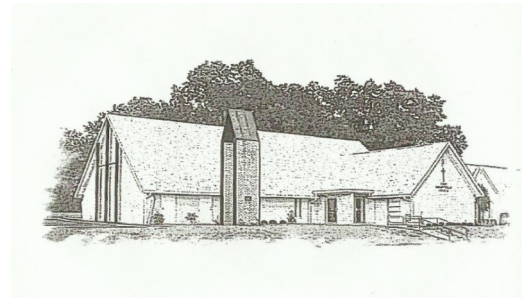




*"Serving God,  
Honoring Creation,  
Embracing Differences"*

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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May 2023 Vol. 55:05

*Mary the Tower by Rev Michele*

I recently read a sermon from Diana Butler Bass entitled "All the Marys." In it, she proposes that in John's gospel, Lazarus has only one sister and her name is Mary.

This does not diminish the scene in Luke 10 about Martha who works tirelessly to serve and Mary who sits contemplatively at Jesus' feet. That beloved story is independent of this discussion. But in John's gospel, there are distinct signs that the oldest known text has been altered. Through the wonder of technology, a master's student at Duke University named Elizabeth Schrader, mapped the evidence. She was viewing a digitized version of Papyrus 66, which is the oldest and most complete gospel of John. The text is dated around the year 200. She focused on chapters 11 and 12, where Lazarus returns from the dead. In the original Greek, Mary is spelled Maria. Ms. Schrader noticed that *Maria* has been changed to *Martha*; it's only one little letter in the Greek. *His* sister has been changed to *hers*, and wherever the text referred to Lazarus' *sister*, an editorial hand has "corrected" the text to read *sisters*, plural. The oldest edition of John's gospel has editorial marks! Perhaps it was done in an earnest attempt to iron out John's rough Greek. Perhaps it was done in an effort to harmonize John and Luke's gospels.

Other writings from Tertullian and a fourth century pilgrim, Egeria, refer to Lazarus and Mary, without Martha. Another clue: the gospel texts refer to different geographical locations.

Consider this: it is Lazarus' sister who makes the Christological declaration that is attributed to Peter in the other gospels. Yes Peter, the rock on which the church is built. If Martha is an editorial addition, then Mary declares "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Messiah. The one who's come into the world." Mary is a named follower of Jesus, traveling with him and the twelve. She stands at the foot of the cross while Jesus breathes his last breath. In John's gospel it is she, Mary Magdalene, who is the first person to see the risen Christ and deliver the message to the others.

One more thing: Magdala isn't a place – in Aramaic it means tower. When we put it all together, Mary the Tower becomes one powerful woman.

*"All the Marys" by Diana Butler Bass, July 17, 2022. Text at [dianabutlerbass.substack.com](http://dianabutlerbass.substack.com).*

### Fellowship and Member Care

*The thing about us is we “bloom where we are”*



And bloom we do. Our Easter preparation and celebration of our risen Lord was wonderful. The services shared in nature and in sanctuary Easter morning were glorious. The Easter brunch was filled with fellowship, friends, food and fun. Gratitude and Grace to all that attended and to those that helped prepare the celebration. Our Team will be hosting a **Spring Fling** and details will be shared later. Our planned April 26<sup>th</sup> meeting got interrupted by the tremendous hail storm and we had to adjust! We'll let you know about the fun and festivities soon. Stay tuned. For those members and friends that we are providing home communion, we will begin in May our home communion visits on the same Sunday afternoons of our in church communion. This will allow us all to share the Table the same day. We'll be calling you to remind you of this special time. There is always room at our table for everyone. Claudia, Lynn, John, Kathy, Chris, Dee Lee, Weldon, Mary & Rev. Michele

We, your **Communications Team**, met April 20<sup>th</sup>, and reviewed committee responsibilities regarding the website, Facebook, newsletter, membership directory, and newspaper. We continue to keep our website updated and maintain a more active Facebook page as we post happenings of our active church membership and events. Regarding the “Connections” newsletter, we work diligently to provide an informative newsletter which includes reports from every committee each month. Last month we were pleased the updated Phone Tree was utilized to telephone reminders to members about the Earth Day Service. Additionally, it is our committee’s responsibility to post the weekly church service bulletin and monthly newsletter to the website, assist with streaming worship services, post songs used in the worship services to licensing companies each week as required by copyright laws, and assist as needed with newspaper columns. With many responsibilities, our committee members keep busy and meet multiple times per month doing what they do best – “communicating” - by telephone, text, face-to-face, and email. We remain excited about 2023 and are honored to serve the congregation.

