

Pastor Columns of 2021

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Please note that the earliest of Pastor Cindy’s columns recorded date to July 7th, 2021, according to our church’s database.

July

07/04/2021

My dear church family,

This Sunday is the Fourth of July, Independence Day. I am thankful that we can publicly meet every Sunday to worship God with no fear of government interference. I was a US Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines for two years in the late 1970's. This was during martial law in that country. President Ferdinand Marcos held dictatorial control. I personally observed the widespread poverty, the lack of infrastructure outside the major cities, the failing infrastructure even within Metro Manila, as well as the desire of educated Filipinos to work in, or emigrate to the US and other developed countries.

SS Columbia



I was not aware of the extent to which martial law enabled President Marcos and his administration to illegally accumulate significant wealth, nor of the extensive torture and death of some who opposed him. While our democracy has its faults, and the 245 years since we declared our independence have included regrettable policies and practices, I am proud of our country's values.

July 4th is also "Immigration Sunday" as designated by the PC(USA). On this day we remember and acknowledge the challenges of new immigrants among us. Our faith history reminds us that we are part of a long line of immigrants. The Hebrew people immigrated to the Promised Land. Matthew recounts that Jesus and his parents were refugees to Egypt fearing that Herod would find the child and kill him.

Many of us know the immigration stories of our own ancestors. My grandmother immigrated through Ellis Island in 1912 after sailing on the ship Columbia from her

home in northern Scotland. We have friends and associates who are more recent immigrants. Pastor Yang and his wife immigrated from Korea. Members of our congregation, the Muchiri family immigrated from Kenya. Our janitor and his wife, Solomon and Addis, are immigrants from Ethiopia. Last week, Johanna's caregiver, from Tonga, Uilani Tuakoi, recited John 3:16 for us. Our hospitals and care facilities are staffed by doctors and nurses from the Philippines.

Teresa Waggener, in the Office of Immigration Issues, PC(USA), recounts a conversation with a mother fleeing Honduras for the US, "If I stay in my country, my daughters will become criminals and I don't want to raise one more criminal. I don't want to bury my daughters."

Last week's scripture reading from Mark 5 told of Jairus, who asked Jesus to save his dying daughter. On the way to his home, some people came to meet Jairus and inform him, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe." After arriving at Jairus' home, Jesus healed his daughter.

Immigrants like the woman quoted believe that there is opportunity in the US for their children to live and to have productive lives. We have seen that to be true. We have also seen that the sacrifices immigrant parents make and the dedication and hard work of the immigrants, not only benefit themselves, but significantly benefit those of us who already live here.

Waggener challenges us, "Will we tell them not to trouble us, that their child is already dead. Or will we represent Christ and say, "Do not fear"?"
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/july-1-2018/> I believe that we at FPCA will extend a hand of welcome, saying, "Do not fear."

Willing to share our freedom in the US,
Pastor Cindy

07/15/2021

My dear church family,

We came to be without a television when our children were toddlers. As a result, books became our family's major form of entertainment. Murray and the kids read lots of History, Economics, Science. Since starting seminary, I've primarily read Religion, and now mostly Christian topics.

As you can imagine, our home has lots of books. Typically, we donate those we feel we can part with to our Friends of the Library bookstore, and while there, pick up replacements to supplement those delivered by Amazon. During the months of the "Shelter In Place" the Friends bookstore was not open. In a moment of inspiration, we decided to put boxes of books with a "Free" sign on the heavily traveled sidewalk in front of our house.

On the first weekend alone, 85 books were taken! It was so much fun to think that people wanted our books, and were willing to carry them off, that we tried again the next weekend. We were able to give away another 60 or 65 books. There is something wonderful about knowing that others value what you also have enjoyed and treasured.

The joy of sharing something valuable is at the heart of the Little Free Library movement. <https://littlefreelibrary.org/> The Mission Committee placed a beautiful red library on the corner of the church lawn. It has already seen lots of use, especially from the parents and children of the Small Size Big Mind preschool. The Committee is trying to ensure that there are always at least a few children's books in the library. If you would like to participate, you can take a book and or donate a book at the library itself. You can also bring books to the office. However, the Library is "Little", so we can't accept boxes of books. Please bring children's books in excellent condition and recently published books for adults. We try to always have at least one Bible in the Library. Already, five or six Bibles have been taken!

The written word has been an important element of our faith history. The Torah, which we know better as the first five books of the Old Testament, was read aloud to the people gathered for study or worship since the time it was written on scrolls. The letters of the New Testament were circulated among the gatherings of new believers. The account of Job's suffering includes a desire for a way to preserve his knowledge about God for the generations to come:

²³ “Oh, that my words were recorded,
that they were written on a scroll,
²⁴ that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
or engraved in rock forever!
²⁵ I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth. (Job 19:23-25 NIV)

May the Little Free Library contribute to our neighbors’ the joy of reading, and may it be a way that FPCA can proclaim to our world that the Redeemer lives!

With gratitude for the Word,
Pastor Cindy

07/18/2021

My dear church family,

God called to Moses to climb to the top of Mount Sinai. There, God spoke to Moses. God gave him the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. God also instructed Moses to have the people build God a sanctuary. God gave explicit directions for how His sanctuary, called the Tabernacle, should be constructed and what materials should be used for its structure and furnishings. Among the details, God described the curtain that would define the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant would reside.

Exodus 26:31-32 says, "You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver."

I love the care and detail with which God planned the tabernacle. While only the Chief Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, the outer courtyard, where the people would go to pray and worship God, was similarly planned by God to be beautiful. It was with similar care and attention to beauty that our sanctuary was planned more than 100 years ago.

