



First Presbyterian Church Communion - March 2022

Dear Friends,

Yet again, I feel a bit off-kilter realizing that Lent is right around the corner. It seems like yesterday (or was it a century ago?) that we were celebrating Christmas. Time seems to wrap around itself of late. I keep hearing people say that they don't even know what day of the week it is. These last two years have wreaked havoc on so many things. We will probably always associate these times with masks, precautions and isolation. Oh, and maybe Wordle as well!

This too...a word I will probably associate with these last few years is "toxic." But bear with me. I'm not going to list the many ways in which a toxic culture has made life worse for everyone. I'm sure you can come up with your own list of things that people say and do that make you grit your teeth, or feel like you're rubbing up against sandpaper in daily life. It sometimes feels like that culture is here to stay. But is it? And more to the point...does it have to take root in us?

Hear these words: **"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** You know the setting, don't you? Calvary...Golgotha...the Place of the Skull...a toxic waste site if ever there was one. A place full of pride, hatred and confusion so heavy that even the sun refused to shine. Yet, you and I have come to know that the light of God can shine

even in the darkest places. The Psalmist wrote, "even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you." In the midst of the chaos of the crucifixion we hear the words of Christ, a clarion call of humility and love. So much so, that a Centurion remarked "Certainly, this was a righteous man!"

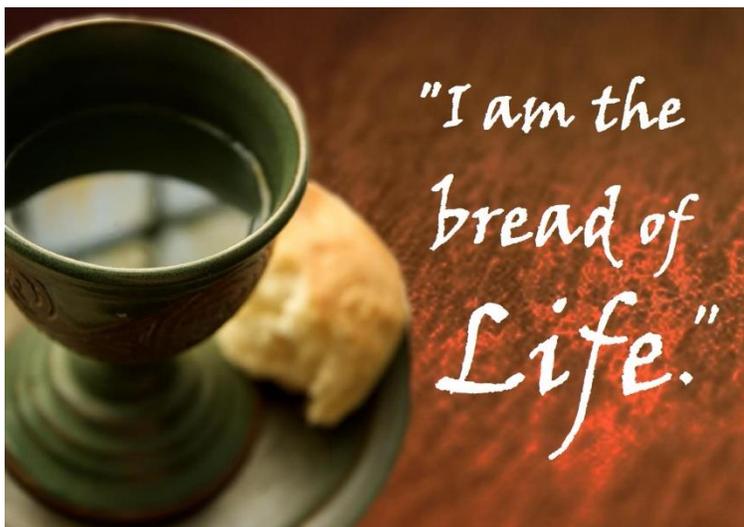


Truth is, Jesus is so much more, as the disciples would gloriously discover three days later.

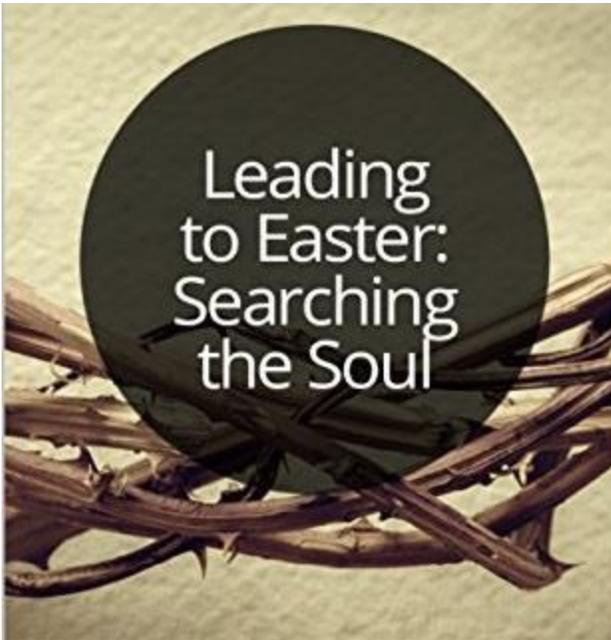
We are living through difficult and tumultuous times, and sometimes those times are playing out right outside our doors. If truth be told, the toxicity in society can leave a negative mark on our lives – a mark that affects our peace of mind and outlook. Even so, take heart, my friends. It is Lent. This is a time when we can come clean once again. Lent is a season to focus on God, instead of our circumstances or shortcomings. Our God is not detached from the suffering in the world, but has experienced it in full, and offers us a way through it. I bet most of us need a reminder of God's love, grace, justice and mercy. We need a **detox**, so to speak, of everything that piles up inside us, and which clogs and hardens our soul. The last thing we want is to let the world harden our hearts. That only leads to more pain and sorrow.

