

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Welcome to the October edition of *Grace Notes*. Please send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to secretary@gracecongregational.org.





From the Pastor's Desk

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it." (Nehemiah 2:5)

I am excited to see our Ladies Bible Class beginning a new study on the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the first book I preached through as a series at Grace Church in 1995. It is the historical account of Nehemiah's vision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar over seventy years earlier during the period of the exile.

Every church needs a vision. A vision is the picture the congregation has as they think about both the present and the future. It is built upon a sense of shared identity, and gives a church focus as to priorities. But isn't it presumptuous to think that we should cast a vision instead of just going with God's flow?

It would be easy to equate Nehemiah's vision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with something as simple as a church building project. But was God, or for that matter Nehemiah, concerned only about bricks and mortar? Seems to me that misses God's larger purpose for Jerusalem and the history of Israel.

Centuries later, Jesus, after Peter's profession that Jesus was the Messiah, declared to his disciples that he would build his church upon the rock of that confession.

We have a phrase on our weekly bulletin: *Bearing witness to Christ with integrity and compassion*. While that phrase does not spell out all the details of our church's operations, it does paint a picture of who we are and how we hope to be seen. The three main functions of any church should be worship, nurture and evangelism. The question is, how are these three things characterized by the words, "bearing witness to Christ with integrity and compassion"?

Worship by its very nature is meant to be directed to God. For us to make it about "me", compromises its integrity, yet how often we are prone to do that very thing when either the mechanics or style become our primary focus. The object of worship must always be God. The Bible defines the content of acceptable worship, and as such, the cross of Christ must always take center stage, because it is only through Christ that we have access to a holy God. And true worship must be offered from a sincere heart.

Nurture is really another word for "discipleship". Discipleship means simply being followers of Jesus. Our calling as Christians is to follow Jesus, and our calling as a church is to help others follow Jesus. How can we do that? Well, Sunday school for starters, but Sunday school is only the tip of the iceberg. How about corporate prayer? How about small group Bible study? How about fellowship? What we're talking about here is not just programs and mechanics, but relationship. It means sacrificial investment in each other's lives. And that means setting an ethos that is reflected in that investment in each other's welfare.

Evangelism means sharing the gospel. "Gospel" is the English translation of the Greek word *euangellion*, from which we get "evangelism". Gospel means "good news". We have good news to share with the rest of the world. Do we really believe we have good news to share or are we embarrassed and so keep it to ourselves? Perhaps it's really a matter of faith.

Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was merely a means to an end – God's glory and the welfare of his people. Jesus summarized the law by saying that we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It seems to me that this pretty much defines "bearing witness with integrity and compassion. Is this our vision?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



The Schmidts' News September/October newsletter

"Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal." Isaiah 26:4

On September 10, the church rejoiced when Miss Aya and Miss Yumiko stepped out on the Rock, confessed Jesus and got baptized! Aya has been part of our group of internationals for seven years, and her school friend, Yumiko had also started coming to church. They both have lived overseas and speak English. As they took this important public step it does come with consequences. For one, tensions can rise in their non-Christian families. **Pray for these two as they learn to be bold for Jesus in a non-believing world.**

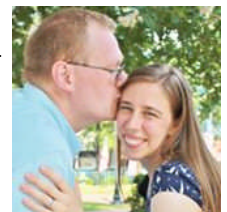
In ESF we now have seven kids from 1-9 years old in one little room while the English Speakers' Fellowship meets for singing and Bible study in the room next door. Lately, Shelley has been staying in the kids' room with the noisy bunch, and is now starting a miniSunday School time with them, besides engaging them in play. This gives the parents the chance to join in a needed time of studying. Please **pray for wisdom** how to develop this and how to train others to help too. Shelley also wants to start a parenting course in October. **Pray for energy, organization and scheduling** of this class and that it will be helpful.

Sapporo International Church News: Retreat in July was an amazing time of bringing the different language groups together! The new pastor Ikeda taught on church unity and we see some strengthened bonds. **Pray on**, especially for more Japanese believers. The baptisms have been a great encouragement to all!

One of our co-workers, Michelle, (Korean lady from L.A.) has been diagnosed with a type of colon cancer. She had just started up Japanese Sunday School again, and now that must be put on hold. **Pray for healing and pray for others to step into the gap** as we trust the Lord for the way forward.

Sapporo Guest Home etc.: The Guest Home continues to be fully occupied. Please **pray for the Eusey family**, who have come back from Home Assignment and are looking for a house in their target area. It is not easy for foreigners nor with the label Christian to rent housing. **Pray for God to lead them to the place He has prepared for them.**

Family News: We are happy to announce Andrea's engagement to Travis Gassmann. We had a chance to meet this godly man on Home Assignment. The wedding is set for November 19, right before Thanksgiving. We, with Hannah, will be travelling to Atlanta for the celebration. Rebekah and Kevin will also be coming and Dieter can finally meet his granddaughter! Shelley will hopefully get to see all her siblings as well.



