



The Full Circle

June 23, 2010



During my candidating visit in October, I was asked at the Men's Breakfast about what it would be like to preach on a weekly basis. I responded, "I think it's a matter of faith, trusting that God will help me find the words and ideas to preach regularly."

Over the past five months I have become intimately aware of the big leap from preaching once or twice a month to preaching three or four times. It is probably the most challenging part of the job and it is indeed a matter of faith.

The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr famously commented on his first year of pastoral ministry that after preaching a dozen sermons to his new congregation, he had used up the few ideas that he had worked up in sermons in seminary and was repeating himself.

His observation sends chills of recognition up the spine of any new pastor. It also provides encouragement, because over the next 56 years, Niebuhr would become a theological giant in American Protestantism, writing 13 books and numerous articles on theology and ministry, influencing the thought of several of our most prominent leaders.

Niebuhr's observation highlights a couple of things. First, preaching is about review. You and I come to worship because we need to be reminded of certain things. It is a constant refresher course. If we wanted, we could distill it all down to a twelve-week course on Christian themes and just repeat it quarterly. The result, however, would be far too reductionist about the daily challenges and intricacies of our faith.

Second, the challenge to preaching well is constantly finding new ways of presenting the material, new ways of understanding, new ways of getting inside the text, new ways of exploring the lessons available, new ways of seeing and experiencing our faith. It requires the preacher to cultivate an ongoing life of study – the study of ideas, of human behavior and of the role of God in the world around us.

A few years ago I heard about a discussion forum that explored the efficacy of sermons. Some provocative and forward-thinking soul asked if sermons were even useful anymore. One man responded by saying that he had been married to the same woman for forty years. For forty years, his wife had prepared dinner for him when he came home from work. Could he remember each of those dinners? No. Most of them he had forgotten, but he knew that for forty years, his wife had been feeding him with nourishing home-cooked meals. They kept him going. A regular diet of preaching, he concluded, was like the devotion of his wife's dinners.

You and I enjoy many meals over our lifetime. Some of them are spectacular, some mediocre, some common, some fancy. The fact is, they all nourish us. I see my job as a similar one: to try and serve up the Gospel in ways that are nourishing, and hopefully, delicious and pleasing. At times sweet, at times piquant. Some sermons will be memorable, most will be forgotten, but they should serve to help us to get by, Sunday to Sunday.

Preaching is also an ongoing dialogue. The study of preaching is called homiletics, which literally means "conversation." Through preaching, you and I are participating in a continuing conversation. Sometimes the conversation happens when I am talking with one of you during the week or listening in a board or committee meeting. What I hear affects how I think about the sermon. On the other end, I am aware that you, as a congregation, are attentive listeners. (Occasionally I notice some of you dozing, but mostly I know you pay close attention. I can see just about everything from our pulpit.) Your attentive listening makes me want to be sure I have something worthwhile and helpful to say.

In the future, we may make this conversational pattern more explicit. I may invite you to respond out loud and in specific ways to the sermon. We may also try some sermon talkback sessions after worship. We can all experiment with the sermon form and find ways for it to help us grow in Christian faith together, to keep our faith vibrant and expanding. What is clear to me is that improving as a preacher requires getting to know you better and better.

One of the greatest American preachers of the last century, Harry Emerson Fosdick, reflected that he finally learned to preach once he understood the pastoral needs of his congregation. If he tried to preach only biblically, that was not enough. If he preached on the exciting ideas of the times found in the op-ed pages, that was not enough. Once he learned to listen to his congregation, then he could listen for the biblical passages that were crying out to meet real human needs, just as he could see how the needs of his congregants connected with the big ideas of his times.

Meals and conversation. I look forward to sharing many of these, both in worship and outside it, as we continue to learn other's tastes, styles, needs and desires, all the while growing in faith together.

Pastor Kent

ALL IN THE FAMILY

This section has been sent via email to those that receive the newsletter by email.

If you would like to receive the Full Circle by email please contact the office at 734-3720 or at office@fccb.net and let us know!

STAFF SCHEDULES

Denise will be on vacation from **July 12-16**. She will be in the office Friday, July 9th prior to her vacation.

