

“THE MEADOWS MESSENGER”
A Communication of Quaker Meadows Presbyterian Church
May 2019, Issue



March and April Financial Reports

We hope that you find this information helpful as you pray for this congregation and evaluate your giving and participation in the worship, work and mission of this part of the Body of Christ. Sincerely, the Session and Pastor.

Tithes and Offerings needed for each week of 2019 = \$1,709.06. This figure is based on a total 2019 budget of \$88,871.00 which was approved by the Session.

MARCH

Total Tithes and Offerings needed (13 weeks)	\$8,545.29
Actual Tithes and Offerings received (13 weeks)	\$6,449.00
This results in a budget shortage for this month	(\$2,096.29)
Total Expenses (13 weeks) resulting in a shortage for the month	(\$1,572.12)

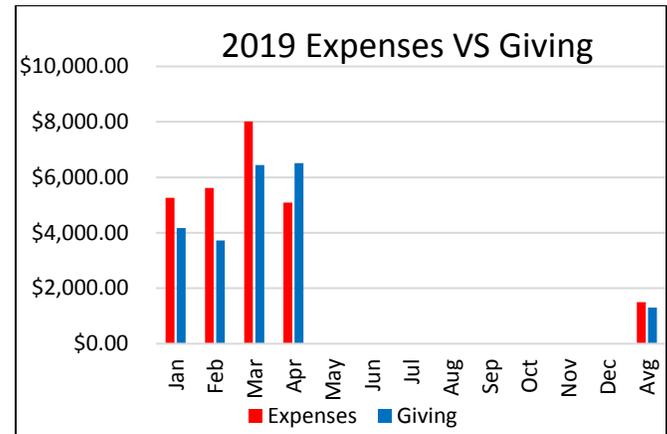
APRIL

Total Tithes and Offerings needed (3 weeks)	\$5,127.17
Actual Tithes and Offerings received (3 weeks)	\$6,512.00
This results in a budget overage for this month	\$1,384.83
Total Expenses (3 weeks) resulting in an overage for the month	\$1,419.36

YEAR TO DATE

Total Tithes and Offerings needed (16 weeks)	\$27,344.92
Actual Tithes and Offerings (16 weeks) received	\$20,860.00
This results in a budget shortage to this point	(\$6,484.92)
Total Expenses (16 weeks) This results in a shortage to expenses for the year	(\$3,130.40)

For those of you who understand a chart better than a bunch of numbers, below is the 'picture' of our YTD finances for April 2019 (through week 3 of 4):



Some Bible Trivia

The Theme for this month is: prophets.

1. This reluctant prophet was thrown overboard during a storm.
2. This young prophet interprets a dream of a statue composed of different metals.
3. This prophet, who was put into a hole in the ground for being too outspoken, is often called the 'weeping prophet'.
4. This man confronted the prophets of Baal in a famous contest. He was also taken to heaven in a chariot of fire.
5. This prophet predicted the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all people.
6. This woman was the only female judge in Israel and is also considered to be a prophetess.

Session Highlights

Stated Meeting – March 24th

The Session:

- Reviewed and approved the financial reports for February.
- Received a letter from Rylee Dean (an 8th great granddaughter of Robert Penland, who was one of the original founding elders of our congregation) requesting an application

for the Henry Harney Scholarship Fund. Pastor Yvonne sent her one.

- Received a letter from Duke Energy notifying us that the security light in the parking lot – near the cemetery – will be replaced in the near future with a new LED fixture.
- Heard an update on our steeple repair. Tommy Fore of Southern Steeplejacks is making the vinyl louvers and window and as soon as the rain stops and he can rent the correct size construction crane (at the same time) he will be out to make the repairs.
- Approved Anita Woods to obtain an estimate on replacing the carpet in our sanctuary from H&A Flooring of Hildebran.

Sabbatical and Study Leave

If you were in worship on Easter Sunday you heard Pastor Yvonne announce that she is taking 8 weeks off from pastoral ministry, beginning Saturday, May 04th. That means that she will be ‘unplugged’ for most of the months of May and June. The first five weeks she will be on sabbatical leave, the next two weeks she will be continuing her Doctor of Ministry classes in Pittsburgh, and the last week will be another week of sabbatical.

