

WAGAM



WRITINGS ABOUT GOD AND ME

*"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you
the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,
but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty."*

2 Peter 1:16



INTRODUCTION

WAGAM - "Writings About God And Me" is a program of the Witness ministry of White Plains United Methodist Church (WPUMC) and consists of periodic publications of stories, experiences, witnesses, tragedies, hopes, fears, questions, accomplishments, miracles, and any other interactions between individual persons and their God.

The opinions, expressions, statements, positions or beliefs stated in a WAGUM article or publication are solely those of the author of the article or publication and not necessarily the expressions, statements, positions or beliefs of WPUMC, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, or the United Methodist Church.

Something "wonderful" happens to you and you think others might be blessed if they knew God "did that." You have a question you don't feel comfortable talking to anyone about: write it down and share it with your brothers and sisters. You will be amazed how many others have that same concern, same fear, same doubt or same "wonder."

Your article, drawing, poem, or note can be submitted to the Church Office in some manner identifying it as a WAGAM contribution. You can also mail your article or contribution to office@wpumc.org. The WAGAM Production Committee will need your name and a way to contact you if there is information we need or a question to be asked.

While you may have your article or contribution published anonymously, please consider taking credit for your article because (1) it's your creation, and (2) others will be encouraged to make a contribution and take credit for it. However, the Production Committee will maintain your identity in strict confidence if you so desire.

Special thanks and appreciation are extended to those numerous people who performed the many tasks and work necessary to write, compile, and publish this issue of WAGAM. To the children who provided the art work and drawings, and to Hunter Wilson who designed the cover for this issue, we say, "Well done and thank you!"

WAGAM Production Committee:

Barbara Parker, Sharon McMillian, Debbie Lewis, & Braxton Matthews

God Works in Mysterious Ways

Perhaps it's cliché to say, "God works in mysterious ways," but sometimes these words uniquely describe the wonderment of what has come my way. When Braxton Matthews asked me to join the first WAGAM committee (for lack of a better word), I was honored that he asked me, and at the same time, I was humbled when he explained that my invitation came as an inspiration. Weeks later, I found myself excitedly reading through the generous musings of fellow human beings experiencing God in various ways. I am in awe of the clarity and certainty with which contributors to WAGAM experience God. The stories, poems, and sentiments seem to share journeys with God that end in victory, amazement, certainty that God is omnipresent and omnipotent. I believe WAGAM can remind us that at our core, we all long to know God better. We want to inspire others as we have been "inspired." I have been deeply touched by the talents represented in this first edition of WAGAM, and I hope you will be also.

As a committee, we wrestled with questions like how long the publication should be, how to select the first contributions to go to press with, and when and how often to publish. We tossed around ideas for publishing around a theme, or according to the length of the story, or simply presenting an assortment of what we received. Well, here it is, our first edition as God inspired each of them to write. We hope it's exactly what God would have it to be. After all, God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

Sharon McMillian

A little something about the author... Sharon McMillian is a long time member of White Plains. She is a member of the Chancel Choir and Bible Study Sunday School Class. Sharon and her husband William have two adult children.



“...And Then There Was WAGAM”

God’s Word is spread at White Plains. It is preached in the pulpit, studied in Sunday School classes, sung from the choir loft, performed on our stages, discussed in committees, shared in service projects, and expanded in our Youth Group. So it’s probably not surprising that a new opportunity to spread God’s Word has arrived at White Plains.

Almost two years ago, two events caused a classic light bulb moment for Braxton Matthews. After Rev. Kelly Lyn Logue formed a new book club study group and concurrently, a new set of Lay Speakers finished up their training, Braxton noticed something. We have many ways for the White Plains congregation to live out our call to share our talents: there are places in our church for readers, for speakers, for singers, and for performers. But there was a hole, a missing component: What about the writers.

Suspecting that we may have many people in our congregation who prefer the quiet surface of a page to the microphone of a stage, Braxton took his idea for a writing-based ministry program to the ministry team, then to the Witness area committees. Although the idea lay dormant for awhile, it never completely died out, and now in the winter of 2009 we are seeing the first pages of the vision of WAGAM, “Writings About God & Me.” Although he helped spearhead the idea, Braxton said he doesn’t consider WAGAM to be “his” program - he just hopes to be a tool for the Holy Spirit to use as It will. He suggested the program may die away or it may become a fixture at White Plains, as a “marvelous and different way for us to grow as individuals and as a congregation.”

Braxton can see the potential for growth not just for the readers of WAGAM but more specifically for the writers themselves. He compared the writing process to being a little like teaching, where often through the preparation of the lesson the teacher gets as much, if not more, out of the material as the potential students. The hope is that the writers will have a chance to grow closer to God in a spiritual exercise, paying attention to their thoughts and taking the time to reflect, analyze and become inspired. He compares writing to learning, “you never learn with your mouth open.” As Braxton said, WAGAM may become a place for the body of Christ to “sit up, shut up, listen...and then write what you hear.”

Those writings can take any form and come from any age group. Whether it is a single line or several pages, WAGAM hopes to gather submissions of any length. “I have no idea what God wants to do with it,” says Braxton. “There is room for praises, exultations, concerns and narratives, all sorts of personal, theological and spiritual things. There are no limits right now on length or form.”

If you find yourself responding to the challenge and the discipline of listening and writing, just put your thoughts on paper, put that paper in an envelope, and give it to Braxton, Barbara Parker, Sharon McMillian or Debbie Lewis, who are working on the WAGAM production committee. Braxton says, “Right now we’re not anticipating a set publishing frequency, we’ll publish when we receive enough material, with our best guess being once a quarter as we get started.

