

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Volume XIV , Issue 4

April 2015

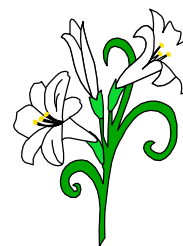


Happy Easter!

I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

John 11:25,26

Any submissions or suggestions for the next edition of this newsletter may be sent to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net





From the Pastor's Desk

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish will give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to you children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:11-13)

Bryan Chapell, in his book, *Praying Backwards*, draws a quote from C. S. Lewis' book, *The Magician's Nephew*, in which Polly and Digory, having been sent on a mission by Aslan, wonder if they will have anything to eat when they get back. "Well, I do think someone might have arranged our meals", said Digory. "I'm sure Aslan would have, if you asked him," said Fledge [their flying horse] "Wouldn't he know without being asked?" said Polly. "I have no doubt he would." Said the horse.... "But, I've a sort of idea he likes to be asked."

That's a bit like prayer, isn't it? The psalmist reminds us, *Even before a word is on our tongue, [the] Lord knows it altogether. (Psalm 139:4)* If God knows all things, then what is the purpose of praying? Isn't it wasted effort, just going through needless motions? Except, of course, Jesus encourages us and teaches us to pray.

There is a bit of a surprise in Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke 11. We understand the inference that God is always a good father, whereas we might not be. We expect Jesus to say that God will give us good gifts instead of those things that would harm us. But instead, Jesus promises "the Holy Spirit". "Well, that's fine, Jesus, but I was really just interested in a fish or an egg." What's with the Holy Spirit anyway? The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans, *The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him... (Romans 8:26-28)*

Can we see the connection between Jesus' teaching on prayer and what Paul has written here? And can we appreciate the importance to our own prayer life? There are two important points here:

One has to do with the fervency of the Holy Spirit's intercession. This is the third time Paul has used the word, "groan". In verse 22 he writes that, creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, because of the effects of the fall. Then in verse 23, Paul writes that we ourselves, *who have the firstfruits of the spirit* (italics mine) also groan as we wait and long for restoration. Then in verse 26 Paul tell us that the Spirit groans through our prayers. This is an expression of fervency, isn't it? As Chapell writes, "The Spirit cries as in the agonies of one birthing new life because new life is being formed- a new world order." What a contrast to my meager attempts to pray, in which so often I find my mind wandering or find myself falling asleep like Jesus' disciples in the garden. But is God limited by my lack of fervency? As I pray weakly, the Spirit pleads strongly for me and through me for God's purposes.

That leads us to the other point, which has to do with God's purposes and design. As Chapell puts it, "The Holy Spirit's intercession is not a swirling hysteria. The Spirit's work is target directed and laser precise." Our knowledge is really quite limited. We may think we know what is the best thing for either ourselves or God's Kingdom, but we don't have access to all the details or the big picture as God does. As Chapell writes, "Were we with Joseph, we would have prayed for his rescue from his brother's plot.... Had we been with Mary and Martha, we would have asked God not to let Lazarus die the first time. Were we at the foot of the cross, we would have cried for God to send his angels to the rescue." The fact is, God knows better how to accomplish his will.

But then, does that mean that our prayers are irrelevant or in the way? No! In actuality The Holy Spirit chooses to use our fallible endeavors to accomplish God's perfect will in ways that will always remain a mystery to us. It is part of the privilege that is ours as sons and daughters of God, and that means relationship with God. That's the part we often miss in prayer, isn't it?

Well, I do think someone might have arranged our meals. I'm sure he would have, if you asked him. Wouldn't he know without being asked? I have no doubt he would. But, I've a sort of idea he likes to be asked.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



WALKING WITH A FAITHFUL GOD *Schmidt Prayer Letter, March/April 2015*

Twenty-six years ago this month a young Swiss/American family arrived in Sapporo, Japan with their three daughters ages 5, 3 and 1! They started Japanese language school and their new life of ministry with OMF International. We have been walking with our Faithful God, and He has been with us all these years! Our life verse in Isaiah 55:12a says, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace." This verse represents how God has guided us, through thick or thin. We praise Him for being so faithful to our family! And His faithfulness also extended to us through all of you, by your love, prayers and support. Thank you for walking the path with us too!

Appropriately, the theme for the Ladies' Conference Shelley went to in March was "Walking with a Faithful God." A Canadian OMF missionary, with over 40 years of service here in Japan, spoke. Up to 50 Christian women from around Hokkaido gathered in Sapporo for a time of fellowship and spiritual refreshment.

Our church, Sapporo International Church, is walking through a time of transition. We are thankful, that the interim pastor and his wife (they are in their 70's) have agreed to extend their time with us. Please pray for unity in the church and God's will to prevail. We know that God will be faithful to our church and will provide the right leader, at the right time.

