

The Third PRESS



March 2023

"Grounds for Assurance: Abiding, Affirming, Acting"

In the early days of radio in Great Britain, George Bernard Shaw was giving a talk about the peculiarities of the English language. In the course of his dialogue he mentioned that there are only two words in the English language which begin with the “sh” sound but which are not spelled with “s-h”. Hearing that, a woman wrote back to say that Shaw was wrong – that there was in fact only one word to fit that category – the word “sugar”. Mr. Shaw sent a postcard back to her with a simple question. It read, “Madam, are you sure”?

Being “sure” of something is not easy – especially when it comes to issues of faith, and trust in God – and especially when the trials, tragedies and temptations of life overwhelm us. And yet John wants the church to be sure: to be sure of our salvation through faith in Jesus; to be sure that we are children of God; to be sure that He is with us always, and is even ever-present within us by His Spirit.

We encounter this theme of assurance – and the desire of John that his “beloved” be assured -- throughout this letter. For example: in chapter 2 and verse 5 we read: **“This is how we know that we are in Him . . .”**; in chapter 3 and verse 14 we read: **“We know that we have passed from death to life . . .”**; in chapter 3 and verse 24 we read: **“This is how we know that He lives in us: We know by the Spirit He gave us”**; and most especially, in that verse that speaks to the purpose of this letter, in chapter 5 and verse 13 we read: **“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

Clearly, John wants us to know some things with certainty. In particular, John wants us to feel secure in our relationship with God. And to this end, as we saw last month when we looked at verse 12 of chapter 4, John mentions God’s abiding in us. In the passage that I’ll reflect upon for this newsletter, 1 John 4:13-16, John repeats this truth, but in these verses he expresses that truth in terms of mutual abiding – in terms of God in us and us in Him. Then, he gives evidence upon which believers can build a foundation of trust in the reality of that “mutual abiding”.

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A community of Christ -followers where,

The Head of the Church
is...

The Lord Jesus Christ

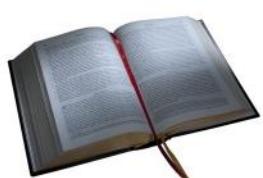
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Church are...
Every Believer

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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



Of course, just because the Bible teaches something doesn't make it easy to believe or accept that thing, after all, we live in a culture that's accustomed to judging reality by our five senses. And because we can't see God – as verse 12 affirms (see Jn 4:24) – He can't be analyzed as we can analyze a finite, material object. What's more, although we can "sense" God's presence in our spirit, we all know how unreliable and how easily deluded feelings can be. The maxim of our day, "If it feels right it must be right" is a poor foundation upon which to build any faith or spirituality.

In other words, all the "normal" methods we might use to seek certainty seem inadequate and unreliable when it comes to being certain about God.

So how can we be sure of our new life in Christ?

In the passage we'll reflect upon in this newsletter, John presents four pieces of evidence that we can use to help build a solid foundation of faith – a surety of our salvation that will not be shaken or destroyed when life's challenges crash upon us. As we consider what these pieces of evidence are, let's first read our passage as found in 1 John 4:12-16.

¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

¹³This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

The first piece of evidence our passage presents to assure the believer that she or he does know God is the fact that all who have put their faith in Jesus have received the Holy Spirit. We encounter this in verse 13 as it builds upon what we looked at last month in verse 12.

Verse 13 also looks back to verse 24 of chapter 3, where John first mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit. The difference between verse 13 of chapter 4, and verse 24 of chapter 3, is that, in chapter 3 John affirmed that God gave us "the Spirit", whereas, in verse 13 of chapter 4 John says that God has given us "of His Spirit". The distinction is in the use of the word "of".

I mention this because some have misunderstood this use of "of" to mean that the believer can receive a "portion" of the Spirit – as if God gives His Spirit in doses. But the reality is that when a believer comes to faith in Jesus, all of the Spirit of God indwells us (Gal 4:6). In turn, when we pray for "the fullness of the Spirit", we're not actually asking God to give us more of the Holy Spirit, as if God gave us say 10% to start with, and if we're good with that, and apply it wisely, He'll give us more. When we speak of "more" of the Spirit we're speaking metaphorically of yielding "more of our hearts" to the Holy Spirit, who is already in us in His fullness.

I take time to mention this because this is part of our assurance – knowing that all of the Spirit of God makes a home in the believer. What's more, the Spirit of God will not leave the believer – although the presence of God's Spirit may become less evident as a person waivers in walking rightly with the Lord. Our challenge is to allow God's Spirit to be Lord over more and more of our lives – that He might "fill us" (work in and through us) even to overflowing (Eph 5:18).

