

**“Origin Story”**  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 31, 2021**

**Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:32 – 12:3 (NRSV)**

<sup>11:32</sup>And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - <sup>33</sup>who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup>Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup>Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup>They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented -<sup>38</sup>of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup>Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup>since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

<sup>12:1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.



**Sermon: “Origin Story”**

That passage from Hebrews drips with history. In recounting the stories of those who have gone before, the author reminds the reader of our shared story, of God’s amazing love and power, and how God has been at work in the world in and through God’s people. Every one of those names reflects a different, but interrelated chapter of that longer story, and we are a part of it. That story is not merely something to be admired. It is to be added to. Their story illuminates and inspires ours. It is an old, old story and we are to write our own chapters in it.

Now, I’m going to tell some stories today that you may have heard before but that’s okay. They are good stories and we need to be reminded of them.

January 11<sup>th</sup> was probably a bitter-sweet day for many of you. Ohio State stood at the pinnacle of the college football world taking on Alabama in the NCAA National Championship Game. It was a moment of pride for Buckeye fans, even though the outcome was disappointing. But regardless, if you can go all season, especially during a pandemic like this one, and be one of the last two teams standing at the end, I think you can call that a successful season.

But this year’s team did not achieve success in a vacuum. Something more helped put them in position to play for a title: Tradition and expectation. When Ryan Day took the coaching reigns from Urban Meyer two seasons ago, Bill Connelly, wrote in a piece for ESPN that: *“Ohio State is one of the few programs for which every loss is an all-caps BREAKING NEWS story. It is always going to be a high-upside, high-stress job, and in following in Urban Meyer's footsteps, Day takes the job at maybe its highest stress and highest upside.”*<sup>1</sup>

For much of Buckeye Nation, getting to the final game was exciting, but it wasn’t surprising. It was expected. How did the program get to that point where sky high expectations are the norm? It’s because for decades, players, coaches, administrators, and fans have committed their resources and emotional energy towards being successful. Every year, those who come new on the scene are presented with two gifts: the success of their predecessors and the expectation that they will match or exceed it.

The story of this year's success on the field was authored by Day, Fields, and Sermon,<sup>2</sup> et al, but it's first chapters were written by names you know like Hayes, Horvath, and Griffin<sup>3</sup> and others you probably don't, like Lilley, and Fesler, and Zarnas.<sup>4</sup> The story of the 2020 Buckeyes is a story of passion and hard work but at the same time, it is a story decades in the writing.

For every team, person, or enterprise that has ever experienced success, there are people and events in their past that helped to make them who they are and who have contributed to that success. Steve Jobs founded Apple Computers not in his own office, but in the garage of his parent's house.<sup>5</sup> TV and Movie star Ashton Kutcher was an engineering student at the University of Iowa, serving tables at an Iowa City Bar.<sup>6</sup> He had no thought of being an actor, but a talent scout noticed him and invited him to enter a modeling competition.<sup>7</sup> NFL veteran Michael Oher, was the product of a broken home, who spent his childhood bouncing among foster homes and was sometimes homeless before a compassionate family took him in, adopted him, and paved the way for him to do incredible things. His story was made famous in the 2009 film "The Blind Side."<sup>8</sup>

Everyone and everything has an origin story, including you. Who you are today is rooted in the lessons and influence of people who have come before you: your ancestors, grandparents, parents, coaches, teachers, friends. Who we are and what we are is very much a product of the people who have come before us. And that fact is true for the church, as well.

The church is, after all, the living embodiment of a faith story that has been told and retold for millennia. Generations of believers have passed on their experiences of God, their traditions, their practice of discipleship to those who have come after. My faith is my own, but at the same time it is the faith of my mother and father, it is the faith of my grandparents, it is the faith of untold hundreds of thousands of people who have come before me.

The old, old story we tell is one that has been told for centuries and it has stood the test of time. That story helps us understand our relationship with God, the impact Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have in our lives, and our call to respond each day. It is a story that both comforts and challenges us. It is our story. And yet it is a much larger story, and we are at the same time both authors, and caretakers of it.

