

Oak Leaves

Vol. LXV, Number 1

September 2022



Preparing for the New by Pastor John

This is my penultimate Oakleaves article. Next month's will be my last and, in that communication, I want to focus on saying in writing thanks and good-bye. For this article, I want to prepare you for the boundaries which will form after I retire.

We will have a Congregational Meeting after worship on September 18 to act officially on my request to retire. All pastoral calls involve three parties: the pastor, the congregation, and the presbytery. When pastors leave for another call or retire, the congregation and the presbytery approve such changes in relationships. The official church language is to dissolve the pastoral relationship. Come November 1, I will no longer be pastor of our church.

The Interim Pastor Search Committee is hard at work securing interim leadership for the church. We are praying for a smooth transition this fall. But before the new era begins, the old must be ended with intention and clarity. Someone from our presbytery will meet with our Session to talk about "A Covenant of Closure." The covenant makes clear that it will no longer be appropriate for me to have a pastoral relationship with the church and its members. Friendships are fine, but my involvement with and weighing in on church matters will cease.

This means no more weddings or funerals, on or off-site by me for church members, unless I am invited by the current pastor. I would go so far as to say, don't put whoever is the next pastor on the spot by asking him or her to invite me. It's not fair to the pastor or to the church's call to move into God's future. The covenant also makes clear that I should not invite members to join me in some on-line offering I might create. I am grateful for clear boundaries. They serve the health of us all.

Of course, there is need for a human acknowledgement of our twenty-four-year relationship. I am so very grateful for my years here. Rosanne and I are very blessed. God works

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through ordinary people like us to do God's healing work in the world. We have sought to commune with and to respond faithfully to God in these years. That is worth celebrating. In doing so, you and Rosanne and I prepare ourselves for a future of ever greater communion with and faithfulness to God. For a while longer, see you in church!

Worshipping Together in September



Communion Sunday, September 4, 2022 @ 9:15 AM

Sermon: **"Life's True Purpose"** by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: **Luke 14:25-33**

Most of us do not see the true purpose of our lives, which is to pour out our lives, ourselves in love, as God does.

Sunday, September 11, 2022 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: **"Blessed Grace"** by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: **1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10**

Only those who see the futility of the ego's program for happiness discover the joy of the experience of grace.

Sunday, September 18, 2022 @ 9:45 AM

Sermon: **"Bringing Your Soul to Work"** by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: **Amos 8:4-7; Luke 16:1-13**

In perhaps his most enigmatic parable, Jesus recognizes the mixed motives involved in making our way in the world. For those on a spiritual journey, the call is to learn how to bring our soul into all our dealings.

Congregational Meeting immediately following service

Sunday, September 25, 2022 @ 9:15 AM

Sermon: **"The Easy Trap"** by Rev. John W. Monroe III

Scripture: **Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Luke 16:19-31**

The trap of the lure of wealth and ease is heart disease – hardness of heart. Doctor Jesus offers the cure – compassion.

For updates & more services, visit rumsonpresbyterian.org/upcoming-services

Church School



As we all return to our back to school routines I would like to remind everyone that Church School is still in session and the nursery is staffed and ready for your childcare needs every Sunday during Worship. I look forward to strengthening your child's Christian Education in a fun and meaningful way. Please contact me with any issues or requests.

I would also like to request you SAVE THE DATE, October 9th Church School will be hosting a welcome back "coffee hour" celebration in honor of our own Thomas Kiningham's BIRTH-DAY!!!

Thank You!

Sandi Van Cleve, Director of Christian Education

As always, looking for "volunteers" for the Nursery. Please reach out to me at churchschool@rumsonpresbyterian.org or (732)768-9913 if you know someone who may be interested. The pay is \$25 per session or credit for volunteer hours.

Music Program



I hope you have all enjoyed your wonderful summer!