As followers of our crucified and risen Lord, we are offered a different path. One in which light shines in the darkest places. It is a path, a life, where love and grace can be found. It is a life in which we can see all people as children of God; as sisters and brothers. A place of forgiveness, hope and renewal. This is not metaphorical, but a reality. It is demonstrated in every life changed by God for the better.

So, if you feel like you've been spinning your wheels of late, or slipping in the mud and mire of these convoluted times, I encourage you to enter into Lent with an expectant attitude. Take time to find a Lenten devotional online, and follow it for the next forty days. Join our Zoom Bible study group which will be looking at the study highlighted below. If at all possible, come to church and worship with your sisters and brothers in Christ. Be strengthened bWe are still observing Covid-19 protocols to make our worship services as safe as possible.



We will celebrate **Holy Communion on March 6 at 10:30 a.m.** Lent provides us the opportunity to remember the events of the Last Supper, and to give thanks to God for his infinite mercy and love. You can bring bread and juice from home or use the disposable wafer/juice packets provided in the sanctuary. If you are watching from home, our livestream will allow you to participate at the same time with your entire church family!



Bible Study: Our Zoom Bible study group meets on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. I will lead a Lenten study titled **“Leading to Easter: Searching the Soul”** and hope it is a blessing to everyone who takes part. This group is always open to new members. You can let me know if you’d like to join the study group by contacting me through my church email at maroney@firstchatham.org. I will then add you to our private Bible study email list. You will receive an email from me every week with the link to the Bible study. It’s easy and safe! Don’t hesitate to call me if you have questions about how to participate in a Zoom video session. I’ll

be happy to guide you through the steps to set up Zoom on your computer or tablet. It really is easier than you think. Once you are set up, I know you will enjoy taking part in our Bible study group.

Sunday School: Allison Shaw continues to work with our families by providing activity packs for the kids in our congregation. As well, Allison faithfully leads our Zoom Youth Group on Thursday evenings. I am thankful for Allison’s desire to stay connected with the parents, teens and children in our congregation during the pandemic. We look forward to resuming Sunday School during the worship service as soon as we feel it is safe to do so. When that time comes, we will work with the parents and students to make the transition back to in person classes as successful as it can be.



Livestreaming at FPC: The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted churches in many ways, and required changes in the way they operate. One of the more notable ways in which churches have adapted to the pandemic is in their expanded use of online ministry. This was done out of absolute necessity when lockdowns came into effect. Churches had to scramble to get their worship services and groups online, because there was no other way to meet. Although churches hoped the pandemic would be short-lived, that did not happen. Truth is, I spent more time in front of a video camera these

last two years than not! As weird as that was, I count it a blessing that we had the technology to reach you at home for both worship and Bible study.

Most of that time I prepared pre-recorded videos, or if we were in the sanctuary, I would upload a recording of the worship service later that afternoon. But as the pandemic continued, we knew we wanted to provide an online presence that seemed more personal



and immediate. To that end, we recently implemented livestreaming, which means you can now watch our worship services online as they happen. We hope that everyone who is still watching from home will feel more connected to our church family by worshipping at the same time.

As you can well imagine, the ability to livestream our worship services did not happen magically. It took the work of a **team of volunteers headed by Ed McLachlin** who researched the necessary technology, and fine-tuned both the video and audio in the sanctuary so that every aspect of the worship services comes to you vividly and clearly on screen. This required weeks of work, all of which was done by our amazing volunteers who wanted you to have the best online experience possible. So, I extend a heartfelt thank you to Ed, and to Bob Fletcher, and Kevin and Barb Capeling who worked together to bring you our livestream capabilities. Without a shadow of a doubt, these are the people to thank if you are watching our services online. I am so grateful for their diligent service to this congregation!

