



## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

The recent election and the recent conversations concerning our country's position vis a vis nuclear arms has not instilled much hope in me. Just prior to President-elect Trump's pronouncement that under his leadership the United States would stand ready to again enter into a nuclear arms race, I had opportunity to read an article that Jeanne Echternach wrote some 30+ years ago. Review of that article led to the above title. Today it does seem to me that the more things change, the more they remain the same. I include that unedited article here for your review realizing that some minor aspects of it will be anachronistic but feeling that the "Big Idea" of it is still quite relevant to where we find ourselves today.

*How Paul Speaks to the Nuclear Age*  
Jeanne Echternach

*On any day casual examination of the newspaper, or indifferent listening to the television news, makes one aware how precarious our existence on this planet has become in the nuclear age. cursory examination of the national budget and the huge deficit reveals how far, as a country, we have traveled away from the ideals of*

***"O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!***

***Beneath the shadow of your throne your saints have dwelt secure; sufficient is your arm alone, and our defense is sure."***

*...serving human needs and toward nuclear disaster. At the Virginia Interfaith Peace Celebration the words of the closing song were "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home: beneath the shadow of your throne your saints have dwelt secure: sufficient is your arm alone, and our defense is sure."*

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS



- 4<sup>TH</sup>: BENJAMIN PHAN**  
1932 Belleville Rd. SW  
Roanoke, VA 24015  
540-484-3689
- 8<sup>TH</sup>: NANCY COMPTON**  
P.O. Box 11  
Bedford, VA 24523  
540-330-9440
- 10<sup>TH</sup>: BRIGITTE ROSENBAUM**  
290 Bonbrook Rd.  
Wirtz, VA 24184  
540-334-1401
- 10<sup>TH</sup>: GILLIAN LIONBERGER**  
3229 Bromley Rd.  
Roanoke, VA 24018  
540-989-2068
- 12<sup>TH</sup>: JACKSON MAUS**  
650 High Meadow Drive.  
Wirtz, VA 24184  
540-493-1346
- 16<sup>TH</sup>: HARRISON LIONBERGER**  
3229 Bromley Rd.  
Roanoke, VA 24018  
540-989-2068
- 19<sup>TH</sup>: KEVIN EVANS**  
1795 Presidential Hts. #523  
Colorado Springs, CO  
80905  
540-493-4551
- 21<sup>ST</sup>: MEGAN LOWE**  
2517 Brookstone Lane  
Henrico, VA 23233

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ON  
NEXT PAGE!**

God is our refuge, our hope, our shelter, our defense no less now than when Paul many years ago addressed the diverse problems of the newly founded Christian congregations. The paradox of society's over-concern with production of nuclear weapons "for defense" at the expense of meeting human needs may seem at the distance of two thousand years greatly different that the difficulties of early Christians, but Paul's timelessly relevant responses are as appropriate now as they were then. Today we struggle against being divided within ourselves. We accept the Bible message as we interpret it, on one hand, and support contradictory government policies on the other hand – just as the Galatian church was divided as a congregation by false teachers who preached a Gospel other than Paul's.

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS



- 21<sup>ST</sup>: DIANE BERNARD**  
285 Boon-Bernard Dr.  
Boones Mill, VA 24065  
540-493-2542
- 23<sup>RD</sup>: MITCH QUINN**  
P.O. Box 204  
Boones Mill, VA 24065  
540-580-6334
- 27<sup>TH</sup>: JENNY EVANS**  
7339 Grassy Hill Road  
Boones Mill, VA 24065  
540-434-2162

**HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY  
Y'ALL!**

Paul insisted that only justification (right status) by faith is authentic. Status and distinctions are used to make one feel secure from what one interprets as a threat in life: status based on money, beliefs, race, power...has caused separation throughout human history. Frequently we give ourselves over to these distinctions, instead of to Christ. Christian liberty, for Paul, is the freedom from the need for these distinctions.

Our fear of communism, of the USSR, impels us to seek protection in production and deployment of increasingly sophisticated and expensive nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear defense systems. This human need to build fortresses also builds alienation: we are giving the lordship of our lives to "gods of metal." Nuclear weapons do not insure our safety – they increase the threat to our existence. The only real power in the universe, misunderstood in Paul's day and now as weakness, is the love which led to Christ's sacrifice for us, from which can come reconciliation for mankind.

Martin Luther said, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Paul Ramsey pointed out that "'Everything is lawful, everything is permitted which Christian love permits' also means 'Everything is demanded which Christian love requires.'" If we are servants of all, if we as Christians are required to do what love demands, can we refuse to feed the hungry is spent instead on high tech weaponry? Paul saw the importance of faith working through love: can we deny it?

