



FIRST and ForMOST

First Presbyterian Church of Annandale

July/August 2020

FROM YOUR PASTOR

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – (Romans 5:6-8, NIV)

As I write this From the Pastor article, I am struck by the most obvious core message of Jesus Christ...His **“Good News”** to the world. It is nothing that any of us *want* to hear...yet we desperately *need* to hear it. It is nothing that we *want* to read...yet we urgently need to read it as often as we possibly can.

Why would I write such a thing? Well, isn't it obvious? In a world where strength is so valued, Jesus Christ tells us that He died for the weak. What kind of **“Good News”** is that for those of us who consider ourselves strong, fit, able, and reasonably righteous and good people? Does it mean that Jesus Christ did not die for us?

Furthermore, how should we respond to St. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2: 3b-4: **“God our Savior...wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”**?

Which is it? Did Jesus Christ simply die for the poor, ungodly, needy, weak, and sick? Or, did Jesus Christ die for all of us?

Well, thankfully this either/or type of simplistic comparison and questioning becomes trivial when one takes a look at the final words in this particular periscope of Scripture.

St. Paul continues: “*God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” Just a few verses earlier in Romans 3: 23, St. Paul writes: “*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*”.

Now, if one takes a more complete look at the whole of Scripture, one can more easily see how all-encompassing God’s Word is in terms of its infallible truth. By doing so, we subject ourselves to (as I stated earlier) a truth that we may not **want** to accept, but in fact desperately **need** to accept in our sinful and fallen lives.

The Good News of Jesus Christ begins with Christ’s challenge that all people recognize and repent from their sins. So, if one does not believe that one is a sinner, then why would he/she want to read or hear the Scripture passage on which this article is based? After all, if one believes that they are not weak or sinful, why would they **want** to hear anything about Jesus Christ dying on the cross so that their non-existent sins could be forgiven?

The number of people of faith in Western Society (mainly the United States and European countries) has been dwindling for the past 60 years or so. Churches are closing every single day. And, more and more people openly challenge and even make fun of people of faith (like ourselves) and their congregations.

Perhaps one could sadly say that our nation and the other “First-World” nations of the West are becoming more and more “ungodly.”

Now, if that is the case, then (*according to Romans 5: 6-8*) that means that God’s answer to “*ungodliness*” is **not** punishment (as some would argue). **Rather**, God’s never-ending response to the increasing “*ungodliness*” we are experiencing in our world is **more** love...**more** mercy...**more** forgiveness...and, **more** grace. Put simply, it is Jesus Christ.

This is why we, as people of faith in Jesus Christ, must never give up trying to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the “*weak*” and the “*ungodly.*” Furthermore, when we realize that “*we are sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God,*” it becomes impossible **not** to see ourselves as also being among the “*weak*” and “*ungodly.*” In other words, when it comes to “*weakness*” and “*ungodliness*”, there is no “*we*” and “*they*” in this world (at least **not** from God’s viewpoint or according to God’s Word). And, “*at (just) the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.*”

I would dare to propose to you that the “*right time*” is now. The message of hope, love, mercy, resurrection, and grace...all that Jesus Christ embodies and stands for...is just as needed now in our history as it has always been in all of history.

2020 has been a challenging, painful, difficult, fearful, and confusing year for us all. And, it has been hard to see any “*Good News*” amidst all of the bad news associated with a global pandemic, racial and political unrest, protests and riots out in the streets, and the temporary loss of many freedoms that we had come to take for granted (like simply going to church to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ, going out to eat with friends, and assembling with people for a host of other wonderful reasons).

But, as my father used to say, “*The only thing about having something bad happen to you is that when something good happens afterwards, you can appreciate it all the more!*”

Yes, we are living in very trying and difficult times. But, let us remember that Jesus Christ “*died for the ungodly*” at just the right time. Nothing that anyone or anything has, can, or will ever be able to do will ever change that fact.

And so, the response to every form of evil that Satan brings into our lives and this world is the same now as it was then...when Jesus died on the cross to take away the sins of the world...all for the “*ungodly*” and the “*sinners*” in the world.

Now, more than ever, we must not lose hope. We must not become bitter or focus all our energies on who is to blame for all the ills in the world.

Rather, we must do as Jesus Christ did on the cross and is still doing now. Our response to the increasing “*ungodliness*” (including our own) and suffering in the world must be the same as God’s response...more love...more mercy...more forgiveness...and, more grace.

It really is the only Way...Christ’s Way.

May the Lord continue to bless you and give you healing, hope, and peace, now and forevermore.

Your Friend and Pastor,



Dr. Chris Looker

PREACHING SCHEDULE FOR JULY AND AUGUST 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Annandale

July 5, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching (Online)

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 11:25-30 (NRSV)

Sermon: "Where is Happiness?"

July 12, 2020

The Rev. Bill Jokela, Preaching

July 19, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

Scripture Lesson: Romans 8:12-25

July 26, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 13:44-46

August 2, 2020

Ms. Stella Lee, Preaching

August 9, 16, 23, 30, 2020

Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching

LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME

Our Christian Childcare Center children are continuing to enjoy a summer filled with lots of hands-on learning, Bible stories, singing, outdoor play, and fun, fun, and more fun. We are so happy that more and more of our blessed children are returning. We've welcomed several new enrollees, too, in recent weeks.

Thanks to all the parents and their children for making this possible. We appreciate your continued trust and support and feel so blessed and fortunate to have you here as part of our FPCA-CCC family. Below, you'll see some of our youngest blessings!

“Miss Jennie”
Jennifer Stoy
FPCA-CCC Director



CCC JULY and AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

Adelaide July 9
Maeve July 22
Austin August 3
Jackson August 20
Abigail August 22



SESSION HIGHLIGHTS FROM JUNE 2020

The session approved the hiring of a new cleaning company, Martha's Cleaning Services, effective June 19, 2020. The previous cleaning company was unable to meet the needs of our church..

The motion to increase the salary of Christian Childcare Center Director Jenn Stoy, passed at the May 17, 2020, stated meeting was duly implemented on June 15, 2020.

Carol Gage, Clerk of Session

MEET FELLOW CHRISTIANS

Marta Strada, longtime and faithful contributor of this article, is taking a well-deserved summer leave. So, for July and August, please choose fellow Christians from the list below to get to know better:

FPCA JULY and AUGUST BIRTHDAYS



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

SUCCESSFUL ACCA FOOD DRIVE

One of the small groups held its second food drive on Saturday, June 20, 2020, collecting much-needed food and other necessities for ACCA.

SHEPHERD'S CENTER

The Shepherd's Center continues to provide rides for medical and physical therapy appointments. Phone: 703 941 1419; web site: www.shepherdscenter.org; email: shepherdscas@vacoxmail.com

IN MEMORIAM

Our heartfelt sympathy and prayers to the families and friends of these loved ones:

Patricia Pascoe, long-time church member: January 1, 1926-April 19, 2020

Glenda Harrell, Dana Jackson's mother: January 1, 1943-May 18, 2020

Priscilla Arkoian, designer and maker of the sanctuary dove-and-flame sculpture:

March 24, 1931-March 18, 2020

GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP

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 has stated that our love and concern for everyone will guide our actions.

DUE DATE: AUGUST 19, 2020, for September issue of FIRST and ForMOST.

Submissions: Email to clgage@runbox.com AND office@fpcannandale.org