

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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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



From the Pastor's Desk

The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple... Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

Our church's statement of faith begins with *"We believe that the Scriptures, contained in the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God, and that as such they are the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice for the individual believer and the church."* Our Conference's (CCCC) statement of faith says something quite similar; *"We believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament, to be the only inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God written."* The commitment to the Bible as the very Word of God is one of the hallmarks that has defined evangelicalism and has stood at the center of the Christian faith since its very beginning.

Now we recognize that the various books of the Bible, whether it be those that record the history of God's dealings with the Israelite people in the Old Testament, the sermonic utterances of the prophets, or the prayers and songs of the Psalter, came through the pens and minds of individual men. The same is true of the accounts of the Gospels and the Epistles in the New Testament. But we also believe that God so moved in the minds and hearts of these individual authors in such a way that the very words that were first written on paper were precisely what God wanted. Thus we can truthfully say that this is indeed Word of God. God wanted us to have his Word in written form. This is why, for example Jesus, in his high priestly prayer said, "Your Word is truth." (Jn. 17:17) This is no small thing. What this means is that the Bible is tremendously important for us as individual Christians and also for us as the church.

It is the Bible that leads us to Christ by displaying the gospel to us clearly and simply. Under the power of the Holy Spirit the words of Scripture bring us new life. The Bible has the power to have a transformative effect on our lives as nothing else, certainly more than any words we may speak. But it also has power to transform us as we grow in our faith. Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, *"All Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness... (2 Tim. 3:16)* and as we read in Hebrews the Scriptures are *"sharper than a two-edged sword ...discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

The Bible also sets the foundation for the church. The Bible defines what we believe (our doctrine), and how we function as the church. Yes, I know there may be different ways in which we interpret various passages in the Bible on lesser issues, but on the major issues, the Bible is really remarkable clear. The real difficulty comes when we seek to subject the authority of God's Word to human reason. Every time the church has done this throughout history it has run into trouble, whether in the days leading up to the Reformation, or within the past two and a half centuries. The church loses its moorings and descends into ecclesiastical and moral confusion. And when it does, the church loses its voice, the voice to provide real hope for broken and sinful people, and the voice to provide security for our communities and our culture.

The Law of the Lord really is perfect, reviving the soul. Let's hold firm to our sure foundation.



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner

Schmidt's Prayer Letter

Countdown



10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and we are off to our 9-month Home Assignment!

We are approaching blast off: the need to get all the to-do lists checked off, to get the Guest Home and ESF in order for others to take over, to prepare for meetings in Switzerland and USA, to start saying our good-byes...

10- enumerable lists of things to get done. **Pray that we will be efficient, prioritize well and not get overwhelmed** too often.

9- or more months until the new pastor for SIC comes. **Praise the Lord the pastor from Tokyo and his family has answered the call to come minister at our church.** Because of his children's schooling they are not able to come right away.

8 plus pages in the Guest Home Manual that are getting revised by our Serve Asia short-term worker to leave things organized. And as usual, the Guest Home continues to be busy.

7- There are **many Dr.'s/Dentist/Eye Dr. appointments** to go to before we leave. We want to use the Japanese Health Insurance while we can. Please pray for us to stay in good health.

6- weeks until **we leave on March 22, to Switzerland!** We will be there 4 months before heading to America.

5- Represents a random number of friends we still want to have over for dinner before we go.

4- Pray for our children as Rebekah and Kevin settle in Vegas. **Kevin is applying for his Green Card**, and his visa will run out in April. **Dieter's re-entry visa to the US will also run out** and needs to be renewed. Hannah and Andrea need prayer for decisions concerning their future.

3- We really **need a leadership team for ESF in place** to work with the Internationals. Please pray for some to be willing to commit to the extra time and organization it needs. We are thankful that a missionary from SIC, Estelle, will take over organizing the monthly English Worship Service while we are gone! We are so glad that Hannah is part of it as the worship leader.

2- Family reunions: In Switzerland the **Schmidt Family meets May 15**, Dieter's Dad's 88th Birthday. **The Soules Family meets July 14-18 in Atlanta** (after 10 years). We are hoping all family members can be there, although our Hannah probably cannot make it. Dieter's parents moved just into a nursing home.

