

# THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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## Anniversary Reflections

By Rev. Sean McCann

This past month was my five-year anniversary as your pastor, and the date prompted some reflection on my part. Collecting my thoughts has been difficult however, since the last year plus has obscured my vision. A full quarter of my time as your pastor has been during the time of the Coronavirus (I've been here for 60 months, with the last 15 during the pandemic), which has made it feel like two entirely different seasons of ministry! With that in mind, I've done my best to not lose the forest for the trees, and if you'll indulge me, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on four pairs of themes have stood out to me from my time in Asheville.

### Spirit and Word

My first sermon as your pastor was from Zechariah 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts." In that sermon I challenged us to seek to be used by the Spirit and laid out what this might look like: through obedience (following God's word and expecting that through ordinary means the Spirit will work in extraordinary ways), through trust (rejecting man-centered growth strategies and trusting God even when the "honeymoon" of a new pastor wears off), and with endurance (pressing on like Joshua and Zerubbabel by not despising the days of small things). If we hadn't learned these lessons in the first four years, then the past fifteen months surely drove the point home!

My second sermon as your pastor was from Romans 10: "How are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" When Martin Luther reflected on the Reformation, he wrote this, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise, I did nothing; the Word did everything." I take great encouragement from this approach and have tried to highlight the Word in all that we've done here. Our gatherings have been arranged so that over the past five years we have read or preached through all or parts of Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, 1 Samuel, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Habakkuk,

Haggai, Zechariah, Mark, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Ephesians, Titus, 1 Peter, 1-3 John, and Revelation. (In total we've covered one third of all the chapters of the Bible in just five years!) It has been my hope and prayer that the reading and preaching of God's word has taught, reproofed, corrected, and trained all of us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), and will continue to do so more and more.

### Life and Death

We began this year with a funeral for our beloved Wes Clapp, and then over the past month we have commemorated the passing of two other faithful members, Robert Sievert and Anna Dillingham. Already I have had more funerals in my fifth year than the first four years combined. This is one of the great sorrows that we experience together as a church family: walking together with our brothers and sisters through the valley of the shadow of death. Each funeral, though sorrowful, is also a beacon of light by which we declare that "we do not grieve as others do who have no hope." (1 Thess 4:13)

We also have some pregnant mothers amongst our members and look forward to welcoming new covenant children into our church family before the year is out. This is one of the great joys that we experience together as a church family, especially on those days of baptism when we vow to assist our young parents in raising their children. "Children are a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3), and we celebrate and cherish each one added to our number. This is the life cycle of the body of Christ: baptisms and burials, celebrations and commemorations, joys and sorrows.

### Constants and Changes

Our first five years together consisted of much change and transition, which is to be expected following the retirement of a wonderful pastor of 31 years. In this brief time we have lost and added members, lost and added elders, and lost and added pastors (and now our first pastoral intern). We have restarted a college out-

### Morning Worship Sundays

#### 8:30 am. Outdoors

**10:45 am**—In addition to our indoor service in the Sanctuary, we have added a set-up in the Fellowship Hall, where a projector will simultaneously broadcast the service from the Sanctuary. Our pastors are preaching from the book of Genesis. Masks and social distancing are required in the Fellowship Hall.

**Livestream Worship Service, Sundays at 10:45 am and 6:00 pm**—Morning and evening services are live streamed every week on our website and continue to be a source of encouragement for those who are not able to attend in person. We usually have 20-30 viewers of the livestream, and our experience setting this up has enabled us to help other sister churches do the same. The services are also posted on our YouTube channel every week.

**Evening Worship Service, Sundays at 6:00 pm**—Our pastors are preaching through the book of 1 Corinthians during these services. This service meets in the Sanctuary, and is also broadcast in the Fellowship Hall.

**Lord's Supper**—We will celebrate the Lord's Supper at the morning services on the third Sunday of each month; July 18 and August 15 are our next two celebrations.

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reach, reorganized our worship service order, sold half of our property to build a new parking lot, hosted summer home prayer groups, expanded our nursery and Sunday school ministries, sent out a new missionary from our church, transitioned to a new church treasurer, and more changes I am sure that I am forgetting.

Despite all this change, the core commitments of Covenant Reformed remain the same: we continue to value God-honoring theology that is rooted in Scripture and preserved in our confessional documents; we continue to value Bible-filled worship that is expressed in historic and reformed forms; we continue to value Christ-exalting ministry that is dependent on the Ordinary Means of Grace; we continue to value Spirit-led community that is served by our members and led by our shepherds; and we continue to value Church-focused evangelism and mission that is faithful to the Great Commission. This gives me great confidence that even in a season of growth and change as a church, the Lord is faithful to care for and guide his flock into new seasons of life and ministry together.

