

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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*"Fair are the meadows, fair are the woodlands, robed in the blooming garb of
spring:*

Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, who makes the woeful heart to sing."

For submission or suggestions for the next newsletter send to secretary@gracecongregational.org



From the Pastor's Desk

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "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." (John 6:66-69)

This conversation between Jesus and his disciples is recorded at the end of a long chapter in John's Gospel. Jesus had traveled to the east side of the Sea of Galilee in the region of what was known as the trans-Jordan. We are told that quite a large crowd followed him because of the miracles they had witnessed him perform. Jesus, as was so often the case, used such occasions as a teaching moment.

Knowing that they had been walking with him for some distance and were inevitably hungry, Jesus asked Philip where they might find enough bread to feed them. Philip, in essence, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Good question." Peter's brother, Andrew, piped up, "There's a little boy here with a bag lunch," knowing full well that it wouldn't go far with a crowd of over 5000. What Jesus did, of course, was to take those two small dried fish and five small pita breads and miraculously multiply them and distribute it among everyone who was there. When everyone had eaten their fill the disciples gathered up the leftovers for another day. This was done for all the crowd to take notice.

Not long after, the disciples got aboard a small fishing boat and set sail for the other side of the lake. Many in the crowd apparently were aware that Jesus hadn't left with them. By the next day the crowd had made their way around to the other side of the lake, and lo and behold, there was Jesus, with his disciples. Sometime during the night Jesus had followed on foot, across the water, no less! Another miracle. The first thing the crowd wanted to know was, "When did you get here?" In other words, "How did you get here?"

Jesus turned the question on its head by saying, "I know what you really want. To be entertained by another miracle not to mention another free lunch." They weren't too keen on Jesus' response, so they appealed to Moses who had fed their ancestors for forty years in the wilderness.

Now here's the teaching moment. Jesus told them that he was the "bread of life", and that to follow him they must "eat his flesh and drink his blood". He was not talking about cannibalism, of course, but rather about being united to him by faith. That union with him would mean walking in covenant relationship with him, just as eating the manna in the wilderness 1500 years earlier required walking in covenant relationship with the God who had spoken to their ancestors from the mountain.

Well, of course, what Jesus said proved too much for many in the crowd who took their leave. Thus, Jesus' question to the twelve, "How about you? Do you want to leave too?"

Simon Peter's response is so telling. "I don't see any option. Not if you are who we have come to believe you are." But notice how he addressed Jesus - "Lord"! That's more than just a polite term of respect. It is an acknowledgement that this Jesus whom they had chosen to follow was more than just some itinerant preacher. He was the Christ. Discipleship is about following Jesus.

Well, being a Christian is more than just going for the entertainment and the expectation of goodies. It really means following Jesus and calling him Lord.



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner

PREREQUISITES TO SHARING YOUR FAITH?

by Ruth Rosen

At the risk of sounding like a Hallmark commercial, when we care enough to give the very best, it's a no-brainer that we want to tell people about Jesus. He is the best thing that you or I have to offer.

So when some folks tell us we must earn the right to share the gospel—what then?

As ambassadors for Jesus ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)), be encouraged! Reaching out to people with the truth of the gospel is a right, a responsibility and a privilege that God Himself has entrusted to you. No prerequisites. Always be ready to offer the truth of Jesus with kindness and humility; God will bless you and make you a blessing!

Kindness, at times, calls for us to care for people's earthly needs. And humility informs us that people might require us to show that we can be trusted in order for them to open up about spiritual matters. But these things are not particularly prerequisites or qualifications for faith-sharing—they are qualities of life God wants us to live out no matter what we are doing.

That said, many Christians have asked us questions about trust and relationships as these issues relate to sharing the faith, so we hope you'll find the following useful.

How much of a relationship do I need to have with someone before sharing my faith?

Peter shared the gospel on Pentecost and 3,000 people responded in faith, not because he had relationships with them, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Sure, most of us are more likely to be called to witness to people one at a time, but it is often possible to share the gospel one-on-one with strangers. On an airplane for example, the stranger seated next to you may open up about subjects she isn't comfortable discussing with family members or friends. "Divine appointments" happen everywhere.

