



The Taftsville Chapel Current

God calls us as followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as a community of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to our world.

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“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

Familiar Words Become A Prayer

We love to say it and love to hear it said. Is it just me, or this time around does it sound a bit more real, more sincere, more like a prayer: "Happy New Year!" Many of us have been (and continue to be) going through circumstances that anyone would describe as unhappy, and I think hopes are high for some good news, both close to home and across the whole wide world. The calendar turns and an extra measure of expectation sets in; things can start afresh.

This past Advent, Dave and Caren Swanson came up with a theme to help us more deeply and honestly look forward to celebrating Jesus' arrival as God with Us, and it strikes me that the steps we took readying ourselves for Christmas would be good disciplines for readying ourselves for each new day of this new year as it unfolds. Here they are:

Longing: There really is so much we care about and long to see happen or, in some cases, stop happening. Our souls just know that if those deep longings were met, everyone would be better off. How do we trust that our longings are placed there by God and can be trusted as more than just a selfish demand? Perhaps the "if only/then" test would help here. When we find ourselves longing (IF ONLY) for some change in someone or something outside us so that we would experience (THEN) a greater degree of personal comfort, it's a good bet our motives need some looking at. If, on the other hand, our deepest longing is to respond to whatever God allows with His grace and strength and dignity, regardless of what happens next, then we can rest in the thought that God has placed the longing there. What we most deeply long for is that Jesus be formed in us for the sake of others. It appears that this will take some....

Waiting: If only (there's that again!) there was a switch inside us we could flip, and the redemption would be complete. When will it end? How long, O Lord? Sometimes, when I remember, it helps to realize that the waiting for what we were most deeply built for will go on as long as we draw breath. Everyone in the list of the heroes of faith (see Hebrews 11) "died without receiving the promise." There are two ways to live with this. One is "So what's the point in waiting? Might as well arrange what I can for myself." The other is "What has been promised must be so far beyond imagining that it MUST be worth even this kind of waiting." This second perspective on waiting requires...

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Hoping: Remember, this isn't wishful thinking about short-term relief. It is a convinced awareness of the promised outcome of the most amazing story there is. It's a BIG story, an eternal one. That's how Paul could say that our present distress is not fit to be compared with the eternal weight of glory that awaits us. Okay, so yes, there are times when I read that and feel like I might want to throw a rotten tomato at him for saying it, but it's true. Very, very true. Jesus said so. The only thing we can do with a promise like that is reject it or open ourselves to...

Receiving: This is hard (as if the others weren't). It means being humble at levels that easily escape us, especially when the data of current events suggest that God is not paying attention to us (or others) in the way that we think He should. What, exactly, are we supposed to be receiving when everything looks impossible? Here's where, for me, the Sermon on the Mount just dances. We receive a WHO, not a what. Sometimes it's by a gritty and determined faith, and sometimes we are simply stunned by the joy accompanying His presence with us. Really, just a moment's taste of the Genuine Love is all we need, and of course, it also starts the cycle over again with a Longing for more, and the Waiting and Hoping that go with life this side of glory.

So, as a prayer, Happy New Year to us all. May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus and be shown new ways to come alongside a very hurting world with real comfort.

With love to all,
Randy

Editor's Note

One of my favorite authors, Anne Lamott, once wrote that the best thing about being a Christian is that every day is a new beginning. She writes, "Augustine said that you have to start your relationship with God all over from the beginning, every day. Yesterday's faith does not wait for you like a dog with your slippers and the morning paper in its mouth. You seek it, and in seeking it, you find it." (Plan B: Further thoughts on Faith, p. 315) God is continually making all things new through this process, and yet it is also true that there is something comforting about marking the new year and taking stock of our lives in new ways. Starting a new year feels like we have the chance to reevaluate the path we're on, and perhaps make some course corrections. As Randy says, at the New Year we have an extra measure of expectation.

As the Church, we have the opportunity and the calling to take this vision of renewing grace beyond our community and into the wider world. In relationship with those outside our circle of faith we witness to the good news of new beginnings. The tragedy that unfolded in Tucson last week has given all of us a chance to reevaluate the nature of our nation's political conversation. While it would be irresponsible to take blame from the individual and locate it squarely on the shoulders of politicians and their rhetoric, it is also irresponsible to see this incident as independent of the fabric of our culture. To put it plainly, this was a terrible tragedy perpetrated by a deranged individual who was operating within a larger culture that all too often celebrates violence, hatred, and incivility. To quote Anne Lamott again, "We know we have created God in our own image when He hates all the same people we do." We Christians have a unique opportunity to offer words that heal, and to model to our neighbors and co-workers what dialogue infused with humility looks like. Most of all, we can model the opportunity to take our grief and confusion to a God who suffers with us. I hope that our nation can seize the opportunity to shake off the vitriol and bitterness that has become an accepted part of political speech but the first task for us as Church is to maintain our witness of Christ's peace regardless of its reception in the world.