1- **Thank the Lord for the couple from Canada, Reg and Mary Shum, who will come fill-in for us for 9 months!** Praise the Lord their visas came through! Pray we have a significant handover time with them.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Ps. 90:12

Thankful for you being part of our "launch crew"!

Off to Jail. Again.

by Ian Bridgman

I like going to jail. I like telling people that I go to jail. Especially girls, ones who know me a little but still not that well. On the 2014 World Cup missions outreach in Brazil, there was a med student from Malaysia. Over the two weeks of outreach, she and I became friends, more or less, and have traded Facebook messages periodically ever since. One Sunday a few months ago, after spending the afternoon with the incarcerated men, I casually told her that I had just gotten out of jail. Imagine her surprise. Her response was fairly typical. It usually looks like “WHAT?” or “WHY??” or “IS THERE SOMETHING YOU NEED TO TELL ME???” Then, of course, I have to tell them my real reason for being there, and they are generally greatly relieved.

It occurred to me that I am the third generation of my family to participate in and lead the Sunday services at the Berkshire County Jail and House of Corrections. My grandfather on my Mom’s side went in regularly while he served as an elder at Grace Church, and my Dad has been going in now for almost 20 years.

I can remember my first time, about 10 years ago. How nervous I felt following my Dad past the series of heavy metal doors that slide shut with a bang, down the corridor, past central command, and finally into the chapel room. I was proud of my Dad as I watched him interact with the men in their orange and blue jumpsuits, making small talk, learning their names, fielding their questions, and delivering a message. A couple years later, the nerves returned in full force when it was finally my turn to address the men. My stomach was in knots; my muscles were tense. What would I say? What message could I bring that would be both Biblical and relevant to these kinds of men? How would they respond? When it was finally all over and my captive audience broke out in a round of applause, I almost melted in relief.

The experience is different now. I’ve given many messages and have gone in on my own several times. I still get nervous and uptight, but thankfully, I’m nowhere near the nervous wreck I was on that first day. If I’m going to be honest, I must say I don’t necessarily look forward to going into the jail. The last Sunday of each month approaches and I am reminded that I need come up with a message. It takes time. It takes effort. Saturday evening arrives, and I still only have a foggy idea, nothing on paper. Then, all of a sudden, I think of everything that I’ve wanted to do all week that I haven’t gotten around to doing. And all those things are more appealing than sitting down with a notepad and thinking hard about a scripture passage and how to make it into a message that the men in jail can relate to. It takes prayer too, lots of it. Then it’s Sunday. I was up too late the night before. Up too early in the morning. Church. I’m tired. The sun is shining; do I really want to spend all afternoon in a windowless jail? I’d rather be on my bicycle, or on the slackline, or kicking a soccer ball, or sleeping. Wow, I can’t wait for this to be over, then I can have another cycle of 3 or 4 free Sundays. But it’s time to go. ID check, then past the same heavy metal doors, the corridor, central command, into the chapel room. The men start to file in for the first service. They are not yet sentenced. Orange jumpsuits. Some swagger in with big smiles and shake my hand. They tell me they are happy to see me, and ask about my most recent trips. Others shuffle in, expressionless, and plop down in the back. One last silent prayer, usually something like, “Dear God, I have no idea how I’m going to do this, please help.” Then it’s go time.

I can't count how many times I have gone in feeling overtired and underprepared. And yet something changes with that last prayer. My heart is beating faster, I'm not sleepy anymore. We're reading the scripture passage and the men are engaged with the message. The night before, I was looking at my notes thinking, "How will I possibly get a full-length message out of this?" Now I'm eyeing the clock thinking, "I wish I had more time!" What before was only raw commitment is now enthusiasm and joy. This is God's Word. We are sharing the Gospel. Then it's all over. Sometimes they have questions or prayer requests. We close in prayer and the guards come and take the men back to their pods. I'm energetic now, almost wound up even. The process repeats, but this time with men who have been already sentenced. Blue jumpsuits. At the end, I find myself wishing we could have gone longer. Or that I could come back next week. Or that I could do a series of messages! Every time, before I go in, I wish I didn't have to go. Every time afterwards, I can't think of anything else I would have rather done.

