



From Pastor Jessica

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

"...but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead..." Philippians 3: 13

When Paul writes this to the Philippians I don't think he's totally forgetting what has happened in his past. After all, why would he want to forget his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, or giving instruction to the Corinthians on the Lord's Supper, or hearing that God's grace is enough in the midst of dealing with his thorn? He probably realizes that his past has made him the person he now is who can be the servant God has called him to be; but he also recognizes that this is by no means the end of his story; that all his "hay days" have passed. I wonder if what Paul is trying to convey that no matter what joys he's experienced in his past, or tragedies for that matter, the future is God's and therefore will be better than what ever was.

Now, remember Paul is writing this letter while he's in prison; one might think that is the end of his story right there. Paul will never leave prison and yet he can look at his life and still see that there is more glory in the Lord awaiting him.

"Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need." ~Philippians 4: 11-12

In our parish I'll hear people reminisce about the "good ol' days." Often there will be the question of why can't our church be like it was; we had all those children in Sunday school, the pews were filled, etc. I love hearing the stories and hear the warmth and pain of the memories and wishes.

Respecting the stories and memories of our past, but with God's future being ahead of us, what does it mean for our lives that God has a future in store for us? What does that future look like? Since God is our pilot, just think of the places where God wishes to take us.

In this new year, do we have our heads lifted to the hills journeying forward with our sight to the horizon of where God is leading us? Or, are we looking back to keep an eye on what used to be at the hazard of missing what is and what can be?

There is nothing wrong with remembering our past – it has made us who we are today. But God has a future for us and God's greatest wish is to move us into our future as a parish, church, and as individual sons and daughters of Abba, Father. We have a future, and that future lies ahead of us, not behind. Taking those steps forward can be unnerving (one of my favorite quotes from Shakespeare is Hamlet saying we'd rather bear those ills we have than move onto ones we know not of); there is always trepidation in setting out on a journey, one never knows what one might encounter. But this we do know: God is there. Whatever our challenge: God is there. Whatever our road: God is there.

So, where is God calling you to be? Who is God calling you to become? What future does God have in store? Moving forward into that future take confidence in the eternal promise of presence and counsel; God is already there bringing us into that place prepared for us.

"I can do all things through God who strengthens me." Philippians 4: 13

Your Servant in Christ,
Pastor Jessica

Our Lent 2012 series: A Covenantal God

One of the greatest blessings in our lives is that God is a covenantal God. What does that mean? It means that God, out of love for us, has made promises that are kept. These kept promises are not contingent on our action, or inaction for that matter. They are kept because of love.

This Lent, we will have an opportunity on Sundays to hear about God's covenant with us. Pastors Kara, Russ, and Jessica will be preaching on the covenants which are found in the Old Testament. We will hear about:

- The Rainbow Covenant
- The Sign of the Covenant
- The Ten Commandments
- The Serpent on the Staff
- The Covenant of the Heart

On Wednesday evenings, Pastors Kara and Jessica will retell the gospel readings from the Sundays of Lent. We'll hear the telling of the Gospel story from the viewpoint of one of the story's characters and then a reflection on the scripture passage.

Therefore, this Lent, we are given two opportunities: to hear of God's work, and to explore our relationship with this covenantal God.

Our Lent schedule

Ash Wednesday (February 22)

- ◆ Noon at First Presbyterian
- ◆ 5:30 at Trinity in Binford
- ◆ 7:00 at Faith in Hannaford, Grace in Grace City, and Lutheran Church of McVile

Wednesdays February 29 — March 28

- ◆ Noon at First Presbyterian
- ◆ 5:30 at Trinity in Binford
- ◆ 7:00 at Faith in Hannaford and Lutheran Church of McVile

Souper Bowl of Caring

In case you haven't heard, February 5 is Super Bowl Sunday. And, it's **Souper Bowl Sunday**.

This is the day that our congregations may choose to fight hunger by participating in this annual event.



