

Words of Faith

THE NEWSLETTER OF FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Volume 3, Issue 3

July–September 2003

50 years of church life celebrated

After half a century, the congregation of Faith Presbyterian Church had come full circle.

In the spring of 1953 the brand-new congregation was meeting at the Masonic Temple Building at 47 St. Helens Avenue in Tacoma, and Dr. Robert G. Rayburn, moderator of the Bible Presbyterian Synod, occupied the pulpit on Sunday, April 19, and oversaw the business of the church as an organized body. The charter membership numbered 198.

On the last weekend in May of 2003 the congregation came together again at 47 St. Helens Avenue, this time for an anniversary banquet to celebrate God's faithfulness over 50 years as a church body. There was a Dr. Rayburn

again in attendance, but this time it was Dr. Rob Rayburn, son of Dr. Robert Rayburn, and he had been pastor of the congregation for the last 25 of those years. The building was now known as the Landmark Convention Center – Temple Theatre, the church now numbered several hundred members, and was now a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America, but the desire to be faithful to the Bible and the truth of the gospel has remained.

The evening began with seating at tables for eight, each with a bouquet of yellow roses and a scattering of 50 year anniversary chaff on the dinner linen. To the delight of anyone with even a few ounces of kid in them, the dessert—sumptuous cheesecake—was already in place, to be studied and contemplated while the other courses were being worked on.

Following a buffet dinner featuring salmon and chicken, some of the history of the church was recounted. Pastor Rayburn sketched the state of American Reformed Christianity in the early 1950s, when conservative Presbyterians, while faithful to the Bible and very missionary-minded, tended to withdraw from the larger religious culture, and mentioned some of the changes that had taken place over the decades as Reformed evangelicalism had matured in both outlook and practice. Elder Dick Hannula traced the 25 years of Rob and Florence's association with the church, beginning with their arrival in Tacoma in the spring of 1978. Some statistics

were shared—361 baptisms during that time, 1300 prayer meetings, 160,000 Sunday School sessions, and 2,600 worship services. Elder Steve Jack noted that a few of the church's earliest members, with last names like DeSoto, Gronewold, Johns, Pappuleas, and Payne, were still active members of the congregation. Missionaries and pastors had been sent out from the ranks of church members, and ministries such as the Tacoma Chapter of the Crisis Pregnancy Center and Covenant High School had been started.

The evening's main address was given by a son of the church, the Rev. Martin Payne, who hid in the Scotch broom around the church as a boy, went off to college and seminary, and is now the pastor of Bay Springs PCA in rural Mississippi. "We are all one family—and what a family it has been over the past 50 years," he noted, and encouraged his listeners to demonstrate the reality of God's family, God's grace, and God's glory.

The preparations for this memorable evening had been underway for months. Some of the key participants in the planning process included Steve Smith (program chairman, and a suave and well-turned-out master of ceremonies), Tadd Bentson (printing), Sandy Edelstein and Suzanne Strozier (table decorations), Doug Lawty (church history booklet), Joanne O'Ban (table decorations), Laurie O'Ban (program), Bonnie Payne (tickets), Carolyn Sugimoto (program and calligraphy),

(continued on page 3)

Calendar

September 1

Church Picnic

October 3-4

PNW Presbytery meets at Crestwood Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, AB

October 11

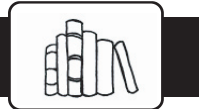
Chad Isenberger/Dana Padgett wedding

October 25

Daylight Savings Time ends

November 27

Thanksgiving; 10:00 a.m. worship service



Lessons of Faith

Biblical Worship: A Continuing Series

The Choir

By the Rev. Rob Rayburn

Many Christians are well used to having a choir sing in their church services and the singing of a choir has been a fixture of our worship at Faith Presbyterian Church since its organization in 1953. That is understandable as choirs feature in the Bible's own description of divine worship. Choirs, with both men and women singers (Neh. 7:67; 2 Chron. 35:25), were organized for the worship of the temple and were placed under the direction of able musicians (1 Chron. 25). Choral singing was accompanied by instruments, indeed in the temple by a full orchestra, as is also indicated in the titles of various psalms (e.g. Ps. 6). From material provided in Chronicles and the psalms themselves, we learn that Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun were directors of separate temple choirs (Heman's choir, for example, was apparently known as the "Sons of Korah.") The title, "For the Choirmaster" or "For the Director of Music," attached to fifty-five psalms, indicates that psalms or anthems, whatever may have been their origin (e.g. Ps. 51), were collected and arranged for the use of the temple choirs.

