

Words of Faith

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Annual Meeting: congregation splits, then regroups

For the first time in many a year, the congregation experienced a split when it showed up for the dinner preceding the annual meeting on January 26, 2005.

The division was not caused by a difference in doctrine or polity, however, but rather by a lack of space, since the lower level of the church was deprived of one of its meeting rooms, which space had been ceded to the new wing, still under construction.

As a result, two food venues were in operation, the second one being in the high school portable classroom building, commandeered for the evening for the purpose of feeding the bodies of all ages rather than just the minds of young ones.

But aside from a concession to the logistics, the evening meal proceeded in traditional fashion. Pizza was the featured food of the night, boxes and boxes of it, exercising the right of eminent doughmain at the head of the line, with vegetables, cookies, and drinks all following along in their assigned places.

(The serving of pizza at a church function perhaps reflects an attempt to foster fellowship and a certain kind of piety among the members. While the piety involved is not necessarily the most ennobling kind there is, pizza piety is a very enjoyable one nevertheless.)

Afterwards the members of the congregation assembled in the sanctuary, united once again, to hear reports from the various ministries of the church, several of which were mentioned briefly but explained more fully in the annual report.

The statistics showed a total communicant membership holding steady at just over 500, with a slight technical decline owing to the erasure of some inactive names from the rolls. Average morning worship increased from 509 in 2003 to 528 in 2004. Sunday School attendance had been on the upswing earlier in the year, but is now on hiatus until the new building becomes operational.

Covenant High School, now in its 13th year of operation with its largest enrollment ▶ 7

Pianos readied for new assignments

Pianos and Presbyterians have several traits in common.

Both have formal, smooth exteriors, possess a quiet dignity, and at times can appear somewhat imposing.

Both have exacting and complicated keyboards (theologies).

Both are capable of producing music that is warm, delightful and full of beauty, even though they often look rather severe when not in use.

And both, when they are settled in one place, are not easily moved.

But the pianos at Faith Presbyterian Church have indeed been on the move recently, as a reshuffling of the instruments is taking place as part of the preparations for furnishing the new wing with the necessary musical instruments.

Recent piano moves at the church include:

1. The introduction of a new sanctuary piano, a 7 foot, 6 inch-long, 838-pound Pramberger, made by the Korean manufacturer Young Chang. With an additional 14 inches in length, it fits very snugly in its space at the front of the sanctuary.

The new piano, according to church pianist and organist Ron Bechtel, accomplishes two things. "First, it provides a beautiful sound; and second, it provides technical suitability for excellence in performance for solo use or accompaniment." He adds that "It has really been a pleasure to play on the new piano. It's much easier to play, and it facilitates musical artistry."

2. The refurbishment of the old sanctuary piano, a 6 foot, 4 inch-long Chickering, ▶ 6

Biblical Worship: A Continuing Series

Ordered Emotion and Heart-felt Formality

By Rev. Rob Rayburn

This is the fourteenth and final installment in this series on the worship we offer to God together in the Lord's House on the Lord's Day. We have covered matters both large and small: from the nature of a biblical liturgy to the question of what the minister should wear when presiding in the sanctuary; from the singing of hymns and the practice of the Lord's Supper to the meaning of the benediction.

Most of what we have considered concerns the *objective* side of right worship – what should be done and how worship should be ordered – though, along the way, we have said a good deal about the attitude of the heart. But I want to conclude this series by noticing again what great emphasis the Scripture places on the *subjective* side – the attitude of our hearts when we participate in corporate worship. It was a major theme of the Old Testament prophets that Israel and Judah worshipped God, that is, they participated in the forms of divine worship, but “their hearts were far from him.” Already in Deuteronomy the Law of Moses required that God's people *rejoice* before the Lord in their worship (16:14). It wasn't enough to go through motions. And God's people did rejoice. We read of that joy often enough, especially in the Psalms. “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’” [Ps. 122:1]

The Lord made a point of the same thing in his preaching and teaching. He told the woman at the well in Samaria that the Father was seeking those who would worship him “in Spirit and in truth.” Whatever else that means, it surely means that right worship must be sincere; it must be real love, real thanksgiving, real joy, and the real promise of one's life, even to a God who looks upon the heart.

