

THE DIARY OF LAMONT BEASLEY

An Excerpt from Saturday, 7/3/2021 through Tuesday, 7/27/2021

Saturday, 7/3/2021

Dear Diary: We just finished unpacking and arranging (and rearranging) the house for the day. Everyone is exhausted. But – we are not so exhausted that we are contemplating skipping our planned visitation of Westminster Presbyterian Church for worship tomorrow. We have been researching area churches, primarily on the Internet and have picked WPC as the one we want to try out first. It has a website and a social media presence that highlights their focus on spirit and truth worship and the ministry of God's word. They seem to have a good theology based church. Although I have yet to see or hear them, the web site advertises a radio broadcast, billboards, and we actually even saw some bumper stickers as we came into town. It seems this church has an obvious presence in town. Em has seen some of the videos on-line and was able to squeeze in some time for listening to a sermon or two. The church has their vision statement and their mission statement published online as well. Everything we've seen seems to indicate that the church has a reputation in town as a place of refuge and comfort. I'm really looking forward to attending, as is Em. The kids are nervous about meeting a whole new set of friends but are encouraged by the annual calendar on the website because it has lots of events listed for the youth of the church. It also has weekly group activities and mission projects. They'll do fine. They always do.

Sunday, 7/4/2021

Dear Diary: We loved the church service at WPC today. Even the kids seem to have had a great time. Their SS class was interesting and engaging to them. They said the class was on the "Doctrines of Grace". George said that he always hated the "high brow" teaching of doctrine, but that this class not only extremely interesting, but also focused on how doctrine gave us a better understanding of who God is, as taught in scripture. He believes he might want to be a minister of some kind when he's grown. At dinner tonight, he actually said, "Dad, did you know that if you don't have a proper understanding of theology, you could actually be worshipping a God of your own imagination rather than the one taught in the Bible God gave us?" Our SS teacher today said that the important thing to remember is that first we have to know and understand scripture accurately and then we'll be able to apply it to our lives so that we are living the gospel and loving the God of scripture (as opposed to an idol).

Em and I visited the adult Sunday school class and found it very edifying also. It was taught by the Pastoral Intern who has revolved in through a program in which the church is involved. As soon as one assistant pastor intern goes, another replaces him. I never heard of that program but can see the value in it. One thing I noticed in the comments of the members of the class is the commitment to truth. I also noticed that the teacher didn't "water down" truth in order to make it more palatable.

The worship service was blended with traditional music and more contemporary music. There were traditional biblical elements that were explained as we went through them. That was edifying for me because I was not familiar with some of the elements and didn't understand why we had to do so many things in the service. The service was followed by a potluck lunch. It was a great time of fellowship and we met a number of members.

We learned that a lot of the leadership and staff of the church are volunteers. The choir director is a volunteer. The church Event Organizer is a volunteer. The instrumentalists are volunteers. The Pastor and the Associate Pastor are paid, of course, and the Preschool director is paid, but surprisingly, the Pastor's Administration Assistant is a volunteer, as is the financial secretary. The church has grown tremendously over the past five years, almost doubling in membership and has ongoing building projects to accommodate the growth. Perhaps with all the building projects, there has not been enough money to pay the growing staff. Or perhaps the membership is just committed to serving the way they do. (I suspect the latter is true!!) I confess I'm a little surprised to see that the members are willing to volunteer as they do. I'm not used to that kind of commitment where we were before. It's gratifying to see and makes me eager to see where I might fit in at the church.

On the way home our daughter, Beatrice, made the comment that that was the longest worship service she had ever been in. My wife said that since lunch was at church and there was no evening worship at the church, the longer service was not a bad thing. After all, the whole day belongs to the Lord. Worshiping God in spirit and truth was more important. When our daughter asked why they had no evening worship, Em commented that she had heard that the evening worship service had been replaced with small groups that occur throughout the week. One of them IS on Sunday night, so Sunday night is still an option.