The fact that an emphasis was placed on the temple singing being directed and accompanied by trained and skilled musicians indicates that part of the reason for having a choir was to offer particularly beautiful singing to the Lord, singing that was beyond the capability of the congregation itself. Much choral music, though we can hardly say how much, in the Old Testament and in Christian history since, was antiphonal, in which one choir responded to another, or one side to another (e.g. Neh. 12:24). In modern times the antiphonal effect has been incorporated into our poly-

phonic music, with voices singing different parts in harmony. Some of the most beautiful music in the world was written to be sung by the choirs of Christian churches.

All of this being so, it may come as a surprise to some that controversies have swirled around church choirs for centuries. In the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition choirs returned, in the teeth of stiff opposition, to Sunday worship only in the later 19th

As the Bible itself shows us, in a properly ordered worship, both choir and congregation have a proper role.

century. This development occurred generally at the same time that musical accompaniment was reintroduced to the church's praise. (Second Presbyterian Church of Charleston, South Carolina, went through a stormy controversy over the introduction of a choir and instruments—highlighted by the padlocking of the cello by some conservatives!—before it finally secured an organ in 1856.)

From the Reformation onwards, the argument against choirs had largely been that they intruded on the congregation's right of participation. This was a natural enough concern, given that congregational participation had diminished virtually to the vanishing point in much of medieval worship. This continued to be a particularly important argument in the Presbyterian tradition because, as a result of some early and unhappy developments in Presbyterian worship, singing was virtually the only partici-

pation left to the congregation. Since that time, in an effort to defend traditional Presbyterian worship against this "innovation," a biblical/theological argument against choirs was developed. It took this form: choirs were part of the temple liturgy in the Old Testament; that liturgy has been done away with; choirs are not re-instated in the liturgical teaching of the New Testament; therefore, they are not to be used by Christian churches today.

There is nothing about that argument that I find remotely persuasive. Choirs are found before, during, and after the temple in the Old Testament. They are part of the temple worship, in the same way that prayer, praise, and sacrament are part of that worship, for reasons that in no way limit their use to a particular period in the history of salvation. The New Testament shows us what seem to be choirs singing in heaven, never says anything that could be taken to forbid or even discourage the use of choirs in worship, and, in any case, tells us comparatively little about how to construct a worship service, in largest part, no doubt, because that instruction had been so comprehensively given in the Old Testament. The Bible is in favor of choral singing as a part of worship.

There have been and are today no doubt churches in which choirs do supplant the congregation's own singing. But, as the Bible itself shows us, in a properly ordered worship, both choir and congregation have a proper role. The great value of a choir, from biblical times to the present day, has been its ability, still more than the congregation's, to glorify the words of worship with the beauty of music. Few Christians have not had the experience of being stirred by the beauty of a sacred text sung well by a choir as part of a service of worship. In fact it was precisely the beauty of music well

(continued on next page)

CHS graduates 24 in class of '03

The Covenant High School treasury minted 24 new coins on May 30, to be placed into circulation in society over the next few decades, as the graduating class of 2003 was commissioned in a ceremony held at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Tacoma.

These coins were imprinted on one side with the CHS motto—"to worship God and enjoy Him forever"—and on the other with the likeness of a son or daughter who had completed their course of study at the school.

