



THE SPARE

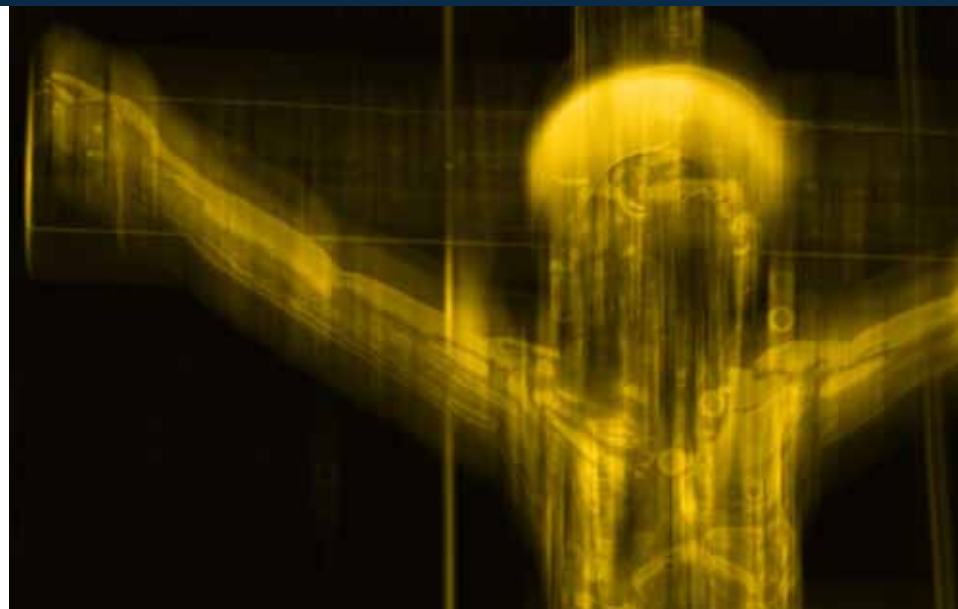
WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Pittsburgh, PA

Does Jesus Matter?

The gospel in a nutshell is something like this. We and all of creation were made by a good and generous God, to whom we owe literally everything. Nevertheless, we all sin and fall short of God's will, following our own inclinations and interests instead of loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Amazingly enough, God still loves us, not because we are good but because God is good and shows his love in that "while we were still sinners Christ died for us," as St. Paul says. If we are "in Christ" we become a new creation, saved from our sins and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to love God and our neighbors, not just in words but in all our actions.

When people join the church they profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which implies that they want to live as Jesus would have us live. They also promise to be faithful members of the church through their prayers, presence, gifts, and service, sharing actively in the joys and responsibilities of the Christian community.

We are all far from perfect in following Christ. Still, I see many of our members striving hard, by the grace of God, to be faithful, while the commitment of others is much harder to see.



God alone is the judge of our hearts, since only God knows our true motivations, and that fact should be both a comfort and a challenge. If we are striving hard to follow Jesus and falling short just because human nature is weak and fallen, God is gracious and "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," to quote Paul once again. But if our other commitments are more important than our commitment to Christ, so that Jesus really doesn't make much difference in the way we live, then we should at least remember that God is not fooled even when we fool ourselves.

The pastor's role is not to judge, but to encourage on the one hand and challenge on the other. So here's a word of encouragement. If you're trying hard to follow Jesus and find yourself falling short and failing to measure up,

don't despair. That's not hypocrisy. It's just human weakness, and all the more evidence that we need the grace of God we find in Jesus Christ.

And here is the challenge. If you show up in church only rarely, or give only a trivial portion of your time or treasure to the work of Christ, what does that say about your commitment? If you're unwilling to pledge your support financially, so that the church can't commit to ministry and mission for the sake of Christ, what explanation do you give to God? If Jesus doesn't make much difference in your priorities, in the way you live, or what you do with the gifts God has given you, what exactly does that mean?

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 telephone number, email address, and a title.
 All articles are subject to editing.

3 Worship

Sunday Worship Services

New Year 1945

Upcoming Events

4 Education

Epiphany

Baptism of the Lord

Family Support & Discussion Group

Christian Formation Seminars

Deaths

Diary of a Lunatic: The Sermon

Between Here and There

Glimpse of My World

Baptisms

9 Spiritual Growth

Unfettered: Listen for the Silence

Arts & Spirituality: God's Silent Embrace

11 Mission

Westminster's Mansion in the Country

12 Community Outreach

WROC

The Gallery at Westminster

Music & Arts Series

14 Stewardship




Financial Report

What Is Per Capita?




15 Caring Community

False Prophets of Health

**Traditional
Worship**

 Sundays
 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.
 Sanctuary

**The Bridge
Contemporary Worship**

 Sundays
 9:45 a.m.
 WROC

*The Lord's Supper is celebrated the first Sunday of each month.
Gluten-free wafers are available at all services.*

One of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's last messages before his execution was the poem "New Year 1945." He was writing from a Nazi prison during air raids on Berlin. Life is much different today, yet Bonhoeffer's words maintain their power. Seventy years later, we honor Bonhoeffer's extraordinary faith and courage.