We are looking forward to some new internationals to walk through the doors of our church on April 18, to join the International Welcome Party. We are praying for leaders to emerge from the ESF group to be able to plan a fun and meaningful evening. Please pray for the ESFers to invite and befriend the new students that arrive on the Hokkaido University campus in April.

As God walks with us, we need His strength to take care of the many guests that will be coming and going in the next few months. We need wisdom to juggle all the requests that continuously come in.

Praise...

- for CIM/OMF's 150 year celebration since Hudson Taylor founded the mission
- for 26 years of God's faithfulness since we first arrived in Japan, Feb. 28, 1989

Pray...

- for the ongoing search for a capable pastor with a heart and vision for internationals
- for planning and holding of the International Welcome Party on April 18
- for energy and smooth running of the Guest Home during the coming two months with many change-overs.
- for a profitable time with a UK pastor on sabbatical who will help with our ESF group April 25-end of May
- for Kevin in Nevada, seeking to begin a business with his uncle, while Rebekah remains in Jakarta to finish her teaching year

Rejoicing in the faithfulness of God,

Dieter and Shelley

-To Be Seen from the Inside Out-

by Cheryl Lanoue

"Appearances are not always what they seem," so the saying goes. We find this to be true in the natural world and the kingdom of God. When I look outside today, the landscape of withered grass and bare trees appears utterly lifeless. Yet what is real does not always correspond to what we see, for better or worse. It's true we must navigate life with our eyes wide open. Yet from a young age we have been conditioned to respond to appearances *first*. Have you seen a baby's smile turn to a quivering frown as she watches her mama feign sadness? We find our heads turned instinctively by the brilliant, the talented, and the affluent and are surprised to discover their universe rather smaller than we imagined. Daniel Webster wrote, "*The world is governed more by appearance than realities so that it is fully as necessary to seem to know something as to know it.*" Ah, there's the rub; we move in a world where appearance has taken precedence over reality and we often feel constrained to act accordingly.

If we're honest, no one is exempt from the temptation to be governed by appearances. Jesus rocked everyone's world when He compared the most respected religious people of the day to dead men's tombs: beautiful on the outside but filled with rotteness on the inside. God is not taken in by our outward show; He cares enough to probe beneath the surface. At a well in Samaria, Jesus took time to talk with an insignificant woman of dubious character. He looked past her appearance to reveal the bondage to sin buried deep inside. He brought her face to face with reality and she responded, "Sir, I perceive you are a prophet." Maybe she wasn't shifting the conversation; maybe she was saying "you have looked beyond my social, cultural and religious complexions into my very heart." "Come everyone, see a man that has told me all the things I have done." (Jn. 4:29)

We cannot hide from God. He sees us from the inside out. This is bad news and good news. David prayed, "*You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part you will make me know wisdom.*" (Ps. 51:6) He realized that "sin is not just a surface problem" but a deep problem. David did not have the means to fix the brokenness inside where God desires truth to be found. But he humbled himself, and asked God for wisdom in his inmost heart, or in other words, "Show me reality, show me the way things really are." David knew God would answer generously and without reproach for asking.

Centuries later, the Son of David was passionate in His discourse and prayer that His disciples (including us) would *know* what is true. Read through John chapters 13-17 and you'll find the word "know" over twenty-six times. Our touchstone for truth and reality is His Word: "*...Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.*" (Jn.17:17) These chapters are rich and significant: they are the last words Jesus spoke; His summing up of thoughts for us. He calls us to abide in Him, to abide in His Word. His Word is the powerful sap that animates our very being by His Spirit. At all times, but especially when the branches of our lives are leafless or pruned and bleeding, we need to stay close to the Word and know that it has the power to sustain us. We will wrestle in our Christian lives with appearances; what seems to be and what is. Paul said we only see in a mirror dimly; we only know in part. Someday we will know fully. But be assured, we are *known fully* by God now (1 Cor. 13:12) and He has made provision for all our needs. "*Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another--showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.*" (2 Tim 3:16)

There will be times when we will look at ourselves and then at each other and be dismayed at what we see. But we must not lose heart; our outer self is decaying but our inner self is being renewed day by day. John reassured his congregation; "*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not **appeared** as yet what we shall be. We **know** that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He is.*" (1 Jn. 3:2) Is that our hope and goal, to be like Him? Let's let the coming days be an encouragement to our souls as God displays His majesty in the drama of spring. As we watch delicate leaves unfurl and stout shoots push their way toward the sun, let us remind each other that in our inner most being "*it is God, all the while effectually at work in us energizing and creating in us the power and desire, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*" (Phil. 2:13)

Boasting in His Shame

By John P. Sartelle

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). This was an absurd statement in Paul’s world. The cross was an instrument of execution used by the government. The cross was a place of shame, disgrace, humiliation, indignity, degradation, and ignominy. The criminal was beaten, undressed, arms spread and nailed to a crossbeam, feet nailed to a vertical beam, and hoisted above the ground for the world to see. Spread-eagled, naked, helpless--the scene was designed to humiliate. Who would make that his ultimate boast?

