

THE EVANGEL - APRIL 2025

News and Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church



A MESSAGE FROM OUR SENIOR PASTOR

I recently asked Sarah what in all the world would bring her the most joy? She answered: A working Dish Washer.

Having washed our dishes in the bathtub for sixteen months during Covid and now needing to buy a new dishwasher due to a failure, her answer made perfect sense to me, and we laughed. However, as I thought about joy last month in our study of the fruit of the spirit, it occurred to me that there are a lot of misconceptions about what joy is and how we as Christians can achieve it.

Joy and Fun Are Not the Same

Many people chase pleasure through entertainment, travel, or indulgence, yet remain joyless. The relentless pursuit of fun often signals a lack of true joy. While Christians who experience the joy of the Lord may also enjoy fun, the two are distinct. For example, Paul, while imprisoned, had no fun yet still possessed deep joy. In fact, he wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say rejoice!” from prison.

A life filled with pleasure—sex, drugs, and entertainment—may seem exciting, but countless tragic examples prove that wealth and excess do not guarantee joy. There are countless tragic examples of people who appear to want for nothing and yet are left wanting for joy.

Joy and Cheerfulness Are Not the Same

We all know people who are naturally bubbly, always smiling, and the life of the party. Their energy can brighten a room, but this does not necessarily mean they have joy. On the other hand, many joyful Christians have a serious demeanor or appear reserved.

Temperament has nothing to do with joy. A person can be exuberant yet lack joy, while someone quiet or even melancholic can be filled with it. This is encouraging because joy is not limited to those with a naturally cheerful disposition—it is available to everyone and a promised gift from God for every believer.

Joy Is Not the Absence of Worry

Advertisements often depict young adults relaxing on a beach, suggesting that escaping on vacation is the key to joy. Many believe this, but if joy depended on getting away, it would vanish as soon as the trip ended. Stressful jobs, difficult people, and ongoing disappointments would make joy impossible.

However, joy is not a temporary escape. In John 15, as Jesus approached the final hours of His life, He encouraged His disciples to press on in obedience and love so that His joy would be in them and their joy would be complete. Jesus was not carefree, yet He spoke of deep joy. Likewise, Paul found joy amid trials. Joy is not the

absence of hardship but rather an anchor to God when circumstances shift and appear dire.

Joy Is a Mindset, Not Just a Feeling

Joy is something we experience, but it is more than an emotion. It is a mindset that encompasses both thought and feeling. It plays a central role in a fulfilling life, and its absence leaves a deep emptiness. Here is how we can grasp hold of and cultivate God given joy in our lives.

Feeling Loved

Joy comes from knowing you are valued and cared for. Those who feel unseen, unappreciated, or unloved often struggle to experience joy. A sense of worth and connection is essential for a joyful life. Christians experience a love unlike any other, knowing that God the Father cared for them so deeply that He sacrificed His only Son, who endured suffering and death on the cross, to grant them eternal life.

- “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8 NIV)
- “Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39 NIV)
- “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy.” (Eph. 5:25 NIV)

Accepting Your Circumstances

Discontent destroys joy. Constantly wishing things were different or longing for unrealistic changes prevents joy from flourishing. True joy comes from finding peace and gratitude *in* your current situation. Christians can rejoice at all times because they trust that every experience—both good and bad—is guided by their loving Father to shape them for eternal glory.

- “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” (Rom. 8:28 NIV)
- “Rejoice in your sufferings, because suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Rom. 5:3-4 NIV)
- “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation... I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (Phil. 4:12-13 NIV)

Having Something Meaningful

Joy comes from cherishing what truly matters—relationships, passions, and purpose. When we find meaning in what we live for, joy follows. Family, hobbies, and personal achievements add depth to life, but as Christians, our greatest joy comes from loving God with all our hearts and serving others.

- “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Phil. 3:8 NIV)

Giving to Others

The world teaches that happiness comes from getting, but true joy is found in giving. Selfishness drains joy, while generosity—whether through love, time, or acts of kindness—creates lasting fulfillment. Like jam, joy sticks to you as you spread it to others.

