



FIRST and ForMOST

January 2012

Happy New Year!

• • • • • (Korean)

Naya Sal Mubarak (Urdu)

Glückliches Neujahr! (German)

Kul 'am wa antum bikhair (Arabic)

Boldog új évet! (Hungarian)

Onnelista uutta vuotta! (Finnish)

!Feliz año nuevo! (Spanish)

Feliz Ano Novo! (Portuguese)

Eutychismenos o kainourgios chronos! (Greek)

Afishapa! (Ghanain)

FROM YOUR PASTOR:

The LORD said: 'I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a path through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland'. (Isaiah 43: 19).

There are three questions that arise from this Scripture passage that I believe are crucial for us to consider as we move into 2012. They are:

1. **What is the LORD doing that is new in our church?**
2. **How has the LORD already begun to do something new here at FPCA and can we see it?**
and,
3. **If God has the power to create rivers where there had previously only been 'dry wasteland,' then what great miracle is God planning for us here at FPCA?**

Even though we are a church where the GOOD NEWS is preached faithfully, we are not always happy.

We get tired of being asked to do things for our church and wonder why somebody else couldn't start doing more around here!

We look at our bank accounts and investments and don't even think once about leaving a portion of it to **"our"** church when we die. Sure it may be **"our"** church now when we're alive. But, when we're dead, it's going to be somebody else's problem!

That's what churches sometimes become: "PROBLEMS."

Churches where the people no longer believe that God is doing something miraculously "new" become **"problems"** for those very people who worked so hard and gave so much to build the church up in the first place. Instead of EVERYTHING being a new joy...a new opportunity... almost everything starts to seem like a new **"problem"**...even if it is something good!

This happens to perfectly good Christians when they get tired and no longer (for whatever reason) see (or care to see) God doing **"something new"** and exciting in their midst.

When you read that the LORD is **"doing something new"** here at FPCA, what is your reaction? Is it **"Wow, that's GREAT!"** or **"Oh no, not again!"**

When you read that the LORD has **"already begun"** doing **"new things"** here at FPCA, what is your reaction? Is it, **"Let's help God with EVERYTHING He wants our church to do!"** Or, is it, **"Did God bring His ideas to one of our commissions for approval? Did the Session pass His plan before He went ahead and started doing things on His Own?"**

And, when you read that the LORD is asking us whether or not we **"see"** what He is already doing, what is your reaction? Is it **"Yes"** or **"no"**?

If the Scriptures are really true (which I believe they are), then we must believe that God is doing something new here in our church and in our world. The **real** question is: **DO WE CARE?** Do we care what God is or is not doing?

As your pastor, I believe that God is doing great, wonderful, and, yes, new things here at FPCA. I am very excited about what God will do through each and every one of us in 2012. And, I ask you to join me in doing everything that we can to seek God's will for our church so that, in the end, **we will always care** that God's Will (and not ours) will be done.

"The grace of the LORD Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."

Your Friend and Pastor,

Chris

PREACHING SCHEDULE for JANUARY 2012

January 1, 2012 – New Year's Day

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:22-40

Sermon Title: **"A LITTLE FAITH GOES A LONG WAY!"**

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

January 8, 2012 – Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Scripture Lesson: Mark 1: 9-11

Sermon Title: **"WHAT IS BAPTISM?"**

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

January 15, 2012 – Second Sunday of Epiphany

Scripture Lesson: 1 Samuel 3:1-20

Sermon Title: **"BIBLE STORIE, ANYONE?"**

The Rev. Bill Jokela, Preaching

January 22, 2012 – Third Sunday of Epiphany

Scripture Lesson: Jonah 3: 1-10

Sermon Title: **"POOR JONAH!"**

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held immediately following the worship service.

January 29, 2012 – Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 111

Sermon Title: **"THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM"**

The Rev. Bill Jokela, Preaching

GREETINGS FROM STEPHEN HIEMSTRA!

Thinking about the New Year, how will you remember 2011?

For me, 2011 has been a year of tremendous growth. My transition from economist to seminary student forced me to take on new activities, but I also had to begin looking at the world through new eyes and hearing scripture with new ears.

We worship a God who communicates primarily through words. A vision can be had alone; words require a speaker and a listener. When Apostle John writes: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:11 ESV), he is describing a God who values dialog.

We are created in the image of God. When God reveals Himself more fully to us, we experience growth. Such was my year. How was yours?

