

First Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 61
Louisville, MS 39339

Address Service Requested

Ushers for March
Gene Davis, Head Usher
Steven Holman
Evan Llewelyn
David Willers
Dan Mittan



First Presbyterian Church

Louisville, Mississippi

William Cowper—"A Stricken Deer"

By Simonetta Carr. This article was originally published at <http://www.placefortruth.org/blog/william-cowper--'-stricken-deer'>, where you could find more of her short articles on men and women from church history in the blog titled "Cloud of Witnesses."

*A Monthly
Publication of*

First Presbyterian Church, Louisville

.....

For I resolved to
know nothing while I
was with you except
Jesus Christ and
him crucified.
(1 Corinthians 2:2)

662-773-3146
Post Office Box 61
Park St. and
S. Columbus Ave.
Louisville, MS
39339

fpclouisville@msn.com

March 2018

1773 didn't start well for William Cowper. In spite of seemingly comfortable circumstances, he felt pressured by both hurtful local gossip and well-meaning friendly advice into making a decision he was just not able to make.

He had been lodging with a pious family, the Unwins, for almost ten years, sharing with them joys and sorrows, including the unexpected deadly accident of Rev. Unwin. Recently, a friend of the family, Rev. John Newton, had invited Mrs. Unwin and her daughter Susanna to live next-door to him in Olney. He had extended the invitation to Cowper, who was for the Unwins like a son.

Newton and Cowper found a great affinity of minds and souls. Cowper's poetic talent and theological understanding provided fresh inspiration to Newton's ministry. Together, the two men produced a large number of hymns to sing at prayer meetings – a collection today known as the Olney Hymns. Cowper was to Newton a trusted friend, and accompanied him to meetings and on regular visits to parishioners.

Most recently, he had been wrestling with some trying circumstances. The sudden death of his beloved brother John, financial pressures due to John's unresolved debts, and the death of two cousins had weighed heavily on Cowper's frail mind.

A Troubled Life

He had always been a sensitive child. Born on 15 November 1731 in Hertfordshire, England, he had experienced sorrow and death from an early age – from the infant deaths of five siblings to the decease of his mother Ann, who died while giving birth to John (the only other child who survived). Cowper was six at that time. About fifty years later, he immortalized his mother in a heart-felt poem, "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture."

Cowper continued his life without the person who had given him most comfort. His father, Reverend John Cowper, sent him to a school in Bedfordshire, 30 miles from home, where a 15-year old bully made him afraid to even raise his eyes in the boy's presence. Later, the prestigious Westminster School in London, he watched a teacher suffer at the hands of bullies. In spite of this intimidating climate, he did well in his studies and created meaningful friendships.

Cowper's father directed him to study law – a path William disliked and felt unsuited to pursue. His first experiences in the legal field confirmed his feelings. His only consolation was his love for his cousin Theadora, which she returned. The relation continued for three years, until her father barred the financially unstable Cowper from marrying her.

Moved by Theadora's tears, her father found a suitable occupation for Cowper. By that time, however, Cowper had been suffering from persistent feelings of depression which blinded him to opportunities and convinced him they were presented to him to cause his failure. When a jealous opponent challenged his credentials, Cowper couldn't take the pressure and entertained thoughts of suicide.

He bought a half-ounce of laudanum, a tincture of opium, but couldn't bring himself to swallow it. He thought of drowning himself. When an attempt to stab himself with a penknife failed (the blade broke), he hanged himself with a garter. This method didn't work either, because the garter snapped just as William was losing consciousness. A friend found him as he had collapsed on his bed. This was the end of William's career and any chance to marry Theadora.

This experience was followed by greater depression, aggravated by fears of spiritual damnation. He found some relief in the sermons of a cousin, Rev. Martin Madan, who preached God's free grace to sinners. At night, however, the terrors returned, so much that his family and friends suggested a hospitalization at St. Albans, a sanatorium. He stayed there for over a year, fluctuating from moments of utter despair (with at least one new suicide attempt) to great delight in the promises of the gospel which friends and even his doctor kept reminding him.

When he left the sanatorium in 1765, friends and family committed to support him financially so he could live as a gentleman. It was around this time that he moved in with the Unwins.

A Mysterious Way

What tipped Cowper's fragile balance at the start of 1773 might have been the people's gossips about a love relationship between him and Mrs. Unwin. As long as Susanna Unwin lived with her mother, the situation looked respectable, but when she became engaged, the prospects of having an unmarried man living alone with an attractive widow seemed scandalous to many.

Newton recommended that Cowper marry Mrs. Unwin, but Cowper and Theadora had promised each other never to marry anyone else, and to keep the promise secret. For this reason, he could neither marry Mrs. Unwin, nor explain why.