Inspired? Not all of God’s servants are called through divine voices, fire, brimstone, or flashing lights. Sometimes inspiration can come quietly. How is God working in your life? Pull up a chair, sharpen that pencil, fire up that keyboard and listen. And then write it down, and share it with all of us, through WAGAM, our newest community pulpit.

(Interview submitted by Debby Brown)



FOOTPRINTS OF A MIRACLE



This is the story of a miracle that continues today. It is the story of a beautiful lady with cerebral palsy. My parents were told when I was born that I would be a vegetable if I lived. This miracle started on January 20, 1950. Mother said I was black and blue, but she thought I was beautiful. Born to the parents of George and Frances Mills, they were determined that I would be independent and care for myself.

Mother and Daddy were such a good support system for me. Mama took me to Aidmore's Crippled Children's Clinic until I was twenty-one. I wore braces on my legs and arm when I started first grade. It was hard for me.

Being the oldest of four children, my sisters and brother thought I got more attention than they did. But Mama made sure that we were all treated the same. My parents were caring and loving people and they taught me to be that way. They were both Christians and made sure that we were always in church every Sunday.

I was Special Education in Middle School and High School. We lived in Decatur, Georgia when I was growing up. After I graduated from High School we moved to Americus, Georgia in 1968. Then on January 29th at 6:30 on a Thursday night my Dad was killed in a terrible car accident. Then on June 24th, 1972 my sister Debbie married her husband Larry Brown at First Baptist Church Chapel.

After my Dad's car accident Debbie and Claudia finished that school year and we moved to Gainesville. We moved to Gainesville, Georgia because Mama's family lived in Gillsville and surrounding areas. My mother was left to raise four children by herself; the smallest one being only two years. I was twenty, Debbie was seventeen, and Claudia eleven.

In 1976 I was praying for a job on the steps of our basement and the next day Sarah Grace Ligon called me from First Baptist Church and said she needed someone from 1:00 to 5:00 to help in the preschool. That was perfect for me because I loved to sleep late. In 1982 I started as a volunteer and volunteered until Oct. 2005 and that is when I decided to move to Cary, N.C. to live close to my sister Debbie and Larry, my brother-in-law. I volunteered for twenty-three years at North Georgia Health Systems, doing the mail and cheering the patients.

Mother went to work at Sears and worked there for twenty-five years until she had to retire because she was getting Parkinson's Disease. She was always there when we got home. I feel like I am a strong person today because of the way I was raised.

When Sunday rolled around we were always in church. Church is real important to me to this day. When we came to First Baptist I started working in the Children's Department and I am still involved in working with children. The Children's Department is called Promise Land. Every child is a promise and a blessing to me. I have worked in VBS and go to Beth Moore Bible Studies every fall.

Before we came to Gainesville there was a doctor in Decatur that told my parents that I would never be able to hold a job, live by myself or have my own place or do anything normal, but God had something else planned for me. Today I am fifty-five, have my own place, have held a job, and volunteer at the Medical Center and The Family Life Center. In 1994 Bob Cain and Michelle Dowdy came to me and asked me if I would be Volunteer Coordinator at The Family Life Center. I found it very rewarding, I did it for 10 years.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future".

In 1996 Mama was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. I was her caregiver from 1996-1999. We decided it was too hard for me to care for her myself and to handle her so we hired some caregivers so I could get out. But on March 17, 2001 Mama left to go live at an Assisted Living Home in Lexington, Virginia. The place was called Kendall and it was very nice and she was well cared for. That was a devastating day for me. Claudia and her family would be there to see her and let us know how she was doing. Debbie went up often to see her.

Mother and I were very close; I had lived with her until she went to Virginia. My family is a great support for me. What a hero she was to me.

The children that I had when I started teaching Sunday School to this day still come up to me and tell me how much I meant to them.

In January 2002 my nephew Adam was sent to Iraq to serve our country. That was a scary time. He was gone for seven months. I prayed for him every day and kept up with him through his mother via emails and phone calls. We had a party for him when he got home. I was so glad to see him get home safely. He is getting married to a wonderful young lady named Sarah Nowadly on July 24, 2004 and we are going to fly to Florida to see them get married. It will be a great celebration.

I had the pleasure of being with Mama the last week of her life. What a beautiful life it was. Debbie and Claudia were also with her. On January 2, 2003 she went to be with the Lord. It was a blessing to be with her that last week.

I was always afraid that I would be by myself when the Lord called her home, but he always works everything out. My church and my friends are very supportive. My sisters Debbie and Claudia are very special to me as are my brothers in law Larry and Kip.

I also have a very special brother, Michael and sister-in-law, Ashley. I have four very special nieces. They are Erin, Amanda, Rebecca and Natalie. I also have four very special nephews: Adam, Brian, Nickolaus, and Connor. God is always first in my life. My parents always had me in church on Sunday. I miss my mother very much she was more than just a friend she meant the world to me. I find that this year is harder than last year because I was still grieving, but this year I miss her more.

I will get pin for 3500 hrs at North Georgia Health Systems for volunteering on Tuesday. We will have a meeting and dinner and then I will go to Joyce's and spend the night. My life has been hard at times but God is always walking beside me.