Tuesday, 7/6/2021

Dear Diary: Tonight a visitation team from the church came to see us. This team was made up of one elder, one deacon, one elderly gentleman who had been at the church since the beginning, one woman involved in women's ministry, and even one of the youth group. That perfect composition of team members enabled us to ask questions regarding the interests of our whole family. In asking about the team later in the evening, we learned that this team was designed for that exact reason. That was well planned, for sure. Everything at the church seems to be well organized and thought out. We learned a little more about the church tonight. Last year,

the church had taken on the project of building a new sanctuary. The year before that, 2019, they had finished a two year project – building a new education building with offices for the pastors and a counseling office to meet the needs of people going through transition times in their lives, or struggling financially, and or with other needs. While the pastor tries to remain focused on studying and preaching the word, the Associate Pastor and the Intern help with these other pastoral needs, including counseling and visiting the infirm. They also help with some of the administrative tasks that come up in a growing church. Amazingly, we were surprised to learn that in 2016, the church was less than half the size it is now and existed in only one building that was shared with the preschool. Also amazing to learn was that in 2016, there were only two elders and three deacons. Now there are five elders in addition to the pastor and associate pastor. Now there are 10 deacons serving in capacities in line with their own spiritual gifts. With the new Education building, there are now twice the number of classrooms, a larger nursery and a very large fellowship hall that can be divided for even more classrooms. I had many questions, but found I could hardly get them out because Em and the kids had just as many. We found we were all separating, Em with the lady who had come with the team, the kids with the youth, and me with the others. I feel that I am getting to know the church here more than I ever have before in other churches. It's true that, being military, we haven't stayed all that long in any one place. But really learning what we've learned has already planted seeds of love for this church in our hearts.

I almost forgot one of the most important things! I already said that Westminster has an organization that is phenomenal. We received a packet from the visitation team tonight that had the event calendar included. (It also had their vision statement, mission statement, a history of the church, some tracts, a copy of the church constitution, and other materials.) The calendar outlined all the events for the year including mission conference, Bible conference, church camping weekend, mission trips, youth retreats, women's retreat, men's retreat, mercy ministry projects and a fully detailed list of all the Small Groups, where and when they meet, and what they were currently studying.

Friday, 7/7/2021

Dear Diary: With a new job and everything, you'd think that would be where my focus would be. But I'm so pleased with WPC; I just focus on it constantly. My wife and kids are the same way. What a blessing to be that engaged. Tonight we went to a Small Group. There are many throughout the week, but we picked the Friday night one because it coincides with the one the kids want to go to (the youth group). The name of this group was "Behold Your God", but there were others we could have chosen: Sunday night was "Teaching your Youngster to Evangelize", Tuesday night there was a special interest outreach group (books, music, other interests), Wednesday night an all-church Prayer meeting, and tonight a class on Discipleship and Memorization of Scripture. I understand that last year (2020) there was a class on finding your niche in evangelism and the Centrality of the Gospel. In 2019 there was one group that was focused on identifying and using your spiritual gift. That year there were only two groups to choose from. In 2018 there were two groups also – one was "Blessings and Curses" and one was "Becoming a Repentant Disciple". In 2017, when these small groups had only been operating for a short while, they were able to have one "Embracing God's Word" and one on Prayer.

The church is actively involved in missions. The calendar says there is a mission trip to do work at the Juarez Seminary to help out there and another mission trip to Window Rock, AZ with the same goal. Entire families apparently use their vacations to go on these trips. Last year the church helped to establish a reformed Bible College Seminary Prep School that meets at the church and exists in cooperation with the RUF working at NMSU-A. In 2018 the church established a goal to send out a team once a year and keep in contact with DH and Emily Henry. In 2017, they started bringing needy folks from the community over once a week to participate in one of the small groups. Can you believe it? In 2016 they didn't even have an ongoing mission outreach program.

The church seems burdened to pray and work toward making Westminster a church that, while on earth, is a reflection of the "church triumphant" – one that is comprised of people from every tribe, tongue, people, & nation the way Heaven is described in the book of Revelation (5:9). They long to see their congregation become a more faithful expression of the cultural diversity of their city. I like that! There seems to be no division among the people in loving, serving, and caring for one another.

