



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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December 30, 2021

Dear Congregation,

As we close out the year, I want to take a few moments to reflect with you on God's goodness to us as well as consider some opportunities and challenges facing us in the coming year.

I. The Lord Is King

We will begin our worship this Lord's Day morning by singing together from Psalm 93:

***T**he LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty! Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.*

The Psalter is divided into five books by an editor - perhaps Ezra or Nehemiah - who arranged the different psalms somewhat thematically. Book Three (Pss. 73-89) of the Psalter concludes with several psalms reflecting on the beauty and privilege of dwelling in God's city and worshiping God in His temple (e.g. Pss. 84, 87), but concludes with Ps. 89 which laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the disgrace of the son of David at the hands of foreigners and pagans. Book Three of the Psalter closes questioning whether the God of Israel reigns and whether He will still be faithful to His covenant.

Those questions are answered clearly in Book Four (Pss. 90-106): *yes God is still king*; He reigns over time and nations, He reigns over all. In the psalm that opens worship this Lord's Day the psalmist dwells on God's might and portrays Him adorning Himself with emblems of His power (e.g. belt, robe, throne). God's voice, declares the psalmist, is mightier than the sea. And yet - as we reflected upon recently - God's mighty voice, the Word was incarnate, born of a virgin, and dwelt among us.

In a world that is rapidly changing and a post-modern society that is increasingly hostile not simply to God's people, but to truth and reality itself, we can draw strength not only from God's transcendent, unchanging truth, but also from God's reign even now and the certain return of Christ in triumph over all His enemies. Singing the psalms is one way we fortify ourselves in God's truth. Reflecting on His work over the past year is also a way to strengthen our hope in Him as we see His steadfast faithfulness.

II. Thanksgiving for Progress

A. Evening Worship: Public worship is the primary means of discipleship as God uses the ordinary means of grace (word, sacraments, and prayer) to grow His people into the likeness of Christ. It is a great blessing to see steady growth in the evening worship as the saints return for a double blessing on Lord's Day evenings. Evening worship helps us to structure our time God's worship and to fortify our hearts against the encroachment of the world on the Christian Sabbath as we look forward to Christ's return together especially on the Lord's Day. If you have not made morning and evening worship a priority in your family, I encourage you to do so because God is worthy of your worship and because God is faithful to bless us as we worship Him together.

B. Sunday School: We now have more men teaching in the adult and youth Sunday school programs. John Porter taught a quarter on Reformed Worship and Jeff Rowan is teaching now on Paul's letter to the Galatians. In the Spring Quarter, Nathan Bowers will work through the "Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity." John Taylor has been teaching the Youth Sunday school and using Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as an outline for the study. We thank God for how He has provided additional men to teach and help us meditate upon God together on the Lord's Day.

- C. Midweek Activities:** I'm very grateful for the structure and organization Joe Wilson has worked out for our Wednesday night studies integrating both middle and high school youth as well as young adults into various studies. The younger children have also been incorporated into a couple of classes appropriate for their ages and development in which they can be taught about God's covenant faithfulness in Christ. The adults continue to suffer through a study in First Kings with me and will soon transition to Second Kings as we work our way to the deportation and exile of the Old Covenant Church.
- D. O Church, Arise:** I loved being a simulcast location for the Gospel Reformation's *O Church, Arise Conference* and seeing members of our congregation get together to hear and think about the current state of our denomination as well as celebrate what it means to be Reformed and Presbyterian. I hope we will be able to participate in this way again in 2022.
- E. New Missionaries:** Two of the missionaries we have supported for years have gone off the field and so we were able to parter with Rev. Ben Kappers (St. George, UT) and Rev. John Blevins (Powell, TN) in their church planting efforts. As Session looks to how we might support missionaries in the future, we continue to prioritize church planting for financial support. In fact for 2022, we were able to increase the amount of financial support given to our church planting missionaries. Our other church planting missionaries are Rev. Andy Young (Oxford, UK) and Nick Bullock (Stuttgart, Germany).
- F. New Deacon:** It has been a great blessing to now have two deacons regularly at morning and evening worship. We are thankful for the Lord's provision of Bill Henshall and his ministry here at FPFO for years and now as a deacon. We pray the Lord will continue to raise up officers for His church to bless and care His people.
- G. Covid Recoveries:** I thank God that though many of us have contracted Covid, no one has become gravely ill from it and very few have known long-term effects from it. Through these sicknesses, God continues to show Himself worthy of our trust. While this is not cause to be reckless, here is another reminder that the threat of sickness must not stop us from worshipping together, showing love and hospitality to one another, and enjoying fellowship with the saints. In a world in which people are being pushed apart by divisions and told to be suspicious of others, God's people must continue to welcome and serve each other and above all answer His call to worship Him publicly together with grateful praise.

