

WEST ISLE NEWS

WEST ISLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

December 2011

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FROM THE SHEPHERD'S HEART

Grieving During Advent

Dear WIPC Family & Friends,

2011 has been a difficult year for evangelicals in the Presbyterian Church USA. With the denomination opening the door to the ordination of non-celibate homosexual clergy, elders, and deacons, irreparable damage was done by elevating the secular culture above Biblical authority. I invite you to read the Advent address by the Executive Director of Presbyterians for Renewal, Paul Detterman. You may recall that I am a founding member of PFR and in attending the Covenanting Conference of the Fellowship of Presbyterians in Orlando, January 18-20, I will become a founding member of the Fellowship as well. We will have much to discuss following the Conference. For now, what Paul writes below will help prepare us for whatever lies ahead.

Yours & His,
Dr. Bob

Good Grief

Posted: 18 Nov 2011 12:58 PM PST

Editor's Note: PFR has been uncommonly quiet since the passage of Amendment 10-A in May. This is partly due to the amount of time and energy PFR has been investing in helping to

promote and advance The Fellowship of Presbyterians, and partly due to the fact that when everyone else is talking it is often polite to wait your turn. Here is what I hope will be a helpful commentary as we come into the season of preparation we call Advent and, as evangelicals in the PC(USA), begin another type of preparation altogether on the threshold of 2012.

I'm blessed. I've never had to endure, in my immediate family, the kind of agony I have seen close friends and parishioners experience; misunderstandings that lead to anger, unresolved anger that leads to acrimony, and acrimony that ends in deep and prolonged bitterness and loss.

Like most adults, I know another kind of grief, however—the grief that comes with the experience of death and the re-ordering of life that includes closing a family home, sorting and disposing of family “things” (many of them with memories attached), and moving on. That grief not only includes lament over what has happened, but the homesickness that comes at the end of an era or the close of a relationship we cherished and thought we could count on.

In the days leading up to this season of Advent, innumerable evangelicals who have been part of the family of faith called the PC(USA) are grieving—a deep

grief that has yet to be adequately named by those of us who are experiencing it, and will seemingly never be understood by those who are causing it. This is not the momentary sadness of watching your political party take a beating in an election or the frustration of seeing your favorite team lose in the playoffs. Nor does our grief find appropriate expression in anger, acrimony, or bitterness. We have witnessed something beautiful, meaningful, and central to our identity destroyed—an expression of the body of Christ that was our theological, sacramental, and communal home. Everyone who has been around for the destruction has been permanently marred as well. At one level we are furious. But we are also hurting, heartbroken, and homesick.

In reality, the denomination we call the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is just a structure. The family of faith that gathered into it was like a beautiful tapestry. The structure has only existed since 1983, relatively young in “church-years.” The family was not invented 28 years ago out of freshly milled cloth. Threads from the past 2000 years of doctrine and teaching, mission and witness, sacrifice and service are woven into the tapestry, as well as emblems from the truly great confessional moments—the times in our ancestry of faith when the Church actually did take a Christ-honoring stand against the prevailing tides of human self-absorption, cultural/political power, popular opinion, or disposable theology.

This Presbyterian tapestry, our family home has had many functions. At times it was a parament that marked the place where intelligent, socially engaged, fearlessly biblical, orthodox preaching

molded the lives of civic leaders and challenged new generations to attempt seemingly outrageous ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. At times this tapestry has marked the place where Christ-honoring worship is cherished and nurtured. In its early years the PC(USA) set the gold standard for worship renewal in the Reformed Tradition. The tapestry we inherited has at times been a reliable shelter for those who were truly marginalized, neglected, or abused, and a banner for the exhibition of God’s Kingdom and the courageous proclamation of the gospel in just about every corner of the world.

The fabric from which this tapestry was woven is tough and enduring, but it has undergone significant wear and tear. Forces have been at work throughout most of the 20th century, undermining the integrity of the fabric. Tensions have mounted over the authority and interpretation of Scripture. Increasingly, disagreement over the person and work of Jesus Christ has divided many and confused many more. Wildly differing interpretations of what the church is, how it is called to serve, and whether it can or should be engaged in any form of mission at all, have fostered timidity and worse; cultural deference.

