

THE PIEDMONT EPISTLE

PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS BY WORD AND DEED

March 2018

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In our first session of this year's Lenten Series, *Practicing the Faith*, I made the point that, in contrast to athletic practice which are focused on making us stronger and better, physically and mentally, the spiritual practices are about making ourselves *less* in order to become more aware of God and more open to what God is doing in and around us. And I offered this quote from Henri Nouwen:

In the spiritual life, the word "discipline" means "the effort to create some space in which God can act." Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on.



It strikes me that this is in fact the reason for the season of Lent, its purpose—to make room for God in our lives. In the rush and rumble of our lives, when we are preoccupied with the details of work and family and social media, Lent provides a time to pause and then to look at ourselves and our lives, not so we may criticize ourselves more harshly but so we can identify the obstructions that keep us from God that keep us from acknowledging God's presence in our lives.

Sarah Parsons, in her book *A Clearing Season: Reflections for Lent*, writes that Lent "gives us the chance to look at those obstructions and to move them gently out of the way so that we can come closer to the Love that gives us life, the Love whose triumph we will celebrate on Easter morning." Parsons goes on to write:

If we picture all the obstructions between us and God as a wilderness, Lent presets us with time to clear and cultivate a part of the wilderness, to create an open space in it. In this newly opened space, we may live more freely and commune more closely with the divine. We can transform this wilderness and make it our home, our garden, a place that invites God in and asks God to stay.

Whether you are taking part in our Lenten series or are practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, confession and almsgiving on your own, I hope that you are finding this season of Lent to be a time of rich spiritual blessing, a time when God's presence is more powerfully felt.

Yours in Christ,

W Terry Miller

Lenten Series

Practicing Our Faith: Spiritual Practices for the Christian Life

Wednesdays, 6pm, February 21-March 21 in the Parish House

For many, Christianity is a matter of beliefs. Yet from its beginning, Christianity has been about more than belief and has presented itself as a way of life. And central to the Christian way of life are the classic spiritual ‘practices’ or disciplines, shared activities that developed over time to integrate faith into daily life. As part of this Lenten series, we will be exploring seven such classic Christian practices and considering three other possible “postmodern” practices. We’ll explore each practice in depth by placing it in its historical and biblical context, reexamining its relevance to our times, and showing how it gives depth and meaning to daily life. Join us as we explore these ancient practices and rediscover their relevance for today.



February 21	Introduction to Spiritual Practices
February 28	Cultivating a Hunger for God
March 7	Holy Reading
March 14	Making Room for God
March 21	Living With God

Following our Vestry Retreat last month, I shared with the vestry this article on the virtues of the small church. The request has then been made that I share it this with the congregation at large. That small churches exhibit these virtues should not make us complacent and uninterested in growing, but this article does remind us that some of what we take for granted are the very things that those who do not attend church and those who attend larger churches are looking for!

--Terry+

CHURCHES IN SMALL TOWNS

By Alex Joyner, Superintendent

Eastern Shore District of The United Methodist church in the Virginia Conference

Saxis United Methodist Church is a small, unassuming church at the end of a long, lonely road. Before it arrives at the church, the road crosses through coastal pine forests and marshes and finally cuts across a causeway connecting Saxis Island to the rest of Virginia’s Eastern Shore. Like many old communities along the Chesapeake Bay, Saxis has declined alongside the traditional fishing industry. Presently, the town is home to just over 200 souls.

I recently visited the church on a Sunday morning. The order of worship told me that it was time for the anthem, but there was no choir to be found and no accompaniment aside from an electronic hymnal. When the anthem slot arrived, William Jefferson, the church’s bivocational pastor, handed off the microphone to a nervous young woman. Was she anxious about singing in front of this small gathering of 20 people? Would the lack of musical backing get the better of her?

After a brief pause, she said, “This is a song by JJ Heller,” and began to sing — in perfect pitch and with great power. Her song told those in attendance about longing for love and God’s gracious gift of love that was available to us. I could feel the congregation silently helping her along. All told, it was a beautiful moment.

As she sang, she stood in front of a display that the congregation had set up weeks before. Covering the table were colorful children’s handbells, a guitar, some drums and more instruments. The table served as a reminder of the congregation’s commitment to pray for their music program and their hope that God would help it grow. And now, in an apparent answer to their prayers, this teenage singer had started attending and just happened to mention to Pastor William that she’d like to sing a solo.