Ted and Elinor had only been in Tuscon for a short time when last Saturday's shooting took place. In her group e-mail last Sunday Elinor wrote,

The tragic shooting that occurred here in Tucson yesterday was on the northwest side of the city. We are located in the southeast so in terms of the city, we were about as far away as you could get from it (probably 45 minutes). We sometimes have worked up in that area in the past. There was non-stop coverage on TV yesterday somewhat like after 9/11. During this morning's worship service there was time for sharing comments and prayers. Although this congregation usually shares very freely, there was mostly silence. I think it was still too fresh and too emotional for most people to speak out. I spoke with one man before the service who said he was so sick when he heard about it, he could not even answer his wife's repeated phone calls because he knew she wanted to talk about it. Then he realized he did not know exactly where his two teenage kids were that morning . . . they live on the north side of town. Having said that, he couldn't continue talking to me either. I can't imagine what it was like for people who were just running to the grocery store on a Saturday morning... During the worship service we sang "There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God" and "My life flows on through endless song"--these songs were chosen for today's service in light of the tragedy here.

Songs Of the Season

Two reflections - Virginia Schlabach

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

*- Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894
(set to music by Gustav Holtz)*



December 27, 2010 (*beginning of our annual Christmas letter*):

This beautiful haunting carol floated into my mind this morning as I looked out the windows at the snow falling, snow on snow. We're in the midst of our first major snowfall of the winter, the mailbox and bird feeder wear tall white crests, icicles decorate the eaves, and as evening comes, snowflakes are still gently falling. Yesterday in church Karen Cox played guitar and sang "In the bleak midwinter" while the little children formed a tableau to represent the story in the song. Our grandson Micah scattered snow; a tiny Mary cradled her Christmas doll ("It's really a girl," she told me, "but right now it's a boy.") and kissed it at the appropriate time; little girl angels stood on chairs and fluttered silvery ribbons; and a two-year-old shepherd cuddled a lamb while his brother, dressed as a wise man, brought a golden gift to the baby. As the congregation sang "Away in a Manger", the wee shepherd wandered about looking for his mommy and daddy, and afterwards, Evelyn cuddled up against me with her baby doll and eventually climbed on my lap and fell asleep - and so I held Mary in one arm and Jesus in the other. For me, holy moments like this help define the beauty and mystery of the Incarnation.



Jesous Ahatonhia - Jesus Is Born

'Twas in the moon of winter-time, when all the birds had fled,
The mighty Gitchi Manitou sent angel choirs instead.
Before their light the stars grew dim, and wond'ring hunters heard the hymn:
Jesus your king is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.

Within a lodge of broken bark the tender babe was found,
A ragged robe of rabbit skin enwrapped his body round.
But as the hunter braves drew nigh, the angel-song rang loud and high:
Jesus your king is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.

The earliest moon of winter-time is not so round and fair
As was the ring of glory on the helpless baby there.
The chiefs from far before him knelt with gifts of fox and beaver pelt.
Jesus your king is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria.

O children of the forest free, O seed of Manitou,
The holy child of earth and heav'n is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant boy who brings you beauty, peace, and joy.
Jesus your king is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis Gloria

- St. Jean de Brebeuf, ca. 1643; translated by J.E. Middleton, 1926

December 6 (E-mail to Janet North and Judy McCrory): Thanks, Janet, for leading "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime" yesterday and adding the drum! It's one of my favorite carols as we used to sing it every year at Perkasio church - Rob Yoder introduced it - but I don't recall ever singing it at Taftsville. Judy and I talked about it afterwards and I remembered the story behind it which Rob had shared and which just last year I discovered in an old Christmas book. Here it is:

*The first carol written on the American continent was probably an Indian song in the language of the Hurons of lower Canada. In 1641 Father Jean de Brebeuf, a French missionary to the Indians, wrote a six-stanza Christmas song titled "Jesous Ahatonhia" (Jesus is born), and set it to a sixteenth-century French melody that sounded a little like "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen." When the Iroquois overran the Huron territory, the priest and many of his converts were captured and burned at the stake. But the hymn was preserved by Hurons who escaped into Quebec and Michigan, and it was later written down by missionaries. It has never been generally known in English. (Rachel Hartman, *The Gifts of Christmas*, 1962 - p. 67)*



I remember that Rob told us that Father de Brebeuf wrote the carol in order to bring the unfamiliar imagery of stable, swaddling clothes, shepherds, and wise men into ideas that the Hurons could understand in their culture. He used "Gitchi Manitou", the Huron name for "the mighty Lord of all the world" for God. The tune we sing says "French melody" but the rhythms seem to have been adapted to their musical culture - try singing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman" with that same rhythm!