New Year 1945

With every power for good to stay and guide me,
 comforted and inspired beyond all fear,
 I'll live these days with you in thought beside me,
 and pass, with you, into the coming year.
 While all the powers of Good aid and attend us,
 boldly we'll face the future, be it what may.
 At even, and at morn, God will befriend us,
 and oh, most surely on each new year's day
 The old year still torments our hearts, unhastening:
 the long days of our sorrow still endure.
 Father, grant to the soul thou hast been chastening
 that Thou hast promised—the healing and the cure.
 Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving
 even to the dregs of pain, at thy command,
 we will not falter, thankfully receiving
 all that is given by thy loving hand.
 But, should it be thy will once more to release us
 to life's enjoyment and its good sunshine,
 that we've learned from sorrow shall increase us
 and all our life be dedicate as thine.
 To-day, let candles shed their radiant greeting:
 lo, on our darkness are they not thy light,
 leading us haply to our longed-for meeting?
 Thou canst illumine e'en our darkest night.
 When now the silence deepens for our harkening,
 grant we may hear thy children's voices raise
 from all the unseen world around us darkening
 their universal paeon, in thy praise.
 While all the powers of Good aid and attend us,
 boldly we'll face the future, be it what way.
 At even, and at morn, God will befriend us,
 And oh, most surely on each new year's day!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Upcoming Events

06
JAN Epiphany of the Lord

10
JAN Baptism of the Lord

Ordination and
Installation of
Officers

17
JAN Violin and
Organ concert in
Galbreath Chapel

29
JAN Chatham Baroque
in Galbreath Chapel

Epiphany

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:10-11

From this story, we should learn how to bear ourselves aright toward our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, we should cast aside all offence, and together with these wise men witness before the world to the Lord Christ, see him from the bottom of our hearts, and adore him as our Savior. And because his reign on earth is so poor and wretched, we should with our gold, goods, and whole possessions gladly help to further and increase his kingdom, which is in so many ways suppressed and hindered by the devil and the world. For on this very day we can still open to Christ our treasure and present them to him as the wise men did. And how? Behold, his word is written (Matthew 25:40): "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Martin Luther, Sermon for Epiphany, 1544

Baptism of the Lord

On the Sunday after Epiphany, the church celebrates the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. This event happened when crowds of people came to be baptized by John and began to wonder if John was the Messiah. In Luke 3, as paraphrased in Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, John answered the crowd and described what happened when Jesus was baptized:

"I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from inside out. He's going to clean house – make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

After this, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness, where he fasted for 40 days and nights and was tested by the devil. Jesus then returned to Galilee to begin his ministry on earth. As we remember this part of Jesus' life in early January, we recommit our own lives to ministry in Christ.

Family Support & Discussion Group

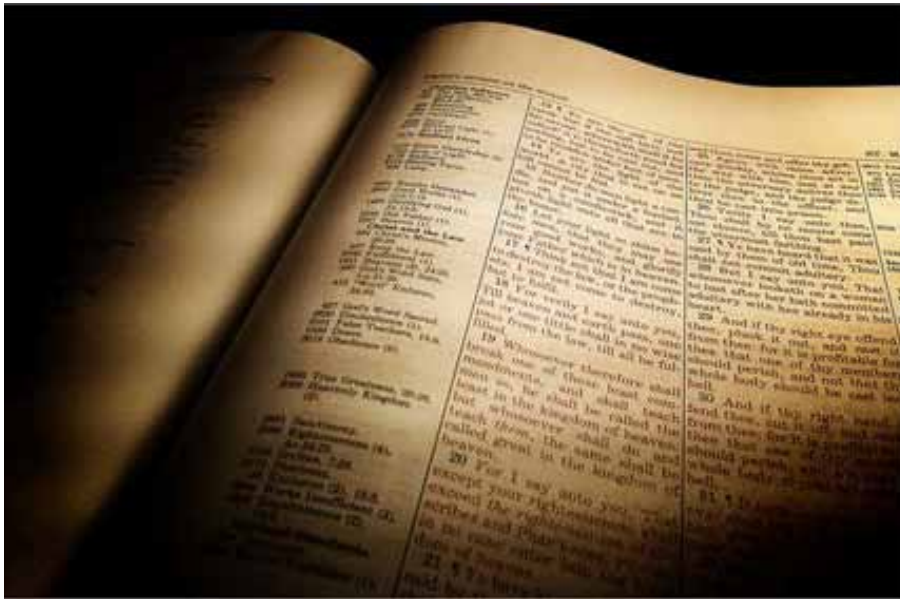
1st and 4th Sundays
of the Month
9:45-10:45 a.m.
Room 238

Are you raising children of any age? Do you have joys and concerns about raising children in today's world? Would you enjoy an opportunity to get to know other parents who are also walking the road of parenthood today? Would a time with other parents, apart from your children, to talk and laugh and pray together be a welcome respite for you?

If you can answer yes to those questions, then you are encouraged to come to Westminster's Family Support & Discussion Group. We will meet in Room 238 for discussion, prayer, and laughter on January 3. With your help we will identify topics of relevance to you for our discussion times. This is your group. We will build it together. Dave Fetterman, Robin Pyles, and Ed Sutter share the facilitation of the group.

CHRISTIAN FORMATION SEMINARS

Sundays at 9:45 a.m. in Galbreath Chapel



The winter seminars feature two professors from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, one returning and the other new to Westminster. In this new year, enrich your spiritual life on Sunday mornings during the seminar hour – and give a warm welcome to both professors.

Beginning January 10, **Steven Tuell** returns to engage us in study of the Scriptures. Tuell is James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament and an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. He presents complex biblical texts in a clear and compelling way, with the fire of a preacher, the wisdom of an experienced teacher, and a robust sense of humor.

