



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2019

JEREMIAH TIME

By Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Hughes

Note: The following is a condensed version of the meditation offered by Rev. Hughes at his installation as Presbytery Moderator at First Church on May 21. The preaching text was Jeremiah 6:13-19 and 29:4-7, 11, with this key passage: "[The prophets and priests] dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."

Every now and then, in my endless stream of emails, some message will stand out and stick. That's exactly what happened a couple of years ago with one of the church-related news services I subscribe to, which this particular day carried an article with a headline that read: "The Church Isn't Dying; It's Failing. There's a Difference."

We've all become accustomed to the idea, and the reality, of an institutional church in decline. And as often as not it is described as a "dying" church. But this article I'm talking about said that's a cop-out. Dying is a natural occurrence – everything that lives, dies. But perhaps the decline we've all witnessed, and

often railed against, is not part of the nature of things. Maybe this downward trajectory is artificial, something brought about not by "cyclical rhythms of the cosmos," but by, among other things, incompetence, apathy, lack of vision. Unlike natural cycles, those are all controllable, correctable things -- correctable by us.

What got me thinking about the difference between dying and failing was the raucous, sometimes offensive prophecies of Jeremiah. Any decent commentary on the book of Jeremiah will tell you it was composed after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Disarray is too weak a word to describe the plight of Judah at that time. Teetering on the brink of extinction might not be overstating it. And into this chaos strode fiery Jeremiah, bringing an unwelcome word that much of this carnage was well deserved. But more than that, Jeremiah said none of the former things was coming back, at least not in the shape and style the Israelites had enjoyed and treasured for 400 years.

There's a glaring question laced through much of what Jeremiah has to say, addressed to the community – do you have the will to revive?

Many of the responses from the afflicted community to Jeremiah's core question took three forms – denial, nostalgia, and doom. The denial faction asserted the ancient institutions would survive the waves of change sweeping over the nation pretty much intact, and accused those who said otherwise of lacking faith and being all too ready to compromise ages-old convictions.

The nostalgia grouping claimed all that was necessary was to return things to the way they used to be, some fondly remembered golden age of worship and fellowship.

Then, of course, there were the doomsayers – there are always doomsayers! Their message was grim and blunt – there is no future; all is lost; we have been abandoned to the whirlwind by heaven above.

Jeremiah rejected these

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Homecoming

A FIRST CHURCH FAMILY REUNION

By Elder Maria Oakley

Homecoming Sunday will be September 8. Please encourage your far-flung family and church friends (old and new) to join us on this special day. The goal of this day is touch base with those who were members or were connected to members. It is a **FIRST CHURCH FAMILY REUNION**. It is NOT a day to recruit new members or ask for funding.

We will have our traditional barbeque that day. We will have a "blast from the past" display with pictures of members young and old, new and long-term members, and old building photos. Did you know the church had a communion rail and kneelers? Have you seen Nancy Barry with a wide brimmed summer hat, Greg Borland dressed as a king or Liz Kamke with leaves growing out of her head?

Aren't you curious to know what's happened to some of the folks who moved on from the church? Wouldn't it be great to see the young adults our Sunday School students are now? Wouldn't you like to meet his/her family and hear of her/his lives? Invite those you are wondering about to come home, just for the day. Invite them to join us for worship and the barbeque.

The office will be sending out Save the Date postcards to out of touch members. We will also be sending cards to the parents of adult children who previously attended church here. Parents, please send them on. Whether a person attends or not, it is a way for her/him to know that we are still thinking of him/her. Know someone who should get a card? Let us know the name and address and we will get it in the mail.

See you in September.

SUNDAY

Sept. 8

11:00 AM



“We will have a ‘blast from the past’ display with pictures of members young and old, new and long-term members, and old building photos.”

Book Group

“ALL BUT MY LIFE: A MEMOIR”
BY GERDA WEISSMANN KLEIN

“...the unforgettable story of a girl's six-year ordeal as a victim of Nazi cruelty. From her comfortable home in Poland to her miraculous survival and her liberation by American troops—including the man who was to become her husband...Gerda takes the reader on a terrifying journey.”

