

The Soul Truth



Presbytery
of
San Francisco

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**The
Omnipotent
Power of God**

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QUICK ALERTS

08.12.17 ♦ STPC Church-Wide Village Fair
08.26.17 ♦ STPC 19 th Annual Golf Tournament
09.10.17 ♦ STPC Back Home Sunday Picnic
10.14.17 & 10.15.17 ♦ 2017 STPC Revival
10.29.17 ♦ STPC October Fest
12.31.17 ♦ Kwanzaa

WEEKLY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUNDAY	10am 11am	Sunday School Morning Worship Service
TUESDAY	12pm 2pm – 5pm 2pm 7pm	Bible Study Pastor's Office Hours Prayer Ministry Senior Choir Rehearsal
WEDNESDAY	10am–2pm 7 pm	Pastor's Office Hours Bible Study
THURSDAY	12pm–4pm	Pastor's Office Hours
SATURDAY	10am–2pm	Pastor's Office Hours

Black Lives Matter

By Reverend Kamal Hassan, Pastor of STPC



"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Psalm 139:14

Sometimes when I think about it, I stop, shake my head and thank God. We are still here. No, we did not immigrate. We were brought here against our will. We were pulled away from our homelands and the bones of those ancestors that we buried in Africa. We came from different peoples who didn't speak the same languages, but shared the same trauma. We appeared to be at the mercy of those who thought themselves to be the most powerful people on the earth with a God-given right to remake the "dark world" just as they saw fit.

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Making Peace with God

By Michael Jenkins, President of LPTS (800) 264-1839

April 25, 2017



I wonder in this moment how many stars are slipping into oblivion. How many are being born.

The turn, turn, turning of the universe goes on all around us all the time, and among and with us too. To everything there is a season in this ceaseless sea of changes, waves rising from the ocean only to fall back again.

My thoughts have turned increasingly toward wisdom literature over the past year, as losses and griefs have accumulated.

I watched my strong, proud, independent and good father reduced to a state he would have seen as "pitiful" (one of his favorite adjectives to describe someone in a condition he would hope never to endure). An uncle as close as a brother died weeks later, and a cousin whose name I share in honor of his father died just a few days later. Shortly after returning to Louisville last August, my wife's best friend died after a long and courageous battle with breast cancer. And we had hardly turned around when Debbie's step-mother, who was in so many ways a mother to her, died suddenly. And these losses last fall, it turned out, were just the beginning. As one year gave way to another, more sorrows followed.

The expressions of sympathy and care we received as a family were overwhelming and overwhelmingly moving. The prayers and words and visits of friends and colleagues bore us through all of these losses as they have sustained so many other families. I have often tried to comfort others by saying that grief is the price of love, the greater the love the more grief we feel. These words are true, I believe, as true as the sympathy we feel for others. But grief is not only a test, it is a teacher.

Gently or roughly, with compassion or with a sublime indifference to our suffering, this teacher enters our lives. The lessons we learn are at a far deeper level than our heads. Broken hearts discover more than whole ones when it comes to life's most profound lessons.

As the Greek dramatist Aeschylus said long ago in Edith Hamilton's glorious translation:

*"Even in our sleep,
Pain which cannot forget,
Falls drop by drop upon the heart,
Until, beyond despite,
And against our will,
Comes wisdom,
Through the awful grace of God."*

Epictetus, another ancient Greek, once described what it is we learn if we embrace, rather than resist, the reality of life with its manifold changes and its terrible losses:

"True instruction is this: – to learn to wish that each thing should come to pass as it does. And how does it come to pass? As the Disposer has disposed it. Now he has disposed that there should be summer and winter, and plenty and dearth, and vice and virtue, and all such opponents, for the harmony of the whole."

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A Letter to Annie's Sunday School Class on The Bible and Homosexuality

Hey Annie's Sunday School Class. Good morning. I'm Annie's friend Mark Yaconelli. Glad you are here. Hope you make Annie bring you donuts and hot cocoa. Did you know many years ago I taught the Sunday School class at St. Andrew's and brought donuts and hot cocoa as a bribe for Annie's son Sam and some other kids? They were always much nicer when I gave them sugar and chocolate.

So Annie asked if I'd write you about the Bible. I worked at a seminary for 10 years. I have two graduate degrees in Christian Spirituality. I've worked in churches for many years. I've been a youth worker most of my life and I'm going to tell you the honest truth about the Bible.

