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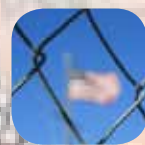
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The VOICE

Fifth Avenue
Presbyterian
Church



March 2011

Who is this Jesus?

"For me as a child, the story of Jesus was the most important story in the world. The conviction has remained with me. But as I have grown older, I have realized there is an equally important issue: how we tell the story of Jesus. There are many ways of telling his story, and how we tell it matters crucially."

—Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (2006)

Google "books about Jesus" and Wikipedia will serve up a list of 145 titles, everything from Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, to Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, to the Watchtower Society's *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*.

There are easily dozens, if not hundreds, of books that Wikipedia omits (Borg's *Jesus*, for instance). But the list is sufficient to make a point: the greatest story ever told keeps getting told and re-told.

But are we any closer to understanding who Jesus was—and is?

Beginning on Ash Wednesday (March 9), senior pastor Scott Black Johnston will launch a series of sermons that will explore some of the myriad Jesuses who have inspired artists, fascinated scholars and attracted followers for more than two millennia.

"Scripture shows us many different facets of Jesus," he explains. "Throughout history, people have been drawn to one aspect or another, depending on their circumstances. Some have been drawn to Jesus the rabbi, others to Jesus the rebel. What is compelling about Jesus in 21st century America—and why?"

Renewed attention to the nature and mission of Jesus could help to restore the vitality of his Church. As Dr. Black Johnston pointed out in his Jan. 16 sermon, "Can Anything Good Come Out of the Church?", American Christianity is suffering from malaise. Protestant denominations, both mainline and evangelical, are losing membership and status.

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TREASURER'S REPORT Year-End 2010

By Kent Collier

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church closed the 2010 fiscal year in a strong financial position, arguably the healthiest we have seen in at least five years.



Kent Collier is treasurer of the FAPC Board of Trustees.

- We collected \$2,319,000 in pledge revenues—the highest amount in our history.
- 2010 marked the first time since 1998 that we achieved our pledge goal. In fact, pledge revenues exceeded the \$2.2 million budget goal of our 2010 Commitment Campaign by \$119,000.
- Total worship offerings—including pledge revenues, plate collections and non-pledge contributions—exceeded \$2.6 million, a 15-percent increase over 2009.
- Our revenue growth, combined with careful control of expenses, enabled FAPC to achieve a *balanced operating budget* for the first time since 2004.

It is important to recognize, and celebrate, just how exceptional this is.

Across the country, pledges and giving to local churches have been on a steady decline for decades, a trend only worsened by the current economic downturn. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported a foreclosure crisis, marked by “a rapid acceleration in the number of churches losing their sanctuaries because they can’t pay the mortgage.”¹ With so many congregations struggling to pay the bills, church spending on outreach and benevolence has sunk to its lowest level in 40 years.²

Thanks to your generosity, and the responsible stewardship of our officers and staff, such is not the case at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Your contributions are not only providing for the upkeep of our Sanctuary, Kirkland Chapel and the church house, but also for the ongoing operation of the shelter, our thriving Sunday School and Adult Education programs, outreach programs such as Meals on Heels and Project Find, and the other diverse ministries of this church.

We are fortunate to have a strong investment portfolio to help fund our operations. We closed 2010 with a portfolio of \$36.9 million, a 14.4-percent gain from 2009, and nearly two points better than the balanced index we use to monitor the strength of our investments versus the market.

As I reported in November, we continue to rely less on our portfolio and more on worship offerings to fund our operating budget. In 2010, worship offerings represented 52 percent of our operating budget, a three-point improvement from 2009. This means that we, the members and friends of FAPC, are exercising increasing ownership and responsibility for the maintenance and growth of our church.

In 2010 we were able to fund our operating budget and allocate \$170,000 to our capital budget. These funds will go toward repairing the stained glass windows in Kirkland Chapel and other much-needed improvements. This was another big step forward from 2009, when we ended the year at a deficit.

Finally, we received \$263,000 to service the debt from the Crossroads campaign, which financed construction of the Christian Education Center and other improvements to our facilities in 2003-04. Our total debt now totals \$2 million.

We will provide further details on our 2010 operating results, and our outlook for 2011, during the annual Congregational Meeting on May 1. Until then, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, and the officers and staff of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, I thank you for your remarkable generosity as, together, we seek to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ in this community.