The Holy Spirit is one person of the Triune God. And when we're "born again" (Jn 3:3, 5, 7) we receive the Holy Spirit, the life of God within us. This has been the consistent teaching of the New Testament from the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8). On that day Peter affirmed this truth saying:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -- for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

Consequently, the apostle Paul could write:

“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” (Rom 8:9b)

And, of course, the corollary is true as well, namely, if anyone does not belong to Christ he or she does not have the Spirit of Christ.

The greatest gift of the ascended Christ to His church is the Holy Spirit, who is Himself the source of all other gifts and graces which we need in order to live as faithful and fruitful children of God in this world. Being filled with the Spirit then can be understood as being constantly energized by the life of God within us as we open every area of our lives to His dynamic influence. It's the Spirit who produces the love of God in us towards others – our friends, and even our enemies. It's the Holy Spirit who grows in us the mind of Christ and the character of Christ.

The living God within us will always produce the characteristics of Christ in us – the characteristics of righteousness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, patience and love – as we walk in the Spirit.

When a believer experiences that inner constraint to love another unselfishly, whereas before she might have feared, ignored or rejected another – that's evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in her. When a believer offers forgiveness for a hurt done to him or to one he loves instead of seeking ways to pay another back for that hurt – that's evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in him. When a believer gives of her resources to the poor and needy sacrificially whereas before she might have calculated her giving so has not to interfere with her lifestyle – that's evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in her. And that evidence is real assurance of salvation.

In other words, as we see God's Spirit working in us that's evidence that we do belong to God – that we are His, and always will be.

Of course, we can't avoid the negative implication in this. When someone claims to be a Christian but criticizes the church without helping it to serve better, or goes off on his own thinking he can worship and serve God apart from God's people, or withholds from the church the resources God has given him that he might instead satisfy his own wants, or displays a lack of patience or graciousness or forgiveness, then it's not only appropriate but important to ask whether that person really does love God, and whether the Spirit of God really does live in him.

Where the Spirit of God is at work, our lives are transformed so that our bitterness is sweetened, our irritability is calmed, our hardness is softened, our love is purified and multiplied.

The first piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have received the Holy Spirit. The second piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have the testimony of the apostles.

Linked to the witness of the Holy Spirit is the witness of the apostles. This, of course, is true because it's the Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles to teach, preach, and write what they did (1 Tim 3:16). And yet, both are needed.

Jesus Himself taught His disciples this need for the Holy Spirit and their witness when, in the Upper Room before His crucifixion, Jesus said:

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father -- the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father -- He will testify about Me. And you also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning.” (Jn 15:26-27)

The “you” in this passage from John's Gospel, as with the “we” in verse 14 of “1 John 4”, refers to the apostolic company (see 1 Jn 1:1). It was the apostles' unique privilege and responsibility to witness to what

they saw and heard. In fact, one of the main tests of New Testament apostleship was that the person saw and heard Jesus teach, and was commissioned to pass along what they were taught.

All Christians are “sent ones”, which is what the most basic sense of the word “apostle” means – sent to bring the transforming truth and love of Christ into our world (Mt 28:18-19) – but only a few were “commissioned” by Jesus for their specific apostolic ministry.

What John is saying in verse 14 is that we can find assurance of our faith in the fact that the testimony we’ve received and believed in is from Jesus’ “apostles”. We can believe and trust their word – as opposed to the false teachers who had “wormed” their way into the church in John’s day, and who do the same in ours. And we can believe the apostles because the message they proclaimed and recorded is inspired by God’s Spirit, and finds its roots in the message they received directly from Jesus (1 Cor 15:1-3).

We have not seen Jesus, but they did. They saw the eternal Word made flesh in the person of Jesus. As Peter affirmed in his second letter:

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” (2 Pt 1:16)

The apostles taught that the pre-existent Son was sent by the Father into the world; and, that He came to be its Savior by His real human death on the cross. These are historical facts, and the testimony of the Spirit and the apostles, come together to affirm these truths. Which also means that we can’t separate the work of the apostles from the work of the Spirit, or, in other words, we can’t separate the work of the Spirit from the Word of God delivered to us. What’s more, the One who wrote the Word through inspired human authors, uses that Word to bring us “to life” and to build us up in the faith. And the vindication of the reality of the Spirit’s work in our lives is seen in our commitment to the Scriptures.