Pray also for: Fall Outreach Concert with a Saxophone team from the USA, Oct.20 • Preparation for the International Welcome Dinner Oct.29 following the English Service • For God to call 200 new OMF members to the Japan field by the year 2020.

Thank you so much for standing with us on the Rock,
Dieter and Shelley

You Have the Words of Life

"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you,

Autumn has begun and with it new opportunities to study and teach the Word of God. You might be finding it hard to slow down and lay your heart open to the Scriptures right now for many reasons. Whether it's a busy schedule, doubt that the Word has answers for your situation or simply a numb indifference that has settled around you like a fog. Take heart, these struggles are not unique to you; they are part of our life as believers. God's Word is called the 'sword of the Spirit' because we will encounter resistance from the flesh, the world and the devil and especially when we endeavor to take up and use this weapon. Moses' words are filled with just as much pastoral love and warning for us as they were for those he was saying goodbye to: *"Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today...even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed, it is your life"* (Deut. 32:46). Some of us will walk for miles, straight into the headwinds to learn this truth. *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."* (Jn. 6)

Read through John 6 - picture the crowds, people running, the loud, angry voices. There is Jesus in the middle of it all, teaching with passion and authority that He is the living Bread and unless they ate His flesh they would have no life. These were hard words for the people and many disciples turned away from Him. Picture yourself as one of the twelve; watching, listening, weighing...wrestling with all of it. In that electric moment Jesus turns your way and asks, "Do you want to go away as well?" Peter answered with a defining confession: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."* This is the place God will always be bringing our hearts back to as students and teachers alike. By His Spirit and through His Word we have received eternal life and believed. Amazingly, in this new birth, *we have come to know* God. Peter has left us a description of a life that knows no other place to go, except after Jesus - *"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory"* (1Peter 1:8)

And yet, with that wonderful verse, I admit it's baffling to discover when I'm doubting in the valleys and thirsting in the desert, I can slowly become accustomed to an irritable and dehydrated existence! That is why it is a blessing that we do not travel alone. God has designed that we be a part of a local community of believers, a church. How apt then, is the counsel in Hebrews 3, *"See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."* Calvin wrote:

"For as by nature we are inclined to evil, we have need of various helps to retain us in the fear of God. Unless our faith be now and then raised up, it will lie prostrate; unless it be warmed, it will be frozen; unless it be roused, it will grow torpid. He would have us then to stimulate one another by mutual exhortations, so that Satan may not creep into our hearts, and by his fallacies draw us away from God. And this is a way of speaking that ought to be especially observed; for we fall not immediately by the first assault into this madness of striving against God; but Satan by degrees accosts us artfully by indirect means, until he holds us ensnared in his delusions."

In that light, I would read the passage in chapter 10 with more urgency than usual - *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."* There is no way around it...we need each other!

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When I was fourteen, God, by His Spirit graciously gave me new life. Jesus made Himself known to me as Savior and Lord. I went to the Bible with a new expectation, that I would find Him there as He promised. Do you expect to meet Jesus there? I can tell you He has been true to His word! There have been seasons of silence, but there too, God has been faithful - *“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him.”* (Lam. 3:25). This ‘Christ’ life within me has become a magnet, drawing, always drawing me toward that life of Christ in others. Christ has broken the barriers of age, status, race and preference. The topic of conversation is no longer ‘who I am’ but who *we are* in Christ; the people, the priesthood, the temple He is making us into! Christ in you, Christ in me the hope of glory! We experience this reality in worshipping together. I would also testify that we experience this truth in a unique way when we gather to explore Scripture together.

Even as a teacher, I need to often consider the priority of God’s Word in my life. Not what I believe about God’s Word, but how that belief is working in my everyday existence. I have read and listened to many great teachers and preachers. Calvin, Owen, Spurgeon and a host of others, those long dead and those still living... their ministry in my life is incalculable! But I’m learning when I gather, with even one other, to seek God in His Word, I find a multiplying grace at work: diversity of questions, insights, experience and yet one holy Word, one holy Truth, one Triune God. The time I spent in the letter to the Romans with a dying friend and studies in Exodus with a child are precious to me beyond compare. How rich my life in Christ becomes, opening Scripture face to face! I urge you to reflect on the place God’s Word has in your everyday – you have within your reach the Words of life. Feel and recognize the pull of the ‘magnetic’ life of Christ within your heart and dare to engage in God’s Word with your church family. You will not be disappointed.

