

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Welcome to the August edition of the Grace Church newsletter. If you have any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter, please send them to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net





From the Pastor's Desk

He who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went out and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' (Matthew 25:24-25)

We have a congregational meeting after worship this Sunday. The condition of our budget will be on our agenda. The giving has been down and cash flow is tight, and there is anxiety over how we will meet our expenses. Grace Church is not alone. This seems to be a common plight among many if not most churches, but here in New England, where so many churches are small, it seems more pronounced.

There is a danger that extends beyond just the bottom line though, and that is what it does to our view of our identity as the church and how that affects how we see our calling. So many churches go into what we could call "survival mode"; that is where we see our primary goal as self-preservation.

This is really at the heart of Jesus' parable in Matthew 25. Jesus had given a differing number of talents to three servants. Two of the servants, as you know, invested those talents in productive ways. Yes, it was a gamble, because their investments could have gone south, and when the master returned they would have nothing to show for their investments. The third servant just hung on to the talent so that, at least, he could return it intact. But the motive for not investing the talent was self-preservation. He did not want to incur the master's wrath for losing the money.

The application has to do with how we see our relationship to God and how we understand the nature of our calling. Is God really "hard", as the servant understood the master to be? Well, yes, and much harder. But isn't that the reason for the cross? That's the nature of grace. His "hardness" is directed toward his own Son not toward us. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid to make mistakes. If the big "mistakes" have been dealt with by Christ, then certainly the lesser ones have too. We can live within that freedom.

But what about our calling? What is the purpose of the talents he has given us to invest anyway? Self-preservation is not the goal, nor is it an option. Our preservation as individual Christians is secure in the cross, and so is the preservation of the Church of Jesus Christ. For us to doubt that, either as individuals or as local congregations, betrays our lack of confidence in the gospel itself, and it moves us in entirely the wrong direction.

There is a wonderful example for us in the early church. In the early days, the Christian community hunkered down in Jerusalem. It wasn't until God used persecution to push them out of the nest did they really begin to move out into the mission field. But they began with nothing! Nevertheless, they went throughout the known world with the gospel starting churches wherever they went. How could they do that? They went with Christ's commission behind them, the Kingdom of God before them and they went in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have the same Great Commission behind us. We have the same Holy Spirit within us. But do we have Kingdom of God before us? Should lack of finances be an obstacle? Only if we think it is. And only if self-preservation is our goal. Is not just one talent sufficient to invest for the Kingdom of God?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



Schmidt's Prayer Letter - July 2012

"This is the confidence that we have in approaching God...that; if we ask anything according to His will, we know that He hears us,...and if He hears us, - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we have asked of Him." 1 John 5:14-15

Our time in Switzerland has been an encouraging time getting to know new people and re-connecting with others. We can see how God has gone before us. The apartment we stayed in has given us much-appreciated time with Dieter's parents and family. By being in Switzerland longer this time, we were able to make deeper friendships at the International church we attended and at the village church. We are thankful to have been an encouragement to the pastor in Azmoos. We feel humbled by all the prayer that we know goes on in the OMF prayer groups and conferences. God has sustained us and provided for us.

Thank you for praying for the week-long retreat we led. The Bible talks were challenging and helpful, and God granted us good weather to hike in. Adelboden is a beautiful resort place. One participant has excitedly shared with us about her being able to share the Gospel with two neighbors recently. Dieter's parents were also able to come, which added to the special times we've had together.

Andrea and Rebekah spent 2 weeks here in Switzerland. We all missed Hannah who was in Japan working. Our girls are in three different time zones. We praise the Lord for His faithfulness in their lives.

We fly to Atlanta on August 2nd, to stay with Andrea for a month. Dieter will help her with some house projects, and we will spend time with Shelley's family too. A Soules mini-family reunion is planned for August 19. Sadly, her brother from Seattle as he is struggling with cancer in his kidney. Pray for him and many of Shelley's family members to believe in Jesus.

We tell friends in Switzerland that you cannot live very easily in America without a car, as we have done for the past 6 months here. Thank you all for praying - the Stolls, who are filling in for us at the Guest Home- are lending us their car!! It will be waiting for us when we arrive. God is so good.

In September we are planning our re-connecting trip with many of you! We would appreciate prayer for wisdom as we plan, and safe travels as we head north from Chattanooga to Michigan, over to Minnesota, then across to Massachusetts. We will be in the Northeast for 2 months, and we are praying about a place we could housesit for that time. This will be our chance to re-connect with you and your church.

Praises:

- A Japanese woman has accepted the Lord and is being discipled. Pray Mie-san will grow in grace.
- A church in the US and one in Switzerland have taken us on as their missionaries.