From 1894 to 1914, the Reverend Dr. Frank S. Brush was the pastor of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Alameda (FPCA). During the design of the sanctuary, Rev. Brush was traveling in Italy. He was in awe of the beauty of the art depicting religious scenes that was both painted on glass and that used stained glass. At that time, the glass made in the United States could not accept color as could Italian glass.

Rev. Brush purchased Italian glass and sent it to the US to be used in the new sanctuary. The glass was stained, and the windows were painted in Chicago. The ten scenes depicting Jesus are framed by stained glass, while a church document of 1906 states, "The faces are exquisitely pictured. It should be said here that the glass upon which the faces and hands are painted is imported." Thus we know that some parts of the windows are painted, not composed of stained glass.

Soon after I was called as your pastor, I was told by several different people that Pastor Jack Buckley often preached a summer series using the scenes on the windows as the basis for the Sunday scripture. I am delighted that for the next ten weeks I will preach using the windows as the inspiration for the sermons. This will be a wonderful time to invite family members and friends to join us for the Sunday service.

In appreciation for the beauty of the sanctuary,
Pastor Cindy

07/29/2021

My dear church family,

On the first Sunday of the month, we celebrate Communion, which we also call “The Lord’s Supper.” Communion is one of the two sacraments which churches in the Reformed tradition practice. The other sacrament is Baptism.

You will recognize the familiar words spoken by the minister as the writings of Paul:

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,
²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
“This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

We acknowledge Communion as a gift from God. It is our opportunity to join with believers from all parts of the globe and throughout time, to remember Jesus and give thanks to God for our redemption through Christ. The bread and the cup enable us to see, feel and even taste the mercy and grace of God. When we participate in Communion, we show that, no matter where we are in our journey of faith, we have opened the door of our hearts to the knocking of Jesus. We show that we desire to be faithful followers of Him.

The preaching of the Bible and the practice of the sacraments are signs of our Reformed faith. The theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) taught: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the Sacraments administered according

to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists." Institutes of the Christian Religion 4.1.9

We celebrate Communion in community after the preaching of the Word, as part of our worship service. In addition, our Book of Order allows Communion to be carried to the homes of those who cannot worship by Zoom or in person. Last month Michael, Sonja and I visited Gene and Angie, Marilyn, Julie and Pearl, and Barbara. We celebrated Communion with them in their homes, and in so doing, we brought you, the congregation of FPCA, to them. It was wonderful to be with them after the long pandemic isolation.

You may notice an elder and deacon and I will be leaving the sanctuary before the end of the Postlude this Sunday. We will extend the worship service to bring Communion to friends at home. If you know of someone we should visit, please call the church office at 510-522-1477 and leave us the person's contact information.

Your Minister of Word and Sacrament,
Pastor Cindy

August

August 5, 2021

My dear church family,

This Sunday we will look closely at the stained-glass window depicting Jesus as the good shepherd. The window shows a tender scene in which Jesus is cradling a lamb in one arm and carrying his staff in the other as he leads two sheep along a path.

The Session of First Pres is charged with leading the congregation and providing for regular worship opportunities. The last sixteen months of the pandemic have been a challenge, with most of the worship services held on Zoom. Session was delighted to open the sanctuary for worship on Pentecost Sunday. This past Sunday, more than 40 people worshipped in the sanctuary. What a joy it was to see people sitting in so many pews!

However, with the rapid spread of the delta variant we are seeing the numbers rise in the city of Alameda. In June there were 47 new cases while in July, it increased to 239 new cases of the coronavirus. In compliance with the County guidelines Session will require all people gathering indoors to wear a mask, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated. Also, we will again ask that people space themselves throughout the sanctuary. Households may sit together. Those who travel to church together may consider themselves a household and sit together. Session will continue to provide Zoom services in August for those who would like to worship from home.

Many thanks go out to the members of session, and especially to all who make the Sunday worship services possible, including the worship leaders, the Zoom techs and gatekeepers, the sound techs, the choir members and musicians, and the audio/visual tech. It truly takes a large team to support the worship each Sunday.

In Mark 6:34, we are told of the time Jesus and his disciples used a boat to slip away to a quiet spot so they could rest after a busy season of teaching. However, some people recognized them as they left, and soon a whole crowd had gathered in the location where Jesus landed. Despite his fatigue, we are told that when Jesus saw all the people, he “had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Friends, Jesus is the good shepherd. Jesus wants to care for us. Let us willingly follow the One who will lead us beside the still waters.

Willing to follow,
Pastor Cindy

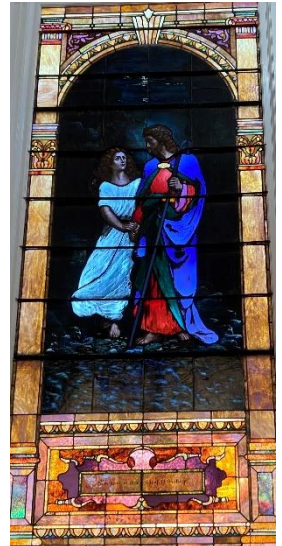
September

September 2, 2021

My dear church family,

This Sunday we will look closely at the stained glass window given in memory of Mrs. Sarah Hastings. Mrs. Hastings was born in Massachusetts and married at age 20 in 1835. She and her husband, William, had three children. Their third child died as a toddler. Then, three years later, William died of consumption at age 31.