Youth music: As we head into the new school year, I wanted to remind everyone that we will be starting our youth choir rehearsals after church services. If your child would like to participate, please let me know. Rehearsals will be short, typically running from 10:45 am to 11:00 am, and I'm hoping to perform in worship about once a month. Feel free to email me with any questions; andreeafegan@gmail.com.

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Adult Choir: Starting this September, we will also be bringing back the choir to perform in our worship services. So far, we will be performing one piece per Sunday, rehearsing on Sunday mornings, and as the weeks progress towards the holiday we will begin working on the Christmas Cantata. Please let me know if you'd like to join us. We'd love to welcome new members!

Blessings to you and your family,
Andreea Fegan, Music Director

Mission News



The Mission Commission is preparing for a busy Fall as we approach the end of the year. During these hot, dry months, climate change and environmental matters are top of mind. In June, we donated to the Ironbound Community Corporation, an organization founded in 1969 in Newark, New Jersey that works to engage and empower individuals, families, and groups in realizing their aspirations and, together, work to create a just, vibrant and sustainable community. The ICC's organizing precepts include "Progress with People", "Always Uplift, never Uproot" and "Development without Displacement" and their focus on environmental justice advocacy has been especially impactful to the Ironbound community. Given the pandemics sweeping impacts on mental wellbeing, we also donated to NJ Center for Healing Arts. This non-profit agency offers one of the first models of integrative health in the country, integrating counseling and psychotherapy with the best practices of conventional, alternative and complementary medicines. We were keen to direct the funds to support behavioral health therapies for families and children. In July, we moved forward with our annual support for Rumson municipal organizations which include First Aid, Police and Firefighters. Contention for the Zoom number scuttled our August meeting, but we will be meeting again on September 26th at 7:30pm to outline our strategy for the remainder of the year. All are welcome to join.

Anita Waters, Mission Chair

A Note of Thanks

We received this lovely note of thanks from Pastor Mary Farnham of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Manasquan for our support of their Furniture Bank through the work of our Mission Commission.

Dear Pastor Monroe,

Sending heartfelt thanks to you and the people of First Presbyterian in Rumson for your extraordinary gift to our Holy Trinity Furniture Bank! The thousand-dollar donation from your Endowment Fund will become an answer to the prayers of many – whether the unexpectedly ill-and-unemployed, disabled veterans, single parent families, previously homeless folks transitioning back to housing, impoverished elderly... "God only knows!"

Our Furniture Bank is coming up to its 10th anniversary, as is Superstorm Sandy. We say here that Sandy washed us out of the sanctuary into the community – in ways that endure.

God bless you and your flock. May the blessing you've shared with us here in southern Monmouth County return to you many times over.

Gratefully,

Pastor Mary Farnham and the faith family of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church



Trinity

Other Church News



Congregational Meeting September 18—Immediately after worship

The Session has called a Congregational Meeting on September 18, immediately after worship, for the purpose of voting to dissolve the pastoral relationship with John Monroe, effective November 1, 2022, and to elect members to serve on the Nominating Committee.



Save the Date

for a

Dinner Celebration

HONORING

Pastor John and Rosanne Monroe

FRIDAY | October 7, 2022

Wilson Hall

Rumson Presbyterian Church



2022 Crop Hunger Walk



Rumson Presbyterian Church has registered! Walk. Give. Change the world.

We're participating in the 2022 CROP Hunger Walk to support CWS and help families who are struggling with hunger. We're asking you to join us - with your steps and your donations - to provide more meals for the growing number of people in our community who need them, and greater food security in communities around the world.

Please visit <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2022/team/rumson-presbyterian-church-2>

to join our team on October 16th, or if you can't join us, to support us by making a donation today! Thank you!

Giving

GIVEPLUS⁺

YOUR CHURCH GIVING APP

Rumson Presbyterian Church is excited to partner with the Presbyterian Foundation and Vanco Payment Solutions to bring you our GivePlus Online Giving page (<https://rumsonpresbyterian.org/giving/>).