Requests:

- Pray for the summer teams helping in the Tsunami areas to have a significant impact.
- In mid-August Japan celebrates the Obon festival, which relates to ancestor worship. For many Christians this is a difficult time with pressure from their families. Pray for protection and courage to stand strong.
- Pray for a house-sitting situation for us while we are in the Northeast.
- Continue to pray for our further needs of support.

Thank you for connecting with the Lord on our behalf. You are part of our team, and we appreciate every one of you! We praise the Lord that He answers prayer!

In God's hands, Dieter and Shelley

LEARNING & ARRIVING: Rejoice & Sing!

by Doug Rose

*But I have trusted in Your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
because He has dealt bountifully with me.*
(Psalm 13:5-6)

All the godly should be sustained by the same confidence, and thereby persevere in prayer; for it is by faith, unknown to the natural man, that we grasp the grace of God.¹

When we trust in God's steadfast love, our hearts rejoice and we can only sing our praise and worship of His salvific being. This trust is our faith, and it is only through His love that He allows us the grace to enter into this faith. This faith is the source of our perseverance, yet we only persevere by His grace. When we persevere, through grace, we know that He has and will deal bountifully with us, and among His blessings, freely given, is our ultimate salvation. In this dawning light of our salvation do we sing!

*Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.*
(Zephaniah 3:14-15)

We know that the King is in our midst and that He has cleared away the enemy! Jesus Christ is in our midst and we shall never again feel the insecurity, doubt, attraction, and compulsion of evil in our lives. Jesus Christ has taken away these judgments of condemnation for sinfulness, and accordingly do we sing aloud. We rejoice and sing, exulting with all our hearts; we sing aloud!

Our messianic era since the incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of our LORD, is a time of great joy, as the LORD will be in the midst of His people.² Fear and suffering will be removed, and it will be a time for singing and rejoicing.³ Let us rejoice and sing because of our unmerited salvation: rejoice and sing for the gift undeserved.

¹ Calvin, John, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust; 2009), p.60.

² Gabelein, Frank E., Editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan; 1985), p.562.

³ *Id.* at 562 – 563.

PeaceMeal

Food for Thought on Biblical Peacemaking

submitted by Elder Bob Kirkman

The Church: A Support System for Peacemaking

When we are unable to resolve a conflict on our own, God commands the local church to step in and bring its wisdom, resources, and authority to bear on the problem (Matt. 18:16-17; Phil. 4:2-3; 1 Cor. 6:1-8). I thank God for the many churches that are fulfilling this important responsibility so faithfully. They are teaching their people to be peacemakers, training gifted members to serve as conflict coaches and mediators, and reinstating the ministry of loving, redemptive accountability as a means to restore members who have become entangled in destructive sin... this kind of training and assistance from local churches has often proven to be the key to restoring relationships, averting divorce, and resolving seemingly hopeless conflicts.

Taken from The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict by Ken Sande, Updated Edition (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2003) p. 14.

Food for Thought

When you are unable to resolve a conflict on your own, is your first thought to get your church involved?

For many of us, the church as a source of help in conflict doesn't even cross our minds. "The church? This is a private situation. Why should they get involved?" That kind of attitude really underestimates the critical role that churches should play when it comes to helping Christians resolve conflict.

But what about if your church isn't really equipped to help? It may be more equipped than you think, but even so, what positive role can you play in helping your church get where it needs to be? Think about how you might strengthen your local church, so that it is able to bring its wisdom, resources, and authority to bear on the problem of conflict. Pray that God will use your church, and churches around the world, to be centers of peacemaking--so that, as Jesus commanded, all will know that we are his disciples, if we love one another (John 13:35).

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Meaningful Acts of Easily Forgotten Kindness

I have been on Facebook for a few years. It started as a way to oversee and engage with my children when they first joined Facebook. I am not a fanatic, but I do enjoy the occasional interaction with a friend or reconnecting with someone from high school or college that I have not spoken to in thirty years! I recently reconnected with a former college student from my days as a campus minister. He sent me this message:

*Tim,
I do not know if you remember me from your campus ministry days. I just wanted to let you know that you gave me my first Bible. This story is dear to me and I tell it often: You were making an announcement about free Bibles for kids in low-income neighborhoods. I had just become a Christian through a retreat the week before. I asked you if I could have one of those Bibles and you gave it to me. I read one chapter every night during that semester and wept over the pages. I just wanted to thank you for being faithful. It changed my life!*

Wow, all I did was hand this student a Bible! Thankfully, he said that it wasn't me who changed his life; reading God's word changed him. Yet God involved me in getting a Bible into this young man's hands. It was such a simple act on my part, not even remotely heroic. But it was an opportunity and I could have responded differently. I could have acted on these thoughts, "These are for the kids, not you." Or, "Can't you afford to buy one? You aren't in our target population." By God's grace, I didn't. I stretched out my arm and handed him a Bible. That's it.