And there's this too. Even when all Covid-related restrictions are lifted, a robust online presence will be essential to the future of this church. First of all, this will offer an engaging method for our shut-ins to watch our services, or for anyone who is sick or away and still wants to worship at FPC. Secondly, online ministry is quickly becoming the "church door" for first-time visitors. That is, most people will check out a church service online before they ever step through the sanctuary doors. I know this to be true, for many visitors at FPC over the years have told me that they'd checked us out online before coming to church in person.





Mission: Certainly, the pandemic has made it difficult to run some of our mission projects these last two years. Sadly, our Backyard Mission will not run this year, but we feel certain that we will be able to run it next year. We chose a deserving homeowner at the start of 2020 to be the recipient of the Backyard Mission, and we will honour that choice in 2023.

On a sad note, the **Margaret Strang Auxiliary of the Women's Missionary Society** at FPC was disbanded last December after 88 years of service to our congregation and our denomination. I thank **Shirley McCall** who was largely responsible for keeping this fine group running in its last stage of ministry. I am thankful for people like Shirley, and the ladies of the WMS, who understand that a big part of the work of the church is helping others.

The WMS across Canada has helped to educate people in our denomination about the importance of mission, and has raised tens of millions of dollars for countless projects across Canada and the world. Their work has meant that communities have received medical clinics, schools, fresh water and many other live-saving and enhancing services that many of us take for granted in Canada. Hopefully, we as a congregation, will honour their efforts by continuing helping those in need in our community and across the world.



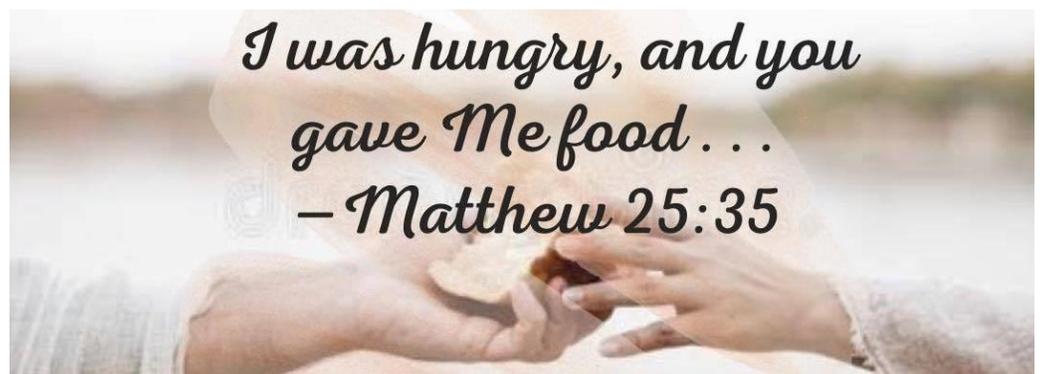
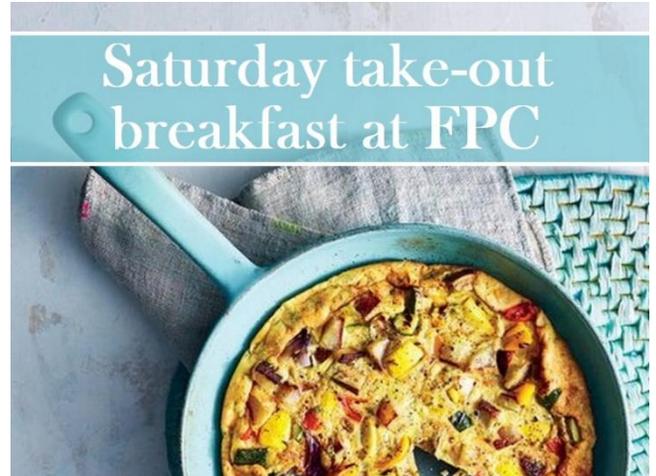
One of the ways in which you can help people in need across Canada and the world is by donating to **Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D)**. The mandate of this agency of the Presbyterian Church in Canada reads: "Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world." You can find out more about it at www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd. You can donate through their website, or designate money through your church offering. Jodi and I donate to PWS&D through our church offering – it's a simple way to partner with this important agency in the PCC

Saturday Breakfast: Thankfully, the Saturday Breakfast is one of the ministries we have been able to continue throughout the pandemic. We are serving a take-out breakfast every other Saturday, and will continue to do so until it is safe to welcome our guests back in the lower hall.

