



THE WITNESS

St. Stephen's Church Newsletter

Volume 31, Issue 6
The Rev. Mark Bradford, Pastor

June 2020
Church Phone (405) 843-5333

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Chapter XVII of the Westminster Confession of Faith is "Of the Perseverance of the Saints." The five doctrines of grace in Reformed Theology are sometimes referred to as the acronym TULIP. The fifth doctrine (P) stands for the Perseverance of the Saints. Some feel that it would be better titled the Preservation of God which stresses the fact that it is not so much that we persevere as it is God who preserves.

The Confession begins with these words: "They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." Some refer to this as "once saved always saved." The point I have often made when having this discussion with people is that God will never unadopt those whom He has adopted.

Three people in the New Testament (in my humble opinion, since not everyone holds to this doctrine) speak clearly on this subject, Jesus, John and Paul. Jesus is always a good person to start with. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and *no one will snatch them out of My hand*. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and *no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*." (John 10:27-29) The apostle Paul speaks the following words with confidence, "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)

Many people seek to argue against this doctrine, not so much from God's word as from experience. All of us have known people who were at one time, "Christians," but are no longer. I would argue that in such cases there are two possibilities. One is that they have fallen away, but eventually will return to the faith. Many of us can point to times in our lives when, like lost sheep, we have wandered from the fold. Fortunately, the Good Shepherd in grace and love has come, found us and brought us back. But in these times of wandering we never ceased to be His sheep. The Westminster Confession addresses this first possibility. "Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein."

The other possibility is that some of these people were never truly born of the Spirit. They attended church and did the Christian things without ever being truly converted. John speaks to this in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."

On what then does our perseverance depend? "It depends not upon our free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace." (Westminster Confession) Since our

salvation is a free gift, there is nothing we can do to earn it, or to lose it.

Without this understanding of the perseverance of the saints, can there be any true assurance of our salvation? However, with it we can have the assurance of our salvation. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Romans 8:33-34) With so great a one as Christ interceding for us, do we think it is possible that we will not persevere? Paul goes on to say in Romans 8 that he is sure that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39)

All is of grace; our justification, our sanctification, our perseverance. We should never allow grace to be a license to sin, but should always respond to grace with gratitude. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Mark*

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Worship Schedule

Sunday

9:45-10:40AM Adult Sunday School

11:00AM – Worship

11:00AM – Streaming online Worship

JUNE SERMON TOPICS

In June we will be continuing our study of the book of Proverbs and the wisdom that comes from God through the writer of Proverbs.

- June 7 Proverbs 11:12-23
The Trustworthy and the Talebearer
- June 14 Proverbs 11:24-31
The Man Who Gives Freely
- June 21 Proverbs 4:10-19
A Father's Wise Instruction
- June 28 Proverbs 15:1-7
The Tongue of the Wise

May Session Minutes

WORSHIP: Mark McBride led a discussion on the upcoming worship calendar. A motion was made to open the church for worship in the sanctuary on May 17, however, the service would be held at 9:30AM to facilitate Facebook posting at 11:00AM with subsequent worship services returning to the customary 11:00AM start time and being live-streamed on Facebook and seating in alternating pews being required until further notice with the wearing of masks being optional.

NEW BUSINESS: Motion was made that children's Sunday School and the adult choir would remain adjourned until next fall, with Sunday fellowship, Women's Fellowship, adult Sunday School, and Summer Drama Camp reconvening at dates yet to be determined, and Men's Prayer Breakfast and all outside groups using church facilities to determine their own dates to reconvene.

SMALL GROUPS

Bible Study & Prayer – TBA

Monday Prayer Group – TBA

Tuesday Bible Study – TBA

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.

OUR SERVICE ONLINE

We will continue to live stream our services at our usual time, 11:00AM. You will be able to watch the service on Facebook at [facebook.com/StStephensOKC](https://www.facebook.com/StStephensOKC).



There will be no Drama Camp this summer.

Needed: When we all return together again, donations of cheese and sausage for Sunday mornings would be greatly appreciated.

MEET OUR ST. STEPHEN'S FAMILY

By Margo Whiting

This article will resume in the July newsletter.