Dante has a sinner in his *Purgatory* who, while he is confessing his sins, is all the while planning to commit them again. But we all know how easy it is to say words that we don't mean or hardly mean; words we utter without thought or genuine intention. A Puritan by the name of Richard Steele wrote a book entitled *A Remedy*

for Wandering Thoughts in Worship and every earnest Christian knows he needs to apply that remedy many times.

But when we come to think about genuineness in worship, about true and deep emotion in worship, especially in corporate worship, we cannot help but be dragged into the current controversy over right worship in the evangelical church. It is a controversy as likely to be encountered in the Reformed wing of that church as in others.

On the one side are many who fear that structured worship, especially of the classically Christian type, in the nature of the case works against true emotion and deep feeling. They imagine that such a worship service must be boring and who can be sincere while bored? Or they think that the formality of an ordered worship service must kill spontaneity and thus stifle the sincere engagement of the heart. Real interest and heart-felt participation succumb to personal detachment as the same rituals are repeated Sunday after Sunday.

On the other side are those who fear that sacrificing order and content for spontaneity must finally result in worship that is immature, mindless, and, while fostering emotion, it is emotion that is, however strongly felt, emotion only for its own sake. It may be joy, or look like joy, but is it joy *in the Lord*? These are fair questions and they go a long way to explain what have been called “the worship wars” in contemporary American evangelical church life.

It will not surprise you to learn, of course, that at Faith Presbyterian Church we stand on the side of those who argue that deep emotion and the true engagement of the mind and heart is not only *not* hindered by a thoughtful, ordered service of worship but that it is actually fostered by it. We point out that the very biblical texts that stress joy and love and thankfulness and sincerity in worship do so in the context of a worship service that was ordered ritual, formal, and full of content that required spiritual maturity fully to appreciate.

In the middle of the last century, the English

“Right worship must be sincere; it must be real love, real thanksgiving, real joy, and the real promise of one's life.”

Congregationalist P.T. Forsyth expressed the reason for our concern at the popularity of new forms of Sunday worship that omit much that has always been included and made lighter what remains.

“There are few dangers threatening the religious future more serious than the slow shallowing of the religious mind.... Our safety is in the deep. The lazy cry for simplicity is a great danger. It indicates a frame of mind which is only appalled at the great things of God, and a senility of faith which fears that which is high. Men complain that they are jaded and cannot rise to such matters. That may mean that the matters of the world absorb all the energies of the great side of the soul, that divine things are no more than a comfort. And, if so, it means much for the future of religion, and much which is ominous. And the poverty of our worship amid its very refinement, its lack of solemnity...is the fatal index of the peril.”

It is, of course, precisely solemnity that has been lost in modern evangelical worship, the sense of the fear of the Lord, that God’s people have come into the presence of the Almighty and are offering their service to him. Some will say, “But worship ought to be joyful, not solemn.” No, in the Bible worship is both, always both. They were to rejoice, but they were to also to humble themselves before their high God, confess their sins, promise their lives to him again; they were to sing of and to hear preaching about the glory of God and of his terrible judgments as well as his grace and mercy.

C.S. Lewis reminds us that solemnity “implies the opposite of what is familiar, free, and easy, or ordinary. But it does not suggest gloom, oppression, or austerity.” He goes on to illustrate the point.

“The ball in the first act of Romeo and Juliet was a ‘solemnity’.... A great mass by Mozart or Beethoven is as much a

solemnity in its hilarious Gloria as in its poignant Crucifixus Est. Feasts are, in this sense, more solemn than fasts. ...We have lost the old idea of ‘solemnity.’ To recover it you must think of a court ball, or a coronation, or a victory march as these things appear to people who enjoy them; in an age when every one puts on his oldest clothes to be happy in, you must reawake to the simpler state of mind in which people put on gold and scarlet to be happy in.”