We are also listed in the GivePlus Mobile App, which can be downloaded to your smartphone, making Online Giving even easier. This YouTube video explains how to get and use the App. In addition, here are links to two more documents about the service and the App: "Vanco GivePlus Church FAQs for Donors" and "Vanco GivePlus Church How it Works".

Note: 2% of your GivePlus donation will be retained as an administrative fee by the Presbyterian Foundation.

Community News



Early Risers



If you want to stop drinking call: 1-908-687-8566
or (toll free from NJ area codes): 1-800-245-1377
24 hours a day / 7 days a week.

For a list of other local A.A. meetings, visit www.nnjaa.org/#
For information about A.A. visit www.nnjaa.org

Meetings: Fri. from 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM at Rumson Presbyterian Church

Waterspirit



Waterspirit Event Calendar

Meditation for Earth Every **Tues.** from **12:15 PM - 12:45 PM**

Please join Waterspirit for a "Meditation for Earth." We read a short blessing, followed by an excerpt from Hal Borland's '12 moons of the Year'. Then we lead a simple meditation followed with silence, for a flourishing Earth. The meditation and silence is approximately 30 minutes.

Webinar : The Challenge of Stormwater **Wed., Sept. 7** from **12:00 PM - 1:00 PM**

What Public Officials & Local Leaders can do to Prevent Flood Disaster Join our 2nd webinar

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of the 4 part series focusing on environmental justice and related stormwater management and green infrastructure opportunities for funding/implementation. Register to join us for this virtual mid day meeting.

10 Step Eco-Anxiety Support Group Info Session Wed., Sept. 7 from 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Register for this informational meeting that will outline what this 10-week support group entails, explain the course's suggested donation, and answer any questions you might have prior to committing. The group will meet on Zoom from 9/14 - 11/16 at 6-8 p.m. ET.

Fall Equinox Celebration Thu., Sept. 22 from 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Please save the date for our fall equinox celebration! More information will be shared soon.

All are welcome. Please visit their website (waterspirit.org)
for more information about these events.

Caring for God's Earth



Submitted by **Diane Burke** and **Sue Smith**

Environmental Policies approved by the 2022 General Assembly

The 225th General Assembly, which was held in June/July of this year, approved a number of environmental policies. The two policies that garnered the most attention were divestment from fossil fuel companies and Investing in a Green Future: a Vision for a Renewed Creation.

Fossil Fuel Divestment

Fossil Free PCUSA (FFPCUSA) has been advocating for categorical divestment from fossil fuels companies since the 221st General Assembly (2014). Since then, no GA has approved this overture. Instead, there were approvals to continue conversations with these companies and to create an environmental policy to measure corporate compliance with PCUSA values. The Mission Responsibility Thru Investment (MRTI) committee, the shareholder en-

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agement arm of the church, was tasked with carrying out these directives. MRTI recommended to this General Assembly that the church divest from five corporations out of compliance with our policies: Chevron, ExxonMobil, Marathon Petroleum, Phillips 66 and Valero Energy. The General Assembly approved this report, saying these companies are not doing enough to slow climate change.

This is not categorical divestment. MRTI contends selective divestment is more effective in that continued engagement with companies that are not divested may result in progress toward climate goals, and that divestment recommendations single out particularly bad actors.

Investing in a Green Future: a Vision for a Renewed Creation

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) was directed by the church's 223rd General Assembly (2018) to develop a policy to respond to the impacts of climate change with individual and collective action.

A previous policy, *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* (1990), called for the 1990's to be the turnaround decade for creation. That did not happen. The current report calls for recommitting to a turnaround decade now. But not only the turnaround decade outlined in 1990. Any policy needs to be intentional about addressing the intersection of environmental, economic and racial justice.