“Your words were found and I ate them,

And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart...”

Jeremiah 15:16

Cheryl Lanoue



Love One Another

As the weather gets cooler, lets make opportunities for warm fellowship. Consider getting together for tea, coffee, or hot chocolate. Look around and see who could use a card or a phone call. Consider sharing what God is doing in your life ,sharing His Word with one another, or memorizing Scripture together.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another... (Hebrews 10:24,25)



IT'S TIME FOR OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD!



Would you like to bring the hope of the Gospel to children and families around the world in the form of a simple gift?

Then get packing!



-Pack a shoebox by yourself or with a friend. (Decorative boxes are available at the church.) Decide on a gender and age and fill a box with toys, school supplies, toiletries, and other things a child would love.

OR

-Purchase individual items that can go into a box and bring them to the church.

(For these options, please consult the list of gift suggestions and items to avoid. Guidelines are available at www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/)

-If you can't get out to shop you can **build a box online** at: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/buildonline/>

National Collection Week, is November 13-20.

People from around the county will be bringing over a thousand shoeboxes to our church!

Our ministry as a Drop-Off Location is a team effort.

That means we need you on the team to:

- ⇒ Greet those who come through our doors and help carry in their donated boxes
- ⇒ Bake cookies to offer our guests
- ⇒ Keep accurate records of the number of boxes brought in each day, and from whom
- ⇒ Pack the shoeboxes into cartons that will be transported to the Central Drop Off in Northampton
- ⇒ Load a truck with the boxes on the final day of National Collection week
- ⇒ Drive the truck to College Church in Northampton

To sign up and to get more information, please speak to Charleen Bridgman, Drop Off Location Team Leader, at 499-3040, or send an email to secretary@gracecongregational.org

After receiving a shoebox, children have the opportunity to take part in **The Greatest Journey**, a 12-lesson discipleship and evangelism program. Upon completion of the program, graduates receive their own copy of a New Testament in their own language. Operation Christmas Child now reaches over 11 million children a year and is used by God to transform individual children, families and whole communities with the Good News of the Gospel.

What goes into the box is fun.

What comes out is eternal!



White Hoods, Black Bandannas, and the Church

Ian Bridgman

There's been a whole lot about "free speech" in the news lately. So much so that I hesitated to even write this article for fear of further saturating the airwaves. I felt like the subject was all but passé, and that it was probably time to move on to bigger, but not necessarily better things. Then the circus came to Charlottesville, VA and the show went off the rails. One person died. What a mess.

Somehow, all of this supposedly was to defend free speech, and maybe a statue or two. At first, I really didn't think too much of it, apart from the girl who was killed. I had in mind the usual scene: a miniscule group of attention-seeking people in white hoods or a few cave dwellers emerging onto the steps of some city hall to briefly holler into megaphones before getting shouted down and possibly beat up by a much larger group of protesters. Happens on the regular, makes page 2 of the newspaper, maybe, then it's on to things of more importance, like the sports section. Maybe, I thought, it was just a group of nostalgic southerners trying to prop up an embellished and partly fanciful version of confederate heritage. But this time was different. Hordes of swastika waving white nationalists going toe to toe with a brigade of black bandannas was not just another bemusing spectacle. Just ask the parents of the girl that was mowed down by that car. I guess I never expected, in 2017, to see the ideological descendants of those who made book burning famous clamoring for "free speech" just an hour from where I went to college. Creepy.

Creepier still is the growing association of America's premier constitutional right with the image of white men screaming racial slurs, and their black-clad opponents. Mention the first amendment to a random college student, and I'll bet you the first image in their head is now smoke bombs and fistfights, white hoods and black bandannas. Whether this association exists by accident or by conspiratorial design, we have a huge problem.

Even more creepy is a knee-jerk tendency from many, including some in the church, to somehow sympathize with these groups. Considering where our society is at right now, it's almost hard not to. We're all tired of seeing speakers shouted down, of spoiled college students squealing out their demands, and of constantly being told what we can and can't say to keep someone else from throwing a fit or launching a lawsuit. Besides, although the constant news coverage is more recent, Christianity has been being squeezed from the American public square for years. Maybe it is time to give these people a taste of their own medicine, and break a jaw or two. Somebody has to stand for free speech, even if they do have a dubious dark side. The saying is true. Common enemies can make for bizarre bedfellows.

As far as I know, the Bible never mentions constitutional rights, or free speech. It does, however, have a lot to say about wise speech. And wise speech can take many forms depending on the context. There is a time to shout (Joshua), a time to speak out boldly (Acts), a time to use words with restraint (Proverbs 17) and privately explain things in detail (Acts 18), and a time for the wise person to keep silent (Amos 5). The wise man in Proverbs is repeatedly marked by gentleness and discretion, in sharp contrast to the loose lips and loud mouth of the fool. Perhaps the verse that comes first to my own mind is the familiar command in 1 Peter 3 to "always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect".

