



# Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational  
1055 Williams Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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*Happy Thanksgiving*

*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. . Psalm 136*





## From the Pastor's Desk

*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22)*

Quite a number of years ago, I was attending a denominational meeting in Minnesota, when during one of our discussions a friend and fellow pastor said we must move beyond protecting our theology and get on with the mission of the church. I took public issue with his statement for fear that we would progress down the same road toward a less than biblical theology that many other churches and denominations have done before us. I and several others there had previously served in churches where this had been the case; churches where there was little appreciation for the Bible as the Word of God and little commitment to Christ or the gospel. Yet over the past twelve or fifteen years since that meeting I have found myself reflecting on that conversation and have come to the conclusion that protecting our theology and getting on with the mission are not mutually exclusive.

At first glance it might seem that the Apostle Paul had jettisoned his core theology and adopted a pragmatic approach to evangelism. (Pragmatism is the notion that whatever works is true.) But when we evaluate what Paul writes in I Corinthians against what he writes elsewhere in the rest of his epistles, not to mention in other parts of this same letter, we realize this is not the case at all. For Paul, without his core theology we have no impetus for mission. It is the gospel that provides the motive for our mission and the Bible that provides the definition of the mission of the church.

So what is the real issue at stake? I think in the long run it has to do with how much we really trust God, and this can cut both ways.

Every time the church has moved toward liberalism, it is due to an underlying mistrust of the veracity and authority of the Bible as the Word of God. By making the harder teachings of the Bible more palatable we assume we can be more effective at accomplishing God's work. For example, we might assign miracles to the category of myth because modern people might find it unreasonable to believe such a thing, or perhaps we avoid talking about sin because others might find such talk offensive. After all, we reason, people will be more attracted to a positive message of a God who wants to affirm us than to a God who has chosen to save us from our sin through the death of his Son. If such a message draws a crowd, then it must be true (i.e. pragmatism). I'm convinced that the real danger for the church always comes from within, and it begins with the notion that human ingenuity is more valuable than divine revelation, because we believe we can do it better.

So what is the problem on the flip side? I think it has to do with defining the mission of the church by what is familiar to us culturally. Numerous times in the Bible we see God challenging his people to lengthen their tent pegs. All we have to do is think about Jonah's call to go to Nineveh, or Peter's visions leading up to the conversion of Cornelius. Make no bones about it, these were calls to reach beyond their own comfort zones. One of the things I appreciate about our conference is that we now have two congregations in the CCCC that are made up almost entirely of immigrants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (in Maine of all places!), and another Somali church plant in Minnesota. Of course, we are familiar with Bob Hall's work in the Bronx. What do we do with the alien at our gates? Or, for that matter, those asking for asylum from Honduras or Syria? Cultural self-protection is not our calling. Making disciples of all nations is. It might be helpful to remember that were it not for the faithfulness of the early Christians to the Great Commission, the American church would not be here at all, nor, I would dare say, America itself.

Several times I have made reference to Dick Keyes' book, *Chameleon Christianity*. In it he talks about Jesus' call for us to be "salt" and "light". The dual dangers we face are accommodation (losing our saltiness), and self-protection (hiding our light under a basket). Both are motivated by the fear of engaging those outside the gospel. I don't believe Paul was guilty of either. How about us?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



# Missions Corner

Schmidt News-excerpts from October 2018 newsletter



*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

*Matthew 11:28+29*

**Is there an angry GIANT shaking our 3rd floor apartment?!** That is how it felt as a huge earthquake shocked us out of our sleep at 3:08 a.m., on September 6th. (One of the worst typhoons woke us up the night before!) The earthquake had the strength of a 6.7 on the Japan scale of 7. Hannah was in her 8th floor apartment and was able to grab her phone and sit down in the entrance before it started shaking too badly, despite her bad knee! We were all very frightened, having never experienced anything like this before. Soon after, the electricity went out completely. Still shell-shocked, we scrambled to find flashlights and checked on our guests and the house. Some dishes, glasses and some of our special mugs broke. Bookshelves toppled; CD player, speakers, a TV, plants, framed photos, and knickknacks all fell.

