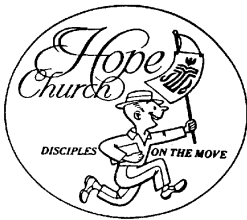


HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TINTON FALLS, NEW JERSEY



NOTES OF HOPE



A monthly publication to keep us informed.

March 2008

Edited by
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Steven Buckley

Our Mission Statement

We believe that God has gathered this congregation and staff at this time and place in order to:

Introduce people to the enduring love of Jesus found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Invite them to become part of the family of God

Instruct them in the scriptures, God's word to us

Involve them in the ministry of the church, according to their gifts

Inspire them to go into the world, making disciples of others

One of the things I often like to do with our monthly newsletters is take the opportunity to share with you the latest thoughts that have been tossing about in my head (scary... I know). But I also like to use the newsletter to expose you to something that you may not ordinarily have the opportunity to encounter.

Towards the end of this month we will be celebrating Easter together (I know... Easter in March?!), and in preparation for that day I thought it might be fitting to think upon the meaning of Easter. Easter Sunday is one of the most well attended days of the year. Clearly it remains a significant day for many people within the culture at large. And yet no event has become more controversial and more misunderstood than Easter (and I'm not talking about the Easter Bunny here).

Rather than me telling you what I believe Easter is about (I get to do that on March 23 anyway) I thought it might be nice to share with you a article that one of my favorite theologians, N. T. Wright, wrote on the subject. "Tom" Wright is the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England and a leading New Testament scholar. This article is a little long, and the language he uses is a little odd (he's British after all), but hang in there... it's humorous and the payoff is well worth it.

The peace of Christ be with you,

Pastor Andrew

IF I WERE A BETTING MAN, I would lay good money on two basic messages going out from pulpits this Easter...

Pastor "Gospelman" believes passionately in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the empty tomb, the angels, the whole supernatural shebang. (If that isn't how you spell that last word, sorry, I'm relying on oral tradition.) Every Easter he denounces the wicked liberals, not least The Reverend Jeremy "Smoothtongue" up the road, for their unwillingness to acknowledge that the Bible is true, that God really does do miracles, and that – as the demonstration of those two points – Jesus really did rise again.

He may try a few stunts to show that eye-witnesses can tell strange stories and still be speaking the truth: watch him eat a daffodil in the pulpit. He may quote the old chorus: "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!" Yes, Jesus is risen from the dead, and he is therefore alive and we can get to know him for ourselves.

When it comes to the "so what?" the Pastor is equally emphatic. There really is a life after death! Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven! Salvation awaits, in a glorious, blissful world beyond this one. We are, after all, "citizens of heaven", as Paul says, so when we're done with this wicked world our souls will be snatched away to be there for ever. We shall be reunited with our loved ones (don't you wish there was a better phrase, even a better cliché, for saying that?).

We shall share the life of the New Jerusalem. "Here for a season, then above, O Lamb of God I come." "Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise."

Alas: Pastor "Gospelman" has missed the point. Much of what he says is true, but most of it isn't the truth that the Easter stories were written to convey.

DOWN THE ROAD, FORTIFIED BY champagne in the Rectory after the midnight Easter Vigil (why not break the Lenten fast in style, even if your fasting itself has been, well, somewhat sporadic), Mr. "Smoothtongue" is in full flow. We know of course that the crude, surface meaning of the story can't be what the writers really meant. Modern science has shown that miracles don't happen, that dead people don't rise. Anyway, what kind of a God would break into history just this once, to rescue one favored person, while standing back and doing nothing during the Holocaust? To believe in something so obvious, so blatant, so... unspiritual as the empty tomb and the bodily resurrection – it's offensive to all one's finer instincts.

In particular, it might be taken to mean (as his good friend Pastor “Gospelman” up the road would no doubt imagine, bless his fundamentalist socks) that Christianity is therefore superior to all other faiths, whereas we know that God is radically inclusive and that all religions, all faiths, all worldviews can be equally valid pathways to The Divine.

So... the stories of the empty tomb were probably made up many years after it all. The learned Rector wants to make this quite clear: they are a remythologization of the primal eschatological drama, which caught up the disciples in a moment of sociomorphic, possibly even sociopathic, empathy with the apocalyptic dénouement of the Beatific Vision. Hmm. No, the congregation didn't quite get that either. But then they, too, had ended the Lenten Fast in style.

