



Dear FCC Family and Friends,

Do you believe in miracles? No, I'm not talking about the U.S. ice hockey team that upset the highly favored team from the Soviet Union that spurred that famous sports caster's line a few decades ago. I think it is interesting that in John's Gospel, what we often refer to as miracles are called "signs." In fact The Gospel of John is referred to as a "signs" gospel. So perhaps a better question is—Do you believe in "signs?"

In a novel I read recently titled *The Fifth Gospel*, the author intertwines within his writing a lot of Christian scholarship on the Gospel of John which puts forth the idea that the reason that John is different from the synoptic gospels is that it is really a book of theology.

Theology, according to Webster's Dictionary is defined as: *the study of religious faith, practice, and experience: the study of God and God's relation to the world.* If you look at John's gospel, it certainly fits the definition more than the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

From beginning to end, the Gospel of John provides a glimpse of God's love with Jesus as evidence of that love. John 3:16 is one of the first scriptures taught to children: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."** (NRSV)

In his gospel, John ties the "signs" to much of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. The first "sign" in John, usually referred to as Jesus' first miracle, occurs when Jesus turns water into wine. On the surface, it seems to be somewhat of a simple story, but there is more to it when it is examined more closely.

Notice that John points out that the six water jars are not just any clay containers; they are jars for the Jewish rite of purification. As such, they represent the old order. Throughout Jesus' ministry he confronts religious leaders because they have corrupted the faith and have presented the people many wrong ideas about God. Jesus points out the religious leaders have turned faith into a list of lifeless laws—a list of "do's and don'ts." The religious leaders had forgotten that the laws were not to be followed for their own sakes but were given to enrich life. They had turned God into a harsh judge and twisted faith into following a set of rules.

The huge stone water jars were vessels for the water needed for ritual cleansing—water for the sake of people trying to make themselves clean before God with rituals they had made up. Jesus overturned their ideas and spoke of God as a loving parent and pictured the life of faith as caring for one's neighbor.

There are multiple layers of meaning in this story. For one, God blesses joyful celebrations. Think about what a welcome respite comes from the occasional breaks from our normal life—laughter, celebration, and joyful fellowship. I want to focus on this a bit more in Sunday's sermon.

Another connection to what Jesus is doing harkens back to Amos, the Old Testament prophet who said that when God's kingdom breaks forth on earth, there will be an abundance of good wine.

Jesus initiates the new age, and He launches it with an act of grace. He turns potential disaster into a blessing. This becomes a reoccurring theme in His ministry. Remember the woman caught in adultery? Jesus forgives her and gives her a fresh start. When the prodigal son drags himself back, the father forgives him and throws a party. Jesus heals the blind, the lame, and forgives the sinners. He feeds the multitudes. He teaches us that if we truly love God, then we will serve as He served.

In John, the focus of the Last Supper is not on the bread and the cup, but John's focus is on Jesus' washing the disciple's feet. Jesus then says that he came to serve, and we should follow his example. It is in the Gospel of John that Jesus tells His disciples **"whoever has seen me has seen the Father."**

John 1:17 tells us, **"The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."** (NRSV)

Are you beginning to see why many scholars consider the Gospel of John to be a book of theology as we see God's relation to the world through Jesus?

Gregory Jones, a Presbyterian minister, says, "Turning water into wine becomes a metaphor for his (Jesus') ministry. Wherever he encounters a problem, he envisions the new possibilities that could arise if touched by grace."

While you might not believe in miracles, you should believe in "signs"—"signs" of God's love for us for they are all around us each and every day.

The sermon title for Sunday is "Let's Party!" and is based on John 2:1-11.

If you are able, come and join in joyful celebration of our Lord and Savior each time we gather to worship.