Long ago I was handing out tracts at a location famous for drug deals and prostitution. I saw a young man leaning against a chain link fence and could not ignore the growing sense that I was supposed to tell him something. Though it was the last thing I wanted to do, I walked over and without a word of introduction, quietly said, "Excuse me. I think God wants me to tell you that He loves you and wants to set you free." His eyes widened as he replied, "I just got out of jail. I was supposed to be on my way to a job interview and instead I came here to get high." I shared Jesus with this stranger and he responded in faith to ask for God's pardon. I didn't earn the right to get in this guy's business, I just did what I was told.

Even so, most people, including Jews for Jesus, want to invest in longer-term gospel conversations within the context of trusting relationships.

Continued on following page

How long does it take to build trust?

Deep and lasting trust is normally built over time, as people go through trials and/or conflict resolution together. Most do not require that level of trust to have a spiritual conversation. However, Jewish people—and others who aren't part of what they perceive as a Christian majority—do need to sense your respect for them. Many can size up your sincerity and sensitivity fairly quickly, and might even say something deliberately provocative to see whether you will judge or ridicule them for stating an opposing view.

Most people won't distrust you based on differences of opinion if you state your difference respectfully. Show respect by asking questions and being a good listener. It probably won't take long to build enough trust to begin a spiritual conversation. Take cues from the other person about how much to say or ask, and continue to nurture trust with each interaction.

What if I try to share my faith and the person responds negatively?

Remember: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

Salvation by grace applies not only to those who receive the life-giving message, but also to those of us who offer it. We look for thoughtful and creative ways to share the gospel. But isn't it liberating to know that when someone comes to faith, it wasn't because we somehow managed to do everything right? It was God's grace. Pure, simple, mind-boggling, heart-rejoicing grace.

This summer, as Jews for Jesus reaches out to strangers and friends alike all over the world, please pray that He will pour out His grace on our efforts. And for your own evangelistic efforts, pray for grace, practice grace . . . and watch God lavish His grace where you least expect it!

Ruth Rosen, the younger daughter of Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen, is a writer, editor and speaker who loves to discuss the glory, grace and transforming power of God through the gospel of Jesus.

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MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS

Roger and Patty Lueken

We met in 1983 while attending a missionary training school in New Hampshire called Youth With A Mission (YWAM). A year and a half later we married. For a few years we lived and worked in New Hampshire. We later went on staff with YWAM for 6 years working with children both in New Hampshire and in the inner city of Elizabeth NJ. Later we traveled to a YWAM school in Scotland to get some training in children's ministry for 6 months with our two sons Josh (age 5) and Jon (almost 3). Returning to New Hampshire in 1993, we grew to a family of 5 with Emma's arrival in 1994 and began working as a family doing children's ministry and starting a puppet ministry that lasted about 10 years.

In 2005, we returned to live in Massachusetts near Patty's family. It was then that the Lord began to work in our hearts the truth of his sovereignty and work of initiating and completing grace, and especially His great mercy toward us sinners who had tried so hard to serve Him without that knowledge. There we began to be set free.

We began work with a ministry in Prince Edward Island, Canada in 2010, and lived there as a family for 2 ½ years. There we had a crisis of belief of sorts and delved into the writings of Spurgeon, Jon Piper, Paul David Tripp and David Powlison, to name a few, in order to sort out what we believed. The Lord really used that to solidify our beliefs and strengthen our faith in Him together.

We returned home to Massachusetts to be a home base for Josh, who, in 2013 was heading to Army Boot Camp, and for Jon who traveled to South Sudan that spring. Roger and I went fulltime with Operation Nehemiah in May 2014, taking our first trip in April 2015 in the midst of a 6 month stay for Jon. Jon returned at the end of May and 2 weeks later suffered a coma as the result of cerebral malaria. Weeks after his awakening and discharge from the hospital he went back in with neurological complications connected with the malaria. God's peace was amazing through it all. We returned to South Sudan at the end of Nov. 2015 in order to meet Joyce's family. We returned home from a second trip to South Sudan with a greater commitment to the work and a deep concern for the Gospel to come by the Spirit and in truth to the hearts of the people of Africa.