Okay, here's what all my study has taught me:

The Bible is a weird collection of songs, stories, poems, letters, prayers, rules, dreams, mystical experiences, dietary rules and detailed instructions for building a giant boat.

The Bible is not a book of science, the Bible is not a book of facts.

None of the authors of the Bible ever intended that their writing would help readers grow in their understanding of human biology or science. The people who wrote the Bible are trying to express this overwhelming, freeing, terrifying, exhilarating experience that we have nicknamed "God." That's what the Bible is for – to help us encounter God.

The writers of the Bible are pointing out of a window and they want us to look for ourselves and feel for ourselves that there is a welcoming Presence of Love that names us and claims us and frees us to live the lives we've always wanted to live.

Jesus said the teachings of the Bible are only useful if they help us love God (the Creator, The Maker, The Compassionate Presence), love other people, and love ourselves. Jesus says this is the Rule of Love – loving others as we love ourselves. This is the most important message of the Bible.

So Jesus teaches that God is only known through Love and every experience of Love is an experience of God. That means when two people love each other, God is there. It doesn't matter if they are two men, a woman and a man, or two women, if it is real love (mutual care and respect and delight), God is there and it is blessed. Every act of love brings God into the world. When a parent loves her child, when friends love each other, when a stranger offers kindness to a hurting person, when people commit to loving one another (Gay or Straight) – God is there and it is blessed. And here's the reverse of that:

Anything that leaves you more fearful, more isolated, more disconnected from other people, more full of judgement or self-hatred is not of God, it does not follow the Rule of Love – and you should stop doing it.

Now you may ask, "Hang on. If the Bible says loving others is the highest rule, what about homosexuality? Doesn't the Bible say homosexuality is wrong?"

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The Violence of Love

Quote by Oscar A. Romero

"We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work."



Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery



Members of Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church

Members of Sojourner Truth went to view a museum exhibit of media created by Sojourner Truth and other abolitionists at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Film Archive.

Who Was Sojourner Truth?

She was born a slave named Isabella Baumfree, perhaps in 1797.

She spoke Dutch as her first language in an upstate New York community.

She could neither read nor write. She signed her "mark" to petitions.

She was probably thirteen years old when she was sold by her first owner in 1810 for a hundred dollars and separated from her parents.

She was beaten as a slave; she also lost a portion of her right index finger in a field accident in 1826.

She bore five children between 1815 and 1826, one of whom died.

She ran away from her last owner in 1826, at the age of thirty, after completing the spinning of one hundred pounds of wool, work that she felt she owed him.

She renamed herself Sojourner Truth in 1843 at the age of forty-six.

She chose to go to court three times and won all three cases. In 1828 she litigated to recover her son Peter who had been illegally sold into slavery. In 1832 she filed a slander suit. In 1865 she brought assault charges against a Washington, DC, streetcar conductor who tried to throw her off his car; he was dismissed from his job.

She wrote an autobiography with the help of two different women friends and paid for its first printing in 1850 on credit; she reissued the book 1875, 1878, and 1881.

She had newspapers read to her and frequently published letters in the press.

She campaigned on behalf of the abolition of slavery, the right of African Americans and women to vote, the right of emancipated slaves to education and property, the desegregation of streetcars, and the elimination of capital punishment.

She was a moving speaker. According to a Quaker abolitionist, she "poured forth a torrent of natural eloquence which swept everything before it."

She worked tirelessly from 1864 to 1867 on behalf of the thousands of emancipated Southern slaves refuged at the Freedmen's Village in Washington, DC.

She filed petitions with Congress and paid to have petitions printed.

She tried to vote several times in advance of female suffrage, but was turned away from the polls.

She collected autographs of famous persons, despite having no signature of her own, and compiled three scrapbooks with press clippings about abolitionism and her activism.

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Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery from Page 4

She knew the Bible, but she also embraced modernity and technological inventions such as photography.

She posed for photographic portraits, primarily *cartes de visite*, at least eleven different times, mostly during the years of the Civil War when she was in her late sixties, but also in the years immediately prior to her death in 1883.

She had a copyright filed in her name for her *cartes de visite* in 1864, which was unprecedented for a portrait sitter: usually copyrights were filed in the name of the photographer. The copyright appeared on the backs of her portraits; at the same time, she added her name and a caption to the front.

She sold her photographs at her lectures and through the mail in order to support herself.

She died at her home in Battle Creek, Michigan, on November 26, 1883.



What Is a *Carte de Visite*?

