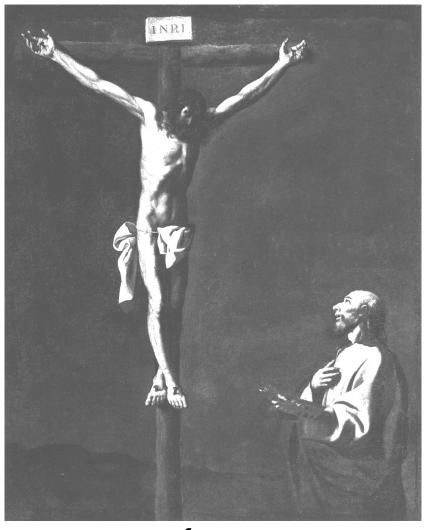


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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month, in honor of the Feast of St. Luke (October 18), is Saint Luke as a Painter before Christ on the Cross by Francisco de Zurbarán. It is a relatively small oil on canvas, about 41x33", painted in 1660. It is on display in the Museo del Prado in Madrid. There is a very ancient tradition that Saint Luke was not only a physician, but also a painter. In this painting he stands before the cross with a paintbrush in his right hand and holding a painter's palette, preparing to paint the crucifixion. This is theologically inaccurate, as the evidence is strong that while Luke knew the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles intimately, he never met Jesus. It is interesting to note that Zurbarán painted Luke with the face of the 17th century Jewish stereotype (17th century Spain was extremely anti-Semitic). Luke, in fact, was a Greek, not a Jew. We will comment further on stereotypes in a later article in this *Epistle*.

Francisco de Zurbarán was born of Basque ancestry in 1598 in Fuente de Cantos, Badajos Province, Spain. His parents were Luis de Zurbarán, a haberdasher, and his wife, Isabel Marquéz. As a small child Francesco displayed his talent by drawing figures with charcoal that he retrieved from the hearth. His father, recognizing his potential, sent him at the age of 16 to Seville for a 3 year apprenticeship with Pedro Díaz de Villanueva, an artist about whom little is known today. He returned home in 1617 and married María Paet, and worked in his father's haberdashery. María died in

1624 bearing their third child. He then married Beatriz de Morales, a rich widow. He could then afford to leave the business and launch his career as an artist, immediately becoming a prolific painter. He accepted a commission to do several large paintings for the altar of the cathedral in Seville, and then in the Carthusian monastery there. In 1626 he accepted a commission to do 21 paintings in 18 months for the Dominican monastery in Seville. He was invited to move to Seville, and did so with his wife, children, and several relatives. Soon thereafter he was appointed Court Painter to King Philip IV, who called him "Painter to the King, and King of Painters." His wife Beatriz died in 1639. Shortly thereafter his reputation began to decline as Spanish taste came to lean more toward the softer style of Bartolomé Estéban Murillo, In 1644 he married another wealthy widow, Leonor de Torder. He continued to paint, but his style suffered greatly as he allowed himself to be influenced by that of Murillo. His heart apparently was not in his new style, and he began to fade into obscurity. In 1658 he moved to Madrid to seek work, but received no significant commissions. In 1664 he died in poverty.

Richard R. Losch+

Common sense is not a blessing, it's a burden, because you have to deal with so many people who don't have it.

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. Richard R. Losch, Editor. Phone 205-499-0968, email loschr@bellsouth.net. Copyright © 2014 R. R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in parish newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

A Word from the Editor

I recently saw a bumper sticker that said, "Where an I going, and why am I in this hand-basket?" Although I chuckle at this, it also makes me very uncomfortable. As I look at the world today I have little question that it is going to hell in a hand-basket, that it doesn't know it, and if it does it doesn't seem to care very much. Western civilization is no longer immoral-it has become amoral. There is a difference. In the Middle Ages people were immoral. They knew that they were sinning, and were willing to take the risk of repenting in time. Today people are amoral. They are not even aware that they are sinning, because they do not know or care that some things are wrong just because they are wrong, regardless of whether we get caught or punished. We have abandoned our standards, and are flailing about without any guidelines.

