobs as fishermen in order to follow him?

Jesus asks them to repent, and to believe the good news that the Kingdom of God is near. He invites them to trust that there is something about God's love that will make their lives and world better.

How will you respond to such an offer? Do you believe Jesus is worth trusting and following?

Think About It:

Have you chosen to be a follower of Christ? How has that choice changed as you have grown?

Make a Choice:

As you mature, what role will your faith play in your life and decisions? Will you choose to follow Christ?

Pray:

Share with God your thoughts, feelings and even your fears about being a true follower.

Astounded and Amazed

JANUARY 29

Have you ever felt amazed or astounded by someone? Perhaps it was a magician, an artist, a musician or some other performer. Can you recall how that felt?

Usually, when we use words such as "astounded" or "amazed" about someone, they have surprised us with their abilities and gone far beyond what we expected or thought was possible.

In today's text (Mark 1:21-28), those in Capernaum use the words "astounded" and "amazed" to describe their experience with Jesus. They are astounded by Jesus' teaching. It is so different and authoritative that

it surprises those in attendance. His teaching goes well beyond their expectations.

While still in the synagogue, Jesus is confronted by a "man with unclean spirits" who taunts Jesus and asks Jesus to leave him alone. In response, Jesus ignores the taunting and instead calls for the unclean spirit to come out of him. The man changes in front of the crowd, and they are "amazed."

When was the last time you were astounded or amazed by Jesus? Do you still hear his unbelievable message of radical love — and acceptance? Does Jesus still work in your life in ways that surprise you?

Think About It:

When was the last time you were astounded or amazed by Jesus — his message or his work in your life?

Make a Choice:

Perhaps it is time to take a fresh look at Jesus. What if he is more radical than you previously thought?

Pray:

Thank God for the places where Jesus has surprised you, and ask that your eyes and heart be open to see amazing deeds yet to come.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

John 1:43-51

Jan. 15, 2012

Come and See

Imagine that you're participating in an exercise designed to help everyone in a class or on a work team get to know each other better. The leader asks: "Would you say that your life is characterized more by nouns or verbs? Is your life about being or doing?"

Both aspects of life are important, of course: we make steady progress as we govern the tension between the two. None of us would be complete if our lives were all action, and none of us would get anywhere if our lives were all being.

Today's text is all about the verbs. Watch for them: Find. Follow. Come. See. Know. Believe. And in the process, learn.

Finding and following (vv. 43-44)

Today is the second Sunday of a season called Epiphany, a time in which the gospel texts from the lectionary tend to focus on witnesses to Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. 📖 John 1:43-51 deals with the call of the first disciples, and John, as usual, tells the story differently from the other three gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke have Jesus calling Andrew and Peter beside the Sea of Galilee. In John, however, Jesus had connected with them in Judea, where they had come to hear and possibly to follow John the Baptist.

The next day, as John tells it, Jesus decided to go to Galilee, and apparently headed toward the north shore near Peter and Andrew's hometown, which John identifies as Bethsaida. Mark



holds that Peter and Andrew were from Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29). The two towns were not far apart, both on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was actually on the western edge of a different governmental district, but was so closely connected with other Galilean towns that it was locally considered a part of Galilee. 📖

The important thing, however, is not the location, but the manner in which Jesus located Philip: he "found" him. We don't know exactly what this means. Does it suggest that Jesus already knew Philip, and that he travelled to Bethsaida to find him again? Or, should we imagine that some manner of divine intelligence or revelation led him to Philip?

We can't answer those questions, but John tells us clearly the outcome of the meeting: Jesus said, "Follow me" – and Philip did. "Follow me" implied far more than physically trailing after Jesus in his travels. It was an invitation to observe what Jesus did, to hear Jesus teach, to converse with Jesus directly – in short, to become Jesus' disciple.

Coming and seeing (vv. 45-46)

Philip responded by not only following Jesus, but also bringing others to him. In the text, take note that v. 44 is really a parenthetical statement designed to identify Bethsaida, the sort of brief explanation likely to have been added later. If that is the case, the news that Jesus found Philip and said "Follow me" is followed immediately by the note that Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus.

Thus, as Jesus had sought and found Philip, so Philip sought and found Nathanael. It is this sort of behavior that has led some to call Philip "the great introducer." Elsewhere, when Philip is mentioned, it is often with regard to his skill in relationships. In 12:21, a contingent of Greek-speakers who wanted to meet Jesus approached Philip about making it happen. In 14:8, Philip's question "show us the Father" reveals his concern about maintaining relationships.

When we come to the Book of

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Acts, Philip is portrayed as one of the first apostles to reach out to non-Jews. Acts 8:5-12 says he went and “proclaimed the Messiah” in Samaria, which was heavily populated by the despised Samaritans. A more familiar story, in Acts 8:26-40, relates the account of how the Spirit led Philip to witness to a high official from Ethiopia and ultimately to baptize him.

We take note of not only Philip’s interest in finding Nathanael, but also the content of what he said: “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote – Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth” (v. 45). This suggests that Nathanael and Philip had belonged to a group who actively longed for the coming of a Messiah they believed to be predicted in scripture. Philip had concluded that Jesus was the long-awaited one. ↓

Nathanael’s response reveals he was quite skeptical of Philip’s conclusion. John 21:2 says that Nathanael was from Cana, about nine miles north of Nazareth. Reflecting a local prejudice against Jesus’ home village – a place so tiny that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament or any early Jewish writings – Nathanael responded with disbelief: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Later in John, a similar cynicism is expressed when others doubted that the Messiah could possibly come from anywhere in Galilee (7:40-41).

Philip responded to Nathanael’s dubiety by inviting him to replace his prejudice with experience: “Come and see.” ↓

This is how evangelism works: not only by what we hear, but also what we see. Philip did not try to convince his friend Nathanael with logical arguments or even scriptural evidence. Instead, he invited him to come and see Jesus: to experience his presence, to hear his words, to observe his actions. It was an invitation to encounter.

If we should be so bold as to encourage our friends to trust in Jesus as Lord, they might react with similar skepticism. We can’t offer them an opportunity to come and see Jesus in

the same way that Philip did, but we can invite them to come and experience a community of faith made of people who are committed to Jesus.

That raises the issue, of course, of whether we dare to do so. Would a seeker who attended our church find Jesus there? Would he or she experience the love and grace and power of God at work in the lives of the people?

If not, perhaps we need to spend more time “coming and seeing” in our own lives, experiencing the kind of transformative relationship with Jesus that another can see.

Seeing and believing (vv. 47-51)

Nathanael was curious enough to accept Philip’s invitation to come to meet Jesus, who greeted him with a surprising display of prescience: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” (v. 47).

What did Jesus mean by this? Did he intend it purely as a compliment, indicating that Nathanael was always truthful? Was he saying that Nathanael was not deceitful like Jacob, for whom the Israelites were named? Or was Jesus indicating knowledge of Nathanael’s disparaging comment about Nazareth, and making a joking remark that Nathanael was prone to speak his mind? ↓

Whatever Jesus’ intent, his remarks intrigued Nathanael, who wondered where or how Jesus had come to know anything about him. John, more than the other gospels, attributes a measure of omniscience to Jesus, and this is reflected in Jesus’ response that he had seen Nathanael sitting under a fig tree just before Philip had arrived.

Amazed by Jesus’ powers of perception, Nathanael quickly changed his tune: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49). Philip had invited Nathanael to come and see – now he had come and believed.

Jesus acknowledged Nathanael’s newfound belief, indicating he would see far more impressive things (v. 50), but he does not criticize him for his lack of belief prior to witnessing a sign. There is some ambiguity about the relationship between signs and faith in John’s gospel, which usually speaks more highly of faith that requires no signs and wonders (4:48, 20:29).

Jesus’ comment in v. 51 has engendered considerable head scratching, for although Jesus has been in conversation with Nathanael alone, and John introduces the comment with “And he said to *him*,” the pronoun for “you” and the verb for “you will see” are both in the plural. Does this mean Jesus stopped, looked around, and addressed his comment about angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man to all who were gathered there?

It is more likely, many scholars think, that the saying in v. 51 was originally an independent saying transposed to this story, left in the plural because it was so familiar.

But what did Jesus mean by it? What is the significance of saying “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”?

The verse is an apparent reference to the familiar vision of Jacob in Genesis 28. As Jacob fled from his brother Esau and traveled toward Haran, he stopped near Bethel to spend the night. As he slept, he saw a vision of a ladder or staircase reaching from the earth to the heavens. In his dream, God appeared and promised to establish a covenant with him (Gen. 28:10-17).

Jacob celebrated the event by erecting a stone pillar to mark the spot, believing that he had discovered the gateway between heaven and earth. Jesus does not mention a ladder or staircase, but says the angels will be “ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” ↓ Thus, Jesus appears to identify himself as the ladder, the gateway, the connection between heaven and earth, between God and humankind. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 1:14-20

Jan. 22, 2012

Come with Me

A thought-provoking picture has been making the rounds on Facebook. In it, Jesus sits on a park bench beside a young man whose backpack and sleeping roll are nearby. In the caption, Jesus says “No, I’m not talking about Twitter. I literally want you to follow me.”

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Does our concept of discipleship amount to little more than subscribing to “tweets” or blog updates from religious friends?

If Jesus had used Twitter, his first post might have looked like this: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news*” (Mark 1:15).

Let’s see if we can unpack that tweet.

The right time for the Kingdom (vv. 14-15a)

Mark suggests that Jesus began his public ministry after John the Baptist was arrested, perhaps intentionally avoiding any conflict or confusion between them by waiting until John was out of the public eye before drawing attention to his own message.

When he did, Mark says, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God” (v. 14). “Galilee” was used as both a geographic and governmental term to describe an area north and west of the Sea of Galilee. Both Jews and Gentiles lived there, as well as anti-Roman zealots.

