

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Volume XIII, Issue 8

November 2014

Happy Thanksgiving!



Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever. Psalm 136

Welcome to the November edition *Grace Notes*. Please send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net.



From the Pastor's Desk

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:35b)

What a remarkable trip to China! It would take a hundred newsletters to convey everything to you despite the fact that I was there for only two weeks. We got to see many of the historic sites around Beijing: the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and, of course, the Great Wall. We weren't able to make it to the Ming Tombs. I came away feeling a sense of connection with China I had not known before- a new appreciation of China's history and culture, and yes, even the food.

Part of my appreciation came from seeing firsthand the results of my ancestors' ministry. I had the opportunity to participate in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of a school that was founded by one of my ancestors. I was also able to visit the location of my grandparents' ministry and see where my own dad was brought up. To top it off, I was able to worship at the international church which is pastored by a friend and former seminary classmate whom I hadn't seen in 31 years. It was an incredible to worship with so many students and young professionals from all over the world.

So all the historic tourist attractions notwithstanding, the greatest thing by far for me was to see what God is doing in China. I came away a sense of awe that far exceeded what I would have ever expected. The church in China has lived through some dark days, from the days of the Japanese occupation to the Cultural Revolution. But China today is a nation in transition in a multitude of ways. The church is active and growing, and I can't wait to see what God intends to do in the next generation.

We just had another election in our own country. All of us who are citizens of the USA had the opportunity to vote as we do every two years. There will be new faces in Washington and new faces in Boston. I do not want to minimize the importance of our being engaged in the political process; there are many in the world, including many in China, who would give their eye teeth to be able to exercise the freedoms we so often take for granted. And while this is true, I sometimes think there is the very real danger for us as American Christians of losing sight of God's bigger picture.

The prophet Daniel conducted his ministry from his captivity in Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and then, after the fall of Babylon, Darius, the King of Persia. Daniel's heart was always in Israel, yet he never, as far as we know, saw his beloved land again. Chapter 2 of Daniel records Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This dream is paralleled by a series of dreams which Daniel himself had at a later time. The gist of these dreams is that there will be a succession of kingdoms, each supplanting the previous one. In the midst of this succession of earthly kingdoms it is revealed to Daniel that God will send a rock from heaven which will grow into a mountain and fill the whole earth.

After Peter had declared that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus told his disciples that He [Christ] would build his church upon the rock of this revelation and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Jesus' promise has proven true as we can observe from our understanding of 2000 years of church history, and yet, as we can see, Jesus was not equating his church with an earthly kingdom.

American history is quite short compared to Chinese history. Chinese history dates back to the days of Abraham, approximately 4000 years. There has been a succession of many dynasties including the Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. For the past sixty five years, China has been ruled by a communist government. Sixty five years is really quite short in comparison to 4000 years. Even shorter is the four years or eight years of US presidential administrations, although it never seems short to those living through it. But the promise of the rock (the church) still stands.

I found myself completely staggered by what God is doing in China today. China has lived through its tribulation. The church there went into hiding for a season only to emerge stronger than ever. There now appears to be a new openness taking shape, and we can only wait and see what God will continue to do.

Is there not a lesson for us here? God's promises do not fail. Do we believe that, not just for China but for us as well?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



More Than a Shoebox: The Eternal Impact of Operation Christmas

Roberto, 12 years old, Guatemala: “I live in a very poor neighborhood and many times I don’t have the school items that I require at school. I always wanted to have a special pencil with removable leads. I prayed to God for one and some friends at my school laughed at me because I said I prayed for one. However, when I was invited to participate in a special celebration in a Christian church at my village, they gave me a gift where I got school supplies. Among them were two of the special pencils I always wanted to have. Now I’m happy that I have the opportunity to study the Bible lessons and I’m learning a lot from what our teacher explains. I have learned that God cares for me. These lessons came to our village because God is good. Thank you for sending to us these lessons.”

Haiti: In Cite-Soleil, the poorest neighborhood in the Western hemisphere, a Haitian church is growing as a result of Operation Christmas Child. Children who experienced God’s love through gift-filled shoeboxes have returned to attend the voluntary, follow up discipleship program, The Greatest Journey—so many that the church had to move to a nearby school. Today, local Christians are ministering to more than 260 children. Praise God, who is growing churches through simple gift-filled shoeboxes and a tangible representation of Christ’s love!