There is a reason why people are so fascinated by the pre-Gotti Mafia (as is witnessed by the long-lasting success of the Godfather saga). While the Mafia's moral code was in conflict with traditional western morality, they nonetheless had a strict moral code and demanded adherence to it. Violation of the Mafia moral code was one of the surest ways to end up "sleeping with the fishes." I submit that there is a deep-seated longing in many people for the "good old days" when there were clear-cut standards, rules and expectations to guide our daily lives. Whether or not those standards were good, fair or valid, at least there were standards. In fact, many of them were indeed unfair and harsh. The mistake we made when we realized that is that instead of emending them, we threw them out altogether. The result is rampant sexual libertarianism devoid of love or commitment, untrammeled greed that replaces honest profit with exploitation, a complete loss of trust in government and law, tyranny in high places, distrust and outright enmity to religion, and an exponential growth of corruption in almost all facets of society. That is the hand-basket, and where it is headed is clear.

That's the bad news, but there is also Good News, the Gospel. If it's any consolation-and it should be-Christ is still in charge. Despite the fact that the world is a mess, we don't have to join it in that hand-basket. It's an easy ride in there, though, and if we don't make the effort with God's help to walk on our own two feet, we will ride in that basket along with the rest. The only way we can restore a moral standing to our society is to espouse one ourselves, even when it is unpopular or downright dangerous to do so. Demanding that it be legislated is fruitless—you cannot legislate morality—and demanding it of others is equally fruitless. If we live it ourselves, though, some will notice, see the value of it, and emulate it. Some will not, and there is not much we can do for them but pray for them. Witnessing by living the Gospel bears fruit, however, As Tertullian observed, "Behold how these Christians love one another!"

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise The Kingdom of God

We normally explore the derivation of words in this column, but this month we will consider a meaning. The phrases "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are used many times in the New Testament (but never in the Old). It is also interesting that that the former is used only by Matthew, and the latter only by Matthew and Luke. In English we have two related words: "kingdom," which means the territory ruled by a monarch; and "kingship," which means the power or sovereignty of a monarch. In both Greek and Hebrew there is only one word that encompasses both meanings, and the specific meaning must be discerned by the context. The Greek word is basileia (βασιλεια), which derives from basileus, "king." The equivalent Hebrew and Aramaic word for "kingdom" is malkut (מלכת), which derives from melek (מלכ), also "king." ¹

The Greek expression that we translate "kingdom of heaven" is actually a plural, "kingdom of the heavens (basileia ton ouranon, βασιλεια των 'ουρανων). Ouranos (Uranus) was the god of the heavens, and the first ruler of the universe.² When used in the singular the word ouranos

meant simply the sky, while in the plural it meant the entire realm of spiritual existence as opposed to material creation. The pagan Greeks had no concept of Heaven as Christians use the term, but the Greek-speaking Christians would have understood what is meant. When Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God is upon us, he was not referring to a politically ruled realm with God as the monarch. What he meant is that the way was now opened for the kingship of divine perfection to take precedence over any worldly or material authority. He is announcing the beginning of a messianic era in which the kingship of God will prevail over any earthly power.

Richard R. Losch+

Last Month's Epistle

As many of you know, I broke my hip in August and spent a month in the hospital and rehab. As a result, while I was able to finish writing the September *Epistle*, I was not able to prepare it for mailing. For those who missed it, it is available online at http://rlosch.com. Click on the "Epistle" tab at the top and you will see the last two years of it (including last month's) in <code>.pdf</code> form. You can read it online, or download and print it. If you don't have computer access, contact me and I can mail you a copy.

I will reprint some of the articles in upcoming editions so that those who missed them will have an opportunity to read them (and I won't have to write so much for a few months).

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Matthew and Luke wrote in Greek, but Jesus' teaching would have been in Aramaic, which they translated. The words for king and kingdom are the same in Hebrew and Aramaic.

² To use perfectly correct Greek mythology he was a Titan, not a god. He was overthrown by his son, the Titan Chronos, who was in turn overthrown by his son, the god Zeus.

Slaves or Craftsmen?

