



THE WITNESS

St. Stephen's Church Newsletter

Volume 30, Issue 4
The Rev. Mark Bradford, Pastor

April 2019
Church Phone (405) 843-5333

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession is titled "Of God's Eternal Decree." The first article states, "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor in the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." There is a lot contained in this statement. I wonder how much time the Westminster Assembly of Divines spent crafting that sentence!

For me there are two important points to be derived from this statement. One is that an understanding that God is the primary cause of all things and yet there are also secondary causes. An example might be a person's healing. We could say that God is the primary cause of a person's healing but that there are secondary causes that would include prayer and medicine. A good example from Scripture would be Acts 2:23, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." The primary cause of Jesus' crucifixion was clearly God. However, there were numerous secondary causes including Judas, the Jewish authorities, Pilate and the Roman soldiers.

A second important point is that God is not the author of sin. James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when He is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one."

In a discussion of God's eternal decree there is a natural progression to what is a controversial topic within the Christian Church, that being predestination. The Westminster Confession supports the doctrine of predestination. Article V of Chapter 3 states, "Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or cause moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace."

I have many dear friends in Christ who would disagree with my view and the view of the Westminster Confession on the topic of predestination, including my brother-in-law and a number of the pastors I pray with regularly. There is not enough space here to make a full case for the doctrine of predestination, but here are a few important passages of scripture.

Let us begin with Ephesians. "...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will...In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." (Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11) Continuing in

Ephesians 2:4-5, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved." Notice in these verses that it is God who made us alive in Christ; there is nothing we did or could have done to become alive in Christ. Also notice that this happened when we were dead in our trespasses. Paul is speaking here of being spiritually dead. The understanding is that a dead person can do nothing towards his or her own salvation.

There are many other passages in the New Testament, including in the Gospels, that could be used to support this position, including 2 Timothy 1:9, "God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."

The ideas expounded in Chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession are stated more briefly and simply in the Short Catechism.

Question 7: "What are the decrees of God?" Answer: The decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

Question 8: "How doth God execute His decrees?" Answer: God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence."

Question and Answer 8 of the Catechism will lead us into Chapters 4 and 5 of the Confession which have to do with creation and providence.

One of the comforting things about God's eternal decree is the realization that God is in control. Let us learn to trust God in all things. Let us continue to seek the Lord and to seek the truth as it is revealed in God's holy word.

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Mark*

Worship Schedule

Every Sunday

9:30AM - Adult & Children's Sunday School

11:00AM – Worship

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP

April 14 Palm Sunday 11:00AM

April 18 Maundy Thursday 7:00PM

April 21 Easter Sunday 11:00AM

APRIL SERMON TOPICS

During April we will continue our study of the Parables of Jesus except on Easter Sunday when we will be celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord. There will be a special time of worship on Thursday, April 18 to celebrate Maundy Thursday.

April 7 Luke 12:35-38

The Parable of the Serving Master

April 14 Luke 16:19-30

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

April 18 Maundy Thursday John 16:16-24

Your Sorrow Will Turn into Joy

April 21 Easter John 20:19-29

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

April 28 Luke 19:11-27

The Parables of the Pound

March Session Minutes

FELLOWSHIP: Fellowship dinner was very successful. (97 people)

NOMINATIONS: The Nominating Committee will add a new member for the 2021 class.

NURTURE: Each of the areas of nurture are going very well. There will be no VBS this summer.

OUTREACH: Easter this year is April 21. There will be an Easter celebration on 4/21/19.

WORSHIP: Discussion of the passing of the peace. We will continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper each Sunday during the season of Lent. We will be using intinction except on April 7 when we will be celebrating communion in our traditional way. There will be a special service on Maundy Thursday, April 18 at 7:00PM.

SMALL GROUPS

Bible Study & Prayer – Sunday evenings at Pastor Mark & Anne Bradford's – April 14 & 28 at 5:30PM.

Monday Prayer Group – April 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29 at 12:30PM, church library.

Tuesday Bible Study – Bible study will be April 16 at 2:30PM.