**But thank the Lord we were all kept safe!** Communicating with our OMF leader was next, thanks to still functioning cell phones, before we drove to pick up Hannah to come and stay with us. The power outage affected the whole of Hokkaido, so there were no traffic lights working and of course, Hannah’s elevator was out too. She had to walk down 98 stairs with her crutches- and her Dad by her side! We saw God’s provision in many ways: Hannah had a portable modem that helped with communication with OMF workers and our international students, and we had plenty of food and water. In one OMF couple’s apartment (10th floor) everything fell down, so they joined us at the Guest home for a couple of nights. All our guests joined us for an adventurous “candlelight” dinner Thursday evening. We were thankful the electricity came back later that night. Many people were without gas, water or electricity for many days. We all were shaken up, but God is our refuge.

**English Speakers’ Fellowship:** Different groups make lunch for the church each Sunday. Our ESF group made “Taco Rice” for 70 people lately and everyone loved it! The International Welcome Party on October 28 after the worship service was attended by almost 50 people. Please pray that more internationals will join this group of believers.

**New workers:** An Australian couple is considering joining us from April 2019 on. Please pray for details to fall into place.

**Family News:** *Hannah* has been diligently going to Physical Therapy 3x/wk. and this week she hit a milestone! She is able to ride bikes again, though slowly and carefully! She still experiences pain, and all the stairs at her work prove to be a challenge! Please keep praying for complete healing and mobility. This month she will also start playing piano for church again.

**Shelley’s teaching:** It has taken some weeks, but now Shelley is getting more used to the schedule of teaching three Kindergarten classes in a row, twice a month, all different levels. Simplifying the Bible story is the biggest challenge. May the influence of Christ be seeds in their little hearts for the Gospel to take root.

Thank you for your prayers for Japan and us!

*Dieter & Shelley*

## *More than Tacos*

*by Ian Bridgman*

Shortly before my first trip to Finland I stumbled across a cartoon. The drawing was of several faces, each labeled with a different emotion, such as Happy, Sad, Angry, Excited, etc. It was supposed to show the variety of Finnish facial expressions and emotions. The joke was that every face was exactly the same—neutral, showing no emotion at all.

Soon after, I was in Finland, along with my parents, for Octavio's wedding. As many of you know, Octavio, my best friend, is married to a Finnish woman. As my Dad walked everyone through the rehearsal, he mentioned that people would probably clap at the conclusion of the ceremony, when the couple is finally announced as husband and wife. Mari, the bride-to-be, started to laugh.

"No, they won't clap," she said. "They are Finns!" We were told not to be dismayed, however. The guests would certainly be "smiling on the inside." It's true, Finns are not known for open displays of emotion.

Fast forward almost 3 years. After spending close to 8 months of that time in Finland, I was accustomed to the Finnish face, Octavio even more so, and that is why our encounter with the "Waffle Man" was so surprising. The Waffle Man, as he was affectionately called, was the closest and friendliest of our neighbors among the food vendors in the city square. This was not our home city of Kajaani, but a larger city to the south, where we had repeatedly set up shop on the weekends, bringing traditional Mexican food to central Finland. Together, along with the "Thai Girls" and the "Burger Boys", we had formed a sort of culinary cartel, often swapping tacos for waffles, or quesadillas for pad Thai. Over the past month, we had shared plenty of good food and good times, but especially so with the energetic, white haired purveyor of Belgian sweets. We learned about his years spent in the mining towns of northern Minnesota and his failed first marriage. He told us how he found it hard to trust outsiders after watching his eastern European wife run away with their son to her native country, and of how he brought his son back to Finland in similar fashion. He mentioned often how much he enjoyed having us as neighbors, and how sorry he would be to see us go at the end of the season. In fact, he told us so many times that we began to doubt his sincerity.

