

# The Third PRESS



FEBRUARY 2019

## “Walking In Wisdom”

As we continue this series of newsletter articles on Paul’s letter to the “Ephesians”, for February we will reflect upon what Paul wrote in chapter five and verses 15 through 20, with special focus upon verses 15 through 17. Then, for March we will spend some time reflecting upon verses 18 through 20 while looking to study God’s Word within its context.

Before reflecting upon our passage for this newsletter, let’s read it, where Paul wrote:

**“Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph 5:15-20)**

Solomon was only about twenty years old when he ascended to the throne of one of the most powerful nations in his time. His father was a military leader of unsurpassed skill, who, during his reign, amassed land, wealth and loyal followers. And David left all this to the charge of his son, a young man who knew he needed to trust in the Lord, even as his father did, if he were to succeed.

Now, one night, near the beginning of his reign as king of Israel, Solomon had a dream in which the Lord said to him, **“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” (1 Ki 3:5)**

If you were Solomon what would you have asked for?

There are many things for which Solomon could’ve asked, but what he prayed for is what he most needed and valued -- wisdom -- wisdom to know the difference between right and wrong, truth and a lie -- and wisdom to act upon that which he knew to be right.

Listen to Solomon’s prayer as found in 1 Kings, chapter 3 (vv. 7 ff.):

**“LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” (1Ki 3:7-9a)**

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-followers where,

The Head of the Church  
is...  
The Lord Jesus Christ

The Ministers of the  
Church are...  
Every Believer

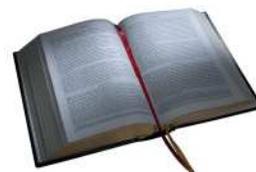
The Passion of the  
Church is...  
to be Spirit empowered  
ministers of  
reconciliation to God,  
inviting all people to  
faith in Christ Jesus  
our Lord and  
to holiness of life.

Our Mission:

To Love our God and  
Neighbor

To Proclaim the Gospel  
through Word and Deed

To Make Disciples of  
Jesus the Christ



Many seek fame. Many seek power. But few are those who call out for a right understanding of the truth. And even fewer are those who pray for the courage to live out that truth. Indeed, few have the wisdom to pray for wisdom!

And so the LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom rather than power or great riches or personal security. And, God said to Solomon, **“I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart.”** (1 Ki 3:12)

But even more, because, in humility, Solomon asked for wisdom over riches or fame or power, God gave him all of those things as well.

And, as a result of God’s empowering of him, Solomon went on to write much of the wisdom literature of the Bible, and is known as the wisest man ever to live. Solomon knew that God’s greatest gift to him was not wealth or power but wisdom – for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing we desire can compare with her (Prov 8:11), and whoever finds her finds life, and receives favor from the LORD (Prov 8:35a).

Now, as we look back at chapters 4 and 5 of “Ephesians”, we see that Paul repeated the metaphor of “walking” as he called believers to live as imitators of Jesus. And so, in this call to discipleship: Paul has exhorted us to walk in Unity -- to tear down the walls of racism, sexism and ethnic division, and to live as one in Christ, worshipping one Lord, adhering to one faith; and, Paul has exhorted us to walk in Love -- unconditional, forgiving, accepting love; and, Paul has exhorted us to walk in the Light -- that we might experience God’s comforting light and that we might be a comforting light to others caught in the darkness and loneliness of our world.

And, as we consider our text in this newsletter, we find Paul carrying these exhortations further by calling us to “walk in Wisdom”. (see Prov 28:26)

Like Solomon, we’re to ask for and exercise godly wisdom as we live as disciples of Jesus.

And with this admonition to walk in wisdom, Paul contrasted the wise person and the unwise person, a contrast found throughout Scripture but most especially in the book of Proverbs where we read such statements as: **“A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes, but a person of understanding delights in wisdom”** (Prov 10:23); **“The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly”** (Prov 15:14); and, **“Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end”** (Prov 29:11).

The Scriptures address many areas of contrast between the wise person and the fool, but most fundamentally, the Scriptures tell us that the wise person is the one: who believes that God is; who believes that God is sovereign; who believes that God loves good; and, who believes that God judges evil.

