Listening to the Preaching of God’s Word

As a pastor, I have studied preaching (especially when I was in seminary), read a lot about preaching, and, of course, I preach on a regular basis. I am always trying to learn how to preach better.

However, as important as preaching is, it is also important to know how to listen to the preaching of God’s Word. Question 90 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?” The answer given is as follows: *That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.* So much could (and probably should) be said about this. But let me just make a few comments.

Our first duty in connection with the preaching of God’s Word is to hear it. In order to benefit from the preaching of God’s Word we must take every opportunity to sit under this means of God’s grace. We should conscientiously attend *all* the regular public preaching services of our church unless providentially hindered (which does *not* include trips to Disney, vacations, or family visiting us).

Second, effectual listening to the preaching of God’s Word requires diligence, preparation, and prayer. That means being alert when the Word is preached. It means setting out of our minds the things of the world so that we can concentrate on what is being said. It means avoid coming late, whispering, reading text messages, or anything else that would distract us from carefully paying attention to the preaching of God’s Word.
Third, we should receive the preaching of God’s Word with faith and love, and lay it up in our hearts. That is, we should have a receptive attitude rather than a stubborn resistance to the preaching of God’s Word. We should listen to every sermon with the attitude that God has something to say to “me.”

And fourth, our response to the preaching of God’s Word is to practice it in our lives. Every time we listen to preaching, we should leave as different people because we have heard God’s Word to us. We should determine to put into practice what God requires of us so that we might become more like Christ every day.

Let me encourage you to listen to the preaching of God’s Word in such a way that your life is transformed daily by the Word of God.
By Suzanne Swenson

I hope this finds everyone well and enjoying the beautiful weather. As I write this, I am reminded of an article I read about hospitality. The Greek word for hospitality is “philoxenia” which, when translated, means “love of strangers.” When the Bible was written, it was common to invite a stranger into the homes as Inns were scarce. I am so appreciative of how various TBPC ministries are reaching out to offer opportunities for us to become better acquainted with our members and those who are either joining or visiting. Some of our ministries that come to mind are: Second Sunday Soups On; First Friday Family Fun Night; Refreshment Café; and the Women’s Ministry’s Sister to Sister events. Others include the Welcome Lunch, Missions, and Adult Bible Fellowship. In each example, there is a welcoming warmth of prayer, light refreshment, activity, and most of all, the opportunity to become better acquainted with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Women’s Ministry is busily working on its second event of 2019 which will be held on Saturday, March 30. We are still forming the details for this Sister to Sister event. Stay tuned as details will be provided in the worship bulletin. It will include a

“What we learn from Jesus by his example is the importance of putting the needs of others ahead of our own. Father, in our desire to be more hospitable, create in us a heart that aims to serve others in Jesus’ name. May we discover that true greatness is not in fame or position but in humble service.”

Lloyd Wicker, Chaplain USN

“In humility, value others above ourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others” (Philippians 2: 3-4). 

Hostage of Hope – Holly Mickler

Do men and women in prison for horrendous acts still serve a purpose? Does their worth warrant as much attention and fight as we give a baby in utero? Is their sinful nature further out of grace’s reach than those of us living in freedom? Do they still qualify for redemption, despite their choices… wait, did we qualify?

David has been incarcerated in the Florida Department of Corrections for almost 18 years, serving the bulk of his time at Hardee Correctional Institution. After a month’s stint at Calhoun Correctional in the panhandle, where we pray he will spend the next chunk of his life sentence. Let that sink in a moment – 18 years…longer than some of us have held jobs, longer than some of our children have been alive, longer than some of us have been married. The impact on a person spending that many years in prison can scarcely be fathomed. And his time is chump change compared to some. All these men and women. All that time. All that ripe vulnerability. The vastness of such a field, waiting for seeds to be spread, aching to know a harvest, simply cannot be ignored by the Church. No matter how scary. No matter how uncomfortable. No matter how many pride lies that we are better than them.

Over the course of his incarceration, David has seen depravity on display, but he has also seen grace transcend barbed wire and cement walls. He has witnessed men go to great lengths to acquire a tube of deodorant or a cup of coffee, and he has encountered spiritually hungry men seeking to be fed and to grow in their understanding of who God is and what He has done. He has watched men turn into the next painful statistic, and he has seen them wait and hope for a connection to the outside world, a connection that gradually fades to nothing over the years. That is, unless someone living in freedom takes a risk, unless someone, maybe someone like you, decides to reach out to the least of these (Matthew 25:40).

David and I have long felt called to use our circumstances as a ministry to the men and families we encounter day after day, week after week, year after year. Recently God is opening doors and placing ideas on our hearts for how this calling can develop into intentional action.

