

LENT, 1981

The newsletter for the Utica and
Mt. Pleasant United Presbyterian
Churches.

Letter from your Pastor:

Dear Friends,

This is a letter written in tears--tears of sorrow, of gratitude, of hope. Most of you have heard about the death of my beloved friend and pastor, the Rev. Fletcher C. Hutcheson, Sr. For some reason I feel led to share with you my feelings about this wonderful man.

It is very difficult to lose someone you love, even when you have complete faith in that person's eternal life in God's Kingdom. I learned that lesson in a new and deeper way when Fletcher died. Sitting through his memorial service was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. As soon as I found a seat in the packed sanctuary of the Bayside Presbyterian Church, I was flooded with memories. I looked at the pulpit and remembered Fletcher standing there, preaching the sermons that shaped my life. I remembered the way he proudly introduced me to the congregation on the day I preached my very first sermon. I remembered the sermon he preached at my ordination service three years later--a sermon that inspires me still. I looked at the baptismal font, and remembered Fletcher baptizing my sisters and neices. As I looked at the front of the church I remembered Fletcher's look of love and joy as he married John and me. I thought of his office, and the countless hours we had spent there as he shared his deep Christian wisdom and counselled me through all kinds of personal crises. More than anyone else in the world, Fletcher taught me what the love of God in Jesus Christ is all about. More than anyone else in the world, he shaped me into the Christian and pastor I've become. He was one of the four most important men in my life--along with my husband, father, and brother. When the guest minister read the text for his memorial meditation for Fletcher my heart jumped, for the Scripture was absolutely perfect: And the King said unto his servants, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" (II Samuel 3:38)

I cannot quote verbatim all the things he taught me through the years, but the faith and wisdom Fletcher shared has become an important part of who I am as a Christian. It is awesome to realize that this has happened not only in my life, but in the lives of hundreds of other people as well. There are two strong statements of faith Fletcher made which I remember quite clearly. I have thought of them often since his memorial service. On one occasion he reflected on his days as a captive in a Nazi prison camp. It was a time of tremendous spiritual struggle for Fletcher, but there in a prison cell he came to the firm belief that, "No matter what happens to me in this place, God is still God...and God is ^{good} ^{another time he said} When I die, if people remember nothing else about me, I hope they'll remember that Fletcher Hutcheson loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and soul, and strength." For Fletcher, loving and serving our Lord was what life was all about. It was very fitting that his memorial service ended with the Bayside choir singing Handel's "Halleluia Chorus". As the choir sang the familiar words of tribute to Jesus Christ, I knew that Fletcher would be pleased: "And We shall reign forever and ever, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Halleluia!"

I would be lying if I said that I was "over" my grief at the death of Fletcher C. Hutcheson. When I realize that I will never again see his broad smile, hear his laugh and his rich Southern brogue, sit in his office and soak up his wisdom, or feel his strong hand rest reassuringly on my shoulder, I feel as if a knife were jabbing at my heart.

But the tears I shed are not only tears of sorrow for his family, his friends, and myself. I shed tears of gratitude to God for giving me such an inspiring pastor, mentor, and friend. I'm grateful for the solid Christian leadership he gave to the church, and for the love and compassion he shared with my family. I also shed tears of hope for the Hutcheson family ~~and~~ for the Bayside Presbyterian Church....I hope they'll feel the constant presence of God and the comfort and guidance of His Holy Spirit. I rejoice in the Christian hope Fletcher proclaimed so gladly: The hope of salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

"Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" Yes, I know. But I also know another great verse from Scripture: "I am the Resurrection, and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

In Christ's Love,

Melany

April 6, 1981

The Rev. Melany S. Hamilton
P. O. Box 1027
Polk, PA 16342

Dear Melany:

It has been some time since the arrival of your Pastoral letter in The Parish Voice concerning your feelings about our beloved Pastor, Fletcher.

It was posted on the Bulletin Board just outside the Sanctuary, along with letters from Fletcher, Jr. and Mrs. Hutcheson. There the congregation could read it for the first time. There was so much interest in it that we have mimeographed copies for general distribution to the membership of the Church. It was beautifully phrased and evoked such emotion in the hearts of us all that some were observed to be unable to continue to read it through without turning away momentarily to collect themselves. It has made us doubly proud when we remember that you are a daughter of this Church and one upon whom Fletcher exercised a deeply spiritual and abiding influence. For that we can be extremely grateful as it is one way in which his spirit continues to be with us and can serve to inspire the lives of others.

Ruling Elder Fred Edmonds has been active in administering the "taping ministry" of Bayside whereby the sick and shut-ins can enjoy the Sunday morning services while remaining at home. As a result, he has selected four of Fletcher's taped sermons which we consider to be some of his best and are sending them to you as a token of Bayside's love, appreciation and gratitude for the special place you occupy in our hearts.

We look forward to seeing you whenever events bring you to the Tidewater area, and we pray God's blessing upon you and your husband as you continue your ministry of the Word.

Faithfully yours,

Robert L. Kays
Clerk of Session