On the other hand, it’s the fool who says in his heart, **“There is no God”**, at least no one true, unchanging, sovereign God. (Ps 14:1)

Instead the fool goes about defining and creating his own ‘god’ -- whether it be himself, another person, an idea, an activity, or an object.

And this ‘god’ of the fool is always changing even as the whims of the fool and the latest fads of the culture change.

And so, Paul calls us to beware of the fool for his ways are cunning, and his reasoning persuasive and deadly. And, Paul also warns us to beware of the times for the days are evil.

As we study Paul’s letters it becomes clear that Paul saw the times as evil, after all, he lived in a day when the moral values of the society were in severe decay – when immorality was endemic. And, he

lived in a day when the worship of idols, such as Artemis and Dionysius, was widely accepted and practiced.

In other words, Paul lived in a time not unlike our own, where false ‘gods’ and false teachings blind the eyes of many, confusing Christian and non-Christian alike – as we worship innovation, and as we yield more and more of our lives to the godlessness of our day!

Moreover, Paul knew that Christ would return at an hour and a time of which no one could know. And so he knew God’s people needed to be “on the ready”, which is why Paul preached and wrote with a sense of urgency saying in essence: Now is the time to change one’s ways! Now is the time to walk in the steps of the Savior! Now is the time to exercise wisdom!

And that same urgency should move us to active discipleship, for we live in dire times. Yes, we live in the most powerful, most technologically advanced, well-educated and perhaps wealthiest country in the history of mankind. And yet, we’re a people who have managed to distort and pervert our freedoms and advances to the detriment of many of the less fortunate in our own country, and in our world. For, we live in a time where the practice of, and even more, the definitions of right and wrong are unclear and often indistinguishable. And we live in a day when false teachers and false teachings enter our homes via air waves, printed media, and electronic cable, saturating our thoughts and so numbing our consciences that we’re no longer repulsed by the immorality inflicted upon us.

Our world feeds us lies dressed up in the guise of worldly wisdom, and we too often swallow those lies -- hook, line and sinker – because the world’s wisdom seems appealing, until we face the consequences of following them!

What’s more, God’s wisdom seems almost foolish, until we see the fruit that comes from it. Whereas the wisdom of the world tells us to stand up for our rights, the wisdom of God tells us to stand up for what’s right. Whereas the wisdom of the world tells us to take what we deserve, the wisdom of God says receive God’s grace so that we won’t get what we deserve. Whereas the wisdom of the world tells us we’re an accident of creation, an evolutionary product of random chemical reactions and thereby worth little if anything, the wisdom of God says that we’re God’s special creation, created in His image, and so we have immeasurable value – indeed, we’re worth so much to God, that, in order to save us God let His only begotten Son die! Whereas the wisdom of the world tells us that the greatest virtue is tolerance, and so it’s not so important what we believe as long as we’re sincere in our belief, the wisdom of God says that the greatest virtue is love, and love does not leave a person to wander in the dark no matter how sincere their wandering, but instead directs a person to the One who is the Light of the World (Jn 8:12). Whereas the wisdom of the world tells us that whoever has the most toys wins, so build that career, acquire those possessions and worry about spending time with your spouse, your children, your friends, or even God, later, because we can always find time for them, later, the wisdom of God says: **“I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before Me,”** and, **“You cannot serve both God and money”** (Ex 20:2b, 3; Mt 6:24b). Moreover, it’s through the wisdom of God’s Word that we’re commanded to look out for one another, to serve one another, to honor one another, to forgive one another – things we can only do when we spend time with one another.

Every day we face the decision to follow the wisdom of the world and then experience the consequences of that wisdom, or, to heed the wisdom of God and experience those consequences.

And so, in our text, Paul wrote about the need to be wise in the wisdom of God. And he wrote us why wisdom is so important, namely, because the days are evil, because Satan, the one who masquerades as an “angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14), is out to deceive and mislead those created in the image of God.

In turn, we must be alert! We must walk in wisdom! We must make the most of our time, for wisdom involves a proper use of our resources -- our talents, our knowledge, and our time.

