


# Grace Notes



 Grace Church Congregational  
1055 Williams Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201



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*Happy Valentine's Day to You*



"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us."

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

 I John 3:16 and I John 4:11



## From the Pastor's Desk

*The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" (Proverbs 26:13)*

Inertia is hard to overcome. So often the hardest part of doing something is getting started, whether it is moving a stationary object or tackling a project we have needed to do for a long time. Ask any high school or college student who has had a paper due.

I believe inertia is what the above proverb is about; the excuses we come up with for not doing what we know needs to be done. The sluggard uses the prospect of a "lion", whether real or imagined, outside his door as an excuse to never get started on his work, or journey. If it's not a lion, then it will be something else.

What are the causes of inertia? There are two primary causes, fear and comfort with the familiar. In many respects the two are not that far apart.

Jesus, in his parable of the talents recorded in Matthew 25 tells about how a man had given each of three servants talents. To one he gave five, to one he gave two, and to one he gave one. Two of the servants went and invested their talents and multiplied them, but the servant he had given only one talent buried his in the ground because he was afraid of losing it. The excuse he gave when the master returned was that he was afraid of offending his master by making a mistake with the talent. Instead the master was offended because the servant had refused to use the talent for its intended purpose.

I believe that the application of this parable is directed at the Pharisees. They had been given a great treasure, but because they were motivated by a faulty view of God they refused to utilize the treasure they had been given for its intended purpose. While the parable is directed toward the Pharisees, it is also intended for Jesus' disciples; not just the twelve, but all of those who would follow Jesus.

Every time I begin a project I feel a twinge of uncertainty, whether it is preparing a sermon or doing a project on my house; what if I do something wrong or make a mistake, or things don't come out perfect, whether it be in the formulation of sermon points or in cutting a board on my deck? Perhaps it would be better if I do nothing. You see, that apprehension could paralyze us if we let it.

Fear. But the other problem is comfort- with the familiar. For the Pharisees is they were content with holding the form of their religion for themselves, but to use it for its intended purpose- i.e. the Kingdom of God, well, that was just not acceptable.

Someone once questioned why I make reference on a regular basis to the fact that I go into the jail. (Believe me, there is not much glory in going into the jail, especially when I'm tired after preaching on Sunday morning.) I confess, it's a subtle way of making a statement. (I'm not being overly subtle now.) You see, if I made more regular reference to my involvement on a committee at the hospital that might seem more socially acceptable than my going into the jail. But what happens if my going into the jail translates into some of the guys coming to church here upon their release? (Some of the guys ask me where our church is located.) Would we, as a church, be ready to receive them?

So, to get back to this inertia thing, what does it have to do with us as a church? We have to ask, "What are we here for?" And "What is God calling us to do?"

What are we afraid of? God? People's perceptions? Social unacceptability? There really aren't any lions in the road; not here in Pittsfield.

Pastor Tom Bridgman





# GRACE CHURCH NEWS



## Annual Meeting Follow-up

At our Annual Congregational Business Meeting on January 24, the Elders of the church proposed the placement of a shed on church property for the collection of used clothing. There were many questions and we did not have time to answer all of them. If you have questions, please give them in writing to the Elders so that they may be given proper consideration.



## Valentine Breakfast

Ladies of all ages are invited to attend our Valentine's Day Breakfast here at the church on **Saturday, February 11th, at 9:00 a.m.** Please join us for this annual event put on by the men of Grace Church to honor the women of Grace Church. Feel free to invite a friend!

## Women of Grace

The next meeting of the *Women of Grace* will be at the church on **Saturday, February 18th from 10 a.m.-1:00 p.m.**, including lunch. This year we have been learning how to be better ambassadors for Christ as we learn how to share our lives and our faith with others. We have been using Rebecca Pippert's *Out of the Salt Shaker and into the World*, as well as reading through the Gospels. All women and teenaged girls are invited to join together for a time of study of the Scriptures, discussion, prayer, and fellowship over a bring-your-own lunch. For more information call Cheryl at 413-528-2502.



## Mission to South Sudan

**Elder Bob Kirkman** will be traveling to South Sudan with Operation Nehemiah, leaving on **February 7th**. The trip will last two months. Bob will be taking with him a recent photograph of the congregation here as a greeting to our brothers and sisters in Christ in South Sudan. Bob covets our prayers for the trip in all its aspects, and for the people of South Sudan.



## Haiti Mission

**Dave Fairfield and Ian Bridgman** have been accepted by Samaritan's Purse to be part of a team going to Haiti in April. For ten days they will be assisting in rebuilding homes for the many who are still homeless after the 2010 earthquake. If anyone would like to help with the cost of airfare, contributions may be made to the church, earmarked for "Haiti Mission".