Fact is, were we to find ourselves visibly in the presence of God, and when we find ourselves there, we would and will experience love, joy, fear, humility, and confidence more intensely than we have ever experienced them before and all at the same time. But “informality” will be one word no one will ever think to use to describe that scene! We will bow down together and stand at attention; we will sing great hymns of praise to God whose texts rise to express the deepest, the most serious, the most wonderful thoughts about him in the most beautiful and thoughtful poetry.

When he speaks we will listen with rapt attention. We will speak only when we are called upon to speak and then with the greatest care. There will be a thoughtful order to all that is done. There will be a formality to it all. Such is inevitably the expression of reverence. Sunday worship, when by faith we come into the very presence of that same Almighty God, ought to be, as much as it can be by faith, as it will be by sight. Reverence and awe, gratitude, love, and joy all compact.

The heart that on a Lord’s Day morning truly prays to God

*Let me with my heart today,
Holy, Holy, Holy, singing,
Rapt awhile from earth away,
All my soul to thee upspringing,
Have a foretaste inly given
How they worship Thee in heaven*

will love the formal order of worship even as he seeks to invest that order with all the emotion of his heart and sincerity of his mind. ♦

“It is, of course, precisely solemnity that has been lost in modern evangelical worship, the sense of the fear of the Lord.”

Salt of the Empire

By Mike Aquilina

By the time Constantine legalized the practice of Christianity in 313, the Roman Empire was already heavily Christianized. By the year 300 perhaps 10 percent of the people were Christians, and by the middle of the century, Christians may well have been a majority of the citizens, 33 million Christians in an empire of 60 million people. So Constantine did not so much ensure Christianity's success as acknowledge it.

These were not 33 million "nominal" Christians. They did not have the luxury of being lukewarm. In the decade before Constantine's edict, the church had suffered its most ruthless and systematic persecution ever under the emperor Diocletian and his successors. The practice of the faith was, in many places, punished by torture and death. In many places, to live as a Christian meant, at the least, to accept social stigma and humiliation.

Yet the rate of conversion throughout the empire – beginning with the first Christians, long before Constantine – was most remarkable.

A few years ago a sociologist, Rodney Stark of the University of Washington, set out to track church growth in the ancient world. He gathered his findings in *The Rise of Christianity*. Dr. Stark is not a Christian and had no vested interest in making Christianity look good.

What he found was an astonishing growth rate of 40 percent per decade. Stark holds that most growth came from individual conversions, and not only from the poor, but also from the merchant and upper classes. Using historical data and sociological methods, he argues that the Christian population grew by 40 percent a decade, from about 1,000 Christians in the year 40 to 7,530 in 100 to a little over six million in 300 and 33 million in 350 – growing, in the hundred years between 250 and 350, from about two percent of the population to slightly over half.

Stark vividly describes the misery of ordinary citizens in the cities of the pagan world. All but the rich lived in cramped, smoky tenements – one family to a small room, with no ventilation or plumbing. Cities were horribly crowded, a city like Antioch having perhaps 200 people per acre, plus livestock (modern Calcutta has 122 people per acre). Constant immigration meant that the cities were peopled by strangers, with the resulting crime and disorder.

Infanticide was common, especially for female or defective offspring. Of the 600 families who show up in the records from ancient Delphi, only six raised more than one daughter. Though most of those 600 families were quite large, they had all routinely killed their baby girls. Stark quotes a letter from a pagan businessman writing home to his pregnant wife. After the usual endearments, he closes his letter by saying, briefly and casually, "If you are delivered of a child, if it is a boy, keep it, if a girl, discard it."

This is the world in which the first Christians were born, in which they grew up and married, and in which they raised their families. You might call it a culture of death.

But Christian marriage and childrearing immediately set Christians apart. According to Stark, Christian husbands and wives genuinely tried to love one another, as their religion required. Their mutual affection and their openness to fertility led to a higher birthrate, and thus to a still higher growth rate for the early church. They did not abort their children, nor did husbands endanger their wives' lives by doing so.

The early Christians' respect for the dignity of marriage made the faith enormously attractive to pagan women. So women made up a disproportionate number of the early converts. This in turn made Christianity enormously attractive to pagan men – who could not find many pagan women to marry, but saw young ladies attending Christian services in great numbers.