Because the Scriptures are the work of the Spirit, our desire to read and know God’s Word is evidence of the Spirit’s presence in us. In turn, where there’s no desire for the Word of God there’s either no work of God in that individual, or, that person has so suppressed the working of the Spirit that she has lost an appetite for the Word the Spirit inspired.

If that describes you, pray that you will hunger after that Word – pray that God will help you to give your mind over to the working of God’s Spirit in you.

The first piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have received the Holy Spirit. The second piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have the testimony of the apostles. The third piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have personally acknowledged Jesus as God’s Son.

We encounter this evidence in verse 15, where John writes:

“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.”

Now, we need to remember that John is writing to the church, who, it is assumed, has made such a confession. John’s purpose here is to encourage those who might be feeling uncertain about their salvation that if they’ve made that profession of faith – with repentance – then they can rest assured of their salvation (Rom 8:38-39).

As we put verse 15 alongside verse 12, we see John moving from the theme of love to that of truth. Again, John speaks of God living in the believer, but this time the evidence of that is not our love, as in verse 12, but our outward confession of our inner conviction. Of course, that inner conviction means nothing if it isn’t based upon the truth. Simply put, there can be no relationship with God without the historical incarnation of Jesus. But, because of the incarnation of Jesus, and because of His death, resurrection and ascension, we can be sure that we’re saved, when we acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God – when we:

“declare with our mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in [our] heart that God raised Him from the dead”. (Rom 10:9)

So, what does John mean when he indicates that the condition of the assurance of salvation is that we “acknowledge” Jesus as “the Son of God”?

Clearly, by “acknowledge” John means more than a simple intellectual acceptance of a historical fact. At the same time, in our post-modern day where the existence of absolute truth is challenged, and where being “objective” is believed to be impossible, John is not discounting the need for intellectual acceptance of the truth of Jesus’ person and work.

Saving faith depends on a doctrinal confession concerning the person of Christ that involves our whole being – our thinking, our feeling, and our doing. In turn, evidence of the authenticity of this confession of faith is seen by our obedience to God’s commands and our growth in becoming like Jesus in character. In other words, truth, love and holiness can’t be separated. But then we saw this last month when we reflected upon the interdependence of the “Doctrinal”, the “Social”, and the “Moral” tests of genuine faith.

From the earliest days of the church it was understood that believers must be instructed and encouraged in right believing -- because right belief leads to right behavior. We need to be reminded of this, especially in our day when “Creeds” or “Statements of Faith”, or “Essential Tenets” are seen as too limiting, or too stifling.

We need to understand that what we believe is fundamental to framing and directing how we live.

We need to understand that any personal relationship we may claim to have with God has to be rooted in His revealed truth – the Bible -- if it’s to be assessed as genuine.

The bottom line is that we can never really enjoy, celebrate or appreciate what we don’t know. We see this truth in all our relationships. Friendships will never go deep unless we come to know more about our friends. Marriages will never grow strong amidst the challenges of this world if husbands and wives don’t work at knowing each other. What’s more, if we don’t really work to know the truth about another person, then for all we know, what we may be enjoying or appreciating about that person may not even be true about that person, but may only be what we’ve created in our minds as part of our own wishful thinking.

And the same can be said of our relationship with God.

In fact, many claim to believe in God, but the “God” they believe in is one they created in their imaginations – often to serve their own wants (Rom 1:25). And then they get frustrated, confused, or despondent when this “god” of their imagination can’t live up to their expectations.

John is saying that if we’ve put our faith in Jesus – the One who is the only begotten Son of God – we’ve put our faith in the truth, and our affirmation is then a solid basis for our assurance of our salvation.

The first piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have received the Holy Spirit. The second piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have the testimony of the apostles. The third piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that we have personally acknowledged Jesus as God’s Son. The fourth piece of evidence our passage presents in offering us assurance of life with the Father is that the God in whom we trust is the God who is love.

Here, in verse 16, we again encounter that concise declaration: **“God is love”** (see 1 Jn 4:8). And John reiterates this statement because he wants us to understand that theological knowledge and doctrinal convictions, if true, can be proved by real life experience. In fact, such doctrinal truths can be deepened by such experience. Simply put, the experience of God’s love proves the doctrinal reality of God’s love.

