

Perspective

A Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church
of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

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Phone: 610-933-8816

www.fpc-phoenixville.org
email: secretaryfpc145@gmail.com



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From the Pastor

Following up on last month, I am going to be answering two more questions I've received from the kids that are just too complex to answer in a Children's Sermon. Or maybe I just wanted to give long answers to these...

Why did God not give Adam and Eve a second chance in the garden?

When we think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as Christians, we probably mostly think about a Fall - about the entry of sin and death into creation, from which Jesus later came to redeem us. I find it interesting that in all of scripture, only Paul mentions this idea, and he only does so a couple of times, and it really took hold of our imagination in Christianity. But for the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures, what happened in the Garden of Eden is not presented this way. Nor does Jesus bring this up (though he doesn't mention a lot of things, and you can't make a strong argument from absence or silence).

There is a lot of baggage in our reading of Adam and Eve. Reading in English we think Adam was created first, but that isn't true. "*Ha 'adam*" was created first, a word that means something like dust-person or earth-person, and then when *ha adam* is divided into Adam and Eve, Adam gets his name as a play on words with 'dust' or 'earth.' English translations render Eve as Adam's "helper," but almost every other time that Hebrew word appears in scripture it is translated as "savior" and refers to God rescuing the Hebrew people. (And it is never used to refer to someone who is subservient) Does it change your view of the story to see Eve as Adam's "savior?"

In my own reading, the story of the Garden of Eden is a story of inevitability. The creation story places the first humans in a garden, and they are to live in peaceful bliss and tend it forever. So now why is the world the way that it is? Well, here is how Adam and Eve were forced to leave the Garden. Here is why childbirth is painful, and why snakes bite, and why we have to till the soil, etc. Here there is even a clear declaration that Patriarchy is not God's plan, and is in fact a curse! (Genesis 3:16) It is part of an etiological story of how the world came to be, similar to the story of the Tower of Babel explaining why there are many languages instead of just one. But we won't find the physical location of the Garden any more than we will find archaeological ruins of the Tower of Babel. We cannot help but read these stories differently today than when they were first written, 2500 to 3000 years ago (depending on the story). And so Adam and Eve didn't get a second chance in the Garden, perhaps, because that isn't the kind of story it was. If they had gotten a second chance, and everything had turned out well in the Garden, there would have been no one to write a story.

Maybe every time we are placed in a garden and left to live in peace we will mess things up. Maybe human beings struggle to learn from past mistakes (I think we can vouch for that one being true). Maybe Adam and Eve leaving the Garden was the only way for the story to

continue. Maybe it is a metaphor for human intelligence and civilization (human childbirth is so painful because of our large brains, and we till the soil because 10,000 years ago we had agricultural revolutions all over the world). Like any Bible story, there are many ways to read it and find meaning.

There are a lot of other religions, and do they go to heaven or hell, and if so why? (rewritten slightly)

Like many of these questions, this one touches on a literal lifetime of reading and thinking for me, as well as my undergraduate degree and seminary degree and current interfaith work and relationships. So what I'm going to try to do is to give a short answer when I want to write a book.

Different religions ask different questions. Christianity, among the other religions, asks its own questions, and seeks to answer them. But Hinduism, or Sikhism, or Buddhism, etc. ask different questions, and seek to answer those questions. Some questions overlap, and are asked in different ways, like: how should we treat other people? What is a good life? What do we owe society? What happens after we die? Other questions don't overlap at all, but are very important to the religion in question.

