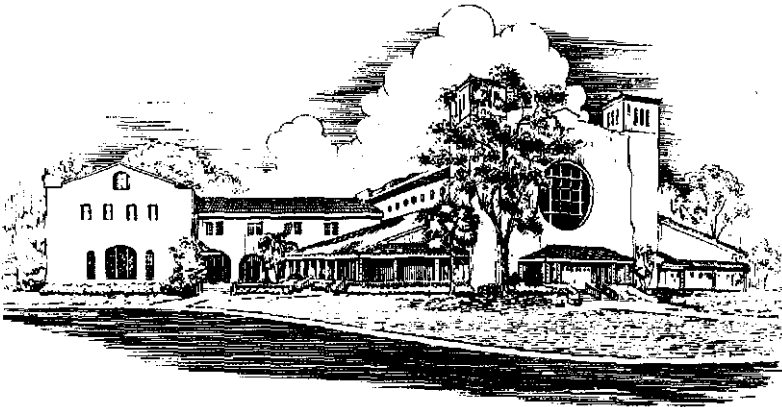


First Church Pulpit

"LET'S HEAR IT FOR FORT LAUDERDALE!"

Text: "... He looked forward to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . . Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of the city . . . and the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."

-- Hebrews 11:10; Zechariah 8:4-5



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33301

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I hope some of you attended some of the all-day party yesterday at Bubier Park, called "Celebrate! Fort Lauderdale 1994." The rain sure didn't help. I planned this sermon to coincide with the festive weekend. I was on the original committee several years ago which set a 1994 goal of Fort Lauderdale becoming "The Best City Of Its Size In The Nation." I commend the city employees who initiated the program a decade back, and all who have been working on it ever since.

Some history of Fort Lauderdale was reenacted there. The Spanish Conquistadors from the 16th Century Spanish encampment arrived, as did the Seminoles, the Indians, I mean. Our namesake Major Lauderdale, of Tennessee, came back in borrowed historic military dress. There were food and drinks and displays, and so forth. It was a grand occasion, topped off by a fine fire works show, which I missed. Late Saturday night is not a good time for preachers with colds to be out. Mayor Jim Naugle said that the announced goal has been achieved, thanks to a great community effort. In 1994, we are "The Best City Of Our Size In The Nation." Just ask us.

I would not argue with the Mayor, now. He is a friend of mine. He is a church member here and a fine Christian gentleman. But, I do not know how one can ascertain what it takes to be "the best little city in America." (Watch it! At least we're not in

Texas.) We are roughly 150,000 as a city, two million in the metropolitan area. A combined purposeful attempt has been going on in the past years to improve Fort Lauderdale, to honor its heritage, its strengths, and its recent accomplishments. We can be proud. Some chronic whiners are going to jump up now and say, "But what about this? What about our problems?" HMMMM.

The Cromie family came to Fort Lauderdale ten years plus ago. When we arrived there were just two downtown skyscrapers. It was hard to figure out exactly where downtown was. Now there are more than a dozen. There was a little museum of art in a store front on Las Olas Boulevard. Our new Museum building is the envy of many. A new library was underway downtown, but not yet open. There was no Performing Arts Center on the water, no Museum of Discovery and Science, no I-Max Theater. A-1-A was filled with small pubs and trouble-making young visitors, not the sparkling new and impressive ocean front we have now, with much more to come.

There was no Convention Center. There were no Marlins or Panthers, and the Dolphins belonged to a family in Miami. Most of our largest corporations were still little puppies back then. One of the finest was not even born ten years ago, and another had not yet moved here. The list could go on and on. Each of you could add your favorite improvement.

This did not all come about by accident. No real progress ever does, not for you and me, not for communities, not for churches. Adjustments were sometimes late in coming, and some groups have been left behind, but there are several united efforts that have spearheaded the improvement. People accomplish change when they decide they want it! The Chamber of Commerce, with many First Church members involved, like Linda Gill chaired the organization and Peg Buchan was interim director. Then there was "Make It Shine," a far ranging program, which Anne Joyner of our congregation spearheaded. Laura Ward, one of our officers, and others in our congregation helped tremendously with the successful bond issue which made so much of the progress possible. Chuck Ritchie's planning department unfolded it all. Former Mayor Bob Cox was faithful, good, and true.