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*“I’m all for Christ.
I’m very big on Christ.
I’ve always fancied him.
He was right.
As he said in his book, you’ll get knocked if you follow my ways.”*
—John Lennon (1969)

“The Church, my friends, is a cracked vessel,” he said. “We mumble and stutter in our attempts to get our message out. What keeps us going—though many have counted us out, through centuries of change, through transformations big and small, through the thicket made by our own mistakes—is our attempt to point beyond ourselves to another.”

To Jesus. And to the God whom Jesus proclaimed.

In addition to Dr. Black Johnston, three other preachers will lend their perspectives to this study of Jesus—the Rev. Dr. Michael Jinkins, president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; the Rev. Dr. J. Oscar McCloud, associate pastor emeritus of FAPC; and Charlene Han Powell, interim director of Christian education. *See the complete calendar below.*

The Lenten preaching series will conclude on Easter Sunday, April 24.

2011 LENTEN PREACHING SERIES

March 9	Ash Wednesday <i>Jesus the Sinner</i> 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston	April 3	Fourth Sunday in Lent <i>Jesus the Giver of Sight</i> 1 Samuel 16:1-13; John 9:1-41 Rev. Dr. J. Oscar McCloud
March 13	First Sunday in Lent <i>Jesus the Hermit</i> Hebrews 4:14-16; Matthew 4:1-11 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston	April 10	Fifth Sunday in Lent <i>Jesus the Trumpet</i> John 11:1-45 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston
March 20	Second Sunday in Lent <i>Jesus the Hidden Heart</i> 1 John 4:8-12 Rev. Dr. Michael Jinkins	April 17	Palm Sunday <i>Jesus the Traitor</i> Matthew 21:1-11 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston
March 27	Third Sunday in Lent <i>Jesus the Gossip</i> John 4:5-42 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston	April 24	Easter Sunday <i>Jesus the Victor</i> John 20:1-18 Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston
March 30	Lenten Mid-Week Service <i>Jesus the Rock Star</i> Matthew 8:1-4, 14:13-23; Mark 3:7-12 Charlene Han Powell, M.Div.		

¹“Churches Find the End is Nigh,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 25, 2011.

²Empty Tomb, Inc. *The State of Church Giving*, 20th ed., October 2010.

EGYPT: FREE AT LAST?



Nimet, Suzan and Nazeeh Habachy display a rug made by indigent Egyptian artisans from trash collected in Cairo's "garbage city." The rug is among the handicrafts that will go on sale at FAPC May 2-4. Proceeds will benefit the artisans as well as local schools in Cairo.



By John Crane

The news on Feb. 11 spread like wildfire through Cairo's Tahrir Square as thousands knelt for evening prayers.

Following 18 days of demonstrations, President Hosni Mubarak had turned over the government to the country's Supreme Military Council. Prayers turned to cheers as Egyptians realized that the leader of their repressive government had, after 30 years, finally resigned.

The startling events in Cairo brought joy to a family of Egyptian Christians at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.

"We are optimistic that Egyptians will have more freedom and better economic opportunities as a result of this revolution," said Nazeeh Habachy, an FAPC member for over 50 years. "The policies of the government have been stifling, while the gap between the rich and the poor has widened dramatically. All Egyptians felt that there was a need for a change."

The demand for a new government ignited in late January, echoing the revolutionary outbreak in Tunisia. Anonymous Facebook postings began calling for similar demonstrations in Egypt.

Habachy and his two sisters—Suzan and Nimet—were surprised by the huge outpouring of people who responded. Every day, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians traveled to Tahrir Square—also known as Liberation Square—to demand President Mubarak's resignation. The government's harsh response spawned violent clashes for several days until Mubarak finally left office.

The Habachys are in awe of the protesters' spirit and strong nationalism, as well as what they achieved by peaceful means.

"Every group in Egypt wanted a change," Suzan said. "The rich and the poor, the educated and uneducated, the young and the old, Christians and Muslims. All of them wanted freedom and a better political system."

"Throughout the demonstrations, Egypt was not divided along religious lines," Nimet added. "I've seen photographs of Muslims protecting their Coptic friends as they proceeded to Mass. The Copts did the same for the Muslims. The people have been completely united in their goals, their deprivations and their aspirations."