When a man and a woman pledge themselves to live together as husband and wife, the vows they exchange include solemn promises that they rely upon, whatever may happen. “For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health” – this is an expression of the love that they already have for each other, but, which will deepen as they experience its reality in practice “through all the changing scenes of life.” On their wedding

day, a couple declares that their love is real. At the same time, only the demonstration of walking together in all situations can prove that their love is real.

And the same can be said of our relationship with God. Because God's love is grounded in His unchanging character, as we walk daily in a relationship of trust and obedience with Him, we're constantly in touch with that divine love, and through that ongoing experience we learn the reality of that love, and we learn to rely on God's love more and more.

Returning to the marriage metaphor, a couple who has been happily married for several years often has such extensive areas of agreement and mutual understanding that each can tell what the other is thinking without any words being spoken.

This is the relationship that our God wants us to have with Him – to live with the heart, mind, and will of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5; Rom 15:5; Eph 5:1-2). But this sort of intimacy with God is only possible if we rely on His love and walk in step with His Word (Ps 119:105).

What's more, if we want to experience more of His love and the intimacy of living according to His Word, we must release more of our life to the control of His indwelling Spirit.

Sometimes we go through trials and testing for that very reason -- because God wants us to rely on Him more completely and to trust Him more fully. Sometimes God allows us to go through trials and testing to refine and strengthen our faith, and to increase our hunger for Him (Heb 12:11).

John wants believers to be “sure” of our life and hope with the Father. And so, John writes in our passage that we can know that we live in God, and that God lives in us, because He has given us His Holy Spirit. This is the promise of His Son that was initiated at that first Pentecost, and that is experienced by all who come to the Father through faith in Jesus. Moreover, John says that we can know we've been given God's Spirit because we believe in Jesus with a belief that includes both mental ascent and active service – both love for God and others.

John writes that we can be sure of our salvation because of the fruit of the Spirit in us – not that we're perfect, but that we're moving in the right direction.

So how should we respond to this truth?

Our response should be to pray for and to allow God's Spirit to grow more and more of that fruit in us – that love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and kindness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control -- both that we might be a blessing to others, and that we might know for sure, in our heart and in our head, that we belong to God.

May you know that truth, and in knowing it, may you live it that you might be blessed and be a blessing, to the praise of God's holy name.

God's joy and peace be in you,

Pastor John

Remember in Prayer...

Our Shut-ins at home:

Stephanie Miller, Marilyn Gibbs, Edith Lovell,
Ginny Steffen, Alice Bentley

At Van Rensselaer Manor: Don King

At Peregrine Senior Living: Jan Pedersen

At Evergreen Commons: Stan Bentley

Those dealing with health issues:

Stan and Alice Bentley, Marilyn Gibbs, Doris Calamaras

Our Church:

Pastor John and the Session

Our Community:

Those who do not 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:

Christian Multunas (RPI)
Adam Stacey (RPI)

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

Any non-perishable food items and/or toiletries are always welcome. Currently they could use juice, toothpaste, and soap.

Donations can be dropped off at the church; taken to the food pantry (Monday through Friday from 9:30 - 11:45 AM); or you can contact Sue Laz to arrange for a pick-up.



If you would like to order Easter flowers, please use the order form in the order of worship or call the church office at 518-283-2420 before March 26th.



LENTEN PROGRAM

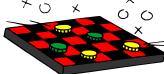
Wednesday evenings at 6:15
beginning February 22nd

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 February 22nd** 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 some cookies to share.



International Crossroads Game and Movie Night



April 1st from 4:00-9:00 PM

We will have the privilege of hosting a game night for international students and their friendship partners on April 1st. There will be snacks and time to play various board games, along with the always popular ping pong tournament! Then we will have pizza and end the night by watching a movie that presents the gospel message. This is a wonderful opportunity to interact with individuals from all around the world. Everyone is encouraged to come and join in the fun for all or just part of the evening. If you can help with set up, clean up, or serving snacks please speak with Pastor John or Sue Laz.



We are charged in Scripture to take the Gospel message into the whole world. In this case, the world is coming to us!!

Ministry Opportunity

Lawn Mowers will be needed soon to help keep the church lawn looking nice during the spring and summer months. If you like being outside...this is for you!! If interested please speak with Andy Miller or Rob Jensen.



HOLY WEEK SERVICES

PALM SUNDAY – April 2nd at 10:30



We will remember and celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

MAUNDY THURSDAY – April 6th

This is a time to remember and reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. We will begin the evening with a **light meal at 6:15** followed by **worship with communion at 6:45**.



