

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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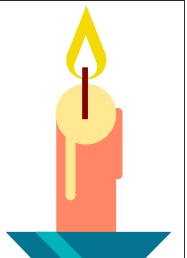
January 2015



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26





From the Pastor's Desk

*And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
(Acts 8:1)*

I don't know about you, but it seems like 2014 passed more quickly than usual. I feel like it ought to still be 2013 or 2012. Or maybe even 1999. Yet here we are; the calendar tells us it is 2015.

Sometimes when I drive around Pittsfield I think, this is not the same Pittsfield I used to know. Where is England Brothers? Where is Besse Clarke? Drive down East Street; where is GE? Where are the Thursday night crowds on North Street? They're long gone. It's not just that some of the landmarks are gone, but the nature of the community has changed too. The population is less than 75% of what it used to be. The largest employer is the hospital now, and the socio-economic status of the community has dropped significantly in the past two decades. Who could have predicted twenty years ago how serious a problem heroin addiction would become in our community? (Actually the heroin problem is all over the country).

Two decades? Wait a second! That's how long I've been back ministering in Pittsfield! What does that mean for my ministry here? More importantly, what does that mean for Grace Church? What does that mean for the future of Grace Church? We have little control over our circumstances, but we can control how we as the church respond to the circumstances at hand.

Acts chapter 8 represents a major turning point for the early church. Up to this point in the book of Acts early Christians had witnessed Jesus' ascension. They had experienced the arrival of the Holy Spirit and had witnessed unprecedented growth in the believing community in Jerusalem, all in a very short time. And then things changed. One of the first deacons of the church was taken outside the city and martyred with the approval of the religious leaders in Jerusalem because of his testimony, and then the dam of persecution broke. Christians fled for their lives, all but the apostles. Why did God allow this to happen if everything was going so well in Jerusalem?

Remember, the early believers had asked Jesus if he was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at that time. Jesus essentially refused to answer that question, but instead told them that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and throughout the rest of the world. The early Christians had not fully understood Jesus' promise or challenge. They were content with Jerusalem. But Jesus had promised to build his church in all nations and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. It took a little persecution to joggle them loose.

Oh, how nice it would be to remain cooped up here on the end of Williams St in 2015, waiting for Jesus to "restore the Kingdom to Israel". Instead, Jesus is going to build his church and the gates of hell, heroin and socio-economic decline will not prevail. Are we content to isolate ourselves behind our comfortable traditions and lament the passing of England Brothers and GE because of an image we want to maintain? Or do we see ourselves as a part of Jesus' mission to Judea (North St.), Samaria (the jail), and the uttermost parts of the world (heroin addict, homosexual, and everything else that is "unclean")? These are serious questions that every generation of Christians must ask. Seeing ourselves as part of Jesus' mission might challenge the image we want to project as a church, but we have to ask ourselves the question, what is more important? And what does Jesus want from us?

Thank you for allowing my son, Ian, to preach last Sunday. I was afraid I could be accused of nepotism, but I felt it was that important. I had sensed a call to the ministry by the time I was his age, and began my seminary studies at his age. I don't expect he will ever find his calling to pastor in Pittsfield but, at my age now (64), I know someone of the next generation will. Pittsfield will be their mission field. It's crucial that we begin to make room for them now. Because, before you know it, we will be handing them the keys.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



News from Susan Stone in Romania

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (Col 2:9-10)

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Christmas Greetings from Romania!

In this season may we respond personally to the One who "put on" human-ness in order to both save us from sin and give us eternal life. And further, may we know in a deeper way the glorious God-Man who for each one of us, is grace & truth and light & life!

Working on a national level in ministry I've found that there is a tension when between strategic activities, programs and projects on the one hand, and life-on-life relationships, community and personal service on the other. You find a good rhythm for a while and then you invariably get thrown off-kilter when some BIG THING happens in one or the other realm. Below are the sorts of things I have been up to in the past months in both realms.