Sunday, 7/11/2021

Dear Diary: After church today we again stayed for the potluck lunch. We sat with Mr. Eli Clinton Lacks and Mr. David Washington Simmons and their wives during lunch. They told us how many things have changed over the past 5 years. It began with a program "Fanning the Flame" in 2016. In the beginning much of the focus was on remembering the past, repentance, and returning to our first love. This year, the Bible Conference is going to be on "How to Love your Siblings in Christ". This theme has been growing in intensity throughout these five years. Last year, the elders really pushed the congregation to develop an ongoing culture in which members readily confess their sins to one another. The year before the church participated in a reconciliation ministry that began with a Bible Conference teaching them the importance of reconciliation and what love really looks like. Mr. Lacks told us about how the church began by remembering the past and the original reason WPC was started in the first place. The main events in the history of the church are on the web site but it was interesting to hear from one who had been there from the beginning. The church had begun because of the need of a church that held fast to the preaching of the truth from the pulpit and the absence of that in the church that five families had left. He talked about the joy they had meeting in each other's homes and how they emphasized outreach. He

actually had tears in his eyes when he talked about the joy the session members had and the members had in the fellowship of Presbytery meetings because of the unity in their values and their goals. It is gratifying to know what a firm foundation these folks built in this church. Mr. Simmons said that is why, when it seemed WPC had lost that unity and vision that five years ago they came to a time when they knew they needed to repent of their apathy and lack of love for each other. They no longer had that joy that comes from eagerness for fellowship and unity in truth. They organized a day in 2016 devoted specifically to confessing our congregational sins, fasting, prayer, and corporate repentance. Yes, this may be our church! We may have found it!

Tuesday, 7/13/2021

Tonight we had dinner with the Eli Clinton Lacks family. We were glad to have an opportunity to continue our conversation from Sunday. We asked him about some of the mercy ministries and service ministries we had found on the calendar. How did one small church with only around 300 members find time to do all the things that were on that calendar? He explained that they hadn't always had such a full calendar. As more people have joined the ranks of service-committed members through the past five years, the calendar has been growing in number of events and participants as well. He said that they only added the weekly jail ministry this year, and at present, there are only two or three participating but that it is still a dynamic ministry and the church has seen results already. The leadership of the church has been focused on hospitality this year as well, encouraging families to this calling from the pulpit, and encouraging young families to learn from older members. Last year they added a youth retreat in the mountains to encourage a refocus on the spiritual growth of our younger members. They also started joining with another local church in an effort to feed the hungry on a monthly basis – and on a weekly basis, there's an after school program for children. In 2018 the church began a bereavement group that meets weekly and an outreach ministry into convalescent homes to teach Sunday School classes and provide music weekly during the Sunday school hour. In 2017 a ministry to singles and divorced members group began to share and pray each week together. The associate pastor leads that group and always presents a good devotional time as well. That's the year the church began their counseling ministry. The pastor's administrative assistant makes appointments and the pastor selects from a team of trained volunteers to fit the specific counselor with the need. They've addressed many issues – abuse, overcoming the culture taught in public schools, dealing with life transitions, financial problems, etc. One of the biggest ministries that have taken off is the women's ministry. They meet on a monthly basis for Bible Study and prayer and fellowship. In addition, they've gone back to having an annual retreat as they did many years ago.

Sunday, 7/18/2021

We joined the New Member's Class today. This first class was a bible study on what God has called His church to do. It focused on first, of all things, Moses and the exodus from Egypt. God called the Israelites out of Egypt that they could SERVE HIM. Then the Bible study transitioned to what real freedom is as defined in Galatians 5. As members of Westminster Pres, the goal of our leadership is to call us to freedom! We are not to use our freedom as an opportunity to satisfy our own desires, ***“but through love to serve one another”*** as is taught in that chapter. It was clear from this first class that by joining WPC we were being called to serve. The teacher encouraged us to understand that membership is more than filling a seat. It is a call to corporate commitment from the member to the membership and from the leaders to the members to provide them with the tools they need to fulfill God's purposes for them in their church life. The leadership desires to combat the culturally prevalent man-centered view of Scripture and give the membership opportunities to get away from the culturally driven expectations and into a Biblical driven expectation of their life style. If we decide to join the church, the promises will be going both ways at the meeting with the elders. Rather than intimidating me with this revelation, I was actually inspired. The church leadership was promising to avail me and my family with tools and opportunities, training and inspiration to trust and obey and to remember what God has done for us and to follow His instructions without distractions. I believed the emphasis on loving and obeying and serving the Lord was really put into perspective, the pluses and the minuses, the blessings and the curses of consequences for obeying or ignoring God's will. This teacher stressed the desire of WPC to equip its members to serve and to encourage them to heed God's call to service. It is clear that the church wants to seek the face of God and encourage every member to do so.