First invented and patented in 1854 by French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, *cartes de visite* were substitutes for calling cards. Sustaining the calling card's small size, approximately two-and-one-half by four inches, *cartes de visite* consisted of albumen photographs made from glass negatives glued onto cardboard mounts. The production of multiple portraits had been made cheap and easy by Disdéri's invention of a special camera with four lenses so that a single negative could include four shots on the same plate.

By the end of the 1850s, the craze for the relatively inexpensive *cartes de visite* had reached the United States. Americans who could never have afforded a painted or daguerreotype portrait, or even a relatively inexpensive tintype, could now have their likenesses memorialized. Combining affordability, repeatability,

and portability across great distances thanks to the new US postal system, these cards appealed to a vast nation of dispersed people.

As this exhibition demonstrates, *cartes de visite* could aggrandize the formerly enslaved, delivering them into the personhood of portraiture, but they could also be used to memorialize war heroes or denigrate the enemy. In either case, these modest objects were tools of war.



A Letter to Annie's Sunday School Class on The Bible and Homosexuality from Page 3

Remember, God did not write the Bible. Jesus did not write the Bible (by the way Jesus was silent about homosexuality). People wrote the Bible and people get things wrong all the time. And although the people who wrote the Bible loved God, they also were not scientists nor biologists and they also weren't God. So they sometimes wrote things that were ignorant or limited or plain wrong. For example, they wrote stuff like...

Don't wear clothes made of more than one fabric (Leviticus 19:19)

Don't cut your hair nor shave. (Leviticus 19:27)

Any person who curses his mother or father, must be killed. (Leviticus 20:9)

People who have flat noses, or are blind or lame, cannot go to an altar of God (Leviticus 21:17-18)

Anyone who curses or blasphemes God, should be stoned to death by the community. (Leviticus 24:14-16)

Don't let cattle graze with other kinds of cattle (Leviticus 19:19)

Don't eat shellfish. (Leviticus 11:10)

Christians don't believe nor follow these writings. We know shrimp tacos can be delicious and healthy. We know it's alright to cut your hair. Different cows can

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A Deafening Silence: Bonhoeffer's Germany

Part Four ♦ May 10, 2016

"Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." (Edmund Burke, 1729-1797)

By Michael Jenkins, President of LPTS (800) 264-1839



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The phrase "a deafening silence," gets used a good bit these days, usually to describe a situation when something ought to be said but isn't. But on the evening of February 1, 1933, a "deafening silence" really did echo across Germany, when toward the end of [a radio broadcast](#) given by a young professor, [Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), suddenly listeners experienced what those in the broadcasting world call "dead air." The broadcast suddenly and, at the most crucial moment in Bonhoeffer's speech, went silent.

We can only imagine the confusion as families were sitting, gathered around their radios in their sitting rooms, in those days when the radio was still both a large piece of furniture and a big part of most people's lives, listening to the young scholar earnestly speaking on a subject of considerable interest to many listeners. His argument had unfolded step-by-step, reasonably, rationally. He was just about to make the critical point. He was about to raise the concern for which he had

carefully set the stage, trying to earn credibility with his audience before raising the alarm.

Then.

Suddenly.

Nothing.

Dead air.

To this day, it remains unclear exactly what happened in the control room of the broadcast center. Even [Eberhard Bethge](#), Bonhoeffer's student, close friend and biographer, couldn't discover what really occurred that night. But, whatever happened, whoever pulled the plug on the radio broadcast, and for whatever reason they did so, the broadcast of Bonhoeffer's speech on the topic "The Younger Generation's Altered View of the Concept of Führer" came to an abrupt halt before Bonhoeffer could utter the most provocative words in his script.

His listeners that evening never heard those final words which we can now read.

In the closing sentences of his address, Bonhoeffer wanted to warn his listeners that if a nation leader surrenders "to the wishes of his followers, who would always make him their idol – then the image of the leader will gradually become the image of the 'misleader' ... Leaders or offices which set themselves up as gods mock God."*

Bonhoeffer's address was really quite conservative. It was also, however, deeply critical. He raised questions about why youth in Germany at that particular historical moment placed so much hope in a "strong leader," allowing their enthusiasm to be transformed from a political movement to a personality cult.**

Whenever he communicated, Bonhoeffer's message was theological, even when he examined social, cultural and political matters. But his theological message was never abstracted from the human arena. Anyone who has read Bonhoeffer's doctoral dissertation, ["Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church"](#) (1930), for example, will know that for Bonhoeffer there was no impermeable firewall between theology and so-called "secular disciplines"

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A Deafening Silence: Bonhoeffer's Germany from Page 6

such as sociology. When Bonhoeffer took up consideration of a theological question, he refused to ignore the human and social dimensions of that question. To understand Bonhoeffer's theological reflections, one must be prepared to allow theology to touch the ground. And, conversely, it is helpful in understanding Bonhoeffer's social, cultural, and political remarks (such as his radio address) to examine also his explicitly theological statements.