There might have been other reasons for Cowper's renewed bout of depression. In any case, on 1 January 1773 he felt the oncoming of a crisis similar to what he had experienced ten years earlier, including the urge to take his own life. He picked up his pen and wrote one of the greatest poetic reminders of God's sovereign grace – the hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."

*"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread;
Are big with mercy and shall
break;
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence;
He hides a smiling face."*

During the night, Cowper was afflicted by dreams and hallucinations. He thought God was commanding him to put an end to his life. John Newton, who rushed to Cowper's side when Mrs. Unwin called him, spared us the details of that painful night, mentioning only "an affecting and critical dispensation" [which in those days meant "a distribution of blood," probably from wounds Cowper had inflicted himself].

(continued)

(continued from page 2)

Newton's diary over the next month is a testimony of the gravity of Cowper's condition. A few days later, Newton witnessed another "affecting scene" at Cowper's side. "I have now devoted myself and time as much as possible to attend on Mr. Cowper," he wrote on January 5. "We walked today and probably shall daily. I shall now have little leisure but for such things as indispensably require attention."

In spite of Cowper's distrust of his own salvation, Newton never doubted it for a moment. He was just "astonished and grieved" by the pain his friend was suffering. "My dear friend still walks in darkness," he wrote. "I can hardly conceive that anyone in a state of grace and favor with God can be in greater distress."

On Cowper's request, Newton took him back into his home for thirteen months, where he reminded him daily of God's faithfulness. When he finally returned to his home, Cowper devoted himself to quiet pursuits such as writing, gardening, carpentry, drawing, and caring for three young hares he celebrated in verse and prose as Puss, Tiney, and Bëss.

A few of his poems revealed his anguish (particularly his 1774 "Hatred and Vengeance, my Eternal Portion"). Many, however, were just expressions of a simple life and renewed attention to ordinary things: a cat who was mistakenly closed inside a drawer and – more famously – a poem in six books inspired by a sofa. The latter ("The Task") moved from the origins of the sofa to a description of his life of retirement and the local village, a commentary on contemporary England, a denunciation of slavery, and an exhortation to turn to Christ. Cowper gives this exhortation as "a stricken deer that left the herd" and was stricken by arrows, until Christ found him, "who had Himself been hurt by the archers."

Whatever other people may have thought of Cowper's permanence at Mrs. Urwin's home, she became his caretaker, while he swung from feelings of gratitude to delusional beliefs that she hated him and was trying to poison his food.

After his 1773 attack, Cowper never went back to church, but Newton didn't give up on his friend. When Cowper died in April 1800, Newton preached at his funeral from Exodus 3:2-3, saying, "He was indeed a bush in flames for 27 years but he was not consumed. And why? Because the Lord was there."

2nd Sunday Supper

Join us for 2nd Sunday Supper Sunday,
March 11th, immediately following the
evening worship service in the home of
John and Rachel Brownlee.

The Deacons
will meet
Sunday, March
11th, at 8:00a.m.

Duty Deacon

3/11 Dan
3/18 Jay
3/25 David

The Session
will meet
Monday, March
12th, at 7:00p.m.

YOUTH HOSTS

3/11 Roger & Jennie Caperton
3/18 David & Jamey Willers
3/25 VOLUNTEER???

YOUTH NEWS

Our youth are attending
Against the Flow, March 23-25
at the Twin Lakes Conference
Center. Rev. Ro Taylor is the
speaker. Pray for a safe trip as
well as good conversation!

Thanks,
Matt

Church LIFE
Night Desserts

3/7 Wanda Hudson & Jennie
Caperton

3/21 Jamey Willers &
Carol Higginbotham

3/28 Janet Koeder &
VOLUNTEER??



*There will be an Easter Egg Hunt Saturday,
March 31st, 2:00p.m.-4:00p.m., in the home
of Kevin & Wanda Hudson. Children from
infant to 6th grade are invited!! Bring your
Easter basket and 3 plastic eggs to hide!
Parents, bring a snack and lawn chairs!*

*We will be observing the
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper
Sunday, March 25th,
during the morning service.*

Women in the Church News

2018 PCA Women's Conference

One...one hope...one faith....one church

Located at First Presbyterian Church Jackson, Ms April 13-14

Cost: \$100 and \$50 for highschool and college age

**deadline March 30th*

Cost of hotel not included!

Speaker: Courtney Doctor

******The WIC will pay half of the registration fee.
Please contact Kristi McCown if you would like to attend!***

March 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.m.	7Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.m	8	9	10
11Diaconate Meeting 8:00a.m.	12Session Meeting 7:00p.m.	13Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.	14 NO CHURCH LIFE NIGHT	15	16	17
18	19	20Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.	21Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.m	22	23	24
25The Lord's Supper Ob- served	26	27Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.	28Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.m	29	30	31Easter Egg Hunt 2:00p.m.-4:p.m.