First Church member, Senator Jim Scott, helped to direct significant monies from Tallahassee, for education and other things, and especially to aid Coach Nelson with the new Swim and Dive Facilities and the Swimming Hall of Fame. Jack is an officer here, as are City employees Ernie Moore, and Herb Carroll, and countless other members who have been actively seeking to blend progress with conservative good thinking all along the way, to say nothing of the innumerable volunteers who serve on various boards and committees, and those of you who have

contributed money to the projects.

We have also concentrated on attracting jobs and corporation headquarters to our area, Sunbeam Oyster being the latest. Tourism is still a major. Five million visitors came to Fort Lauderdale last year. They spent something like 3.3 billion dollars around our area, in various costs, rent, food, clothes, at one of the 2,500 restaurants (surely the best in the nation), in the 550 hotels and motels, and in all the other things necessary to keep an attractive tourist community going. We are working on a unified transportation system, traffic alleviation, Riverwalk, Community Celebration, and so forth. Time and space prevent me from mentioning them all by name, but let your mind and memory roam.

Then we are blessed with companies and corporations who care: Alamo Car Rental Corporation with First Church Members, Michael Egan, Norman Tripp, MacDonald Clark, Marc Cannon and several more have long committed themselves to cultural community improvement. Blockbuster Entertainment with Wayne Huizenga, Steve Berrard, Ron Castell and several others who belong to or attend our church, have recently led the way to enormous improvements. They have attracted talented working men and women to our area. They reach out to the needs and growth of our area, including the coming Blockbuster Park, which will alter our whole community for the

good! There are others: law firms who care, an excellent Health Care System, small and large companies, and the list could go on all day.

Neighborhood redevelopment is another unheralded area, which has been so successful it could serve as a model to the nation. First Church member and former Mayor Bob Dressler first alerted me to this good a few years ago.

Then the burgeoning growth of office buildings, residences, condominiums, hotels, and the rest with men like Terry Stiles a First Church Trustee, and Jack Loos, and Hugh Anderson, in the forefront.

Another increasingly major factor is the Broward Community Foundation, thanks to Libby Deinhart and others, including current Board President, Wil Greaton. It has only recently come into prominence, but hundreds of residents now contribute. Some corporations and individuals have committed huge reserve dollars. The way things look, with a little help from our friends, it should one day become one of the leading Community Foundations in the nation. I am a great fan of Community Foundations, having been well schooled by lifelong friend Alfred W. Wishart, and previously Stanton Belfour at the Pittsburgh Foundation.

We have the necessary funds here in our area.

As one of my friends said when he came to visit ten years ago: "Cromie, there sure is a lot of money down here!" But we have to persuade more donors to come forward. I know that everything is not perfect here, but we are blessed indeed.

There is a choice which each of us has to make about what goes on in every town and every city you know. You can be positive or negative! There are no other choices. If you sit on the fence, you might feel safe, but you help no one. The choice is radical. You can be pessimistic and point out the dangers and difficult things to worry about in the world. Growth and progress always carry with them a shadow side. "All things cast a shadow," Carl Jung once wrote, "and the larger is the strength, the longer is its shadow." You can mope and mourn, or, you can get up off your "status quo" and move forward.

It was easier and quieter to have been a sleepy little town 40 years ago where everybody knew everybody, when the tourists left for six months, and everything calmed down. It was simpler then, than to face the clatter and clutter of being a burgeoning, diverse, and often crowded major year-round city. I once told you of the lady who said to me that she was in favor of progress. She yelled, "It's all these changes I can't stand!" Touche! She speaks for a lot of us.

For everything you get in life, you give up

something else. One thing is sure, you can't go back again. Slumber not in the tents of your fathers. You can choose to accentuate the negative, or you can turn and celebrate the good things that are impressive and important, ones which auger well for the future. The blessings God has given to our community are bountiful: the sun, the sea, the sky, the Gulf Stream, the easterly breeze, the clouds. The rest we have to do ourselves. I tell my northern friends that living in Fort Lauderdale now is akin to what it must have been like to have lived in New York 125 years ago, when that city was aborning.

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When I came here I felt like a missionary in a foreign field. God called us down from Pittsburgh, a large industrial city which had tried to face and overcome its problems of smog, crime, unemployment, and lack of community pride for thirty years. I could not adjust easily to the small town attitudes in Fort Lauderdale, or the lack of caring in our community. It depressed me just a decade ago. What we needed was not here, at least not largely.

