

# The Hilltops

Monthly Newsletter | September 2018

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serving Pepperell, Townsend, and the surrounding communities.

Editors - Brenda Bennett & Lynne Connors



**New Beginnings**

United Methodist Church

***We are followers of Jesus, who tend God's garden, serving the mind, body and spirit of all God's children.***

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Brenda Bennett 802-318-7563  
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Linda Jones 978-877-1923

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## Faith

God is always faithful. God keeps his covenant with us, but our faith is not always firm. How do I know this? Two examples come easily to mind. One is that the Hebrews remain. All the ancient cultures and empires that were once great are now gone, but the Jews remain. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires are all dust, but the chosen people remain. God's covenant remains. The other example is more personal. I know that God is faithful because when I do his will, I thrive, and when I turn from his will, I suffer.

I hate Ferris Wheels. I love roller coasters, and Tilt-a-Whirls. I have taken passage on the Pirate Ship and the Kamikaze. I have cheerfully ridden the Log flume, Fish Pipe and Water Slide. I bravely rode the Tumble Bug, Hydro, and Octopus, I have willingly strapped myself into the Wipe Out, Spin Out, Power Surge, Gravitron, Fireball and Fun slide, but I am not going on another Ferris Wheel. UH-UH, no way. I hate Ferris Wheels, but it's not because I don't have faith in them.

Faith, along with Love and Forgiveness, are among the most fundamental commands of Christianity. In one sense, faith refers to the way we understand and articulate the human relationship to the divine. We speak about the Christian faith, or the Jewish Faith, or The Buddhist faith or the Islamic faith, or the Hindu faith, or the atheistic faith.

For many years, I took the word faith for granted. I assumed it meant that if you had faith



you believed without analysis or proof, you simply: "took it on faith." This is the common understanding of faith, and it is very much alive in the world. This is what the world thinks of faith:

- Faith means not wanting to know what is true. Nietzsche.
- Faith is believing something you know ain't true." Twain.
- Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile. Kurt Vonnegut.
- The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason. Benjamin Franklin.

I have a great deal of respect for all those men, but about faith, they appear to be ignorant; they are mistaken, they are wrong...that is, they are wrong if they are referring to faith as it is understood in the bible.

The word faith occurs in 458 verses-Old and New Testament. I read every one of those verses. Not one of them assumes that faith is blind; on the contrary, in the bible, those who have faith have their eyes wide open, and are doing something. What do the biblical authors mean when they use the word faith? They mean: My words and my actions are alike. You can count on me. I keep my promise.

The author of Genesis uses the word faith ten times. In six of those occurrences he uses the same construction: "he walked faithfully." When the bible speaks of Noah walking faithfully, it means that he did what was asked, he built the ark. There is no question that, in Genesis, Noah did what he was told. This is how faith is used in the Old Testament. If one is faithful, one does what he says he will do, accomplishes what is asked, and acts in accordance to the will of God. Every single time the word faith occurs in the Old Testament, it has a very concrete and practical application. When the biblical authors use the word faith, they are talking about following through or not following through. The person of faith is trustworthy because he does what is asked or what he says she will do. In one of the most important moments in the Star Wars trilogy, Luke is training to be a Jedi. He is trying

to lift his spaceship with "the force." He is failing. His mentor, Yoda is exhorting him. Luke says: I'm trying." Yoda replies: "do or do not, there is no try." The faithful do.

I used to hate roller coasters, but one day, I decided to give up and trust. I let faith rule my mind and now I love them. But I am stubborn. I refuse to give up my fear of Ferris wheels. I refuse to let reason rule and have faith. What have you refused to give up?

In one of my favorite gospel passages, known as "the faith of the centurion," Jesus commends a Roman officer, a commander of men, not the sort of man given to flights of fancy. He has asked Jesus to heal his servant. The centurion has heard of Jesus, heard of his healing others and asks Jesus to help. Jesus says that he will come to the house and see the man. The centurion replies that he knows that if Jesus only says the word, his servant will be healed. Jesus replies (Mathew 8:10) "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." Now you might say that the centurion had "blind faith" but then you would be wrong. The centurion heard of Jesus and what he was doing. He had evidence for his trust. Unlike others, he had faith.

One of the most remarkable things about the gospel accounts is that, despite constant evidence, the disciples seem to always need more proof. "Oh ye of little faith." Is a phrase Jesus uses often, scolding those near to him; and to those he heals he often says: "your faith has healed you." The disciples lose faith despite evidence. The healed have faith because they saw and believed. People can and do argue over whether the miracles happened, but to argue the construction of the passages is nonsensical. Jesus is not asking his followers to have faith without evidence, on the contrary, he is saying "believe and act on what you have seen."

As you know, the bulk of the New Testament is made up of the letters. They were written after the first hand evidence had gone. The physical Jesus had left the earth. When faith is used in the letters, it refers in some way to having faith in the truth of Jesus and what he promised. When the letter writers use the word faith, they are using in it one sense to mean Christianity, as in Ephesians 4:13 where Paul



exhorts: "Until we reach unity in **the faith**, and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Or 1st Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from **the faith** and pierced themselves with many griefs." When faith is not used as a synonym for Christianity, Paul and the other letter writers use faith to describe what people are or are not doing, specifically whether or not they are doing what Christ asked. What did Christ ask? What do we do to follow him? It's very clear. If we are faithful, we are loving God and loving our neighbor. To do these things is to have faith in Christ.

The letter to the Hebrews contains the only definition of the word faith in the bible (Hebrews 11:1): "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith contains substance and evidence, and yet it also contains things hoped for and things not seen. Is this a paradox? I submit that it is not. I have faith in all sorts of things I cannot see: tomorrow's sunrise, subatomic particles, daffodils rising after winter, my mom. I don't see these things but I have much evidence that they do or will exist.

I hate Ferris Wheels, but not because I don't have faith in them. I have faith in the substance of mechanical engineering; I have faith in the reality of electrical engineering. I know by the evidence that thousands of people have safely returned from their Ferris Wheel journey. But when I am on that wheel and it begins to roll upwards, I begin to lose my faith; emotion and imagination overwhelm my faith. Even though there is no substance or evidence, no rational reason, as that wheel tops the sky, I KNOW that the bar that holds me in is going to let go, even though I have checked it many times. My mind is full of imaginings of what might be, my emotions take over, and I fear. So I don't ride Ferris Wheels, because I lose reason; emotion and imagination steal my faith.

As for me, what do I know of faith? This is what I know. 100% of the time I have kept faith with what Jesus asks of me, I see better days and I do better things. 100% of the time I let

imagination and fear control me I suffer. 100%. That, for me, is good evidence. As for substance, this is what I have witnessed. I have seen cruel and brutal men become kind and noble. I have seen the hateful become loving; I have seen selfishness give way to compassion, and the transformation of broken lives into whole and useful ones. I have seen the sick in spirit become well, and I have seen this not once but many, many times, all by walking in faithful obedience to what Christ asks us to do.

Now I know most of you have not strayed so far from the path of faith as those I just spoke of. Perhaps you have only paused along the way. Perhaps you are only a few steps from the path. Perhaps you are wondering if you would like to go at all, but if you look to your heart, whether you are one step away or one thousand, I think you will find that there is something you have not been faithful in. There is some place where fear and imagination has stolen your faith, and I invite you to turn, get back on the path, put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the waters and walk with God.

*Rev. Chris Jones*

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What was the first bird that Noah let go from the Ark?

(August: Why didn't any of the kingdoms surrounding Judah attempt to make war against King Jehoshaphat? (2 Chronicles 17:10) Answer: They feared the Lord)

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*"Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth; help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart."*

~ Martin Luther ~

*"Prayer is where the action is."*

~ John Wesley ~

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Ken & Susan Gerken, Sep 9<sup>th</sup>



Gale Durno, Sep 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 Lynne Connors, Sep 5<sup>th</sup>  
 Alberta Dearborn, Sep 6<sup>th</sup>  
 Denise Batchelder, Sep 17<sup>th</sup>  
 Heidi Bouchard, Sep 20<sup>th</sup>



Debbie Alger; Lily Andreasen; Joan Arsenault (shoulder replacement); Kathryn Bruen (Louise's sister, stroke); Judy Bureau; Patrick and Collette Burns; Betty Conley; Ralph Cusano (cancer); David Dearborn; Mary Ann DiStefano (The Poehler's dear friend, ovarian cancer); Gale Durno; Philip Durno (cancer); Keith Edmonds (cancer & heart problems); Emma Ermel; Marcus Ermel; Delaney Fallon; Bill and Gail Felton (homebound); Janee Freeman; Sandy Freeman; Donna Gallagher (brain injury); Andrew Garbino; Shirley Gibson & family; Steven (Ann Goebel's brother, cancer); Merle Grant; Sally Greig (Krissy's friend); Jimmy Harnish (cancer); Kathy Harris; Lucky & Penny Howie; Michele Kelley; Jean Krikorian; Dondi LaRue; Tommy Maciorowski; Chloe Miner; Herman Miner (cancer); Dick & Judie Moore; Bob & Terry Newton; Lance Osborne; Debby Parker; Wallace Powers (cancer); Sally

Provencher (cancer); Terry Quinn; Bradley Raymond (seizures); Leslie Rice; Gloria Roddy (multiple myeloma); Marcia Scofield; Peter Sheldon; Rita Signoretti (Krissy's mom); Richard Simmons; Al St. Croix (cancer); Louise Thorpe; Patty Thorpe (MS and graves disease); Jimmy Tompkinson; Christine & Roy Walker; Don Waye (cancer); Rev. Joan-Anne Westfall; Emma Whitman; Sheila Wick; Nevaeh Wilder (cancer); Edward (Margie Wilson's brother, cancer); Robert Withee; Bonnie Wozniak; the victims of natural disasters all over the world; all those unemployed.



On Wednesday, Sep. 12<sup>th</sup> from 4 -6 pm our monthly Community Supper returns! On the menu is Shepherd's Pie, salad, rolls, desserts, and beverages. We need some servers and help setting up and cleaning up too. Please check the signup sheets for any help you can give. Hope you will join us for a tasty dinner and enjoy the community that will be there.