The real meaning of security is not wrestling with life to control it for our benefit, but being set free to relate to others. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he addressed specific problems, such as the affluent's gorging themselves at a banquet while the poor went unfed, thus perverting the meaning of the Lord's Supper and showing a lack of love. If we eat moderately but live in a country where money is spent on weapons while people's needs are not met, are we not behaving in a manner similar to the thoughtless wealthy members of the Corinthian congregation? A primary concern is doing away with alienation, whether this refers to the Corinthian congregation, internal American affairs, or today's US-USSR relations.

Assuming that life is defined by coping with dangerous situations implies our ultimate being is always under threat: we must work to keep the threat from being realized. Paul asks in I Corinthians "What

do we have that we do not receive" (as a gift)? Ultimately our safety is a gift. Nothing can threaten our basic existence in God's love.

Acting out of love and not out of vengeance and self defense is difficult to achieve. The most radical thing Jesus said was "Love your enemies." Love which does not include enemies is not love – it is self interest, and belongs to the age of Adam, not the age of Christ. Unless we love our enemies, we are not really loving our friends. In I Corinthians Paul speaks of the love which lays aside boasting, distinctions and the need for superiority, and concentrates on building relationship among men. What is important is what expresses love and relates human beings in a way of love.

Faith is the perspective, faith makes nonmanipulative love possible, that love which acts on the basis of need. Have we the courage to understand and act out our faith in the wisdom and power of Christ as expressed through love of all mankind, through tangible acts of meeting human needs? Our current experience as a country seems to indicate the use of borrowed money to provide ever increasing numbers and types of nuclear weaponry precludes meeting many basic human needs.

The hymn in Philippians 2: 5-11 expresses how love relates. Love is not anxious or threatened, love is not grasping after power, status or distinction. Today we are in danger of alienating ourselves from God by placing our faith in nuclear weapons. Our faith in God's power in our lives, in God's love of mankind can set us free from distinctions set up out of fear, from the need to depend on nuclear weapons, for nothing can threaten our basic existence in God's love. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In light of where we find ourselves as a nation today, and in light of Jeanne's important reminders of how God in the person of Jesus Christ was in the world, my prayer is "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me, let it begin with us, the church, the body of Christ." That, brothers and sisters, is not an easy thing to do, but still what I am convinced we are called to do today as the body of Christ.

Blessings,

**Pastor Joe**

## **DON'T FORGET!!!**

- Throughout the month of January we have opportunities to serve our community. Please see George Carlson if you can help with the American Red Cross Blood Drive that will take place at our building on January 6<sup>th</sup> or if you can help prepare and serve a meal at Stepping Stones on January 21<sup>st</sup>.
- Dear brothers and sisters, Pat and I want to express our heartfelt thanks for your expressions of appreciation and love. The feelings are mutual – we appreciate and love each one of you. We look forward to a blessed and productive year working with you in the Kingdom. Blessings, Joe and Pat
- Our first Congregational Consensus Meeting of the new year will be January 15<sup>th</sup> immediately following worship. Please plan to stay for this brief but important meeting if possible.

# BMCC JANUARY 2017



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>FIRST SUNDAY OF 1</b> <b>CHRISTMAS</b>  STUDY @ 9:15 AM WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM HAPPY NEW YEAR!	2	3	4 CHOIR PRACTICE 7:30 PM	5	6 <b>AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE @ BMCC</b> <b>1:00 – 6:00 PM</b>	7
<b>BAPTISM OF THE 8</b> <b>LORD SUNDAY</b> ELDERS @8:15 STUDY @ 9:15 AM WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM	9	10	11 CHOIR PRACTICE 7:30 PM	12	13	14
<b>15</b> <b>SECOND EPIPHANY</b> STUDY @ 9:15 AM WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM <b>CONSENSUS MEETING AFTER WORSHIP</b>	16	17	18 CHOIR PRACTICE 7:30 PM	19	20	21 <b>STEPPING STONES</b> 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
<b>22</b> <b>THIRD EPIPHANY</b> STUDY @ 9:15 AM WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM	23	24	25 CHOIR PRACTICE 7:30 PM	26	27	28 <b>BMCC FELLOWSHIP BREAKFAST ROANOKER</b> 9:00 AM
<b>29</b> <b>FOURTH EPIPHANY</b> STUDY @ 9:15 AM WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM	30	31				