

## October 30 and November 7 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### *Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – John Knox*

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is John Knox, founder of the Scottish Presbyterian Church and spiritual father of American Presbyterianism, located in the left back of the sanctuary, facing the chancel and framed in the lower medallion.

In the window, we see John Knox preaching at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh Scotland from 1564 to 1572. Gifted with power and passion in preaching God's Word, Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador to Queen Elizabeth, once stated of John Knox: "His voice could put life into them more than 500 trumpets". Knox's conviction to preaching Scripture was paramount as he stated, "The Scriptures of God are my only foundation and substance in all matters of weight and importance." Throughout his ministry and life, he was known as one to fear no man, no power, and no principality – "I never once feared the devil, but I tremble every time I enter the pulpit." In all his ministry, including the formulation of church and political governments, he professed the sovereignty and power of God: "A man with God is always in the majority."

Knox (1514-1572) was a Scottish minister, Reformed theologian, writer, and leader of Scotland's Reformation and the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. He gave us the Scots Confession of 1560, which is part of the PCUSA's Book of Confession, and provided the representative democratic polity of today's Presbyterian Church in his Book of Discipline of 1561, which was the basis of our Book of Order. Knox led the Protestant Reformation in Scotland and England and was active in shaping the form of church and state of the day and that which followed, even influencing future American political thought. Knox's beliefs about church-building and politics remained constant in that his reverence for God remained central. Knox concluded that political government was based on the concept of covenant as set forth on the Old Testament and that rulers, king or queen, subordinate magistrates and people were to obey God's law in all political matters, which allowed for civil replacement of rulers who were ungodly, idolatrous, and unjust.

John Knox was born in Haddington, near Edinburgh, in about 1514 or 1515. He was orphaned at an early age, but his relatives sent him to St. Andrews University and when he graduated, he became a priest, working as a notary apostolic (ecclesiastical lawyer) and then as tutor to two young boys whose parents were Protestants. Knox converted to Protestantism and became a bodyguard for Reformer George Wishart as he traveled and preached throughout Scotland from 1543 to 1546 until Wishart's arrest. Wishart was tried by a Church court presided over by Cardinal Beaton and burned at the stake. Two months later, a group of Protestants broke into St. Andrews Castle and murdered Beaton. They then held the Castle and were joined by supporters of Wishart, including Knox. It was during this time that his gifts as a preacher were recognized by the chaplain. At first reluctant and overwhelmed by his call, Knox gave his first sermon at St. Andrews with the Bible as sole authority and justification by faith alone as key to his entire ministry.

A lengthy siege by the Scottish army ensued until a French fleet, summoned by the Dowager Queen Mary of Guise, eventually captured the Castle, and carried off Knox and his colleagues to serve as galley slaves. While passing the steeple of St Andrews while on the slave ship, Knox declared to a fellow prisoner that he would not die until he had preached there again.

Permanently and physically impaired from his imprisonment, Knox was finally released in a prisoner exchange. It was too dangerous for Knox to return to Scotland. Instead, he travelled to England and was appointed pastor of Berwick-on-Tweed. There he gained such fame that he preached before King Edward VI of England, became an influential figure in the English Protestant Church and was invited to become Bishop of Rochester but refused. Upon the death of King Edward VI, his Catholic sister, Mary Tudor, took power and began to persecute Protestants. Knox moved to the safety of Geneva in January 1554, becoming the friend and disciple of John Calvin. During this time, Knox formulated his political thoughts on the situations in England and Scotland. He posed difficult questions to Calvin, who deferred to reformer Heinrich Bullinger, with both giving cautious answers. Knox particularly wanted to know whether people should obey ungodly or idolatrous rulers and what party godly persons should follow if they resisted an idolatrous ruler.

In July 1554, Knox published a pamphlet attacking Mary Tudor and the bishops who brought her to the throne. He also attacked the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, calling him “no less enemy to Christ than was Nero.”

In September 1554, Knox took a minister position in a Frankfurt congregation of English exiles. After conflicts on the use of different reformed versions of the Book of Common Prayer, with a parishioner exposing his earlier attack on the Holy Roman Emperor, he was asked to return to Geneva after only 6 months.