Our last day came eventually, in the last week of August. Octavio and I had finished a long 5-day "weekend" in the city center, our last time working together for the summer before Octavio returned to Kajaani and I left for good. It was getting late as we hitched our trailer to the car and turned around for a final goodbye. And there was the Waffle Man, standing beside his own truck, the last vendor in a now deserted city square, just looking at his feet. When he looked up, his eyes became watery and his face contorted as he tried to play a proper Finn and keep his emotions in check. He hadn't been insincere after all. After a final round of farewells, back in the car, Octavio and I processed what we had just seen. This was Finland, after all, and neither of us had seen that coming.

*continued on next page*

*More than Tacos continued*

I'm convinced that just as individual people have strengths and weaknesses, so do entire cultures. The Finnish people have produced a remarkable society that is prosperous and peaceful, organized and modern. Their government is probably one of the least corrupt on earth. It is a place where parents leave their infants outside and unattended at naptime and where young women can walk down a dark alley at night with nothing to fear. Yet over the 3 months I spent at the window of our little trailer, it seemed that despite these blessings, something was off. Many of our customers lived comfortable, physically stable lives, but they often seemed so lonely. The Finns may be good at many things, but I had to wonder if they were bad at relationships. The evidence was everywhere. What does it look like? It looks like the curiously high number of Finnish men in modern-day mail order marriages to women from Thailand. It looks like all the neglected spouses and cynical exes that shamelessly vented at our window. It looks like some of our young customers, drifting in and out of alternate sexual lifestyles desperately looking for connection only to return unhappy and even more confused. The evidence was at the karaoke bar, filled week after week with the same crew of senior citizens, many of whom lived alone, carousing like college students for a few hours before returning home again to an empty house or apartment. Statistics show the notoriously high suicide rate, second only to Belgium among non-former-Soviet European nations. And then, finally, there was the Waffle Man, staring at his shoes and holding back tears as we rolled out of town for the last time.

Relationships, whether romance, family or friends, are a big deal and for good reason. Consider God's own character, one God in three Persons. Our own capacity and desire for relationship is one of the ways we are made in His image, a reflection of God Himself. Then in Genesis chapter 2, God watches Adam growing lonelier with every animal brought before him and declares "it is not good for man to be alone" (v18). And when Adam and Eve, through sin, break the special relationship they have with their Creator, God sacrifices his own Son that someday we might have a more perfect relationship with Him than even the one in the Garden. Relationships are a big deal to us because they are a big deal to God. Most Finns don't know this. They may know it in the same way any country with a long history of cultural Christianity knows the basics of the faith, but they don't *know* it. When a city of 40,000 people has only one small Bible preaching church, it's safe to say that although most people might know *about* Jesus, very few really *know* Him.

As tough as it was to leave the Waffle Man behind, he is in good hands. Among our many customers there were two older Christian women, who faithfully made the rounds among the sellers in the square, sometimes as customers, but sometimes simply as a friendly face and a listening ear. They were well liked by everyone and they were not shy about their faith. Octavio and I enjoyed their frequent visits to our trailer. These two women were not unhappy and confused. They had hope and were ready to give a reason for it—because know their Savior. By God's mercy, I know Jesus too. So does Octavio. And we know the Waffle Man, and many others hurting like him. I hope we get to see our friends in the square again, both our vendor neighbors and our food-court missionary friends. I hope that God will remind us daily that we have more to offer than just tacos. And I pray for the Waffle Man to know Jesus.



## OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



### National Collection Week is upon us!

Our Drop-Off Location will be open to receive boxes beginning

**Monday, November 12** **Monday, November 19th**. The hours will be:

|        |         |        |          |        |        |         |        |
|--------|---------|--------|----------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| Mon 12 | Tues 13 | Wed 14 | Thurs 15 | Fri 16 | Sat 17 | Sun 18  | Mon 19 |
| 3-5    | 3-5     | 3-5    | 3-5      | 2-6    | 1-4    | 12:30-4 | 1-3    |

### **Samaritan's Purse is a ministry undergirded by prayer.**

**Please pray for your box** as you pack it, that God would use it to bless a child not only materially, but also spiritually. Each box represents a Gospel Opportunity for a child and his or her family.