The following people will be preaching and leading worship in her absence:

- May 05th and May 19th – Tamika Garrison, who is currently preparing to graduate from the Church Leadership School and will be eligible to be commissioned as a lay pastor (ruling elder). She is a member of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese.
- May 12th, May 26th and June 16th – Rick Leissner, who is a commissioned lay pastor (ruling elder). He is a member of First Presbyterian of Morganton and has worked on several presbytery committees.

¹ Lauren F. Winner is vicar (pastor) of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Louisburg, North Carolina, assistant professor at

- June 02nd, June 09th and June 23rd – Rev. Dr. James Cockerham, who has served 9 congregations (5 in North Carolina) and is currently retired from full-time pastoral ministry.

There may also be various folks from the congregation who assist in worship leadership, making the bank deposits and passing on prayer concerns and other information to the Clerk of Session. Pastor Yvonne will be brought up to date when she returns.

If you have a pastoral need while Pastor Yvonne is on sabbatical and study leave, please call your shepherd elder and/or Judy Galey, Clerk of Session, and they will get in touch with the people who will be covering pastoral care.



The Pastor’s Ponderings

Well, we have just celebrated another Easter ... and it was a wonderful day of worship and beautiful weather. But I wonder, if the story is so familiar that it has lost its power to move us in our souls. So, as a way to help us consider more deeply what Jesus did during Holy Week and through his Easter resurrection I include the following article by Lauren F. Winner¹ from the March 05, 2015 issue of The Christian Century.

Duke Divinity School, and author, most recently, of Wearing God. The article has been slightly edited for readability.

It is a little graphic but so was Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion.

Divine Contractions:
God's Labor, Our Deliverance²

I remember the first time I encountered the image of God as a laboring woman. I was reading Isaiah for an Old Testament class I took in seminary, and I was, it must be admitted, sort of skimming. Then I came to the middle of chapter 42, and I was stopped cold: "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant" (v. 14).

What came to mind was a photograph I had once seen, an old, grainy, black-and-white photograph from the feminist 1970s ... of a woman in a hospital bed, her long blond hair tied back from her face, her right hand on her forehead, a nurse's hands on her engorged stomach, her face knotted in agony. Although it was just a photograph, you could practically hear a low, loud groan emerging from her throat.

This [passage] turns out to be just one of three images of childbirth Isaiah uses to characterize God. In addition to depicting God as a laboring woman, Isaiah also likens God to a midwife and a nursing mother. ... These birthing images compel me because they speak of God's intimate, bodily involvement with our redemption. They compel me in their suggestion of a divine body that suffers, changes, swells, and leaks. For me, a divine body that leaks is also a divine body that [is humbled]; Isaiah's pictures compel me precisely in their [humbleness].

The section of Isaiah in which the laboring woman appears ... was written while a significant slice of the Judean population was living in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem had been politically and militarily trounced, and its people were living in alien territory, with no realistic hope of imminent

return. [This passage] was written in the wake of the catastrophe, and the text aims to assure the exiled people that God has not abandoned them: God is present; God is at work, tending to God's people even now, even though the exiles might have felt forgotten and renounced.

At Christmas we read Isaiah's words about proclaiming peace and bringing good tidings, and on Good Friday we read his description of a suffering servant being pierced for our transgressions. ... However, if you attend a church that follows the lectionary, you will never hear this verse read on Sunday from the lectern. Perhaps the lectionary crafters find the picture of God squatting and grunting in labor as disconcerting as I do.

Here is what is going on in the verses just before the laboring woman image. God announces that old things are passing away, and that soon God will bring about something new. Then a narrator invites a large convocation to celebrate God and God's declaration by singing "a new song." Next, God speaks again, describing the new, redemptive action that God is about to undertake on behalf of God's people. "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant."