We should not dismiss these benefits of Christianity in the natural order. One thing that the rise of Christianity demonstrated is that faithfulness to the one true God is the best way to happiness, not only in heaven, but also in the world that God created. Christian faith, then as now, makes for happy homes. And, in pagan cultures, then as now, happy homes are very attractive. The evidence seems to indicate that, in the Roman Empire, Christian homes provided the church's primary place of evangelization.

The fire of Christian charity tended in the Christian home soon consumed city blocks and then neighborhoods. It was not the sort of ecstatic experience we see in the account of the first Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles. It was, rather, quiet and gradual. Let us look at just one example of how this fire of charity burned.

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Epidemics were among the great terrors of life in the ancient world. Physicians knew that diseases were communicable, but they knew nothing about bacteria or viruses, never mind antibiotics or antiseptics. Once the diseases hit your hometown, there was really no stopping them. Several major epidemics ravaged the empire during the rise of Christianity, and each of them reduced the empire's population by about one-third.

Ordinary pagan families were encouraged to abandon their homes when family members contracted the plague. They knew no other way to isolate the disease than to leave the afflicted family members behind to die, perhaps slowly.

Yet Christians were duty-bound not to abandon the sick. Jesus himself had said that, in caring for the sick, Christians were caring for him. So, even though Christians knew no more about medicine than the pagans did, they stayed with their family members, friends, and neighbors who were suffering.

Consider this account of the great epidemic of the year 260, left to us by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria:

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending their every need and ministering to them in Christ - and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sicknesses of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.”

While pagans would only help their own, Christians treated all men as their brothers. And the pagans took notice. The wicked emperor Julian, who despised all Christians and led the charge to re-paganize the empire, had to grudgingly admire their charity: “The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well. Everyone can see that our poor lack aid from us.”

Again, this charitable activity was not so much the work of institutions as of families. The family was then, as it is now, the fundamental unit of the church. Until the third century, most Christians did not have a building they could call their “church.” Their Christian life was cen-

tered in their homes. Institutionalized charitable organizations were still years away in the future, to be established during more settled times.

Charity was the way of Christian family life. Outwardly, little had changed in the neighborhoods inhabited by Christians. The law, the government, the routines of daily life remained as they were - and as they would largely remain even after Constantine. But inwardly, everything had changed.

Gradually, invisibly, but inexorably. This is the way that Christian doctrine, hope, and charity transformed the Roman Empire - one person at a time. Christianity transformed the way neighbors treated the sick, the way parents treated their children, and the way husbands and wives loved each other.

That is what really happened to the Roman Empire. The gospel of Jesus Christ gradually spread, from person to person, from family to family, from home to home, from neighborhood to neighborhood, then to entire provinces. Conversion took place in the smallest increments, one by one, because of homes. ♦

The Christian affirmation is that a number of quite commonplace human beings, in an obscure province of the Roman Empire, killed and murdered God Almighty - quite casually, almost as a matter of religious and political routine, and certainly with no notion that they were doing anything out of the way.

God was executed by people, painfully like us, in a society very similar to our own - in the over-ripeness of the most splendid and sophisticated Empire the world has ever seen. In a nation famous for its religious genius and under a government renowned for its efficiency, He was executed by a corrupt church, a timid politician, and a fickle proletariat led by professional agitators. His executioners made vulgar jokes about Him, called Him filthy names, taunted Him, smacked Him in the face, flogged Him with the cat, and hanged Him on the common gibbet - a bloody, dusty, sweaty and sordid business. If you show people that, they are shocked. So they should be. If that does not shock them, nothing can... It is curious that people who are filled with horrified indignation whenever a cat kills a sparrow can hear that story of the killing of God told Sunday after Sunday and not experience any shock at all.

God did not stop the Crucifixion; instead He rose from the dead.

—Dorothy Sayers, writing in *The Man Born To Be King*

“The fire of Christian charity tended in the Christian home soon consumed city blocks and then neighborhoods.”

