

FIRST CHURCH

CHATTER

May 2020

This is the another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who have contributed stories, biographies, reflections, letters, poems and encourage any who wish to contribute to our church newsletter. As you can read in this edition, we have many talented friends and church members. We would like to get to know all of you better and encourage you to send your thoughts, poems, stories to us to publish. Thanks so much.

The newsletter will be printed at the beginning of each month and be sent via email to church members and friends, be sent by mail to those who would prefer a written copy and be available in the foyer for all to pick up when the church is reopened. In the meantime, we will deliver the Chatter to those who would prefer paper copy or don't receive email.

During this difficult time of the COVID pandemic when we are separated and missing church gathering, I like to think about the positive experiences we are gaining during this time. Everyone with whom I have talked, reflects how much they are missing church and our Sundays together, but how much they appreciate the virtual church events on Sunday morning. They are spending more time with family, with children/students at home cooking, sewing, sharing classroom learning, playing games, and going for walks together as well as virtual zoom visits with family who live a distance away. I've heard of many of our church members calling and visiting other friends, offering to bring meals and do grocery shopping, errands for those who should be isolating at home. Aren't these connections with family and friends what make our lives whole and meaningful, which define our Christian values. Special thanks to all who are keeping our church running and fulfilling: Anne O'Connor, Lynn Chick, Elayne Murphy, and all of the Deacons who are helping to find us the very best "Interim Pastor" . We've included some Spring pictures which give us hope for better days ahead with sunshine and togetherness

Meditations
April 2020
Hugh L. Guilderson

Pandemic

now we know.
plant, animal, human,
every life is connected
to every other life.
we all breathe the same air,
we all drink the same water,
we will share the same future.
may we live carefully.

“The Lens is not the Landscape.” *

The lens is not the landscape.
The lens shows only the virus now,
obscuring the field waiting to be sown,
not the field we imagined when we learned
we could grow like mustard seeds to become
a new kingdom, nor did we imagine a day
when we would pray, like the Shakers,
to become sanctuaries.

*Barbara Brown Taylor, Holy Envy:
How I Found God in the Faith of Others.

"morning mantra"

may I be an instrument of peace.
where there is hate, let me sow love.
where there is pain,
let me sow compassion.
where there is doubt,

let me sow hope.
where there is sorrow,
let me sow comfort.
amen.

May Birthdays

Please wish the following people a joyful Happy Birthday. We will celebrate all of those missed birthdays since the closing of Church service when we can gather again.

3. Lauren Stevens
 4. Allen Rork
 6. Liz Costley
 15. Steve Chick
 19. Katherine Myers
 23. William Clark
 24. Mary Ellen Pattee
 26. Ashley Bianchi
 30. Jody Green
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Our Deacon, Dick Markham has written a reflection for the Chatter. We appreciate his wisdom and thoughtful reflection.

God and the Virus*

The coronavirus has disrupted our lives, undermined our normal perspectives and patterns of behavior, and generated considerable confusion, anxiety and fear. Am I going to lose my job or my pension? If so, how will I pay my rent or mortgage and put food on the table for my family? What does this mean for the future of my children? Will my loved ones survive? Where is God in all this? The answers depend largely upon one's perspective of God.

Conservative Christians may offer a clear perspective on the virus. God is chastising us for our sinful ways. We have strayed from his commandments, succumbed to the temptations of a secular culture, presumed that our ways of knowing have no limitations, and disregarded the wisdom of the Christian tradition. Our collective pride is dooming us for an eventual fall. We've allowed the devil to undermine God's will. Unless we repent, we are headed for the calamitous end times in which the righteous will be saved and the unrighteous lost. God warned us not to disregard his moral guidelines and has sent the virus as a warning that we need to repent.

Progressive Christians reject the notion of a dictatorial God, a judgmental God, a God who has the whole world in his hands and manipulates conditions in order that his

children will wake up before it is too late. They have had enough of hierarchical and paternalistic religious structures. They don't accept the notion of God as a Supreme Being that is in control of everything that has happened or is happening, including the appearance of the coronavirus.

