

First Baptist Church of Peoria

FIRST BAPTIST NEWS

MARCH 14, 2017



BUILDING BRIDGES INSTEAD OF WALLS

By: The Reverend Dr. Rodney Kennedy

The Rev. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, recently preached a sermon in favor of building a wall between Mexico and the United States. Setting aside the politics of walls, let's consider the biblical and theological implications. I believe that the proper order is for Christians to search the Bible and then make decisions about how they will live and what they will support. The Bible loses its punch if you make up your mind and then go to the Bible looking for proof that you were right in your opinion.

Dr. Jeffress took his text from the Hebrew Scriptures – the book of Nehemiah. Jeffress trumpeted that the “first step of rebuilding the nation was the building of a great wall. God instructed Nehemiah to build a wall around Jerusalem to protect its citizens from enemy attack. You see, God is NOT against building walls!”

As one Baptist preacher to another, I want to say to Rev. Jeffress that his idealization of the rebuilding of the wall in Jerusalem ignores the way the returning exiles systematically rejected and excluded their fellow Jews left behind during the exile. They had intermarried with foreigners and would become known as the Samaritans. There then followed generations of hatred between Jews and Samaritans. The wall in this case was invisible, but no less real.

Rev. Jeffress, inexplicably completely ignores the message of the Christian Scripture, the New Testament. He has nothing to say about Jesus visiting with the Samaritan woman and breaking down the wall between Jews and Samaritans, men and women. He seems oblivious to the passage from Ephesians: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.”

Rev. Jeffress seems to want nothing to do with the reality that Jesus symbolically broke down the wall in the Temple that separated Jews from Gentiles. Then Jesus broke down the wall between men and women. Finally, Jesus destroyed the wall between laity and clergy. Jesus was not a wall builder. Jesus never left a wall standing between persons. He destroyed walls of all kinds. He calls his people to use crowbars to rip the nails from wooden walls and hammers to destroy stone walls wherever they exist.

Robert Frost, not a Baptist preacher, was more truthful when he said, “Something there is that doesn't love a wall...,” and “Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know what I am walling in or walling out and to whom I was like to give offense. Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down.”

On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan spoke in West Berlin and famously said, “General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Toward the conclusion of the speech President Reagan said, “As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag, that embodiment of German unity, I noticed words crudely spray-painted upon the wall, perhaps by a young Berliner: “This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.” Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom.” That is more prophetic, more truthful than the groveling words of the pastor from Dallas, who “seems hand-tamed by the wealthy and the powerful of this world. If Christians want to be in the construction business, we would be better served to build bridges rather than walls. Or even more, we could “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” O Lord, lay us on an anvil and pound us into crowbars that tear down walls and give our world peace!

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WORSHIP SERVICES

10 A.M. WORSHIP & CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL ■ 11 A.M. FELLOWSHIP TIME

March 19, 2017, Third Sunday in Lent

"Water from Rock"

Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42

Questions explode in desert air. The preacher fires first: "Why do you quarrel with me?" "Why do you test the Lord?" The people retort: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us?" Then the preacher appeals to the Lord: "What shall I do with this people?" And then a later editor adds the question that is the prequel and sequel to all questions: "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Well, what did you expect besides argument? This is not Israel's first or last time to pick a fight with the preacher. These are knock-down-drag-out struggles. Much of Israel's rich and embarrassing memory takes place in wilderness. There's Israel cavorting before a golden calf as Moses comes from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. Hear stone breaking against rock as Moses explodes in anger. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." There's Israel dodging poisonous snakes. Israel's record is not squeaky clean, but a mixture of faith and mistrust, of courage and cowardice. Sound familiar? *Additional texts are Psalm 95 and Romans 5:1-11.*

Music: "At the Cross" - Karen Pilgrim
a piano duet by Joshua Russell and Mark Grizzard

Welcome Center: Lynelle Ryan

March 26, 2017, Fourth Sunday in Lent

"THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD "

John 9:1-41

One day Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He then healed a man of blindness. Of all things, Jesus now exits stage right. We have the churches dealing with Jesus after Jesus has left the building. The story of the formerly blind man is a rhetorical invention – a wonderful short story, based on a Jesus healing – of the writer of John's gospel showing us what life was like in the churches of the early second century: Jesus in dispute. The story has 2 settings: 30 AD for the actual healing story; 90 AD or so for the expelling of the born blind man. In other words, the churches, including ours, are inside the story – they are the very ones with all these questions about Jesus. And the formerly blind man is their teacher. What could be more relevant since Jesus gets dragged around like a rag doll to give his support to every hare-brained political scheme and every social issue in our country? You would think that people own Jesus instead of him being the light of the world, the king of the universe, or the son of man. *Additional texts are: 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23 and Ephesians 5:8-14.*

Music: "Kingsfold" - Chancel Bells

Welcome Center: Staci Payton

LENTEN DINNER SERIES

6:00 p.m., Wednesdays through April 5

Dr Kennedy will guide us on a journey of readings and questions that begins in the Garden of Eden and brings us to the Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Each week we will explore the story of God's love for humankind using biblical texts, pictures by Rembrandt and masterpieces of Russian literature. This study will help us fully embrace the passion of Christ and its transforming power . . . as Life Conquers Death.



On March 19 we will be receiving the America For Christ Offering, which is designed to support home mission work across the United States and Puerto Rico.

Our American Baptist denomination is one of the most diverse Christian denominations serving Christ today. Our denomination is made up of over 5200 local congregations with over 1.3 million members across the United States and Puerto Rico, all working together to serve God. In March we will be working together to help the American Baptist Home Mission Society by giving to the America For Christ offering. The theme of the offering this year is "Cultivating Leaders, Equipping Disciples, Healing Communities." Great emphasis is being placed on the need for cultivating and supporting dedicated and dynamic Christian leaders who will work to advance Christ's mission of peace, hope and love in their churches and communities.

The Mission Board asks you to be a part of this important mission by giving generously to the America For Christ offering when it is received on March 19.

Janet Middleton, Mission Board

ADULT ISSUES CLASS

Charles Bandoian, chief executive officer of Heartland Health Services, will speak on "Affordable Health Care: Still a Critical Issue" on March 26 at the church. Heartland Health Services is Peoria's only federally qualified health center, serving more than 20,000 area residents, who depend on it for their health care. He will speak at our Adult Contemporary Issues class, meeting at 11:15 a.m. in the sanctuary. Do invite your friends to learn more about this critically important issue.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Services for Joan Bloomenshine, mother of FBC member, Jo Sternberg, will be held in the chapel on Saturday, March 25th: visitation at 11:00 a.m., memorial service at noon.

SPRING CLEAN-UP

Greetings, friends of First Baptist Church.

The Trustees wanted to provide everyone with an update on the grounds surrounding our facility. As the trees in the front of the church have aged, the amount of dirt and debris being deposited on the ground has increased significantly. This has led to an increase in volunteer maintenance, as members are needed to walk the front of the property at least 2 to 3 times per week picking up limbs, debris and other odds and ends. As we have continued to share our findings and feedback with the Executive Committee over the last 90 days, the Trustees have begun to explore what options might be available. Wayne Nowlan was kind enough to reach out to the Park District and have a professional arborist come and inspect all of the trees. Sadly, what was pointed out at the time of inspection was that the trees are far beyond any state where trimming or grooming of any kind can be performed in a meaningful manner. The work that needed to occur to those trees, in order to prevent this, would have needed to be done approximately 30 years prior. Trustees have also begun to run low on the size of our volunteer workforce to walk the grounds and keep everything in proper order. The question of whether or not to remove the trees at the front of the property has been extensively reviewed, and that is the initial recommendation of the Trustee Committee. After some ongoing discussion over the last 90 days, the Trustees have been tasked to take a different look at our needs and really develop an aggressive plan to freshen and beautify our entire landscaping solution around the building. With that in mind, here is the scope of the project the Trustees have been asked to give consideration:

- Professional removal and stump grinding of the trees at the front of the property.
- Addition of ornamental flowering trees at the front of the property.
- Installation of sidewalk lighting to the walkways that lead down to the street parallel to our driveway.
- Addition of a few handicapped parking places to the front of the property with easy access through the main doorway.
- Addition of at least 2 flowering gardens across the property.
- Addition of a walkway to the newly installed gazebo.
- Evening lighting / illumination to be added to the gazebo.
- Replacement of the church sign with a digital LED message board that can be updated more regularly and have rotating messages for display.