Tuell's January series is titled "Who Are Those Guys? Major Insights from the Minor Prophets." Here are the details:

The last 12 books of the Old Testament are sometimes called the "Minor Prophets," a name meant to indicate their size (they are much shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, the "Major Prophets"), not their importance. But sadly, many Christians have never even heard of some of these books, let alone read them; indeed, few of us have heard a sermon preached on these books, or encountered them in Bible study. In our four weeks together, we will look at the last four books in the Old Testament (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), listening for what God has to say to us in these ancient, unfamiliar words.

On February 7, **Roger Owens** opens our Lenten Series. Owens, also a Methodist minister, received his PhD in theology from Duke University in 2006. He came to PTS in 2013 as Associate Professor of Leadership and Ministry. His areas of specialty include preaching, practical theology and ministry, and Christian spirituality. The author of numerous books and articles, Owens has preached and lectured across the country. He serves on the faculty for the Upper Room's Academy for Spiritual Formation, where he lectures on postmodern spirituality and traditions of Christian spirituality.

Baptisms

Sept. 13

Brecken David

Parents:

Cyndi & Ben Miller

Liam Allan

Parents:

Ashley & Chad Surich

**Margaret Rose
Elizabeth**

Parents:

Julie & Jeffrey Boles

November 15

Coleman Thomas

Parents:

Lauren & Benjamin Hassett

Ryan McLaren

Parents:

Ann & Fred Lese Jr.

December 13

Adam Jay

Parents:

Sarah & Ross Garin

Charlie Samuel

Parents:

Megan & Samuel Kane

**Ella Marie & Clayton
Douglas**

Parents:

Heidi & Phil Shaffalo



The Sermon

One of the questions I ask myself almost every week is “What makes a good sermon?” Is there some sort of formula to this thing we do, the proclaiming of God’s word to the assembled masses at Westminster? Should I always have a funny story? Is it really supposed to have three points? Will the homiletic police come and get me if it has four? Can folks walk out of the service with a challenge? Each sermon is different, each sermon takes a different path, which is why I’m always asking “What makes this one great?”

If you ask preachers who their favorite preacher is, almost everyone has an answer. Some love the old school guys like Martin Luther or Charles Wesley.

Some prefer preachers from contemporary history, like Martin Luther King Jr. or Bono.

Others still like the up and coming crowd, guys like Francis Chan and Rob Bell. Hearing a good sermon for me can be a little like listening to a well crafted symphony. Words when spoken out loud for an audience are music. They have pitch and tenor and rhythm, and some preachers are better players than others.*

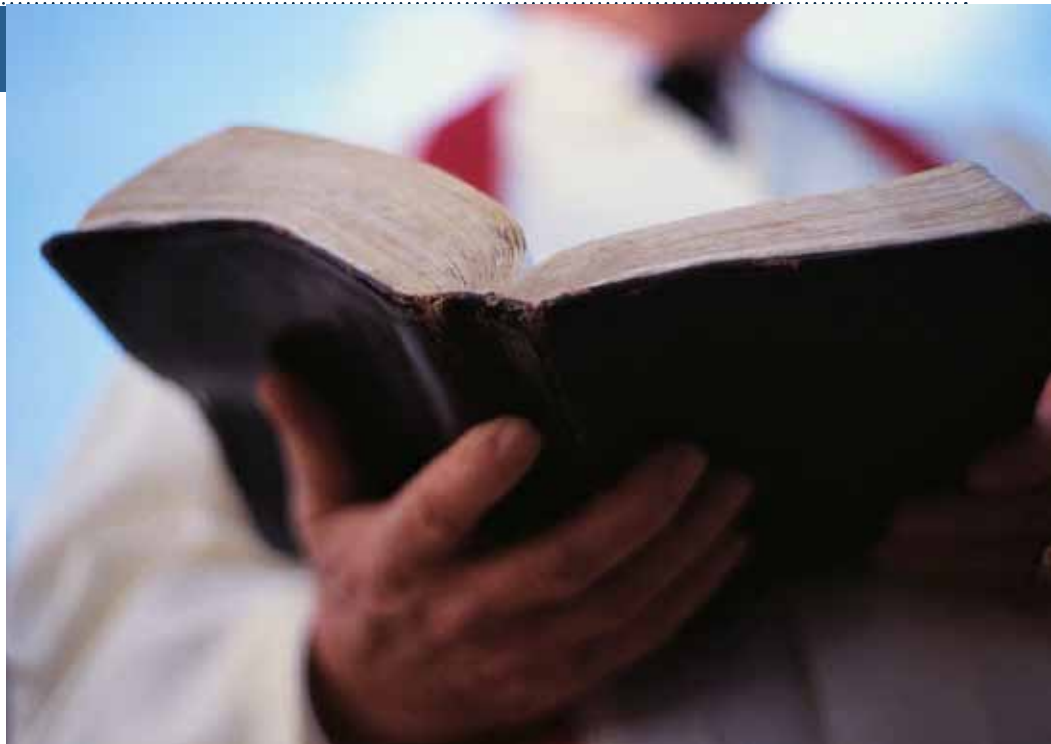
This month at Veritas, we are turning to the sermon to end all sermons, the one delivered by Jesus himself in Matthew. It is hard to overemphasize the impact this sermon, which spans Chapters 5-7, has on our Christian faith. The delivery is beautiful, using different cadences and rhetorical tools to make big points with few words. But the content is radical and life changing, if we give ourselves over to it.

Take, for instance, the opening words: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This kingdom doesn’t play by the normal rules! Usually we would assume that those who are rich have greater access, but Jesus seems to be saying that those who don’t have much will actually be given plenty. It’s a theme that keeps on going throughout the sermon. We, the followers of Jesus, are blessed when we’re persecuted. We’re supposed to remain humble, even when we get it right in our prayers or our giving. We really shouldn’t worry. And at the end of it all, Jesus tells us that if we build a life like this, it’s going to feel like we’ve been built up on a solid foundation. This is a life we can stand on.

