February 26 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

***Let There Be Light*: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Beginnings of Presbyterian Education**

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 the beginnings of Presbyterian Education, located in the first window from the altar on the right side of the sanctuary and framed in the lower medallion.

The window shows a log-constructed church with a mountain backdrop, which may be representative of those developed along the frontier of the American colonies. The window may also represent the Log College, founded in 1727, as the first theological seminary serving Presbyterians in North America. The College of New Jersey was formed out of the Log College, which would be renamed Princeton University. Presbyterians were among the earliest Reformed immigrants to America. They settled up and down the East Coast, and began to push westward into the American wilderness, founding congregations as early as the 1630s. Presbyterian churches such as that depicted grew in the western regions of the middle colonies including Appalachia as Scots-Irish Presbyterians migrated from Pennsylvania during the 18th century.

Education has historically been a strong emphasis of the Presbyterian Church for ministers and lay members as a means for evangelism and discipleship. John Knox, the founder of the Scottish Presbyterian Church and spiritual father of American Presbyterianism, wanted every person educated enough to read the Word of God so that their consciences would be dictated by God's Word.

The Presbyterian Church history is filled with notable ministers who exemplified Christian outreach and discipleship through education and preaching of the Word while challenged with their own weaknesses. The Log College, founded in 1727 by William Tennent, was the first theological seminary serving Presbyterians in North America, and was located in what is now Warminster, Pennsylvania. The Log College was a purely private institution of very plain structure. The institution had no charter but was innovative as a ministers' training college in that its founding was at a time when there were few college-educated ministers in North America. The number of eventual graduates is estimated to be about 20, including William Tennent, Jr., who would become a trustee of a newly formed College of New Jersey, which would be renamed Princeton University in 1896.

Gilbert Tennent, born in Ireland in 1703, was the son of minister William Tennent Sr, who moved his family to Pennsylvania when Gilbert was fifteen. Gilbert received an excellent education from his father, who established The Log College school for ministers. After wrestling over salvation in his teens, Tennent was converted at age twenty. Three years later he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister and began pastoring a church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Tennent was a stirring, enthusiastic preacher, and his sermons led many to experience conversion.

In 1739, Tennent became a revivalist preacher along with George Whitefield, a traveling evangelist from England, who called Tennent "a son of thunder." Tennent traveled with Whitefield, introducing him to other ministers in the middle colonies and helping to make Whitefield's preaching tour a success. George Whitefield was probably the most famous religious figure of the eighteenth century. Whitefield was a preacher capable of commanding thousands on two continents through the sheer power of his oratory and his gifted ability to act out the stories of Scripture. In his lifetime, he preached at least 18,000 times to perhaps 10 million hearers. In 1739, Philadelphia, the most cosmopolitan city in the

New World, was the first American stop. Even the largest churches could not hold the 8,000 who came, so they met outdoors. Every stop along Whitefield's trip had record audiences, often exceeding the population of the towns in which he preached. Whitefield was a convinced Calvinist with his main theme being the necessity of the "new birth," i.e., a conversion experience. He never pleaded with people to convert, but only announced and dramatized his message. Whitefield also made the slave community a part of his revivals, though he was far from an abolitionist. He increasingly sought out audiences of slaves and wrote on their behalf. The response was so great that some historians date it as the genesis of African-American Christianity. The spiritual revival he ignited, the Great Awakening, became one of the most formative events in American history. His last sermon on this tour was given at Boston Commons before 23,000 people, likely the largest gathering in American history to that point.

When Whitefield returned to England, Tennent continued to preach for several months in New England. These tours served to unite a series of scattered, local revivals into the Great Awakening. Tennent was known for his fiery exhortations to sinners to repent and also for his scorn of his critics among the more conservative Presbyterians. Not every minister shared Tennent's zeal; many opposed both the revival and Tennent's emphasis on personal conversion. Both sides of the debate preached and published on the question. Tennent's contribution was his sermon titled *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (1740). In the sermon, he denounced his opponents as hypocrites. Tennent argued that ministers who had not experienced conversion could not preach the gospel, and that Christians who had been converted were free to leave their churches and seek other ministers. The sermon did much to harden those who questioned the methods of the revivalists into opponents of the Awakening.