Some of you will remember August Burghard, a First Church member and a nationally known author and historian. He was a little frail when I first came, but he never missed a thing. I loved and respected him. The first time I met with Mr. Burghard, he

ended our visit by saying, "Young man, it's great to have a big city boy like you down here. We are going to need a lot of them as the future unfolds." I was flattered. It turned my attitude around. I do not know how he knew from what I had said, but he was aware then that Fort Lauderdale was changing, and people would have to change, too.

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Our First Presbyterian Church, has been a bastion of strength and guidance for this city for 82 years. For a long time we were out there by ourselves. In culture, music and the arts, in community services. First Church was everywhere. We still lead the area in our commitment to all things good, like our Habitat For Humanity project to build 10 homes in 10 years. I am so proud of you people in our Church who serve and contribute to our area. The Boys' Club of Broward County, now add the Girl's Club, began with First Church people. It, with endless other organizations which help children and youth, should all take a bow. We support two dozen local agencies with children's work in our Benevolence Budget. We all need to commit ourselves to young people, all races and stations and religions, not forgetting any of them. The surest way to guarantee the future of South Florida, as the future of the nation, is to take good and proper care of our youth, and those with special problems, too. Neither

can we forget those with special strengths.

Our school district has undergone rapid expansion. There are presently 191,000 students in the Broward School District which makes it the second largest in Florida and the eighth largest school district in the nation. That is incredible when you think of our pretty little sleepy tourist town. In addition, there are 140 private schools which serve the area. The area has 22 high schools, 31 middle schools and 114 elementary schools, plus 24 alternative locations for special and vocational education.

It costs money to educate or to give scholarships to young people, but it costs next to nothing compared to the financial and social costs of failing to do so. Say, \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year for a moderate college tuition, and \$30,000 a year plus for incarceration. I like our new Superintendent of Schools in Broward, Dr. Frank Petruzielo. I like the way he tightens the ship. I like his no nonsense approach. I like his unwillingness to compromise. I frankly do not mind us paying him a good salary. Large salaries are necessary these days to attract the best people. He could triple his income in the corporate world. He is committed to public education. What could be more important than bringing the best possible leader to head the Broward County schools for 191,000 students. We have come

a long, long way.

Continuing problems abound here as they do almost everywhere: crime, drugs, AIDS, reasonable health care, and so forth. We must do much more to make our streets and city safe. We need massive commitments in housing and rehabilitation.

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The homeless problem is a special one. Let me talk honestly with you for a moment about it. I mean no criticism of our political leaders. Mayor Naugle, a First Church member, the Council and City Management have been forced to take a tiger by the tail. Homelessness is a growing concern all across the land and is fed strongly by homeless advocates all the way to Washington, with their nice sounding phrases and plans of what we should be doing and how much we should set everything aside to help the homeless.

Professor Christopher Jencks of Northwestern University has written a marvelous book, The Homeless. I recommend it to you. He shows that it is a very complicated problem. Some homeless are innocent, but most homeless people make choices, too. They chose a lifestyle which leads to homelessness.

I do not mean to be cruel, but the homeless are

not heroes. We need to make a distinction between two different kinds of homeless people. There are some families who, for a variety of reasons, fire or displacement, poverty, unemployment, illness, sometimes because of native inabilities to function in a competitive society . . . there are some families with small children who, because of illness, or desertion, or the rest, have no place to lay their heads at night. I am not speaking of India, but right here in beloved Fort Lauderdale. We need to separate those who are innocently homeless from the chronically homeless. A re-entry training and assistance, rather than custodial care is, in my opinion, the key.

But the larger problem with the homeless is somewhere else. I do not want to hear the sociological gibberish about how I helped to create the problem. There are those who won't work, never did, and never will, who assume they have a right to have everything others of God's children have worked hard for to achieve. It would have been easy for hundreds of people I know to have given up, to have abandoned their responsibilities of parenthood and homemaking, to chase off after their shooting star. I thank God for the commitment of those who have worked hard just to make ends meet, everyone of them. It rankles me then to have to listen to a bunch of Ne'er-do-wells making their incessant demands about their rights to have free-everything.

I think of how unfair it is that tax dollars contributed by the wealthy, the middle class and the poor, by all of us who work, go to provide free shelter, food, clothing, and the rest for those who won't. I hope you saw the recent article about an immigrant woman living in a big house in a comfortable neighborhood, who has 17 children, and more than 100 grandchildren and great grandchildren -- all on welfare, which has cost the Federal Government nearly One Million Dollars per year -- every year for the past 28 years. Possibly exaggerated, all this was reported in a recent Boston Globe article. Neighbors said repeatedly that while others work, they loaf around, watch television, smoke and drink, and collect their checks.

