



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Volume XVI, Issue 2

March/April 2017



Happy Spring, Blessed 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



From the Pastor's Desk

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..., let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.... (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Easter Sunday is later this year than it has been for a long time. Sometimes it is in mid-March, but this year it falls on April 16. After this past snowstorm and the accompanying cold temps, it seems like spring is running late too. My sense is that many are getting impatient for spring to arrive. We only have to endure a few more weeks and the grass will start to turn green.

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage the members of the fledgling church to persevere in their pilgrimage of faith. It was not easy being a Christian in those days. The message of the gospel was not well received by society at large. The Jewish religious leaders of the day saw followers of Jesus as a heretical threat to their religious tradition, and secular Rome saw Christians as strange religious fanatics who had the potential to rock the political boat. So there was always the temptation for Christians to either throw in the towel or withdraw into seclusion.

When we look at it like that, we realize that things were not that radically different from what they are today. Do we not have the same temptation to either lose our salty distinctiveness or hide our light under a basket? The same exhortation to endure that was given to the early Christians is given to us.

The author of Hebrews was adept at drawing from Old Testament history and symbolism to illustrate the gospel. In doing so, he highlights God's central purpose in biblical history- to send his Son to redeem us and create us as a people to be his unique possession. But he also highlights Christ's supreme lordship over all of history. For those outside Christ this sounds absolutely absurd, but by spelling all this out for us he intends for us to see our circumstances in light of the bigger game plan.

I have always loved how the author of Hebrews lists in chapter 11 those whom we often refer to as "the gallery of the saints" as an example to us. He starts with Abel and brings us down through Old Testament history to the prophets. I am convinced he leaves chapter 11 open ended, intending for us to read the New Testament saints into the story as well; the Apostles, and, yes, while we're at it, why not those throughout the history of the church? And perhaps our own loved ones too! They are meant to serve as an example of those who trusted in God's faithfulness to his bigger game plan. While we see them as an encouragement, we are specifically encouraged to focus our attention on Christ himself.

I have especially found myself intrigued by the use of the word "joy" with regard to Christ's crucifixion- "*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.*" Why did he use this particular word? Certainly crucifixion was not a joyful experience for Jesus. Especially given Jesus' agonizing prayer in the garden just hours before his death, that if possible God would "remove this cup from [him]", not to mention Jesus cry of dereliction from the cross itself, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" We can only understand the use of "joy" in Hebrews in terms of Jesus' overarching anticipation of and commitment to his crucifixion as a means by which he would redeem us to himself. This was the source of his joy, and in this he willingly (and joyfully) endured to the end. That's a pretty staggering thought when we understand it in this light.

The Christian life is indeed much more akin to a marathon than a 100 meter dash. The 100 yard dash is, as Sam Mussovinini said in the film *Chariots of Fire*, "*tailor made for neurotics*", but we need to go further out. That requires endurance.



Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner

Tuvya Zaretsky- Jews for Jesus

Tuvya reports that he has two significant projects ahead.

“First, I am writing a follow-up outreach booklet for Jewish-Gentile couples. It will introduce them to avenues for finding spiritual harmony in Christ. Please pray for the Lord’s guidance in the material and production of the booklet.

The other project is with the Jews for Jesus leadership ‘team at the top,’ a specialized cross-generational leadership team. Please pray for the Lord’s wisdom on this team and His purpose through it.

Ellen and I were delighted to celebrate the New Year and new life in Jesus with a Jewish-Gentile couple. He came to faith in Christ during 2016. We are trusting the Lord for more spiritual fruit just like him during 2017! So thank you for partnering with us in this ministry reaching Jews for Jesus.”

Your brother in our Messiah,

Susan Stone- InterVarsity Romania

Susan is due for Home Assignment and will leave for the U.S. on March 30th. She would appreciate prayer for good progress on the website the team is developing for the ministry of encouraging young graduates to put Christian principles into practice in the workplace, an often challenging environment. Specifically she asks for prayer for:

- All the logistics of filming the banner video and getting it done within the next few weeks
- A recruiting email recently sent out with specific tasks, requirements – that many good people will respond to this
- That we can complete the Home Page and “About Us” page of the Website before I leave for the States on March 30.

Be strengthened in the Lord,

Susan

“P.S. I know these seem like little things but I really am desiring that each step we do for God’s glory and God’s way. And I think that praying specifically keeps us conscious of the fact that God is attentive to us at



This is an essay I wrote about 10 years ago, when I wanted to record some memories of my childhood for my mother Margaret Barbour. For many pleasant years, we lived in the pretty neighborhood of Mountain Drive, across Williams Street from Grace Church. I'd estimate that this took place was when I was around 10 years old.

I thought this essay would relate to the Adult Sunday School Class's study of The Lord's Prayer.