**Growing In and Growing Out**

It is that next season of life and ministry that I want to close with. As I've reflected on all the changes and transitions of members and officers, two points stand out in my prayers for our church in the next five years. First, that we would grow inwards together. Now to be clear, I do not mean that we should aspire to be an "ingrown" church, but rather that we would grow deeper in our community and fellowship. Our church is a mix of long-time members (20-30 year memberships) and those who have joined in the past 2-3 years. Combining these groups has proven to be a challenge, and one we must rise to meet. It

takes time and energy to learn new names, incorporate new faces, and listen to new stories. To form the type of community that exemplifies the love of Christ, I encourage you to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you (Rom 15:7), to seek out one another to intentionally build relationships, to pray with and for each other, and to be eager to outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10).

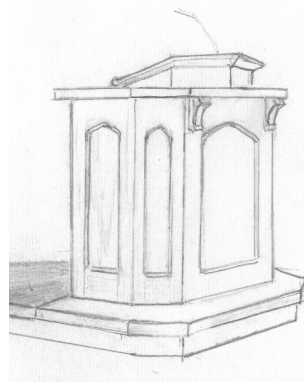
But we must not stop with inward growth, for my second prayer is that we grow outward in our neighborhoods and communities. We pray continually that our church would have an outward focus, that we would love our neighbors, serve our community, and declare the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death. I pray that God will open wide doors of ministry for us – both in our corporate witness in our neighborhood in North Asheville and on the campus of UNC-A, as well as in our individual spheres of relationships at home, work, school, etc. May we heed the words of Jesus: "Go to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23)

It has been an eventful five years, and one I am sure none of us could have drawn up ahead of time. As I look back, I see areas where I have failed as your pastor, and times when we as a church have struggled, but I also see grace upon grace from our faithful God. With that in mind, I close with a favorite hymn of our church that summarizes my both my reflections of the past and my prayers for the future:

"Our God, our help, for ages past, our hope for years to come: O be our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home."

**The Sacred Desk**

By Rev. Sean McCann



In our evening worship services we are continuing to work through 1st Corinthians in a sermon series called, "Built to Unify". As Paul addresses numerous concerns in this letter, we can discern a central concern behind them, which is that the Church must desire Christian unity that is based on truth and love. He addresses this in three different large sections in the letter. We could summarize these three sections as dealing with authority, morality, and worship. We have already seen the first section, chapters 1-4, where Paul speaks to a report of divisions that he has received from "Chloe's people". There are divisions over how to view authority in the Church, particularly the authority of the apostles. We saw that today, this issue of authority is best addressed by receiving and resting on the Word of God that He has given to us. We must drop our petty grievances, and cling, together, to Jesus as He is proclaimed in Scripture. We have also looked at the second

section, chapters 5-6, where Paul addresses a report he has received that tells him about the Corinthian's lack of discernment in regards to certain moral issues like incest, lawsuits, and sexual immorality. There are divisions over how to handle moral issues in the life of the Church. These questions and issues are not foreign to us today, either. We also need to hear from God on how to be discerning about moral issues. Sometimes, our hearts are hardened in certain areas, and we need God to soften them. Sometimes, we have soft hearts, but our minds are weak, and we need God's wisdom to direct us. We recently began the last, and largest, section of the book, chapters 7-16, where Paul responds to a letter that the Church in Corinth has sent to him. This letter has apparently asked numerous questions of Paul: on marriage and divorce, on food offered to idols, on regulating services of worship, on spiritual gifts, on the resurrection, and on tithes. It appears that the Church in Corinth was divided and bickering about nearly every point of Christian worship! They seem unsure about how to live as Christians, worshipping God in their day-to-day responsibilities. They seem equally unsure about how to worship God as they assemble together corporately. We need God's direction today on how we ought to worship God in our daily lives, as well as when we assemble together to worship Him.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
July 4	STEVE LAWSON	
July 11	Genesis 20	1 Cor. 10:1-13
July 18	Genesis 21	1 Cor. 10:14-22
July 25	Genesis 22	1 Cor. 10:23-11:1
Aug. 1	Genesis 23	
Aug. 8	Genesis 24	1 Cor. 11:2-16
Aug. 15	Genesis 25	1 Cor. 11:17-34
Aug. 22	Genesis 26	1 Cor. 12:1-11
Aug. 29*	Genesis 27	1 Cor. 12:12-31

**Prayers for General Assembly**

By Rev. Chris Brown

Our denomination's General Assembly (GA) will meet soon, from June 28th-July 2nd. The General Assembly is the highest court of the Presbyterian Church in America in that it is an assembling of the ruling and teaching elders (pastors) of the denomination to worship God, and vote on important matters concerning the life of the Church.

