PLANT THE APPLE TREE

By Colton Underwood
Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families

"How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?" Psalm 89 is, all at once, one of the most beautiful psalms and one of the harshest.

It begins with joy and adoration: "I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD forever." For 37 verses, he recounts God's lovingkindness over all creation. In the heavens and in the skies, his excellence is established. There is no heavenly being that could ever rival his glory. Earth itself belongs to him for he founded it; even its most chaotic forces are subject to his totalizing sovereignty.

What's more, God's faithfulness is to be seen among his people! He has set apart a people for himself, ruling over them in righteousness, calling them to walk in the light of his face. He established his covenant with David and his sons after him, promising to prosper him, to keep his offspring, even to discipline them should they transgress God's law—but never to forsake them.

"But now," we begin in verse 38, "you have cast off and rejected." For 14 verses, the psalmist now cries out to God in light of the fact that God's prior promises don't seem to square with his present circumstances. It seems that God has renounced his covenant, toppled the throne of his anointed, tossed his crown in the dust, exalted his foes against him, and covered him with shame.

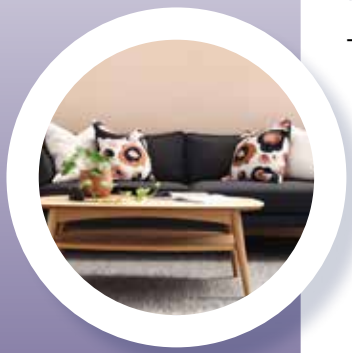
How many times have God's people been in this place? How often have Christians wondered, "Is this it? Is this the end? Where are you in this, O God?"

We may not remember that, after the Council of Nicea (325), the Arians were ascendant and gained so much sway that it seemed like orthodoxy would die out, but that Athanasius should stand contra mundum. We may forget that, when Rome fell, many of the faithful thought the world must be ending, but for Augustine's pastoral insight. And what of the Muslim conquest which consumed regions which once were the seedbed of Christianity? And on we could go, even to the present day.

Do we see our circumstances in light of the steadfast love of God? Or do we doubt his promises in light of our circumstances? Which is more real to us? Faith does not demand naive optimism when faced with disappointment and uncertainty. It demands prayers like Psalm 89. Honest appeal to God in light of what he has promised, trusting as Spurgeon did, "When we cannot trace [God's] hand, we must trust his heart." Trust that meets trial with hope, as Luther did, saying, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."

10.30 AM WORSHIP SEPTEMBER 6

On Sunday, September 6, First Presbyterian will have just one 10.30 am worship service in the Sanctuary. This will be a blended service combining the worship styles of the Chapel Communion, Contemporary and Classic Reformed services. There will be no Sunday school.



FALL COMMUNITY GROUPS START THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 13

The Scriptures affirm again and again that God has created us to live in community—with him and with one another. One of the most practical ways to do this in a church our size is to commit to being part of a community group.

When we prayerfully say, "As the Lord leads me, I am committing to walk with these people for the next 10 weeks," we make room for the Spirit to create and deepen meaningful bonds with the Lord. Because none of us are perfect, those relationships can sometimes be difficult, but much more often, God uses them to draw us deeper into Christ and mature us as his disciples.

This fall, our groups will follow our sermon series through the Gospel of Luke. As we take time together to reflect on Luke's words and consider how they apply to our lives today, we can expect the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Groups meet throughout the Baton Rouge area on various days of the week and at a variety of times. If you aren't already connected to a group, contact Blake Fowler (*blake@fpcbr.org*) to find one that fits your schedule and location. If you are looking for a group in which childcare is provided, we've got you! Our Sunday night groups that meet at the church provide childcare, but we need you to register. Scan the code to let us know you're coming.

Whatever your stage in life, we would love to get you connected. Come be part of a fall community group!

GAME NIGHT WITH INTERNATIONALS

Join International Friendship Partners (IFP) on Saturday, September 19 for Game Night! Our annual fall kickoff brings together church members and international students. Come for fellowship and games from 6 to 8 pm, in the FPC Gym and give a warm welcome to international students and their families. We'll have board games, toss games, ping pong and indoor badminton. It's fun for the whole family, with food provided. And, maybe you'll discover an international to befriend and share the love of Christ on an ongoing basis.

This event is free but we do need a headcount. Scan the code to register. There's even an opportunity to volunteer for set up, greeting, registration, food and beverage service, and clean up.

IFP Contacts: LeeAnn Kozan to volunteer (*leeannkozan@gmail.com*); David Kozan for more information on how to get involved with IFP (*davidkozan@hotmail.com*); or Valerie Gastinel (*vgastinel@yahoo.com*) to host a student or find out more about IFP.