As Confucius said "Keep an open mind, but don't let your brains fall out!"

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So, now as the future unfolds, what are we to do? First, this is like Sociology 101. In South Florida we need to find an increasing and continuing commitment to the common good which will draw all of us closer together. We have a wonderful city and county. We are the envy of people all across the nation. There is a battle going on for the future of Broward County and Fort Lauderdale. To win, we need a positive thrust by everybody to make sure the

right side wins. There are many selfish interest groups involved in the battle. We need to defeat them. We need to rearrange those who want this and that for themselves.

I told you once of the television interview years ago when the CIO Steel workers were on strike. The reporter asked the union representative: "What are you trying to accomplish with this strike? Your men are out of work. They are losing their income. The company is going broke."

The man said, "We are striving for the common good." The reporter asked, "What is the common good?" He said, "When we get more money for the steel workers, that is the common good."

Don't laugh too loudly. My dad was a CIO Steelworker. Don't point your finger. Mostly, we define the common good from a personal point of view. What is the common good? When "my group," "my family," "my way of life" get what I/we want and need. Some define it as the Hispanics getting this, the Jews want that, the Blacks get this, and the Haitians, and the Cubans, and the singles, the homosexuals, the women, the wealthy, the elderly: everybody wants preferred treatment and nobody wants to pay the costs.

It is not only here. It is everywhere. But South

Florida has a peculiar kind of problem. For decades this was a vacation paradise where people did not have to care about schools or community problems. Most of them went home at Easter and came back at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Those who stayed had a highly individualistic spirit, or they were worn out and weary, having fought too many battles back home. You know what I mean, those of you who have struggled for decades in this community. You know the problem in encouraging people who basically do not care to become involved. Those who want to play golf, or go boating, or swim, fish, or eat out, or sit, and who have no love of a growing city and wish things were the way they used to be. It is easy here to adopt the recreational life.

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We need to close. . . . I chose for one of our Scripture lessons an unknown little portion of minor prophesy in the Old Testament -- Zechariah. He had a very short career in prophesy. He came to the fore when the people of God had returned from exile in Babylon and found Jerusalem in ruins.

God brought him to the time to re-establish faith in the future, to organize a deepening religious activity for the area. Are you listening? God sent him to a time that was dangerous, where religious values and morals were not keeping pace with

progress. The people were building their houses and recreational places. They were slow to rebuild the temple and the wall around the city. They were allowing what was right in God's eyes to slip.

Zechariah warned them that with all their other progress, they needed to dream about a day when their city would be prosperous and great, when the elderly would once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem and not be afraid, and when the streets of the city would be full again of little boys and girls playing without fear. "Then will my people be glad," the Lord said, when they combine their building efforts in the city with the strengthening of their souls.

Our second Scripture verse has a similar message from the Book of Hebrews. Chapter Eleven speaks of the faith that God's people have always had, without which they could not have lived through any time, let alone the bad times. Life has always been uncertain. It says that Abraham went out to find the future. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise," along with his family and friends. Then, "He looked forward to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." A city who builder and maker is God.

My sermon topic says "Let's Hear It For Fort Lauderdale!" I want you to do that. I want you to be

positive. Three cheers, at least. I want you to look beyond our problems, to the solutions. And let's all work together and put aside personal preferences and prejudice. There is a lot to do.

But essentially, we, Christ's people, need to look for a city which hath spiritual and moral foundations and whose builder and maker is Christ. Without His presence, without a renewal of the great moral themes of the faith, it will not matter much what else we do. If the power of God deserts us, not much else will matter. It is true with you personally, too.

At the time when Zechariah was writing, Ezra and Nehemiah were also writing about the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The times were out of joint. There was much to do to set it right. Nehemiah tells us that with one hand they worked on the building of the wall and the temple, and with the other hand they held a sword. A symbol of their determination to win God's battles in the world, while their moral and spiritual progress was continuing.

That symbol will do for Fort Lauderdale and Broward County, and everywhere else for that matter. Let's keep everything good going, let's use the proverbial sword of strength to fight off danger. But with the other hand of our energy, let's renew our spiritual power. Let's seek for purity. Let's let love and concern shine as brightly as the sun. Let's live on

hope, the hope that God will continue to bless us.
For now and evermore. Amen.