



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Volume X, Issue 4

May 2011

Honor Your Mother



Any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter may be sent to **secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net**, or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.



From the Pastor's Desk

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. (Psalm 46:1-3)

They are still counting the bodies in Alabama. As I write this the count is over three hundred thirty. What a month this has been. Actually a little over a month ago it was the earthquake and Tsunami in Japan- one of the strongest earthquakes on record. A couple of weeks ago the tornados passed through North Carolina. The Lowes that was demolished was only a short distance from my mom's home. My niece and her family live next door to Holly Springs, and one tornado just missed my brother's home in the eastern part of the state and took out the mobile home just down the road. Then just the other day we experienced the worst outbreak of tornados in almost a century. What's going on?

For many, global warming is the culprit. A case could be made for that in the case of the recent tornado outbreaks, but it would be hard to make that connection with regard to the earthquake in Japan. For others, these are all signs of the imminent return of Christ. We certainly do believe that Jesus is coming back; the Bible tells us that. The problem is we just don't know when or how soon. So with regard to the connection between either global warming or the return of Christ and the current events, all we can do is speculate. It would be nice to have some certain answers.

The Bible tells us that *"the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth..."* (Romans 8:22) This is a result of the fall. If Adam and Eve had not sinned by disobeying God by eating of the fruit in the garden then we would not have all these problems. It is as if the axis of the whole earth is thrown off and everything is out of balance. Paul tells us that death itself is the result of that one act of sin.

The beauty is that in the midst of all of this pain and suffering we have the promise of restoration. John writes in his Revelation, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.... the dwelling place of God is with man.... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.* (Rev. 21:1-4) This will be after the return of Christ.

Christians are not immune to the suffering in this world. I would dare say that there were many who professed the name of Jesus who have perished in the catastrophes of the past month and a half, just as many Christians have succumbed to cancer and heart attacks. What Christians do have is the hope of eternal life.

We celebrated the resurrection of Jesus last Sunday. What greater testimony to the power of God and the truth of the gospel! But is it not also a testimony of the reversal of the curse that came as a result of sin that was placed upon Adam in the garden and all his posterity after him? Jesus Christ became man and identified with us in our mortality, died to take the judgment of God that we so rightly deserve upon himself, and then rose again to signify to us that the curse of death was broken for all who believe. What that means is that we of all people have a message of hope in the midst of crisis, peace in the midst of uncertainty, and comfort in the midst of suffering.

The psalmist concludes his psalm with the words, *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* (v. 11) The Lord of hosts IS with us.



Pastor Tom Bridgman



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Lamplight Women's Bible Study

An 8-week women's Bible study will start on **Tuesday, May 3rd, from 7-9 p.m.**, at the church, using *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything*, by Tim Keller. It is an intensive course on the gospel and how it is lived out in all of life—in your heart, your community, and then out into the world. For more information, speak to Cheryl at 413-528-2502.

Women of Grace

Women and teenage girls are encouraged to be a part of the Women of Grace. The May meeting will be on **Saturday, May 14th, from 10 a.m. -1:00 p.m.** Join us as we continue our theme of "Prayer and Friendship", and spend time in a study of prayer, in praying for one another, and in fellowship over lunch. Be sure to add your name to the sign-up sheet at the back of the sanctuary if you plan to attend.

Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to meet at the church on **Saturday, May 21st**, for a time of devotional, fellowship and prayer, from **7:00 -8:30 a.m.** The men are using *Whiter than Snow: Meditations on Sin and Mercy*, based on Psalm 51. Light refreshments will be served.



Prayer Gathering

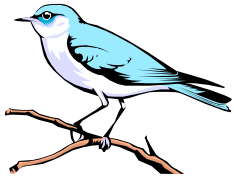
All are encouraged to join us for our next prayer gathering as we seek God's guidance and His provision for our church and our ministry in the community. A time of corporate prayer will take place on **Sunday evening, May 29th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, in the sanctuary.



Updated Website

Our church website is in the process of being updated, thanks to the work of Tim and Julie Ross, and Keith Ross. The church newsletter can now be accessed there, and updates on the Grace African Medical Project. More changes are coming including an updated picture gallery, and possibly some audio. So go to **gracecongregational.org** and see for yourself!





MCA 2011



S M T W T F S

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|--|--|--|-----------|--|---|---|
| 1 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 2 | 3 7:00 p.m. Lamplight Women's Bible study | 4 | 5 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 6 | 7 |
| 8 Mothers' Day 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 9 | 10 7:00 p.m. Lamplight Women's Bible study | 11 | 12 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 13 | 14 10 am-1 pm Women of Grace |
| 15 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 16 | 17 7:00 p.m. Lamplight Women's Bible study | 18 | 19 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 20 | 21 7-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship |
| 22 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 23 | 24 7:00 p.m. Lamplight Women's Bible study | 25 | 26 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 27 | 28 |
| 29 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship Prayer Gathering | 30  | 31 7:00 p.m. Lamplight Women's Bible study | | |  | |



Missions Corner

From the March newsletter of Octavio Gonzalez in London,

It has been a very interesting and productive time here in London, interacting with so many nationalities and overhearing so many different languages as I walk the London streets.

I've had great conversations about religion, about God and His own nature--some one-sided and others two-sided. A one-sided conversation with a Muslim means that he tears you apart with his many out-of-context questions and "contradictions". It is funny because he can make you fall into his game. However, this sort of conversations makes me go back home and investigate further. On the other hand, two-sided conversations lead to sharing the Gospel. We openly share our lives in when opportunities arise and we see the heart of the person. Some are truly seeking for truth.

I have been learning a lot about Islam and Christianity. It is lovely to see how His word is full of truth and connection--how verses from the Old Testament predict Jesus' coming to this earth to save the world from the wrath that is to come. Even more striking is the fact that God Himself came to earth and dwelt among us. He walked on earth, ate with us and became one of us to better relate to us. It was all about fellowship and being closer to us. This is our story in Christianity--a God that can take up human form, who can eat and walk, who saves and who fathers. Unlike Christianity, Muslims have a god that is limited. He cannot eat, walk, and of course he could never take up human form. He is an arbitrary dictator and they do not have assurance of salvation.

Making friends in London has been a means for evangelism. I met a young man at a shopping center and gave him a New Testament in his own language. He is from the Middle East, and we have been in touch ever since, chatting about sports (something we both like very much) and school and other matters.

There are a lot of Islamic missionaries here in London--people that get paid to bring people to Islam and have the promise to inherit paradise if they do so. A man from France wanted to convert us to Islam and I asked him why I should become a Muslim?

He said to me, "If you convert to Islam Allah will spare me a spot in paradise where I will find rivers flowing with wine, and I will have a lot of virgins for me, women that no man has ever laid a hand on!"

I replied, "Is that the reason why you want to be in paradise? So it means that you do not wish to be with Allah?"

Can we see the difference here? We Christians want to go to heaven because we will be with the Father forever and ever and nothing will ever separate us from His love. That will be the end of our sinful bodies and we will be reunited with Christ. Muslims lack the fatherhood of God. Our God is a loving father; theirs is a dictator, a master that has slaves. We are children of the Most High. The Islamic god has sent his sons to die for Him and our Mighty God has sent his Only Begotten Son to die for us. Can we see the difference?

We Christians are called to love one another, to love God and even more powerfully we are to love our enemies. *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you...(Matthew 5:44)*

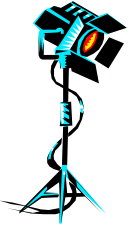
Prayer Requests:

- Spiritual and physical health
- More encounters with Muslims and much wisdom to deal with their tricky questions
- Finances for my flight back home in July from where I must apply for a longer (two-year) visa.



Islamic

Octavio is the Bridgmans' "other son" and is currently serving with Operation Mobilization in London.



Spotlight on Students

Special Missions News from Bill Wanamaker

Dear Grace Church,

During time at UMass Amherst, I have become very involved with Campus Crusade for Christ. This year I've been co-leading a small group men's Bible study, and playing guitar with our worship team at our weekly meetings. It's awesome to see what God can do in our lives, and I have something coming up that is very exciting.

On May 23rd, I will join a group of about 15 students and Crusade staff on a flight to Istanbul, Turkey for the six-week Breakthrough summer project. My faith will be stretched in ways it never has before as I try to learn the culture of a new country, while also sharing the message of Jesus with college students in Istanbul. Turkey is predominantly a Muslim nation, although there is freedom of religion, this strong Muslim faith can make sharing the Gospel a slow process. While my group may not see a single person accept Christ while we are in Turkey, we can be trusting that God will be using us to alter the eternity of the people we talk to.

Because of the significant leap of faith that this project takes on my part, I would really appreciate your prayers. There is still a great amount to be done in preparing for this summer, as well as a large financial obstacle. The cost of the project is \$5,000, and I am trusting that God will bring this money in from supporters who really believe in the cause.

If you feel led to help out financially, please send a check payable to Campus Crusade for Christ, or give via credit or debit card at give.ccci.org/give



Mother's Day



Learning & Arriving: Thinking Christianly

“The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:15 – 16). Jesus bids us to love the LORD our God to the fullest extent of our minds’ ability to reason (Matthew 22:37), and to set our minds on the things of God and not on those of man (Mark 8:33). Jesus exhorts us when we stray from His truth even to change our minds and believe in Him (Matthew 21:32).

Our prayers are gifts to our minds made by His Spirit, and only by joining our minds with the human mind of Christ are we able to contemplate God. David, the psalmist, prayed, “Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind ...” (Psalm 26:2), and again, Isaiah prophesied, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

We cannot instruct ourselves in the ways of God, except through His Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ, and His Word revealed, Holy Scripture. If our minds, our thoughts, our dreams, and our imaginings are fixed on Christ, however, stayed on His teaching and His instruction, we are fixed on the truth. “If you abide in My word,” spoke the LORD, “you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32). Jesus’ words test our fallen minds, as well as our broken hearts, but He will keep us in perfect peace as long as we fix Him as our intellectual compass and set our minds on the truth He spoke. Jesus told us that we need to stretch our minds to understand God, but that if we comprehend the Incarnate Son, and hear His words, then “Whoever is of God hears the words of God.” (John 8:47).

“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.” (Proverbs 28:26). We cannot understand God, but we can understand Christ, our LORD. Faced with His truth, we are set free, such that we have no choice but to change our minds and believe in Him.

Doug Rose



Vacation Bible School *FAITH EXPEDITION*
Join the exploration!



What? Songs, Bible stories, daily skit, crafts, recreation, and snacks.

For Whom? Children entering kindergarten this fall through those completing 4th grade this spring.

Dates: June 28- July 2 (Tuesday- Saturday)

Time: 9:00 a.m.-12 noon



Closing program and cookout: On Saturday we will have a closing program and a picnic lunch for children and parents.

Students will travel across time through the lives of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul and Silas to discover how God gives his covenant people faith to follow him, believe His promises, and obey Him.

It is time to get the word out. We have flyers and invitation postcards available. If you know of families with children, grab some flyers and pass them on! Let us know if you know of a place of business where we can put up a poster, or let us know of names and addresses, and we will see that invitations are mailed out.

Please be praying for the staff that we will be well-prepared and ready to serve the children and their families. Pray for the children who will be attending, that the week would be a time of blessing and fun.