So, we honor and give thanks to God for all of those faithful people who came before us; especially those who committed to telling that old, old story in this little corner of Ohio; the ones who set out to found this congregation, who faithfully served God in big and small ways here, and who for over a century, nurtured this congregation in which you and I grow and are spiritually fed today. And in so doing, all those people, many of them with names we do not know and faces we have never seen, have played a part in helping to form and shape us into the people that we are today.

There have been hundreds, thousands of people who have called this church home. Many of them cast long shadows and are still remembered today. Some of their names you know very well. Dr. Ray Dronesfeld was pastor here for almost 30 years. The Overbrook Church building is part of his legacy. Mr. John Beltz donated the land for the Overbrook retreat center that bears his name. But for every name you know, there are hundreds you probably don't.

Like Harry Barr. In January 1915, 39 intrepid souls set forth on a journey to found this little church in the heart of Clintonville. Harry Barr was their first pastor<sup>9</sup> and six months after the church was founded, George and Edna Moore became the first parents to bring their infant child to receive the sacrament of baptism. His name was David Wilson Moore.<sup>10</sup>

There was Sadie Legg and Edith Butterworth and Elnathan Pettit. Pettit was one of those original founding members. In 1920 when the presbytery submitted an overture to the churches that would allow women to be elected as Deacons and Elders, everyone on the session of Overbrook Church voted "no" except one person: Elnathan Pettit.<sup>11</sup> Then in 1926, just 6 years later Ms. Sadie Legg became the first woman to serve in elected office at Overbrook when she was elected to the Board of Deacons.<sup>12</sup> And in 1940, Edith Butterworth broke through the glass ceiling when she became the first woman to

serve on Overbrook's Board of Trustees. The person who nominated her for that position: Elnathan Pettit.<sup>13</sup> Florence Wild then became the first woman to be ordained as an elder at Overbrook church in 1962.<sup>14</sup>

Mary McQuinniff was a long-time member who collected tax stamps to raise money for the church. For the uninitiated, tax stamps were "receipts merchants were required to buy from the state and give to consumers when merchants charged them state sales tax. Consumers were encouraged to collect the receipts and give them to schools or charities. These organizations could then turn them in to the state and collect three per cent of the face value."<sup>15</sup> When the church was trying to raise money to build the sanctuary, Ms. McQuinniff collected bags and boxes of three-cent tax stamps. She and her family sorted, counted, and redeemed them all. She was able to contribute \$2,143.40 to the building fund, one tenth of a penny at a time.<sup>16</sup>

Ms. Sarah "Auntie" Gruebler served 28 years as the superintendent of the Beginners Sunday School department<sup>17</sup> from 1916 until 1944.<sup>18</sup>

Eleanor Waterloo was a child of this church who served as a missionary in Thailand. Worldwide Communion Day in October 1947 was designated "Eleanor Waterloo Day" here at Overbrook in her honor.<sup>19</sup> Her father, Vic Waterloo was treasurer of the Sunday School and also the person who located the property on which the Overbrook Church building sits today.<sup>20</sup>

Gypsy Belle McIntosh,<sup>21</sup> Cecil Roy and Nellie Clouse,<sup>22</sup> Gordon Olson,<sup>23</sup> Jerry Riesen<sup>24</sup> all played important parts in teaching Sunday school and leading education programs during the church's early years.

If you polled the membership of this church asking for the names of people who have been important in the life of this congregation, I doubt many of the names I've mentioned here today would come up. But that's the point. Where we are today and who we are as a church is the result of the faithful, hard work of the mostly anonymous saints who have come before us. Through their dedication, they bequeathed us all the inheritance of a spiritual foundation on which we can grow and become what God intends for us to be.

Now it is our time to pick up where they have left off. Like your beloved Buckeyes, success does not come by simply enjoying the fruits of those who have come before, but by nurturing them, and building upon them. Through the saints who have come before us, God has given this church so much and it is now our responsibility to pick up on the work of Elnathan Pettit and Sadie Legg and Gypsy Belle McIntosh, that God's church may continue to grow and thrive in this place; that those who come after us may call our names as the anonymous saints who bequeathed to them the church they will call home for the next 100 years and more.