Isaiah's metaphor, which is much more specific than "God is like a woman in labor," derives its punch from real women groaning in labor. Isaiah focuses on God's breathing and the sound of that breathing: in this one verse, Isaiah uses three verbs that pertain to breath. The first is *pa'ah*, often translated as "cry out" – but "groan" or "bellow" is a better translation. I have often heard women describe the sounds they make in labor in animal terms. [One woman said:] "Deep guttural, almost animal noises came from within me. Loud noises. Noises I soon had no control over." This animal breathing is what we hear in Isaiah's first verb. The next two breathing words in the verse

² This article is excerpted from Lauren F. Winner's book *Wearing God*, published by HarperOne. © Copyright

continue to stress that God's breath is not at ease: God "gasps" (*nasham*) and "pants" (*sha'aph*).

Why does Isaiah focus so much attention on breathing? One answer may be found in an echo of earlier biblical breath. At the dawn of creation God breathed into Adam; so too, here in Isaiah's promise of new creation, God's breath is the agent of life. For Christians the image may also anticipate the church's efforts to speak about the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit – the very word spirit is tied to breath, to aspiration (and the New Testament's word for "spirit," *pneuma*, is also the Greek term for breath). It is this Holy Spirit who, Paul tells us in Romans, prays for us with deep groans.

But I would suggest that more important for Isaiah's metaphor is the centrality of breathing to a woman's experience of labor. Panting and groaning are part of how women manage the pain of childbirth. "The key to the patient's ability to suppress pain lies in her . . . breathing," wrote Priscilla Richardson Ulin, a nurse, in 1963. The groans of labor signal the woman's active participation in the birthing process, a participation that does not fight the pain (fighting labor pain only makes the pain worse). Isaiah gives us this groaning woman as a picture of the sovereign God, the God who is in control of redemption: God chooses to participate in the work of new creation with bellowing and panting. God chooses a participation that does not fight the pain, but that works from inside the pain.

When discussing pain in childbirth, Christian readers have rarely turned to Isaiah. Far more often, the Christian tradition has focused on Genesis 3, where pain in childbirth is meted out to women as a punishment for Eve's eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Throughout the history of the church many Christian interpreters have thought labor to be unbearable – because of its physical pain, but also unbearably shameful because of its connection with the Fall. In this interpretation, pain at childbirth signals Eve's alienation (and that of

any individual pregnant woman) from God and God's holiness.

Isaiah seems to refute that distancing – God will be identified with humanity, utterly, even in those things that testify to our sin. As the laboring woman, God takes on the very punishment God assigned to us. God pointedly enters into the parts of our life that [testify to] our finitude and "misdirected desire" – and Isaiah's metaphor converts the groans of childbirth from a sign of humanity's fallenness to a sign of God's intimate identification with us. The groans of childbirth are both a sign of humanity's distance from God and a sign of God's nearness to us (they're the second exactly because they're also the first).

Today women talk and write about groaning as an aid to labor. Groaning helps relax the woman's entire body, especially the pelvic area, making it possible for the baby to make her way out. . . . Gaskin encourages laboring women to "make a sound pitched low enough to vibrate your chest."

Groans also communicate the woman's need for assistance: women do not go through delivery alone, but are usually assisted by a spouse, doula, midwife, doctor, friend, or relative. I [propose] that we read in Isaiah 42 a suggestion that we – we who worship the God who has redeemed and is redeeming us – participate and play a role in the birthing process. Remember that the passage in which the laboring woman appears, begins with the injunction to sing a new song to the Lord: "All who want to worship the Lord, come and sing a new song." . . .

In ancient Greece, birth attendants sometimes played the lute to soothe the pains of laboring women. Contemporary studies of laboring women around the world . . . show that women who listen to music during labor experience less pain and distress than women whose labors are nonmusical. Music helps women relax or withdraw themselves from the pain of labor and focus on the work of laboring.

The next time you're belting out a hymn in church, consider that the hymn is the music that helps the laboring mother God focus on delivery. Perhaps our music, our new song, helps God in birthing the new creation. God is redeeming us, yet we are the singers encouraging God in the work of delivering a renewed creation. Thus the passage in Isaiah may suggest [that] God is suffering the pains of redemption, and, as we are being redeemed, the new song we sing helps – helps God breathe, helps God relax, helps God feel less pain, helps God deliver.

