



THE NEW DOVER HERALD

December 2023

Vol. 206

*A Ministry Newsletter of New Dover United Methodist Church
Celebrating 175 Years 1848-2023*

THURK & THURGH THAS

*“Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town...
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot...”*

From “Directive” by Robert Frost

Saints,

Grace to you and peace as we enter the season offering us a road leading home through the threatening shadows into a most hopeful light.

If you're counting, this is the eighth December “Chat” I've written and over the years I've shared quite a bit about the various Christmas traditions my family took part in over the years. One experience I haven't previously mentioned occurred on Christmas mornings during the period in my life when I was home on winter break from college and my brothers were also off from school. Despite our ardent, yearly prayers, it rarely snowed in Quinton on Christmas Day, but it seemed as though every yuletide morning back then was crisp, clear, and cold. So after the gifts were exchanged and opened, the pancakes and sausages wolfed down, and syrupy dishes cleared, Dad, Paul, Harry, and I would put on our wool socks, hiking boots, and winter jackets, jump in the car and take off for Berry's Chapel.

Berry's Chapel was the name of an African American community, located in the pine barrens on the eastern outskirts of Quinton. It was a village of a dozen or so houses surrounding a spare wooden church sitting amidst a graveyard. It had sprung up in the 19th century, when people of color were not welcomed in town, and was itself a stop on the Underground Railroad. The chapel, as well as the houses were long gone, just the weathered stones of the graveyard, some broken, rusty artifacts of daily life, and the sandy road leading there was all that was left of the village.

Dad would turn off the paved road, drive back a mile or so, the pine boughs scraping the sides of the car, and park by the graveyard to begin our adventure. Emerging from the car our exhaled breath proceeded us in billowy steam clouds as we took the narrow footpath into the woods that descended down a gentle slope between straight, standing trunks of native ash, maple, and oak and over patches of green ground pine. Our boots crunched the frozen tundra as we walked, the only competition being the rustle of squirrels digging desperately through the brown leaves for what was left of the fallen fall harvest of acorns. One memorable morning we were startled by a great horned owl as it leapt from a limb, flew through the woods, and somehow negotiated its escape through the tangled mass of interlocking tree limbs.

The footpath led down then up, about half a mile past the foundation and brick-lined well of an abandoned homestead, then turned hard to the right, down again into a holly swamp. Most years the dark green trees were loaded with bright red berries, as if nature herself had hung her Christmas decorations. At this point the path petered out, so the going grew more challenging as we pushed through the brush and bracken and clambered over downed trees and broken limbs. Then we saw it.



Rising like an ancient monolith from the forest floor, the trunk of a mighty oak tree, nearly 20 feet in diameter, with all but one of its limbs broken off under their immense weight and strewn about the base.

Now there are many notable trees in New Jersey, and most are on a historic register or, at the very least, well-known to their local community, but this majestic oak, sprung hundreds of years ago from an acorn the squirrels somehow missed, hidden away in a holly swamp, was known only to itself, the birds and squirrels who nested in its boughs, and the rare wanderer who stumbled upon it while trekking through the woods below Berry's Chapel.

On those cherished Christmas mornings, my Dad, my brothers, and I were the ones fortunate enough to stand awestruck in its presence.

Have a most blessed December,

Thuck

KEEP US IN YOUR PRAYERS



Manny & Nora De La Paz
Debbie Ladym
Shirley & Lamont Shaffer
Beverly Vollmar
Evelyn MacKenzie
Fran Livecchia
Gail Engel
Family of Marilyn Kimball
Service men & women

Veterans
Homeless, unemployed
& uninsured
The People of Ukraine
For Peace in the ongoing
conflict in Israel & Gaza
Victims & their Families of
mass shootings
All Elderly of NDUMC

Pray for all those affected by Natural Disasters, those suffering with addictions, those suffering from depression, Victims of terrorism & violence, all national leaders, and all those serving at New Dover UMC.

All doctors, nurses, EMT, teachers, grocery store workers, janitors, and all other frontline workers. Thank you and God Bless.

If you wish to add anyone to the 2023 permanent prayer list, please contact Karen Rowland at krowland648@yahoo.com

FROM YOUR PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

PLEASE JOIN US FOR PRAYER FELLOWSHIP EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING AT 10 AM

The purpose of prayer
is not to receive what
you asked for, but to
strengthen your
relationship with God.

