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NEWS JOURNAL

JULY 2011



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for adults and youth

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cover photo by Tony W. Cartledge

Petra in Jordan calls for prayer and contemplation

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WHAT'S NEW?

Baptists Today is now providing a complete Bible study curriculum for adults and youth within the news journal. Sunday school classes and other groups can dig into biblical truths while gaining a better understanding of the context in which faith is lived out.

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It's a unique and flexible approach to teaching and learning.

See page 17 for more details.

The new Nurturing Faith Bible Studies section begins on page 18.



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Attention: God speaking

Petra's high place of sacrifice demands response

When returning to Petra in Jordan recently — this time, bringing with me a group of students, friends and alumni from Campbell University Divinity School — I wanted most to visit the high place of sacrifice.

It is not a popular destination in Petra: most visitors never see it, and there's not even a sign at the foot of the steep stairway, nearly hidden behind a row of souvenir shops, that leads to it.

But that's where I wanted to go.

The Nabatean city of Petra has been acclaimed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and for good reason. The Nabateans were primarily merchants who controlled the trade routes between Saudi Arabia and countries to the north. They flourished especially during the last two centuries before Christ and the first century after, when they were finally conquered by the Romans.

Petra is located in the southern part of what is now Jordan, in a narrow valley surrounded by precipitous mountains on every side, and accessible only through the mile-long *Bab al-Siq*, a crack in the mountains resulting from a major earthquake long ago.

The mountains are made of sandstone, in colors ranging from yellow to orange to red to brown, often in striated patterns. When one first emerges from the *siq*, he or she is greeted by the stunning façade of an ancient edifice known popularly as the "Treasury," though it never served that purpose.

Most people know the Treasury as the setting for the climactic scene in the movie

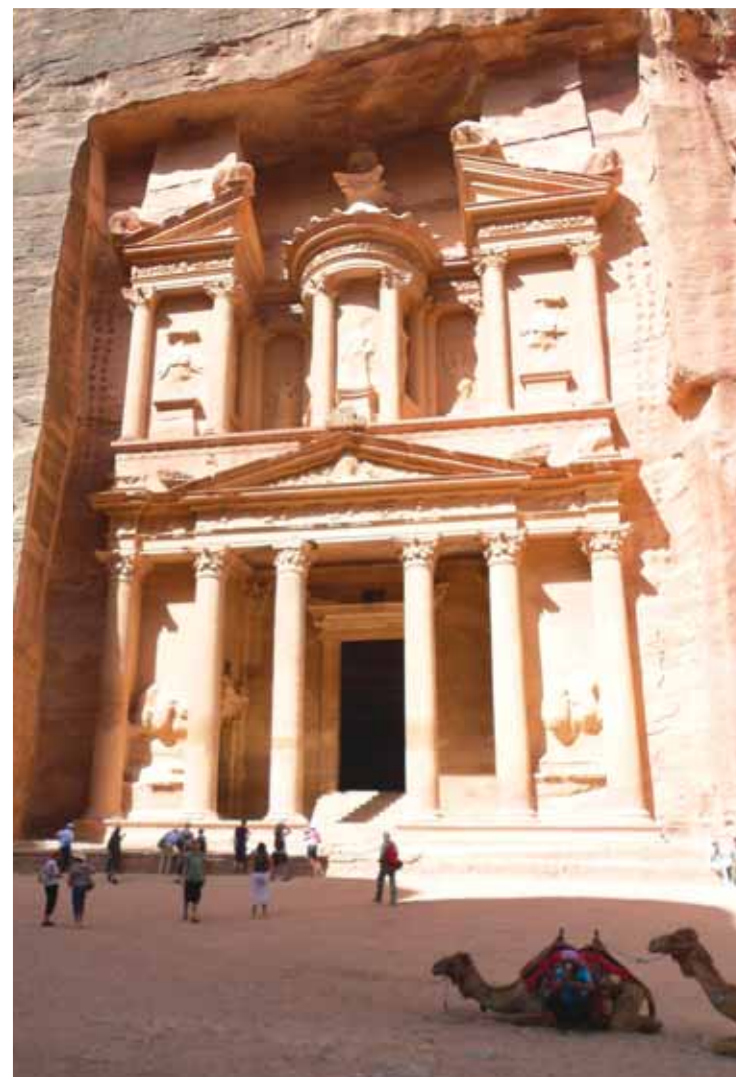
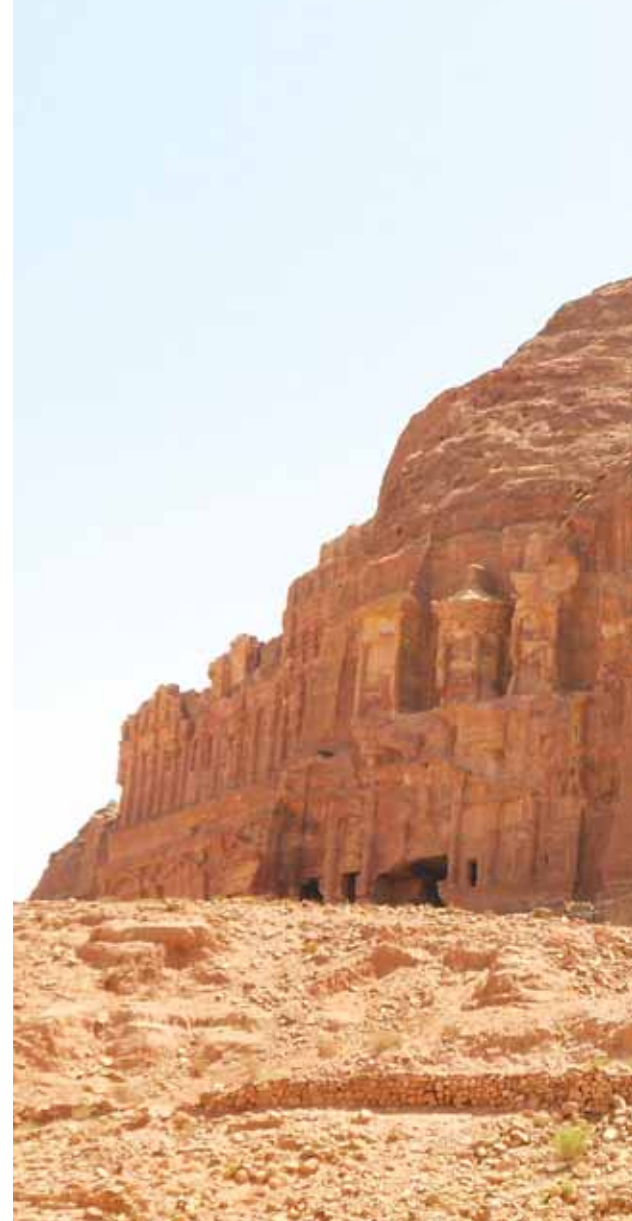
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, a sequence in which all of the interior beyond the structure's single large room is imaginary.

Turning right and walking down the valley, one sees scores of similar tombs, fashioned for royalty or wealthy city dwellers, on every side.

The beauty of the structures is that they all were carved directly into the mountainsides — ancient architects had to design what they wanted, then chisel away the extraneous stone until what remained was an impressive façade. In most cases, the elaborate doors led to a single room containing niches for the dead.

The remains of an impressive city built in typical Roman style can be found at the valley bottom. Adventurous souls can climb more than 900 uneven rock-hewn steps to the largest of the tombs, inappropriately called the "Monastery," located on the backside of one of the surrounding mountains.

Fewer people make the effort to see the high place of sacrifice, which requires a similar winding climb through the Wadi al-Mahfur,





There's something about being in such an exposed place — surrounded by the majesty of an almost otherworldly creation — that demands a response.

a tight cleft between two mountains where Nabatean engineers chiseled steps and occasional “god-blocks” as protective images. After a 20-30 minute climb and a final, steep ascent, one comes to a platform at the edge of a cliff, overlooking a dramatic 500-foot drop into the Wadi Musa and the rugged mountains beyond.

At the edge of the platform, two stone altars, shaped as blocks about five feet on each side and about four feet tall, each with four steps, have been fashioned by cutting away the rock surrounding them.

One has a basin-like depression carved into it. The other has a perfectly circular depression carved out, with a deeper bowl cut into the center and a channel running to the side.

The altar is the perfect size for sacrificing a goat or sheep — or a child — and collecting the blood for ceremonial purposes. The same altar has a hollow carved into the side with a drain at the bottom.

The Bedouin say that was used for washing the sacrifice after it was skinned, and that it was burned or cooked on the other altar, with the basin-like depression. No one knows for sure.

Facing the altars is a large rectangular *tricladium* for worship participants, a three-sided sitting area carefully cut into the rocky surface, with a low table near the center.

Little is really known about Nabatean religion. There were two main gods, a male god known as Dushara, and a female god known as al-Uzza.

They are generally depicted as simple blocks, sometimes with square or rounded eyes. Whether the high place was used for the sacrifice of animals or children, or perhaps as a place for the ritual exposure of the dead, is unclear.

What is certain is that being on the high place seems to draw out a sense of worship and awe. Standing atop the Atuff ridge, one can

look down into the bare bones of the Wadi Musa on the one side, or into the carved canyon walls of Petra on the other.

There's something about being in such an exposed place — surrounded by the majesty of an almost otherworldly creation — that demands a response.

My response on the high place was not one of blood sacrifice, but of prayer and contemplation in trying to imagine the grandeur of a god who could envision such a setting, and then set in motion a world in which it could be created.

The high place at Petra is not the only place that inspires such adoration, of course. God's splendor is all around, even in the mundane, if we have eyes to see. Often, however, we don't see.

That's why I'm thankful for places like the high place at Petra, where the presence of God is like a spiritual slap in the face that says “Pay attention, child: I'm talking to you.” **BT**

quotation remarks

“What players do on their own time is their business, but what they do when they are in uniform and on camera is all of ours, especially considering what’s at stake.”

—Members of the coalition group *Faith United Against Tobacco* in a letter to the *Major League Baseball Players Association*, regarding the use of smokeless tobacco that has been banned in the minor leagues (RNS)

“Baseball is a social institution; . . . we broke barriers 18 years before [racial] desegregation.”

—Major League Baseball Commissioner *Allan “Bud” Selig* during *Civil Rights Game weekend in Atlanta in mid-May* (Braves Radio Network)

“I didn’t necessarily think I was part of history; I just played.”

—Pat McGlothin, 91-year-old member of *Knoxville’s First Baptist Church*, who played for the *Brooklyn Dodgers* when *Jackie Robinson* broke baseball’s color barrier in 1947 (wbir.com)

“We may not be able to predict the rapture. But here in the South, people can tell you the exact week the cicada plague will hit.”

— (New York Times)

“The French treated me just the same as any other American.”

—Famous kidnapping survivor *Elizabeth Smart*, now 23, on serving as an overseas *Mormon missionary* (RNS)

“That’s our market.”

—Former *Christian Coalition* leader *Ralph Reed* on targeting *Tea Party* supporters and *Christian conservatives* with his new *Faith and Freedom Coalition* (New York Times)

“This is an historic institution, founded by one of Christianity’s most courageous voices, Dr. J. Frank Norris.”

—Former *Liberty Theological Seminary* President *Ergun Caner* on being hired as provost and vice president for academic affairs at *Arlington Baptist College*, founded in 1939 as the *Fundamental Bible Baptist Institute* (ABP)

“How many times have we walked over this?”

—Archaeologist *Kathleen Deagan* on the discovery of a 300-year-old stone mission church in *St. Augustine, Fla.*, that will be excavated this fall (St. Augustine Record)

“Men are much more willing to cut him some slack than women are.”

—Southern Baptist ethicist *Richard Land* on whether thrice-married Republican presidential hopeful *Newt Gingrich* can gain evangelical support (RNS)

“Those under 30 are significantly less likely than older Americans to say they believe in God. It remains to be seen whether these young Americans will move toward a belief in God as they age, or instead stick with their current beliefs.”

—Gallup, reporting that more than nine in 10 Americans polled still say “yes” to the question, “Do you believe in God?”

It helped me realize that what we have is way more than we need and that our ability to give is hindered by this property . . . We just wanted to be in a better position to give and bless people that don’t have anything.”

—University of Georgia football coach *Mark Richt* on reading *The Hole in Our Gospel* by *World Vision* president *Richard Stearns*, who noted that 40 percent of the world’s population lives on less than \$2 a day, that led Richt and his wife to put their \$2 million lake retreat house up for sale (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

“Thinking they are special enables children to take the risks of growing up. But in an adult, such exceptionalism and entitlement become ugly.”

—Religion News Service columnist and Episcopal priest *Tom Ehrich* (RNS)

“... Various studies continue to show what biblical Christians have known since the days of Corinth — change is possible.”

—Bob Stith, the *Southern Baptist Convention’s* national strategist for gender issues claiming the Bible clearly states that homosexuals can change their sexual orientation (Baptist Press)

“In the black community they think you can pray the gay away.”

—CNN news anchor *Don Lemon*, whose new memoir is titled *Transparent*, revealing he is gay (AJC)

In search and praise of imagination

Though briefly, good timing put me in the presence of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga., in the late '80s. I have described my classroom experience to friends as like hearing George C. Scott as Patton telling Old Testament stories.

Intense. Riveting times.

His books were so numerous that they covered more space in the faculty section of the campus bookstore than all of his colleagues' published works combined. A joke about his prolific writing floated around at times.

Someone called his office and was told by the receptionist that Brueggemann was working on a new book manuscript and unable to take the call at the time. The caller replied: "I'll hold."

So it is not surprising that his insightful words are often quoted and passed along.

But recently, the seminary alumni journal carried a quote from their well-known professor emeritus that struck me as especially pertinent:

"'Imagining' is the capacity to host and embrace a world other than the one that is in front of us ... In the tradition of prophets and parables, the church has a vocation to out-imagine dominant culture informed by the Bible and church tradition, moved by the way of the cross, led by God's own spirit."

I've been chewing on these words for awhile, and think Brueggemann may — once again — have said something worth our consideration.

First, too many of us live by sight rather than by faith. What's happening before our eyes is what we accept as reality — perhaps even the limits of possibility. Brueggemann urges a biblical call (voca-

tion) for the church to envision a world beyond what we see out the window each day.

Two, a call to "out-imagine dominant culture" is a reminder that salvation, reconciliation and restoration should mark our visions. A good starting confession for many Christians would be an acknowledgment that the dominant-culture values of greed, self-interest and love of the temporal are not that strange to us.



We can't out-imagine a shortsighted culture when we are simply baptizing those values as our own.

Three, to out-imagine other values and viewpoints is a constructive response that makes us better people rather than simply coming across as arrogant know-it-alls who seek to impose our ways on others.

Imagining, and then living into that imagination, is a moving response to God's call — not a fearful reaction to a changing society that doesn't fit our comfort zones. So much of the public, evangelical reaction to sociological shifts today looks and sounds like defensiveness rather than devotion.

Instead of imagining what could happen if we more fully embrace the radical gospel call to faith, hope and justice, evangelical Christians too often resort to tactics

that come across as nothing more than a weak defense of the status quo — or failing attempts to gain a preferred legal status for our narrow understandings of faith and practice.

Some evangelical leaders like to portray themselves (and other Christians most like them) as victims — and then chalk up everything that does not align with their values and viewpoints as some form of persecution. Such petty ways of fighting back is all some Christians know — even though Jesus famously called for cheek-turning.

There is nothing more beautiful than the gospel of Jesus Christ — and nothing uglier than its distortions that get created out of the fear of losing.

But what if we chose a better response to a culture mired in self-focus, materialistic gain, hostility and exclusivist thinking? What if we looked more deeply at the ways of Jesus — and then "out imagined" those who choose less meaningful and constructive ways of living?

My professor of old says the "alternative world is grounded in God's holy love that impels us toward love of neighbor with peculiar attentiveness toward justice for the marginal and the vulnerable." Is that what we see through eyes of faith? **BT**



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Communication the key to good transitions

By Chris Gambill with Natalie Aho

Because significant transitions occur infrequently, most congregations do not naturally have the tools to cope with them effectively.

Transitions — positive or negative — create anxiety. Whether it's calling a new pastor, changing location, saying goodbye to a church patriarch or matriarch, adding or subtracting a worship service, or even deciding how to handle a large financial gift — transitions can cause discomfort, distrust and conflict.

The primary way to decrease discomfort and anxiety and to increase trust during a transition is through intentional, consistent, multi-modal communication. While effective communication is important to any faith community, it is vital during a time of transition.