Yours in Christ

Stephen

PRAY FOR THE CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA!

Sadly, there were multiple news stories in December 2011 of murder, pillaging, and burning of the churches of Christians by their Muslim Countrymen. Nigeria is a country that really needs our prayers and attention!

Hugh Iwanicki



Pat Pascoe ~ January 1
Joan Johnson ~ January 5
Kyle Hanson ~ January 10
Ruth Sutton ~ January 13
Paula Santen ~ January 19

Patti Young ~ January 23
Katie Fuller ~ January 27
Lois Nashorn ~ January 28
Cara Lauler ~ January 30
Leslie Whetzel ~ January 31

BOOK CLUB NEWS

The Book Club will meet on Tuesday, January 17 at 1:00 PM in the church library. Members of the group will discuss the novel, Madonnas of Leningrad by Debra Dean. Newcomers are welcome.

Randy Meli

CHRISTMAS BANNER

We hope you enjoyed the Christmas banner that hung at the front of the church the month of December. We are grateful to Punch Jackson who drew the figures and to Tuula Jung for her creativity. What talents!

The Worship Commission

DO YOU WANT TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OUR DEAR SUSI?

The Rev. Susi Ennis has a new e-mail address:

slennis@nemont.net

She certainly would be delighted to get messages from you!

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

By the Rev. Judit Mayer

“But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.”

(Isaiah 40:31)

January, and especially the first day of January, is a time of renewal. It is the time when we make New Year's resolutions. When I was young, I also made resolutions practically every year, but was never able to carry them out. That is typical of our efforts – our human will is not strong enough to carry out our plans all the way from beginning to end.

Somehow the situation is similar in our relationship with God. From time to time we are determined to build a closer relationship with God, to read the Bible every day, to pray every day, to be better Christians, to observe the people around us more closely, help them more, give more to charity – I could list many more promises we make. But then, our enthusiasm slowly fades away and we fall back into our normal daily routine. Our connection with God dwindles, and often we only think of turning to God when we are in trouble.

The connection between God and humanity goes both ways in an interesting manner: God's connection with us, His love, His mercy is constant and unchanging. But our faith, or love, our gratitude may change. Sometimes it is smaller, sometimes larger, sometimes we cling to God, sometimes we turn away from Him. When we look at Israel's history, we see how Israel turned away from God occasionally, causing misery and destruction. And every time God gave Israel another chance to find the right way, which they followed for a while, and then turned away, which was repeated again and again.

We Christians also have a chance to return to God again and again, begging for and receiving strength by holding on to Christ. Not just at the beginning of a new year, but during any time in our life when we have the chance to ask Him for strength and are willing to accept it. The Lord's love is constant. It never changes. I am certain that all of us have had times in our lives when we have turned our backs to God. Those were the times when we believed that He had forsaken us, had not helped us – so we deserted Him. But, somehow, we always found our way back to Him. And God always forgave, waited for our return with open arms and an open heart.

We must never forget that we Christians also have a very important responsibility regarding our relationship with God. If we live a life in which we turn to God only when we have a problem, we cheapen God's grace. God's grace is available to us always. In turn, we must be available to God always.

Our responsibility is that once we have accepted God's love, grace, and forgiveness, we should respond by living a life which pleases God. We should not put it off until the future. Let us not allow our close relationship with God to fade away. As the old saying goes, “We must not put off until tomorrow what we can or should do today.” We don't know when our last day, our last hour will come. We don't know how long our life here on earth will last. Let us not postpone reaching out for Christ's renewing power. We know whoever asks for it with a clean heart in faith, will be renewed.

Therefore, let this month be the time of renewal. Let us ask God to help us to walk through life, help us to pass over hard times, give us strength to spend our days in a truly Christian way. Let us not assume that we can postpone our closeness to Christ to some future time. Amen.

[Article written by the Pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Washington DC, the Rev. Judit Mayer, for the January 2010 issue of the newsletter Egyházi Látogató (The Church's Visitor). Freely translated from Hungarian by Marta Strada.]

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

November 16, 2011

Dr. Chris Looker called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM, with prayer. At this time of Spiritual Growth he read prayers thanking God for all the beautiful gifts He has given us in our lives, for His blessings. Our worries in our life should never keep us from trusting God.