Location: Joyce Young's home
Please bring a dish to share.

THURSDAY

June 27

6:00 PM



Summer Worship

Remember, church services start at 10:00 beginning with services on **June 30**. Come and hear Mark Armesto preach.

Join us for Communion and a Hymn Sing on **July 7**.



Tower Construction

WORK TO BEGIN IN JULY

By Dr. David Bond

After a year of engineering and architectural studies we finally have a bid for the tower reconstruction! Pending final approval by New York State, Highland Masonry & Restoration will begin work in July. Most of the work will be done from a very large lift and I don't expect any long-term restrictions to the main entrance. I will be providing updates as the work progresses.

November 15, 2019 is the target date for completion of this phase. Once that is done, I will be applying for another state grant to complete the remainder of the work. Once the entire project is completed, we hope to be able to remove the steel cable that has been supporting the tower for fifteen years.

“Most of the work will be done from a very large lift...”

Garden Walk

25TH ANNIVERSARY!

The chapel and sanctuary will be open to the public for tours during the Garden Walk on Saturday, July 27 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM and Sunday, July 28 after worship until 4:00 PM. Volunteers are needed to assist with tours. A script will be provided. Please sign up in the Narthex or by contacting the Church Office at 884-7250. Thank you!

SATURDAY, JULY 27

SUNDAY, JULY 28

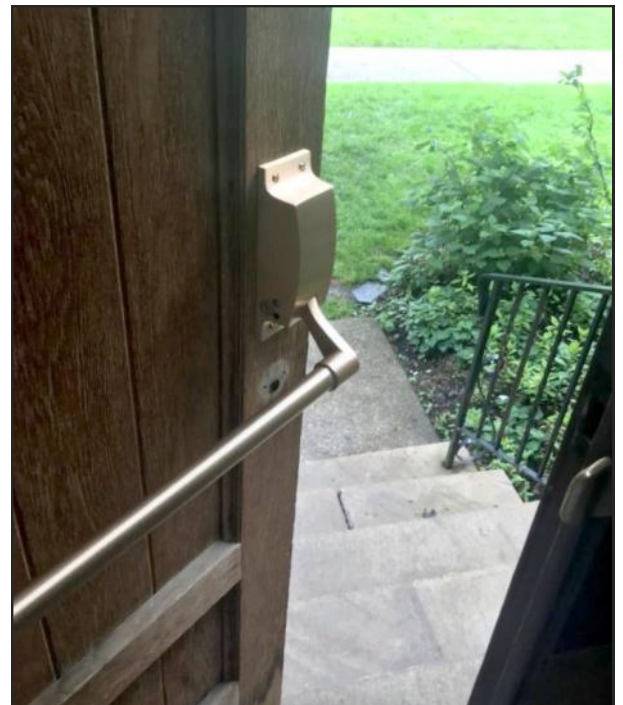


Summer Fun

The Membership Committee recommends seeing the **Tall Ships** sailing into Buffalo Harbor July 4-7. For details, visit portofcallbuffalo.org.

Tour season is in full swing for our friends at **Explore Buffalo**. Buy an Explorer Pass and enjoy sightseeing by kayaking, climb to the top of a grain elevator, sail on a Prohibition Cruise, and much more! Visit explorebuffalo.org to book a tour.

The Serendipity Thrift Shoppe in the church basement is offering a 50% off sale! Browse for neat finds, artwork, housewares and collectibles.



A crash bar has been installed on the chapel door.

Simple change, big improvement!

American Guild of Organists Convention

PERFORMANCE TAKING PLACE AT FIRST CHURCH

World-renown and GRAMMY-award-winning organist Nathan Laube headlines a truly exciting concert series to kick-off the American Guild of Organists' Northeast Regional Convention, to be held in Buffalo July 1st through the 5th. This is your chance to see and hear Buffalo's most magnificent and powerful pipe organs brought to life by some of the globe's most gifted and accomplished organists, brought together for one amazing week to celebrate through music and song the 100th anniversary of the Buffalo Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity where you can enjoy a concert given by these famous and talented organists who have been invited to perform at many of our landmark churches and the University at Buffalo.