God brought us to the Berkshires through an opportunity to run Maplewood B&B in Otis for 1 ½ years. Thanks to the Kirkmans, who invited us to join them at their church, we attended Grace for the first time in the spring of 2016. We found a loving family of honest and transparent people who confessed their great need of Jesus. We knew we had found our church home.

Many of you followed the miracle of getting Joyce here from South Sudan and the birth of Patience our dear granddaughter one month later in 2017. When she was 5 days old we found out we had to move in 6 or 7 weeks. We have moved 22 times in the 34 years we have been married and half the time, it was not our choice. But God always knew before we did and He went ahead and has provided all we've needed.

More detailed accounts of the above is on our blogs, where you can read more of our adventures in trusting the Lord: www.theluekens.blogspot.com www.fromjoniafrica.blogspot.com Our hearts are to be wherever the Lord leads us and to proclaim the wonder of Who He is!!!

The Light of the Cross

When you feel the waves of life crashing against you;
Knocking at your door, pulling you under, leaving you gasping
for air,
Feeling yourself sinking into the depths of the sea;
God is there, waiting to pull you out of the rising sea; a life
ring in your time of need.

When you feel as if you've given life all you've got and can't
give anymore;

When it is a dark and stormy night, when you are treading on
the boulders of life,

When you are lost at sea- look for the roving light at the top of
the lighthouse-

He is inside the light waiting to cradle you in His arms, to tell
you that it is going to be okay;

Look to the Cross in times of trouble, for it will be your light.

By Sinaia A. Smith



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Live Coals Prayer

All are encouraged to take part in our monthly Live Coals Prayer on **Sunday, March 3rd** from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** Join us as we come before our Father's throne to praise Him, pray for one another, and seek His direction for our part in His kingdom work.

"...in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Phil. 4:6



Daylight Savings Begins

Daylight savings time begins on **Sunday March 10th**, so be sure to turn your clocks one hour ahead on Saturday night, March 9th.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men are welcome at the Men's Prayer Fellowship, **Saturday, March 16th**, from **7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. The men are using *The Godly Man's Picture* by Thomas Watson. Breakfast will be served.

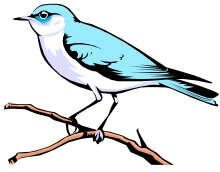


Fun and Fellowship Game Day

Pastor Tom and Charleen are hosting a game day on **Sunday, March 24th, after church**. They will provide a batch of chili and cornbread. Please bring a dish or side to share, along with your favorite game. A sign-up sheet for attendance and food will be at the church closer to the date.

Women's Retreats

- ◆ The annual one-day FaithLift, put on by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield, is **Saturday, March 23rd, at Hope Church in Lenox**. Theme: **"Trusting Jesus in Uncharted Waters."** For more information and registration go to pittsfieldefc.org/registeronline.html **Registration deadline is March 11th.**
- ◆ The annual **OPC Women's Retreat** at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield is **Friday and Saturday, April 12-13**. Theme: **"Faithfulness: Journeying to the Father's Heart."** Keynote speaker is Lynne Rienstra. For more information and registration forms go to <http://pnynewomen.wordpress.com> or see Charleen Bridgman. **Registrations must be postmarked by March 22.**
- ◆ **CCCC Women's Conference, March 30th** at First Church Congregational, Boxford, MA. Theme: **Daughters of the Kingdom**. Speaker is Liz Arthurs. Register by contacting Kathy Morse by email: rolandkat@comcast.net, or phone: 781-289-6478.



March 2019



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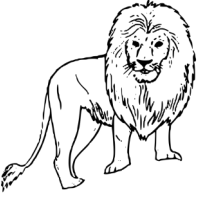
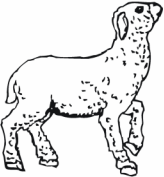
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| 10 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship | 11 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 12 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship |
| 17 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship | 18 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 19 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 25 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 26 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | | | | | |  |