- 1. Using national holidays and events in town to invite friends into Christian community.** (We hosted a picnic in the park on Romania's "Labor Day", May 1st with our Bucharest students and grads and their friends).
- 2. Preparing last year college students to make to transition into the work world** ("Christian Perspective of Work & Career", "What to expect in your 1st year out of university: Joys & Challenges", How to write a good CV and to prepare for a job interview", etc.)
- 3. Preparing, equipping and mobilizing grads in 7 cities to follow Christ at work.** (Being salt & light in the workplace, Loving your co-workers and boss, Ethics & integrity at work, Values conflicts at work, etc.)
- 4. Discipleship, Mentoring, Life & Career Counseling** with grads in București
- 5. Working, as a member of the national leadership team,** to keep OSCER aligned with and moving forward toward our vision - a national movement of authentic Christians with impact (for Christ and the Kingdom) in the university and society. Our national conference was November 6-9. The main theme was the Heart of God - for us, for others and our having His heart for others. I did a workshop for grads - Evangelism in the Workplace.
- 6. Honoring my parents**
From July 23 to October 23 I was in the States helping take care of my father at home. He died on September 30. He had planned out his whole funeral ahead of time and the piece he had asked the choir to sing was "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name." As classical church anthems go, it was magnificent. There is a nice version of it on You tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Lcc7y7AXUc>
- 7. Using Music Therapy expertise to contribute to social ministries.** Starting in January our Bucharest students will begin visiting monthly, the young children of one of the many orphanages in town. I'll be helping with music and training.

I haven't communicated anything here about the course ProImpact that I am revising and the 1st national grad conference we are planning for the next June. That's because I we'll be revving up with those things more after Christmas. Appreciate your interest and prayers for these two strategic projects!
That's all! Have a wonderful holiday season and a great new year!

Susan

LEARNING & ARRIVING: Learning to Pray
by Doug Rose

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." Luke 11:1

I have for about a year now been embarked upon a quest to learn how to pray. I have read dozens of sermons from collections by Charles Spurgeon and E. M. Bounds, I have studied Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, John Bunyan's *Praying in the Spirit and Throne of Grace*, C. S. Lewis's *Letters to Malcolm*, Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, and I have on my desk, reading table, and bed stand a stack of unread tomes of equal or surpassing weight (I wince at the length and tiny typeset of Matthew Henry's *A Method for Prayer*). My most recent literary endeavor, however, was found in Tim Keller's refreshing and brand new book, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*.

Keller startled me in the very first chapter by describing the very condition from which I am suffering. "In the second half of my adult life, I discovered prayer. I had to ... It became clear to me that I was barely scratching the surface of what the Bible commanded and promised regarding prayer."¹ Keller readily admits that at age 52, not much younger than the age of your correspondent, almost a dozen years after he started his work at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, he was met by "my own growing conviction that I just didn't *get* prayer ... As I looked around, I quickly came to see that I was not alone."²

Keller's book consists of fifteen chapters, organized into five parts styled "Desiring Prayer", "Understanding Prayer", "Learning Prayer", "Deepening Prayer", and "Doing Prayer." As with all of his writing, the text is approachable and written as a model of clarity, yet the 386 footnotes testify to the depth and breadth of research and analysis the author devotes to his literature. Keller explains the understanding and practice of Christian prayer as both a conversation and encounter with God, and concludes the book with a practical pattern of daily prayer, both morning and evening, consisting of approaching God, Bible reading, meditation on Scripture, and deliberately praying in the four traditional schools of prayer – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Keller also provides a concise but grandiose bibliography of both classic and modern literature on prayer.

My first prayer request is always, "Lord, teach me to pray," for I know all too well that "we do not know how to pray as we should". Ro. 8:26

¹Keller, Timothy, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, N.Y.: Dutton, 2014), p.9.

²*Id.*, p.10.

Soccer and Samba Pt. 3: 6 Weeks, 6 Cities, One Great Adventure

By Ian Bridgman

Many of you know that while the World Cup and short-term missions trip were the primary purposes for this summer's adventure in Brazil, I was also there to learn Portuguese and explore the country in search of a new place to settle for a time, teach English, and get involved in some sort of Christian ministry. Rio had proved to be the "Marvellous City" it claims to be, but I had to see if there was any other city that might capture my heart or where perhaps the Lord would make it clear that I was to return for a longer time. The World Cup and mission outreach in Sao Paulo were covered in my previous articles. In this one, I'll try to give a decent rundown of the remaining 6 weeks.