One of the most important sources of copper in the Levant during the Copper and Bronze Ages was the copper mine in the Timna Valley in southern Israel. Timna Valley is located in the arid Arabah region about 25 miles north of the Gulf of Aqaba.

In ancient times the worst of all slave assignments was working in the mines, where the life expectancy of a slave was counted in months. In metal mines the ore was usually smelted at the site of the mine so that the heavy ore would not have to be transported to a different site. Smelting was hot, labor-intensive and dangerous work. In 1934 the archaeologist Nelson Gluek named one of the smelting sites at Timna "Slave Hill," in accord with the universally accepted belief that smelting was done by slaves.

Recent discoveries of 3000-vearold animal bones at Slave Hill have cast a whole new light on the smelters. If the evidence has been properly interpreted, the smelting was done not by slaves, but by well-treated craftsmen. The types of animals and the way they were butchered indicates that there was a plentiful supply of top quality meat available, and the quantity indicates that it was for the workers, not just for the overseers and mine managers. There is also a large cache of fish remains. Fish would have had to be imported from a great distance at considerable expense, so it was a luxury that would never have been offered to slaves. This all indicates that the smelters' food was of the quality of middle class people rather than that of peasants, menials or slaves. The only reason for this would be that they were treated as skilled craftsmen and artisans rather than as common laborers.

In the days of the United Monarchy and the later kingdoms of Israel and Judah (after about 1000 B.C.), there were strict laws for the humane treatment of slaves, but that treatment was still harsh. It observed only the most basic human rights (slaves in the Gentile world were not considered human, and had no rights whatever). This would also have been true at the Timna mines, where slaves brought the ore out of the earth. Once out of the earth, however, it appears that respected artisans rather than slaves smelted it, contrary to what was previously believed. It has yet to be determined whether this was also true in other late Bronze and early Iron Age mines in the ancient world.

Richard R. Losch+

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

Our October service of Evening Prayer will be on October 15th at 6:00 p.m. with a Soup, Salad and Sandwich Supper following in the parish house. Signup sheets for soups, salads, sandwiches, desserts, and tea will be posted in the parish house kitchen, as well as a sheet for those planning to attend (so that we may know how many to plan for). As always there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please plan to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

Blessing of the Animals

In honor of the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, we will have a service of the Blessing of the Animals on Sunday, October 5, 2014, at 3:00 p.m. in the courtyard. While altercations between animals are extremely rare at these services, we ask that your animals be leashed, tethered or caged. Please invite your friends and neighbors to this happy occasion.

Hiram Patrenos

Gideons International Annual Contribution

During the month of October we will be receiving contributions for the work of the Gideons International. We will not have a speaker from the Gideons but will hold all contributions and forward them to the local Encampment following our service on October 26th. Envelopes for contributions are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins at the Offertory. Checks should be made payable to "The Gideons".

Hiram Patrenos

United Thank Offering

The United Thank Offering (UTO) is a ministry of the Episcopal Church for the mission of the whole church. Through the UTO, men, women and children nurture the habit of giving daily thanks to God. These prayers of thanksgiving start when we recognize and name our many daily blessings. Those who participate in UTO discover that thankfulness leads to gen-

erosity. The UTO is entrusted to promote thank offerings, to receive the offerings, and to distribute the UTO monies to support missions and ministries impacting the lives of women and children throughout the Episcopal Church and in invited Provinces of the Anglican Communion in the developing world.

The Episcopal Church Women's ingathering of the UTO will be on Sunday, October 12th. Envelopes for contributions are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins or given to Ethel Scott, UTO Coordinator. Checks should be payable to Episcopal Church Women.

Hiram Patrenos

Presbyterians Sponsor Habitat for Humanity

St. James' parishioners have been invited by the Livingston First Presbyterian Church to join with their members on Saturday, November 1st as they head to Tuscaloosa to embark on a Habitat for Humanity Build. You do not have to have any experience and are not required to bring any tools. You are asked to bring your own lunch and to be certain to wear "closed-toe" shoes. They will be carpooling, and will be leaving from the Common Grounds parking lot at 7:15 a.m. and will return to Livingston around 5:00 p.m. For more information, contact the Reverend Barrett Abernethy at pastorbda@gmail.com or at (205) 652-2550 (office).

