



THE *Pillar*
BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

AUGUST 2022



TO BE LOVING, SERVING, AND ACCEPTING
OF ALL PEOPLE
WITH GOD'S LIFE-CHANGING POWER
AND GRACE

Pastor's Ponderings.....

A Preacher Goes to Hell

You've never heard a sermon from me about hell. I've got too much Good News to share to squander sermons on threats. I think love and truth are sufficient motives for doing the right thing, without punishments and rewards. Maybe I just don't believe that a loving God would punish God's beloved with eternal suffering. At any rate, the Biblical idea of hell is actually less clear than many people seem to think.

We're familiar with popular imagery of a devil. He (why always he) holds a pitchfork, gleefully wags a bifurcated tail, and busily torments souls amid fire and brimstone. Biblical? Nope. Most of this popular folklore actually comes from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (1314). If you want to cite a verse about those classic devils, read them. But a careful reading of the Bible reveals something else.

The Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) speak of a shadowy afterlife called "Sheol;" this was the place of the dead inhabited by both the good and the evil. "There is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going." (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

In the New Testament, there are three Greek words that get translated as "hell" in English. The first is Hades; it appears 11 times and comes from Greek mythology. Hades is the underworld, the place of the dead found in Homer's *Odyssey*. It seems a lot like Sheol, a misty, gloomy, quiet place of wandering spirits. Both the good and the bad went to Hades.

But in the deepest recesses of Hades was Tartarus. According to Greek mythology, only the truly wicked went there. In the Bible, the word Tartarus is only used once (2 Peter 2:4). It refers to it as the destination of unruly angels, not people.

The third and most common biblical word for "hell" is Gehenna, which appears 30 times. I've actually been to Gehenna. It is a valley just outside of Jerusalem where people burned trash in Jesus' time. Gehenna was especially despised because some had offered sacrifices to the god Ba'al there.

But none of those three biblical words for "hell" coincide with our pop culture ideas about hell. Most of that imagery comes from ancient fiction. So, what does the Bible tell us about hell? In Jesus' time there were mainly two philosophies about an afterlife: The Sadducees didn't accept an afterlife; the Pharisees did.

The Pharisees borrowed most of their afterlife ideas from the Greeks and Persian empires. After all, they'd been exiled there for generations. (In fact, the "Pharisees" got their name from "Farsi" – an old word for Persian.)

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Pastor's Ponderings..... (continued)

According to the Pharisees, you'd go to hell if you were careless about ritual purifications and religious traditions. Wealth was a sign of blessing, and poverty a sign that God was punishing you. So, to the Pharisees, hell was for the poor and the ritually impure. In other words, the Pharisees said that you went to hell if you weren't as good as them. How convenient.

Jesus clearly agreed with the Pharisees that there is an afterlife. But Jesus' message is full of hope. He speaks of "eternal life," of "going to prepare a place for us." Jesus uses the word "heaven" 139 times in the Gospels. This is a clear theme in Jesus' teaching. But Jesus sharply disagreed with the Pharisees about whom they destined to hell. Pharisees condemned the poor and the ritually impure. But Jesus' references to "hell" flip the Pharisees judgment of others back on themselves. Jesus told parables, in which the condemned looked, well, like the Pharisees.

Jesus had particularly harsh words for those who viewed the religious community as exclusive, rather than inclusive. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them!"* (Mt. 23:13).

Neither the poor, nor the prostitutes, nor the ritually impure were condemned by Jesus. Rather, harsh judgement went to those who condemn others in their own religious arrogance (Luke 18:9). Who went to hell in Jesus' parables? People like the rich man who ignored poor Lazarus (Lk 16:20). Those who ignore the plight of the hungry, the stranger, or those who need healthcare. (Matthew 25:41). Thus, Jesus took the Pharisees understanding of hell and flipped it upside-down.

The old-time preachers told scary stories to effectively scare the hell out of us. But it turns out that Jesus' parables were actually teaching us a radically transformative vision of a God who loves all, including those whom the religious elite thought didn't have a snowball's chance. In the words of Brian McLaren, "Jesus wasn't so much teaching about hell as he was un-teaching about hell."

The God I believe in does not condemn countless billions of souls to eternal torment. Nor is God an extortionist who demands doctrinal conformity under threat of torture. The God I believe in does beckon us with love, to love one another (Jn 15:12) to feed the hungry (Matthew 25:35) and to drive out all fear (1 John 4:18). I believe in a God whose mercy and love extend beyond our imaginations - even to those we would myopically condemn.

