

THEOLOGY | CRITIQUE | REVIEW | ESSAY | CULTURE

salt&light

Winter Edition 2015

Advent 2015

US FREE CANADA \$2.50



a publication
of
Riverwood
Presbyterian Church
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

www.riverwoodchurch.org

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A PUBLICATION OF
RIVERWOOD
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

501 Rice Valley Road North
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35406

Member church of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
www.riverwoodchurch.org

Cover: Painting: "The rest on the flight into Egypt" (National Gallery of Art) by Gerard David, 1510. Photo: May Day March In Istanbul 2015, from www.news.cn

FROM THE EDITOR

As the year changes from Fall to Winter, we have much on our minds: jobs, school, family, and football. The beat and pace of life in Tuscaloosa and Riverwood goes on. In November, we think of the holiday season. As Christians, we think of Advent. We celebrate Advent in 2015 keeping an eye on the news. There is not much to celebrate there, certainly not much peace. The Middle East is aflame with war. Terrorists strike Europe in Paris and the United States in California. But in the midst of chaos, Advent comes again; and so we consider the coming of the Lord, that event that changed everything.

In our lead article, Jeff Pate looks at Advent in our chaotic world when he writes about "The Promise of His Coming." He compares our world with the world of the prophet Micah, who gives the promise of the Savior in another very dark time. Read it and be encouraged by the promises of our Lord.

Dr. Bob Thornton takes on the fascinating subject of God and our concept of time. In his article "Of God and Time", he speaks to the idea of God outside of time entering time for the astonishing purpose of our redemption.

Our third article is unique. The Riverwood Classical School Rhetoric class was asked to present an assignment as an article in *Salt & Light* about "Young Christians in Our Culture." Their subjects touch on social media, celebrities, ballet, gender changes, personal sin, and self-harm. Gracen Miller, Olivia Staggs, Brianna Morgan and Matthew Haynes speak to these issues

Riverwood has been a missions-minded church since it was founded. Elder Gene Martin oversees and organizes our mission emphasis and he has contacted two of our missionaries who have recently visited Riverwood, Chuck Tartar and Beth Nicholson Almeida, for articles to update us on their work. Chuck speaks of their work in Ireland, building the kingdom one personal interaction at a time in "For Such a Time as This." Beth speaks of Bible translation and introduces us to two people whose life has been changed by having the Bible in their own language in her beautiful article, "Meet the Reasons."

My article, "Tis the Season" considers how Christians celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas with a different ethos than the culture. Drawing upon memory and pre-Christian attitudes, I try to define the differences Christianity has made in the holidays.

Dr. Leon Walker's life has been an inspiration to this church – literally for generations. Peggy Drinkard has given us a beautiful and inspiring tribute to Leon in the simply titled "One Good Man." Be sure and read it.

Our Finale piece is a portion of W. H. Auden's *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*. It is a beautiful meditation on the person of Christ.



The Promise of His Coming

The Meaning of Advent in a Chaotic World

By Jeff Pate

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.

Micah 7:8

Among the images filed away among my childhood memories, one of the most intense is a painting of a clown that hung in my bedroom. His face was painted and colorful but he wore a frown and large tears hung on his eyelids. In spite of his clear vocational choice to be a means of making people laugh, this clown brought me little joy. At night when the only light in my room came from the nearby streetlight filtering through the curtains, the painting would come to life in my imagination and it haunted me. It looked at me. He looked at me. No matter how dark I tried to make the room, I could always see him seeing me. I knew the truth and when I complained to my parents they would remind me, “It is only a painting.” But for some reason, objective truth often tends to lose its persuasiveness in the dark. So I would lay there in my bed, afraid to look at *The Ever-Present Starer* but also terrified to look away. The only options that I found to survive were to either close my eyes and pretend that the clown wasn’t there, or turn on the light and prove to myself that it was still only a painting.

With each day’s news cycle comes fresh accounts of suffering, violence, and abuse in this world. As my screens (TV, laptop, smartphone) are filled with images of children washed up on beaches, rivers of refugees pouring through the countryside or bloodied victims of the latest terrorist bombing, the temptation to despair and fear is not easily eluded. The pictures of pain stare back at me, challenging me to either respond with compassion, anger or indifference. Like that little boy lying in his bed, I am tempted to close my eyes and pretend that it is all just a bad trick of the mind and wish it away. Opting for delusion over reality is the approach many people in our nation, Christians included, have chosen. During a season our society associates with cheer and holiday joy, we close our eyes to the images because they are too troubling or too inconvenient to consider as “visions of sugarplums dance in our heads.”

Preaching through the book of Micah during the Advent season has taught me more than I anticipated. When we think of Advent, we instinctively imagine lights, parties, sweets and music. Our neighborhoods are lined with luminaries and our shopping is accompanied with the loop of Johnny Mathis singing *Sleigh Ride* and *Winter Wonderland*. But the time leading up to the birth of our Savior with the

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message of *advent* reverberating among God's people was not an era of winter wonder or ring-ting-tingling sleigh bells. It was a period of darkness and confusion, sorrow and longing. Through the prophet Micah, God announced, "that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established" to people who were toiling in the valley of despair. He proclaimed that the "daughter of Zion...shall beat in pieces many peoples" to His covenant people who lived under the threat of annihilation. Micah prophesied that the city of Bethlehem would provide a ruler for Israel to people who lived under the rule of immoral leaders. The message of God's coming, his advent, was originally announced with bullhorn authority into the chaos of a desperately wicked world. The depictions of the guilt and coming judgment of God's people did not eradicate the need for the message of a coming Savior but corroborated it. The promises of God's advent sustained the faithful through the dark and uncertain centuries that followed.

So the chaos we see in the world should not deter us this Advent season any more than the wickedness in Micah's day deterred him. In fact, the images I see testify to the effects of the fall and the want of salvation. It is a world that needs Christ to come in mercy and grace before he comes again in glory and judgment. How will that happen since he has already ascended and will not return until the Day of

Judgment? He "comes" to the lost and suffering in the world today through his ambassadors, his Church.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

How do we respond to a wicked and anger-filled world? We respond as ambassadors for Christ who implore others on His behalf. When God spoke through Micah, he warned his people of impending judgment for their sin but also promised salvation for a remnant. God came in a *word of salvation and promise* through Micah before he came in judgment by means of an Assyrian army. Christ now comes in the *word of salvation and promise* through his church before he comes in judgment in his return. This should be a guiding principle in everything we do as the people of God.

Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest who was executed in 1945 for his resistance to Adolf Hitler, wrote about the contrast between the message of Christ's coming and the "space" into which it is announced.

Of God and Time

By Robert Thornton

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...
Galatians 4:4

Well, it's the season again. Christmas is just around the corner. It's a time of celebration. It's a time for family get-togethers. It's a time for opening presents and exchanging cards. Hmm, I've just noted that the operative word in the above paragraph is "time". I guess this kind of begs the question: what is time? Wait a minute, you say. Just look at your watch or calendar if you want to know the answer to that question. And I'd say, yeah, you've got a point.

I'll pose another related question then: Is God outside of time?

I did a little research and found some interesting things. To begin with, the ancient Greeks believed that God is timeless. Articulated by the likes of Plato, they said that God has no past and no future. This implies that God exists outside of time. It appears that Augustine also believed this Greek concept of God.

An illustration at this point might help. Suppose I'm in a raft going along a stretch of a slow meandering river. I pass a log cabin, rustic and weathered. Further down I see a majestic oak, branches spread to the sky. Finally, after going around a bend I come upon a herd of deer drinking at a small tributary. Now, I experience each one after the other. As soon as I pass one scene it becomes the past. The current scene is the present. And, the upcoming scene is the future.

Next, suppose I'm in a helicopter hovering above the same stretch of river. From that vantage point I can simultaneously see the cabin, oak and deer. As long as the helicopter maintains its hover I see the entire stretch of river at once. In a sense, I can see the past, present and future of the river's course all at once. This hovering helicopter scene is the concept of timelessness. In it God sees the past, present, and future all at once.

Well, what does Scripture say? There are many verses that refer to God's relation to time with phrases such as: "the Ancient of Days", "the everlasting God", "from everlasting to everlasting", and "of His Kingdom there will be no end". The above phrases from various verses, I can argue, mean unending and not necessarily timeless or outside of time.

But, there are verses that seem to indicate God exists outside of time. Two of them contain the phrase "before the ages began" in the ESV (2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2). Are these verses indicating that God is operating outside of time? The footnote in my Bible reads the following regarding 2 Timothy 1:9: "Made in eternity past, God's plan for salvation was revealed at the incarnation of Christ." The King James Version renders the phrase in Titus 1:2 as, "before the world began". In the New American Standard Bible its: "long ages ago". In one reference I found it stated that the phrase could be rendered as: "before the times of the ages."

It certainly looks as if these two verses are not stating that God is operating outside of time.

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Let's look at another verse. Perhaps one that's more familiar. 2 Peter 3:8 says, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Surely, this calls to mind that hovering helicopter view, God looking down on us past, present, and future in one fell swoop. Or does it? The next verse gives a hint. 2 Peter 3:9 says: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

So, 2 Peter 3:8 refers to God's extraordinary patience toward us, His called people, and His extraordinary capability--able to carry out in one day what we would think would take a thousand years. Besides, if God is outside of time, why would He need to be patient with us? Remember, the helicopter view means He's seeing past, present, and future simultaneously.

Well, are there verses that definitely say that God operates in time? I think so. And, it involves the Christmas season. In John Chapter One the Word says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Later, it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." In Galatians 4:4 it says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,..." And, in 1 Timothy 2:5 we have, "For there is one God, and there is

one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,...."

Each of these passages confirms unequivocally that God entered into space and time as the man Jesus Christ. God the Son did not hovering above, but floated along the river with us. And, as stated in Hebrews 4:15b, "...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." And, not only that, He suffered and died on the cross and rose again, ransoming us from sin and death. We are saved from eternal damnation by His atoning work. Even now, He sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

This is a wonderful thing. Christian apologist and philosopher, William Lane Craig has said in an interview, "...it is God's condescension that He would quit eternal timeless perfection to enter in and sustain a relationship with us out of His love for us."

At this time of Christmas cheer I'm reminded of Job's statement: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth (Job 19:25)." And, I am so thankful that my Redeemer entered time and space for my salvation because of His love for me. How about you?

Merry Christmas, everyone!

Dr. Robert Thornton is an elder at Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact him at rthorn3423@comcast.net.

(The Bible) confirms unequivocally that God entered into space and time as the man Jesus Christ

Young Christians in Our Culture

By the Riverwood Classical School Rhetoric Class

Classical education aims to teach students to view and consider everything that comes before the student through God's word. Additionally, classical education encourages students to consider the non-Christian view of topics in order to anticipate the views and arguments that they will be confronted with in the world. These skills are taught during the upper school years in classes specifically dedicated to Logic and Rhetoric. The Logic class teaches the middle school-aged student to formulate arguments and to detect flaws in arguments. The Rhetoric class teaches the high school-aged student to express his or her argument in a clear and persuasive manner. Following are brief examples of topics about which the Riverwood Classical Rhetoric class has been thinking and speaking.

Being a Teen-Aged Christian in the World

by Gracen Miller

I am a teenaged Christian trying to live out my faith surrounded by our modern day culture. I believe that a large portion of young Christians have a difficult time applying what they know about their faith to the modern culture that constantly surrounds them, especially in today's times. I think that it is hard for a Christian of any age to be a part of such a seemingly pagan culture, but it is especially difficult for a teen.

In my personal life I look at social media, news articles, and just the world in general, and I feel conflicted. In my education and home life I am being taught to lead a life that is glorifying to God in everything that I do. I look at the outside world, though, and I see world leaders, celebrities, and other people sending ungodly messages out to the people who look up to them, whether it be as a role model or as an authority figure. Knowing how impressionable young Christians are, the fact that there are so many seemingly unbelievers in places of power is concerning.

As I grow older, form my thoughts, and expand my knowledge, both spiritually and earthly, Romans 12:2 is always reminding me, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by the testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." This passage is very comforting to me. I have never been one to just follow the trends or what those around me are doing. When I have tried to force myself into whatever the current trend was, I never felt right doing so. This has caused me to feel like an outcast at times, and has led to feeling lonely and sorry for myself. Romans 12:2 reminds me, though, that I am specifically called as a Christian not to conform to this world, and I will always have a place with Christ, even when I feel like I do not fit in on this earth.