In This Issue:

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- Keep Us in Your Prayers
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SERMON OF THE MONTH

“The Approach of a Distant Fire”

(Preached on Sunday, November 28, 2021)

Malachi 4:1-3/Matthew 3:1-12

Back in the year 2000, I joined a group of friends for an off-road bike trip up and over the Bitterroot Mountains in Montana into Idaho retracing the path of the explorers, Lewis and Clark. The roads we biked were nothing more than two wheel rutted fire trails far from any asphalt. The arid conditions that summer made the roads dry, sandy and countless times my rear tire would simply spin-out as I leaned onto my pedals trying to negotiate the next ridge. After a challenging first day, the next morning we crawled out of our tents in the grey dawn-light and noticed a narrow wisp of smoke curling up from the valley below us to the east. It looked no more threatening than a candle on the Advent wreath and so we paid it little mind. But after another hard day of riding, the following morning I awoke ahead of the sun climbed out of my tent, walked to a clearing, and looking east noticed that the valley was now filling up with smoke.

To make our four-day journey short, once we made it off the trail on our way back to the motel we saw a fire station set up on the side of the road and stopped, because, well, it's not something you see every day in Jersey! Turns out that tiny wisp of smoke now had grown so big it had been given a name- the Crooked Fire. It had started by a mere spark from a chain dragging behind a truck hauling timber out of the Bitterroots. By the time it was under control over a month and a half later, it had joined with other fires, most caused by lightning strikes, and burned everything in its path from magnificent ponderosa pines to all manner of plants and wildlife, in all over 350,000 acres. At the time it was far and away the largest fire in Montana's history, and it all started with a tiny spark from a dragging chain, leading to a slender wisp of smoke rising from a distant valley floor. And so that brings us to Advent!

One way of comprehending this first week of Advent is to see it as that slender wisp of smoke, but at the same time realize that there is a fire building in the distance, and it's coming our way. The first candle of the wreath has been lit, and so the smoke begins to rise. And if we heed the words of prophets like Malachi and John the Baptist, this fire will soon grow into a conflagration. But unlike the inferno I witnessed in the Bitterroots 23 years ago, this fire is more selective with what it burns to ashes, and it might be a good idea to figure out just how flammable we are as we start out on the dry, sandy road to Bethlehem, don't ya think?

We'll start this sermon at the very end of the Hebrew Scriptures with the book of the prophet Malachi, and we'll end at the beginning of the New Testament with the Gospel of Matthew. “Malachi” means simply, “my messenger,” and so the Hebrew compilers of the Old Testament gave this book of prophecies that name. While we don't know the actual name of the prophet, clues in the text allow scholars to determine that the book was written in the period between the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon, and the construction projects led by Nehemiah almost a century later. In what has been described as a time of “dull depression” for the people of Judea. The hope that sprang from the return to Jerusalem after 65 years in exile was met with hard cold reality. The city walls and Solomon's Temple that been laid to waste by the Babylonians, and the ruins yet lay about the city. To add further to their misery, in the years following the return the region was hit with devastating droughts and famine.

Old Testament scholar, Robert Denton, writes of how the priests themselves were affected by the atmosphere of discouragement, leading services with indifference, and failing to give proper religious instruction to the people. Malachi found himself fighting against the lethargy on the streets of Jerusalem, openly debating those who had given in to the apathy; publicly defending the honor and justice of God against the attacks of skeptical opponents. Denton writes that in Malachi's day, the institution of oral prophecy was rapidly falling into disrepute and was on the verge of disappearing. Perhaps that's the reason why it would be almost 500 years between the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New.

So, what was Malachi's message to such a gloom and doom population? Well, it centered around the justice of God. The people asked, *"If God loves us, why doesn't he show it? If God is so good and righteous, why are not the rewards of life more equitably distributed?"* Malachi gives them a three part answer:

First of all, he told them that the harsh conditions they are experiencing are largely due to their disloyalty to God and their neglect of worship and service. In other words, their suffering is justified; it is a direct consequence of their sin. Second, he informs them that there is still evidence of moral law to be seen, pointing to the eventual downfall of all nations whose power was built upon fraud and injustice. And finally, he warns them that the day of God's judgment is not far distant, and when it comes, rewards and punishments will be measured out and all will see that loyalty and justice are not forgotten in the record books of God. And so you see how Malachi's message provides the background for the New Testament proclamation, beginning with John the Baptist, that the Kingdom of God is at hand! That there is a divine purpose which runs through history and in the end, God's purpose will be completely realized. But what will this coming advent of God look like?

Well, it won't be pretty for some, but it will be awesome for others! I know what you're thinking-sounds like Rev is gonna get all hellfire and brimstone on us this morning! To which I would reply, don't shoot me, I'm just the messenger, or should I say "the Malachi!" The thing is, both Malachi and John the Baptist have similar messages when it come to the approach of this distant fire they prophecy.

