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*Join us for a cup  
of coffee every Sunday  
morning in the kitchen  
before Church School*

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STEEPLE VIEWS



# STEEPLE VIEWS

First Presbyterian Church

December, 2008

Martinsville, Virginia

## From My Perspective Within The Kingdom

As I write this article, Thanksgiving is just around the corner. I was reminded of the following story: Matthew Henry, the famous Bible scholar, was once accosted by thieves and robbed of his wallet. He wrote these words in his diary about the experience: "Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

I admire Matthew Henry's ability to see the good in a very bad situation. His perspective on life, which exudes gratitude, enables him to see that "the glass is half-full and not half-empty." His outlook on life reminds me of the Apostle Paul's affirmation: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Matthew Henry could reflect on his experience of being robbed and find ways to rejoice because, while it was bad, it was not as bad as it could have been. There was much to be thankful for in that situation. Matthew Henry had cultivated an attitude of gratitude!

Likewise, last month I went on a retreat with ten other colleagues from our presbytery. Part of the, we discussed Thomas G. Long's book, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, which the Margaret Irby Sunday School class had studied some time earlier year. I was struck by something Tom Long said about starting each new day. He said that many times we ask each other, "What do you have to do today?" This is a question about our jobs, responsibilities, commitments, and schedules. On vacation days, the question changes to "What would you like to do today?" This question focuses on pleasure; we are free from the usual burdens and we can sleep late, dress casually, and plan the day as we see fit. Then, Tom Long suggests that for people of faith there is a third way to put the question: not "What do I have to do?" or "What would I like to do?" but "What can I do today that would be joyful?" Beyond burden and pleasure, what could we do this day to bring deep joy? (p. 70)

I have tried my best to ask that question of myself, and I would suggest that it's a good exercise of faith for you to attempt as well. When we look for joy in the day, as we seek, we will find. Even on some of the most stressful days, there is some joyful, grace-filled experience waiting to happen or be discovered. This third question causes us to live our lives with purpose rather than simply going through the motions, day in and day out. As I noted, ever since I read that bit of wisdom, I have tried to put it into practice; and, I have found that it really does work! There is joy headed our way and, if we are expectant to find joy, we will – just like Matthew Henry. We will not be disappointed.

Also, just around the corner - beginning Sunday, November 30 – is the season of Advent, which is the four-week period in which the church joyfully remembers the coming of Christ and eagerly looks forward to his coming again. During Advent, as we focus on and prepare for the coming of the Christ – first in Bethlehem and in our hearts anew – we will certainly look for and find deep joy in each new day and throughout Advent. Here is good news at its best: we will find joy in "Immanuel" – God with us (and for us!) - in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior!

In Christ's love,  
Randy



**Angel Trees are Back!** Once again this year, our congregation is adopting several needy families in the Martinsville/Henry County community. The trees are up in the narthex and the hallway outside the church office. Please return your gifts to the church office no later than Wednesday, December 10, at noon. The gifts should be wrapped with the angels attached on the outside.

### **A Word from the Associate Pastor:**

We are now in the midst of Advent, that season where we celebrate the incarnation, which is the fact that Christ took on human flesh and became one of us, through the birth of a little baby boy in Bethlehem. Jesus gave up the comforts of a place at his Father's right hand in the heavenly kingdom to live among us; he faced persecution, pain, disappointment, and betrayal.

In Philosophical Fragments, Soren Kierkegaard, the renowned Danish theologian of the early 1800s, tried to explain how ridiculous the idea of the incarnation appears to many people. Kierkegaard told a parable of a king who was very influential. All of his subjects were in awe of his power. His king was so intimidating that no one would even consider opposing him.

One day while in a poorer part of a local village, the king looked out the window of his carriage and saw a beautiful peasant maiden. It was love at first sight as the king's heart melted. He often passed by the same spot, hoping she'd be there again. But he had a problem: how could he tell her that he loved her?

The king could have ordered her to marry him. He could bring her to the royal palace and amaze her with fancy meals, clothes, and jewels. She would not resist his plans, but would she love him? She would say she loved him, but would she really? Even a king wants his bride to choose him. The king hoped he could make her happy.