New Members

Jason Van Gilder has been attending Faith off and on since the summer of 1992, the year he graduated from Tacoma Baptist. He was impressed by both the style of worship (kneeling, attention to detail, hymns) and the preaching (Pastor Rayburn spoke on Deuteronomy and the death penalty the first month he attended, and hearing a sermon with authoritative reasoning from the Scripture on a controversial topic was a new experience for him). He graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in civil engineering, and since moving back to the Northwest from New York in the fall of 1999 has attended regularly. In addition to being a new member he is also a new husband, having married Leanne (German) last summer.

Baptisms

Teresa Sullivan, daughter of Andy & Jennifer Sullivan ♦ *Lilias Tamminga*, daughter of Micah

& Wendy Tamminga ♦ *Joseph Dawson*, son of Kent & Aubree Dawson ♦ *Robert Schuster*, son of Robert & Kathryn Schuster. Robert's baptism was on the same week as that of the birthday of his grandmother, Sharon Allen (faithful member of FPC and the wife of Andy Allen), who died in 2004 just days after Robert was born.

Child Professions of faith

Amy Arial, daughter of Robert & Mary Jane Arial ♦ *Haylee Darby*, daughter of Paul & Dawn Darby ♦ *Payton Chiou*, son of Peter & Sandra Chiou ♦ *Hope Proctor*, daughter of Kyle & Dorothy Proctor ♦ *Gage Welch*, son of Brandon & Denise Welch ♦ *Anastaceja Woodard*, daughter of Dale and Tamara Woodard ♦

Briefly Noted

- The Covenant High School Christmas Concert XII was held on December 9 and 10, 2004, and featured the Madrigal Choir, the Chamber Choir, and Covenant Choir with a selection of Christmas music down through the ages and across the cultures of Europe and America.

- The 2004 Faith Presbyterian Church Sunday School Christmas program was held on December 19. Entitled "Star of Wonder," it featured selections from grades 1 through junior and senior high school, as well as the inchoate offerings of the wee folk from age 2 through kindergarten.

- The 2005 High School snow camp took 127 students and chaperones (69 from Faith and 58 from three other Reformed churches in Puget Sound) into the North Cascades from January 28-30. Despite a dismal lack of snow in the region, which has kept local ski resorts shut down, the campers did have a foot of the stuff on the ground to play in at Tall Timber Ranch near Leavenworth. Speaker for the weekend was David Rapp, campus minister for Reformed University Fellowship at the University of Oregon. ♦

Pianos, continued

1 ◀ which will become the instrument for the new fellowship hall.

3. The introduction of a refurbished, 15-year-old Baldwin-Hamilton studio piano for the balcony, replacing the underpowered Kohler studio model that has been in use there. The replacement piano has a much greater dynamic range, according to Bechtel, and is "voiced more brightly than the muffled sound of the old piano." The Kohler will be assigned to Sunday school duties in the new building.

4. The planned introduction of a 6 foot, 1 inch,

705-pound Young Chang concert grand for the choir room in the new addition.

Accessories for the fellowship hall and choir room pianos include dollies and padded covers to allow the instruments to be moved and protected as necessary.

Refurbishment of the old sanctuary piano is being done by Prosser Piano in Tacoma, from which the new piano is on loan. The total package for the purchase and refurbishment of the church pianos comes to some \$42,000, with half of that total already committed. ♦

Annual Meeting, cont'd

1 ← ever (134 students) was looking forward to moving from cramped quarters to the new facility.

The new wing was also given some attention. Among the many causes for gratitude: giving to the general fund was not diminishing because of giving to the building fund, which often happens during such building projects, and the church budget was continuing to operate in the black.

Approximately 60-65% of funds for furnishings in the new church have also been raised, and building committee chairman Don Mellott announced a furniture fundraiser to help generate cash flow for the remaining part of this project.

Among the questions during the course of the evening was one that had long burned in the minds of many members of the congregation: How do the dozens and dozens of little lights in the sanctuary chandeliers get replaced? The answer: by intrepid deacon Ken Kvale, using a very tall stepladder. ♦

Building Update

New wing nears completion; anticipation grows

As the winter of 2004-2005 progressed, so did the new addition to Faith Presbyterian Church.