If we truly embrace the love of Christ, we are compelled to share it. We are called to love the unlovable, care for the poor, and bring hope to a broken world. As Mother Teresa famously said, “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then feed just one.” Our joy grows when we give of ourselves in service to others.

The Unshakable Joy Found in Christ

The unfading joy promised in Scripture is unique to believers because it comes from Christ Himself. To “rejoice in the Lord” means to find joy in belonging to Him, knowing that His Father is also our Father, and being made right with God through Him. This joy is rooted in the assurance of salvation, the promise of eternal life, and the inheritance of His glory.

Let us not forget what the angel declared to the shepherds that night:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11 NIV)

Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Let us rejoice in the Lord always, and again, rejoice!

- Ben

A PRAYER FOR JOY

Jesus, thank You for becoming Immanuel, “God with us.”
It’s because of You that I can experience true joy.

I admit that it can sometimes feel hard to be joyful in the middle of a busy or difficult season. But when the cares of my heart are many, Your comfort gives me renewed hope and cheer.

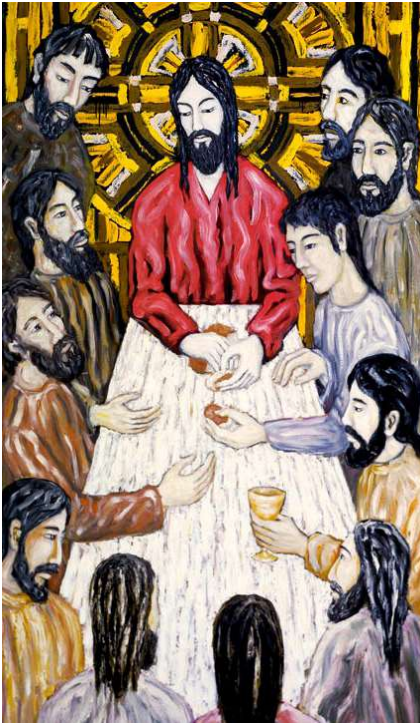
So today, I choose to take refuge in You and rejoice. I will sing for joy because You are my strength and my salvation. In Your presence there is fullness of joy!

You are always worthy of all glory, honor, and power – and so no matter what I face, I will choose to worship You. Amen

Notes from the Director of Music

The temperatures are warming up and the days are noticeably longer, which can only mean one thing: Holy Week is almost here! There's a lot packed into the space of this one week, and so I want to draw your attention to what's happening:

Palm Sunday: Festive Worship at 8:30 & 11:00 AM. On this day we commemorate Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem with palm branches and shouts of "Hosanna!"



Wednesday of Holy Week: Soulstice at 7:15 PM. This candlelight gathering in the downstairs chapel will prepare us for the events ahead with music, prayer, and silence.

Maundy Thursday: Tenebrae with Holy Communion at 7:30 PM. At this service scripture is read and candles extinguished, recalling the night on which Jesus shared his Last Supper with his disciples, and then was arrested.

Good Friday: Musical Reflections on the Seven Last Words at noon. Each of Christ's seven last words from the cross, recorded in the Gospels, will be paired with a suitable piece of music.

Easter Sunday: Festive Worship at 8:30 & 11:00 AM. We celebrate the empty tomb with flowers and Alleluias. The Choir and French Creek Brass Quintet will join us at the 11:00 service only.

There's a magnificent drama that unfolds over the course of Holy Week, and we best get a sense of what it's all about when we make the effort to fully immerse ourselves in the sequence of events. No matter how many Holy Weeks you've lived through, there's room to discover something unexpected each time!

One other event of note this month: the Allegheny College Choirs will present their spring concert on Saturday, April 5 (a few weeks earlier than usual). A number of people connected with our congregation – including all the choral scholars – are singing in the various ensembles, and once again I'm the piano accompanist. The program begins at 3:15 PM at Shafer Auditorium, and admission is free.

