

“THE CORNERSTONE”

FEBRUARY 2023 – MARCH 2023

First Presbyterian Church PC (U.S.A.)
206 E. 20th Street P. O. Box 444
Falls City, Nebraska 68355
402-245-2650 – <http://www.fallscitypres.org>
Worship Time: 11 am

Pastor's Reflection

“New Year, new you”: this is the message we get from pop culture, year after year. We vow to make changes to our diet, exercise habits, or lifestyle, but in spite of those resolutions, most things stay the same. This may be cause for disappointment, but there is some consistency we can celebrate. God’s promises to us do not change with the calendar or the latest fitness trend. Rather than focusing our attention on making and in all likelihood breaking, promises to ourselves, let us spend the first part of the new year appreciating God’s unbreakable promise.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

I know someone faced with a terrible choice. It feels like a life-or-death decision, except that from his perspective, both options are fatal. He could stay where he is, knowing that his current circumstances cause him to experience soul-crushing unhappiness. He could venture out into the unknown but that’s a terrific risk. Who’s to say the unknown will be better? Yet it is hard to imagine that it could possibly be worse. Sometimes he wishes he didn’t even have this choice; that some external force would decide for him. As stuck as he feels, it is the burden of his freedom that terrifies him the most. He doesn’t want to make the wrong decision. This is freedom. It is painful, messy, ambiguous, and frightening. So much so that it is easy to comprehend why many people seem willing to exchange freedom for fate. If I believe I am fulfilling a destiny as I journey through life, I don’t bear the same responsibility for my life. It is out of my hands.

It is true: a lot of life is out of our hands. We are free, but so is everyone else. We are free, but forces beyond us nevertheless act upon us. Our freedom is not absolute, and we certainly aren’t guaranteed the wisdom and foresight to be good stewards of the freedom we do have.

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In Deuteronomy, God addresses God's people: "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity." There is nothing we can do to elude this weighty freedom. The choice is ours. Do we turn to God, or do we turn away from God? Reading this passage from the comfort of our armchairs, or the discomfort of our pews, as the case may be, it is easy to imagine this is an easy decision. Of course, we choose well. Who would choose death over life? Who prefers curses to blessings? Not I. Not ever. Yet the choice God sets before the Israelites echoes in our lives every day. It is a choice we must continue making, a path we make, as the parable goes, by walking. It isn't always clear which choice is life and which choice is death.

We cannot elude this choice; these choices. We have been promised freedom, and we have been furthermore promised consequences according to how we spend that freedom. Freedom is a gift, but like so many of the gifts we receive from God, it doesn't always seem like it. Still, do we trust God? We can grasp our terrible, wondrous freedom by the reins and courageously ride into the land of the living. We can choose life.

Pastor Rick

RECOMMENDED READING

31 Proverbs to Light Your Path by Liz Curtis Higgs
The Gift for All People by Max Lucado
Didn't See It Coming by Carey Nieuwhof
The Angel of Forest Hill by Cindy Woodsmall

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

All newsletter articles for the April-May newsletter will be due to the office by **MARCH 13TH**. Please submit an article for the newsletter. Keep everyone informed about the activities of the church. Thank you for marking this *important* date on your calendar! Submit your good news!

++++++PARISH NEWS++++++

LENTEN SERVICES

We approach the Lenten season with an emphasis on personal investigation and contrition; the intentional work of seeking a change of heart or actions. Reflection and change take work, hard work. Lent can be like a boot camp for the soul, a restart in a focused area. We walk this season together, demanding the best of ourselves, ready to support this season together, demanding



COMMUNITY NEWS

Mark your calendars! The Community Easter Cantata will be held at Humboldt United Methodist Church on Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023 under the direction of Doug Kirkendall. The time will be determined later and we will update the information when available. Practice begins on Sunday, February 19th from 6:30 pm to 8 pm and will continue each Sunday evening at First Methodist Church, Humboldt, Nebraska. The community is invited to join the choir. Mark your calendars now and plan to attend a meaningful and faithful program. See you there!

A Bit of Humor

There was a little old Christian lady living next door to an atheist. Every morning she came out onto her front porch and shouted: "Praise the Lord!" And every morning the atheist yelled back: "There is no God!"

As time went by, the lady ran into financial difficulties and had trouble buying food. She went out on to the porch and asked God for help with groceries. The next morning low and behold when she went out on to the porch, she saw groceries she had asked for, and of course, she shouted: "Praise the Lord!" The atheist jumped out from behind a bush and said: "Ha, I heard you pray and I bought those groceries, there is no God." The old lady looked at him, smiled and shouted: "Praise the Lord, not only did you provide for me Lord, you made the devil pay for the groceries!"

JOINT LENTEN SERVICES

The Falls City and Hiawatha Presbyterian churches will hold joint Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday services. Falls City will host Ash Wednesday services on February 22nd beginning at 6:30 pm. Maundy Thursday services will be held in Hiawatha on April 6th beginning at 6:30 pm.