EXPERIENCE SCRIPTURE WHERE IT UNFOLDED, ISRAEL

Plans are moving forward for our church trip to Israel scheduled for January 12–21, 2027. As always, we will continue to monitor conditions as the trip approaches and make decisions with the well-being of our group in mind. Visit the church website for more information (*fpcbr.org*) or contact Darin Travis if you have questions (*darin@fpcbr.org*).

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

2	Middle School Surge Event
2	Young Adult Worship
6	10.30 am Worship
7	Church Office Closed
13	Session Welcomes Children Ready for Communion
13	Community Groups Resume
13	Children's Choir Resumes
15	Men's BBQ
19	IFP Game Night
20	Discover First Class Begins
30	Boys' Ultimate Frisbee

DON'T JUST ATTEND CHURCH, BE THE CHURCH! by Chan Willis, Parish Visitor

What an honor and privilege it has been to serve the First Presbyterian Church family and friends as your Parish Visitor during this season of pastoral transition. It has been deeply rewarding to renew long-standing relationships and build new friendships within a faith community that has been so beloved by me and my family for more than half a century. I am grateful to God—and to the leaders of this congregation—for the opportunity to give back, in some small way, to this beautiful body of Christ that has been such a loving and supportive part of my own journey of faith.

What I especially want to encourage you to remember is that this opportunity for ministry is not limited to this particular retired Presbyterian minister. This interim season of seeking new pastoral leadership is also a time for all of you to discover and grow in your own gifts for ministry and leadership at FPC.

We have been blessed with a rich heritage of strong senior pastors, but the church is so much more than the person who stands in the pulpit. The church is ***you***.

As I go about the sometimes-daunting task of caring for a congregation of this size, especially in a part-time role, I am increasingly aware of how much I need the help of others in this ministry of care.

> **You are the hands of Christ**—hands that rest on a troubled shoulder or help with a needed home repair.
> **You are the eyes of Christ**—eyes that notice when someone is hurting or needs a word of encouragement.
> **You are the feet of Christ**—feet that walk alongside others in their struggles.
> **You are the mouth of Christ**—lips that offer words of prayer, comfort, and encouragement from the heart of Christ.

I encourage you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Please know that I am here for you as we all seek to share the love of God with his children—not only to minister to your personal needs, but also to encourage and equip you in your ministry to others. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me (*barrieandchan@gmail.com*), whether for yourself, a fellow church member, or another friend in need.

The most effective form of evangelism is simply to show that you care, because Christ cares for you.

And as we enter a season when there is often a great deal of focus on our favorite "teams," let us not forget the most important allegiance we have: Team Jesus.

T.E.A.M. — Together Everyone Achieves More

GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE! BLOOD DRIVE, OCTOBER 4

Join us for our upcoming blood drive on October 4 from 8 am—1 pm. The LifeShare truck will be in the gated, church parking lot off of Convention St.

Your generous donation can help save lives in our community. Please consider rolling up your sleeve and making a difference!

A COUPLE OF NOTES FROM SCOTT GRAHAM, INTERIM SENIOR PASTOR:

If you are interested in keeping up with the latest news on the EPC, check out *epconnect.org*. Stated Clerk Dean Weaver hosts a weekly podcast, *In All Things*. You will also find a quarterly newsletter with pertinent updates.

Kristina and I are rejoicing in the birth of Rosemary Kristina Graham, born August 28, 8 lbs. 9 oz, 21". Mom, baby and even dad are doing great! This is their first child, and our third grandchild. So grateful to our wonderful God!

UPCOMING OCTOBER EVENTS

2-3	Women's Stay-Treat
4	Blood Drive
23	Prime Time Club
25	Kirkin' O' the Tartans
30–31	Couples' Workshop

"MORE THAN CONQUERORS" WOMEN'S OCTOBER STAY TREAT

Romans 8 is one of the most cherished chapters in all of Scripture. It begins with a magnificent promise, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and ends with the unshakable assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

But what does it actually mean to live with no condemnation? To know that we are beloved children and heirs of God? To trust we are secure in his grip, even when life brings suffering and uncertainty? To truly believe that God is for us?

Join us for "More Than Conquerors," a weekend retreat centered entirely on Romans 8.

Friday, October 2
6 pm @ the home of Sherry Tucker (15610 Philemon Thomas Ct.)
Dinner, Fellowship, Worship

Saturday, October 3
8.30 am—12 pm @ Dunham Chapel (childcare offered)
Breakfast, Worship, Reflection

$20/person (increases to $25 on September 28). Register online or scan the code.

From no condemnation to no separation, Romans 8 reminds us that we are free, we are his, we are secure, and we are loved, and because of him, *we are more than conquerors.*

CIRCLES BEGIN THIS MONTH!

Join one of our Women's Ministry Circles this year as we study H*ebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, by Michael Kruger. Together, we'll discover why Christ is infinitely better than anything this world offers–and why, when our hearts are prone to drift, he alone is the anchor that holds us fast.

