

MIDWEEK MESSAGE

December 11, 2013

Words to Consider: *"Hidden God,*

wherever you are

in your own kind of space,

we watch and wait for you

to startle us to wakeful newness

in this Advent season."

Ted Loder, *My Heart in my Mouth – Prayers for our Lives*

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH



- ❖ **CHURCH COUNCIL** meets **Thursday, December 12 at 5:00 PM** in the Parlor.
- ❖ **CHURCH CHOIR** **Thursday, December 12 at 7:30 PM** in the Parlor. All are welcome to join in song (and fun).
- ❖ **SENIOR CHAT** **Friday, December 13 - Julie Groves**, executive of **Therapy in your Home** will share with us about the help we can receive when we need Occupational, Physical, or Speech Therapy in our homes. Held in the Fireside Room of Covenant Presbyterian Church, 670 East Meadow Drive. For information, Dona Smith-Powers, Coordinator (650) 494-3093.
- ❖ **ISING GIRL CHOIR: Friday, December 13, 7:00 PM: "Be the Joy"** A festive concert of holiday favorites from around the world in our sanctuary.
- ❖ **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 10:00 AM Worship for the whole family:** *"Let Us Build a House where Hands Will Reach Beyond the Wood and Stone"* Naomi Schulz preaching, *"A Mess of Crocuses."* **11:30 AM Adult Spiritual Formation:** *Kneeling in Bethlehem* by Ann Weems and other poetry of the season. Everyone is invited to bring a poem or two to share. Led by Pastor Rick.
- ❖ **CHRISTMAS CAROLING AND CHILI SUPPER, Sunday, December 15, 4:00 PM.**

- ❖ **BIBLE STUDY, Tuesday, December 17, 10:30 AM** at the Terraces of Los Altos at Janet Maxwell's apartment. The address is 373 Pine Lane, #2106, Los Altos. Let Pastor Rick know if you need transportation.
- ❖ **MEN'S BREAKFAST, 8:00 AM, Wednesday, December 18,** at Hobe's Restaurant, 4224 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. All the men from our Church family are welcome.

UPCOMING AND ONGOING EVENTS

FROM THE STEWARDSHIP TASK TEAM

A gentle and friendly reminder to those who have not yet turned in their pledge forms for 2014, please carefully and prayerfully consider your commitment to support financially the life of our congregation. Then fill out your form and turn it in as soon as possible. This is an enormous help to the budgeting process and a way of affirming your belief that God has good work to do through us. Thanks to everyone who has submitted a pledge. We are about 3/4s the projected amount for 2014 pledges.

Retired Ministers & Missionaries Offering



Thank You For...

goal of \$750.

The **SPECIAL MISSION OFFERING FOR DECEMBER** is our annual **thank you offering for retired ministers and missionaries**. This year's theme is "Thank You for..." all the myriad ways in which these folk have served Christ's church in every corner of the globe. We give in gratitude for the years of sacrificial service that many of these leaders have provided, often at very low levels of income. It is a way of saying "thank you" for the blessings they have brought to the church and our lives. We have received \$331 toward our

ECUMENICAL HUNGER PROGRAM, ADOPT A FAMILY FOR CHRISTMAS AT FIRST BAPTIST

From Thelma Tuttle:

Again this year the members of First Baptist Palo Alto will be participating in E.H.P. CHRISTMAS FAMILY SHARING.

First Baptist Church is adopting 4 families this Christmas. Look for the basket in the church entryway and take a tag (or two or three) to purchase a gift for a neighbor in need. You can also make food contributions to this project. This is a great opportunity for you, your children and/or grandchildren to share some time shopping, wrapping and celebrating gifts and prayers for others. Suggested donations include: gift certificates for Sears, Kohl's and grocery stores; non-perishable food staples; personal hygiene items and toiletries; detergent. E.H.P. will also tell us of any other Christmas events in which we might participate.

Please bring your wrapped gifts by Sunday December 15.

- ❖ **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 10:00 AM Worship for the whole family:** *“Let Us Build a House where All Are Named, their Songs and Visions Heard”* Pastor Rick preaching, *“Love Is on the Way.”*
11:30 AM Christmas Brunch (bring finger food to share) and **Pageant** – *“The Adventures of the Grinch, Nope, Dan Who Misplaced and Generally Neglected our Savior and Messiah, Christ Jesus (Amen): Episode 1”* – the premier screening of a brand new video, featuring – us all!
- ❖ **CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE, Tuesday, December 24, 5:30 PM** A brief service of candles and carols for the family.
- ❖ **NO WOMEN’S BRUNCH** this month. We will resume on Thursday, January 23.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Joys:

