

Well, So I am giving a review or wrap up or whatever of my observations on the 218th, General Senate of the of the ARP Church. It's a blessing to be able to say that because it reminds us of and how merciful the Lord has been to us to preserve us for so long.

One of your ruling elders, Uncle Charlie as he is most known. Most commonly known the most of us. I think also was a delegate and attended and okay perhaps you can if he hears something that you wants to come just catch my attention or go get the second opinion from him later.

However you want to do that. I think the first thing that I would like to highlight for you because I find that a lot of church members don't really know what goes on at these Presbytery and assembly. If you're in another Presbyterian denomination or scented meetings is basically, there are a number of things that either because of the way the Senate has been constituted with kind of permanent work that the Senate does or things that Presbyteries are sessions which are the more local courts.

People like to use the language of higher and lower, but as we'll hear even a little bit today in in the sermon and then, especially when we get to Act 14x15 will find that it's not really higher and lower courts in crisis Church, there's just Christ and elders and elders.

Gather in more local and more broad courts And it's kind of a mishmash of the word court. It's not just making judicial decisions, although that sometimes happens when necessary. But some of you perhaps are familiar with the language of like a king's court and those who are doing the governing and establishing the policy are all gathered together to take counsel together and make decisions And it is the king's court.

It's supposed to be anyway. King Jesus, which is one of the reasons that the preaching of the word and prayer have historically marked Presbyterian courts of all sorts. So even your session meetings, your sessions meetings here are marked by an opening of the word together, prayer at the beginning prayer throughout.

Especially if there's something difficult to prayer at the conclusion overall that has been discussed One of the differences between the ARP and my former denomination. I was in another Presbyterian. Nate Park. Reformed Westminster Confessional denomination for 15 years and I'd like to summarize for you just my observations, the differences between that one.

Some of you know what it is and some of you don't you don't need to know which one it was to appreciate God's mercy to us. And I could summarize those differences under really three headings and of course, they're all literative. Because creatures and those three headings are

preaching piece and progressives In my in my former denomination.

We would just have worship once every evening and the worship service would be very difficult to get through. If you were a Westminster confession, chapter 21 believing Presbyterian. The those assemblies moved around and whoever the host Presbytery was seemed to take it as an opportunity to show. Whatever was the latest or most cutting-edge thing they had in their worship, would have been very easy to just sing the Bible, read the Bible, pray the Bible preached.

The Bible have the Lord's Supper which is an innovation will get to that in a moment and then everybody could just worship. But for years, I had to sit through somewhere between one and 90 minutes of worship. And if they said, now we're going to have an interpretive dance, you get up and you walk out or if we're gonna do such and such and Jane is going to lead us, you get up and you walk out.

You get all the way to the sermon. And yeah. It's some woke Ted talk. You get up and walk out or smashing the confessionalists and conservatives on some issue that's supposed to be debated later that week. But you know some celebrity has the bully pulpit and he's gonna use it.

This was what it was like Worship was the worst part of those assembly meetings. It's exactly opposite in the ARP. It's very simple. Most of the singing is Psalms. You have a plain Bible sermon, not by a celebrity, but by a local pastor, from some ARP church, it's probably the largest congregation he has ever preached to and there's opening of Scripture and application of scripture that exalts God and not man and doesn't following a political agenda.

So that's one of the great differences is preaching. Oh, and every session. So, the morning business session. The afternoon business session the evening business session. Every single one begins begins with worship, the preaching has been almost uniformly, good. The five years that I've been in the ARP. My very first air piece ended meeting.

I was actually being examined to come into Hopewell's Presbytery and I was stunned that they could have preaching like that first or second sermon. I think it was the first sermon I heard was on the wheat in the tears and I won't summarize the whole sermon for you. Trying to get done quickly but towards the end of the sermon, one of the applications was for each of us ministers to examine ourselves.

Whether we might be a terror because you can make it into a pulpit and you can have a lot of doctrine and you can do, you can develop skills and things that are ministerial and still be unsaved. And he made application to the Sabbath and delighting in the Lord who made us for himself and redeemed us for himself and gave us a day of delighting in

him and how even ministers who are telling everyone else that that's what the day is for, for them can have their hearts exposed by failing to delighten him on his day.

Now coming out of the denomination that I had come from where in in ministerial examinations, it seemed to be a competitive sport to deny and depose the biblical doctrine of the Lord's Day. I wondered if he was allowed to say that, or if whoever the executive committee enforcers were something else, the ARP doesn't have praise God, or going to escort him out of the pulpit.