Circles provide meaningful fellowship through a cohesive Scripture-based book study and time of prayer. Circles meet monthly from September through May, but you can join anytime. Email *jaime@fpcbr.org* for more information or visit *fpcbr.org* for Circle meeting days and times.

SERMON TEXTS
Texts are subject to change.

SEPTEMBER 6
Luke 4:16–30

SEPTEMBER 13
Luke 5:1–11

SEPTEMBER 20
Luke 5:12–16

SEPTEMBER 27
Luke 5:27–32

CREATED FOR CONNECTION COUPLES' WORKSHOP

Friday, October 30-Saturday, October 31, 2026

"Created for Connection" couples' workshops are "Hold Me Tight" workshops for Christian couples based on EFT, Dr. Sue Johnson's Emotionally Focused Therapy. These experiential learning workshops are presented in a Friday afternoon—Saturday format. The workshops provide a context for couples to work together on designed structured exercises.

This program will help you ignite your romantic fire by experiencing new ways of connecting.

SPECIAL RATE FOR MEMBERS OF FPC: Please be sure to choose the "First Presbyterian Church Couples' Price" option if you are a member of First Presbyterian Church. The fee for FPC members is $175. The church will pay the remainder of your fee in support of your commitment to working on your marriage! Scan the code to reserve your spot.

MEN'S BBQ SEPTEMBER 15

Our fall Men's Ministry kick-off event is right around the corner! Are you ready to feast on BBQ ribs dripping with flavor? Are you eager to enjoy camaraderie with fellow men in the church? Most importantly, are you wanting to go deeper in your experience of God? Come join us on Tuesday, September 15 at 6 pm for a night of food and fellowship. Similar to last year, we will have a panel of FPC members share how the Lord has met and encouraged them. As we hear how Jesus has ministered to our brothers, I trust each of us will be encouraged to ask the Lord for a deeper experience of him. We will once again meet at Calvin Fabre's (5700 Sandalwood Dr. Baton Rouge, 70808). The BBQ ribs will be coming hot off the grill and delicious sides will be feasted upon by all! FPC Men's Ministry will provide food and drinks for the dinner. So that we have enough food, please RSVP. Visit *fpcbr.org* or scan the code to register.

"THE BRIDGE" YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

"The Bridge" is First Presbyterian's young adult ministry for ages 18–26. It's a place to build friendships, grow in faith, and worship together. We meet each Wednesday evening at Jacob Struppeck's to study the Bible, talk about faith, and learn from one another. On the first Wednesday of each month, we gather in Dunham Chapel at 6.30 pm for music, prayer, and time together before the Lord. Whether you're new to First Presbyterian, new to faith, or have been around for a while, we'd love for you to join us. Come for worship, connect with others, and grow in your faith with "The Bridge." Contact Darin Travis for more information (*darin@fpcbr.org*).

PRIME TIME LUNCH WITH "AMERICA'S MINISTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT!"

Please plan to join the Prime Time group on Friday, October 23 to laugh along with our special guest, Dennis Swanberg, who is known as "America's Minister of Encouragement!" Dr. Swanberg is an ordained minister, who speaks across the country to encourage people from all walks of life to look at the "lighter side of life." We will begin with lunch and fellowship in the Reception Room at 11.30 am. The cost will be $35 and information regarding registration will be coming soon.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY SERVING AT OUR ADOPTED SCHOOL!

We are looking for members to serve in the following ways at McKinley Elementary:
Teacher Encourager – 31 teachers would love to be adopted by you
Storytime Reader – 7 classrooms would love for you to read to them monthly
Reading Friend – ongoing need to tutor a below level reader
School Supplies – donate supplies for needy kids (Amazon link: *fpcbr.org*)
Email Laura Shaw (*laura@fpcbr.org*) or call 225-387-0617!

FRONT YARD BIKES BASH

Join us for the 2nd Annual Front Yard Bike Bash on Sunday, October 25, 3–6 pm! Enjoy a community bike ride through Mid-City, followed by food, refreshments and fun—all supporting Front Yard Bikes' mission to empower youth through cycling and community. Registration coming soon!

CARING TO LOVE IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Help with their Labor Day mailing or the Baby Boutique (sorting, organizing items for mothers, or minor facility repairs). They are also urgently collecting newborn and size 1 diapers and baby wipes. Want to donate? Shop their Amazon Wish List by scanning the QR code.