In my efforts to understand Isaiah's image of God gasping and panting in labor, I have collected a lot of birth stories from books and from friends. My friend the writer Stina Kielsmeier-Cook tells me that there comes a point in nearly every birth story when the woman does not believe she can keep going... The laboring woman is no longer focused on meeting her baby; she just wants the pain to stop. She says, "I cannot do this anymore." Stina says this reminds her of Jesus.

We know that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays, "Please, Lord, take this cup from me." For a moment – before Jesus says: "Yet, not my will but yours be done" – he is the mother in labor saying, "I cannot do this anymore." Jesus knew that new life would be born out of his suffering on the cross, yet he still asked God to take away the cup.

What is spoken to the mother in the moment when she feels she cannot continue is crucial. A good midwife or doula will look the woman in the eyes, remind her of her strength, and remind her of the baby she is about to meet. "It's a moment that stands still in most birthing mothers' memories," says Stina.

I wonder what Jesus heard his father say in the garden. Whatever it was [helped] Jesus go on.

When I think about the hard work of labor, I realize that my unreflective assumption is somehow that redemption is easy for God. Because God is all-powerful, I somehow imagine

redemption being a snap of the divine fingers. But Isaiah's image tells us how hard God, the laboring woman, is working to bring forth redemption, a kind of hard work that many of us may be unaccustomed to in our technological 21st-century world. Underpinning the hard work is the profound strength of laboring.

At the same time that laboring is an experience of strength and power, it is also an experience of bodily vulnerability. That is the core of my discomfort with Isaiah's picture of God's groaning in labor: it makes me uncomfortable to think of God groaning in pain, God bleeding, God's body uncontrollably shaking, God exhausted.

The image of God as a laboring woman puts together strength and vulnerability in a way that tells us something about God and how God works. The point is not just that God is vulnerable, although that itself is startling. The point is that in the struggles of labor, we can learn what strength is. If our picture of strength is a laboring woman, then strength is not about refusing to cry or denying pain. Strength is not about being in charge, or being independent, or being dignified. If our picture of strength is a laboring woman, then strength entails enduring, receiving help and support, being open to pain and risk. If our picture of strength is a laboring woman, strength entails entrusting yourself (to medicine, or to the wisdom of your own body, or to the guidance of someone who is there in the room with you). Strength even entails giving yourself over to the possibility of death.

Let's return to the context of Isaiah. The people are in exile. Isaiah is writing to reassure them of God's abiding interest in them and to reassure them that God is sovereign. A woman in labor is a curious picture of sovereignty. A woman in labor cannot protect herself. She is dependent on others – and at the same time, she is exercising a profound power. She is receiving help – and at the same time, her body is strong and knows what to do to deliver. Hers is a sovereignty in which

the best tool is not a scepter or a gun, but breath: panting, groaning, and bellowing. In their darkest hour the exiles wondered, “God, where are you?” In his final hour Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the image of the laboring woman we see that God does not respond with silence. God groans, gasps, and pants – making a new way for the exiles, breathing life into the whole of creation, offering God’s own body to be broken open for the sake of the world God created. Of course, Christianity has always claimed that strength and power are something different than we had assumed they were. Christianity has usually told us to look at the cross to see how this is so, but maybe Isaiah is saying that we could just as well look at the birthing stool.

Still, thinking of God this way – the exposed female body, shaking and in pain – leaves me feeling unnerved and a touch frantic. Do I really want a God with a body? With this kind of body? ... Whatever I think or feel about God’s body when I imagine God groaning and panting in labor, I should also think or feel when I remember God executed by a Roman prefect: if panic, then panic; if something high-minded and Pauline about strength in weakness, the same.

But I don’t. I picture Jesus on the cross, and I feel very little. The crucifixion has become so sanitized in my mind, so normalized and familiar, that thinking of it does not really produce much reaction at all. I, along with much of the church, have turned a bloody state punishment into nothing more or less than tidy doctrine. Perhaps God as a woman in travail can remind me of God’s vulnerability and the centrality of that vulnerability for my relationship with that God.

