**Pastor’s Log July 22, 2020\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Dear Friends,

The peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, be with you. It has been a poignant month for our congregation’s members and friends, now that two churches are one. The poignancy of the last Sunday in June, when both congregations voted to combine into one church, has been heightened during the recent Sundays of July. In this regard, on these recent Sundays Elders as well as Deacons have been ordained and installed. It is always moving to hear such vows exchanged and such service unto the church of Christ affirmed. And although we are not gathered in person due to Covid19, we have found that we can still participate in an on-line version of Laying on of Hands, and feel the Spirit’s movement within and between us all. This coming Sunday, we will be again exchanging vows and affirming the covenant, that is, the promise, which exists between our congregation and its pastors--Pastor Paul and myself. Anticipating that this Sunday will prove to again be full of God’s presence and promise and grace, and to be very emotional as well, I encourage you to plan to attend and participate. It is important to mark the new life of Ewing-Covenant Presbyterian Church by affirming the promises and blessings of God, and within that, our promises and blessing unto each other.

There is no doubt that the context of our new church is complicated: the complexity of social unrest and change, the pain and violence of racial injustice and the pandemic of corona virus could not have been foreseen. And while some would wish to return to pre-covid19 days, and to pre-George Floyd reality, that is not possible. For me, I am hopeful and encouraged by a future where our scientists develop an effective and widely available vaccine for corona virus; a future where the voices crying out against injustice continue to effect real and impactful change for the better, and a future where the pain of the past has begun to heal. My hope is based upon nothing less than God’s blessing and promise—both have rarely acquiesced to the world’s status quo. Rather, God surprises us, using ordinary people and flawed human organizations to overturn oppressive systems of power. It is just uncanny that a God sent a savior to us in the form of a vulnerable baby born into a very complicated circumstance. Go figure, and Amen. I am so excited for the future of our church and its role in God’s ongoing transformation of contemporary life and community.

In Christ,

Pastor Ann

On the verso page, you will find a reflection on the value of counting blessings, followed by a listing of important information and links for joining Sunday bible study with Sam Bonner, Sunday worship service, and other events during the week including Pastor Ann's chats and Pastor Paul's faith conversation.

Thank you.

Ann

**Counting Blessings**

Sometimes in the midst of particularly difficult times, it is an astounding thing to actually count your blessings.

Some years ago, Barbara Flythe, who was then very active in the New Brunswick Presbytery, told me about her deepened faith. She attributed it to this: every night, during her evening prayer she lifted up at least two things for which she was grateful to God. A variation of this spiritual practice is done by another good friend of mine-- many of you know her-- Jane Politi—on a more involved level using notions of “disconsolation” and “consolation”. And these days’ church member Margie Burtis reminds our “Tuesday chat” group that her habit of ‘counting my blessings’ has been the very thing which helped her through the many rough patches she has navigated in over 100 years of living. Finally, there is a favorite poet of mine, Jane Kenyon, whose poem “Otherwise” is a kind of dark-night-of-the-soul tally of blessings. (Yes, Jane Kenyon’s line *God does not leave us comfortless* from her poem titled “Let Evening Come” is a profound understatement of faith within its context.)

But let’s be real: most times what is front and center is our suffering; laments just tumble out like rolled up socks escaping over the top of a too full drawer. (Pastor Paul, who bravely and often asks “Ann, how are you feeling today?” would agree!) So, have I learned from years of reading psalms aloud to persons undergoing difficult times? Just that the psalms often meet you where you are, and then move you to an unexpected clearing where blessings can be discovered and yes, counted. For me, to read or hear aloud a psalm is to undergo a process helping me to remember: God is with me, no matter what. (This resonates with the message of Freddie Sanchez’ sermons these past two Sundays.)

So it happened recently that verse 4 from psalm 104 demanded I attend to its place of discovery for me: *(The Lord) who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy….*And my mind and heart were flooded with blessings to count: cards from all of you containing well-wishes, prayers, letters of encouragement setting out profound recounting of sufferings overcome, yeasty challah bread baked every Friday for me by a good neighbor, “healthy food” cookbooks assembled by mothers of my kid’s best friends, meals brought to our house. And not only these, but even more astounding blessings in this time of covid19: a baby dove hatched from an egg on which a mother dove sat for weeks, spring flowers tumbling out planters having survived the winter, new red-skinned potatoes having been covered by the earth, warm and full of nutrition. All blessings of God’s creation, seeming oblivious to a pandemic.

And yet still more blessings: spent relationships gracefully ended, new relationships begun, existing relationships deepened, damaged relationships repaired. Two churches now one, talk about relationships! New life in God and in community.

What blessings can you count this day?

**Sunday Worship Service - July 26 - 8th Sunday after Pentecost**

10:00 worship online      Pastors Covenanting Service

Re. Ann Schoonover Preaching

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39;

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/910100569>

Or if calling in by phone, dial +1 929 436 2866 and when/if prompted enter meeting ID 910 100 569

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**Sunday Morning Bible Study - 9:00 AM Led by Sam Bonner**

<https://zoom.us/j/564813133?pwd=WXV3dk5zYlkvUGJDUUEwZEc2R3REdz09>

**By phone**: dial 1-646-558-8656 and enter when asked the meeting ID 564-813-133

**Ann Schoonover's Tuesday morning chat at 10:00 am via Zoom Meeting**

Join by clicking on the link below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81010467123?pwd=UDNqWG5pN0t3MFJUeDN5SFcvQnpzdz09>

**Or** if you have the Zoom app, simply enter

Meeting ID: 810 1046 7123

Passcode: 271785

**Or** call in by phone by dialing and providing meeting ID and Passcode as prompted:

+1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 810 1046 7123

Passcode: 271785

**Ann Schoonover’s Thursday evening chat at 7:00 pm via Zoom Meeting**

Join by clicking the link below

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/960150849?pwd=bTdYTVV3S1M0R2xmenZSWlc5MnhMUT09>

**Or** if you have the Zoom app, simply enter

Meeting ID: 960 150 849

Passcode: 079496

**Or** call in by phone by dialing and providing meeting ID and passcode as prompted:

+1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

**Wednesday Evening Faith Conversations with Pastor Paul 6:30pm-7:30pm**

Check in with other folk, then view or listen to a short video and explore how our times have affected how we understand God, and Christ’s command to love one another. Join by Zoom **Link**: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/251970464>

**By phone:** dial 1-929-205-6099 or 1-301-715-8592 enter Meeting ID: 251-970-464