When it comes to the "so what?" Mr. “Smoothtongue” is emphatic. Now that we've got away from that crude supernatural nonsense, the way is clear to "True Resurrection". This, it turns out, is a new way of construing the human project, breaking through the old taboos (he has traditional sexual ethics in mind, but is too delicate to mention it) and discovering a new kind of life, a welcoming, yes, inclusive approach.

The "stone" of legalism has been rolled away, and the "risen body", the true spark of life and identity hidden inside each of us, can burst forth. And – well, of course, this new life must now infect all our relationships. All our social policies. Resurrection must become, not a one-off event, imagined by pre-modern minds and insisted on by backward-looking conservatives, but an ongoing event in the liberation of humans and the world.

Mr. “Smoothtongue” is on to something here at last, but he doesn't know what it is. Or why.

WHAT PASTOR GOSPELMAN never notices is that the resurrection stories in the four Gospels aren't about going to heaven when you die. In fact, there is almost nothing about "going to heaven when you die" in the whole New Testament. Being "citizens of heaven" (Philippians 3.20) doesn't mean you're supposed to end up there. Many of the Philippians were Roman citizens, but Rome didn't want them back when they retired. Their job was to bring Roman culture to Philippi.

That's the point which all the Gospels actually make, in their own ways. Jesus is risen, therefore God's new world has begun. Jesus is risen, therefore Israel and the world have been redeemed. Jesus is risen, therefore his followers have a new job to do.

And what is that new job? To bring the life of heaven to birth in actual, physical, earthly reality. This is what Pastor "Gospelman" never imagines (though his preaching does sometimes accidentally have this result). The bodily resurrection of Jesus is more than a proof that God performs miracles or that the Bible is true. It is more than the Christian's knowing of Jesus in our own experience (that is the truth of Pentecost, not of Easter). It is much, much more than the assurance of heaven after death (Paul speaks of "going away and being with Christ", but his main emphasis is on coming back again in a risen body, to live in God's new-born creation).

Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about.

That's why Mr. "Smoothtongue's" final point has a grain of truth in it, though all his previous denials make it impossible for him to see why it's true or what its proper shape is. The resurrection is indeed the foundation for a renewed way of life in and for the world. But to get that social, political and cultural result you really do need the bodily resurrection, not just a "spiritual" event that might have happened to Jesus or perhaps simply to the disciples. And his insistence on "modern science" (not that he's read any physics recently) is pure Enlightenment rhetoric. We didn't need Galileo and Einstein to tell us that dead people don't come back to life.

When Paul wrote his great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, he didn't end by saying, "So let's celebrate the great future life that awaits us." He ended by saying, "So get on with your work, because you know that in the Lord it won't go to waste." When the final resurrection occurs, as the centrepiece of God's new creation, we will discover that everything done in the present world in the power of Jesus' own resurrection will be celebrated and included, appropriately transformed.

Of course, when the muddled Rector tries to make Easter mean "liberation from moral constraint", and "discovering the true spark within each of us", he is standing genuine Christianity on its head and making it perform tricks like a circus lion. Easter is about new creation, a huge and stunning fresh gift of transforming grace, not about discovering that the old world has been misunderstood and needs simply to be allowed to be truly itself. Romans 6, 1 Corinthians 6 and Colossians 3 stand firmly in his way at this point.

HANDS UP ALL THOSE who have heard one or other of those sermons. Thank you. How much did I win?

Now hands up those who have heard a sermon which reflects what Paul is talking about in Romans 8, or the evangelists in their final chapters, or John the Seer in Revelation 21 and 22: that, with Easter, God's new creation is launched upon a surprised world, pointing ahead to the renewal, the redemption, the rebirth of the entire creation.

Hands up those who have heard the message that every act of love, every deed done in Christ and by the Spirit, every work of true creativity – every time justice is done, peace is made, families are healed, temptation is resisted, true freedom is sought and won – that this very earthly event takes its place within a long history of things which implement Jesus' own resurrection and anticipate the final new creation, and act as signposts of hope, pointing back to the first and on to the second.

I thought so. Thank you.

- Tom Wright

A Deacon Request

The 'giving tree' is again adorned with Easter decorations and is on display February 24th. Please take a decoration or two and purchase the food item written on it. The purchases will please be returned Sunday, March 16th, which is Palm Sunday. The Deacons will organize the Easter dinners and distribute them that day.

