

A TIME FOR SILENT CONFESSION

THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Pastor: We have opened our hearts wide in God's holy presence. Here and now we have offered our failures, our faults, and our secret sins, seeking divine mercy and forgiveness. Friends, this is the good news of the gospel:

People: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Amen!**

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*THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH *from: "A Brief Statement of Faith," PC (USA)*

**We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female,
of every race and people, to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and
ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten
death to the planet entrusted to our care.**

**We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are never alone.
Thanks be to God!**

*THE GREETINGS OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP

THE CHILDREN'S SERMON

Kindly pass your written prayer requests to the center so they may be placed into the basket. These will be included in the Pastoral Prayer of the Day and also forwarded to the Prayer Cordon for special attention. Thank you.

THE SHARING OF JOYS, CONCERNS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE CHORAL PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Cast Thy Burden Upon the Lord

Felix Mendelssohn

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 55:1-9 *(Pew Bible p. 650)*

Liturgist: This is the word of the Lord. All: **Thanks be to God!**

THE CHOIR ANTHEM *Cast Me Not Away* Robert J. Powell

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 *(Pew Bible p. 162)*

Liturgist: Here ends the reading of the Epistle. All: **Praise be to you, O Lord.**

GREETINGS to all this day who worship the God of past, present and future. We want to get to know you. Please introduce yourself to others sitting nearby during the passing of the peace.

THE GREETERS TODAY - Greeting our members and visitors before the Sunday worship services in March are Enid and Les Dunmire.

THE FLOWERS in the Sanctuary are provided by Ann Morrison in honor of Ann's nephew, Daniel Kittner's Bar Mitzvah on March 10th; and in memory of Ann's father, Jack Faulkner whose birthday is March 10th.

FELLOWSHIP HOUR immediately follows this worship service downstairs in the Assembly Room. Everyone is cordially invited to attend. Hosting today's Fellowship Hour are Mary Lee Marten and Linda Peters.

THE PASTOR'S STUDY LEAVE - Pastor Jim will be away on Study Leave from March 13 - March 22. Reverend William A. Jamieson will be available for any pastoral concerns.

GUEST PREACHER - The Reverend Michael Winship, Honorably Retired, will be the guest preacher next Sunday, March 18. Reverend Winship was the former minister of Calvary Evangelical Presbyterian Church (now known as Grace at Calvary Lutheran Church), located on the diamond.

HOLY WEEK / EASTER CHOIR REHEARSAL - Choir Rehearsals for Holy Week and Easter continue each Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary. **An invitation to attend Thursday rehearsals is extended to anyone who may be interested in singing with the choir for the Holy Week/Easter services.** If you have questions, you may contact Bev Antis, Choir Director/Organist at 724-991-8240 (cell).

COMMITTEE MEETINGS:

- **Fellowship & Outreach** will meet **TODAY** in the Connell Room immediately following this morning's worship service.
- Administration & Stewardship - This Tuesday, March 13 at 7:00 p.m. in the Connell Room

Hallelujah: The Bible and Handel's Messiah

Wednesday, March 14 @ 1:00 p.m. [RESCHEDULED FROM LAST WEEK]

- held this week at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church
- Reverend Merry Hope Meloy leading the discussion

This Lenten course is based on the book *Hallelujah: The Bible and Handel's Messiah* by Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel, published by Kerygma. Covenant, St. Andrews and Faith Presbyterian churches are participating. Reverend Merry Hope Meloy and Pastor Jim are teaching the class on alternate weeks.

Suggested Donations for Covenant Cupboard in March

Soda or graham crackers

Baskets for your donations are located at the front entrance on E. Jefferson St.

SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNION - THURSDAY, MARCH 29 @ 11:30 A.M.



A half-hour Special Needs Communion Service will be held on **Thursday, March 29th at 11:30 a.m.** The service is for shut-ins who are restricted by mobility, disability or have other health related issues which makes it difficult for them to attend the longer more formal Sunday worship services. A light lunch and fellowship will follow the service. **If you know of someone who can benefit from this service, please contact Pastor Jim at the church office.**

DRIVERS NEEDED to provide transportation for the shut-ins so that they can attend the service. If you can help, see Pastor Jim.

In The Life of Our Church

Prayer Concerns . . .

Dorothy Hitchcock at Butler Memorial Hospital
Jennie Jamieson prayers for relief from bronchitis and asthma
Mary Timmons prayers for improved physical comfort and for her beloved dog Sam who is experiencing some health problems
Ann Morrison Prayers for her continued recovery and health
Bob Moore Concordia at Rebecca Residence, 3746 Cedar Ridge Rd., Apt. 144-B, Allison Park, PA 15101
Paul Hoffman Ask God's care for Paul and reassurance for Mary

No birthdays or anniversaries to report this week.

If we have missed your birthday or anniversary, please accept our apology. If you would like us to publish the date in the Chronicle and bulletin, please call the church office at 724-287-7731.