It was to this area, one ripe for change and distant from the entrenched



Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, that Jesus chose to begin his ministry, and Mark says the first part of his first message was this: “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near ...”

Throughout the long period that the Hebrews had longed for a messiah, the notion of God’s in-breaking kingdom was thought of as an earthly rule at a future time. In prophets such as Isaiah and Micah it was seen in the hope that one day all nations would come to Jerusalem to worship God, and there would be peace on earth (Isa. 2:2-4, Mic. 4:1-4).

Popular thought was not as lofty, as people in Jesus’ day seem to have hoped for a military messiah to rise up, lead them to victory over the despised Romans, and re-establish an Israelite kingdom.

In the teaching of Jesus, however, the messianic age was no longer future, but present: the time was “fulfilled” in his own coming. Rather than setting up a restored world or a restored monarchy, Jesus introduced a radically different notion of the Kingdom. It

would not be about peace-loving carnivores or political institutions, but the spiritual realm in which God is king. The Kingdom of God is the Rule of God, the realm in which God operates, the “-dom” (think “domain” or “dominion”) in “Kingdom.”

Jesus could say “the kingdom of God is at hand” because *he* was at hand. The rule of God was at work in his life and ministry, and those who wanted to experience life in the Kingdom had only to listen to his words and respond to his call.

It was the right time to proclaim the good news of God’s eternal rule, because in Jesus Christ the kingdom had broken through into our world.

The right time to repent and believe (v. 15b)

If the first part of Jesus’ first sermon was “the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand,” the second part was “repent and believe in the good news.”

Jesus called upon *every* person

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to repent and believe the gospel – not just the greatest sinners; not just crack addicts and drug dealers, child molesters and rapists, extortionists and exhibitionists. Jesus did not speak to the heathen and the heartless alone, but called on every person to repent, because every person who lives is subject to sin.

The Greek word for repent (*metanoia*) means “to change the mind.” It reflects the Hebrew word (*shub*), which means literally “to turn around.” To repent is to change our mind about whether our way is better than God’s way. To repent is to turn around from the easy road on the big highway that leads to destruction, and to find the lesser traveled pathway that leads to the kingdom of life, the dimension of reality in which God is king.

In Mark’s presentation of the life of Christ, Jesus’ first command was this: “Repent!”

“Repent,” Jesus said, “and believe the good news.” When we choose to believe the remarkable good news of the kingdom, we give up our illusion that this world is all there is and that the rules of this world are the most important. We trust there is a God out there – a real God who made this world and put us in it – a God who loved us enough to make us free, even though that meant our bad choices could make of the world an evil and dangerous place.

We believe there is a God who loved us enough to take on human flesh and experience human suffering and die a human death to call us toward a kingdom that is greater than this world, and to open the door that leads to it.

We should not pretend it is easy to believe that. Sometimes, the older we get, the harder it is to believe. It may have been easy to believe when life was simple and we trusted everything adults told us, but the older we grow, the more mountains and valleys we cross, the more challenging it becomes to believe. ↓

Jesus pointed to children as an example of the kind of faith that opens

heaven’s doors. Adults may no longer have the simplicity of faith that children know, but we can have the same sincerity. We can hope with all our heart, and when we entrust that hope to Jesus, the good news of the kingdom really is at hand.

The right time to follow (vv. 16-20)

As Jesus began his active ministry, he did more than preach inspiring sermons to anonymous crowds: he also spoke to individuals, built relationships, and challenged a small group of people to follow him as disciples. The gospels agree that Andrew and Simon Peter were among the first disciples called, though John tells it differently. ↓

As Mark relates the story, Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee when he saw Simon and Andrew, apparently within shouting distance of shore, casting their nets. With no prior recorded conversation, Jesus challenged them to leave their nets, follow him, and start fishing for people (vv. 16-17). ↓

The two men, Mark says, did so “immediately.” ↓ What do we make of this? Mark tells the story as if the brothers had never seen Jesus before, and one simple command led them to leave their boats behind and follow him.

This is where the other gospels are helpful: Luke suggests that Jesus spent some time in the boat with Simon Peter and had guided him to make a miraculous catch of fish before the crusty fisherman went to his knees (Luke 5:1-11). John suggests that Jesus first met Andrew and another unnamed disciple of John the Baptist in Judea, and that Andrew later brought his brother to Jesus (John 1:35-42).

These variant versions remind us that there may have been multiple opportunities for the prospective disciples to meet Jesus and hear him teach before the day he called them to leave

their nets and follow him. Mark gives us a snapshot of the day Jesus said “Follow me,” but it is unlikely that this is the first time the brothers had seen or heard the new rabbi.

The same would almost certainly be true of James and John, another pair of brothers who appear to have been working on the shore a short distance away, going about the tiresome but necessary business of mending their nets. At Jesus’ call, they left their father Zebedee and the hired hands with the boat and also followed Jesus, Mark says (vv. 18-20).

As we wonder how well the first disciples knew Jesus, and what motivated them to leave their livelihoods behind and follow him as disciples, we can’t help but ask ourselves what it took (or would take!) to motivate us to follow Jesus.

Why should any person give his or her first allegiance to God when the patterns and comforts of ordinary life are so familiar? What would attract us to a lifestyle of living and loving as Jesus taught us to do?

Would it take more knowledge about Jesus? A sense of desperation in which we felt we had no place left to turn, or a spiritual experience we can’t understand? In many cases, new followers are motivated by the example of a friend whose life seems so grounded and joyful that they want to be like him or her.

Are you a follower yet? If not, what would it take to send you down the road with Jesus? If you are a follower, does your example encourage others to join you on the path? **BT**

“Rather than setting up a restored world or a restored monarchy, Jesus introduced a racially different notion of the Kingdom. It would not be about peace-loving carnivores or political institutions, but the spiritual realm in which God is king.”

Bible Study

Mark 1:21-28

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jan. 29, 2012


Listen To Me

All of us, from time to time, find ourselves listening to speeches or presentations of one sort or another – and it’s usually fairly obvious whether the person speaks with authority on his or her assigned topic.

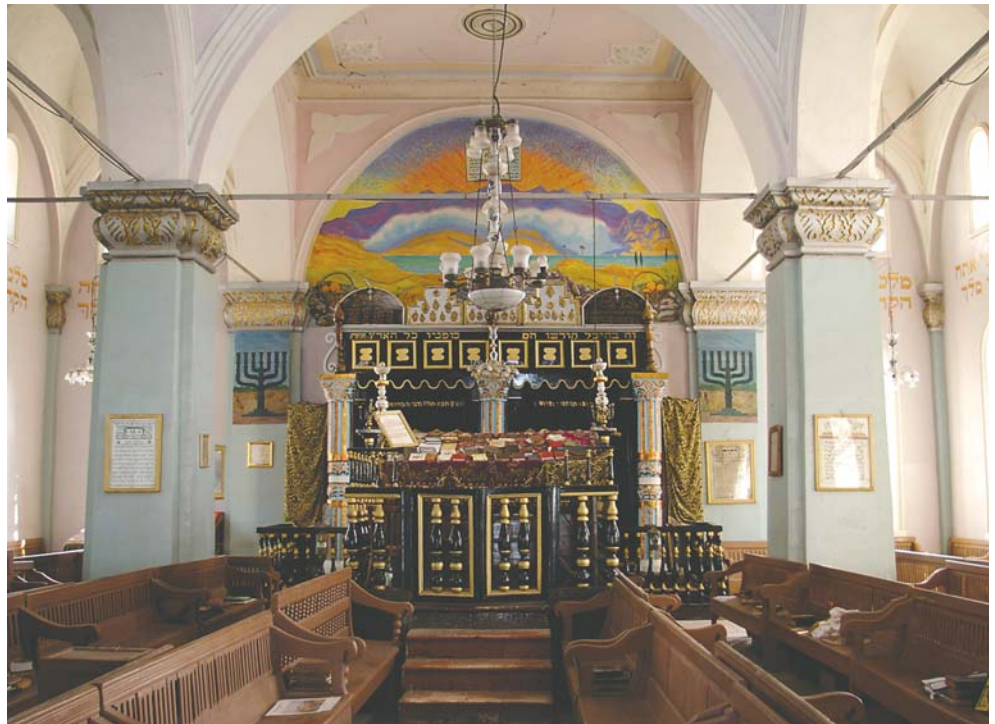
I remember the first day of class, three decades ago, when I sat down for the first session of the late Elmo Scoggin’s introductory Hebrew class at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. I knew that Dr. Scoggin had been teaching Hebrew for almost as long as I’d been alive, that he had lived in Israel for several years, and that he had participated in scores of digs and tours of the Holy Land. He knew biblical Hebrew backwards and forwards, and he spoke modern Hebrew like a native. Hebrew oozed from his pores, and when he taught, I listened, because he spoke with authority.

Authority to teach (vv. 21-22)

Today’s text, which continues the Epiphany theme of Jesus’ appearance and growing fame, is all about authority. Through two vignettes, we learn that Jesus displayed a kind of authority no one had seen before.

Mark’s account suggests that Jesus’ first synagogue sermon was proclaimed in Capernaum, and it immediately followed the calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John. Mark indicates that Capernaum was their hometown, and it was an appropriate place to begin. 

We often think of Jesus’ first synagogue sermon as being in his



own hometown of Nazareth, because Luke’s gospel puts greater emphasis on that one, but Luke doesn’t claim that it was the first time Jesus taught in a synagogue. Just before the account of his teaching and rejection in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), Luke says that Jesus “returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone” (vv. 14-15). And, Jesus’ sermon specifically references his previous work in Capernaum (v. 23). Mark’s account apparently preserves that encounter.

Synagogues may have their beginning as far back as the exile, when Israelites living in Babylon could no longer worship in the temple, but they came to prominence during the late postexilic period. A synagogue required the presence of at least 10 Jewish men (a *minyan*), who would gather to hear the scriptures read and to talk about them.