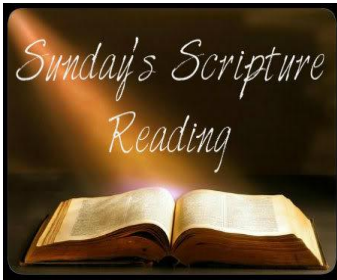
Each religion works to answer its own questions first. So a key Buddhist question: "How do we end the eternal karmic cycle of death and rebirth?" is not a question that Christianity even considers. And a key Christian question: "How can we be redeemed from sin?" is similarly not a question that Buddhism spends any time considering. Even the question of heaven and hell differs drastically. Drawing a comparison to (some branches of) Buddhism again (since it's a religion I know a lot about), Buddhism can have many heavens and many hells, but usually all of them are considered false paths, even traps, on the way to enlightenment. If anything, the heaven realms are worse because they are beautiful, pleasant traps, but they prevent enlightenment just as much as the hells. Compare this to the Christian idea of a new heaven and a new earth where the resurrected live forever in a world of joy, peace, and justice. Hopefully you can see the distance between the two views - not two different answers to the same question, but two different questions with two very different answers.

Generally speaking, a religion answers its own questions best. Christianity answers Christian questions better than Buddhism does, and vice-versa. On some issues, like what is a good life, or how we should treat each other, we can have fruitful (and fun!) inter-religious dialogue. We can work together to better our communities and do what's right because we can find wide areas of agreement on what is beneficial. If we are feeding the hungry or making sure people can be educated, we can work with pretty much any religion you can name. Things get a lot more difficult when we start comparing who is going to whose heaven or whose hell. First we have to agree on what heavens and hells we're even talking about.

To be clear I think Christianity has great answers on what is a good life, how we should treat each other, and other questions that religions share, and additionally, I think our specifically Christian questions are important ones. I'm also humble enough, and have learned and studied and experienced enough, to know that my view is largely shaped by where I was born and how I was raised. If I was born in Japan or India, I understand that I would almost certainly have very different religious beliefs. So I love these conversations, and learn a lot through them, but I also approach them with humility and caution.

I think the most fruitful way to live among other religions (which I think is a good thing) is to be eager to work together where we can to make the lives of vulnerable people better, and to respectfully have these larger conversations about big questions when they come up. I don't think it is wrong to believe what we believe, and be clear about what I believe, but at the same time I would expect the same from someone else who practices another religion. In some cases, people will hear something that moves them, and they might convert to a new religion. In other cases, people will hear something meaningful that will deepen their practice of their own religion. To me, both of those are potentially good things, and in the meantime, we can focus on doing good work together.

Sincerely,
Pastor Doug



Upcoming Scripture Readings

April 7th: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

April 14th: 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

April 21st: Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24

April 28th: Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21

Prayer Chain & Prayer Requests

Please send any prayer needs to Sandy Schrack at fpcprayerchain2@gmail.com. Your request will be distributed to FPC's prayer angels. Their silent efforts will be put to work to lift you up. The same email address can be used for anyone wishing to join the prayer team.





Sunday School

Regular Sunday School classes continue to meet each week during the worship service, from approximately 10:45 to 11:45. (On Sundays when Confirmation Classes are held, the confirmands remain in the sanctuary for the worship service.)

On March 10, Sunday School children participated in Bread for the World's **Offering of Letters** on behalf of the Farm Bill. A total of 50 letters (from both children and adults) were dedicated on March 17 and they have been forwarded to our elected representatives.

On March 17, in Sunday School, we explored the lives of both Saint Patrick and Saint Brigid of Ireland. To learn a bit about Brigid – and Saint Brigid's cross – check the bulletin board in the hallway behind the sanctuary.

Spring Fling Family Bingo Night will be take place on Friday, April 12, beginning at 6:00 p.m. More information and an RSVP sign-up can be found at: <https://bit.ly/springflingbingo24> or scan the QR Code. This has been a popular and fun event in the past and we hope you can join us! Decorate and dress up for spring and bring a joke to tell during intermission!



Several other family events are in the works for the coming months. Once dates and details are confirmed, we will spread the word!

Confirmation Class – for young disciples from Grade 5 and up – continues to meet monthly. The two-hour sessions (which include lunch) occur after the Sunday worship service. The next (and final) Confirmation Class will be held on April 28, with Confirmation of our new members to occur on Sunday, May 19.



A key factor contributing to the success of our Sunday School program is our talented and energetic crew of Sunday School teachers. So, whenever you get a chance, **thank a teacher!**

If you have any questions about Sunday School – or wish to volunteer * to help out with the program – contact Jeff McLaughlin at fpcchildrenandyouth@gmail.com.