This led to a schism the following year when Tennent and other members of the New Brunswick Presbytery withdrew from the church. In 1743 he moved to a church in Philadelphia, to become the pastor of a New Side Congregation where he remained for the rest of his life. His preaching became less impassioned, and he worked to heal the breach in the Presbyterian Church. Despite the move and the animosity his sermon caused, Tennant continued to support the Great Awakening. He later attempted to bring reconciliation, when he publicly admitted that he was responsible for personally causing dissension that led to the split. As a result of his attempt to bring reconciliation, his efforts were successful and in 1758, the Old Side and New Side factions reconciled and reunited.

Samuel Davies (1723-61) was born into a tradition of religious dissent. He was the son of a "plain farmer" in Delaware, who could not easily fund a formal education for his son. However, his parents did provide an early introduction to the evangelical Presbyterian thought of the Great Awakening. When Davies was nine years old, his mother Martha was expelled from her Baptist church for adopting Presbyterian doctrine. As a young man, Davies studied under "New Light" minister Samuel Blair, supported by donations from a congregation in Hanover, Virginia. Davies was ordained in 1745, at the age of twenty-two. Two years later he relocated to Hanover as the first resident Presbyterian minister in the Piedmont, what was then Virginia's western frontier. Davies was a tireless preacher and defender of religious freedom in Virginia. He brought legal challenges against Virginia's restrictions on non-Anglican churches to the governor in Williamsburg as well as the king's attorney-general in England, winning significant victories for evangelical sects and earning the epithet "apostle of dissent". Davies's success as a minister was due in part to his skill as a public speaker. His preaching style allegedly influenced a young Patrick Henry—one of the most famous orators of the Revolutionary period—who claimed that he was "first taught what an orator should be" by listening to Davies's sermons. During the decade he spent in Virginia, he had extensive contact with enslaved people—both as a slave-owner himself, and as a missionary to Africans and African Americans. Davies was one of the first and most successful Christian evangelists to a growing population of enslaved Africans and African Americans in

the American colonies. When addressing slave-owners in his sermons, Davies emphasized the “awful and important” responsibility masters had to give enslaved people access to religious education.

John Knox Witherspoon (1723-1794) was a clergyman, educator, and founding father, who served as Princeton’s (College of New Jersey) sixth president from 1768 through the Revolutionary War until his death in 1794. Witherspoon was the only clergyman and college president to sign the Declaration of Independence. Born in Scotland and educated at the University of Edinburgh, Witherspoon was a prominent 18th-century intellectual associated with the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. After migrating to New Jersey in 1768, he also became a major figure in both Princeton and United States history. Witherspoon’s relationship to slavery shifted when he accepted a position as president of the College of New Jersey in 1768.

Like many ministers and lay people at the time, Witherspoon had a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship with slavery and enslaved people. The story of John Witherspoon and his relationship to slavery begins in Scotland in 1756. While a minister for the Beith parish of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), Witherspoon broke with tradition by baptizing an enslaved man named Jamie Montgomery. Born a slave in Virginia, Montgomery was sent by his master to Beith as a carpenter’s apprentice sometime around 1750. Slavery would not be prohibited in England until 1772 and throughout the British Empire until 1833, but even when Montgomery lived in Beith fewer than one hundred individuals were held as slaves in all of Scotland. Apparently, Montgomery’s legal status did not prevent Witherspoon from offering him the same religious instruction available to his white congregants. Witherspoon granted him a certificate verifying his “good Christian conduct” and then baptized him under the name James Montgomery in April 1756. Witherspoon baptized Montgomery with the understanding that he was freeing him from sin, not slavery, and likely did not anticipate that his actions would embolden Montgomery to seek his freedom. Shortly after his baptism, however, Montgomery fled his bondage on a ship bound for Virginia. He later testified to his belief that “by being baptized he would become free,” sparking debate within Scottish legal and religious communities regarding the morality of slavery.