And so, for example, throughout the Scriptures we're challenged to be good stewards of our finances -- to give to God of our money. And we're challenged to give sacrificially so that our giving causes us to consider our priorities, and in so doing to decide where we want our hearts to be. (Mt 6:21)

But often a greater struggle we face in being good stewards of God's gifts is the struggle to be good and faithful stewards of our time, to use our time wisely -- for Satan will be most pleased to see us waste the opportunities we have for serving God and ministering to others. Satan delights when we squander our time, because that's the one commodity of life that we can never get back! And so, as we speak about practicing wisdom in our stewardship, we must remember that stewardship that pleases God includes the proper and productive use of time.

As I was looking over this passage, I was challenged to reflect upon my use of time, and in so doing I was made aware again of how much of my time is wasted time.

How about you? How much time do you waste . . . watching TV or surfing the internet? How often does a few minutes in front of your TV or computer, or playing with your phone, turn into hours of wasted time that you can never get back?

Now, television isn't all bad (just mostly!), and the internet is helpful (sometimes), and we need to have our phones at hand (although not in hand as often as they are). We can learn a lot with the wise use of these items. But, whenever we make use of one of these items, we need to ask ourselves who has control of whom? Do we use these possessions for our edification and the blessing of others, or do we spend hours in mindless vegetation because of some enticing or provocative visual and audio stimulus?

I would challenge you to keep track for one week of how much time you spend watching TV or surfing the Internet or playing with your phone or reading things whose content is of little value. Then, as you add up the hours at the end of the week, ask yourself if you're happy with the amount of time given to those activities.

But more importantly, ask yourself whether or not you think God would be pleased with the amount of time that you spent on those activities.

And, as we consider Paul's charge to make the most of the time -- of the opportunities God gives us to love and serve others -- let's also ask ourselves, "How much time do we spend with those important to us?" Surely most of us would agree that our spouse, our children, our parents, and our close friends are significant people in our lives. Yet some of us spend less time talking with them than we do twittering the night away!

Sadly, studies show that the average father spends about 5 minutes a day talking with his children, while the average mother spends about 10 minutes a day in quality conversation. Is that enough time to show our children that we care about them -- that we want to be there for them? Is that enough time to teach godly values that can form a foundation for wise decisions as our children face life's challenges?

And what about our relationship with God? How much time do we spend with God in prayer, meditation, and the study of His Word? Does our time spent with God reflect what we profess as Christians -- that our greatest desire is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (or should be; Mk 12:30)? Or, do we stingily measure out every minute we spend in prayer and the worship of God, while squandering away hours on meaningless and even spiritually harmful activities?

And how much time do we spend trying to understand the needs, cares and concerns of our neighbors? After all, a mark of genuine wisdom includes knowing the longings, sorrows and hurts of the world within which God calls us to minister? How much time do we spend helping others, and how much do we spend serving ourselves?

Walking in wisdom requires that we use our time intelligently and profitably, knowing that some of Satan's greatest gains are made when we throw away our time on foolish endeavors.

And so, Paul commanded that we must make the most of every opportunity, and then he told us how. We're most efficient, most wise, when we understand and do the will of God.

And what is God's will?

As Paul has made clear throughout the letter to the Ephesians, God's will for His children is: that we would put our faith in Jesus and in turn know the joy of having Jesus as our Lord and Savior; that we would use our God given abilities for the building up of the Body of Christ; that we would be loving, forgiving, encouraging, hardworking, generous, humble and truthful; and, that we would not live according to the wisdom of the world but according to the wisdom of God, even when God's ways seem foolish in the eyes of the world.

Jim Elliot sought to do God's will by exercising this godly wisdom in bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Auca Indians of Ecuador, for he believed that: "he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!" And, as a reward for their efforts, he and four other men were killed by the Aucas in January of 1956. Now, some missiologists, who too often measure wisdom in worldly terms with its practical accountings, look back at the efforts of these five men and criticize their every step. But these men and their wives and friends prayed, studied God's Word, sought God's will, and proceeded in faith. In the world's eyes their deaths represented a waste of five brilliant young men. In God's eyes they were the seed that had to fall to the ground and die for new life to spring forth. For indeed, the Aucas were eventually reached with the gospel – and that by the witness of two women -- Elizabeth Elliot the wife of Jim Elliot, and Rachel Saint the sister of Nate Saint, who was one of those five martyred missionaries. And so, through the courageous sacrifice of five godly men, and later through the self-less devotion of Elizabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint, the words of Jim Elliot became a victory shout for the Christian Community around the world, for in the sacrifice of those five men the world came to see that: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!"

In that one statement Jim Elliot summarized the wisdom that has moved the church throughout the ages to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth -- a wisdom that transcends any wisdom this world has to offer. For, the wisdom of the world says, "find your own road to salvation, follow your dreams, play hard, grab your piece of the pie, and look out for number one!" But the wisdom of God says:

**"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."** (Mt 16:24-25)

As believers, each day we find ourselves standing at a cross-road with decisions to make. And we can choose to follow the wisdom of our world, and perhaps experience some immediate pleasure, but in the end face a life filled with emptiness and despair. Or, we can choose to walk in the wisdom of God, and face each day in the power of God, knowing that regardless of what we encounter, as we walk in the wisdom of the Lord, we will experience a peace that transcends understanding, and a harvest of unspeakable joy.

The choice is yours: Will you walk in the wisdom of the world, or in the wisdom of God? And remember as you consider your answer that the consequences of your decision shall be with you for all eternity.

May we all choose wisely – in accordance with the wisdom of God!

Grace and peace to you,

Pastor John

**Remember in Prayer...**

**Our Shut-ins at home:**

Tillie Herman, Marcella Goard, Jan and John Pedersen, Hazel Landry

**At the Eddy:** Dot Multunas, Edna Wells

**Those dealing with health issues:**

Stan Bentley, Kelly Valerio

**Our Church:**

Pastor John and the Session

**Our Community:**

Those who don't know the Lord  
Those dealing with financial difficulties  
That our schools would be places of safety

**Our World:**

Missionaries serving around the world  
Open doors for sharing the Gospel message  
Persecuted Christians around the world

**Our college students:**

Brian Giddings (Roger Williams)  
Joshua Multunas (Gordon Conwell)  
Alida Scechitano (Boston College)  
Natalie Scechitano (Houghton)  
Angelina Solomon (SUNY Albany)

**Help Fill the Shelves at Hope 7's Food Pantry!**

Hope 7's food pantry serves families in need right here in our own community. The need is great and has been growing every year!

**During the month of February we will be collecting toilet paper.**



Donations of other non-perishable food items will also be accepted.



Our next Sunday school class will be held **February 17<sup>th</sup>** following the worship service.

**Questions of Faith**



- Do you ever wonder...*
- If the Bible is true?*
- What God is like?*
- What the big deal is about Jesus?*
- What the church is all about?*

The Outward Ministry Committee is offering a series of presentations to answer these and other questions of faith. We would ask you to consider who you know that might be interested in learning more about what it is that we, as Christians, believe and then invite them to come with you to learn and ask any questions they may have.

The next "Questions" event will be held **February 17<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 – 7:30 PM.** We will be considering the questions:

- "What is the significance of the cross?"
- "What is salvation and why do we need it?"

There will be a brief presentation and a time for questions and discussion. Light refreshments will be served.

**Bring your questions and find answers that will transform your heart and mind!**

## Bible Quiz for February 2019

For this quiz we will return to our study of 1 Corinthians as we continue through this letter as part of our current sermon series. In particular we will consider questions from chapters 7 through 9.

1. True or False: Paul believes it is essential that all Christians who are able should get married.
2. True or False: Paul believes that the main reason to marry is to avoid sexual immorality.
3. True or False: Regarding giving directives, when Paul writes: "I not the Lord", what he is saying is that what follows was his opinion and should not be taken as a word from God.
4. Fill in the blanks: "Only let each person lead the life that \_\_\_\_\_ has assigned to them, and to which God has \_\_\_\_\_ them."
5. True or False: When Paul says that a believer living with an unbelieving spouse makes that spouse holy, Paul means that the unbelieving spouse will be saved through the faith of the believing spouse.
6. Fill in the blanks: "\_\_\_\_\_ puffs up, but \_\_\_\_\_ builds up."
7. True or False: Regarding the eating of food sacrificed to idols, Paul taught that each was allowed to do what he or she pleased and they should not worry about how their behavior was seen by other believers.
8. True or False: Although we are free in Christ to live as we believe is right for us, in accordance with God's word, when our behavior negatively impacts another Paul taught that we should be willing to sacrifice our personal desires for the good of the other.
9. Fill in the blanks: "For though I am \_\_\_\_\_ from all, I have made myself a \_\_\_\_\_ to all, that I might win more of them."
10. Fill in the blanks: "To the weak I became \_\_\_\_\_, that I might win the \_\_\_\_\_. I have become \_\_\_\_\_ to all people, that by \_\_\_\_\_ means I might save some."

## Mission Updates

*"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" 1 Peter 4:10*

Your giving to Third Church enables us to support many varied ministries, both locally and around the world. The funds given and the prayers offered for our various mission partners are greatly appreciated and we wanted to share some of the thoughts and comments we have received from those we support.

**From Perry Jones (Capital City Rescue Mission)** – "Your gift not only provides physical nourishment, you also help fill the emptiness of our city's homeless and hungry neighbors by offering spiritual hope. Chris lived for years struggling with addiction. Today, he is a graduate of the New Life Program. He is employed and grateful to be part of the Mission's Transitional Living Program. His life is transformed. Thank you for making a difference one man, one woman and one child at a time."

## General Financial Update for December

	Year to Date	December	
Total			
Income	\$168,969.50	\$ 18,792.00	
Total			
Expenses	\$171,035.03	\$ 15,861.92	
Difference	\$ (2,065.53)	\$ 2,930.08	

### 2019 Per Capita

The 2019 Per Capita apportionment is \$43.00 per member. If you would like to help offset this cost, please use the blue envelope in your offering envelope box. Thank you.



### LENTEN PROGRAM

Wednesday evenings at 6:15  
Beginning March 6<sup>th</sup>

The Upward Ministry Committee invites you to join us during this Lenten season for a time of worship and fellowship. We will gather on **Wednesday evenings at 6:15 beginning March 6<sup>th</sup>** for a light meal of soup and bread followed by an informal time of worship.

If you would like to contribute to the meal you can bring a pot of soup or cookies to share.



### Serving This Month

#### February 3

Worship Assistants: Natalia Multunas  
Ella Miller  
Greeters: Pat Gilmaier  
Head Greeter: Andy Miller  
Nursery: Alice Bentley & Lois Pasinella  
Communion: Sue Laz  
Fellowship Hosts: Dean & Doris Calamaras

#### February 10

Worship Assistants: Deena Dominy & Jesse Ofori  
Greeters: Joe Pasinella & Alice Bentley  
Head Greeter: Peter Laz  
Nursery: Jen McAuley & Irene Ofori  
Communion: Andy Miller, Bill Multunas,  
Dean Calamaras, Alice Bentley  
Fellowship Hosts: Valerie Bidwell  
Vaughn Skarzynski

#### February 17

Worship Assistants: Sue Laz & Eric Ofori  
Greeters: Valerie Bidwell  
Vaughn Skarzynski  
Head Greeter: Rob Jensen  
Nursery: Alice Bentley & Lois Pasinella  
Communion: Doris Calamaras, Eric Ofori,  
Jason Laz, Deena Dominy  
Fellowship Hosts: Sue Laz

#### February 24

Worship Assistants: Bill Multunas  
Natalia Multunas  
Greeters: Dean & Doris Calamaras  
Head Greeter: Andy Miller  
Nursery: Jen McAuley  
Irene Ofori  
Communion: Natalia Multunas, Pat Gilmaier  
Rob Jensen, Sue Laz  
Fellowship: Holly Steciuk



#### February Birthdays

2/3 Julie Ann Tootell  
2/4 Valerie Bidwell  
2/7 Diane Morlock  
2/10 Ame'-Jane Mai Tootell  
2/23 Joan Wocher  
2/27 Victoria Nolan



#### February Anniversaries

2/25 Kirsten and Joe Hope

**Session Meeting  
January 14, 2019**

**ACTION ITEMS**

1. A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to approve the amended 2019 budget.
2. A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to appoint Terry Marra as the General Fund treasurer for 2019 and to appoint Dean Calamaras as the Session Designated Funds treasurer for 2019.