Sharing Interests with Unbelievers

by Olivia Staggs

Dealing with unbelief in everyday activities is something all Christians do in their daily lives. In my life it often happens in the context of ballet. I love my teacher and everyone that I take ballet with. However, I find that I do have to be cautious, especially when doing something that I get wound up in, like ballet. When someone with authority tells me that only I can make myself better, my instinct is to listen.

As a Christian, though, I have to remember it is all God strengthening me and helping me to improve. According to the Bible we are to “praise His name with dancing.” Glorifying God should be the reason for dancing, not impressing people or fitting in.

Thankfully, one of my ballet classes is at RCS, so I do have a teacher who consistently leads me to dance for the Lord. She prays with my classmates and me before class and keeps us thinking about glorifying Him throughout our class. I often pray that I will focus on Christ and not get taken in by the worldliness of dance, since I know I can’t hold to my faith on my own, but having a teacher who keeps my perspective godly in one class really helps in all of my classes. Despite the fact that many dance studios encourage a student to think about doing the best for herself so that she can impress others (mostly so the studio gets more business), being around other Christian dancers helps me to remember to dance for God’s glory, not my own.

Dealing with Topics That Are Controversial to the World

by Brianna Morgan

In Deuteronomy 22:5. Moses says, “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” God made man and woman, and when he was finished he said they were very good. Mark 10:6 also says, “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.” When God created man he had an order and purpose for doing it that way. When we, His creatures, tamper with God’s order in the world we are basically saying what God did is not important. Even though God created each of us male and female, some people claim to be a man trapped in a woman’s body or vice versa. In order to “correct” the way they were created people change the way they act and look. No matter which sex someone tries to convey himself or herself to be, though, a person cannot change his or her DNA, given by God. Physically a person is either male or female, as God created him or her.

Trying to tell others we are something that we are not is a sin in itself; lying is a sin, whether about one’s sex or anything else. People who identify themselves as someone of the opposite sex can take hormones and have surgery to look like something they aren’t, but God knows that is not how He made them. God made us in his image to deal with the circumstances that He has given us, and we are not to pervert that. It is unbiblical to change ourselves from what God made.

Even though I think this particular act is paganistic, as was likely the putting on of a man's garment or woman's cloak in Deuteronomy, it is not my place to judge others since I do not have God's authority. However, as Christians we are called to help each other realize our sins. Furthermore we are also called to love and pray for each other, especially when we know others are struggling. As Christians we all need to encourage each other, including transsexuals, to repent and go to God when we stumble. And when we repent and try to do better and walk on in path of Christ, God has mercy and grace on us. The fact that we are such a fallen and disobedient people and God still has immeasurable love for us is a really beautiful and encouraging thing.

Dealing with pop culture and the unbelieving culture that refuses to assign a right or wrong to anything is very difficult as a teenager. I suspect it is even more difficult now than it was "back in the day" because the internet and social media put so many ungodly ideas right at our fingertips, allowing more temptations to reach us. I'm not saying my parents or grandparents didn't have temptations; I just think it is easier to succumb to them now, with so many of them around us and there being so little that the world says is wrong. As a Christian, I know from Scripture that transsexuals sin by claiming to be transsexual and desiring to change the way God made them, but I also know that we all sin. And as a Christians, I know from Scripture that we need to love and pray for them and to encourage them to repent and change their ways. Although we can't control what someone thinks or the way someone believes something should be, we as Christians should point them in the right direction, toward Christ, with love and biblical wisdom.

Dealing with Sin in Ourselves

by Matthew Haynes

Leviticus 19:28 states, "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord." In making this statement the Lord was instructing His people, the Israelites, to set themselves apart by acting differently than the pagan Canaanites. Many parents use this verse to persuade their children against getting tattoos, but for me it leads to a completely different subject altogether: self harm.

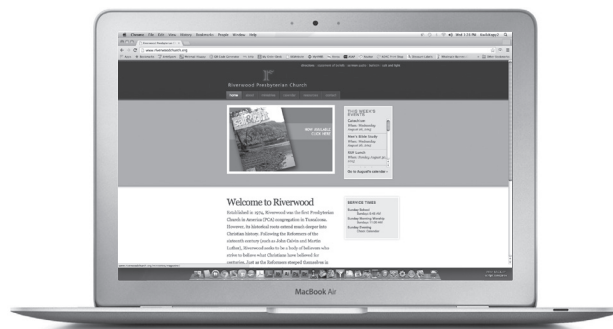
Many people think of Leviticus as just an accumulation of ceremonial rules to follow, and it is, but this rule in particular stands out as applicable to me. Even though it is against God's Law, and in general not a good thing to do, even I have inflicted harm on myself. If you know me personally, then this might reveal to you that this issue is a lot more common than most people think.

People harm themselves for many different reasons, but none are Godly reasons. Some do it to clear their heads with the release of endorphins from the pain. Some do it to punish themselves, not feeling "worthy" or "good enough." Some do it to feel in control. There is no one true reason for self harm, and in God's eyes there are no reasons at all. 1 Peter 5:7 instructs, "Humble yourselves, .

. . casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” If we truly cast our anxieties on God, there is no need to “clear our heads.” Luke 12:6-7 says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” If even the hairs of our heads are numbered by God, how can we be unworthy or not good enough? Finally, Proverbs 19:21 states, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.” No matter how we try to control our lives, only God is in control. Whatever “reason” people claim to inflict self harm, there is no real reason in the sight of God.

Self harm may be a psychological issue that can be cured or stopped with help, but, if you’re a Christian, there is no reason to resort to it in the first place. We shouldn’t release through self harm, destroying our bodies as pagans once did and still do. Self harm can destroy a person inside and out, which from a Christian and even a simply moral perspective is terrible. Scripture shows that that God bears the anxieties and pains of His people, providing them happiness in Him in this life and the next. His people have worth to Him, and everything is in His control. As difficult as it is for us as sinners to believe, we are admonished in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

*Riverwood Classical School is a ministry of Riverwood Presbyterian Church.
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MISSION REPORT:

For Such A Time Like This

But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. Acts 12:24

By Chuck Tarter

We are people of the Word. We have a hope filled future rooted deep in the soil of our souls by a gospel-seeded promise which states that if we are rightly related to the most Powerful, Influential Person in the Universe to know, we WILL pass from death into eternal life. Wow! It is, to quote Stevie Wonder, “Signed, Sealed and Delivered.” Shouldn’t that top the charts as the best news going?