**Pray for the collection process**, that it might go smoothly and that Drop-Off location volunteers would faithfully represent Christ to the community in our interactions with those who come through our doors.

**Pray for the follow-up offered through *The Greatest Journey***, a discipleship program for children. Pray that many children will be introduced to Jesus as their Savior and Lord through this program, and be transformed by the grace and power of God.

**Pray for the wider impact of this ministry** to families and churches and communities.

### **A SHOEBOX IMPACT STORY**

In Malawi, 12-year-old Angella squealed with delight when she opened her shoebox gift. Her parents couldn't afford to buy her school supplies, but in her box she found pens, pencils, a notebook, and a ruler. The flashlight inside was a real treasure because there was no electricity in their home. But by far, Angella's favorite item was *The Greatest Gift* Gospel booklet that accompanied her shoebox.

"When I read the booklet, it proved to me that God is there," Angella said. "That encouraged me to start going to church. As I learned about the Bible, I was being transformed."

She soon accepted Christ as her Savior and began reading the booklet to her family. Now all 10 of them are attending church and have decided to follow Jesus too!

God continues to use these simple shoeboxes in a mighty way.

**What goes into the box is fun; What comes out is eternal.**

**Thank you for your part in this ministry.**



# GRACE CHURCH NEWS

## Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to join together each month for Bible study, discussion, prayer and fellowship. This month's meeting will be on **Saturday morning, November 17th, from 7-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Breakfast will be served.



## LOOKING AHEAD

### Live Coals Prayer

The congregation is encouraged to join together for our monthly time of corporate prayer at the church on **Sunday evening, December 2nd from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** As a body, let's express our complete dependence on the Lord, thank Him for His many blessings, and seek to grow in knowing and loving Him.



### Advent Season

It is hard to believe, but Advent is right around the corner. The four weeks of Advent begin on **Sunday, December 2nd.**



### Holiday Cheer

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays can be a lonely time for many people. Look around and see who could use some encouragement and company at this time of year. A seemingly small gesture can go a long way. What can we do to spread some joy and show the love of Christ? Send a card, make a phone call, bake some cookies, make a meal, invite for tea or coffee, invite for dinner, shovel a sidewalk. Pray for opportunities, and act on them, in the name of Christ.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10*



**Give thanks to the LORD for He is good. His love endures forever...to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.**

*Psalm 136:1-4*



# November 2018

S M T W T F S

|  |  |  |   |  |           |  |
|--|--|--|---|--|-----------|--|
|  |  |  |   | 1  | 2         | 3  |
| <b>4</b><br>9:30 Sunday School<br>10:45 Worship<br><br><b>5:00 Prayer Gathering</b>  | <b>5</b><br><br>7:00 Addictions Victorious | <b>6</b><br><br>1:00 Ladies' Bible Class | <b>7</b>  | <b>8</b>   | <b>9</b>  | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>11</b><br>9:30 Sunday School<br>10:45 Worship   | <b>12</b><br>7:00 Addictions Victorious    | <b>13</b><br>1:00 Ladies' Bible Class    | <b>Operation Christmas Child Collection Week November 12-19</b> |  |           | <b>17</b><br><br><b>7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship</b> |
| <b>18</b><br>9:30 Sunday School<br>10:45 Worship<br><br><div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <b>OCC Collection</b> </div> | <b>19</b><br>7:00 Addictions Victorious    | <b>20</b>                                | <b>21</b>   | <b>22 Thanksgiving</b><br> | <b>23</b> | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>25</b><br>9:30 Sunday School<br>10:45 Worship   | <b>26</b><br>7:00 Addictions Victorious    | <b>27</b><br>1:00 Ladies' Bible Class    | <b>28</b>   |  <b>Thankful</b>           |           |  |