About a week ago I woke up and I could tell that someone was in my room standing beside my bed. I turned my head around and it was Mama. She was standing there telling me I had done a good job living by myself. What a blessing she was to me. It was my Mother that made me so independent. It is now two thousand six and it has been three years since Mama went to be with the Lord.

I have some very special friends at White Plains in Cary, North Carolina where I live now, Pam and Jim Payne and Dianne and Marvin Welton are two couples that are very close to me.

My aunts and uncle helped me out a lot when I lived in Gainesville, Ga. My brother Michael and his wife also helped me when I lived there. My sisters Claudia and Debbie looked after me too when I needed them.

Most of the time I am very positive but when January rolls around I get a little sad. I lost both of my parents in January and both grandmothers in that month. My life is very blessed every day. Sometimes it is a struggle to get through a day, but most of the time every day is a good one. I am so grateful to be able to live by myself and able to visit my sister when I want to. They both help me and are a joy in my life. I love to read, volunteer, go to church, and do Bible Studies. I also like to do jigsaw puzzles. I could not make it without God in my life every day. What a joy to walk with him each day. I have found my place at White Plains United Methodist Church and I am in Bible Studies and have found a niche and made a lot of new friends. I have a nice place to live and have made new friends here too, at The Commons. I volunteer at Wake Medical Hospital and enjoy it very much. I have already got a two hundred hour service pin while volunteering at Wake Med. I play cards, read, and enjoy my apartment very much. I go out to lunch with friends and sometimes I go out to supper. This October I will have lived in Cary two years. Boy, the time has flown by. Cary feels like home now. I went back to Gainesville, Georgia this past Christmas and I felt out of place. I went back to my home church and it was not the same. I was not a part of that community anymore because I had made new friends in Cary and found a church here in Cary.

In October 2007 I went on the Walk to Emmaus. It was October 11th-14th. It was the most wonderful thing that I have ever experienced. You cannot ever explain it to anyone. It was walk number 97. What a blessing it was for me. I am in a wonderful reunion group. I had disconnected myself from the friends in Georgia and found a new path the Lord had opened for me in Cary. I felt like this was where I was meant to be because the Lord kept closing doors in Georgia and opening doors in North Carolina.

It is a wonderful place to live.

Sharon Mills



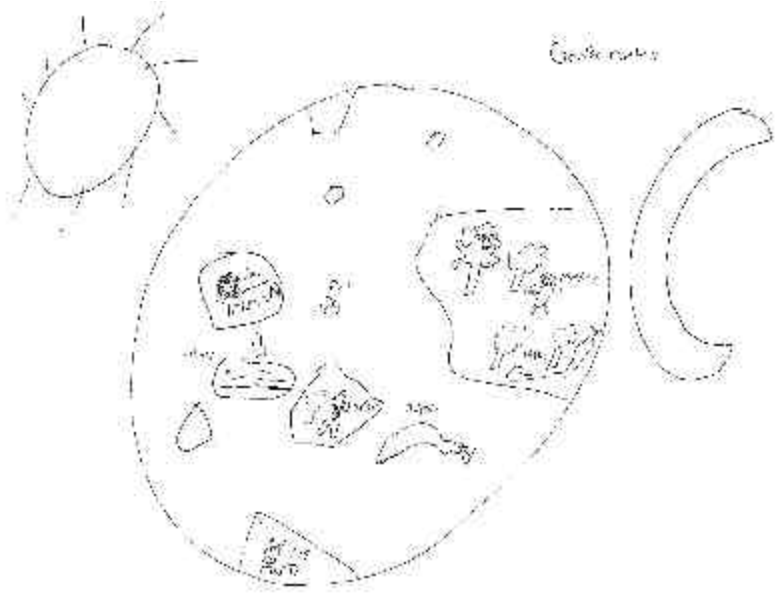
A little something about the author... Sharon Mills moved to Cary in 2005 and visited White Plains for the first time on her sister Debbie's birthday in October of the same year. A member of the Closer Walk Sunday School Class, Sharon loves to participate in Bible studies (she is in 3 studies at the present time) and to volunteer her services. In her "spare" time, Sharon loves to read, "eat out", talk about her family, and attend birthday parties, play cards, and socialize with her friends and neighbors at The Commons. Quite a busy life for someone who was told that "she would never be able to do anything normal"...God didn't get THAT memo!!

Divine Creation

The progressing seasons of the year,
Their timely appearance and uniqueness,
And cycle of orderly repetition
Lend a circle of promise to mankind.

The months carrying special characteristics,
Each a superior plan of divine creation
Proceeding in vast world settings
Reveal the Holiness of these gifts from God.

By Frances Thomas Tew



New Fallen Snow, February Morning

Today a new world seen upon arising
Promised a pause from the tedium of yesterday.
Sunlight, whiter than the snow laden trees,
Ethereal, to soothe the soul,
A sky of silken blue-violet
Of beauty seldom seen
Proclaimed a blessing for the morning.

By Frances Thomas Tew



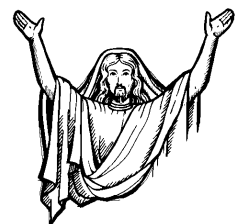
GOD'S GRACE

I recently felt God's grace in a small way that meant a lot to me. The youth musical was scheduled for the one weekend a year when I attend a regional conference in Atlanta. My return flight from Atlanta to RDU was scheduled to arrive at 6:40pm and the youth musical started at White Plains at 7pm.