Pastor Ray

<u>Attendance</u>		<u>Giving</u>	
Sunday Worship	57	Giving for operations	\$3,289.39
Emerging Worship	9	Giving for Capital	.00
Total	66	Giving for Outreach	.00
Sunday School	23	Giving total	\$3,289.39

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
Psalm 36:7-9 NRSV

Office Hours
 Monday-Thursday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
 Lunch times vary
 Email: office@fccshawnee.com
 Church Website: www.fccshawnee.com

Keep Us Informed
 Please contact your church if you or a loved one is ill, injured, in the hospital, needs special prayer, wants a visit, or has other needs.
 Pastor Ray's: Cell Phone-405-833-2272
 Email-raybelford@hotmail.com
 Office: (405) 275-1525

 **Yes, We Are Still Collecting Clothes**
 Just bring your gently-used garments to the stage area.

We are collecting **EXTRA-HEAVY** sacks for the take-out service of our February Ground Hog Dinner.

THANKS!

Ground Hog Alert
All Women of the Church "The Slow Sweeties" we will make Cole Slow Friday Jan. 29th at 9:00am. We need all the help we can get.
Thank you -
Mary Ann Luman
Jaye Shepherd

 *Thank You Again,*
 Mick and Nelda Ward for wrestling boxes of decorations back up to the attic!!! Bless you!

Ground Hog Dinner containers will also sit flat in  sacks.
 Save 'em up and send 'em in!
THANKS, once more!

Lenten Lunch Series
 We will be participating in the annual Community Ecumenical Lenten Worship Series and are scheduled to host the only Friday service on Good Friday, March 25.
 The series is set to begin on Thursday, February 11 with United Presbyterian Church providing the worship and lunch. (This will probably be at our facilities due to their transition after leaving their Beard Street building.) The series will continue at the following:
 St. John Lutheran Church—Thursday, February 18
 St. Paul's United Methodist Church—Thursday, February 25
 First Baptist Church—Thursday, March 3
 Emmanuel Episcopal Church—Thursday, March 10
 St. Benedict Catholic Church—Thursday, March 17
 First Christian Church—Friday, March 25
 Services will begin at noon with a short worship service to be followed by a light fellowship meal. The host church provides the meal with donations from participants helping with the cost. Growing during the years, the services reinforce ecumenical

Canning Jars
 If you'll return salsa **canning jars**, we will save them for salsa-ing again!


MILLENNIAL MINUTE

Happy New Year!

To kick off the New Year, the Youth Group met for a lock-in on the 2nd of January. I am pleased to announce that we had 13 youth and three adult chaperones in attendance. We laughed, ran, played games, watched the latest Star Wars installment in the theatre, ate junk food, and were still able to gather for worship on Sunday morning! Special thanks to our adult sponsors. This fun event would not have been possible without you.

As a reminder, the Youth will continue to gather for Sunday School on Sunday morning from 9:00-9:30. Youth Group is on Sunday Evenings from 4:00-6:00. We are already hard at work planning for our annual fundraiser, the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner on February 9! Also, next week we will begin featuring our Youth and Young Adults in the newsletter. Stay tuned for smiling faces!



May God guide us in all things,

Kyle Miller-Shawnee

Board Approves Budget

During the called board meeting last Sunday, the church board approved the proposed church budget for 2016, and it will be presented to the congregation for approval this coming Sunday, January 17.

The budget reflects the current level of giving plus the lease payments from One Safe Place of the Family Justice Center. It also reflects the actions taken during 2015 to reduce expenses in several areas including: the restructuring of the loan on the elevator expansion; the restructuring of Associate Pastor Josh's role to a Sunday-only position including the assumption of responsibility for the church choir; no first service pianist; and elimination of custodial costs with John Broomfield assuming those responsibilities as a gift of his time and talent to the church.

Other reductions include using choir music from our extensive files rather than purchasing new music this year and closely watching all expenses throughout the year.

If we maintain the level of giving and control our expenses, we should be able to continue with our current ministries and potentially launch new ministries and rebuild some of our reserves.