Anyway, I I didn't know what that time that the preaching would be so uniformly. Good, the way we got or identified Dr. Taylor for our conference from this past, winter was, he had preached an excellent sermon last last year at Synod and the man that we were hoping to get Dr.

McGraw, who's coming this coming February but he was on sabbatical and couldn't make the schedule work so we needed it. Back up Anyway, lots of good sermons this year at centered. They're currently being someone had to ask about, can we get them? They're currently being edited. There was a audio video sync problem during the stream so they're being fixed and they'll be uploaded and all I'll let you know and I'll send you a link to the one that touched me most closely.

So that's preaching that second one is peace. There aren't a lot of there. Aren't two or more kind of major, factions, or parties trying to push an agenda. There is, I will say, I think a discernible divide between old school ERP, ARP and young confessional guys. One of the things that is a great encouragement to me, is every year, I meet more young people, more young ministers, who are somewhere along the lines of where the Lord has brought me and not that.

There's anything wonderful about me but I'm very grateful for what the Lord has done for me, the last 25 years. Since Since I went to seminary began at seminary and started discovering the rich doctrine of the Bible and that there was hundreds of years of faithful men who had opened and applied those things, and things that had been lost for generations and so much more explicit instruction for me than I knew existed.

One of the things that you children, what does that duty? Which God requires of man? Sort of catechism kids. So I got some kids who don't feel like speaking out loud in the class. The duty, it's got required of man. As obedience to his revealed will that he has revealed what he wants and that there's so much and that it's all connected to Christ and powered by Christ.

And His Spirit, We don't have to make it up along the way there aren't. There's neither. Do you have to tune in the secret will of God

to figure out the next thing to do? Nor are there these like lesser Christian works of kind of this ordinary Christianity, that isn't so great.

And these great Christian works of you know going and being a camp counselor which I know that sounds crazy to you. But, you know, when I was in junior high, that seemed to me like one of these like works of super irrigation, and all the other ones are just just as silly before the Living God.

So the reason, these young men are so confessional and zealous for it, is because they have discovered that Jesus really is all his church needs the great power by which conversion and sanctification and the worship of God is done and are at some, you know, not all, you know, like they were dropped out of the Westminster Assembly or teleported from a 17th century.

Covenant inter field meeting but somewhere along the lines of getting there and they're really encouraging to meet The other kind of main group. Our old line ARPs who are either coming along because they had heard about none these things. And they're just kind of still in a, you know, 10 to 40 year shock that God has actually doing it again in his church, which rarely happens.

The ERP is very, very strange in the fact that it is that it is being reformed from almost having given up the Bible as the Word of God. That's where it was in in the 80s to where it is now. So some of them are just kind of coming along every step.

They think It's all going to fall apart and then there are others who liked kind of being mainline. You know what? We would call a pescatarian lots of liturgies black robes organs inquires, you know, 15 different, social, or study groups in the church. And those, those guys tend to be at the big steeple churches as well, but they are kind of resisting change.

And yet, there is peace, a piece among all when I was in my former denomination. If I ever met a another elder minister for the first time, I knew that he was going to spend the first few moments of our conversation, trying to figure out what group I'm in so that he can know whether or not he hates me or likes me.

I had to use such short hand but that's just the way the interaction was or be 1500 ministers and elders. At those assemblies. Praise God. They're gonna have a lot more of their assembly next next week because the elders have been awakened that their denomination has been awakened. And something is going to happen between those two.

Things discouraged to hear from from a brother who was at another Neparck Presbyterian Assembly. Last week that that particular

denomination is fed a lot by Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and Escondido California. And there's a lot of the awokenness coming out of those two and there's a fair amount of just tell people what Jesus has done for them.

Don't tell them what Jesus wants them to do sort of stuff. Any idea of piety is viewed as pietism, so you have so you have folks coming out of that, seminary, those seminaries, believing those things. And then you have Greenville is, is producing a lot of ministers for that particular denomination.

They of course are not woke and do believe that there's such a thing as good piety, that is not pietism and is how God makes and grows these believers who delight in the gospel and live in months to it Anyway. This brother who attended that assembly said that the divide relationally between people from those.

Kind of two groups is getting sharper that there hasn't been as much brotherly affection between between the two and recent years. And then this year in particular, they were meeting at a university that accused some of the delegates of racism. It was investigated later and it turned out that none of the instances were well one wasn't actually even one of their delegates and the other three were misunderstandings that got great vined to campus administration but the campus had let the assembly know.

You better deal with this and the assembly made a big woke apology without even investigating into what had happened. Anyway, the ARP is extremely boring by comparison to those two denominations. It's very peaceful. And one of the reasons as we lack progressives, There's no one, there's no party in the ARP trying to actively, push it to the left.