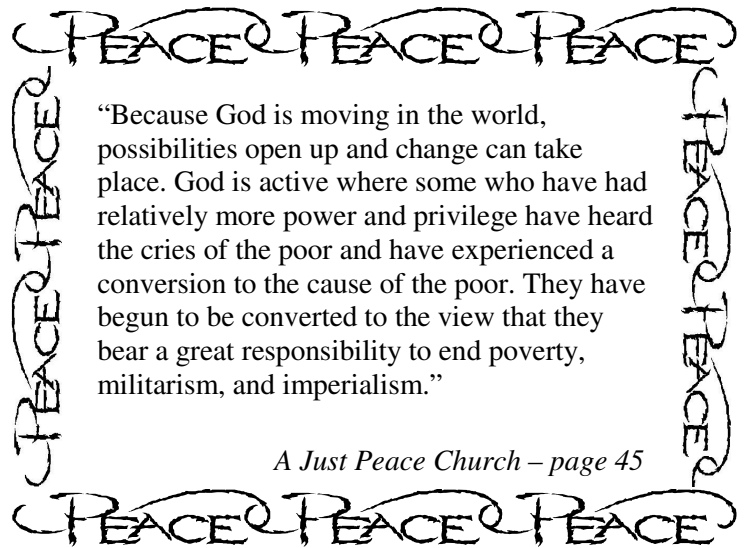
Darlene will be on vacation for **July 6th**.

AROUND THE CHURCH

COMMUNITY MEAL: This month the community meal will be on **June 27th**. We will be on the **3:00-5:00 p.m.** shift. Sign up on the Narthex bulletin boards or with Donna Romjue on Sundays.

CHURCH OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED for the holidays on **Monday, July 5th**.

HEALING PRAYER: On the first Sunday of each month, we will hold a healing prayer service in the Chapel directly after the worship service. You are welcome to enter this time of quiet and music to pray silently or to write a prayer. A pastor will be available to pray with you and, if you wish, offer an anointing with oil. The next healing service will be **July 4th**.



“Because God is moving in the world, possibilities open up and change can take place. God is active where some who have had relatively more power and privilege have heard the cries of the poor and have experienced a conversion to the cause of the poor. They have begun to be converted to the view that they bear a great responsibility to end poverty, militarism, and imperialism.”

A Just Peace Church – page 45

ANGELA PAHLOW, DEBRA PEHRSON SCHOLARSHIP WINNER!!!

Debra Pehrson and her mother Arvilla Pehrson were both faithful members of our FCCB community. Debra, a registered nurse, was killed in a car accident on January 10, 1990. In 1993, Arvilla established a memorial fund in Debra's honor. The fund, administered by the Trustees, provides a \$2,500 scholarship each year to a person in our congregation who is pursuing a career in a healthcare profession. The first award was made in 1994. This memorial fund is not an endowment designed to last in perpetuity. It will exist only as long as the principal and interest earnings outpace the awards, unless contributions are made specifically to the fund by interested and supportive people.

Angela Pahlow, our FCCB Youth Coordinator, is the 2010 scholarship winner. Angela is in her second year of graduate school at WWU and will graduate next year with a master's degree in counseling. Admission to this program is highly selective and Angela's references from faculty are high. Angela plans to apply the award money toward her tuition, thus reducing both the amount of money she will have to borrow from the government and also the number of hours she will have to work at an outside job. She is excited and grateful that this award will allow her to focus more intensely on her graduate studies, which she describes as “intensive.”

Congratulations to Angela!



Stephen Ministry

A friend in need . . . In times of trouble, we look to caring Christian friends to listen to us. A Stephen minister can listen and care while you, or someone you know, works through their feelings. Our Stephen Ministers have received 50 hours of training and have continuing education so they can provide Christian care for others.

If you or someone you know has need of this ministry contact one of our Stephen Leaders: *Donna Romjue (752-1747) Libby Weiss (756-2062) Kathleen McGuinness (733-1251) Pat & Bob Styer (676-2585).*

CHURCH SCHOOL NEWS

SUMMER CHURCH SCHOOL: The Pre-school class will meet with teacher Lisa Vaughn in Room 24. Children in Kindergarten through Middle School are invited to join Shannon McGuinness and her assistants in Room 12/14 on Sunday mornings as they prepare for our first ever summer musical The Three Threes. Watch for performance details.

SUMMER VOLUNTEERS are needed to assist Erin Schick (our Nursery Attendant) in the Nursery/Toddler room on Sunday mornings during the summer. This is a wonderful opportunity to spend quality time with the babies and toddlers in our congregation. Please sign up for a Sunday outside Room 33.

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

DAYTIME BOOK CLUB: Do you enjoy reading? Why not plan to join the daytime book club which meets the first **Tuesday of the month at 9:30 a.m.** in the Fireplace Room (**September – May**) for conversation and refreshments, followed by a discussion of the book for the month. The book we will be discussing at our **next meeting on September 7** will be “The Help” by Kathryn Stockette.

LABYRINTH WALK: The labyrinth is generally in the Chapel available for walking during church office hours (Monday – Thursday 9:00 to 5:00 p.m. and Friday 9:00 to 1:00 p.m.) and on Sunday mornings. Please join us for our next facilitated walk on **Thursday, July 1** when our theme will be “Freeing Your Spirit.”

