

The Spire

Newsletter of the First Baptist Church in America

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One Anothering... *“What’s Fair”*

There’s a lot of talk about fairness recently since the OWS protests, amplified by the State of the Union address. There’s a revolt against what some claim is unfairness. Of course, we wish everyone was equal. But we’re not, and life isn’t ever going to be fair. Still, it’s appropriate to try to make it more so. But, a lot of it has to do with one’s definition of “fair.” That depends, of course, on who gets to do the defining. Then fairness, a noble goal, gets politicized so somebody gets to make hay if they get their way.

I saw a Maxine cartoon: “Life’s not fair. Get over it.” Too harsh for our church sign. I don’t want my attempts to make people think and help them laugh to give the wrong impression about a caring congregation like ours. But questioning the fairness of God is a fair question. From Job to Jesus, the Bible is full of characters complaining about God’s unfairness. So, if even God’s not fair, how can we expect frail human beings to be?

Consider the Gospel of Matthew where fairness is a common theme. In Chapter 19, the Disciples try to stop mothers from bringing their kids to Jesus who repudiated them by taking up for the little ones, because in God’s kingdom even the least have status. But that’s not fair. Then comes the story of the rich young ruler who can keep the commandments, but he can’t give up the wealth and prestige of society. It was preposterous to suggest that he sell all he has and give it to the poor. That would put him at the bottom of the heap - too much of a leap from his status at the top.

But they didn’t get his stories of unfairness, so finally the tale of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), that ends with the same sentiment, *“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”* Then he tells the Disciples how that will play out on their way to Jerusalem. They expect Jesus to become an earthly king, with power, fame and glory. Instead, he told them that he will be delivered to the authorities and crucified and raised on the 3rd day. But James and John want to know if they can sit in the places of honor. That seems fair, since they’ve left all to follow him. What’s the payoff? *“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

But that’s not fair. It’s not how the World works. Status, power and wealth don’t count in the Kingdom of God. Then, he tells this parable where some are first and some are last but everybody’s in, revealing clear differences of understanding of fairness. We value wages and rewards. God values the harvest, the fruits of our labor.

So is God fair? No, at least not in the way we deem fairness. But neither is God cruel. The pay is the one agreed upon. It wasn’t substandard. But our standard of fairness is relative, and if you do what this landowner did, there will be mutiny in the ranks.

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What if the standard of value is not the wage, but the work? Ah, yes, work. What if they loved tending to grapes, and pay was a side effect of being employed? Or working for the love of the landowner? But the workers were there only for the pay which guaranteed their grievance. The point of the story is if you're here for the pay; to keep records and to make sure nobody gets anything they don't deserve, your sense of fairness guarantees misery.

God's kingdom has nothing to do with how much you have earned and work is not done for the sake of reward. *"The last will be first, the first last,"* so you can't tell who's the CEO or how much he has in the bank for somebody else to resent, whining about unfairness. Some have more talents and apply themselves more than others.

So we know life's not fair. And neither is God. Not when it comes to rewards and punishments. But God will pay everybody the same in the end, no matter whether you've been with him all day long or one hour. Is that fair? Not if you're vexed by God's extending mercy to someone who hasn't worked as hard as you have. Or, are you amazed that God would pay you so much for the privilege of working in his vineyard? When *"the first are last and the last are first,"* it's all in how you look at it.

Br'er Dan #36

Second Mile Smiles ☺ to: Steve and Angela, Jason and Betsy



"Our employees are our greatest asset. I say we sell them."

LINDA'S LINES

Since I have been Associate Pastor, I have seen in a new way how members of this church care for each other. Time and again I hear stories of how someone has helped another member or visitor. Sometimes in simple ways and other times in significant and very helpful or time-consuming ways. Such things as offering a ride to a member who no longer drives, providing resources to someone in need, meeting a lonely or grieving person for lunch, etc. I won't embarrass anyone by naming names but the list goes on and on. Most of these things are done quietly and without acknowledgement. Then there is lots of socializing too. I think all these things together build our community and make us stronger. Dan, of course, plays a major role in that he does a lot of visitation and socializing himself. But I am glad to observe how not only the deacons but everyone is getting into the act. And, I am grateful to be a part of such a giving community.

Paster Dan

By Margaret Steadman



FBCIA NEWS



After the worship services and a deli luncheon on Sunday, January 22, 2012, the church and Charitable Baptist Society held their annual meeting, chaired by the moderator, David Coon.



PICA Annual Silent Auction

April 11, 2012

It's time to rid yourself of all those unwanted items that are stuffed in closets, bureaus and under the beds. If they are in good condition (no clothes please) we will auction them off. You will get a tax deduction. - We will get much needed cash.

The need for PICA services grows by leaps and bounds. The food pantry fed 71,000 people in 2011. The Friday night meal site regularly feed 250 people. The numbers in the Homeless Out Reachg Program have risen so much that our case managers are busy nonstop, connecting people to the needed services.

PLEASE HELP

*PICA stands for
Providence Intown Churches Association

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Dr. Dan Ivins, Pastor
Dr. Linda Bausserman, Associate Pastor
Stephen T. Martorella, Minister of Music

Sunday Calendar

Sun. Feb 05	10:00 AM	Adult Forum: Discovering God's Plan - Ruth Marris Macaulay College Bible Study/Sunday School
	11:00 AM	Sermon: "Run for the Roses" Dr. Dan Ivins Scripture: Acts 20:17-24 - Donna Campopiano Greeters: TBA Ushers: TBA
	12:15 AM	Guided tour: Joanne Schneider
Sun. Feb 12	10:00 AM	Adult Forum: Compassion - Dr. Linda Bausserman College Bible Study/Sunday School
	11:00 AM	Sermon: "When it's hard to believe in God" Dr. Dan Ivins Scripture: Mark 9:24 Greeters: TBA Ushers: TBA
	12:15 AM	Guided tour: Stan Lemons
Sun. Feb 19	10:00 AM	Adult Forum/ College Bible Study/Sunday School
	11:00 AM	Sermon: Dr. Linda Bausserman Scripture: Mark 2:1-12 Eva Adodoadji Greeters: TBA Ushers: TBA
	12:15 AM	Guided tour: Justin Squizzero

MISSIONS CALENDAR

☀ 3rd Sunday of the Month Amnesty International Letter writing Sunday

☀ 4th Sunday of the Month is PICA Sunday—Please bring non-perishable food items to church Sunday

SNOW POLICY

When there is a parking ban for snow in effect in Providence, all Church Services and activities will be cancelled. Please be sure to check the television and radio notices and the Church website at: www.fbcia.org.