

If you read the bestselling novel *The Shack*, most of the conversation between the main character, Mackenzie Phillips, and God, takes

place around food in a kitchen in shack deep in the woods. Not too often does a book about Christianity and theology come to us in novel form and attract a wide audience. Over 2 million people have bought William Young's novel about a relatively non-religious father trying to come to grips with a family tragedy. I enjoyed the book when my mother gave me a copy 2 years ago. Several people in the church have asked me what I thought about it. I enjoyed it for several reasons. I will make further comments when I preach about forgiveness on March 29th.

I have found academic portrayals of the Trinity to be remote and vaguely unsatisfactory. Here God's three forms are multiethnic and multigendered. God the Father is a big beaming black woman. The Spirit is a shimmering, Asian woman? Jesus is a man with a big Jewish nose. It is interesting that in one chapter a fourth person appears, Sophia, representing God's wisdom, in the form of a tall and beautiful, Hispanic woman. Certainly part of the appeal is that God is not just an old white guy.

God the father is portrayed by a figure (a woman) named Papa. Papa responds to Mack (the central figure in the book) about the gendering of God, "I am neither male nor female, even though both genders are derived from my nature ... for me to appear as a woman and suggest that you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help keep you from falling back so easily into your religious conditioning." Clearly the author has read the Bible and studied some theology. This book causes you to think.

It is also not accidental that the story about the Trinity appears in the woods instead of the sanctuary. Young's trinity is against institutions, hierarchy, and politics and for nature, individual healing, relationships, gardening and cooking. The author is targeting the huge number of Americans who consider themselves Christians but rarely set foot in a church.

Much of the book consists of a conversation between Mack and one or more members of the kitchen Trinity about the nature of human freedom and divine goodness in a world where serial killers target little girls and suicide bombers frequent marketplaces. The members of the Trinity are at times long winded. But I found they answered several questions I would like to ask God myself.

I thought *The Shack* was fresh and makes foundational Biblical concepts accessible and interesting. Sadly the book has been hysterically criticized by fundamentalist for its liberal theological leanings and by academic theologians for being simplistic. I think Jesus said "whoever is not against us is for us." Not a bad read for Lent.

Grace and peace, **James Brassard**

Worship on March 8, 2009

2nd Sunday in Lent

(9:30 & 11 AM)

We have watched several public figures make dramatic public confessions of misconduct. Some have been successful in restoring leaders who were on the brink of failure. Others were deemed to have not shown enough personal regret and shame equal to the pain and suffering that resulted from their behavior. What is the role of confession (I am thinking private not public) in receiving the emotional and spiritual freedom that comes with God's forgiveness? Read Psalm 32.

Lenten Dinners—Each Friday in Lent (through April 3) 6:30 p.m., in Dodds Hall. Cost: \$3.00/person, \$2.00 for kids, \$10 maximum per family. On Friday, March 6, the Paper Tigers will be serving barbecued pork and baked beans for the main course and ice cream and graham crackers for dessert. We will also conduct the Third Annual Paper Tigers Book Quiz with questions to answer from one of the books we have read this past year. Other menus include: March 13 (lasagna by the Presbyterian Women of the Church), March 20 (chili by the choirs), March 27 (sloppy Joes by the Board of Deacons) and an international meal on April 2. **There will be activities for children from 7:00-7:30 p.m. in the Children's Worship Center.**

Inside Greening Your Congregation

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...” Genesis 1:31

On March 23rd, CCPC will host Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light's (GW IPL) "Inside Greening Your Congregation" event here in Dodds Hall at 7:00pm. This regional forum, open to faith congregations in the Bowie/Crofton area will be led by GW IPL's Director, Allison Fisher, and will be a time to:

- Hear from your neighbors about how they are answering the call to protect creation
- Learn how you can make your building more energy efficient and save money
- Work through common challenges and share best practices around greening your building
- Explore how we can work together to bring hope for a healthy and sustainable planet.