Inmates in the state of Florida are provided with: 1 hotel bar of soap a week, 1 roll of toilet paper a week, and 1 small toothpaste/toothbrush a month. They are allowed to keep and exchange (as they wear out): 6 pair of socks, 4 pair of boxers, 4 tee shirts, a pair of “Crocs” type slides, and 3 sets of “prison blues.” Each inmate is given the opportunity to go to the “chow hall” for 3 meals a day, but the nutritional value and sanitary guidelines are often questionable. David worked in the kitchen, so he could tell you horror stories of food prep and service. So, unless you hustle or steal or have money sent to you, you have no deodorant, no shampoo, no lotion, very little food of quality, no real shoes, etc. And the prisons are not air conditioned, so you can imagine what it must smell like to be in a cement building with nothing but a common area exhaust fan and 50+ men in the middle of a Florida summer!

In addition to their physical needs, these men have very little access to resources in sound biblical doctrine, especially print materials in Reformed Theology. Many are hungry to learn and grow but can only turn to what is available in the chapel library (a mixture of all faiths).
Most significantly, they need to feel connected to the outside world, to know there is more to life than behind the barbed wire fence. They need men and women to come alongside them and befriend them, to mentor them, to hold them accountable, to be real with them. Research shows relationships are the number one way to rehabilitate and prevent recidivism. Imagine a man whose family stopped visiting after a few years because it just got to be too much. Picture an inmate longing to find answers, desperate to have some kind of hope that there’s more for him than just death in isolation. These men (and women) still have value even if society would prefer to lock them up and throw away the key. I believe in consequences. And I certainly believe in justice. But I also believe in second chances. And I believe in forgiveness because I believe in redemption. None of us out here is immune to the sins that landed them in there. We should never fool ourselves into thinking otherwise. By God’s grace alone, we’re on this side of barbed wire instead of the other. Because of His mercy, there will be no cells in heaven to separate us from the men and women society forgets but God calls by name. These men and women in prison need us. And maybe, just maybe, our pride blinds us from the fact that we need them, too. Some are already brothers, and they need to know they aren’t forgotten. Some may not be brothers, and we don’t know if they ever will be, but they need to hear the Gospel and experience firsthand how it moves us to love…yes, to love even them. And when we arrive in heaven, we can’t wait to see who is there because God allowed TBPC to plant and water a seed.

**What Your Monetary Donations Provide**

Our vision is to help inmates aware of the Gospel, deepen their knowledge and understanding of Christ by meeting their physical and spiritual needs, and serve as an example of “love they neighbor” in an “every man for himself” prison culture. We seek to provide inmates with:

- **Mercy Bags (about $12-15)** – include but not limited to: food, hygiene products, stamps, envelopes/paper, coffee, tea, etc. Each Mercy Bag contains a card presenting the Gospel message and invites the inmate to ask for prayer.
- **Sermons** - currently 20+ men across the state receive weekly copies of Pastor Freddy’s transcribed sermons.
- **Print Resources** – Bibles, Tabletalk, World Magazine, devotionals, topical books with a biblical worldview.

**Our Vision for the Future**

We hope to grow the Mercy Bag and Sermon parts of the ministry into something even greater. Being in a new facility opens the door for more men to receive access to the Gospel. And when they transfer, the ripple effects just keep moving throughout prisons and families all over the state!

Meeting physical needs and the need for resources is critical, but we would eventually like to see some men and women of faith befriend someone currently incarcerated. Mentoring and ministry would naturally follow, but these men in prison need bonds with strong, honest, brothers and sisters. The addition of jPay email and 30-second pre-recorded videograms makes this a much easier undertaking than in the past. What if TBPC decided to send a group to a prison once or twice a month to hold a small group bible study or worship service? Think of the possibilities! Clearly there is room for growth and expansion as the Lord allows.

**How You Can Join Us**

**Prayer**

Pray for us as we seek to glorify God through Hostage of Hope. Pray for the men (now in multiple prisons across the state) who receive the weekly sermons, that they would grow in their understanding of God and his grace. Pray for the thousands of men who have no one to connect them to the outside world. Pray for the salvation of inmates, guards, administration, and family members. And pray that the Holy Spirit would sweep through barbed wire and cement walls of every institution in the state.
Connect

Talk with me if you are interested in forming a pen pal relationship with an inmate. This can be done via jPay (online) or USPS. David will make sure the match is appropriate, and I can offer pointers for how to maintain boundaries in a prison friendship…though I apparently didn’t do so well with that myself!

Financial Contributions

Please consider a financial contribution to assist with the purchase of items for Mercy Bags, postage for mailing sermons, and print resources for men seeking to grow in knowledge and understanding of the Gospel and reformed theology. I am working to set up a nonprofit, but if you are interested before that is available, please make all checks out to Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church with HoH in the memo line.

May God use us to build his kingdom as we see the need, fill the gap, serve the hopeless, and love the captive.