Dr. Chris Looker reported that he keeps visiting Alan Young who is having a very difficult time recuperating after his complicated cancer and tongue surgery. He has also visited Larry Young who is slowly recovering. Dr. Looker is working on getting organist Filipe Dominguez and his family to move into Marcella Gooding's house to give them more comfortable living conditions.

The Rev. Bill Jokela had e-mailed his report to Session, listing his visits of Sara Schmoyer, Samia Bentley, Aggie Jo Millard, Ed and Miriam Houseworth, Alan, Patti and Tyler Young, Larry and Margot Young

Reporting for the **Marketing and Stewardship Commission**, Elder Ruth Sutton told the Session that the packages had been sent out in time for Stewardship Sunday on November 20, 2011. Elder Tom Martin called to the Session's attention that so far the income received during 2011 was some \$ 4,500 less than the amount pledged.

Reporting for the **Worship Commission**, Elder Sandy Mori shared with Session that preparations for the Community Thanksgiving Service at our church on November 23, 2011 were underway. People have to be encouraged to bring food for the reception after the worship service, and volunteer to clean up afterwards.

Reporting for the **Christian Education Commission**, Elder Marta Strada talked about the planned library move to Room 107. It is still uncertain whether this would be a good solution; it may be the best that Room 107 be a comfortable, quiet reading room, while the books stay at their present location.

Reporting for the **Administration and Finance Commission**, Elder Tom Martin discussed utilities and consumption graphs. They showed how much electricity, water and gas was used over the last two or three years by the church's physical plant. Water consumption has increased quite a bit, electricity use was a little higher during the first half of 2011, and no savings on gas can be seen in spite of the new efficiency boiler installed a couple of years ago. It is necessary to find out what changes could be made to improve the utilities consumption.

As the number of members attending Commission meetings is dwindling, Elder Cara Laufer emphasized that it would be a good idea to have commission meetings on Sundays right after worship service in the sanctuary about every other month, to involve the congregation. Session agreed.

Presbytery Representative, Elder Sandy Mori reported that she had attended the Presbytery meeting on November 15, 2011. The main theme was what was going on in Presbytery at present.

Few people know about it, and think that Presbytery does not inform people enough. The participants were asked to point out what they felt to be the most important activities. They were told that there were resources available that offer suggestions how to improve the conditions in today's churches; the resources are available on Presbytery's website.

Marta Strada, Clerk of Session

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, A FAITHFUL SERVANT

by Felipe Dominguez

Since I became organist of the Church in August, I have played at least four pieces during the worship service that have been authored by Johann Sebastian Bach. You will probably continue to hear his music as long as I am the organist, so I want to introduce you to J. S. Bach for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with his life and works.

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in 1685 in the city of Eisenach in central Germany. He was blessed to be born in a family of musicians by profession, who prided in their art. The young Johann Sebastian lost both of his parents early in his life, and subsequently moved with his older brother Johann Christoph, who was himself an accomplished organist and a former pupil of the famed organist Johannes Pachelbel. His brother gave the young Johann Sebastian his first organ lessons.

Bach demonstrated early on that he was no ordinary child. He excelled in school and quickly became a young organ prodigy. He got his first organist position at the St. Boniface church in Arnstadt. From then on, his reputation as a great organist continued to grow and he moved to most prestigious positions, including the Court of the Imperial city of Weimar, in which he was the court composer for many years.

His reputation was such that an observer once made the comment that Bach "could play with his feet faster than other people could play with their hands."

Besides Bach's talent at the keyboard and as a composer, he was a very religious man. When Bach died, his library contained all the works of Martin Luther with notes and comments, and an exhaustively marked up Bible. In almost every Bach manuscript sheet music, one can unequivocally find one of two inscriptions: SDG (Soli Deo Gloria – *trans.* To God Alone the Glory) or JJ (Jesu Juva – *trans.* Jesus Help me.)

Johann Sebastian Bach died in 1750 in Leipzig, and left a legacy of faith and excellence in music that remains unsurpassed. As you hear his music, I hope you remember the man's devotion and his genius, which was laid on the altar as an offering to our God, and may we all say, as he did: To God Alone the Glory!

MEET MR. SNOWMAN

by Marta Strada

Will we have a lot of snow this winter? If we do – who can resist building a snowman, a big "man" of snow, with a carrot nose, with a hat, perhaps a scarf or necktie? Holding a broom -- to help us sweep up all the snow?