Lenten Concert



Michael Desnyoers, Vocalist
Beverly Antis, Piano Accompanist
&
Krista Shinew, Organ

~ **Saturday, March 31, 2007** ~

3 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Free Will Offering
A reception will follow the program

Meet Marcus Borg

Sixth Presbyterian Church (Forbes and Murray St. in Squirrel Hill) is pleased to host Dr. Marcus J. Borg's weekend of lectures in Pittsburgh, March 16-18. An internationally known Jesus scholar, Borg is sought after in both academic and church circles. The weekend is full and diverse. Fri. only is \$10 / Fri. and Sat. \$30. Contact the church office for details, or visit our webpage (<http://covenantbutler.org>)

Seekers Class Explores & Discusses PBS videos

The Seekers Class is currently viewing "*From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians*," the original series broadcast on PBS which explores the life and death of Jesus and tells the epic story of the rise of Christianity.

Drawing upon historical evidence, the series challenges familiar assumptions and conventional notions about Christian origins. Archaeological finds have yielded new understandings of Jesus' class and social status; fresh interpretations have transformed earlier ideas about the identity of the early Christians and their communities. Through engaging on-camera interviews with twelve scholars -- New Testament theologians, archaeologists, and historians -- the videos highlight their contributions to this intellectual revolution.

The scholars who are interviewed represent a range of viewpoints, a diversity of faiths and a shared commitment to bring new ways of thinking about Christianity to a public audience. The Seekers will view each video for a half-hour and then discuss how Christian faith can be reconciled with the "historical approach" to the Bible and to Jesus.

Inquiring minds are always welcome at the Seekers Adult Class which gathers each Sunday morning at 9:45 a.m. in the Assembly Room. Tea, coffee and a snack are served from the small kitchen before class.



HOLY WEEK

Holy Week begins with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on **Palm Sunday, April 1**. Pastor Jim and the Covenant Choir will process during the **11:00 a.m. worship service** with palm crowns. As is our tradition, palm fronds will be distributed to the congregation. The One Great Hour of Sharing Offering will also be received.

Our **Maundy Thursday Service of Darkness** will be held at **8:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 5th**. This powerful service is based on the ancient tradition of extinguishing the lights one by one until the worshipping congregation sits in total darkness in anticipation of Good Friday.

On **Friday, April 6th**, a **Joint Good Friday Worship Service** is scheduled with other Presbyterian churches and will be held at **St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, 201 E. Jefferson St. at 12 noon**.

We will celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ on **Easter morning, April 8th, at 11:00 a.m.** Preceding worship a prelude concert of organ music will be presented.

Background on Today's Gospel **"The Barren Fig Tree"**

by John J. Pilch of Georgetown University

Keep in mind that this parable is not really about trees, but about the nation's leadership. While the preceding discussion concerned the people of Israel, this one unmistakably concerns the leaders (= fig tree) who are stealing life from the people (= the vineyard; see Isa 5:7).

Later in this Gospel (Luke 20:19) the leadership (scribes and chief priests) clearly understands that vineyard parables are directed to them and told about them. Thus this present parable unmistakably implies that current leadership within the nation is fruitless and should be rooted out.

The details of this parable reflect its Mediterranean cultural context perfectly. The vineyard owner obviously lives in the city and rents his vineyard to a tenant farmer who does the digging, the planting, etc. He "had the tree planted." The Palestinian fig tree bears fruit ten months of the year, and so one can reasonably expect to find fruit at almost any time. The time sequence regarding fig trees is this: first, the tree would have three years to grow after planting. The fruit of the next three years is considered forbidden (see Lev 19:23). The fruit of the seventh year is considered clean and ought to be offered to the Lord (Lev 19:24).

The owner in this parable has come seeking fruit for three years, hence it is nine years since planting, and the situation begins to look hopeless. He rightly urges that it be rooted out, but the gardener in Jesus' parable urges "mercy" -- give the tree yet another chance. His proposed remedy for the tree's problems reflects Jesus' mastery of "insult humor." Throughout the Gospels Jesus, the authentic Mediterranean native, resorts to insults on a regular basis, and they are always gems. The gardener might have proposed new soil for the tree, or increased watering. Instead he proposed spreading manure on it. Jesus' original peasant audience undoubtedly roared with laughter. This is just what those #)%!@* leaders need!

Moreover, in Aramaic there is a wordplay between "dig it out" and "let it alone" (also the word for forgiveness), which makes the parable and its point very easy to remember. Judgment (dig it out)? No, mercy and forgiveness (let it alone)! The tree cannot lift itself by its roots. They (the leaders) need the intervention of an outsider, the gardener, God himself!

Dedicated reformers are often so focused on the evils to be exterminated that they neglect the need for personal reform as well. This is as true of all the people as it is of leaders. It is as true today in our nation as it was in Jesus' day when he confronted the corrupt leadership of Israel. The passage is beautifully appropriate to the message of Lent: "Repent!" It needs no further comment.

March 11, 2007

Third Sunday of Lent

“We must not content ourselves with liberty and consolation and gust in prayer. We must come out from prayer the most rapturous and sweet, only to do harder and ever harder works for God and our neighbors. Otherwise the prayer is not good, and the gusts are not from God.”

--St. Teresa of Avila

The Reverend Dr. James E. Swanson

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