Men's Prayer Group – Saturday mornings at 7:30AM.

Prayer Requests

If you have missed prayers or would like to be added to the Women's Fellowship prayer chain please call Doris Cornell 605-6172 or Treva Gullett 735-9908.

Way Day Dates 2019

April 3, 10 & 17



We remember the Catron and Miller families at the passing of Mary Catron on March 3.

Fellowship Needs

Fellowship is requesting donations of frozen sausage biscuits and/or mini-quiches. Any donation would be greatly appreciated.

Fellowship Hour Treats

April 7 – Carla & Nelson Pickrell, Jaquelyn Kuhn

April 14 – Patsy Kuhn, Jean & Kent Larason

April 21 – **Easter Breakfast**

April 28 – Wendy Smith, Erin Von Tungeln

Ushers/Greeters

April Greeters: Frank & Joan Miranda

April Ushers:

April 7 – Michael Bassett, Ashley McCormick, Pat Robison, Nancy Spradling

April 14 – Wendy Smith, Becky & Randy Stateler, Nancy Spradling

April 21 – Christa & Sumish Charlie, Ashley McCormick, Nancy Spradling

April 28 – Youth



Lily Sale

Sign up for your lily in the hallway with Christa Charlie. The price is \$10 and orders will be taken through Sunday, April 14.



BETA FLOWER SALE

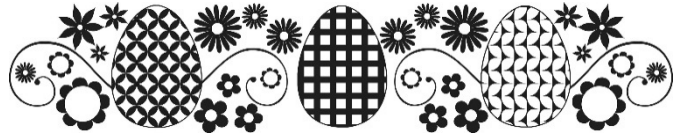
The flower sale is Friday, April 12 from 8AM-5PM and Saturday, April 13 from 9AM-12:00PM.

Most sales are made by pre-orders but we always order enough extra plants to sell on the dates above. The profits from the sale go to provide scholarships to local students and to support our Literacy programs.

Thank you for your support, *Marilyn Hanson*

Special EASTER OFFERING

We will be collecting our Special Easter Offering April 14 and 21. Our offerings will be going to support the work of *Infant Crisis Center* and *Manos Juntas Clinic*. The *Manos Juntas Clinic* is a free medical clinic that provides medical services for many homeless and poor in our community.



Easter Adventure

The Easter Adventure will take place on Easter Sunday, April 21 during Sunday school time, 9:30-10:30AM. Children need to be at church by 9:15AM in the sanctuary to start promptly at 9:30AM. The children won't want to miss any part of the hunt so be on time!☺ Following the hunt will be our wonderful Easter fellowship time with family and friends.

We will need prizes for the children to purchase with their Bunny Bucks. There is a sign-up to purchase prizes or you can make a donation.

Please extend an invitation to friends and family to join us Easter Sunday.

SEQUENCE PLAYERS

Sequence April 23. Any questions, please call Doris Cornell at 605-6172.

HELP NEEDED

Have a Green Thumb and want to volunteer? We need help watering the church's outdoor flowers this summer. Many hands will make watering easier. You can help weekly or monthly. Please contact Christa Charlie if you are able and willing to help with the watering.



LOOKING AHEAD

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Drama Camp July 8-12, 9AM-12PM

Programs: Saturday, July 13 at 6:00PM

Sunday, July 14 at 11:00AM

DRIVERS NEEDED

As the Transportation Deacon this year, I would like to begin building a list of those members who would be willing to help someone else get to church functions, possibly even doctor's appointments, or grocery shopping.

If you would be willing to be listed in the office, please email Laurie or me, put a note in the offering plate, or drop it by the office. Please put your name, which part of town you live in, which days you would be willing to help, etc.

When someone has a need for a ride, one of us may call to see if you are available on that day. This is part of our congregational ministry.

Thank you to all who feel called to this ministry.

Jaquelyn Kuhn, jaquelyn@hotmail.com



This month's Hymn of the Month is a new hymn.