Samaritan’s Purse began collecting shoeboxes filled with gifts for hurting children 21 years ago. That first year, they prayed that God would provide a thousand gifts for children in war-torn Bosnia, but 28,000 gifts came in. In 2012, Operation Christmas Child reached a milestone—over 100 million shoe box gifts collected since 1993 and handed out to children in more than 150 countries and territories. Each gift brings joy, hope, and smiles to a child whose life has been haunted by poverty, disaster, disease, or war. More than that, each box brings the true meaning of Christmas—God’s gift to mankind, the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The shoebox is just the beginning.

At the processing center, Christian literature is placed in each box to introduce Jesus Christ. In addition, children are given the opportunity to take part in *The Greatest Journey*, a 12-lesson discipleship program developed by Samaritan’s Purse and taught by the churches that hand out the shoe box gifts. The lessons and Scriptures have been translated into 68 languages, enabling Operation Christmas Child and their church partners to effectively share the Gospel in some of the most remote corners of the world. Children are invited to respond to the Gospel and learn how to share their faith with friends and family. Graduates receive their very own New Testament.

Be a part of changing children’s lives all over the world in Jesus’ Name through the power of a simple gift.

What goes into the box is fun, but what comes out of it is eternal .

Submitted by Charleen Bridgman



Missions Corner



Soccer and Samba Pt. 2: World Cup Outreach in Sao Paulo *by Ian Bridgman*

“OK guys go to it!” Our team leader said with a smile as she sent us off in groups of 2 or 3. Everybody else at least seemed to be excited and I knew I was supposed to be. We were there, after all, to share about Christ. In reality, though, I was apprehensive and uncomfortable. I had always known that if I went on enough of these short term mission trips, then I would probably end up doing street evangelism sooner or later. Well my time had come, and so there I was, outside the Fan Fest in Sao Paulo, feeling like a fish out of water, with a pocket full of gospel bracelets and a fist full of tracts. I was surrounded by crowds of soccer fans from all over the world, trying to figure out how to approach somebody with whom I could share the gospel, knowing full well the only thing on any of our minds was the soccer tournament that had brought us all there in the first place. The first real day of Operation Mobilization’s World Cup outreach had begun, and despite a relatively outgoing personality and a deep appreciation for the Gospel, this was definitely not my style.



First-time street evangelism jitters aside, the outreach was actually a great experience. I was one of a small group of foreigners joining a mostly Brazilian team for two weeks of sports clinics, nursing home visitation, school and youth center programs, and of course, the long feared street evangelism. We were hosted by a large charismatic church in the south eastern area of Sao Paulo. Our team slept in upstairs rooms on pads and mattresses laid out on the floor, while a dedicated support crew provided us with 3 filling meals a day, along with coffees and cakes after each day’s work, plus a fridge stocked with goodies for midnight munchers like me.

*Team members’ nationalities (L-R):
Brazil, Brazil, Kenya, Guatemala, Malaysia,
USA, Brazil, USA, England*

One thing about mission trips is that there is almost always someone who can’t seem to get along with someone else, and this discord can eventually act as a drag on the rest of the team. I feel blessed in that

our team seemed to be an exception to the rule. Over the course of two weeks there was never a moment when I was not excited to work with anybody and everybody on the team. When the mission is to show Christ’s love to the rest of the world, I was grateful for teammates that could show it to each other as well.

This outreach also highlighted a couple of cultural differences between the United States and Brazil. The first probably contributed to this being the most laid back missions trip I have ever been on. Many other outreaches seem to have the goal of keeping its team as busy as possible, with as many activities as possible slammed into a given time for maximum productivity. Our schedule in Brazil was different, with long, relaxed meal times and plenty of free time to process the day, pray, exercise, or simply get to know the other teammates and the members of our host church.

