

# Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational  
1055 Williams Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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*Honor Your Father*



Any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter may be sent to [secretary@gracecongregational.org](mailto:secretary@gracecongregational.org), or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.



## From the Pastor's Desk

*Give us this day our daily bread (Matthew 6:11)*

I love the smell of fresh baked bread, whether walking through the bread section of Price Chopper or in my own kitchen. Charleen and I used to make all our own bread in the early years of our marriage. I made sourdough and anadama, and she made oatmeal-molasses and whole wheat. She still bakes bread periodically, but it's been years since I had my hands in dough.

Our young adults' Bible study just started the book, *Praying Backwards*, by Bryan Chapell. He reminds us that when Jesus teaches us to pray, "give us this day our daily bread" he has in mind more than Pepperidge Farm or Arnold, or for that matter homemade sourdough. It is a request for God to provide us with the necessities of life, whether it be enough groceries for tonight's meal or next month's rent.

Does that mean it is out of place to pray for strawberry shortcake a la mode as Chapell asks? Even the psalmist says, "*Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.*" (Ps. 37:4) While we can't hold God accountable to giving us everything we might want, like strawberry shortcake or a million dollars, it is not necessarily a sin to seek the desires of our heart. The real question is, do we delight ourselves in the Lord first and foremost? Chapell writes, "*When we delight most in fulfilling his purpose (having his name revered and his kingdom furthered), then God gives us the desires of our heart. However, when we try to nourish our heart with empty pleasures or self-destructive pursuits, then the prayer for daily bread actually becomes a petition for a healthier diet.*"

Chapell quotes a letter that was allegedly found on the body of a Civil War soldier after the battle of Gettysburg. It expresses well the desires of a heart shaped by the Holy Spirit:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.

I was made weak, that I might humbly learn to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things.

I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy.

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.

I was given weakness, that I feel the need for God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.

I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for, but everything that I hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I among all men am most richly blessed.

I'm always a sucker for fresh baked bread, hot out of the oven, and strawberry shortcake with lots of whipped cream, but what do I really pray for? And what do you pray for?



Pastor Tom Bridgman



# Missions Corner

## Carnevale News

Praise to the Father who has brought us through this organizational change! [from Wycliffe Associates] We are now functioning as independent missionaries serving the International Linguistic Center and Deaf Missions. We think this introduction in June to Deaf Missions could open up a whole new area of ministry for the deaf.

Praise God the “new” house in Midlothian is finished on the inside and we can move into it whenever we are ready. That won’t be until after George’s June mission trip, but we are not setting any dates yet. There is still much outside work to be done, siding and roofing, but these can be done later.

Pray for all our decisions as we prepare the house we own in Dallas to be rented. We are considering even selling it. We are waiting for our Father’s direction here as well. Both are good options for different reasons.

Pray for the upcoming trip to Iowa. George has a group of men volunteering with him whom he is excited about working with. Still many details to put together for this project with Deaf Missions in Council Bluffs.

Praise Father for the lovely little granddaughter born on May 11th to our son Grant and his wife Lissi. Trinity arrived quickly and healthy and sweet! Her big brothers are loving her and protecting her already! Trinity makes our 10th grandchild.

Pray for my mother who will celebrate 99 years on July 15th. She is slowing down and sleeping more, struggling with hearing loss and losing eyesight but still holding her own rather well. She will be moving with us, and that is a big issue also.

Praise the Lord for the success so far with the hydroponic gardens just recently completed on the International Linguistics Center. The first fruits have been shared with the poor and some produce has already been served in the dining hall. Pray for the ministry outreach potential of this endeavor, and for a team of volunteers to efficiently operate it.

Thank you!

Norine (George too)

## Growth by Degrees

Jason Helopoulos

Discouragement in the Christian life comes easily when expectations are not realized. Some days we read the Scriptures and sense Christ's stirring—our soul awakens from its doldrums, our mind engages, our heart inflames, and our affections kindle. We find encouragement or challenge in something we read, and our prayers flow with ease.

But then there are other days, days we don't see the effect we would hope for. Our devotions aren't quite so stirring. Our Bible reading feels more like a burden than a means of grace. Listlessness and formality mark our prayers. We begin to wonder if the time spent is worth the effort. We examine our Christian life and wonder why we haven't progressed further.

At best, that line of thinking and feeling is silly, and at worst, it is dangerous. The Christian life is not lived in a moment, and it seldom progresses by major triumphs. Rather, most often, in Christ, we grow by degrees. Like the kindergartner who shows up for the first day of class and decries his classmates' inability to answer calculus questions, so the Christian who despairs of seeing little progress in the moment proves rash. Few moments rise to the monumental. Rather, our growth in Christ happens by degrees and small alterations. This should encourage the Christian to read his Bible and pray daily, walk humbly, and keep persevering, even when it feels as though little occurs.