The church's Office of Public Witness, which advocates on behalf of the church in Washington, D.C., can only advocate on issues that the General Assembly of the PCUSA has approved. Here are some of the policies that can now be used by the church in its advocacy:

- Acknowledge that pollution in specific communities is a systemic problem.
- Ensure that those affected by environmental racism provide leadership in the movement shaping solutions.
- Support regulations that reduce air pollution that disproportionately affects environmental justice communities.
- Stop fracking and other fossil fuel extraction that endangers local communities.
- Halt construction of fossil fuel pipelines.
- Ensure toxic waste sites and other environmental hazards are not located near people's homes.
- Acknowledge that women bear the economic brunt of many climate impacts.
- Recognize that Indigenous Peoples have been particularly harmed by environmental racism.

This policy report is meant to be inspirational and aspirational. We lament what climate change is doing to our world. But we can hope that we will make a difference in realizing the hope of a more just, restored and sustainable world.

A Meditation



Center for
Action and
Contemplation

Discerning What Is Ours To Do : Contemplation and Right Action

by [Richard Rohr, OFM](#)

August 22, 2022

Father Richard shares about an important time of discernment in his own life:

There are two spiritual disciplines that keep me honest and growing: contemplative prayer and the perspective from the bottom. In 1985, I was freed for a year to pursue the contemplative part of my vocation. It was a major turning point. Father William McNamara's definition of contemplation—"a long loving look at the real"—became transformative. [1] The world, my own issues and hurts, all goals and desires gradually dissolved into proper perspective. God became obvious and everywhere.

Ultimately, we do not earn or find God. We just get ourselves out of the way. We let go of illusions and the preoccupations of our smaller selves. As the cheap scaffolding falls away, the soul stands revealed. The soul, or True Self, cannot be created or achieved by our work. It just is, and it is already. The soul is God's "I AM" continued in me. That part of me already knows, desires, and truly seeks God. Discernment of God's will comes naturally to the True Self because here "I" and God seem to be one "I."

Richard reflects on how this extended time of contemplation brought him to a point of decisive action:

After my sabbatical year, I found my way to the conviction that I should open the Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico. I wanted to help people get thoroughly involved in the issues and goals of social justice, to help people work in solidarity with those on the margins, but from the right point of departure. It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons!

Contemplation is a way to hear with the Spirit and not just with the head. Contemplation is the search for a wide-open space, a space broad enough for the head, the heart, the feelings, the gut, the subconscious, our memories, our intuitions, our whole body. We need a holistic place for discerning wisdom.

The effect of contemplation is authentic action; if contemplation doesn't lead to genuine action, then it remains only navel-gazing and self-preoccupation.

I'm convinced that if we stick with it, if we practice contemplation regularly, then we will

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come to an inner place of compassion—for ourselves and for others. In this place, we notice how much *the suffering of the world is our suffering*. We become committed to this world, not cerebrally, but from the much deeper perspective of our soul. At this point, we're indestructible, because in that place we find the peace that the world cannot give. We don't need to win anymore; *we just need to do what we have to do*, as naive and simplistic as that might sound. That's why Augustine could make such an outrageous statement as "Love [God] and do what you will"! [2] People who are living from a truly God-centered place instead of a self-centered place are dangerously free precisely because they are tethered at the center.

References:

[1] William McNamara as quoted by Walter J. Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real," in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 91.

[2] Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John to the Parthians*, tractate 7.8.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Essential Teachings on Love*, selected by Joelle Chase and Judy Traeger (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 133, 141–142.

Pastor John's Weekly E-Mail "Blasts"

Mid-Summer Thoughts (July 13)

This Sunday, July 17, the Scripture readings are Colossians 1: 15 – 28 and Luke 10: 38 – 42. The sermon title is "Learning What Is Ours to Do." The hymns are "Let All Things Now Living" and "Two of Us" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

Rosanne and I were away the last two Sundays, enjoying some time upstate. Rosanne was working on organizing and beautifying and I mowed and trimmed, lifted and cleaned. The days were magnificent with highs in the 70s most days and lows dipping into the low 50s or even high 40s most nights. The kids and grans came for a long weekend. We hosted a dinner for our neighbors, got our septic pumped, and saw a black bear. This morning my neighbor sent me a picture of the bear in his yard. It had made a mess of another neighbor's garbage. It is time for Rosanne and me to take down our birdfeeders and make the bear less inclined to show up in our space—amazing as it is to see. One has to learn how to live appropriately where one resides.