-- Peace and blessing, Pastor John



FROM THE MINISTRIES OF BUCC

FACILITIES

The parking lot has been repaired, seal-coated and restriped. The total cost was \$12,100.

A pully system to raise banners over the front entrance was installed.

We are getting estimates to install an EV charging station in the parking lot.

The front doors of the church are in serious need of painting and has been added to our to-do list.

BE THE CHURCH

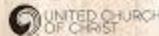
Protect the environment. Care for the poor.

Forgive often. Reject racism.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.



CHURCH FRIENDS

By David Ritchey

After the death of my mother, I received a note from my friend Carolyn. We were in high school together and attended the same church from grade school until I graduated one year ahead of her. In the note she commented on how much it had meant to her that our mothers and fathers had been active in the church. She recalled how they involved us, their children, in church activities. For both families church life was a significant part of our family life.

Our mothers were named Mary and Martha – two names Jesus knew. Those two women served the church during Jesus' life. Our Mary and Martha served the church centuries later. Sometimes our mothers were not quite Biblical in their approach to serving the church community.

Both mothers thought the children's Sunday School classroom was dull and drab. Each brought from home to the church left-over paint, paint brushes and drop cloths. They went to work. By the next Sunday the walls, ceilings and floors were vibrant with color. But the center piece of this painting project was an old upright piano. Mary and Martha painted the old piano a vivid green.

Our mothers laughed as they showed our fathers and the minister this spectacular green piano with bright black and white keys. They were sure the hymns played on that piano would take on a vibrant new life.

Our parents and adult church friends shaped our lives for attending worship, participating in the life of the church, and dealing with the important issues in life. We learned responsible people attended worship service and church activities. We understood that church friends were a part of our family and should be treated with the same love, respect and forgiveness we gave to our relatives.

We were in training to be active members of the church and, in doing so, to make a difference in our own lives and in the community.

I can trace a direct line from Jesus to his mother, Mary, and his friend Martha. That line may skip a few generations to my mother, Mary, and Carolyn's mother, Martha. But these four women served the church in their own time and important ways.

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(CHURCH FRIENDS, continued from p. 5)

Recently, I had the opportunity to look out at the congregation at my home church. I didn't see a Mary or a Martha. I suspect this has something to do with the popularity of names. But I did see women and men who continue in the spirit of Mary and Martha. I saw Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, choir members, and people who volunteer to rake leaves in the fall or shovel snow during the winter.

They may not be named Mary or Martha, and they may not have painted a piano green. But who knows what the future holds for those women and men who represent the best for those who watch them live a dedicated life in the church?

As I've matured, and my own life has become complicated, I've learned at moments of stress to ask what Mary and Martha would have done. Those women had a keen sense of humor. They laughed, talked and helped each other through the tough times in their lives. They celebrated successes and they grieved when tears were appropriate. They trained us to know that we should follow in the footsteps of the Mary and Martha who celebrated and grieved with Jesus.



Notes & Announcements:



FOOD FOR THOUGHT - From early May through the middle of July of this year, the amount of food donated by BUCC members and friends for the hunger centers totaled between 130 and 175 pounds!

Just imagine what would happen if each one of us added just one item to our shopping list and put the item

in the basket by the office door for donation to the hunger centers. Would the pile be so large that Annie and Pastor John couldn't get in the door?

- Caroline & Bob Chandler



THE OPERA IS COMING TO BUCC! – On Saturday, August 6th, the premier of a locally produced oratorio/opera, “Coming Home”, will be performed in our sanctuary. It’s the true story of Jim Stulz’s journey from teaching high school to becoming one of the moral leaders of San Francisco’s gay community. Jim was instrumental in establishing both a “Gays and Grays” ministry and America’s first residential AIDS hospice, called “Coming Home”.

“Coming Home” is a pastiche, that is, a collection of miscellaneous opera arias that Jim Stulz used to play for his students (with new English lyrics suited to the story), as well as other classical and pop pieces. Although Mark Kilkenny is the work’s principal lyricist, he received help from his co-producing sister, Anne, and several others. The lyrics of “Coming Home” reflect and dramatize actual events in the life of the hero, Jim Stulz, and actual things said by him. Jonathan Williams is the composer/arranger for “Coming Home”, and there are two arias which have both original music and original lyrics.

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***(OPERA, continued from p. 7)***

The end of the show will include an audience sing-along set to the theme of the Finale of Saint-Saen's Organ Symphony. Afterwards, Mark will be available for a question/answer period with the audience.