These are the moments that remind me of the promise and potential of small-town churches. Most of these churches will never grow much larger than they are, and their members often feel insufficient when confronted by our culture’s emphasis on size and scale. Yet, in a time when many rural communities are struggling, churches like these can offer deep connection and new hope.

Small church, small town

Two-thirds of congregations in the United States average fewer than 100 attendees, according to a 2012 National Congregations Study (NCS). In small towns, these churches form the fabric of the community, offering places of connection and hope in environments that are stressed by economic decline and narratives of despair.

That’s the story for much of rural America today. Rural areas are cumulatively losing an average of 33,000 people a year, according to statistics cited in a recent Atlantic article. “Rural America has become older, whiter, and less populated” due to demographic and economic changes, The Atlantic reported. “Today, just 19 percent of Americans live in areas the Census department classifies as rural, down from 44 percent in 1930.”

Churches have suffered from this decline as well. The NCS showed the number of churches reporting 50 or fewer in attendance has increased by five percent since 1998. These churches now make up almost half of all congregations.

Despite their size, these churches continue to serve a vital role. When a gunman attacked a small rural congregation in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in November 2017, Stephen A. Curry, pastor of La Vernia United Methodist Church in the same county, noted in a New York Times editorial, “A church in Wilson County is a community center where good people strive to do good for fellow human beings. A church in Wilson County is a home for extended family to share their lives. A church in Wilson County is a place where we come to mourn losses, grieve the death of a friend or relative, celebrate the joys of life and love. A church in Wilson County is a place where we connect with the God who loves us, watches over us, and, in the end, welcomes us home.”

Blessed inefficiency

Winn Collier, pastor of All Souls Church in Charlottesville, Virginia, believes small churches have some advantages over large churches. In large churches, he says, “it’s just very difficult to keep the human at the center. If the Incarnation tells us anything it’s that this joining of humanity with God is at the very heart of what God is doing in the world. . . . To be large and efficient, you

have to reduce the inefficiency that comes from human relationships. In the smaller churches, that's not even a question. Everything is inefficient."

Collier longs for this kind of blessed inefficiency in his larger church. He points out that the growing focus on small-group ministry is, in part, a way to compensate for the losses that come from growing larger. "We're coming up with ways to get people in proximity and that's always going to feel orchestrated because it is. In small churches all they have is each other and the storyline they're being told is that that's a problem and I think it's a gift."

In his new book *Love Big, Be Well: Letters to a Small-town Church*, Collier imagines a pastor writing to a small-town church he's coming to serve. "Too much pastoral leadership literature recirculates anxious efforts to make the church significant or influential or up-to-date, as if they need to harangue the church into becoming something," the fictional pastor writes. "I think my job is to remind the church that she already is something. Can we settle down and be who we are, where we are?"

Won't you be my neighbor?

One of the regularly cited virtues of a small church is that everyone knows one another. It's the kind of thing Collier says larger churches are seeking to imitate.

At LifeBridge Christian Church in Longmont, Colorado, the pastoral staff decided they would go one step further and challenge their congregants to really get to know their neighbors. In their 2016 book *The Neighboring Church: Getting Better at What Jesus Said Matters Most*, pastors Rick Rusaw and Brian Mavis describe how LifeBridge tried to simplify their church's mission by emphasizing Christ's call to love our neighbors. "We as staff asked one another about the eight neighbors living around us:

How many names do you know?

Do you know something about each of them?

Can you tell some hurt or hope or dream they have?"

A 2003 study found that small churches had unique potential to connect people to a strong community. Researcher George Barna noted, "If church leaders can maintain a focus on transformation rather than numbers, then we could enter an era of healthy churches at all sizes and shapes and shed the unhealthy spirit of numerical competition that currently distracts many churches."

Trusting that God will provide

There are hard challenges facing small churches. Deferring maintenance to church buildings sometimes brings congregations to a crisis point when a furnace stops working or a roof starts leaking. Retaining a full-time salaried pastor has also become increasingly difficult for many churches, and the role of bivocational pastors is growing. Finally, there's the danger of nostalgia, the temptation to hold on to the past because of its comforts and a resistance to innovations that could lead to a new future.

In the end, vibrant ministry in small towns comes down to trusting that God will provide and living out of that trust. Back at Saxis, when the solo was over and the singer with the beautiful voice returned to her seat, Pastor William went to the table of instruments over which the congregation had prayed for a new music ministry. He picked up a small blue bell and rang it. He took a rickety clacker and twirled it noisily. "We've been praying for a music program," he told the congregation, "and God has answered."