Roughly at the same time that Bonhoeffer was wrestling with the subject of his radio address, the ways in which the youth of Germany were thinking about the "Führer," Bonhoeffer also wrote a fascinating theological essay: ["Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God's Kingdom on Earth."](#) As one can tell from the title of this essay, it is a theological text about a fundamental theological act, prayer, specifically the prayer of the Christian community. The essay, in which the full range of Bonhoeffer's extraordinary mind is on display, from biblical interpreter to philosopher, culminates in passages of crystalline clarity, stripped of all technical jargon, words simple and direct. He writes:

*"The kingdom of God is found not in some other world beyond but in our midst. It seeks our obedience despite contradictory appearances, and then it constantly seeks, through our obedience, the miracle, like lightening allowed to flash from the perfect, blessed world of the final promise. On Earth, God seeks to be honored by us in the other, and nowhere else. God plants his kingdom in the cursed ground. We must open our eyes, become sober, obey God here."*****

Bonhoeffer believed that our faith in God is a matter of life and death. Bonhoeffer believed our faith in God is even more important than that. He believed it is of eternal consequence. And he would not allow talk about such things as "eternity" or "eternal consequence" or even "God's kingdom" to float off into the stratosphere of abstractions. Our love for God is

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Style...

By Nikki Gionvanni



"Style has a profound meaning to Black Americans. If we can't drive, we will invent walks and the world will envy the dexterity of our feet. If we can't have ham, we will boil chitterlings; if we are given rotten peaches, we will make cobbles; if given scraps, we will make quilts; take away our drums, and we will clap our hands. We prove the human spirit will prevail. We will take what we have to make what we need. We need confidence in our knowledge of who we are."



A Letter to Annie's Sunday School Class on The Bible and Homosexuality from Page 5

graze in a field, no problem. Christians do not follow these rules from the Bible because we know better now. God gave us a brain and intelligence and the capacity to learn and we have learned and now know that many of those ancient rules are just plain ignorant or wrong.

I say all of this because some of the most hurtful writings in the Bible are about homosexuality. There are a few places in the Bible that refer to sexual relationships between two men or between two [women] as prohibited or sinful. Sometimes these rules or condemnations were actually about prostitution or abuse, but there are cases where some writings in the Bible condemn homosexuality as sinful. This is sad and unfortunate and has caused a lot of people pain and suffering. What we now know is that just as the Bible was incorrect about wearing mixed fabrics, the writings in the Bible about homosexuality are simply ignorant (people didn't know what they were saying) and entirely wrong.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people are people, created in the image of God, it is their birthright to be honored, respected, and celebrated just like everyone else. The Bible was never meant to be a book about gender or sexual ethics. The people who wrote those things did not know what we now know.

How can we say these teachings are wrong?

One big reason is because of Jesus. Jesus is our primary spiritual teacher and the one who shows us what God is like. Jesus is the one who says: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Jesus is the one the Bible holds up as a window into God. Jesus is the one who teaches us and shows us and helps us feel and know that it is not loving to dominate nor discriminate against other people. To exclude or reject or restrict people because of who they love and how they love goes directly against the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.

Paul (one of the writer's in the New Testament) says, whenever the Spirit of God is near, you will feel more patient, more generous, more kind, more self-disciplined, more joyful, hopeful, and loving (Galatians 5). So tell me, if you condemn a woman because she loves another woman does that make you feel more generous, kind, and joyful?

In the Gospel of Luke (12:57) Jesus says, "Why don't you judge for yourself what is right?" Does it feel right, given what we now know about sexuality and human relationships, that LGBT people should be condemned or treated differently than we treat other people? Does that feel loving?

The Bible itself must be judged according to Jesus' Rule of Love. When we do that, we find that the teachings of the Bible that discriminate against homosexuals are plain wrong. The Bible was never meant to be a book about sexuality and it shouldn't be treated that way. The Bible is trying to help you go out into the world and meet God for yourself so that you might be more alive, more yourself, more open and connected to other people.