“Coming Home” was written in a way that appeals to both seasoned opera lovers and to those who just enjoy good music! It’s not meant to be a “pro-gay” or “anti-Catholic” or “political” statement – it’s merely a story about being the best one can be “under the circumstances”! The performance begins at 4 pm, and free-will donations will be used to defray production costs, with any excess revenue going to BUCC’s LGBTQIA+ ministries.



MEMORIAL SERVICE - The family of Ada and Howard Carter, former long-time members of BUCC, would like to announce a memorial service for Nancy Carter Trantum and her husband, Tom. Family and friends will be celebrating their lives in the sanctuary on Sunday, August 7th, at 1:00 pm, followed by a small reception in Pilgrim Hall. Any members who have had a connection with the Carters are welcome to join the family in remembering Nancy and Tom.

August

Happy, Happy August Birthdays* to the following BUCC Members! Please share in their joy and wish them a Happy Birthday!

| | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|
| Jeff | Ferfolia | August 01 |
| Michael | Corrado | August 02 |
| Courtni | Began | August 08 |
| Rachel | Brown | August 09 |
| Kathy | Ford | August 09 |
| Beth | Rehling | August 11 |
| Dave | Bernard | August 15 |
| George | Snider | August 15 |
| Carol | Miller | August 16 |
| Bettina | Ortiz | August 18 |

****If you have an AUGUST birthday and are not included above, please contact the church office so we can add you to the BUCC Birthday List!***

CALENDAR

AUGUST 2022

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mon., AUGUST 1 | Thu., AUGUST 11 | Sunday, AUGUST 21 10am Worship Service |
| Tue., AUGUST 2 8:15am "Holy Grounds" (Brecksville Panera) | Fri., AUGUST 12 *OFFICE CLOSED* | Mon., AUGUST 22 |
| Wed., AUGUST 3 | Sat., AUGUST 13 | Tue., AUGUST 23 8:15am "Holy Grounds" (Brecksville Panera) |
| Thu., AUGUST 4 | Sunday, AUGUST 14 10am Worship Service | Wed., AUGUST 24 |
| Fri., AUGUST 5 *OFFICE CLOSED* | Mon., AUGUST 15 *PILLAR DEADLINE* | Thu., AUGUST 25 |
| Sat., AUGUST 6 | Tue., AUGUST 16 8:15am "Holy Grounds" (Brecksville Panera) | Fri., AUGUST 26 *OFFICE CLOSED* |
| Sunday, AUGUST 7 10am Worship Service | Wed., AUGUST 17 | Sat., AUGUST 27 |
| Mon., AUGUST 8 | Thu., AUGUST 18 | Sunday, AUGUST 28 10am Worship Service |
| Tue., AUGUST 9 8:15am "Holy Grounds" (Brecksville Panera) | Fri., AUGUST 19 *OFFICE CLOSED* | Mon., AUGUST 29 |
| Wed., AUGUST 10 | Sat., AUGUST 20 | Tue., AUGUST 30 8:15am "Holy Grounds" (Brecksville Panera) |
| | | Wed., AUGUST 31 |



PARTICIPANTS IN WORSHIP

AUGUST 7, 2022

Head Usher: TBD
Ushers: Allison Colbert
TBD
Lay Reader: Jill Zedan
Greeter: TBD
Nursery: TBD
Counters: Marge Culver
TBD
Acolyte: TBD
Peace Candle: TBD
A/V: Jim Duffy
Flowers: Anne Melfo
Setup/Serve: Carole Snider
TBD
Cleanup: TBD
TBD

AUGUST 21, 2022

Head Usher: Jill Zedan
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
TBD
Lay Reader: Diane Gressley
Greeter: Dave Bernard
Nursery: TBD
Counters: Marge Culver
Janet Renovetz
Acolyte: TBD
Peace Candle: TBD
A/V: David Pastor
Flowers: TBD
Setup/Serve: TBD
Cleanup: TBD
TBD

AUGUST 14, 2022

Head Usher: Diane Gressley
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
Dave Bernard
Lay Reader: Rose Kaval
Greeter: Jon Thompson
Nursery: TBD
Counters: Marge Culver
Janet Renovetz
Acolyte: TBD
Peace Candle: TBD
A/V: Fred Pedersen
Flowers: Julie Bernard
Setup/Serve: TBD
TBD
Cleanup: TBD
TBD

AUGUST 28, 2022

Head Usher: Diane Gressley
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
TBD
Lay Reader: Betsey Wilson
Greeter: TBD
Nursery: TBD
Counters: Marge Culver
TBD
Acolyte: TBD
Peace Candle: TBD
A/V: Fred Pedersen
Flowers: Tia Began
Setup/Serve: TBD
TBD
Cleanup: TBD
TBD

The Pillar

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