WELCOME BASKETS

Outside the Church Office will be a table of Welcome Baskets to be given to someone that is new in your neighborhood. They may own a home, or they may be renting. Nevertheless, they are our new neighbor, and we want to hear their story. The church will prepare a basket of goodies from Richardson County for you to give as a gift from you and your church welcoming them to the neighborhood. Your thoughtfulness will be delivered, and they will know one less stranger. Please provide the church office the name and address of the recipient. Blessings to you.



SOUPER BOWL SUNDAY

On Sunday, February 12, we will collect the Super Bowl offering. Everyone is asked to bring items for the Food Pantry or monetary donations. Celebrate the Super Bowl by helping to replenish the inventory at the Food Pantry. Please use a pew envelope and mark Souper Bowl for monetary donations. Thank you for helping to overcome hunger in the community!

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

The One Great Hour of Sharing campaign will kick-off on March 5. These gifts are a reminder how blessed we are by God's abundance and through the simple act of sharing we express our gratitude. We will complete our campaign with a dedication on Easter Sunday, April 9th. Envelopes and coin boxes for this special offering will be on the ramp entrance and sanctuary tables.

DIAPER CLOSET

The Diaper Closet was blessed with two large monetary donations in December. As more people use the Diaper Closet, those donations are a huge help. We buy many bigger diapers (Sizes 5 and 6), diaper wipes and bottles of detergent. We have many other items to distribute to people and we're happy to take baby/toddler clothes and shoes to size 5T, diapers, wipes, detergent, baby lotion, baby wash, gently used toys, baby blankets, and other baby items (high chairs, playpens, etc.). We are always looking for volunteers. We're open 4 to 6 pm on Mondays and the work is not physically taxing. You need to be friendly and welcoming. You greet people, offer items, find specific items and visit about their kids. You write thank you notes as needed and record what items each family takes. Sometimes you would need to sack diapers in packages of 14, refold and sort clothing, and provide a sympathetic ear. Talk to Jennifer James or John Martin if you would enjoy helping!

WEDNESDAY'S MOSAIC TABLE

We have had a wonderful time bringing Wednesday's Mosaic Table to life during 2022. Normally we meet the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. In February, however, we will have back-to-back meetings on the 8th and the 15th as we are planning on hosting the SixPence parents meeting at the church on the 15th. In March, we will go back to the regular schedule.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

Many thanks to the women of First Presbyterian Church for the generous Christmas gift. Your love and support are much appreciated. Linda

BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIPS

On December 11, 2022 we were blessed to receive Albert Lopstain through baptism and new membership. On January 8, 2023, John Christopher Martin was received as a new member through transfer.

Please welcome them both and learn their stories. They each have quite the resume to share!

FELLOWSHIP HALL

You will have noticed some of the changes on the east side of the church building. With the receipt of the Nebraska Presbyterian Foundation grant we were able to start the necessary construction of an enclosure at the top of the stairs prior to installing a chair lift. Scheduling the services of various trades people delayed the construction and the surprise requirement of a new concrete pad to rest the enclosure upon. All is now complete except the electrical and some painting which will wait till spring. The door at the bottom of the steps has been widened to allow wheelchair use. More will be done in the spring from the grant funding including widening two doors going to the restroom and converting the ladies' restroom to a fully accessible restroom.



the best of ourselves, ready to support one another, and prepared to see truths that shatter our self-understanding. Our range of readings in this season is the full breadth of lived human experience creation to death and new life. We have the opportunity to place the foundational Christian narrative on the significant life events of the community in this season. Paralleling the false choices of temptation with the conditions of suffering in the world today.

Lent 1	The Need for Change	Ps. 32	We face temptation as we discern what God really wants for us.	Matt 4: 1-11
Lent 2	Reset	Gen. 12:1-4a;	Spiritual rebirth means a new start	John 3:1-17
Lent 3	Hydrate	Exod. N17:1-7;	Living water sustains us on our journey.	
Lent 4	Redefined	1 Sam16:1-13;	We are more than we appear to be	John 9:1-41
Lent 5	Dead End	Ezekiel 37:1-4	When all hope seems lost, God revives.	John 11:1-45
Palm Sunday	Celebrate and Wait	Ps. 118:1-2, 19-29	Rejoice at the end of the life journey.	Matt 21: 1-11
Easter	The Stories Women Tell	John 20:1-18	We hear and trust Mary's story, and the stories we all have to tell.	

CONTRIBUTION REPORTS

Contribution reports are included with the newsletter. Those receiving the newsletter via email will receive them in the mail. If you have any questions, please contact the office @ 402-245-2650. Thank you.

ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting was held on January 22nd. If you were unable to attend and would like a copy of the 2022 annual report, copies are available on the table at the back of the sanctuary or call the church office 245-2650 to obtain a copy.