



Masquerading Worship by Gerrit Dawson, Senior Pastor

Feeling a bit like Darth Vader in my mask, I walked through the Sanctuary greeting a number of families who had come to the confirmation service. I found comfort that we were all doing the same. From a safe distance, I said, "It's like a masquerade ball. Or a Halloween party. You feel ridiculous getting ready. But once you see that everyone else has on a costume, it's ok." Indeed, it was ok. No, I'm not a big fan of breathing back my own breath. But I get it. We're helping each other. We're making the best of the situation given to us. And I'm awfully proud that you are making the effort to regather our congregation in the Sanctuary while following the safest recommendations in a spirit of adventure. *Of course you are!*

Now I don't mind telling you, leadership in an uncharted crisis is exhausting! Every week, sometimes every other day, we have to *pivot*. We have to adapt. To plot a new course knowing it might change overnight. I've been so impressed with the flexibility and innovation and sheer hard work of our on-the-ground staff. Our team bowls me over with the way they've communicated and created worship and ministry for all of us in these strange days.

Lately, I've found a place to be peaceful. I think our elders have found that same place. We're sheltering in the leadership that is above us. We're thankful for and praying for our freely elected government. As long as what the state asks doesn't compel us to compromise the gospel or doesn't egregiously and specifically target people of faith, we are glad to follow. To be part of Team Louisiana.

This gives us two strong directions. On the one hand, we want to do everything that is *permitted* to us to do. Our business is gathered worship. We exist to proclaim the gospel in community *for* the community. So when we can open at 25%, we do. We energetically embrace what we may do, offering the best we can give to the most who can come. On the other hand, we accept what is *prescribed* for our safety. If sanitizing, distancing and masking is what is asked, we're happy to do it. It's not fun. But it's what is called for. And that makes me peaceful.

I don't want to try to think I know better. Nor do I want to live in fear. I want to live boldly within the guidance of what is both permitted and safe. Down this road, lies peace, restoration and love for our community. Just think, no one has ever done this before! We'll always remember this time. I will always remember your overwhelming love for your church and commitment to our ministry in the heart of Baton Rouge. These days, it's easy as pie to say I love being your pastor!

Gratitude for Steve Rushing



The director of our chancel choir ends his tenure with us this month. Dr. Steve Rushing has partnered with me in leading Classic Reformed Worship for the last fifteen years. His outstanding full-time vocal teaching at Southeastern University and then at Baton Rouge International School have meant that Steve's service

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Father's Day JUNE 21
Stay tuned for upcoming event information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

VBS (tentative) JULY 20-23

BIRTHS:

May 4, 2020
Eleanor Ramsey Dawson
Parents are Rachel and Micah Dawson
Grandparents are Rhonda and Gerrit Dawson
Grandparents are Carol and Peter Lazar

WEDDINGS:

May 17, 2020
Brennan Segrest and Mitchell Rodeheaver

IN MEMORIAM:

April 30, 2020
Wayne Pourciau
Father of Trace Pourciau

SANCTUARY FLOWERS

The flowers are placed . . .

JUNE 7 . . . in memory of Sue and Bill Edrington and Mary and Emmett Edrington by Susie and Buzzy Heroman, Leah and Billy Edrington and Lynn and Mark Edwards.

JUNE 14 . . . to celebrate the 52nd wedding anniversary of Helen and Jerry Bowman and to the glory of God in loving memory of their fathers Lamar Randall and Ralph Bowman.

JUNE 21 . . . Open date. If you would like to donate flowers, please contact Kathy Mullins at 291.3095.

JUNE 28 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of our parents: Dorothy and Joachim Aubert and Emma and Pete Ramos by Fe' and Murphy Aubert.

The flowers serve to honor a departed loved one or celebrate with thanksgiving cherished people or events. If you would like to donate flowers for a particular Sunday, please contact Kathy Mullins at 291.3095.

I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People by Jaime Carnaggio

What is a covenant and what does it represent? How do the covenants of the Old Testament apply to us today?

