

FROM PASTOR CHAD

Strange Voices from the Past

You may or may not have noticed in years past that Advent is the church season for reading from the Prophets. At no other time in the church year do the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, and the rest of them weave their way into so much of the language of worship and church life.

I suppose there are many reasons we choose to limit our reading of the Prophets, not least of which is their tendency to seem rather obscure, literarily strange, fairly inaccessible, or just too harsh and full of judgement.

So, why in this *happy* season do we turn to texts that seem so distant and difficult to understand?

Before we answer that we should agree on just what a prophet is. I have a hunch one of the real reasons we avoid the writings of the Prophets is a fundamental misunderstanding. Frederick Buechner gets straight to the point in his definition: "Prophet means *spokesman*, not *fortune-teller*."* I suspect when most of us hear the term *prophet* we immediately imagine someone akin to the weather forecaster, but with a dark side to his personality. We think of an Eeyore type who predicts future events.

*... a prophet's quarrel with the world is deep-down a lover's quarrel. If they didn't love the world, they probably wouldn't bother to tell it that it's going to Hell. They'd just let it go. Their quarrel is God's quarrel.**

— Frederick Buechner

However, it is better to think of the biblical Prophets in the way we think of voices in our epoch that call attention to the shortcomings of our society and culture. Yes, the church has read in the works of Isaiah and others the coming of Jesus, but for the most part the prophetic writings are a commentary on the present state of things.

The unique claim of the biblical Prophets is to call attention to the present state of things on behalf of the Creator of the universe. It is having the nerve to speak for God, words other than blessing, that so often got them killed and turns us away.

So, getting back to our original question, why in this *happy* season do we turn to some of the more difficult voices in scripture? I'll take a risk, align myself with the Prophets, and suggest that Advent and Christmas are not about *happiness* and *cheerfulness*, so much as they are about recognizing the present state of things. Like Israel in Isaiah's time we've got a mess on our hands: peace, justice, love, real joy, hope, care for God's creation, and even good will toward our fellow human beings is in short supply around the globe.

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The voices of the Prophets call us to account for our short comings, they call us to repent and seek justice, peace, and love, and they remind us that God has not given up on us or left us to face this reality alone. Surely, cry the Prophets, God will have an answer.

Again, it is Frederick Buechner who helps us get to the heart of understanding why we must listen to the Prophets, "... a prophet's quarrel with the world is deep-down a lover's quarrel. If they didn't love the world, they probably wouldn't bother to tell it that it's going to Hell. They'd just let it go. Their quarrel is God's quarrel."*

May the prophetic voices of long ago speak into our reality and move us to honest reflection on our own circumstances so we too



might be filled with the true hope of Advent.

* Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) p. 73, 75

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

The children of LVPC are busy! Sunday School is in full swing, Channel is meeting on Wednesday evenings, a high school group is meeting with Chad to discuss committing to a Christian life, another high school group is meeting with Kim to prepare to teach SS, children are practicing the bells, new faces are preparing for this summer's ASP trip, and young artists are eagerly creating during Family Worship.

Advent begins on Sunday November 30. We are blessed to be able to enter this season of preparation together. Many of the children are busy learning lines and going to rehearsals so that they can lead worship on December 21, with their interpretation of the Christmas story. The practice schedule is on page 6. Costume fittings will be on November 30, for all those who are in the play. In addition, on November 29, at 6:30 in the Parish Hall there will be an Advent Workshop. The workshop is for all ages. Eat dinner at home, but please bring a dessert to share...yum!

Colleen Cryan soon will be joined in the nursery by Maureen Bruton. The two will share the Sunday duties. Drop in to meet Maureen in the coming Sundays as she works with Colleen to learn the ropes! She was kind enough to introduce herself to us with the following blurb:

My name is Maureen Bruton and I'm happy to be in the

nursery with Colleen! I grew up in Pottersville and attended Voorhees High School and then went on to Villanova University to study Communications and Business. While at Villanova, I enjoyed working with children in Philadelphia. After I graduated, I worked in Human Resources in New York City. I recently decided to take some time off from commuting to the city to spend time with my three sons Finley, who will turn 8 on Thanksgiving, Rumsey, 5 and Maclain who is 16 months. We live in Califon and I'm married to Mike Bruton who grew up in High Bridge and is a teacher in Newark. I have already had such a warm welcome and look forward to meeting the families and children in the nursery.