Communication engenders trust when leaders do what they say they will do. Effective communication can move a change process forward by creating positive energy and anticipation. Where transition can be foreseen, congregational leaders should create a communications plan and assign responsibilities.

Multi-modal communication

Every individual has a preferred way to receive and process information. Some prefer to read; others to see, hear or witness an event. Church leaders should engage all communication methods: newsletter, worship bulletin, oral announcements during worship and other community gatherings, and online tools such as the church website, Facebook church page, Twitter, and email newsletters and groups.

Visual communication is often neglected. One church did it effectively by placing a large, multicolored timeline of the pastor search process and moving a large arrow along the timeline to show the congregation where the search committee was in the process. The same graphic appeared in the newsletter.

For oral announcements, it is important to find a spokesperson with excellent speaking skills and a presence that inspires trust. The speaker should have written remarks, prepared

For more on how a congregation can actively use these communication tools, go to www.healthychurch.org.

in advance, that give the appropriate amount of information.

Be thoughtful and intentional about how much to communicate. Too much detail too soon in a transition process can increase anxiety if those details change. Too little information leaves people distrustful and wondering what they are not being told.

When using online communication, remember that most of these platforms are accessible to the general public. For example, the church website is likely to be viewed by a visitor or non-member. Be selective about what is shared with the larger population.

Consider providing a "members only" area, which requires a log-in password. Emails should be limited to regular releases once a week to refrain from overwhelming inboxes. One suggestion would be to set up a separate news list that members can choose to subscribe to for information regarding a transition.

Talk among yourselves

Besides communicating effectively *to the congregation* during transition, leaders need to foster healthy communication *from and among the congregation*. Congregation members and leaders need to dialogue about important issues. For example, during a pastoral transition, leaders must engage the congregation in a discussion of the gifts, skills and experiences needed in a new pastor.

Social media platforms such as Facebook can be an effective means of online communi-

cation. Relationships and boundaries should be established before serious discussions begin, however. It is important for the congregation to encourage friendly engagement, learn about one another's lives, and when meeting in person, reference status updates and photos seen online. Creating a church covenant to guide online interaction is a good idea.

Sometimes for efficiency, a church uses non-conversational methods for data gathering, i.e. surveys. Using a survey alone to gather data can be a mistake, because surveys do not address the emotional concerns and deeper issues raised during times of change. There is no substitute for a good conversation.

Planned dialogue

Churches can use a structured process to ensure good face-to-face conversation about sensitive issues. This can be as simple as a community gathering with a volunteer moderator and a few ground rules or it can be a structured dialogue led by an outside moderator.

Today, congregations rarely have conversations about the life of the church. Most leaders only hear from the upset "squeaky wheels," who may not accurately represent the majority of the congregation. Consequently, every faith community can benefit from regular opportunities for conversation *without* decision-making.

Quarterly gatherings for discussing "our common life together as God's people in this place" are helpful. This type of relaxed forum allows leaders to take the pulse of the congregation and address needs before they become problems. And when the gatherings conclude, leaders can share the thoughts with the community at-large by posting on the church website, Facebook page or blog.

When a congregation has already established intentional, consistent and multi-modal methods of communication, transitions go much smoother and can become opportunities for positive growth.**BT**

—Chris Gambill is senior consultant and manager of congregational health services, and Natalie Aho is communications consultant for the Center for Congregational Health.



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Main Presenter — Brett Younger

He is probably best known to readers of *Baptists Today* for his popular humor column "The Lighter Side," but Brett Younger has a real job as the Associate Professor of Preaching at the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta. He teaches introductory and advanced courses in preaching as well as classes in writing and spiritual formation. His qualifications for speaking on "Preaching to Christ's Church" include serving as a pastor for 22 years in Texas, Kansas and Indiana.

Brett and his wife Carol recently co-authored *Mark: Finding Ourselves in the Story*. He has written numerous articles and sermons that have appeared in the kind of journals and periodicals that not many people read. He received his B.A. in religion from Baylor University and his M.Div. and Ph.D. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Brett and Carol (also a graduate of Baylor and Southern) have two sons, Graham, a first year student at the University of Georgia Law School, and Caleb, a senior at Parkview High School.



Other speakers scheduled for the three-day program —

- Milburn Price, School of the Arts, Samford University
- Wallace Daniel, Provost, Mercer University
- Jimmy Elder, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Columbus, GA
- Carlton Allen, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Commerce, GA
- Rodger Murchison, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Augusta, GA
- Thomas Slater, Professor, McAfee School of Theology
- Z. Allen Abbott, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board
- Dock Hollingsworth, Assistant Professor, McAfee School of Theology
- Tripp Martin, Pastor, Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, GA
- Colleen Burroughs, Executive Vice President, PASSPORT, Inc.
- Barry Howard, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Pensacola, FL

Registration is \$100 per person and is on a first-come, first-served basis.

A golf outing is planned for Monday afternoon.

Questions regarding registration or lodging?

Contact Diane Frazier at (678) 547-6470

or frazier_d@mercer.edu.

EVENT SCHEDULE

Sunday Evening, September 25

- 4:00-7:15 Check in and Registration
- 7:15-7:30 Music, Milburn Price, School of the Arts, Samford University
- 7:30-7:45 Welcome and Word from Mercer — Wallace Daniel, Provost, Mercer University
- 7:45-8:45 Brett Younger, Associate Professor, McAfee School of Theology — *Preaching to Would-be Disciples*
- 8:45 President's Reception

Monday Morning, September 26

- 7:00 McAfee Board of Visitors Breakfast
- 7:00 Doctor of Ministry Degree Information Breakfast
- 8:20-8:30 Music, Milburn Price
- 8:30-9:00 Jimmy Elder, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Columbus, GA — *Setting the Table with Grape Juice and Chocolate*
- 9:00-9:30 Carlton Allen, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Commerce, GA — *Shoulder Work: The Changing Landscape of Funerals*
- 9:30-10:00 Rodger Murchison, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Augusta, GA — *Preaching Can Be Painful*
- 10:00-10:30 Fellowship/Refreshments by Morningstar Treatment Services, Inc.
- 10:30-10:45 Music, Milburn Price
- 10:45-11:15 Thomas Slater, Professor, McAfee School of Theology — *Is Narrative Preaching All that New?*
- 11:15-12:00 Brett Younger — *Preaching to Religious Authorities*

Monday Afternoon, September 26

- 1:00 Golf Tournament
- 2:00 Discussion of Texts for Advent — Alan Culpepper and Brett Younger
- 2:00 Retirement Planning Check-up — Z. Allen Abbott, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board
- 6:00 Dinner for McAfee Students and Alumni hosted by Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board

Monday Evening, September 26

First Baptist Church, St. Simons

- 8:00 Dock Hollingsworth, Assistant Professor, McAfee School of Theology — *When David Sapp Retires — Then There Will Be Peace in My House*
- 9:00 Fellowship/Refreshments hosted by First Baptist Church, St. Simons

Tuesday Morning, September 27

- 8:30-8:45 Wake up to Music, Milburn Price
- 8:45-9:15 Tripp Martin, Pastor, Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, GA — *Talk Less, Say More*
- 9:15-9:45 Colleen Burroughs, Executive Vice President, PASSPORT, Inc. — *Stop Stealing Jesus*
- 9:45-10:15 Barry Howard, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Pensacola, FL — *Pushing Up Daisies: Staves of Faith in the Face of Death*
- 10:15-10:30 Fellowship and Refreshments hosted by Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board
- 10:30-11:20 Brett Younger — *Preaching to Surprising Saints*
- 11:20-11:30 Announcement about MPC 2012 and Adjournment

'Sujay' sworn in

After long wait, Baptist minister becomes religious freedom envoy

BY ADELLE M. BANKS
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton defended her new ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom on June 2, calling Suzan Johnson Cook a bridge-builder who is right for the job.

Speaking at Cook's ceremonial swearing-in, Clinton cited Cook's firsts as an African-American Baptist minister and New York police chaplain, as well as her involvement in international activities.

"She is going to demonstrate every single day why she is the person for this job at this time," Clinton said. "To many, she is more than a minister, more than a spiritual leader, although she is certainly that. She is a pas-



Johnson Cook

sionate advocate for the God-given rights of people everywhere, no matter which god they believe gave them those rights in the first place."

Clinton called Cook's swearing-in "a long time coming" after a lengthy confirmation process as some critics questioned Cook's qualifications. Her nomination a year ago stalled in the Senate; she was renominated in February and confirmed in April.

The Baptist minister known as "Dr. Sujay" was cheered by an interfaith crowd of about 300 inside the State Department's ornate Benjamin Franklin Room, including Jewish and Muslim leaders and members from the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church that she founded in 1996.

"In this era of globalization and democratic uprisings, the values of religious freedom and respect are more important than ever," Cook said, "because religious freedom provides a cornerstone for every healthy society." **BT**

"As a people who offered the tenet of religious liberty to the world, we as Baptists take great pride in having Suzan Johnson Cook serve as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom."

—ABC-USA General Secretary Roy Medley, after attending the swearing-in ceremony of the new ambassador who earlier broke ground as the first African-American woman to serve as senior pastor of an American Baptist congregation

Two-thirds of Americans OK with Mormon candidate

BY ADELLE M. BANKS

WASHINGTON (RNS) — Roughly two out of three Americans say it makes no difference to them if a presidential candidate is Mormon, according to a new Pew Research Center poll, although evangelicals are more cautious.



Mitt Romney

The poll found that 68 percent of respondents said a candidate's Mormon faith would not matter, while one in four said they would be less likely to support a Mormon.

White evangelicals were most likely to care about a candidate's Mormon faith, with one third of them saying they would be less

likely to support a Mormon candidate, compared to 24 percent of the religiously unaffiliated and 19 percent of Catholics and white mainline Protestants.

Half of registered voters who had heard of Mormon candidate Mitt Romney said there's at least some chance they would support him in 2012. Among those who are less likely to vote for a Mormon candidate, just 31 percent said there was at least some chance the former Massachusetts governor would be their choice.

Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, who is also a Mormon, is expected to announce his plans soon.

The survey, conducted May 25-30, is based on a national sample of 1,509 adults and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. **BT**



MLK's daughter leaves Atlanta-area megachurch

BY ADELLE M. BANKS
Religion News Service

Bernice King, daughter of the late Martin Luther King Jr., is leaving an Atlanta-area megachurch whose leader has been embroiled in scandal.

"When I came to New Birth I came for a season and I expected that season not to be quite as long as it was," King said in an interview on Atlanta gospel music station WPZE-FM, after her last Sunday at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church at the end of May.

Her announcement follows a settlement between the church's senior pastor, Bishop Eddie Long, and four young men who accused him of sexual misconduct.

King, who did not tie her departure to the scandal, said she had told Long in April that she would be leaving at the end of May.

After declining the presidency of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in January, King said she feels called to a new assignment.

"I'm not calling it a church right now," she said. "What God is showing me doesn't look like what people are accustomed to."

In a statement, Long said he had discussed how King could continue the legacy of her father and mother, Coretta Scott King, whose 2006 funeral was at held at New Birth.

"I am in full support of her decision to leave New Birth in pursuit of this worthy endeavor," he said. **BT**

“I am no fan of big government, but there are far better ways to critique it than (Ayn) Rand’s godless nonsense, especially for Christians.”

—EVANGELICAL LEADER CHUCK COLSON

Ayn Rand v. Jesus?

Atheist’s influence on federal budget debated

WASHINGTON — The atheist philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand published more than a dozen books before she died in 1982. Now, some Christians say another work belongs in Rand’s controversial canon: the 2012 Republican budget.

House Republicans passed their budget along party lines in April, saying its drastic cuts to federal programs are necessary to prevent a deficit crisis.

But in a petition drive, video, ads, and websites, more-liberal Christians counter that Rand’s dog-eat-dog philosophy is the real inspiration for the GOP budget and its author, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

“You’ve got a guy who is a rising Republican star, and who wrote the budget, saying he’s read her books and Washington needs more of her values,” said Eric Sapp, executive director of the American Values Network, which produced the video. “If you’re a Christian, you’ve got to ask some serious questions about what’s going on here.”

In novels such as *Atlas Shrugged*, the Russian-born Rand portrays American capitalists as heroes battling an encroaching government bent on milking their success. In nonfiction writings, Rand is more explicit about her objectivist philosophy, which views religion as a “primitive” sop to the feeble-minded masses.

Tea Party Republicans have embraced Rand’s writings, particularly *Atlas Shrugged*, which some argue foretells the Great Recession and Washington’s extraordinary efforts to end it. Rush Limbaugh, former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas all call themselves Rand fans.

Biographer Anne C. Heller says Rand was raised a secular Jew in Russia at a time when Jews were persecuted by the Russian Orthodox

Church. Early on, Rand decided that the existence of God and the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice were untenable ideas, Heller said.

“It must be either reason or faith,” Rand said in a 1979 interview. “I am against God for the reason that I don’t want to destroy reason.” Rand saw her materialist philosophy and Christianity as incompatible and hoped to undermine Judeo-Christian ethics.

Rand’s anti-religious views, however, are not as well known as her novels. By highlighting them, Sapp hoped to drive a wedge between the conservative Christian and Tea Party wings of the Republican Party.

Sapp is promoting a video in which evangelical leader Chuck Colson warns Christians to beware of Rand’s “idolatry of self and selfishness.”

“I am no fan of big government, but there are far better ways to critique it than Rand’s godless nonsense, especially for Christians,” Colson says in the video.

The American Values Network video opens with anti-religious remarks from Rand and segues into Ryan and Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., offering high praise of the Russian novelist.

“Rand, more than anyone else, did a fantastic job of explaining the morality of capitalism, the morality of individualism,” Ryan says in a 2009 Facebook video excerpted in the ad. “It’s that kind of thinking, that kind of writing that is sorely needed right now.”

Ryan’s spokesman, Kevin Seifert, said the congressman “does not find his Catholic faith to be incompatible with his feelings for Ayn Rand’s literary works. ... Rand is one of many figures and authors that Congressman Ryan has cited as influencing his thinking during his formative years.”

In a letter, Ryan sought to assure New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, that the GOP budget aligns with Catholicism.



Author and philosopher Ayn Rand provided much of the intellectual framework for the conservative movement, but some Christians say her go-it-alone philosophy is more antithetical to the Bible. RNS file photo.

“Those who represent the people, including myself, have a moral obligation, implicit in the church’s social teaching, to address difficult basic problems before they explode into social crisis,” Ryan wrote in the April 29 letter.

Ryan argues that his budget is informed by the Catholic principal of subsidiarity, which holds that large bureaucracies should not assume tasks best left to individuals.

The GOP congressman also quotes the late Pope John Paul II’s warning that government welfare programs can lead to inertia, overweening public agencies, and ballooning budgets. **BT**

Georgia church diverts funds from two SBC seminaries that ‘breed’ Calvinism

MARTINEZ, Ga. —Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., will no longer get their slices of Cooperative Program mission funds from a church near Augusta, Ga., according to a report in the *Christian Index*, the newspaper of the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC).

A bilene Baptist Church in Martinez, Ga., led by longtime pastor Bill Harrell, is taking advantage of a GBC provision allowing congregations to exclude up to two budgeted items and still count their contributions to Georgia Baptist and Southern Baptist causes as Cooperative Program receipts.

The provision was adopted in 1997 when some of the state’s more conservative churches wanted to direct funds around Mercer University — that was defunded by the GBC in 2005.

Harrell, a former chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention’s executive committee, sent a May 4 letter to the GBC explaining the church’s decision to direct funds away from the two seminaries that he deemed a “breeding ground for an ‘army’ of Calvinists.”

“...I cannot support entities which have Calvinism as their agenda and are using it as a tool to take the SBC into a theological model with which 95 percent of the people in the



Growing Calvinists? Longtime Georgia pastor and Southern Baptist Convention leader Bill Harrell has led his church to direct funds away from Southern (pictured) and Southeastern Baptist Theological seminaries, claiming the two SBC schools are a “breeding ground” for Calvinism and that seminary leaders “seem bent on being able to call the SBC a ‘reformed’ convention.” Photo by Bruce Gourley.

SBC disagree,” said Harrell in the letter to GBC Executive Director J. Robert White. “The leaders in charge will not listen to advice and they seem bent on being able to call the SBC a ‘reformed’ convention.”