* ... and this includes dads!

Jeff McLaughlin, Children & Youth Coordinator

Church Growth Update

Church Growth Committee meetings are held on the second Friday of the month with the Grant Writing sub-committee at 10:00 am and Church Growth committee at 11:00 am. Meetings are via Zoom and in the Church Office. If you want to join the Church Growth Committee, email Kristin at kristin.c.craven@gmail.com.

Anti-Racism Book Club:

Book Club:

The next meeting of the Anti-Racism Book Club is *Sunday, April 28th at 7:00 pm* via Zoom.

Grant Writing:

The Grant Writing team is pursuing 5 different grants. We are busy working on them – if asked for information, please help us help the church!

Gratitude Journal:

In continuing our gratitude, we will be providing monthly prompts in kindness. For the month of April, we ask, *how do you show kindness to nature?*

Prison Ministry:

Pen Pals:

We received a few responses from our holiday cards. You can view them here: <https://bit.ly/FPCPrisonMinistry>

After receiving them, we would like to start a pen-pal group. If you are interested in being a Pen Pal to a person (or more) incarcerated in Pennsylvania, have any questions, or would like more information on being a Pen Pal, don't hesitate to get in touch with Kristin Craven at kristin.c.craven@gmail.com. We are looking for 12 more Pen Pals!

Book Through Bars:

We suspend our trip to Books Through Bars until we find a Books Through Bars Coordinator.

Books Through Bars Coordinator

The BTB Coordinator will be a member of the Church Growth Committee, providing updates and information about BTB's needs. The coordinator will ensure FPC Phoenixville has volunteers attending a monthly service trip and assist with carpools for the group. The coordinator will also assist with bringing donations to BTB. If you are interested, please get in touch with Kristin Craven at kristin.c.craven@gmail.com.

Donate books:

Please look at the books we need right now at BTB, and be sure to look at the type of books they DO NOT need. <https://www.booksthroughbars.org/donate-books>

Alternatively, you can purchase books from the Wishlist using this link to Bookshop.org and have them shipped directly to Books Through Bars 4722 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143. And by ordering from Bookshop.org, you will be supporting small booksellers.

For more information about Books Through Bars, visit <https://www.booksthroughbars.org/>.

Queer Circle:

The next meeting of *Queer Circle will be on Monday, April 22nd at 7:00 pm*. We hope this discussion will bring in folks interested in learning more about gender, sexual orientation, Christian faith, and related issues. Talk to Pastor Doug, Sarah, or Jacqui for more information.

Save the date! Phoenixville's PrideFest will be on Saturday, June 8th. For more details, visit <https://lgbteachesco.org/pridefest>.

Kristin Craven, Ministry Chair

Men's Group Book Discussion

Join the Men's Group on the 3rd Sunday of each month after church for lunch and discussion.

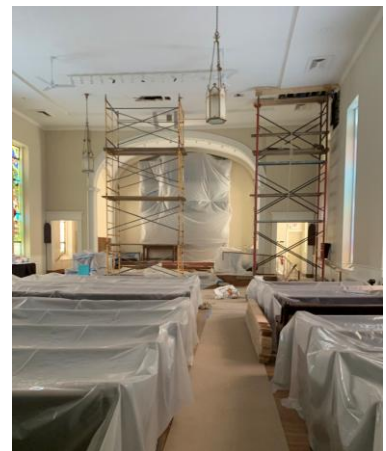
Stewardship Committee Notes

Scrip Gift Cards

Happy Spring! Happy April! We will be placing orders for gift cards on **Tuesday, April 9** and **Tuesday, April 23**. If you would like to place an order, please call or text Lynne Williams at 610-955-4749 (cell), or send an email to (brettdrew@comcast.net). We will complete the order forms for you. Orders and checks must be received by the day before the orders are placed (**April 8 and April 22**). Please make checks payable to "First Presbyterian Church DR". All money raised goes to benefit First Presbyterian Church. As always, thank you for continuing to support this program!