GOOD FRIDAY – April 7th



We will gather for worship at 7:00 P.M. to reflect on the suffering of our Lord and what it means for us today.

EASTER SUNDAY – April 9th at 10:30

Come and celebrate with us the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of new life in him!



COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE June 3rd from 9:00 – 2:00

The Outward Ministry Committee is once again planning for a Community Garage Sale this summer so as you do your spring cleaning begin saving the treasures you no longer need and plan on joining us on the 3rd. There is no cost to participate. Just bring a table and your treasures to sell. If you would like to use one of the church's tables please speak with Andy Miller.



If you would like to help out, we are looking for people who can help with set up and clean up and a few people who could man the food table and the church information table. This is a great opportunity to interact with individuals from the community and share the love of God with them.

If you are able to help out or if you have any questions, please speak with Sue Laz.

Where Will You Use Your Gifts?

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." - 1 Peter 4:10

Listed below are various areas of ministry available for you to participate in. Please prayerfully consider how God may be calling you to use your gifts to support and grow the ministry of Third Church.

Upward Ministry includes the areas of worship and prayer. You could:

- serve on the Upward Ministry Committee to assist with planning for all regular and special worship services.
- serve as a worship assistant
- participate in our music ministry (vocal or instrumental)
- help with A/V during the worship service

For more information, please speak with Deena Dominy.

Outward Ministry - You could serve on the Outward Ministry Committee to help with planning ways to share the Gospel with those outside the church and to serve those in need. For more information, please speak with Sue Laz.

Inward Ministry, this ministry is divided into two main areas – Congregational Care and Christian Nurture. You could

- serve on the Inward Ministry Committee
- visit those who are homebound or in nursing homes and hospitals
- provide meals or other assistance when needed
- send cards or make phone calls for special occasions
- Participate in our Sunday School and Bible studies

For more information, please speak with Bill Multunas.

Stewardship, includes all the ways we care for the resources God has given us – our finances, our building and grounds, our staff, etc. You could:

- Serve on the Stewardship Committee
- Help with maintenance and minor repairs
- Help with lawn mowing, trimming, etc.
- Help on special work days

For more information, please speak with Andy Miller.

As always, we ask you to **pray regularly** for Pastor John, the Session and the work of the various committees.



Your giving to Third Church enables us to support a variety of ministries, both locally and around the world. The funds given and the prayers offered for our various mission partners are 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) – “As we begin this new year, I’m grateful for friends like you who reach out to those who are suffering – who show kindness for strangers you may never even meet – because it’s the right and godly thing to do. When you and others demonstrate your concern for the poor through your gifts and prayers, our entire community is lifted up and made stronger. Thank you for your kind help friends at 3rd Pres. You are so good to the needy in Jesus’ name.”

From Peter Halder (Bangladesh YFC) – “All praises and glory to God and with the help of the Holy Spirit – BYFC finished another blessed year with the desired ministries and programs in 2022. Even though COVID was present in its minor shape. Apart from that, the global economic crisis and war have disrupted the journey a little from its regular process. But thanks to God we could function the way we had planned, and we are looking forward to 2023. All your sincere prayers and support are always encouraging to continue the journey.”

Newsletters from the Vissani's, Niki Campbell, and Peter Halder are posted on the bulletin board in the narthex.



March Birthdays

3/4 Nancy Boyle
3/11 Serena Solomon
3/22 Vaughn Skarzynski
3/25 Sue Stierer
3/26 Chuck Davey
3/27 Diane Lewinski

March Anniversaries

3/23 Joe & Lois Pasinella

General Financial Update for January

	Year to Date	January
Total		
Income	\$ 15,037.00	\$ 15,037.00
Total		
Expenses	\$ 15,866.28	\$ 15,866.28
Difference	\$ (829.28)	\$ (829.28)

Bible Quiz for March 2023

The following questions focus on John chapter 19.

1. When the soldiers were mocking Jesus, what two items does John say they put on Him?
2. How many times did Pilate meet with Jesus and examine Him before delivering Jesus over to be crucified? (note: You need to get information from chapter 18 to help answer this question.)
3. True or False: After multiple examinations Pilate figured out that Jesus was guilty of the charges brought against Him.
4. What is the name of the location where Pilate sat down and pronounced judgement on Jesus?
5. True or False: When Pilate introduced Jesus to the crowd as their King, the chief priests responded, “We have no king but Caesar.”