Around the year 450 BCE, Malachi prophecies on the streets of Jerusalem: ***"See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."***

And nearly 500 years later John preaches to the crowds gathered at the River Jordan, ***"Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."***

See what I mean, serious "hellfire and brimstone" stuff, right?! But like I mentioned earlier the fire they prophecy will be more selective than the Crooked Fire whose birth I witnessed in 2000, because that fire burned everything in its path. The God's inferno will be far more discriminatory. Which leads us to the questions we all want to know: who gets burned? And who escapes the flames? And here both Malachi and John provide us with the answers.

Malachi says, ***"all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up,"*** And John says, ***"every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."***

So, just who are these arrogant, evil doers, and fruitless trees they refer to? The arrogant are those who, despite their going against everything the Bible teaches, have convinced themselves that God is on their side! And the evil doers? Well this one's kind of obvious isn't it? Those who do evil are evil doers! *And* what is evil? That which opposes God's word in scripture. Despite being informed time and again through scripture, the prophets, through John, Jesus, and Paul that we are all created in God's image, and loved equally and unconditionally by God, evil doers continue to judge others based their own fears, prejudices, and hatred. And the worst of them turn their evil ideologies into deadly, destructive action.

Who then are the fruitless trees of which John speaks? Basically those who stand around doing next to nothing while the arrogant and the evil doers have their way. They think, “*Wait, that’s not fair; I didn’t break a commandment, why should I be lumped in with those guys?*” But as Martin Luther King so often said, apathy in the face of injustice is utterly unacceptable in God’s eyes. John the Baptist leaves us with no doubt that there is no excuse for inaction in the face of evil. To have the ability to do good, to fight against evil, and do nothing is perhaps the greatest sin of all! And so those trees that do not bare fruit are cast into the same fire as the arrogant who commit evil. They are fuel for the fire.

But what about those who emerge from the fire unscathed? Who are spared from the flames? Malachi and John are very clear about their fate as well. Malachi prophecies, “***But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.***”

And from John the Baptist, a similar promise: “***I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.***’

And so, for those who rise up to take on the evils of this world, who love the Lord their God with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and who love their neighbor as themselves, they have nothing to fear from the approaching flames, from the unquenchable fire, for they will bask in the sun of righteousness, leap like calves from their stall; they shall be baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, and gather like wheat into the Lord’s granary. And so the prophecies of both Malachi and John are echoed in that great hymn of Thanksgiving we sang just last week:

*For the Lord our God shall come, and shall take the harvest home;
From the field shall in that day all offenses purge away,
Giving angels charge at last in the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store in the garner evermore.*

Saints, Advent can be either a time of dread, of approaching judgment or a time of hope, of approaching grace. It all depends on us. And so let us join our hands together as we travel this dry, dusty road to Bethlehem, lit along the way by candle after candle after candle, until at last we greet with joy the very source of light on Christmas morning.



DECEMBER EVENTS

- 2 CHURCH DECORATING**
- 3 STARS FOR CHARITY AUCTION**
- 5 LAST DAY OF FLEA MARKET**
- 10 ANNUAL PARSONAGE OPEN HOUSE**
- 17 CANTATA**
- 17 UWF COOKIE SALE**

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

- 10:15AM SERVICE AND CHILDREN'S PAGEANT**
- 7:00PM SERVICE**
- 11:00PM CANDLELIGHT SERVICE**

NEW YEAR'S EVE SERVICES

- 10:15AM SERVICE**
- 11:00PM WATCH NIGHT SERVICE**

IT'S TIME TO
DECK THE HALLS



Volunteers needed to help
“Deck the Halls and Sanctuary”
on December 2 at 9 am.
Food and coffee will be provided.

Please let Kyle Becker or Karen
Rowland know if you can help.



CHRISTMAS FOOD BASKETS

If you know of a family in need,
please call the office with their
information.

Christmas Food Baskets will be
distributed on December 17th.

Food needed:

Canned goods, i.e. soups, vegetable, cranberry
sauce, gravy,
mashed potatoes,
items to make pies, cake mix, cereal,
turkeys and/or hams.