Hiram Patrenos

Ancient Stereotypes

Our ability to know what some famous ancient people looked like varies greatly with their culture. In most cases, statues and paintings followed carefully developed stereotypes designed to make their subjects look as good as possible. For example, for the first 1500 years in ancient Egypt every pharaoh was handsome and a perfect physical specimen. The first statue to vary from that was a bust of Senusret III (1878-39 B.C.), who was portrayed with a stern, strong face with angry eyes and a down-turned mouth. We cannot even be sure that he looked like that. He was a powerful and demanding tyrant, and may have been portrayed to look as such.

The first that we are fairly sure are accurate are the portrayals of Amen-Hotep IV (1351-34 B.C.). He undoubtedly was a victim of Marfan Syndrome, which is a disease that causes physical malformation. Amen-Hotep is portrayed with an elongated skull, long neck, narrow chest, protruding belly and wide hips. These are typical symptoms of that disease.¹

The ancient Greeks believed that a beautiful body was an honor to the gods. If we believe Greek statuary, every Greek was a paragon of physi-

¹ Amen-Hotep was the father-in-law of King Tut (and probably also his father—most Egyptian royal families were inbred). For all his ugliness, his wife was beautiful. He "marched to a different drummer," and insisted on being portrayed as he really was. Because of this we can also trust the images of his wife Nerfertiti, who is generally considered to be one of the most beautiful women in history.

cal perfection. The Romans, on the other hand, at least during the late Republican era, believed in portraying things as they were. If a Roman had a pot belly or a physical defect, so did his statue. A bust of Brutus shows him with a face badly scarred by either acne or smallpox. Caesar was very vain, especially about his going bald, yet every bust and statue of him shows him with his receding hairline and "comb-over." At least during that era, we have a good idea what most of the important people looked like.

There is no contemporary description of Saint Paul, yet we do have one from the late 2nd century, in one of the so-called Gnostic gospels. Unfortunately, the person who wrote it was born long after Paul's death, and probably had no idea what he really looked like. It describes him as short. bow-legged, rather dumpy and balding, with a sloping brow, large hooked nose and thick lips. The first reaction is that this might be a stereotypical ancient Gentile image of a Jew. On further study, however, we find that in the 2nd century this was the image of an ideal military or political leader. When that description was used it was intended to conjure up the image of a strong, wise and fearless leader-no one expected it to be taken literally.

There is no accounting for the stereotypical images that various cultures have considered ideal throughout history, so all descriptions in art and literature must me taken in the context of the times and cultures in which they were made.

Richard R. Losch+

Jesus' Tomb

The gospels tell us that after Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea requested permission from Pilate to take his body (John 19:38) and give it a proper burial. Pilate assented, and Joseph had Jesus' body laid in "a new tomb" that he had had made for himself. The account was written at least a generation after the actual events, yet it is completely consistent with the customs of the times.

Jewish law required that burial take place within 24 hours of death, and that the burial must take place before the sundown that begins a sabbath. 1 Jewish burial customs varied over the centuries, but the customs that prevailed in Jesus' time are clear. Wealthy families had family tombs that were carved out of rock, usually in hillsides. These were designed to hold the bodies of all family members. Tombs for individuals were extremely rare, usually being used only for kings. The design of these tombs was fairly constant. There was a small entrance, usually so small that at best one had to stoop to enter it. A large disc-shaped stone that would be rolled in front of it to cover it would close this entrance. Inside the tomb was a large room with stone shelves or benches along the walls. The shelf was called a loculus. Sometimes it was simply a stone bench or shelf, and at others it was a niche carved into the wall. Some tombs contained more than one room. In older tombs, in the back there would be a bone pit. When the body had been prepared (washed, anointed with spices and resins, and wrapped in a shroud) it was laid on one of the shelves. Often this would require pushing aside the remains of bodies that were already there. If the shelf got too crowded, the old bones were removed and thrown into the bone pit at the back of the tomb. By Jesus' time it had become common to leave the body in the tomb for a year, during which time in the hot arid Palestinian climate it would decay and dry, leaving little but the bones. After a year the bones were collected and put into a small stone casket called an ossuary, which might be left in the tomb or buried elsewhere.2