The need for food assistance is great in our city, and we routinely serve 180 meals on Saturday mornings. Our guests will stand outside our building in all kinds of weather, which shows us how much they rely on this ministry. Since the need is so great in our city, we want to offer the breakfast every week. But to do so, we need more volunteer cooks, servers and dish washers. Rest assured, when you join our breakfast volunteer team you will be paired with a seasoned volunteer who will show you what to do. All the tasks are easy and straightforward, and I know you will catch on easily.

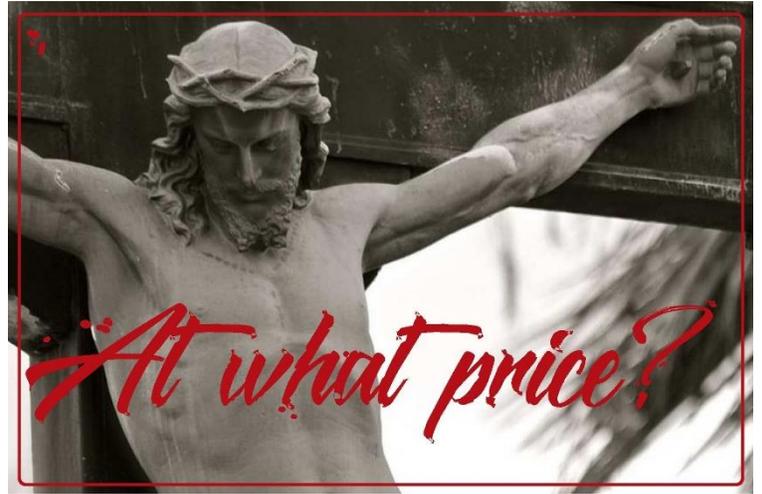
We are in particular need for people to help with cooking in order to offer the breakfast every week. Please know that you do not need to be a chef to help in this capacity. Again, you will be shown exactly what needs to be done, and you will find that the job is easier than it might seem. We know that you will be an expert and feel at ease in no time flat!

By volunteering at the breakfast, you will have the very real satisfaction of helping people in need in our city. I am always moved by the stories I hear from our guests. Many of them are facing incredible hardship in this pandemic. And yet, despite their troubles, our guests are quick to thank us for providing a meal they can count on. I've often responded that I wish we could do more to turn things around, but our guests reply that they are thankful for what we *are* doing. It is both sobering and moving. I know you will be blessed if you choose to help in this important ministry. Should you care to serve in this capacity, please contact Mike Currie, our volunteer coordinator, at currie1012@gmail.com or call the office for information.



Upcoming Message Series:

“At What Price?” (A Lenten series) God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to bring forgiveness of sin, grant eternal life, and to demonstrate the way of love to all who would believe. This could only have been done by our loving and gracious God. Both the shame and pain of the cross, and the glory of the resurrection come from God’s infinite coffers of love and grace. We could never afford it, not at any price. What then do we make of our loving, sacrificial and generous God? How does Jesus affect our life? Join us as we look at the events in the ministry of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection. As we examine the price Jesus paid on our behalf, let’s take the time to reflect on the love and devotion we must return to our Lord and Saviour.



Mar 6 “First things first.” Mark 8:27-9:1 **Communion and Annual Meeting**

Mar 13 “What’s the deal?” Mark 12:28-34

Mar 20 “Priceless.” Mark 14:1-11

Mar 27 “Table manners.” Mark 14:12-26

Apr 3 “His pain, our gain.” Mark 14:32-42

Apr 10 “What’s he to you?” Mark 11:1-11 **Palm Sunday**

Apr 15 “Dead Ends” Mark 15:16-41 **Good Friday**

Apr 17 “He is Risen!” Mark 16:1-20 **Easter Sunday**



Your financial support: I am so grateful for your generous support during the pandemic. Thanks to you we are holding our own financially, helped somewhat by lower expense costs of late. I am glad we are able to fulfill our financial obligations to our ministry teams, staff and building maintenance. We would not be able to continue without your ongoing financial support!