I was the last member of the mission team to leave Sao Paulo, and after spending a great evening with a professional soccer team at the invite of one of the members of our host church, I was on the bus for the midnight ride to the next major city to the south.

Curitiba

Curitiba, settled largely by German and Italian immigrants, had been recommended as a good possible place to live and teach English, with its low crime rate, orderly layout, and highly efficient public transport. I also needed a quiet place to hibernate and ride out the World Cup withdrawal along with the emotional low that tends to follow a great missions trip. The hostel I stayed in was mainly used by young Brazilians temporarily working or studying in the city, which made it a great place to relax, make new friends, and put in some quality Portuguese practice. Curitiba itself felt lacklustre compared to the bright lights and bustle of Rio and Sao Paulo, so it was hard to give it a fair trial. On top of that, the city is far south enough for the Brazilian winter to almost actually feel like winter, with temperatures at night hovering around freezing. After a week, I was ready to change places, but I was sorry to leave my new band of friends behind.

Foz do Igauçu

A one hour flight brought me to the small inland city on the border with both Paraguay and Argentina. Foreigners come to this place for just one thing: the awe inspiring Iguacu Falls, one of the 7 natural wonders of the world. My new hostel was entirely English speaking, and endearingly dilapidated so that it felt almost like camping while indoors. There was even a massive tree growing up through the living room floor and out the ceiling! Opportunities to teach English in the area are quite limited, so my 5 days there were more of an all-English-speaking nature vacation than anything else. The waterfalls were spectacular and a blazing sunset behind them brought cheers and applause from all the visitors to the park that afternoon. In the evenings, back at the hostel, most of the guests would huddle together in the living room wrapped in thick blankets to fend off the damp chill. After a few days of trading backpacker stories, swapping travel tips, and eating lots of pizza, it was time for us all to part ways.



Salvador

A full 8 hour day of air travel brought me north and across the country warmer temperatures but cloudy skies in the coastal city of Salvador. I came here with high hopes, as many people had said I would be a good fit given the city's outgoing and festive atmosphere. Salvador is also the center of Brazil's black population, the largest outside of Africa (United States is the second largest). What I found though, were herds of tourists crammed into a few well-preserved and heavily patrolled blocks filled with expensive restaurants and souvenir shops, and dire warnings against venturing into the dark and dingy streets that lay beyond. Panhandlers and petty thieves combed the busy cobblestone streets in the day time, and drug addicted children threatened passers-by in the deserted square at night. It's true, there were plenty of festivities, but despite the near constant companionship of other travellers and a few new Brazilian friends, I felt uneasy, lonely, and discontent. One of my mission teammates who came from the area confirmed my own feeling that this city was heavy with black magic. I looked forward to visiting a church that Sunday and picked my way through deserted streets after dark to arrive at the evening service of a large Presbyterian church. The

(Soccer and Samba continued)

service itself was nice, but the church itself was not particularly welcoming. I came and went without being able to meet anyone at all. After 8 days, Salvador had been a disappointment, and I was ready to discover a new city.

Fortaleza

Another 8 hours of air travel landed me much further up Brazil's coast, just a few degrees south of the equator. Fortaleza is the largest city in the rugged, lawless swath of desert that is north eastern Brazil. I took up the invite of a young American man and his Brazilian fiancée to help turn their newly purchased fixer-upper into a comfortable new backpacker's hostel. In return for a few hours of sanding, painting, and other grub work, they provided me with accommodation, and an authentic introduction to their city. The new house was not yet ready to be lived in, so we were all squeezed into the high-rise apartment that housed the couple along with the young Brazilians woman's entire family. Although it was tight quarters at times, the living situation gave me a close up view of their culture from inside a family home, complete with mandatory cooking lessons from the mom, who insisted that I not be useless in a Brazilian kitchen.

