

“So Great a Cloud of Witnesses and Friendly”

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November 4, 2007

*1st Presbyterian Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Hebrews 11:32-12:3
III John 1:13-15*

We are a friendly, inclusive and welcoming church! Over the next three Sundays, starting this morning – I want to share with you thoughts, convictions about us, our church. What a church should and needs to be, and that we reflect these three excellent attributes – Friendly, Inclusive and Welcoming. Of course we have other wonderful attributes, but these three are a good reflection.

David and Gladys Kaufman (friends) 90th birthdays. Shawn and I were blessed in being included in their surprise birthday party, last month. Their families did a great job of surprising them and bringing tears to all our eyes – tears of affection, watching a presentation of family and friends photos, of their lives.

Weddings, baptisms, worship, parties, celebrations – so many wonderful times of friends being together. And many of us have held each other and wept over the loss of a loved one. Friends.

As I look around this beautiful sanctuary (under repair), I see friendly faces, and I also miss seeing friendly faces. Friends, witnesses to Christ and his church over the past years. Bob, Ruth, Gwen, Tom, Dave, George, Chuck, Horace, Minerva, Bill and others. Those and many others have ensured that First Presbyterian Church endures and thrives, sharing the Gospel of Christ. We have this great cloud of Witnesses surrounding us! Through many them, via our Endowment Fund, we continue our ministry. Many of them through their commitments continue to support our friendly church.

The Hebrews preacher declares: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”

Fabulous words!
Inspiring words!

My friends, many, many faithful have gone on before you! Many of them went through great distress, and hardship! Those within this great cloud of witnesses that surrounds you have left you a great and wondrous legacy!

In this beautiful sanctuary, those among the faithful, the great cloud of witnesses - once sat in the very pews that you are now sitting. They put aside those issues that dragged them down! They ran with perseverance! They kept their eyes on Christ and his message!

There is indeed, a great cloud of witnesses from this very church, surrounding us in this magnificent sanctuary!

From the very beginning, there have been men and women in these pews who have believed in the ministry and mission of this city church, and these faithful witnesses should inspire us in our commitment to this, Christ's church!

Since 1772 First Presbyterian church has proclaimed the message and mission of Christ. Each generation has stepped up to continue this holy and sacred ministry. We are now that generation in these pews! Thankfully, the "cloud of witnesses" has blessed us with the endowment fund, but the real responsibility is now with us, to maintain and enhance this our shared ministry.

Over the next several years we need to improve our giving patterns. Some of you are giving at a level that fits you income and ability. If you are there, thank you and keep moving forward in the race. But if you sense you are not where you could be in financially supporting your church, challenge yourself with this text in mind.

You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses!

They were faithful.

Now it's your time!

What should you pledge – give?!

Friends, your church needs your support. Today, now – Christ's Gospel of hope, needs your commitment. To be shared within these beautiful walls, out into the Wyoming Valley, and beyond.

We are a friendly church, with much to offer!

Support Christ's Church here on 97 South Franklin Street. Be generous!

The Stewardship letter and pledge card are in the mail. Fill out one today, or the one you receive this week.

It's time to continue the witness of Christ's hope and love – through our friendly, inclusive and welcoming church.

Amen.