Sometime in the next fourteen years, Mrs. Hastings and her two sons moved from the East Coast to Alameda. Here she met and married a widower, Samuel Hastings, whose first wife had died in childbirth. Mr. and Mrs. Hastings were among the 12 charter members of First Presbyterian Church in 1865, when she was 50 years old. Mrs. Hastings was very active in bringing people of Alameda into First Presbyterian. The historical document by Mark and Louise Cronenwett describes Sarah Hastings as an “ex-officio elder, deacon and trustee. It should be pointed out that Mrs. Hastings, who by her untiring zeal, played a major role in the start of the church.” Before the first permanent pastor was hired, Sarah arranged for traveling ministers to preach each Sunday. “She would send for ministers, meet them with her carriage and take them to their destination. She was the life and soul of social gatherings. She helped raise money and was very successful.” Sarah died at age 65.



Though Sarah Hastings experienced much sadness in her life, her faith in the grace and guidance of Christ remained strong. She left us a legacy of devotion to God.

This Sunday, our choir will sing “Abide with Me,” a hymn which was written about 15 years before the founding of First Presbyterian. I like to imagine that perhaps Sarah

Hastings and the congregation sang this hymn. The following verse seems quite appropriate to Mrs. Hastings' life:

*I need thy presence every passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

Ever depending on the abiding presence of Christ,

Pastor Cindy

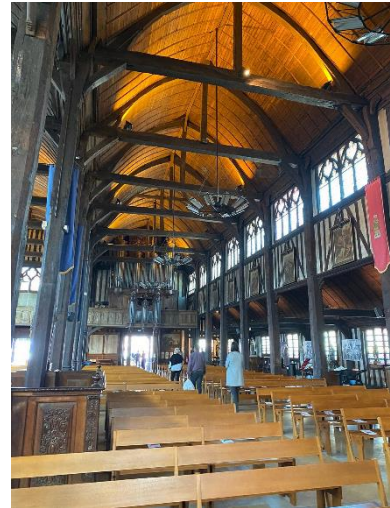
September 16, 2021

My dear church family,

Six years ago, Murray and I visited Normandy. In the picturesque port town of Honfleur is the Church of Saint Catherine, built in the 15th century by shipbuilders. Remarkably, it is constructed entirely of wood. As you can see in the picture, the nave of the church, the main area where the congregants sit, looks like the inside of an inverted ship. This, in fact, is how the word “nave” came to be associated with churches. It is derived from the Latin word “navis” which means “ship.”

Last Sunday our Scripture was Matthew 14:22-33. Jesus sent the disciples away while he stayed at the place where he had been preaching to the crowd. There was a violent storm which battered the boat in which the disciples were attempting to cross the Sea of Galilee. Jesus appeared to them, walking on the water, and they were terrified, thinking he was a ghost.

We can imagine that on seeing this frightening image, the disciples might have questioned why Jesus had ordered them to go out on the water. They had done everything right. They had listened to what Jesus said, they had obeyed Jesus, they were engaging in an activity that fishermen were well qualified to do, and they were together in the boat with others who also followed Jesus. Why would Jesus allow them to be approached by this terrifying figure?



Have you ever been certain about a ministry God called you to? You may have listened to Jesus guiding you and obeyed his instruction. You may have been well qualified for the responsibility given to you. And you may not have attempted the ministry alone but joined with others who had the same goal. Yet, you may have found that you were battered and frightened by unexpected challenges.

Jesus calls us to obedience. Jesus doesn't promise us smooth sailing. But Jesus does promise to always be with us (Matthew 28:20). And Jesus was with the disciples. After Jesus had identified himself and calmed the storm, the disciples declared, “Truly, you are the Son of God.” They had expanded their understanding of who Jesus was, and their faith was deepened by this experience.

May we continue to expand our understanding and deepen our faith in Jesus as we sail together in ministry.

Happily, in the ship together with you,
Pastor Cindy

September 30, 2021

My dear church family,

I am greatly enjoying our worship series on the life of Jesus as depicted in the stained glass windows in our sanctuary. I have the luxury of going into the sanctuary at various times of day. As the sun moves from east to west, various aspects of each window are highlighted or subdued.

Last week I preached for the second week on the window of Jesus rescuing Peter from the Sea of Galilee. Peter took his eyes off Jesus, and immediately had, “That Sinking Feeling,” (the name of my sermon) that all was not well. Crying out to Jesus, “Save me,” Jesus lifted him above the water and calmed the storm.



This Sunday we will dwell in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. This is another place of deep despair, but this time, it is Jesus who has, “That Sinking Feeling.”

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, **“Sit here while I pray.”** He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,”** he said to them. **“Stay here and keep watch.”**

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. **“Abba, Father,”** he said, **“everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** Mark 14:32-36

Dr. Marcia McFee wrote:

Gethsemane is the moment when a chain of events begins that cannot be halted. Once Jesus is taken into custody, there is no going back. So, we pause a moment with him in the garden just before his arrest, and we feel with him the temptations that arise when facing difficult circumstances—to run, hide, use whatever power we have, to change things, fight it, perhaps even bargain with God.

We walk among the sleepy disciples who just can't grasp what is about to happen. And we let the story remind us that no matter what we face, or how we fail to meet the demand of the moment, second chances are possible.¹

¹ Dr. Marcia McFee, Worship Design Studio, @www.worshipdesignstudio.com/passion, Week 6 of Lent

While we can only begin to imagine what Jesus was experiencing in Gethsemane, we can relate more easily to the reaction of the disciples. We have all had times of distress, perhaps when our expectations were not being met, when our world seemed to be falling apart, when we were faced with serious illness, when we were grieving the death of a loved one, or when, as during the pandemic, so many experienced deep loneliness.