The other difference had to do with street evangelism. In some circles in the United States, open air street evangelism has been largely dismissed as being unhelpful or even counterproductive, and I can understand why. In all the days outside the Fan Fest and stadium, I only had one person decline my literature. He was an American. He wasn't rude or standoffish; he was just too busy to be bothered by strange people passing out strange papers. The only paper he wanted was a ticket to see the match. In contrast, most of the Brazilians we approached didn't seem bothered at all, and were perfectly happy to take some literature and even chat for a while. They were generally more comfortable talking with us, and more open to talking about Jesus and the gospel. Seeing how enthusiastic people were to meet and chill with foreigners like us, and how open they were to discussing spiritual things started to change my view of our work. It became fun, and I found myself looking forward to our afternoons among the crowds, finding new ways of breaking the ice, meeting new people, and sharing the gospel.

All this doesn't mean that I'm a certified street evangelist. I'm pretty sure there were others on the team more gifted in this area than I, although practice and experience seemed to help. I enjoyed much more leading our sports clinics for teenagers, who both played hard and also were all ears when it came time to give a message. I'm also sure, though, that the God we serve is much bigger than our perceived strengths and weaknesses, and that each member of our team was exactly where we were supposed to be on each day.

There were no dramatic emotional highs or lows on this outreach. It was just mostly a highly enjoyable experience to work with other believers in the atmosphere of what is really the biggest party on the planet. I was sorry to see it all come to an end. The World Cup is a unique phenomenon that brings together a lot of people with good moods, open minds, and free time, making it the perfect open door for this kind of outreach. And at least for now, most Brazilians are welcoming to new faces and open to discussing spiritual things. God was working in Brazil long before our little team showed up, and he will be there long after, and I am thankful for the chance to play even just a small role in his great plan for that great country.



The team after a weekend outreach in the nearby beach town of Santos



Angel Tree Project

We will be soon be gearing up for the Angel Tree ministry. Angel Tree is a ministry of Prison Fellowship for the purpose of reaching out to the children of inmates and their families with the love of Christ. This unique program gives our church an opportunity to share Christ's love by helping to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the families of prisoners. We will have the opportunity to purchase gifts for the children of inmates who live locally, and to deliver them in time for Christmas. Watch for more information to follow in the church bulletin, or speak to Mary Neff or JoAnn Kulberg, project coordinators.



Grace Church News

Potluck and China Presentation



On **Sunday, November 9th**, we will share a potluck lunch following the worship service, and Pastor Tom will be showing slides and reporting on his recent trip to China. Beverage and dessert will be provided. Please bring a dish to share. See you there!

Men's Prayer Fellowship



Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship **Saturday, November 15th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** 443-2575 for the location. Join us for a time of Bible discussion, prayer, fellowship, and light refreshments.



Operation Christmas Child Relay Center Ministry

Thanks to all who are offering to serve in our Relay Center ministry. We will be open to receive filled shoeboxes from the community during National Collection Week, **Monday, November 17 to Monday, November 24** during the following hours:

Monday- Thursday 3-5 p.m., Friday 2-6 p.m., Saturday 12:30-5 p.m., Sunday 12:30-4 p.m., and Monday the 24th from 2-4 p.m.

Please consider being part of this ministry as a greeter, cookie baker, box carrier, recorder, packer, or loader. Come on out and be a part of this wonderful ministry of Samaritan's Purse to deliver gifts and the message of the Gospel to children and their families all over the world!



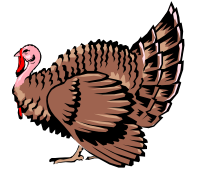
Prayer Gathering



Our monthly prayer vigil will be held in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, November 30th**. All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek His direction for our part in His kingdom work.



November 2014



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

			k			1
2 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	3 7:00 Addictions Victorious	4 Election Day	5	6	7	8
9 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 12:30 Potluck & China Report	10 7:00 Addictions Victorious	11 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	12	13	14	15 7:00-8:30 a.m. Men's Prayer Fellowship 
16 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	17 7:00 Victorious	18 Bible Class	19	20	21	22
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Operation Christmas Child Collection Week Monday November 17– Monday November 24 </div>						
23 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	24 7:00 Addictions Victorious	25	26	27 Thanksgiving Day 	28	29
30 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering						