



Beheld

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-13; Proverbs 9:9-10; Psalm 84
A sermon by William M. Klein

22 January 2012

9 Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning. **10** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Prov. 9:9-10 NRSV)

1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all... **11** The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Eph. 4:1-6, 11-13 NRSV)

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As we look back upon 2011, at least one of the things we'll remember is renovation to Murray Hall. The work done in the Dunlap Hall wing of the church - involving the kitchen, the museum, the bathrooms, and the entrance hall - began on January 19. Work began the Monday after Easter on the first floor - involving Brady Chapel, the passage way between the sanctuary and Murray Hall, the restrooms, the elevator, and the offices across from the elevator.

Today we celebrate the completion of the renovations planned for this moment in the long life of this church. I say this moment in time because, as chairman of our Financial Management Committee reminded Session, "these improvements are marvelous and much needed...but this is still an old building."

Be that as it may, today we celebrate the completion of this particular project. And there is reason to celebrate. When I came here in 1995, I was told a way must be found to make the buildings more accessible to members and visitors. I have no idea how long folks closest to the pulse of this church had identified this critical need...but we can say that in our day we finally stepped up to the plate.

Our building is now fully accessible. I have stood outside the elevator when the doors opened and have been so gratified to see smiling faces on people who had not ventured to WestFel Lounge in quite a while. I love to see the grins from people in wheel chairs when they realize they can so easily enter through the new entryway between the two buildings. I have enjoyed hearing people happily working away in the new kitchen. I have been pleased to hear those who set up for the Lord's Supper say close proximity to the new kitchenette has made their work so much easier. I have been pleased to see Brady Chapel being used every Sunday morning for worship and coffee fellowship...and now that tables have arrived, it will be used during the week for larger meeting space.

There are lots of people to thank for guiding this process. Let me name a few. Jack Page was quickly brought on-board to be “clerk of the works.” Having recently retired as professor of civil engineering at VMI, he was the right man for the moment. He speaks constructionese. His attention to this project really was a God-send. Thank him when you see him.

Train & Partners Architects provided a plan for us that was far more creative and user-friendly than we could have imagined. The faces of Train we saw most were Tom Keogh, Kirk Train, and Mitch Roessing. Train & Partners helped put the sanctuary back together after the church fire 12 years ago...and so we thank them again for seeing us through yet another major project. **Lantz Construction Company** was our contractor. The faces of Lantz we saw on a regular basis were Jerry Brown and Andy Tutwiler. Both these men served the church well. I am very grateful to them for all the ways their service to us went well beyond the scope of work. Andy had been involved with the restoration after the church fire and so we knew that with him we were getting quality. I am so grateful to have had the chance to get to know and respect Jerry Brown. Since he's from Natural Bridge I look forward to bumping into him from time to time.

A good number of folks served on a **Task Force** that shepherded the project from start to finish: Doug Caldwell, Rae Carpenter, Dick Emrey; Betsy Lee, Dianne Herrick, John Morman, Mike Strickler, Michael Tschantz, and Jay Williams.

A **Capital Campaign Committee**, chaired by Hardin Marion, provided opportunities for you to participate in the project. The capital campaign committee was made up of: Gregg Amonette, Mimi Elrod, Joe Irby, Chuck Phillips, and Neely Young.

Skip Hess, Curt Fredin, and Mary Ann Bowden put in many, many hours giving shape and style to the new parlor/library. Some of you made their work easier by responding to the email that went out asking for furniture for the parlor. Thanks.