At times like these, the temptations are great. The desire to give up, perhaps to crawl back into bed, cover our heads and just go to sleep, sometimes cannot be resisted. Yet we can look to the Lord's example and pray, "Not my will, God, but yours." And we can be assured that when, like the disciples, we fall asleep, failing ourselves and God, we will be forgiven.

Grateful for God's grace,
Pastor Cindy

October

October 8, 2021

My dear church family,

Our worship series on “Windows into the World” have enabled us to look at the life of Jesus as we look at each window. Last Sunday, we saw Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying. On this most anguished night of his life, Jesus went to God in prayer to confirm that he understood correctly what God the Father was asking him to do. “Not my will, but thine be done.” We read that throughout his ministry, Jesus sought quiet places to pray.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Mark 1:35

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. Luke 5:15-16



Do we intentionally set aside time to pray? When we are in the midst of difficulties or major decisions, do we seek to understand God’s will for us through prayer? In his book on Christian leadership, Henri Nouwen writes,

“[Jesus] asks us to move from a concern for relevance to a life of prayer, ... and from a leadership built on power to a leadership in which we critically discern where God is leading us...”²

Every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon at four o’clock I open all three double doors of the church and put out the sign:

“Open Sanctuary”

² In the Name of Jesus, Reflections on Christian Leadership, Henri J. M. Nouwen, page 91.

Come in to enjoy the windows
and the quiet

Many of our neighbors and some of the children and parents from Small Size Big Mind have walked in and admired the windows. Last week a neighbor who is a long-time member of First Pres Berkeley came in and we had a wonderful time of prayer together. This past Tuesday, Merrill spent the hour playing the piano and the organ. Her powerful music filled the sanctuary and reached easily across the sidewalk. It was heavenly.

I invite you to take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy your sanctuary and use the beautiful space as a place of prayer. I can't guarantee that it will be "deserted" nor "quiet", but I believe that you may find a space that is conducive to spending intentional time with God.

"Open Sanctuary"
Monday and Tuesday
4:00 to 5:00PM

In prayer,
Pastor Cindy

October 14, 2021

My dear church family,

Mary Magdalene is one of only four people identifiable by name in the scenes of Jesus depicted in our stained-glass windows. She is also the only person, apart from Jesus, shown in multiple windows. Last week we explored the encounter by Mary Magdalene and other two Marys with the angel at the empty tomb. On Sunday, I will preach on John 20, where Mary unknowingly meets Jesus, thinking that he is the gardener.

The Mary Magdalene of the New Testament is not the Mary Magdalene who has been depicted throughout the history of the church. Even today, Mary's identity is often confused with a woman whose sinful past is highlighted. Many have believed that Mary Magdalene is the woman who comes to the dinner held in Jesus' honor at the home of Simone the Pharisee. This woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her exposed, flowing hair. She then makes a most intimate gesture of kissing Jesus' feet then anointing them pouring out lavish amounts of expensive perfume from her alabaster jar. Jesus acknowledges the love and respect she shows, and says to her, "Your sins are forgiven." and "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This woman has been traditionally referred to as a prostitute, though there is no justification for this in the New Testament. The sins of the woman with the alabaster jar are never specified. Furthermore, since she is unnamed, and since Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the next chapter, many have assumed that she and Mary Magdalene are one and the same. Unfortunately, the description of Mary Magdalene was promoted in a series of sermons by Pope Gregory in the sixth century, ensuring that this reputation would last. We even see traces of this belief in our windows. Unlike the other two Marys, Mary Magdalene is shown with her hair freely flowing.

We do know that Mary Magdalene was healed by Jesus of "seven demons," perhaps indicating some form of mental illness. We know that she, and other women who had been cured of "evil spirits and infirmities" provided financial support for Jesus and his disciples. Finally, we know that a devoted Mary Magdalene was with Jesus at his crucifixion, at his burial by Joseph of Arimathea, and at the tomb that first Easter morning.

May we use the example of Mary Magdalene as a reminder to question our assumptions about what we may think is Biblical and study the Scripture to learn the truth.

In study,
Pastor Cindy

October 21, 2021

My dear church family,

This Sunday will be the last Sunday of the worship series “Windows Into the World.” We will look at the window of Jesus’ Ascension. The painting on this window focusses our attention on the expression on Jesus’ face during this theologically rich -event in his life.

Henri Nouwen is the author of The Return of the Prodigal Son which is the topic of the Wednesday evening book study. Nouwen describes the time he spent hours in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg contemplating Rembrandt’s painting “Return of the Prodigal Son.” The painting is hung on a wall near a large window so receives abundant natural light. Nouwen writes, “Gradually I realized that there were as many paintings of the *Prodigal Son* as there were changes in the light and, for a long time, I was held spellbound by this gracious dance of nature and art.”

We are blessed with the opportunity to experience this same “dance of nature and art” as we gaze at the windows in our sanctuary. I feel so privileged to hold a key to the sanctuary so I can look at the windows whenever I please. On Tuesday I was scrutinizing the Ascension window. On Wednesday, a very cloudy day, I looked closely at it again and saw, for the first time, a halo above Jesus’ head. I was stunned! How had I not seen the halo the day before? I suspect it was the “gracious dance of nature and art” that kept it hidden one day and revealed the next.

My husband Murray recently purchased a book written in 1909 about stained and painted glass windows. The author writes at length about the need to see stained glass windows at different times of day and under different light conditions to fully appreciate them. He asks, “How often can the tourist sit down in a church with the feeling that he has all the day before him, and can give himself up to enjoyment of the glass, wait (sic) till it has something to say to him?”

Most of us only see the windows on Sunday morning. However, the sanctuary is also open every Tuesday and Wednesday from 4 to 5PM. I encourage you to come see the windows in the afternoon light. Better yet, stop by the church when you have no time constraints at all, borrow my key, and enter the sanctuary to sit and “give yourself up to the enjoyment of the glass, waiting for it to speak to you.”



With wonder at the windows,
Pastor Cindy

October 28, 2021

My dear church family,

We are blessed to remember those friends and family members in the faith who have been a part of our lives or a part of this congregation in the years and decades before us. We will remember some of these by name on Sunday, as we celebrate All Saints Day.

It has been a special pleasure to learn more about the people named on our stained glass windows. I want to thank Mark and Louise Cronenwett for the many hours of research and detective work they did to learn so much about these folks who lived in the 19th century!

Today I'd like to remember a family whose legacy we enjoy every Sunday: the Meyers Family. Henry Meyers was the architect who designed our sanctuary. He also designed numerous buildings in San Francisco and the East Bay including Highland Hospital and the superstructure of the Posey Tube. A description of his collection is available here: [Henry Meyer Collection UC Berkeley 1901-1942](#)



While the architectural drawings of FPCA were destroyed in Meyers' office in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the picture shown here survived in his collection.

Henry and his wife, Bertha May had three daughters, Mildred (1898–1982), Edith (1900–1971) and Jeanette (1905–1993), all graduates of Cal. The Meyers family were members of First Presbyterian Church of Alameda.

Like her father, Mildred became an architect. Late in Henry's career he practiced with her until his retirement in 1936. She took over the practice until her death in 1982.

The Alameda Museum Quarterly, Fall 2014 issue, wrote an article about the Meyers sisters. The article is available here: [Alameda Museum Quarterly Fall 2014](#)

The following information is from that article:

“Edith continued her studies at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco. She practiced pediatrics from 1929 until 1950, but retirement didn’t appear to slow Edith down a bit. She served on the Board at Children’s Hospital in Oakland and was named chief of their Outpatient Department.”

“Avid world travelers, the Meyers sisters were well known for sharing their hobby at fund raising events they called Travelogues. Held at the Alameda High School Little Theater, they showed slides taken by Mildred of their exotic travels in Africa (a 6,000 mile trip from Cape Town, South Africa to Nairobi, Kenya); Australia and New Zealand; England; India and Burma; and, Japan. The events included commentary and narration by Edith, followed by refreshments that Jeanette helped serve.”

“Upon their parents’ deaths, Jeanette managed the assets and properties, including the family’s Dry Creek Ranch in Decoto (now Union City), California. All unmarried, the Meyers sisters made plans to bequeath over 1,200 acres of their ranch to the East Bay Regional Park District, the transfer of which was official in 1979. The sisters’ extraordinary commitment to philanthropy included several lump sum donations and annual trust disbursements to the many non-profit organizations they supported, including Alameda Girls’ Club.”

First Pres Alameda is one of the recipients of the generosity of the Meyers sisters. Each year FPCA receives a grant from the Mildred and Jeanette Meyers Fund. This year the grant totaled more than \$8,000. The legacy of the Meyers family lives on through their generosity to many organizations in Alameda and beyond.

With thanksgiving,

Pastor Cindy

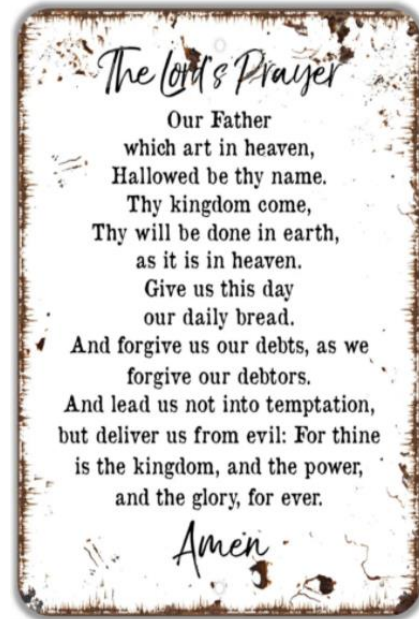
November

November 4, 2021

My dear church family,

Last Sunday during the worship service I began the Lord's Prayer. About halfway through, I suddenly couldn't remember the words. I stumbled along and improvised a bit until I reached the "Amen." It was an uncomfortable experience.

Later, as I thought about it, I was quite disturbed. The Lord's Prayer is one element of the worship service which we include every Sunday and which we pray word for word. The pastor needs to be able to recite the Lord's Prayer!



I wondered, "Had my mind been wandering during the time of prayer?" or, "Was I tired and therefore forgetful?" Then it occurred to me that the Lord's Prayer is a prayer that we say in community. In community, we not only affirm our shared praise and the common desires for which we petition God, but we encourage each other to participate in achieving the goals that Jesus first set out for the disciples. Finally, in praying aloud together, we guide each other in the words of the prayer. We become a choir of prayers!

During the pandemic, health precautions prevent the congregation from speaking and reciting aloud. I realized I'm not comfortable leading the Lord's Prayer when I am not able to hear the voices of the congregation praying with me. Praying it aloud alone removes the community aspect of the prayer.

This week we will again bow together for the Lord's Prayer. But this week, my voice will be joined by the recorded voices of our choir. I believe this will reestablish the community aspect of this important part of our worship service, and I suspect I will remember each word.

In prayer,
Pastor Cindy

November 11, 2021

My dear church family,

Today our nation is celebrating “Veterans’ Day”. Murray and I are flying our American flag. Murray’s dad and my uncles were all veterans of WWII. Last Sunday in church we honored those who are veterans and those currently serving our nation. We are so grateful for those who literally put their lives on the line to ensure our freedom, particularly our freedom to worship without fear of prosecution.

The picture we’ve shown here is of a plaque that is displayed in the church parlor. It lists the names of one hundred forty WWII veterans, all of whom we believe were members or friends of First Pres. If you have a magnifying glass, you may be able to read it. You may recognize some of the family names, such as Birkholm, Cronenwett, Fisher, Gielow, Moffatt, Romanowitz, Strehlow, Tebault and Wright.



Dr. Cronenwett, Mark’s dad, served in the Army Air Corps in the South Pacific for 2.5 years as a flight surgeon. He returned to his family and served the Alameda community for over fifty years as a physician, community volunteer, and an Elder of First Pres. Three of the names on the plaque have stars displayed indicating that they were killed in the line of duty. I would like to share their stories here.

Henry Campbell Harris - February 10, 1915 - July 2, 1943. Henry lived at 876 Walnut Street. He was in the Navy, on board the Tulsa-PG-22. He died at age 28, in a POW camp in the Philippines and is buried in the Manila American Cemetery.

Harry Douglas Hedges - February 7, 1925 - December 12, 1944. Harry was a member of the Alameda High School Class of 1942, a tennis and football player. He lived at 1601 High Street. Harry was a Sergeant in the Infantry and received a Purple Heart. He died at age 19, in Alsace, France. He is buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery in France.

John Dewitt Lucas - December 24, 1917 - June 5, 1943. He lived at 1600 Central and later at 1500 Fernside Avenue. John was a Second Lieutenant in the Marines and a pilot. His plane was shot down in the Pacific during the Battle of Midway. His body was never found. He was 25 years old.

We remember those who served and those who died, and we pray for peace in our country and throughout the world.

Remembering,

Pastor Cindy

November 18, 2021

My dear church family,

Did you know that Mary and Joseph and their infant son Jesus were refugees? They fled because they feared that Jesus would be killed by King Herod. In Matthew 2 we read the story of the wise men who cleverly avoided telling Herod where they had found the baby Jesus. When Herod realized this, he was furious, and declared that all babies aged two and younger in Bethlehem were to be put to death. An angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream to warn him. So, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and escaped to Egypt during the night, where they lived until Herod's death.

Many people flee violence in their home countries to enter the United States as refugees. Many of you spoke to me about your concern for the many families trying to escape sure persecution if they remained in Afghanistan. With the advice of a committee of the four Catholic parishes on the island, Kathy/Rose Kennedy and I orchestrated the formation of a committee comprised of volunteers from FPCA, AKPC, St. Vincent de Paul, Alameda All Faiths Coalition, and the Alameda Rotary. A retired attorney, Robin Seeley, who is a member of Rotary agreed to take on the Herculean effort of chairing the committee which now has almost 30 volunteers. We named it, "Never Alone in Alameda."

Miraculously, within a week of forming "Never Alone," we were made aware of an Afghan family who was trying to leave Kabul and would need sponsorship once they arrived in Alameda. Through the Afghan father's efforts on Facebook, he located a childhood friend who now lives in Alameda with his two children and wife who is bilingual. The family of six, with children aged 4 to 16, was able to get a flight out of Kabul to Dubai to Istanbul, finally arriving at SFO last Saturday. They have squeezed into the apartment of the family of the childhood friend.

Another miracle was that a non-profit organization in Alameda called "Shelter in Peace" was willing to give us first right of refusal on a small apartment on Encinal for an under-market rent.

On Monday, your Session met and agreed to guarantee the rent on this apartment for the first 6 months that the family will occupy it. The generosity of the Session and therefore of our congregation will never be forgotten by all the organizations involved in this effort. The adults in the family hope to find employment soon. Eventually the US government will offer a housing subsidy since the family holds "Special Immigration Visas." In addition, a member of FPCA started an Afghan Relief fund which has been growing each day. With the combination of these monies, it is possible that FPCA will never have to pay any of the rent.

But, just as the family has met great uncertainty in the last many months, so too has the “Never Alone” committee in helping them. After multiple previous inspections, the “final” city inspection of the Encinal apartment determined that all sheet rock needs to be replaced with double fireproof sheetrock. This pushes back the move-in date by ten or more days. Therein lies another opportunity for the committee, and us as a congregation, to possibly shine Christ’s light on this family.

Does anyone in the congregation have a home or apartment where you could accommodate this family for ten or possibly more, days? They are a dad who speaks English, a very considerate mom who desperately wants to learn English, a 16-year-old who is already reading English but does not speak English, an 11-year-old boy, a 7-year-old girl and a 4-year-old boy. The children are all well behaved and have shown to be very respectful of the home of the family they are currently staying with.

Or, do you know of any temporary housing for them? The current plan is that when they must leave the apartment on Saturday, they will move into two rooms at the Coral Reef Hotel near South Shore. One of the rooms has a kitchenette. Unfortunately, it is a very expensive option. If you have any ideas, please call me at 925-788-4120.

We have no biblical record of how Mary and Joseph supported their little family in Egypt. Perhaps they, too, had to rely on the hospitality of the people where they settled. I know for the Afghan family who have settled in Alameda, they are enormously grateful for the help they are receiving from the people of this island city. Please pray with me that a more suitable place for them to stay will materialize in the next two days.

We trust in the providence of a loving God. Pray with me that God will provide for this family just as God provided for the children of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. (Nehemiah 9:20-21)

Trusting in God,
Pastor Cindy

THIS JUST IN:

Another Miracle - Temporary housing no longer needed for the Afghan refugee family

I just received an email announcing that St Joseph Basilica has agreed to allow the Afghan refugee family to use its two-bedroom apartment on Encinal for a few weeks. Let us pray our prayers of thanksgiving to God.