BIRTHS

August 2, 2026
Wilson James Davis
Parents are Mary & Robert

August 9, 2026
Elanor Fay Hinson
Parents are Hannah & Andrew

BAPTISMS

August 9, 2026
Daniel Whitaker Hollingsworth
Parents are Ken
dall & Blake

DEATHS

August 10, 2026
John Crnko
Father of Emily-Kate Crnko

August 13, 2026
Leslie Godwin
Father of Cindy Morris

August 22, 2026
Sarah Anne Creed

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Session Welcomes Children Ready for Communion on September 13

In our Presbyterian Church, we welcome children to partake with all of us at the table after 3 steps have been taken: 1) they have received baptism, 2) they have received training in the meaning of the Lord's Supper (attended meeting with Scott August 23) and 3) their parents feel they are ready to say "yes" to Jesus as they eat of him and drink of him in the Supper.

If you believe your child is ready to take the step of receiving communion, we will have a short meeting at 10.15 am in Dunham Chapel Sunday, September 13 to approve those gathered to receive the Lord's Supper in the future. This is a Book of Order requirement that allows our Elders to help with the spiritual oversight of our church community.

Please sign up by September 8 if your child will be attending the September 13 meeting. Parental attendance is required for this event.

FIRST DAY OF MOTHER'S DAY OUT

First day of Mother's Day Out! Some crying (both babies and moms), but mostly smiles!

VOLUNTEER IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Contact Candace Walker (*candace@fpcbr.org*) or visit our Opportunities to Serve webpage to see how you can volunteer to help in the So Loved nursery.

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS & HAPPENINGS

A Youth Summer of Service by Daniel Croskrey

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The mission of Christ himself was service. In perfect humility, God himself served. And we are called to follow in his steps. Striving to reflect this, tMAKE Thankfully, First Presbyterian supports over 20 local missions partners throughout the city. After a quick chat with Lindsay Stratman, we had enough opportunities to fill multiple summers! Here is a list of what the youth accomplished this summer!

Church Cleaning Day: Did you notice the Gym is looking more spectacular than usual and all the white tables and chairs are clean? Thanks youth!

Habitat Build: Our team painted the entire exterior of a home.

S.T.A.R.S.: We spent a week leading k–6th graders in sports camp.

Caring to Love: From shredding documents to sorting baby clothes, the youth had a special day helping the crisis pregnancy center!

Christian Outreach Center: I am amazed at how efficient the middle school boys were at packing frozen French fries into grocery bags . . . well done!

Painting Parking Lines: Perhaps the most impressive task accomplished was painting new parking lines on 8th Street and the Convention Street lot in the ridiculous heat!

I encourage everyone to find an area of service, gather a few friends or family members, and enjoy the gift of giving!

UPCOMING YOUTH EVENTS

Middle School Surge. On September 2 at 6 pm, our middle school students are invited to an afternoon at Surge Entertainment. Surge is a large indoor family entertainment center featuring bowling, laser tag, an arcade, sports simulators, and mini-golf. Scan the code for more information and to register.

Ultimate Frisbee. Middle and high school boys are invited on Sunday, September 30 to join us at 6 pm for a game of ultimate frisbee at the Highland Road Park football field near the main entrance. Come ready to play, have fun, and enjoy some time together! For more information, contact Colton (*colton@fpcbr.org*).

CHAPEL & SANCTUARY FLOWERS

The Chapel and Sanctuary flowers are given . . .

Sept 6 . . . in loving memory with thanksgiving for Van Andrew Wilson remembering his birthdate of September 3, by his parents Claire & Steve Wilson.

Sept 13 . . . to the glory of God in loving memory of Jerry Johnson by his wife, LaNelle Johnson, and their daughters, Debra Matthews, Joy Pennington, and Jeri J. Cochran.

Sept 20 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Will Dixon by Shea & Tim Firnberg and Sharon Dixon.

Sept 27 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of Mr. and Mrs. Henry G. McKowen II, Mr. and Mrs. Alex C. McKowen Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Frank Woodford, Jolie Thuneman Peel, and Jolie Berry, by Jeanie McKowen Thuneman, Wayne McKowen, Ann McKowen Gerald, and Allie McKowen.

Chapel and Sanctuary flowers may be donated by contacting Kathy Mullins (225.603.4735).

GOOD YEARS FOR FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

FPC Church History
Continued from the August 2026 newsletter

By Zora Olsson

In the years leading up to the Civil War, First Presbyterian grew in activity and responsibility, though it was often handicapped by the lack of a regular pastor. In 1840, Rev. Jahleel Woodbridge, one of the most influential figures in Louisiana Presbyterianism, became pastor and served for 14 years. During his tenure, a new church was erected. Dedicated January 15, 1854, it received glowing reviews in local papers as “the largest and best ordered house of worship in the city.” One of its chief features was ample room for the choir (more than likely to accommodate the hoop skirts fashionable at the time!). Rev. Woodbridge left later that year, and by 1855, another notable Virginian, Rev. Thomas Castleton, assumed the pastorate.

To be continued in next month’s issue of FPC News.

First Presbyterian Church
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