

*Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name. - Psalm 86:11*

Dear friends in Christ,

Greetings from 30,000 feet! As I write to you this month I am flying to Minneapolis, MN, for the 2023 Festival of Homiletics. The Festival of Homiletics is in its 30th year, bringing together preachers from all over the world for a week of worship, lectures, and fellowship led by some of today's most talented preachers. Homiletics is the academic study of preaching, so not only will the worship and fellowship be enriching, but we'll also have a chance to learn more about how these preachers do their art. And I have you to thank for this opportunity.

Written into my yearly compensation package is, what I believe to be, one of the most important ways you support me as your pastor: continuing education.

The story is told that when Presbyterians began arriving in America, the first thing they did was not build a church but a community school house (one of the most-well known of those school houses is now known as Princeton University). Since our founding in the aftermath of the Reformation, Presbyterians have prided ourselves on supporting education for all people. We believe that faithful worship and service to God is inextricably linked with hearts and minds made broader through education, in whatever form that may take. Whether it is in higher academic study or in learning a skill or trade, or both, we believe as the Psalmist did that reverence for God happens in the sanctuary and also in the workplace and school room.

This theology of education extends from our tradition in a specific way to the clergy. Another Presbyterian historical tidbit: for the first 100 years or so of Presbyterianism, the local clergy person was not only the church preacher but also the local theologian, civil judge, and teacher. My colleagues of yesteryear had to be good at a little bit of everything and so they were constantly reading and learning in order to better serve their communities. The same is true for me. Though I am not the local judge or teacher, I am expected to continue to learn and grow so that I can best lead our community in the ways of Jesus Christ for God's glory.

This year's Festival of Homiletics theme is an important one: Preaching Hope In A Weary World. I'm tired of the phrase, "The pandemic changed everything," but it is, and will always be, true. The pandemic certainly changed the way we practice our faith. From modifications to worship practices, to how we meet and do the church's business, we are building the plane mid-flight. Preaching has changed, too. Our attention spans have shortened even more recently, so sermons need to be succinct. We realize now, more than ever, that church is not the only avenue through which change can take place in the world, so sermons need to claim the powerful promises of God in new ways. Hope was never a commodity, but pre-pandemic I believe the church got lazy with it—that can no longer be. We've just lived through a hellish reminder of the brevity of life, and so the worship hour and the preaching moment have to actually mean something. I hope to bring fresh energy and a tangible hope back to FPC from my time in Minneapolis this week!

On the topic of learning, I want you to know how welcome you are to join in the current session of "Going Deeper" as we study Marjorie Thompson's *Soul Feast*. We have two more large-group discussions on May 21 and 28 before we break up for small group fellowship; books are still available in Fellowship Hall. Then, later in June, we will take on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's short but important book, *Life Together*, which is a classic study in building and nurturing Christian community.

I also want to invite you, as I did last year, to help me shape worship this summer at FPC by suggesting Bible passages and topics for preaching and meditation during Sunday worship. Look for a suggestion card in the Sunday bulletin in a few weeks!

So from all of us at...no, wait, that was the announcement that just came from the flight attendant. But it is about time to power down devices as we arrive in Minneapolis. I look forward to being with you in worship, in the classroom, at tables for fellowship, and in all the ways God has called us together as a community of faith! God is good! Always.

Andrew

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ALEESHA GILL
NURSERY STAFF

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:
TUESDAY THRU FRIDAY
9:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.



“Nightly Roll Around at the Jabbok’s Edge”
by Emily Rose Proctor
for Madeleine Rose

In the dark, wisps tickle my face like loose down.
I hold steady for her twitches - 1 - 2 - 3; she is asleep again.
Earlier, in the shower, I combed half a bottle
of conditioner through those corkscrew
curls - painstakingly teasing out the knots
with my slick fingers, cringing
every time she cried out, wrenched away.
By morning they will have twisted and dried
into dreadlocks again. If she lets me, I will bind
those blonde snakes into a gorgeously messy
bun. For now, she rests
in the thunderbolt cradle of my body,
her back to my chest, my arm
under her head, her green legs
bent against mine. Soon we will both be
sweating. Soon she will thrust her heel into my
stomach, rake my thigh with toenails so long they are starting to
curl. She will cry out *Nooooooo*, knock
her head against the post, fling
her limp arm out across my face. Still,
I breathe in her little-girl scent, musky rose.
She rolls to face me, grunts, her hot breath
a strawberry funk. Her tiny arm pushes its way
under my head. I move to escape. She wraps
her other arm around my neck. She knows
where she is at. She is at the edge
of a fast-moving river. I am a dark angel,
huge for my weight. We are locked
in a terrible embrace. She will not let me go
without a blessing.



June 2	Daniel Hodge	June 19	Hunter Rudd
June 2	Beckett Green	June 20	Rebecca McCullough
June 4	Ethan Deem	June 25	Taylor Sinclair
June 5	Katelyn Hodge	June 25	Anthony Paroubek
June 9	Dorothy Willaman	June 26	Deanne Scanlon
June 10	Warren Schweitzer	June 27	Bradley Walton
June 11	Alex Roth	June 27	John Gleason
June 13	Shane McWayne	June 29	Theo Burgoon Long
June 13	Hartley Schweitzer	June 30	Beth Linderman
June 13	Spencer Sudduth		



Pentecost is Sunday May 28. Fellowship time will be a celebration of birthday cakes, and each month of the year will be represented. If you would like to make/bring a cake for a particular month, there is a sign up sheet in Fellowship Hall. Please feel free to jot down your name. This is only 1 week away!

CHURCH picnic

Sunday, June 11th
After Worship

Please make your reservations to attend by signing up on the list posted in Fellowship Hall.

Picnic helpers are needed to make this event as successful as it has been in past years.

Those wishing to assist with set up, serving or clean up are encouraged to sign the *Help Wanted Poster*.

Anyone who might be interested in a **CPR-AED Training Class**, please contact the church office, 782-1750, by May 28th. We have not set a date; we are trying to get a list of those interested first.

“The well-credentialed pastor” by Julian DeShazier, May 2023

A close friend called me recently with some distressing news: he is getting a PhD. “That’s a shame,” I said, followed by, “Congratulations.” It was not good news, but the latter felt like the thing a good friend should say.

To be clear: my friend does not want a PhD. And what I’ve learned pastoring a church that neighbors a campus with a lot of PhDs on it is that few people in their right mind do. The path to a PhD is purposefully rigorous, attracting those who want to pursue some line of inquiry and expand their own and the field’s scholarship into bold new territory. It is equal parts revelation, determination, and pioneering, and the extra years spent in the classroom are seen not as sacrificial but as the best use of a candidate’s gifts and time (and money!). The commitment is such that the mere pursuit can become a profession unto itself.

My friend knows all of this, but these reasons for a PhD are not compelling to him. He is a pastor - an excellent pastor - and he lives in the same world as the rest of us, where a terminal degree will open career doors but otherwise will feature scarcely in his chosen vocation. His choice is like the choice to exercise or cut your fingernails: it is ostensibly a necessary evil on the path to a better future.

But what if some necessary evils are not necessary after all?

Walter Gretzky told the peewee hockey team he coached - which included his son, Wayne, to “skate to where the puck is going, not to where it has been.” Hockey fans know this advice better than Proverbs, and business leaders often use it to talk about innovation. As tired as sports metaphors can be - Are you tired of having the ball in your court yet? - this is one that I think can actually help us.

Churches are notoriously tardy to the party. Some congregations are still years away from having an Instagram presence, to say nothing of TikTok; meanwhile, the Enneagram of the 1970s is beginning to take flight. We spend a lot of our time skating to current trends, only to find that the puck has already slid somewhere else. We spend way too much time looking backward, playing catch-up, instead of preparing for what lies ahead.

As a firm believer in the West African philosophy of Sankofa, I treasure deeply the stories and wisdom that come from our past. But let’s be honest: instead of equipping leaders for 21st-century realities, a lot of what the church is doing is forcing leaders to equip themselves for 20th-century expectations. We spend a lot of our time reacting to where the puck has just been.

The PhD has long been the ultimate prize for both pastor and congregation. For a pastor, it means you’ve been through something and you’re really smart, even if you haven’t really been through all that much yet and your degree has in no way prepared you for congregational ministry. The PhD is mostly agnostic toward practical ministry, but it doesn’t matter: you’re the best.

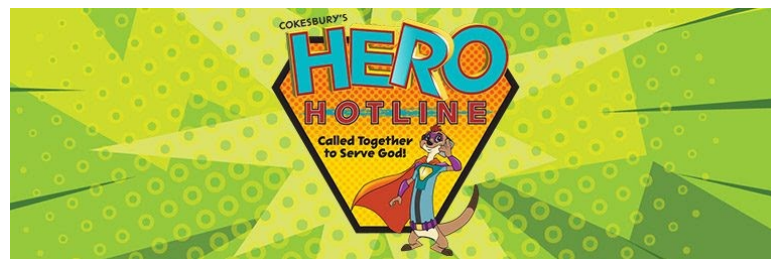
For a congregation, if your pastor is the best and your pastor works for you, then how impressive does that make *you*? We’ve embraced this myth that smart people solve our problems. It’s a classic model of leadership, even though there are countless times when “the smart one” leads us straight into nowhere. It’s the reason my friend is pursuing

a degree that he does not want and can't imagine using. Because this kind of thinking is where the puck has been.

Where we're headed is much more exciting. Global health crises, changing political landscapes, economic upheaval, and racial reckonings are but a few of the real chances we have as the church to mark the world with the imprint of God. And if we think the people leading us will all need to have PhDs, we are not only fooling ourselves but costing ourselves precious time. What our church needs are people who can help elicit trust and speak to our deepest yearnings. We need congregations that address realities with the boldness and faithfulness of the One whom we claim inspires us. We need laypeople and clergy who are emboldened to speak the truth of God within the church's walls and at the gates of empire.

We need critical thinkers - always - but this is but one cog in the wheel of critical leadership. This diversity of gifts and skills is where the puck is headed. So if it sounds like I'm disappointed in my friend, I'm not. He's doing what he needs to do to thrive in the world as it is. But it's a shame when ecclesial bodies lack the imagination for what "the best" means beyond a terminal degree, and it's a shame when people denigrate the DMin degree as a mere shortcut to becoming "the Rev. Dr." We need more people focused on the practice of ministry in the 21st century. We need better criteria to assess fitness for ministry, emphasizing competency over credential. We need ordination processes and seminary curricula that encourage students to use their education not to open doors but to pursue their vocation.

The work ahead of us is difficult, because we'll have to say good-bye to some old ways around preparation for ministry. But the good news is that ahead of us is exactly where God needs us.



An exciting, fun-filled Vacation Bible School is returning to First Pres this summer! This year's theme is: **"HERO HOTLINE: Called Together to Serve God!"** In the **Hero Hotline Headquarters**, our young "heroes" will learn that their gifts are valued and that everyone has a role to play in following Jesus, helping others, working together, listening to God, and showing grace through Bible stories, music, crafts, recreation and other meaningful activities. VBS will run for **four Wednesdays in July** - the 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th - from **9:30 am until NOON**, with a take-home lunch being provided for each participant. It is open to kids from preschool through grade 6 - **ages 4 through 12**. Enrollment is limited to **24 kids**, so register NOW! You can register either on-line through our church website (www.watertownfirstpres.org) or with Bunny Gorman (315-552-8226 or paggorman@gmail.com).

***IMPORTANT NOTE:**

If you would like to help on one or more of the Wednesdays, please consider it! We are in desperate need of volunteers in the following areas: decorating, sign-in/sign-out table, group escorts, teachers, and snack preparers/servers. Please call Bunny if you would like to help with the **HERO HOTLINE!**

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SUNDAY WORSHIP AT
10:00 A.M.

Listen on your radio
WATN 1240AM or
watch the service live from
www.watertownfirstpres.org
or

www.facebook.com/watertownfpc

If you miss a week of worship it is just a click away.
just visit our website at www.watertownfirstpres.org.



*“I will pour out my Spirit
on all people.”*



**Begins
June 21, 2023**