I will have no more Sundays away. My final sermon will be October 30. After this Sunday, I will have fifteen more sermons to preach. What will I do with those sermons? What will the Spirit lead me to say?

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I just read an article by Russell Moore, dean of the School of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, entitled, "Faith, Fiction, and Christian Nationalism." He reflects about the forces and social realities which give rise to Christian nationalism in our country and in other parts of the globe, with sympathy and challenge. Using the novels of Wendell Berry as support, he observes how communities have been upended by mobilization and how this can lead to communities by ideology, left and right.

Moore sees a need both for real communities in real places, and also a need to be so grounded in communion with Christ which transcends any earthly community, that one can avoid an idolatrous conformity to human communities. It is okay and necessary to critique and step out of human conformity. "Be in the world, but not of it," is how Jesus put it. But it is important to be in it.

This is a confusing and challenging time to be in our world. But, in love, we must. Let's also learn how not to be of it—not out of hate or despair, but out of love, humility, and continual repentance. Blessings and hope, all!

Time and Eternity (July 19)

This Sunday, July 24, our Scripture readings will be Colossians 2: 6-15 and Luke 11: 1-13. The sermon is called, "Persistent Seekers" and the hymns will be "Seek Ye First" and "Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore."

In these summer weeks, I am taking advantage of the time to clean out my office and the manse. I am discovering items in my drawers and also on my walls and doors which pre-date my time here. This morning, I noticed a map of the area on the inside of my closet door which was attached behind my robes and stoles. Of course, I've noticed it before, but this morning it struck me that its time for removal had come. In 1998, when I arrived, maps were valuable to newcomers like me. But in 2022, our smart phones make them obsolete. Whoever comes after me would not need to look at this very old and tattered map.

The cultural changes of these past twenty-four years are hard to fathom. It's hard to keep up with the implications of it all. Churches, especially, are tempted to look backwards and to remember the role of the church in people's personal and collective history. This is fine to remember. Yet, it is much more difficult to imagine and to plan for the massive change which has been upon us. My leaving will present obligations for our church to engage in imagining and planning. I believe that if this work is done with consciousness, trust, and openness, God will work in surprising and life-giving ways among our church—your church.

You hear me speak all the time about the fundamental Christian spiritual practice of letting go (see Philippians 2: 5-11). It is in the act of letting go and emptying that the fullness of God

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is able to flow into time, bringing into time the renewing and vivifying force of eternity. Our rich contemplative heritage has always known this truth and deep personal knowledge of this truth is what enables finite people to endure challenging times and to plant seeds of a new wave of creativity and vitality.

“Be transformed by the renewing of your minds,” wrote Paul (Romans 12: 2). Renewal can come with change, just as surely as resurrection in Christ is born from death. Hold our Session and church in prayer these days. In your own prayer, ask for grace for the task of letting go and opening, that eternity may rush in and do its work in time. Blessings all!

What Creates Results? (July 27)

The readings this Sunday, July 31, are Colossians 3: 1-11 and Luke 12: 13-21. The sermon title is “True Treasure”, and the hymns are “Be Thou My Vision” and “Desperado” by the Eagles.

As I continue to pursue a calling of integration of the spiritual into my earthly life, I notice a deep bias in our culture against the spiritual realm. There is a sense that spiritual practice is a luxury that busy people can't afford. There is a bias toward action as the pathway to results, and spiritual practice is viewed by many as being the opposite of action, a waste of time. Change, many believe, doesn't come through prayer, but through work.

Why, then, is change so hard for us to create? We are busy people. You would think that results would be popping up all over the place. Notice how sometimes our efforts produce the exact opposite of what we intended. I believe that much more is at work in creating results than mere action. There are qualities which are hard to define, and which cannot be manufactured superficially, which operate in mysterious ways to bring results. Another way of putting this is that we create what we are. Results come inevitably from qualities of being. The cultural mess that we find ourselves in has more to do with our collective quality of being than it does with the plans and efforts we have made to create a better world. We have failed to work intelligently on who we are, and the results reveal this failure.