He could ride to the front door of her cottage in the royal carriage robed in expensive garments, flanked by a royal escort waving decorative banners. That, too, would overwhelm her. He did not want a wife in awe of him. He wanted a partner, a lover, and an equal. He hoped she could forget that he was a king and she was a humble maiden. He wanted mutual love to bridge the enormous divide between them.

He decided that he needed to take on the true form of a servant, and make the maiden love the incarnation of him. He gave

up his royal vestments. He gave up his loyal guards and spacious living quarters. He moved into the village with the garb of a peasant. He lived among the people, sharing their joys and concerns. In time, the maiden grew to love the man for who he was. She loved him because he reached out and first loved her.

Kierkegaard suggests that God must first take the form of a servant through Jesus Christ so that our love would be genuine. God was humbled to become, not just a man, but even a vulnerable little baby boy. God is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing): both characteristics are awe-inspiring and humbling. But God would rather gain our trust because of our Lord's great love for us. Instead of wooing us with power or knowledge, God woos us with love. That's Good News and a wonderful reason to celebrate this Christmas season!

Peace in Christ,  
Jody Moore



### **Happy Birthday in December**

- 1 Anne Vipperman
- 2 Margaret Hotchkiss, Erik Stegall
- 3 Dru Rothrock
- 4 Ashby Pritchett, Deb Easley
- 5 Ken Wilson, Keith Sanders, Roslyn Ramsey, Katherine Lester
- 8 Lyn Davis
- 9 Joan Montgomery, Chris Wingfield, Jack Adkins
- 10 Betsy Haskins, Marion Miller
- 11 John Kuhn
- 12 Ron Dailey
- 14 Merv King
- 15 Kim Boyd
- 17 Matthew Mason
- 18 Bill Kirby
- 19 Beth Chapman
- 20 Claire Adkins
- 22 Jeb Bowles, Vera Jane Kuhn, Grayson Russell
- 24 Jackie McLachlan
- 26 Smith Chaney
- 27 Nancy Moore, Cathy Stone, Gael Chaney

- 28 Doc Altizer, Brenda Williams  
 29 Ken Smith, Denise Unterbrink, Lucy Wilson, Kimberly Toothman

**and in January**

- 4 Vicki Easley, Melissa Seamon, Marie Thompson  
 5 Katherine Earles, Ashley Pruitt  
 6 John Chappell, Iliene Hite, Lea Washburn  
 7 Buck Flythe, Rob King  
 8 Stan Cobb  
 9 Jennifer Nease  
 29 Alan Ferguson, Rusty Reaser  
 30 Pat Hokanson, Lanie Walsh  
 31 Jim Haskins, Mattie Wingfield

**SYMPATHY** of the congregation is extended to Marian Campbell and Cliff and Allyson Campbell on the death of Marian's sister and Cliff's aunt, Nancy Keaton, on November 5, 2008, in Manassas, Virginia.

**SYMPATHY** of the congregation is extended to Joe, Susan, and Sam Smith on the death of Joe's brother, Ronald Charles Smith, on November 17, 2008, in Martinsville.

**Congratulations** to Scott and Elizabeth Geier on the birth of their daughter, Georgette Elizabeth Geier, on November 17, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina. Bill and Mary Manning are the proud grandparents and Mary Page is the proud great grandmother!

**The Power of a Simple Gift**



The youth participated in a world-wide mission project at First Presbyterian on November 9 and 16-  
**Operation Christmas Child.**  
 One hundred seventeen (117)

shoeboxes were wrapped by members of the youth group and friends, participants in Betsy's Christmas play and their parents, and volunteers from the congregation and their family members. The youth and advisors thank you for donating packed wrapped

boxes, items to be packed, and donations for shipping. This was truly an inspirational event for all. Many children will experience Christmas joy when they receive these gift-filled boxes. **Thank you** for making an eternal difference in the lives of hurting children and their families.