One of my best friends Carol and her family attended the pink Catholic Church Sacred Heart on Elm Street. My parents were raising me in a Protestant household that adhered to the sovereignty of Scripture. As a Catholic, Carol was not really supposed to come to my church at the top of Mountain Drive, Grace Church. But, sometimes I went with her to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve at Sacred Heart. I went with her because I was her friend, but it was also my way of whiling away the time until Christmas morning, when I could open presents. She and her siblings were allowed to open presents on Christmas Eve! I could not believe how unfair that was. I came to believe that Catholics and Protestants were very different indeed philosophically. Were Protestants called that because they weren't allowed to open presents on Christmas Eve and Catholics were? And the Protestants protested because it wasn't fair? The mind of my childhood tried to make sense of the facts as they appeared to me.

Another difference I noticed between Catholics and Protestants was that when we said the Lord's Prayer at Grace Church, we said "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." At Sacred Heart, the Catholics said "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." To me, these sentences meant very different things, and I tried to figure out how they were applicable to either the Protestant Way or the Catholic Way.

"Forgive us our debts ..." I knew that my father did not believe in having debts. He paid in full the price of his house and his car, and everything else. Using credit was unacceptable. He did not have credit cards or a checking account. He did not loan anyone money so in that way prevented them from having debts with him. I concluded that this was because of his religious beliefs. So, that must mean that to a Protestant, debts are evil, and one must never have them or cause others to have them. If you ever had a debt, it needed to be forgiven, because it was a sin. If someone had a debt with us, we had to forgive it so God would forgive us. This was in accordance with the Protestant prayer, I thought.

As for the Catholic "trespasses" version of the Lord's Prayer, I assumed it meant that if you were Catholic, you did not like people walking across your property. No Trespassing. Even though Carol was one of my two best friends, I did not walk across her family's property next door, out of respect for this part of the Catholic prayer. To complicate matters, the family on the other side of our house was also Catholic, so I did not walk through their yard, either. Since we lived on the corner between them, that meant that there was a very narrow place through which I could actually walk from our property to non-Catholic, trespassable land in the middle of the circle of Richard Drive. I had to step over the place where the two corners of their land met. But, I didn't have the heart to do it very often, afraid that I would be in violation of another Catholic family's yard.

On the other hand, I didn't mind walking through my other best friend Linda's yard across the street, and on to the pretty cow pasture and brook behind her house. Trespassing did not apply; her family was Episcopalian. I assumed that because they were Protestant, they did not mind trespassing, but didn't like debt. No problem for me. I felt morally correct as I walked through their yard. If they saw me and wondered what on earth I was doing, they did not say anything about it.

Did I ever ask an adult about this? No, I just came to my own conclusion.

Although I have since learned that the difference between the two statements in the Lord's Prayer is just semantic – and guess what, the Episcopalians do say "Trespasses" - it still affects me in that I have a dread of making people pay me back for anything they owe me. So, I am still trying to forgive my debtors.

This and other incidents of my misinterpretations or over-interpretations have taught me that my mind can make up stories to explain the facts as they appear to me. My interpretations may be just that – stories, and fictional ones at that. I have only learned this about myself in recent years. So, now I take my own stories with a few grains of salt.

A Journey through the Beatitudes

Using as a guide the book *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*
by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Continuing from last month:

Our next verse is a little different than the others but it is still an account and description of the Christian. The Lord changes the emphasis slightly from what the Holy Spirit is enabling to come forth in our lives to what will be the likely outcome of being born again and entering the kingdom of God.

Verse 10: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

There is a reason that this Beatitude follows right after the reference to peacemakers. The biblical doctrines of sin and the world are displayed perfectly in these two Beatitudes: *"Blessed are the peacemakers..."* and *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake..."*. If a Christian person is a peacemaker this is what happens to him. Many times, even if you have tried in a calm, gentle and non-threatening way, to explain that what a person has said or done is not in the best interest of peace, it will not be taken kindly and persecution with its many different ways of being displayed will start to happen. It is the way of the world.

The promise attached to this Beatitude is the same as the one attached to the first Beatitude: *"... theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* That is further and additional proof of the fact that this is the last Beatitude. The Lord starts with the kingdom of God and ends with it. This verifies his statement at the beginning of his ministry when he said: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* The important point the Lord was making was membership in the kingdom of heaven.

This Beatitude is one that will test us the most as to our Christian character and devotion to the Lord if we ever have to face severe persecution. Therefore, we must be positive that we understand what the Beatitude is actually saying. The key to that understanding is in the words after *"persecuted"*: *"...for righteousness' sake."* It does not merely say: *"Blessed are they which are persecuted."* What it does not mean is being persecuted for being objectionable, quarrelsome, or difficult. We are so prone because of the sin nature still in us to fall into this trap. We must discern between being offensive in a natural sense and causing offense because we are righteous by the Lord's work in us.