How do we work on our being? It requires making contact with realms which are not perceived through the physical senses. It means finding that within us which can perceive something more. When we practice at letting go of identification with the story of me and its preferences and dislikes, we begin to sense in us something which is more, which is not easily caught up in stuff. I have recently started a practice of watching how my self of habitual personality reacts to what is arising, and then, watching how a higher self in me reacts. It is amazing to see the difference. The trick is to let go of our habitual reactions and to create space for something genuinely new and much freer.

A new structure of being in us, I believe, will lead to results that our logical minds cannot foresee. Working on our quality of being is not an avoidance of work. It is the most demanding work of all, and at this time on our planet, the most needed. Blessings all!

The Gift of Turmoil (August 3)

This Sunday, August 7, is Communion Sunday. The Scripture reading is Luke 12: 32 – 40. The sermon title is “Inner Wealth.” The hymns are “Morning Has Broken” and “People Get Ready” by Curtis Mayfield.

Each morning, I have an intention to begin the day with spiritual practice. For about thirty minutes, I use one of a variety of contemplative exercises in which I try to free myself from the incessant flow of thoughts and the emotional attachments which accompany each thought and to deepen my awareness of the aliveness of my body and the higher levels of perception which are available to us when we make efforts to quieten and to pay attention.

This is a practice which has been a part of my life for years and decades. As with any practice which extends for any length of time, of course, there are days when the practice comes easy and others when it is a struggle. Part of the practice is not to attach to one’s subjective experience of the practice or to fall into evaluation which will bring one back into attachment and reactivity. Can we experience simple, pure awareness?

This morning was a bit of a struggle. Part of me wanted to blow the practice off. As I entered into my practice, I was also present to that in me which was resisting. Momentarily, I saw those parts of me which were angry about the turmoil in our world. I saw how my desires for the world and its reality are in conflict. Part of me wants to run away. Part of me wants to pout. Part of me feels hopeless. For a brief moment, however, I experienced another part which knows that much of my reactivity has to do with the illusions I have carried throughout my life being ripped away. The ripping away of illusions, though painful, is a necessary stage in our spiritual growth, which looks into life fully and clearly and loves and accepts no matter what. Jesus taught us this capacity with his words and with his life.

Spiritual growth is not about happily-ever-after. It is not about achieving some kind of ideal picture of reality. It is about finding that in us which can see clearly and wholly, and which can see that all of reality, in all of its incompleteness and resistance, is held in an invisible field of love. If we can begin to see this, if only for a moment, then we are on the way of beginning to see that there is gift, even in the turmoil of our lives and our world. Blessings all!

Pray without Ceasing (August 10)

This Sunday, August 14, the Scripture readings are Jeremiah 23: 23-29 and Luke 12: 49-56. The sermon title is “Inner Flame”, and the hymns are “Lord, the Light of Your Love Is Shining” and “These Are the Days” by Van Morrison.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul admonishes the people of that young church to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). Most of us, of course, hear this passage as impossible, pass it off, and assume that Paul was simply exaggerating to make a point. We leave it at that. Paul’s

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words leave us unchanged.

The author of the nineteenth-century spiritual classic, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, however, was haunted by this passage that he heard read in worship. He felt a life-changing call in it and began searching for how he might fulfill this command. He found that very few, if any, church leaders took this passage seriously. It was only a monk who heard in him a deep and authentic spiritual search and came to his assistance. The writer of this work went on a journey that changed his life and brought him into a sustained awareness of God throughout the day.

What this book and the writings of other great souls show us is that the journey to God requires our all. Their zeal and vigilance judge the apathy and spiritual sloth of so much of Christian life. Most Christians are Christian in name only. Our lack of striving demonstrates our lack of desire for following Christ's path.