Amazingly my flight from Atlanta was on time. The bus to the remote parking lot pulled up just as I came to the curb, the traffic lights were in my favor, and I made it to White Plains in time to see the opening number of the youth musical! Since my son had a part in the musical, this was a real blessing to see it from start to finish.

By Cynthia Rohm

A little something about the author... Cynthia has been a long time Methodist and affiliated with White Plains UMC since moving to Cary in 1995. Cynthia is frequently seen worshipping at the 8:20am service and attends the Koinonia Sunday School Class. She is a wife, mother of two, and a local Optometrist.





***The following is the text of a speech given during the prayer service for the
Discovery weekend in 2007.***

Did you know you can find God in a cinnamon roll? Good evening, my name is Ben Brown and I'm the Vice President of our Mid-High Youth Group. This is my third year of participating in Discovery, and the Discovery committee asked if I would say a few words about what Discovery has meant to me.

So, everyone says that Discovery is all about finding God, learning about the Bible, and growing in the spirit. I personally say that it is all about groups of kids named after candy, bits of broken glass, and a special kind of cinnamon roll called monkey bread.

Of course, Discovery means all of those first "big" things I listed, but just as much it means all of those other seemingly random things.

The "Candy" theme groups from last year are one example of how Discovery creates closer friends. Growing in a spirit of friendship has been a major part of Discovery for me. Staying with friends at caring and loving families from the church has taught me just how much the church and God loves me. The small groups were special times where I felt like I knew everyone, including the Senior High members whom I don't usually see, and who gave so much time to us Mid Highs during Discovery weekend.

The bits of broken glass are from an activity where we all remembered what it was like to feel broken at some point in our lives. Then we took these broken bits of colored glass and each one of us designed something beautiful out of something broken. Seeing the broken glass changing to new glory helped me learn about the Bible and some of the Bible verses connections.

And don't forget the monkey bread! The sweet cinnamon bread was one of the best things served for breakfast by my host family each morning of my first Discovery experience. But it wasn't just the bread, it was their act of making something special just for my roommate and me. My host families for each year have showed the kindness and generosity to give something truly memorable to me. Not monkey bread, but God's love. They showed me you CAN find God's love in a cinnamon roll.

In closing, I think Discovery's key message is that although Mid High students often feel like we are not accepted or respected in other places in our lives, Discovery shows us how big a circle of caring people we have around us. I'll especially never forget the prayer service from the first year, where everyone just spontaneously started to come up to lay hands on each of us, with the circles of people getting so big that sometimes even the parents couldn't get close.

Seeing all of these people surrounding us truly showed me and the rest of the Mid Highs that everyone is loved by God and we could feel God's love surrounding us, just as the adults, Senior Highs and church members have surrounded us each Discovery weekend.

Ben Brown

Seeking Immortality

We send rockets to explore, view scenes as they unfold
Ever eager to learn more, of a universe vast and cold

Cosmologists look into space, use telescopes to scan and view
Study galaxies for some trace, a missing link or an elusive clue

We see so many stars on high, what can they be concealing
We look at those far and nigh, but little are they revealing

The sun gives heat and light, beaming down relentlessly
It shines clear and bright, yet its origin is a mystery

We ask how the universe began, scientists strive to give insight
Develop theories when they can, can't prove them wrong or right

Cell mutation, chaotic creation, did life come about by chance
Does the scientific speculation, prove that life is happenstance

Are secrets abiding in this place, too difficult to grasp and cope
Does life and all it may embrace, serve to give mankind false hope

Midst uncertainty and doubt, we reflect on the role of man
We ask what life is all about, if it was by chance or plan

Lingering uncertainty casts a pall, our beleaguered souls can not rest
Until we know the answers to all, we must continue with our quest

We study the bible and we pray, to glean it's message for mankind
We read what Christ had to say, He said, "Seek and you shall find"

So we seek answers on our own, immersed in a sea of complexity
And conclude that God alone, gives us life and immortality

Ormond Booth

I BELIEVE

by Ormond Booth

I believe God created man, How? I do not understand
Why? I do not know, I just believe that it is so

And for what it's worth, I believe God created earth
For his handiwork I see in every flower, every tree

The universe, its vast expanse was not created by luck or chance
It was created by the same one who created me and created you

The physicists deserve high marks for finding atoms and the quarks
But despite their wide acclaim, know not whence or how they came

Though we may want to find the origin of earth and mankind
The mind of man cannot reveal what God chooses to conceal

So we are better off by far to accept things as they are
For God will reveal and show all we will ever need to know

ENDURING HOPE

By Ormond Booth

Hope is steadfast and sustains, helps us thru our darkest hour
Hope is enthusiastic and remains the path to God's saving power

Hope is motivating, not demanding, encourages us to search and find
It guides us, but is not commanding, stimulates and enlightens the mind

We look back into the past, lots to learn, much unknown
We know life here will not last, hope assures, helps carry on

Hope is the key to understanding, unlocks mysteries that confound
Belief in God is our safe landing, Faith makes it sure and sound

Enduring Hope is our guide, from the beginning to the end
It blots and casts doubt aside, helps a faltering spirit mend



A little something about the author... I have enjoyed reading poetry since grammar school. After retirement, I decided to try my hand at writing poetry. To date, I have written over 220 poems on many different topics. The Bible has been the source and inspiration for many of my poems.

Ormond Booth

FROM MY JOURNAL - FEBRUARY 1994

Prior to Lent this year, we were encouraged to “take on a Spiritual Discipline” rather than “give up something.” This was my introduction to Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline. I’m really enjoying this and plan to read some more of his books.