This article can be found at <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8685/churches-in-small-towns>.



PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 10 A.M.

Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter and commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of his passion week. We have palm branches as did those who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that day. During the Palm Sunday service, there is a dramatic reading of one of the gospel accounts of Jesus' passion and death.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 7 P.M.

The word Maundy is derived from the Latin word, *mandatum* (commandment), and refers to Jesus giving the "new commandment" to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34) to his disciples at the Last Supper. The Maundy Thursday service commemorates the Last Supper and often focuses on the two things Jesus did then: washing of the disciples' feet and instituting the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The service concludes with the "stripping of the altar" during which all the accoutrements of the altar and chancel are removed.

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 30

Noon Stations of the Cross (*meet behind Pig 'N Steak*)

7 pm Good Friday: Seven Last Words of Jesus (*at Hebron Lutheran Church*)

The Stations of the Cross are a devotional practice that commemorates Jesus Christ's last day on Earth. The 14 devotions, or "stations," focus on specific events of His last day, beginning with His condemnation. The stations are commonly used as a mini pilgrimage as participants move from station to station. This year, the Stations of the Cross will be observed, weather permitting, in a procession of the cross through the town of Madison. We will be meeting at the car wash parking lot behind Pig 'N Steak and processing to Piedmont.

On Good Friday we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ on the cross to atone for the sins of the world. The service includes hymns and readings of the "seven last words" of Jesus from the Gospel accounts. There is no communion.

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 10 a.m.

Easter Day is the annual feast of the resurrection, the *pascha* or Christian Passover, and the "eighth day" of creation. Faith in Jesus' resurrection on the Sunday or third day following his crucifixion is at the heart of Christian belief. Easter sets Jesus' resurrection next to the ancient stories of Israel's deliverance.

PRAYER JOYS & CONCERNS

We offer prayers of healing for friends and family:

Sarah Aloumouati	Cynthia Gerstner	Susan Muston
Melvin Amos	Carrie Gilles	Donna Nettles
Corey Barker	Jacob Good	Amanda Paff
The Barksdale Family	Griff & Vera Griffin	Sara Parmenter
Emily Begovitch (Kathy Henken's niece)	Stanley Griffin (Vera & Griff's son)	Maria Rosenberg
Nicky Bourgeois (Doris Lackey's friend)	Mary Haley	Myia MacKenzie Shifflett
Fran Bowers	Reggie Hall (Barbara Straightiff's brother-in- law)	Ann Skidmore
Jean Brashears	Chloe Hammer (Jean Kane's sister)	Lorraine Sandifer
Max Brown (Sue Burnett's friend, 4-y.o.)	Luke Harbert,	Jacqueline Smith
Lanee Butler	Sue Lam	Judy Taylor (friend of Kathy Henken)
Jane Cameer	Ted and Rene Hinds	Betty Thomas (friend of Barbara Straightiff)
Doris & Roland Chapman	Skip McDanolds	Matt Tsun
Sandra Clore (Waltine Robinson's niece)	The Hitt family	Robert Ulrich
Heather Comer	Tammy Kelliher	Bernie Valdez
The Cox family	Ren LeVally (Dink's son)	Donna Whitman (friend of the Griffiths)
Harley Cronk	The Miller Family	Augusta Woodward
David Cronk	Ruby Minick (grandmother of a friend of Kay John)	Kimberley Yarbrough (friend of Sherry Spencer with an auto- immune disease)
Sara DeLaurentis (Sue Burnett's niece)	Rosalie Mow (Doug's mother)	Alex Yowell
The Filmore Family	Susan Mowchan	Jeff Yowel
Patrick & Sean Fohner	Dorothy Mudd	
James Gardiner		
Lisa Gardner		

We offer prayers of healing and God's loving presence for friends living in nursing home care:
Barbara Kiley and Jane Chapman.

We pray for peace and the restoration of people's safety and dignity in Philippines, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Iran, Sudan, West Africa, and the Congo.

We pray for the men and women in the armed services, especially Mike Butterworth, Patrick DaSilva, Graham Davidson, Sean Hegg, R.E. Hutton, Nathan Kinkey, Brian Mainwaring, Jeffery Mainwaring, Todd Mainwaring, Anthony Mark, and Clay Puryear, and for our first responders. We pray for our presiding bishop, Michael Curry; our bishops, Shannon Johnston, Susan Goff, Ted Gulick, the churches of the Diocese of Virginia, and for our 70 million brothers and sisters in our 30 member Hill Anglican Communion.