Capital Campaign Update

Last May, we kicked off a Capital Campaign with the purpose of funding repairs to the sanctuary and roof. These repairs were necessary for us to safely return to worshipping together in the sanctuary, which we were able to do in time for last Easter. We appreciate all who have already donated and pledged. To date, \$75,988 has been pledged, of which \$68,220 has been received. This is approximately **43%** of our goal of \$160,000. Every contribution helps secure the financial security and the future of First Presbyterian Church. If you have not yet



pledged to this campaign, we ask that you prayerfully consider doing so in the coming weeks and months. **It is not too late!** This effort will continue through the month of May. You may find pledge cards and envelopes in the narthex and the church office. We thank you for your continued support and commitment to our church.

**One Great Hour of Sharing
A Friendly Reminder**

During the weeks throughout **Lent**, we have invited you to give generously to “**One Great Hour of Sharing**”. Know that it is not too late to contribute. **Envelopes** are available in your offering envelope boxes, in the pew racks and on the table in the narthex. You may also send a check to the church office with **OGHS** noted in the memo. This is once again good opportunity for you to clear out your **collection of coins!!** Join our Sunday School children and fill up a “**fish box**” with coins. Boxes are available on the table in the narthex, by the envelopes. Offerings will be received, with a special dedication on **Sunday, April 14th**. Together we can once again help change the lives of many. **Thank you for your life changing offering.**



Mission, Action, Concern (MAC) Committee News

Do you support a nonprofit that could use extra hands? MAC is looking for volunteer and service opportunities we can offer to the congregation. If you have any opportunities that you think the congregation could assist with, email us at MissionsFPC145@gmail.com.

If you are looking to expand your involvement in church, consider MAC. Meetings are held via Zoom on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 10:00 am. If you want to join MAC, email Kristin at MissionsFPC145@gmail.com.

The MAC Committee is looking for a treasurer. If you are interested in serving as the treasurer, please contact MAC at MissionsFPC145@gmail.com.

Local Missions:

You can see all updates from our Local Mission Organizations (and all organizations we support) at this link: <https://bit.ly/FPCMissionaries>.

People to People

Thank you to those who donated and assisted with the sale! We will have the final numbers in next month's Perspective.

Phoenixville Area Community Services (PACS)

Thank you to those who donated! We will have the final numbers in next month's Perspective.

To learn more about Phoenixville Area Community Services (PACS), visit <https://www.pacsphx.org/>

St Mary's Franciscan Shelter

St. Mary's is hiring! St Mary's Franciscan Shelter for homeless families is seeking a live-in house manager to oversee the shelter's operation Monday – Friday from 9:30 PM – 9:00 AM. Holiday and additional hours might also be available.

The overnight house manager can sleep after closing/securing the shelter (11 PM – 6 AM). This shift is considered “on call” should there be an issue overnight. The House Manager is to be available by 6:30 to set up breakfast, oversee the needs of residents, perform light housekeeping, and answer phones until 9 AM.

Job responsibilities include: Closing shelter, setting up breakfast, overseeing the needs of residents, light housekeeping, and answering phones

Compensation includes room, food, laundry facilities, all utilities (including internet and cable) and a bi-weekly stipend of \$500.

If you want to serve families facing homelessness and are willing to engage in the shelter's life, please contact Elsa Haile at 610-933-3097 or through Indeed. A complete job description is available upon request at smfs@stmarysfs.org.

National Missions:

You can see all updates from our National Missions (and all organizations we support) at this link: <https://bit.ly/FPCMissionaries>.

Bread for the World

Letter Writing: Thank you to those who wrote letters to your representatives during our March Letter campaign. In total, 50 letters were written to support the Farm Bill. This is the most we have done in a single offering!