There are some who are trying to actively reform and there are some who don't want to get reformed But that's different than having a party within the church. That's actively pushing left. So that's kind of big broad brushstroke things. Again we do so much worshiping and and preaching that that that ends up kind of being the main thing in a year like this year, most of the issues that need to be addressed got pushed off until next year Committees that were studying.

And we're not able to finish their work and produce something for the Senate as a whole to discuss and consider, very likely that next year, will be a very long synod because of the number of kind of significant things that will need to be attended to One of the first things that happened was something that didn't happen because of the way that the dates of the Tennessee Alabama, Spring Presbytery meeting and the dates of the required deadline for a memorial to be included in the Senate packet.

A memorial is when a lot more local court, sends something to a broader court and asks, for opinion or action or judicial decision. But because of the way, the dates of our load, are Presbytery meeting coincide with deadlines for synod. Meeting often a memorial that has sent to the Senate by Tennessee, Alabama, doesn't get there in time that happened again.

This year. My my second year at Synod, It happened with respect to asking Erskine to explore getting out of taking government money didn't get there in time. Then you have to have a two-thirds vote of whether or not they're going to hear the memorial That Synod voted to to hear it and then voted everyone, you know, a big number to four.

Yeah. Dave, I and two delegates from Canada, not to ask Erskine to try to get out of government money. This year. It was just asking if we might be permitted to have wine offered at the Lord's Supper, some of us are conscientiously convicted. They only offer pasteurized grape juice and Senate did not even accept to take up the matter.

We didn't get the two-thirds to take it up. So, it wasn't heard it'll be heard next year. Ironically the, the moderator of the Senate who's kind of the guy who leads the meeting. Sorry, I'm trying to watch my time. He he made a big deal about how the bread that was being used at the Lord's.

Supper was an original recipe that went back at least to the middle of the 18th century in his congregation and had been handed down by ruling elders, wives across the centuries and could probably be traced back to Scotland, but at least to, to the early origins of his church.

And I thought well, that swell about the bread, I wish we used the original set original recipe for the cup. Anyway, for me, it's a question of whether or not I could take the separates in it, and it doesn't actually hurt my feelings to not take this upperate synod.

Because celebrating the Lord's Supper at a church court, as opposed to in congregational worship, is a fairly recent innovation in Presbyterianism late 1800s, and nothing that started in the late 1800s in the church is good. It's not a good time for you to have started, something Late 1500s. Okay, middle.

1600s depends on where you were late 1800s. Not so much. So our memorial wasn't heard and it'll and it will have to be resubmitted and the great benefit of that memorial is just to, to get brothers to, to care about. Yeah, permitting. Other brothers of good conference, to think about one another, and then having them study the origin of the pasteurized juice and the reason for wine honey is good friend.

Yeah, Williamson has an excellent book called wine in the Bible in the church. So that'll come later. Yes sir. Be downloading this a PDF file

for nothing. It can be downloaded as a PDF file for free.

So before the, I guess annual things, get dealt with or special committees. One is net assets reallocation and that's just a fancy name for a committee that is robbing the coffers of a bunch of very wealthy agencies to refund a retirement plan. That was a pension plan. It was a worldly way of thinking about, retirement and approaching retirement, and it was further mismanaged whenever the church apes, the world.

Not only does it depart from the wisdom of Christ, but it's never good at being as good at being worldly as the actual world. Is This happens in, in worship styles and inflating membership numbers and it happened with the retirement fund Anyway, that's kind of winding down. They almost have enough money to finish whatever they're doing and then men will be responsible for their own retirement the way that Hopewell does it, for me is very grateful.

Hopewell has kept me out of the denominational stuff and we're given a certain amount of money to invest every year which we are, and which we do. And God has been merciful. There's a Presbytery composition committee Part of the reason for that, is that different congregations are being planted in places like Minnesota, Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas by churches in places like South Carolina and Florida and we need to redraw Presbytery boundary lines.

I was on the synod committee for this. And one of the things that came out was that there are some Presbyteries that are very weak, both numerically and as far as doing things, biblically and orderly and Tennessee Alabama, was at the top of that list. So that that committee is report, it can't really tell Presbyteries what to do.

Synod can't tell Presbyteries what they have to do, but one of the results was it was requested that our Presbyterian two other Presbyteries that are stronger, would meet and figure out how to make two presbyteries out of the three which basically means redraw the boundaries so that ours would include some more faithful churches.