6. What was the name of the place to which Jesus carried His cross (with Simon of Cyrene’s help according to the synoptic Gospels)?
7. How many others were crucified with Jesus? Where was Jesus positioned in relation to the others?
8. Pilate had a sign made to fasten to the cross above Jesus so onlookers could see who He was. The sign read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”. How many languages was it written in and what were those languages?
9. Upon looking down from the cross to His mother and one of His disciples, Jesus said to that disciple, “Here is your mother.” Who was the disciple to whom Jesus said that?
10. After Jesus died, who asked Pilate for Jesus’ body? As that person took Jesus’ body to bury Jesus, who helped him with the burial?

(Answer key: 1. Crown of thorns, purple robe , 2. Three, 3. False , 4. The Stone Pavement (Gabbatha in Aramaic), 5. True, 6. The Skull (Golgatha in Aramaic), 7. Two, between them, 8. Three, Aramaic, Latin, Greek, 9. “the disciple whom He loved” (believed to have been John), 10. Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus)

I’m departing from my customary music/audio-visual topics to report, as I’ve been requested, on the National Gathering of our new Presbyterian denomination that John and Dan McAuley and I attended at the end of January. John and I flew from Albany to Los Angeles and Dan joined us from Boston as we joined about 1200 others at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach. No one had to twist our arms to leave the chilly northeast for the high 60’s and sunshine of our “left coast”!

Much has been skillfully said (and written) about our decision to leave the PCUSA for this new *Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians*, so I won’t tread over that well-worn territory other than to happily confirm the excellence of our decision! I had been to two national gatherings of the PCUSA--in 2012 (Plattsburgh) as elder delegate for Albany Presbytery and in 2014 (Detroit) as Presbytery Moderator. The contrast between the experiences was stark. Politics seemed to infuse every aspect of the PCUSA enclaves. We were greeted by protestors angrily demanding our divestment from companies they found objectionable. Divisive causes were trumpeted with less than subtle in-your-face techniques. And hours and hours and hours of meetings were held with debates and votes on issues that continue to vex and divide our church even today.

NONE such things marked our gathering at ECO. We were there to learn, be inspired, be encouraged and to be cared for in body, soul and spirit. We were there to worship our one, true God in Spirit and in truth and had no other gods put before us. The famous contemporary Christian song, *I Can Only Imagine* posits what it might be like as we stand in the presence of the Almighty in heavenly glory:

*Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still?
Will I stand in your presence or to my knees, will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah?
Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine. I can only imagine.*

And *speechless*, unable to speak or sing is where I often found myself at times during worship. There was a noticeable absence of *hierarchies* in the structures of ECO and a marked lack of *red tape* needing to be cut to accomplish things and just *do* ministry. The attitude always seemed to be one of *What can we do to help you get this done?* Refreshing! Several speakers, not necessarily associated with ECO, nonetheless had a little fun with the oft-confusing environmental associations of our name and logo--*eco-friendly* indeed! I’m sure there is a healthy respect for God’s good creation and its care within the membership of ECO. But it is nice to see it not elevated as a religion unto itself the way it so often is in PCUSA.

As I noted in my briefer, verbal report during worship on Sunday, February 5th--we now have some work to do! Our Annual Meeting’s Statistical Report noted a net loss of four (4) “Covenant Partners” (what we now call our members). Three are now saints in the Church Triumphant and one left due to geography (now out of the area). It is important that we take advantage of the iron-sharpeneth-iron, mutual aid strategies with our sister ECO congregations in this Northeast “Cornerstone” Presbytery and begin deliberate efforts to see growth in our congregation. In a few years, John will embark on a well-deserved retirement and we will have to take a good look at ourselves as we ponder who God is calling to be the next shepherd of this flock. Tom Bodett famously told us that he’d “Leave the light on for us” in those Motel 6 commercials. Let’s make sure that Third Church isn’t just leaving the light on for a chosen few who will turn it off as the last ones on the way out the door!

I’m glad we made the right decision to switch denominational vessels. I wasn’t always of that mind when this was being discussed years ago, especially when I first came here in 2014. Having just served as Albany Presbytery Moderator, I continued to maintain a strong loyalty to that structure. But eventually, I came to the realization that this wasn’t about us leaving the PCUSA. It was about acknowledging that the PCUSA had already left *us* and what were we going to do about it. I joked in that earlier worship report that I could have summarized our trip to the ECO Gathering in five words: *We made the right decision!* But I didn’t then and obviously haven’t here either. It’s not that I’m being paid by the word--I just don’t want to put Abby in shock with such a short article! ☺

With joy in the journey,
Sal Scecchitano

Endowment Fund Offerings

On June 3 of this year the congregation of Third Presbyterian Church will have been worshiping God in this sanctuary for 61 years.