One of the simplest ways to contribute financially to the church is to join our **Pre-Authorized Remittance** plan, in which your offering will be automatically withdrawn from your bank account every month. Jodi and I use this method as do many people at FPC. Please leave a message at the office if you'd like to find out more about PAR, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

If you are not on PAR, but would like to continue your offerings, we have set up and auto deposit to FPC's bank account using the email office@firstchatham.org. You can e-transfer funds using that email. In the memo line please include your envelope number and where you want your funds designated (general operations, building fund, etc.).

Finally, if you are not comfortable with the above two methods, you can mail a cheque made out to "First Presbyterian Church" to Barb Capeling, our church treasurer, who will deposit your cheque. Please do not send cash by mail! Barb's address is: Mrs. Barb Capeling, 30 O'Brien Drive, Chatham, ON., N7M 2E7



Join the Property and Finance Committee: Needless to say, a church this size could not operate without the work of many dedicated volunteers. This is especially true of the Property and Finance Team. At the moment we are very much in need of people to join this vitally important team at FPC. I ask you to prayerfully consider whether you could serve God and your church family in this capacity. Although everything looks "in place" when we gather for worship in person or online, you know that nothing happens by accident or chance. It is the result of

the work of people who serve behind the scenes, and who make sure every aspect of our ministry is in place and can function properly. Again, I ask you to prayerfully consider whether you can use your gifts in this particular team. You can call or email the office to let us know if you'd like to join this team.

Study Leave: I will be on study leave **March 14-20**. I have watched a number of webinars hosted by "Church Answers" on the issues facing the post-pandemic church, and I have asked Presbytery for the time to reflect on what I have learned. It is my hope that the time I spend in study and reflection will translate to ideas that we can use at FPC as we emerge out of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rev. Paul Shaw has kindly agreed to preach on Sunday, March 20. As well, please contact the office should you have any pastoral concerns while I am away.

Welcome to our Newcomers! We are so thankful for every person who joins our family at First Church. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has made it difficult to meet in person for the time being, I and our Pastoral Care team want to connect with you right away. I try to say hello to all newcomers who attend our services, but with all of us wearing masks it doesn't always happen! Please be patient as we try our best to connect with everyone who comes to FPC. For sure, we don't want you to slip through the cracks, as can easily happen during the social isolation in effect at the moment.



Please contact the office if you have questions regarding **membership or would like to transfer your membership** to FPC. Linda Weeks, our Administrative Assistant, will be glad to request your transfer for you. As well, Linda can arrange a phone or video call with me. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have about life and ministry at FPC.

If you are new to our church family, we hope you are able to connect with what's going on at FPC, despite the curtailing of some of our in-person opportunities. I sincerely hope you can feel a part of this family, knowing that an active church congregation is a blessing in many ways, even if we're wearing masks and social distancing!



Well, my friends, I look forward to the Season of Lent ahead. I pray that it will give us the opportunity to reconnect with God, amidst a very topsy-turvy world. It is my prayer that you will be able to focus on what it means to be a follower of Christ, and how that plays out in your personal circumstances.

I invite you to join us during Lent, and especially for Holy Communion, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And if you're still not comfortable worshipping in the sanctuary, remember to join us online. You can watch our livestream Sundays at 10:30 a.m. or watch the service at a later date. As always, I hope our services are a

blessing to you, and I would love to hear back from you to hear what is happening in your life and faith.

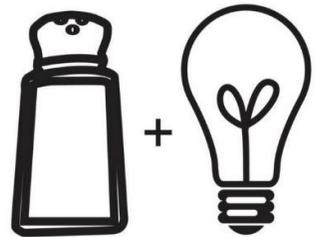
As always, should you have a pastoral concern, please contact Sue Easun, the office or me, and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Although meeting together is still not easy, we want to connect and pray with you.

More than anything, remember that your church family is both a gift and a responsibility. We exist to love God, and love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Thank you for making that possible at FPC!

Blessings,

Mike

Be these
MATTHEW 5:13-16



FPC Website: Please check out our church website at www.firstchatham.org You can view videos of our worship services by clicking on the “Current Message Series” link. You can also find about the groups, Bible studies and ministries in our church. Please feel free to share this website with family, friends and neighbours. It is a great resource for anyone thinking about joining our church family.

First Church is also on **Facebook!** Go to First Church’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FirstPresbyterianChatham and click “Like” on our main page. You will receive announcements, updates and articles of interest delivered right to your newsfeed.

