

Footprints of Westminster

January/February 2018

Preaching Christmas

Some preachers believe that they have to hit a homerun on Christmas Eve. Others believe they need to proclaim the mysteries – and most of these are incomprehensible to the “nones” and “spiritual but not religious” – of Christmas as they elaborate on the incarnation, virgin birth, the supernatural coming of God. Still, more “orthodox” preachers want to connect Christmas with Calvary, or as a billboard in Central Pennsylvania announces, “born to die”. I don’t take any of these paths to Christmas preaching. Of course, I aim at excellence and desire to communicate the deeper messages of the incarnation, but it is the excellence of making Christmas come alive in the experience of those present, perhaps not until next year. While moments of grace can be dramatic and a worship service can be life-changing, more often than not grace comes without fanfare and may not even be noticed as it moves through our lives. My hope is to open the door for God’s revelation in the busyness and reveling of the season.

These days, the Isaiah 9 reading seems all too relevant. To at least half those present, we have been in a state of national confusion, chaos, and uncertainty, for the past year. Leaders seem to have lost their reason, bloviating about nuclear war like playground bullies; intentionally creating environmentally-destructive programs or eliminating environmental regulations; rolling back gains in human rights and health care; and preferring polarization to community. Our national and planetary future is in doubt. Some have given up altogether, feeling themselves powerless pawns in the machinations of the indifferent, if not, malevolent powers and principalities. We need a light to shine in our darkness. We need images of hope. We need to discover, as Howard Thurman says, the growing edges of personal and institutional spiritual transformation. On Christmas, the hopes and fears of all the years are gathered in a humble stable and in the messiness of our lives.

I move from Isaiah to the synoptic and Johannine Christmas stories, once more emphasizing the messiness and complexity of the first Christmas. The Christmas story is simple and undramatic, repeated in the birth of every child. But, the birth of every child is testimony to God’s growing edge and hope in the darkness. Moreover, this child, born in Bethlehem, changes everything and gives birth to a new season of human history. Divinity coming to a working class family who have nowhere to stay. Christmas is about unlikely incarnations, not only in Bethlehem but in our own lives. God comes to the places that hurt most and that are most troubled in our world. God comes to the undocumented workers and their “dreamer” children, Syrian refugees, persons experiencing homelessness, and God comes to us. John’s Gospel goes even further to proclaim that the true light enlightens everyone – yes, everyone without exception – and that includes black lives matter protesters, frightened white males supporting Trump and Moore, justice-seekers and corporate moguls. As Titus and John both note, salvation is possible for everyone. The “Christmas magic,” touted by television holiday shows is not just the kiss under the mistletoe but the transformed heart and lifestyle we see in Ebenezer Scrooge, George Bailey, and our own world-weary and wintry spirits.

Footprints of WPC

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Our Mission is:



LOVING GOD,

We are a community of faith, called together by Jesus Christ to love God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our minds, and all our strength. (Mark 12:30)

LOVING LIFE,

Southwest Florida is the best place we know to live out our faith with one another, learning together and loving each other.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

We were created by God, each with a unique gift to share with our neighbors. We are encouraging and empowering the sharing of gifts with the world in Jesus' name.

I keep in mind the joyful messiness of Christmas, the presence of the Infinite in the finite, and God in humankind, but most of all I share this good news through a story – a story about fallible humans who, having been touched by an angel, seek all the rest of their lives to live up to God’s revealing presence. At Christmas, we are the characters – we are unkempt and weary shepherds, privileged magi, anxious political leaders, and harried parents. We are the Christ-child, albeit metaphorical, in the sense that God has a dream for us. Here is a chance for all of us to hear the message, be transformed, and go forth illumined by what we’ve experienced.

Pastor John (The Reverend Dr. John Wintringham)

Happy Birthday to all of you born in January

1	John Progar	3	Don Townsend
3	Ed Richter	3	Ray Scherf
5	Phyllis Redford	5	Val Beechy
10	Nicole O’Dell	11	Emmett Scott
13	Laura Cooper	14	Woody Johnson
17	Karen Jones	19	Betty Wolfe
21	Mary Morse	21	Nancy Atherton
22	David Rezabek	23	Corinne Sipes
23	Gerald Jones	25	Lura Backer
28	Eugene Sommerfeld	29	Maricele “Mary” Gates
31	Cheryl Angus		

Happy Birthday to all of you born in February

1	Trudy Thorn	5	Becky Beckwith
7	David Sipes	13	Aubrie Borden
14	Mary Ann Wells	18	Linda Progar
22	Jeanne Paulsen		

All Committees Annual Reports are due in the church office by Friday, January 12, 2018. These committee reports will be part of the Annual Report presented to the congregation at the January 28, 2018 Annual Congregational Meeting.

SCOTTISH SUNDAY SERVICE AND DINNER

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

The Fellowship Committee announces that our Annual Scottish dinner will be held on Sunday, February 18, 2018, in the Sarah Center following our church service. We are working on the menu and will provide a delicious meal for you at the best possible price. Sign ups will be Sundays, January 28th, February 4th and 11th. Further information will be in our Sunday bulletins. Those attending are encouraged to share their Scottish ancestry and/or Scottish association (trips, or other information

pertinent to Scotland). Everyone is designated a Scottish “associate” on this special day regardless of their heredity. Please save the date of February 18!

Thank you to everyone who brought in your empty ink and printer cartridges throughout the year. We received a reimbursement check for \$77.75 deposited in the church account to pay for our worship bulletins. Thanks again everyone.

Sanctuary Flower Dedications for January and February, 2018

1-7, Nancy Atherton	1-14, Beth and Mike Stone
1-21, Nancy Shimandle	1-28, Pat Dodson
2-4, Sherri Kramer	2-11, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Richter
2-18, Jim and Becky Beckwith	2-25, Mike and Beth Stone

Brass Vases

The brass flower vases have been repaired, cleaned, and ceramic coated. They will never need polishing again. If water gets on the outside, they should simply be dried. They also should never be covered and should be handled, when if ever necessary with gloves. We ask everyone to please not touch them unless it is necessary. And when you do handle them, be very careful and wear gloves.

And Other News from Around Town:

John Crowell is very pleased to announce that the Manatee County Special Olympics team received FIRST PLACE! These games were in the “State Games” and John won the “Gold”. (And this was out of 40 teams!) Go special Olympics and Go John!!!

The Eat Around Lunch Bunch is planning on having lunch on Saturday, January 20, 2018, at noon, at Red Lobster, 14th St West. We welcome anyone who wishes to join us. The “bunch” enjoys one another’s friendship, camaraderie and a good meal together. Please RSVP to Mary Anne Paulsen, 755-9427, so that she can make sure they have the table and enough seats available for all of us.

Addendum # 14

Hacker, Don (Donald E) went to live with Jesus on 11-27-17
Newhall, Sue, went to live with Jesus on 12-20-17
Sarver, Sally, address change, C/O Brook Haven, 1 Country Lane, Apt. 202, Brookville, OH 45309
Wilson, Carolyn, went to rest in Jesus’ arms on 11/28/17