Until next time,
Kevin

Christian Education News

April 2025

Confirmation Sunday

April 6, 2025

11:00 Service

Congratulations to Maddie Black, Anna Claspy, Lydia Green, Carson Hilburn, and Perry Hilburn. These teens will be joining First Presbyterian Church after a year of study lead by Chuck Claspy and Chris Lafferty.

Their families, their mentors and Session members will meet for the confirmation breakfast from 9:30-10:30 in Fellowship Hall. This is a time of fellowship for the confirmands and their guests.

The confirmands will share their personal Statements of Faith at the breakfast.



Owen Dill – 1

Anastasia Bilka – 12

Kate Chapel – 13

Annie Jane Stoner – 17

Maggie Chapel – 24

P.R.A.Y. will not meet in April.

Thank you to all those of our church who donated treats for the Easter Egg Hunt.

The eggs will be filled with the “goodies” on April 9th in preparation for the big event on April 12th.



B.L.A.S.T.

Thank you for creating the special Easter greeting cards for our Shut-Ins from First Presbyterian Church on March 23rd. They will be mailed soon.

There are four meeting days left. The LOCK IN has been cancelled because one is being held for the Confirmation class.

The B.L.A.S.T. kids will take part in the Palm Sunday Processional during Sunday services.

B.L.A.S.T. members are going to attend a Christian concert sometime before the end of May. All they have to do is pick a date that works for everyone.

Grambo thanks Rachel Claspy, Casey O’Shea and Sarah Black for doing a wonderful job of running the program during her absence.



Bring your Easter Basket and join us for the Annual Easter Egg Hunt and Fun family event on Saturday, April 12th in Fellowship Hall at First Presbyterian Church, from 10:00 a.m to 12:00 p.m.

We will enjoy a few games, a few crafts and a few snacks and the BIG event: **The Easter Egg Hunt.**

Please RSVP by April 6, 2025, by completing this short form:

Family Name _____ No. of Children _____

Age 1-2: _____ Age 3-5: _____ Age 6-12: _____

OR

Via: 814-333-2161 or vfischer@zoominternet.net



This Lenten season, please join with Presbyterians worldwide in sharing God's love with our neighbors-in-need around the world. Our gifts support ministries of disaster response, refugee assistance and resettlement, and community development that help people find safe refuge, start new lives and work together to strengthen their families and communities.

In Isaiah 58, the Scripture that best helps us to understand the ministries supported by One Great Hour of Sharing, we are called to be repairers of the breach. The prophet implores us to see those on the margins, the hungry and afflicted, as those for whom God holds great care. And so should we. Showing our love & sharing our love is how we repair the breach in so many of our interactions in this world. (www.pcusa.org)

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

Isaiah 58



Our Soulstice gatherings will continue to meet Wednesday evenings during the season of Lent (April 2, 9, and 16). We invite you to join us in the downstairs chapel at 7:15 PM as we immerse ourselves in candlelight, music, prayer, and silence.



Wedding Invitation

CHURCH FAMILY: Please join **Elijah Boyd & Sherry McDonald** as they are joined in holy matrimony on Saturday, April 26. The wedding ceremony will take place at 1:00 p.m. in the sanctuary with a reception to follow at 2:30 p.m. at Active Aging, 1034 Park Avenue. Please RSVP at smdonald@zoominternet.net or 814-550-9574.



Are you having trouble hearing Rev. Black and the Liturgist during Sunday Worship? Why not try using one of the

assistive listening devices on the Welcome Table beside the broadcast booth. Simply place the earpiece in one of your ears, turn the device on and adjust the volume to your liking. There are also headphones available for those that have hearing aids and are unable to use the earpieces. If you would like to try using the headphones, please see Vickie Fischer or call the church office. We will be placing an order shortly.

CLOSED ON SATURDAYS

Please take note that the church will now be closed on Saturdays unless there is a scheduled church event. If you need access to the church on Saturday, please call the church office to make arrangements.



The Mission Committee will host the **April 6 congregation lunch** following the 11:00 a.m. worship service. The menu is pulled pork with buns. The congregation is asked to bring sides and desserts to share. April 6 is also Confirmation Sunday. Please join us as we honor our young disciples who are now official members of our church.