Martin Luther, in what would’ve been posted immediately on Twitter in our day, commented to a watching world in the 16th Century about the impact he had on the Protestant Reformation. Luther said, “I did nothing. The Word did it all.” Where I live the people are Word-deficit, and this Biblical poverty trap has been set for a long time by the enemies of the Church.

I suspect that this is true in America as well because we are all suffering from spiritual drought conditions in the West. We could all use a torrential downpour of fresh-faith power from on high so that we don’t lose another generation to unbelief. There have been two ‘Great Awakenings’ in the history of America, the last one was at the end of the 19th century. If one were to go to any small town or city in the Southern states where the revival of the Church occurred, you will find that there are almost always two churches present: a Methodist and a Baptist church. These churches were birthed with true, unmistakable conversion growth as

circuit riders on horseback would bring the Word of God to these places and hold meetings where the Holy Spirit would sovereignly move upon the hearts of men, women and children. To amazement and awe, there would be a great harvest of souls akin to what we read about in the book of Acts.

Today there seems to be little interest about the need for renewal of the Church in the West; in a Biblical way that is. Likewise, we find the same to be true here in Ireland and Europe. On the whole the talk is more centered on what we need to do or not do and what the government needs to do or not do in order to make our lives safer, wealthier and more independent. Rather than encouraging the church to have a curious, childlike expectancy about what our great Sovereign is going to do next to bring about supernatural, incomparable jaw-dropping awe of His glory, we are left hanging in the balance between fear and ingrowth as to why things are as they are. So we wonder, will real, eternal change ever come?

If there is a regular cycle of renewal like the regular tidal movements I can observe at Greystones in the Irish Sea, only a twenty minute walk from my house, where we are in the cycle of a present renewal is not fully clear. Why is that? Unlike the law of gravity pulling on the tides to go out and come back because of the moon’s relationship with earth, there is no such law which binds God to renew His people.

we are all suffering from spiritual drought conditions in the West and could all use a torrential downpour of fresh-faith power from on high so that we don't lose another generation to unbelief

As Jesus told Nicodemus, “*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*” John 3:8

What we do know from God's word is that there are times for corporate repentance in the body life of the Church as a precondition leading to times of great refreshment and vitality of faith. Like an untapped water supply suddenly and without warning these waters of renewal break forth and flow. Richard Lovelace points out in his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life* how these cycles operate, illustrated in the great movements of God in the Bible and those found in the Reformation, the First and Second Great Awakening, etc. All were characterized by a preceding spiritual drought as the culture becomes infested with a stiff-necked people stubbornly committed to idolatrous independence from God. This can last for a long time in human terms: the children of Israel in captivity for four hundred years, the Dark Ages, etc.

The good news of the gospel is that our heavenly Father is the same sovereign from first to last. It is He who engineered, orchestrated and directed every detailed event in the history of Israel from her covenant given through Moses to possess the land of Canaan to her eventual deportation and humiliation by foreign Kings. Every time, every time and without fail when the people of Israel fell it was because of their dependency on idols

coupled with a failure to listen to the Word of God given through the Law and the prophets.

We can see a clear example of this in the life of King Manasseh found in 2 Chron. 33:9-13, “*Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the Lord brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains and took him to Babylon. When he was in distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.*”

Lovelace illustrates an early historical departure from **dependency** on God (modeled by Moses and Joshua's leadership) to **independent** living (modeled on the foreign nations i.e. the World, the Flesh and the Devil). He cites the example found in the Book of Judges where the author records in chapter two these words, “*After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They*

forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths."

There was a major Pew research poll published Nov 3, 2015 by Reuters which showed what has been trending for some time was that: "Americans are becoming less religious, judging by such markers as church attendance, prayer and belief in God, and the trend is more pronounced among young adults, according to a poll released on Tuesday. The share of U.S. adults who say they believe in God, while still high compared with other advanced industrial countries, slipped to 89 percent in 2014 from 92 percent in 2007, according to the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study. The proportion of Americans who say they are "absolutely certain" God exists fell even more, to 63 percent in 2014 from 71 percent in 2007. The percentage of Americans who pray every day, attend religious services regularly and consider religion important in their lives are down by small, but statistically significant measures, the survey found. The trend is most pronounced among young adults, with only half of those born from 1990 to 1996 absolutely certain of their belief in God, compared to 71 percent of the "silent generation," or those born from 1928 to 1945. Younger people also are less likely to pray daily, at 39 percent, compared to "silent

generation" adults at 67 percent. Young adults are also much less likely to attend religious services, the survey found."

I have been personally blessed more and more by the Word of God than at any other time in my life. After my call as a missionary way back in 1995 (seems like yesterday) to Ireland it was true then and it's still true today that His Word keeps me from being chewed up and spat out by the Enemy. It is through His Word that the Spirit regularly convicts me of my great need for a righteousness not my own. My hungry flesh craves another kind of righteousness, one that is based on independence alone. It is in fact addicted to this independence by trying harder to figure out life on its own terms and by its own schemes.

You cannot get past the clarion call of Jesus' command to hear and obey His demand on us to give a perfect, holy, loving response to God, our neighbor and ourselves as anything other than a call to dependency. Who can do this? Only those who've been given righteousness by faith (Romans 1:17) can be delivered from the curse of living independently minded, a living hell. The world values and lifts up independence as the highest ideal. It despises dependence on Jesus, and it teaches us early on to hate dependency.

The next most significant contributor to my spiritual life having any vitality is down to

Today there seems to be little interest about the need for renewal of the Church in the West in a Biblical way... and we find the same to be true here in Ireland and Europe

Only those who've been given righteousness by faith can be delivered from the curse of living independently minded, a living hell.

having a mentor/discipler. He has regularly and often preached, shouted to my conscience of my need for Jesus plus nothing else: not a home, not a loving wife and obedient children (that one would be nice though!), not a better retirement package. He has regularly encouraged me to hear the truth about myself, others and God; all with one unifying theme: Chuck, you're a recovering idolater who needs to be freshly convicted of his need 'to lean on nothing else but Jesus' blood and righteousness'.

The Word describes something altogether different in my NOT so humble opinion that what the world promotes. What is clear from John's gospel is that "We can do NOTHING apart from Him." We were made for DEPENDENCY and we live enslaved to worry, anxiety, frustration and boredom when we act like the world acts: Independent-minded, CEO-wannabe's, and Chief-Shepherds, who think they have some wisdom to lean on when Proverbs 3:5-6 tells a completely different story altogether.

Church, do not underestimate the Enemy's ability to terrorize you. He loves to seek to paralyze and wound your souls. He loves nothing more than to see the flock scattered by believing his one big lie: you need to change your circumstances first and then wait to have a change of heart because then and only then will you be happy.' He loves to use the worldly pressure that we would be more successful if the kingdom were run like a corporation where we hire talented people, we develop the best plan possible, and we work the plan to measured

results. In the upside-down Kingdom of Jesus it is just the opposite: He uses weak people, who are regularly confessing that they don't know what's best (Proverbs 3:5-6) and need supernatural power and help to love their lost neighbor who has grown resistant to the gospel because they see themselves as the weakest-link to renewal. Jesus-followers regularly ask for fresh repentance from idolatrous glory-seeking because they know how spiritually weak they are.

Would you like to be renewed in your faith? I suspect the answer is yes. Maybe no one has asked you. If you want to have more curious expectancy about His genius plan for your life, more joy, more awareness of His leading and direction, and more, well, more of life in abundance, then all you need do is confess how much you need to be freshly overhauled of having believed that life is up to you to manage mainly. Confess that you love your plans, your independence, more than you love His plan for you to live as a dependent. Nothing could be easier. Nothing is harder.

Everything in us screams that this is no way out of our unbelief: confess and wait for His perfectly timed response. Remember, He's the Sovereign. He will heal you of your failure to depend on Him as His law demands. He will bless you with His presence. It may last only for a short while coming into your awareness when you least expected it. Then we'll need to confess again how much we need His Spirit to bring grace to our prodigal hearts and to deliver us from having been snookered AGAIN into

MISSION REPORT:

Meet The Reasons

Bible Translation is So Important

By Beth Nicolson Almeida

On Thanksgiving, what will I be thanking God for? One of the biggest things is Riverwood. You have partnered with me and Wycliffe Bible Translators for more years than I can count. Together we have impacted countless lives. I have worked in many roles in the organization but all had the focus of making sure all have access to God's Word.

When I joined Wycliffe, we estimated that getting access to God's Word to every language would be accomplished by the year 2150. But new strategies and God expanding the number of those involved has seen that estimate drop to the year 2038. In other words, we could see that access provided within this generation. The faithfulness of partners like Riverwood has made such an increase in progress possible.

But why is Bible translation needed? There are about 250 million reasons. That's the estimate of the people that have no access to the Bible in a language that they can understand. Let me introduce you to just 2 of those 250 million reasons.

Meet Grisel Flores



Grisel is a deaf woman of San Salvador and she would be the first to tell you that sign languages represent one of the greatest needs for Bible

translation. Because she is deaf, she has never heard Spanish so the sound system of reading doesn't make sense. In many countries, tuition for deaf school is beyond the means of most. Interpreters tend to know Sign Language words but not the grammar leaving the meaning unclear. So, even in church, the deaf are blocked from the Gospel. Grisel telling her story,

"When I was younger I attended church. But when I had my daughter, I quit going. Then I started having troubles with my husband and he left me. I started going to the church and telling them about my problems, but the priest would say, 'Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.' I'd go home and I'd be frustrated and I'd cry."

Grisel met a missionary to the deaf who explained the Gospel in a way she could understand. From there she learned what the Bible said.

"I understood who Jesus was in my head but not my heart. Until one day when was I asked to write down all my past sins on paper. They put that paper into a cup. At first, I didn't understand why. But they explained that this was like the cup Jesus drank for us. They explained how Jesus paid for my sins. I understood it for the first time! I began a relationship with Jesus. It's beautiful what God has done."

Grisel's life was forever changed when she could understand Bible truth. She wants to see the lives of the other deaf transformed also. So, she answered the invitation to be part of the team

that will translate the Bible into Salvadorian Sign Language using video, the medium that works best for the deaf. They have finished their first DVD of stories from the life of Christ as a way to get started and she is excited to see how God is using it. She looks forward to the day that the deaf will be able to read about God's love for themselves.

See her testimony: <https://youtu.be/CeRZKtRlhP4>

Meet Tatyana Lar



Tatyanna is a speaker of the Nenets language, a group that lives in the Arctic Circle. She had no interest in anything “Christian” but her daughter kept begging her to go to church. Not wanting to disappoint her daughter she went but she was not able

to understand the Russian used. Soon after, she was asked to help with the translation of the Gospel of Mark into Nenets. But she admits that the Bible is not a book that unbelievers can understand. Eunsub Song, the exegetical advisor to the Nenets translation project—and who had asked Tatyana to participate—was praying regularly for her. In fact, Eunsub had friends around the world praying for her and Tatyana says that made all the difference,

“For me, this book was opened thanks to prayer, thanks to Eunsub, and all those people who prayed at that time.”

The Scriptures began to come alive to her. What her friend had told her was true—God's message is “amazing”—and moving.

“When I read my translation ... in some places as I read, tears were just running by themselves. When I read the translation I made, all of it went inside me.”

Yes, the translation process is a challenge, but she relies on prayer, *“As you pray, that's how the work succeeds.”* Her focus is on finishing because she knows how desperately her people need the Gospel.

Read more at <http://blog.wycliffe.org/2014/08/04/songs-of-the-tundra/>

Both of these ladies have seen their life change—eternally by just being able to understand the Bible for themselves. And, they are committed to making sure that their communities have that life-giving Word. But there are so many still waiting. But if the church work's together we could all communities reached within this generation. Thank you Riverwood-- your faithfulness that is making that possible.

Beth Nicolson Almeida was commissioned by Riverwood Presbyterian Church to serve with Wycliffe Bible translators 25 years ago. She started serving in Southeast Asia and went on to manage strategic projects for that challenging region. She now continues to work on strategy development and manage projects with a global scope all focused on getting the Word to all in this generation. Want to hear more; is God calling you to be part of the Bible translation movement? She can be reached at beth_almeida@sil.org or visit www.wycliffe.org.



Tis the Season

Thanksgiving, Advent and Christianity

By Jimmy Hopper

I have always enjoyed, and even loved, Thanksgiving. Even as a child, it was a big deal. There seemed to be nothing to draw a child; no Easter eggs, no Santa Claus, not even Halloween candy, but to me it was a big deal. My mother would prepare her part of the feast on Wednesday night and put it in the refrigerator. On Thanksgiving morning, my parents, my younger brother and I would get up, eat a light breakfast, put the food in the car, and set off on the one-hundred-mile trip from Montgomery to Moundville. With great anticipation, we would turn off the highway at Moundville onto a gravel road and would drive the three miles through the red clay fields of already-picked cotton to my grandparents' farm. The white frame house on the little knoll was a welcome sight after the two hour drive filled with anticipation, an eternity for a small boy. As we arrived, the cars parked on the circular driveway indicated that my aunts and uncles, and thus my cousins, were there. Going into the house, they came to meet us and there was the hustle and bustle and laughter and voices and the wonderful smell of the food.

I think, in retrospect, that my ideas of family were shaped by our times at that farm, and at the same time, my ideas of Thanksgiving were shaped as well. Mother's family was big, six daughters and a son. They had gone through the

Great Depression, followed almost immediately by World War II, and they were strong and close. My grandmother was the center of it all. She was strong, loved God, and was adored by her children and grandchildren. To this day, she is the only person I knew in depth who I never heard say something negative about someone else.

Those days would come to an end as my brother and I and our cousins grew up, married, and had children. Then each unit coalesced around their own portion of the family. The Thanksgiving family feasts and other holiday gatherings also separated out into single family units. My ideas of Thanksgiving went with me, however. At my parents' home and then at mine, there was food, family, conversation, love – all good things – and I was a Thanksgiving fan.

Then I discovered that I was a Christian. Thanksgiving changed, in a profound way, for me.

Thanksgiving is a secular holiday. It is on no church calendar as a religious holiday. It was established by Congress at the request of Abraham Lincoln on October 3rd, 1863, because of the twin victories of Gettysburg and Vicksburg on July 4th of that year. Lincoln's

Then I discovered that I was a Christian. Thanksgiving changed, in a profound way, for me.

proclamation of that date is interesting and reads as follows:

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.

Although it is a secular holiday, notice Lincoln's focus on the reasons for the celebration. He specifically states neither he nor the army had anything to do with the victories, that they were the gracious gifts of God. A simple reason for speaking of God's graciousness on a secular holiday called Thanksgiving is that there must be someone or something to thank on Thanksgiving, and this effectively puts divine providence into it.

As a new Christian, Thanksgiving became even more important. When you finally understand the Gospel, you are thankful. You have been given something you can't deserve and only thankfulness can follow. But Thanksgiving

suddenly seemed to be more – much more.

Before Thanksgiving dinner with the family gathered around, I began reading Deuteronomy 8, Moses' speech to the people telling them what the Lord was going to give them in the land and warning them to give thanks to God because, as Lincoln said centuries later, everything had been given through God's providence. Verses 8-10 says: When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Thanksgiving had become for me a special occasion to remember to give thanks to God, in much the same way as Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to remember the necessity for perpetual repentance.

Thanksgiving as a holiday has recently aborted into something apart from any idea of giving thanks with its necessary corollary recognizing God as the giver of gifts. It has become instead a lead-in to the ultimate day of commercial grotesquerie. Black Friday/Cyber Monday is the new American holiday and greed and cupidity has replaced the impulse to thankfulness. But



One Good Man

A Grateful Remembrance of Leon Walker

By Peggy Drinkard

On the evening of November 1st my husband and I attended an All Saints Day service at Christ Episcopal Church in downtown Tuscaloosa. I'll acknowledge that we went for the music, which was indeed spectacular. But as we prayed, knelt, recited prayers and scriptures and heard the recalling of the names of various men and women who had connections to that church and were now in glory, a good many of my own thoughts were on Leon Walker and his recent death. It was especially fitting for this occasion. I recently learned from Catherine, Leon's lovely wife, that Leon was led to Christ while attending an Episcopal church in his youth, and had seriously considered a life of ministry as an Episcopal priest. What a pity most of us Protestants don't observe All Saints Day (or much of the Christian calendar, for that matter.) It's an example of throwing the baby out with the bath water. How appropriate to take time now and then to corporately acknowledge the debt a church owes its many friends, fellow saints who have finished their course and entered into their eternal rest in Christ. It provides a time for reflecting on Christ's work in us as his body, each giving and receiving of our gifts to the growth and maturity of us all. It's in that vein I write this article. I will not do him justice, but I'd like to acknowledge the far-reaching influence of one good man's life, that of Phineas Leon Walker.

Any time I use the term "a good man" or "a good woman" I'm always cognizant of Jesus' question to the wealthy young man who called Him "good master." Jesus asked him, "Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." Describing someone as good is not saying they are sinless. But when Christ enters a man's life, he becomes a new creature. The Spirit of God comes to reside in him, and one of the evidences or fruits of that fact is goodness. C.S. Lewis credited the quality of goodness he observed in the writings of George MacDonald as instrumental in his own conversion. "Now the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22.) When Christ enters our lives, these attributes begin to show up in varying degrees. I always felt goodness was one of the Christ qualities so evident in Leon Walker. Encountering goodness makes you feel safe and secure. It awakens a desire to be good as well. Leon's goodness made you feel you could trust him completely, that you could count on him not to change, and that he was for you. When I first met him he was serving on the Board of Directors for Child Evangelism Fellowship of West Alabama. I had just come on staff and one felt he was always looking out for your welfare, as well as that of the ministry. I was teaching Bible classes in several housing projects in the Tuscaloosa area at that time, and

But when Christ enters a man's life, he becomes a new creature. The Spirit of God comes to reside in him, and one of the evidences or fruits of that fact is goodness.

in one I had begun to be harassed by a group of teens who probably had nothing else to do. At any rate, I will never forget Leon and Tommy Howard taking turns accompanying me to those meetings until things settled down. I'm not sure what we would have done had things gotten out of hand, but I always felt safe, and grateful.

Another sterling quality evident in Leon was kindness. I couldn't imagine him being unkind to a soul, even if he didn't agree or see eye-to-eye with you. He was never weak, and he could feel anger, but he was invariably kind, gracious and gentlemanly to the core. Directly connected to his kindness was also his desire for peace. In our church, when one becomes a member we vow to seek the peace and purity of the church. As with most churches, Riverwood has seen its share of troubles, splits, and factions. During much of its history Leon served as an elder. While never reticent to give his point of view about any issue, he wasn't one to harbor a grudge and I thought it was most telling that at his funeral, there were representatives from every stage of Riverwood's history in attendance. Despite disagreements and, yes, some sad and painful splits, Leon remained even-keeled and kind to all. Consequently, he won the respect of all.