Harrell also noted that his church does not want its funds going “to help start Acts 29 churches” — referring to a church-starting network that embraces Reformed (Calvinist)

theology — although he did not specify any restriction of funds beyond the two named seminaries.

According to the *Index* story, another Southern Baptist pastor, Mike Stone of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Ga., referred to Abilene’s newly restricted giving plan as “a sign of a growing rift in our convention.” **BT**

New release

FROM THE BAPTIST HISTORY & HERITAGE SOCIETY

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In the Know

PEOPLE

Patricia P. Hernandez is the new national director for American Baptist Women in Ministry. She will implement the ABWIM strategic priorities that include building partnerships with ABC entities, developing a team of volunteer coordinators, and working with the ABWIM advisory committee on matters of strategy and support.

John Jonsson died May 26 at his home in South Africa. In 1985, he was the only Baptist minister to sign the Kairos Document, which called on all churches to demand equal rights for all South Africans. From 1985 to 1989 he was not allowed to enter South Africa. In 1989, he was one of the few white citizens of South Africa to be invited to attend the first Conference for a Democratic Future in South Africa, resulting in the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. For more than two decades, Jonsson served on the Human Rights Commission of the Baptist World Alliance. He taught missions and world religions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1982 to 1991 before joining the Baylor University faculty in 1992. In 2002, he retired from Baylor as professor of religion and director of African Studies.

Stephanie McLeskey is the new chaplain at Mars Hill College in Western North Carolina. She comes from Athens, Ga., where she served as an academic advisor at the University of Georgia and did campus ministry through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. She was also active in Milledge Avenue Baptist Church.

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Editor's note: James Pleitz, an influential Baptist leader who held longtime pastorates at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and the First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla., died May 15. He is honored here by Charlie Johnson who serves on the pastoral team of Bread Fellowship in Fort Worth, Texas, and as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Desdemona, Texas.

Pleitz believed in boundless capacity of love

BY CHARLES FOSTER JOHNSON

Even after I reached the status of mutual adult and fellow pastor, I never could bring myself to call Jim Pleitz by his first name. Even for this warmest, most informal of men, he was always Dr. Pleitz to me.

He must have sensed that I needed to invest that extra measure of spiritual authority in the man who baptized me and my father together when I was 15, because he never once requested that I refer to him without the conventional title.

From the day we stood in the waters of baptism together almost 40 years ago, Dr. Pleitz was my pastor.

He pastorally endured my adolescent zeal for social justice, telling me, exasperated, "Charlie, we can't help every needy person who walks through our door." My earnestness was his fault: Dr. Pleitz made us minister to the poor, an essential shaper of any authentic Gospel ministry.

He pastorally counseled me when my Baptist college kicked me out for espousing views deemed inconsistent with the school's philosophy. Distraught,

I immediately called Dr. Pleitz.

He told me two things: "Call your parents; they will support you" and "All of this is going to be OK." They did and it was. A few mediating calls by my pastor put me back in good stead with my folks and my college.

He pastorally shepherded me through my call to ministry, receiving me at the altar as I stood before God and the church in that outrageous decision, and speaking affirmations so absurdly wonderful I could not help but try to live up to them. I can still feel Dr. Pleitz's arm draped around me in deep affection.

If Dr. Pleitz possessed a pastoral flaw, it was his belief in the boundless capacity of love to win any foe, resolve any conflict. Perhaps we witnessed that flaw in his unfailing belief that Baptist fundamentalists could not wreck a perfectly good denomination. He was wrong. They did. But, what a marvelous flaw to believe that love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." May we all be so similarly flawed.

Our pastor is gone, and the mantle befalls us anew. We will not dishonor him by basking too long in his radiant charisma and dynamism, but will get back to the race set before us. His unmistakable voice cheers us on. **BT**



James Pleitz

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Baptists Converge

Theology no issue for volunteers serving in disaster relief

Serious mission leaders have long understood that volunteers shed theological strait jackets when they bend together to meet needs of disaster victims.

In storm-ravaged communities that truth is being confirmed — almost unnoticed — as Baptists of different perspectives find common ground working in the rubble.

Charles Ray coordinates disaster relief for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, formed 20 years ago after a rightward shift in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Bob Putman is communications director and disaster-relief coordinator for Converge Worldwide, the marketing brand name for what is the Baptist General Conference, a conservative group known by some as the Swedish Baptists.

Converge Worldwide's most prominent figure is John Piper, the Calvinist pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. Piper is the symbolic, theological godfather of a growing Calvinist wave of future pastors graduating from Southern Baptist seminaries, most notably Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Yet in the blood, mud, dust and rubble of disaster, Converge appreciates CBF's methodology of working through local churches, its



for disaster relief, they work through others, such as the North American Baptist Fellowship Disaster Response Network.

"The challenge from this end is purely trust," Putman said. "We are giving them funds and recommending our teams to them."

In the case of the Atlanta-based Fellowship that trust is based on experience. "They were very helpful in directing our teams in (Hurricane) Katrina relief," Putman said.

The Baptist General Conference has been a member of the Baptist World Alliance and NABF for decades, and its leaders have met and mingled with CBF leaders in BWA forums. In 2004 Southern Baptists pulled out of BWA, which it helped found in 1905, partly in protest of CBF's admission the year before.

While noting points of disagreement on doctrinal matters, Putman said Converge and the CBF share a "brotherhood of belief and a

brotherhood of spirit."

For his part, Charles Ray welcomes Converge and everyone else willing to help. CBF operations in Joplin, Mo., are housed at First Church of the Nazarene.

CBF volunteers are helping at homes and churches, and the churches don't have to be Baptist to get a helping hand. "We don't check pedigree," Ray said.

"This is not the place, when people are hurting, to discuss our philosophies and theology," Ray said. "If we're going to call ourselves God-like or Christian, it's time to go out and act like it."

Putman, whose group also is working with the Missouri Baptist Convention, which is strongly aligned with the SBC, would caution against squeezing Converge Worldwide into a theological box other than Baptist. He said Converge is "pretty diverse" and "irenic in spirit."

"We're committed to the old Swedish irenic spirit," he said. "We may fight in meetings about the stuff, but at the end of the day we're brothers." **BT**

"This is not the place, when people are hurting, to discuss our philosophies and theology. If we're going to call ourselves God-like or Christian, it's time to go out and act like it."

—Charles Ray, coordinator of disaster relief efforts for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship on working with volunteers from other Baptist groups as well as those from non-Baptist traditions

commitment to long-term solutions, its track record and yes, its theology.

"We trust their theology," said Putman, who is confident CBF will be on site "for years and years."

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

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

Youth lessons build off of Tony's Bible studies and direct these biblical truths to the daily lives of students. Christian educator and curriculum developer **David Cassady** of the FaithLab provides the youth-focused lessons that follow each of Tony's Bible studies.

Youth teachers will find creative resources (video, music, links, etc.) online at baptiststoday.org/bible to enhance the lessons for today's youth.

Children get to enjoy and learn from a colorful center spread (pages 22-23) developed by **Kelly Belcher**, a creative and experienced minister in Spartanburg, S.C. These materials — written for children — may be used at home, during children's sermons or at other times. 🎵

Bible Study


with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 7, 2011

Skiing Without a Boat

The lessons for August all derive from the gospel of Matthew, and all of them deal with various aspects of the question: “Who is Jesus?” The question has previously arisen in Matthew (7:28-29, 11:3, 13:54-56, 14:2). We all have some notion of who we think Jesus is. Perhaps a closer study of these texts can help us gain a fresher notion of how the first disciples came to the gradual understanding that Jesus was more than an ordinary man.

Have you ever felt emotionally lost at sea on a stormy night, tossed by waves and frightened by darkness? The metaphor naturally comes easily to mind. We all know what it is to endure the tempests of life. Those who follow Jesus also know how to find hope in the midst of the darkest night and the fiercest storm.

The biblical account of Jesus’ famous water walk is found in Matt. 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-51, and John 6:15-21. The parallels are marked by significant differences, most notably Matthew’s solo inclusion of the episode with Peter. This story would have had special significance to the early church, which faced hard times and would have preserved this account as a reminder that Jesus offers hope and calm in the midst of any storm. 

A quiet prayer (vv. 22-23)

All accounts agree that the water-walking episode followed the exciting and tumultuous event in which Jesus fed thousands of people with a single boy’s lunch of bread and fish. The natural uproar caused by the long day of teaching and miracle-working left Jesus exhausted and in need of quiet. So, Jesus sent the crowds away — and his disciples, too —


while he stole into the mountains to pray.

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus seems to be motivated primarily by the need for quiet reflection. Jesus’ popularity had skyrocketed, and people were clamoring for him to become king. John, in fact, says the crowds intended to seize Jesus and make him king by force (John 6:15). John also says that the miracle took place during Passover, which celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and often gave rise to messianic fever.

Jesus’ meteoric rise in fame must have tempted him to choose the route of popular political power. He needed a time of reflection and prayer to reaffirm his commitment to the servant role he had come to fulfill.

Jesus’ actions offer a helpful lesson for modern disciples, especially those who experience some success in either personal or professional ministry. When we are lauded for our speaking, teaching or unselfish service, we may be tempted to attempt greater things in hopes of greater praise. Jesus saw the danger of trusting in public acclaim. As the potential for greater and greater things drew near, Jesus pulled back to center himself on his true mission.

A noisy sea (vv. 24-27)

While Jesus prayed on the slumbering mountain, the disciples found themselves caught in one of the severe and sudden squalls that often plague the Sea of Galilee, which is about 13 miles long and 7.5 miles wide. The NRSV’s “early in the morning,” when Jesus came to meet the disciples, is less specific than the Greek text’s “in the fourth watch of the night.” The Greeks divided the night into four watches, the last of which extended from 3:00 to 6:00 a.m. Jesus had prayed far into the night, giving the disciples time to venture far out from shore. 

As the 12 tired men battled the battering wind, they must have been astonished to see Jesus coming toward them, striding confidently across the

waves with the wind whipping his robe and hair. Is it any wonder they were terrified? Seeing such a thing in the dead of night, they assumed that the advancing apparition must be a ghost, perhaps of some fisherman who had drowned.

The disciples may have screamed as loudly as men allow themselves to do, but Jesus quickly quieted their fears, if not their curiosity. When he was close enough so they could hear him over the wind and waves, he said “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Scholars have often noted that the Greek words “it is I” (*ego eimi*) are equivalent to the self-revelation of Yahweh to Moses: “I am” (Exod. 3:14; Hebrew *ehyeh*, translated as *ego eimi* in the Septuagint, an early Greek version).

Matthew’s gospel was likely written for a primarily Jewish audience, so his readers would have immediately seen the connection. God had self-identified as “I am” to Moses from a burning bush, and now Jesus uses the same words from a roiling sea. Neither Moses nor the disciples expected to meet God in such circumstances, but both were confronted by the great “I am.”

A stammering disciple (vv. 28-33)

As mentioned above, only Matthew includes the story about Peter’s attempt to join Jesus on the water. Emboldened by the moment, but not entirely convinced it was Jesus, Peter devised a thrill-seeking test: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (v. 28). Note that Peter was not ready to jump in of his own accord, but he was ready to attempt anything at Christ’s command.

Jesus’ answer was simple. “Come.” And, according to Matthew, Peter began to walk firmly upon the water. But then — as countless preachers and teachers have pointed out through the years — “when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened.” Peter, “the Rock,” began to sink like a stone. Preachers often insist that Peter began to sink “when he took his eyes off Jesus,” but

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



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the story itself is concerned with Peter's faith as well as his focus.


There was a problem with Peter's faith, as Jesus himself indicated (v. 31). As Malcolm Tolbert suggested, Peter had enough faith to begin, but not enough to finish (*Good News from Matthew*, Broadman Press, 133). Yet, when Peter began to sink and he realized Jesus was his only hope for salvation, true faith was born. "This, then, is true faith: not the sublime achievement of an especially religious individual, but 'single minded' devotion to the Lord, to his bidding and to his help" (Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, John Knox Press, 323).

Despite his impulsive nature and human weakness, Peter alone got out of the boat to go to Jesus. All of the disciples begin this episode with abject fear, but move to faith and worship (v. 33). Peter's role as a catalyst in this transformation recalls his crucial place in leading the early church in the stormy days after Pentecost.

When Jesus entered the boat, the

storm ceased and the disciples began to worship him as the Son of God. Note the progression from unchecked fear to unequivocal faith: from Jesus' "I am" to Peter's "if it is you" to the disciples' "truly you are the Son of God." If they remembered their synagogue lessons, they would know that only God could walk on water (Job 9:8, Ps. 77:19).


Matthew's ending attributes far more faith to the disciples than Mark's story, in which they remain confused. Mark concludes with the observation that "they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:51-52).

Who is Jesus? The disciples' growing belief is stated clearly: "truly you are the Son of God." 

The disciples' experience of growing in their developing faith and understanding of Jesus offers comfort to contemporary followers who also find their faith

faltering and their assurance in need of assistance. All of the disciples were uncertain about Jesus' identity. Even the great Simon Peter had doubts and fears, stumbling in the face of turbulent weather. But, as Peter extended his hand to Jesus as the only source of hope and salvation, Jesus was able to take Peter's "little faith" and nourish it so that Peter grew — through further fits and starts — to become the prime pillar of the early church.

Ben Witherington III puts it nicely: "Peter then has become the poster child of both faith and too little faith, of faith giving way to doubt and fear but also of faith overcoming one's initial fears" (*Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, 293).

God does not expect our faith to emerge full-blown. We must grow in faith even as our bodies grow, even as we grow intellectually and in maturity. We also face severe trials and howling storms, but Jesus is always there, looking upon our fear and doubt with grace unmeasured, ready to lift us up unto life. 

Stormy Faith

Is it easier for you to have faith when you are happy or when you are afraid? In today's passage, we find the disciples out on a boat when a storm explodes around them.

Being on a boat in a storm can be especially frightening. The wind and waves rock the boat violently, and can even flip it over. The disciples know this, and are afraid of the storm's power and the threat it poses.

As if the storm is not scary enough, they see a person walking toward them on the water. They do not realize it is Jesus until he identifies himself, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."


While most of the disciples seem content to watch Jesus walk toward them, Peter asks Jesus if he can join him on the water. Jesus says, "come" and Peter steps out. At first he too is walking on the water, but when he realizes how strong the wind is, he becomes frightened and starts to sink. Jesus reaches to pull him up.

Life finds many ways to frighten us. Tense situations, conflict, pressures to excel, the possibility of failure, and the very fact that our world can be unpredictable and dangerous give us plenty of opportunities to be afraid.

When you are afraid, do you find yourself praying and hoping God will support you and

protect you? Do you turn to God more often when you are scared or when you feel safe? Do you wonder if your faith is strong?

Jesus does not seem troubled by Peter's failure to walk further on the water. He rescues Peter, and they return to the boat. He seems to understand that Peter's faith is still growing and maturing, and that he will grow through the experience.

As you face your own storms and times of fear, know that Jesus is there with you, even if your faith is sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker like Peter's. 

Think About It:

Did Peter's fear cause his faith to weaken? How does fear affect your faith? In the past, how has God rescued you when your faith has been weak?



Make a Choice:

Will you choose to keep your faith strong? When times are good, will you keep talking with God so that your faith will be strong when life's storms arrive?



Pray:

Thank God for being with you through life's storms and for helping you when your faith is weak. Pray for those you know who are dealing with fear.



Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 14, 2011

When Crumbs Are More Than Enough

Can you imagine Jesus being hard or cold, turning a deaf ear to someone in need, or even stooping to insult a woman? That is not the image of Jesus we cherish, but it is precisely the picture we find painted in Matt. 15:21-28. When reading such an alarming text, we can't help but ask: "What's up with that?"

Matt. 15:21-28 is apparently drawn from a similar text in Mark 7:24-30, though Matthew makes significant changes and adds new material to the story, which does not appear in either Luke or John.

A foiled vacation (vv. 21-22)

When the story begins, Jesus has been teaching and preaching, healing the sick and feeding the hungry non-stop for some time, and he is tired. Seeking time away from the crowds, Jesus traveled north and east to the region of Tyre and Sidon, important cities along the Phoenician coast (Mark mentions only Tyre; Matthew adds Sidon).

Jesus had little luck, however. People from the region had traveled to hear Jesus in Galilee, and Mark insists "he could not escape notice" (Mark 7:24). Matthew omits that part of Mark's story, going immediately to Jesus' confrontation with a woman who recognized Jesus and latched onto him.