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Human Rights

Quote by Oscar A. Romero

"When we struggle for human rights, for freedom, for dignity, when we feel that it is a ministry of the church to concern itself for those who are hungry, for those who have no schools, for those who are deprived, we are not departing from God's promise. He comes to free us from sin, and the church knows that sin's consequences are all such injustices and abuses. The church knows it is saving the world when it undertakes to speak also of such things."

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A Deafening Silence: Bonhoeffer's Germany from Page 7

demonstrated in the ways we treat other human beings, most especially those from whom we have nothing to gain, those with whom we have little or nothing in common, the powerless, the outsiders, the strangers, the vulnerable, the forgotten, the hated and the despised. Either we love them, or we don't love God. The reign of God changes us in the here-and-now because to speak of God's reign is to speak of the ways in which God demands our ultimate allegiance in this life. The ultimate allegiance which God demands of us takes the concrete shape of love, not an emotion, nor some thin affection, but a living commitment "to be for the other" no matter what the cost.

"On Earth, God seeks to be honored by us in the other, and nowhere else." If Bonhoeffer had uttered those words from his "Thy Kingdom Come!" essay on the radio, let's say at the beginning of the radio address, I wonder how long he would have remained on the air. In some ways, this explicitly theological message speaks even more directly to his contemporary situation than his radio address did. But, the concern in both the radio address and the essay on the Lord's Prayer was idolatry, worshipping that which is not God in place of God, allowing that which should never claim our ultimate allegiance to shape our actions and attitudes.

Whom we worship determines whom we serve. And whom we serve determines who we are.

Bonhoeffer was observing the fundamental problem of turning over our ultimate allegiance, which properly belonged only to God, to a human leader. Whatever fear and insecurity, uncertainty and resentment drove the youth (and others) of his day to surrender their allegiance to a human "Führer," the outcome would never live up to the promises. Human idols have a way of ushering in demonic reigns.

It is striking to note the scarlet thread that runs through Bonhoeffer's life and thought from his first days as a preacher and teacher to his last days as a political prisoner. I have often wondered what it must have been like for this gregarious and kind young man, who loved music from the most formal Bach chorales to the lively gospel anthems he heard in churches in Harlem, New York, who loved conversation and the free flow of ideas, to endure the months and years of incarceration.

The reports of him in prison are of a person engaged fully in his vocation even behind bars. I mean his "vocation" in the strictest sense of the term, as his "calling" to follow Jesus Christ. This vocation, for Bonhoeffer, trumped every other claim on his own allegiance. And this vocation kept shaping him as a person, kept expanding his love for others, including his enemies, even in the midst of oppression, even in the shadow of the scaffold.

"The church is the church only when it exists for others."**** So Bonhoeffer wrote in one of his last communications from prison.

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Beautiful is the moment...

Quote by Oscar A. Romero from his last homily March 23, 1980

"Beautiful is the moment in which we understand that we are no more than an instrument of God; we live only as long as God wants us to live; we can only do as much as God makes us able to do; we are only as intelligent as God would have us be."



A Letter to Annie's Sunday School Class on The Bible and Homosexuality from Page 8

"God is love," Christians remind one another. This means that Christians experience love as something alive and living and personal and true. This Love that is God and God that is Love is the creating and healing power within life. This Love that is God is kind and patient and humble and free – never trying to control nor manipulate. Every human being has experienced and knows this capital "L" Love that Christians call God.

Christians believe that to receive and share this reality of Love, this God within who live and move and have our being, is the meaning and purpose of life. Why would we stop anyone from experiencing and expressing love? Or to put it another way, why would we stop gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, transgendered – anyone from experiencing, celebrating, and expressing God?

Letter by Mark Yaconnelli written to a Sunday School Class taught by author Annie Lamott at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Marin City.

To Leave or Stay in the PCUSA

A Response to HPPC's Decision

On December 8, 1924, the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas approved a "plan of organization for expansion program" that included "the promotion of a new church for Oak Lawn and Highland Park." On December 14, 1925, the Session approved a resolution to raise, "our pro rata of the \$10,000 appropriated to Presbyterian Church Expansion in Dallas." In addition, a meeting was called "to be held in the Municipal Bldg. of Highland Park on Sunday, January 3, 1926, in the afternoon, of all persons desiring to organize a Southern Presbyterian Church in Highland Park." April 25, 1926, the Session granted 52 people "letters to the Highland Park Presbyterian Church to be organized." On May 9, 1926, another 32 people were transferred to Highland Park. Those 84 saints played a

critical role in forming the Highland Park Presbyterian Church.

