

A LAMPSTAND

FOR MOUNT AIRY

COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PASTOR SCOTT WILLET

JANUARY 2021

Where Do We Go from Here?

No one will be sad to see the end of 2020, a year unlike any other. But neither can anyone predict what to expect in the year that is just now beginning. To be sure, there is little cause for any optimism or expectation that the multiple traumas of the past year will pass away quietly, especially those brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. There is much unrest in our nation and around the whole world. Unrest borne of uncertainty, of tragedy, and of exasperation and frustration. It is not hard to notice the extreme dysfunction in our government, the rampant partisanship at all levels, and a vitriol in our public debate that betrays a deep-rooted personal animosity among those elected to lead our country. Additionally, it's all too easy to observe hypocrisy in high places and to fear the loss of civil liberties.

All of that has provided occasion for Satan to meddle with the visible church, and in meddling, to disrupt the peace and unity of Christ's church. As I have often written this past year, the preservation of that sense of unity has been a high priority of mine in my leadership here at Covenant. In that context, I am thankful that the Lord has preserved us in many good ways, though I count this year as one of the most difficult in my ministry. I am thankful for the spirit and demeanor we have cultivated as a congregation—freed from the partisanship that afflicts our country. I will be the first to say that not every decision that I and the Session have made with respect to the impact of COVID upon our church activities has been equally plain and clear. Should we meet for worship or cancel? Meet outside or in the sanctuary? Limit our gathering to 10 people? A second service? Fellowship lunch? Masks or no masks? Social distancing? Sunday school? And for all of you, your decisions arose from your own sense of safety and vulnerability to COVID—Do I attend worship or stay at home?

Welcome!

To our visitors,
we welcome you to
Covenant Reformed
Presbyterian Church.

Visitors, please take a copy of
the burgundy colored

Welcome!

folder located on the foyer
table next to the bulletins.
Please fill out a visitor's card
and either give it to an usher
or put it in the offering plate.

"But now God has set the members,
each one of them, in the body
just as He pleased."
(1 Cor. 12:18 NKJV)

In all of those matters, there is no clear biblical precept that is easy to apply across the board. In most cases, there was no clearcut "right" answer with a contrasting "wrong" answer, as if one was biblical and the other ungodly, black and white, a binary choice. Instead, we have to rely on wisdom. Discernment. And forbearance. Bearing with one another in love. Considering others more important than ourselves. Since we all inherited Adam's fallen nature, that process is not often easy.

There are, of course, a host of political issues inexorably connected with all these matters, and while the Bible would instruct Christian citizens of our earthly kingdoms how to live out their civic duty, the church itself is inherently spiritual. Our focus is in the spiritual realm, and our King is Jesus. So as a body, as a church, we don't align ourselves with any political party or even distinctly political issue. We aren't partisan, in a political sense. We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven made manifest and visible on earth in the church. As such, Jesus would still have us be salt and light.

So where do we go from here? In a real sense, we stay the course. We

focus on what is most important, which for us as a church is the fellowship of our corporate worship. With that priority, we always keep before us the awareness that we are members of one another, not merely members of an organization. We belong to one another, as our hands and eyes each belong to our bodies. We are not independent of each other. So we protect and encourage those who are vulnerable and at greater risk to the dangers of COVID. We bear with those who might have a difference of opinion with regard to masks or social distancing. We act with courage, even in the face of danger or persecution; and with love toward our neighbors. We practice what it means to live in submission where God has defined it, especially within the church and with relation to our civil authorities.

And then, on a deeply personal and spiritual level, we trust. The God of all ages, who created the heavens and the earth, has ruled on his throne even in 2020. There he shall remain throughout 2021. Words are cheap and while I loathe simplistic, flowery and spiritually superficial language, we are called to live out our lives on earth with the simple faith and trust of a little child. It is He who declares the end from the beginning. (Isaiah 46:10) It is He who will accomplish His own eternal purpose, perfectly and completely. We are left to live by faith, not by sight. We are left to endure the fiery trials that are part of life in this age, while urged to resist the unsettling thoughts that some strange thing has befallen us. (1 Peter 4:12)

But we are unsettled! Many of you have expressed to me and to one another your exasperation. Even anger. At times, a depression. Or the quickness of irritation with those closest to us. It's palpable. We can all feel it. We are just ready for all this craziness to be over. But we are called by God to wait. To love Him. And to love one another.

No doubt all of you have been affected by COVID in one way or another, perhaps with lifelong implications. Many people have observed that things will never again be the same. No one really knows what the new normal will actually look like. But we remain in the same position as we were when 2020 began—children of a heavenly Father, beloved. Objects of divine mercy and recipients of grace. Citizens of an eternal kingdom by virtue of our faith in Jesus. And yet, still...citizens of this dark and fallen world. The words of Psalm 90 have never rung more true: "For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:9-10)

I know the temptation to want the things of my life to be all in order, managed, under control. I also know the futility of such an idolatrous goal. The events of 2020 have reinforced that perspective in ways that were unimaginable a year ago. But still, in a true sense, nothing has changed. The reality remains as Moses expresses it in that Psalm: "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." (Psalm 90:1-2)

There are no easy answers. There is no simplistic panacea. Flowery spiritual language is hardly adequate. Exasperation will often come. Yet a deep and abiding trust in the unchanging God remains our only hope and help.