That, as they say, will preach.

But it turns out that this way of life will preach too. When we are kind to our neighbors, it proclaims something to them. When we refuse to give in to anger, even refusing to call someone who cuts us off in traffic a “fool,” we set an example. When we live according to the sermon, Jesus tells us we’ll be like a tree that bears fruit. People will take notice. People will hear what we’re saying. We, when we simply live according to the kingdom values of the sermon, are preaching the good news.

So perhaps it’s time for you to pick up a new calling. Perhaps preaching isn’t reserved for those of us with fancy seminary



When we live according to the sermon, Jesus tells us we’ll be like a tree that bears fruit. People will take notice.

degrees (soon!) or a pulpit to occupy. Perhaps preaching is the work of any and all of us who will take seriously the words of Christ. Perhaps we’re preaching already, through our everyday coming and going, and we have no idea it’s happening.

Because for all the great preachers in the world, my favorite preachers are the ones who can do it without ever opening their mouths.

Till next time.**

– Jason Freyer

*Even though this isn’t where I’m going with this article, we should probably stop here and note that Westminster has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to our preachers, don’t we? It’s really fun to be a part of the preaching team here!

** Did you know that you don’t have to wait a whole month until next time? Check out some of the work that I and others on staff are doing on the Westminster Blog by visiting: www.westminster-church.org/blog. We’d love to have you!



New Year's Resolutions have been the subject of speeches, sermons, articles, research studies, and so on. So what more can be said about them? Well, I for one would suggest that we become a church that does away with them. I propose instead that we each commit to New Day's Resolutions: daily resolutions that aim for the betterment of our relationships, our health, and our walk with Christ.

I've done zero research for this particular column, but honestly I don't feel like stats and figures would help. In general, New Year's Resolutions simply do not work. Most fail in the first few months of the year. Ask me to read my Bible for daily devotion every single day throughout the year and I'll likely fail. Ask me to exercise more and I may start off strong, but the winter cold is likely to knock the practice right out of me. Ask me to give up old habits or take up new ones and I may be successful for a few months, but those too will likely end up in the failure column. New Year's Resolutions tend to be a practice in futility – but why?

Allow me an example. When I was in elementary school, I had mountain-out-of-a-molehill syndrome when it came to homework. Because I was focused on the mountain of homework, I usually had no idea where to begin. My mother would sit down with me and sort through my

assignments and ask, "How long do you think this assignment will take you?" I would generally respond with something like "Four hours!" My mother would then set a timer for four hours and have me (begrudgingly) begin my work. I generally clocked back in with something like 3:53 left on the clock. In this way my mother taught me that the mountain was in fact a molehill (or at its very worst, a small series of molehills), that I needed only to work on one piece at a time.

When it comes to New Year's Resolutions, I think that many of us suffer from mountain-out-of-a-molehill syndrome. When we think to ourselves, "No cookies for a whole year?!" we're quick to give up, or even fail to begin. So, what if we took up New Day's Resolutions? *Today I will make healthy choices. Today I will read my Bible. Today I will tell a friend that I prayed for them.* Jesus said it this way: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Lamentations puts it this way: "His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (3:22-23).

Don't look at the turning of the calendar as your chance for change; look instead at the turning of the planet. Worry not about tomorrow but care for today. Every morning God's mercies are new for you. Every new day comes with opportunities to become closer to God, closer to

others, healthier, more loving, stronger. It's amazing what a series of New Day's Resolutions may add up to.

What do you resolve to do? At the end of this day will you be healthier? Will you be closer to Christ? Will you be better than you were this morning? We need only care for the day in front of us – worry about tomorrow when it comes. Each day, we want to make the next right decision. Not sure of what that next right decision looks like? Perhaps the next right move is to sit down with Christ and ask him.

I'd love to hear what you've resolved to do. Let's chat about it sometime soon.

– Ed Sutter

**Every new day
comes with
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stronger.**



We're just wrapping up the Christmas season – a crazy busy part of the year in my world, including the many events and activities we host for Westminster's children and families. One part of almost every one of those events is an opportunity to share the Christmas story. Over and over, we revisit the tale – angel announcements, surprise and joy, sheep and shepherds, long trips by donkey, life in a stable, and all the rest. Even the smallest of our children know the story – and yet, we love to hear it again and again. What is it about this story that is so endlessly fascinating?

Of course, it's a warm and fuzzy story, full of happy news and new babies to celebrate. But somehow I'm guessing there might be more to it than that. I think there might be a clue in the opening lines of Psalm 98:

O Sing to the Lord
a new song, for he
has done marvelous
things....He has
remembered his love
and his faithfulness to
Israel. All the ends of
the earth have seen the
victory of our God.

I wonder if one of the reasons we never seem to tire of this story is that it recounts one of the most amazing actions of our God. God has "remembered his love" – and evidence of that love is everywhere in the Gospel stories that begin with the birth of this baby. So sharing this story is a wonderful reminder of how God is at work in our world – or at least how he has acted in our world in the past.

Throughout the Old Testament, God explained how to live as his own people, how to grow into the promises he had made. Again and again, the people were instructed to celebrate certain festivals, set aside special places and ceremonies. Why? So that "When in the future your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall answer, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:14).