The Habachy family left Egypt in 1954 to seek higher education for their children and build a better life in the United States. Shortly after their arrival, both parents and their three children joined Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Suzan, who has retired from a career at the United Nations, has been an FAPC Elder and led the mission trip to Egypt in 2010. Nazeeh, a lawyer for an investment group, has been an FAPC Deacon. Nimet is an announcer and classical-music commentator for radio station WQXR; the two sisters help the poor in their home country by selling Egyptian-made crafts throughout the U.S.

Throughout the recent crisis, the Habachys had daily telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges with three sets of cousins and many friends in Egypt.

"Let My People Go!"

The standoff between the Cairo demonstrators and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak reminded Scott Black Johnston of a similar confrontation that took place in Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. That story, told in the Book of Exodus, provided the text for Dr. Black Johnston's sermon on Feb. 6 ("Tell Old Pharaoh, Let My People Go!"). Following is an excerpt. To hear the complete sermon, click on the Sermon Archive on fapc.org.

Whenever and wherever people find themselves struggling under oppressive regimes that deny basic freedoms, there is a chance that the Exodus will get invoked. It didn't take much of an imaginative leap for some journalists to declare that Mubarak is "the last Pharaoh."

Still, I think this comparison deserves more exploration. I believe that the Bible, this remarkably relevant document, can shed light on the exciting and scary aspects of what is unfolding in Egypt today. Exodus may also shed light on our lives as contemporary New Yorkers, as people who live in a world in which Mubarak is almost certainly *not* the last Pharaoh.

In this seminal Biblical story, God works through Moses, through the people, through history, to bring about liberty. I am not a political scientist; I am a theologian. And on this point, Exodus is clear. God is not on Pharaoh's side—ever. There is no *realpolitik* in God's kingdom. When we start talking ourselves into supporting dictators, we should not kid ourselves: we are working at cross-purposes with God.

The story of the Exodus doesn't end with the defeat of Pharaoh. After leaving Egypt, the Hebrew people are in the wilderness. The wilderness is a harsh place; it is not long before the people begin to murmur. They say to Moses, "This independence thing is tough. Maybe we should go back—back to Egypt."

Did you know that one in five people who live in Northern Africa and the Middle East are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old? Put another way, in that region of the world there are 100 million people whom the United Nations classifies as "youth." Over the next decade, whatever happens to the masses of youth who live in this region will have a huge impact on the world. Will these people have the educational and economic opportunities that will enable them to freely pursue their ambitions and dreams?

A challenging path lies ahead, and the story of Exodus reminds us that the temptation will be to backslide and return to the Egypt of old.

It seems that every political change in the Middle East results in more hardship for minority populations. Here at FAPC we have a special affinity for Egyptian Christians, a group that includes some of the poorest people in a poor country. Last year, 12 courageous, big-hearted women from this congregation visited Cairo. They visited the Zabbaleen, a minority group of Coptic Christians who survive by being the garbage collectors in that vast city. These women know, firsthand, that in whatever further upheaval is going to come, the possibility for violence and blame against the minority Christians is high.

Christians in this country have a sacred responsibility in these times. We need to respond, not simply because we have visited Egypt and we care about the Christians there, not simply because there are minorities closer to home who deserve our neighborly love. We need to respond because the story of Exodus is God's story.

God's love crosses boundaries—boundaries that we have set up in our minds and draw on our maps everyday. That is the story of the Exodus, the story of the One who stood with the underdogs against the violent, and against the powerful.



Egyptians celebrate the departure of President Hosni Mubarak

"When attacks on demonstrators caused deaths and injuries, our cousins bought medical supplies and went to Tahrir Square to help doctors care for the injured," said Suzan. "They were not allowed to enter, so they left the supplies at a nearby clinic where doctors hopefully could use them to treat the injured. Like everyone in Egypt, they wanted to do their part to help."

As quiet returns to Cairo, the world wonders what a new government will look like. Will it be a democratic government fully responsive to the needs of the people and will work for peace in the Middle East? Or will it be a radical Islamic government like the one in Iran?

"I trust the new government will be moderate and represent all parts of Egyptian society," said Nazeeh. "The Muslim Brotherhood appears to be more secular than other Islamic organizations. Also, it appears that no group in Egypt is strong enough to dominate a future government. So I believe Egypt will have a multi-party government that should be willing to work with the rest of the world for peace."

