



# Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational  
1055 Williams Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20,21



# From the Pastor's Desk

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10-12)*

There is no doubt about the fact that Christians are engaged in a spiritual battle. What we often miss is the fact that the primary battlefield is in our hearts.

We have begun an investigation of the life of Elijah from the book of 1 Kings. We are also engaged in a study of the book of Revelation. I have begun to sense that the two are more closely interconnected than I had ever anticipated.

The backdrop of Elijah's ministry was the reign of King Ahab, who became king of Israel several generations after the northern tribes had seceded from Judah in the south. The true succession of kings was supposed to come from Judah and reign in Jerusalem. Rather, a capital was set up in the northern city of Samaria, and two alternative locations for worship were set up in Bethel and Dan where golden calves were forged to serve as visual objects of worship for the northern tribes, all contrary to God's command. Omri, Ahab's father, had made an alliance with the King of Sidon and had sealed it by securing a Sidonian princess for Ahab, by the name of Jezebel.

When Jezebel moved south she did not come empty handed, but brought her religion with her- the worship of Baal. Baal was the deity, according to the ancient Phoenicians, of the storm and rain, thus the deity of fertility. This was the context of Elijah's prophetic ministry, and much of 1 Kings records the ongoing struggle between Ahab and Jezebel on one side and God's prophet, Elijah, on the other.

The heart of the struggle is not new to Elijah. It actually began in the garden. From the days of Adam and Eve a spiritual battle has been raging. The manifestations of that spiritual battle trace throughout the Bible in bold letters, from the days of Noah, to Moses and Pharaoh, through the days of the conquest, and the ensuing cycles of apostasy during the period of the Judges. It eventually shows up in the last book of the Bible where John, while held captive for his faith by the secular powers of Rome, has his eyes opened to the spiritual dimension.

One of the beauties coming to us through Elijah's battle is the fact that Baal cannot hold a candle to the LORD. Just the very fact, for example, that Elijah would walk into Baal's backyard and perform a miracle in Yahweh's name by providing ongoing provisions for the widow of Zarephath, is a case in point. It proves that Baal is really impotent, even on his home turf. The question, then, is why would anyone in his right mind choose to follow after Baal rather than the true God?

The answer is spiritual deception. You see, Satan is "a liar and the father of lies", as Jesus put it. That was his weapon in the garden. And it is his weapon today. Deception!

Time and again, The LORD proved himself to be Sovereign through the ministry of Elijah, and later through his successor, Elisha, even in a world that appeared to be dominated by heathen gods. Is this not the overarching message of John's Revelation too? This does not diminish the reality of Satan or minimize the spiritual battle. What it does do is provide us with a whole new perspective on the spiritual battle.

This is why, I believe, Paul's command to us in Ephesians 6 is to "stand firm". Not to "charge the gates of hell with a water pistol" as one of our Elders so aptly put it, nor engage in superficial speculations. *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof*, as the psalmist reminds us. (Psalm 24:1) It doesn't belong to either Satan or Baal. The victory, as far as God is concerned, is a *fait accompli*. The real battlefield now is our hearts.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



# Missions Corner



## Grace African Medical Project Update

Grace African Medical Missions has partnered with Dr. David Bruenning of the International Children's Fund to deliver a sea rail container full of 17 million dollars worth of medicine, to missions serving children in South Sudan. The container is scheduled to arrive in Mombassa on February 15th. It will cost \$8500 to get it from Mombassa to Sudan. Please see the church's webpage ( <http://www.gracecongregational.org>) and check out the blog (<http://joininghandsnewsudan.blogspot.com>) if you wish to donate or see the updates. Please share this information with others who may be interested in getting involved in the support of this ministry.

## 2011 Short Term Mission Trips

### Sponsored by the Missions Committee of the 4C's

The following trips are tentatively set for the year 2011. Each of these trips requires an application, a confidential pastoral reference, a valid passport, and a one-time, non-refundable deposit.

#### **KOSOVO TEAM**

July 8-23

Youth ministry Team- Teaching Children's Bible Clubs- 4 to 5 people. Cost: \$995 plus airfare.

#### **GERMANY TEAM**

July 8-20

Refugee ministry- 4 to 6 people. Cost: \$1455 plus airfare.

#### **BELGIAN TEAM**

July 8-23

Helping the Arab Church with Vacation Bible School - 4 to 7 people. Cost: \$1230 plus airfare.

#### **HUNGARY TEAM**

July 8-23

Teaching English Classes - 5 to 10 people. Cost: \$1095 plus airfare.

For more information and an application packet contact:

Rev. Clair Longuevan

2208 Dakota Drive

Grand Junction, CO 81507

email: [clonguevan@cs.com](mailto:clonguevan@cs.com)

phone: (970) 243-5949

**Please do not let price be your deciding factor.** We request that all participants send out personal support letters to let their church, friends, and family have a chance to take part in the mission outreach or project with finances and prayer. **In all the years of sending these teams, we have yet to see anyone drop out of a trip because of finances. Remember: Where God guides, God provides!**



# GRACE CHURCH NEWS



## Prayer Gathering

The congregation is encouraged to gather together for a time of corporate prayer at the church, **Sunday, January 16th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, for the purpose of seeking God's vision for our ministry in the New Year.

## Annual Meeting

**Tuesday, January 18th, at 7 p.m.**, is the date for our annual business meeting. Please join us as we look back and look ahead, and seek to discern God's leading for our congregation.

## Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men of the church are invited to join together for a time of prayer and fellowship **at the church, on Saturday, January 15th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** Coffee and refreshments will be served.



## Women of Grace

All women and teenaged girls are invited to the monthly Women of Grace Fellowship on **Saturday, January 15th, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.** Join us for a time of Biblical nurture, discussion, prayer, and fellowship over lunch.

## College Students

Please pray for our college students as they return to school for their spring semester. Pray for diligence in their studies, and growth in faith.

**Aaron Durkee** -Worcester Polytechnic Institute

**Ally Lanoue**- Syracuse University

**Jeffrey Durkee**-Siena College, New York

**Emily Graham**-UMass

**Brittany Kiley**-Springfield College

**Nicole Lanoue**-Gordon College

**Billy Wanamaker**- University of Massachusetts, Amherst

## New Column Coming!

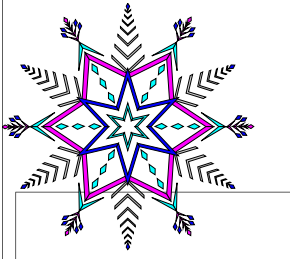
What books have influenced you most in your life of faith? Our new column on the "Top Ten" list of books will give you an opportunity to share this with the rest of us, that we might also benefit. The new column will begin next month. So be thinking about the books you have read over the years that have been helpful to you, and be ready to share!



## Service Opportunity

A current area of need is for **people willing to take part in keeping the church clean and presentable.** Many hands make light work. Share the load by grabbing a friend or family member to split the work. You could volunteer to clean the upstairs or the downstairs or the bathrooms or some other area. If this is a ministry you are willing to be part of, please see Elder Tom Ross for more details or to sign up.





# January 2011



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						<b>1</b> <i>New Year's Day</i>
<b>2</b> 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> 7:00 Elders' Meeting	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> 7:00 Addictions Victorious	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>



## Learning & Arriving: Remember, O Thou Man!

Standing quietly, hauntingly behind the joyful peals and refrains of Christmastide's "Deck the Halls!" and "O, Come All Ye Faithful!", perhaps the subtle, chanting tones of Thomas Ravenscroft's seventeenth-century carol, "O, Remember Adam's Fall" usher us into a more contemplative spirit of the reasons for our New Year's celebrations. The carolist implores us to pause and "remember": remember that our time is spent; remember that "we were condemned all to Hell perpetual, there for to dwell"; and remember God's goodness that sent His only Son "our sins for to redress". Christ was born to set man free: He did what only He can; therefore, repent!

Jesus reminds us, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." (John.8:34). Paul also recalls for us, "[Y]ou are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness", and "you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:16 – 18). We must resolve, in this and each New Year, to throw off the shackles of our slavery to sin and to be obedient to the faith and love and Word of our Savior and LORD. Remember, "Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free." (Psalm 118:5).

We are so often slaves to our unique idolatries. What can we give up without losing our very selves? Everything, except our faith in God. What is truly dispensable? All of the shackles and chains of worldliness and materialism, comfort, contentment, and complacency, with which we are held in bondage. Our time is spent, we are condemned, but our sins have been redressed by His atonement – God saving God's elect from God's wrath by God's grace alone. "Give thanks to God always, with heart most joyfully." Let us resolve, as our New Year's resolutions for this next year and each and every year subsequent, simply to remember that through the saving power of Jesus Christ, God, who blots out our transgressions for our own sakes, will not remember our sins (Isaiah. 43:25), and He remembers not the sins of our youth or our transgressions, but according to His steadfast love remembers us for the sake of His goodness, and His goodness alone! (Ps.25:7).

*Doug Rose*



### Women's Retreat Opportunities

- ♦ **NECCF Women's Retreat:** for women of 4C's churches in New England. **Friday evening March 11-Saturday March 12.** Topic: Listening to God, Listening to Others. Location: Days Hotel and Conference Center, Methuen, MA. Hotel cost \$59 per room. including breakfast. Retreat cost: \$60 (includes Friday dinner and Saturday lunch). **Registration deadline:** full payment must be received by **February 15.** For registration forms or more information see Charleen Bridgman.
- ♦ **Faithlift:** a non-denominational women's retreat sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church. **Saturday, April 2.** Location: Hope Church in Lenox. Registration packets will be available in February.