Of course, God’s vulnerability does not begin or end on the cross. God’s election of a particular people makes God vulnerable to the people’s refusal of life with God. The incarnation makes God vulnerable to all the ravages of human life. And the calling of the church – the naming of a collection of human beings as God’s own body –

makes God vulnerable to our continued failings, our continued rejections, our continued refusals to be God’s body. “God is vulnerable because God loves,” writes William Placher.

And that is the rub: I have removed myself from the discomfort Isaiah provokes. In one short paragraph I have carried myself from God panting and groaning on a delivery table to something anesthetized and lovely, something polite and glassy and far away: just as the church so often turns the crucifixion into the theological abstraction of “the cross,” I have turned God’s labored grunting neatly into “love.” But the verse from Isaiah doesn’t say anything abstract or polite. The verse from Isaiah tells me that God [brings about our redemption as a woman in labor]: “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will bellow like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant.”

Inclusion of this article also seems appropriate for this month because May is when we celebrate Mother’s Day. No matter what kind of relationship you have or had with your mother, I hope that you can honor her in some way on Mother’s Day.

In that spirit, I thank God for my mother and all the mothers who came before her who brought me physical life in this world and I thank God, who has given me spiritual life for all eternity.

Pastor Yvonne



Do You Know These Hymns?

- Dentist’s Hymn – “Crown Him with Many Crowns”
- Weatherman’s Hymn – “There Shall Be Showers of Blessings”
- Contractor’s Hymn – “The Church’s One Foundation”
- Tailor’s Hymn – “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- Golfer’s Hymn – “There Is a Green Hill Far Away”
- Politician’s Hymn – “Standing on the Promises”
- Optometrist’s Hymn – “Open My Eyes That I May See”
- IRS Agents Hymn – “I Surrender All”
- Gossiper’s Hymn – “Pass It On”
- Electricians’ Hymn – “Send the Light”
- Shopper’s Hymn – “Sweet Bye and Bye”
- Realtors Hymn – “I’ve Got a Mansion, Just Over the Hilltop”
- Massage Therapist’s Hymn – “He Touched Me”
- Cat’s Hymn – “His Eye Is on the Sparrow”
- Pilot’s Hymn – “I’ll Fly Away”

And for all those who drive on the highways ...

- 55 mph – “God Will Take Care of You”
- 65 mph – “Nearer My God to Thee”
- 75 mph – “This World Is Not My Home”
- 85 mph – “Lord I’m Coming Home”
- 95 mph – “I Greet The, Who My Savior Art”
- 100 mph – “Precious Mem’ries”

Some Bible Trivia Answers

1. Jonah – Jonah 1:15
2. Daniel – Daniel 2:31-45
3. Jeremiah – Jeremiah 37:11 - 38:6
4. Elijah – 2 Kings
5. Joel – Joel 2:28-29
6. Miriam – Exodus 15:20



The adult version of “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” is “Wallet, Glasses, Keys, and Phone”.

Doings at Quaker Meadows Presbyterian Church

Ministry with the Children

- May 05th – TBD (sermon), Rita Whisnant (downstairs)
- May 12th – Kathy Staton (sermon), Christine Rose (downstairs)
- May 19th – Ruth Pershing (sermon), Lelia Bruder (downstairs)
- May 26th – Heather Kramer (sermon), Lelia Bruder (downstairs)

Upcoming Events

- Saturday, **May 11th** – Mother’s Day Luncheon, fellowship hall @ noon
- Monday, **May 13th** – Circle # 1, Ruth Preston’s home @ 10
- Monday, **May 27th** – Circle # 2, fellowship hall @ 6

Birthdays

None

Church sign: <http://www.yourdailybible.com/blog/funny-church-signs>

Kids image: <https://chiddingly.pioneerfederation.co.uk/beechnewsletter-term-1-head-shoulders-knees-and-toes/>

Cover image: <https://www.countryliving.com/diy-crafts/g3195/free-printable-cards-for-mothers-day/>