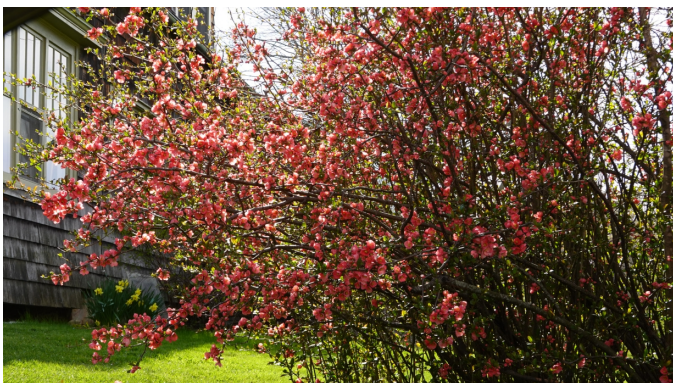
Progressives do not throw out the "baby with the bath water" when they challenge some ideas of Christian conservatives. They agree our culture has been captivated by secular convictions. They agree that many people are alienated from God and make a mistake when they assert the superiority of human ways of knowing over the accumulated wisdom of the past.

Instead of believing God to be authoritarian, Progressive Christians believe there is a dimension of reality far deeper than what we conventionally consider to be real. This deeper dimension is invisible and eternal. It is a spiritual dimension that transcends and yet is imminent within all of existence. God does not "exist" in the same way that all other phenomena (physical, mental, emotional, or otherwise) can be experienced, discussed, and compared using our marvelous ability to use symbols. God is beneath/within conventional reality, beyond all facets of existence, yet we can be aware of this mysterious God as being the ultimate source of love, creativity, courage, freedom, and compassion, all of which will be necessary for meeting the challenges of the virus.

Things have fallen apart, and it is unlikely we'll recover what we think of as normal or as business as usual. Even darker times may well await us, but it's good to keep in mind what writers like Eckhart Tolle and Richard Rohr argue that periods of darkness can be the stimulus for seeking and experiencing the light. Let the light shine through.

**I acknowledge my essay does not encompass the full range and depth of Christian perspectives nor does it take into account the perspectives of other religious traditions. Its purpose is to stimulate reflection and discussion among members of our congregation.*

Many thanks to Merry Anderson, Deborah Brown, Deborah Edson, Elinor Myers, Anne Short, and Henry Thomas for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts.



Our senior church member, Carol Goodman, unbeknownst to us loves, to write short stories and we have included some of these in this month's Chatter. We will include THE CANARIES, THE DOG AND THE SKUNK in our June Chatter. Thanks to Carol for her creativity as a writer.

"THE SNAKES, THE PIGEONS, THE DUCKS"

J. Carol Goodman

(Today, snakes, pigeons and ducks...)

The SNAKES

When I was eight I was fascinated with snakes, two little garter snakes that lived in our Garden. I picked up the two snakes and let them twine around my fingers and crawl up my arm. At night, I put them in a tiny cage my father made for me, with grass and worms to eat. The cage was left on our terrace. But I wanted people to see my pets so I put them in my pocket and sneaked them to church. We lived right next to the church where my father was the minister.

In the midst of my father's sermon I let them crawl along the back of the pew and then one crawled up the neck of the woman in front of me. She stood up screaming and screaming. I leaned over and grabbed the snakes. My father with a look of horror said calmly, "Carol will you please take the snakes home." I rushed out snickering.

PIGEONS

A few months later I told my best friend Gloria we were going on another adventure. She loved adventures. The janitor, Mr. Weiggle hated me because Glorybe, (she was called Glorybe because that is what her mother screamed when she was

born) and I played a game of jumping the backs of the pews to see who got to the end first, a hurdle race. If Weiggle caught us he would yell saying we were getting mud on the pews and he would tell my father, which he never did. But this particular day I said, "Guess what we're doing? Something more exciting. We're getting some pigeons from up in the tower."

I brought along a big garbage bag to put them in. Glorybe jumped up and down. Anyway, she was always excited over our adventures.

We climbed the steps to the balcony at the back of the church. Lying on the floor was a long ladder that we had to hoist up to get to the trap door that opened to the tower. We missed several times but at last we made it. We knew Weiggle was cleaning the Sunday school rooms and wouldn't know.