Your Communications Team:  
Liz, Claudia, Weldon, Kathy, and Rev. Michele



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### FINANCE AT A GLANCE



#### March 2023:

IN	OUT	NET CHANGE
\$8,633	\$13,102	-\$4,469

#### February 2023:

IN	OUT	NET CHANGE
\$9,890	\$12,219	-\$2,329

#### Year to Date:

IN	OUT	NET CHANGE
\$25, 976	36,339	-\$10,363



The **One Great Hour of Sharing** offering ended on Easter Sunday and with your full hearts and generosity our total collection for this very worthy cause is \$803.65!! Thank you for your generous contributions to this impactful cause. Additional thanks to Moses, Isla, Reyna and River for their part in making loud noise for this worthy offering. Many people will be helped by this offering.

Louise has been our ambassador for the **Chamber of Commerce Mid-morning Coffee** events. She presents

current events going on in the church during the social time. Thank you Louise.

Thank you, too, for all of you that wore your blue ribbon to help remind folks of Child Abuse Awareness. Our church was an active participant in the show blue in our community and in partnership with the **Rusk County Children's Advocacy Team**.

They are here --- the new FPC T-shirts have arrived! These wonderful new T-shirts show our logo and our mission statement – “Serving God, Honoring Creation, Embracing Differences.” If you ordered one, they are ready for pickup in Rev. Michele's office. When you pick yours up, please check your name on the list.

People are struggling everywhere and we have been presented again with several opportunities to help those that need a hand up. Our **Outreach Team** will be working on guidelines in the coming month to help manage these requests in the most caring and equitable way. We have worked with HIM, Salvation Army, Highway 80 Rescue Mission, Friends Helping Friends etc. If you'd like to be involved in this much needed ministry through our church, please contact Lynn.

The shelves at HIM are in need of our help in a big way. Through the generosity of our church and this community we hope to get and keep their shelves filled. Give as often and as much as you can.

We continue to invite anyone to join our group of volunteers for Meals on Wheels.

Lynn, Kathy, Jimmy, Kelly, Claudia, Mary, John, Louise, and Rev. Michele.

The **Christian Education Green Team**, with the help of friends in the congregation, hosted a wonderful Earth Day celebration and service on Saturday, April 22, 2023 in the parking lot in front of the church. The event was a perfect combination of celebrating our Creator's creation and educating ourselves and community participants about the importance of helping preserve our Earth. We shared information about recycling and water usage and ideas for small changes in your normal routines to help save the Earth a little at a time. What a beautiful and enjoyable day!



The CE Team and the Session approved sending our local legislators the resolution approved by the PCUSA Mission Committee regarding gun safety. In addition, members of the CE Social Justice Committee sent various state and federal legislators a letter asking that they support certain measures supported by the majority of Americans regarding gun safety. With all of the recent gun violence incidents, we do hope legislators will act on legislation to reduce gun violence. We will present more information on gun safety next month as June 2nd is Gun Violence Awareness Day. It will take all of us to make a difference on this important issue.

Sunday school is studying the Gospel of Matthew using N.T. Wright's **Matthew For Everyone** as the guide. Each week, the class will explore and discuss two chapters. Anyone is welcome and encouraged to join our study at any time. Discussion assists us as we read and understand Matthew's message for all of us.

Behold our Blessings,

Lynn, Claudia, Jimmy, Kathy, Liz and Rev. Michele





## SESSION COUNCIL ACTIONS

April 20, 2023

Worshipped and prayed together.

- ◇ Reviewed church finances.
- ◇ Set a minimum balance for church checking account.
- ◇ Reviewed ALICE Safety training.
- ◇ Extended invitation to congregation to attend Alice Review before Session Meeting on May 18.
- ◇ Discussed new time for doing home communions.
- ◇ Reviewed C.E.'s Earth Day Event for April 22.



Our whole congregation and friends made Holy Week such a special time together. Thank you to everyone. We are a blessed congregation. We are small, but as we say all the time, we are mighty. Everyone in our church family has a very significant and important role. It really does take a village, and we are a mighty village.

May is another opportunity to share in the life of the church. We will share the Lord's Table together on Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup> (and will deliver our home communion elements that afternoon). Remember, too, to bring items for the HIM basket.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate Mother's Day and honor Mothers and Mothers at heart. David Reeder will return to our pulpit

The season of Pentecost will culminate on Pentecost Sunday, May 28<sup>th</sup>. We invite you to wear red that Sunday.