When snow falls, it falls in very small flakes. As those small flakes hit the ground, little appears to happen. Yet, a few hours pass and white covers the ground. An entire landscape changes, but only by small additions.

Most lasting change in Christ takes place by degrees, small additions, as we read and apply His Word. John Newton compared it to a house under construction. The beginnings of the construction appear insignificant. One passes by the home project for days and little progress is evident. The concrete slab is laid and supplies litter the yard. A few nails lie here and a few boards lie there. It doesn't look like

much. In fact, it looks like a mess. Yet, the architect and the builder know exactly what they are doing, and they accomplish it by degrees. The Lord is at work in you, dear Christian. The Master Architect and Great Builder has a plan, He knows what He is doing, but you can't always see evidence of it today.

Keep attending to the means of grace—read your Bible, partake of the sacraments, and pray. Never give it up, not for a day, and surely not for a week. God is at work. Persevere in pursuing Christ. He is conforming you more and more to His image. You are not what you desire to be, but Christ is at work. We all “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2Cor. 3:18). Walk humbly, read the Word, pray, and keep your head up—looking to Christ who is at work in you and upon you. Make no mistake, you are being changed—it is simply by degrees.

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Rev. Jason Helopoulos is associate pastor at University Reformed Church (PCA) in East Lansing, Mich. He is author of *The New Pastor's Handbook* and *These Truths Alone*.

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## Unexpected Encounter

Last Monday evening was very hot indeed for the Pittsfield Adult Learning Center's graduation ceremonies held at the Crosby School. In spite of the heat, I noticed eager and excited faces scattered among the group making their way into the auditorium to find a seat. Yet, it was completely unexpected; that unlooked-for voice of God in the midst of everyday life. Why the surprise? I should have remembered it wasn't in the strong wind, or the earthquake, or the fire that Elijah heard Jehovah speak...but "a still small voice". How like our patient God; *He asked Elijah a question and listened for his reply!* "What are you doing here, Elijah?" It would seem evident from his long answer, Elijah was not expecting God's come back. I was sweating as if the fire Elijah saw was right next to me! I didn't expect God to speak. But there it was, 'a still, small voice' ... slowly taking center stage in my thoughts.

We were at the PALC graduation to watch our daughter, Grace, receive her HiSET certificate for finishing the high school course. The ceremony unrolled like an old parchment and I sensed something familiar. Seated at the front, among others, were the PALC Director, City Council President, Superintendent of Schools and Chairperson of the School Committee. As each spoke, they mentioned *this* was the graduation ceremony that was 'closest to their heart', 'the one they most looked forward to'. Persevering through extreme difficulties of various kinds, this diverse group of students had obviously captured their attention and admiration. The Director talked about the students, with all their differences, supporting each other like family, encouraging and helping each other in day to day classes. A lovely older woman, an immigrant from Haiti, was recognized for her friendly, cheerful ways and her strong faith in God. A young man, who looked old beyond his years was the student speaker. While admitting he was extremely nervous, it was evident as he wrestled through his speech to a few calls of encouragement from fellow students, that his learning experience with these people had made a huge impact in his life. A former graduate of the program added her encouragement to the group and told them "to never be ashamed of getting their GED. It was not only themselves being affected but all the people that were part of their lives." Finally, the teachers and staff, who surprisingly weren't asked to stand together to be recognized, were nevertheless, identifiable by the joy on their faces as they congratulated their students and sought out family members to meet and greet. What was so *familiar* here? Why were these officials finding such delight in sharing in the success of these people?

God's quiet voice was clear: *you are seeing a shadowy picture of redemption and it's hard for anyone to resist being caught up in its joy.* Each student's story, a lost-ness of some sort; needing recovery; needing help beyond their own abilities, was changed through the intervention of another. There was the fruit of mutual encouragement and a display of joy over each other's success. I wasn't expecting this—this beautiful display of God's common grace to sinful men – heaven spilling over into this lost world! Redemption always elicits joy. Didn't Jesus say there was "joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents"? That arrow of a question, "*What are you doing here?*" went straight to my heart. What are you doing here, Cheryl, in this life I have given you? Are you persevering with joy, knowing that these daily hardships, sorrows and trials of yours are producing in you an eternal weight of glory? "You were trapped in a darkness you could never free yourself from and I securely planted you in the kingdom of My Beloved Son." I know your frame, you are dust, but remember the mystery which is now revealed – Christ in you the hope of glory.! God was speaking to me powerfully, I dare say, through the lives of my unbelieving neighbors. I was not expecting that!

