

The Pipe Line

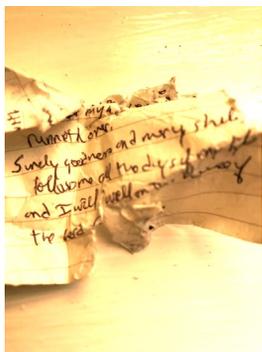
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December 1, 2022

When I raised the lid of the washing machine, I was surprised to see hundreds of bits of paper all over my clothes. I thought at first there had been some sort of malfunction, and some part of the machine had come apart, but I soon realized these were the remnants of a small notebook I'd left in my shirt pocket. I took the wet clothes to the backyard and shook out a snowfall of confetti. I hung the clothes to dry and then spent more than an hour going over them with a lint roller, then washed the clothes again. I wound up losing several shirts to ink stains, but the worse loss was that little notebook. I use these little notebooks to jot down phone numbers and hospital room numbers and other things that I have a difficult time remembering. Each notebook lasts me about a year-and-a-half or so, and then I get a new one and save the old ones in a drawer for future reference.



I found a clump of about a half dozen partial pages still intact enough that I could make out what I had written. I dried them out and carefully peeled apart wrinkled pages to read what the washing machine had left me.

One note was a phone number for a young woman who had asked me to officiate at her wedding. That was a joy and honor.

I would need the note to remember the number, but not the smiles of both bride and groom, and the happiness of friends and family.

Some of the crinkled pages contained phone numbers I needed for church business, such as offerings and worship, but all those items have been handled already. I would need the notes to remember specifics, but the monies have been disbursed and the worship is done, and there is a video and audio record that is still available for people who want to remember a special time or hear the choir anthem again. We've created an online library of worship services that includes you or some of your loved ones or friends reading scripture, singing and otherwise participating in worship.

Sadly, the notes contained a cell phone number for someone who has since died. We had conversations about life and death. I needed the note to remember the phone number, but will not forget the sweetness of a saint in the valley of the shadow of death.

One of the larger note fragments I found said this: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord..." There's a story behind that note. I was at Wolf Creek in the New River Gorge one day and I was trying to recite Psalm 23 from the King James Version. I kept messing it up, because I couldn't remember which came first: green pastures or still waters. (For the record, it goes: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.") I have a New Revised Standard Version of the Bible on my phone, but wrote down the King James Version in my notebook when I was going to Hospice one day. I wanted to make sure I said it right. I will never forget the grace and courage in that Hospice room.

The waterlogged note had torn off the word that completes the sentence, but you know what it is, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER." You remember the part about forever even if it's not written down.

I've started a new notebook, and have already copied down the 23rd Psalm in the King James Version, although I hope I can recite it from memory.

The prophet Jeremiah quotes God about a new covenant, not written down, not carved in stone tablets, but carried within us: "...says the Lord: I will put my law within their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Christmas is the incarnation of that new covenant, when the Word became flesh, the promised one was born, and grace reached out to us. We have the printed words to remind us and we study, as we should. But if all those words we cherish washed away, we still carry in our hearts this covenant and message of grace from God. Before you were born, God loved you. The child born to Mary made grace become flesh. His was a message of grace. His life revealed grace, showing us a goodness we don't deserve, a kindness, a love, a blessing. His remains a kingdom not of place, but of grace: loving God and neighbor, loving enemies, praying for all, forgiving, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty and welcoming the stranger.

We remember, in our hearts, what the angel said:

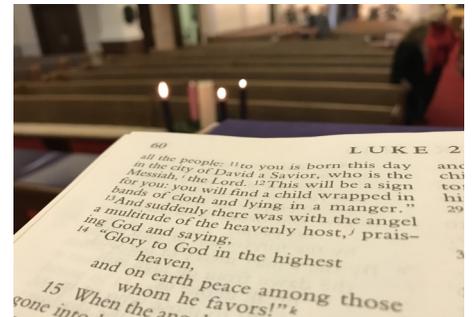
"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Check your pockets. Guard your heart.

God bless you!

Merry Christmas!

Monte



RALEIGH CO. COMMUNITY ACTION ASSOCIATION CENTRAL HEAD START DONATION

The church has made a generous donation to the RCCAA Central Head Start once again this year. The staff will use the money to shop for and provide a similar wrapped gift to each of their 98 kids during their annual Christmas party.



WHITE CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

The White Christmas program will be during our 11:00 a.m. morning service on Sunday, December 18th. Please bring gifts of canned goods wrapped in white tissue paper or monetary donations in white envelopes to be collected and distributed to local food banks.

MEMORIAL GIFT FUND



We are grateful for the following Memorial Gifts:

--In Memory of **Carolyn Lucas** by James E. Songer, Mr. William Haslem, Ms. Nancy Keatley, Ms. Barbara Daniel, Ms. Helen Walker, Ms. Linda Daniel

--In Memory of **John P. Scherer**: by Mr. William Haslem

--In Memory of **Norma & Allen Diggs and Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Gravely**: by Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Gravely

--In Memory of **Shiela Dixson**: by Ms. Helen Walker

Offering Envelopes



Offering envelopes for those who requested them have been assigned and may be picked up at the church. They are located on the table in the back of the sanctuary. There are several boxes still available for anyone that would like to use them. Simply pick up a box located on the table and put your name next to the corresponding number on the list or call the church so that a box can be designated for you.

—Toni Mullins, Treasurer



To date, we have received \$126,909 in pledges for the 2023 budget. This amount is 63% of our goal needed to carry on the programs and projects proposed by the committees for the coming year. We appreciate the response of

those who have returned their pledge cards. If you have not had the opportunity to remit yours, the Stewardship Ministry Group would appreciate it if you could do this as soon as possible, so that we can finalize the proposed budget for presentation to the Session at the next meeting.

Pledge Goal	\$198,830
Received	<u>126,909</u>
SHORT	\$ 71,921

LECTIONARY READINGS

December 4

Isa. 11:1-10 and
Ps. 72:1-7, 18-19;
Ros. 15:4-13; Matt 3:1-12

December 11

Isa. 35:1-10 and Ps.
146:5-10 or
Luke 1:46b-55;
James 5:7-10;
Matt. 11:2-11

December 18

Isa. 7:10-16 and
Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19;
Rom. 1:1-7;
Matt. 1:18-25

December 24

Christmas Eve
Isa. 9:2-7 and Ps. 96;
Titus 2:11-14;
Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

December 25

Dawn: Isa. 62:6-12
and Ps. 97; Titus 3:4-7;
Luke 2: (1-7) 8-20
Day: Isa. 52:7-10
and Ps. 98;
Heb 1:1-4 (5-12);
John 1:1-14

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BIRTHDAYS

02 Morgan Bridi	16 Sandi Schroder
03 Nancy Keatley	18 Charlie Chandler
03 Colette Meadows	19 Roger Reed
09 Alice Tener	20 Brenda Meadows
10 Jack Schroder	22 Nick Yurick
11 Ann Worley	23 Peggy Debnam
13 Susan Akers	23 Howard Mollohan
13 Betty Klingensmith	23 William Haslam
16 John Beaver	24 Scott VanMeter
	25 Diane Bridi

THE GIVING TREE



The church is collecting items for families being served by the Women's Resource Center during this Advent season. A giving tree has been set up in the back of the sanctuary. You may pull a tag off the tree and return the items to the church by

December 18th. Items do not need to be wrapped. The list of what is needed include things like pajamas, socks, robes, slippers, games, and stuffed toys. Specific sizes will be listed on the tag.

The WRC, with offices in Beckley, Fayetteville, Hinton and Summersville, provides services to all victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence and human trafficking. Support and services are available 24 hours a day by calling the WRC hotline at 304-255-2559.



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Please join us **7:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 24th** for the candlelight Christmas Eve communion service.

NURTURING FAITH IDEAS

December 4 – Second Sunday of Advent: Read Romans 15:4-13 The holiday season is often filled with occasions for hospitality and celebration. As we prepare to welcome the birth of our Lord, how are you also “welcoming one another” (verse 7)? How might we seek the sort of unity and reconciliation Paul encourages between the Jews and Gentiles in our own communities today?

December 11 – Third Sunday of Advent: Read James 5:7-10 Patience is consistently listed as one of the great virtues, and Paul calls it a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Why is it so hard to be patient? What are you waiting for even now; how can you pray about that this week?



December 18 – Fourth Sunday of Advent: Read Isaiah 7:10-16 This prophecy from Isaiah likely referred to a young woman who was there before Ahaz, but Christians have long held the tradition that it also anticipates Jesus. Have you ever asked God for a sign? How might the Spirit use the same event to speak different messages to people? Where have you witnessed the Spirit speaking to you lately?

December 25 – Nativity of the Lord/Christmas Day: Read Luke 2:1-20 Merry Christmas! What good news do you have to share with others this holy day? What treasures are you pondering in your heart? Let us pray together for peace and joy in our world!