From the moment in Caesarea Philippi when Jesus first told His disciples that He would be crucified, they fought the idea. Messiahs were victors, not victims. To the very end in the upper room and garden they were thinking about which of them would sit in the most honored positions when He came into power. They were thinking of swords, battles, and heroic feats. Peter even pulled a sword against overwhelming odds.

When the crucifiers who were counting Jesus a criminal and an outcast confronted Peter, he denied multiple times that he even knew Jesus. Do you think Peter would have denied knowing Him if Jesus had gone to the palace and called Jerusalem and Israel to arms? Do you think Peter would have denied knowing Him if Jesus had been the one sitting in power? Do you think He would have denied knowing Him if Jesus had raised an army and conquered the Romans? Peter was fighting the idea of a Messiah crucified as a criminal. When Jesus told His disciples that He would be numbered with the transgressors, His major point was not that He would carry the sin of the world. He was saying to the disciples that He would die a dishonorable death, between two thieves. The disciples were resisting that idea to the end.

I can understand Peter and the disciples. In the world of the intellectual elite, in the world of the self-sufficient moralist, the cross of Christ is an embarrassing place to stand. The world will always scoff at the idea that God became flesh. The theology that teaches men are sinners before God and need a sacrifice to die and atone for their sins is deemed primitive in our culture.

Many of us evangelicals deny that we know Jesus by taking the emphasis away from the cross as we speak to His disciples and present our gospel to the world: “Follow Jesus: he will straighten out your marriage. Follow Jesus: He will make you better parents. Follow Jesus: He will make you financially solvent. Follow Jesus: He will enrich your relationships.” Now, that is a Jesus who is easy to

like and easy to follow. It is easy to stand in the world and be proud of that Jesus. To attract the world we say, “Come, drink coffee and hang out with Jesus. Be comfortable with Him. Kick back with Him. He is anti-institutional. He is anti-authority. Living with Him is a cool ride.”

Dear reader, if we would recapture the gospel we must return to the ignominious cross. “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (Heb. 13:11-13).

Even though the animals were sacrificed in the temple, their bodies were burned in the wilderness outside the camp. If you lived outside the camp you were considered an outcast. It was a reproach to dwell outside the camp. The writer of Hebrews used that analogy to say that Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem. He was crucified on the city’s garbage dump--a place of refuse. It was a place where criminals were executed. Just so, let’s go outside the camp “and bear the reproach he endured.”

Consider, then, two, questions: Have you ever gone to the cross--the place of reproach, the place of ridicule, the place where the world laughs and scoffs? Have you ever gone to the cross as a sinner even while the world mocks, praying, “Jesus, Lamb of God, Savior, I am a sinner. Have mercy on me. I now trust in you and you alone to save me from God’s just judgment through your atoning death”?

As a follower of Jesus do you pitch your tent every morning and every evening outside the camp at the cross? Do you do this in your home, at the university, in the office, on the golf course, at the coffee shop?

If you answered the first question “yes,” then you know what Paul meant when he said, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul was so proud of Jesus and His cross that he counted it an honor to suffer in the world for the cause of the cross. Be sure, if you pitch your tent under His cross in this world, your life in some way will bear the marks of His ignominy.

Rev. John P. Sartelle is senior minister of Tates Creek Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Kentucky.

From Tabletalk April 2009

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GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to join together for a time of devotional study using Andrew Murray's book *Humility*, prayer and light refreshment. Meet on **Saturday morning, April 18th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m., at the home of Doug Rose.**



Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to join together for a special times of corporate prayer **Sunday, April 26th from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, as we acknowledge our dependence on God, seek His direction for our church and our ministry in the community, and pray for His glory to be made known.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Psalm 127:1



4C's Annual Family Conference

This year the 4C's Annual Conference will be in Rochester, NY, from **Monday -Thursday, July 20-23** The theme is "Fully Invested," and the conference includes speakers, workshops, and worship. There are also comprehensive programs for youth and children. For more information and online registration go to www.cccusa.com, or see Charleen for a brochure.

"Love the LORD your God...with all your heart, and soul, and strength..." Deuteronomy 4:6-9





April 2015



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5 EASTER 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	6 7:00 p.m. Addictions Victorious	7 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	8	9	10	11
12 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	13 7:00 p.m. Addictions Victorious	14 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	15	16	17	18 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
19 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	20 7:00 p.m. Addictions Victorious	21 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	22	23	24	25
26 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	27 7:00 p.m. Addictions Victorious	28 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	29	30		