In 1774, while serving as college president, John Witherspoon privately tutored two free African men- Bristol Yamma and John Quamine, at the request of fellow ministers and educators. Witherspoon did not appear to see a conflict between the relationship he had with his students and the practice of slaveholding. Witherspoon’s motivations did not stem from antislavery sentiment. Rather, he hoped that these students would ultimately serve as missionaries and spread Christianity throughout Africa. In 1779, when Witherspoon moved from the President’s House on campus into the newly completed country home he called “Tusculum,” he purchased two enslaved people to help him farm the 500-acre estate. However conflicting, Witherspoon remained dedicated to the cause of religious education. In September 1792, the trustees of the college discussed the possibility of John Chavis, a “free black man of Virginia,” receiving funds for an education at Princeton. Chavis arrived in Princeton and began private lessons with Witherspoon at Tusculum in late 1792. Witherspoon justified this as a means of preparing Chavis “for better enjoyment of freedom,” even as two enslaved people lived and worked beside Chavis at Tusculum.

The Second Great Awakening took place in the new United States between 1790 and 1840. By the year 1800, nearly 1 million people had moved West (Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee). Religion seemed to be fading in the rough wilderness. During this time, revival meetings were held in small towns and large cities throughout the country, and the unique frontier institution known as the camp meeting began. The Presbyterian General Assembly and New England Congregationalists agreed to a Plan of Union, a

successful cooperative work to plant churches along the frontier. James McGready, a fearless Presbyterian minister and pastor of three churches, led a camp meeting at Cane Ridge, KY in August 1801, lasting seven days where over 25,000 people attended In the West. Waves of camp meeting revivals spread throughout the South and Midwest giving rise to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1810. The Cumberland Church was formed out of disagreement to the requirement that ordained ministers be formally educated and the necessity to assent to the Westminster Confession. The Cumberland Presbyterian denomination, known for its socially progressive tradition, was among the first to admit women to their educational institutions and to accept them in leadership roles including the ordained clergy. The first woman ordained in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in 1889 was Louisa Woosley. Cumberland Presbyterians were early to ordain African Americans to the ministry (circa 1830) and eventually birthed a Presbyterian denomination for African Americans in 1874. The Cumberland Church largely reunited with the larger Presbyterian Church in 1906.

The Second Great Awakening made soul-winning the primary function of ministry and stimulated several moral and philanthropic reforms, including temperance and the emancipation of women. The second wave of evangelical revivalism led to the founding of numerous colleges and seminaries and to the organization of mission societies across the country. Many churches experienced a great increase in membership, particularly among Methodist and Baptists churches. It greatly increased the number of Christians both in New England and on the frontier.

While the Second Great Awakening greatly increased the number of churches, it brought conflicts in theology within the Presbyterian Church. The idea of individual salvation and free will over predestination was advanced and brought to question the role of revivals and the primacy of the traditional Calvinist orthodoxy in Westminster standards. This brought about a third schism within the Presbyterian Church known as Old School-New School in 1837, which eventually ended with reconciliation and reunion in 1869. The Presbyterian Church was also challenged with the role and influence of slavery in American society such that staunch abolitionists in the Synod of Cincinnati broke off in 1837 although they reunited in 1863. Similarly, the United Synod of the South broke in 1858 over the belief that that slavery was divinely ordained and resulted in the longest schism in the American Presbyterian Church, which lasted until 1983 with reconciliation and reunion with the Northern Church to form PCUSA.