The church has failed to teach people that our faith is to be more than transactional. Most of us assume, perhaps unconsciously, that our interactions with God will lead God to do for us what we wish. We pray for help, for success, for healing, for the results that we want. When God doesn't come through for us in the way we envision, we withdraw, grow cynical and cold in our faith.

What we fail to see is that authentic communion with God is our one true goal and that any transactional "good" pales in comparison. Those who have really tried to pray without ceasing usually do not withdraw from the world but attempt to bring a mindfulness of Christ to all of their dealings. How do we bring Christ's presence to our anger, our pain, our discouragement, our despair, our fear? Christ is always present, only our hearts cannot see. If we ever learn how to see, how might our lives be different? Such is the invitation of our faith. Blessings all!

Leaning In (August 17)

This Sunday, August 21, the Scripture readings are Isaiah 58: 9b-14 and Luke 13: 10-17. The sermon title is "Removing the Weight of Self", and the hymns are "For the Beauty of the Earth" and "Nowhere Man" by the Beatles.

As the days of summer begin to wind down, for many, there is always a twinge of sadness. Plentiful sun, care-free moments, time with family and friends will give way to routines of school and work and busyness and for some, loneliness. I am probably in the minority of those who love the summer, but also look forward to the approach of fall. I loved going back to school—I know, I'm strange—and I loved the return of activity in the church which came with fall. Mostly, I enjoyed the cooler, crisper days and the colors of fall.

This approaching fall is different from most in that it will bring the end of a lifetime of minis-

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try—thirty-eight years since ordination and also four years of preparing for ministry in seminary. My life's rhythms will change. Change, I'm convinced brings blessings, and is challenging at the same time. Let's face it, there is grief in change, grief in letting go.

Perhaps I am beginning to see signs of this going on, especially among our church's leadership. Our giving is down this year, causing Session to have to approve additional drawdowns from our endowment. The church has never returned to what it was before COVID. We worship from three different platforms—in-person, Zoom, and livestream. And soon, a pastor of twenty-four years will leave. Some may welcome this change, but regardless of one's perspective, our church will be moving into an unknown future. Will Rumson Presbyterian renew, or will it continue on a path of numerical decline?

Our instinct is to avoid unpleasant feelings and the human experience of vulnerability. As Christians, we can understand our human responses, and also see that vulnerability and pain are the path to resurrection. Jesus leaned into pain and invites us to do the same. He knew a secret that most do not. Vulnerability is not our enemy, but the magic through which God remakes us.

Whatever lies ahead, God is and will be working for our transformation into children who can receive our inheritance. During challenging times Jesus said to his followers, "Don't be afraid little children, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The kingdom is an opening in us to the Presence which abounds in every moment, if we just had eyes to see. Blessings all!

The Foolishness of Wisdom (August 24)

This Sunday, August 28, the Scripture readings are Proverbs 25: 6-7 and Luke 14: 1, 7-14. The sermon title is "Wisdom Jesus", and the hymns are "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" and "The Sound of Silence."

I have started re-reading a spiritual classic which I read for the first time about ten years ago. I came across the following quote: "Learn at first concentration without effort; transform work into play; make every yoke that you have accepted easy and every burden that you carry light." I think that I have chosen to write about this quote because I feel drawn to try to live into for a while.

Concentration without effort I think is the author's way of describing a meditative awareness. Ironically, it takes some effort to arrive at a state of consciousness which is concentrated without effort, but I have tasted that kind of state. My goal is to sustain that kind of state throughout the day. I rarely succeed. But when I catch myself out of that state, I try to get back there.

The other two suggestions about transforming work into play and making every yoke easy

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and every burden light are less familiar to me in my inner experience. That's why I want to experiment with them. I have a tendency to live too seriously, where work is effortful, and burdens weigh me down. What would it be like to let go of that part of myself which takes myself too seriously? Of course, sometimes work is hard, and burdens are real. But if I could let go of that part of me which resists reality and engages in stories and complaints about reality, my guess is that my experience would be less heavy, and my responses might be freer and more creative.