**CLERK'S REPORT**

- Reporting for the record the ordination of Deena Dominy to the office of elder on January 13, 2019.
- Reporting for the record the installation of elders Dean Calamaras, Deena Dominy, Jennifer McAuley and Andy Miller on January 13, 2019.
- Joshua Multunas preached on December 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Committee Reports**

- Upward Ministry (Worship and Prayer)
  - We will be planning for the Lenten Season which begins in March.
- Inward Ministry (Congregational Care and Christian Nurture)
  - There will be a pot luck luncheon along with the Annual Meeting on February 3rd.
- Outward Ministry (Mission, Outreach and Communications)
  - Mission spending for December
    - Capital City Rescue Mission       \$ 500.00
    - Bangladesh YFC                   \$ 500.00
    - Compassion International       \$ 456.00
  - The next Questions of Faith event will be Sunday, February 17th, from 6:00—7:30. We will be looking at the significance of the cross and what salvation is and why we need it.
- Stewardship
  - Finance – General Fund and Session Designated Funds
    - There was a positive cash flow during December of \$2,930.08. This gives us a year-to-date deficit of \$2,065.53. The actual cash deficit was \$444.53 which equates to 3% of total expenditures. Unspent mission funds of \$1,621.00 were moved to the restricted account.
    - At this point we are short about \$175 per month, or approximately \$40 per week.
    - 2018 Financial Giving Statements were distributed.
  - Property
    - Will be looking into a new phone and internet service provider.
    - Some items that will need to be considered in the coming year – organ repairs, document security and destruction, replacement of the windows in the sanctuary and the addition of a childcare space.
  - Albany Presbytery
    - Moderator Kate Kotfila and Vice-moderator Michael Burkley are offering to do a pulpit exchange with any interested church.
    - There is no longer a physical presbytery office. All staff members are working from home as of 1/1.

**Pastor's Report**

- Will be attending Boundary Awareness training.
- Committee Assignments for 2019 were handed out.

**Next Meetings**

- January 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM, Informal Study meeting. Please read **The Cross and Christian Ministry** by D.A. Carson, chapter 4.
- February 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM, Business meeting. Please read **The Cross and Christian Ministry** by D.A. Carson, chapter 5.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Laz, Clerk

## ***From Music and AV Ministries...***

### **“A More Groovy Kinda Love”**

You can almost set your watch by it. You can definitely set your calendar! You walk into Wal-Mart the day after Christmas (perhaps your first mistake!), and you're greeted by the unmistakable signs of Christmas, which took place just the day before, right? Nope. You're greeted by the red and pink display announcing... you got it-- Valentine's Day! Sheesh--have these people ever heard of the concept of *letting the dust settle*? No rest for the weary--on to the next holiday and opportunity to separate us from our money! So here we are in February--the LOVE month. Sorry, Abe and George--your birthdays are just an afterthought. If we're lucky enough, we'll get a day off to celebrate your *combined* birthdays. But there WILL be a whole lot of sales taking place in your honor, so rest easy (figuratively and well, figuratively!)

Chances are you'll get to hear, read and see all kinds of things about *love* this month. Lots of ads and commercials, especially geared toward men to steer us to the right flowers, chocolates, life-sized teddy bears and even pajamas! All guaranteed to make us successful in our romantic pursuits. The chances of us hearing much about the *love of God*? Not as good. But I'm going to do my part here. I'm going to tell you about three tremendous hymns of our faith that speak volumes about that matchless, unparalleled and unconditional love of our Creator--the ultimate *groovy* kind of love. (Yes, the 60's were VERY good to me!)