If you have always wanted to see, hear and literally feel these mighty organs played by the masters, this your chance! If you are an organ music aficionado, you simply can't let this opportunity go by. Individual Tickets are now available for these exciting concerts! To purchase tickets go to <https://www.buffalo2019.org/concert-tickets>.

“This is your chance to see and hear Buffalo’s most magnificent and powerful pipe organs brought to life by some of the globe’s most gifted and accomplished organists...”

July 1, 8:00 PM, Nathan Laube at St. Joseph Cathedral

July 2, 1:00 PM, Michael Hey at Westminster Presbyterian

July 2, 2:30 PM, AGO/Quimby Young Organist Competition Winner at First Presbyterian Church

July 2, 7:00 PM, Theater Organist Richard Hills at Shea's Performing Arts Center

July 3, 11:15 AM, Katelyn Emerson at Lippes Concert Hall at the University at Buffalo



July 3, 6:30 PM, Chelsea Chen at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

July 4, 10:30 AM, Judy Congdon at Trinity Episcopal Church

July 4, 1:30 PM, Abigail Rockwood and Members of the Buffalo Chamber Players at St. Paul's Cathedral

July 4, 7:00 PM, David Higgs at Westminster Presbyterian Church

National Night Out

COMMUNITY PICNIC

Join us for a multiple block/neighborhood wide National Night Out Picnic. The FREE event encompasses block groups from throughout Allentown. City and community representatives along with law and safety enforcement officials will be on hand to introduce themselves and chat about our neighborhood.

FREE grilled hot dogs and hamburgers, salads, chips, desserts, and beverages will be set up on the lawn at Symphony Circle in front of Kleinhans Music Hall.

Families, friends, business owners and neighbors are all encouraged to attend to show solidarity among neighbors to keep a watch out for one another and each other's property.

TUESDAY
AUGUST 6
6:00 PM



Friends of Night People

HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Join us on the fifth Wednesday of the month in July to serve meals to the hungry at Friends of Night People (corner of Wadsworth and Hudson). Wear First Church gear if you have it!

In May 235 meals were served the night First Church volunteered— a record we were told.

WEDNESDAY
JULY 31
4:30 PM



International Peacemaker Visit in the Works

The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program makes it possible for leaders from partner denominations and organizations around the world to visit the churches each year to interpret issues of peace and justice. First Church, with the enthusiastic endorsement of the Session and Presbytery of WNY, has applied to host 1 of 14 International Peacemakers the weekend of World Communion Sunday. If the application is granted, a Peacemaker from Myanmar, Zimbabwe or South Korea will visit, and a weekend of events will take place throughout the Presbytery. Look for more information in the Fall newsletter.

Brain Museum Tour Postponed

The event originally scheduled for June 23 after worship has been postponed to due a scheduling change at the museum. It will be rescheduled for the fall. Contact Liz Kamke at eksk476@gmail.com with any questions.

Picture Page

"That Gateway Band" performing for Buffalo PorchFest May 18

Chickens in the church's community garden on St. Johns Pl

Dinner at the May 21 Presbytery annual meeting.

Staff member Rama and some of his family stopped by church on their way to celebrate Eid on June 4.

Connie and Lucas at their wedding shower on June 9.



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messages. But his prescription was not simple-minded nor was it to be easily achieved. But I do think there are several elements of this ancient text that resonate particularly strongly for us. Unlike post-exile Judah and Israel, our nation is not materially devastated. For all the divisions in our society, we are not set completely adrift. And our churches themselves are not disassembled so that not one stone stands upon another.

Still, within the faith, we have reason for worry, even alarm. Our denomination is half the size it was when the southern and northern wings of Presbyterianism merged in 1983. The contraction of members and churches in our own Presbytery continues on a descending slope. Resources committed to the oversight and connectional ministries of the Presbytery have been whittled away.

And yet Jeremiah would whisper to us, or more likely bellow at us, that we should not fall into any of the camps so familiar to him – those of denial, nostalgia, or doom. Rather, he would argue that the beginnings of revival are found in an unblinking assessment of who and what we are, a critique that spares nothing – not tradition or structures, not leadership, not our member communities of faith. And that would be followed in short order by remedies, spiritual, material, and personal. Some of which might be – probably would be – wrenching and marked

by previously unseen levels of commitment and sacrifice. All of it bound together, and rooted in, what Jeremiah constantly calls for – a refreshed and renewed “right relationship” with God.

This is what I meant by titling this message, “Jeremiah Time.” The time is ripe for us -- to use Jeremiah’s language -- to stop dressing “the wound of our people as though it were not serious...”; we should refrain from proclaiming “peace, peace,” when there is no peace.’ Instead, completing Jeremiah’s thought, we should “stand at the crossroads and look...ask where the good way is, and walk in it.” Doing that while relying on the power and promise of God for “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

So the binary, black-and-white choice I opened with – we’re either dying or failing – probably is a false one. Part of what we are experiencing may well be a natural process, the hand of God working through “a seed that dies,” as Jesus said, to create new life. But that does not let us off the hook for those things that are controllable, and correctable – the “failing” part of the equation. This is the moment of the annual meeting of our Presbytery. It also could be “Jeremiah Time,” if we choose to make it so. Amen.

News in the Family

Our deepest sympathies are with the family of José Gomez who died on June 11. His memorial service will be held at First Church on Saturday, June 22 at 11:00 AM.



Congratulations to Joyce Young for receiving the 2019 Volunteer of the Year Award from Compeer for her 19 years of work in the older adult program for mentally challenged individuals.



With sadness we share that long-time member John Burgess passed away on May 10 at the age of 94. A celebration of his life took place on June 1.



See Elder Lucas Lloyd on stage this summer in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” at Shakespeare in Delaware running July 25-August 18. Lucas will play the role of “Lord Longaville.”



Our condolences are extended Cleo Alexander as she mourns the recent death of her sister, Ruby Siggers. Cleo and Ruby’s families are in our prayers.

FIRST CHURCH STAFF

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Parish Associate for Community Outreach

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The Reverend Jack Smiley, *Pastor Emeritus*

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Cory Connell, *Maintenance Coordinator*

Church Office, extension 200

SUMMER SUNDAY SCHEDULE

(beginning June 30)

10:00 AM Worship in the Chapel
10:15 AM Children's Sunday school
11:00 AM Fellowship time

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday

9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Staff meetings are held each

Wednesday from 10:00 to 11:30 AM

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OFFICERS

SESSION AND TRUSTEES BY CLASS AND TERM

Class of 2019

Mark Armesto (1)

Don Houck (1)

Liz Kamke (1)

Maria Oakley (2)

Class of 2020

Lucas Lloyd (2)

Janet Hill (1) *Clerk*

Henry Porter (2)

Sue Snyder (2)

Class of 2021

John Darby (2)

Jean Hess (1)

Tina Osei (1)

BOARD OF DEACONS BY CLASS AND TERM

Class of 2019

Gifty Koramoah (2)

June McGrath (1)

Denis Wettlaufer (1)

Class of 2020

India Asplundh (1)

Barry Farmer (1)

Madeline Mason-Brandon (2)

Suzanne Pilon (1)

Lou Ann Luther Riegle (2)

Class of 2021

Mary Field (2)

Jim McKeel (1)

Sheila Miller (2)

Shannon Rogers (1)

OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

Michael Henry, President

Rebecca Whipple, Vice President

Mark Armesto, Treasurer

Janet Hill, Secretary



The mission of historic First Church is to bring diverse people of metropolitan Buffalo together to follow Jesus Christ through worshiping God, fostering spiritual growth and serving the community.