

FirstNews

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Lent: A Lesson from John's Gospel BY REV. PEN PEERY

Each of the four Gospels that tell about Jesus' life and ministry was written within a community. That may sound a little strange because we know the Gospel writers by their first names: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. What might not be as obvious to us is that the author of each Gospel was (a) years removed from the actual events they narrated and (b) was shaped by a community of faith for whom they wrote their Gospel account.

Most scholars date John's Gospel to about 90 CE. This makes John the "newest" of the four Gospels. One thing distinguishing John's community of faith from the others (Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which were written 20-30 years before John) is that, by 90 CE, there began to be a difference between Christians and Jews. Early on, of course, all those who followed Jesus as disciples were Jewish. Eventually, however, the difference in belief and practice between those who followed Jesus as Lord and those who were grounded in the Jewish faith and tradition began to diverge.

Many scholars believe that John wrote for followers of Jesus who had been "kicked out of the synagogue" and who had to start their own community of faith "down the street." Whether they were kicked out or chose to leave is a matter of debate, but what is important for us to notice is that, for Christians in John's time, following Jesus took courage because it meant choosing to live in a way that was counter-cultural. Christians in John's time were on the margins of society; practicing faith took work.

It strikes me that, in our context, all these years later, being a follower of Jesus in a world that is less and less Christian also takes work; it also takes courage.

This Lent, I invite us to consider the ways being a disciple of Jesus asks us to live differently than the world around us. I think doing so might lead to growth – for us and our faith.

Hosanna to Hallelujah THE JOURNEY AND JOY OF HOLY WEEK

Holy Week is a time in the church year when we remember how Christ gave his life in love for the world. On Palm Sunday, we commemorate Christ's journey and triumphal entry into Jerusalem with the cross as the goal. On Maundy Thursday, we remember the Last Supper and Jesus' final two days on the way to the cross. On Easter morning, we celebrate the Risen Lord. To experience the full joy Easter morning brings, one must also experience the journey to the cross. If we leap from Palm Sunday's "Hosannas" to Easter Day's "Hallelujahs," we overlook the pivotal event of Christ's suffering and death on the cross. All are invited and encouraged to experience the entire Easter story during Holy Week.



On Easter Sunday, we'll celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Join us for a time of joyful worship, powerful music, and the uplifting message of hope and redemption. Please note: there will be no Sunrise Service in the park or Contemplative Service on Easter Sunday, but there will be two Traditional Services in the sanctuary.

Holy Week Schedule

Easter Egg Hunt

Friday, March 22
4:30-6:30 p.m.

Palm Sunday Services

Sunday, March 24
9 a.m. Contemplative
11 a.m. Traditional

Maundy Thursday Service

Thursday, March 28
Time: 7:30 p.m.

Easter Sunday Services

Sunday, March 31
9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

A Path to Wellness CHAIR YOGA 2024



First Presbyterian's chair yoga is a rejuvenating experience, which offers an opportunity to stretch, destress, and foster a sense of community among our church members. The class is non-judgmental and creates a welcoming environment where everyone can embrace their own unique yoga journey.

Chair yoga is a form of yoga that accommodates individuals of all skill levels, making it a wonderful way to relax midday/midweek. The sessions focus on proper breathing, stretching from head to toe, and improving balance, all while utilizing the support of a chair. The inclusivity of this practice ensures that participants can engage at their own pace and ability, with new members warmly embraced.

One participant shared, "I love yoga because it helps build both strength and flexibility. Chair yoga is wonderful because it does not overly stress my joints. Learning to breathe properly also helps reduce stress."

Another participant highlighted, "Benefits for me from yoga: I move better; my posture and balance are better; I feel better."

In March, the class will expand to add Mondays to the schedule. Though Catherine Lynn recently shared that she will be leaving her position as Faith Community Nurse at First Presbyterian, she has agreed to continue teaching chair yoga. The class will meet every Monday and Wednesday from 11-11:45 a.m. in P206 of the Church Street Building. Beginners and experts alike are invited to drop in for a tranquil midday yoga break.