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES!!!

Margie Scribner, graduated from Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa with a Bachelors in Sociology and Women and Gender Studies on May 24th. She is off to Baton Rouge, LA for Teach for America. She will teach for 2 years in an elementary school.



Karen Harris, graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in Communications Sciences & Disorders Audiology on June 12th.

Lina Walkinshaw, graduated from Carleton College in Minnesota with a degree in Sociology and Anthropology on June 12th.

Kristin Johnson, daughter of Steve & Julee Johnson, graduated in June from Western Washington University with a Bachelors of Arts in Philosophy.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The mid-year Congregational Meeting will be held on **Sunday, July 11th** after worship, in the Sanctuary. In addition to the business mentioned below, we will discuss some of the exciting new developments happening in our congregational life and how we can think creatively about our future.

ENDOWMENT FUNDS, DESIGNATED GIFTS AND UNDESIGNATED GIFTS

Not too long ago, Lad Anderson put together an informational pamphlet called “Our Legacy,” summarizing our church’s endowment funds and policy for designated and undesignated gifts. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help educate the congregation on each fund and provide information for anyone considering a special designated or undesignated gift to the church through a bequest in a personal will. These procedures and guidelines are also listed in a binder maintained in the church office. Recently, the Church Council passed a motion to change part of the policy regarding undesignated gifts. The current policy was reviewed and voted on during a congregational annual meeting in 1997. The new change will be reviewed and voted on during our next congregational meeting on **July 11th**, and reads as follows:

Gifts to the church which are not designated for a specific endowment or memorial fund or other use are handled as follows:

- Ten percent of the gift amount shall be invested in the Elizabeth Diehl Memorial Fund for use in the local mission work of the church.
- Up to 25 % of the gift amount may be used for local church programs, local and worldwide outreach, or for building maintenance or capital improvements, as proposed by the Trustees Board and approved by the Church Council.
- The remainder of the gift amount shall be invested in the Carl Calhoun/Legacy Endowment Fund, from which 4% of the balance shall be available annually for church operating needs.

Originally, the second bullet above required a congregational vote to authorize the decision for the 25% gift amount allocation. Both the Board of Trustees and Church Council felt this was an unnecessary encumbrance to church financial oversight, and unanimously approved this change.

MISSION JUSTICE SOCIAL CONCERNS NAME CHANGE

The Mission Justice and Social Concerns Board would like to propose a name change to be decided on at the next Congregational Meeting on July 11th. Mission Justice and Social Concerns would like to shorten their name to “The Mission and Justice Board”. We believe that the word justice includes social concerns and that shortening the name will not change the good work that we do. We wish to continue our service to the church and the community, with a shorter name. Please consider this. Thank you. MJSC

YOU Are Christ's Hands: Please Complete a Time and Talents Survey!

A reminder that you have the opportunity to indicate how you would like to share your gifts in our community by completing a Time and Talents survey. The Stewardship Board invites all FCCB members and friends - including children and youth - to let us know how **you'd** like to be Christ's hands. You may find blank Time and Talents surveys in the Narthex or you may complete one online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/fccbtimeandtalents. Please return your paper survey to the Narthex or to Kathryn in the FCCB office. The deadline for completing the survey is **June 30**. Thank you!

INTERESTED IN JOINING?

If you are interested in knowing more about joining our church, we welcome you to an Inquirers' Class, after church this **Sunday, June 27, from 11:30 to 1 p.m.** in Room 12/14, located downstairs. The next joining will be **Sunday, July 11**, in worship. For more information, please contact the church office at 734.3720 or office@fccb.net or Kate Eifrig at kate.eifrig@comcast.net. Childcare is available.

**First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ**
An Open & Affirming Congregation
2401 Cornwall Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225-3414

Date: June 23, 2010

CHURCH CALENDAR

June 28

9:00 AM *Shalom Circle*
5:00 PM *Exercise Group*
7:00 PM *Church Council*

June 30

5:00 PM *Exercise Group*

July 1

6:30 PM *Labyrinth Walk*

July 2

10:00 AM *In Stitches*
5:00 PM *Exercise Group*

July 4—Fourth of July

10:00 AM *Worship/Summer Church School*
11:00 AM *Healing Service*

July 5—OFFICE CLOSED

July 7

5:00 PM *Exercise Group*
7:00 PM *Stephen Ministers*

July 8

1:00 PM *Jesus Seminar*

July 9

10:00 AM *In Stitches*
5:00 PM *Exercise Group*

July 11

10:00 AM *Worship/Summer Church School*
11:00 AM *Congregational Meeting*