Nearly all of the graduates are headed to college, with destinations rang-

ing from nearby schools like Tacoma Community College to moderately-distant institutions like Covenant College at Lookout Mountain in Georgia to faraway places like St. Andrews University in Fife, Scotland. Nine of the students were recipients of the Washington State Honors Award, designating them as being in the top ten per cent of the state's graduating seniors, based on GPA and college entrance exam scores.

Ed Dunnington, pastor of the Reformed University Fellowship at the University of Washington, charged the graduates to remember how much they

were indebted to God's mercy, and challenged them to live transformed lives that would impact the world into which they are headed. The Madrigal Choir and Covenant Choir performed selections from Bach, Mendelssohn, and Jon Williams, directed by Mrs. Florence Rayburn.

Bright and shiny, the new graduates will have their mettle tested as they go on to further schooling, jobs, and the other experiences of life. It is hoped that their value will increase over time, and that they will be well-spent in the service of the kingdom. ✠

Lessons of Faith, continued

(continued from previous page)

sung and the power of words when set to such music that tempted the church at times in her history to use the choir to such an extent that it supplanted the congregation's own voice of praise.

Choirs can cause other problems. If they are composed of poor singers or are poorly schooled and directed, the congregation is not helped in its worship but finds itself obliged to endure an alien element. Further, the music chosen for church choirs to sing may not fit the musical training or taste of a congregation and so leave the people behind. Musicians do not always have the same tastes or interests as a congregation, though congregations, of course, should expect to have their tastes educated and elevated over time.

Choirs are meant to animate worship, not distract from it. Choirs are, in the Bible and in all serious Christian liturgical theology, the voice of the people. They belong with the people, therefore, in the architecture of the church. The modern, largely American, innovation of a large choir facing the congregation, sitting above and behind the table and the pulpit, singing *to* rather than *on*

behalf of the congregation, has contributed significantly to the idea of the congregation as spectators rather than worshippers themselves. The voice of the choir is to be taken into the heart and made one's own expression, very much as the prayer of one who leads the congregation in prayer.

Here at Faith Presbyterian we add the choir's voice to the congregation, with the latter singing much more than the former; we place the choir within the congregation by placing it in the balcony; and we choose a selection of anthems, whether ancient or modern, that are accessible to a congregation like ours. We have avoided the custom of an "anthem" to be sung by the choir at some customary point in the service, as if an anthem, in and of itself, had a place or purpose in the liturgy, and instead use the choir to articulate the congregation's own voice at certain points in the liturgy, especially the lifting up of our hearts to the Lord at the beginning of worship, the confession of our sins, and the prayer or spiritual reflection that concludes our worship just before we leave the sanctuary.

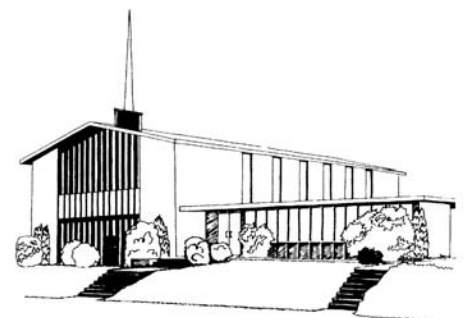
Rob ✠

Cover Story

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Chris Zodrow (ticket design), and Florence Rayburn and the Covenant High School Chamber Choir (musical selections).

Included in the evening was the singing of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (from Psalm 103), the fourth-century hymn "Te Deum" that had been set to music by Franz Joseph Haydn, the 19th-century hymn "Unless the Lord the House Shall Build," John Wykoff's "Peace to this House" (written in 2003 for the occasion), and finally the doxology—a fitting way to end the first 50 years of the church's life, and to start the next 50. ✠





A Faith that Sustains

By Dr. Philip Douglas

I was born and raised in a community where church-going was the norm, not the exception. My parents made certain that my two brothers, two sisters, and I were in attendance at church every time the doors were opened. We were there Sunday mornings and back for evening service, youth fellowship, choirs, and scouting.