We have called a congregational meeting for today at 1:00 p.m. on Zoom. The link is in your weekly email. During that meeting you will get to hear from your Capital Campaign Team as they launch our next drive to help us care for and grow the gifts that have been given to us. I hope you will be there, and I hope you will commit to being a part of the campaign. So many saints have come before us. They have left us a legacy and a mission and a home. Now it is our time to extend that legacy of mission and home to all of those who will come after us.

Sir Isaac Newton once famously gave credit to those great minds who had come before him writing "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." Author Linda Hogan puts that sentiment another way: "Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me," she writes. "Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands."<sup>25</sup>

We are heirs to something grander than we can ever fully comprehend. Our traditions, our faith, our mission in the world, has all been passed to us by those faithful generations who came before us. If we have seen farther or accomplished more, it is because we stand on their shoulders. This congregation of which we are a part is not just a structure of iron and stone, it is a mission built by love and when we receive God's Word and are sent forth into the world to live it, we are guided by the love of all those saints who have embarked on this same journey before us. The path before us is well-worn. Our direction is clear.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "ESPN." ESPN, 7 Aug. 2019, [www.espn.com/college-football/story/\\_/id/27329146/from-ohio-state-kansas-expect-every-first-year-coach](http://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/27329146/from-ohio-state-kansas-expect-every-first-year-coach).

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Day (Head Coach), Justin Fields (QB), and Trey Sermon (RB)

<sup>3</sup> Woody Hayes (Head Coach 1951-78), Les Horvath (RB, 1940-42, 1944), Archie Griffin (RB, 1972-75)

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Lilley (First Head Coach, 1890-91<sup>4</sup>), Wes Fesler (TE, 1928-30<sup>4</sup> and Coach, 1947-50<sup>4</sup>), Gust Zarnas (OG, 1935-37<sup>4</sup>)

<sup>5</sup> Newman, Bruce. "Steve Jobs' old garage about to become a piece of history." Mercury News, 27 Sept. 2013, [www.mercurynews.com/2013/09/27/steve-jobs-old-garage-about-to-become-a-piece-of-history](http://www.mercurynews.com/2013/09/27/steve-jobs-old-garage-about-to-become-a-piece-of-history).

<sup>6</sup> "The Black Sheep." Black Sheep, 15 Sept. 2017, [theblacksheeponline.com/iowa/wave-of-young-hotties-apply-at-airliner-in-hopes-of-getting-discovered-like-ashton](http://theblacksheeponline.com/iowa/wave-of-young-hotties-apply-at-airliner-in-hopes-of-getting-discovered-like-ashton).

<sup>7</sup> "Charlie Hunnam Was Scouted at a Shoe Store and More of the Very Different Ways Your Favorite Celebs Were Discovered." PEOPLE.com, 31 Oct. 2019, [people.com/celebrity/how-celebrities-were-discovered/?slide=5528527#5528527](http://people.com/celebrity/how-celebrities-were-discovered/?slide=5528527#5528527).

<sup>8</sup> McDavid. "From Zero to Hero: 10 Famous Athletes Who Made It Big." McDavid, 28 Jan. 2021, [www.mcdavidusa.com/blogs/posts/zero-hero-10-famous-athletes-made-big](http://www.mcdavidusa.com/blogs/posts/zero-hero-10-famous-athletes-made-big).

<sup>9</sup> Morrison, Francis G. "Bud". *A History of Overbrook Presbyterian Church*. Volume 1:1915-1953, Overbrook Presbyterian Church, 1990. p. 2

<sup>10</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 13

<sup>12</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 11

<sup>13</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 14

<sup>14</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 28

<sup>15</sup> "Ohio tax stamps · Local History Digital Collection." 1 Nov. 2019, [www.yourppl.org/history/items/show/15784](http://www.yourppl.org/history/items/show/15784).

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 20

<sup>17</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 18

<sup>18</sup> Morrison, Francis G. "Bud". *A History of Overbrook Presbyterian Church*. Volume 2: 1953-1990, Overbrook Presbyterian Church, 1990. p. 13

<sup>19</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 19

<sup>20</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 19

<sup>21</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 7

<sup>22</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 24

<sup>23</sup> Morrison, Vol. 2 p. 25

<sup>24</sup> Morrison, Vol. 1 p. 26

<sup>25</sup> Hogan, Linda. *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. Touchstone, 1995, page 159.