- ✚ With gratitude for new voices in worship – Doug Davidson who preached and the iSing “girls” who sang
- ✚ Paul Tuan for successfully completing his driver’s test; for a much anticipated 3 week trip to Canada to be with Jessie’s family
- ✚ Jennah Dep-Somers for the joy of being a teacher of wonderful students (in the iSing program and of being able to do her teaching at FBCPA
- ✚ Kathy Gillam that her daughter, Julia will married next summer to her fiancé, Micah, (“Whom we like very much!”)
- ✚ Chip Clark for his dad, Charlie, who passed his driver’s test
- ✚ Daniel Ramirez for Oscar who passed his drive’s test
- ✚ Thelma Parodi with thanksgiving for a beautiful morning in worship
- ✚ Joanne Jones for the joy of spending Thanksgiving with her youngest daughter and for her oldest , Jan, who turned 60 on Sunday
- ✚ Pastor Rick for the great music program provided by the Los Altos High School choral program, which includes Oscar Ramirez, and for the band program, including Clara and Daniel; for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Judsons work in Burma; for the lovely Open House at the Spiridons

Concerns – New:

- ✚ For Don Granholm who is hospitalized at El Camino Hospital
- ✚ For Richard and the family and friends as they grieve the death of Patrice
- ✚ Pastor Rick for Pastor Bruce Chittick of Burton Community Church who is recovering at home with heart problems; for Marcia Patton recovering at home from hip surgery
- ✚ Thelma Parodi for her daughter, Lee, who will have back surgery January 8
- ✚ For the lives in service of all our retired ministers and missionaries in the ABC-USA
- ✚ Pastor Tripp for Cathleen Falsani who will have surgery this week
- ✚ Lois Ville for her brother, Lew, who had back surgery on December 10 and her friend, Barbara, who is having hip surgery on December 12

Ongoing:

- ✚ For Bob Towner at Manor Care in Sunnyvale and for Lucille
- ✚ Laura Garcia for Janice and other family members with health concerns
- ✚ For Don and Mary Granholm, Ruth Clark, Earl and Virginia Knechtel, Carl Schilling
- ✚ For Ruriko Uda's congregation, Izumi Parktown Church, in Sendai , Japan
- ✚ For Ramesh Kumar and the ministry of Balasore Technical School in India
- ✚ For our sister church in Corinto, Nicaragua
- ✚ For refugees and all victims of war and disaster everywhere
- ✚ For the work of EHP and the Opportunity Center with the homeless and hungry
- ✚ For the well-being of our church: wisdom and guidance for our leaders and its future
- ✚ For the economies of which we are a part (global, national, state, local)
- ✚ For the care of the earth
- ✚ For the peoples of the world striving for freedom and dignity
- ✚ For peace in a war-torn world, food for the hungry, homes for the homeless, justice for the abused and oppressed, and hope for the future
- ✚ For those affected by indiscriminate acts of violence and for the adoption of measures to heal our communities of all the many ways these make us less safe and less free

FROM PASTOR TRIPP

It's not too late. If you are online at all, we're also going to try a little photographic meditation. Take a photo and post it on the church Facebook page and any other favorite social media platform with the hashtag #rethinkchurch or #redpoinsettias and we'll be sure to feature them in the Midweek Message and the church bulletin. You'll see here that each day of December has a theme! It has the potential to be fun and beautiful.



TIME

Advent photo-a-day [Dec. 1-25]

1 go	12 hope	23 neighbors
2 bound	13 justice	24 joy
3 peace	14 gather	25 light
4 time	15 rejoice	
5 flood	16 strong	
6 awake	17 free	
7 ready	18 mercy	
8 wisdom	19 patient/patience	
9 delight	20 good news	
10 holy	21 prophet	
11 steadfast/steady	22 sign	

#rethinkchurch
#rethinkadvent
rethinkchurch.org



FLOOD



AWAKE



READY



WISDOM



DELIGHT



HOLY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2013

Third Sunday of Advent

Let Us Build a House where Hands Will Reach Beyond the Wood and Stone

"A Mess of Crocuses"

Naomi Schulz Preaching

Lectionary reading for the Week: Psalm 146; **ISAIAH 35**; Matthew 11:2-1; **LUKE 1:46b-55**; James 5:7-10.
(Focus scripture for this week is in bold.)

IN THE WORLD

This text shouldn't be here.

Amid rumors of war and desolation, Isaiah 35 surprises us. A voice speaks without addressing anyone by name, without the particularity of time. This poem follows another poem filled with ecological destruction: "The streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; her land shall become burning pitch...Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses."

Then, without a break and without explanation, Isaiah 35 interrupts devastation and despair:

The wilderness and the dry
land shall be glad.
the desert shall rejoice and
blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom
abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and
singing...

How can we help people see this word?

Perhaps you can place a long blue cloth running down into the aisle from the communion table -- a river in the sanctuary. Can you see people fishing in the Hudson River from the pier on 125th Street in Harlem?

Can you see the vacant lot in the Bronx once strewn with broken bottles and crack vials? Now it's a community garden. Look at the rows of string beans and beets! Young kids and grandmothers are weeding together.

What can you see where you live -- in nearby farms or city streets?

Some say this hopeful promise belongs to Second Isaiah. Others argue that it comes even later -- sixth century BCE or later still -- surely after the exile. This poem comes too early. Who moved it? Some things even our best scholarship cannot explain. The Spirit hovered over the text and over the scribes: "Put it here," breathed the Spirit, "before anyone is ready. Interrupt the narrative of despair." So, here it is: a word that couldn't wait until it might make more sense.