Throughout the evolution of our most recent history, orthodox voices from within the PC(USA), many ecumenical partners, and the vast majority of the global church have pleaded persistently for this communal tug of war to stop, trying to help those who were straining our denominational fabric to understand that when (not if) the tapestry was torn the resulting destruction would be far worse than any of us could imagine. But these voices have seemingly fallen on deaf ears.

The final tug that destroyed the PC(USA) tapestry came when we capitulated to the current moral confusion championed by a relentless subset of western culture. The determination of some and the apathy of others finally allowed the PC(USA), as the late Tom Gillespie would say, “to condone what God can redeem.” And with that one final yank, the strained threads gave way and the marker of “church” for so many for so long, fell on the floor in shreds—the threads of historic integrity unharmed, but dis-united and functionally useless.

Some evangelicals believe the passage of amendment 10-A on its own was responsible for this destruction. In truth, however, we were well on our way long before May 10, 2011. What the neutering of ordination standards did was complete the job—tearing the last remnants of the once amazing tapestry into pieces in front of us.

There is no point in being angry. It will fix nothing. The destruction is done, and will not easily be undone in the foreseeable future. There is also no point in expecting those who see this destruction as progress to understand our sense of grief and loss. We see a mess of torn fabric scattered across the floor. They are now suggesting what we need to do is celebrate the diversity of the pretty patterns “God has created”—like there was still something to admire in the thing destroyed. They don’t understand our grief and, quite frankly, many who are involved at the heart of this destruction seemingly could not care less.

It is right for us to grieve—truly right and a good and faithful thing. Under the Presbyterian tapestry many of us have been nurtured and disciplined, credentialed, and deployed in mission

and ministry. This tapestry was the banner of our tribe. Seeing what has become of it creates indescribable grief. It is heart wrenching to hear the core claims of the gospel of salvation minimized or denied altogether because others might think us foolish for holding those beliefs, or because people might be challenged in their stubbornness. Scripture has something to say about both scenarios. It is humbling to the point of tears to see the faithful and continuing witness of Jesus’ followers around the world who are truly persecuted for their enduring faith, and then to realize that the family of faith in the PC(USA), the “mother church” to many, has now dismissed the transforming grace of Jesus by simple majority vote. Six months after that vote, the grief of many is very real. And we must deal with it before we can move on in any healthy way.

The question is, what do we do with our grief? Bitterness is not a biblical option. Scripture has much to say about the root of bitterness, and none of it good. Sustained anger is not a productive option either. We are called by the gospel we profess to repurpose anger into grace.

But it is also not an option for us to resign ourselves to our current situation and thank the destroyers of the once great denominational tapestry for the shreds of cloth they toss our way. God’s people need to see a tapestry of faithfulness—a banner of joy and hope and resurrection power lifted over the chaos of our post-modern, self-motivated lives. We need to process our grief because God’s mission has not changed and neither has his call upon us to be part of it. This does not mean pulling ourselves together and showing

up at the next presbytery or General Assembly as though nothing has happened. It does mean taking serious stock of our current situation, dealing with any lingering debilitations, and moving into a future God is opening up to us.

We need to begin to reassemble a tapestry—utilizing the great theological threads and confessional emblems that are in our heritage, assessing the true needs of God's people and addressing the myths of our culture; creating something that will once again draw people to Jesus and deploy disciples in his name. For the moment at least, this can happen equally well in the life and ministry of those evangelicals who remain in the structure of the PC(USA) and of those for whom contextual integrity demands distance from a denomination that has been turned off course.

Ours is not the challenge of creating new and clever theological statements—at least not yet. We have everything we need for this moment in Scripture and the Confessions of our heritage. This is also not a challenge that will be solved completely by any restructuring of an existing denomination or the crafting of a new one. The challenge we face is radical discipleship—a challenge of biblical proportions; obedience, faithfulness, and passion for the Savior that must be kindled in every believing heart.

Our current challenge is voicing the yearning of the ancient hymn, "O come, O come Emmanuel..." and believing the reality of the promise, "Rejoice! Emmanuel has come to you!" Our present-day angst is heard in the pain of the psalmists' laments and, like those, will be answered and transformed by

God into praise. This moment is our opportunity to discover (or remember) that God's love took human form for a reason—and that Love cannot be voted off the island by all the presbyteries in the world.

So for now, as we who are grieving seek to recapture a like-mindedness with Christ and reclaim our identity in him, let's not be ashamed or embarrassed to cry together. We have endured a long and hideous season of misunderstanding, acrimony, bitterness, and loss. We must take the time to mourn the destruction of what once was in order to see what now can be.

And in reconnecting with the mind of Christ, let's take every opportunity God provides to pray together. We, and many of the congregations to which we are called, have experienced the death of something we held dear, and we need God's patient love and direction to close up the old, sort out the goods, and deal with a form of homesickness that is very real.

But as we are grieving the destruction of the tapestry of one fellowship and sorting out the pieces to begin forming another, we also need to intentionally seek God's grace to be able to move beyond this current season so that we can once again praise the living Lord with full voiced hope, and joy, and resurrection power, committed in new and deeper ways to celebrate and participate in what God is up to now!

Paul Detterman
Executive Director of Presbyterians for
Renewal

NOTICES

The **Women's Prayer Group** meets after Sunday morning worship services each Sunday.

The **Women's Bible Study** meets Friday, December 9, at 10 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall. The study will be on Luke 11. The study will be on Luke 12.

The **Revelations Bible Study** meets Sunday, December 4, at 4 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

The **choir** is hoping to have more people join. Our director, Angelo Tolentino, is a joy to work with, and is very open to working with anyone who wishes to raise a voice in praise to the Lord. If you are interested in singing with the choir, just show up! If you need more information, please contact Angelo (angelo@musician.org or cell 409-256-7729) or Crystal (crystalnicole@gmail.com or cell 409-939-9619)

FOOD BANK

Please remember to bring non-perishable items for the food bank. The collection point is the large green covered barrel in the hall between the sanctuary and fellowship hall.

WEBSITE

The website is up! Log on to www.westislepres.org to see it. If you want to look at a password-protected page, the password is Jesus (it is a case-sensitive password).

POINSETTIAS

This is the time of year we place poinsettias on the altar in memory or in honor of loved ones. It always looks so lovely! The cost of each poinsettia is \$12, and the green order slips are available at

the church. Give your orders to Barbara Hankins or Beth Shriner.

BUDGET

The proposed 2012 church budget will be posted on the bulletin board in the kitchen for you to review after it is presented to Session at its January 8th meeting.

FINALLY. . .

As have so many others lately, I've been thinking a lot about gifts. I ask myself all the usual questions ("What should I give?" "What does she need?" "Is he really going to like this?"), and often find myself going off on a rabbit trail, remembering past successes and disasters, and how I felt about them.

There's the joy of giving exactly what the recipient wanted, knowing it will be used and cherished. There's the gift that's fully appreciated for awhile, then forgotten. Then there's the one I spent so much time on, maybe an afghan I'd crocheted, only to discover it'd been relegated to the floor of the dog's house. Not so gratifying.

There are endless variations on how and what we give to and received from others, and what we expect or hope, as well as the reasons we give. None of them even approach the gift God gave us a little over 2000 years ago.

His gift of His Son for our salvation is perfect. Not only does it give us pardon for our sins and eternal life in heaven, it gives us the opportunity for a personal relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It offers love, peace, assurance, safety, joy. It gives us the ability to be whatever God wants us to be. It is, as the saying goes, the gift that keeps on giving.

We can reject it, or treat it as a gift we loved when we first received but sort of

forgot about until we needed it or stumbled across it. Or we can accept that gift and realize its full potential daily. It's up to each of us.

Merri Edwards

A PRAYER

Thank you, God, for loving me and being my substitute on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin.

Each time I take communion I remember what you did for me.

You suffered tremendously on that cross because you loved me so much.

The bread reminds me of your body broken for me.

The grape juice represents your blood shed for me.

I wonder, why did you have to suffer like that?

I can never repay you for what you did.

But yet, many still reject you. Thank you, God, for saving me. Give me the words to share my Savior with others.

Help me to trust and obey you always. Never let me deny or reject you in any way.

This would be the greatest sin. Precious Jesus, I love you. Continue to hold me as I draw close to you. I praise and worship you.

HALLELUJAH!

Esther Mancillas
8/3/03

May the
blessings of
Christmas fill
your hearts
and lives
with peace
and joy all
year long.