The old year ended and the new year began. The roof was nearly completed, most of the windows were in, and the structure had been covered in building wrap to protect it from wind and weather.

Tours of the new structure were conducted in small groups by the elders on January 8, a wintry gray day but one that could not dampen the enthusiasm of those who turned out to see what the half-finished addition looked like from the inside.

Studded walls bristled with electrical conduit, water and drain pipes, and ductwork. Roof trusses, and beams at the lower levels, sketched a geometry of engineering that would soon mostly be hidden from sight but which would provide strength to the building for decades to come. Strings of yellow work lights were fastened temporarily to the walls, punctuating the gray interior with dabs of color even when they were not on. Door frames, insulation batts, and additional ductwork, along with door frames and a few remaining windows, awaited their turn to be put into place. Plastic sheeting hung from doorways and from those few window spaces that had not been filled. Workmen's tables and equipment were scattered throughout the 30,000 square feet of space, silent and off-duty for the weekend, but providing

evidence of the activity which hummed throughout the week.

In the new narthex, its roof not yet finished, water puddled and dripped into a temporary reflecting pool that would soon dry up as the building became more and more weather-tight.

As the end of January approached, the exterior brick was being installed, adding to the sturdy look of the structure and providing a matching finish to the sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the church staff, deprived of most any place to hang their hats, continued to make do as best they could. Pastor Rayburn and Pastor DeMass were still sequestered in their homes, shuttling back and forth for services and meetings. Church administrator Mike Simpson and secretary Debby Bowdle were stashed in tiny temporary offices, with one benefit being, according to Simpson, "that people tend not to want to spend a lot of time hanging around the church office." Books and church equipment found space wherever they could, in boxes and in piles, tucked under pews and in corners and closets and cubbyholes, awaiting the time when they would again be able to stretch and breathe and see the light of day in their new environment.

Although weather had delayed the original schedule slightly, the contractor was making steady progress, and construction is still on pace for a completion date sometime in April 2005. ♦



Watch the building grow! Live photos of the construction are online at <http://www.faithtacoma.org/cam.htm>.

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MTW focuses relief efforts after tsunamis

The stories are shocking and surreal. Babies ripped from parents' arms. Snorkelers raked across coral reefs. Sunbathers swept to sea. Entire families buried beneath furious waters. And the sheer sorrow of the survivors, many wishing they had died.

It is estimated that more than 150,000 have now perished from the mammoth earthquake and tsunamis that pummeled Southeast Asia. Thousands are still missing and the threat of disease looms. One survivor in India asked, "Why, God? What did we do to upset you?" Others say there is no point in living.

In an effort to comfort these hurting ones and to help them survive and rebuild, the PCA through Mission to the World is focusing initial efforts on one of the areas hit most severely. Colombo, Sri Lanka, is where MTW has nationals in place. Along with advance funds of \$15,000, MTW sent disaster response

teams to help with medical, safety, construction and pastoral needs. As additional funds come in, the teams are using them as needed in Colombo and outlying areas.

Glenn and Gayle Beckwith, Presbyterian missionaries in neighboring Thailand, wrote "Thank you all so much for your prayers and encouragement over this past month. Christmas seems so far away as we continue to recover from the catastrophic disaster here. We were blessed to hear of several accounts from people we know how they escaped calamity for one reason or another. It really brought home God's grace and mercy in our lives. It brings to mind also that our lives are so tentative and we have little idea of how and when they will end. We need to be prepared to meet our God at any time. That moves us to confession and repentance and the knowledge that, but for His grace and mercy, we would be lost for eternity." ♦

Church Calendar

March 17 & 18: Covenant High School Play ♦ **March 27:** Easter Sunday ♦ **April 22:** Pacific NW Presbytery meets at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Issaquah ♦ **May 12:** Covenant High School Spring Concert ♦ **May 14:** Alicia Skrivan - Nathaniel Gutierrez wedding ♦ **May 20:** Covenant High School Art Show