God's covenants form the backbone of the Bible's meta-narrative. They are the unifying thread of God's saving action through Scripture, beginning with Creation and reaching fulfillment in the New Covenant confirmed through the blood of Jesus Christ. How remarkable that our great God desired so deeply to enter into relationship with his people that he stooped down to establish an everlasting, unbreakable covenant with us!



This summer we will journey through the five major covenants of the Old Testament: Creation, Noah, Abraham, Moses and King David . . . and we will point each of these to the New Covenant in Christ, when our Lord Jesus perfectly fulfilled them, sealing our relationship with God eternally.

Join us as we trace the significance of God's covenants in our redemptive history, as we witness a covenant-making God create a people for himself from which the Savior of the whole world would come. Our study meets each Wednesday in July from 6.30 to 8 pm.

Stay tuned for details on our meeting location (in person and/or virtual).

You Are My Tribe; My Ministry by Chris Phillips, Director of Worship

I am fairly certain I had never uttered the phrase "social distancing" before all of this began. I was just starting to get to know you. Then we were literally forbidden to visit with one another. As we pivoted to livestream worship, I found myself peering into the camera each Sunday with such a desire to connect to you that it probably sometimes looked like fidgety energy. I know you are accustomed to seeing me less animated and more subdued. (Ha!)



The realities of a global pandemic were not on my calendar as I anticipated my first Lent and Easter season with you here at First Presbyterian. Despite having been warned about the donkey, I was anticipating the grandeur and celebration of Palm Sunday. I wanted to experience Maundy Thursday with its darkness and striking visuals. I wanted to see who wore fancy hats for Easter Sunday. Gerrit would say, "He is risen!" and we would say, "He is risen indeed!"

The realities of the Lenten and Easter seasons were a different and strange story. Yet even in all this strangeness and interruption, something *wonderful* has come into clear focus for me. I believe that our God, in his gracious sovereignty, has brought me here. I needed you. You are my tribe. My people. It is hard to fully explain. My time in ministry here has not been long. There is surely much we will learn and walk through with one another in the coming years. But my dear brothers and sisters, you have my heart. It is my deep honor to serve you. There is a satisfying 'click' in my spirit. It is the click of a good, solid fit.

We have returned now to gathered worship in our beautiful Sanctuary. While it is not the grand and massive reunion I imagined, seeing your masked faces brings me joy. Thank you! Thank you for welcoming me into this wonderful faith family. Thank you for entrusting me to lead you in giving glory to our most worthy Lord. Thank you for joining your voices with mine to sing the deep truths of the faith.

Deeper in Christ, Further into God's Economy by Barry Phillips, Ministry Ex.

When Gerrit joined us as Senior Pastor 16 years ago, he said that his goal was to take us "deeper in Christ and further into the world." Since then the average pledge (or estimate of giving) has increased \$4,052!!! How can that be? Martin Luther said that three conversions must take place if one is to truly have an intimate relationship with Christ: a conversion of the head, the heart and the purse.

Going deeper in Christ changes us. It makes us generous. It makes us generous with our time, our affections, our love and, yes, our money.

From my vantage point as one of only two on our staff who handle receipts, I am privileged to see first-hand what has happened over the years. And it is remarkable.

The first year I was on board one year after Gerrit arrived, Katrina paid us a visit. Our purses opened wide to assist those devastated by this calamity. Then came Gustav and we lived out the principal of "blessed to be a blessing." The Floods of 2016 presented another opportunity. Gerrit and I were honored to distribute your "gifts" to 27 church families in the amount of \$10,000 each! And now, COVID-19.

Your Session approved an initiative called Neighbors Helping Neighbors, during the month of May. The goal was to give the Baton Rouge Food Bank and the Downtown Outreach Center \$10,000 each. Any gifts received over and above that would go into our Helping Hands Fund from which we would provide direct financial assistance to members needing help. We reached that milestone of \$20,000 early in May. And as promised we have cut checks to the Food Bank and Outreach Center. As of this writing (May 26), gifts are over \$57,000. The Helping Hands fund balance is over \$37,000 and we've begun receiving requests.