Encouraged by friends and family he returned to Scotland in May of 1556 but only stayed for a short time, and then upon returned to Geneva as minister of Auditiore de Calvin. He viewed Geneva as the best place for Protestants, stating it as “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in earth since the days of apostles.” Here he anonymously published the First Blast of the Trumpet, which called the “regimen: or rule of women ‘monstruous’, meaning “unnatural”, and it was directed specifically at Queen Mary 1 of England and Mary of Guise, the Queen Regent of Scotland. The pamphlet did not find favor with many, including John Calvin. In England, it was officially condemned by royal proclamation and complicated his relationship with Queen Elizabeth when she came to power although she supported the Protestants.

Knox returned to Scotland in May 1559 upon Elizabeth becoming queen of England and with the invitation of the Scottish Lords who were determined to make Scotland a Protestant country. Many of their motives were secular rather than religious, but Knox’s preaching inspired them. Within two days of his return, he was declared an outlaw by the Queen Regent Mary Guise, mother of Mary Queen of Scots. Revolution persisted in Scotland in 1559 and 1560 where Protestant riots followed sermons of Knox. He returned to St. Andrews fulfilling the prophecy he made in the slave ship galley that he would one day preach again in its church. The Queen Regent brought in French troops to quell the rebellion, while Knox discreetly negotiated England’s support from Queen Elizabeth. The Scottish nobility followed by formally deposing the Queen Regent upon the arrival of English troops. The revolution ended in June 1560 when Queen Regent Mary of Guise died.

In 1560, the Scottish Parliament approved Knox’s Scots Confession, which set forth three marks of a true and faithful church: “the true preaching of the Word of God,” the right administration of the sacrament of Christ Jesus” and “ecclesiastical discipline... whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.” The jurisdiction of the Pope in Scotland was abolished and all doctrine and practice contrary to the reformed faith was condemned. The celebration of Mass was forbidden and Knox along with other ministers were tasked to organize the newly reformed church. In 1561, the Scottish Parliament reconvened to consider the Book of Discipline that set out a system of church order that included

superintendents, ministers, teachers, elders, and deacons in addition to a parish-based reformation including a universal primary, secondary and university educational system and arrangements for poor relief. The proposed funding was rejected by the nobles, which was to come from the old church wealth, and which the nobles now controlled. However, the proposal became the seed for future generations of Scotland to become world leaders in all disciplines of education.

When Mary Queen of Scots came back from France in 1561, Knox was convinced that she intended to make the country Catholic once more, and preached vigorously against her. Their relationship was contentious until her subsequent abdication and imprisonment in 1566 and eventual escape to England in May 1568. During her reign, Mary Queen of Scots tried every tactic to win over Knox but failed. She stated: " I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe." She even had Knox arrested for treason when he objected to her personally having Mass in violation of Scottish law. Knox successfully defended himself and the case was thrown out. Knox preached the sermon for James VI (future James I of England) coronation following his mother's abdication. Knox continued to serve as minister of St Giles Church in Edinburgh until his death in November 1572, following a massive stroke a year earlier. True to his perpetual honor and commitment in his call, he dragged himself into the pulpit to address the tragedy of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 5,000 to 30,000 French Protestants across France in August 1572 and continued to preach until two weeks prior to his death. In his will, Knox was able to leave only a paltry sum of money to his family, true to his quote: "I have neither preeminence, glory, nor riches; my honor was that Jesus Christ would reign.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(1004\) Home Free - How Great Thou Art - YouTube](#)

### **Resource Videos**

[\(1004\) 28. John Knox and the Scottish Reformation \(part 1\) - YouTube](#)

[\(1004\) 29. John Knox: Prisoner, Exile, Reformer \(part 2\) - YouTube](#)

[\(1004\) 30. John Knox and a New Vision for Scotland \(part 3\) - YouTube](#)

[\(1004\) A Treatise on Prayer - John Knox \(1514 – 1572\) - YouTube](#)

## **Looking ahead – Sunday November 13**

Third Window on Left Back Side Facing Chancel (Lower Medallion) – The Baptism of Jesus