This past Sunday Highland Park voted to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians, a new denomination founded last year. Their decision to leave our denomination is heartbreaking. I grieve the loss of this important congregation and their witness as part of our communion these past 87 years.

Their leadership cited as their primary motivation for leaving, "the PC(USA)'s lack of core theological beliefs; disagreement over the authority of Scripture and salvation through Jesus Christ alone; and the impact of PC(USA) governance policy and practices on the life of HPPC, particularly on the selection process for new pastors." Their assertions might leave someone wondering, "Do we have core theological beliefs?" Of course we do. What does the PC(USA) believe about Jesus Christ and the Bible?

When teaching and ruling elders are ordained to office, one of the vows we take is to fulfill our ministry "in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions." (Book of Order, W-4.4003d) It is a summary of the first three ordination vows placing Jesus, the Bible, and our core theological beliefs in proper order. Jesus is Lord. Scripture's authority is found in its unique witness to this truth. **Our historic confessions guide our understandings of the Bible and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.**

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Making Peace with God from Page 2

Epictetus might easily have been a conversation partner to the biblical writer Koheleth, the mysterious author of the book most of us know as Ecclesiastes.

“There is a time for everything under heaven.”

“The sun sets, the sun also rises.”

“Generations rise. Generations fall.”

Wisdom, we learn, consists in embracing with equanimity and grace all the times we are given, each season of life, because the One who Disposes acts for the harmony of the whole. We who live just now are but “a minuscule speck,” Epictetus tells us. We exist momentarily within the vast inconceivable reaches and ages of the universe, a minuscule speck given the gift of understanding, a smattering of energy and matter with the gift of consciousness. However foggy and uncertain and faulty these gifts may be; however partial, flawed, deformed by emotions, distorted by assumptions and driven by passions, these capacities we have in common with God, Epictetus tells us.

With these gifts we glimpse what we are within the universe, a speck of matter, a spark of energy, a wave on a rising then ebbing tide. Yet, we have come to believe that we are also, as small and as apparently insignificant as we may be, created by God in God’s own beloved image and likeness.

One of my favorite stories of the late Carlyle Marney, that maverick Baptist preacher who owned the Reformed tradition as his own and whose teaching and preaching shaped so many of us Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopal ministers, goes like this. He was leading a service at a retirement home, surrounded by a score of aged men and women, among whom were a number of very elderly people who had outlived everyone in their own generation and most of the people they had loved. Marney began his devotional by saying in that deep Southern voice like God’s only deeper, “Oh, what a bunch of losers we are.”

And we are. But until we can embrace the losses, the griefs, the deaths, including our own, and know them ultimately to be a blessing and a gift as surely as are the births; until we learn the wisdom of acceptance in the depths of our souls, we will struggle, as Leonard Cohen has sung “like a fish on a hook” to be free.

According to the wisdom of our faith and the thought of some of humanity’s great souls, wisdom, like joy, lies in embracing life as it is, and holding it with gratitude and grace just as we receive it from the hand of God.

May be this is what is meant by “making peace with God.”

Source: presidentlistening@lpts.edu | www.lpts.edu

Peace

Quote by Oscar A. Romero

“Peace is not the product of terror or fear.

Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.

Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.

Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.

Peace is dynamism.

Peace is generosity.

It is right and it is duty.”

~ † ~

To Leave or Stay in the PCUSA from Page 10

So what does the PC(USA) believe about Jesus? In 2002, the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a document entitled, "Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ." Within that document are these words:

Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, and all people everywhere are called to place their faith, hope, and love in him. No one is saved by virtue of inherent goodness or admirable living, for "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" [Ephesians 2.8]. No one is saved apart from God's gracious redemption in Jesus Christ. Yet we do not presume to limit the sovereign freedom of "God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth" [1 Timothy 2.4]. Thus, we neither restrict the grace of God to those who profess explicit faith in Christ nor assume that all people are saved regardless of faith. Grace, love, and communion belong to God, and are not ours to determine.

Some Christians believe we are saved by our faith in Jesus Christ. Presbyterians do not. We believe we are saved by God's faithfulness embodied in Jesus Christ, not by the authenticity and efficacy of our own faith. Further, we do not presume to limit God's freedom to save whomever God wants to save. This belief recognizes the sovereignty of God, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all things, including the salvation of creation, a core theological belief for Presbyterians.

