

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PRESBYTERIAN CONNECTION

MARCH, APRIL 2021

GREETINGS,

My last newsletter article was a personal lament formed from observing a litany of cultural and religious breakdowns. These breakdowns dominate our landscape currently. At the heart of ministry is a deep desire to see ongoing evidence of God's Kingdom taking root in God's people and the world around us. When this ideal is not only stalled but headed in reverse, lament and sorrow is my only response.

This article moves me in a different direction. Admitting to the reality that darkness is at present exposing the deep rooted sinfulness of both the church and American culture is important. Coming to grips with my personal failures as a minister within this reality is likewise healthy; health that is unless I refuse to move from sorrow and lament and fail to find hope within God's grace, mercy, and steadfast love.

But it is also important to personal wellbeing to understand the reasons we find ourselves in such breakdowns and why clinging to hope has become so difficult. Let me try to explain.

It is important to understand how we are wired as human beings. Life for each of us is composed of one's personal identity that is shaped by one's community, one's family and friendships, and of one's faith. No one's identity is developed in a vacuum. The influences that shape us, deeply bind us to our place, our time, and our tribe at multiple levels. Outside influences play in the background of our subconscious. They are so powerful that they often impair our ability to be logical, reasonable, and knowledgeable.

The holistic society (even with its warts and failings) of the past upheld by broad perspectives, has been replaced with a fragmented society now. A holistic culture views life from

a macro or large picture perspective. A fragmented culture is lived in a micro or narrow perspective. As with all life, the bigger the picture that we frame things in, the more healthy the existence. A prime example is found in those (Micros) who view and build their lives on close alliance to narrow or selective groups of scripture and those (Macros) who see and build their lives on the entire story of the Bible. Micro Christians are legalists and toxic. Macro Christians are healers and faith ambassadors.

In a fragmented society individuals pick and choose which specific fragmentation they wish to associate with. Once associated, people then begin to align themselves with others within that particular community. Once aligned, one chooses to align with the specific voices, practices, beliefs. This fragmented culture determines right and wrong, good and bad, as well as worldviews, virtues, moral standards, religious orientation for its particular group.

The standards associated with the group may be completely wrong or evil, but as seen as right to those within the group. Take for instance the strange practices of cults that have dotted our history. Members never thought that sexual exploitation or even drinking the Kool-Aid was strange. Think about the Confederacy and its treatment of blacks. No one thought it anything but normal and right; normal and right to the point that a war was fought over it.

This fragmented narrative is something I call "Prevailing Faith Mindset" or PFM. It is not just a system of thought and behavior, but also a foundation for personal
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(*Con't from Page 1*) value and acceptance. To stray from a PFM is to risk rejection by those who previously guaranteed one's entire self-worth. As a result, to persuade someone of something outside of their PFM is nearly impossible. To move an individual from a PFM means that the individual must not only be open to new ideas, but must also be willing to change identities, group affiliations, and most importantly, risk alienation from the PFM's support system offering security and identity. It also requires an admission of being wrong and living wrong. This is a large hurdle to overcome.

To lose association with what I believe to be my identity built on these platforms is a scary thing. To risk losing the approval of what I accept as my community, to risk damage to my friendships and family ties, or to admit that what I hold as true, right and acceptable to God; is to self-create an identity crisis. Unless I can be assured that there exists a better alternative to what currently affirms my importance, I am unwilling to listen to anything no matter how rational or true. Instead I will normally double down on all the markers that I currently believe to define me. I will choose to only be informed by certain news channels. I will only trust certain sources. I only follow certain opinionists, I will only associate with certain circles or friends. And I will convince myself that my current spiritual platform is the only acceptable one with God.

The beginning step in solving our dilemma is in reorienting ourselves back to holistic cultures, beliefs, and programs. This is harder than you might think. For example, look at the recent hearings on the 2nd impeachment trial and see the response to all those Republicans voting conscience over party loyalty. They have been censored and now face recriminations from within their own group moving forward. Look at Southerners demanding social justice for blacks and minorities. They have been bullied, intimidated and even threatened by those still holding to a fragmented South. Think of Christians who cannot in good conscience align with their denomination or association's beliefs and practices. They face censure, excommunication, shaming, or even martyrdom. But in all of these cases it is only trading in the Micro for the Macro and stepping out from under the PFM associated with fragmented culture that results in freedom and health for the individual and betterment of the whole.

It is acceptable to be a Democrat or Republican if one admits that these are fragmented groups that demand loyalty and allegiance at the expense of truth and integrity. It is acceptable to be politically affiliated if one sees their allegiance to the Kingdom of God as primary over lesser fragmentations.

It is acceptable to be patriotic, have a love for country, and covet and pray for God's blessing. One can observe all the patriotic signposts if one admits that America has no special standing in God's eyes over other nation. It is acceptable to love one's country provided we offer our pledge of allegiance and passionate devotion to the One and Only King of all Kings as citizens of another Kingdom not of this world.

It is fine to be Presbyterian or Baptist or Evangelical if one admits that these are fragmented cultures of faith. It is acceptable to be denominationalized if one sees their allegiance to follow Christ and his commands as more important than one's devotion to, and compliance with lesser fragmented rules of good standing.

It is acceptable to view oneself as white if one agrees that all people regardless of skin color, nationality, economic status, educational status, celebrity status, and neighborhood or community status share life equally as humans created in the image of God.

If we are able to take the necessary step back to a broader more holistic cultural affiliation, void of the PFMs of our little fragmented cultural group, we begin to experience the world as God intended. A world free from tribalism, racism, culturalism, sexism, and believeism is God's design. We become closer aligned with the example of Jesus, who came to break down divisions and walls, destroy isolating practices of faith, and render meaningless the endless layers of class and status. Meals with tax collectors, contact with adulterers, close proximity to lepers, personal exchanges with Samaritans, and personal associations with poor, needy, and no-names all show us the way to life in a healthy sense. This is holistic living. This is Christ's call to us in this season of Lent.

Blessings,
Pastor Tom

STATISTICS FOR JANUARY, FEBRUARY

Attendance

January 3	20
January 10	22
January 17	26
January 24	26
January 31	
February 7	
February 14	20
February 21	26
February 28	26

Financial

Budgeted expenses/month	
	\$ 12,635.00
January contributions	
	\$ 8,025.00
February contributions	
	\$ 14,398.00

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT OF THE
CHURCH,
COMMUNITY,
AND THE
WORLD.

Thank You

First Presbyterian Church

I would like to thank you all for packing OCC shoe boxes and bringing them to our drop off site. The packing numbers are in and I thought I would share with you all.

Worldwide total—9,113,853
US Total—7,809,410
Built online—415,403

Thanks again, Michelle Lulfs

Dear Church family,

Thank you for the warm and thoughtful gift you sent me. It was great to get something to break up the studying. I hope you all have a warm winter.

Thank you,
Andrew Birkhold



The Church Directory is currently being updated. If you have any changes or corrections to your address or phone number, please let the church office know by Tuesday, March 9.

New Directories will be available March 14. If you would like one sent to your home please email, fpcnapoleon@gmail.com, or call the church office, 419-592-7736.

BIRTHDAYS!

MARCH

4 Sherry Joseph
6 Julie Polker
10 Glenna Pool
23 Nancy Johnston

APRIL

5 Alex Birkhold
Emily Birkhold
Lois Stange
6 Matthew Hall
12 Sarah Luzny
19 Brenda Stough
28 Frank Brown
29 John Yarnell
Connie Cobb



IN OUR PRAYERS

TOLEDO HOSPITAL: Dan Badenhop

VANCREST HEALTH CARE: Ann Spieth

ALPINE VILLAGE: Sherry Joseph, Connie Cobb

FULTON MANOR: Kathy Rubinstein, Frank Brown

HOME: Bob Brubaker, Mike Hershberger, April Brown,
Sandy Johnson, Margaret Whitman, Charlie Leader



Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family and friends of Delores McColley who died Sunday, January 24, 2021, at her home. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

The church office was recently notified of the death of Pastor William Fogg on Friday, February 12, 2021. Pastor Fogg was the minister of FPC from 1968-1978. Please keep his family in your prayers.

Thank you for all the prayers and thoughts during the past three months. I'm back home but no visitors yet—COVID! Many cards, notes and well wishes from so many. Enjoyed phone calls. So much going on in our church—hopefully we will get back to NORMAL soon.

Love, Sandy Johnson

Thank you to my church Families for all the prayers, cards, and phone calls.

Connie Cobb

PRAYER WARRIORS

PLEASE CONTACT THE CHURCH OFFICE WITH YOUR PRAYER REQUEST.. PRAYER REQUESTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL. NAMES WILL BE PUT ON THE CHURCH PRAYER LIST ONLY IF REQUESTED.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

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TOM POLKER, PASTOR

10:00 a.m. Worship In-person or Live Online