We thank everyone for your faithfulness in giving this past year and pray that you will continue to support our church so that we may remain a vital part of Christ's ministry in this community in our 125th year and beyond.



Congregational Meeting



There will be a called meeting of the congregation on Sunday, January 17, to consider action on the 2016 church budget. This second annual meeting has become our normal budget approval method for the last several years, so that we have the final giving statistics for the previous year from which to plan.

Wed., Jan. 13—Boomer Bridge, noon - 5:00 p.m.

Sun., Jan. 17—Sunday school 9:00-9:30 a.m.

Fellowship 9:30-9:50 a.m. **United Service 10 a.m.**

Chancel Choir 11:15 a.m Youth 4-6 p.m.

Tues., Jan. 19—Start of square dance lessons in Fellowship Hall 7-9:00 p.m.

Wed., Jan 20—Boomer Bridge, noon - 5:00 p.m.

Sun., Jan. 24—Sunday school 9:00-9:30 a.m. Fellowship 9:30-9:50 a.m.

United Service 10 a.m. Chancel Choir 11:15 a.m

Youth 4-6 p.m.

Wed., Jan. 27—Boomer Bridge, noon - 5:00 p.m.

Fri., Jan. 29—Slaw making for Ground Hog dinner. 9:00 a.m.

Tues., Feb. 2—**Ground Hog Dinner.**



WORSHIP MATTERS

This past Sunday, liturgically minded Christians around the world celebrated the Baptism of the Lord. Following the Feast of the Epiphany, which fell midweek this year, the Baptism of the Lord is one of the principal observances of Epiphanytide (the season after Epiphany). In Epiphany, we celebrate the Revelatory Radiance of God as manifest in the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ. This year we observed Baptism of the Lord Sunday by returning to the baptismal waters to renew our baptismal covenant and commit ourselves again to living God's sacramental grace.

You may also have noticed a change in liturgical color. Following the Feast of the Epiphany the Church moves from the high festal colors of white and gold to the color green, representing our continual growth in relationship to the life and witness of Jesus. This "short green season" (there is a much longer one from Pentecost to Advent) leads us into the holy season of Lent and allows us to fatten up spiritually before the lean penitential season. For this reason, the Chancel Choir will be offering anthems focused on the Lord's Supper throughout Epiphanytide. It is our prayer that these musical selections will be a feast, not only for your ears, but for your soul as well.

This Sunday Pastor Ray will be preaching about Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine. Prepare for worship by prayerfully studying Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, I Corinthians 12:1-11 and John 2:1-11. Pray this week about finding joy in your Christian journey and come Sunday prepared to receive the warm radiance of Christ on behalf of an often cold and dark world. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16, NRSV)

Blessed Epiphanytide,

josh

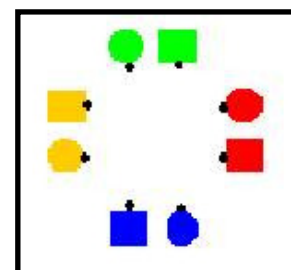
Ground Hog Fundraiser

Tuesday, February 2's dinner is another way our church benefits community organizations. The majority of the labor for the dinner is short-term, over few days. We will have tickets to sell, food prep to do, and set-up of the take-out, kitchen, Fellowship Hall, and dessert areas.

Tickets will be going on sale soon, and everyone is encouraged to help with ticket sales.

The menu typically includes: two hog (sausage) patties, mashed potatoes, green beans, coleslaw, applesauce, roll, drink, and dessert. YUM! Serving hours are: 11 a.m.—1:30 p.m.

4 p.m.—7:00 p.m.



Square Dance Lessons

The Shawnee Square 8's square dance club will begin providing lessons for those who are interested in learning to allemande left, do sa do, promenade, swing your partner, circle left or right, or to just make some new friends. All are welcome to attend the lessons which will run for 10 weeks. They will held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7-9 p.m. in our Fellowship Hall. The lessons will begin on January 19. See Richard MacMillan for more details.