What does the PC(USA) believe about the Bible? Through the centuries, the Reformed church has made many statements about the authority of Scripture. In the 20th Century, the Confession of 1967 offered these words:

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel ... The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of

reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. (Confession of 1967, 9.27, 29)

This understanding of the Bible's authority does not lend itself to absolutist claims that use isolated verses of Scripture to take theological stands. It is not a fundamentalist understanding of the Bible. It is a thoughtful articulation of how the authority of Scripture is understood within the PC(USA).

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Today's Christians

Quote by Oscar A. Romero



"Let us be today's Christians. Let us not take fright at the boldness of today's church. With Christ's light let us illuminate even the most hideous caverns of the human person: torture, jail, plunder, want, chronic illness. The oppressed must be saved, not with a revolutionary salvation, in mere human fashion, but with the holy revolution of the Son of Man, who dies on the cross to cleanse God's image, which is soiled in today's humanity, a humanity so enslaved, so selfish, so sinful."



A Brief Statement of Faith –

10.1-3

THE STATEMENT

10.1

In life and death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

†††

10.2

We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, full God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

†††

10.3

We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments. We violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all

families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.

†††

10.4

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and the re-newer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

†††

10.5

With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

†††

10.6

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.



A deafening Silence: Bonhoeffer's Germany from Page 9

Existing “for others” is what it means to be like Jesus of Nazareth. Not to exist “for others” is to deny Christ. Thus, if some “Führer,” some “strong leader” or some political idol sculpted and crafted by human hands comes along and tells us that our prosperity, security or national future can be secured by demeaning, destroying, torturing and vilifying others – strangers, aliens, foreigners, immigrants, outsiders – the Christian’s choice isn’t all that hard to figure out.

Making that choice, however, may just cost a lot.

*Eberhard Bethge, [*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*](#) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, revised edition, 2000), pp. 259-260

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Younger Generation’s Altered a View of the Concept of Fuhrer,” in [*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Berlin: 1932-1933, Works, Volume 12*](#), Larry Rasmussen, editor (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), pp. 266-268.

***Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Thy Kingdom Come,” *Berlin: 1932-1933*, p. 295.

****Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [*Letters and Papers from Prison*](#) (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), p. 382.

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Sexuality: A Gift from God Are You Comfortable – Sexually?

General Characteristics of People Who Are Comfortable with Their Sexuality

Sexually Comfortable People...

- Have examined their own personal sexual history.
- Have explored their own sexual attitudes and confronted their own limitations and biases about sexuality.
- Have listened to the beliefs of others about sexuality, which are different from their own.
- Have the ability to speak openly, honestly and confidently about any aspect of human sexuality.
- Have the ability to accept the sexual preference and activities of others without feeling personally threatened and without moralizing or being judgmental.
- Have the ability to discuss sex with the young, middle aged and elderly people.
- Have the ability to interact with people of all genders, ages and sexual orientations in respectful and appropriate ways.
- Are knowledgeable or seek to increase their knowledge about human sexuality, including sexual behaviors, sexual response, sexual and gender orientation and relationships.
- Will have up-to-date, science-based factual knowledge.
- Will have knowledge of different sociocultural and religious beliefs about human sexuality

Beliefs Across Faith Traditions

- There is an amazing diversity of beliefs about human sexuality among Christians, Jews, Muslims, followers of other faith groups, and those who are not affiliated with any organized religion.
- On matters related to human sexuality, Americans tend to be polarized between social and religious conservatives and liberals/progressives.
- Conservatives from all religions tend to agree with each other that only heterosexual behavior is moral, and then only between a man and a woman who are married to each other.

Continued on Page 15

To Leave or Stay in the PCUSA from Page 12

What about our core theological beliefs? Since the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the early 1900's, the Presbyterian church has battled over a need to assert "fundamentals" of the faith," a term invoked by Presbyterian lay leader Lyman Stewart, who published a series of essays that would become the foundation of a fundamentalist movement within Protestantism. Some see our lack of defined "essential tenets" as a lack of core theological beliefs. I do not. It keeps our theology in proper perspective to the sovereignty of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So we debate essential tenets of the faith. We hold to the sovereignty of God in all things, and we debate what that means. We point to the total depravity of humanity, and we debate what that means. We debate predestination and its impact on the important decisions of discipleship. This does not mean we lack core theological beliefs, rather we refuse to make an idol out of our theology.