We heard our church's preaching and teaching for each of our first eighteen years. But today none of my brothers and sisters is involved in a committed way with any branch of the Church of Jesus Christ. I believe the reason for this outcome is that we were taught what the apostle Paul terms in Galatians 1:6-7 "another gospel—which is really no gospel at all."

The "gospel" my family was taught was fundamentally a moral code centered on what we had to do in order to obtain the approval and acceptance of God. Many of my peers in school had a similar experience in their churches as well, and as a result we seemed on the surface to be a religious, moral group of young people. However, now as I look back on my peers' lives, some thirty years later, I see the effect of the moralism with which we were raised.

One of my best friends was quite involved in the church. His parents were faithful in taking him there for every activity. He graduated from college, became a CPA, married his high school sweetheart and had two children. But as the normal trials and tribulations of life began to impose themselves upon him, he jettisoned whatever faith he had, left his wife and children, moved to Las Vegas, and is now a sports gambling expert - a sad outcome for a life that was nurtured with the rest of us in our Bible belt religious community.

Another one of my peers was a young woman who was a leader in her high school class and lived a very righteous life. She attended college, was a fine student, became a teacher, and married a physician who grew up in a nearby town. But she was involved in a severe automobile accident and endured several surgeries. Through that difficulty she found that her moralistic man-centered faith would not hold. It did not provide any sustaining power for her. So she left her husband, went to law school, and is now one of the lead-

The Reformed faith teaches that union with Christ is the centerpiece of all Biblical theology...

ing attorneys in Washington D.C. for a movement that challenges many of the family values that Christians hold dear.

I get very angry when I think about the religious teaching that was presented to my siblings and peers in our hometown during the fifties and sixties. I look back now and believe we were defrauded because the preachers and teachers proclaimed another gospel—which is no gospel at all.

The Apostle Paul describes this kind of religion in Philippians. He writes, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again and it is a safeguard for you" (3:1). He reiterates this same message time and time again in his thirteen letters, because he is zealous to safeguard the good news of Jesus Christ. He wants this gospel of grace to be the sustaining center that will hold them in the midst of tribulation.

The central message of that other gospel is that Christ alone is not sufficient.

Through their preaching and teaching, the religious leaders in my hometown indicated that Christ's atonement was not enough to establish our righteousness before God. Sadly, they taught us very little about Christ crucified. Instead, they told us what we needed to do in order to reach up to God to take hold of Him. But, our grip was never strong enough to hold on to God, particularly when we grew older and the normal difficulties of life intruded upon us. We could not hold on to God! None of my peers did. My siblings did not. But the religious leaders never taught us that God in Christ would hold on to us because of His grace, through His initiative alone, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us.

We had been baptized into the church. In our thinking the religious rite of baptism is what saved us. Other friends of mine went through a class sometime between 8 and 12 and were told that by reciting the salvation formula they became Christians. But that moralistic center did not sustain them.

Later, as an adult, I learned from the daughter of my childhood hometown pastor that he believed neither in the resurrection nor eternal life. Instead, we were taught a moral code that centered on human relationships—that minimized the eternal perspective—and as a result that ethic veered from Biblical morality on key points.

When I left my hometown for college, I endured all the normal trials and tribulations that freshmen experience. And my moralistic center did not hold me. I drifted into despair and spent a significant portion of my freshman year depressed. The academic pressure was intense, and I was far away from the culture in which I had been raised. But the Lord used that experience to break me down. Providentially, He led me into a small group of Christian young men, and they led me to Christ.

(continued on back page)

After 25 years, Mrs. Rayburn re-directs

Watching Florence Rayburn conduct a choir, you might think that she transmits music through her face and fingertips.

Her expression is one of total concentration, her hands move gracefully, energetically and purposefully in front of the choir members, and out of their mouths comes beautiful music.

Of course, the reality is somewhat more complicated than that, but for the past 25 years that is the very short version of what she has done with the church choir at Faith Presbyterian Church.

