

Good Friday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 28th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending January 10, 2020.

-----The Critical-----

Announcements

1) Pastors / Elders / Appointees Conference Report Forms were e-mailed out this past Tuesday. Every person/deacon/elder under appointment should fill out this brief form and return it to me by January 31, 2020. Your information helps the Ministerial Appointments Committee determine appointments for the following conference year. Many thanks for your timely attention to this. Those report forms are on the conference website under “Resources / Pastor and Elder Resources” as well.

2) Compensation Change Forms If you are a pastor and your church is paying into the denominational retirement/pension on your behalf, and if your compensation has changed for 2020, be sure to complete the change form...found on the conference website, resources page, pastors’ resources...or...right here:

<https://hr.fmcusa.org/pension-change-of-status-form/>

3) Denominational Church Report Forms will be out in a few weeks. Please watch for these, coming from the World Ministry Center. These are the statistical reports for the general church.

4) Pass Through Funds Your church’s financial assessment/fair share amount is based on your church’s income from “two” years ago – 2020 assessment amounts are based on your church income from 2018, for example. That income number is the result of a calculation which may involve pass through funds – which need to be approved by the superintendent by the end of January. If you’d like to submit pass through funds for approval, please send your request to me by January 31. That is my deadline for submission to the World Ministry Center.

Church of the Week: Living Stones FMC in Harriman Tennessee – Randy Scarborough is assistant pastor there. Keep Living Stones in your prayers, especially that a full time pastor can be appointed soon. They have an interim that they’d love to move to full time.

Conference Calendar:

January 23-24	Daryl in Nashville area for meetings
February 2-4:	Area Bishop and Superintendents (ABS) meeting in Nashville (Daryl attends these under duress – ha)
February 7:	FM History and Polity class begins
February __:	Strategy Day
March 20:	District Leaders – Wilmore, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
March 20:	BOA – Wilmore, 6:00 – 10:00 p.m.
March 21:	MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00 a.m. - noon
March 31-April 2:	Global Overseers Team (GOT) - Indianapolis
April 26-28:	ABS - Tampa
May 29-30:	New South Annual Conference, Oakdale Christian Academy
June 7-9:	ABS - Indianapolis
June 15-20:	NSC Teen Camp
June 11-14:	NSC Family Camp
June 22-26:	NSC Kids’ Camp
August 9-11:	ABS – Baltimore
August 25-28:	Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis
September 23-25:	New Room Conference, Nashville, TN

And now...

-----The Important-----

Resources, Articles and Attachments

1) New Resources Online at FMCNewsouth.org: Several new links have been posted to useful and informative websites, including:

The John and Charles Wesley Center – which exists to provide a contemporary witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ out of the Wesleyan tradition that articulates, defends, and promotes Christian orthodox faith and its Scriptural foundation and to create resources to strengthen the discipleship, faith, and ministries of 21st century Christians. <https://jcwcenter.org/>

First Things – an evangelical Catholic theological journal that I find challenging and helpful. <https://www.firstthings.com/>

The Francis Asbury Society - FAS exists to proclaim and resource the message of biblical holiness as the central priority in all Christian activity, for every individual and every church, in every situation. <http://www.francisasburysociety.com/>

Seedbed Publishing – Seedbed is the publishing and resourcing arm of Asbury Seminary and exists to gather, connect, and resource the people of God to sow for a great awakening by producing Bible studies, books, small-group studies, training courses, videos, podcasts, conferences, and articles through print, digital, electronic, online, offline, web-based applications, social media, and good old-fashioned word of mouth messaging. <https://www.seedbed.com/>

Institute for Faith and Freedom – This is a “think tank” that integrates faith and freedom in applications for today. <https://www.faithandfreedom.com/>

2) You’ll Find the new “Mere Musings” by our own David Schreiner attached, entitled, ““In What Have You Put Your Faith?”

3) Church Reports about the Christmas Season: Murphy - “Although we have sometimes had a Christmas dinner for the community, this year with the week of Christmas being the time when our family could be together in Kentucky, we decided not to do it. What a blessing when others in our church family wanted to go ahead anyway, pulled together and made a wonderful meal for the community joining in fellowship with each other and a number of those from the area who otherwise would have been alone and/or not had much of a meal.”