Save the Date! MAC will be furthering our participation with Bread for the World by hosting a community Listen In on *Saturday, June 15 from 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm on the Church Lawn and in Fellowship Hall*. At this event, we plan on bringing the community

of Phoenixville together where leaders of local nonprofits and businesses will share stories of food insecurity and how it impacts our community, live music, engage the community in writing letters to our representatives, church tours, and of course, have snacks!

Global Missions:

You can see all updates from our Missionaries (and all organizations we support) at this link: <https://bit.ly/FPCMissionaries>.

Betsey & Eric Moe

Here is an excerpt from a recent letter from Betsey & Eric Moe on March 7th.

The year has gotten off to a good start here in Guatemala. In the Intercultural Encounters program of CEDEPCA, we hosted nine groups between January and March. I (Betsey) was a facilitator on three of those trips. CEDEPCA has a team of internal and external facilitators who are able to accompany groups and share the load. I don't often talk about what exactly goes on during a trip, so I'll take you along on my journey on two of those visits.

Personnel Committee

The Personnel committee is interested in receiving feedback from the congregation about our staff's performance. Please feel free to email Jean Osterhoudt (jeanoster@comcast.net) or any committee member with your thoughts. If you would like to voice matters in person, please contact a committee member so time can be scheduled at the next meeting.



Presbyterian Women Circle



All women are invited to attend Circle meeting on the third Sunday each month. We meet in the parlor following worship to watch a video led by the study author and have discussion following the Horizon Study Guide. Please join us as we continue *Sacred Encounters - The Power and Presence of Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts*. Please see Jewell Baker for more information.

April 2024

First Presbyterian Church of Phoenixville

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Queer Circle (Z)	2 6:30p Zumba	3 11:00a Music Ministry 12:30p Jazz Rehearsal 2:00p Trumpets 7:30p Bell Choir	4 9:00a WIC 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 10:00a People to People Food Ministry 7:00p Choir	5 9:00a WIC	6 9:30a Zumba
7 8:30a Bible Study 10:30a Worship Rev. Charlie Gross 10:45a Sunday School 12:00p Deacons' Mtg	8 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Finance Meeting. 7:00p Drama Group	9 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Praise Team 7:00p Personnel Meeting	10 K. Grocki-Life Celebration 10:00a Visitation 11:00a Memorial <i>Burial & Lunch to follow</i> 2:00p Trumpets 7:30p Bell Choir	11 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 10:00a People to People Food Ministry 7:00p Choir	12 6:00p Spring Fling Bingo	13 1:00p-5:00p Private Party
14 8:30a Bible Study 10:30a Worship 10:45a Sunday School 12:00p Worship & Music 7:00p Pub Theology	15 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 12:30p Staff Meeting 6:30p Zumba	16 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Praise Team 7:00p Property Meeting	17 10:00a MAC 11:00a Music Ministry 12:30p Jazz Rehearsal 2:00p Trumpets 7:30p Bell Choir	18 9:00a WIC 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 10:00a People to People Food Ministry 7:00p Choir 7:00p Compassionate Friends	19 9:00a WIC 10:00a Grant Writing 11:00a Church Growth	20 9:30a Zumba 1:00p or 2:00p Axe Throwing at Angry Jack's, Phoenixville
21 8:30a Bible Study 10:30a Worship 10:45a Sunday School 12:00p Men's Group 12:00p Women's Circle 12:00p Children's Choir	22 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Queer Circle	23 Voting – All day in Fellowship Hall 7:00p Praise Team	24 11:00a Music Ministry 12:30p Jazz Rehearsal 2:00p Trumpets 7:30p Bell Choir	25 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 10:00a People to People Food Ministry 7:00p Choir	26	27
28 8:30a Bible study 10:30a Worship 10:45a Sunday School 12:00p Confirmation Class 10:45a Sunday School 7:00p Antiracism Book Club	29 9:00a People to People Clothing Ministry 6:30p Zumba	30 6:30p Zumba 7:00p Praise Team			SAVE the MAY Dates 5/5: Communion Sunday 5/12: Teacher Appreciation Sunday 5/19: Pentecost Sunday Outdoor Worship Service with Confirmation & Welcoming New Members	