Hostage of Hope Ministries Offering
Will be collected Sunday, March 3

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard…”

Colossians 1:21–23
Men’s Night at the Lightning game

January 17, 2019

On November 17, 2019 the Men’s Ministry had its annual night at the Lightning game and we invited anyone from the church to attend. We had a total of 20 people that attended and it was fun to see the hockey game live. There was a lot of hard checking and fighting for puck control. The Maple Leafs took the early lead, but we came back in the game to tie it up only to have the Maple Leafs take the final lead.

There was a lot of action at the game and we had an abundant amount of Maple Leafs’ fans that kept it very interesting. Since the two teams were close to each other in points it was important for the home team to win this game, but the Maple Leafs prevailed. We appreciate everyone that was able to attend this year. We hope to pick a winning game next year. We, unfortunately, lost that game to the Maple Leafs 4-2, but it was great fellowship for all who came.

We have these events for the men and sometimes the entire church is invited to larger events like this. We plan on having Golf and the Men’s breakfast in the month of March.

Also planned is our annual Rays game that everyone is invited to attend. We typically rent a bus and have food on the bus during the ride over to the game. The Rays game will be in May and is typically on a Friday night. We are looking at two days, either May 10 or May 31. Please look in the Sunday bulletin soon for the exact date the closer we get.

We also hope that you men can make it to the Men’s Bible Study every Saturday morning at 7:45 a.m. led by our own Dr. Jeff Beams studying, “The Message of Creation” by Jack B. Scott.

Thank you again for the support of the Men’s Ministry and Men’s Bible Study.
Join us the first Friday of every month at Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church for a meal, prayer, family focused devotional activities, and fun! Open to all church members and attendees! Families with children are highly encouraged to attend. Great opportunities for volunteers are available for games, crafts, and food setup.

**Dates:** Mar 1, April 5, May 3

**What to expect...**

6:30 - 7:00 p.m.: Meal time and opening prayer  
7:10 - 7:45 p.m.: Family devotional Activity  
7:45 - 8:25 p.m.: Fellowship and board games  
8:30 p.m.: Closing

*Please RSVP so we can prepare appropriately.*

*If you are interested in helping please contact:*  
**Christy Almonte 813-484-9771.**
**Happening in March**

Friday, March 1, 6:30 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. Friday Family Fun Night
See page 8 for details.

**Sunday, March 10, 5:00 P.M. Simple Soup Supper for Sunday Seconds**
Please join us for soup, bread, and dessert prior to the evening worship service. Please RSVP in advance by sending an email to Lesley Schmidt at jrlks92@yahoo.com, or completing a pew card, by March 3. Please let us know the number of adults and children in your party.

**Sunday, March 10, 6:00 P.M. Evening Worship Service**
Please plan to attend. We would love to see you there. Childcare is provided.

**March 14—16. Ligonier Conference**
This year’s conference will be held at First Baptist Church Orlando and will focus on the holiness of God as it presents “He Is Holy.” These three days will help us understand the holiness of God, his glorious attributes, and the implications of God’s holiness for our own lives. Various men will teach on subjects including how God’s holiness sets him apart from false gods, how that impacts the infallibility of scripture and the sanctity of life, and its implications for our personal holiness. To register, call 800-435-4343 or online at www.ligonier.org/events/2019-national-conference/register/

**March 17, 12:30 p.m. Emptynesters**
Liang’s Bistro, 17515 Bruce B. Down’s Blvd. Tampa, 33647. Please RSVP to Sandy Neal at (813) 973-7814 or sandybill1941@gmail.com by Friday, March 15.
## March Birthdays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Burns</td>
<td>March 01</td>
<td>Hannah Montoney</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac Montoney</td>
<td>March 04</td>
<td>Jeff Beams</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildred Myers</td>
<td>March 04</td>
<td>Dora Burchfield</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Finch</td>
<td>March 06</td>
<td>Becky Jordan</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Pothoven</td>
<td>March 08</td>
<td>Nancy Kirkpatrick</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Tyler</td>
<td>March 08</td>
<td>Sheri Nies</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cross</td>
<td>March 09</td>
<td>Rebekah Skopp</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Egbert</td>
<td>March 09</td>
<td>Gary Smith</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nolan Becker</td>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>Esaie Etienne</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashleigh Kemp</td>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>Roger Kaiser</td>
<td>March 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharell Karibi-Whyte</td>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>Jennie Roque</td>
<td>March 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Bayley</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Coleen Knecht</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Kirkpatrick</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>David Mickler</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Barber</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Jack Diaz</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jena Barber</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Linda Hallstrand</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## March Anniversaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert &amp; Christym Almonte</td>
<td>March 03, 2008</td>
<td>11 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier &amp; Patty Lugo</td>
<td>March 18, 2000</td>
<td>19 Years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>