While reading about the Fruits of Worship, Foster writes, “Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter into His gracious light”. This thought led me to one of my often repeated prayers, Lord, let me get rid of the “garbage” in the bag I carry on my back. The resentments, anger, hurt feelings, all the things that weigh me down. Then with words that did not seem to be mine, for the FIRST time I prayed, Get rid of the garbage and then let me throw away the bag once and for all so that I won’t have anywhere to store these kinds of things anymore.

I’ve often prayed to empty the contents of the bag but never asked that the bag itself be destroyed! I do believe this was God speaking to me. I must remember this whenever I want to hold on to the “garbage” in my life. It was truly a meaningful Lenten season.

Donna Long

Bubba’s Ramblings WHY GOD DID THE CREATION

02/06

As I prepared for a recent class, several things came into my mind that I had not considered before. I prayed the prayer in the book and extended it to request that I would be able to comprehend the truths that God wanted me to have and to live by.

The part of the Bible we were studying was Chapters 6-11 of Romans. The study guide asked the following question: “How do you understand the experience of dying to self?” The answer I wrote was “Our attachment to self ends and is replaced by the act of attaching our self to God. Man by creative nature must be “attached” to something: himself, another person, work, gold, God, or something.” Paul tells us in these Chapters that we must become “slaves” of Christ. To me that meant we must be totally committed to God. That we must try to love God as much as he loves us, even through we know we can never, never, never achieve that goal.

Then the question “why does God love us so much?” came to mind. The obvious answer is that “GOD IS LOVE.” Then for some reason that I do not understand and could not anticipate, the thought came to me, “That is why God did the creation!” The following is what came next to a rather simple minded, redeemed sinner:

Prior to beginning the creation of his universe, God was sitting around in a “void.” Now my understanding of a “void” is that it is “nothing.” That means that God was sitting in or existing in “nothing” and he was miserable, bored, and unhappy. “You must be crazy”, I thought. “God is God; he is not going to be unhappy, miserable or bored.” Then I thought, “he laughs when we make him happy; why couldn’t he be unhappy, bored, sad and miserable?” Therefore, it made sense to me that while he was sitting or existing in the void, in the nothingness, he simply was not a happy God! Being God, he could solve this problem of being unhappy, bored, sad and miserable. He realized that he simply needed something to love. So he started to make himself something to love and to play with and share his “being” with. He began the creation over time as it is recorded in Genesis. He made the heavens, and the sun, and the stars, and the planets and separated the water from the dry ground and it all was good!

I think he probably took his time and played with his new “toy”, his creation. He probably changed things around several times as he created this new thing and that new thing over time. But, at some point the things he had created became kinda boring - they were just there. They didn’t “do” any thing; they were not alive: they did not react to God’s attention. They just stayed where he put them and did what he made them to do, over and over, day after day, year after year, century after century - until finally God got “just plain bored with his new toys”. He probably said, “What I have made is good, but it needs something moving about, living on the earth I’ve made. Something that I can watch do things, run and jump, live and reproduce, and grow and enjoy with me the things that I have created. So God decided to “play” some more. He probably looked at all that water he had made on earth and said, “I’m going to fill it with fish, and mammals, and little things and big things, swimming things and crawling things, fast things and slow things, strong things and weak things. They will live together and support each other and reproduce their own kind, and provide food for each other according to their characteristics.” He did as he pleased and when he finished, he looked at his new creation and said, “It is good.”

Over the next amount of unknown time, God enjoyed his new water creation. He added to the water creatures and removed some and changed some to do different things as he played with his new toy. But eventually, God became a little tired of this new toy also and started to look around for something else to do. He realized that this "creating thing" was fun and certainly "beat" sitting around in a "void" all the time. He was now ready to do more! As he looked throughout his entire universe, he came back to earth and saw all that dry ground. He thought the dry ground, all that dirt, looked awfully boring and that it needed something growing and flourishing in it. Since the sky was a light blue color, and the water was kinda greenish blue, he decided that the things he would make grow on the surface of the earth would be called plants and would have the color green as their dominant color. (He liked the contrast with the blue sky and the water.) He added many other colors in the form of flowers to make a bright, cheerful and beautiful place for him to enjoy. In fact, he liked walking about among the plants and trees and flowers. Of course, he was continuously changing things around and trying new things just because he was God, the Creator, and he wanted to and he could. Of course, he knew it was all good and God enjoyed his creation. But alas, the plants were stationary in the earth and there was nothing running and jumping and enjoying his creation other than himself. God knew it was his nature to want to share his creation with other living things that could enjoy it with him. So he decided to duplicate on earth what he had done earlier in the waters. He made all kinds of animals and birds and creeping things and big things and small things and strong things and weak things, each with its own design and purpose and God said, "It is good!"

God was very pleased with his creation now. He could watch the things in the heavens, and in the seas, and on the earth. He could reach out and pet his animals and sea creatures and enjoy the beauty of the plants and the fragrance of the flowers. It was all very good! God loved his plants and animals and creatures but he knew he was not totally satisfied with what he had made. It was very good cause he knew "he don't make no junk" but none of his creation could communicate directly with him and none of them were able to love him back. The simple truth of the matter may have been that God just got plain tired of talking to himself. He wanted somebody or something that could talk to him, and he could talk to them, and they could learn to love him back a little bit, maybe. It is too simple to be actually true, but maybe God just got lonesome. He may have decided that he was ready to do something more than "just create things." It was fun but after all when you've created one universe and one world, doing it again and again could get kinda mundane. And besides, his creation was done so perfectly that it "could run itself" and he really didn't need to spend all his time "fine tuning" and changing things, the creation could do all that on its own.