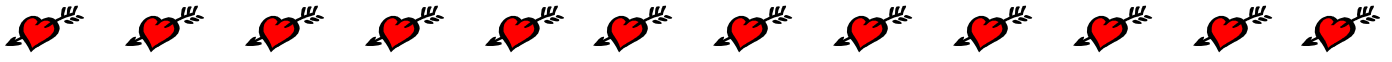
## Poetry Presentation

**Sorina (Kulberg) Higgins** will be presenting her poetry on **Sunday evening, March 11th, at 6:00 p.m.** at the church. Join us for an evening of poetry from her latest book, fellowship, and refreshments.



## Prayer Life Conference

**Upper Valley Bible Conference, Saturday, March 10, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**, Valley Bible Church, White River Junction, VT. Topic: **PrayerLife: Learning to Pray in a Distracting World**. Some questions that will be explored are: How do you stay focused when you are distracted with so much to do? How do you pray when your own life is messed up? Speaker: Paul Mill, Director, SeeJesus Cost: \$25-30. For a registration form, see Charleen Bridgman, or go to <http://uvbc.wordpress.com>



# February 2012



<i>S</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>S</i>
			<b>1</b>	<b>2</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> 9:00 a.m. Valentine's Day Breakfast
<b>12</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> 10 a.m-1 p.m. Women of Grace
<b>19</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship  5:00 Prayer Gathering	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class	<b>29</b>			

# Missions Corner



## Schmidts' February Prayer Letter from Japan

Dear Friends,

Our remaining time in Sapporo is zooming by. Living in two countries in the next 12 months, we foresee many adventures, challenges and joys ahead. Praise the Lord, who daily carries our burdens.

We leave in less than 2 weeks! It feels challenging to keep up with regular work at church and in the guest home, plus packing. We are so thankful that the Stolls, recently retired couple from Florida, arrived safely! We are in the middle of the hand-over process for them to run the Guest Home. A week before leaving, we will move down to the 2nd floor and they will move up to our 3rd floor apartment. At least we do not have to pack away everything!

Please pray for the planning team that we put together for ESF. Our daughter Hannah, Mutumbi (a Zambian), and an OMF short-term worker will be leading the group. Hannah will be playing the piano, as there will be no more guitarist after Shelley leaves. Pray that others will fill in where needed, and that the communication with the church side still flows. Pray for protection from wrong influences that could hinder the group's growth. Many students are moving on, and it would be great to get some new, enthusiastic Christians coming into the group.

Please pray for some couples with marriage problems. International marriages are complicated.

### **Praise for:**

- On January 22 we were asked to do a house blessing ceremony for an international couple who wants to live their lives for Jesus and use their new spacious apartment for outreach.
- On January 29, Dieter preached in two services, in English. The translation into Japanese went well and people were blessed.
- On January 29 in the evening we celebrated our last English Service, about 45 attended. We were sad to say good-bye to a mature Christian Ethiopian family who will be moving to the USA
- on **February 15**, Shelley and Hannah fly to LA. Hannah will return to Japan, and Shelley will go on to Andrea's in Georgia on **February 23**. She will see her Mom, who turns 86 and her siblings in Chattanooga.
- the Nigerian woman and her daughter come to church regularly again!
- an apartment is ready for us in Azmoos, Switzerland!

### **Please Pray:**

- for us to have time to have meaningful closure with all the different people we work with.
- on February 12 will be our last Sunday at church and in the English Speakers' Fellowship group. It is hard to leave these dear friends.
- for us to be able to schedule time with those who still want to meet with us and for protection on the snowy roads.
- for our health and energy to sort, pack and clean, and not to forget anything.
- for the Stolls to get to know the job and settle into Japanese culture well.
- for safe travels for Dieter, Hannah and Shelley. **Dieter leaves February 16 for Switzerland. Shelley will fly March 8 to Switzerland.** Pray there will be good weather for our travels.
- for Dieter and Shelley to settle into Swiss life and ministry well.

In God's hands, Dieter and Shelley

## Learning & Arriving: No Futile Faith

by Doug Rose

“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:16 – 19).

The traditional church liturgical calendar marks the season between the celebration of the Incarnation and that of the Resurrection as one of the two seasons of “Ordinary Time”. As we contemplate the Christological implications of our LORD’s birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection bracketing each end of these thirteen winter weeks, our adult Sunday school class will shortly begin a seminar with no “ordinary” subject matter – a practical approach to an apologetic defense of the fundamentals of our faith, based upon Tim Keller’s *The Reason for God* (New York, N.Y; Dutton, 2008). Unless and until we can sensibly articulate that “the ultimate evidence for the existence of God is Jesus Christ himself” (Keller, p.128), we cannot explain why our faith is *not* futile.

The apostle, Paul, focuses our faith on the Resurrection. Many believe that Jesus lived; most of those believe He died, as all men will. Others believe that He was a prophet, a philosophical giant, or at very least an influential teacher. Christians alone believe that He is the Son of God and that He is resurrected from the dead. His resurrection foreshadows ours.

No other worldview espouses bodily resurrection into a new kingdom of God in a new creation. Buddhists look to the end of reincarnation and absorption into some godhead; Muslims look to afterlife in the sumptuous, self-aggrandizing paradise of *Jannah*; secular humanists and post-modernist look bleakly to annihilation. We Christians alone believe that we will be raised into bodily life in which the Trinitarian God will dwell eternally with us, and all creation will be as new. (Rev. 21:3 – 5a).

We believe that we will ultimately not see bodily corruption or even annihilation, but as Jesus was resurrected from the dead so shall we be.

For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.  
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25 – 27)

Our faith in Jesus’s resurrection is our faith in His grace that we shall see God in the flesh. Our Redeemer lived, died, was resurrected, and lives still! Thus is our faith not futile: Jesus stood upon the earth, and bodily dwells in the new reality of God. He is the resurrected Man, and in His resurrection lies the promise of our resurrection. The person of Jesus proves the justification of our faith, and only by His grace will we hope in the life to come.

**A Note from Betty DeNoble**

January 27, 2012

Dear Family and Friends,

It is now a little over 2 months since Ken passed away. This time has been very hard for me, as I miss him so very much. I never realized what loneliness was, but now I know.

I want to say my deepest Thank You to each of you. For those of you who were able to visit with him those last few weeks, he loved those visits. For those of you who came to remember him at the funeral, some of you came from very far. For the many cards and notes, the phone calls, the visits, the prayers, I will always be grateful.

Last June Ken and I decided it was time for us to start downsizing, so we began to look at Senior Apartments. We applied at a few here in Pittsfield and one in New York. We hoped that we would be settled in a new home before the holidays. Little did we know at the time how much things would change. GOD in His wisdom knew that Ken would be at home with Him before the holidays, and I would need time to prepare for the move down here.

Three weeks ago I received a letter stating that I was now near the top of the list for an apartment (it just happened that it was the place that Ken had liked the most and hoped that we would get). Then last week I was called and was told there was an apartment available this coming month. So on Saturday, February 4th, the men from the church will help me move. The past few weeks I've been busy getting ready for the move. I was able to donate many chemical books of Ken's to Berkshire Community College. Believe me, downsizing is not an easy job.

As I said, the past few months have been very hard, but they have also been times of great blessings. I see GOD's direction and peace through it all, and I give Him the praise.

Thank you again, please keep in touch. I love you all.

Betty

My new address: 176 Columbus Avenue  
B726  
Pittsfield, MA 01201

same phone: 413-464-8013  
413 212-6420

I will not be having the computer for a while, so no email!

## **Help For Those Who Struggle With A Judgmental Attitude**

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.  
And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ~ Romans 14:4

When [other people] fail to satisfy our desires and live up to our expectations, we criticize and condemn them in our hearts if not with our words. As David Powlison writes:

We judge others--criticize, nit-pick, nag, attack, condemn--because we literally play God. This is heinous. [The Bible says,] "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?" Who are you when you judge? None other than a God wannabe. In this we become like the Devil himself (no surprise that the Devil is mentioned in James 3:15 and 4:7). We act exactly like the adversary who seeks to usurp God's throne and who acts as the accuser of the brethren.

When you and I fight, our minds become filled with accusations: your wrongs and my rights preoccupy me. We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish....

I am not saying that it is inherently wrong to evaluate or even judge others within certain limits. As we will see in chapter 7, Scripture teaches that we should observe and evaluate others' behavior so that we can respond and minister to them in appropriate ways, which may even involve loving correction (see Matt. 7:1-5; 18:15; Gal. 6:1).

Taken from [The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict](#)  
by Ken Sande, Updated Edition (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2003) p. 106-107

### ***Food for Thought***

Why does Scripture repeatedly caution us regarding judging our Christian brothers and sisters? What is the fundamental danger involved in such judgment? Is it that we might judge other Christians inaccurately?

Paul delivers a surprising answer in Romans 14:4. He says that the danger involved in judging other Christians actually has nothing to do with other Christians at all. The danger, he says, is that we judge God inaccurately when we say that other Christians cannot or will not change. "He [the person we are judging] will stand," Paul asserts, "for the Lord is able to make him stand" (emphasis ours). Judging others is wrong, says Paul, when it leaves the Lord--the only one who can change human hearts, and the one who is passionately committed to change human hearts--out of the change equation. It neglects entirely God's great promise in Philippians 1:6, "he who began a good work in [that brother or sister] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Judgment of other Christians that is not grounded in God's power and promises is heinous judgment indeed, as David Powlison notes in the quote above. It is the opposite of humility and confident faith. If you are struggling with a judgmental attitude toward another Christian, remember Scripture's command to "hope in the Lord" and don't be discouraged by the actions (or inactions) of that person. Remember and repeat to yourself as you pray for the other person (and for your own patience): The Lord is able to make him stand!

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