There are other questions to be asked. What am I doing this for? Is it really for the sake of the Gospel or do I just like the attention and affirmation? Am I truly invested in these men or am I just using this to sharpen my public speaking skills for a more profitable opportunity later? And the original question never goes away. What can I say that will be both Biblical and beneficial?

It is helpful to remember that all of the men who attend the Sunday services are there because they want to be. They could be watching football, working out, or doing whatever, but God has put in their hearts a desire to hear His Word opened before them. It is also helpful to remember that God loves these men, and He will see Himself glorified, and make Himself known to these men accordingly. He will not bring them to chapel just to waste their time, even when the one giving the message is feeling desperately unenthusiased or unprepared. It is equally important to remember that the only significant difference between me and the men in orange and blue is my relationship with Jesus Christ.

I'm thankful for my grandfather and others at Grace Church who have been a part of the jail ministry in the past. I'm thankful for those who have joined us in the present, like Bob Kirkman, Dave Fairfield, and Paul Denzel, whose faithful participation and enthusiasm is always an encouragement. I would encourage anyone interested to go ahead and take the required orientation and join us some Sunday. You won't have to give the message the first time. You are welcome to just meet the men, observe, and support with prayer. We had good numbers today, the room was pretty packed, but I'm sure we can find room for one more.

God loves the men in the jail. They are real people with real lives. They need the Good News of the Gospel. It is my privilege to share the Gospel with them. I never want to go in, yet once I'm there, there is no place I'd rather be. I love sharing the Gospel. I like going to jail.

Written November 29, 2015

LEARNING & ARRIVING: GOD IS GOOD, ALL THE TIME!

Doug Rose

*O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

I Chron. 16:34

... and when they praised the Lord saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud ...

2 Chron. 5:13b

... and they worshiped and gave praise to the Lord, saying, "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."

2 Chron. 7:3b

*For the Lord is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.*

Ps. 100:5

*Praise the Lord!
Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Ps. 106:1

*Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Ps. 107:1

*For His lovingkindness is great toward us,
And the truth of the Lord is everlasting.
Praise the Lord!*

Ps. 117:2

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Ps. 118:1

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Ps. 118:29

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Ps. 136:1

They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever."

Ezra 3:11a

*... the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride,
the voice of those who say,
"Give thanks to the Lord of hosts,
For the Lord is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting" ...*

Jer. 33:11a



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Daylight Savings

Daylight savings time begins **March 13th**, so be sure to set your clock ahead one hour on Saturday night, March 12th!



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are welcome at the Men's Prayer Fellowship. This month the men will meet **Saturday, March 19th**, 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.



Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to take part in our monthly Prayer Gathering on **Sunday, March 20th** 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*

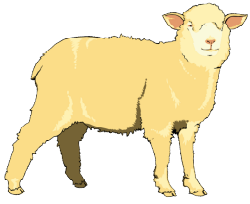
Maundy Thursday Dinner and Communion

Mark your calendars for our Maundy Thursday potluck and communion service on **Thursday, March 24th**. The potluck **dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.** followed by the **communion service at 7:00**. Beverage and dessert will be provided. Please bring a dish to share.

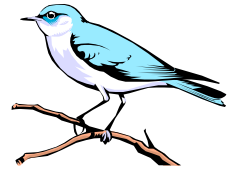


LOOKING AHEAD

- ◆ The February Women's Fellowship will gather on **Saturday, April 2nd, from 9:30-11 a.m.** at the church. Join us for a fruitful time of looking into Gods' Word as we consider the power of words. Yummy refreshments will be served.
- ◆ Reserve Friday and Saturday, **April 15-16, 2016** for the annual OPC Women's Retreat at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield. Theme is "**Women of the Light**" and the keynote speaker is Jean Gaffiin. For more information and registration forms see Charleen Bridgman.



March 2016



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