Well, God probably sat down under one of his biggest trees and while he petted his favorite animal creation (which I'm sure was a standard poodle), he pondered what he wanted to do about his lonesomeness. He thought that actually his earth could use a creation to oversee it - all the plants and animals that were in the seas and on the earth and in the air above the earth. Maybe this creation could oversee the earth, provide company to him, and need his continuous love, attention, and guidance. God thought and thought about this new creation and where it would fit within the universe he had already established. He decided that it probably should fit in at a point "a little lower than the angels" but above every other creation on the earth. This being could be in his own image with very carefully selected, limited capabilities and powers such as the ability to communicate with him and each other, to think and reason, to build and solve problems, and to reproduce and prosper. The creation could know love and be innocent of heart and mind within the earthly setting. The new creation could be able to grow in learning and wisdom but not have access to the very inner secrets of God until such time as God might choose to reveal those secrets.

So God created this final new creation and called it man and then he created woman. God now had a being in his own image to love, to communicate with, and to watch over for an eternity. God made this man and woman with the ability to love God and to choose God. While mankind has taken the capabilities and powers granted to him by God for other purposes, there is obviously no doubt in God's mind that he created mankind for a single purpose - **to love and please God.**

WHY GOD DID THE CREATION? - LOVE.

GOD GAVE LOVE TO MANKIND: FIRST DURING THE CREATION, SECOND ON THE CROSS - HE NOW EXPECTS US TO CONTINUOUSLY GIVE IT BACK TO HIM FOR ALL ETERNITY.

SEEMS RIGHT...AND REASONABLE TO ME!!!

Bubba.

You Get Your Hands Dirty When You Wash A Lot Of Feet

I've never felt called to mission work. Honestly, I've always felt that folks who leave everything behind and go to Africa and South America or other difficult lands are probably a little nuts. It must be that I truly don't have a "calling" or I guess things like lack of indoor plumbing and access to medical care, not to mention cable TV, wouldn't cross my mind.

My "mission" work has usually taken a very safe route: write a check. Oh, sometimes I'd volunteer to pack boxes for Samaritan Purse's Operation Christmas Child or flood buckets for hurricane victims all things that can be done from the safety of a cushioned church pew. And a few summers back our family hosted a young girl through ABRO, a relief organization that brings children suffering from radiation over to the US for a kind of summer-Fresh Air program. But none of those things ever made me leave the comfort of my own living room.

But six years ago I unwittingly signed up for a more direct kind of mission project. Each year our church adopts needy families at Christmas and provides a food basket, clothes, and Christmas gifts. The first year I heard about the program, called "White Christmas," I signed right up. "Oh boy!" I thought. "Another excuse to shop and wrap presents!"

But then came the bombshell: I was expected to deliver these gifts. No safe drop off at our little suburban church. I had to go out into some very dark places in the Raleigh-Durham area and meet these folks face to face.

I'll admit it: I was prejudiced, full of stereotypes, and scared. I'd never been to the projects. Would I get lost and get mugged? Would my purse be stolen from one side of my car while I unloaded a frozen turkey out the other? Would these people be resentful of me, this white soccer mom driving a mini-van and playing at being Santa Claus, able to drive off back to my white picket fence cul-de-sac life style?

As you might guess, none of these things happened. Although the families I've met over the past six years do sometimes make voices from TV's "Fox & Friends" dance in my head; Why do you keep having kids you can't support? Where are the fathers? Don't you have a plan to get off of food stamps? Most have been in a temporary bad spot, a bit embarrassed at having to ask for help, and incredibly grateful for the smallest of gifts.

Indeed, the very first year my number one feeling when I dropped off the goodies was shame. It was a year when I was working, my husband was making his usual good income, and frankly, we were pretty flush. Although I spent only a fraction on my "adopted" family of what I'd spent on my nuclear family, when I got there to unload the gifts, it seemed like an enormous amount. We had gotten each child in the family some clothes, three or four toys, and brought along Christmas stockings and some decorations, too, along with all the food the church provides.

When the grateful mom went to thank me, I choked. I couldn't tell this struggling mom that really, this was just a drop in the bucket for my family, that what was an embarrassment of riches for her was just a modest part of our charity budget. So I fudged my answer, telling her that the gifts were from the church, which really they were. Mark and I may have paid the bills, but the gifts came from a larger ministry where we were just the hands and feet and yes, checkbook.

But it was one of those moments where you are dumbstruck by the blessings in your own life-not the least of which were safe neighborhoods in which to raise kids and security of a roof over your heads and a well stocked refrigerator. It was a moment when suddenly all the pretty be-ribboned gifts under the tree seemed, truly, as inconsequential as they really are in the larger scheme of life.