While I reflected on these things I had the chance to ask Catherine what she saw as Leon's

defining characteristic. I'm sure she agrees with me that there are many, but the one she singled out was perseverance. She should know. She shared the journey while she and Leon sacrificed to obtain his master's and doctoral degrees. She was by his side as they both sought, and found, a deeper level of walking with Christ through a local Bible Study they participated in for over five years, the fruits of which live on today. They raised their two children, Lora and Tom, together, seeing them through their childhoods and all the way through college and their marriages. Perhaps one particular incident in Leon's life illustrates his perseverance best, as well as his strength, courage and most of the other fruits of God's Spirit. In 1991 Leon suffered severe burns in an accident at his work that he had foreseen and warned against well before it occurred. His burns were chemical burns, and he acquired them rescuing a young coworker caught in the caustic liquid. His recovery was long, slow and painful. Many thought he would retire as a result, but in the spring of 1992 Leon went back to work. He displayed no bitterness, and to the amazement of most, refused to take his employers to court to receive any compensation for the safety negligence that resulted in the accident. He had every right, and every cause, to feel justified had he taken that course, but he wouldn't. That was just Leon.

...when (Leon) prayed, he always began his prayers, “Holy Father...” I’ve thought on that a lot lately. In a sense, it is really a beautiful summary of the Gospel.

Leon was born in Greene County in 1933 when the results of the great depression were still being felt. Like many a family during that era, Leon’s was poor. There was no family car, and this resulted in his having to walk anywhere he wanted to go. Since he was big in size, and his school was small (Leon was one of 43 people in his graduating class) he was recruited to play on all the sports teams, and he played “every sport they offered.” He said he wasn’t particularly good at any of them, but he did credit sports with “keeping him out of trouble.” With all the games, practices, and walking to and from them all there was little time for much else. There was, thankfully, time for one other thing. When he was 14 years old a local family took an interest in Leon and included him in their family and church life. He began attending the Episcopal Church with them, his first real encounter with the Christian faith, which he embraced. That was, I suppose, the beginning of his incredible faith story, for which all of us who knew him are the better. After a short stint in the army after high school graduation, Leon began working and pursuing his education. In Birmingham in 1966, he met Catherine, and, as they say, “the rest is history.”

But what a sweet history it is. And how much richer we are to have known Leon, learned from him (mostly by example) and been blessed by him and his family in so many ways, as we still are. At Leon’s funeral it was noted that when

he prayed, he always began his prayers, “Holy Father...” I’ve thought on that a lot lately. In a sense, it is really a beautiful summary of the Gospel. God is Holy, and we are not...yet He allows us, through the sacrifice of His son, to become His children and own Him as our Father. To be able to call Him both Holy and Father is a wonder, one which I think Leon Walker never took for granted, and a truth that formed him into the good man he was and is. I thank God and I praise Him for this good man’s life.

Peggy Drinkard is newly retired from the position of Children’s Director at Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact her at pdrinkard@riverwoodchurch.org.

...we don't have to be afraid of the images on our screens or the threat they may represent... we know the truth and shouldn't let the darkness around us obscure it

“Advent is the time of promise; it is not yet the time of fulfillment. We are still in the midst of everything and in the logical inexorability and relentlessness of destiny....Space is still filled with the noise of destruction and annihilation, the shouts of self-assurance and arrogance, the weeping of despair and helplessness. But round about the horizon the eternal realities stand silent in their age-old longing. There shines on them already the first mild light of the radiant fulfillment to come. From afar sound the first notes as of pipes and voices, not yet discernable as a song or melody. It is all far off still, and only just announced and foretold. But it is happening, today.”

I like the contrast Delp points to in this quote. In the world we hear “the noise of destruction and annihilation, the shouts of self-assurance and arrogance.” But in the gospel there are “notes as of pipes and voices.” In the cacophony of a sin-addicted world, we hear the melody of peace and righteousness. During the season of Advent we are reminded of the story that redirects our ears to hear angels singing even though the world is groaning.

For the herald's voice is crying in the desert far and near, bidding all men to repentance, since the kingdom now is here. O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way; let the valleys rise to meet him, and the hills bow down to greet him.

Thinking back to those terror-filled nights in my youth, there is one option that could have made a big difference, a flashlight! One little beam of light would have been enough to put my fears to rest and returned the sad clown to his framed prison. Similarly, we don't have to be afraid of the images on our screens or the threat they may represent. They look foreboding but we know the truth and shouldn't let the darkness around us obscure it. Jesus Christ is at the Father's right hand and will be until every enemy is made a footstool for his feet. One day, he will turn the light on and all things will be revealed, but until then we have a message that illumines the darkness.

Jeff Pate is the Senior Pastor at Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You can contact him at jpate@riverwoodchurch.org.

Instead of ending up like Bonny and Clyde, these two have been rescued by the Word of God.

believing that big old lie of the Serpent that it's our job, our problem to manage our lives. Are you tired of trying harder?

Who knows? Maybe we will see His glory in a way we never, ever in our wildest dreams expected. I long for that. Will you join me in praying for His Spirit to be poured out on our generation like King Hezekiah prayed for the faith-needy people of Judah? ***But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone who sets their heart on seeking God—the Lord, the God of their ancestors—even if they are not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary."***
2 Chronicles 30:18-19

It is so encouraging to see the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of men that I have the opportunity to disciple and teach. I have the privilege of seeing men transformed by the gospel who have otherwise been in bondage to drugs and alcohol addiction and criminal behavior. One of these is the young man I met with just last week. He grew up in a drug-infested and crime riddled community called Coolock, a place notorious for drug gangs and violence. 'D' was a violent young man as was his partner, 'R', who is a woman. 'D' told me that she would strike fearful respect in the hearts of strong men gang leaders because of her propensity for violence. They aren't the easily intimidated kind.

Instead of ending up like Bonny and Clyde, these two have been rescued by the Word of God. They have both been saved and have received Jesus as their Lord. 'D' continues to

struggle in his fight against sin, but he clings more and more to the Holy Spirit in prayer because he remembers his desperate past. His need for Jesus' righteousness is the basis for his faith life more and more as I point out to him who it is that qualifies for grace. It is lawbreakers like us.

If you've read any of my prayer letters, you'll know that Gospel Friendships Outreach is a ministry which was formed out of desire to see the Church changed so that it can once again be fruitful in reaching the lost. We are grateful for your prayers. We feel them!

As I teach God's Word, as I disciple men who are new believers, as I do evangelistic outreach to our friends in our community through relational contact points (sports, meals, hanging out in the Pub and invitations to Church events) and as I seek to plant a church in the Muslim area of South Dublin we are desperate to be revived by the Holy Spirit through the prayers of His people. Thank you for your partnership with us. I pray that you will be refreshed in your faith by His glorious presence at work in your hearts to fulfill His Great Commission.

He is Good and His Love Endures Forever,

Chuck, for Michelle, Ava, Giselle and Charlie

Chuck Tartar has served as a missionary for twenty years with Gospel Friendships Outreach in Ireland. He serves with his wife, Michelle and three children. You may contact him at tar5macg@eircom.net.

that phenomenon needs another article. Another attraction of Thanksgiving to me as a child was the knowledge that Christmas wasn't far off. The mystique of an American Christmas, the oft-mentioned hustle and bustle, again the family and food, the coming of winter, the sleigh rides (since we didn't have snow at Christmas, I appreciated the mystique for all the lucky people who did), the smell of the evergreen decorations and tree, and, of course, the gifts of Christmas.

As a child, and even as a young husband and father, all of that was important to me. On the other side, I knew the "real meaning" of Christmas, but as a non-practicing, and ultimately a non-professing Christian, I can't recall much spiritual ado and no sense of worship about it. When I discovered the reality of my calling as a Christian, the same thing happened that happened regarding Thanksgiving, except a thousand times more. Christmas became Advent, and the change in me was much more profound.

When one understands, when one is given the ability to believe by the Holy Spirit of God, nothing is the same. You don't even think the same way. You are aware of great profundities and mysteries. You understand that the guilt that woke you up at three o'clock was real guilt because there was a real God whose character is

the moral code of the universe. You understand that God created that universe, and it belongs to Him. Then you consider that God, the owner and creator and judge of everything and everyone, in the person of Jesus, the Son, came to earth to redeem a people (substitute me personally for a people in that), and nothing remains the same. Absolutely nothing. No book is read without the knowledge that God created and interacts in the world. Everything in the world is different once faith has been given. No act is perpetuated, no word is spoken, no marriage is consummated, no lesson is learned except the knowledge of who He is and that understanding exists and changes us. Gerrard Manley Hopkins, the great Christian poet, spoke of this when he wrote that, for the Christian, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Hopkins spoke of both nature and man when he wrote those words, and the power of it is very real to the believer.

So Christmas became so much more than lights, decorated streets, trees, shopping and the occasional crèche in front of the church and city hall before the lawsuits took them away. Christmas become Advent, a season of worship of the God who gave us everything, even the hope without which we are in desperate trouble. Christians look back at Advent. The readings and the prayers speak to the anticipation of His coming, even back to the beginning of

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Christmas become Advent, a season of worship of the God who gave us everything, even the hope without which we are in desperate trouble.

time. We read the words of the prophets who were given the word of His coming. We also look forward to Advent, the second coming, when we, like old Job, can say, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

Finally, we consider the coming of the Lord, the Advent that has happened in time and space. We read the Apostle John as he unravels the mystery of Advent when he writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of

God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We believers, His people, Christians, are blessed to know this and to know Him. Advent is part of that blessing, a time when we pause, consider again His beauty, and worship. The “holiday” is exceedingly busy, a time of hurry and hassle and muttering under our breath but at some point we need to stop, ponder, and worship. I have fallen into a double focus. The “holiday” I still participate in – this includes decorations, family, food, drink, presents under the tree, and children. But Advent is focused on worship during the month of rising anticipation and is centered in the Christmas Eve service. That night we worship, hear the Word, share the Lord’s Table together, and consider again the wonder and majesty of the thing that has happened, that the Lord has come, and brought redemption to His people.

Jimmy Hopper is a Ruling Elder at Riverwood Presbyterian Church and can be contacted at jimhop7@att.net



FINALE

Sometimes you find great things in unexpected places. While looking for something else in W. H. Auden's poetry, I came across ***For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio***, a long poem I had never heard of but whose title I quickly in interested me. This beautiful stanza takes the words of Jesus, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" and describes how following Him affects you in modern times. Our "unlikeness" following the Way will lead us to the rare and unique.

Jesus is the Truth, and the "Kingdom of Anxiety" that we all live in will disappear, we will have peace and we will find our home in the city that has expected us. He is the Life, and as we live our lives in Him, our human loves will change and "all our occasions shall dance for joy."

The Advent that was and is to come has given us everything.

*He is the Way.
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
You will see rare beasts and have unique adventures.*

*He is the Truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.*

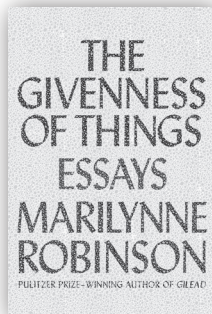
*He is the Life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.*

*W. H. Auden
from For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*

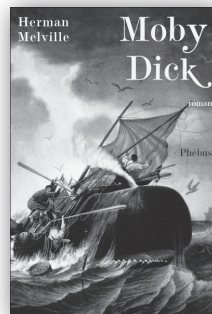


INTERACT WITH CULTURE

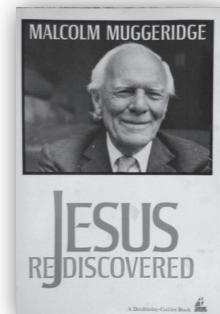
RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP



The Givenness of Things
Marilynne Robinson



Moby Dick
Herman Melville



Jesus Rediscovered
Malcolm Muggeridge

The Riverwood Book Group meets each Monday evening at 7:00 PM in the home of Kay Kirkley, at 1745 Ridgemont Drive. We select the books we will read together, an eclectic combination of fiction, history, theology, biography, commentary and drama, then we meet to look at them through the lens of the Gospel, "sharpening each other" through discussion. If you enjoy books, ideas, fellowship, and coffee, join us. Everyone is welcome.



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