Thank you,  
 Youth Group

**A Note of Thanks from the Richeson Family**

Liz Owens and Bob Richeson wish to thank the church family for the food, cards, visits, prayers, concern and help during their Dad's (Jack) illness. He has made progress for which they are very thankful.

**The Tempo  
 "Our Musical Pulse"**

**Chancel Choir**

For the Chancel Choir, Advent and Christmas has already arrived. Music is in the folders and preparation is happening for the Sunday Morning 11:00 worship service as well as the Advent and Christmas Lessons Service which is on Sunday evening, December 21, at 7:00 p.m. I am glad to say that several singers have joined us for this program.

For regular singers, Wednesday evening rehearsals are from 7:00-8:00, and for regular and program singers, rehearsals are from 8:00-9:00. For those who desire more rehearsal on the program music, there is a 10:00-10:30 rehearsal on Sunday mornings with the exception of November 16 and December 14.

One special part of the Advent and Christmas Lessons Service will be the playing of the Roanoke Chamber Brass, five top notch players who will play an extended prelude and accompany some of the congregational hymns as well as the final anthem. Our own Erik Stegall is a member of that quintet and plays Trombone. Jeff Kresge and Steve Hedrick, Trumpets, have played in our church many times before. We also welcome Donna Chernault, French Horn, and Charlie Krause, Tuba.

The Christmas Music Service is open to all so make your plans to come to this service on December 21. Bring friends with you!

### Sanctuary Ringers

The Sanctuary Ringers are moving forward in great style. You heard this fine choir in worship on November 16, and will hear them again on December 14 at the 11:00 worship service. In that service you will hear two Christmas Carol arrangements, arranged by our own Cynthia Dobrinski. These pieces are; "He Is Born" and "Once In Royal David's City".

### Piedmont Opera at First Presbyterian-Winston-Salem

Someone left an advertisement on my music stand last Sunday that announces the presentation of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* at the First Presbyterian Church of Winston-Salem. There will be three performances; Friday evening, December 5 at 7:30; Saturday afternoon, December 6, at 2:00; and Saturday evening, December 6 at 7:30 p.m. The church is located in the downtown area at 300 North Cherry Street. For more information telephone 336-724-3202 or on the web, piedmontopera.org.

### Weekday School

The weather is turning colder and most of the leaves have fallen. That signals the start of a multitude of Thanksgiving and Christmas activities at The Weekday School. The children have been busy learning about the first Thanksgiving. Needless to say there are a lot of turkey and Indian crafts in process. The Weekday School will not be in session for the week of November 24<sup>th</sup>. The teachers will be conducting Parent/Teacher conferences then we break for the Thanksgiving holiday. Upon our return from our Thanksgiving break we will turn our attention to Christmas and teaching the children about



the miracle of Jesus' birth and what that means to us today.

Our annual Fall Open House, held on October 30<sup>th</sup>, was a big success! The children did a great job singing their fall songs on stage, dressed in their Halloween costumes. Only a few cases of stage fright! We continue to have our Wendy's Night Out each month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday at the Wendy's in Ridgeway. Please join us and don't forget to fill out a slip and put it in the box at the register.

We are still in need of some baby doll and dress-up clothes. So if you have sewing skills we would welcome help with that.

During the hectic holiday season it is all too easy to lose sight of the real reason for the season. The staff at the Weekday School is grateful to serve such a great group of children and their families.

Have a great holiday season!

Melissa White, Weekday School Director

**Christmas Cheer: Saturday, December 6, 2008, at 8:30 a.m.** we will be meeting at the warehouse at 211 Doyle Street, which is behind the former Martinsville Henry County Rescue Squad building. Want to help needy families in our community? The Youth Group and members of the entire congregation are invited to join us in a community-wide endeavor to pack 1,000 boxes of food for hungry families in our community.