Who can't remember having fun as a child rolling up snow into big balls, putting 3 on top of each other, looking for things we could use to give him a cute face. We were proud of our

creation, and were sad when the weather changed and the poor guy melted in the sun, his nose fell down, he lost his broom..... and he ended up turning into a big puddle.

We all take snowmen for granted. Have you ever wondered where they have come from? We really don't have good documentation when the first snowman appeared among us, but in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in the Hague, there is an illustration in the *Book of Hours* from 1380 showing a snowman.

There is also a story that in 1494, after a heavy snowfall in Florence, Italy, Michelangelo was commissioned to sculpt an enormous figure of snow in the courtyard of Piero de' Medici.

Snowmen appeared in early American history when on the eve of the Massacre of 1690 the guards of Fort Schenectady warmed up indoors and left only a pair of snowmen to greet the French soldiers and Indians.

Another funny story dates back to 1809, when in Eau Clair, Wisconsin, a Mr. Vernon N. Paul told his little daughter Yetty that the snowman was supposed to frighten the Boxing Day elves who, according to popular legend, were trying to reclaim Christmas presents. Thanks to the snowman, those elves were kept away. Consequently, children all over town were making snowmen to save their Christmas gifts. Word spread, and a dispatcher of the New York Times was sent to Eau Claire to verify the story. She found a town populated by snowmen. As time went by, snowmen were built all over the country and beyond. Foreign newsmen who came to the US in 1861 to report on the outbreak of the Civil War, took the snowmen story with them to their homelands.

In Brattleboro, Vermont, sculptor Larkin Meads created a world famous Snow Angel in 1856.

And snowmen are still making records in our days. In 1999 the biggest snowman was built in Bethel, Maine. He was 113 feet 7 inches tall! He was named "Angus, King of the Mountains," in honor of the then current governor of Maine.

Nine years later, an even taller snowman emerged in the same town – no, not a snowman, it was a snowwoman! She was 122 feet 1 inch tall! She was named in honor of Olympia Snow, a U.S. Senator representing Maine.

Will this winter bring us another historical snowman/woman? Well, we will be happy if we don't have to shovel snow.... but we will enjoy building a new snowman if we do!

ACOLYTE SCHEDULE

1/8/2012 Andrew Lauler
1/15/2012 Scot Springston
1/22/2012 Isabella Jackson

1/29/2012 Ben Looker
2/12/2012 Mitchell Youmans
2/15/2012 Sam Looker
2/26/2012 Josh Musih

PRESCRIBED BY THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

The next time you feel like GOD can't use you, just remember...

*Noah was a drunk
Abraham was too old
Isaac was a daydreamer
Jacob was a liar
Leah was ugly
Joseph was abused
Moses had a stuttering problem
Gideon was afraid
Samson had long hair and was a womanizer
Rahab was a prostitute
Jeremiah and Timothy were too young
David had an affair and was a murderer
Elijah was suicidal
Isaiah preached naked
Jonah ran from God
Naomi was a widow
Job went bankrupt
Peter denied Christ
The Disciples fell asleep while praying
Martha worried about everything
The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once
Zaccheus was too small
Paul was too religious
Timothy had an ulcer..AND
Lazarus was dead.*

*Now! No more excuses!
God can use you to your full potential.*

- 1. God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts.*
- 2. Dear God, I have a problem, it's Me.*
- 3. Growing old is inevitable .. growing UP is optional.*
- 4. There is no key to happiness. The door is always open.*
- 5. Silence is often misinterpreted but never misquoted.*
- 6. Do the math .. count your blessings.*
- 7. Faith is the ability to not panic.*

- 8. Laugh every day, it's like inner jogging.*
9. If you worry, you didn't pray . If you pray, don't worry.
10. As a child of God, prayer is kind of like calling home everyday.
11. Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape.
12. The most important things in your house are the people.
13 When we get tangled up in our problems, be still.
God wants us to be still so He can untangle the knot.
14. A grudge is a heavy thing to carry.
15 He who dies with the most toys is still dead.

Have a great day!!! The SON is shining and he can certainly use you!

(Origin unknown)



Deadline for the February issue of FIRST and ForMOST is January18, 2012. Please e-mail your announcements and reports to the Editor, Marta Strada, LUXI7777@aol.com, or put them in the FIRST and ForMOST drawer in the church office. Thank you.