III. Stewardship

- A. Facility:** Our building continues to get older (as most things do) and repairs are becoming increasingly costly. The diaconate works tirelessly to keep things in operation. This year the diaconate approved painting the chapel building, but the contractor seems to have disappeared. Please continue to pray God will enable us to care for and maintain this building.
- B. Finances:** While the final numbers for 2021 were not available at the time of this writing, it appears the Lord has graciously enabled the congregation to receive more in offerings than were needed to cover expenses. This will allow us to enter 2022 well prepared for necessary repairs as well as to increase our financial reserves to plan for the future. As you probably know, inflation in 2022 is expected to be at historic levels. Please pray the Lord will enable you and your family to give faithfully and generously to the worship and work of this congregation and that the Lord will provide direction and insight to the deacons and elders as we seek to faithfully deploy the resources God has entrusted to our care.

IV. Renewal Opportunities

- A. Elder Nominations:** For the month of January, nominations for Ruling Elder are open. Pray the Lord will raise up additional men to share the work of shepherding here at FPFO. Pray the men nominated and elected to the Session will integrate well and enhance the ministry of the elders for the glory of Christ in this place.
- B. Outreach:** As I reviewed the 2019 Annual Report, I read about the success we were having at building relationships with children and families at Battlewood Apartments and elsewhere in the community. As you know, those efforts have "stalled" due to concerns regarding Covid.

While disease will be with us for a great while to come, I believe it is time to resume efforts to bring people from the neighborhoods around the church building into worship.

C. Prison Mentoring: Concerns regarding Covid have also resulted in reduced involvement in the local prisons. Additionally, policy changes by one of the prison ministries initially excluded many potential mentors; that policy has since been rescinded. In 2022, there will be additional opportunities for members of FPFO to serve at Walker and Hays State prisons. For information about serving as a mentor to prisoners, contact Bill Henshall: 706-726-0126.

V. New Members Received: Session received several households into membership as the Lord continues to gather people to Himself and unite us to one another in His Son for worship now here at FPFO and forevermore in the New Creation. In addition to these, Session just last week received Will McCutcheon into full communicant membership as he professed faith in Christ. We will present him to the congregation soon to give him a chance to profess his faith publicly. Below are some pictures of the new members to the FPFO family; please greet them and get to know them if you have not yet had the chance to do so!



Larry & Nancy Mehne



Alayna, Diana & Nathan
Bowers



Luke, Ezra & Hannah
Rowan



Jeff, Cate, James, David & Beth
Rowan



John, Julia, Calvin, Bruce, Jackson & Evelyn
Porter

The Lord continues to be exceedingly good to His people and we can testify to His goodness here at FPFO over the last year. I am so grateful to get to serve and worship along with this congregation. We will have a congregational forum on January 9 after morning worship to view the 2022 budget as well as discuss opportunities for ministry in the coming year. I hope you'll be able to stay to take part.

Let's continue to pray the Lord will make His kingdom great in our hearts, magnify His glory in all the earth, and build up Zion here at the corner of Harker and Lafayette.

Your friend.

Ryan Biese,
Pastor