When the Rayburns came to FPC in 1978, one of the immediate needs was for a choir director. The newly-appointed pastor encouraged his fairly-new wife to look at her participation as an ordinary member of the congregation, and to use her abilities where she thought there might be a good fit.

Music was a ready choice for the Drake University graduate (degree in musical education, with a major in violin and a minor in voice), and she decided to give choir directing a try.

A quarter of a century later, the fit appears to have been a very good one indeed, and the congregation has benefited greatly in its worship from her tireless work in the ministry of music.

At first the choir did a lot of practicing and not much performing, singing perhaps once a month. As their cohesiveness and ability developed, so did their frequency.

Around 1990, the balcony was converted from an enclosed sitting room to an open area, and the choir moved upstairs, after having spent the previous dozen years at the back of the church on the lower level, with Florence using hand signals to coordinate with the piano accompaniment at the front of the church. This, along with the installation of a piano in the

balcony, proved to be a turning point in the choir's development.

Another big step came when there was an influx of choir members from another local congregation, whom Florence gratifyingly found to be disciplined and faithful in their musical participation.

"The choir has grown with me," she observes. "They have taught me as I have taught them." And she believes that the divine hand has been very much at work through her work. "The Lord really developed this choir Himself. He sanctifies the imperfect work that I do, and it's humbling to feel His blessing."

For presentation of music, she says that "First, you need to get people's attention. Then you need to have something to say." She strives for works that not only sound beautiful, but which are also accessible to musically uneducated ears.

Beyond the musical basics, she is mindful of the spiritual ends to which the work of the choir is directed.

"Through the years I have thought a lot about what the choir ought to sing," says Florence. She looks for music that is centered on who the Lord is, and His attributes. "I've also tried to find music that is objective, either in confession, or praise, or dedicating ourselves to His work." In addition, she has tried to use the choir in a role as the voice of the congregation, which is one reason why the choir is at the back of the church facing forward, just like the rest of the church members.

Ideas for selections come from various sources, starting with bending an ear to other musical performances ("I listen to a lot of recordings"). Rob has contributed a steady flow of musical ideas, many of them picked up in his travels, and Florence has found her periodic visits to Covenant College another productive source as well.

This fall she will be taking a break from working with the church choir, and turning over her directing duties to Steve Lewin, a 2003 Covenant College graduate who is himself a violinist and music major, and who has on occasion guest-conducted the college chorale. However, she will not be stepping entirely away from musical direction, for she will continue to work with the Covenant High School choirs, as she has done for the past 11 years, thus assuring that music will continue to flow from her fingertips, to the blessing of all who listen. ✪

Often I have what I call a "summer vacation" mentality. I remember when I was a child and at the beginning of summer vacation time seemed to stretch out endlessly before me. Sometimes life seems to stretch out endlessly and I think to myself "I have lots of time to do this or that." It's likely that I would be better off with a "company's coming in three hours and I have lots of chores to do!" mentality. When we have an imminent deadline before us it is easier to make each moment count and to be more intentional about each action. I love the fact that our days are numbered by the Lord. Job says that God has "decreed the number of his months" (Job 14:5). This gives us great assurance and confidence as we continue to grow in learning how to number our days: the Lord has already numbered them for us.

—Hollie Seibert, WIC president,
writing in the February 2003
WIC newsletter

New Member Spotlight



By Ron Boydston

DAVID and HARRIETT BYE met while they were living in a commune in northern California in the 1960s. Both are from Jewish homes, but the gospel came calling in the form of the Jesus movement, which brought many young people into the kingdom during that time. Within a six-month period they both became believers, were married, spent the next 15 years in a non-denominational church, and helped to establish a congregation in Oregon that is still going strong. In the early 1980s they moved to Tacoma, and made their way through a series of different churches before starting to attend Faith three years ago. With five children (their youngest, Yosef, is 19) and nine grandchildren, they have been involved in Bible Study Fellowship for many years, and are self-employed in the window cleaning business.