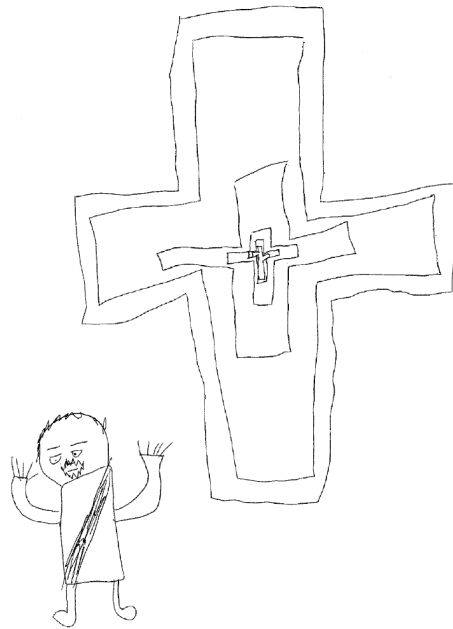
We have continued to participate in the White Christmas program each year, and each year I am struck anew at what our former pastor liked to call "God's Economics: to live a life so that those who have much, do not have too much, and that those who have little, do not have too little."

Nothing better teaches me the Christmas message better than the time I've spent delivering gifts to these families. God's perfect gift to us did not arrive at the McMansion in town, it arrived out back, in the barn, a poor baby whose cradle was an animal's feeding dish. When the Wise Men wanted to honor the Baby with their gifts, they didn't get to stay in their luxurious bowers, but went directly around to the back door and knelt there in the dirt right along with the baby.

We would also do well to remember that after the joyous, peaceful birth of Christmas Eve, came a horrible time, Mary and Joseph's flight and Herod's slaughter of the innocents. Those who directly followed Jesus in His own day did not come to comfortable lives and easy endings, either.

If we wish to truly live the Christmas message, we need to follow the example Christ Himself set. In washing the feet of those around us we find in need, we certainly may get our own hands dirty, but it is truly what will make us count our own blessings and live up to the name of Christ in the word "Christian."

Debbie Brown



"Annie and the Spider" (revised for WAGAM 5.5.08)

by The Reverend Kelly Lyn Logue

It was the second day of a week of Sabbath-true Sabbath rest. I long for it. Just me, the Blue Ridge Mountains, a cabin with a majestic view, a journal, a pile of cds, a bigger pile of books and my banjo.

With dark clouds and thunder rumbling in the distant south of me, I spent the afternoon reading Anne Lamott and trying not to convince myself to pick up and move to the West Coast. Every time I read Annie I begin to day dream about living in a place like San Francisco or Seattle. (I like to think that she and I are comfortable friends and confidants and "Annie" is her self titled term of endearment.)

I've never been to California but hope to go one day. I've been to Europe, to Central America and to the Caribbean, but not the West Coast of North America. If it wasn't for educational opportunities or mission trips through the Church, I would probably never leave the Southland.

Many moons ago, the summer I turned 10 (26 years ago this summer), my family headed West in a blue Honda station wagon to see the Grand Canyon and to visit my PopPop and Aunt living in Phoenix. That's the extent of my Western trail. In a recent conversation with a beloved colleague, he recounted his wife's comment about their visit to the Grand Canyon as she said: "It's big." The deadpan look on his face when he said it makes me laugh even now.

During my time with Annie that afternoon I did a lot of giggling and even shed a few tears. I spent some good quiet time just listening to the wind and birds in the trees. I admired the rhododendrons that were coming alive all over the moutainscape.

More than anything, though, I spent time brushing annoying little bugs off me. Perhaps it was the peacock blue palazzo suit I had on, or the yummy smelling, milky lotion I'd lathered myself up with earlier in the morning. Whatever the case, I was a living bug catcher! Little red spiders, ants, tiny flying insects (Gee, I hope they weren't fleas) lady bugs and flies were lighting on me.

Now, I'm not one to be afraid of bugs. To tell the truth, I make fun of people who are afraid of bugs. I am the one who will scoop up a spider and let 'em loose outside and will shun anyone who steps on such a creature just to be rid of it. If we only knew how many mites we share space with on a daily basis...

On this particular afternoon, however, the power of suggestion and the regular onslaught of these insects made me itch all over, even in between my toes! In the mist of my "get-the-bugs-off-me" dance, as I tried to continue reading, I kept seeing a black shadow at the left ridge of my eye glasses. Twice I took them off and used my blouse to wipe away whatever gunk had collected on the lenses. I could see clearer but there was still a small dark spot bugging me. I convinced myself that it was a floater inside my own eye.

I pressed on reading and mustered up the best tom-girl, mountaineering, living with creation persona inside of me, while my skin was surely being eaten away and larvae was being laid in my scalp and armpits.

More clouds rolled in over the mountain side and yet the haze over the Blue Ridge disappeared. It takes my breath away-the stillness of the peaks. Perhaps only the mountains know what it means to "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46)

Another day dream of mine is that I was one of the first settlers of the mountains of North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. Writers like Charles Frazier, Barbara Kingsolver, Lee Smith and Silas House write the kind of Appalachian fiction that makes the reader come to life themselves as they turn the pages of stories about the mountain living. I learn more about myself, my history and my place in the world by reading about Appalachia than I do reading anything else except for Holy Scripture. There is so much of the Bible in Southern literature, the gritty, aching truth about God, us and the world. I guess if I ever were to move out West, I'd need a big library. I hear there is one in Annie's home town. But, it's only still there because she helped to save it from being shut down by the state government. God help us all.

In the midst of all my reflection, suddenly the annoying dark smudge on my spectacles began to move! In horror I swung the glasses away from me and shook my head to and fro. Heebeegeegees went all through me. Inspecting my glasses at closer range, I discovered a small, coal colored spider making her way across the ridge of the frame, not so unlike my own journey on this particular Sabbath day.

