

From the Pastor

This past Sunday, January 26, our sermon text was Luke 4 when Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth and reads the scroll of Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Citizens of the city of Rensselaer, including our congregation, as I understand it, were living this out when they supported or participated in the Underground Railroad in the mid-1800’s. In this part of the state we sat on at least two major routes: one was to Canada (where slavery was outlawed in 1833), and one was to go to Chicago or to connect with an eastward path from Chicago heading to Detroit. This work was just one of the ways our forebears could live out their call from Christ: to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, and let the oppressed go free.

This is a hard history to track, I am learning. There needed to be secrecy for the African Americans who were seeking to escape enslavement. A lot of information was shared but not written down, so there would be no damning evidence. And this is a good thing, isn’t it? That folks were willing to help people who were fleeing enslavement even if they had to be careful about their own involvement as they protected people who were vulnerable.

What our forebears remind us is that our calling as disciples of Christ is a concrete calling: it is about making a real difference in the real lives of real people. In the case of the Underground Railroad, that meant going through the physical actions of inviting people into one’s home or building spaces and hiding them. It meant clear enough communications that those on the road of escape knew which way to go and which people they could trust. Sometimes this would have meant feeding them, as well, which

involved cooking, of course. Likely folks needed clothes provided, diapers for infants and toddlers, shoes – the list goes on.

I realize I emphasize this a lot, that what we are called to is real actions that matter. And what is going on in the lives of real people right now is intensifying by the day. Safeguards for communities and vulnerable individuals are under threat, and the chance is good that many will suffer.

Our spiritual life entails our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In this part of the first great commandment Jesus is telling his listeners directly that they live out their lives through their entire selves, their whole selves. So our spiritual calling entails making a real difference in the real lives of real people. Loving our neighbor as ourselves means action. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is Jesus’ answer to the man who,

“..... desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion..... Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”

The man who tried to justify himself listened closely to Jesus and learned that we are neighbors to others. Jesus presents a different question: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The man’s response was “The one who showed him mercy.”

And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

That is the calling and challenge for us, to go and do likewise. Each one of us needs to do this in our own context, with whatever resources we have, for those who suffer. We are called to have mercy, not in thought, but, as the Good Samaritan, in deeds.

Proclaiming the good news to those who are poor or suffering in any way does surely involve words. But as Jesus teaches us, it also includes how we behave toward others, how we show them mercy and compassion.

In these coming weeks, months, years, and, frankly, for the rest of our lives, let's be like our forebears who participated in the Underground Railroad. Let's be alert for what acts of mercy and compassion we can offer here and now to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight, and to let the oppressed go free.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,

Pastor Michelle

Celebrating Black History Month

"I'm always amazed when people walk up to me and say, 'I'm a Christian,'" Maya Angelou said in a 2011 interview, on the occasion of her being awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. "I think, 'Already? You already got it?' I'm working at it, which means that I try to be as kind and fair and generous and respectful and courteous to every human being."

-Maya Angelou



"Stand up straight and realize who you are, that you tower over your circumstances. You are a child of God. Stand up straight."

- Maya Angelou

What happened at Session?

We studied 1 Timothy 4, beginning in verse 7:

“Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.....These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Approved:

1.the celebration of communion on the first Sunday of every month and on Christmas Eve.

2. Prairie Arts Council requested use of the sanctuary and fellowship hall for art and show awards on February 2,23, and April 6, 2025

Ministry Reports:

Youth sessions resume Wednesday, January 15

Church attendance for December was 101, with Communion being served to 18 by Elders Julie Williams and Suzi Jordan. The choir was present and sang at the December 8, 15, and 22 services. Also on December 15, RCHS students from Mrs. Davisson's choir sang for us.

16 were present at the Christmas Eve service, which included 4 youth.

Paraments were changed to white for Christmas/Epiphany.

Mission made contributions to LUM: Immigration clinic, Presbyterian Giving Catalog: (our youth choose), Presbyterian Disaster North Carolina, Appleseed Child Development Center

Streaming of the Sunday morning worship service still has its problems, there always seems to be new issues popping up. Andrew Dodge has been working on these issues and has been able solve them. The latest issue is a high-pitched hum in the audio.

Andrew has setup the steaming program (Vmix) to stream to both Facebook and You Tube.