We pray for the families in Barbara's House; for the work of Madison Emergency Services Association, Madison Free Clinic, Literacy Council of Madison County, Boy's and Girl's Club of Madison, Senior Nutrition Site, Madison County Education Foundation, Boy Scout Troop 116, and Madison Strong.

We pray for our youth in college: Nick Bader, Josh Good, Isabella Hansen, Sam Landolt, Paul Jackson, Peter Thawngzauk, Jacob Young, and Nathan Young.

We give thanks to God for all the families in this blessed Piedmont Church, and especially for the work God has done in the life of Peter Bank, in his recovery from surgery. Gracious Lord, guide, preserve and protect your servants as they create for your glory a holy family of love. May their love for each other be a sign of your tender care.

WEEKLY CALENDAR

Sunday 9:45 a.m. Shepherd's Way (Sunday School)
10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite II
11:30 a.m. Fellowship Hour in the parish house
Monday 7:00 p.m. Adult study group at the McDowell's home
Wednesday 10:00 a.m. Community Book Discussion
Thursday 7:00 p.m. Bible Fellowship – parish house

If you know of someone who is unable to get to church, but would like to receive communion, please let Father Terry or Deacon Kathryn know and they will arrange for a visitation.

MESA food donations - Please bring a can, bag, bottle, or box of non-perishable food item. Thanks for your generosity.



New Prayer Books--We are replacing the worn Books of Common Prayer in the Sanctuary and you are invited to purchase one or multiple prayer books in thanksgiving or in memoriam. The cost of each prayer book is \$20. If you would like to purchase one, please contact Hardie Newton.

Graves Chapel News

Movie Night at Graves Chapel -- On Saturday evening March 17th at 5:00pm.....pizza and refreshments will be served! The movie chosen for the evening is: **Matewan**.

Matewan is based upon an event which occurred on May 19, 1920 in the town of [Matewan](#) in [Mingo County](#) at the [Pocahontas Coalfield](#) mining district, in southern [West Virginia](#). There a clash occurred between local [coal miners](#) and the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency.

The coal miners were struggling to form a union and are up against company operators and the gun thugs of the notorious Baldwin-Felts detective agency. Black and Italian miners, brought in by the company to break the strike, are caught between the two forces. The final result is a massacre from which no one emerges unscathed.

This film is based on solid historical events in the West Virginia coal mining country, and is also referred to as the "Matewan Massacre" or the "Battle of Matewan." It dramatizes for both adults and young people the sacrifices made by American laborers as they fought for unionization and, ultimately, for the power to collective bargain.

The movie was written and directed by [John Sayles](#), and stars [Chris Cooper](#) (in his film debut), [James Earl Jones](#), [Mary McDonnell](#) and [Will Oldham](#), with [David Strathairn](#), [Kevin Tighe](#) and [Gordon Clapp](#) in supporting roles.

It is a very interesting movie....one I know you won't wish to miss....

Art Workshop – Saturday, April 28. Susan has arranged for Lucia Bakewell to return to the Chapel and offer her art expertise as it pertains to **hands on art!** It's a **very** fun event and all individuals that attended earlier classes, really enjoyed themselves.

The event will begin at 10:00am and run until approximately 1:00pm with a light lunch provided.

There is no fee involved although tax deductible donations to Graves Chapel would be appreciated.

So mark your calendars for this very fun event!

Church Service Volunteer List March 2018

	4 th	11 th	18 th	25 th
Lector	Nannette Crowdus	Sue Brown	Rida Dellenger	Colt Puryear
Intercessor	Molly Sanford	Vickie Parker	Eve Bargmann	Norris John
Acolyte/ Crucifer	Molly Sanford	Jim Landolt	Amanda Dale & Thomas Dale	Jordan Spencer
Chalice	Kathryn Thomas	Bob Nowak	Eve Bargmann	Norris John
Usher	Colt Puryear	Vickie Parker	Dink Kreis	Kay John
Vestry Person	Hardie Newton	Dink Kreis	James Maloney	Jim Landolt
Social Hour		Rita Dellenger		Cindy McDowell
Altar Care	Susan Good and Elizabeth Maloney			