As one might expect, hewing a family tomb out of the rock was a very expensive procedure, and was thus done only by the wealthy. Poor people were simply buried in trench graves in the ground, sometimes in a wooden coffin, but more often just wrapped in a shroud. We don't know much about these, because so few have been found. They are fragile, and are easily destroyed by weather, building, and countless other events that cause them simply to disappear. The Essene community at Qumran buried its dead in trench graves, but their cemetery has been fairly well preserved and is under constant study by archaeologists. Poor farmers and herdsmen, however, buried their loved ones wherever they could find a con-

¹ Sabbath does not mean just the seventh day. Any holy day, such as Passover, is a Sabbath.

² To this day an important Jewish ceremonial remembrance is the *Jahrzeit* ("year-time"), which is the first anniversary of a death.

venient place to dig a grave. They would then often pile stones on the grave to keep wild animals from digging it up. People visiting the grave would often place a stone on the cairn just to help maintain it. To this day it is a common Jewish practice to place a pebble on the gravestone when visiting a grave.1 The bodies of executed criminals were usually buried in an unmarked pit. In some cases, even if they came from wealthy families with family tombs, they were not allowed to be buried in those tombs. Many communities had fields outside the town for the burial of strangers.²

Jesus died at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) on the eve of the Passover, so there would only have been about three hours to obtain permission to take his body down from the cross,³ prepare it, and bury it before the Sabbath began. Coming from a poor family, he would not have had a tomb, and normally would have been buried in a trench grave (or a common pit if his family did not claim his body).

One of Jesus' disciples, Joseph of Arimathea, was a rich merchant. He was possibly a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body. While there is no hard evidence of this, it is an ancient tradition and is not unreasonable. He had access to a family tomb. Even though he was from Arimathea, as a rich man living in Jerusalem he undoubtedly would have had family with him, and would have wanted a local family tomb. The Bible says that it was a new tomb. That does not necessarily mean that it had never been used—it could simply mean that there was a newly carved unused loculus in it; and if it were for him as family head, it would have been a very fine one. At any rate, Joseph donated the use of it for Jesus' burial. As there would have been no time to prepare a trench grave before sundown, there was no alternative. This was an act of great devotion on Joseph's part, because it was rare that anyone be buried in a family tomb other then members of the immediate family.

At burial, the body would be washed and anointed with spices, ointments and resins. This was a long process, and there was not time for it before sundown. Mark and John disagree on the details. John says that Joseph supplied a hundred pounds of spices⁴ and they prepared the body before taking it to the tomb. Mark indicates that they simply washed his body, wrapped it in the shroud, and laid it in the tomb. In either case, on the third day the women came to the tomb to go through the whole purification ceremony, and found it open and Jesus' body gone.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This can be seen in the final scene of *Schindler's List*, where Schindler's grave is visited by some of the Jews he saved.

² Such was the "Potter's Field" that the priests bought with the money Judas tried to return to them.

³ The Roman soldiers would do that. They would want to retrieve the nails and ropes for future use, and see that the cross was not damaged, as it also would be used again.

⁴ This sounds like a huge amount (and it is), but it would not have been uncommon for a rich man to be anointed with that much.

Jacob's Wrestling Match

Jacob was a scoundrel—no one could deny that—but he is also a great encouragement to all of us scoundrels, because he shows that God, like a medieval alchemist, can turn lead into gold. God turned Jacob from a cheating, lying con man into a righteous man who became the father of the Israelites.¹ Almost four millennia later God is still referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That change was finalized one night on the banks of the Jabbok River (Gen. 32).