Mark does not suggest that Jesus was invited to read from the scroll in Capernaum, as Luke says he did in

Nazareth, but as a male member of the Jewish community, he would have been free to comment on the text. Evidently, Jesus quickly took the lead role in the discussion, for Mark says, “when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught” (v. 21).

Jesus did more than simply express an opinion; he taught with a certainty that caught other participants off guard: “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (v. 22).

Have you ever heard a sermon or lecture that left you flabbergasted by the speaker’s expertise and impressed with his or her passion? If so, how did you respond?

The verb translated as “astounded” suggests not only surprise, but also discomfort. It consists of the preposition *ek* (meaning “out”) and the verb *plesso* (“to strike”). The combination takes on the sense of being struck with panic, hence, “to be so amazed as to be practically overwhelmed” (see Louw & Nida’s lexicon, among others).

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If those present had worn socks with their sandals, Jesus would have knocked them off. They had never heard such teaching; it was completely unlike that of the scribes. Jesus taught with *authority*.

To understand the difference, consider how the scribes taught. The word translated as “scribe” is *grammateis* (notice the similarity to the English word “grammar”). The term could describe someone skilled in writing new documents or copying old ones that needed to be preserved, such as the scriptures. It also came to be used in a technical sense, however, to describe Jewish rabbis who specialized in the study and interpretation of the law – not only commands found in the Torah, but also the hundreds of additional rules the rabbis developed in the postexilic period.

During that time, believing that the Hebrews had been conquered because of their persistent disobedience, an emerging group of priests-turned-rabbis sought to “build a hedge about the law” by adding 365 derivative commands designed to clarify and preserve Jewish ethnicity as “a holy nation.” The theory seemed to be that, if people gave attention to the many specific rules the rabbis taught, perhaps they wouldn’t break through the fence to violate the more central laws found in the Pentateuch.

Over time, these laws and the justifications for them were compiled into a series of judicial commentaries that came to be called the Mishnah. Scribes who taught the laws in the synagogue or elsewhere did so on the authority of generations of scribes who came before them. The authority for teaching was not within the scribes, but in the opinions of others they cited.

This practice of finding authority mainly in the teaching of others created a problem for the scribes, because the rabbis often disagreed with each other, and the Mishnah preserves their debates. Thus, a particular scribe in a given synagogue might teach and agree with the opinions of Rabbi Hillel over Rabbi Shammai (two popular

first-century teachers), but there was no real certainty about his conclusions. 🇺🇸

In contrast, Jesus did not cite the rabbis or express any doubt about his teaching. He taught with an authority that came from within, with a certainty that both amazed and offended his hearers. Of course, someone can be dead certain and also dead wrong. How could they know that Jesus was not only confident, but also correct?

Here it is helpful to take a closer look at the Greek word typically translated as “authority.” The word is *exousia*. Its makeup suggests the literal meaning “out of one’s being,” but in practical use it meant “power to act” or “authority to act.” In some cases, it means simply “power.” One who spoke or gave a command with *exousia* had the power to back up his words with actions.

Did Jesus have such power? Was he more than just a convincing preacher?

Authority over unclean spirits (1:23-28)

Mark immediately presents an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate the inner power needed to confirm his troublesome teaching. “A man with an unclean spirit” rose up and screamed at Jesus: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (v. 24). 🇺🇸

Mark, like others in the first century, accepted the presence of evil spirits as the cause of various mental and physical illnesses that most modern people would explain with medical and psychological terminology. We cannot be sure whether Jesus held the same understanding, or simply chose to speak and act in a way that communicated most clearly to those around him.

“What have you to do with us?” (NRSV, literally, “what to us and to

you”) could carry the sense of “Leave us alone” (NET). It would have been spoken, we presume, from the perspective of the unclean spirit, who feared destruction, knowing that “the Holy One of God” could not abide its presence.

Jesus had no interest in harming the man, however, but in restoring him to health. Speaking in a way that both the man and those surrounding him would understand, Jesus addressed the perceived unclean spirit with a rebuke and a command to leave (v. 25). The man then convulsed and cried out before presumably assuming a peaceful posture that made his healing apparent to all (v. 26).

The following verse ties this powerful sign to Jesus’ earlier, powerful words. As Jesus had shown authority to teach (v. 22), he now demonstrated his authority to heal, even to command the dreaded unclean spirits. Once again, the people were amazed (though a different word is used to describe their amazement).

Interestingly, the people described Jesus’ act of power as “a new teaching – with authority” (v. 27). We would not ordinarily think of an action or miracle as a “teaching,” but Jesus’ audience apparently saw it as a revelation of a new truth, and therefore a “teaching” that demonstrated Jesus’ uncanny authority in yet another way.

Jesus’ authoritative teaching in both words and deed was bound to have consequences, and it did. His “fame” (literally, “the hearing of him”) spread quickly throughout the region of Galilee, and he was soon inundated with people who came to hear his words and seek his healing touch (see 1:32-34).

Do you see evidence of Jesus’ radical message spreading rapidly today? Could it be that the version of the gospel we proclaim is lacking in the kind of clarity and power that attracts attention and calls for response?

What would it take for guests attending your church to express amazement and spread the word that something new has come? **BT**

Adventures with Luler the Hound



Kelly Belcher



The Bow Wow

There is no feeling that God does not know about and care about. God loves us enough to want our worship and all our different feelings. In God's sanctuary, all feelings are allowed.



When people walk into the sanctuary to worship, are they always happy and quiet? Is it okay to come into worship if you're feeling bad? How do you usually feel as you sit down to worship?

Imagine Luler the Hound walking into the sanctuary. She might walk lazily up the aisle and plop down near the baptistry and sleep through the sermon. She might scamper in, tail wagging and ears perked up, trotting from pew to pew to get a belly scratch from people. She might never sit down. Or, she might run in and race around barking, then run out again.

People are like that. We all come to worship God feeling many different ways: happy, sad, tired, excited, angry, bored, afraid, calm, disappointed, relaxed, nervous, proud, shy, frustrated, friendly.

When you walk into the sanctuary, take your feelings in with you. Give them to God in prayer. God makes room for them. God meets you in worship, cares about all your feelings and loves you.



The Question Box

Name every feeling you can ever remember having as you sat down to worship.

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Reviews by Jackie Riley, Managing Editor

God Is in the Manger

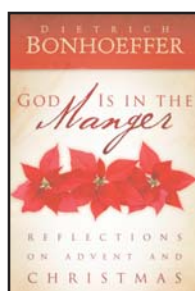
Reflections on Advent and Christmas

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(Westminster John Knox Press)

The words of beloved 20th-century theologian Bonhoeffer live on in these 40 short devotions that move thematically through the weeks of Advent and Christmas. Bonhoeffer, who fought Nazism for 12 years before being executed for participating in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, challenged his contemporaries — and his readers today — with his unsettling sermons and writings that denied a “comfortable” Christianity that provides easy answers.

His challenging thoughts are evident in the five sections of *God Is in the Manger*: waiting, mystery, redemption, incarnation and the 12 days of Christmas and Epiphany — the latter of which are not usually present in devotional books for the Advent season. Reflections are short excerpts from Bonhoeffer’s letters and passages from his sermons, followed by bonus material written by Bonhoeffer or one of his followers. The lilting cadence of Bonhoeffer’s voice is evident in the flowing language of the excerpts, although some updating of language has been included.

The devotions are brief, but not to be read quickly; instead, readers should contemplate their meaning and meditate on their words. This volume provides a good introduction to Bonhoeffer’s work and lasting influence.



A Lancaster County Christmas

Suzanne Woods Fisher
(Revell)

Jaime and C.J. are a young couple from the city whose marriage seems to be unraveling at a quick pace. Jaime has unsettled issues related to abandonment and her dream career, and now the sudden appearance of her father in her life. C.J. is a committed husband and teacher, a Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteer, and companion to Tucker the yellow Lab.

Mattie and Sol are an Amish couple living

in a large country farmhouse and dealing with the challenges of raising precocious 6-year-old Danny and trying to steer wayward Cousin Zach in the right direction. All the while, they’re dealing with the grief of not having the many children they have always wanted.

A chance meeting brings together these two families from very different backgrounds and approaches to life and faith, but with similar needs and problems. Then, a blizzard forces them to spend Christmas together.

The entire story takes place in 48 hours, with the author jumping from one plot to another, one character to another — all the while maintaining cohesiveness in the story line and piquing the interest of the reader. This is a signature skill utilized by bestselling writer of Amish fiction and nonfiction, Suzanne Fisher. She has a gift for detail and imagery that draws the reader into the story and a knack for helping her characters teach lessons indirectly through their conversation and musings.

Like other books in the Lancaster County series, this Christmas piece is bound to become a bestseller. Along with a cozy blanket and a cup of hot chocolate, it’s the perfect companion for a cold or rainy afternoon.

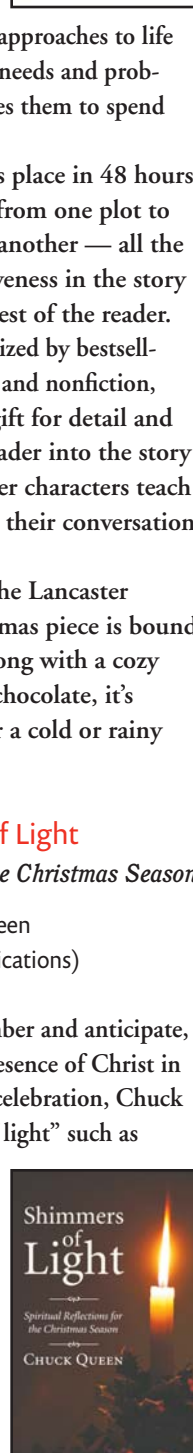
Shimmers of Light

Spiritual Reflections for the Christmas Season

Chuck Queen
(Resource Publications)

Advent invites us to remember and anticipate, but also to celebrate the presence of Christ in the present. To aid in this celebration, Chuck Queen offers “shimmers of light” such as gratitude, hope, renewal, a world made whole, divine love, transforming grace and deeper joy.

He explains in the introduction to his book: “It is my hope that amid all the glitter, glamour, gladness, and grief of the



Christmas season, you will find some shimmers of light in these spiritual reflections that will enlarge your vision of God’s kingdom, expand your love for all persons, and evoke your creative participation with God’s project to heal and transform our world.”

With this goal in mind, Queen’s “shimmers” are less tied to Christmas themes and therefore provide challenges appropriate for other times of the year. He ably weaves together scriptural wisdom, theological reflection, pastoral insight, and illustrations from film, literature and contemporary experience that could be used in sermons or as devotional reading.

Remembering a Child’s Best Christmas

Paul H. Story Sr.
(AuthorHouse)

It’s Christmastime in south Alabama in the early 1940s depression era. A family with little financial means is overjoyed at the prospect of having their first-ever lighted Christmas tree, especially since their little two-room rural house has no electricity.

The 11-year-old boy in the family recalls, “I did not know exactly what frankincense and myrrh were, but ...” and how “[Mr. Bud] was as close as we would ever get to seeing Santa Claus.” These and other words are evidence of the joy and thankfulness he and his loved ones experienced in the simplest of things.

Through his descriptions of various family members and his dog Big Jim (who found the “perfect” Christmas tree), readers can feel a nostalgic kindred to the characters in the story and the era in which they lived.

This young boy is now a grandfather sharing his memories of childhood with his grandchildren. His true story is an inspirational “chapter book” to be enjoyed by young readers or by senior adults as they remember “the good old days” or for families to share together. “Papaw” is an able storyteller, and the detailed sketches in the book are first-rate. He models well how we should pass our stories on to succeeding generations. **BT**



BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

December arrives, and the armies, unable to maneuver or fight because of weather-related communication and supply chain problems, settle down to wait out the long, cold months of winter.

Tens of thousands of men spend Christmas far from home, away from families and loved ones. Some live in canvas tents, struggling to stay warm. In many instances, idle troops build log cabins as winter quarters. In the winter camps, the days are filled with drills, gambling, drinking alcohol, eating, and occasional preaching.

Meanwhile, Baptists on the home fronts South and North talk of the war and worry about the health and morality of loved ones serving as soldiers.

Among white southerners, hatred of the “Abolitionist” North is now at a fever pitch. J.R. Graves, famed Landmark editor of the *Tennessee Baptist*, remains under a cloud of suspicion. A northern transplant, Graves has long been accused of being an abolitionist, and by now has spent years trying to refute his critics. This month Graves prints a letter in the *Tennessee Baptist* written by a Texas Baptist identified as B.F. Burroughs:

There is no religious interest anywhere, hardly; this unholy war has absorbed everything else. I see at every corner, and in every lane and alley, the Secular and Methodist papers are publishing and boasting of their preachers and lay members' bravery; and what valiant soldiers they all are, to read their accounts! One would think that the Confederate army was composed of the Methodist denomination alone, gathered to fight this Abolition war, of which they had a great deal to do in the bringing of it on, by publishing to the world in their law-book, (the Discipline), as strong Abolition sentiments, ever since the days of John Wesley as ever were proclaimed from a Northern Abolition pulpit. What would have been your fate if you and your brethren had published such sentiments? They would have taken you



to the rack, or the stake, and burned you because you had the moral courage merely to express your thoughts. Dr. Howell & Co., I reckon, will drop the charge of Abolitionism against you now, since your faith and works on that point are known, and read of all men. What will they resort to next, since their marriage to Method-ism, and all other sorts of Isms, to make sure of your destruction and the downfall of the Tennessee Baptist; but surely they are kicking against the pricks, or at least they are certainly beginning to think so. They have gained just such victories as the Lincoln army has in every engagement of any note that they have had with the Confederate army.

Most white Southern Baptists remain certain that African slavery is God’s ordained will for the black race, and are convinced that the Confederate army is God’s army. A Baptist minister in Richmond thus enthuses:

Never was an army, since the days of Cromwell in which there was a more pervading sense of the power of God.

Northward, some Baptist preachers ratchet up patriotic themes as the year draws to a close. In some cases, church congregations offer the use of their buildings and lands to the Union army. Such is the case of the First Baptist Church of York, Pennsylvania.

George M. Slaysman, pastor of First

150 YEARS AGO

December 1861

Baptist York, and his congregation earlier in the year allowed the Duquesne Grays Pennsylvania unit to use church buildings as barracks as the soldiers trained in preparation for the battlefield. Upon completion of their training, the soldiers sought to pay the church for their use of the facilities, but Slaysman refused payment. In appreciation, the Grays soldiers gift the church with a Communion Table Bible.

For his part, Slaysman remains ardent in his support of Union soldiers, and plays a prominent role in the building of a U.S. Army hospital in York. Later, in the summer of 1862, the Baptist pastor volunteers his services as the chaplain of the newly-created 130th Pennsylvania Regiment.

Baptist ministers serving as army chaplains North and South in almost all instances (other than active soldiers who also assume chaplain responsibilities) refuse government pay, instead depending upon their own resources or funding from Baptist congregations and/or denominational bodies. Particularly in the South, the refusal to accept government pay for army chaplain services is one of a few ways that Baptists, caught up in the fervor of Christian nationalism, remain faithful to their heritage of church-state separation. **BT**

—For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit civilwarbaptists.org.

That's billion with a 'b'

Reblog

By Tony W. Cartledge

The United Nations estimated that the earth's population surpassed seven billion last month. The number is alarming, but not surprising.

When I was in college, the world population had just topped four billion, and experts accurately predicted that it would surpass six billion by the end of the century. By 2050, the number is expected to easily exceed 10 billion.

For at least 40 years, environmentalists have been crying that we need to do something about population growth lest resources become scarce and chaos ensues, and the problem has only grown larger.

Though birth rates have declined in developed countries, they continue at high levels in the most impoverished lands. This presents a conundrum, of course: those who are least able to provide for children are the ones who have the most.

While it's easy for Westerners to go "tsk, tsk" and condemn people in places such as Africa, India and some Arab countries for having too many children, we have to understand the cultural and economic situations that drive their behavior.

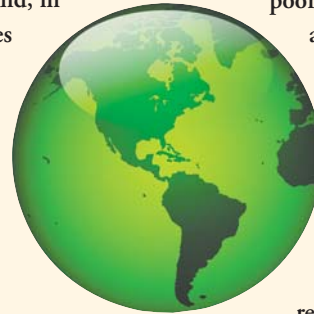
In some places, birth control may be in short supply, or patriarchal husbands may forbid wives from using it. Where infant mortality is high, there is pressure to have more children so some will survive.

Greater access to medical care means that far more children are living to produce more children of their own, but the cultural imperative has yet to fade away. And, in areas where tribal influences remain important, families seek to strengthen their tribes — or their position in the tribe — by producing more offspring.

One would hope that further economic development, educational efforts, greater access to birth control, and shifting cultural pressures might lead to more reasonable birth rates, but the end to that goal is not in sight.

The earth's resources are vast, but they are also finite. The world can support more people, but not an infinite number of people.

Poverty is already endemic in many overpopulated lands, and climate change brought about by global warming is compounding the



Selections from recent blogs at baptiststoday.org

problem. The oceans are already over-fished, rich farmlands are growing more depleted, and forestlands crucial to atmospheric balance and biodiversity are being leveled for crops.

It's not hard to envision a day when the poor masses of the world rise up and revolt against those countries that have more goods and fewer people.

The answer is not for the wealthy to start having more children so they can compete, but for those of us who are blessed with resources and knowledge to do our part in providing education and resources for birth control while also helping impoverished populations achieve food security so there's less pressure to produce more children. A number of U.S. programs and international organizations are working hard to those ends, and we must pray that budget hawks don't slice those important funds.

There are no easy answers to the challenges of world population growth, but the ostrich approach is not an option: the problem, like the population, is growing. **BT**

Faith not helped by political stunts

By John Pierce

Two of the most memorable and moving moments in my life were the baptisms of our daughters. They were done in the best of all ways: a full dunk.

On each occasion, I asked my daughter to state her profession of faith. And she responded with the historic Christian affirmation: "Jesus is Lord."

Then I lowered her into the water — a symbolic and sacred moment.

Faith comes that way. While we are called into community, authentic faith is rooted in an individual affirmation to follow Jesus.

Genuine faith can be nurtured, encouraged and challenged. It cannot be enforced.

Despite all the pressing needs in our nation, the U.S. House of Representatives voted last month on a resolution to reaffirm "In God We Trust" as the nation's

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

—Jesus (Matt. 6:1 NIV)

official motto.

Not surprisingly, Congressman J. Randy Forbes, who represents God and Virginia in the House, sponsored the measure.

Also, not surprising is the number of American Christians (some of whom are more likely Christian Americans) who will fall for this political stunt. They will see it as scoring a point for God.

But the goal of this action is clear to anyone with eyes to see: These politicians are positioning themselves and therefore their political agendas as being more closely aligned with God than their

partisan opponents.

It is yet another way to play to those religiously inclined, but naïve, Americans who will foolishly fall for such nonsense.

Historically, the motto was adopted in 1956 in response to the rise of "godless Communism." Apparently, it was extremely effective since everyone in the U.S. has acted very godly since that time.

Two things to keep in mind:

Today's divisive political climate gets more divisive when religious faith is used as a political wedge rather than a means of unification.

Faith cannot be legislated; only an individual can profess faith and trust in God.

We desperately need for our government leaders to do something about the economy and other pressing issues. Instead we get more political grandstanding from modern-day Pharisees who prefer beating their chests. **BT**

Q&A

with
Archbishop
Desmond Tutu



“[Apartheid] protagonists claimed to have biblical support for their vicious policy and so we had to demonstrate that it was unacceptable on theological and biblical grounds.”

Retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, fresh off his 80th birthday celebrations, is the subject of a new biography, *Authorized: Tutu*, written by journalist Allister Sparks and featuring interviews by Tutu’s daughter, Mpho, with world leaders and celebrities who have worked with him.

Tutu recently responded to questions from Religion News Service about his decades of work fighting apartheid in South Africa and advocating worldwide for justice and peace. Some answers were edited for length and clarity.

Q: Looking back over your 80 years, what’s your greatest success? Bringing down apartheid?

A: The defeat of apartheid was undoubtedly our greatest success, not mine alone. It was a joint effort and, remember, we had very considerable help from the international community. We could not have accomplished it on our own.

Q: Was apartheid primarily a spiritual battle, or a moral or political one?

A: Apartheid was grossly evil without remainder, and thus it was a moral battle. Its protagonists claimed to have biblical support for their vicious policy, and so we had to demonstrate that it was unacceptable on theological and biblical grounds.

It was also a struggle that encompassed the political, quite obviously, since we wanted

a different sociopolitical and economic dispensation. We had to convince Western economic leaders that it was in their interests to support sanctions against the apartheid regime and they, in turn, had to convince political leaders who were opposed to such sanctions.

I could myself not have survived had I not been buttressed by my spiritual disciplines of prayer, quiet and regular attendance at the Eucharist.

Q: The biography describes how you developed a personal tradition of hours of daily prayer. Do you continue that — and is or was it ever difficult to keep that commitment?

A: Yes. Without that daily routine, I just could not operate. I try and because many are praying for me, it has not been difficult to maintain the discipline.

Q: You have said, “What faith you belong to is very largely an accident of birth and geography.” Can you explain your simultaneous commitment to Christianity and your belief that other faiths are valid?

A: For me the way to the divine is through the way Christ has revealed. That for me is the only way. But there patently are others. Abraham, Moses etc., were not Christians but we cannot deny that they had an encounter, a genuine encounter, with the divine. Can anyone in

their right mind declare that the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi [did not have] an encounter with the divine? And that it has shown in their lives? If we denied the validity of Judaism, then we would have to shut up shop.

Q: You’ve chosen to join the Elders, a group of retired leaders who address global problems, rather than a typical retirement. Don’t you know how to slow down?

A: We hope as Elders to use our collective experience and “wisdom” to benefit humankind. We live in a global village. In the traditional village, elders were looked to as repositories of wisdom, knowledge and experience. We hope we can be this for our planet community.

Q: One of the things people seem to like about you is that you take your causes seriously but you don’t take yourself so seriously. What’s your secret?

A: My family is forever bringing me down a peg or two the minute I get pompous and full of myself!

Q: The new biography declares, “A silent Tutu is an oxymoron.” Do you agree?

A: They can’t be serious. I could be a Trappist monk. **BT**

**Children of God
Storybook Bible**

By Archbishop Desmond Tutu

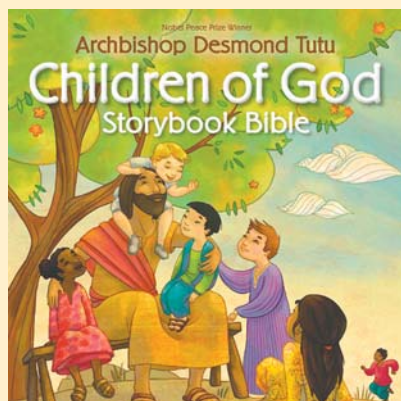
(Zondervan)

A review by Jackie Riley,
Managing Editor

The political world knows him as a champion of human rights. The religious world knows him as a deeply committed man of God whose faith informs his life's work. Archbishop Tutu also is known for his great love of children, as evidenced in a delightful new Bible storybook he has written for ages 4-7.

Named the best Children's Religious Book from the 2011 International Book Awards, this collection of 56 Bible stories presents the idea of how God worked through history to bring forgiveness and reconciliation and his desire for all people to live in community. The stories come alive through the full-color artistic creations depicting different cultural interpretations and also the sentence prayers that encourage personal application of the teachings.

While the storybook may be intended for children and their parents who read with them, the accompanying CDs will captivate all ages. Adults will be inspired by the soothing voice of the Archbishop reading paraphrased Scripture that follow along with the book. Listeners will find exceptional quality in the crispness and clarity of the voice, music and sound effects. Both the book and CDs are nicely packaged into a slipcase box, making the set a wonderful Christmas gift. **BT**



'Most caring and benevolent'

American Baptist missionary honored by Chinese government

VALLEY FORGE, Penn. — An American Baptist missionary was the only foreigner among more than 30 recipients of a prestigious charity award granted recently by the government of Jiangsu Province, China.

Chosen from nearly 1,000 nominees, recipients of the first-ever Jiangsu Charity Award presented Oct. 12 in the ancient capital city of Nanjing included Judy Sutterlin, an American Baptist International Ministries missionary in the People's Republic of China appointed in 1995.

The award, designed to recognize the role played by charity and philanthropy in improving people's lives and promoting social harmony, recognized Sutterlin as a "most caring and benevolent model" for service.

Sutterlin, who teaches at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, was nominated by the Amity Foundation, an International Ministries partner created at the initiative of Chinese Christians in 1985. The foundation's initiatives include education, social welfare, basic health and public hygiene, environmental protection, rural development, church-run social services and disaster relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation from China's coastal provinces in the east to the minority areas of the west.

Sutterlin teaches general, biblical and theological English at the seminary campus in the southern part of the Nanjing metropolitan area with 250 students. As faculty and students improve English skills, they gain access to additional Bible study resources, increase their ability to dialogue with Christians from around the world and acquire proficiency that can enable them to lead English outreach ministries now existing in some city churches.

"Judy has been recognized as a caring



and benevolent model, because her work demonstrates care for the whole person — intellectually, spiritually, relationally and physically," observed Reid Trulson, executive director for American Baptist International Ministries.

On top of her theological and academic work at the seminary, Sutterlin helps with orientation and care for the Amity Foundation's English teachers and serves as a liaison to Amity projects supported by IM. Those include help for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, support for remote village clinic work, drug rehabilitation and economic development projects.

The Amity Foundation is overseen by the China Christian Council, an umbrella organization for China's Protestant churches and member of the World Council of Churches. Amity Printing Company, a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and United Bible Societies, has published more than 86 million Bibles since it was established in 1988. **BT**

What will **your** Sunday School class be studying during the next year?

You could explore these Lectionary-based lessons by Tony Cartledge found only in the center of Baptists Today — with free online resources for teachers. But why wait?

January: A New Beginning

Jan. 1 — Luke 2:22-40
“Welcome, Welcome, Welcome!”
Jesus is circumcised, then blessed by Simeon and Anna.

Jan. 8 — Mark 1:4-11
“Taking the Plunge”
Jesus is baptized by John and blessed by a sign from the heavens.

Jan. 15 — John 1:43-51
“Come and See”
Jesus calls Philip and Nathaniel, who is surprised.

Jan. 22 — Mark 1:14-20
“Come with Me”
Jesus preaches and four men sign up for the program.

Jan. 29 — Mark 1:21-28
“Listen to Me”
In Capernaum, Jesus teaches with authority and amazes his hearers.

February: Unexpected Blessings

Feb. 5 — Isaiah 40:21-31
“Finding God in Every Gear”
God promises strength for those who fly, run or walk.

Feb. 12 — 2 Kings 5:1-14
“A Muddy Water Miracle”
Elisha teaches Naaman the power of obedience.

Feb. 19 — 2 Kings 2:1-12
“Give Me a Double!”
As Elijah flies away, Elisha seeks a double portion of his spirit.

Feb. 26 — Genesis 9:8-17
“Always and Never”
God’s covenant with Noah has something old, something new and something never.

March: Let’s Make a Deal

Mar. 4 — Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
“Yes, I Did Promise ...”
God reiterates the promises to Abraham, who is bound to be wondering ...

Mar. 11 — Exodus 20:1-17
“Here’s the Deal ...”
The covenant at Sinai: what God expects the Israelites to do.

Mar. 18 — Num. 21:4-9
“A Bump in the Road”
Rebellion in the wilderness calls forth snakes to fear and to admire.

Mar. 25 — Jer. 31:31-34
“A New Deal”
The prophet Jeremiah promises broken Israel a new deal and a new heart.

April: Heart of the Gospel

April 1 — Mark 11:1-11
“Triumph and Tears”
The crowds cry “Hosanna,” but Jesus has other thoughts.

April 8 — Mark 16:1-8
“Scary Good News”
Getting what you want isn’t always what you want.

April 15 — Acts 4:32-35
“One Heart, One Mind, One Pocketbook?”
The first church offers a lesson in sharing vs. materialism.

April 22 — Acts 3:12-19 (1-11, 20-21)
“The Last Piece of the Puzzle”
Peter explains how Jesus’ work connects to God’s ongoing work.

April 29 — Acts 4:5-12 (1-12)
“No Other Way”
John and Peter testify to the Sanhedrin, speak of Jesus as the only way to salvation.

May: One For All

May 6 — Acts 8:26-40
“What Hinders Me?”
Phillip and the Ethiopian official learn from each other.

May 13 — Acts 10:44-48
“Could It Be?”
At Joppa, Peter learns a lesson for the world.

May 20 — Acts 1:1-11
“Life Is Different Now”
As Jesus ascends to heaven, the disciples learn that life will be different.

May 27 — Acts 2:1-21
“Well, Blow Me Down!”
A mighty rushing wind ushers in a new era at Pentecost.

June: Fit For a King?

June 3 — Psalm 29
“O Worship the King”
A powerful psalm testifies that God reigns eternally, and humans should remember.

June 10 — 1 Sam. 8:4-11 (12-15), 16-20 (11:14-15)
“A King To Fight Our Battles”
The elders of Israel ask for a king they can see, one who will lead them into battle.

June 17 — 1 Sam. 15:34-16:13
“A King in Waiting”
When Saul turns out to be a disaster, David is designated as king-in-waiting.

June 24 — 1 Sam. 17:57-18:5, 18:10-16
“Actions Speak Louder Than Names”
Saul holds the title, but David acts like a king.

July: So Close, and Yet So Far

July 1 — 2 Sam. 1:1, 17-27
“How the Mighty Have Fallen”
David laments the old king and prepares to become the new one.

July 8 — 2 Sam. 5:1-5, 9-10
“Well, If You Insist ...”
David becomes king over all Israel, and takes Jerusalem to be his own city.

July 15 — 2 Sam. 6:1-5, 12b-19
“A Marriage of Church and State”
David makes Jerusalem the center of both church and state: why was it OK for Israel, but not for us?

July 22 — 2 Sam. 7:1-14a
“I Promise: Forever!”
God makes an amazing promise to David and his descendants: what will happen?

July 29 — 2 Sam. 11:1-15
“How the Mighty Have Fallen Again”
David grows slack and metaphorically falls on his own sword.

August: Up, Up and Away

August 5 — Eph. 4:1-16
“Grow Up!”
Paul calls believers to grow up in faith and maturity, expressing gifts within the body.

August 12 — Eph. 4:25-5:2
“Build Up!”
Paul challenges church members to love and build up others for the sake of Christ.

August 19 — Eph. 5:15-20
“Live Up!”
Paul charges us to live up to our potential by making wise decisions.

August 26 — Eph. 6:10-20
“Armor Up!”
Paul gets metaphorical and calls believers to “put on the whole armor of God.”

September: Wise Women

Sept. 2 — Song of Songs 2:8-15

“A Woman Who Loves”
A maiden happily sings the praises of her beloved.

Sept. 9 — Prov. 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

“A Word About Justice”
Three proverbs relating to economic justice, where women do better than men.

Sept. 16 — Prov. 1:20-33

“A Shout in the Street”
Lady Wisdom issues a call to those who would be wise.

Sept. 23 — Prov. 31:10-31

“A Woman Beyond Belief”
Could anyone really live up to the “ideal woman’s” reputation? Should they try?

Sept. 30 — Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

“A Winning Woman”
Esther’s courage and cleverness save the Hebrews.

October: Hard Lessons

Oct. 7 — Job 1:1, 2:1-10

“When God Takes a Bet”
Job suffers as the subject of a heavenly wager.

Oct. 14 — Job 23:1-9, 16-17

“When Life Isn’t Fair”
Job wants God to answer his complaint but is also afraid.

Oct. 21 — Job 38:1-7, (34-41)

“When God Takes the Stand”
When God speaks, Job gets more of an answer than he wants.

Oct. 28 — Job 42:1-6, 10-17

“When God Settles Debts”
God restores Job’s fortunes, but not because he passes the test ...

November: What Would Jesus Think?

Nov. 4 — Mark 12:28-34

“What Rules Matter Most?”
Jesus opines on the greatest commandment, or two.

Nov. 11 — Mark 12:38-44

“What Really Pleases God?”
Jesus has a go at pride and humility.

Nov. 18 — Mark 13:1-8

“What About the Future?”
Jesus on the fate of Jerusalem, and other fates, too?

Nov. 25 — John 18:33-37

“What Really Counts?”
Jesus takes the Kingdom of God over any earthly rule.

December: Living in Between

Dec. 2 — Jer. 33:14-16

“New Things Coming”
Jeremiah prophesies the coming of a “righteous branch” that will change things.

Dec. 9 — Luke 3:1-6

“People, Get Ready”
John the Baptist, an unlikely conductor, calls people to get on the train.

Dec. 16 — Luke 3:7-18

“You’ve Got To Be Kidding”
John’s hard preaching seems designed to alienate, but still wins followers.

Dec. 23 — Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

“Fetal Attraction”
Mary and Elizabeth, both pregnant, rejoice in imagining what their children will do.

Dec. 30 — Luke 2:41-52

“Questions and Answers”
Scribes, are you smarter than a 12-year-old?

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A moral issue

Documentary, dialogues debunk immigration myths, call for broad reform

RALEIGH, N.C. — Hispanic Baptist pastor Hector Villanueva, who was facing deportation, is glad to be free. But he still wants to become a United States citizen.

Villanueva, pastor of Iglesia Bautista La Roca in Siler City, N.C., was arrested by eight law enforcement officers who showed up at his house early one morning in August 2010. He was released on bail a few weeks later, but authorities said they intended to deport him because of a 15-year-old crime for which he had already served a sentence.

Federal officials discovered the crime during a background check when Villanueva applied for citizenship. He had become addicted to drugs in the mid-1990s and was arrested for trying to cash someone else's check in California.

While serving a 16-month prison sentence, Villanueva became a Christian and was later ordained to ministry. He moved to North Carolina so he could minister to the growing number of Hispanic people moving into the state.

Villanueva told a federal judge about his transformation during a hearing in Charlotte, N.C. More than 30 of his friends packed the courtroom for a deportation hearing. When he finished, the judge ruled that he could stay in the United States.

However, Villanueva is still not a United States citizen. He said to gain citizenship he will need a pardon from the governor of California, where the crime was committed.

"I want that right," he said. "I want to be able to vote."

Villanueva's story is featured in *Gospel Without Borders*, a documentary on immigration. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina sponsored three screenings of the documentary recently — as is being done in

other locations around the nation.

Villanueva told several dozen people at an Oct. 3 screening in Raleigh that there is not a place where immigrants can easily gain residency. "It's really hard to get legal status here," he said.

Villanueva told about a chicken processing plant that employed numerous Hispanic workers before it closed. Authorities seldom checked workers at the plant, he said.

"The people in the community don't want immigrants, yet they hire them," Villanueva said.

Instead, law enforcement officers set up checkpoints on a busy highway near Hispanic neighborhoods, he said.

"They know where the Hispanic population lives," Villanueva said. "There's only one way in and one way out."

The documentary, which was produced by EthicsDaily.com with funding from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, also includes stories from four other states that focus on the immigration issue. It tells of Christians who minister to immigrants because they believe the Bible calls them to care for the strangers in their midst.

The documentary looks at what it calls common misperceptions about immigration.

Many people wrongly believe that immigrants could go to an embassy and get in line for citizenship or residency. Immigrants have no legal avenue to raise their hand and say they would like to come to the United States to work, according to the documentary.

Another misperception featured in the

documentary is that immigrants don't pay taxes. They pay sales and other taxes, but don't get the benefits other people have.

Some people also wrongly think that immigrants use up the social services opportunities in the United States. Instead, undocumented workers are a net revenue gain for the country because many are afraid of using services for fear of being deported, the documentary says.

Carlos Arce, vicar for Hispanics in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh, and Carol Goehring, executive director of Connectional Ministries in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, served on a discussion panel with Villanueva at the Raleigh meeting. Robert Parham, co-producer and director of the documentary and executive editor of EthicsDaily.com, moderated.

Arce said many immigrants want legal status, but don't have an "open window" to obtain it.

"The only way is to work for comprehensive immigration reform," he said. "This broken system is a real business for some people."

Parham said a quota system determines how many people from various countries are allowed to come to the United States. The amount of people from Mexico and some other countries is "over-subscribed," meaning no visas are available, he said.

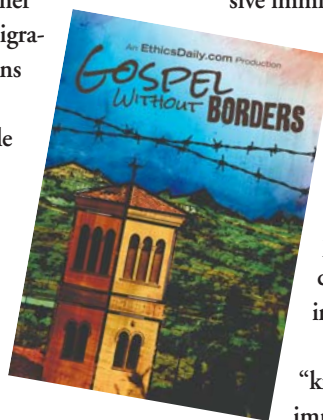
Goehring said churches could host "know your rights" seminars that teach immigrants how to navigate the legal system in the United States. Law students can often teach the workshops, she said.

Arce said immigration is a moral issue.

"The people you see in the documentary are not far from you," he said. "They are behind you. They are among you." **BT**



Hector Villanueva



Have you ever wished you could go to the Holy Land?

Dr. Tom Jackson, pastor emeritus, Wake Forest Baptist Church, has been hosting a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for more than 30 years, assisted by one of Israel's most respected guides. For information regarding his next pilgrimage, April 17-27, 2012, contact Dr. Jackson at (919) 395-1290 or PastorTAJ@gmail.com.

Preachers' soles

She asked as though it is a common concern, “Do I have to wear shoes when I preach?”

Seminary students pose odd questions before preaching in class: “Can I tell the parable from the fatted calf’s viewpoint?” “Can I dance my sermon?” “Can I show a clip from *Glee*?” (The answer to these is “No.”) This was the first question on footwear. The issues surrounding preachers’ shoes are woefully neglected. Ministers who ignore the homiletical implications of footwear do so at their own peril.

One Saturday evening I drove 200 miles to a small town in Tennessee where I was preaching the next day. On Sunday morning I realized that I brought two left shoes. (I owned two pairs of dress shoes because I once went to preach without any shoes, but that’s another story that I should skip.) There are no shoe stores open on Sunday at 8:00 a.m. My first attempt to put a left shoe on my right foot was unbearable. The second shoe, however, was endurable. I could get through it. (It should have been comforting to know that right and left shoes were invented only a little more than a century ago, but it wasn’t.) I considered other options. I could claim to have sprained my ankle and wear one shoe. I could say that I felt preachers should preach on one foot so as to communicate urgency. I could tell the truth.

I was sure that someone was going to ask, “Why are you wearing two left shoes that don’t match?” but no one did. I was ready with a response, “Like many Baptists, I was born with two left feet.”

When Jesus sent out the seventy, he said, “Carry no sandals” (Luke 10:4) — which indicates I should never have had two pairs of dress shoes. This is not a universally helpful suggestion, but God said this to one preacher, “‘Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet,’ and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot” (Isaiah 20:2). On the other hand/foot, the father of the prodigal told the servants, “Put shoes on

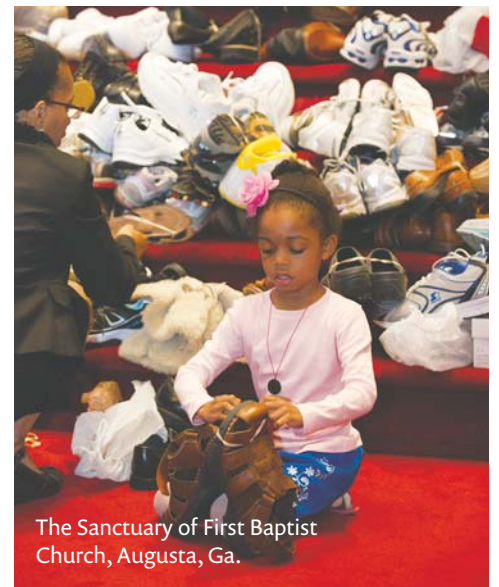


his feet” (Luke 15:22). John the Baptist said, “I am not worthy to carry his sandals” — which indicates that Jesus wasn’t barefoot. Solomon 7:1 exults, “How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden!”¹

Preachers have to get off on the right foot, because the truth is still putting on its shoes while lies are traveling halfway around the world. Ministers should not be Goody Two-Shoes, but need to walk in the shoes of those to whom they preach. As someone said, “You don’t want to dance in a puddle with a hole in your shoe.” (This sounds like it might be relevant, but isn’t.)

I recently preached at First Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga. The congregation was observing a missions emphasis, so I preached on the sacrifices necessary to be Christ’s missionaries. After I finished, Rodger Murchison, the associate pastor, offered the invitation: “Today, we are taking an offering of shoes for our ministry in Liberia. We invite you to come to the front and leave your shoes. I’m about to be barefoot and hope you are, too.”

What choice did I have? Like everyone else, I took off my shoes and left them at the front. After the service was over, Rodger graciously offered to let me dig through the pile of shoes to find mine. I was tongue-tied at first, but then said, “That would feel like trading my



The Sanctuary of First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga.

soul for my soles.”

God told Moses, “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). I told my student she could preach barefoot. I told myself I should try it, too. **BT**

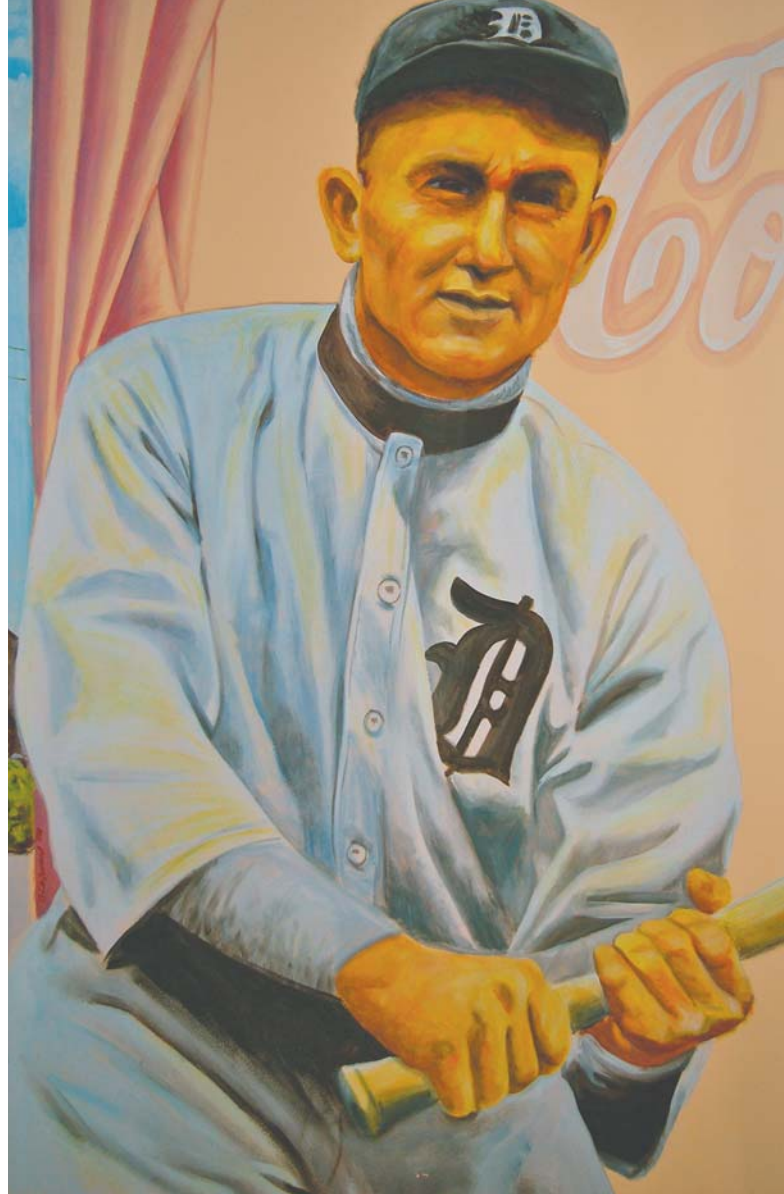
—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology.

¹ Since I wrote a column on shoes, I thought I needed to include a footnote. Solomon 7:1 is not a text on which I would suggest anyone preach.

'Sincerely Ty Cobb'

Letter from hard-living baseball great surprised seminarian in 1959

ROYSTON, Ga. — With a lifetime batting average of .367, Tyrus Raymond Cobb is widely heralded as the greatest hitter in baseball history. He is also remembered as a demanding, combative and embittered man — although some argue that his negative reputation was overstated.



Jack Colwell, now a retired Baptist pastor in Macon, Ga., discovered a different side of the famed “Georgia Peach” in 1959 when an envelope showed up in his Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary mailbox.

“Enclosed is my personal check to you for \$100 which you might find useful in a constructive way...” began the four-page letter, handwritten in Cobb’s trademark green ink.

Colwell grew up in the North Georgia mountains and was a scholarship recipient of the Cobb Educational Foundation that the baseball great had established a few years earlier. Although his top baseball salary was less than \$40,000 a year, Cobb invested wisely — buying stock in General Motors and Coca-Cola.

The check he sent to Jack was a personal gift, however, not part of the scholarship from his foundation. In the letter, Cobb noted that more than 30 students were receiving scholarships at that time — including two ministerial students.

“It is something that brings me much happiness,” wrote Cobb. “Your selection for

the ministry is very commendable; we have you and one other going to divinity schools.”

MORE THAN MONEY

Colwell notes that \$100 was a lot of money for a young seminarian in 1959. He deposited the personal check from Cobb in his bank account in Wake Forest, N.C., but doesn’t recall using the funds for any particular purpose.

However, the welcomed and unexpected monetary gift paled in comparison to receiving the personal handwritten letter.

“I looked closely to confirm that it was, indeed, intended for me,” said Colwell. “I was amazed and excited to discover that the letter was from Ty Cobb, the famous former baseball player.”

Cobb wrote that his foundation staff kept him well informed about the scholarship recipients, noting that “we know all about you more than you might think.” Then he encouraged Jack in his ministerial pursuits.

“Keep up your good work, spare no efforts, aim high,” wrote Cobb. “You have but one life to live, you are fortunate to apply yourself on God’s side.”

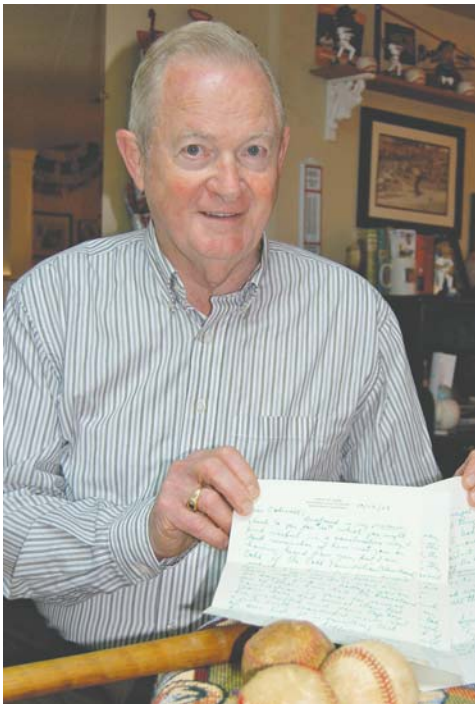
‘SELFISH PRAYER’

In the letter, Cobb explained that the \$200 he was splitting between Jack and another unnamed ministerial student came to him in an unusual way. He had lost a check that he had cashed for a “religiously inclined” person who wouldn’t replace it.

“I said a little selfish prayer to God and asked this person be influenced to see the right way and pledged if I did receive this money I would put it to good use in God’s work,” Cobb explained. “So help me, I was called on telephone next day, the person had thought it over and assured me a check would come. It has been cashed, so I am carrying out my pledge and hence half of this, the check enclosed. The other half goes to the other divinity student.”

Reflecting on the contents of the letter 52 years later, Colwell said he is reminded that personalities are complex and that few public figures are as one-dimensional as they may appear.

“Cobb has been portrayed as self-centered and self-seeking, especially in his latter years,” said Colwell. “His letter acknowledged twice that his prayer was selfish, but focused



Ty Cobb was widely known for being confrontational, hot-tempered and impatient — as well as a great competitor — making his 1959 letter to ministerial student Jack Colwell (left) more surprising.

the story from the pulpit, he advised, then he should replace the well-known name of Ty Cobb with “John Smith.”

This point was further emphasized when Cobb closed the personal letter with: “Hope you very good wish in your work, remember all this is strictly between you and I. I am sincerely, Ty Cobb.”

For more than a half-century, Jack has honored that request.

“As a minister and counselor I have great respect for confidentiality,” said Colwell. “In some cases, though, I believe that confidences should have expiration dates.”

So now, for the first time, he is sharing the story of the green-inked letter and personal check from a baseball giant who was better known for confrontation than compassion.

“Fifty years after Cobb’s death I cannot see how the content of his letter could harm anyone,” said Jack. “Of more importance, the communication might refute some negative popular notions about Cobb’s character.”

REPUTATION AND REALITY

The harshest image of Cobb comes from a lengthy biography by Al Stump that was made into a movie starring Tommy Lee Jones. On the other side is an ongoing effort by others to present a different perspective on the nearly mythological figure.

He would fight at the drop of a hat yet give generously to support former players such as Mickey Cochrane, to make college possible for students from struggling North Georgia families, and to build a hospital in memory of his

parents in his hometown of Royston, Ga.

The Cobb Educational Foundation and the Ty Cobb Healthcare System stand in contrast to the public image of a man who cared only for himself. A small, but nicely presented museum is attached to the waiting room of one of the medical facilities in the northeast Georgia town of Royston where the baseball legend first played baseball and is now buried.

The museum emphasizes Cobb’s athletic prowess, family history and philanthropy. The gift shop sells various Ty Cobb collectables — but not Al Stump’s biography.

While oft-repeated legends have grown over the years — especially the one about Cobb filing down his spikes before games so he could inflict pain on opposing infielders — the reality seems to be that Cobb was a troubled and troubling man, yet one who could do good things for others.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATION

The calmness that surrounds the mausoleum where Cobb and his relatives are buried belies the troubles he and his family faced. Cobb’s mother was just 15 when he was born. She later was cleared of charges after she shot and killed her husband as he was sneaking back to their house.

Cobb’s two failed marriages and his fatherly ways were not of championship caliber. Tragically, two of his five children died young: Herschel at age 34 from a heart attack and Ty Cobb Jr., a physician, at age 42 from a brain tumor.

Like others, Colwell believes the death of his beloved father contributed to both Cobb’s aggressive play and his struggle to build healthy relationships.

From a baseball perspective, there are no questions about Cobb’s greatness. He received the most votes — ahead of Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner and others — for the inaugural induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. Concerning the person of Ty Cobb, however, there are numerable accounts that have led to a public image of a real scoundrel.

But for 52 years, one Baptist preacher has kept a letter in a safety deposit box that shows his one encounter with baseball’s greatest hitter made a faith connection and enabled him in his preparation for ministry.

“Undoubtedly Cobb lacked ability to win friends, and was not always a good role model,” said Colwell. “His letter to me indicated, though, that in his inner self he had another side. After 50 years I came to feel that this glimpse of his religious faith should be shared.” **BT**

attention upon its result ... He seemed to rejoice genuinely, though, in the other man’s change of heart.”

Cobb reveled in seeing his prayer fulfilled in this “small matter” of receiving the \$200. “I struck a responsive cord in this person, he answered from his conscience and so got closer back to God,” he wrote.

Cobb even got theological, noting that one should not pray for material things but “try to live God’s way.”

KEEPING A CONFIDENCE

Though not a churchman, Cobb knew such a story would be fodder for any preacher — or, as he put it to Jack, “right in your alley.” But he clearly did not want to become a sermon illustration.

So more than once in the letter, he insisted on anonymity. If Jack couldn’t resist telling

Renewal of a call

Tuscaloosa pastor in right place, at right time

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — “I remember it like it was yesterday,” said Mary An Wilson of her call to ministry when she was but 11 years old.

Wilson recently became the pastor of Woodland Forest Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Ala., at the age of 66. But she recounts the earlier experience with clarity.

“When I was 11, I was at a worship service and, during the invitation, something happened inside of me that was so otherworldly that I remember looking around to see if other people had felt anything,” said Wilson. “I knew then that God was calling me to the ministry, but it wasn’t a time when women were accepted in most ministry areas.”

Mary An remembers really paying attention in church as a teenager, memorizing the words the ministers said during baptisms, the Lord’s Supper and weddings. Yet at that time, the only woman she knew who worked in the church was an organist. And the only other women ministers she knew of were missionaries.

“I knew as a teenager that my mom wouldn’t let me become a missionary and move away,” she had resolved.

After high school, Mary An attended Judson College, a Baptist-related women’s college in Marion, Ala., where she pursued degrees in biology and chemistry.

“I was strongly influenced by the presence of Oma Dell Franklin Ely who was our (Baptist Student Union) director,” said Wilson. “She was the first woman I’d met who had a seminary degree and was working in ministry.”

Ely encouraged Mary An in her spiritual growth and her heart for ministry. However, it was the mid-1960s and Ely made sure that Mary An knew that the only reason she was able to be the BSU director at Judson was because it was an all-female college.

Seminary was on Mary An’s agenda following college graduation until her father opposed the idea. So she turned her attention to a career, and later graduate studies, in microbiology.

Mary An had met Ron Wilson, a student at Samford University who also served a church in Bessemer, Ala., as minister of music. Their



Pastor Mary An Wilson (fourth from left) has found her congregation eager to respond to community needs.

relationship grew following her graduation and led to marriage while he finished his college degree.

Then the couple headed to Fort Worth, Texas, where Ron began studies at Southwestern Seminary while Mary An worked as a microbiologist. After Ron completed seminary, they returned to Alabama where he served as a minister of music and their family began to grow. Mary An resolved that her earlier clear call to ministry would be lived out as the wife of a minister and an active worker in the church.

A few years later Ron joined the staff of First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa. Mary An became the children’s choir coordinator and the church music secretary.

“During those years I discovered how important relationships are,” she said. “Our relationships with God and with each other. I had 60 to 70 volunteers who served in 14 children’s choirs. The relationships I shared with some of those people were very important to me.”

Wilson points to a “Walk to Emmaus” weekend in 1991 in which a young United Methodist pastor Lona Lynn Euler-Higgs spoke on “The Means of Grace.” Mary An said she cried for four hours straight that day, when “I

saw what I had lost because my denomination basically rejected both me and my call.”

Between 1997 and 2001, Mary An explored spiritual formation and directorship through the Upper Room Academy and Sursum Corda. Her call to ministry was strongly reaffirmed.

In 1998, Mary An was invited to offer a prayer at an Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship event. When she arrived at the meeting, she sat on the front pew to wait for the service to begin. Mart Gray, Alabama CBF coordinator at that time, invited Mary An to sit on the platform of the church.

“It was the first time that I remember being treated like a minister and invited to sit with the other ministers,” she said. “But some people weren’t happy that I had gone.”

Changes were taking place at the church they served. After 25 years as music minister, Ron was asked to become minister of senior adults. A shift in musical style occurred, and Mary An’s work came to an end.

“It was 1999 and I decided that I would just retire early,” said Mary An. “I told Ron that I wasn’t going to do anything and that if someone needed help with something, they could call me.”

The next morning, Jonathan Ivy, pastor of Woodland Forest Baptist Church, a small congregation in Tuscaloosa called. He asked Mary An if she would be willing to help him in ministry at Woodland Forest.

"I asked, 'With what?' He said, 'Everything.'"

Jonathan called Mary An for 10 days in a row, and she finally agreed to meet with him. After three hours of drinking coffee at Cracker Barrel, she agreed to try it for six months.

She began as associate pastor in October 1999 and was ordained the following year. She and Jonathan worked together until he resigned early this year. In September, Woodland Forest called Mary An to be pastor.

The April 27 tornadoes that ripped across the Southeast tore through Tuscaloosa, killing dozens and leaving thousands without homes. The Woodland Forest facilities were left intact, but homes all around them were destroyed.

"Thankfully, Marsha Sprayberry, director of Project Blessings, had recently renovated the home of one of our church families," said Wilson. "She said that she decided to join our little church because she was looking for a church that helps people."

When the tornadoes came, Woodland

Forest opened up the church building and Marsha and Mary An organized the efforts of Project Blessings and the church family from the church's old gymnasium.

"For days we had 18 wheelers arriving from all over the U.S. bringing supplies to the area," said Wilson. "We fed 2,000 people a day for the first couple of weeks and then fed hundreds for weeks after that. We clothed hundreds of people and gave away supplies (food, personal hygiene items, diapers, etc.) in the tens of thousands."

"For a church that has only 45 to 50 people on Sunday morning," she added, "God gave us the resources to help thousands in our community when tragedy came."

Clothing left over from the tornadoes response could have been given to another agency, but after prayer and conversation the church decided they had been given an opportunity to continue a ministry. Various agencies in Tuscaloosa now refer people to Woodland Forest's clothes distribution.

"We have a long way to go," said Mary An. "We're a small, multi-ethnic church with few financial resources. But we have an energy to move forward and continue to be the presence of God to this community."

Mary An said the church is beginning to



see growth from youth and young families. "I'm praying that God will show us the changes we need to make and the courage to make them."

Walking around the church grounds, she has a twinkle in her eyes and a spring in her step. She is here for a season and intends to do all she can to minister with the people of Woodland Forest during the time at hand.

"I feel so blessed," she said. "I walk around and feel God is in this place. Who would have ever thought that this little church could do so much to help so many and that I would be here to be a part of it?"

"I always knew that God had called me to be a pastor," she said with a smile. "It just took me 55 years to get here." **BT**

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Romans 12:2



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