On top of all of that and in the face of economic and financial uncertainty, your tithes and offerings to your church exceed the budget through the first four months of the year.

Deeper in Christ? Yes, Deeper in Christ! You demonstrate everyday a generosity that could only come through life change; life change brought on by and through Christ in you. The Triune God of the universe bought you at an inestimable price. You've come to know what it is to participate in his economy. You've come to acknowledge that everything is his; that our role is to be good stewards of all that he has given us and to look on the needs of others with compassion and generosity.

From where I sit, I get to see glorious giving by the members of First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge. What a view it is! What a privilege to see. What an honor to be a part of it all.

PS: If you'll put Neighbor's Fund in the memo line of your check, we will still accept your gifts to help out our members in need even though May is in the rear view mirror.

The Proper Perspective by Jim Solomon, Associate Pastor of Pastoral Care and Prayer

Sometimes it's difficult to realize that God is in control even when things seem to be out of control or at least beyond our control. Psalm 46 offers us the proper perspective in the midst of life's problems that can lead to our peace. After reading Psalm 46, please consider these thoughts that I pray will keep you in his peace.

We can keep a proper perspective by looking for, reflecting upon and remembering four things about God that would lead to having peace in Christ.

First, God's presence (vv. 1-3) is within, above and beyond the troubles we face.

Second, God's power (vv. 4-6) is doing what we alone cannot do.

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SUNDAY WORSHIP

First Presbyterian Church will have two
Sanctuary services:
9 am and 11 am.

JUNE SERMON TEXTS

Texts are subject to change.

JUNE 7, 2020
Isaiah 64: 1-12

JUNE 14, 2020
Isaiah 58: 6-12

JUNE 21, 2020
Psalm 1: 1-3; Isaiah 61: 1-3

JUNE 28, 2020
To be determined

PASTORAL STAFF

GERRIT DAWSON
Senior Pastor

WHITNEY ALEXANDER
Associate Pastor of Missions

BARRY PHILLIPS
Ministry Executive

JIM SOLOMON
Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care & Prayer

DARIN TRAVIS
Director of Discipleship,
Men's Ministry & Young Adults



PH: 225.387.0617
FAX: 225.338.1010

fpibr.org

763 North Boulevard
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Mother's Day Out and Preschool
225.620.0245

Baton Rouge Christian Counseling Center
225.387.2287

brchristiancounseling.com

Masquerading Worship *continued from page 1*

to us has always been on a quarter-time basis. With the arrival of our first full-time worship director who is fluent in both classic and contemporary styles, there is too much overlap to continue with two choir directors. So it is with both sadness and gratitude that we bid farewell to Steve in his official capacity.

But first, we want to celebrate his work among us. Steve raised high the excellence of our choir program. He established the reputation of our music throughout the community and especially amidst the musicians in town. His gracious spirit and love for all kinds of music played a significant role in healing tensions that once existed between our worship styles. Steve has freely offered vocal lessons to many members, taking a personal interest in his choir and enhancing the careers of our

student singers. And that voice! Could anyone else have sung the voice of God in *Roots and Promises*? The annual cantatas with orchestra have become a beloved tradition among us. Seeing and hearing Steve's great pleasure in getting the most out of his singers and musicians communicates joy to all of us. We will miss his humor, his spiritual insights and his collegiality.

Though social distancing limits our options, we can still heartily celebrate Steve on Sunday, June 21 at the 11 am service. We all want to express our appreciation for this fine Christian man, musician and vocalist.



Steve

Perspective *continued from page 3*

Third, God's purpose (vv. 8-10) in tearing down any human kingdom to build up a holy kingdom, being known to his people that they may make him known to others. This cannot happen if we are not *still*, outwardly and inwardly.

Fourth, God's promise (vv. 7 & 11) to never leave you nor forsake you because he loves you.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14: 27)."