This holiday, we, in conjunction with our 'giving buddies' ILEX from Industrial Way, will be providing food items for 14 families! We have 7 outreach families and 7 Hope Church families that we are assisting. Praise God.

Thank you for sharing God's blessings.

From the Deacons

Thanks to all of you who are helping with our Old Monmouth Easter Candy Sale fundraiser. A reminder that all candy forms and money should be returned to the church on Sunday, March 2nd. Checks can be made out to Hope Presbyterian Church. Thank you!

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

In your offering envelopes and in the pews you will find gold envelopes marked ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING. Here is our chance to support a very worthwhile mission

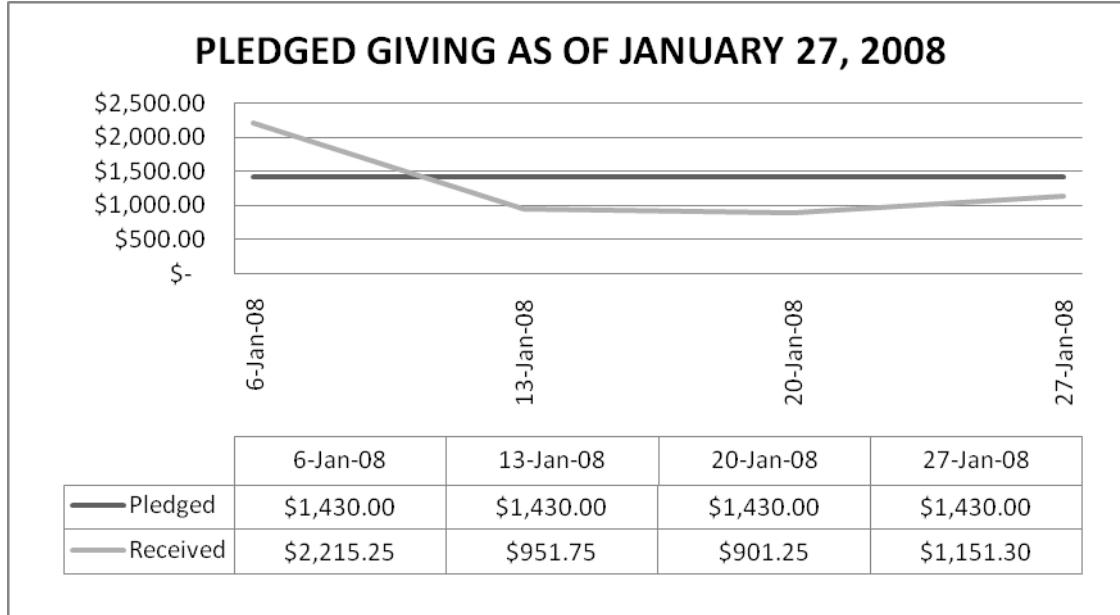


Since 1949, Presbyterians have joined with millions of other Christians through One Great Hour of Sharing to share God's love with people experiencing need. Our gifts support ministries of disaster response, refugee assistance and resettlement, and community development that help people find safe refuge, start new lives, and work together to strengthen their families and communities.

Recognizing that the hope we have in Christ is lived out in our hope for one another, we respond with gifts that help our sisters and brothers around the world find the hope for a brighter future.

Where does the money go?

The [Presbyterian Hunger Program](#) receives 36 percent of undesignated One Great Hour of Sharing gifts, while the [Self-Development of People](#) and [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#) each receives 32 percent.



The chart above represents our pledged giving vs. pledged receipts in the General Fund for the month of January. The straight line is the amount that has been promised to be pledged weekly for 2008. This amount is determined by the total amount of dollars pledged divided by 52 weeks. The other line reflects the received weekly pledges. As you can see, we fell below for the month of January. Total pledges expected for January were to be \$5,720.00. We received \$5,219.55 resulting in a shortfall of \$500.45.

Honoring Our Debt (Building Fund) also had a shortfall. The pledged amount per month is \$1,962.00. Receipts for January were \$1,693.00 resulting in a shortfall of \$269.00.

