

First and foremost

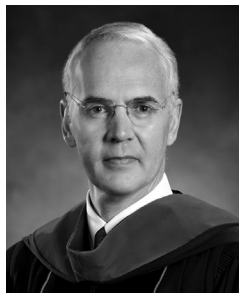
Rev. Dr. Richard Gibbons

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



SUNDAY WORSHIP:
8:30am and 11:00am (Sanctuary)
10:45am (*Ignite* Modern Worship)

FirstPresGreenville.org



“Oh, You’d Better Watch Out!”

Isaiah 40:1-31

A Florida lady did her shopping and, upon returning to her car, found four males in the act of leaving with her vehicle.

She dropped her shopping bags, drew her handgun, and proceeded to scream at the top of her lungs, “I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!” The four men didn’t wait for a second threat. They got out and ran.

The lady, somewhat shaken, then proceeded to load her shopping bags into the back of the car and got into the driver’s seat. She was so shaken that she could not get her key into the ignition.

She tried and tried, and then realized why when she noticed a football and a Frisbee on the passenger seat. A few minutes later, she found her own car parked four or five spaces farther down. She loaded her bags into the car and drove to the police station to report her mistake.

The sergeant to whom she told the story couldn’t stop laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four pale males were reporting a carjacking by a mad, elderly woman described as white, less than five feet tall, with glasses and curly white hair, carrying a large handgun.

No charges were filed. The moral of the story? If you’re going to forget about where you parked your car, have a memorable story to explain what happened!

The Old Testament book of Isaiah contains some of the most memorable passages in all of Scripture. Because of its lofty portrayal of the nature and character of God, Isaiah is often called “the fifth gospel,” implying that it contains themes similar to the gospels of the New Testament.

In Isaiah chapter 40, Isaiah writes in a manner sometimes referred to as “supra-historical,” meaning he writes of things above and beyond the immediacy of the historical context. In fact, as part of his prophetic ministry, he often takes his readers to the 37,000-foot view. In this way he allows us to see not just one part of the developing story of God’s redemptive history, but also to see the much larger picture of what God is doing.

“He tends his flock like a shepherd”

Isaiah 40:11

In chapter 40, one of the supreme passages in the entire Old Testament, Isaiah highlights the warmth of God’s love and His sovereign care for His children. He does this by reminding his readers that God gathers us like a shepherd and carries us close to His heart. In holding us close, He comforts us amidst change and uncertainty. Isaiah’s day was often dominated by the fear of predators and parasites, especially when they found themselves walking through new or strange terrain.

In the year ahead you may find yourself enjoying not only the comforting presence of God, but also His leading and guiding through a promotion at work, the birth of a child or grandchild, moving to a new home, or preparing for retirement. Yet there may also be moments of challenge and difficulty in 2019. At those moments we especially need His comforting, guiding presence as He settles His sheep and brings us comfort and relief from the predators and parasites. When the sheep have confidence in the Shepherd, when there is deep, lasting contentment, they can rest and relax as they draw closer to the Shepherd.

Isaiah provides for us a picture of God caring for His children, holding them close, loving them, caring for them, protecting them, gently leading them, and looking out for them. This is when we are most satisfied; this is when we rest, relax, and trust Him. It is this trust that brings contentment and satisfaction. It is His presence

that makes the difference. God Himself. Not just someone or something, but God Himself. What a wonderful picture Isaiah provides us as we move into a New Year with all of its blessings and challenges!

Yet you may be tempted to think, “I agree that Isaiah provides a great picture of the love and care God lavishes on His children, yet for me the thrill and excitement of my faith is fading. I’m tired. Every week it seems that I am running hard just to stand still. If I am not taking my children or grandchildren to soccer practice, it is basketball or baseball or music or gymnastics or ballet lessons!”

When you get to the point in your life that you are so tired you cannot think straight, when every day is a battle filled with stress and pressure, you need to disengage, recharge, and spend time with Him. Look at your life. Prayerfully examine all that you are involved in and then radically cut out everything that is not essential. Try to intentionally do less, yet enjoy it more. Prayerfully let Him gather you up in His arms and carry you, and you will find that you grow stronger in your faith, able to determine your priorities for the year ahead.

The promises contained in Isaiah become clear when you rest in Him and allow Him to hold you close and care for you. You do this by spending time with Him, praying, reading, meditating upon His Word, delighting in His presence. By growing closer you will discover that His grace will equip and enable you for all that 2019 has in store. And as you do, remember and rejoice in His promise: He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak (Isaiah 40:29). Then you will have a memorable beginning to a New Year!

Dr. Gibbons messages are available online at FirstPresGreenville.org (click the Media tab) and on Fox Carolina each Sunday morning at 10:30am. Watch our live stream, Sundays at 8:30am and 11:00am at FirstPresGreenville.org.