Each congregation may decide how they want to observe this day. Your church might choose to collect actual food donations, or it might choose to collect money to be given to a food pantry.

Some of our churches will have their Souper Bowl on the 5th. Others may opt to have their Souper Bowl on another Sunday or not to participate.

Senior Meals

Our pastors have decided to begin attending senior meals again. We'll try to announce in the Sunday bulletins the weeks that Jessica and Kara will be in each town.

m & m's in the car

All seven of our TCM congregations participated in the m & m's project at the end of 2011.



Donations from the six ELCA congregations were sent to the END Synod office, to be used for projects in the Central African Republic. The total sent to the synod was \$841.88.

First Presbyterian Church collected \$181.30 for Heifer International.

Thanks to all for your contributions!

New directory this year

Tri-County Ministry is in the midst of our 20th year!

One thing that will happen this year is the publication of a new pictorial directory. We have been doing a new directory every five years.

The TCM Council has approved the opportunity for us to have our directory done locally this time. Therefore, the Duttons from Valley City will be doing the photography and publishing.

Your TCM staff hopes that everyone will choose to be photographed. Up-to-date pictures are very helpful for our pastors as they try to learn everyone's names. And with the possibility of our parish being assigned an intern pastor, the directory becomes important for that person also.

If you are having family portraits, senior pictures, or any other kind of photographs done by Duttons this year, those photos may be used in the directory. Duttons plans to go to all seven of our churches for the photo sessions.

Please watch for sign-up opportunities later this spring. The photography will most likely be done sometime in June.

Also, anyone who would like to volunteer to help with organizing the photography sessions and the directory pages may contact Theresa. Ideally, we'll have at least one helper from each congregation.

TCM Survey Results

This past fall, the TCM council put together a survey and your leaders have been trying to sort and make sense of the data. I could give you only numbers, but I decided a simple summary and some reflections would be easier to digest. If you want more data, please contact one of your pastors or TCM council members.



Here are some stats to know about the 108 who responded (roughly 1 out of every 5 TCM members):

- ◆ 66 Female/42 Male
- ◆ 63% over age 55, 37% age 54 and under
- ◆ 30 Faith, 3 First Presbyterian, 6 Grace, 19 McVile, 3 OS Klotten, 16 OS McHenry, 31 Trinity
- ◆ Top aspect about church that excites us: "Church makes a difference in my week and in my life" (65 responses)
- ◆ Top reason we miss church: "Work on Sundays or weekends" (although if "vacation and/or family visit" had been an option, it probably would have won)
- ◆ Top needs from church: "Community/Fellowship" (68 responses) with "Peace of Mind" at a close second (65)
- ◆ Top desired activity: "Shared Meals" with "Bible Studies" and "Service Projects" not far behind
- ◆ Top gifts and skills to share: "Helping with Worship" and "Lawn care/Snow removal"
- ◆ Summary about what the church can do in our communities: be a visible and active presence

Each congregation has its own particular interests and needs, but I think that it is telling when a majority of the answers were geared towards a feeling that church makes a difference in our lives as we build relationships with other believers and find the peace that only God can provide through our community that gathers to sing, pray and praise God.

Over the coming months, we are going to set up activities and events that you expressed an interest in. We want to build up our church family beyond Sunday morning worship and beyond the church building walls, so there will be meals, games and service projects to come! Please pass on any suggestions to Pastors Jessica and Kara, since we are not mind readers and cannot know what interests you without you telling us.

Thank you for being in ministry with us as we continually discern where God is guiding TCM!

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August, September, October, and
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Coming up at Red Willow Bible Camp

Josh's Winter Survival Camp
February 17-19
Grades 7-12

It's All in the Family Retreat
February 17-18

Sled-a-Thon Dayplay
Saturday, February 25 if there's enough snow
Grades K-6

Home and Garden Art Retreat
March 30-31

676-2681
www.redwillowbiblecamp.org