Bottom line, we need to do better. In order to stay afloat for 2008 we need to stay **above** the pledged amount each week by over \$300.00. This takes into account that we do not want to have to spend the \$11,000.00 allocated from our savings account to meet costs for 2008. Staying above each week by \$300.00 or more will help us meet the needs of rising cost in staff payroll and building maintenance without having to use our savings.

Stewardship

Paul speaks of two motivations for giving ourselves, our time and our possessions to God's work. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, he appeals to the model and example of Jesus and asks us to give as Jesus did. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, he reminds us that God promises to richly supply all that is needed for us to continue to give.

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” —2 Corinthians 8:9

The model of Jesus and the promise of God's provision motivate us to be generous. Our generosity honors God, the source of all generosity. Our generosity makes God's purposes known. By God's power, our generosity provides the announcement of the Good News of salvation and the deeds of mercy, the actions of love, which serve the needs of people everywhere.

“God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” — 2 Corinthians 9:8

Our generosity draws us closer to God, the Giver of all good gifts. Generous deeds shape our lives and our understandings. Through generosity we begin to know more deeply and more broadly the graciousness Of God. Generosity does not change God's behavior toward us, but it changes our behavior toward God.

From: <http://www.elca.org/ot/congregations/guideline.html>

March Stewardship Prayer

Praised are you, Oh God, creator of universe. You graciously bestow all good gifts on us. You have made us caretakers of the entire world. In honoring your creation, we honor you. Grant that we may use your gifts gratefully and that we may have generous hearts and minds. Help us return to you in gratitude and in delight all the good things you have given us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

What's New on the Worship Scene?

Do you know what "Tenebrae" means? You may have heard the word, but what in the world does this rather old-fashioned term mean?

"Tenebrae" is Latin for "shadows". And it is one name for the type of worship service that takes place in some churches during the end of Holy Week. Here at Hope Church, we will be having a "service of shadows" on Good Friday at 8PM. This year is different from previous years: in the recent past, we have had a service of Holy Communion, to commemorate the Last Supper, on Maundy Thursday, and then on Friday we have had a Prayer Vigil, but no actual worship service. This year, there will be no worship on Thursday, but we will have a very special service on Good Friday.

The purpose of the Tenebrae service is to recreate the emotional aspects of the passion story, so this is not supposed to be a happy service, because the occasion is not happy. It is at this service that we remember our Lord's death on the cross to pay for our sins. The betrayal, abandonment and agony are recreated, and usually the liturgy is left unfinished, because the story of redemption is not complete until Easter morning!

The worship service usually consists of hymns, Scripture readings, sometimes Communion, and always candlelight: candles are gradually extinguished as the service progresses, finally ending in total darkness.

What our exact Liturgy will be like I don't know. Why not come and find out what our worship team has planned? It will be a great learning time for you and your children, and a time to draw closer to the Lord in the few days prior to Easter. It promises to be a very special worship experience. See you there!

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School is returning to Hope Church! We are very excited to announce the return of VBS this summer. This will be a huge undertaking and can only be accomplished with your help. Look for weekly updates in your bulletin and scheduled meetings throughout the Spring. If you wish to be involved please see Michelle Mullan or call (732) 222-9182. Please consider this worthwhile venture as Hope Church endeavors to spread God's love throughout the community.

Hope Church Tackles Hunger

Thank you to the congregation for so generously donating to the Church School's collection for the Souper Bowl of Caring on Feb. 3. We have donated \$175 to the Monmouth-Ocean Food Bank. Our "Service Blitz Project", collecting snack foods for the Soup Kitchen at First Methodist in Asbury Park, was very successful with two tubs of food collected.

Ladies, Get Your Scissors

Ladies of the church are invited to participate in a special Lenten project to create a new banner reflecting the events of Holy Week for our sanctuary. We will gather in the John Calvin Room on Tuesday, March 4 and Thursday, March 6 at 7:00 to work together to make the small panels that will go together to create the larger banner. On Palm Sunday, the banner will be presented and dedicated during worship. Please see Mary Harris or Kathy Heller if you are interested.

March Birthdays at Hope

1	Nancy Morgan
5	Carol-Jeanne Turk
10	Elisabeth Buckley
12	Jim Scheidt
18	Edith Leadbeater
19	Phyllis Trask
19	Helen Hubeny
20	Shannon Rivera
27	Rebecca Flynn
27	Fred Moag
30	Joe Massa
30	Rob Weiss
30	Ellen Dingman