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Less well known, however, is the sentence that comes right before it, “But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord.” Giving an answer to those who ask depends on having Christ as Lord in our hearts. What comes out of our mouths, whether our speech is wise or foolish, is a reflection of who rules our hearts, and when Christ does not dictate, culture will, in one of two ways.* One is that we get blown whichever way the wind is blowing. Love first, judge never, offend no one. We may not be ready to fly rainbow flags in our sanctuary, but what about young Christians living together before marriage? Really? Don’t we have bigger fish to fry? And what about the sanctity of life? Isn’t that fight getting old? Anything to not be associated with that overweight aging hick from the sticks squawking about traditional values, whatever those are supposed to be. Segregated water fountains perhaps? Who knows. Times are changing, and the church needs to get with it. Besides, the cooler and less offensive the Gospel sounds to people, the faster it will spread, right? Being cool, at least within our own social circle, is important. Let’s not pretend otherwise. And being a sexually prude, submissive slave to an oppressively racist, hetero-normative and patriarchal society is definitely not cool.

The flipside is the reactionary response, where culture continues to dictate, but in reverse. In this scenario, we dig in our heels and take culture head on, even when, by God’s grace, culture gets it right. Judge first, love those who look and sound like us, offend everybody else, just because we can. Social justice and racial reconciliation? Better not touch that one, that’s liberal church territory. Women serving in the church? Whoa now, that’s a slippery slope to radical feminism. The homeless? The sojourner within our gates? Widows and orphans (and single moms) in their distress? I mean, the Bible mentions that but . . . don’t they have government programs for that? Why couldn’t those people just follow the rules? What are we here for, to subsidize poor choices by irresponsible people? We can’t afford to get our hands dirty, we have an image to protect.

One thing to remember: The Gospel will never, ever, be cool. It will always be offensive. The King of Glory didn’t willingly give up His cool card and utterly humiliate himself to rescue good, decent and dignified people. The Gospel is good news to filthy slobs wallowing helplessly in a sea of irresponsible and rebellious choices. Free speech is a blessing to be protected. Our persecuted brothers and sisters know the alternative. But what will we do with our privilege? God doesn’t need constitutional rights to advance his kingdom, and the church certainly doesn’t need neo-Nazis to defend its cause in the streets. The world needs us to boldly proclaim the Good News, not taking a verbal blowtorch to melt “snowflakes”. So may the church boldly proclaim Christ, not culture. May we speak freely, but wisely. May we live out the Gospel faithfully, and always do so with gentleness and respect.

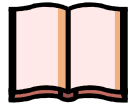
**The idea of culture dictating to the church in two ways was shamelessly swiped from my dad, whom I have heard speak on this topic more than once.*



Grace Church News

Ladies' Bible Class

The **Tuesday afternoon** Ladies' Bible Class resumed on **October 3rd**. The class is held **weekly** at the church from **1:15-2:45 p.m.** This semester the class is using as its study book *Memoirs of the Way Home, Ezra and Nehemiah as a Call to Conversion*, by Gerald M. Bilkes. All women are welcome to be a part of the study.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship **Saturday, October 21st, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Enjoy a time of Bible study (*Unlimited Grace* by Bryan Chappel), discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Breakfast will be served.



Women's Fellowship

This fall, the Women's Fellowship resumes with a study of I Peter on the **first Saturday of each month from 9:30-11 a.m.** Women of all ages are invited to come share in the richness of fellowship in Christ in study, discussion, prayer and fellowship. The next meeting will be **Saturday, November 4th**.

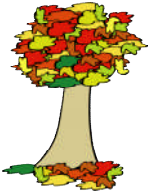


"Live Goals" Prayer

Our monthly time of corporate has been moved to the **first Sunday of each month, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** in the sanctuary. All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek to know Him and His direction for our part in His kingdom work. Our next gathering will be **Sunday, November 5th**.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. - [1 John 5:14](#)





October 2017



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

1 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 pm Live Coals Prayer	2 7:00 Addictions Victorious	3 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	4	5	6 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	7 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship
8 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	9 7:00 Addictions Victorious	10 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	11	12	12 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	14
15 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	16 7:00 Addictions Victorious	17 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	18	19	20 6:30 Young Adult Bible Study	21 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
22 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	23 7:00 Addictions Victorious	24 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	25	26	27	28
29 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 2:00 pm Jail Ministry	30 7:00 Addictions Victorious	31 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class				