The **church staff** were the ones who lived closest to this project this past year. **Doug Stevenson**, our custodian, altered his work hours to try to accommodate the demolition and reconstruction. He prides himself on keeping this building looking spotless...and so the dust and mess were a formidable challenge. But Doug kept his good humor through it all. What a tremendous asset he is to this church. **Lila Rogers** put up with noise, dust, and additional duties she never imagined. She was often the first person to welcome the contractor and sub-contractors. You will not be surprised to learn they all warmed to her quickly. **Sarah Hill** began her work with us about the time the project started. What a good sport she has been. She gets the prize for having the greatest number of offices during the year: three. **Deb Klein**, who teaches a couple of adult classes each week the whole through, had to be creative in finding places for her classes to meet. She was a good sport, too...and lent her support and good ideas to the project from the start. **Bill McCorkle** was not physically displaced... but getting to his office was a challenge. And where to practice the choirs became a weekly game of chance. Thanks so much to the staff for their flexibility and good cheer through it all. You have good reason to be proud of them. **Ruth Floyd** and **Cindy Irby** both had to put up with all sorts of inconvenience in the carrying out of their respective tasks.

When you see any of these folks thank them for the ways in which they helped to bring to fruition what I believe was God's dream for this church. I want them to know my gratitude...and my true appreciation for the way they helped us all remember the "means" were as important as the "end result." Thanks.

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Where do we go from here? Not to worry. I'm not going to announce the kick-off of a new project. But you can be assured a day will come when this church will be led to the next project. Evolution has been a part of our history. We have not and will not stand still. Let me give you a sense of what I mean by way of a quick review of some of our history.

The folks who would become Lexington Presbyterians attended Hall's Meeting House, five miles to the west of town, beginning in 1746. Lexington Presbytery authorized the formation of this church as a new church development in 1789 (223 years ago). (We'll need to start gearing up for our 225th anniversary soon.) From 1789 to 1799, though, we continued to worship with the folks at Hall's Meeting House that would become New Monmouth Presbyterian.

Our first sanctuary was built in 1799 and was located in what we know today as the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery. In the early 1840s, though, as a result of two desires - 1st for a more comfortable place of worship, and 2nd to move to town - the Female Working Society of the Presbyterian Church, purchased and gave to the church the lot at the corner of Main and Nelson Streets, the ground we now occupy. The Greek Revival structure was completed in 1845.¹ In 1895 the church added wings to accommodate continuing growth and activity. The building was enlarged, improved, and refurbished again in 1899. In 1998 the sanctuary's chancel was renovated...but we did not live with those changes long because on July 18, 2000, the sanctuary burned. The congregation reoccupied the restored sanctuary on January 5, 2003.

Our educational facilities evolved, as well. The first classroom amounted to a much-used lecture room that stood beside the church building after 1845, sandwiched between the sanctuary and a private dwelling. In 1905 the house was purchased by the church and a new classroom building was erected in its place by 1907. In 1952 the land behind this classroom building through to Randolph Street was purchased, and by 1956 a new enlarged Christian Education Building had been completed. In May 1957, the new building was named **Murray Hall** for Dr. J. J. Murray, pastor of thirty-three years.

And now, in our day, we add the renovations to Murray Hall that afford easier accessibility throughout the building. The renovations provide for handicap restrooms on the first floor and across from the kitchen, a remodeled kitchen, and an elevator (given by Chip Honsinger and his sons in memory of his wife and their mother, Beryl, who died suddenly last January). The renovations included an enlarged entry at the juncture of the sanctuary and Murray Hall, a reconfigured Brady Chapel and an internal passageway to it from the sanctuary, a kitchenette outside Brady Chapel, an entrance ramp at Randolph Street, a ramp from the Dunlap wing to the WestFel level, reconfigured offices intended for the pastor and associate pastor, and reworked walkways approaching the building.

My point in giving you this historical litany is to say we should not be surprised when further improvements are made to our buildings. It is right and good for us to

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rejoice in what we have been able to contribute to the ongoing life of this church. But I don't believe the completion of this project means our work on God's behalf is done. If our aim is to be the church we believe God wants us to be...if our aim is to let our individual lives and our life together be shaped by the God who never stands still...then change will occur. Change will occur within us as the people of the church...and change will occur to the buildings where we are schooled and nurtured in faithful living.

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So what is next? As always, answering that question is the discernment work before us. Knowing what God wants from us next entails renewed commitment to listen...and listening is an aspect of prayer isn't it? It entails a renewed commitment to regular study and worship and service. And knowing God's will entails the humble and deliberate work of letting the church be the gift God meant it to be.

Knowing God's will entails wisdom...the sort of wisdom that is rooted in the "fear of the Lord," as the writer of Proverbs put it. He said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Abraham Heschel, the great Jewish thinker of the last century, helps us realize that fear means *reverence* and *awe*. He went a step further, though, by suggesting fear entails *embarrassment*...the deep kind of embarrassment we are meant to feel when it dawns on us we fall short of being the people God made us to be.

Heschel believed our ability to be embarrassed is the beginning of wisdom. By that he meant embarrassment is the appropriate response to living in the shadow of greatness and ignoring it. We ought to be embarrassed when we go through our days without noticing God at work all around us. Wisdom begins when we are embarrassed by our inattention to the things of God.²

I am confident listening for and discerning God's will for us involves the sort of wisdom that comes from being embarrassed. I'm talking about the kind of embarrassment that comes when we realize we have been far too cautious, far too conservative. Embarrassment that comes when we realize we have been overly focused on a rainy day and not nearly enough focused upon the profligate grace of God that has been poured upon us. Embarrassment that comes when we look back and say, "What were we thinking? Why didn't we trust God more?"

This sort of embarrassment may just open us to the kind of wisdom that allows us to say, "We will do better. We will try not to ignore God's nudge. We will try not to stand in the way of what God wants us to be and do. If we can help it, we will not let the church settle for being anything less than a Gospel-light to those around us."

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The Apostle Paul had a pretty good idea what the church could be. He wrote to the church at Ephesus expressing his hope that they mature in their faith...which for him meant allowing God's Spirit to reign in their hearts and minds so they could grow to the full stature of Christ.

Think of this as Paul's dream. It was not a dream he cooked up. It was a dream right out of God's dreaming, God's intention that had been revealed in one fashion or another through the ages. It was a dream that the Ephesian church and our church at the corner of Nelson and Main "grow up" into Christ. It was a dream that we realize the life

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we share in the church is God's gift – the God-given context where you and I are meant to mature and grow into the full stature of Christ.

If we are to become the church Paul dreamed of, though, we have an uphill battle before us. I say this because contemporary America does not offer favorable conditions for growing up. Maturity is not the hallmark of our culture. Our culture is no knee-deep...it is neck-deep in selfishness. Our shallow, individualistic culture is doing its dead level best to keep us in a perpetually arrested state of adolescence.³

It may be that one of the most important tasks before the church is to help those around us realize they do not need to settle for anything less than the sort of maturity that measures true value and worth against the full stature of Christ. What God has next for us to do may be for us to settle for nothing less than this sort of maturity...and then, after we have done the hard work of growing up, to help the shallow, selfish culture around us see from our example that there is a better way, a healthier way, a more fulfilling way.

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It is right and good that we pause today to give glad thanks that the renovations to Murray Hall have been completed. These renovations will enlarge our ability to be God's hospitable witness in this community. And those of you who helped in any way to make this dream a reality deserve our genuine gratitude. Congratulations...job well done.

It is also right and good for us to look to the future and to ask God to challenge and embarrass us in ways that will make us his wiser and ever grateful witnesses. To that end, let us go from here this day with eyes and ears, hearts and minds ready..."to lead a life worthy of the calling to which (we) have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." So may it be to God's glory. Amen.



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Endnotes:

¹ Designed by Thomas U. Walter who designed the Capital Dome in Washington. Once the original church was vacated, it was demolished and the bricks and timbers were used to build the manse. Construction of the manse was completed in 1848...and its first inhabitants were William S. White and his family. The pastors' of this church have lived in that manse to this day.

² Heschel, Susannah. ed. 2011. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 46.

³ Peterson, Eugene H. 2010. *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., e-book location 1666-1668.