Mark identifies the woman as "a Greek, of Syrophenician origin" (Mark 7:26). Matthew, however calls her a Canaanite, which brings up Old Testament images of local residents whose idolatry was a constant threat to the Israelites. What matters most is that the

woman is not Jewish. When Jesus had sent his disciples on their first preaching mission (Matt. 10:5-6), he had instructed them to avoid Gentiles and Samaritans, "but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

How would Jesus respond to this Gentile woman who kept shouting at him, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon"?

The woman must have been familiar with Jewish language and custom: her plea "have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David" is identical to the cry of blind supplicants (presumably Jewish) in 9:27 and 20:30-31. "Son of David," as noted by Donald Hagner, was in use as a Jewish title for the Messiah, as in 1:1, 12:23, 21:9, and 22:42 (*Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, 441).

Demon possession is mentioned frequently in the Gospels. In the first century, all types of mental illness were attributed to possession by demons, and Jesus used the same language common to his culture in speaking of people who were so afflicted.

Would Jesus, who was tired and didn't want to be bothered, take the time to heal a Gentile child?

Hard words (vv. 23-24)

Matthew adds the material in vv. 23-24, and omits Mark's observation that Jesus had gone into a house and wanted to be left alone. We recall that Matthew's gospel was directed mainly to Jewish Christians, and his intent appears to be one of stressing Jesus' mission to the Jews while acknowledging his compassion for all.

In Matthew's addition, neither Jesus nor the Twelve come across particularly well. Though the woman had cried pitifully for help, Matthew says, "he did not answer her at all" (v. 23). How could Jesus so blatantly ignore her? It seems uncharacteristic, to be sure, but neither Jesus nor the gospel writer is apologetic. Why would Jesus act this way?

Commentators have often suggested that Jesus was testing the woman, first ignoring and then insulting her to see if she would persist in seeking a blessing, if her faith was true. Even if that is the case, it seems harsh.

As Jesus turned a deaf ear to the woman, his disciples — who may have been trying to shield him — took the brunt of her cries, and pleaded with Jesus to send her away before she nagged them to death.

Jesus' answer brings no comfort: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We might expect Jesus to say he was sent first to the Jews, but his words are far more exclusive: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This does not mean that Jesus did not care for other peoples. It became clear, later, that he would send his disciples out to teach and baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). His words to the woman emphasized that his mission was to the Jews, but that does not diminish his followers' mission to all peoples.

A persistent woman (vv. 25-28)

The woman was not put off by Jesus' cold shoulder. Instead, she pushed her way forward and fell to her knees before him. The Greek word translated as "knelt" can also mean "worship," but here it probably means simply that she prostrated herself before Jesus as she continued to plead. For the second time she addressed him as "Lord," this time adding "help me."

Jesus' reply didn't sound like the Jesus we think we know. "It is not fair," he said, "to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (v. 26).

Three words are of particular importance here. "Food" (literally "bread") may refer to the messianic fulfillment of promises to Israel (Hagner, 442), to which previous signs had been pointing — a careful reader will observe that this story is sandwiched between two stories in which Jesus fed the multitudes (14:15-21, 15:32-39).

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“Children” was commonly used by rabbis in reference to the Jews, and “dogs” could be an epithet for Gentiles. 🇺

Some commentators have sought to soften Jesus’ response by noting that the word used (*kunarion*) is a diminutive form used for “house dogs” or “puppies” rather than wild dogs, but that doesn’t remove the sting. In more graphic fashion, Jesus was repeating his contention that his concern lay with the Jews, not with Gentiles.

I’ve often wondered if Jesus’ hard and exclusive-sounding words might have been accompanied by a secretive wink. Whether encouraged in that way or not, the woman persevered, searching for a way through Jesus’ defenses. Thinking quickly, she shot back: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27).

Again she calls Jesus “Lord,” and she appears to accept her status as a Gentile who is outside the boundaries of Jesus’ primary mission. But, she did not consider herself or her child unworthy of care. She hoped that Jesus’ compassion would

extend beyond his own race and that he would extend the overflow of his blessing to her, even as humans give their leftovers to household pets.

I have to believe that Jesus smiled at her retort, even if it was a tired grin. The determined woman’s perseverance and wit cut through Jesus’ weariness, and may even have been a catalyst for the future shape of his ministry. Surely there was a twinkle in Jesus’ eyes as he said to her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!” Matthew notes, “And her daughter was healed instantly” (v. 28).

A persistent question

What do we do with a story like this? For one thing, the story reminds us that Jesus truly was human. He grew tired and weary, and perhaps even cranky. There were times when he didn’t want to be

bothered, when he had to step away from his active ministry to seek needed rest.

Some of us could learn from Jesus. It is easy to get so caught up in work and family demands and even good deeds that we ignore our own need for rest and relaxation. When that happens, we become like batteries that have been so depleted that they are worthless until they are recharged.

A second thing we note is that, though Jesus stuck with the script of having been sent to the Jews, he still stretched beyond cultural borders to offer blessing and healing to outsiders who were seen as having no official right to God’s beneficence.

The vast majority of Christian believers were born into the same “outsider” status as the Canaanite woman: we have no claim to Abraham’s inheritance. Are there any of us who deserve the forgiveness and promise of life that Jesus brought? Are there any of us who seek God’s grace as persistently as the woman who fought through inattention and insults to gain a hearing with Jesus? 🇺

Who Is Jesus?

Sometimes we focus so much on the fact that Jesus was the Son of God that we forget he was also completely human. In today’s passage, we find a tired and even grumpy Jesus.

In the preceding days Jesus has been extremely busy traveling, preaching and healing. Like anyone, the work has exhausted him and he wants to take some time to be alone and rest.

However, a Greek woman seeks Jesus and is persistent in her plea for him to help her

daughter, who is possessed by a demon (likely their way of explaining mental illness).

At first, Jesus tries to ignore and avoid her. But she stays and pleads with him. When he finally speaks with her, he seems to suggest he is only ministering to Jews.

Again, she remains persistent and asks for him to heal her daughter. She believes that, even though she is not Jewish, Jesus can and will help her. Jesus is amazed by her faith, and heals the girl.

Youth • August 14, 2011

Who is Jesus? Was he really human and able to be tired and even grumpy? Is Jesus’ love and care only for some people or for everyone?

The Greek woman seemed sure of Jesus’ identity. He was human, and thus she could overlook his grumpiness. His ministry was for everyone, and she knew he could heal her daughter.

Are we as sure of Jesus as this woman? Her trust in him, and her persistence with him, showed the depth of her faith. 🇺

Think About It:

We sometimes think Jesus is only for people who act or believe in certain ways. In his time, some thought he only came for the Jews. Can you think of anyone Jesus doesn’t love?



Make a Choice:

Do you see Jesus differently than when you were a child? As you mature, your understanding of Jesus should also grow. Who do you understand Jesus to be?



Pray:

Ask God to help you grow in your understanding of Jesus, and to help you care for all people as Jesus does.



Thumbtacks

8-7-11

Matthew 14:22-33
The Secret Word is *ghost*.

Do you believe in ghosts? Of course not! But in this great story about Simon Peter, who was Jesus' best friend, it seems that Jesus' first 12 followers believed in ghosts. They thought that was what they saw coming at them through the waves, thunderstorm and lightning, when it was really Jesus coming toward their boat.

This year many people we know have been in the same terrible kinds of storms the 12 disciples were in: tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, lightning, winds that tear things apart. Maybe you have been in a storm like this yourself. It is a scary place, and it makes us understand that weather is one thing people can't control. We can only be prepared to handle it when it comes.

Simon Peter saw it was not a ghost, but Jesus, coming to meet him as the storm was tossing the boat. And, he trusted Jesus enough to do an even scarier thing: he went over the side of the boat into the water to meet Jesus. (Don't try this at home!) When the waves swelled around him, he got scared and started to sink. Then Jesus held onto him and said a very important thing: it is when you are most scared that Jesus is close to you... so, believe in that!

The Holy Spirit, which some people call the Holy Ghost, is with us in good times and especially in rough moments. Jesus is with us as the only real ghost there is, the Holy Spirit. Remember this and trust Jesus to be present with you, just like he was with Simon Peter, when you are afraid. (Do try this at home!) And don't be afraid of ghosts — there's no such thing!



8-14-11

Matthew 15:21-28
The Secret Word is *crumb*.

There is nothing Luler the Hound Dog likes better than a bite of what the people are eating at the table. Is your pet like that? She doesn't get table scraps very often because we usually eat the food all up and leave nothing for her. When she gets something, it is only a bite or two and it makes her lick her chops.

In this story a worried mom is afraid her daughter will die. The mom and her daughter are not Hebrew or Jewish people like Jesus. They are Canaanites, outsiders, someone who is not in the group. Can you think of people you know who are in the "in" group and other people who are not?

If you meet someone who is different from you, it can be tempting to treat that person as an outsider. When we divide people into different groups, ones we like and ones we do not like, we are getting into trouble! We give the outsiders a strong feeling that they are not like us, not welcome and not good enough for us. And it can also be the other way around: other people can decide that YOU are an outsider. This hurts very much. Being left out is one of the most awful things that can happen to us. Jesus does not like it.

Jesus does not leave the Canannite mom and her daughter out. In talking to each other, Jesus and the mom seem to be using a secret code language. She says that even the dogs get the crumbs or table scraps from the peoples' feast, and Jesus agrees. Jesus means that not just the Jewish or Hebrew people get him as a Savior, but every other kind of person gets him, too. To Jesus, no person is ever an outsider. Nobody. Is there someone you know who is being treated like an outsider? How can you let her know she is not an outsider to you?



8-21-11

Matthew 16:13-20
The Secret Word is rock.

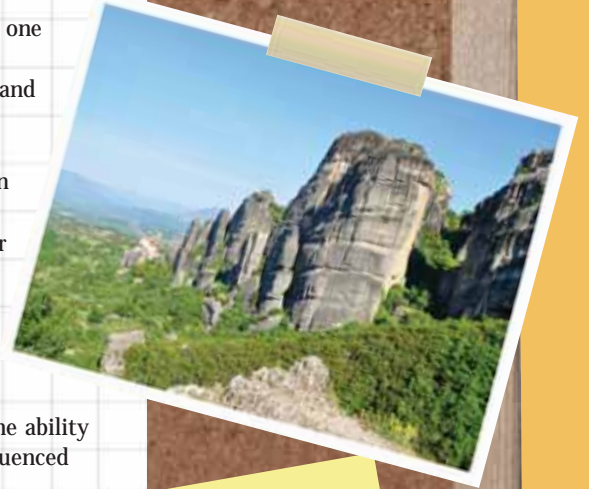
Congratulations on starting off a great year at school. Maybe the best thing about it is getting to see some friends again after a long summer apart. This week and next week we are talking about friends. Do you have a best friend?

Some people are friends with a few others in a close group of buddies. Other people have one person they like most, and those two stick together all the time. You can think of people you would name as best friends to each other: Sponge Bob Square Pants and Patrick Star, Phineas and Ferb, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, you and ... who? Maybe you are in a group of three best friends. Four perhaps?

It might sound funny, but Jesus had a best friend too. His name was Simon Peter, the son of Jonah, who is just called Peter in the stories of the four Gospels. In the Greek language, which was the language used to write these stories, Peter's name was the same as the word for rock.

Your best friend is important to you. This is a person you like so much that you would not want to hurt her, tell her a lie, be mean to her, disappoint her or go for a long time without seeing her. This person is the one you text the most often, the one you invite to camp with you, the one you give the best birthday present to.

Have you ever thought how much influence your friend has over you? Influence means the ability to affect something. Can you remember ways your friend has influenced you, or you have influenced her? Jesus' friend Peter loved him so much that Jesus was influenced to start building the Jesus-followers, beginning with Peter as Jesus-follower Number One. But that's not the end of the story.



8-28-11

Matthew 16:21-28
The Secret Word is Satan.

Think of a time when your best friend disappointed you or you disappointed him. It might be that your friend tempted you to do something wrong, and you got in big trouble. Maybe something sad happened to you and your friend ignored you when you needed her most. Or maybe your friend hurt you and it felt like he did it on purpose, and like he wasn't your friend anymore. Feeling separated from the people we love most is a terrible feeling. The more we like someone, the more influence they have over us, and the deeper our hurt can be if they act in an unfriendly way.

Jesus thought Peter understood him just as you believe you understand your friends and you know how they feel and what they think about important things. In Matthew's story, Jesus knew that he was going to get into trouble with the Jewish religious leaders, the priests. He also knew the priests would probably want to arrest him, put him in jail and then kill him, because the priests disagreed with Jesus' teachings and with the Jesus-followers who believed Jesus was the Messiah. In Matthew's story, Jesus tried to help his friends understand that these bad things were probably going to happen to him. He was hoping his friends would not disappoint him, and that they would let him lean on them and give him help and support when the trouble started.

So when Jesus' best friend Peter did not understand, did not offer to help him, and did not want to hear what he had to say about the priests, Jesus was hurt, disappointed and angry. You would be too, wouldn't you? He used the word Satan, which means opponent or adversary, one who is against you — not with you. This is no way for a best friend to act! But all of us have disappointed the ones we love most, and Peter disappointed his friend Jesus. Do you think Jesus forgave Peter and still kept him as his best friend anyway?



Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 21, 2011

Know, but Don't Tell

Pete knew that something was up with Jesse. They had been friends for years, and like most men, they didn't talk a lot about deep or personal things. But still, Pete could see something bubbling beneath the surface of Jesse's otherwise calm exterior.

A day finally came when Jesse allowed his inner thoughts to surface. Unable to contain a grin, he looked at Pete and asked, "Who do you think might become the next CEO of my company?"

Pete slapped Jesse on the back before congratulating him with a man-hug. "Thanks," Jesse said, "but don't get carried away. You can't tell anybody."

Have you ever come to a happy and exciting realization that you had to keep secret? Jesus' disciples learned how puzzling the whole matter could be.

What do others think? (vv. 13-14)


Today's text draws on Mark 8:27-30 in 16:13-16, with the addition of material (vv. 17-19) regarding Peter that is unique to Matthew.

Last week's text found Jesus and his disciples in the north coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, after which they returned to the region near the Sea of Galilee (15:29-16:12). Then, Jesus led his followers about 25 miles due north, to Caesarea Philippi. Herod Philip, who ruled northern Galilee, had built the city and named it in honor of the Roman emperor, who was worshiped there.

The significance of the location is most likely in the city's setting, adjacent to the ancient cultic site called Panyas (now pronounced Banyas). Set in the foothills of Mount Hermon and named for the nature god Pan, the site features a

large grotto-like cave in a sharp cliff face, and a fast, fresh spring that emerges from underground.

Local tradition considered the grotto and the spring a gateway to the underground world of the dead and the fabled River Styx.

In this verdant setting, with shrines to pagan gods and the emperor nearby, Jesus voiced a question his disciples had no doubt been debating for some time: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (v. 13). 

The disciples' response in v. 14 suggests popular opinion considered Jesus to be someone special — perhaps even John the Baptist returned from the dead, or a famed prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah who had been sent back to earth. People had not, however, thought of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Despite his impressive displays of power, Jesus' lack of interest in leading a revolution against Rome made him a poor match for what the Jews looked for in a Messiah.


What do you think? (vv. 15-17)

Had the disciples thought otherwise? Jesus intended to find out, so he asked "But who do you say that I am?" Both the "you" and the "I" are emphatic, spelled out with pronouns even though person is included in the verbs: literally, "But you (plural), who do you say that I am?" (v. 15).


Peter, the most outspoken of the Twelve, provided the answer Jesus was hoping for: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

Peter was probably not speaking for himself alone, but offering a confession on behalf of all the disciples, who had no doubt discussed the matter. The word translated "Messiah" is *christos*, the Greek term used for the Hebrew word we transliterate as "Messiah." Both mean "anointed one."

Peter's confession goes beyond acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, for he adds "the Son of the living God." The word "Son" is not capitalized in the

Greek text, but English translations typically use the upper case to indicate the term is a title, and to reflect later Trinitarian thinking, as in "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." 

We cannot assume that Peter was reflecting a full-blown understanding of Jesus as God, but as Ben Witherington III notes, "The phrase at a minimum implies a special relationship between the person called Son of the Living God and the one true God" (311).


Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter — notably using a variation on his full name that seems to connect him with the prophet Jonah  — declaring that such knowledge of his nature could come only by divine revelation. Note that Jesus' remark appears to claim full kinship with God. Peter had called him "the Son of the living God." Now Jesus insists that "my Father in heaven" had revealed that truth.

