

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Most of the time, I like to write my own short little blurbs for the *Evangelist*. However—like last month—I have found another piece that is compelling enough to share with you. This was written as an introduction to the book of 1 John in the “Jesus-Centered Bible”, New Living Translation.

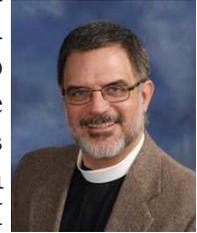
My “church family” history is a mixed bag—some aspects of it will always surface in me a grateful response, but there is much

that drives me to ask, “God, what were you thinking?” The problem with my religious community [is] simple: they are people a lot like [I am], each towing behind them lots of baggage, secrets, broken hearts, and

damaged souls. They, like [I, are] full of self-justifying shame and a performance obsession that has always been the grist of religious machinery.

Most of my life, religion taught me that my relationship with God centered on trying to “please” God. In a twisted way, that was a huge relief.

The great sadnesses and losses of my childhood had seared distrust into my soul—people were inherently dangerous and religion gave me a way out of that prison. I could learn the language of “trust” without actually having to trust, as long as I worked hard at keeping the lists of rules and observances that I was told would please God and avoided the behaviors that



Bishop Steve Breedlove and his wife, Sally to visit St. John’s June 10th–12th.

would not. This system was much easier than actually trusting—at least, that’s what I

hoped. [It] turns out [that] I’m not very good at managing the lists and they gave momentum to a cycle of promise, violation, guilt, shame, repentance, and re-commitment. A life lived this way is exhausting at best.

All religions are like this—the performance of the rules matters much more than a relationship with the deity. As long as you try to do what’s expected of you, it doesn’t matter who the god is. And in the game of compare, contrast, and compete there’s always some other loser who’s doing worse.

St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church
P. O. Box 387, Willow Grove, PA 19090
Worshipping at Abington Baptist Church,
1501 Huntingdon Rd., Abington, PA 19001
Church Office: (215) 396.1970
Family Resource Center: (215) 337-2018 ext. 3
email: info@toknowchrist.org

It took me years to understand and believe that a relationship with God has never been about “pleasing”, but about learning to “trust”. Trust

Inside This Issue:	
Opening Letter	1
Baker Library Book Brief	2
Blank	3
Nicaragua Student Program Update	4
Title from Bill Kenney	4
News from the Family Resource Center	5
Blanket of Prayer	6
Wheat Teaches Us	7
Why Keep Silent About Our Sin	10
June 2016 Save the Dates	11
It Is Well with My Soul	12

requires that we know the character of the person who's the beneficiary of our gift, but performance requires nothing so risky. We cannot trust a Someone we don't believe is good "all the time", nor can we trust an Anyone we don't believe is "for" us or who doesn't love us. This is why Jesus is the centrally significant revelation of the true nature of God and a living example of what a relationship with God looks like. We discover we've been grafted into a relationship with his Father, who is good all the time.

And this is where the old-man disciple John starts his first letter, summing up everything in one sentence what we have learned from Jesus. What he says is shocking: "God is light, and in God there is *no* darkness—at all". From there we begin to understand what love is—this other-centered self-giving that characterizes the relationship of the Three who are God/One. This is a God whose character is certain, whose love is relentless and unaffected by performance, and the Someone we can begin to learn to trust.



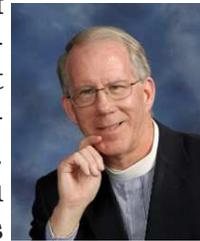
—William Paul Young

Baker Library Book Brief *By Ken Cook*

Given our present turbulent political season, it seems likely that many of us might gain from a perusal of the newly-published *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* by John D. Wilsey. While students of American history and political theory will have a ready def-

inition or conception of "American exceptionalism" in mind, it might be that the term is confusing for most others. If you are like me, you may have heard this expression used frequently on talk-radio shows, without being certain what is intended. Our author notes that "ever since [Pilgrim founding father] John Winthrop told his fellow colonists in 1630 that they were about to establish a 'city upon a hill' [see Matthew 5:13-16], the idea of having a special place in history has captured the American imagination." And, yes, I recall that as recently as Fall, 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin took the exceptional action of writing an article to the New York Times rebuking President Obama's assertion that American exceptionalism might justify an American attack on Syrian forces that had used chemical weapons against the populations of villages caught in the midst of civil war. But I had forgotten that the two Latin phrases printed on the Great Seal of the United States, *Novus Ordo Seclorum* and *Annuet Coeptis* - see the back of a one dollar bill - mean "a new order for the ages" as well as the implication that God "approves our undertaking."