MICHAEL FREY graduated from Bethel High School in 2000, attended PLU for several semesters, and now works as a stocker at Costco. A member of Bible Presbyterian, he visited

Faith at the invitation of his roommate Chad Isenberger, and found that he liked it here and felt right at home. He's an assistant football coach at Tacoma Baptist (he was an offensive lineman at Bethel) and likes to produce graphite drawings in his spare time. His career goal is to enter public service, either as a police officer or firefighter.

TODD JOHNSON is a 2001 graduate of Curtis High School in University Place and currently a student at TCC studying computer network administration, and planning on transferring to UW Tacoma to study business. As a child he attended a Methodist church, then had a period of no church attendance, and several years ago started attending University Place Presbyterian, where he became a Christian.

Several years ago STEVE LEWIN was pulled into the gravitational field of the planet Pribyl, one of the larger family bodies in the FPC solar system; a planet with no suns but a number of very eligible daughters. He was not



Todd Johnson

able to escape. It began when Nicole Pribyl went to study in France, where Steve lived with his British-born dad and French mom, one older sister and two older brothers. When Nicole returned to the United States to attend Covenant College, Steve decided to emigrate. They were married two years later. Both are 2003 Covenant grads, Nicole in voice and Steve in music and pre-engineering. He is doing remodeling work this summer and preparing to shoulder the duties of conducting the church choir this fall. He plays the violin, makes furniture and does other woodworking, and hopes to someday establish a business in violin-making.

BARRY and MARY MALONE met in the 1980s at Boise State University in Idaho, where they were both in the college choir. At the time Mary, who was at that time a Mormon, was fully convinced that she was going to convert Barry, who had been raised a Baptist. Two years after their 1987 marriage a conversion did take place, but it was in the opposite direction, and Mary left the LDS, to which the rest of her family still belongs. Barry spent five years in the Army on his first enlistment,



This "file photo" of the Malones was taken last fall. R.J. (not pictured) was born in August.

New Member Spotlight

got out and worked in Kansas City, Kansas for time, and then re-enlisted in 2002, and is now a chaplain's assistant, stationed at Ft. Lewis but currently deployed overseas. They have five children – Andrew, Chelly, Lauren, Asa, and R.J. – ranging in ages from 14 to newborn. They became Reformed in their outlook while Barry worked with a Presbyterian chaplain candidate at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and were members of Redeemer Presbyterian in Overland Park, KS, before transferring to Faith last fall.

ALAN and BARBARA ORSBORN live in Bonney Lake, where Alan also has his dental practice. New to the Reformed faith, they attended an OPC congregation when they lived in the Tri-cities, but before that were affiliated with a charismatic congregation. They were introduced to Reformed teaching by good friends who were members of Green Lake Presbyterian Church in Seattle, who were themselves former charismatics. "The Reformed faith is like putting on glasses," says Alan. "You can see things more clearly...it's like being born again, again." Both are avid readers, and they have three children, plus a lot of catching up to do in the area of reading Reformed authors.



Alan and Barbara Orsborn

MARK SHARP was released from prison in February of this year, and lives with his wife JENNIFER and 11-month-old son Rivers in Tacoma. Converted while incarcerated (he was baptized in December 2000 at the Clallam Bay Correctional Facility), his only prior worship experience was in prison chapels, and he was fairly certain that he would not be accepted on the inside of a church that was outside of a prison. But, he says, "I've found that my preconceived ideas were totally misconstrued. I've never experienced love like this." Mark met FPC member and former inmate Rob Moren 3½ years ago, and has been greatly helped by Rob in his Christian walk. Currently on disability waiting for a knee replacement, he reads extensively, a practice that helped him pass the time when he had nowhere else to go, and which is helping him now as he and Jennifer grow in their faith. They were married at Faith last March.