Listen to what Peter says in 1st Peter 4:12-17:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice, insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

What does this *"...for righteousness' sake"* mean then? It means being like the Lord Jesus Christ. Following in his footsteps and having the opportunity to speak concerning the things of God, we

Continued on following page

Speak about the truth that is in the scriptures, with the emphasis on the words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, knowing full well in so doing that we will be persecuted in some way or other. That is why the Lord has given us this Beatitude, to give us a warning. The Lord's words are certainly ringing true in our 21st century and as it has been down through the ages and will continue to be until the Lord returns to restore all things.

We can draw certain conclusions from all this. First, it tells us what our ideas are concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we think He can be admired and applauded by the non-Christian, we have a wrong view of Him. The effect of Jesus on his contemporaries was that they hated him. Second, this Beatitude does test our ideas as to what makes a Christian. The Christian is like his Lord and if the world hated the Lord it will hate the Christian. The Lord explains this to us in John 15:18-20:

"If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master'. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

The Lord was so concerned that his followers down through the ages would understand this Beatitude that he added a footnote in verses 11 and 12.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

We have been looking at the Beatitudes, which the Lord has used for his opening statement to the Sermon on the Mount. He is giving us in this overview the description and the characteristics of a Christian. In other words, what he expects from us who say we are Christians. Also, he is obviously searching us and testing us. The question remaining is how are we reacting to this searching and testing? ? Our response really tells us everything about our Christian profession. If we dislike this kind of thing, if we are impatient with it, if we dislike this personal searching and testing it simply means that our position is entirely contrary to what the Lord and the rest of the New Testament is saying. But, if the searching and testing are taken in humility and understanding, even though sometimes it hurts, we will mature in knowing that it is for our good spiritually. The primary, central truth about the whole Christian position should come into focus for us. It is that the Christian Gospel places the emphasis upon being, rather than doing. It's upon our attitude before our action. It's on what we are rather than what we do. Our actions and doings come out of who we are: born again, Holy Spirit filled, belonging to the kingdom of God. God in his tender mercies and love for us understands our true condition before him, but by the completed atoning work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he has promised us that if we "hunger and thirst after righteousness" he will by his power fully complete for us what we cannot do; take on the image of Christ and enter in the kingdom of heaven to spend eternity with him. Praise God!!

Tom Ross
Elder Emeritus



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



"Live Coals" Prayer Gatherings



All are encouraged to take part in our monthly corporate time of prayer on **Sunday, March 26th** and **Sunday, April 30th** from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** Join us as we come before our Father's throne to praise Him, pray for one another, seek His direction, and "find grace and mercy to help us in our time of need." *Hebrews 4:16*

Women's Fellowship

Women of all ages are welcome at the Women's Fellowship, **Saturday, April 8th, from 9:30-11:00 a.m.** Come and be encouraged and motivated as we explore *Habits of Grace*, and discuss, pray and enjoy refreshments together.



Maundy Thursday Dinner and Communion



Mark your calendars for our Maundy Thursday potluck and communion service on **Thursday, April 13th**. The potluck **dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.** followed by the **communion service at 7:00**.

Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are welcome at the Men's Prayer Fellowship, **Saturday, April 15th** from **7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Come for a time of looking into the Scriptures, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Refreshments will be served.



- ◆ Consider reserving Friday and Saturday, **April 21-22, 2016** for the annual OPC Women's Retreat at Lakeside Christian Camp in Pittsfield. The topic is "Rooted and Grounded in Jesus: God's Design for Sexuality," with featured speaker Ellen Dykas of HarvestUSA. Registrations must be postmarked by **April 6**. For the early bird discount they must be postmarked by **March 30**. Late registrations will not be accepted. For more information please see Charleen Bridgman, or go to <https://pnynewomen.wordpress.com/>



LOOKING AHEAD

- ◆ The annual Faithlift (sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield) will be held at Lakeside Christian Camp, on **Friday and Saturday, May 5-6**. A **Saturday only option** is available. Denise Ridley will speak on "Joy - Diamonds in the Dust." sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield. See Charleen for more information, or to register online go to pittsfieldefc.org



March/April 2017



S

M

T

W

T

F

S

19 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship	20 7:00 Addictions Victorious	21 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	22	23	24 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	25
26 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship 5:00 pm Prayer	27 7:00 Addictions Victorious	28 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	29	30	31 6:30 Young Adult Bible	1
2 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship	3 7:00 Addictions Victorious	4 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	5	6	7 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	8 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship
9 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship	10 7:00 Addictions Victorious	11 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	12	13 6:00 Maundy Thursday dinner and communion	14 Good Friday	15 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
16 Easter 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	17 7:00 Addictions Victorious	18 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	19	20	21 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	22
23 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	24 7:00 Addictions Victorious	25 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	26	27	28 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	29
30 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 pm Prayer Gathering						