Added Nimet, "I hope Americans will pray for a good outcome for Egyptians after their extraordinary display of courage and solidarity."

John Crane is a member of the Board of Trustees and a frequent contributor to The VOICE.

WARM BED, NO SNOW



Lonza Robinson (left) and Michael Hawks in the temporary shelter at Church of the Ascension.

By John Crane

It's been a brutal winter for Lonza Robinson.

For the past three years, he has been homeless, sleeping on the steps of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and elsewhere in the city. This winter has been cold enough that New York City outreach teams have been waking him up and taking him to one of the large, city-run shelters. Since he doesn't feel comfortable sleeping there, he sneaks out, heads for the subway and spends the night riding the train.

But since Feb. 1, Lonza and seven of the homeless from our steps have been sleeping on warm, comfortable beds at Church of the Ascension, on 107th Street near Amsterdam Avenue. This temporary shelter is the result of a collaboration among FAPC, Ascension and the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH).

"On Code Blue nights, when the temperature drops below 32 degrees, it's not safe for guests to sleep outside on our steps," explained the Rev. Kate Dunn, who leads FAPC's pastoral care and outreach ministries. "Last year, the city's outreach teams would take guests from our steps to safe havens for the night. This winter, though, resources are stretched so thin that the city could not provide this service. So we had to come up with a different plan."

The plan involved converting a classroom at Ascension Church into a shelter for eight men to spend the night. Joe Vedella, FAPC's manager of homeless ministries, screens each of the

guests, and FAPC pays for two trained staff members to stay with them until morning. WSFSSH case workers also are available to help the men find permanent housing.

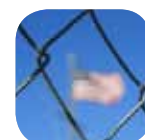
This new arrangement will operate until April 1, when (God willing) warmer temperatures should return. FAPC has officially closed the steps until then to encourage the homeless to relocate to Ascension Church or find another shelter.

Many homeless people insist on sleeping outside rather than in the city's shelters, even when frigid temperatures endanger their lives. One of those who avoids the city's shelters is Michael Hawks, who has slept on the FAPC steps on and off for a couple of years. He feels the city shelters are dirty and dangerous. He views the new shelter as a blessing.

"The shelter makes us feel welcome and comfortable," he said. "As someone who has slept on the streets and knows what is going on out there, the church is the best for what it is doing for us this winter."

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church is grateful for the assistance of Church of the Ascension, West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing, and the New York City Department of Homeless Services. Without their cooperation, the new shelter would not be possible.

FAPC continues to operate a year-round, volunteer-run shelter for 12 homeless men in the church house. Volunteers are especially needed in March as the program at Ascension Church proceeds. To volunteer as an early-evening or overnight host in the FAPC shelter, contact Joe Vedella (212.247.0490, jvedella@fapc.org).



A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

By Katie Farber

Last spring, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer signed a bill authorizing local police to apprehend people suspected of having entered the country illegally. The law drove deeper divisions into an already divided nation—between those urging stronger action against illegal immigration, and those who fear the Arizona measure will lead to racial profiling and other abuses.

If the two sides agree on anything, it is that the nation's immigration policy needs fixing. But how?

That question will frame a two-part conversation at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church beginning Sunday, March 6. The Adult Education class, "How Do We Treat the 'Alien' Among Us: Immigration from a Christian Perspective," will be led by FACP members Jim Copland and Charlotte Smith. Copland is director of the Center for Legal Policy at the Manhattan Institute, a public policy research organization; Smith is an attorney specializing in immigration law.

"Our main objective in teaching this class together is to bring different perspectives to bear," Copland said. "We hope to equip students with Scripture, law and statistics, and enable them to come out of the class better able to make up their own minds."

In 2004, the Presbyterian Church (USA) called for comprehensive immigration reform that would keep families together, enable undocumented immigrants to earn legal status and protect workers from exploitation. Last year's General Assembly voted to refrain from holding national meetings in Arizona or in any state where legislation based on the Arizona model is enacted. The PCUSA boycott could include the denomination's home state, Kentucky, should a pending bill be signed into law there.

The heart of the issue, Copland says, is that "it is our clear Christian duty to support the disaffected, including the poor, the orphans, the widows and the aliens."