Peace be with you all,

**Worship Team** - Mary, Liz, Jimmy, Kathy, Lynn, Kelly, Joshua and Rev. Michelle



Palm Sunday



Easter Sunrise Service



Hunting eggs on church lawn Easter Sunday



Earth Day Prayer Service





DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its report on March 20, 2023, shows that the clock is ticking for our planet and our global family and that the next decade is crucial? The IPCC is a U.N. body composed of scientists from all over the world that evaluates climate science and explores solutions to cut emissions and adapt to a hotter planet. In sober language, the IPCC set out the devastations that have already been inflicted on vast areas of the world. Extreme weather, including heat waves, drought, floods, wildfires , and severe storms, is already occurring.

The world is likely to pass a dangerous temperature threshold within the next ten years. Scientists report that the world is likely to surpass its most ambitious climate target—limiting warming to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit by the early 2030s. Beyond that threshold, they found that climate disasters may become so extreme that people may not be able to adapt. Basic components of the earth will be fundamentally, irrevocably altered. IPPC Chair, Hoesung Lee, said that the report shows humanity has reached a “critical moment.”

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Gutierres states that “Humanity is on thin ice—and that ice is melting fast.” However, the IPCC report is also a how-to guide to defuse the climate time bomb. It is a survival guide for humanity. As it shows, the 2.7-degree limit is achievable, but it will take immediate climate action. The world is up the proverbial creek – but we still have a paddle. Humanity can still stop the worst consequences of climate change because the good news is that we have the means to act. The world has all the knowledge, tools, and financial resources needed to achieve climate goals. But after decades of delaying climate efforts, the window for action is rapidly closing. The report shows that the world needs to transition to renewables, fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage, demand-side measures, and improving efficiency in industry, energy, and food systems. All these measures are within reach but transformations will be needed in our political motivations, social behaviors, and our apathy.

The new IPCC report will alarm those who have not been paying close attention to the state of the Earth’s climate. But the signs of progress reported in this report are encouraging. We need to build on the progress already made by pressing harder for our governments, for our cities, and the companies we rely on to make rapid improvements in their environmental performance. Each of us can add our voices to those of the scientists by calling for more investment in a green, prosperous world we can hand down to future generations.



The CE Green Team

NPR, ABC, Earth911New York Times, Washington Post, The Week, BBC, The Guardian, PBS, , USA Today



Every month of the year has its special little niche – May is that “in between” Spring and our intro into summer. So are you getting ready for fine-tuning some gardening? Some of the best plants to plant for May are Marigolds, Morning Glories, Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Squash and Watermelon!

As a Certified Green Congregation, all of us take the tenant of our Presbyterian faith to honor, protect and preserve our Creator’s creation – Mother Earth very seriously and to heart. Last month, we celebrated Earth Day in a big way. So the question and perhaps the challenge from the **Building and Grounds Team** is to make one small change in your life that will have a positive impact on our Earth. Recycle at home like we do at the church. Get a reusable water bottle and use it rather than single use plastic water bottles. Turn the faucet in the bathroom off when you shave and/or brush your teeth. Turn the lights off when you leave a room. Watch where your thermostats are set. For questions or more ideas on what you can do please check with our in-house green team Guru Kathy Porter!

Enjoy the beauty that is blooming around the church. Mark on your calendar for next month the Rusk County Farmer’s Market will be opening June 3, 2023 at 7:00 am.

Let’s Keep Building a Better World Together

# May 2023



Sun

Mon


Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

	1	2	3	4	5 Meals on Wheels	6
7 9:45 Sunday School 10:00 Coffee Fellowship 11:00 Worship Sanctuary/FB / Communion Home Communion afternoon <b>HIM Donation Day</b>	8	9	10	11 9:30 Chamber of Commerce Mid-Morning Coffee—Texas Bank/ downtown	12 Meals on Wheels	13 Grace Presbytery Fellowship at Camp Gilmont
14 <b>Mothers' Day</b>  9:45 Sunday School 10:00 Coffee Fellowship 11:00 Worship Sanctuary/FB	15	16	17	18 <b>Ascension of the Lord</b> 2:00 L.E.A.N. 5:30 Safety Meeting 6:00 Session Meeting	19 Meals on Wheels  Newsletter Deadline	20
21  9:45 Sunday School 10:00 Coffee Fellowship 11:00 Worship Sanctuary /FB	22	23	24	25  6:00 Manual Review  HISD Graduation	26 Meals on Wheels	27
28 <b>Pentecost</b> 9:45 Sunday School 10:00 Coffee Fellowship 11:00 Worship Sanctuary/ FB	29 <b>Memorial Day</b> Office Closed 	30	31			

## Duty Elders for May:

Claudia

## Liturgists for May:

7– John H.

14—Kelly

21– Claudia

28– Carol

## May Birthdays:

7– Liz

13—Pat

13—Patsy

18—Bert

18—Mary

21—Mike

26– Tela