Some people will hear the recitative from *The Messiah* in Isaiah's promise of restoration for those with disabilities: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be open-ed and the ears of the deaf unstop-ped..." How do these promises sound to people who live with disabilities?

Perhaps you can create a Call to Worship or post-communion litany that offers a different vision:

Then the blind woman and her dog
shall process with the choir;
the deaf man who sees what we often miss
shall paint the text on the sanctuary walls;
the veteran in the wheelchair
shall break the bread of life,
and the homeless man who cannot speak
shall sign the hymns for everyone to see.

For many years Chuck Campbell taught preaching at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. He required students in one of his classes to lead worship and preach at the Open Door Shelter for homeless people in downtown Atlanta. One day he was leading worship in front of the shelter, amid the noise of rush-hour traffic. After the call to worship and a song, Chuck's plans were interrupted. "I noticed one homeless man waving to me and pointing to himself. I was surprised when I saw him for the man can neither hear nor speak and is normally very reserved.

But there he was, eager to do something. He stepped into the middle of the circle, bowed his head in silence, and began to sign a hymn for us. It was beautiful, like a dance... In that moment our notions of 'abled' and 'disabled' were turned upside down. The rest of us had been shouting to be heard, but the noise was no problem for our friend...Our worship became a token of the resurrection in the midst of the powers of death, a glimpse of God's beloved community." Even Isaiah couldn't have imagined the glory of that moment in downtown Atlanta as the hands of the speechless were singing for joy!¹

Isaiah dares to speak a word out of place. A word that refused to wait until things improved. As Walter Bruggemann has reminded us, "Israel's doxologies are characteristically against the data." We see and hear the data every night on the news and every morning on the front page of the paper. Add to that the data of our own lives: waiting for the test results from the doctor, mourning the death of a loved one, wondering if we'll make it through the next round of lay-offs. We know the data all too well and we long for a word out of place.

Who will speak a word out of place? Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund often speaks such a word. She refuses to wait until the time is right and everyone is on her side. After the latest defeat of a gun control measure, she wrote: "I woke up the morning after the Senate vote thinking about Sojourner Truth, one of my role models, a brilliant and indomitable slave woman who could neither read nor write but who was passionate about ending unjust slavery and second-class treatment of women. At the end of one of her antislavery talks in Ohio, a man came up to her and said, "Old woman, do you think that your talk about slavery does any good? Do you suppose people care what you say? Why, I don't care anymore for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea."

"Perhaps not," she answered, "but, the Lord willing, I'll keep you scratching."

Then Marian goes on in her own words: "We must be determined and persistent fleas...Enough fleas biting strategically can make the biggest dog uncomfortable. And if they flick some of us off but even more of us keep coming back with our calls, emails, visits, nonviolent direct action protests, and votes - *we'll win.*"²

Who will speak a word out of place? A homeless deaf man in downtown Atlanta. An advocate for children who refuses to be silent. A prophet who couldn't wait until the hopeful Part 2 of Isaiah 40-55. He spoke a word out of place. This is exactly the word many people are yearning to hear.

O come now, living water, pour your grace,

And bring new life to ev'ry withered place;
Speak comfort to each trembling heart:
"Be strong! Fear not, for I will ne'er depart."

Rejoice, rejoice! Take heart and do not fear,
God's chosen one, Immanuel, draws near.

¹ Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 123-124.

² Marian Wright Edelman, "We Must Never Give Up," *Child Watch Column*, April 20, 2013. (Barbara Lundblad, "Commentary on Isaiah 35," December 15, 2013, workingpreacher.org).

Prayer: *O God of Isaiah and John the Baptist, through all such faithful ones you proclaim the unfolding of future joy and renewed life. Strengthen our hearts to believe your advent promise that one day we will walk in the holy way of Christ, where sorrow and sighing will be no more and the journey of God's people will be joy. Amen.*

A NOTE FROM PASTOR RICK

Advent continues to be a blessed time for our congregation. We were graced with a fine sermon and liturgy from our intern, Doug, on Sunday along with beautiful music from Jennah Delp-Somers and two of the iSing girls. Then the day was capped off with a lovely Open House hosted by the Spiridons. Good friends – old and new, good food, good community. Thanks to Nana and Alex for being such gracious hosts.

This Sunday the service will be led by our other intern, Naomi. She will be preaching on Isaiah's vision of a blooming desert and God who comes to a young woman in Galilee with an incredible message of good news. In Adult Spiritual Formation we will look at some of the beautiful poetry that Ann Weems penned for her seasonal volume, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, plus everyone is invited to bring Advent/Christmas/Epiphany poetry to share. Then at 4 PM everyone is invited to come back to the church where we will divide up to go caroling to the members of our community who don't get out easily or often. Following the caroling, we'll return to the church for chili. It will be another full and fabulous day to share with a family member, friend, neighbor, colleague or stranger or two. See you Sunday at 10 AM.

May God's new thing flourish within us and among us.

Pastor Rick