What happens next? (vv. 18-20)

The next three verses have troubled Protestants for hundreds of years, because Roman Catholics find in them justification for the notion that Peter was the first pope, and that the pope has God-given authority over the church.

To tease out what Jesus does and does not say here, we'll have to look closely at several important words.

First, Jesus uses a play on words to speak of Peter as the firm foundation upon which "I will build my church." Although Simon was Peter's given name, "Cephas" (pronounced like "Kephas") — from an Aramaic word meaning "rock" or "rock shelf" — was apparently his nickname. Jesus uses both masculine and feminine forms of the Greek word for rock in saying, "You are Peter (*petros*), and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build my church."

The word we translate as "church" (*ekklesia*) is used commonly in the epistles, but appears only here and in Matt. 18:17 in the Gospels. 

Exactly what Jesus means by *ekklesia* is uncertain, but it is clear that he

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speaks of it as “my *ekklesia*,” and uses the future tense. Old Testament references to the gathered people of Israel spoke of them as the community of God’s people; now Jesus declares that he will build a new community of his followers.

This community, built on the foundation of Peter and the other disciples, would be built to last — so strong that even the “gates of Hades” could not defeat it: the nearby grotto at Pnyas would have reinforced the image. We should not read the popular concept of Hell into this verse, or assume that Jesus had in mind some sort of impending spiritual warfare: he was talking about death, which could not prevail against him or his community of followers.

Some assume Jesus’ reference to building the church “upon this rock” means Peter was given charge of the early church. That assumption is problematic, however, unless we imagine he led it briefly before surrendering the lead role to James, who was clearly the most visible leader of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15). In Gal. 2:9, Paul refers to “James and Cephas and John” as the


“acknowledged pillars” of the church.

One might possibly interpret the statement in light of Peter’s revelation and mission to the Gentiles in Acts 10 as being the catalyst for the expansion of the church to Gentiles, since most of the church was ultimately composed of Gentiles.


Jesus’ reference to giving Peter the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19) lies behind the traditional image of Peter as the man in charge at the pearly gates of heaven, but that is not what Jesus had in mind. Though Jesus addresses Peter here, he is a representative of the other disciples: later he gives some of the same commands to the disciples as a group (see Matt. 18:1, 18).

Was Peter’s possession of the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” to be interpreted temporally or eschatologically? While the popular notion of Peter as the doorkeeper in heaven assumes the eschatological

view, Jesus was clearly speaking of a community of followers to be established on earth (see Witherington, 313).

The “keys” appear to be a symbol of the authority given Peter and the other disciples to “bind and loose.”  They are to determine what behavior is appropriate for Christ-followers in the same manner that the rabbis acted to delimit what was and was not permitted to Jews. The importance and difficulty of such determinations can be seen in the Acts 15 debate, and in Paul’s criticism of Peter’s inconsistent behavior in Galatians 1-2.

This text deals with weighty matters, and is the climax of the first part of Matthew: with the next verse, Jesus will turn toward Jerusalem and his coming passion. In the meantime, his followers were expected to keep their knowledge of Jesus as the Christ close to the vest, for “he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah” (v. 20).

They had yet to understand that Jesus’ concept of what it meant to be the Messiah was far different than anything they had yet imagined. 

Which Jesus?

Do you have a favorite movie or television actor? Have you ever wondered what that person is “really” like? Would she be anything like the characters she plays, or completely different?

Jesus was not an actor, but there were a lot of different opinions about “who” he was. Some people thought he was a popular preacher and healer. Others thought he was a great prophet. Some, who wanted an Israel free from Roman rule, saw Jesus as one who would rise up to lead a political and military rebellion against the Romans. And there were a few who believed he was the Messiah, the Son of God.


So, when Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am,” he already knew the list of possible answers. When he asked, “Who do you say that I am,” he was asking a far more personal question.

In our day, people still hold a wide range of opinions about Jesus. Some see him as a great prophet and religious leader or a wise philosopher. Some see him as God’s Son who is largely concerned about how well we follow important rules and hold particular beliefs. Others view him as a kind, loving, personal savior.

When Peter answered Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” Jesus

responded that it was on that foundation he would build the church — the community of Christ-followers.

The church is a place full of people who are trying to answer, “Who do you say that I am?” We often have different ideas about the kind of savior Jesus is and how we should best follow him.

How would you answer the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Who is Jesus in your life? The way you answer will likely have a lot to do with how you relate to God, others, the church and even yourself. 

Youth • August 21, 2011

Think About It:

If you were to take a photo of Jesus, what would you likely find him doing? Who would he be with? What might he be saying?



Make a Choice:

There are many voices telling us who Jesus is. Will you read the Bible for yourself and make your own decision? How have you experienced Jesus in your life?



Pray:

Ask for God’s guidance and wisdom as you seek to discover Jesus’ real identity. When you pray, allow for periods of silence so that you can sense God’s work in your heart.




Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 28, 2011

Don't Tempt Me!

Have you ever thought you understood something, only to have it completely wrong? On more than one occasion, I've had to take a kit-based bed or bookcase apart and start over again because I had put a piece in backwards.

Restarting a household project is aggravating, but discovering that one's entire way of thinking needs reversing is much more serious business. That's where Peter finds himself in today's text, which is adapted from Mark 8:31-38, also the source for Luke 9:22-27. 

Getting with the text

In all three gospels, this text serves as a major turning point. The first section of each gospel carefully follows Jesus' work and his teaching, gradually developing an image that becomes fully exposed with Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

From that point, Jesus turns his attention toward Jerusalem and the death that awaits him there. Matthew uses a forceful expression, "from that time on," to emphasize a shift in Jesus' focus.

Jesus predicts his coming passion in today's text, and again in 17:22-23 and 20:17-19, revealing new information with each prediction. We have reached a watershed in the gospel story. Like most turning points, it was an uncomfortable time for those who were being turned.

Getting behind Jesus (vv. 21-23)

Fresh from being congratulated by Jesus for his spiritual and divinely revealed insight, Peter quickly learned that knowing to call Jesus "Messiah" and understanding what that means are two different things.

Peter thought he knew what "Messiah" meant. For many years he, like his fellow Jews, had longed for a military messiah who would come to defeat the Romans and to return Israel to its former glory. Although Jesus had given no indication of such plans, perhaps Peter assumed that the Teacher was only biding his time until he had won sufficient followers to accomplish the task.

Imagine, then, how Peter and the others must have felt when Jesus first warned them not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. Then try to feel their shock as Jesus went on to explain that, instead of amassing and leading an army of Hebrew zealots, he fully expected to suffer many things at the hands of "the elders and chief priests and scribes" — the leaders of the Jewish people (v. 21).


As if that were not bad enough, Jesus added "and be killed." Jesus' second and third predictions add the information that he would first be betrayed, and the final one makes it clear that the governing Gentiles would bring about his demise.

Even Jesus' prediction that he would rise again on the third day could not allay the concussive effect those words must have had on his disciples, who would have noticed that Jesus emphasized it was necessary for these awful things to happen.

Peter again acted as spokesman, though Matthew says he pulled Jesus aside, as if to avoid embarrassing the Teacher before the others, and rebuked him for saying such outlandish things. Mark does not tell us what Peter's rebuke involved, but Matthew quotes him as saying, "God forbid, Lord! This should never happen to you!" (Mat. 16:22b).

A literal translation of the Greek would be something like "(God) be gracious to you, Lord — no way will this happen to you!" My "no way" translates a double negative, used for emphasis, as in "not never."

Peter's speech was so fervent, Jesus was apparently tempted to listen to him. The human side of Jesus had no more desire to suffer and die than any of us. Yet, recognizing the true source of this temptation, Jesus responded to his

friend's chiding with a rebuke of his own: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." (v. 23). 

Jesus addressed Peter as "Satan" because his friend had unwittingly acted as an agent of the adversary, tempting him to stray from his mission and take an easier road. This created an obstacle or stumbling block that would make Jesus' path more difficult.

The problem for Peter, Jesus said, is that his mind was focused on human things rather than divine things. This must have been a stunning rebuke, because it follows immediately Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, and Jesus' congratulatory declaration that Peter had not learned that truth from "flesh and blood," but from God. It appears that Peter's mind had switched gears to a more human orientation.

In telling Peter to "get behind me," Jesus was probably not saying "go away" or even "get out of my way," but "get behind me" in the sense of supporting or encouraging Jesus — much as sports fans "get behind" their favorite teams or players.

For Peter to "get behind" Jesus also implies that he is to follow Jesus, rather than trying to lead him astray. In the next few verses, Jesus explains that following him can be a dangerous enterprise.

Following Jesus (vv. 24-28)

Although Mark says that Jesus included a gathering crowd in the following conversation about what it means to follow him, Matthew limits Jesus' teaching to the disciples.

Jesus' teaching is tightly structured, taking the form of "an initial main saying, followed by three supportive logia reminiscent of wisdom sayings" (Hagner, 483). The initial saying is in v. 24; each of the supportive sayings (vv. 25, 26, 27) is introduced by the word "for."

The hard words of v. 24 appear twice in Matthew, and once in each of the other

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gospels (see also Mark 8:35, Matt. 10:39, Luke 17:33, and John 12:25), so it “was obviously important to the early church” (Witherington, 322).

Those who want to follow Jesus must “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me,” Jesus said. The cross was yet in Jesus’ future, but still fresh in the memory of the church. Though not all should expect to be crucified, all should be willing to die, if necessary, thus taking up their metaphorical cross.

To “deny oneself” is not to give up a few nice things, as we often do during Lent, but to give up the right to call the shots at all. It is to say “No” to self and “Yes” to God — no matter what it costs.

The first supportive saying (v. 25) states the paradox that those who seek to save their lives will lose them, while those who willingly surrender their lives will save them. That makes little sense in human reckoning, but reflects a new equation Jesus was bringing to bear.

V. 26 raises a question that is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, who did not believe in life beyond the grave, and com-

plained that there was no profit in life, that all was vanity. Jesus asked the question, repeated in countless sermons through the years, “For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

The answers, of course, are “Nothing,” and “nothing.” To gain all the world has to offer and yet to lose the very essence of true life yields no profit at all. And, when we reach the end of our empty lives and would gladly trade all we have gained in order to regain our life, there will be nothing we can do.

Jesus’ third supportive teaching has eschatological overtones: a time of judgment will come when “the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (v. 27). In context, we assume that judgment would be

based not on one’s life-list of deeds, but on one’s willingness to follow Jesus.

The final verse of today’s text is troublesome. It is connected to v. 27 in the sense that it appears to speak of the *parousia*, the return of Christ at the end of the age. Jesus firmly predicted that “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (v. 28).

Although some commentators are convinced that Jesus believed the *eschaton* would occur within a generation, others suggest that Jesus may have had in mind the transfiguration or the resurrection as events in which Jesus’ kingdom or dominion was breaking into the world, though it was not yet fully realized. The transfiguration was witnessed by Peter, James, and John, while all but Judas witnessed the resurrection.

The more important question relates to whether we expect to share in the full experience of knowing Christ’s kingdom. The answer, Jesus told his disciples, lies in whether we are also willing to share in the experience of bearing his cross.

A Plot Twist

A surprising plot twist can be exciting in a movie. We follow along with the story, expecting it to turn out a certain way and then — bam! — the story suddenly takes an unexpected turn and we have to reconsider what to expect.

In today’s scripture passage, Jesus throws a serious plot twist at the disciples. They have been traveling with Jesus, watching him heal and minister, listening to his provocative and wise words, watching the crowds grow larger and more enthusiastic, and they believe they can see how the story will unfold. As anyone can see, Jesus will use his influence, wisdom and power to free and transform Israel!

But then Jesus throws cold water on their plans and expectations. He explains that he will be attacked, suffer and ultimately die. The disciples are stunned and shocked, and protest Jesus’ predictions. But Jesus holds firm to this hard path.

As if the disciples are not shaken enough, Jesus explains to them that if they want to be his followers, they too must deny themselves and give their lives away for others. He calls them to live a life of humility and service, rather than one of glory, power and prosperity.

Some have described Jesus as a “suffering servant.” He loves others so much that he is willing to set aside his own desires and needs

for their sake. Jesus places the needs of others ahead of himself.

As we continue to wonder, “who is this Jesus?” we also have to see him as a suffering servant rather than as a conquering leader. And we must also hear his call to us to care for others in the same way.

Jesus said, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25). He seems to be saying that we really discover our potential as we serve others. What have you learned about yourself when you put others first?

Think About It:

Remember the last time you gave of yourself and put the needs of another person ahead of your own. What did you learn about yourself?



Make a Choice:

What are ways you can be more of a servant to others? Where can you give up something that might make another person’s life better?



Pray:

Thank God for the gift of Jesus, and ask for the wisdom to be a good follower of Christ. Ask God to help you think more of others and less of yourself.





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Happy 20th, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

In 1991 the final episode of *Dallas* aired, the Chicago Bulls won their first championship, Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in *Terminator 2* and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship began. All of this is ancient history to most of my students. Just as someone needs to explain J.R., M.J. and why bodybuilders should not be governors, we need to keep telling the Baptist story.

Baptists find their beginnings in the Anabaptists of 16th-century Europe. They fought for religious freedom and an absolute separation of church and state that would have driven Jerry Falwell crazy. The British Baptists of the 17th century refused to fill out membership cards for the state-controlled Church of England. Thomas Helwys was criticized for defending religious liberty for atheists, Jews and Muslims. (Imagine the reaction if Pat Robertson defended Charlie Sheen.) King James, who clearly had not read the more gracious portions of the King James Bible, sent Helwys to jail where the Baptist preacher died.



Roger Williams is often called the father of the Baptist movement in America even though shortly after starting the First Baptist Church in America in 1638, he gave up on Baptists for not being radical enough. He argued for making recompense to Native Americans for taking their land. That was hard for the Baptists on the finance committee to take.

Up until the 1800s, Baptists in the United States would not join together in a national body, because they were afraid of becoming too organized. Some argue that Baptists might have been better off if they had never gotten over this fear of large organizations.

When the Civil War began, Baptists in the South took a firm stand for what they believed.



Unfortunately, they believed in slavery.

When the war was over, Baptists began overwhelming the South in a way that would have made Sherman envious. By the 1970s there were more Baptists in the South than there were people. Baptists ruled the land, but they wanted to rule one another. New pseudo-Baptists decided that all Baptists had to think the same.

In 1979, an uncivil war broke out. The fundamentalists said it was about the inerrancy of the Bible. The old-time Baptists said it was about the priesthood of the believer. We fought over *The Baptist Faith and Message*, which was not supposed to be a creed, as though it was a creed. We surprisingly decided that Jesus is not “the criterion by which Scripture is to be interpreted.” We argued over whether God was allowed to call a woman to be a minister and if we were allowed to go to Disneyworld.

For 10 years the moderates struggled to hold things together, but it was not to be. The potentates who took over the Southern Baptist Convention were not paying attention in their Baptist heritage class. The new SBC would not be southern in the hospitable sense of the word or Baptist in the historic sense of the word or what you would hope for in a convention.

The painful process of deciding who gets which kids began. They got Adrian Rogers. We got Melissa Rogers. They got Jimmy Draper. We got Jimmy Allen. They got Jim Henry. We got Jim Dunn. They got Bailey

Smith. We got to keep our Jewish friends. They got the buildings at Glorieta and Ridgecrest. We didn't. They got the seminaries. We got the professors. They got new seminary presidents like Al Mohler. We got new seminary presidents like Molly Marshall. They got 44,000 churches. We got about 1,900 — admittedly less.

Since 1991, Cooperative Baptists have been creating a new yet old way to be Baptist. CBF works with a commitment to global missions, missional churches, women in ministry, theological education and intellectual freedom. Being marginalized leads to creativity. Churches are doing new, exciting, incarnational, Kingdom ministries. Connections are being made between churches and missions. God is at work.

CBF is not as big as some might hope and not as radical as Roger Williams might wish, but if the fundamentalists had not taken over the Southern Baptist Convention, I wonder if I would still be a Baptist. While it is easy for Baptists to remember the good old days fondly, the SBC of 1978 was not particularly diverse, affirming of women or open to new ideas. I will keep trying to explain to my students that history matters. The CBF is not only a new family, but also the reason some of us have a family. We need to tell that story. **BT**

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

Baptists AND THE CIVIL WAR

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Near Washington, D.C., on July 21 beneath a dawning Sunday morning, the war begins in earnest. Under pressure from the northern public to march on the Confederate capital of Richmond, President Lincoln orders Brig. Gen. Irvin McDowell southward, where his Union army encounters Brig. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard's Confederate army.

