



EXPRESSIONS

OUR VISION

A church deeply formed by the Good News of Jesus Christ, experiencing and expressing God's grace together in Hattiesburg.

*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*

Psalm 34:8 ESV



TASTE AND SEE!

Jesse Noote, Director of Music Ministries

Have you ever been in church listening to a sermon and the pastor says something that sends you on a rabbit trail in your mind? This recently happened to me during one of Pastor Darwin's sermons when he said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The triggering words related to food were likely a consequence of my breakfast being fully digested and my stomach deciding it was time to ring the lunch bell. Most of the time when tempted to wander, I can arrest my mind and bring it back to the room where it belongs. To my shame, I admit that on this particular day I followed the rabbit all the way down the hole of continuous thought that ultimately led to the creation of this article. In a nutshell, the three main pitstops along the rabbit trail were food, music, and how these first two relate to the Gospel.

One of my favorite television shows is MasterChef. I love everything about it, from the back stories of the contestants, to the initial competition to get onto the show, to the shock and awe on the faces of each contestant as they walk into the MasterChef kitchen for the first time. Over the course of the show, the contestants exhibit their cooking skills, obtain new skills and techniques, all to hopefully reach their dream of becoming the next MasterChef, possibly own their own restaurant, or start a business as a result of being on the show.

Throughout the series, various challenges are presented to the contestants. Often, a famous chef suddenly appears on the show. When this occurs, it usually means the cooks will have to recreate a dish for which that particular Michelin-star chef is world famous. The challenge usually follows the same plot. The chef, along with all his or her accomplishments, is introduced to the contestants. The dish to be recreated is brought out on a beautiful cart. This mystery meal is also covered under a shiny dome, which is a torturous tease for the novice contestants who look on in both excitement and horror as they wonder what high level dish they will be required to recreate.

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SUNDAYS

Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship, 10:45 a.m.
in McIntosh Hall

Everyone holds his breath (including those watching from the comfort of home) as the dome is slowly lifted, revealing the fully prepared meal. Audible sighs of both admiration and dismay break the silence as the aspiring chefs behold the beautiful masterpiece before them. At this point, the contestants are invited to approach the dish. They may smell, touch, taste, and retaste as many times as they would like to discover each ingredient that went into the making of that dish. There are always very dazed and confused looks on the faces of the contestants as they attempt to recognize ingredients. Some contestants even close their eyes to block out all distraction so their palates can focus solely on aroma, flavor, and texture. Suddenly, the countdown is given, and the chefs fly off to their stations to begin the recreation process.

Whether you're on MasterChef or in your home kitchen, every chef has a finished product in mind. Every meal has a recipe. However, before a meal can be enjoyed, ingested, and nutrients absorbed, it must be cooked. Before preparing and cooking ingredients, they must first be broken down to their most rudimentary parts. In order to gather ingredients, plants must be uprooted and chopped, fruit must be plucked from the tree, and animals must be slaughtered.

In other words, something must die. Some cultures do a better job of paying homage to this process than others. Those that do offer such acknowledgment of the sacrifices of land and animals state that it produces gratefulness and perspective to the one who enjoys the finished product.

If you look at a table of ingredients, it looks like a jumbled mess. You might even wonder how this ingredient and that ingredient might possibly go together, as they appear to have nothing in common. But the MasterChef knows. *Your* job is to trust, follow the recipe, and remember that the master chef is not the one on trial here.

Perhaps one of the reasons I love these shows is because the cooking process is quite similar to the musical process. When I receive a piece of music in the mail from a publisher, the composition is complete. All of the notes and rhythms are exactly where the composer wants them. However, before the music can be served to the congregation, the piece must be broken down into its most basic elements.

The "ingredients" for a musical composition are pitch, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, text broken into syllables, and so on. The pianist studies the score to find out what key signature the composer used, and plays only those notes related to that key (unless the composer instructs the pianist to vary momentarily from that key or change keys all together).

The choir, whose main job involves singing the text, is broken up into four primary parts: soprano (higher female voices), alto (lower female voices), tenor (higher male voices), and bass (lower male voices). Each section must learn their part and retain it. Staying on one's own part can be challenging when there are other sections singing different notes at the same time. For this reason, we often rehearse individual voice parts in isolation. Rehearsal may be considered the "cooking" stage of music and can feel like a messy process at times. The music does not sound quite right when rehearsing individual parts, but this is because the "recipe" is not yet complete. If heard at this point, it would indeed seem unappetizing to the listener. However, the composer does not intend for the audience to hear that part in isolation any more than a chef intends a diner to eat the onion powder by itself. It is just a part of the whole.

In music, the individual rehearsal is necessary, but in the end, it is to be sung in concert with the accompaniment and other voice parts added to it. The sacrifice of labor and love that the choir puts into rehearsal is always with the intent of making for an enjoyable musical feast for our Lord and congregation. While it is not always clear at first, the intentions of the composer are always revealed in the end. Our job is to trust the process and the master composer.

