



FIRST and ForMOST

First Presbyterian Church of Annandale

June 2020

FROM YOUR PASTOR



It certainly is a strange time in which to live! Restaurants, hotels, and stores have been closed for some time. Some shelves in the grocery store that used to have items on them are empty...**ESPECIALLY TOILET PAPER!** Even churches have been vacant for months. The Wuhan Coronavirus has and continues to be a dangerous threat to our normal way of living...at least the ***“normal”*** that used to exist before the Wuhan Coronavirus 19 Pandemic began.

People are afraid. People are getting sick. At-risk individuals, especially our dearly beloved ones in some cases, are dying.

Children...especially those who are poor...run the risk of not being able to attend schools and learn how to get ahead in life this coming Fall...causing them to slip further back into the endless cycle of poverty and suffering.

And everyone is beginning to wonder... is this going to be the *“NEW NORMAL”*?

Human beings have been responding to disasters and calamities for thousands of years. And each time, the initial reaction is justifiably fear, disbelief, and even panic. We want to blame someone...even God...for our suffering!

We want to cry out, like the Psalmist, *“My God, my God...why have You forsaken me? Why do you seem so far from saving me, so far from hearing my groans and cries? Oh God, I cry by day but You do not answer. I cry by night and find no rest...” (Psalm 22)*. Understandably, this is the very same Scripture that Jesus Christ cried out when He hung on the Cross to suffer and die for our sins.

And, then if we are blessed to survive the initial devastation and terror of the event (like the Wuhan Coronavirus 19 Pandemic), we identify ourselves as a *“survivor”* and we are thankful to God, we feel blessed, and we want to help others and give back to those who were less fortunate. Our faith in God is re-awakened and we begin to (almost naturally) want to say the words found in Psalm 23 over and over: *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul. He guides me along the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil and my cup runs over. Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

I believe that we, in the United States, have been challenged by a very dangerous and frightening pandemic that none of us could have possibly imagined possible. We have gone from states of shock, disbelief, panic, self-preservation, confusion, a feeling of abandonment by God, and a surreal retreat from our normal (or, at least it used to be) freedom into our homes, as though they were isolation chambers and (for some) prison cells.

Yet now, the time that we have spent hiding away from everyone else is beginning to affect more and more people with what we used to call back in Pennsylvania, *“Cabin Fever.”* Our fears are beginning to wane as we feel the God-given and irresistible longing to be free. For some, it feels like the walls are closing in on them. For others, they have watched the businesses fail because they were not considered *“essential.”* Still for others, the fear and panic for their lives

at the start of the pandemic has been replaced by fear and panic for their livelihoods.

What will I do now that the business that my Great-Great Grandparents started and I was proudly running...has gone bankrupt because it was not considered “essential”?

“What will I do now that my husband or wife has died from the Wuhan Coronavirus 19 Virus?”

“What will I do now that, for the first time in my life, I have to rely on the government to provide me with enough money to buy food, pay my rent, and pay my medical bills?”

“What if I get the Wuhan Coronavirus 19?”

“How can I get to the point where I am able to faithfully say: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....?”

“How can I honestly get to the point where I can say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You (O God) are with me?”

For those of us who are believers in God and God’s Son, Jesus Christ, Psalm 23 is the New Normal. Some of us get to that point faster than others...but, then again, it’s not a race! It is a process that is as old and as variable as creation and humankind.

St. Paul once said wrote something that NONE OF US wants to hear in I Corinthians 15: 56-57...yet EVERY ONE OF US DESPERATELY WANTS TO BELIEVE:

“Oh, Death, who’s afraid of you now? Where is your sting?

It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!”

Where are you in the age-old struggle of the human soul...the human mind?

Are you still saying, "My God, my God...why have You forsaken me?" Or, have you reached the point where you can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...?" Wherever you are in the process, please know that you are not the only person who has ever faced this challenging and difficult transition. As a matter of fact, of all the possibilities that exist in the universe that could befall human beings, I believe that EVERY HUMAN BEING has faced or will face this trying test, one way or the other.