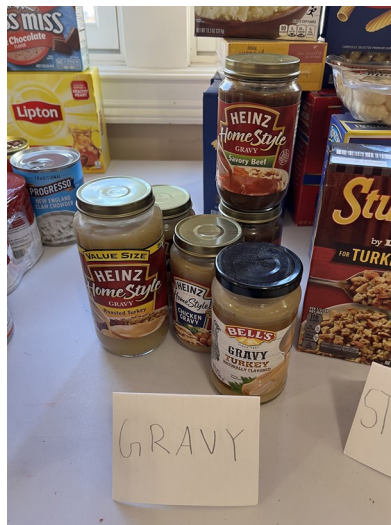
An Angel Tree will be set up in Fellowship Hall for
gifts for the children of the families. An online
Angel Tree will also be set up on Sign Up Genius.

The Finance Committee is continuing to provide financial information. The following provides the income and expenses as of September 2023. The church income includes what is provided to the church in pledge envelopes to current expense and other income sources such as building rentals, flea market and various fundraising activities. Church expenses are shown which include salaries, utilities, conference obligations and other costs to keep the church operating.

New Dover United Methodist Church Operating Fund		
	2023	
	September	Year to Date
Income	\$ 28,873.98	\$ 260,701.90
Expenses	\$ (32,598.66)	\$ (281,303.65)
Difference	\$ (3,598.66)	\$ (20,601.75)

Sunday School Food Drive

Sunday School Food Drive raised \$177+ and a whole lot of food items for Thanksgiving holiday baskets! Thank you all who contributed.



United Women in Faith

The UWF will hold their annual cookie sale on December 17th. Stop by our table in Fellowship Hall before and after service for a delicious treat.

December Birthdays

- 3 *Sherry Katkar*
Herbert H. Wittke
- 4 *Gem Aludino*
- 6 *Joycelyn Meade*
- 8 *Regan Christie*
- 10 *Brian Richards*
- 11 *Alice Lamoreaux*
- 12 *Paulette Harland*
Edward Ladym
Stephanie Rademacher
- 13 *Sarisha Christian*
Peter Nyema
- 17 *Brian Rademacher*
- 19 *Jim Dalton*
- 20 *Carol White*
- 21 *Mukesh Christian*
- 24 *Mackenze Chesney*
- 25 *Roz Pizont*
- 26 *Ruzwalt Khristi*
- 27 *Kennyson Christian*
Violet David
- 30 *Ashley Rademacher*
- 31 *Brian Chesney*

December Anniversaries

- 18 *Gerry & Lin Allarey*
- 19 *Hemant & Rosemary Raju*
- 20 *Herold & Jyotika David*
- 30 *Ashok & Violet David*



You are invited by
Rev Chuck and Jean
to their annual Open House
at the Parsonage
on December 10 12-4pm
for fellowship, food
(including Rev's famous chili) and drinks.
Please stop by and celebrate the holiday season
together.

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

FAIRYTALE

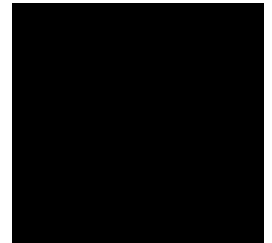
(Amy Grant)

Fairytale.
My life was just a fairytale.
I was letting an illusion
Come into this heart of mine.
Fairytale.
Searchin' for a fairytale,
Hiding in a world
Where life was simple all the time.
I was just like Peter Pan in Never Never Land,
Afraid of what the future might be.
Afraid to face the things I couldn't understand.
Afraid of things that I couldn't see.
But fantasy,
I know there's more to life than a fantasy.
There's so much more that my life was meant to be.
So much more than make-believe.
Fairytale.
It seems just like fairytale.
But there's something in my heart
That says this time the story's real.
Fairytale.
Extraordinary tale.
Of a King who offers love
So far beyond what I can feel.
*There's a world out there that human eyes can never see,
But it's just within the reach of the heart.
Two princes wages the battle for eternity,
But the Victor has been known from the start.
Now I can see
The truth can seem so much like a fantasy,
But make-believe was never as real to me,
I know this time the story's true.
Just like Sleeping Beauty in a neverland,
I was dying under a spell,
But then a Prince who comes from the foreverland
Awakened me from my fairytale.*

If we are not living to serve God and work for the Kingdom, if we are not fully believing and trusting in Jesus as our Savior, if we are not following the nudgings of the Holy Spirit in everyday life, if we are not choosing the Word as the standard for our thoughts and actions, if we are allowing the world to influence us and distract us from what is really going on...then we are living in an illusion. The real truth can only be seen through the eyes of faith, while the world's truth is distorted with lies, half-truths and compromises. Stay close to Him, His Word and His people, stay focused on the work we are called for, pray unceasingly, and remember as believers we are His forever.

Blessings everyone, and have a joyous Christmas! Anita

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**NEW DOVER
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"A Caring Community"