Wilsey, who understands himself to be a patriotic American, seeks to be precise and to avoid any ambiguity in his use of language throughout this volume. I will quote him at some length in order to do justice to his concerns on this fundamental matter. He says that he "will argue that a high view of American exceptionalism is, at significant points, at odds with the Christian gospel. Ex-



ceptionalism does not necessarily come into conflict with Christianity. But when expressed and understood in strongly providential terms, it involves at least five theological themes imported from Protestant Christian theology and applied to America: (1) chosen nation, (2) divine commission, (3) innocence, (4) sacred land and (5) glory. . . . However, American exceptionalism does not necessarily carry this salvifically charged meaning, even though the idea still ought to be considered as an aspect of civil religion. American exceptionalism can carry a more limited political/cultural meaning. That is, America strives to serve as a communal paragon of justice, freedom and equality among nations. Civil religion and American exceptionalism, when understood politically/culturally rather than salvifically, can serve as a beacon pointing to justice, natural rights and the ethical well-being of the nation and the world. . . . Throughout [this book], I am referring to the former as *closed* and the latter as *open* American exceptionalism.” (See pp. 18-19 for a fuller statement. “Civil religion” is considered at some length in pp. 20-28.)

Wilsey’s new book is carefully organized. His Introduction begins with a quotation from J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur (1782): “The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions. . . .” as well as a consideration of Theodore Roosevelt’s 1894 essay “True Americanism”. Chapter One, “The Origins of American Exceptionalism”, likewise quotes Alexis De Tocqueville (1832): “Anglo-Americans . . . conceive a high opinion of their superiority and are not very remote from believing them-

selves to be a distinct species of mankind.” Then we are introduced to William Walker (1824-1860), known as the “grey-eyed man of destiny”, a “filibuster” and the first president of Nicaragua. The seven chapters which follow reflect on “Expansion, Slavery and Two American Exceptionalisms”, “The Chosen Nation”, “The Commissioned Nation”, “The Innocent Nation”, “The Nation and Her Land”, “The Glorious Nation” - surprisingly, this chapter includes an “Overview of Select Christian School and Homeschool Curriculum”; Wilsey was once the principal of a Christian school - and “Open Exceptionalism and Civic Engagement”.

American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion is a piece of serious historical scholarship and, yet, is eminently readable throughout, even entertaining at times. A vast host of American figures, major and minor, show up in the narrative, from John Locke, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Cole, Dred Scott and Abraham Lincoln, to Malcolm X, John Foster Dulles, Ronald Reagan and Patrick J. Buchanan. Wilsey does not aim at the character assassination of anyone, large or small, or of our nation, but this is a work of critical thinking by an author who is a patriot and a Christian. John D. Wilsey is assistant professor of history and apologetics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Houston. I found it interesting to note that he was aided in his research for, and writing of, this volume by colleagues and graduate students at the seminary, as well as, by students working on a fully accredited B.S. in biblical studies at Southwestern’s extension campus at a maximum security prison, the Darrington Unit.

Ken

The Courts vs. Christianity
By Bill Kenney

Civil courts are increasingly forcing wider acceptance of many expressions of deviant sexuality. This upsurge achieved notoriety in the U.S. Supreme Court's June 26, 2015 decision of Obergefell vs. Hodges. Its implications are accumulating momentum, affecting churches, businesses, charitable organizations, individuals, etc. We are ever more likely to be sued for allegedly demeaning deviant sexual preferences.



The Christian Legal Society provides much needed advise and counsel. Michael McTigue has done *probono* work on this dangerous threat. I believe there are also other legal agencies involved. We are blessed that our Diocese of Christ Our Hope has engaged the counsel of Weber, Stegall and Grewal. This firm has already provided our parish with many pages of guidance. Our Bishop Breedlove directed us to use this material as we pursue our assignment of updating our Diocesan Constitution and Canons as well as our Parish Bylaws.

Bill

**NICARAGUA STUDENT
PROGRAM UPDATE**
From Chris Freisheim

We are very excited that our Nicaragua Student program has been taken to the

next level. Beginning in April, Juan Gonzalez, whom you may remember from his and his wife's visit to St. Johns last November, has begun expanding his efforts with our students. What began as basic tutoring efforts, has now grown to 2^{1/2} days per week in Santa Maria. In addition to tutoring and study hall, he is now teaching English and computer skills



to the students in the mornings. We are looking at ways for Juan to expand these classes to the community as an outreach of Verbo Church. Please keep Juan in your prayers as he undertakes this challenging ministry.