Some of you are already familiar with GW IPL's mission as a non-profit initiative that helps congregations, religious institutions and others in the Washington, DC area work for a more just, sustainable and healthier creation by reducing the threat of global warming. As part of their mission, GW IPL provides free energy audits for congregations. This past October, Rev. James, Skip Oates, Bob Brutout, Jim Woods and I had the pleasure of working with Allison. First Allison interviewed us regarding CCPC's demographics, habits, intentions and goals and then she performed a thorough walk-through inspection of our buildings and grounds. A detailed report designed to help our congregation create an action plan to reduce our environmental impact was delivered to us in December. The good news is that our overall rating was much better than average- as we have already made a number of big-ticket energy efficient upgrades to our campus. Here is a list of our "green" accomplishments at the time of the audit:

- Zero trash coffee hour, Fair trade coffee, • Energy efficient ac system in the CE building • Motion sensors in the bathrooms • High efficiency dishwasher • Replaced windows of CE Programmable thermostats - people just do a 2-3 hour override - within in a limit • Upgraded heating and ac in fellowship hall and new windows • A recycling program • A gardening program • An e-newsletter to save paper

The report provides constructive and practical suggestions for behavioral changes and investments in reducing our environmental footprint and energy bills- from purchasing recycling bins for classrooms and unplugging televisions and other electronics to switching out conventional fluorescent bulbs and fixtures to T8 bulbs and electronic ballasts. Worship resources are also provided to help raise awareness of the biblical call to be good stewards of all Creation.

Along these lines, in December, CCPC joined the Bowie Interfaith Green Group (BIGG). B.I.G.G. is the collective effort of congregations in the Bowie, Maryland area. Our goal is to increase the awareness of "Green Living", Environmental Responsibility and to provide information about ways we can all make a difference in our community. Even though our faiths may be different, we all share the common belief that we are stewards of the Earth and as such, we need to care for it and all its inhabitants. Check out our blog- created and maintained by Michelle Malta of Goodloe Memorial Unitarian Universalist Congregation as a way to share information and upcoming events: <http://bowie-interfaith-green-groups.blogspot.com/>. You will find CCPC's March 23rd event as well as a wonderful Eco-Living/Shopping Event March 3rd at All Saints Lutheran Church. Maria Arnold of All Saint's has obtained donations, samples and coupons of a wide variety of green cleaning products, compostable/biodegradable disposable serving ware, organic pet food samples, and more from local businesses. Various groups will be on hand to provide information on what you can do as an individual, including me, representing the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

I do hope you will be so moved to join us at one or both of these events. If you are looking for a new spiritual discipline this season of Lent, try GW IPL's Lenten Carbon Fast: <http://www.gwipl.org/lent.asp>. Finally, If you are interested in learning more and being part of an Environmental Stewardship team here at CCPC, please contact me at 301-346-2368.

Blessings,
Sheree Ruhl

Events at CCPC ...

AARP Tax-Aide—Tuesdays, 2/3 through 4/14

CCPC is hosting the AARP Tax-Aide program in Dodds Hall from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays during tax time. There is no charge for this service. Age 60 and over with income of \$50,000 or less will receive priority. Others are screened.

For appointments call 301-809-2300 between 1-2 p.m., weekdays. This service is open to our community.

Women's Retreat—March 6-8 Chambersburg, PA

Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, March 8th! Don't forget to set your clocks ahead one hour at 2 AM.

Youth Groups—Sunday, March 8th (5 PM) Senior High Room

COMMUNITY CAFÉ—Friday, March 13th

We will leave the church at 11:15 for anyone interested in going. We are in need of socks to hand out to these men working in the cold. Please leave any donations in the box in the church office. We'll make sandwiches and assemble snacks and cookies in bag lunches for the cafe on Thursday, March 12th. Anyone wishing to share an hour of their time can join us in the church kitchen at 3 pm. Any questions, call Jackie Smith or Nancy Honeyford.

Health and Healing—Tuesday, March 17th (9:30 AM) Parlor

CCPC Kids head to Bowie Ice Arena, 3330 Northview Drive. — Saturday, March 21st

We will be skating from 1:00-3:00 p.m. during the public skate session. If your child needs a "walker" to skate it is suggested that you arrive early as they are first come, first serve.

Admission price, which includes skates, is: \$6.25 for children (12 and under); \$6.75 for adults. You must mention that you are with CCPC to receive these admission prices.

For more information, please contact Marilee Neff at ccpckids@verizon.net

Capital Area Food Bank—Saturday, March 21st

(8:15 AM-12:30 PM) Downtown Washington, DC

Meet at CCPC at 8:15AM to carpool. Thanks, Jo Bolig.

Spring Clean Up Day—Saturday, March 28th

8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Please join fellow cleaners, rakers, mulchers, diggers, weeders, planters and painters to spruce up our lovely campus in time for our Easter celebration.



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CCPC, the first Protestant church in Levitt Bowie, was born from a passion for Christian mission in the local community, and this focus continues.

Our Mission: To worship God, to grow in faith and community, and to place our gifts in the service of Jesus Christ.

*** Next Caller Distribution: 3/10/09 ***

Articles are due by Thursday, 3/5.