In that trust, may we all continue to love and encourage one another, "and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25)

Yours with a pastor's heart,

Schedule of Preaching

January 3

AM *Deuteronomy 31:1-29*
PM *Philippians 4:8-9*

January 10

AM *Deuteronomy 32:1-43*
PM *Philippians 4:10-13*

January 17

AM *Pulpit Supply*
PM *Pulpit Supply*

January 24

AM *Pulpit Supply*
PM *Pulpit Supply*

January 31

AM *Deuteronomy 32:44-52*
PM *Philippians 4:14-23*

Congregational Meeting

The Session has set the time for our annual congregational meeting to be Sunday January 10 following the afternoon worship service, approximately 3 pm. We will elect Trustees for the corporation and the 2021 budget will be presented. The meeting will include the joint congregations (officially still one church) of Covenant and our Harvest mission work in Winston-Salem.

With thanks to the work of Treasurer Mark Mattson, the 2021 budget to be presented at the congregational meeting is included in this newsletter. The final Treasurer's Report of income and expenses is attached below.

Please speak to a session member if you have any questions on the budget as presented.

Treasurer's Report

<u>Monthly Income</u>		<u>Monthly Expenses</u>		<u>Income minus Expenses</u>	
November	\$13,551.04	November	\$13,639.51	November	(\$88.47)
December	\$14,654.43	December	\$20,180.99	December	(\$5,526.56)
YTD	\$139,548.59	YTD	\$139,627.08	YTD	(\$78.49)
<u>Monthly Average Income</u>		<u>Monthly Average Expenses</u>		<u>Monthly Budget</u>	
\$11,629.05		\$11,635.59		\$12,500.00	

Wednesday Night Bible Study

Everyone is invited and encouraged to come to our weekly Bible study each Wednesday evening at 7 pm, via Zoom.

We are studying the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Please join us online. All are invited.

Men's Reading Group

Each Friday, 9:00 AM
at the church
studying the book, *Devoted to God*, by Sinclair Ferguson

All the men and young men of the church are invited
for a time of study, prayer and fellowship.

Session Actions

Actions of the Session in previous months include:

Transfer of membership for Celeste Jackson from her previous OPC church upon her marriage to Dale.

Approved pulpit supply for the vacation weeks observed by Pastor Willet.

Received monthly Treasurer's Reports and Deacon's Fund Reports.

Approved the 2021 budget.

Discussed various matters with regard to the work of our Presbytery, appointing Mark Mattson as a representative for the December 4 special meeting.

Scheduled our annual congregational meeting for Sunday January 10, following the afternoon worship service, for the purpose of electing Trustees for the corporation and for presentation of the annual budget.

The session has an extended season of prayer for all church members and visitors each meeting.

Next meeting date will be January 30, 10 am at the Vigilant Cyber System office building, 1326 N. Main St.

Live Stream

Our church website was significantly improved with the addition of LiveStream for our worship services beginning in October. The LiveStream is available for everyone who is unable to attend worship in person, either because of temporary illnesses/travel or because of the heightened dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic. The LiveStream is also available publicly for anyone who wishes to join us in that way.

Worship service recordings will remain available on the website, in addition to audio sermon recordings and sermon manuscripts. Please familiarize yourself with the website if you have not done so.

Please let Pastor Willet know if you have any pictures available in electronic form that could be used on the website. Josiah DeGraaf has agreed to work as an administrator on the site as well—please let him know if you find any errors or have any constructive suggestions for the improvement of the site. If you encounter temporary problems in a LiveStream on a Sunday, please be patient, as Josiah will be resolving whatever glitches might arise.

www.mtairyopc.org

2020 Singles Retreat
Machen Retreat and Conference Center
McDowell, VA
RESCHEDULED FOR APRIL 16-18, 2021

Theme Statement
Serving God in All the Seasons of Your Life

Theme Verse
*To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Speaker
Pastor Scott Willet

Personal Invitation

I want to invite you to the 2020 Singles Retreat at MRCC, emphasizing at the outset that I want to focus your thinking on the concept of seasons of life. Singleness is not simply a temporary prelude to marriage, nor is it merely something to be endured as some sort of struggle or incompleteness. In that context, there is no singular definition of the impact of singleness upon your lives nor broad over-arching goal that should define singleness for everyone uniformly. Thus the broader concept upon which we will focus, beginning with Ecclesiastes 3:1, To everything there is a season. Recognizing that the providence of God governs all those seasons in all of our lives, the goal of the retreat will be to recognize, define, evaluate, and embrace the seasons of your own life. Ultimately, the goal is contentment and hope. (1 Timothy 6:6)

The great benefit of a retreat at MRCC is that we will have time not only to relax and enjoy all the beauty of Highland County, but also time to talk and interact together. There will be time for questions and for thinking out loud, both in our group sessions as well as informal conversations. I hope you will get to know me as I look forward to getting to know all of you. I expect to present the opening and closing segments (Saturday morning and Sunday worship) in a preaching format, but the Saturday evening and Sunday School segments will be designed much more as interactive teaching opportunities. For those who are able to arrive in time Friday evening, I will also plan a time of informal discussion not simply designed as an ice breaker, but more so as a time to begin the process of thinking (talking and listening) together. I hope that I can stimulate your mind in a good way, and help you to understand not only your current season of life but be well prepared for whatever seasons of life might remain ahead of you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION:
<https://machen.org/camps-and-events/singles-retreat/>

Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church

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Mount Airy, NC 27030
336-673-3176 (Church office)
336-907-0202 (Pastor's phone)

mtairyopc.org

Pastor Scott Willet: sswillet@mac.com

Sunday Services

Sunday School Classes
Currently cancelled due to COVID-19

Sunday Morning Worship Service
11:00 AM

Fellowship Luncheon
12:30 AM

Sunday Evening Worship Service
2:00 PM

Other Activities

Wed. Night Bible Study
7:00 PM
Meeting by Zoom

Thursday Night Youth and Young Adult Bible Study
Meeting will resume when possible.

Men's Reading Group
Friday 9:00 AM
Meeting at the church