The two armies square off in fields and woods near the town of Manassas, initiating the first major conflict of the Civil War. Baptists serve on both sides.

News of the battle spreads as the armies clash throughout the morning hours. Confederate sympathizer Mary Beckley Bristow, a member of Sardis Baptist Church in Kentucky, hears cannon fire announcing the battle:

This is a lovely morning, but my heart is sad and restless; have heard the cannons roaring at Cincinnati. I know full well that if they are not deceived by their dispatches, as they have been several times, the roaring of federal cannon brings no good news from the side on which my sympathies are enlisted, the side of liberty and right as I firmly believe.

On the battlefield this day the Union army, initially gaining the upper hand, is forced to retreat late in the afternoon, suffering defeat. Victory is cheered throughout the South; northerners are dismayed and bewildered.

Yet starker than defeat and victory is the human cost of the battle: among the 5,000 casualties, 460 Union and 387 Confederate soldiers lie dead.

Five days later, on Friday, July 26, the South Carolina Baptist Convention convenes in Spartanburg. The first resolution passed by delegates thanks God for the victory at Manassas:

Resolved, That we heartily concur in the recommendation of our



150 YEARS AGO

July 1861

Confederate Congress, to unite in making our late signal victories the occasion of special thanksgiving to God, by appropriate religious services on the approaching Sabbath...

Another resolution voices confidence in God's favoritism of the Confederacy:

Resolved, That, in the present peculiar condition of our political affairs, it becomes us thus to assure our beloved country of our sympathies, prayers and thanksgiving on her behalf; that so far as we can understand the remarkable openings and guidance of Divine Providence, we have but received, in almost every instance, the merciful blessing of our God, as approbation upon the plans our State and Southern Confederacy have deemed it best to adopt; ... we can but rejoice in the oneness of our brethren of this State in prayer and effort to defend our homes, our liberties and our Churches, and encourage them to be assured that, as hitherto, putting our faith in God, though each of us may have much to bear, yet the rod will not finally rest upon us, but that in this most unrighteous and

most wicked attack upon our otherwise peaceful homes, the wickedness of the wicked will return on their own heads.

The following Sunday, one week after Manassas, is a time of rejoicing in many southern Baptist congregations. As black slaves quietly watch from their segregated perches in church balconies, preachers affirm the righteousness of the Confederacy and the liberties of white citizens for whom sons, fathers and brothers are fighting.

Meanwhile, soberness marks many Baptist worship services in the North. The cause of liberty for all men has been dealt a setback. Yet firm are the convictions of many on the home front, buttressed with a certainty that God and righteousness are on the side of the Union.

In community emotions are openly expressed, but in quiet moments lurking anxieties grip the minds of many. As night falls over the broken land this Sunday evening, soldiers on both sides think of their families and wonder what lies ahead.

On the home front, as lamps and candles are snuffed out in thousands of Baptist homes North and South, the grieving of lonely wives, sisters, young children and aged parents alike mingles with the pressing darkness.

Yet among enslaved Baptists despair and despondency has long been a way of life unchosen, a darkness greater than night. While the Baptist faith in its southern expression offers a faint echo of the fervency and emotion of slaves' ancestral religions and provides an otherworldly hope that transcends earthly shackles, southern white divines insist that the Bible's God created blacks for bondage.

Rarely taught to read or write and forced to live in crude shacks, few yet realize that many of their spiritual kin in the North are committed to liberating them from the darkness of slavery. **BT**

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

Motivated by Missions

Brazilian Baptists reach near and far

The first Baptist church in Brazil was formed Sept. 10, 1871, in the city of Santa Bárbara d'Oeste, in the State of São Paulo. The founders of the church were Baptists from the United States who had immigrated to Brazil following the Civil War.

Eight years later, in November 1879, another Baptist church was planted in the city of Americana, then called Estação — the Portuguese word for a railroad station.

Missionaries from America soon followed, and on Oct. 15, 1882, Southern Baptist missionaries William Buck Bagby and Anne Luther Bagby; Zachary Clay Taylor and Kate Stevens Crawford Taylor; and Antonio Teixeira de Albuquerque, a former Roman Catholic priest, planted the First Baptist Church of Salvador, in the State of Bahia.

Salvador, the first capital city of Brazil, was a very important city at the time, and the main purpose of the church was to evangelize Brazilians.

In the first 25 years of their missionary ministry, Bagby and Taylor, assisted by other Baptist missionaries and a growing number of Brazilian Baptists, organized another 83 churches, with a total membership of 4,200 members.

On June 22, 1907, 36 years after the first Baptist church was planted and 25 years after the church in Salvador was organized, the Brazilian Baptist Convention was formally installed. Forty-three messengers attended the first meeting, where they focused on evangelism and missions.

The same inaugural assembly also established a Brazilian Sunday School Board, a

Home Mission Board, and an International Mission Board that hoped to send missionaries to Chile, Portugal and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

Local, national and international missions continue to motivate Brazilian Baptists, whose missionary outreach is now worldwide.

There are two main bodies of Baptists in Brazil: both the Brazilian Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention (organized on Sept. 16, 1967) are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance.

The Brazilian Baptist Convention reports 1.3 million members in 7,657 churches and 4,204 missions or preaching points. The convention supports three national seminaries and 37 regional and state seminaries. Within Brazil, 503 missionaries serve in 25 states. Internationally, 612 missionaries serve in 64 countries.

The National Baptist Convention has more than 400,000 members in 1,565 churches and 1,314 missions and preaching points. It supports one national seminary and 12 regional seminaries. About 70 missionaries serve in Brazil, with 110 missionaries working in trans-cultural missions, including seven who work among Indian tribes. Seventy international



Fausto Vasconcelos

missionaries serve in 23 countries on four continents.

Brazilian Baptists hosted the fourth Youth Baptist Conference in 1953 and the tenth Baptist World Congress in 1960, both events held in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The closing service of the 1960 Congress was held in the Maracanã Soccer Stadium and was attended by nearly 200,000 persons; it remains the best-attended closing service of any congress in the history of the Baptist World Alliance.

Two Brazilian Baptists have occupied the BWA presidency: Dr. João Filson Soren (1960-1965) and Dr. Nilson do Amaral Fanini (1995-2000).

Brazilian Baptists made a significant contribution to the Baptist family through the First National Crusade of Evangelism (1965), followed by the Crusade of the Americas (1969) and the World Mission of Reconciliation (1975). **BT**

—Fausto A. Vasconcelos is director of the Division on Mission, Evangelism & Theological Reflection for the Baptist World Alliance.

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SIX QUESTIONS

about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Editor's note: In this series, various participants respond to the same six questions from Baptists. Today editor John Pierce about their involvement in and understanding of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship that is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

BT: What was your first experience with CBF?

Herron: My first exposure to “free and faithful Baptists” came during the late 1970s as a student at Southwestern Seminary and coming to realize a disturbance had been set loose in the Baptist world. Those days were the first of many to come whereby slander and distrust would become a season of fear and name-calling.

The roots of CBF were born in those days as ministers and laity were forced to determine what they believed and where they stood in the midst of raw politics and fear-mongering. It all culminated with the need to give birth to a fellowship for those who yearned to be free from the politics and to live faithfully apart from such fights.

BT: What is it about CBF that caused you to get and remain engaged?

Herron: I did not attend the first organizational meeting in Atlanta, but have made most since. At the General Assembly I have found kindred spirits who are excited about their ministries and their partnerships with other like-minded Baptists.

What has made me grateful has been the sense of openness and a spirit willing to explore ministry in new forms. The leadership has been people who've spoken clearly and honestly, and of whom I've been proud to call as friends.

BT: What was a significant “CBF moment” for you?

Herron: I would say chief among many CBF moments was the call to Atlanta by President Jimmy Carter for Baptists to gather together to celebrate our shared roots. At that meeting we were brought together as Baptist families who've seldom come to worship and greet one another, recognizing that we're related and share a common purpose and mission.

That spirit created regional meetings around the country. But larger than that is the open recognition that we're Baptists by conviction

and that our common stock means we share the journey together.

BT: How do you explain CBF to others?

Herron: First, I say, “We're different from whatever else you've heard about Baptists.” It's not so much about whatever negative reputations Baptists have earned, as it is the positive nature of our fellowship.

Our first name, “cooperative,” means we're hoping to work together rather than to fight one another. We're the kind of Baptists who want to seek alliances and to share our ministries with others rather than arrogantly thinking we need to always be in control or to lord it over lesser partners.

Second, I'd say our “Baptistness” means we have a good foundation that allows us to celebrate our basic, historic freedoms and be active participants in life. We can make a real contribution to the goodness of our community.

The old preacher might ask a colleague, “Did you have a good gospel to bring?” I believe CBF has a “good gospel” to offer.

BT: What are the biggest challenges facing CBF at age 20?

Herron: In an age of heightened individualism, we need to rediscover in our churches that God has called us to a more fluid community where we can share life and ministry together in trust

knowing God is at work in our midst. These relationships will look less and less like those of the past and will require a spirit of adventure to view our partners with less suspicion allowing for each partner to blend with others for shared ministries.

Most of our churches are losing a sizeable portion of our younger adults. We need a welcoming spirit to new wineskins for the future.

We have to embrace a mission model that is less dependent upon career missionaries and more connected with global partnerships.

Training a new generation of leaders requires working with seminaries and churches



Keith Herron is pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., and moderator-elect of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

to nurture young leaders through education and hands-on experience; the Peer Learning Group system can be further enhanced to provide collegial systems on a regional basis to assist new ministers.

Culturally and racially, the face of the church is changing and we must see the world as our home and our neighbors who may come from different cultures as our brothers and sisters.

BT: What hopes do you have for the Fellowship's future?

Herron: I still believe there is a great need for CBF to exist, but admit it must evolve faster than it has in order to meet the ever-changing needs of our churches. The push-pull of the past, present and future must be less rigidly fought so that a spirit of adventure can guide us in these challenging days.

The task force launched last summer will present a preliminary report this coming year with recommendations for implementing a new organizational model. All of this will be very challenging, and turf issues will need to be navigated delicately.

I suspect some organizations that emerged over the past two decades will not exist in the future. We must become more efficient with our collective resources and see that a larger hand is at work with all of us. **BT**



‘Balcony thinking’

Christian stewardship looks better from above

Raising money in the church isn't that hard if you don't care how you do it. Some years ago I was working in Detroit and happened upon a large suburban church advertising — via flashing front lawn marquee — its “Annual Casino Night.”

The parking lot was packed. They'd turned their parish hall into a veritable Christian gambling den, complete with blackjack, baccarat, a roulette wheel and five-card stud. The joint was jumping.

I located the pastor-croupier and asked what was going on. “Isn't it fabulous?” he enthused. “We do this every year and raise our entire budget in a weekend!”

Gimmicks still abound. A church not far from me is giving away free gas cards to everyone who pledges. The mind boggles at what might be next.

Thankfully, the national stewardship conversation seems to be shifting from “raising the budget” to “changing the culture of giving.”

This is a good thing. But it requires “balcony thinking,” i.e. getting a good look at mission, ministry and calling from up above the weekly demands of budget and cash flow.

Balcony thinking is strategic. It moves past the tactical “what, when, where and how” of annual budgets to the one question that drives generous giving: “WHY?”

Balcony thinking transforms stewardship from an annual “budget emphasis” to a continuing holy conversation among the people of God. It shifts the center of gravity from the church's needs to God's call.

No longer is the appeal, “the church needs your money.” Now we beseech one another in Christ's name, “Come be a fully formed follower of Jesus Christ. Grow in the grace of giving.”

Churches doing balcony thinking about stewardship evidence the following “best practices.”

1. They are unafraid to talk about money. Indeed, they talk about it regularly, as Jesus did. But they don't assign money talk to clergy only. They *all* accept it as essential to the dialogue of faith. And they do it year-round.

2. They do vision-based budgeting, relentlessly evaluating each initiative to see if it continues to support their larger purpose. This kind of balcony thinking requires great courage, because an overriding ministry vision often requires painful decisions about programs, staff, partnerships and other ministry tools. But that same vision can birth new, exciting initiatives of brave, bold Christianity. Truth is, people love giving to exciting visions. They are less wild about funding sentimental institutions committed to scrapbook nostalgia.

3. They assume accountability. Church *membership* is a voluntary covenant of mutual responsibility. Church *leadership* is limited to those who take that covenant seriously.

4. They realize they're not the only Christian ministry in town. Rather than bemoaning the “competition” for the tithe, they are wise enough to recognize that a rising tide lifts all boats. Every time my church passes the offering plates, all the loose cash and coins go to a local ministry caring for people in need. We call it the “noisy” offering. Rather than siphoning funds away from our mission, we believe all that noise prompts a deeper spirit of giving among the faithful.

5. They recognize that wise management of congregational resources includes knowing not only where the money goes, but also from whence it comes. Though they value and practice confidentiality, they

are not paralyzed by an archaic devotion to secrecy that prevents them from careful forecasting and strategic stewardship analysis, not to mention the ability to thank those stewards whose sacrificial giving keeps the church financially strong.

(Recently during lunch with a United Methodist pastor friend, he lamented one of the difficulties of shepherding an increasingly aging congregation. “John,” he said, “last year I buried \$150,000.” My friend wasn't being pastorally insensitive; he was demonstrating balcony thinking about Christian stewardship. He knew that the standard practice of comparing tithes and offerings year to year had blinded his leaders to the truth that their current donor base would cease to exist in five to seven years. Out of that conversation I developed the concept of a donor “age map,” by which client churches could create accurate forecasts of their financial futures and avoid the unhappy surprises visited upon my pastor friend.)

6. They eschew a “one size fits all” approach to stewardship education, recognizing that different people, particularly different age groups, respond to different appeals. And they especially believe that stewardship is too important to be left to adults, so they teach their children well.

7. They plan and budget for stewardship development, setting aside at least three percent of undesignated receipts for the singular purpose of growing and sustaining ongoing financial support for the church's total mission and ministry.

I still bear on my soul the scars of that long-ago Pledge Sunday when the finance committee chair stepped to the pulpit and said, “This is the time of year I dread the most.”

It need not be so. There is a better way. Come up to the balcony, and see. **BT**



—John Hewett is president of Hewett Consulting LLC and a member of Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.

Bringing Baptists together



Ed Pettibone (left) shares a laugh with Howard Sheffey, a retired New York City police officer who moved “up into the country” and was ordained at age 69 to serve as pastor of ABC-affiliated Old Stone Church near Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Pettibones make good connections in the Northeast

BURNT HILLS, N.Y. — What a former U.S. president and heads of various Baptist denominational groups are seeking to do on a large scale through a second New Baptist Covenant event, Ed and Trudy Pettibone are doing quietly in their own corner of the world: introducing Baptists to one another.

Former Southern Baptists who have been individual members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) since its founding nearly 20 years ago, the Pettibones have lived in various parts of the country. Now they are in upstate New York where Trudy is pastor of Burnt Hills Baptist Church, a historic congregation affiliated with the American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABC-USA).

In May, Pastor Trudy and the congregation warmly hosted a regional gathering of CBF churches, known as the Baptist Fellowship of the Northeast. It was an event her husband, Ed, had long sought to host.

In doing so, the Pettibones invited their American Baptist neighbors to attend the two-day gathering. Fellowship Baptists and American Baptists were given the chance to get acquainted on a personal level and to become familiar with various ministries where connections might be made as well.

“I think we should celebrate our common heritage and our similarities,” said Trudy.

“I rejoice in opportunities to help others discover our partnership in ministry and mission.”

Trudy, a graduate of the University of South Florida, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Hebrew Union College, served Baptist congregations in the Adirondacks of New York for six years before accepting the pastorate of Burnt Hills in January 2010.

She recalled a joint meeting of ABC and the CBF in Washington in 2007, and hearing her American Baptist friends share how impressed they were with the Fellowship’s resource fair.

“ABC folk and CBF folk don’t seem to know a lot about each other,” said Trudy. “The recent Baptist Fellowship of the Northeast meeting was an opportunity to continue to introduce people of these two groups to each other.”

Ed, who is retired from government work in his native Indiana, has studied at Southern Seminary as well and is involved in various Baptist activities related to ABC and CBF life. He is also a longtime participant and forum moderator with baptistlife.com.