We are able to gather here each week to glorify God in community because of God's grace and the fact that over 60 years ago the members of this congregation gave joyfully and sacrificially of their time, talents and financial resources so this building and sanctuary could be here.

We now have an opportunity to do our part to ensure that the tradition of serving God in this community continues for many years.

As you know a condition of TPC leaving the PCUSA required us to pay \$19,000 to Albany Presbytery to obtain the title to the Church's property.

In order to facilitate a smooth and quick transfer from PCUSA to ECO the Session made the decision to use monies in the Endowment Fund to pay this sum. This congregation now has clear legal title to the property without debt.

As a result of this expenditure the Endowment Fund has been nearly depleted.

In order to help replenish the fund the Session has approved a special offer to be held between next Sunday and Pentecost Sunday. This offering will be in place of our traditional Spring Mission offering.

Your session respectfully requests that over the span of this offering you would prayerfully consider what you believe God is calling you to contribute to this offering.

By having a strong Endowment Fund it allows us to make major improvement and repairs to the church property and to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to our care.

By making a contribution, as you are able, to the Endowment Fund you will not only help build back the fund but also help with another important ministry.

Our new denomination "ECO Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians" is in the process of creating a seminary titled ***Flourishing Institute of Theology*** in order to prepare future pastors for the denomination.

Session has designated that 10% of the Endowment Fund Offering, up to \$1000 will be dedicated to help support this new and important ministry of ECO.

By contributing to this special offering you will not only help Third Church in the coming years but will also help prepare future pastors who will bring the Gospel to a world that desperately needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

If you have any questions about this offering, the Endowment Fund or the ***Flourishing Institute of Theology*** please doesn't hesitate to ask your Session members or Pastor John. Thank you.

**Session Meeting
February 13, 2023**

The regular monthly business meeting of the Session of Third Presbyterian Church of Troy, NY was held February 13, 2023, at 7:00 PM at the church.

Those members present, which did constitute a quorum, were Deena Dominy, Peter Laz, Sue Laz, Abby McAuley, Andy Miller, Bill Multunas, Holly Steciuk, and Kelly Valerio.

Action Items: A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to spend \$908.00 from the Building Fund to pay for repairs to the water system; A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to give \$1,000.00 from the Endowment Fund Offering to the Flourishing Institute of Theology.

Old Business: Some ideas presented for how we could use the Flourishing Grant were new signage and air conditioning for the sanctuary. The Session is open to other ideas.

Clerk's Report: Average attendance for January: in-person - 32; online -10; Andy Miller preached and officiated communion on February 5th; Albany Presbytery sent letters of dismissal for the church and for John to ECO; we have received confirmation from the Board of Pensions of PC(USA) of the discontinuation of our membership effective 12/31/22.