**Advent:** Advent is a period of prayer, reflection, and anticipation for the coming of the Christ child. It begins on Sunday, November 30, continuing until the Christmas Eve celebration. At a time when our attention can be focused on the gifts that we need to buy and wrap (and those gifts we hope to receive), the season of Advent provides us with a wonderful opportunity to prepare the way of the Lord in our own lives. The four Sundays of Advent are: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Anyone who would like to have offering envelopes should call Nancy Erikson, (632-3431, Ext. 314) or [fpc@kimbanet.org](mailto:fpc@kimbanet.org)

The annual **JOY GIFT offering** will be on Sunday, December 14, and Sunday, December 21. Special envelopes will be available in the pew racks. Those who benefit from this offering are retired church workers and students of our Presbyterian-related ethnic schools. Your gift will support these valuable ongoing ministries.

### Family Christmas Eve Service

December 24, 5:00 P.M.



### Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

December 24, 7:30 P.M.

On Sunday, December 28, there will not be an early worship service. Instead, at 10:00 a.m., our church members and friends are invited to gather in the sanctuary to sing the beloved Christmas carols of Christ's birth. Please plan to come and sing and share in the joy of this holy season. The 11:00 a.m. worship service will follow.

### Session Highlights:

- Approved the stated Session minutes for September 29, 2008 and the minutes of the annual congregational meeting held on Sunday, October 19, 2009
- Discussed the recent Officers' Retreat led by the Rev. Dr. Nancy Dawson, who is the General Presbyter of the Presbytery of the Peaks
- Adopted the new mission statement for our church: Share God's love, embrace our neighbors, nurture each other
- Transferred Sherri Haley Bell and her son, Morgan Haley, to the first United Methodist Church of Martinsville
- Elected Bill Peterson and Ann Reaser to be commissioners to the presbytery meeting on November 20, 2008

**In order to accommodate** our members and visitors, who use wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility aids, there will be four additional spaces made available in the sanctuary. Work on this project will be accomplished in early December.

STEEPLEVIEWS is published 12 times per year.  
Editor: Patrice Newnam, Publisher: Sarah Altizer; Mailing Staff: volunteers

# Stories of Faith

By **GLENNA HARMEYER**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

*Oh, no Jesus! This time you are wrong. You must be wrong. There is no comfort for me,* I thought, when I heard those words that my beautiful husband had only a short time to live on this earth.

But, I was the one who was wrong. I have been comforted in so many ways, especially by words.

Before my husband's illness, one of my favorite times of the day was late in the afternoon as I waited for him to come home from work. I would listen to hear the garage door go up and then those beautiful words, “I'm home.”

The funeral was over, the people had gone home and I was sitting in the den late in the afternoon when a feeling hit me like a lightning bolt -- a sickening, empty feeling. It was the reality that I would never hear those words again.

But over time I heard other words, comforting words. I searched the scriptures and God spoke to me.

I could identify with David's words in the 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm where he cried out to God asking, “How long must I bear this pain?” But then he closed the Psalm with words of praise for “God's steadfast love.”

God spoke to me through words to Moses when He said in essence, “Do you think, my arm is too short to reach down to my people?” It was not too short then and it was not too short to reach down to me. I felt those everlasting arms carry me and comfort me.

I could identify with Job when in the midst of his suffering he could say “I know that my redeemer lives.” And Habakkuk's words comforted me when in suffering he said, “I will rejoice in the Lord. He is my strength.”

These words and many others comforted me. I kept a list which I titled “Food for the Journey.” I ate this food. I digested this food. It became a part of me. It nourished me. It comforted me.

God comforted me through words from my pastor, my family and my friends. Their prayers, their words of concern, their tears and their hugs meant so much.

I was comforted by all the letters and notes that I received from people telling me how my husband had touched their lives. I was comforted by the words from that beautiful hymn, “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.”

I was comforted by the words of my late husband. He knew and was confident that he would live with our Savior forever. And I was comforted knowing that someday I will greet my husband with those beautiful words, “I'm Home.”

Oh, yes Jesus, I HAVE been blessed. Your words are true. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

*(Glenna Harmeyer, a native of Toledo, Ohio, has been a member of First Presbyterian Church for 18 years. Stories of Faith” are written by members of First Presbyterian Church. If you have a faith experience you would like to share in Steeple Views, submit it to [jmstegall@comcast.net](mailto:jmstegall@comcast.net) or leave a copy with Sarah Altizer in the church office.)*