He and Trudy joined an American Baptist church near their home when moving to Cincinnati in 1998 for her to study at Hebrew Union. But they kept their Fellowship ties by connecting with Joe and Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler at a CBF-related church nearly an hour away. Ed believes “providential guidance” led to their dual Baptist fellowships.

“We attended both regional and national meetings of ABC and CBF,” said Ed, noting that he and Trudy have served in leadership

roles with both Baptist groups.

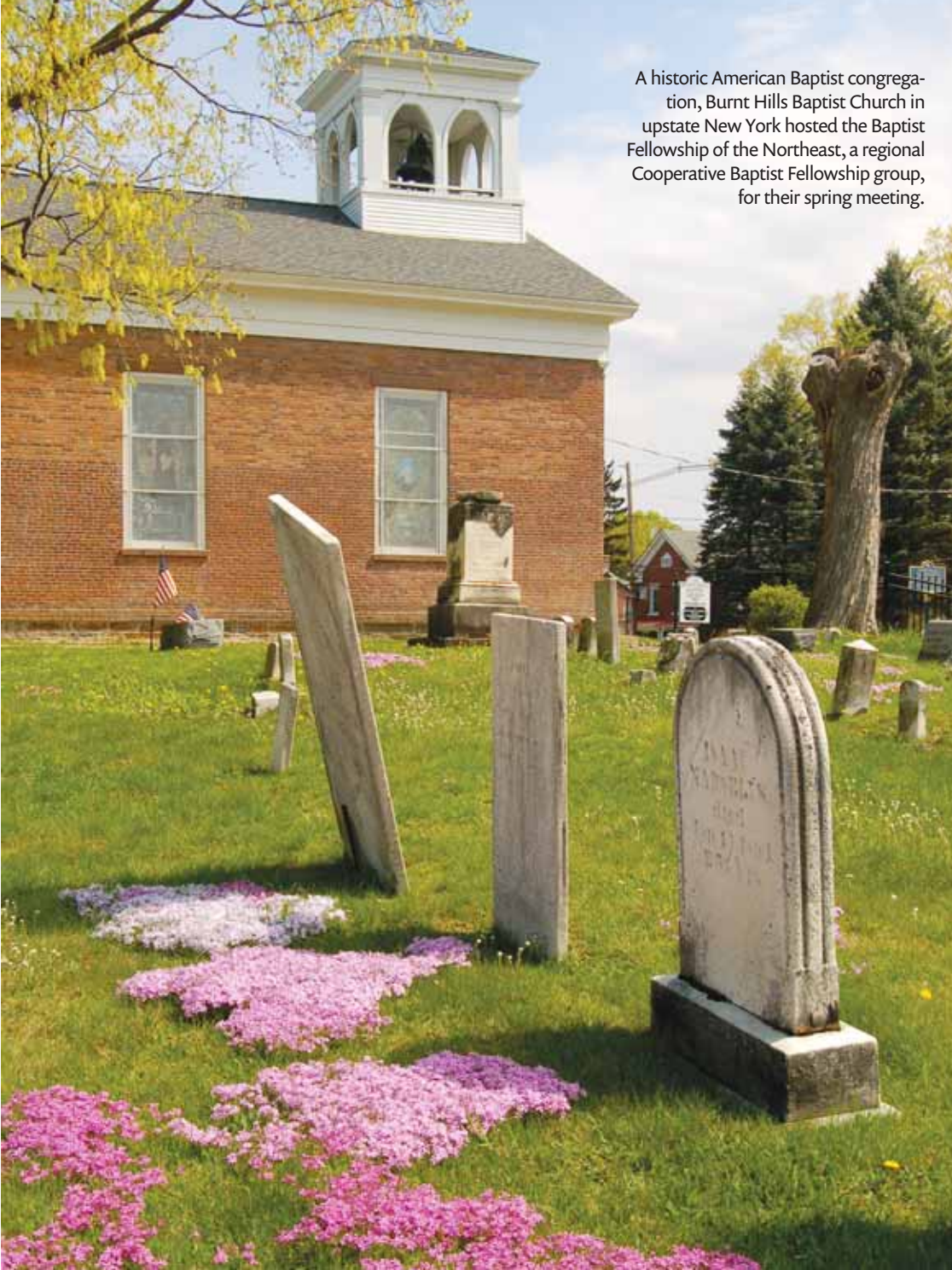
At the May gathering in Burnt Hills, the Pettibones scheduled greetings and brief reports from those they wished to bring together.



Bob Brilling informs a gathering of ABC and Fellowship Baptists about a migrant ministry among the orchard workers in upstate New York.

“Baptists have always come together around missions,” said Jane Lang of the American Baptist Churches of New York State, thanking the Pettibones for assembling the neighboring Baptists to share about various mission opportunities.

Likewise, Baptist Fellowship of the Northeast moderator Randy Parks spoke on “the graciousness of Baptist life in the Northeast” and welcomed the chance for Fellowship and American Baptists to share in worship and fellowship as well as make connecting points for ministry. He is a CBF-endorsed hospital



A historic American Baptist congregation, Burnt Hills Baptist Church in upstate New York hosted the Baptist Fellowship of the Northeast, a regional Cooperative Baptist Fellowship group, for their spring meeting.



Pastor Trudy Pettibone of Burnt Hills Baptist Church enjoys bringing Baptists from different groups together to “share our common heritage and our similarities.”

New Baptist Covenant II gearing up for November multi-site gatherings

BY JOHN PIERCE

ATLANTA — Building on a successful mass gathering of representatives from various Baptist groups from throughout North America in Atlanta in 2008, a second major event — called New Baptist Covenant II — is planned for Nov. 17-19 of this year.

Major programming from Atlanta’s Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church will be broadcast via satellite to several locations including San Antonio, Texas, and Denver, Colo. As additional locations are confirmed, they will be posted along with other information at newbaptistcovenant.org.

Once again, the program will focus on Jesus’ call in Luke 4 to “bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

On Saturday, Nov. 19, the final day of the event, each host city will coordinate opportunities for local mission involvement.

chaplain serving in Sparta, N.J.

Bob Brillung shared about the work American Baptists — through the Capital Baptist Association in New York — are doing with migrant workers who seasonally populate the large apple orchards in the upstate.

Churches, he said, are needed to visit and interact with workers and to help provide health-care kits. But he warned: “Once you do it, it’s hard to back away from it.”

Brillung said churches of various denominations have joined American Baptists in the Migrant North Ministries and there is room for more. Ministry opportunities include hosting activities such as dinners or game nights for orchard workers, and discovering any health-related needs.

He said the workers discover that “someone cares about them for something other than

picking apples.”

Those active in the Baptist Fellowship of the Northeast, a CBF regional group led by Ken and Sandy Hale, shared about various ministries on college campuses and in urban settings.

While tied to different groups within Baptist life, each of these persons shared common commitments to ministry and historic Baptist principles of autonomy and cooperation.

And they were all brought together by Trudy and Ed Pettibone — who quietly but effectively build good Baptist bridges out of the framework of their own relationships and experiences.

“We are excited about both CBF and ABC,” said Ed. “We are each heavily invested in both, and we enjoy talking about each and sharing our experiences with others of whatever Baptist signage.” **BT**

CBF, Texas Baptist leaders respond to

Reply

By Steve Vernon

Cooperative missions changing, not dead

In the May issue (page 26), Mark Wingfield asked, “Is cooperative missions dead?” I would suggest that the premise is overstated.

Cooperative missions is not dead but changing. The old prepackaged mission program is an old paradigm that churches and most denominations are not adopting.

What are the realities and changes in this new era of missions?

It will take all of us together. There is

not one church or even a collection of a few churches that can reach the entire world. The efforts of many churches in missions can multiply the efforts of a few in amazing ways. It is the “five loaves and two fish” principle.

It will take churches of all sizes. Wingfield suggests that small churches are needy and a part of a welfare system that large churches are asked to support. In many cases the opposite of Wingfield’s assessment is true.

Small churches sacrificially support missions in a way that not many large churches do. Many small churches regularly give 10 percent of their income past the local church. Large churches tend to talk in terms of dollars and not in terms of percentage because their percentage is small.

Is it easier for a small church to give 10 percent of its income beyond the local church than for a large church? Is it easier for a poor man to tithe 10 percent than a rich man? The truth is that it takes all of the churches, big and small, cooperating together.

To reach the world before us with the hope of Christ will take denominations, churches, agencies, institutions and individual Christians collaborating together.

Wingfield suggests that the missing piece is a denominational structure serving as a connector between churches and direct

providers. The reality is denominations are becoming just that.

They are uniquely positioned to collaborate the efforts of schools and seminaries, hospitals and human care agencies, associations, churches and individual Christians to share the hope of Christ with the world. They have collaborated across the world in education, church starting, disaster relief, mission response, and world hunger just to name a few.

What will be required is a vision to reach the world. It is a vision that will require churches to see beyond themselves. In any church the vision to reach the world can get lost behind the local ministries expected by its members.

In the same way, it is a vision that will require denominations to see beyond the “meet every need of every church” mentality that was a part of previous years. It will require a world vision that utilizes cooperation among indigenous national conventions, and state and national conventions in the United States.

It will include cooperation to support missionaries sent from other countries to countries where missionaries from the United States cannot go. It will require collaboration and cooperation in new ways.

In a rapidly changing world the way we do missions cooperatively must be dynamic and fluid. It is the challenge of Acts 1:8. That is the “clear call to which we can march.” **BT**

—Steve Vernon is acting executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.



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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
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*What will be required is a vision to reach the world.
It is a vision that will require churches to see beyond themselves.*

Reply

By Jack Glasgow

Fellowship's mission strategy not 'radically altered' by UN goals

I would like to address the article by Mark Wingfield in the May 2011 edition titled, "Is Cooperative Missions Dead?" The writer claimed that "CBF radically altered its mission strategy to follow the Millennial Development Goals of the United Nations."

I wish to correct any misconceptions his statement is likely to create among readers.

At the 2007 CBF General Assembly in Washington, D.C., a motion passed from the floor with near unanimous support asking the CBF Coordinating Council "to investigate the feasibility and means by which the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship might be involved with acting with other bodies to reach the United Nations Millennium Development Goals." The Council acted responsibly to that motion.

It voted without dissent in October 2007 for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to support the Millennium Development Goals after a time of education and questioning aided by ministry partner Bread for the World. We surveyed our global missions personnel and found that our field personnel were already engaged in more than 100 projects that were relevant to the Millennium Development Goals.

At the 2008 General Assembly in Memphis we reported on the council's action and encouraged local congregations and individual Christians to find ways to share Christ in ministries that support one

or more of the goals. As an example, the youth of my church built beautiful crosses they sold to the congregation during the following Lenten season to support "Watering Malawi."

At that same meeting, in discernment sessions on establishing strategic priorities, support for ministries that are related to the MDG's was one of the top three priorities selected by the attendees who participated in the discernment process as well as those who took the survey online.

In no way did these actions constitute a radical altering of the mission strategy of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. There were no directives sent from the council to



Goals to be full partners with us in our mission endeavors that were consistent with those goals. We were not being directed by the United Nations, but by our understanding of Jesus and our commitment to global missions that shares God's love in word and deed.

In these challenging and changing times the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is striving to share a compelling vision of a global missions effort that will inspire the support of Baptist Christians of every generation and Baptist congregations throughout our Fellowship. The challenge is great, and the interest and ideas of the article's author are appreciated and should be a part of a vibrant conversation to help us find a better way to increase passion and commitment to missions.

I simply do not think the conversation is well served by the inaccurate statement

The interest and ideas of the article's author are appreciated and should be a part of a vibrant conversation to help us find a better way to increase passion and commitment to missions.

the leadership of Global Missions to alter our strategy in any way.

We simply responded to the energy and passion of our constituents to point out that their passion for addressing the suffering of the poor, hungry, uneducated and oppressed the world over was indeed consistent with the teachings of Jesus and our mission strategy in CBF to be the presence of Christ among the most neglected.

We welcomed those focused on the realization of the Millennium Development

that CBF has failed to come up with its own mission goals and is asking its congregations and individuals to "give to the offering for Global Missions so we can support the goals of the United Nations." We are about so much more than that through our CBF-supported mission endeavors. **BT**

—Jack Glasgow is pastor of Zebulon Baptist Church in Zebulon, N.C., and a former moderator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Baptist leader Louie D. Newton of Atlanta shows the Communion chalice he received on a 1946 visit to Moscow. This contributed photo from 1947 was taken at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C.

Editor's note: The story is based on a report in Visions, newsletter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia.

Common cup

Well-traveled chalice brings Baptists from two Georgias closer together



1947
Photo by Cooper
Meredith College
chapel in the
background

MACON, Ga. — When a partnership was struck between the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia and a Baptist group in the Republic of Georgia several years ago, leaders expected cross-cultural learning and Christian fellowship. But no one imagined a historic Communion chalice would bind the two groups more closely.

Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, who leads the Evangelical Baptist Church in Georgia, was doing research at Oxford University in February 2010 when he came across the name of Louie D. Newton in files related to the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the USSR.

Newton, an Atlanta pastor, educator and denominational leader, had been part of

the Russian War Relief delegation. He visited Russia in 1946 to meet with political and religious leaders.

Newton's report to the BWA was in the research material — although one part was missing. So Malkhaz asked a couple of American friends, including Susan Broome, an archivist with Mercer University, for help.



'HANDSOME VESSEL'

Additional material noted that Newton, while in Moscow, had been given a chalice that once belonged to the Baptist church in Tbilisi (the capital of the Republic of Georgia). From some earlier historical work for Atlanta's Druid Hills Baptist Church where Newton was pastor, Susan recalled seeing a photo of him holding the chalice.

As part of his doctoral research at Oxford, Malkhaz gained interest in Newton's trip to Tbilisi and other parts of the Soviet Union at the time — particularly the possibility that the Southern Baptist leader had met with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Susan checked with one of Newton's grandsons who confirmed that the two pipe-smokers had indeed met.

Nearly 65 years after its presentation to Newton, Susan wondered if the chalice — which she described as "a very handsome vessel" — might be found. However, it was not in Mercer's holdings of Newton's personal records, nor at Druid Hills Baptist Church, the American Baptist Historical Society or the Southern Baptist Historical Library.

After searching various Baptist archives, Susan Broome of Mercer University's library staff, found the historic chalice in the university's Louie D. Newton Chapel. CBF of Georgia photo.



TWO GEORGIANS — Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, who leads the Evangelical Baptist Church in the Republic of Georgia, and Frank Broome, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, have built a partnership that brings Baptists from the two Georgias together. Now a historic common Communion chalice connects the two groups more closely. Photo by John Pierce.

Research materials about the chalice and its presentation to Newton grew, however, and were shared with Malkhaz.

SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

“I came to realize that this was the first chalice ever to be acquired by the first Baptist church in the Russian Empire of which then Georgia was a part,” said Malkhaz. “Dr. Newton had reported that the chalice was purchased by N. Voronin, who was the first Baptist to be baptized in the river Mtakvari that divides the Georgian capital of Tbilisi into two parts.”

Baptists in the Republic of Georgia knew nothing about the chalice, he said, but were thrilled when Susan shared a photograph. Communion (or Eucharist) is very important to Georgian Baptists.

“We had a photo of the first chalice with which our spiritual ancestors celebrated Eucharist,” he said, “the chalice from which all of our martyrs and teachers of faith drank.”

Georgian Baptists have their share of martyrs — including church founder Ilia Kandelaki, who was assassinated by Bolshevik

authorities when returning from a mission trip, and Ekaterine Kutateladze, a woman who endured heavy persecution to teach the faith.

‘DRINK YE ALL OF IT’

Malkhaz had built a good friendship with Susan and her husband Frank Broome, coordinator of CBF of Georgia. They had hosted each other on international visits.

Settling for a photo of the chalice was not enough. One of Susan’s colleagues mentioned that former Mercer University President Kirby Godsey had referred to a chalice in a taped interview.

Chalice was “not a word that Baptists use very often,” Susan noted. “Why would he mention a chalice if he’d not seen one?”

A few nights later as she tried to sleep, her mind flashed to the anteroom in Mercer’s chapel — the Louie D. Newton Chapel.

The next day she walked over to the chapel and through an unlocked door to the room where the historic chalice was the centerpiece of a display about Newton. The gold-plated silver chalice was engraved with a

Latin phrase meaning “Drink ye all of it.”

The well-traveled chalice — which had drawn little attention in recent years — had been found.