Some more active men. Men who want to do things in a biblical way You could pray for that coming up. I already know that this year's moderator of Tennessee, Alabama, is opposed to it. He he doesn't want to do things in a particularly orderly way. In fact, one of the motions I guess that got past, really not in order at all at our most recent Presbytery meeting when he became the moderator was that we would do things with flexibility, which meant don't follow the, the procedure whenever we don't feel like it, But we do need help.

And the Senate acted in a way that ought to give us some help. The restructure and committee did not report, but basically what that is is the ARP. Following other following other denominations had started

have come very centralized having ministry done by agencies. Instead of done by sessions and, and Presbyteries.

And there, of course, a number of problematic things because agencies are not the church. When we actually confess in the Westminster Confession, what the purpose of Synods and councils are and taking over, or overseeing, or running the ministry of Presbyterianism, churches is definitely not a biblical function of sentence and councils.

So that was one of the committees that asked for another year. But they've already kind of let the agencies know that their days are numbered. One of the things we're moving to is, instead of having professional agencies, which are separate corporations run by executives making \$150,000 or more a year, we're going to have ministry done by sessions and Presbyteries.

And then when there's coordination needed at the Synod level, it's going to be committees of ministers and elders that do that coordinating. So it's decentralization a re ecclesiasation researchening of of the ARP, One of the features, then of later in the Synod meeting was ONA the home missions committee.

Tried to make it this display of how important and necessary they are world witness the world missions committee. Tried to make a big display of how important and necessary they are. That's going to be a big deal next year. This is a point in which the, the RP is being formed.

One of the problems is there's a lot of money involved. These organizations have a lot and request a lot. The synod continues to ask of every congregation 20% of its of non-designated giving in order to do things like fund these agencies. No, we don't do that. Hopewell. There's a retirement fund crisis study which is important.

It's committee that was formed last year saying we're not just going to sweep this thing under the rug. We want a investigation and a document saying here's how we got where we ended up and we don't want to do that again. There's still investigating that. So that that report Lord willing will come next year.

The, the women's deacons study asked for another year. One of the discouraging things are, there are a couple Erskine Profs on that committee. That are are very much in favor of women's deacons. This is another one of those issues where we have reformation happening and although no one is trying to make us more progressive.

Those who participated in the decline, female deacons in. The ARP is new in 1972. It came as a result of a memorial to the 1968 Senate. So you think of that in terms of a 218 year church and the decline that

was occurring at that point. It really is an aberration that the Lord is moving us away from the majority of the committee.

I think is more sound, more biblical. But there were some things in the report that as far as like what they were wanting to study and books that they were and papers that they were looking over, that weren't very encouraging. I suspect there was a fair amount of I suspect.

There's a fair amount of input from the the two Erskine profs. As far as that goes judicial review. One of the most discouraging things that happened at the Synod was a big steeple church that had given half a million dollars to the to try and resolve the retirement crisis and had hosted.

Synod. When Bon Clark and wouldn't because of Covidiacy the the session of that church had handled a judicial case entirely by executive committee had not been heard by the session. As a whole, the executive committee had hired, a security firm that went out and hired a private investigator to basically trash.

One of the parties, the security firm returned a report based on the PI investigation saying this guy is you know the biggest threat since Putin. And and here are the three different security packages that you could buy from us in order to protect yourself from him. So, no no vested interest at all by the security firm.

Anyway, based on the report the church went and got a restraining order. This this without pressing any ecclesiastical charges against the man so he complained against the session but if you're a big steeple church, if you're a big influence at the Synod, just imagine how big of an influence you are in your Presbytery.

The man basically said, you know, first Corinthians 6, I should be tried by the church before I'm condemned. And so it was a, it was appealed and the synod almost did the lot wrong thing. They let the lawyer from the big church talk and they did not let the two elders who had represented the man in his complaint against the session.

And then against the Presbytery talk, they actually voted not to let those do two men talk. And so, there were some men who got up and said, you know, the synod can't possibly offer a righteous hearing based on hearing one side talk and the other side's not talk. And so we appointed a judicial commission to investigate and and hear both sides based on the body language of the lawyer.

I think he expected to to get his way. And I think the Senate ended up showing a little bit of on by, not just dismissing the case, which is what he was arguing and asking for some grateful for that. Well, I guess we're not finishing quickly or early Minister and his work

approved.

A uniform exam to recommend to all Presbyteries, is this great news for Tennessee Alabama because we have had people skating through licensure and ordination who are less qualified than many of you children. And I don't mean that to puff you up. I mean that you're actually being taught the Reformed faith and have some conviction about it and God have mercy.