Our August Community Supper was replaced with an Ice Cream Sundae Night, Our "supper crew" was happy not to be cooking on a hot summer night! We purchased vanilla ice cream from the Ice Cream Factory here in town (thank you, it was delicious), and brought in many varied toppings, including additions of crushed Oreo cookies, gummy bears, M & M's, sprinkles, and more! We had a good amount of ice cream left, so we'll offer more sundaes at our upcoming September Supper, so try to get there early before we run out! Thanks to everyone who helped out!

### **CHURCH FAMILY LOSS**

We grieve the loss of Ron Sinclair who passed away recently. Ron was very active in our church and will be missed greatly. His contributions were many including Men's Breakfast Bible Study, Community Suppers, the



Church gift shop -The Cozy Corner, Finance, Band Concerts, and more. His friendship will be missed, along with his "humor", big smile, and willingness to help the church wherever it was needed. May he rest in Peace.

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## ***Mother Peckett (part 2)***

In my last article I reported on how unique a person Mother Margaret Appleton Peckett was for her time. This article touches on some of the work she did to support and educate men into the role of Itinerant Ministers. The population in the United States was spread out in farmland and not many church buildings were built yet. Mother Peckett felt it was her calling to provide training and her home became a small seminary.

*"Her home became a small seminary where she trained a group of young men as pioneer Methodist preachers. These included Martin Ruter, Laban Clark and others whose influence was felt throughout the northeast and as far away as frontier Texas."*

Martin Ruter was a pastor in Boston and Philadelphia, before moving to the Midwest and then to Texas. In his lifetime, he was the president of Alleghany College in Pennsylvania and founded Ruterville College (now Southwestern University) in Texas. He was also the founder of Augusta College in Kentucky, which although no longer in existence, was the first of what has become a world-wide network of Methodist colleges. As a Texas circuit preacher he logged over 2200 miles in a single year.

Laban Clark was an outstanding Methodist leader and one of the principal founders of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. The level of influence of these and other early Methodists was an outgrowth of the training they received in Mother Peckett's Bradford home.

According to Troy Conference historian, Ouida Schwartz, the Peckett's encouraged the family of John Langdon of Vershire to organize a Methodist group in 1791. Mother Peckett assisted in building a church in Vershire and a subsequent one at Corinth Corners. These are among the earliest Methodist churches in Vermont.

Margaret Peckett died in the spring of 1802 strong in faith, giving glory to God. It was written of her:

*"This venerable lady...had an important instrumentality in the introduction of Methodism into Vermont." She certainly deserves the title given to her by her denomination, "Mother of the Troy Conference."*

## ***Brenda Bennett***

Note: Text that is enclosed in "" are taken from an article of Larry Coffin who is the Curator and past President of the Bradley Historical Society.

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## ***Upcoming Indoor Yard Sale***

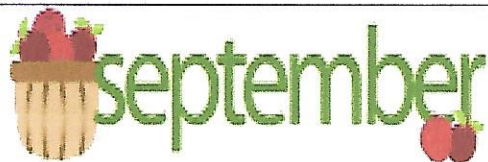
Our Indoor Yard Sale will be held at the Pepperell Church in mid-October. Exact date will be coming soon! Start packing up those items you no longer need and drop them off at the church now.

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## ***Love Your Neighbor Rally***

Save the date, October 14<sup>th</sup>. The plan for that day is to present a speaker series. Invited speakers will tell their story and how they fit into our community. Hopefully empathy and connections will be created. This day is in the planning stages, speakers may include a LGBTQ speaker, someone to speak on the opioid crisis, and one who can address the issues of poverty and hunger in our community. Complete information will be posted in the church and on our website as plans are solidified. [www.newbeginningsumcma.org](http://www.newbeginningsumcma.org)

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2 9:30am Hymn Sing on Townsend Common	3 10am-12pm Wesley Group at Pepperell Church	4	5 12:30pm Women's Bible Study at Elaine Aho's	6	7	8
9 9:00am Simple / Casual Service 10:00am Coffee & Fellowship; 10:30am Traditional Worship	10 10am-12pm Wesley Group at Pepperell Church	11	12 4:00-6:00pm Community Supper	13	14	15
16 9:00am Simple / Casual Service 10:00am Coffee & Fellowship; 10:30am Traditional Worship	17 10am-12pm Wesley Group at Pepperell Church	18	19 12:30pm Women's Bible Study at Elaine Aho's	20	21	22
23 9:00am Simple / Casual Service 10:00am Coffee & Fellowship; 10:30am Traditional Worship	24 10am-12pm Wesley Group at Pepperell Church	25	26 12:30pm Women's Bible Study at Elaine Aho's	27	28	29
30 9:00am Simple / Casual Service 10:00am Coffee & Fellowship; 10:30am Traditional Worship						



**Worship Times:**  
9:00am Casual Service  
10:30am Traditional

**Meetings and Social Events:**  
11:30am Church Council (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday)  
11:30am Positive Pot Luck (Last Sunday)

**To learn more, visit**  
[www.newbeginningsumcma.org](http://www.newbeginningsumcma.org)