Congratulations to **MiKe and Sarah Miller** (and big brother, Oliver) on the birth of their second child, **Avery Miller**, on February 13. Proud great grandma is **Norma Miller**.



Session Retreat

Last month, your session met to lay the groundwork and establish plans for the church's next steps. We began by exploring what it means to be an elder and the responsibilities that come with this role. We reflected on scripture from the pastoral epistles and examined how our denomination understands eldership. Above all, being an elder means serving as a spiritual leader, discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance for the church.

We also discussed the church's priorities and identified three key areas of focus:

- Reaching, supporting, and encouraging young families with intentionality, nurturing young people's relationship with Christ.
- Fostering a strong sense of community within the church.
- Strengthening the church's connection with the broader Meadville community.

As we mapped out our vision, we recognized several areas of opportunity and potential challenges, including:

- Attracting more young families to our congregation.
- Expanding outreach and service opportunities.
- Encouraging cross-generational relationships.
- Partnering with other churches in Meadville
- Enhancing our mission work beyond financial contributions by fostering hands-on involvement.
- Organizing mission trips.
- Increasing small group and teaching opportunities.

- Hosting family-friendly events such as:
 - Fishing trips
 - Visits to Waldameer and Presque Isle
 - Bowling and swimming outings
 - Cookouts
 - Participation in parades and carnivals
- Engaging in service projects, including:
 - The Crop Walk
 - Habitat for Humanity
 - Home improvement and cleanup projects for members in need.

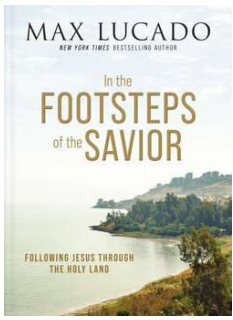
Additionally, we want to take meaningful steps in welcoming visitors, ensuring that our church is a joyful, inviting place where everyone can feel a sense of belonging.

Ideas are valuable but implementing them effectively requires a solid foundation. Your elders are working on a job description for a new staff member who will help refine these plans and bring them to life. Please keep your session in prayer as we carefully navigate the path ahead. If you have any questions or thoughts, I encourage you to reach out to me or a session member and share what you are praying for as our congregation grows.

There is so much to celebrate within our church community. By God's grace, we will continue deepening our love for Him and serving Meadville with even greater vibrancy and purpose. – Ben



See what Good Books the Librarian has selected for you this month. COME IN AND CHECK IT OUT!



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL IN APRIL: "In the Footsteps of the Savior- Following Jesus Through the Holy Land"

We will continue following Max Lucado's inspirational journey through the Holy Land. Discover God's heart for his people and his deep love for you. As Max weaves together insights from his own travels to Israel, he will guide you to walk where Jesus walked and ponder the promises he made. This video Bible study will provide you an encounter with the life

changing Holy One as you follow in the footsteps of the Savior through the Holy Land. Please join us on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in the Culbertson Theater.



Praying for Children (momsinprayer.org) will resume meetings on April 15. Please join us in the church library at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesdays to pray for your children and their schools. Every child needs a praying mom, grandma or friend!



MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Our Mission Committee is collecting monetary donations for **Women's Services** to refurbish their rooms. They will be painting the walls and replacing the linens and drapes. Please make your check out to "FPC" and write "Women's Services" in the memo. Thank you for helping to make the women's homeless shelter a warm and inviting place for women and their children.



Fairview Fairmont Family Center

The children are bursting with energy, and we're all looking forward to the Spring weather. Tuesdays are our busiest days with over twenty children attending our *afterschool program* and around 10 teens attending our *youth nights*. During *Messy Church*, we had a "Fruits of the Spirit" scavenger hunt. The kids

loved it! The *Grown-up and Me* Program for younger children continues to be a success. The parents and little ones that attend are building caring relationships with one another.