You can find updates on his work on the Student Program Facebook page — www.facebook.com/NicaStudents/.



News from the Family Resource Center

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10: 14, 28

Do you ever wonder how life can be so complicated? I recently had a phone call from a woman who desperately wants to work. She has issues that led to difficulties keeping a job, resulting in major financial problems. She has exhausted every avenue she knows to fix her credit, her health is poor, and her relationship with her family is rocky.

"I need a miracle," she said, "someone to just give me a chance."

Every suggestion I made was rejected, however, with the answer "I've already tried that." So finally I had to say to her that I was so sorry, but I couldn't help her. I asked her if she would like me to pray with her, since she was a Christian. She was very open to that. Jesus says "Do not be afraid," and that's where I started. I included each of her circumstances: employment, finances, family difficulties, and health.

It's in my nature that I want to jump in and "fix" things for people in need. I often have to remind myself to take a step back and let God do the heavy lifting. Sometimes the best thing, the only thing, I can do is simply

listen attentively, offer a



prayer, and remember that God is in control.

Update: Writing a Great Cover Letter

A couple of weeks ago I attended a networking group where the focus for the evening was "Writing a Great Cover Letter." It's a new technique, and one that I'd be happy to share. Finding a job these days is competitive, and this is a great tool for a jobseeker. Give us a call at the Family Resource Center if you're interested in learning the newest and most effective ways to look for a job, educational resources, spiritual counseling, or a friendly listening ear and prayer time: **215-337-2018, ext. 103.**

We're here to help our parishioners, as well as the Abington community.

Yours in Christ,



Helen Miller
Family Resource Center:
215-337-2018 x3
helen@toknowchrist.org



A Blanket of Prayer



³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:3-6 ESV

You can find more pictures in Galleries under Fellowship at the www.toknowchrist.org website.

*WHEAT TEACHES US
EASTERTIDE 2016
By Bishop Steve Breedlove
April 26th, 2016*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Eastertide is a time of sustained joy. The Resurrection has reinterpreted the world in light of things that were never imagined possible before.

I am grateful it is Eastertide. Nevertheless, my mind keeps returning to the text that I preached on Palm Sunday, John 12:24: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This passage speaks of death and life; it forms a bridge between Lent and Easter. It is a guiding text for Christian discipleship, powerful and helpful 365 days a year. But the most obvious application, especially as a text for Palm Sunday, is to Jesus. More than instructing his disciples, Jesus is describing his own embrace of the Cross. He is THE grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died, and as a result, continues to produce much fruit.

If "like produces like" in the natural world, the same is true of the life that the Holy Spirit births in us. We who are the fruit of Jesus' death and resurrection are called to follow his path of death to self. That's not just a matter of our becoming disciples (which does, of course, call us to "die to the flesh" – Galatians 5: 13-25 – or to "consider ourselves dead to sin / alive to God" – Romans 6:1-14). It's also essential for bearing fruit in the sense of reproduction. If we are to be agents of the Gospel and partners

in the work of salvation, we must "die to self." For 21st century American Christians, that will require "deaths" we never imagined a decade ago.

The setting for our life and ministry has shifted epically. Any place of privilege that Christianity had in the West for the past 1700 years is gone.

The prevailing winds of culture are against us. (Tod Bolinger comments in his



excellent new book, *Canoeing the Mountains*, that in 1963, the Los Angeles Times included a weekly list of Bible readings in each edition. Enough said.) Public respect for Christian faith and biblical morality has eroded at a dizzying pace. We are rapidly returning to an atmosphere more akin to A.D. 90 than 1990. The cultural tide has turned, and those who reject the Gospel believe they have the upper hand.

None of this is news to many: this is where you've been living for years. Even more emphatically, this does not threaten the truth of the Gospel. This does not negate the power of the Cross to subvert the wisdom of the world. This does not change the core strategy of witness carried out in simple acts of persevering love and compassion. Nevertheless, the cultural setting calls all of us to work from a different angle, with different strategies than we may have ever conceived. It will require new levels of death-to-self personally and institutionally.

First, agents of Gospel mission will have to think better. We must work harder than ever to engage the questions, principles, and truths at the heart of the cultural conversa-

tion. We must search God's word with new eyes and ears. We have to listen better than ever to the assumptions and longings of people in our community. Eventually, we will have to develop the capacity to engage the conversation more honestly, more directly, in starker terms, than we have in the past. What has to die in us? Easy answers and presumptions, simple moralisms, and especially our own refusal to engage the conversation in depth. Our desire to put blinders on.

This is not just an urban, millennial conversation. This past weekend I preached in rural New England. I spoke briefly about the radical difference of defining human identity and fulfillment according to our world versus according to Jesus. The world says identity and fulfillment require the freedom to define oneself without reference to objective truth or to relational obligations. One's essential identity is no longer tied to objective givens or truths, even the form our body is given at birth. Our freedom to name our own identity without restriction or obligation is essential to human flourishing. According to Supreme Court Justice Kennedy (*Obergefell vs the State of Ohio*), freedom of self-definition is a basic human right.

Contrast that to the Christian view of human identity and freedom: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply . . ." And Jesus said to them, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." The gulf between these two definitions of hu-

man identity and freedom could not be wider.

The person who lit up to these comments was a 70+-year-old man. He came to me after the service, wanting more conversation. Why? Because he wants to stand for Christ among the retirees he hangs out with. Why? They, too, have fully bought the definition of human identity and freedom that millennial urbanites and Justice Kennedy now assume.

Second, we must strengthen the ground of our personal confidence. God's covenantal love and truth in Christ Jesus are not shaken by rejection and disdain. (Read Psalm 52, as David clings to God's steadfast love as the anchor of his soul, vv. 1 and 8.) Pray and seek the confidence and understanding of our life with Christ that nurtures a non-anxious presence and a genuine smile on our face as we talk with people who oppose our faith. What has to die? Defensiveness and fear.

Third, we will have to accept the fact that we are the minority, the exiles, out of the seat of power. We have no ground of assumptive priority on even the most basic questions of human identity and human purpose. This is old news, but we keep having to learn it: in the eyes of the world, we are weak. We have to accept that with humility and grace. What must die? Our pride of place. Our presumption of power. All efforts to use power or position to control the conversation.

Fourth, we must learn from the early church and its path of godly subversion. Critical to the spread of the Gospel in the Roman Empire were Christians who persevered in loving the weak and disenfranchised (widows, slaves, orphans, children),

whose sexual morality was relentlessly different than the culture's, who were faithful and utterly honest in the workplace, who ministered to the needy in times of crisis, and who practiced radical hospitality. We must consider each of these elements of effective long-term witness in our own lives and local churches. What has to die? The assumption that being a Christian is primarily about my own comfort and blessing. The assumption that there will be a quick turnaround in our culture.

Fifth, we must begin a conversation about the New Testament community, the OIKOS (household). More and more people are considering the unusual nature of the nuclear family in the last 75 years, wondering if it may have become an idol of the Church. Have we baptized our desire for a fortress of protection and privacy? Have we lost our capacity to embody the extended household of God in our living patterns? Have we relegated single people to unbearable loneliness, without the basic comfort of human affection, instead of joining with God, "who sets the widows in households?"

Finally, if there is one call to action I would bring to our Diocese, it is this: we must disciple children, youth, and adults in the truths of the Gospel for the questions of our age. In age-appropriate ways, we must communicate what it means to be made in the image of God, male and female. We must wrestle through and name aloud the dividing place between a life lived in submission to objective, revealed truth and a life defined by subjective personal desire. We must debunk our

culture's baptism of personal desire – beginning with ourselves and our children. We must teach our children to groan with compassion for their friends who struggle with never-before-imagined questions about identity, and simultaneously teach them to never lose their grip on the truth about true human identity and freedom. What must die? Believing that we can disciple our children and youth by osmosis. Our own failure to fiercely seek to embody what we are trying to inculcate in the souls of the next generation.

Solomon tells us that there's nothing new under the sun. "Death to self" as essential Christian discipleship was taught and embodied by our Lord: Luke 9:23-24, 51. St Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 that his ministry requires him to die daily. The difference I am seeing this Eastertide, and the difference that I hope you'll ponder, is that death to self is also essential to fruitfulness in mission. Consider not "just a little extra effort" to being effective agents of the Gospel: consider radical "death to self" – to self-protection, idols, fears and defensiveness, laziness, presumptions and pride, unwillingness to think in new ways about the mission of your local church.

Lest I seem to hammer the issue into hopelessness, let me return to the point: this multiphase death-to-self is unavoidable if we truly follow Christ in Gospel mission. It is also the beginning of a harvest of fruitfulness in the lives of people we love.

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,

to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” “I determined to know nothing among but Jesus Christ and him crucified.” “So death is at work in us, but life in you.” “When Christ, who is your life, appears, you will also appear with him in glory.”

"WHY KEEP SILENT ABOUT OUR SIN?" (PS 32:1-5)

*By Bishop Thaddeus Barnum
APRIL 26TH, 2016*

“I’m fine,” we tend to say a lot.

But what if we’re not – would we know it?