One disconcerting aspect of Fortaleza was the fear that many residents had after dark. Outside of a few select places, sidewalks are deserted after sunset, and most drivers avoid stopping at red lights out of fear of being sitting targets. Everyone had stories of being robbed at gunpoint, and vigilante style law enforcement appeared to be the norm.

Despite the risks, I found myself attracted to the city, with its long sandy beaches and a steamy, sunny climate almost every day. I also had the chance to meet two friendly groups of Christians, one of which was a Baptist church just walking distance from our apartment; the other, a new Calvary Chapel group that met on the beach on Sunday evenings. After plenty of beach soccer and a healthy overdose of water sports, it was time to leave, but I would have gladly stayed for a more extended time.

Rio de Janeiro

With one week left in Brazil, it was time to bring the trip full circle. My adventure would end where it began, in Rio. I returned to the same hillside favela I had stayed in previously, renting a room with the same host family. Any anxiety I felt about returning to this often unpredictable district on the city's edge melted upon arrival. Although much of the police presence had faded with the departure of the World Cup tourists, I still felt much more at ease here than almost anywhere else. My host family was gracious, even after I blew up part of the stove in their guest apartment. A



couple new friends showed me new parts of the neighbourhood that would have been no-go zones had I been by myself. More highlights included a mountain hike leading to an amazing view of the city, and seeing a swimmer successfully rescued by helicopter out of the high surf. I said goodbye to the favela with 2 days left and checked into a backpacker hostel closer to both the city center and the airport. One more night out with other travellers, one more sunrise over the beach, and it was time to pack up one last time and fly home.

Conclusion

Spending almost 3 months in Brazil was a long-time dream come true. Although only a small part of it was officially with a missions team, I have no doubt that God had me right where I was supposed to be each step of the way, and I am thankful for the many prayers that surrounded me during that time. I never experienced any Elijah-and-prophets-of-Baal style divine intervention, but I

know that the Lord was guiding my paths, even as I occasionally stumbled along the way. Brazil is an incredible country, and my time there confirmed my desire to return as an English teacher for a longer period of time. I would appreciate any prayers for wisdom and direction. God is doing great things in Brazil, and I consider it an amazing privilege and blessing to have been able to share in that experience.



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Congratulations!

Happy Anniversary to Peter and JoAnn Kulberg who celebrated **43** years of marriage on December 27th.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are welcome at the next monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship, **Saturday, January 17th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. There will be a time of study of Psalm 51 utilizing *Whiter Than Snow*, by Paul Tripp, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Light refreshments will be served.



Presentation: A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out

On **Sunday, January 18th, at 5:00 p.m.**, Michael Gant, a friend of Elder Bob Kirkman's, will share the story of the Immanuel School for the Deaf in Ringa, Kenya.

Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to take part in our monthly Prayer Gathering on **Sunday, January 25th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** Join us as we come before our Father's throne to praise Him, find grace and mercy, and seek His direction for our part in His Kingdom work.

"Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life;"
Jonathan Edwards

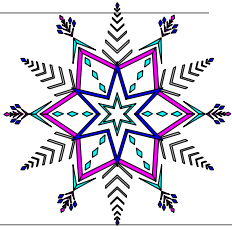


Spring Women's Retreats

- ♦ Mark your calendars for the annual one-day Faithlift, to be held this year on **Saturday, March 14th**, sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield. The speaker will be Judy Reamer. More details will be provided as they become available.
- ♦ Reserve **April 17-18, 2015** for the annual OPC Women's Retreat at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield. The keynote speaker will be Kathleen Curto. The topic is **Keeping the Heart**, based on the Puritan John Flavel's study of Proverbs 4:23: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."



Many women find these retreats edifying and a blessed time of fellowship with fellow sisters in Christ. Consider attending one or both as you are able!



January 2015

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
				1 Happy New Year!	2	3
4 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	5 7:00 Addictions Victorious	6 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	7	8	9	10
11 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	12 7:00 Addictions Victorious	13 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	14	15	16	17 7:00-8:30 a.m. Men's Prayer Fellowship
18 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 School for the Deaf Presentation	19 7:00 Addictions Victorious	20 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	21	22	23	24
25 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	26 7:00 Addictions Victorious	27 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	28	29	30	31 