O God Beyond All Praising

Unlike most hymns, "O God Beyond All Praising" was first written with the music in mind, and a text was then put to the music. Traditionally, this sequence is reversed, with a tune found to fit an already written text. It is even more uncommon for a symphonic tune to be used, because often the ranges are too wide and the phrases are too long for congregational singing. The tune, Thaxted, is more commonly known as the Chorale Theme from the Jupiter movement of Gustav Holst's composition, *The Planets*. Holst composed *The Planets* from 1914-1916 as an astrological, not astronomical, depiction of each of the planets in astrology (This is why Earth is omitted, and Pluto had not been discovered at the date of composition), and is intended to depict the effect each planet has on the human psyche, rather than a depiction of the ancient deities. The fourth movement, Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity, is a very energetic and bright movement that yields to a slower, warm chorale in the middle of the movement. Holst had originally fit the music for the Jupiter Chorale to Cecil Spring Rice's poem "I Vow To Thee, My Country."

The text is a setting by Michael Perry. Perry, who lived from 1942-1996, was born and raised in

England where he worked as a canon of the Rochester Cathedral and Vicar of Tonbridge. He was considered one of England's most promising hymn writers, and was the editor and director of Jubilate Hymns. Perry wrote the text to "O God Beyond All Praising" "in response to a call for alternative words that would be more appropriate for Christian worship."

He set the text to Holst's tune in 1982. Perry had a daunting task of finding text to set to such a well-known tune, and a tune that often conjures feelings of patriotism, not worship, in England. To surmount this challenge, he wrote a text that is firmly biblically based, and majestic. While many hymns often draw from a single scripture reference, such as a Psalm, "O God Beyond All Praising" draws from a potpourri of biblical references.

The words "without number" was a recognition of fellow hymn writer Timothy Dudley Smith for his encouragement, and an expression of appreciation to Dudley Smith because this was one of his favorite phrases. In the final verse, the phrase "we'll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still" was, according to the author, a "reflect[ion on] my remembered determination of youthful days to overcome acute disappointment and personal loss." Originally, the hymn only had two verses, what are now verses one and three. Verse two was added at the request of Roman Catholic composer Richard Proulx, because he wanted to write a choral anthem based on the text. Because the added verse was intended to be sung on select Sundays only, it is often omitted in some hymnals. When the hymn is sung on days of communion, it is also common practice to omit the second verse. "O God Beyond All Praising" is often sung on Remembrance Day, and was even requested by Princess Diana to be sung at her wedding in 1981, and was repeated at her funeral in 1997, and again for the 10th anniversary of her funeral ceremony in 2007.

For Hymn of the Month requests, contact Kaleb at Kaleb.B.Benda@gmail.com or (405)-410-9331.

Thank you to all who came to Sooner Sinfonia's Inaugural Concert. It was a gift to share the orchestra's music making with you all. I hope you enjoyed it and will continue to come to our concerts.

Kaleb Benda

RECIPE CORNER

Resurrection Buns/Empty Tomb Biscuits

Submitted by Miss Butch

This is a wonderful EASTER reminder for young children and those of us young at heart.

*Each child takes a Grand (or other large) canned biscuit, flatten it out until it's about five inches across, and spread melted butter, sugar and cinnamon on it. We explain that the spices represent the spices used to anoint Jesus' body before His burial.

*Then each child gets one large marshmallow which represents Jesus. It is white because it stands for His purity and sinless life. They place the marshmallow in the center of the biscuit, and fold the sides around it forming a "tomb". (I help the younger children pinch the sides of their tombs closed and then we place them crease side down on a baking sheet so they will not open while cooking). Put more butter, cinnamon and sugar on the outside. We talk about the sweet taste of the spices and how Jesus gave us the sweetest gift we will ever receive.

*At this point you can go ahead and bake the buns. (We wait and bake them in the morning while the kids are hunting the eggs.) They need to bake following the directions on the biscuit package. Then they need a little cooling time because the marshmallows will be very hot.