One of the purposes for the celebrations and sacrifices, the traditions and holidays, was to cause the children (or those who are newer to the faith) to ask questions. And why were the questions important? Because they created an opportunity to share stories, to tell about the "marvelous things" that God had done. We would call this a teachable moment – that time when the interest and motivation to learn are present in a way that makes us more ready to learn, more open to gaining new information. Through the ages, God has used our love of story as a way to capture our attention, to help us grow closer to him.

So, all those December events are great invitations to tell the story of Emmanuel, of God with us. Now, as we wrap up the holidays and move on to the ordinariness of everyday life, I'm guessing we won't be telling the Bethlehem story so much in the coming days. But I'm wondering: what other traditions and events can we use to remind us to ask questions about God's work? What are the "marvelous things" God is doing in my life, in your life? I'd love to hear. Please, if we happen to meet in the hallway (or the mall), tell me a story.

– Robin Pyles

Deaths

Jan Cook
December 3

Janice Billingsley
December 6



Listen for the Silence

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

1 Kings 19:11-12, NRSV

Poor Elijah, sitting alone in a cave in the wilderness waiting to die. He had just, with God's spectacular help, defeated the prophets of Baal. In doing so he had annoyed Queen Jezebel to the point that she was preparing to have him killed. Elijah, not quite ready to die, decided to flee. That's why he is sitting all by himself in that cave in the middle of nowhere. He figured that it was better to simply wait for his time to die than to have angry Jezebel hasten his end in dastardly ways.

God wasn't ready for Elijah to die cowering in a cave on a hillside. So, an angel told Elijah to get out of the cave and to wait for God to appear for a chat. Elijah waited. A strong wind kicked up and got Elijah's attention. Certainly this was God announcing his entrance! Nope...not yet. Then an earthquake. Surely *this* was God's entrance. Nope...still not yet. Then came a fire. Ah, *now* God had arrived for their chat. Nope...*still* not yet. Elijah must have wondered what in the world God was up to. After all, God had appeared in a pretty dramatic way to allow Elijah to defeat Baal's prophets. Certainly, Elijah thought, this was how the God of power and creation liked to come: with lots of

drama and glitz and attention-getting special effects. Was he ever surprised! "The sound of sheer silence" followed the wind, earthquake, and fire...and *now* God had arrived to talk to Elijah. How wonderful are those words, "the *sound* of sheer silence." When God finally showed up for Elijah *in silence*, it was such a contrast to what Elijah was expecting that it got his attention like no other sound could.

We are on the threshold of a new year and uncertainty beckons us. Oh, we may bluster from time to time about how we are in control of our destinies, but in truth our lives are more surrounded by uncertainty than control. We don't know what tomorrow holds, let alone next month or the end of the year. And the uncertainty can be if not frightening, at least unsettling. What will happen in our economy and how will it affect my life and the lives of those I love? How will my health fare over these next months? Will my children remain safe in their schools and with their friends and in our neighborhoods? Are there crises ahead or smooth sailing? Will my life remain as good and happy throughout the next months as it is now?

Uncertainty...not knowing about the future: that was Elijah's lot. And for a while he was trapped, victimized by that uncertainty. When God came, Elijah was cowering in a cave, paralyzed by fear of the future – and expecting God to show him the way in a powerful, glitzy demonstration. Aren't we often the same? The uncertainty of the future freaks us out a bit, and we long for God to deliver us. The problem is that we often wait, like Elijah, for the powerful, glitzy demonstrations of God's presence and conclude that God isn't around when they don't happen.



Let's join in making just one New Year's Resolution: to resolve to look for God to come to us in all of life – including the "sound of sheer silence." If we do, we won't find uncertainty eliminated, nor the often accompanying fear and anxiety. We may, though, find God's presence and strength more easily because we'll be looking for it in all of the ways that God chooses, not only the loud, flashy ways that we might prefer. God came to Elijah in the "sound of sheer silence" and gave him the courage to leave his cave. A prayer for us at the beginning of 2016 might be that of the hymn writer:

**Breathe through the
heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy
balm;
Let sense be dumb, let
flesh retire;
Speak through the
earthquake, wind, and
fire,
O still, small voice of
calm.**

Listen for the silence...God is there.
Shalom.

– Dave Fetterman

God's Silent Embrace



To read Franz Wright's poems is to enter the hidden rooms of his soul. It's to be let in, with no preamble, into the dark quarters of loneliness and desperation. To submerge oneself into his poems is to experience vulnerability and redemption, and to recognize our collective soul in his voice.

Franz Wright was a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet whose work shows his passage from despair to gratefulness; the grief over the absence of his father, who abandoned him and his mother when he was eight years old; his struggles with alcoholism, drug addiction, and manic depression; and, finally, his profound religious awakening after years of spiritual longing.

His writing is crude, filled with images of waking up in unknown places after nights of drinking, or not having the strength and will to get out of bed for days, or feeling abandoned in a world where he doesn't think he belongs. They are poems of deep hurt, but they are also poems of love and redemption. They are poems about the human experience of suffering and loneliness, but also, the transcendence of forgiveness and faith.

Part of the genius of his work is that it has the power to both pull us into the darkest night and to lift us high by the sweetest grace. His words make us travel from the deepest pit to the most radiant light.

As a writer, Wright is well aware of the limits of language: there are

certain things in life that need to be experienced, as words never seem to be big enough to describe them. And Wright's words are about experience. He spares no details in describing his darkest days, but also exposes in tender rendition the awakening of grace. His poems are a window into the experience of being lost and found, being lonely and loved, abandoned and cared for. He delves into suffering's most blunt details to unveil the experience of God's enduring love and forgiveness.