With warm Regards,

Pastor Cindy

November 23, 2021

My dear church family,

Murray and I would like to wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving day. It is good to set aside a day and even a season when we can join together remembering to thank God for God's love and to thank each other for the care and dedication shown to us. Murray and I are thankful to you and to God that you have called us to First Pres Alameda. We enjoy and appreciate serving the Lord with you, our church family.



The Psalmists frequently wrote poems of thanksgiving. Psalm 92 reads:

*It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.*

As members of the Alameda community, we are thankful that the Afghan family who we have been helping was able to leave Afghanistan. Many Afghan people who supported the efforts of the US during the 20-year war have not been able to make their way to the US. Among them are interpreters, judges, police officers, and many others. The Wall Street Journal recently reported (11/22 Page A5) that 70,000 Afghans "entered the pipeline" to receive temporary placement at US military bases in the US or abroad. The sheer numbers have overwhelmed the processing by the State Department. Fortunately, many other countries across Africa, Europe, and South America have agreed to temporarily house the refugees. However, the wait to enter the US, as they were promised, may be extended for many, many months.

It could be argued that helping one family is only a drop in the bucket. However, for this family it means everything. As your pastor, I am thankful and appreciate the willingness of congregants to volunteer with "Never Alone in Alameda" to help this family and to donate funds to meet their immediate needs. I also give thanks that your leadership, the Session of this church, chose to guarantee the rent for this family so that they were able to secure an "under market" rental on Encinal Avenue. Fortunately, the funds donated by the many members of "Never Alone in Alameda" who belong to First Pres, Alameda Rotary, the All Faiths Coalition and others, continue to come in, so the rent may be covered without any outlay from First Pres.

This year, the first Sunday of Advent begins on the Sunday immediately following Thanksgiving. We have chosen an Advent worship series called “Angels Among Us.” We will be reading the stories of the angels who visited John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. We will listen to the words of these messengers from God, especially their statements of reassurance, “Do Not Be Afraid.”

As we reflect on the journey that the Afghan family in Alameda has been on, and the many uncertainties they face in their new home country, we imagine that they need to hear the words, “Do not be afraid” often. I know they will hear those words, perhaps not always spoken aloud, but conveyed by the many helpful gestures of the people of this congregation and others. In this season of Advent, we can see many “Angels Among Us.” Those angels are you!

With thanksgiving to God and you,
Pastor Cindy



December

December 2, 2021

My dear church family,

What joy it was to walk into the sanctuary on Sunday and see all the beautiful Advent decorations. This Advent we are remembering the angels who were part of Jesus' birth story. We are also recognizing the "angels among us" who bring God's hope and peace to us every day. Thank you to each of you "angels" who decorated the sanctuary. A special thanks to Damon, and his daughter Bailey, who painted two sets of "life-size" angel wings so we can have our pictures taken wearing wings!



Advent means "coming". But many of us prefer to think of this season as a time of "waiting." In last Sunday's sermon I preached that fear often paralyzes us and prevents us from stepping out in faith to answer God's call to join in God's mission for the world. Henri Nouwen wrote an essay entitled, "Waiting for God." Nouwen wrote,

"Fearful people have a hard time waiting...People who live in a world of fear are more likely to make aggressive, hostile, destructive responses than people who are not so frightened... [The people in Jesus' birth story, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary] have been able to wait, to be attentive, to live expectantly...People who wait have received a promise that allows them to wait. They have received something that is at work in them, like a seed that has started to grow...Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it... Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary... were alert, attentive to the voice that spoke to them and said, "Don't be afraid. Something is happening to you. Pay attention."... Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary were not filled with wishes. They were filled with hope... Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes. Therefore, hope is always open-ended."

Last Sunday we lit the candle of hope. May we allow our hope in Christ to enable us to set aside our fear this Advent season. May we be the "angels among us" who bring the

hope of Christ to our family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, and help them overcome their fear in this chaotic world. May we be messengers of peace.

With hope, in peace,

Pastor Cindy

December 9, 2021

My dear church family,

Did you notice last week that our angel on top of the organ had grown white feather wings? Every week there is something new or different in the sanctuary. This week be sure to look for an addition to the Christmas tree. Our worship series, “Angels Among Us” is a theme that has lots of potential for fun decorations.

Last Sunday I invited those who were worshipping to write down the names of “angels” in their lives. Many people mentioned other members of the congregation, or family members, or friends. I even recognized the names of two family dogs!

Our congregation was recently thanked for being “angels” to Gwen, a woman who was having many challenges in 2019. Before I arrived at First Pres, the church helped her when she lost her cell phone and when she needed money for food and bus fare. She frequently visited for prayer and encouragement from Pastor Jeff. Early in the pandemic, she was contacted by an estranged family member, and invited to live with them outside the Bay Area until the danger had passed.

Gwen stopped by on Tuesday to say hello and give me an update on her situation. She is now living in housing on Broadway in Oakland where she has her own room and communal kitchen privileges. Her rent is significantly under-market, so she is able to pay her rent and still have money left over for the essentials. She looks healthy and very happy and wanted us to know of her gratitude for the “angelic” help of First Pres. Our angels here contributed to where she is today.

Soon after waving goodbye to Gwen at the bus stop, I noticed a woman looking at the books in our Little Free Library. As we began to talk, she explained that she and

her husband receive free books because he is involved with the Alameda Library book sale. Since the sale has been canceled during the pandemic, they regularly stroll this neighborhood replenishing books in the nearby Little Free Libraries. I explained about our Advent worship series, and thanked her for being one of the “angels among us!”