The first room was dark except for the light from the trap door. The big brass bell where a rope was attached and went down through a hole in the ceiling, waiting for Weiggle to ring it Sunday, announcing the Church service. I don't think he ever went farther up the tower where we were going to go. Next to the bell was another ladder to the room with the glass windows. There we walked round and round the tower pointing out the streets, our school, the river, the Wheatena factory and the park.

The next and last room, with only slats to the outside was where the pigeons lived. That ladder was wiggly. I let Glorybe go first while I held it. I was pretty scared how it wavered even though Glorybe held tight from the top. When we entered, the birds flew all around us sometimes hitting us.

“How will we catch them?” Glorybe asked.

“We will,” I said., not having any idea, just trying to grab them. We ran at them, trying to grab them. Exhausted we sat on the floor full of pigeon droppings and Glorybe said, “Look there is a nest of young ones.”

We grabbed them, four, with all their new feathers and put them in the bag and tied it with a string.

“My heavens,” my mother said, laughing. She was a lenient mother, more like a grandmother, since I was born when she was forty-five. My sister was born when she was forty and my father was four years younger than my mother.

My father was astonished and asked how I thought I could keep them.

“You’ll build us a cage, fast.”

“Oh yeah?” He laughed.

But the next day, he went to Weiggle, of all things, and asked him to help him build a cage. Weiggle liked my father and so said yes. I stayed out of the way. They made a pretty big cage, like 5x7 feet, near the snake pen under our huge Chestnut tree. Glorybe and I went to the feed store across the street and bought grain and laid it in an old pan my mother gave me. After a while, the pigeons became friendly and occasionally one would sit on our hands. Glorybe and I named them after the boys we liked, Billy, Tom, Paul and Dave. We told our friends to come and see. Even the boys we liked came. “We’re going to be famous. “ I told Glorybe.

THE DUCKS

“What’s next?” Glorybe asked.

“Ducks.”

“How do we get them?”

We had a little stream by our house. “First we have to dig in the stream to make it wider and deeper and then we get Daddy to go to the kosher butcher and buy four live ducks and take them home. Daddy said okay and we dug and dug to make a pond out in our little stream, then off we went to the butcher. We picked out the four ducks and the butcher was ready to kill them and pluck them for us when I explained we wanted them live. The butcher knew my father, almost everyone in town knew my father, “Reverend,” he said, “are you going to kill them, wasn’t Jesus against killing?”

Daddy laughed. “They are to be pets for the kid here. She and her friend dug out a pond for them and put screens at each end so they can’t swim away.”

“You better be careful of raccoons,” the butcher warned.

“Raccoons,” my sister, Annie, who was five years older than me, said “I’ve never seen any, have you?” She was always a bit skeptical.” Years later she became a doctor. Skepticism made her a respected doctor. “How does he know raccoons will eat them?”

Nobody answered.

Glorybe and I bought a lot of grain and soon the ducks began eating out of our hands but a few nights later we heard screaming. “Raccoons scream,” my sister said. We ran out to discover a raccoon with a

duck in its mouth racing into the woods. Crying to my parents "I'm sitting here all night and tomorrow we'll get Weiggle to build a cage to put them in at night". "You're not sitting there all night," my mother said.

"I will," Annie said. She liked to show she was tough and much more capable than me.

Daddy brought her a chair and a flash light and guess what she did sit until dawn with the flashlight, reading a book about medicine. She told us why she was going to be a doctor because Daddy went to see the sick in the hospital but wouldn't describe in detail what was wrong with them. He said it was private. "Well it won't be private when I am a

doctor."

We had three ducks now and Weiggle and my father built a pen that we put them in at night.

By then I was getting a reputation for my menagerie and I had the idea we should charge 10 cents a look. Glorybe and I put up a sign on the telephone poles down the street. neighborhood kids came. Some complained we didn't have lions, then others were okay about it. I let them hold the snakes for a few seconds. Glorybe and I split the money 5 cents apiece. We immediately bought candy.

J. Carol Goodman