King David knew it. He “kept silent” about his sin against Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. He buried it inside.

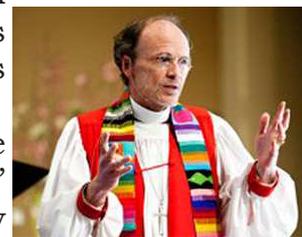
Yet, he knew three things: One, it affected his body (“my bones wasted away”). Two, it affected his soul (“my groaning all day long”). And three, it affected his relationship with the Lord (“your hand was heavy upon me”). Still, he “kept silent” about it.

Is that what we do?

It’s not hard to do. We’re experts in silencing sin in our soul. We pretend it’s not there by avoiding it, denying it, and refusing to think about it. We make light of it by convincing ourselves “It’s no big deal” or, worse, justifying it by saying, “I’m basically a good person. We’ve all messed up at some point in our lives.”

We even – if necessary -- quietly approve the morals of the culture, knowing full well the culture allows what God does not.

It’s a choice to “keep silent.” It’s how we stay in control.



But are we sure we’re in control? Is it possible it is? The prophet Isaiah tells us that holding sin inside for a prolonged period of time harms us (Isa 6:9-10). Our hearts become “calloused” (NIV), our ears “dull”, our eyes “dim” (NASB). We know the severity of it the moment the Lord sends a “Nathan” to us.

Nathan was the prophet who came to King David. He knew what David had done. He forced the sins buried deep in David’s heart to come into the light of God’s presence. How often has that happened to us? Have we welcomed our “Nathan”? Or have we pushed him away and, by so doing, proved to God and to ourselves our heart is hard, our ears deaf, and our eyes blind to the power of sin in our lives?

Why push our “Nathan” away?

Why think “survival mode” is normal? Healthy? Acceptable?

The counsel King David brings has power to heal us: “Don’t be “like a horse or a mule, without understanding...” (Ps 32:9). Do what David did: Stop being silent. Say what David said: “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”. And get what David got: “and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps 32:5).

When that happens, we can say, “I’m fine!” and mean it. “Blessed

is the one,” King David shouts from experience, “whose transgression is forgiven” (Ps 32:1).

But if we keep silent, we put ourselves in grave danger. Why not take the initiative, before the next Nathan comes barging into our life, and make our confession to Almighty God?

To contact the Office of Clergy Care, go to: www.call2disciple.com

To contact Bishop Thaddeus Barnum directly: bishopbarnum@gmail.com



Save These Dates in June 2016

Saturday, June 5th 5:30 pm	Joy in June, A Fundraiser for Logan Hope in the Fellowship Hall
Sunday, June 6th Follow 9:00 am Service	Parish Picnic
Friday, Saturday & Sunday, June 10th—12th	Bishop Steve Breedlove, and His Wife Sally Visit St. Johns
Saturday, June 11th	Women’s Retreat
	Bishop Meeting With Vestry and Staff
Sunday, June 12th 9:00 am	Confirmation and Reception

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

Horatio Spafford (1828-1888) was a wealthy Chicago lawyer with a thriving legal practice, a beautiful home, a wife, four daughters and a son. He was also a devout Christian and faithful student of the Scriptures. His circle of friends included Dwight L. Moody, Ira Sankey and various other well-known Christians of the day.

At the very height of his financial and professional success, Horatio and his wife Anna suffered the tragic loss of their young son. Shortly thereafter on October 8, 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed almost every real estate investment that Spafford had.

In 1873, Spafford scheduled a boat trip to Europe in order to give his wife and daughters a much needed vacation and time to recover from the tragedy. He also went to join Moody and Sankey on an evangelistic campaign in England. Spafford sent his wife and daughters ahead of him while he remained in Chicago to take care of some unexpected last minute business. Several days later he received notice that his family's ship had encountered a collision. All four of his daughters drowned; only his wife had survived.

With a heavy heart, Spafford boarded a boat that would take him to his grieving Anna in England. It was on this trip that he penned those now famous words, *When sorrow like sea billows roll; it is well, it is well with my soul.*

Philip Bliss (1838-1876), composer of many songs including *Hold the Fort, Let the Lower Lights be Burning, and Jesus Loves Even Me*, was so impressed with Spafford's life and the words of his hymn that he composed a beautiful piece of music to accompany the lyrics. The song was published by Bliss and Sankey, in 1876.

For more than a century, the tragic story of one man has given hope to countless thousands who have lifted their voices to sing, *It Is Well With My Soul.*

This information was provided to us from Brian Gring, who is the lay leader of Christ Our King Anglican Fellowship in Lancaster County.