Psalm 34:8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" But just as with food and music, in order for us to actually enjoy the fruit of salvation, something, or rather, *someone* had to die. It is no accident that God chose food as the medium through which we are commanded to continually remember Him:

"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" (Luke 22:19)

While we are too often tempted by Satan's "false fruits" (a phrase from one of Darwin's recent sermons), Jesus calls to us like He did the woman at the well and says, "...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

To taste and see of the Lord's goodness, although a free gift of God, does not come without a cost. Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). When we do this, we become, "...the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 2:14-15). Have you tasted and seen how good the Lord is? Jesus bled and died so that we might eat and drink deeply of His love.

Much like the countertop with random ingredients scattered all over, or the choir struggling to make sense of new notes and rhythms, our lives sometimes resemble a mess. Life's circumstances overwhelm us as we wonder what in the world God could be thinking. However, our job is not to understand it all, but to trust the recipe (God's word), and to know that the Master Chef is preparing a table that will ultimately turn each disaster into something beautiful and glorious.

The choir has indeed worked very hard the last three months, and so we invite you to a musical feast that we have prepared especially for you on **Sunday, Dec. 14 at 6:00PM**. This is not just a musical feast but a spiritual one, where we will proclaim everything from the fall of man, to the Incarnation, to the future celebration of the marriage feast that He has gone to prepare for us. I hope you will join us.

In the words of my mother before dinner: "Everything's ready! Y'all get ready to dig in!"

Merry Christmas!
Jesse





HARVEST FUND UPDATE

With the support of the church family for the **FPC Harvest Fund**, renovations are nearing completion in the Sanctuary and the office building! We expect to resume worshipping in the Sanctuary later this month, after which work in the Fellowship Hall and McIntosh Hall can be finished.

The Harvest Fund has received over \$1.2 million in pledges and \$993,000 in payments to date from 100+ donors.

A worthy goal would be to fully fund these facilities upgrades in order to devote our financial resources to onboarding of new ministry staff in 2026. An additional \$300,000 in gifts and commitments is needed to meet the Harvest Campaign goal of \$1.5 million.

As we enter into the Advent season, there's much to rejoice in as a church family! While our construction partners work diligently to complete facilities renovations, your year-end gift to the **Harvest Fund** would be a wonderful expression of gratitude for all that the Lord has done for us.

The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. PSALM 126:3 ESV

WELCOME AINSLIE CURTIS!

Hey First Presbyterian Church family! My name is Ainslie Curtis, and I'm so excited to be serving as the youth intern this spring. I'm graduating in December from the University of Southern Mississippi with a bachelor's degree in Health Sciences. I plan to pursue a career as a pediatric occupational therapist—a field that allows me to combine my love for children and my desire to serve others.

At Southern Miss, I served on the leadership team for Reformed University Fellowship and have been involved with the Baptist Student Union as part of their fall outreach team. I've spent three summers working at Twin Lakes Camp and Conference Center as a nanny, counselor, and lifeguard—camp ministry will always hold a special place in my heart! I also had the privilege of serving at Village Seven Presbyterian Church as a junior high staff member for two summers.

I'm a member of Brandon Presbyterian Church and have attended Woodland Presbyterian Church while at school. And I'm thrilled for the opportunity to serve the youth at First Pres, share the Gospel, and build meaningful relationships within this wonderful church family.

With joy,
Ainslie Curtis



CHRISTMAS AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

White Gift Candlelight Service & Carol Sing

Sunday, December 7, 6:00 p.m., McIntosh Hall

Service of Lessons & Carols

Sunday, December 14, 6:00 p.m.

featuring FPC Sanctuary Choir, guest singers from area PCA churches, and orchestra

Christmas Caroling

Sunday, December 21, 4:30 p.m.

We will meet in Currie Hall and divide into groups to go into the community to sing for older members of our church and assisted living residents.

Christmas Eve Communion Service

Wednesday, December 24, 5:00 p.m., Sanctuary

The church office will be closed for the holidays on December 24 and 25 and January 1, 2026.



WHITE GIFT SERVICE

December 7 at 6 p.m.

The White Gift Candlelight Service and Carol Sing is one of the highlights of the year for our church family! The children's choirs and musicians will help lead us in worship, with a brief meditation from Pastor Darwin.

We are asked to bring non-perishable food items to the service that will be used to restock the FPC food pantry and to distribute to those in need in our community through partner agencies. Please see the Grace Notes e-newsletter for more details.

YEAR END GIVING TO FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

If you wish to make a gift to the church prior to year-end, your mailed check should be dated and postmarked no later than **December 31**. The church office will also be open December 29-31 to receive your gift in person.

Online gifts to the **General Fund** or **Harvest Fund** may be made through the church website (www.fpchattiesburg.org) and should occur before midnight on December 31 to be considered as received in 2025.

For assistance with your gift, please contact Arrington Rhett.



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