In fact, the exam is good enough that I'm going to adapt or maybe toss out mine and well will it will use it. We won't make you who are potential officers. Do it closed book. You may have your your Bible and your standards open for for the examine. Of course, we'll do a lot of teaching before we before we try you buy, it Theological theological, and social concerns.

Committee brought several good papers. And two requests one there was a church in which a woman had led a song time and she had read and explained Bible in between those song times. And that church thought that, that was fine, which in my former denomination, it would have been thought to be fine.

But that congregation didn't know that they were operating in violation of our standards and their Presbytery had asked the synod for an opinion. And the synod returned, the opinion that only ministers and elders lead worship that there are no such things as worship leaders outside of ministers and elders because those are Jesus's worship leaders for his church.

So was pretty overwhelmingly ratified the churches and I think there are more than one of them that are guilty of running a foul of that. We're very concerned whether the report would be accepted as a position paper or received as information. It ended up getting received as information, but those who were concerned the report itself just quoted from our standards and from the directory for Public Worship for all of the points that it made.

So they have a difficulty that is greater than a position paper. The Constitution of the church already prohibits what they were doing. So pretty, pretty strong unanimity in the Senate on that, a couple of things that had come out of COVID. Asking for opinions, from the synod one was, how can worship be canceled?

And the answer was basically that it can't that if on a given Lord's day Providence raises a specific difficulty that hinders the people from being able to assemble. That's one thing but you don't cancel for an indefinite period of time and if the church is just under threat of its life, generally the church just keeps worshipping because the church is often been under threat of its life generally and you don't cancel worship for that.

The other one was, is virtual communion acceptable and the sentence answer was, there's no such thing. If it's if it's virtual it's not communion as one elder said, virtually present means actually absent. So so and both of those just sailed through no opposition at all. Even less opposition than on the who may lead worship.

Question, very encouraging stuff. The report on Freemasonry was not completed because one of the things that when we were at Synod in Pennsylvania, I see I'm gonna have to finish this during lunch. Remind me that, we're gonna start with intertrireach relations at lunchtime. One of the things that got amended from the floor when we were asking for that report at the 2019 Synod in Pennsylvania was that Freemasons would be interviewed, you know, there's is one of those, there's no fair.

If you're gonna, if you're gonna ban us and say that we're not the permissible for office or membership or whatever then you have to hear both sides. Well, the committee has been trying to interview Freemasons for three years and none of them will talk. So the Senate instructed, anyone who was a Freemason to talk to the committee and then the committee would be absolved of that requirement if no one came forward and talked to them.

So they get another year on that. I was encouraged to find out that we have ARP ministers, who are former Freemasons, who have talked to the committee in part about why when they became believers or conscientious believers, or we're going to take office in the church, they renounced former vows that were in conflict with their new vows to Christ and his church.

So that promises to be or hopefully will be you could pray for that. There are there are a lot of men in the Senate who port to be practicing Freemasons and don't have a problem with that That may be a point of contention And then best thing that not the best thing.

One of the best things that biology committee asked to send it to do, was to dissolve itself. That when there's a theological question, it's good for the Senate to appoint, a committee of men who are who are well educated and experienced for the answering of that question or for the Senate to debate it as a whole, but that having a standing theology committee of just a few men is not an appropriate function of a synod.

So, the theology committee said having us as bad theology and asks, to be dismissed when it's current business was completed. So, you know, not not a hundred percent Rosa's lollipops, you know, rainbows and unicorns but but very encouraging on the whole and we'll, We'll pick it up again during lunch.

All right. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your great mercy to our congregation and to our Senate and extent of the Reformation that you have given us. We're thankful to you that he, who is your son from Everlasting to everlasting. You have given not only to be our substitute but our our everlasting king, our great high priest are ultimate and great profit and that he governs the church.

And, We ask that you would continue to be merciful to us by your spirit and bring us more, and more in conformity with your word. We do ask particularly for our Presbytery, Lord, the distinction between, what's happening locally, and at a scented level from the way things occur are Presbytery as a concern.

For us, we commit that to you. We ask that you'd give us courage and faithfulness and that you would the bless the Presbytery that way and that you'd also bless the Presbytery through this realignment. That is taking place. To give us more and stronger men. So we pray for that.

We pray for other denominations of your church. Lord, as we are grateful to you for what you have done these last 40 years in the ARP and are continuing to do. We are concerned for some of our sister churches, for what has happened. The last 40 years and then and what seems to be continuing have mercy, O God and turn them back as well.

We bless your name, for your liberty, and your power, and your mercy to do that. And now, oh god, we ask that you'd help us. As we come into the court of the King of Kings and are led by him in the holy assembly to worship. You bless us and help us in the public courtship.

Today, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.