Wright's words tell the journey from what he thought to be God's silence to the recognition that it was, and will always be, God's silent embrace. "I have heard God's silence like the sun,"¹ he says, describing the awe of discovering the warmth of God's love. His poems tell us that even when there is no room for God in our hearts and thoughts, we are always in his. Through all of our mistakes and deceptions and longings and fears, God is always there at each instant and every day.

The moment we learn to recognize God's ever-present life in us, we'll be, along with Wright, ready to face the loud and often tragic world. But we'll also be ready for the speechless universe of silent meaning our spirit yearns for.

— Mariela Mazziotti Antunes

¹ Wright, Franz. "Wake." *God's Silence*. Ed. Alfred A. Knopf. New York, 2006. 103. Print.

Preparations

[...]

While there is time
I call to mind Your constant unrequited
and preemptive forgiveness.

And remember You are not
and never were the object
of my thought,
my prayer,
my words
but rather *I*
was the object of Yours!

And I think I'm beginning to learn finally
what everything has been trying to teach me
just recently
again, and
for the past fifty years of forever:
total love for You—the mysterious gift of my
life—
truly felt at each instant
and every day
of deepest recollection,
grace-filled, apprehension, it *would*
dispel all fear, as well
as the love that requires
a response—
from others, other
ghosts (or
even
You!)

And I have always failed, yet
always know IT was there—this utter love—
And so am ready with the speechless
universe all word
my company,
my light,
my sunflower. Dark morning thoughts—...

Wright, Franz. "Preparations." *God's Silence*.
Ed. Alfred A. Knopf. New York, 2006. 113. Print.



Westminster's Mansion in the Country

Say the name Elmhurst to most Westminster members and you'll be greeted with a blank stare or a questioning look. On the other hand, ask members of a certain age about it and they will likely smile and begin to tell you about a beautiful retreat and camping space that Westminster owned for a number of years starting in the very late 1960s.

Elmhurst was built between 1897 and 1902 and was originally a summer home for the Thaw family, infamous for its connection to Evelyn Nesbit, the girl in the red velvet swing, and the murder of architect Stanford White, then known as the crime of the century. (Google them. It's worth the time.) While there were stories that Evelyn's ghost haunted the mansion, it seems she only visited there on a few occasions. Still, with teenagers camping at the property, is it really all that surprising that a ghost story sprang up?

Just 80 miles east of Pittsburgh, the house had nine bedrooms, six bathrooms, eight fireplaces, a 23 x 17-foot dining room with an 11-foot ceiling, and a 24 x 17-foot living room. And, according to a *Post-Gazette* article written by Gretchen McKay in 2001, there was even a "two-story cork-lined ice house with a fireplace where Helen Keller reportedly stayed in the early 1900s." McKay also described other features of the house including the walnut bookcase-lined library, the 50-foot upstairs hall, and the six-room suite of servants quarters on the third floor while also mentioning the 30-acre front yard. At the time of that article, the 20-room mansion was for sale for \$1.2 million. While Westminster is not mentioned by name, McKay did write that Elmhurst was at one time a summer church camp and that, as a result, the bedroom doors are still numbered.

More than the history and architecture, though, Elmhurst was a great place to camp – inside the mansion or in the barn. It was a great place to enjoy rope swings, hike in the valley 2,000 feet below the house, and play volleyball. You may even have heard that Hetz Marsh, who made his first appearance for the kids at Elmhurst, cheats at volleyball. But I would never say that about a clergyman.

More than the physical memories, though, is the wonderful sense of being among peers who quickly became friends. Then there was Bessie, the cook. Bessie performed minor miracles of her own in taking care of the young people of Westminster. Run out of eggs when you need to bake a cake? No problem for Bessie. She just used mayonnaise instead. More than that, though, she added love as she cared for children to whom she became a surrogate grandma or aunt for the week.

For some of us, it was the first time we were away from our parents in what felt like a grown-up place. We were in an amazing location surrounded by the beauty of creation. What I remember most looking back from the vantage point of now, though, is the peace and serenity that today's 14-year-olds will never experience, which is a week without the distractions and temptations of the outside world of social media, sports practices and just hanging out with friends. We did that last bit at Elmhurst. More than that, though, we got to hang out with God. That's the best memory I have of Elmhurst.

– Carolyn Kerr



Elmhurst Was a Gift

As I write this, we are in the midst of Advent. We are preparing again to receive the greatest gift ever given. God is coming among us, in the flesh, to draw all of creation back to what we were meant to be. Everything is new when we receive that gift.

We were taught about gifts. When a gift is given we are to receive it, open it, use it, and above all say "thank you." Not a bad formula for how to respond to the gift of new life in Christ.

Camp Elmhurst was a gift. It was a gift to more than a generation of youth at Westminster Church. We used that gift. We built youth ministry around that gift. We had three junior high retreats a year plus two urban-suburban junior high weeks of camp each summer. We had 12 high school retreats a year, one each season (fall, winter, spring), for grades 9 through 12. We were also intergenerational with a weekend family camp.

Jesus Christ was made real to hundreds of youth of Westminster Church and the larger community at Camp Elmhurst. The "we" included dozens of junior and senior high advisors and summer college counselors.

As my parents taught me, let me say, "Thank you." Thank you to the congregation of Westminster Church. Above all, thank you to God, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

– Hetz Marsh

Photos ©Matt Freed, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

New at the WROC

Strong Bodies, Strong Bones

An exercise program to build and maintain bone strength

Exercise plays a critical role in building and maintaining bone strength. Exercise Physiologist Anne Brucker presents a gentle, joint friendly OsteoDynamic program that strengthens the spine, rebuilds bone, teaches balance, and reduces fractures. Participants may choose to stand or sit and should bring a pair of light hand weights to class.