1. Owen Dill
2. Marilyn Stallard
10. Logan Luce
11. Bob Engels
12. Doris Edinger
Anastasia Bilka
13. Kate Chapel
17. Shirley Nossokoff
Annie Stoner
23. Kendra Fischer
24. Sonya Eagles-Dill
Sylvia Bridge
Maggie Chapel
26. Linda Bennett
27. Vickie Fischer
30. Bill DeArment



Dr. John Robb
March 1

225TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

May 4: Recognition of long- serving members, display of commemorative quilt, and reception following worship.

May 18: Rev. Dan Corll preaches.

May 20: Return of "Lunch at First" with a historical program on our stained-glass windows.

June 8 (Pentecost Sunday): Rev. Ted Martin preaches.

July 27: Church picnic & historical program.

August 10: Rev. Brian Jensen preaches.

August: End of summer ice cream social.

September: Dinner & program at Iroquois Club.

October 18 & 19: Return of "Renewal Weekend" by Rev. David Hosick. Rev. David Hosick preaches.

November: Rev. David Fugate preaches.

December: Event TBD.

CHECK THE BULLETIN AND NEWSLETTER IN THE UPCOMING MONTHS FOR EVENT UPDATES



april 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 5:30 Session 7:15 Soulstice	3	4	5 PW Spring Gathering at FPC Oil City 3:15 Allegheny College Choirs Spring Concert at Shafer Auditorium
6 CONFIRMATION SUNDAY 8:30 Worship with Communion 9:30 Sunday School & Confirmation Breakfast 11:00 Worship & Confirmation 12:00 Congregation Lunch	7	8 5:30 Bell Rehearsal	9 1:00 Knit Unto Others 7:15 Soulstice	10 3:30 Stephen Ministry Leadership Meeting 4:00 Stephen Ministry Meeting	11	12 10:00 Easter Party & Easter Egg Hunt in Fellowship Hall
13 PALM SUNDAY 8:30 Worship 9:30 Sunday School & Youth Group 11:00 Worship	14 6:30 Deacon Meeting	15 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Bell Rehearsal	16 4:15 Christian Education Committee 7:15 Soulstice	17 MAUNDY THURSDAY 7:30 Tenebrae with Holy Communion	18 GOOD FRIDAY 12:00 Musical Reflections on the Seven Last Words	19
20 RESURRECTION OF THE LORD One Great Hour of Sharing 8:30 Worship 9:30 Choir Rehearsal 11:00 Worship	21 Office Closed	22 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Bell Rehearsal	23	24	25	26 WEDDING DAY ELIJAH & SHERRY 1:00 Ceremony at FPC 2:30 Reception at Active Aging
27 8:30 Worship 9:30 Sunday School, Youth Group, Choir Rehearsal	28	29 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Bell Rehearsal	30			



First Presbyterian Church
890 Liberty Street
Meadville PA 16335
(814) 333-2161

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage Paid
Meadville, PA
Permit #314

Address Service Requested

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 8:30 AM & 11:00 AM

(11:00 AM service is available on YouTube)

SUNDAY SCHOOL - 9:30 AM

(No Sunday School on Easter)

YOUTH GROUP - April 13 & 27 at 9:30 AM

CONFIRMATION SUNDAY

Sunday, April 6 at 11:00 AM Worship

SOULSTICE - April 2, 9 & 16 at 7:15 PM

CHURCH STAFF

Senior Pastor: Rev. Ben Black

Minister of Music: Kevin Dill

Children's Ministry Coordinator: Vickie Fischer

Administrative Assistant: Mary Zahora

Financial Secretary: Kris Lubomski

Custodian: Elijah Boyd

Evening Custodian: Chris Wade

Email: firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org

Find us: www.meadvillefpc.org and

www.facebook.com/FPCMeadville



PALM SUNDAY - April 13

8:30 & 11:00 AM.

SOULSTICE - Wednesday, April 16

7:15 PM

MAUNDY THURSDAY - April 17

7:30 PM

GOOD FRIDAY - April 18

Musical Reflection on the Seven Last Words

12:00 NOON

EASTER SUNDAY - April 20

8:30 & 11:00 AM