So why do I share that story? It certainly doesn't lend itself to my own fame and personal glory. I share it because this simple encounter highlights something that we emphasize at CCEF: you don't have to be a formal counselor to have deep impact in people's lives. Why would someone who works for an organization that seeks to equip wise counselors emphasize this? Because it is biblical! Formal counselors are needed, but the body of Christ is a powerful community and God uses everyone in many different ways.

I teach a class that takes all of what we believe at CCEF and stresses how we have countless opportunities to incarnate the grace of Christ on any given day, within the context of our daily relationships. You don't need a formal degree in counseling or an office with stated hours of operation to help and encourage others. During the first class, I ask students this question, "Who has had significant influence in your life?" You would be astounded to know that I hear the same answers year after year. It never changes! Some of the usual suspects are a parent, relative, friend, Bible study leader, sibling, or informal mentor. Very common people.

I then ask students to describe ways the person wielded influence. I commonly hear responses about patience, humility, gentleness, kindness, vibrant faith in Christ in the face of hardship, pursuing love, or compassion for hurting people. Very common virtues.

It is rare that anyone names a formal counselor or even a pastor. You will get the occasional youth leader, probably because that is such a formative season of life. These consistent responses reveal that God delights in using ordinary people who exhibit simple gospel virtues. This is where God does his miraculous work as he quietly and persistently builds his kingdom.

Let me tell you about one person who impacted my life in a miraculous way. Mr. Prince was an elderly southern gentleman who taught me when I was in junior high Sunday School. That's right. Mr. Prince was brave enough to take on a class of ten junior high boys and teach them week after week. Can you imagine what it must have been like to teach junior high boys the Bible? We would fidget and joke with one another within three feet of Mr. Prince, somehow thinking he couldn't see us! Occasionally, Mr. Prince would say in a calm southern voice, "Boys, I want you to listen to Mr. Prince. He loves you and wants you to grow up to love Jesus." Understand that Mr. Prince was no pushover. He owned his own business and was well acquainted with the push and pull of life. But he was calm, gentle, and patient with us week after week. When I didn't show up one Sunday, he would send me a card saying he had missed me.

I look back and wonder what I might have done if Mr. Prince had come down hard on our boyish antics. It is highly likely that I would not have come back or used it as an excuse to keep God at arm's length (as if we can really do that!). Instead, he loved us well by showing up week after week, exhibiting simple, yet miraculous, gentleness and patience. I remember these things about Mr. Prince—these very relational, personal demonstrations of love—yet I don't remember anything he actually taught us! His love for us is the enduring take-away from my days in junior high Bible study. More than anything else, his love is what spoke the loudest. I think he knew that.

So, who influenced you? Or better still, whom are you influencing?



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



In Sympathy

We grieve with Tim and Julie Ross as they mourn the passing of Julie's mother, Marie Shanahan. The funeral was on August 1. Pray for God's comfort and peace for the family, especially for Marie's husband, Mike, and the six children.

News from Eve

Eve is on the move. She is currently in Germany at a training conference and hopes to visit her aunt in Prague. On **August 11** she will be leaving for her new assignment in West Asia. Her main responsibility for the next two years will be learning the language and culture. Eve is encouraged and excited. Pray for living arrangements, and for safety and wisdom.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to be a part of the Men's Prayer fellowship on **Saturday morning, August 18th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** Join us as we look at the Psalms and pray for one another. Light refreshments will be served.

Third Thursdays Outreach

This month's "Third Thursdays" event downtown will be on **August 16th from 5-8 p.m.** We encourage you to stop by and say hello! Brenda and daughters Ashley and Belle have been providing face painting for passersby. Pray for those who stop by the booth that they might sense the love of Christ and that any conversations might be fruitful. Pray for those who man the booth as we seek to introduce our church to the wider community.



Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we seek His guidance for our church and our ministry in the community. Join us in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, August 26th** for a special time of corporate prayer.

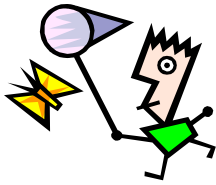


LOOKING AHEAD TO FALL



Fall Schedule to Resume

Beginning on Sunday, September 9th, our fall schedule of Sunday School for all ages will resume at 9:30 a.m. Sunday School will be followed by worship at 10:45.



AUGUST 2012



S M T W T F S

			1	2 7:00 Addictions Victorious	3	4
5 10:00 Worship	6	7	8	9 7:00 Addictions Victorious	10	11
12 10:00 Worship	13	14	15	16 5:00 Third Thursday 7:00 Addictions Victorious	17	18 Men's Prayer Fellowship 7:00-8:30 a.m.
19 10:00 Worship	20	21	22	23 7:00 Addictions Victorious	24	25
26 10:00 Worship 5:00 Prayer Vigil	27	28	29	30 7:00 Addictions Victorious	31	