The Apostle Paul said, "You are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it." Regardless of the votes we take, the truth is both Highland Park and the PCUSA are parts of the body of Christ that is the church catholic in the world. While we may not live into that reality very well, it is a reality nonetheless. As the legal battles over worldly realities continue, please keep all those involved in these struggles in your prayers. Let us pray that whatever resolutions are reached, all parties involved may continue to advance the mission and ministry of the body of Christ in and for this broken world, even in the midst of our own brokenness.

In Christ,

Joe

Sexuality: A Gift from God from Page 14**Beliefs Across Faith Traditions <cont.>**

- Religious progressives are also largely in agreement among themselves. They tend to value sexual behavior as acceptable if it is:
 - ❖ Consensual
 - ❖ Low risk for sexuality transmitted disease [STD] transmission and
 - ❖ [perhaps] within a committed relationship.

- All groups disapprove of sexual behavior that is
 - ❖ Non-consensual
 - ❖ Manipulative
 - ❖ Forced or
 - ❖ Unsafe

Sources: "The Theology Sexuality" Sex and the Church Series United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society; and Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, www.religioustolerance.org

Will Talking with Children about Sexuality and Gender Influence Them?

Many people worry that if we're open with our children about sexual orientation and gender diversity, it will encourage them to experiment, perhaps out of curiosity, and perhaps influence their development.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are internal experiences. Research shows clearly that adults do not cause children to become lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or heterosexual.

Adults can, however, influence how children feel about themselves, including all the ways they may feel out of sync with cultural messages. Adults can have a huge impact on whether children accept or reject themselves and how they feel about and treat those around them.



Speaking the Truth

Quote by Oscar A. Romero

“The church must suffer for speaking the truth, for pointing out sin, for uprooting sin. No one wants to have a sore spot touched, and therefore a society with so many sores twitches when someone has the courage to touch it and say: ‘You have to treat that. You have to get rid of that.’ Believe in Christ. Be converted.”



Black Lives Matter from Page 1

Our captors were unable to see the image of God in our complexions, our hair, or the roundness of our bodies. They seemed ashamed that we glorified in our Black bodies and saw glory in them. They refused to believe that we could have deep conversations with God in our native songs or through the drums and dances that connected us to the rhythms of the divine that we knew were in us and all around us.

These purveyors of one of America’s great original sins sought to bend us to their will with whips and chains, sexual violence and endless dehumanizing work. They used scientific tricknology and racist religion to argue that we were subhuman and cursed by God. They built economic, political, and social systems that will not work unless Black people are at or near the bottom of them. When they were forced to stop holding us as slaves they built a prison-industrial complex that works just as good and a pipeline into it for our children that attend the public schools. Sometimes when I stop and think about it, I just shake my head and go unh, unh, unh.

Paul almost seemed to have been writing about us when he said in 2 Corinthians, “We are afflicted in every

way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” I say “seemed” because despair, feeling forsaken and being destroyed from within and without are all a part of our collective story in this country. But so is the magic, and so is the joy, the love and the spirit that transforms every space where we go and has gotten into the very soil of this land.

We are still here, and my soul looks back in wonder. This is because of the eternal truth that Black Lives have always mattered to the God that made them. We are the descendants of those who were the first to be fearfully and wonderfully made. And we were made again on those ships and these shores, melded from diverse peoples into one with a common language, culture, and history that is yet still multilayered, multivalent, and impossible to name as just one thing.

When I stop and think about it, I thank God and our ancestors that we are still here. This is how Rosemarie Freeney Harding* once explained it: “Grandma Rye and those old Africans put something in the ground. When they got here they stepped off those boats, Chained up and weary. They looked around this new land and could see the heartbreak and suffering that were waiting for them and their generations. They saw these traumas waiting for us here. And they knew we were going to need something strong. Some medicine. Some spirit medicine to carry us through these storms...” Those old Africans blew on the ground, put their breath on the soil. Set their hands on this land and gave it some holiness to hold for us when we would soon need to dig it up. They made prayers from their hands and put sounds on the air...”

This is what sunk into the rich black soil of the southern motherland and served as a countervailing force in the hearts and souls and hands for those that lived there and still inspires them to push against all the hate, blood, and death. As time passed and more of us converted to Christianity we blended these spiritual workings with a theology that saw Jesus as both Savior and liberator. Sometimes when I think about it, I stop, shake my head and thank God that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and Black Lives Matter. ▪

* A spiritual teacher, civil rights worker, and movement leader