Thanks,

Maureen

Featuring Pre-K, K, 1st Grade Sunday School

The Pre-K, K, and 1st grade class has been focusing on different ways they can think and act in order to follow Jesus' teachings. They suggested praying for others and being nice to others. They made cards for those at Lower Valley who are homebound. One week they played a game with straws and cotton balls practicing following God's path, and then talked about wants vs. needs and what things they can buy with money and what things are priceless. Each week they enjoy a time of sharing Joys and Concerns which they follow with a group prayer. This past

Sunday each child shared a closing prayer of their own. They are getting to know one another through their talks about God.

The kids really enjoy hands on crafts. They made a prayer wheel that showed that prayer is good any time of day no matter what they are doing. Prayer is not just for before meals or bed; kids can pray while doing chores or playing. Another Sunday the children traced their own hands and cut them out in a special way so their hands made a heart. The heart used the bible verse Matthew 18:21-35, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind". The kids also loved making paper "s'mores" that used the bible story from Matthew 18:21-35. The story teaches

to "forgive and forgive some more". The paper "s'mores" were glued to another paper with the bible verse on it for the kids to take home as a reminder to forgive.

The class is excited about being featured in this newsletter. They drew a picture of what they think God looks like (check out the original artwork on the hallway bulletin board), and some responded to an interview question: What do you like best about Sunday School?

Bryn Gartelmann - Learning about God and Jesus
 Gianna Ascenzo, Meseret Hochenberger, Margaret



Donlon, Cole Dahl - Arts and Crafts

Rachel Gast, John Garcia and Max Petrik - Joys and Concerns time

Thor Petrik - The food at Coffee and Conversation

The Pre-K, K, 1st class is taught by Janine Ascenzo and Ellen Haggerty. There are 11 boisterous children in the class. It is a busy place on Sunday mornings!



SAVE THE DATE!**November 30 at 5:00 p.m. —
Joyeux Noel Christmas
Benefit Concert**

The Agape Ringers and the Faith Ensemble Ringers of Lower Valley Presbyterian Church will be participating once again in the Joyeux Noel Interfaith Christmas Concert to benefit the Open Cupboard Food Pantry of Clinton. The concert will take place on Sunday, November 30th at 5:00 p.m. at the Immaculate Conception Church of Annandale. Choirs from five different churches, along with the Salvation Army Band and the Hunterdon Harmonizers, join together to create an inspiring evening of Advent and Christmas music.

Although the concert is free, we are asking everyone to consider bringing a donation of dry or canned goods to be given to the Open Cupboard Food Pantry. Last year's concert was a wonderful evening in which over 4,000 pounds of food donations were collected for the Open Cupboard! It is a blessing to be a part of such a worthy cause, and we hope to see you at the concert!

SERRV Sale

We still have lots of SERRV soup mixes — Spicy Pea, Lentil, 6 Bean and 10 Bean. All are \$6.25 and are available at Fellowship after worship. These make wonderful teacher gifts or are perfect for anyone who likes to cook! See Nancy Knight.

ALTERNATIVE GIFT FAIR

Thank you to all who worked so hard to make this year's Alternative Gift Fair a success! We are still accepting shopping lists until December 7th, so if you couldn't attend, mail yours to the church office or bring it to church. We will mail or give you the cards. So far we have collected over \$8,000 in donations for the 16 organizations! This is significantly lower than last year's total, and we know we can do better! Please continue to pass the word. The AGF has greatly increased the mission giving of our church over the 12 years we have held it. It is also a way to showcase our caring church community to our surrounding neighbors, who can join with us in reaching out to others. This event is a wonderful example of what we can accomplish when we all work together — it is truly a team effort. Thank you to **everyone** who planned, set up, decorated, made soup and desserts, worked in the kitchen, greeted shoppers, collected money, gave out cards, helped with SERRV, donated, shopped, and cleaned up! Claudia Gilbert spent many hours publicizing, copying, and pulling things together. Kyle Garcia took over the computer/financial part of the AGF and we thank him for that! Thank you to all, and praise God for answering our prayers!

EVENING CIRCLE

Women's Evening Circle will be meeting Wednesday, December 17 at 7:00 p.m. in the Getz Library. Our Bible study is from Horizons Bible Study "An Abiding Hope, The Presence of God in Exodus and Deuteronomy". All are welcome in fellowship and Bible study.

**FROM THE
STEWARDSHIP
COMMITTEE**

We hope you all received a letter from the stewardship and finance committee last week. (If not, please feel free to contact the church office for a copy.) Our committee reaches out to the church membership and friends each year with the request that you pledge to support our vibrant LVPC community and its mission. We ask that you prayerfully consider your pledge and return your pledge card in a timely fashion. Drop it in Sunday's offering plate or swing by the church office. Your pledge response helps us to make better budget decisions as we plan for the coming year. Our gifts not only fund the work of our church, but challenge us to live with a focus beyond ourselves.

A NOTE FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

What is Per Capita?

Per Capita is LVPC's assessment from the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) to maintain our structure of governance and connectedness. Per Capita is assessed at \$33.00 per church member and is divided among the General Assembly, Synod and Presbytery.

What do Per Capita dollars provide?

More specifically, per capita funding covers expenses related to holding the General Assembly meeting, bringing together church leaders for training events, developing and administering ordination exams, producing the *Book of Order*, and maintaining a Presbyterian presence at ecumenical groups and gatherings worldwide. On a more local level, Newton Presbytery uses per capita funding for administrative, building, and salary costs that help it to pursue its constitutionally required activities along with its mission to promote healthy congregations and community.

Why should I pay Per Capita?

Paying per capita is similar to contributing one's dish to a potluck meal. It is part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. This is important; let's try to raise the funds to cover our per capita expense this year! If you have not done so, please pay your family's (LVPC members only) portion of the per capita expense, and designate it as such on your check or envelope.

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

We will be picking up the Christmas trees for this year's sale on Friday morning, November 28, and need a few extra hands to help unload the trucks. We should be back to LVPC around 11 a.m. Stop by and help for one hour, and just think of all the Thanksgiving Day calories you can recycle! We also continue to need volunteers to help sell trees starting on Saturday, November 29th and continuing each weekend until Christmas – Saturdays from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. You can sign-up for a two-hour shift on any of the eight days we'll be selling trees. Please come and share your time and talents, and be a part of this wonderful community Mission tradition. Please contact Warren Newman at 763-6094 with any questions.

ADVENT WORKSHOP

We often hear it called the *Christmas Season*. It is the time between *Black Friday* and Christmas Day, but judging by what I see in department stores it may have already started. The challenge for us, as followers of Jesus, is that the so called *Christmas Season* doesn't really come until Christmas. While the culture is a buzz with consumer Christmas trappings we are making our way through the season of Advent. Advent is season of alertness to the hope of God's promises fulfilled. It is a time for attentiveness to God's Spirit and a deep reflection.

At LVPC we realize how hard Santa and his reindeer can make it to celebrate Advent. For this reason everyone is invited to participate in our Advent workshop.

Saturday, November 29th from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Bring a desert to share and we'll welcome the season of Advent together.

PRAYER CHAIN

The Prayer Chain is an email distribution group of people from our LVPC family. Prayer requests are forwarded to Wendy Garcia and then Wendy forwards the prayer to the entire group. If you would like your email address added to the Prayer Chain, please send Wendy an email at kwgarcia@msn.com

NEWSLETTER OPTIONS

Please help us save on postage and copier paper costs by receiving the newsletter via e-mail. Also, by receiving an e-mail version, you will be able to enjoy any photos in color! If interested please e-mail: lowervalleyipc@embarqmail.com. The newsletter can also be viewed on our webpage: lowervalley.org.

Christmas Play Practice Schedule

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|--------------------------|--|
| Sunday, November 30th: | 11:30-12:45 Practice for those who have lines |
| Saturday, December 6th: | 11:30-1:00 Practice for those who have lines, costume sizing for those who don't have lines |
| Sunday, December 14th: | 10:00-12:00 Practice for those who have lines
11:30-1:00 Practice for all kids involved in the play |
| Saturday, December 20th: | 9:00-1:00 Dress Rehearsal for those with lines
11:00-1:00 Dress Rehearsal for those without lines
Lunch of pizza and other snacks will be included. Pick up the kids in the Parish Hall. |
| Sunday, December 21st: | 9:30 Arrive and put on costumes
10:00 Lead worship through performance of the Christmas Play |

Pastor Chad's Contact info:

Cell phone: 892.0044

E-mail: revchadrodgers@gmail.com**Church Info:**

Claudia Gilbert: Church Administrator

Phone: 908-832-2933

E-mail: lowervalleypc@embarqmail.comWebsite: www.lowervalley.orgOffice hours: W-F, 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers	Fellowship Host(s)
December 7	Dick Kline	OPEN	Sally Zeiner Linda Stetler Warren Newman Renee Ollerenshaw	
December 14	OPEN	Stephanie and Jeff Donlon		
December 21	Judy Eckwielen	Terry Hoffman		
December 24 7:30 p.m.	OPEN	Warren and Karen Newman		
December 28	Judy Eckwielen	OPEN		

**If you are able to serve in an OPEN spot please contact the church office.
If you are unable to serve in an assigned spot please try your best to find a
substitute and let the office know of any changes. Thanks so much!**

December 2014
Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
Califon, NJ 07830

The Vision of our Church

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.