As you can see, this puts us a little bit past our original goal this year of not taking on any major projects. With the revisions and additions that have been given to the scope of this plan, we will be taking things slow and steady as we begin to put initial pen to paper in 2017.

In the meantime, volunteers are needed as we work to keep our facility looking nice. Two members of the Executive Committee have already agreed to be part of the weekly foot-patrol keeping the grounds picked up of debris. We really need to add to our volunteer team. If you would like to be a part of the ongoing beautification of First Baptist, please reach out to the church office and express interest. The church office is on standby and ready to take your call if you are available to assist. The office phone number is (309) 682-5491.

Spring yard clean-up will take place on Saturday, April 1st. Ideally, we would like to assemble a volunteer crew of 15 to 20 people (ages 10 and above). A breakfast will be served at 8:00 a.m. Please RSVP to either Ron Jacobs or Tim Austin to express interest. It's important that we know how much food to prepare. Yard work will start at 9:00 a.m. Volunteers can bring some basic yard tools if available. This includes rakes, lawn refuse bags, leaf blowers, gloves and other essentials. With a successful clean-up, we can make sure our facility is dressed for success as we look to bring new faces to our congregation in 2017.

Please save the date on your calendar. And don't forget to RSVP!

Tim Austin, Chair
FBC Board of Trustees

DINING OUT GROUP

On Friday, March 24th, at 6:30 p.m., the Dining Out Group is going to Rhythm Kitchen Music Cafe. It's located at 305 SW Water St., Peoria.

Please let John or Jen Dusek know if you will be attending. Thank you, and have a blessed month.

Jennifer Dusek

SAVE THE DATE

Our Rebuilding Together Pre-work Day will be Saturday, April 22nd, and the main Rebuilding Day will be Saturday, April 29th.

Please contact John Dusek to volunteer...help is needed!

FBC RUMMAGE SALE

Our annual rummage sale will be held on Saturday, April 29th, in Fellowship Hall. Donations may be dropped off in Fellowship Hall on April 27th and 28th. Early donations may be left neatly in the Royal Red Theatre room.



Gathered in God's Word, Scattered to God's World

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THE MISSION OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IS TO MINISTER TO OUR CONGREGATION, THE COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD, SO THAT ALL MAY EXPERIENCE THE LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD.

PRAYER CONCERNS

Ruth Turner Happy Dean Pam Orrill Barb Twist
Rose Kimpling Carol Conover Marvin Olson Jay McGee
Alyssa Russell Wally Weber Bob Brown Rosemary Walk
Dorothy Cumming Jacquelyn Kellogg
 Dick Sternberg (Jo Sternberg's husband)
 Elaine Bolen (Paul Grove's sister)
 Jake Teel (Cornelia & Mark Teel's nephew)

CHURCH WOMEN UNITED

Church Women United will have a general meeting on Friday, April 7th, 9:00 a.m. at Memorial Christian Church, 2507 W. Newman Parkway, Peoria.

ABW CIRCLE MEETINGS

Circle of Friends will meet on **Tuesday, March 21st**, in the Parlor at First Baptist Church at 12:30 p.m. Sharon Polakow will be the hostess, Thelma Hopwood will lead the group in Bible study, and Patricia Lang will lead us in devotions.

The **Evening Literature Circle** will meet on **Tuesday, March 21st**, at 7:00 p.m., at the home of Joan Trotter, 4603 N. Missouri, Peoria. The book to be reviewed is The Wright Brothers, by David McCullough.

MARCH 19 CAN-A-THON

The Peoria Area Anti-Hunger Coalition will be holding its 33rd annual Can-A-Thon on Sunday, March 19th. The purpose of the drive is to provide food to help hungry families in the Peoria area. Last year over 60,000 pounds of food were collected to help those in need.

This year the Mission Board would like to invite you to help out with this important endeavor. We will have our shopping cart out in the Warm Room on March 19th for any donations of canned and non-perishable food items you would like to make. This collection of food will be in addition to our regular communion Sunday collection of food for area food pantries. Thank you so much for helping!

—The Mission Board