*When the children bite into their buns they will be surprised to find the center empty. The marshmallow has melted. As each child discovers the empty tomb, we repeat: **He is not here for He is Risen.**

What Easter Does

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is life-changing and life-giving for his followers. But, as Henry Knox Sherrill notes, Easter's "joyful news ... does not change the contemporary world." On earth, we still must deal with sin, pain, death and brokenness. And "still before us lie work, discipline, sacrifice." What Easter does, though, is provide Christians with "the spiritual power to do the work, accept the discipline and make the sacrifice."

By defeating the grave, Jesus empowers us to bear our worldly troubles with joy, peace and hope. His resurrection assures us that trials, tears and suffering are only temporary, while eternal victory and life with Jesus are permanent.

MEANINGS IN THE MEAL

Jesus instituted Communion while celebrating the Jewish Passover with his disciples. The meal's ritual foods hold meaning for Christians, too, because our faith story is interwoven with that of Judaism.

Matzoh: This unraised bread recalls the Israelites' hasty departure from oppression in Egypt. Jesus used the Passover bread to symbolize his body, which delivers us from bondage to sin and death.

Salt water: It symbolizes the tears of the Hebrews and of all who suffer in any time and place. Christians believe that in Jesus, God embraced human suffering so we need never face it alone.

Parsley: Dipped in the salt water, this green, leafy vegetable represents the Hebrews' rebirth out of sorrow into the joy of freedom. Easter's celebration of resurrection proclaims a coming day when God "will wipe every tear from [our] eyes [and] there will be no more death" (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

Shankbone: A lamb slaughtered for each Hebrew household meant life for those within. The meat strengthened them for the escape journey, and the blood, swabbed on their doorframe, signaled for Death to "pass over." Jesus used wine at the Passover meal to symbolize his blood — of the Lamb of God — which he would shed for our salvation.

Egg: For Jews celebrating Passover, an egg symbolizes memory of the Exodus and renewal of faith. For Christians at Easter, eggs — especially open, empty ones — call to mind Jesus' empty tomb, renewal and abundant life.

Prescription Drugs Needed

If you have any prescription drugs to donate, please give them to Laurie. No expired medications will be accepted.

Salvation Army Request

Reminder that we are collecting small soaps like the ones you get at hotels or motels. Bring them to the church office.

"Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'"
Robin Williams

CHURCH OFFICERS

Elders

Class of 2019

Dwight Daub	618-7497	Clerk/Stewardship & Memorials
Kent Larason	808-3971	Fellowship

Class of 2020

John Hermes	202-9621	President of Corporation/ Nominating
Mark McBride	410-2003	Worship

Class of 2021

Lori Pickrell	503-9585	Treasurer
John Robison	627-3565	Outreach
Joan Miranda	210-1731	Nurture

Deacons

Class of 2019

Jaquelyn Kuhn	424-2123	Transportation
Kym Manning	426-7298	Van

Class of 2020

Christa Charlie	834-7031	Flowers
Nancy Spradling	206-5828	Ushers/Greeters
Randy Stateler	620-253-6431	Maintenance

Class of 2021

Michael Bassett	942-2074	Church Work Days
Robin Page	514-8240	Missions
Erin Von Tungeln	410-5901	Clerk

WITNESS DEADLINE

April 22 is the deadline to submit articles for the May *Witness*. You may bring items to the church office or e-mail them to: secretary@ststephensokc.org.

Thanks! Laurie Daub, St. Stephen's Secretary

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1	Raymond Conn
2	Joy Bassett
3	Joshua Bradford
3	Lucas Jones
11	Ann Wilson
21	Jacques Lampin
22	Donna Urdahl
24	Hannah Hudson
24	Treva Gullett
24	Jenni O'Neil
25	Miranda Von Tungeln



26	Fred & Nancy Thompson
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***If we have missed your birthday or anniversary, please contact the church office.*

Special Dates

Fifth Sunday in Lent, *April 7*

Holy Week, *April 14-21*

Palm/Passion Sunday, *April 14*

Maundy Thursday, *April 18*

Good Friday, *April 19*

Easter Sunday, *April 21*

Administrative Professionals Day, *April 24*