Church Life



In December Christopher McCrory began a Sunday school program called Wee Wonder, designed especially for two-year-olds. The undated, reusable curriculum includes music, stories, activities, and a take-home page geared to this age level.

Please continue to pray for the spiritual lives of the children in our congregation, and the lives of the other kids in "our kids" lives!

Advent Project: The hat and mitten tree was filled three times with hats, mittens, gloves, socks, and scarves. Each time that I delivered them to PATH, the staff expressed gratitude. We received a thank you note from them and also from the Haven for our food donations. - *Ruth Ann Glick*

February Candlelighters' Project: Care packages for college students. We will send out ideas for items for these packages by e-mail. The items will be due Sunday February 13th.

India Cross-Cultural Term: This semester I will be traveling throughout India. In the words of my group leader, Eastern Mennonite University psychology

professor Kim Brenneman, we will be "listening to guest lectures and presentations; writing essays, papers; conducting a village study; having home stays with families in Ladakh (Leh area); working with slum children in Delhi; working at Mother Teresa's in Kolkata (we have it lined up so I hope it works out); helping out farmers in Ladakh and helping a village reconstruct their homes after a devastating flood went through last spring; making a short trek; taking classes in classic Indian arts (percussion, voice, dance, mural painting, yoga); taking Hindi lessons; visiting most holy sites for Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist; attending church if possible and developing our own worship services if church isn't available; interacting with a Christian school and orphanage; experiencing beaches; attending ancient Hindu festivals in villages; and learning to live and work with each other! "

I am looking forward to experiencing a semester that is like nothing else that I have done before. I will be keeping a blog, but the updates may be sporadic. The link to my blog is below: <http://currychronicles2011.blogspot.com/> When I return, I am sure I will have many stories and photos to share with my church family! - *Laura Beidler*

Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity: The selection process is beginning for a new home to be completed this summer at 23 Peabody Street in Lebanon. The eligibility guidelines are posted on the outreach bulletin board in the Millen Room. Please share these with anyone you know who currently lives in inadequate housing and may want to apply. - *Allen Guntz*

Christmas Baby: At 8:04 p.m. on December 25th, we received the best Christmas present we ever could have wished for. Elspeth Dove, our second daughter, arrived after a speedy labor at home. She weighed 8lb 3oz and measured 20 3/4" long. Ezra Grace is enjoying being a big sister. Praise the Lord for all of His grace and mercy in our lives!

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." Psalm 139:14-16 - *Silver and Heather Gerrity, former members now living in Colorado (photos and address on bulletin board in Millen Room)*

Taftsville Tidbit Trivia *Do you remember when...*

40 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 13, 1971

Surveys were passed out during the morning service to serve as a basis for discussion about leadership. It was decided that a team ministry would suit best for the situation at present, with continued contacts made to seminaries and elsewhere for future possibilities.

30 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 7, 1981

Planned Youth debate: "Should Christian Men Register for the Draft?"

25 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 16, 1986

The Sunday school format was discussed. It was the consensus that we should not return to the standard Builder lesson series soon, but rather continue to have individuals prepare and teach lessons of varied topics.

20 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 7, 1991

Richard Moon reported that after talking with someone from the town water and sewer department that the previous threats about disconnecting our sewer were a little dubious.

15 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 18, 1996

Thursday is Work Night to finish the interior installation of the lift. An In-service for Lift Operation will be on an upcoming Saturday.

10 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 25, 2001

The trustees are continuing to keep an eye (or nose...) on the water filtering system, to see if the new filters will meet our needs.

5 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

January 11, 2006

Church Council discussed the need for a mailbox reminder for the next person on the cleaning list; Mary Beth volunteered to follow-up with "Your Turn Sponge".



Karen Cox playing guitar for the children's performance of In The Bleak Midwinter

Congratulations!

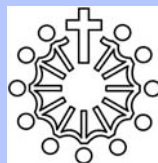
Dennis and Marie Hackman will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on February 11, 2011.

An Open House planned by their family will be held on Sunday, February 20.

Watch for more details!

Taftsville Chapel Mennonite Fellowship

Located in the village of Taftsville, VT, one block south of Rt. 4 on Happy Valley Road.



Randy Good, Pastor

<http://www.taftsvillechapel.org/>

Send your contributions for the Current to: carenswanon@yahoo.com or contact a Newsletter Staff member: Carie Good, Janet North & Virginia Schlabach