"The opportunity to help disadvantaged people who came to the United States seeking a better life for themselves and their children" drew Smith to immigration law. For her, "responding with kindness and understanding" to undocumented immigrants is central to the Christian response. Smith has worked a good deal with juveniles who are undocumented immigrants, young people who hope to pursue college or other opportunities but face obstacles because they lack legal status.

"Our diverse New York community includes people from all over the globe, whether or not they have legal status in the United States," Copland says. "I believe it's important that we continue to keep our doors open to all. Christ's message is universal, not limited to any nationality, race or ethnicity."

DETAILS

"How Do We Treat the 'Alien' Among Us" meets on consecutive Sundays, March 6 and 13, at 12:30 pm in the Coming Logan Room. The class is free and open to all.

Katie Farber is a member of FAPC and a new contributor to *The VOICE*.

"You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

—Exodus 22:21



Jim Copland



Charlotte Smith

Upcoming Events

MAR APR

MARCH

- 6 Communicating Your Christian Faith and Beliefs.** Charlene Han Powell and seminarians Hallie Hottle and John Moore lead this three-week Adult Education class that challenges participants to create their own Personal Statements of Faith. Continues March 13 and 20. 9:30 am, Boardroom.
- How Do We Treat the "Alien" Among Us: Immigration from a Christian Perspective.** In this two-week Adult Education course, FAPC members Jim Copland, director of the Center for Legal Policy at the Manhattan Institute, and Charlotte Smith, an attorney specializing in immigration law, look to Scripture to consider a Christian response to the issue of undocumented immigration. Concludes March 13. 12:30 pm, Corning Logan Room.
- 9 Ash Wednesday.** Worship service and imposition of ashes. The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, preaching. 12:30 pm, Sanctuary.
- 15 Employment Advisory.** 6:30 pm, Christian Education Center.
- 19 Parents Night Out.** 3:30 pm, Christian Education Center.
- 20 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle...Religion?** The Rev. Jenny Phillips, executive director of Creation Change, a New York-based nonprofit, leads this Adult Education class, exploring what God's first job description for humans—"till and keep the garden" (Genesis 2:15)—means for us today. 12:30 pm, Boardroom.
- 24 Triologue: An Interfaith Conversation.** A panel of religious leaders—Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, Imam Ahmad Dewidar and Rabbi Peter Rubinstein—tackle issues ranging from the proposed Islamic center in lower Manhattan to revolutionary fervor in the Middle East. 6:30 pm, Central Synagogue, 123 E. 55th St.
- 27 A Historical and Architectural Tour of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.** Gail Crane, a member of the church for almost 50 years, and Derek Maddalena, director of facilities, lead this inside look at the history and architecture of our remarkable church. 12:30 pm, starting in the Romeyn Room.
- What We Believe.** First session of new members' class, led by the Rev. Randy Weber. 12:15 pm, Corning Logan Room. This class also will be offered at 6:30 pm Tuesday (March 29) for those unable to attend today.
- 30 Lenten Mid-Week Service.** Charlene Han Powell, M.Div., preaching. 7 pm, Kirkland Chapel.

COMING IN APRIL

- 3 Christian Perspectives on India's Religious Pluralism.** Margaret and Byron Shafer lead this Adult Education class on the multifaceted wonder that is India—secular democracy, home to a Hindu majority, with substantial Muslim, Buddhist, Jain and Christian populations. 9:30 am, Corning Logan Room.
- Six Years after Katrina, We're Not Finished Yet.** Kimberley Dow and other participants in FAPC mission trips to New Orleans share their experiences and perspective on the arduous rebuilding of the Louisiana Gulf Coast. 12:30 pm, Corning Logan Room.
- 7 Multifaith Film Series: *Defamation*.** This third and final film in the series is an irreverent examination of modern-day anti-Semitism. Canter Elizabeth Sacks leads a discussion following the film. 7 pm, Central Synagogue, 123 E. 55th St.
- 10 Spring Concert.** Soprano Jennifer Zetlan performs; sponsored by the Arts and Our Faith Committee. 2 pm, Kirkland Chapel.



Carole White leads Sunday Schoolers in creating masterpieces for their upcoming exhibit at FAPC. The children's art will be on display in the Gallery of the church house throughout Lent.