January 25 –
February 29

Mondays: 10:00 –
10:50 a.m.

Fellowship Hall

\$35

Check our website at wroc.westminster-church.org for a complete list of Winter 2016 fitness classes.



Hocus Pocus – Beat Osteoporosis

A body in motion tends to stay in motion. Moving is the key to keeping your bones strong. Walking 20 minutes a day protects your hips from fracture. Daily weight bearing exercises protect your neck and spine from bone density loss. A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D feeds your bones. A diet high in protein feeds your muscles. Bones and muscles work together to keep you tall and strong. That is the magic formula for defeating Osteoporosis.

Before age 30, your body is filling the bone with calcium. After the age of 30, both men and women begin losing bone mass. Ideally, your Osteoporosis prevention program should begin at birth because diet and exercise are critical at all ages. Most often, adults do not become concerned about their bone health until they have received a bone density scan score showing the beginning of serious bone loss diagnosed as Osteopenia. Your age (over 50), body type (slim build), skin (fair), hair color (light), and genetic history may also predispose you to risk of bone loss.

An Osteoporosis treatment care plan is summarized by WebMD as the “basic CDEF’s”: calcium (C), vitamin D (D), weight bearing exercise (E), prevention of falls (F), and bone friendly medicines.

A healthy diet of calcium becomes complicated for individuals who have dairy or soy allergies. After age 50, consumption of 1,200 milligrams of calcium is recommended daily with no more than 600 milligrams taken at one time. Almond milk and other nut milks provide an alternate source for calcium. Green leafy vegetables help boost the daily calcium requirement. Calcium supplement tablets with vitamin D added can help you meet your goal. Choose a source that also has magnesium added to prevent gas and constipation. Fifteen minutes of sunshine daily gives you the natural vitamin D you need to activate dietary calcium.

Weight bearing exercise is defined as a task that requires your body to act against resistance, forcing your muscles and bones to work in unison. Not every exercise meets this definition. Swimming, stationary biking, and yoga are beneficial for the body but will not protect your bones. Twenty minutes of repetitive exercise with light hand weights and 20 minutes of brisk walking provide the best bone health.

Fall prevention is a function of balance. Balance is a skill that can be learned at any age and strengthened with daily practice. Muscle and bone become stronger when they are challenged to keep the body upright. Tai Chi is considered one of the best tools for achieving balance, control, and strength. This ancient Chinese art is taught in a standing posture but excellent results can also be achieved by those who need to be seated.

Bone-friendly medicines provide some treatment choices. Each one, however, has side effects. Your doctor will help you with this choice if it becomes necessary.

– Anne Brucker

Anne Brucker (Master of Education, exercise design) has worked for 40 years as a teacher, lecturer, and researcher in the health industry. She served as the lead exercise physiologist for the six-year Highmark Osteoporosis HOPE Study. She also acted as the exercise design coordinator and conducted the pilot program for the University of Pittsburgh’s 10 Keys to Healthy Living Study and currently serves on the advisory board for the MOVE UP Study at the University of Pittsburgh’s Prevention Research Center.

THE GALLERY AT WESTMINSTER

For the next six weeks, Frank and Laurie Bruns will display photographs of some of the most striking public lands in the western region of our country. They have been hiking and camping in the West for many years because the unspoiled areas of this region let them “imagine the world untouched by human development.”

Although both of the Bruns are photographers, they have slightly different interests. Frank becomes enthusiastic about scenic compositions; Laurie would rather photograph people, animals, and plants. Neither has had any formal artistic training. They have participated in several photo workshops over the years in Pittsburgh and elsewhere and are members of the Photographic Section of the Academy of Science & Art of Pittsburgh, which meets three times a month, September through May. They also enter both print and projected digital competitions because they feel they benefit by having their images critiqued by experienced photographers. One of the Bruns’ favorite workshops was held in South Africa, where they learned about composition and post-image processing while photographing the beautiful spring wildflowers in Namaqualand.

Frank Bruns, a retired nephrologist, was on the University of Pittsburgh faculty for more than 40 years. Laurie is a retired counselor, software professional, and teacher. Before her retirement, she worked as an educator at Phipps Conservatory. Frank and Laurie have been married for more than 52 years and they continue to explore the incredible beauty of our natural world – with cameras, of course. They have just returned from a two-month trip to Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Each of their journeys results in hundreds, sometimes thousands, of new images, more often in color than black and white. They currently use Panasonic Lumix micro four-thirds cameras, and most of the photos in the gallery exhibit were taken with the GMC6 model. Some of the earlier photos were taken with Nikon SLR’s with APS-C formats.

The Bruns’ commitment to the environment is the result of many years of participation in activities that brought them into an intimate relationship with nature. In addition to photography and traveling, they enjoy camping, hiking, biking, kayaking, and skiing, and are members of the Sylvan Canoe Club, Three Rivers Birding Club, and the Wissahickon Nature Club. The splendor of the natural world has enriched their souls; the essence of nature remains a constant source of inspiration for them. The Bruns hope to capture with their cameras the spirit of wondrous places and by sharing their images, they will influence others to protect the special, unspoiled lands, many of which are endangered.

Stop by the gallery any time the church is open to see which regions of the West these adventurous photographers have chosen to share with us.

– Betty Digby



Arches National Park



Natural Bridges National Monument



Grand Teton in Fall

MUSIC & ARTS SERIES

Sunday, January 17

4:00 p.m.