Of course, Jesus told us that his yoke was easy and his burden light. Maybe Jesus was saying, also, that if we let go of the self which is reactive and hooked by resistance and complaining, then we could live with more awareness of God. Paul wrote that the wisdom of God is foolishness to people. I am going to play around with this bit of wisdom and see what I learn. You too? Blessings all!

Transforming Suffering (August 31)

This Sunday, September 4, is our final Sunday at 9:15. On September 11, we will return to 9:45 worship. The Scripture reading is Luke 14: 25-33 and the sermon title is "Life's True Purpose." It is a Communion Sunday, and the hymns are "God of Grace and God of Glory" and "The Heart of the Matter."

As I continue to reflect on our biblical tradition and the good news which we are called to receive and to offer, it is increasingly clear to me that what is being offered to us is a pathway to a new kind of life, here and now. The whole story of a fall from grace and a life of subsequent toil, separation, and anxiety followed by a restoration in Christ is describing for us our own experience, if we are honest, and the possibility for us to find genuine freedom and joy. Somewhere in our hidden depths we know of an experience of oneness and harmony which seems to have been forever disrupted. We cope with our loss and subsequent soul-sickness in ways that only perpetuate our brokenness—selfishness, greed, anger, fear, judgment, and the like. In Christ, we are being shown the way to a deep healing and freedom from what ails us.

What the church has always been supposed to do is to help people move out from the slavery of the old story of fear and selfishness and to move into the new story of freedom in Christ. But here is where we easily get off-track. We are not offered a freedom for self, but a freedom for love of others and God. If we can begin to live into this new story, then, of course, we will also discover the ability to truly love ourselves as well. The temptation for the church is to interpret the new story through the lens of the old. We don't really believe that the new is possible, and so, we continue to live by the confines of the old. It's dog eat dog, too often, even in the church.

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How do we move from the old story to the new? It's a daily process of retraining ourselves, of opening our hearts and awakening our capacity for spiritual perception. We need teachers and companions on the way to the new, which is what the church is called to be. Mostly, we need hearts willing to take the risk of vulnerable love. Instead of moving from pain, we move toward it, in ourselves and others, holding out the possibility for the transformation into the new. Our world is giving us so many possibilities for taking on this work. Blessings all!



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Nonprofit Organization

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DATED MATERIAL ENCLOSED

~Please check our website at www.rumsonpresbyterian.org for calendar updates~

SEPTEMBER 2022

Sep 5	Mon	Labor Day	
Sep 6	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 7	Wed	Eco-Anxiety Meeting*	6:00PM
Sep 7	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 11	Sun	Patriot Day	
Sep 11	Sun	Resume Regular Worship Hours	9:45AM
Sep 13	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 14	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 18	Sun	Congregational Meeting	10:45AM
Sep 20	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 20	Tue	Session	7:00PM
Sep 21	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Sep 22	Thu	First Day of Autumn	
Sep 22	Thu	Fall Equinox Celebration*	7:00PM
Sep 26	Mon	Mission Commission	7:30PM
Sep 27	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Sep 28	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM

OCTOBER 2022

Oct 2	Sun	World Communion Sunday	
Oct 4	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 5	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 7	Fri	Celebration Dinner	6:00PM
Oct 10	Mon	Columbus Day (Observed)	
Oct 11	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 12	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 16	Sun	Red Bank Crop Hunger Walk	
Oct 18	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 18	Tue	Session	7:00PM
Oct 19	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 24	Mon	Mission Commission	7:30PM
Oct 25	Tue	Meditation for Earth*	12:15PM
Oct 26	Wed	Wisdom Group	7:00PM
Oct 30	Sun	Reformation Sunday	

**Waterspirit sponsored event. All are welcome.*

Please visit their website (waterspirit.org) for more information about their events.



www.rumsonprebyterian.org