Wilmore – We had a record 800+ in three Christmas Eve services and great times of worship and, actually, rest over the season. Also, after entering December with a World Mission giving deficit, by the end of the month, we wound up exceeded our church mission giving goal by \$34,000.00 – we’re very grateful to God.

Job Openings

At this point, we have a pastor or interim pastor in every NSC church, although those interim situations are, well, interim.

Remaining January Birthdays (*that we know of)

Don Stevens – January 14 – Elder, retired

Kevin Hale – January 17 – Conference Trustee

Shivraj Mahendra – January 19 – Elder, student

Carol Matthews – January 21 – Conference Auditor

Bob Barnard – January 25 – Elder, Chaplain, Thomson Hood Veteran's Center

Ron Johns – January 27 – Elder, retired

Ralph Kester – January 27, Lay Delegate, Wilmore

*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at

newsouthconference@gmail.com

This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: This Sunday I continue looking at Christmas from the “Backside;” interpreting the Christmas event post-holiday. My text is Luke 2:25-35 and the words of Simeon.

On Sunday night, I will bring the occasional, “While We’re At It” message, which is a series of rather random thoughts on faith and culture, inspired though the holiday season and the events of our day.

Quote: “Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.” –Francis Chan

Joke: *The Sunday School teacher began the week’s lesson with a recap of the previous week’s topic by saying, “We have been learning about how powerful the kings and queens were in Biblical times. But there is a higher power. Who can tell me what it is?”*

Six-year-old Peter blurted out, “I know, Aces.”

Blessings on your weekend and day of worship.

D-

“In What Have You Put Your Faith?”

Growing up in the Schreiner house, Focus on the Family’s *Adventures in Odyssey* was an institution. For a variety of reasons, I have vivid memories of certain episodes, and I remember listening to the programs on a regular basis. Now, as a parent to Maddie, Bailey, and Lily, I am realizing that *Adventures in Odyssey* is becoming an institution in our house as well.

Recently, Ginny (my wife) brought home an album from the library that compiled some of the program’s greatest hits. One of those episodes was “The Search for Whit.” It originally aired in May of 1996, and as soon as I heard the intro, I remembered that this was an episode from my childhood. What I didn’t know then is just how theologically sticky it is.

As the title of the episode implies, the basic arc of the plot is rather simple. Mr. Whitaker goes missing with very little trace, and certain people embark on a quest to find him. However, as the episode unfolds, we find that the plot’s nuances are anything but simple. They involve archaeology, deception, politics, biblical studies, shady antiquities dealing, ancient manuscripts, and more. In fact, given the recent story of the Oxford University Professor’s dealings with the Green Foundation, namely the bogus claim to have a 1st century manuscript of the Gospel of Mark, “The Search for Whit” was rather prescient.

As the episode begins, Mr. Whitaker’s son Jason and Eugene find a message left by Whit. It’s very cryptic, but soon the duo realizes that it’s a clue to decipher so they could track him down. The message details the finding of a manuscript that Whit believes could be the famous “Q-source,” which immediately piques Eugene’s interest. In turn, Jason and Eugene decide to contact Whit’s colleagues stateside. Unfortunately, this domestic pursuit comes up empty, but eventually all arrows point to an archaeological dig in Israel. Thus, Eugene and Jason trek off to Israel with the hope of finding Whit.

When they get to Israel, Eugene and Jason find that Whit is in hiding, presumably because people are after him. Most importantly, the plot quickly thickens. The message that suggested the discovery of the Q-source was actually a ruse. The manuscript found does not concern any hypothetical source document behind the canonical gospel accounts, but rather directions to find a grave wherein the bones of Jesus supposedly lay! In other words, Whit is hiding because he claims to have found a 1st century manuscript that details how the disciples bribed Roman and Jewish officials in order to bury the bones of Jesus in a secret grave all to give the impression of his resurrection.