Galbreath Chapel

Andrew Fouts, violin

Justin Wallace, organ

Westminster's Music & Arts Series begins its winter season in the cozy space of Galbreath Chapel on Sunday, January 17, at 4:00 p.m. Violinist Andrew Fouts of Chatham Baroque will join organist Justin Wallace, assistant organist at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, in a program designed to bring the light of uplifting, beautiful music to the Pittsburgh winter.

The program will include exquisite pieces by 17th-century Baroque masters Biber, Corelli, Marini, and Sweelinck. As the modern era in Europe took hold, these composers were breaking new ground with instrumental music that was dazzling and endlessly inventive in its virtuosity, as well as intensely expressive of all human emotions. To the 21st-century ear, this passionate music is fresh and engaging, bold and subtle, with a huge "wow" factor. And the pieces are compact in length, perfect for the attention span of busy people.

The concert will appeal to all ages. Children, especially music students, and adults will be inspired by the stunning playing of Andrew and Justin. Plan now to brighten your afternoon on January 17.

Admission is free, and a freewill offering will be gratefully accepted to support future programming.

STEWARDSHIP

Financial Report *As of November 30, 2015*

General Fund Contributions

Year-to-Date Actual 2015	\$1,807,034.92
Annual Budget	\$2,073,722.00
Amount needed to fulfill budget	\$ 266,687.08

Year-to-Date Income Statement

Income	\$2,091,866.10
Expenses	\$2,090,338.30
Net Position	\$ 1,527.80

We thank you for your wonderful support through the first 11 months, and we are pleased to report that we have not had to rely on any outside lending sources to fulfill our internal and external commitments. However, as you can see above, we still have approximately 12.9% of our 2015 budgeted contributions yet to be fulfilled.

If you are current or ahead on your 2015 pledge, thank you for your continuing support. If you are behind on your 2015 pledge, please consider catching up and fulfilling your pledge before December 31, so that we can continue to meet our commitments. Thank you.

What Is Per Capita?

The official definition of per capita is "an opportunity for all communicant members of the Presbyterian church through the governing bodies to participate equally, responsibly, and interdependently by sharing the cost of coordination and evaluation of mission; and of performing ecclesiastical, legislative, and judicial functions that identify a Reformed Church, while at the same time strengthening the sense of community among all Presbyterians" (GA Minutes, Part I, 1995).

In other words, per capita is a set amount of money (apportionment) per member that congregations pay to the larger Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Another way to look at it is that per capita is a Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund – part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. Because every Presbyterian shares in the benefit of the PC(USA)'s system of government, the expenses associated with coordinating and performing the functions of that system is shared by everyone as well.

Please remember to forward your 2016 per capita apportionment to the Finance Office anytime after January 1, 2016. **The amount set by Pittsburgh Presbytery for 2016 is \$29.00 per member.** Each year Westminster must send the amount set for the year to Presbytery for **each active member of our church.** For those members who do not send in their per capita apportionment, we must make up the difference from our operating budget. In 2015 we had to make up approximately \$38,000 in per capita shortfall. For those of you who will be receiving offering envelopes, there is an envelope inside each box for the per capita apportionment. For those of you who have elected not to receive offering envelopes, please note "2016 Per Capita" on the memo line of your check. If you have any questions regarding this apportionment, please contact David Reiter, church business administrator, at 412-835-6630x201 or reiter@westminster-church.org. Thank you.

Photo Adam Glanzman for *The New York Times*

False Prophets of Health

Why is it that growing numbers of people find spiritual support in groups formed around philosophies of personal health and fitness, rather than religion? Two Harvard Divinity School students recently found this to be the case. Looking for places where religiously unaffiliated millennials find spiritual community, among the places they focused upon were two commercial health and fitness franchises that met their criteria: SoulCycle and CrossFit.

Describing the ethos of CrossFit, they explain:

The two most striking things about CrossFitters are their evangelical enthusiasm and the way they hold one another to account. Would-be affiliate owners must first become part of the community and submit a written application that testifies to the life-changing experience of CrossFit.

Regarding SoulCycle, they write:

SoulCycle is a spin class where fitness is associated with empowerment, joyful living, and both inner and outer strength. Branded with phrases like “find your soul,” SoulCycle is in the business of changing lives. Classes are described as “journeys” and are led by inspirational instructors by candlelight, with a focus on transforming the mind as well as the body. Every week, 50,000 riders are rejuvenated by inspiring words and liturgy-like music playlists that give meaning to their workout.

The New York Times describes Greg Glassman, co-founder of CrossFit, as “messianic.” He explains his vision by saying:

We’re stewards of something. We’re saving lives, lots of them. Three hundred fifty thousand Americans are going to die next year from sitting on the couch. That’s dangerous. The TV is dangerous. Squatting isn’t.

This mashup of health, commerce, and spirituality seems likely to be unsatisfying in the long term. Perhaps the entrepreneurs who are promising vitality, health, and spirituality in a tidy package will continue to attract a loyal following.

But I wonder if there’s not an irreconcilable conflict embedded in this business model. Apart from issues with for-profit spirituality, people might have a hard time finding transcendent meaning that exceeds the boundaries of their own existence while focused on pursuing an enhanced personal image of bodily health.

God has given us marvelous bodies with finite lifespans. We care for them as best we are able. But a life defined within the confines of one’s own body seems unlikely to fulfill deeper spiritual needs.

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 16:24-25

– Ted Kyle



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“Glory to God in
highest heaven, who
unto us the Christ has given.”
With angels sing the
Savior’s birth, a glad
new year to all the earth.
Martin Luther