Sunday, 7/25/2021

Last Sunday, we learned about the expectations God has for the members of HIS church. This week we learned about the expectations God has for the leadership of HIS church. It seemed to me that WPC Elders are committed to keeping the church from the trap of false teachers and from wandering from HIS truth. They work together to make very clear to newcomers what the church stands for in terms of adherence to biblical truths and practice. We were left with no question marks about what they believe and why. One of the things we especially liked is that the culture of the church is to understand that its foundation was set in the truths of Scripture that were rediscovered by the Reformers. They call it “Reformed Theology” – and the church certainly continues in the business of “reforming” its behavior to the things the Scriptures teach!

They are called to be focused on loving, counseling, nurturing, discipling, and inspiring. While theological and philosophical precision is essential for knowing God and His purposes for us, the elders of WPC understand that their calling is to be driven by love and good works. They are open to input from all the members. They endeavor to call themselves to a spirit of submission as they are thankful for the opportunity to model the love of Christ (as opposed to emphasizing their authority and calling other members to submission to them). I understand now that if my family does become members of WPC, there will be a concentrated effort to discern

my spiritual gifts. (If I don't have knowledge of what those gifts are, I'll get information and counseling on that.) Then I'll be guided to look at three areas of my church life that I can commit my involvement. First, everyone is involved in one of the small groups. Second, there is encouragement to choose a ministry to be involved in (mercy ministry, a service ministry, or an outreach ministry). Third, each member is asked to consider one of the corporate prayer opportunities that are offered, as that is such an important element of our church life. (There is a prayer calendar where members can sign up for a slot to pray, a prayer chain, a mid week prayer meeting, a prayer team who get together for prayer.) Regular follow-up is done by the elders in order to encourage communication and sharing of ideas and needs. There is also a program in place that seeks to accomplish elder visitation to the family of every member at least once per year. This has been established in response to the Lord Jesus's admonitions to feed and tend His sheep (i.e., to watch over the members of the church). In these visits, the elders try to discover needs (both material & spiritual) and to encourage everyone to participate in the activities of the church according to their spiritual gifts & abilities. I can certainly see how this development of a plan to identify and utilize members according to their maturity, willingness, and time without overloading them is essential to being able to minister the way this church is able to do.

Monday, 7/26/2021

Yesterday in the new member's class I was encouraged to attend a joint Elder and Deacon Meeting being held today, and since I was off work this afternoon, I decided to go. The meeting was well planned with an agenda. Both boards present a monthly report to the congregation in the last Sunday's bulletin. The reports were presented at this joint meeting for approval and for additional sharing of information as needed. Discussion began around the monthly questionnaires from the members. Prayer for guidance and needs expressed followed. Plans were then made to meet the needs expressed in the forms. Next, specific attention was turned to members who had not responded with a monthly report. Was that an oversight, is there a problem, are there special needs? Plan of action was discerned for each family. Next, focus and discussion regarding aspiring leaders and how best to involve them in understanding their calling and responding took place. Aspiring deacons were assigned to existing deacons for come alongside for learning and testing. (1 Tim. 3:10) Third, the session went into an executive session to discuss needs of a more private nature.

Tuesday, 7/27/2021

There is no doubt in my mind that the Lord is leading us to this church. We are looking forward to making our church life be so much more than it has ever been in our lives. We have no doubt that the elders and deacons will be there for us as we falter or need help in discerning God's purpose for us in this city, our church and in our family. I'm thankful to have a place of nurturing and commitment to bring my family along the path that God has led us.