Even up here in the fresh mountain air I cannot escape the bugs. I've got ants in the kitchen at home in Cary, but a whole menagerie of companions here. You can't shake off, spray repellent or light the perfect citronella candle to ward off all of the little things that get caught up in the sticky web of our lives. We are a sweet, smelly, colorful milky mess made up of all that attracts all that is good and bad. While time away for Sabbath rest is indeed respite from vocational work-it is never rest from our work as creatures. In the same week God created my kind, God in His infinite wisdom made insects most likely from the same dust out of which Eve and Adam were formed. What an awesome way to spend a week!

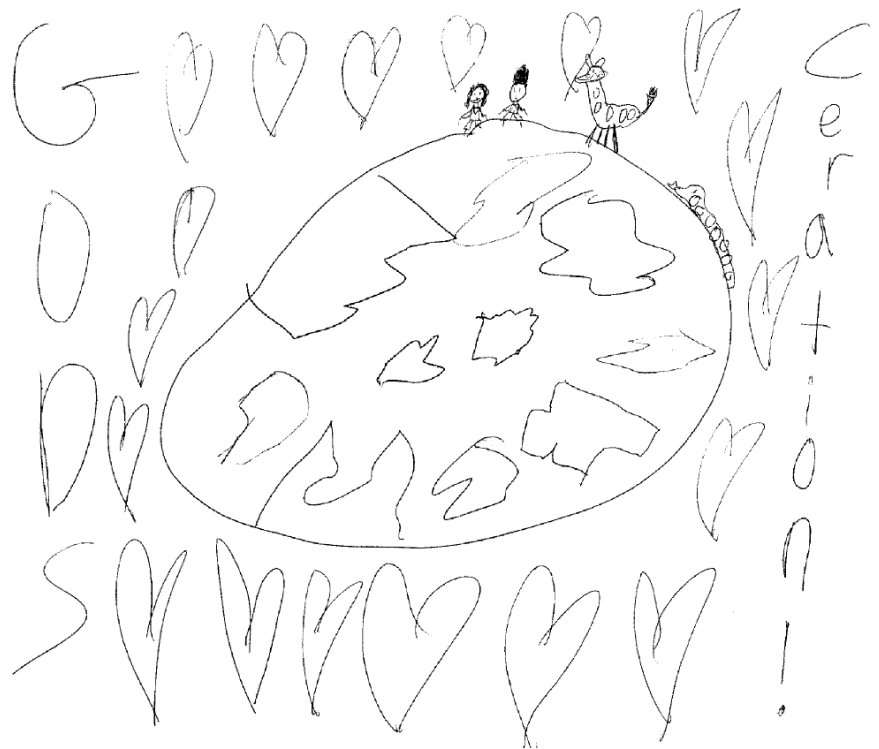
Anne Lamott recounts in her most recent collection of essays: "When I asked Father Tom where we find God in this present darkness, he said that God is in creation and get outdoors as much as you can." "Grace Eventually, p.168," I'll add an enthusiastic, "DITTO!" Although I suppose I should also add this caveat...perhaps one shouldn't wear peacock blue on an early summer day smelling like shea butter and rice flower (with apologies to Bath and Body Works).

"God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good!" (Genesis 1:31 *The Message*)



A little something about the author...*The Reverend Kelly Lyn Logue is in her 5th year of ministry at White Plains. Originally from Kentucky, she loves bluegrass and old time music, and plays the clawhammer banjo, guitar and mountain dulcimer. In her free time she enjoys quality time with her dog Noah, friends, reading, and traveling to the mountains and music festivals.*

Artwork done by the children of White Plains UMC.



A PSALM OF PRAISE

There are not enough words, enough sheets of paper, enough time,
or enough mental capability to adequately praise you, Oh Lord.

From the very beginning, even before life, to the everlasting existence with you in Heaven,
there is no end to your love, your grace, your mercy. There is no limit to your justice, your compassion, your peace.

Mere human words and thoughts cannot begin to adequately express appreciation and praise for you,
Oh Lord, Creator of the universe and all there is. The Provider of all good and perfect things for your children.

While you were doing all the great things you have done, you knew me before I was.
You had time for me after I existed.

You will continue to know me for all eternity, if I but confess and acknowledge you as my God and my Savior.

No human mind can comprehend, nor understand, nor fathom your kind of love, Oh Lord,
and why we are allowed to benefit from it.

Is there any wonder that praising you should be a continuous, everlasting and conscious activity of our very being?

A major problem a mortal has in praising you, Oh Lord,
is that we are completely unaware of the innumerable gifts, graces, and blessings that you have showered upon us.
Oh yes, we know about your love for us, and about Jesus' gift from the cross.

We know about the gift of life and the oxygen, water, food, and protection we must receive to sustain life.

We also know about the love of family, friends, and our Christian brothers and sisters.

For all these known gifts and blessings we shout and sing your praises! We glorify your name!!

But for every gift and blessing we know about or can think about, there are tens of millions,
yea, hundreds of trillions that we are unaware of. How can we adequately praise you, Oh Lord,
when we cannot even begin to know or understand the length or breath of the praise we owe you?

Maybe our desire to be your child, our worship of you, the confession of our sins to you,
and your merciful forgiveness of our inadequacies is your way of letting us render acceptable praise to you.

Even then, Oh Lord, our efforts would be so very inadequate, so very frail, so very unworthy.

However, my God! Please, accept this, my feeble attempt to exalt and to praise your name now and forever.

Amen.

Braxton Matthews

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Philippians 4:4