Eventually, Jason and Eugene find Whit, only to discover that American intelligence agencies and money hungry archaeologists are also in hot pursuit. The trio evades their adversaries and ultimately finds the grave where Jesus’s bones are supposed to be. They dig and find a sarcophagus, but at the last moment, they are held at gun point by some greedy blokes. Of course, the bad guys don’t win the day. The American intelligence officer arrives just in time to arrest the thieves and save Whit, Jason, and Eugene. And as for that sarcophagus, it wasn’t filled with bones, but manuscripts. Actually, copies of manuscripts. What Whit found was essentially the library of a radical Jewish sect that spread false information about Jesus to combat the spread of the Gospel—a 1st century equivalent to “fake news.”

In a climactic moment, when Whit, Jason, and Eugene are witnessing the opening of the sarcophagus, Eugene effectively freaks out about the implications of what may be in the box. If the box does contain the bones of Jesus, then by implication Jesus did NOT rise from the dead! Thus, Eugene is beside himself to consider what would happen to the Christian faith, which is supposedly built upon the reality that Jesus rose from the dead. In response to Eugene's frenzied harangue, Whit merely asks, "In what have you put your faith?"

This is a critical question. In fact, anyone concerned with the logical and historical integrity of the faith has likely asked this question, or something similar.

This same question is revisited toward end of the episode. In both instances, the answer to Whit's question is not the resurrection of Jesus, but Scripture. Let that sink in for a moment. The message of this episode is not that we put our faith in the historical reality of Jesus's resurrection but the testimony about Jesus and God's redemptive actions on behalf of his people and the world. Essentially, it's a position that pits a text versus a person and the events that defined his life.

On the one hand, Whit's answer points to the importance of Scripture, namely its authoritative witness for the Christian. Virtually everything we know about Jesus we know because of Scripture. On the other hand, we have to ask if the locus of our faith should be put *in Scripture...or* in something else.

Consider 1 Corinthians 15. Here, Paul is talking about the content of the Gospel, and he highlights the death and resurrection of Jesus along the way. Then, in v. 12, Paul talks about the implications of denying the resurrection of the dead. Simply, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus was not raised. And if Jesus was not raised, then preaching the faith is futile. For Paul, it seems, that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the foundation to the faith. Without them, the faith implodes. And remember, Paul is not some isolated voice sequestered on an island. Rather, the New Testament revolves around Jesus. The gospel accounts recount the life and ministry of Jesus, and all of them climax with his death and resurrection. Acts recounts how the Church grew in the wake of Jesus's resurrection, and the epistles are obsessed with explaining the significance of Jesus, both for the present and the future.

Nevertheless, in our insistence that Jesus and his resurrection is the fulcrum of the faith, we can't forget that we get to Jesus *through* Scripture. It's God's inspired text that reveals Jesus and what's necessary for salvation, faith, and the Christian way of life, revealing God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, recounting God's redemptive acts through history, anticipating God's final redemption of the cosmos. In short, the two are intimately connected. Nevertheless, I struggle subscribing to the notion that *Scripture* is the locus of my faith versus the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

In my mind, where the episode strayed was not in its implicit emphasis about the importance of Scripture. Rather, it was with the assumption that if the bones of Jesus were found, then Scripture would fill the void to prop up the integrity of the faith. Indeed, it's a very fine line, but I just can't get there. If Jesus was not resurrected, then the claims of his resurrection and the implications of the resurrection entertained in Scripture are either deceptive or erroneous. Why would you anchor a belief system in a text that's either deceptive or embarrassingly wrong?

In 2001, TriStar Pictures distributed *The Body*, which was a film starring Antonio Banderas as a priest appointed by the Vatican to investigate whether a body unearthed outside of Jerusalem that bore the

marks of crucifixion and dated to the time of Pontius Pilate was Jesus of Nazareth. In many ways, this film pursues the same questions as "The Search for Whit." What are the implications if Jesus's bones were found? What are the political and social ramifications, let alone the theological ones? Could the faith survive, and to what lengths would people go to either suppress the information or manipulate it? And when I teach my New Testament survey classes I have my students ponder this movie. Why? To get them thinking about the locus of our faith and just how much rests on the resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, this conversation easily moves into another one. What are the historical non-negotiables of the faith? Indeed, I believe that the historical death and resurrection of Jesus is one of them. But what about the exodus? The ten plagues? Or whether the sun stood still in midair so that the Israelites could rout the Amorites?

So, it's worth pondering again. In what have you put your faith?