Our first stop declares it clearly, right in the title--"*The Love of God.*"

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade:  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.*

F.M. Lehman penned the hymn, but actually only two *other* verses. The words above have been attributed, incredulously enough, to an insane asylum patient, who scrawled them on the walls of his room shortly before his death. Another amazing example of the kind of profound writing that has been scribbled on the likes of prison walls and such. But alas, the uniqueness here may lie more in his memory and transmittal of the words than their originality. Apparently, research on the song led to a Jewish rabbi, who immediately recognized the words as being by the Jewish poet, Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai, who wrote them for the Feast of Weeks or what we now know as *Pentecost*. Pretty astounding that these words, written at the Mediterranean Sea in 1050 A.D. should find their way into a hymn composed in Pasadena CA in 1917, all via the recollections of a profoundly disturbed man. Or was he?

*O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure  
the saints' and angels' song.*

Our second hymn about the *more groovy* love of God is "*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*"

*Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down;  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling; all thy faithful mercies crown!  
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.*

No question of compositional unfamiliarity here! This was written by the great poet/songwriter, Charles Wesley, author of over 6,000 hymns. The youngest of 18 children (you read correctly!), he lived from 1707-1788,

overlapping several decades with the great classical composer, J.S. Bach. Most of Wesley's hymns are based solidly on the Scriptures, which is what gives them so much cross-denominational appeal. He and one of his brothers, John are credited with forming the bedrock of Methodism through their writings' devotion and expression of Christian spirituality. Charles, especially, effectively used scriptural allusion to provide a veritable spiritual roadmap to a Christ-centered life.

This particular, beloved hymn follows a cycle of prayers for the Holy Spirit, prayer for the Return of Christ and prayer for the finalization of God's new creation in that new heaven and earth. The first verse, quoted above, speaks of God's great *downward mobility* in coming to earth as a baby, prepared to make in us his "humble dwelling"--the *love of God* made manifest, incarnate, *in the flesh*. As such he represents *all compassion and pure, unbounded love*. We are to know him and become more *like* him until we see him as he is. "Changed from glory into glory", he writes in verse 4, quoting nearly directly from 2 Corinthians 3:18. He describes that day in heaven when "we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise." When we sing this hymn, remember--we are inviting God to dwell in us, to "enter our heart" and visit us with his salvation".

And finally, for this article at least, what I consider to be the *big kahuna* of hymns about that *more groovy* love of God-- "*And Can It Be*".

*And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood!  
Died he for me? who caused his pain!  
For me? who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

If nothing else, this hymn takes the prize for complexity of punctuation and # of questions asked! And once again, we owe a debt to Charles Wesley, who authored this extraordinary compendium of Christian salvation as a response to his own, following a period of convalescence from illness in the home of a friend. And once again, there was a connection to Pentecost, the feast observed on May 21 that year (1738), when Charles believed he heard a heavenly voice commanding him to "rise and be healed of all thy infirmities."

Filled with poignant, rhetorical questions, the hymn uses stunning imagery, even, as in verse 3, reminiscent of Peter and Paul's miraculous deliverance from prison as told in Acts 12 and 16:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

Wesley begins his final verse with the truth of Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And therein lies the crux of that amazing love of God--the love God so loved us with, John 3:16 says, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever should believe on him would have eternal life. After every verse we sing the chorus that asks the same rhetorical question:

*Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

We'll sing all three of these this month. "Amazing", "groovy"--Charles Wesley or Phil Collins--the 60's or here and now. Let's celebrate this phenomenal *Love of God!*

*With Joy in the Journey,  
Sal Sceccitano*

**The Annual Congregational Meeting** of the Third Presbyterian Church of Troy, NY will be held on *Sunday February 3rd, 2019* following morning worship. We will begin with a pot luck luncheon and then move into the business of the annual meeting. You are encouraged to attend as we celebrate the past year and look ahead to the new year. The luncheon will have an international theme this year, so if you are able, please bring a dish to share that reflects your heritage.

The purpose of the meeting being to:

- Review committee reports for 2018
- Review the 2019 General Fund budget
- Elect members to serve on the Nominating Committee for 2019
- Approve the pastor's Terms to Call for 2019
- Act on any other business or information brought before the congregation.

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



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