Esau, Jacob's elder twin brother, had reason to hate Jacob, Jacob had conned him out of his birthright and cheated him of his father's blessing. and Esau was determined to kill him for it (27:41). Fearing his brother's vengeance, Jacob fled to his mother's homeland in Syria to live with his uncle Laban. There he met his match, because Laban could out-cheat and out-con Jacob at every turn. After twenty years of working for Laban, Jacob finally managed to cheat him out of the best of his flocks, and one night he sneaked out of the camp with his wives and sons and headed for home in Canaan. Laban caught up with him on the way and the two made a tenuous detente. They parted saying, "The Lord watch between thee and me while we are apart one from another" (31:49). This was not a mutual blessing. What it meant was, "Don't try anything funny while

¹ His grandfather Abraham was the father not only of the Israelites, but also of the Arabs.

we're apart, because God is watching and he'll get you."

During Jacob's time in Syria, Esau had married Ishmael's daughter and had become the patriarch of a very large tribe, eventually a nation, called the Edomites.² As Jacob approached his old homeland, he heard that Esau knew he was coming and was on his way to meet him with four hundred Edomites. Fearing an armed conflict, he divided his family and all his followers into two groups and sent them ahead, so that if one group were destroyed the other might survive. He remained at the River Jabbok to await Esau and meet him alone. During the night "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (32:24). As day broke the "man" became weaker. He could not hold Jacob down, so he played "dirty"—as many commentators put it, he struck Jacob "in his manhood," injuring him so that traditionally he limped the rest of his life (32:25). He could not prevail, however, and implored Jacob to let him go. Jacob refused until the man gave him his blessing. He finally did, telling him than henceforth his name would no longer be Jacob ("Grasper")³, but Israel ("God Rules").

Who was it with whom Jacob

² Ishmael, Isaac's elder half-brother and the uncle of Jacob and Esau, was the ancestor of the Arabs. The Ishmaelites and Edomites were traditional enemies of the Israelites. In New Testament times the Edomites were known as Idumeans. Herod the Great was an Idumean.

³ Jacob was born grasping the heel if his firstborn twin, Esau. The name in folk etymology, however, also means "schemer."

wrestled? Most Bible translations call him a man ('ish, שש), but this can also mean "being" or "creature." For the sake of simplicity we will simple refer to him as a being. Hosea says it was an angel (12:4f.), while Jacob (and many theologians) said it was God (Gen. 32:30); the rabbinic tradition is that it was Esau, and folk tradition says that it was a night demon or an evil river spirit. The night demon idea comes from the statement that when dawn came he was weakened and could not prevail over Jacob. Light draws power from evil night creatures (in medieval legendry sunlight kills vampires). In any case, he was certainly not omnipotent, so if it were God or God's representative (an angel), then he limited himself to human abilities during that struggle.

The reason that Jacob would not let him go until he had blessed him was simple self-preservation. The common belief was that once you had blessed a man you could never again curse him, and if you did your curse would have no effect. By holding the being until he had blessed him, Jacob was preventing the possibility of being cursed.

The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were an ancient oral tradition by the time they were written down sometime in the sixth or fifth century B.C. Since we cannot get into the heads of the men who finally wrote them, we cannot be sure what they meant, but it is sure that they did not mean to imply that Jacob wrestled physically with God. Four thousand years ago when all this actually took

place, people's understanding of God was primitive, and many thought and spoke of him anthropomorphically (he walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening). To them, the idea of physically wrestling with God (or a god) was by no means as outlandish as it would be to us. As God revealed himself more and more to the Israelites and they matured in their understanding, they grew well beyond this kind of thinking. However, because it was so deeply rooted in their origins, such a concept remained as a symbol and allegory, even though they were well beyond taking it literally. Because of this, as in so many of our own deep traditions, it entered their writing as a literary device that was not expected to be taken literally.

With whom, then, did Jacob wrestle? I submit that he was actually wrestling with his own conscience. This was in a sense a precursor of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession), by which Jacob finally confronted the sins of his previous life and sought to live in righteousness and honesty. The injury to "the hollow of his thigh" could symbolize his putting aside the ruthless machismo that had led him to cheat his brother, his father and his uncle. He was prepared to meet Esau and reconcile with him, even if it meant his death. As it turned out, Esau, now a rich and powerful tribal leader despite what Jacob had taken from him, welcomed him home and forgave him.

Richard R. Losch+

Political correctness is tyranny pretending to be consideration of others.



LIVINGSTON FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH





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