Baptisms

Chika Matsuda, daughter of Isaac and Wendy Matsuda; Elizabeth Uhler, daughter of Adam and Catherine Uhler; Ethan Havel, son of Chris and Jennifer Havel; Moriah Dawson, daughter of Kent and Aubree Dawson; Josiah Mellott, son of Don and Debbie Mellott; Jordaan Kvale, son of Ken and Wendy Kvale; Duncan Welch, son of Brandon and Denise Welch

Transfers

Michael Jackson, to Oberlin Congregational Church, Steilacoom ☺

Mrs. Rogland, Mrs. Schrupp retire

If you didn't know where to look, you might not be aware that anything was even happening, but two of the behind-the-scenes individuals that have kept the church office paperwork and finances running smoothly for many years are bowing out of their duties this fall.

Mrs. Sharon Rogland, who started working in the church office as a secretary 16 years ago, did the church bulletin, prayer meeting agenda, and correspondence for Pastor Rayburn until 1998, when Mike Simpson became the church administrator. Since then she has been assisting with the bookkeeping, especially the monthly income and expense statements. Before coming to the church office she was the business manager for the Orting School District for three years, and did the district's bookkeeping for another two. "I thought I retired five years ago," says Sharon, but this time it appears to be official.

Mrs. Vickie Shrupp, church treasurer, is also retiring this fall, after 15 years of keeping track of the day-to-day church finances. "It's been a privilege to work with the pastors and Mike Simpson," she says. Like Sharon, she will continue her affiliation with Faith, as both have husbands (Bob Rogland and John Schrupp) who are not yet quite ready to retire, although they are sidling nearer and nearer to the pasture fence.

Mrs. Debby Bowdle will be assuming the duties for both of these very capable and faithful ladies. ☺

Bond is back. No, not that Bond. Doug Bond, teacher at Covenant High School, elder in the church, and avocational novelist, with his second volume in the Crown & Covenant series for young people. Titled "King's Arrow," and illustrated by Matthew Bird, it merits this endorsement from Robert Case of the World Journalism Institute: "Doug Bond's novels do more than entertain. They educate. Bond weaves the voices of Rutherford and Knox into a historic tapestry that includes exciting tales of war, civil disobedience, rebellion, justice, father's love and family devotion... Good stuff to help young teens understand current foreign affairs."

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A Faith that Sustains, Continued

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One of them took me to his church in Washington, D.C., Fourth Presbyterian Church. The pastor was Dr. Richard Halverson, one of the great preachers of his generation, and he preached on Philippians 3:8. He said, "This is my life passage, my life verse—I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." I had never heard anyone talk about the Lord Jesus in such personal terms. The Holy Spirit touched my heart deeply that Sunday evening through the preached Word. He placed a desire in my heart to know the Lord Jesus as intimately as Halverson.

When I embraced Reformed theology I began to understand Paul's next words, "that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Phil.

3:3b.9). This is one of 164 times that the Apostle Paul uses this little phrase, "in Christ," or the similar phrases "with Christ," "by Christ," and "through Christ." In most of those verses, he is referring to the doctrine of our union with Christ.

The Reformed faith teaches that union with Christ is the centerpiece of all Biblical theology and of the Christian life. All of the other great truths and doctrines—especially sanctification—flow out of our union with Christ.

As we serve in religious and secular cultures where that "another gospel" is proclaimed, we must proclaim Christ alone. This does not mean that the Christian life is not concerned with morality; it means that our moral acts flow out of our intimate relationship with Christ. Christ's work alone accomplished our salvation and has made us fully "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6, KJV). We live out of that real-

ity doing unto others even as He has so graciously done unto us in Christ.

Are we assured not only that we love God, but that He loved us and is holding on to us during times of joy and sorrow? That is the true Gospel that is given to us in the pages of Scripture. And this is what we must to proclaim to ourselves, and to those whom we love and serve daily, so the people in our sphere of influence receive a center that holds during the trials and difficulties of life. ✠

Dr. Douglass is Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant. This article is condensed with permission from an article that originally appeared in the Summer 2003 edition of Covenant magazine, the magazine of Covenant Theological Seminary. Free subscriptions to Covenant magazine are available by logging on to www.covenantseminary.edu or calling 1-800-264-8064.