May we all be angels to someone else today, and may we appreciate the angels who pass our way and show the love of Christ during the Advent season. *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”* Hebrews 13:2 NIV

Enjoying the angels in our midst,

Pastor Cindy

December 16, 2021

My dear church family,

Long ago, Murray and I visited our relatives on the north coast of Scotland. They had a big farm with lots of cattle and sheep. Our second cousin, Ian, took us into the barn to show us the stacks of wool fleece that had recently been shorn from their sheep.

With a twinkle in his eye, he encouraged us to “plunge our hands” deeply into the wool. Expecting to have a delightful, soft, furry experience, we were shocked to find that the wool is saturated in lanolin. Of course, this keeps the sheep dry in the damp Scotland winters, but it is less than pleasant when your hands are liberally coated in it!



We often place sheep in our nativity scenes because shepherds figure prominently in the Christmas story. They, like Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, were visited by an angel who told them, “Do not be afraid”. Please enjoy reading this beautiful account of the shepherds’ visit to the newborn Jesus from Luke 2:8-20.

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

***10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

***12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,*

***14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

***15** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The sheep in our nativity scenes often look clean and fluffy and cute. Yet, I now know that there is an aspect of sheep which is greasy and not entirely pleasant. Likewise, we live lives that are not perfect. That is why God chose to become human. May we be amazed, once again this Christmas, by God's great love for us and for the forgiveness for our "greasiness" that Jesus so graciously offers.

Praising God,
Pastor Cindy



December 21, 2021

My dear church family,

Last Saturday evening the sanctuary was full! It was an Eagle Court of Honor ceremony for five Scouts from Scout Troop 2, the troop that First Pres sponsors. One of the Scouts who earned this highest award in Scouting is Ian Muchiri. Near the end of the ceremony, Ian gave a speech that highlighted some of his scouting experiences. He delivered it with confidence and humor. It was excellent, and closed the ceremony on a high note. Those of you who have been at First Pres for twelve years or more have watched Ian grow up in the church. What joy to watch!



As we prepare to celebrate Christmas we can contemplate the joy that Mary and Joseph must have had as they raised their oldest child. As an infant and toddler he was in Egypt with his parents. As a young child he probably played near his father as Joseph built cabinets and other furniture for the wealthier people of the city. When Jesus was old enough, Joseph would have begun teaching him carpentry skills so he could help support the growing family. Beyond this, we have little information about his childhood, teenage years and young adult years.

We do know that Mary and Joseph observed the Jewish feasts with their family. Jesus' extensive use of the Hebrew scriptures during his three years of public ministry shows that he was schooled in Judaism. Perhaps the dearth of information about Jesus prior to his final three years is precisely why the story of his birth is so precious to us. So, let me include his birth story, from Luke 1 and 2, here:

²⁶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

²⁷ To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

²⁹ And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

³⁰ And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

³¹ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

2 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

*20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. **The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***



Just as many of you have watched Ian grow up, our scripture says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52) On this Christmas Day let us remember the willingness of Jesus to become human for our sake and thank him for his sacrifices for us.

With Christmas joy,

Pastor Cindy

December 30, 2021

My dear church family,

At Christmas, our daughter surprised me with a completely unexpected gift: a Fuller brush to remove crumbs from our table. It does an amazing job of cleaning the tablecloth with a minimum of effort. Sometime in the past she and I had talked about my great aunts, maiden sisters who lived with two of their bachelor brothers in Rhode Island. They assigned me to “sweep” the dining room table with a sterling silver handled brush and “dust pan.” It is one of my strong memories, as I had never seen such a tool before. At my home, we simply shook our tablecloths!



Our daughter described her Internet search for a table dustpan and brush. She found that the reviews of the modern products were not nearly as favorable as the reviews for the vintage Fuller Brush. She was able to find my gift, a plastic device a little larger than a pack of cards, with the “Fuller” logo across the top. Some of you may remember the 1948 American comedy film starring Red Skelton as a door-to-door salesman for the Fuller Brush Company. Some of you may even remember the Fuller Brush Man coming to your childhood home!



After our Christmas meal, I used my gift. The rolling brush inside the case easily cleaned the tablecloth, picking up lots of crumbs I hadn’t even noticed on the tablecloth. This was a striking example of the old being better than the new.

This Sunday we will celebrate communion together for the first time in the new year. What a pleasure it is to gather around the table, which is hosted by our Lord Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus, quoted by Paul in I Corinthians 11 are,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Unlike the Fuller brush, Jesus was bringing something new which replaced, and was far better than, the old.

In the Tuesday morning Bible study group, we are now on the short New Testament book of Galatians. In his letter to the believers at Galatia, Paul writes that even the Jewish believers, “know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16 NRSV). Jesus had referred to a “new covenant.” This is the new covenant that fulfilled the old: that believers are seen by God as righteous because of the body and blood of Christ, sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. Our small Bible study group summarized what we learned that day as, “The promise to Abraham, and the law given to Moses, were fulfilled in Jesus.” What wonderful, good news to remember as we prepare for communion on Sunday.

There will undoubtedly be crumbs on our communion table, left from the breaking of the bread which Drew Cheney has so generously offered to bake for us. I think I will bring my Fuller brush for the deacons to use as they clear the table. In the case of the Fuller brush, the old probably does work better than the new. But in our lives of faith, we can be forever grateful that Jesus, Emmanuel, God With Us, was willing to usher in the new covenant for our salvation.

With gratitude for the old and the new,

Pastor Cindy