Two special examples of the fruit of Presbyterian education and discipleship through God's hand in the midst of a society of slavery and persecution based on color of skin are the stories of John Gloucester and Samuel Cornish. John Gloucester was the first African American to become an ordained Presbyterian minister in the United States, and the founder of The First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, which had 123 members by 1811. He was born enslaved in Blount County, Tennessee, in 1776. Before gaining his freedom, his name was Jack, and as a believer he began converting slaves to Christianity at an early age. Rev. Gideon Blackburn, the new Pastor at New Providence Presbyterian Church in Blount County, Tennessee, recognized the potential in Jack and after personally teaching him theology and other subjects, he purchased Jack for the sole purpose of helping him gain his freedom. Although Blackburn's 1806 petition for freedom to the Tennessee legislature was denied, Blackburn received a certificate of manumission for Jack through the local courts the same year. Upon freedom, 30 year-old Jack changed his name to John Gloucester.

Blackburn took Gloucester to a meeting of the Presbyter of the Union in East Tennessee, where Gloucester requested a "license to preach to the Africans." The Presbytery unanimously voted to take Gloucester under their care, and instructed him to return after completing further studies. In November

1806, Gloucester began his formal instructions at Greeneville (now Tusculum) College, becoming the first African American to attend the institution. At the time, Gloucester was one of fewer than six African Americans who had received religious instruction at the college level. After completing his studies, Gloucester first traveled to Philadelphia with Blackburn in 1807. While Blackburn was engaged in meetings with the Philadelphia Presbytery, Gloucester was permitted to preach in the city. There he found a group of people who were looking for a visionary to lead them, while another group of influential individuals in the city were gathering to form a place of worship for African Americans interested in the Presbyterian faith. These two groups were the foundation for the forming of First African Presbyterian Church in 1807. After spending a brief period in Philadelphia, Gloucester was sent by the Philadelphia Presbytery to Charleston, South Carolina. He was brought back to Philadelphia as a missionary in 1809. Gloucester was only licensed to preach by the Presbytery and could not yet lead a church without being fully ordained, so he was again sent back to Tennessee to obtain the final qualifications for his calling. In April 1810, Gloucester was ordained at Baker's Creek Presbyterian Church in Maryville, Tennessee, and after the service, he and his wife Rhoda and their four children, returned by wagon to Philadelphia and his emerging congregation. All four of Gloucester's sons became Presbyterian ministers, and three formed their own congregations. John Gloucester pursued and continued a dedicated ministry until he succumbed to poor health and died of pneumonia in 1822. The Presbytery of Boston sponsors John Gloucester Memorial Scholarships for Presbyterian college students nationwide.

Over two hundred years ago, in 1819, the Presbytery of Philadelphia launched Samuel Eli Cornish (1795–1858) into a remarkable career as minister, evangelist, missionary, publisher, and social reformer. Following a rigorous two-year program of intellectual, practical, and theological training, Cornish became the first African-American preacher to be licensed by the presbytery, making him one of the first African-American ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. For a year, he preached among slaves and freedmen in eastern Maryland and his native Delaware before moving to New York City, where he was ordained as an urban missionary to New York's growing black population. That same year Cornish organized the First Colored Presbyterian Church of New York City and served as its pastor while continuing his missionary work. He founded *Freedom's Journal*, the first black-owned and operated newspaper in America, in 1827.

Over the next two decades, Cornish would go on to found two more congregations, two more newspapers in 1829 and 1837, and help co-found the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1840—all while lending his name, support, and editorial voice to nearly a dozen regional and national missionary, anti-slavery, educational, and moral reform societies. His mentor John Gloucester had told him, "Better to wear out than to rust out," a charge Cornish took to heart.

In all of the efforts of Presbyterian education, discipleship and evangelism, we can claim the surpassing value of knowing Christ as Paul writes in Philippians 3:8: *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

A song to reflect and pray on:

[(71) Phil Wickham - God Of Revival (Acoustic Sessions) [Official Lyric Video] - YouTube]

Looking ahead – Sunday March 5

Chancel Window – Transfiguration of Jesus