My hope and prayer is that, wherever you are right now in relation to this pandemic, the Lord will give you peace, hope, and the assurance of the Holy Spirit. And, it is also my hope and prayer that God will also bless you with the faith to trust in His unique and all-powerful protective power, which will preserve your life here in this world and in the life-everlasting. Thanks be to God.

Your Friend and Pastor,



Dr. Chris Looker

PREACHING SCHEDULE FOR JUNE 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Annandale

June 7, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching. Online

June 14 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

June 21, 2020

Ms. Stella Lee, Preaching

June 28, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME

As more children return to the Christian Childcare Center, we gradually return to a sense of normalcy. As you can see, the children enjoy their play time! Happy June, everyone! Thanks so much for your love and support!



“Miss Jennie”
Jennifer Stoy
FPCA-CCC Director

CCC JUNE BIRTHDAYS

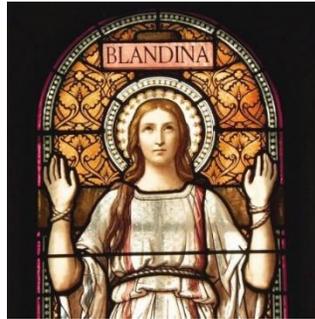
Anai June 3
Robbie June 12
Aila June 18



FPCA JUNE BIRTHDAYS

MEET FELLOW CHRISTIANs: BLANDINA

I could not find a Fellow Christian who was either born or died in June, so I chose to write about Blandina, who has a feast day on June 2, the day she is venerated by various denominations, like the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox, Western Rite Orthodox, Eastern Catholic Churches, and Anglican Communion. As good Presbyterians we do not venerate her, but let us look at her as a human being who loved our Lord, and we may even learn from her.



Blandina lived all her life in Lion, France. She was born about 162 AD, and passed away in 177, when she was only sixteen years old. This was the time when the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius directed, or at least encouraged the persecution of Christians.

Marcus Aurelius was an emperor in an age of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire. But there was no peace for the Christians! When they confessed their faith they were imprisoned, even brought to trial. Among them was the slave Blandina, who had been taken into custody along with her master, who was also a Christian. Although Blandina was tortured in a horrible manner just like her companions, she remained faithful and replied to every question *"I am a Christian, and we commit no wrongdoing."*

Blandina and her companions were subjected to more tortures in the town's amphitheater at the time of the public games. Blandina was bound to a stake and wild beasts were set on her, but they did not touch her. She was the last one being tortured, and was thrown before a wild beast which tossed her into the air with its horns. Blandina's life ended when she was killed with a dagger. Did that happen on the second day of June? We do not know, but we do know that Blandina deserves to be remembered.

Let us think of Blandina on June 2, 2020!

Marta Strada

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS MAY 17, 2020, with GUIDELINES FOR OUR RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

The session passed a motion to resume in-person worship on June 14, 2020, with guidelines for everyone's health and safety: **Please wear a face covering in the sanctuary. We will practice physical distancing of six feet between people and family groups. We will offer spiritual refreshments only. Senior pastor Dr. Chris Looker stated that our love and concern for everyone will guide our actions as we worship in person once again.**

The session passed the Personnel Committee's motion to increase the salary of Christian Childcare Center Director Jenn Stoy, effective June 15, 2020, as she begins her second year as director.

ACCA FOOD DRIVE



Pictured, left to right, are several members of the small group which sponsored a food drive on Saturday, May 8, 2020: Genny Looker, Ruth Hartman, Susan Hanson, and Cara Laufer.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

SUNDAY WORSHIP ONLINE

Sunday worship is online each week and may be viewed on YouTube
Go to our church site (www.fpcannandale.org)

DUE DATE: JUNE 17, 2020, for July/August issue of FIRST and ForMOST.
Submissions: Email to clgage@runbox.com AND office@fpcannandale.org.