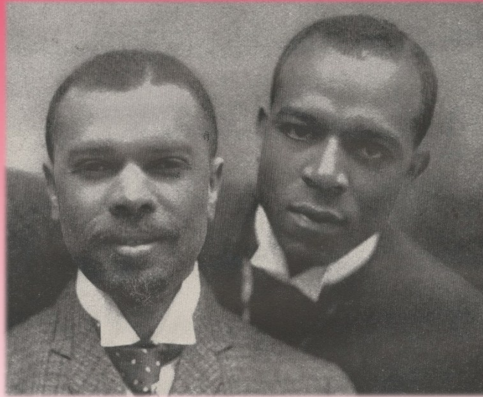
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CALENDAR



2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
2 Worship 9:30 am <i>Communion</i> Corp. Officer Election	3 AAA-Abuse Awareness & Accountability 5pm-8:30 pm	4 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	5 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	6 Bridge Club 12:00pm	7	8 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
9 Worship 9:30 am	10 AAA-Abuse Awareness & Accountability 5pm-8:30 pm	11 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	12 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	13 Bridge Club 12:00pm Session Meeting 4:00 pm	14 	15 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
16 Worship 9:30 am	17 AAA- 5pm-8:30 pm 	18 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	19 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	20 Bridge Club 12:00pm	21	22 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
23 Worship 9:30 am	24 AAA-Abuse Awareness & Accountability 5pm-8:30 pm	25 Dance Magic 3:30 pm Bible Study 4:00 pm	26 Youth Group 5:00-6:30pm	27 Bridge Club 12:00pm	28	

Celebrating Black History Month



Lift Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) and J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954) #339 in *Glory to God* Presbyterian Hymnal

1. Lift ev'ry voice and sing,
till earth and heaven ring,
ring with the harmonies of liberty.
Let our rejoicing rise
high as the list'ning skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark
past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present
has brought us.
Facing the rising sun
of our new day begun,
let us march on till victory is won.

2. Stony the road we trod,
bitter the chast'ning rod,
felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
yet with a steady beat,
have not our weary feet
come to the place for which our people
sighed?
We have come over a way

that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path thro' the
blood of the slaughtered,
out from the gloomy past,
till now we stand at last
where the bright gleam of our bright star is
cast.

3. God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
thou who hast brought us thus far on the
way,
thou who hast by thy might
led us into the light,
keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God,
where we met thee;
lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the
world, we forget thee;
shadowed beneath thy hand,
may we forever stand,
true to our God, true to our native land.

February Discussion Group

I welcome you to join us for our hybrid February discussion of articles that challenge our lives of faith. **We will meet on February 10th at 4 pm in the Lounge.** Please invite others you think might be interested! We will be reading and reflecting on “Orthodoxy, not heresy, is the root problem of Christian nationalism”, written by David W. Congdon for *The Presbyterian Outlook*. In this article he explores the origins of Christian nationalism and the language that sustains it. Copies are currently available on the table at the back of the sanctuary. We think we’ve got some glitches sorted with our Zoom connection, so if you are joining us by Zoom, email Bethany for the link. Her email:

churchoffice@firstpresrenewal.org.

"Where there is love there is life."
—Mahatma Gandhi

"Love makes your soul crawl out
from its hiding place."
—Zora Neale Hurston

"Being deeply loved by
someone gives you
strength, while loving
someone deeply gives you
courage."
—Lao Tzu



First Presbyterian Church
220 North Cullen Street
Rensselaer, Indiana 47978

“I Am A Christian” by Maya Angelou

When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I’m not shouting “I’m clean livin.”
I’m whispering “I was lost,
Now I’m found and forgiven.”
When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I don’t speak of this with pride.
I’m confessing that I stumble
and need Christ to be my guide.
When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I’m not trying to be strong.
I’m professing that I’m weak
And need His strength to carry on.
When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I’m not bragging of success.
I’m admitting I have failed
And need God to clean my mess.

When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I’m not claiming to be perfect,
My flaws are far too visible
But, God believes I am worth it.
When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I still feel the sting of pain.
I have my share of heartaches
So I call upon His name.
When I say ... “I am a Christian”
I’m not holier than thou,
I’m just a simple sinner
Who received God’s good grace, somehow.

-Maya Angelou