The Willard Lecture 2024 ANNOUNCING BRIAN MCLAREN



Brian McLaren, our 2024 Willard Lecturer, was shaped as a youth by a Christian community that embraced a literal reading of the Bible and excluded those whose beliefs weren't in line with his church's.

As a young man, he sensed a disconnect between what his church practiced and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who welcomed all to the table.

Rather than dismiss his faith altogether, he began to explore a personal migration towards an "extravagant and generous

grace, open to all people... A more human, loving, embodied way of relating to God, self, one another, and all creation. ("The Great Spiritual Migration"). Brian's 25+ books and his life work share this vision for the church and invite others to join him. He is particularly attuned to those who have doubted what they have been taught or disillusioned by leaders and institutions whose values and actions don't align with Scripture's teachings.

He has long respected the observations of his friend Father Richard Rohr, who founded the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) where McLaren serves as Dean of the Core Faculty. Just as Father Richard has taught that holding both spiritual connection and fervent action together is essential, McLaren believes disciples of Christ must hold both contemplation and action together as one. That is why he and the CAC faculty are

supporting others in finding a quiet center in the midst of our turbulent times. He says, "If we are going to help people take wise action and imagine a better future beyond coming troubles, then we will have to help people find that better future within themselves so they can live that better future out in the world."

In his lecture, he will offer a guide for finding wisdom and courage in our fractured world. He'll encourage us to have hope even when it seems irrational and to love when hate seems more popular. He'll inspire us to seek the common good so that all can experience the abundance our God has to offer. He told Garrell Keesler, Director of Adult Formation, that he is "looking forward" to The Willard. We are too!



The lecture is April 28 at 5 p.m. Tickets will go on sale March 20. Learn more about Brian and the events around the lecture at firstpres-charlotte.org/the-willard

A Beacon of Hope MAKE A HOME A REALITY THIS EASTER

Homeownership is one of the best ways to create family stability and generational wealth, yet it's out of reach for most Charlotteans. Today, teachers and social service providers like nurses, police officers, and social workers struggle to make ends meet as they care for and create opportunities for some of our community's most vulnerable families.

Freedom Communities, a First Presbyterian partner working in the 28208 zip code, leverages a collective impact approach. Executive Director Hannah Beavers explained, "Freedom Communities is a place-based nonprofit, meaning we intentionally limit the geographic area in which we serve so that we can work holistically with the families who live here while simultaneously investing in infrastructure like affordable housing and childcare."

Just across the street from Westerly Hills Academy – where FPC has supported the staff and families since 2000 – Freedom Communities, in partnership with other local organizations dedicated to affordable housing, has purchased a plot of land dedicated to affordable housing and the construction of 52 townhomes is scheduled to begin this year. Hannah shared, "Many of the children of the families we serve through our 'Moms Moving Forward' program attend school at Westerly Hills Academy."

This year, on Easter Sunday, the church offering will go to buying down these new townhomes into affordable homeownership, and First Presbyterian will match every dollar given. Every \$10,000 contributed buys down the cost of a townhome and helps provide an opportunity for a working family to purchase a new affordable home in an area experiencing fast growth and increasing property value.

In a recent sermon, Rev. Pen Peery asked the congregation, "How are we acting out our mission to be for Christ in our city?" One way you can do so is by joining the affordable housing work of First Presbyterian Church by giving generously to this year's Easter offering.

"I pray this site serves as a beacon of hope for your congregation," Hannah said, "for what is possible when we can come together as the kingdom of God, and build bridges across our community, and love our neighbor well."

Westerly Hills Behavior Store

Westerly Hills Academy implemented the quarterly school store as an incentive to reward exemplary behavior at school. Students earn Eagle Bucks for demonstrating great behavior, and they can then redeem them for toys or treats at the school store. First Presbyterian Church supports the school stores by providing volunteers and inventory for the store. Last month, there were so many Eagle Bucks redeemed that there was little inventory left! The next school store is scheduled for Friday, March 22 from 12-2:30 p.m., and you can support it by purchasing items from our Amazon wishlist or volunteering.

Purchase Items



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