General Assembly matters for a number of reasons, one of which is because many of the decisions about the nature of the denomination are decided there. It is especially important this year because of its location, because of the overtures (requests) that have been submitted to it for voting, and because last year's Assembly was canceled.

This year's GA will meet in St. Louis, MO, near the Church of a pastor in the PCA who previously claimed at the floor of General Assembly that he is a "gay Christian minister". Now, what he means by this is not "I am a practicing homosexual", but rather, "I have recognized a pattern of attraction in my life, and will not act upon it."

Our registered elders for this General Assembly are the highest on record, which is likely because there is a pending trial against this minister, because there are several overtures that seek to deal with what is appropriate for a minister to claim about himself, and because there are also several overtures that seek to deal with how we examine men for ordination and our ministerial standards. Suffice it to say, this General Assembly may decide some very important things for the life of our denomination.

Based on this, I want to urge you all to do two things: First, pray for this General Assembly. Outrage is at times appropriate. Discussions about whether it is time to leave a denomination are at times appropriate. But prayer is always appropriate. Until we have prayed, we can do nothing else.

Second, I would like you all to very calmly consider what warrants a departure from a denomination. When is it appropriate to leave? You see, there is a time to leave and abstain from sin. But there is also a time to stay and fight against sin. Sometimes, leaving is not bold and pure, but an act of cowardice. Sometimes, staying is not courageous and faithful, but rather an act of complacency. So we must make our decisions based upon biblical principles.

There are four biblical principles, which I've derived from Dr. Joey Pipa (who in turn derived them from Owen and Calvin):

1. Does the Church believe and preach the gospel?
2. Does the Church persecute you for holding to the truth?
3. Does the Church require you or other Christians to sin?
4. Does this Church edify me?

Depending on how we answer these questions, it is time to stay, or it is time to leave. In my estimation, it is time to stay and fight for the PCA. It still believes and preaches the gospel, it does not persecute us for holding to the truth, it does not require us to sin, and it edifies us. So think through these things, and pray, pray, pray

**Growing in Grace**

by Mr. Wilson Goins



To be a Christian is to grow in grace and likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This grace, which is necessary for conformity to Christ, cannot be fabricated by natural man, but proceeds only from God. This is the premise by which Dr. Jonathan Master begins his short book, *Growing in Grace*. Master's foundation for this practical volume is found in 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Master reminds us, by Peter's charge, that to follow Christ is to know him better. We must be encouraged that by God's life-giving word we are given perfect instructions of how to conform to Christ's example. Master shows in his book that the Christian walk is not a puzzle, but God has provided the means necessary for us to mature. It is quite humbling to remember that even our good works have been prepared beforehand by God and are ultimately a manifestation of his grace, not our accomplishment. If we find ourselves boasting in anything other than Christ, this necessitates a reminder of our beginnings in the Christian faith. We sinners cannot merit righteousness before the Lord and expiate our own sins, but we were spared from the wrath we deserve by the work of Jesus Christ alone.

Knowledge of Christ's fulfillment of the threefold offices—Prophet, Priest, King—provides us with a better understanding of him, and how he ministers to us in our feebleness, so that we may more fully obey him. As the final prophet, Christ perfectly glorified the Father, even while revealing himself as the accomplisher of Old Testament prophecies. Secondly, Christ is our permanent high priest who sympathizes with our every weakness, and he continues to intercede for us. Thirdly, Christ is the victorious king who reigns even now, and is working good in the midst of our darkest trials. These realities should provide the Christian with comfort necessary to endure present tribulations.

Our Lord has not only provided us with the model to follow, but instituted the means of grace by which we are strengthened. We must never forget that abundant Christian growth takes place in the midst of the Body of Christ. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, publically and visibly administered, clearly point us toward Christ and communicate his grace to us.

Master highlights one of the most significant aspects of Christian growth, the killing of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. Concurrent with Paul's treatise in Rom. 6, Master's book recaps our freedom from the bondage of indwelling sin and charges us to seek holiness in our every stride, because we wholly belong to the Lord.

Concluding, Master leaves readers with an exhortation to press on through many sufferings by holding the same hope that Job possessed, that in our resurrected bodies, we will see God. We must continue to run the race and remember that our present agonies pale in comparison to what Christ has secured for us.