HYMN OF the Month



Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
It is #90 in our hymnal

This hymn was selected because 2020 is the 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's birth. A hymn of praise, the all-encompassing text is meant to show the interplay between the joy given to God by His creation, and the joy we receive through this creation. The third verse is especially poignant in that it directs our attention from creation to Christ and reminds us that our joy means nothing if we do not live out of that joy in love of one another. We experience joy on many levels: we witness the joy expressed by creation, we bask in the joy of God as He delights in us, and we experience our own joy as we reflect on all God has done for us and through us. Some maintain the criticism that the hymn is "too universalist," despite the hymn being of praise from all of creation. Hymnologist Albert Bailey writes, within Van Dyke's text, "creation itself cannot conceal its joy, and that joy is appreciated by God the center of it all; likewise, all nature fills us with joy, caused fundamentally by our recognition of God as the giver" and describes the hymn as an "intricate interweaving of fact and metaphor" (*The Gospel in Hymns*, 554).

The text of "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" was written by Henry Van Dyke. Van Dyke was born in 1852. He graduated from Princeton University in 1873 and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1877. From 1899-1923 he was an English professor at Princeton. He also concurrently served on the faculty at the University of Paris in 1908-1909. President Wilson named him Minister to the Netherlands and Luxembourg in 1913. He chaired the committee that wrote the first printed Presbyterian liturgy, *The Book of Common Worship* (1906). Among his popular writings are the two Christmas stories *The Other Wise Man* (1896) and *The First Christmas Tree* (1897). Various religious themes of his work are also expressed in his poetry, hymns and the essays collected in *Little Rivers* (1895) and *Fisherman's Luck* (1899). He wrote the lyrics to the popular hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, We

Adore Thee" (1907), sung to the tune of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." He compiled several short stories in *The Blue Flower* named after a story by Novalis in 1902. He also contributed a chapter to the collaborative novel, *The Whole Family* (1908). He died in 1933.

"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" is set to music by Ludwig van Beethoven, specifically the "Ode to Joy" theme from the fourth movement of his *Symphony No. 9 in D minor*. One of the most famous composers in the classical music canon, Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany, in December of 1770 into a lineage of musicians. His grandfather, Ludwig, was a kapellmeister (chapel master, modern day music director), the most sought-after position by musicians at the time. His father, Johann, was a singer in the court of the Archbishop of Cologne. Beethoven began his musical studies in Bonn with the city's famous composer, Neefe. He moved to Vienna at the age of 21, having surpassed Neefe's abilities. While in Vienna, Beethoven became known as a virtuoso pianist and eventually gained patronage from Prince Lichnowky for compositions. Around 1801, Beethoven began to lose his hearing. He wrote a letter to his brothers in 1802 confessing this loss, and thoughts of suicide. This letter, known as the Heiligenstadt Testament, was never sent. He died in 1827 in Vienna, Austria. Beethoven's oeuvre includes nine symphonies, one opera, multiple masses, incidental music, and countless chamber and piano compositions.

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

"Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up
enthusiasm wrinkles the soul." *Samuel Ullman*

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"Always laugh when you can. It is cheap
medicine." *Lord Byron*

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"Solutions are not found by pointing fingers; they
are reached by extending hands." *Aysha Taryam*

Prescription Drugs

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

CHURCH OFFICERS

Elders

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

Class of 2022

Robert Buswell	426-7429	Clerk/Stewardship & Memorials
Wendy Smith	850-6564	Fellowship

Deacons

Class of 2020

Christa Charlie	834-7031	Flowers
Nancy Spradling	206-5828	Ushers/Greeters

Class of 2021

Michael Bassett	942-2074	Church Work Days
Erin Von Tungeln	410-5901	Clerk

Class of 2022

Robin Page	514-8240	Missions
Keith Seidemann	474-5454	Transportation

WITNESS DEADLINE

June 22 is the deadline to submit articles for the *July 2020 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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JUNE Birthdays

2	Anna Welte
3	Ashley McCormick
5	Miss Butch Derrick
11	Jaquelyn Kuhn
13	Kaleb Benda
19	Jon Powell
19	Dan Wilson
21	Karin Seidemann
30	Frank Miranda

JUNE Anniversaries

6	Kent & Jean Larason
10	Keith & Karin Seidemann
23	Glenn & Valerie Pulley
30	Dave & Judi Dawson

***If we have missed your birthday or anniversary, please contact the church office.*

Special Dates

Trinity Sunday, *June 7*

Flag Day, *June 14*

First day of summer, *June 20*

Father's Day, *June 21*

"No man stands taller than when he stoops to help a child." *Abraham Lincoln*