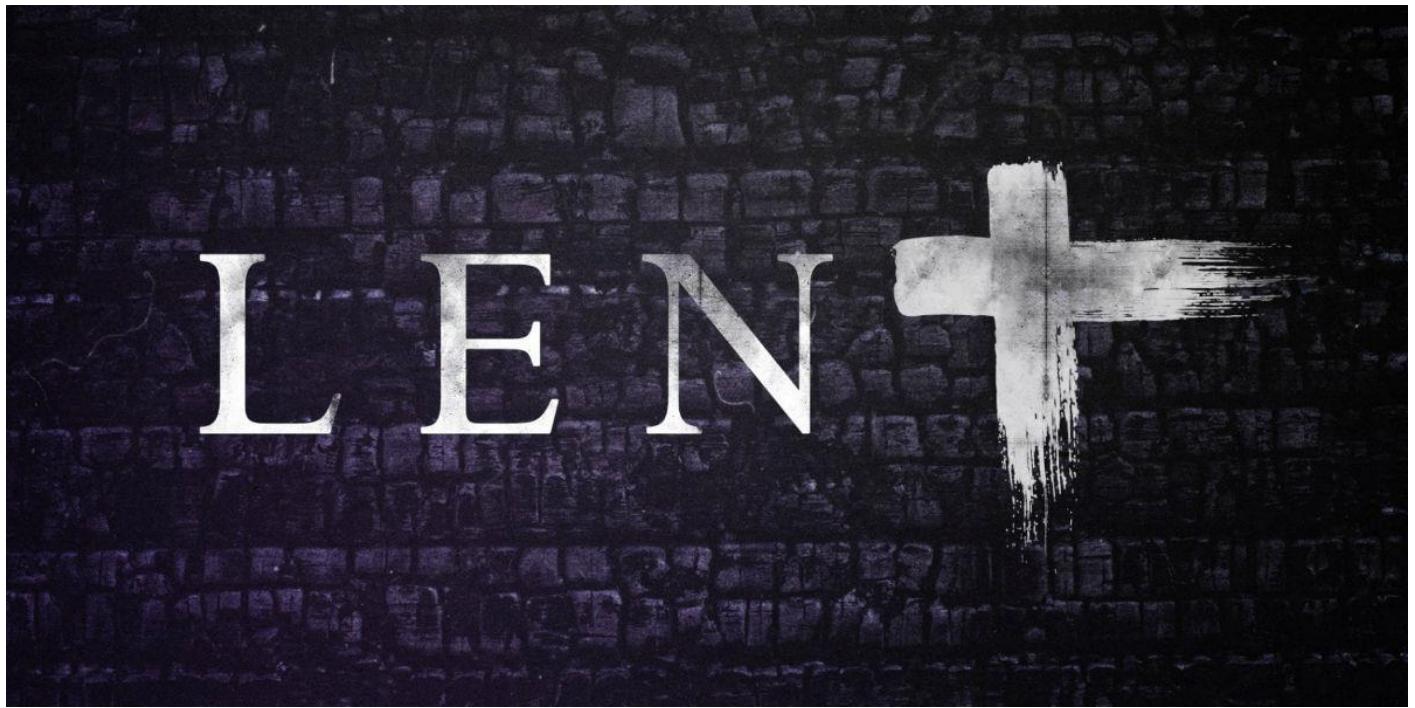
Committee Reports

- Upward Ministry (Worship and Prayer): Lenten Soup Suppers began on February 22nd; discussed ways to make worship more accessible to those with physical impairment; we have begun doing communion by intinction, the prepackaged wafer and juice will still be available for those who wish to partake in that way; we are looking to have a second greeter available each Sunday.
- Inward Ministry (Congregational Care and Christian Nurture): Hosted a luncheon during fellowship time on January 29th; Reviewed Benevolence Fund use for 2022; Have established a calendar to keep track of all the responsibilities of the committee.
- Outward Ministry (Mission, Outreach and Communications): Budgeted mission spending for January -- Bangladesh YFC, \$ 1,000, Dan and Mary Vissani, \$700.00; Will be hosting the International Crossroad Game Night on April 1st; Served the evening meal at Capital City Rescue Mission on Feb. 18 (will be serving the third Sunday of the even numbered months); tThe Community Garage Sale will be held June 3rd; upcoming Minutes for Ministry: April 23rd – Kevin Post for Youth for Christ, May 7th – the Upward Ministry Committee; June 4th – Niki Campbell for InterVarsity.
- Stewardship
 - Finance: the General Fund treasurer's report was reviewed -- there was a negative cash flow during January of \$829.28; A review of the pledged income shows we did not receive \$965.00 in January that was pledged for the month; The Ed Paul Trust is down to principal only and at some point, we will no longer receive funds from that.
 - Property: Yellow safety strips on all the stairs have been redone; Two water shut off valves were replaced -- one was in the boiler room and the other was the main valve in the closet to the right of the stage in fellowship hall; working on a building projects list of things that need to be done and things we would like to do when funds are available; looking to set up an IT team to oversee all the technology stuff.
 - Personnel: 2022 W-2 and W-3 statements were prepared and distributed in January; The 2023 Workers Compensation Audit was completed in early February.
 - Nominating: it was decided that the committee would use consensus (versus unanimity or majority) in the nomination process; Session needs to consider whether there should be term limits for serving on the Nominating Committee.

Pastor's Report: Confirmation class with Gianna is going well; Have been meeting with Falon and Adrian regarding May marriage; 3 individuals have expressed interest in joining the church so will be looking to start an Inquirer's Class soon; Presented information on the offering request to support the Flourishing Institute of Theology; Three key pillars in ECO are reformed, evangelical, and egalitarian.

Next Meetings: March 13th at 7:00. Business Meeting.

Time was spent sharing congregational concerns. These will be included in the closing prayer.
Respectfully submitted, Susan Laz, Clerk



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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