SYMBOL OF FELLOWSHIP

By this time, Malkhaz had good background material: the chalice was likely used at the church in Tbilisi until 1928, when Georgian minister M.A. Orlov became pastor of Moscow’s First Baptist Church, the largest Baptist congregation in the Soviet Union.

The chalice was sent with him as an expression of love and a symbol of fellowship with Russian Baptists.

With further research, Susan learned that Newton had visited the Kremlin on Aug. 8, 1946, and presented Stalin with two smoking pipes and a copy of the New Testament. However, he reported being “prohibited to speak about the meeting.”

That evening, Newton preached at Moscow Central Baptist Church where he shared Communion with other ministers and was presented with the chalice as a gift.

A GIFT AGAIN

Last fall, Malkhaz attended the CBF of Georgia meeting in Macon and held the Communion chalice that connects the two Baptist groups as well as much of his fellowship’s history. He was given a framed picture of the historic cup, but Mercer University President Bill Underwood agreed that the chalice itself should once again become a gift that binds Baptists across miles and cultures.

So later this year, two Communion services — using the well-traveled chalice — will be held in the state of Georgia, including one in Newton Chapel. Then the Broomes and others will take the chalice back to its first Georgian home.

Upon presenting the chalice, Georgians and Americans — connected by a common faith and the Baptist tradition — will share the Eucharist in Tbilisi’s Peace Cathedral.

“The chalice was found owing to the friendship, cooperation and partnership of a great number of people in the United Kingdom and the United States,” said Malkhaz, filled with gratitude. “Had I not been doing research in Oxford, had I not been friends with the Broomes, had they not known of the Newton archives and been interested in the Republic of Georgia, the chalice would never have been found.” **BT**

Showing respect

Reblog

By Tony W. Cartledge

During a 12-day visit to Israel, the West Bank and Jordan, one of my jobs was to keep an eye on the agenda so everyone knew how to dress each day. If we visited sites considered to be particularly sacred to Catholics, Jews or Muslims, both men and women wore something that covered their shoulders and legs, below the knee.

We didn't have any men so gauche as to be wearing tank tops, so for them it was just a matter of wearing long pants on those days — a time when zip-off pants legs came in handy. Several of the women purchased scarves or shawls they could use for wraps, or wore light skirts over their shorts.

In synagogues or other places sacred to Jews, such as the Western Wall, men also had to cover their heads in some fashion. Disposable yamulkes (or *kippahs*, as they are also known) were available for Gentiles, though regular hats were also permitted. A few of our guys bought their own yamulkes and pinned them on, which made for an interesting sight.

Interestingly, Jews believe men show respect for God by covering at least part of the head while Christians believe we show respect by removing our hats when we enter a church, or when we pray (with the excep-



tion of clergy who get to wear big pointy hats in Catholic and Anglican traditions).

My philosophy for wearing headgear is entirely utilitarian: I wear it when needed for protection from the sun, rain or cold — or on formal occasions at school when we're required to put on our academic zoot suits and funny velvet hats.

The Bible says very little about head coverings. In the Old Testament, those who were pledged as Nazirites were not to cut their hair until their vow was completed, at which time they were to shave their heads. Ultra-Orthodox Jews grow long curly locks

Selections from recent blogs at
baptiststoday.org

in front of their ears in slavish obedience to Lev. 19:27, which says “you shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.”

And, there's Paul's odd (and culturally conditioned) theological view that men should pray with their heads uncovered, since they were created in the image of God, while women should pray with veiled heads, because their creation is a reflection of man (1 Cor. 11:1-16). Oy.

It's interesting that many fundamentalist interpreters are all gung-ho about men having authority over women, but blithely throw out the part about women needing to keep their heads veiled.

Where, at the end of the day, does this leave us? What's respectful in one tradition is disrespectful in another.

I think it's appropriate to respect others' traditions: if I'm asked to wear a hat at the Western Wall or long pants in the Church of the Nativity, I will — but I do it to respect the people for whom such practices are important.

I really don't think God gives a rip whether our head, shoulders or knees are covered when we come to a place of prayer. Respect for God is not a matter of what's on our heads, but what's in our hearts. **BT**



From endurance to inspiration

By John Pierce

There were 96 members of my daughter's high school class who received diplomas this spring. The school has an Honors Night tradition of having a teacher say something about each graduate.

So I arrived at the dinner event in the same endurance mode as earlier days of piano recitals: sit through and applaud all, but really care about only one.

For the most part, faculty speakers were concise — and a few even entertaining. Students hustled to the stage for their moment in the spotlight.

Stories of academic and athletic prowess flowed as expected. Others were noted for their school spirit or leadership skills. For a few, teachers made up

something.

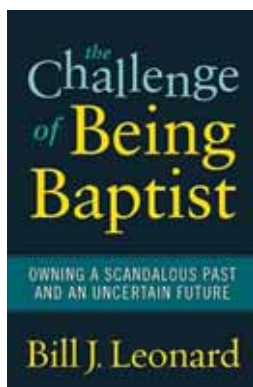
What surprised me most, however, were the stories of generosity and selfless acts: students who serve those in need locally or go on international mission trips — beyond official community-service requirements.

One teacher told of seeing a student stash a wad of money in a bucket set up for loose change to meet the needs of a hurting family. Counting the money at the end of the school day, he found \$86 in rolled bills among the quarters and dimes.

The next day he asked the student about the money. She shrugged and said: “I had a good birthday — and thought I'd share.”

The night was long. Endurance was expected and needed. But inspiration was found as well. **BT**

A review by Bruce Gourley



The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future

by Bill J. Leonard
(2010, Baylor University Press)

For good or bad, democracy is the Baptist way of doing church

Democracy is both the genius of, and the problem with, being Baptist — suggests Bill Leonard, a leading interpreter of Baptist life, in this brief, easily readable survey of historical Baptist themes.

At the heart of Baptist polity is democracy, a “messy, controversial, and divisive” foundation for doing church, writes the longtime professor of church history and former dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. While subject to the changing will of the majority, democracy nonetheless preserves ever-important minority, dissenting viewpoints.

For much of the 400 years of Baptists’ existence, they were a minority faith. Often persecuted by colonial-era “Christian” theocracies, Baptist dissenters responded by championing religious liberty for all and separation of church and state. Yet in the 20th century Baptists became a powerful, majority faith, and their commitments to their heritage wavered.

In the words of Leonard, “as a religious community, Baptists have never done well with privilege.”

At the heart of Leonard’s framing of Baptists’ “scandalous past” lies an early faith rejected by orthodox Christianity and welcoming of internal contradictions. Baptists’ refusal to embrace creeds led to their branding as heretics, while the co-existence of competing Arminian and Calvinist theologies within the Baptist family guaranteed a legacy of schisms.

Early Baptist community, in short, was founded upon the principle of soul liberty as expressed in freedom of conscience and lived out in dissent within and without. Early Baptists’ vocal insistence upon freedom of religion

for *all* persons did little to discourage criticism and persecution from other Christians.

Such was Baptists’ commitment to freedom that they were “obsessed with conscience and voice for heretic and atheist alike,” Leonard observes, lending credibility to charges of theological impropriety and civil offenses. Becoming a Baptist was not for the faint of heart, and being a Baptist required courage in the face of the ever-present threat of persecution.

Against this historical legacy of a defiant, dissenting minority faith free and uncoerced to the point of being scandalous, Leonard examines current divisions in Baptist life. Noting that multiple ways of being Baptist are evidenced to this day, Leonard finds strength in permissive diversity. From biblical interpretation to conversion to church polity, the Baptist narrative yesteryear and today is comprised of many evolving stories that sometimes seem to be more at odds with one another than they are similar.

While the dynamic nature of Baptist faith past, present and future makes some contemporary Baptists uncomfortable, Leonard demurs. Well aware is the author that religious, generational, social, cultural, political, technological and other challenges of the 21st century frame the larger perspective of that which today’s Baptists are becoming, creating a desire on the part of some to retrench around a stack pole of theological certainty or rigid organizational structure.

Yet Leonard warns against a modern desire to force the Baptist name into creedal straightjackets or denominational exclusivity. Whether one chooses to verbalize the Baptist name or not in the 21st century, Leonard points Baptists toward a future from the past.

The early English Baptists at Amsterdam, he reminds us, were a community of confessing believers united in their commitment to freedom of conscience and dissent (both expressed in the radical concept of believer’s baptism); voluntarily gathered together in local congregations; and affirming of biblical

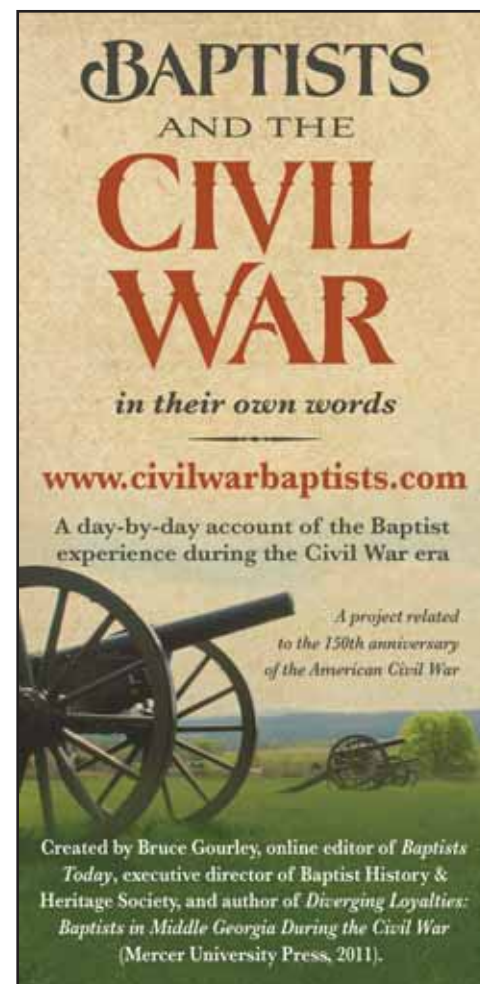
authority and guidance under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

And thus Bill Leonard positions the Baptist future upon the confessions and faith of the earliest Baptists, who four centuries ago stood up in dissent and transformed the trajectory of Christianity. In the face of an uncertain 21st century future, *The Challenge of Being Baptist* is to stand firm upon the freedom of individual conscience, devoted to the community of the faithful and committed to the messiness of democratic polity. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society in addition to serving as online editor for Baptists Today.



Bruce Gourley



New book says Gen. MacArthur flooded Japan with post-war religion

A new book on post-war Japan says Gen. Douglas MacArthur sought to fill the country's "spiritual vacuum" with religious and quasi-religious beliefs, from Christianity to Freemasonry, as an antidote to communism.

In 1945 *Under the Shadow of the Occupation: The Ashlar and The Cross*, Japanese investigative journalist Eiichiro Tokumoto documents MacArthur's efforts to persuade missionaries to intensify their efforts, even encouraging mass conversions to Catholicism.

"There was a complete collapse of faith in Japan in 1945 — in our invincible military, in the emperor, in the religion that had become known as 'state Shinto,'" Tokumoto writes.

A number of documents Tokumoto used for research were declassified only recently, including accounts of a 1946 meeting between MacArthur and two U.S. Catholic bishops.

"General MacArthur asked us to urge

the sending of thousands of Catholic missionaries — at once," Bishops John F. O'Hara and Michael J. Ready later reported to the Vatican. MacArthur told them that they had a year to help fill the "spiritual vacuum" created by the defeat.

Based on his experience in the Philippines, MacArthur believed the Catholic Church could find particular appeal because the tradition of seeking absolution for one's mistakes or misdeeds "appeals to the Oriental," they reported.

In the wake of the missionaries' efforts, the Bible became a best-seller in Japan, while the number of Catholics climbed about 19 percent between 1948 and 1950, Tokumoto said. The missionaries' success, however, was short-lived. Relatively few of the 2,000 or so who flooded into Japan could speak Japanese, and the 1960s saw a student backlash against perceived "elite" Christians who ran several major universities. **BT**

Gallup finds same-sex relations, marriage receive record approval

BY ADELLE M. BANKS

Religion News Service

Nearly two-thirds of Americans say gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should be legal, the highest percentage ever recorded by Gallup. Researchers found that 64 percent of American adults supported legal gay relations, which Gallup has included in surveys since 1977.

Despite the high rate of support for gay relations, Americans are less likely — 56 percent — to consider them "morally acceptable," even as that figure is the highest measured since Gallup first asked that question in 2001.

Americans who believe same-sex orientation is inherent are much more likely to think legal gay relations are morally acceptable, with 81 percent approval, compared to just 33 percent who believe a person's sexual orientation is due to environmental factors.

The same poll, taken May 5-8, found that a majority of Americans (53 percent) supported gay marriage for the first time since Gallup started tracking the issue in 1996. Catholics are more likely than Protestants to support legal same-sex marriage. **BT**

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Romans 12:2



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Joan Baez and Bob Dylan at the Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C., in August 1963. Photograph courtesy of U.S. Information Agency. Press and Publications Service. (ca. 1953 - ca. 1978)

“Some find Dylan merely using religious terms and imagery artistically but with no particular theological intent, whereas others find in his songs meaningful engagements with ultimate questions.”

— Michael J. Gilmour

Mystifying messages

At 70, Bob Dylan’s music, religious mystique endure

Through the 1960s, Bob Dylan was hailed as a prophet, first of folk music, then of rock ‘n’ roll — at least by those who forgave him the heresy of having “gone electric.”

But when rock’s best-known Jew famously declared Jesus to be the answer, many fans turned on him.

For five decades, Robert Allen Zimmerman, who turned 70 on May 24, has shocked, mystified, baffled and intrigued fans with songs rife with biblical references, both Jewish and Christian, and no shortage of religious imagery.

For Michael J. Gilmour, an associate professor of New Testament and English literature at Providence College in Manitoba, Canada, and author of the book *Gods and Guitars*, Dylan proves an irresistible subject for theological analysis.

Some fans gladly embrace the idea of Dylan as a secular prophet, a term vague enough to permit “a semblance of religiosity that does not actually connect the singer to a faith tradition in any way,” Gilmour writes in his recent book, *The Gospel According to Bob Dylan*.

And while some might bristle at linking the word “gospel” to Dylan, Gilmour calls the famous songster a “serious religious thinker,” even a “musical theologian.”

Dylan often mentions God in his songs,

“and though he rarely attempts to define what the term means, he still points us toward that vague Other,” Gilmour writes.

The author, 44, said he experienced something of a religious awakening at age 13 while attending a church camp, where he heard Dylan’s “Slow Train Coming,” a song born of the singer’s embrace of evangelical Christianity in 1979.

“It was the first time I listened to anything with sustained reflection on spiritual themes,” Gilmour said in an interview. “And the idea that a well-known celebrity actually took religion seriously struck me as rather important.”

Raised Jewish, Dylan had a bar mitzvah and, after a visit to Israel in 1971, even pronounced the late far-right Rabbi Meir Kahane “a really sincere guy.” Convalescing from a motorcycle accident and leading up to the 1967 album *John Wesley Harding*, he reportedly read the Bible extensively.

While former Beatle George Harrison embraced Hinduism without fuss and singer Cat Stevens became a pious Muslim, Dylan’s public and unexpected turn to Christianity was met with wide derision.

The singer has since seemed to return to the Jewish fold. He has supported the ultra-Orthodox Chabad Lubavitch movement, even studying at one of its yeshivas, and had his sons, Samuel Isaac Abraham and Jakob Luke,

bar mitzvah.

However, Gilmour believes it’s “hard to answer where (Dylan) is now” religiously. “He’s always going on first dates but never actually settles into a long-term relationship.”

“As far as I know, he never actually attended church on a regular basis.”

In any event, Dylan has recovered from that earlier disdain, Gilmour said.

“The impression I get from his concerts is that people cheer just as loudly for those (Christian gospel) songs as they do for the others,” he said.

Dylan treated Pope John Paul II to a stirring rendition of “Blowin’ in the Wind” and other standards at the 1997 World Eucharist Congress. For Gilmour, Dylan’s papal show and his apparent return to Judaism show the musician “respects religion.”

Dylan has been truly mystified about the fuss over his spiritual messages, Gilmour writes, though he was “not above nurturing this mystique and indulging it occasionally (but) no doubt with a sense of irony (and) exaggerated self-description.”

Gilmour confesses his answer is always the same when someone asks him about Dylan’s personal spiritual beliefs: “I do not know. Ultimately it’s none of my business. All I can say with any confidence is that religious language is everywhere in his songs.” **BT**

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