There is a wonderful promise to Israel in Jeremiah 31 which can be applied to us as God's people (for we are being transformed into Christ's image, from glory to glory): "*I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness. "Again, I will build you and you will be rebuilt..."*" Where is all this new construction?

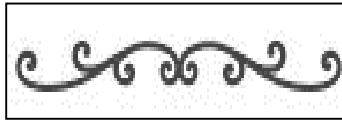
Calvin commented, "Length of time might have extinguished the faith of the people, as it is too commonly the case: for when nothing appears to us but the naked word, and when God repeats

*“Unexpected” continued*

been prevailing, we think that all ways have been already closed up, so that God cannot bring a remedy; we thus measure his power by our own standard: and as he comes late to help us, because he suffers men to be long afflicted with disease or other evils, so we imagine that God will never come, when he suspends and delays his favor longer than we wish.”

The Psalmist said, “The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

Let us stir one another up to rejoice together in the Lord who has redeemed us and is at work in us! The Lord said to Jeremiah: *“For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord”*. We shall come, not to a graduation, but to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Surely, we will be astonished guests at His table! May God grant us grace to persevere now in all we set our hands to. As we confess our brokenness as sinners us to see and rejoice in the work of each other’s lives, *“knowing that we things like silver or gold from our futilities, but with precious blood, as of a blood of Christ.”*



saved by grace, may the Spirit teach grace our heavenly Father is doing in *were not redeemed with perishable way of life inherited from our forefathers, the lamb unblemished and spotless, the*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...”





# GRACE CHURCH NEWS



## Women at Prayer

Women are invited to pray on the first and third Wednesdays of the month through the end of the summer. Join us **on June 21st, July 5th, and July 19th from 7:00-8:00 p.m.**



## "Live Coals" Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to join us for our corporate prayer gathering, **Sunday July 2nd, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, in the sanctuary, as we seek God's wisdom, guidance, and stamina for our part in His Kingdom work.

## Women's Fellowship

The Women's Fellowship will meet **Saturday, July 8th from 9:30-11:00 a.m.** at the church. Grow with us as we look at *Habits of Grace*, by David Mathis.



## Church Informational Gathering

Mark your calendars for **Sunday, July 9th**, for a church informational meeting. Following our worship service we will enjoy a light lunch together and then gather



## Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the Men's Prayer Fellowship, **Saturday, July 15th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Enjoy a look into *Unlimited Grace*, by Bryan Chapell, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Breakfast will be served.



## Home to Glory

**The Reverend Thomas Hunter IV**, well-loved **interim pastor at Grace Church** for several years, went home to glory last fall on October 7, 2016, at the age of 91. Rev. Hunter served the Lord in various ministries, pastoring churches in the Albany area, established C.U.R.E. (a Christian social service agency), Good Shepherd Fellowship, Solid Rock Coffee and Halfway House. He served 18 years as a Chaplain at the VA Medical Center in Albany. He and his **wife Marcia** would have celebrated 66 years of marriage on Friday, June 16th of this year. He also is survived by his daughter Eileen, son Timothy and 2 grandchildren.

Rev. Hunter ministered faithfully and compassionately during what can be a difficult time of transition between pastors, until the calling of Pastor Tom in 1995. The full obituary is available on the table at the back of the sanctuary.

## A Note of Appreciation

Thank you to the Tuesday Ladies' Bible Class who supplied the mulch for the flower beds. Thank you also to Linda and Millie who faithfully tend the flowers. We appreciate all who serve the Lord in service to one another, much of it behind the scenes. *From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Eph. 4:16*



# June-July 2017



S M T W T F S

<b>18</b> 10:00 am Worship  <b>Father's Day</b>	<b>19</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 7:00 Women at Prayer	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> 10:00 am Worship	<b>26</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>July 1</b>
<b>2</b> 10:00 am Worship  <b>5:00 "Live            Coals" Prayer</b>	<b>3</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>4</b>  Happy 4th of July!	<b>5</b> 7:00 Women at Prayer	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>8</b> <b>9:30-11:00            Women's            Fellowship</b>
<b>9</b> 10:00 am Worship <b>Church            Informational            lunch meeting</b>	<b>10</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>15</b> <b>7:00-8:30 am            Men's Prayer            Fellowship</b>
<b>16</b> 10:00 am Worship	<b>17</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> 7:00 Women at Prayer	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>22</b>
<b>23</b> 10:00 am Worship	<b>24</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	<b>29</b>
<b>30</b> 10:00 am Worship	<b>31</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious					