



Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Welcome to the October edition of *Grace Notes*. Please send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net.

From the Pastor's Desk

When we see salvation whole—it's every single part
is found in Christ,
we must beware lest we derive the smallest drop
From somewhere else.

If we seek salvation,
the very name of Jesus
teaches us
that he possesses it.

If other Spirit-given gifts are sought—in his anointing they are
found;
strength—in his reign; and purity—in his conception;
tenderness—expressed in his nativity,
in which he was made like us in all respects, that he might feel
our pain:

Redemption when we seek it, is in his passion found;
acquittal—in his condemnation lies;
and freedom from the curse—in his cross is known.
If satisfaction for our sins we seek—we'll find it in his
sacrifice.

There's cleansing in his blood.
And if it's reconciliation that we need, for it he entered Hades;
if mortification of our flesh—then in his tomb it's laid.
And newness of our life—his resurrection brings and
immortality as well come also with that gift.

And if we long to find that heaven's kingdom's our
inheritance,
His entry there secure it now
with our protection, safety too, and blessing that abound
flowing from his kingly reign.

—all

The sum of all for those who seek such treasure-trove of
blessings,
These blessings of all kinds, is this:
From nowhere else than him can they be drawn;
For they are ours in Christ alone.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.19, 1559 Latin ed., translation and versification by Sinclair B. Ferguson in his *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*, published by



Help spread the joy!

Join us in **Operation Christmas Child**, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse, as we serve as the Relay Center for Northern Berkshire County. People from around the county will be bringing **over a thousand** packed shoeboxes to our church during

National Collection Week, November 14-21.

You can participate in this ministry in several ways:

- Pack a shoebox by yourself or with a friend. Decorative "GO" (Gospel Opportunity) boxes are available at the church.
- Or, rather than packing an entire box yourself, purchase individual items that can go in a box .
(For both of these options, please make use of the packing brochures with gift suggestions and a list of items to avoid)
- **Serve as a volunteer at our Relay Center during Collection week.** Opportunities for service include:
 - ⇒ Putting together gift boxes from individual donated items
 - ⇒ Greeting those who come through our doors with their donated boxes
 - ⇒ Baking cookies to offer our guests
 - ⇒ Carrying packed shoeboxes from the cars into the church (**young people encouraged to apply!**)
 - ⇒ Packing the shoeboxes into larger boxes for transport to the Northampton Collection Center
 - ⇒ Loading the larger boxes onto the transport truck
 - ⇒ Record keeping of the number of boxes brought in each day, and from whom

Millions of children around the world will experience Christmas joy when they receive gift-filled boxes and hear the Gospel through Christian literature.

But it doesn't end there! They are given the opportunity to take part in **The Greatest Journey**, a 12-lesson discipleship and evangelism program offered in their own language. Upon completion of the program, graduates receive their own copy of a New Testament.

What starts out as a simple gift--a shoe box containing toys, school supplies, and toiletries--is used by God to transform the hearts of millions of children, their families, and whole communities, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



To sign up and to get more information, please speak to Charleen Bridgman, Relay Center Coordinator at

A Tale of Two Churches:

Rio de Janeiro

by Ian Bridgman

Earlier this year, in April, when I first arrived in Brazil, I was faced with an unusual dilemma, of sorts. I was looking for a church. Not just a church to attend some Sunday, but a church that I could really commit to and become a part of during my (originally planned) 6-plus months in the country. I was in the hunt for a temporary second home church, more or less, in the city where I was temporarily seeking to make my second home. That is all nice and good, except that I didn't *really* speak Portuguese, which made this task much more difficult.

To be fair, I can speak Portuguese, to some degree. I can joke around with friends, talk soccer and girls, and make basic arrangements by telephone. Just don't ask me to translate a sermon on Sunday morning. Ah yes, a sermon. That central piece of a Sunday service on which, we would assume, any church choosing would be based. But there was my dilemma. I was going to have to make my choice based almost entirely on what we usually consider to be secondary criteria.

So, how does someone choose a church in this situation? Well, as with all searches, Google is not a bad place to start. A quick search gave me an impossibly long list of every kind of "church" possible, from tourist attraction Catholic cathedrals to Charismatic holes in the wall. Brazil doesn't have the same "mainline"/bible-believing divide found in the United States, meaning that I couldn't use the same process of elimination based on denomination or church name. Apart from one specific mega-denomination which I knew to be a mouthpiece for the prosperity gospel, just about every church was fair game. I was concerned that my quest for a church might last until the day I left the country! But Sunday was coming and I had to go somewhere. It was time to get off Google, pound some pavement and plop down in some pews.

My first attempt was the evening service at a Presbyterian church in Copacabana, Rio's most famous beach side neighborhood. The church met in a beautiful older building, rare for a non-Catholic church in a country whose protestant history mostly goes back only a generation or two. The building could seat at least a couple hundred, but it was mostly empty. Those that were there seemed mostly older and they were scattered, in 1s and 2s, throughout the cavernous sanctuary. This brings up an important cultural note. A visitor could walk into a perfectly healthy church in the U.S. or northern Europe and find people evenly spaced throughout the room. These are cold-climate cultures where "body bubbles" are large, and people place a high value on personal space. It's not that they don't like each other, they just need a lot of elbow room to feel like they can breathe. This is not as much the case in Brazil and many other warm climate cultures, where a sense of community is reflected in smaller personal spaces and more physical contact. Knowing this, one quick look around told me that something was off. The worship service began. The music was neither traditional nor contemporary, instead seeming to come from that musical no-man's land in between the two. It felt dated and lacking in power. The preacher emerged, dressed, surprisingly, in a traditional white robe and stole. I did my best to follow the message, from Psalm 11, where the wicked "bend their bows" against the righteous and then have "fiery coals and burning sulfur" rained on them. Beyond that, my limited Portuguese left me scratching my head. I couldn't tell if we were supposed to be fleeing for the hills or assembling a war council, but either way, the congregation didn't look like it was in any condition to be charging anywhere, least of all the gates of hell. By this point, I had the disappointing feeling instead that most in attendance were just going through motions. After the service concluded, I hung around outside, watching as people dispersed into the city. Within 15 minutes, the church was empty, gates locked, congregation gone. This was not a healthy church. I did give it a second chance at the following week's morning service. There were more people, but the atmosphere was the same. It was time to look somewhere else.

By the time the next Sunday came around, my Rio experience was beginning a downward spiral, and I was feeling my need for a good church. I decided to try a smaller Baptist church a 20 minute walk up the hill from my hostel, and arrived early, to find a surprising number of teenagers milling around. They had just wrapped up their evening Sunday school class, I was told; the service would begin soon. The age range diversified as more people came in, but the congregation still skewed young. I noticed even that every member of the worship team was younger than me. During

the first song, people got up, moved around and greeted each other. In true Brazilian fashion, one of the girls came up and gave me a great big bear hug. It is not uncommon to get big hugs from complete strangers in Brazilian churches. Worship was loud and the singing sincere. The message came and went; once again, I was quickly left behind. When the service was over, though, many came up to find out who I was, what I was doing there, and to try out their English phrases as well. After 15 minutes, instead of the church being empty, it seemed no one had left. We all did leave, eventually, but I was back the next week. And the next. And every Sunday afterwards for the rest of my time in Rio. I went to the Friday night small group meetings in their homes; I went to birthday parties. I visited the Bible college some of them attended, and taught English at the evening classes they sponsored. Even after two months, I still couldn't fully understand the messages, but I could see that this was a healthy church, and I was really happy to be a part of it.

I would never say that the sermon is not important. The preaching of the Word is the defining and most integral part of any church. But for those few weeks I had the chance to see church through a different set of eyes and ears. Instead of analyzing how the Gospel was preached, I was able, forced even, to evaluate instead how the Gospel was lived out in that community of Christians. The Gospel doesn't just impact what the pastor preaches; it affects everything. So while I couldn't dissect the theological nuances of the sermons, I could see from experience that this was a group of people who loved the Lord and each other, and who welcomed me when I came looking for Christian fellowship.

To borrow from Philippians chapter 2, Rio is a corrupt and twisted city. I loved it there and believe that I was meant to be there for that time, but it was not a "safe" place for me. I needed that church, and I'm thankful to have found it so quickly. The choice to cut short my stay and begin my journey home was a very difficult one. That said, I am also thankful for the immediate family and church family I can return to. So now, as I see my church across the backyard, hillsides changing color behind it, I consider my experience in Brazil, and I have to wonder. If a new person stumbled into our church, what would they see? What if their English wasn't good enough to fully understand the sermon, or if they were a new believer still learning how to discern a solid biblical message from a shaky one? What if they were young and from a faraway country, adventurous but lonely, looking for refuge from a corrupt and twisted city and running scared from their own corrupt and twisted heart? Would they still be able to see Christ in our music, in our worship, and in how we relate to them and to one another? Would they see Christ's presence in us? Would they see it in me? Is it something they would want to stay and be a part of? I hope and pray that their answer is yes.



*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so...
Psalm 107:1,2*

A Journey through the Beatitudes"

Using as a guide the book entitled *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*
authored by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Continuing from last month:

Now before we leave these first three Beatitudes we must take another view of them because it is so important that we are sure we understand them. They are needed for the entrance into the kingdom of God, but as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the New Testament repeats over and over these three principles are to be the very fabric of all born again Christians for the length of their walk with the Lord here on earth. Are we poor in spirit, mournful, meek? Are they difficult statements to us? Jesus, King of the kingdom of God, through whom grace and truth comes, has told us in no uncertain terms that these three Beatitudes need not only to be in our understanding in order to enter the kingdom of God but are to be part and parcel of us as born again Christians. They do not come easy to us; they are not part of our natural instinct. Remember now the kingdom of God is not of this world, it is a spiritual kingdom. The world is constantly telling us on all sides that the way to happiness is the direct opposite. Eat, drink and be merry. Build up your self-esteem, do what ever is right in your own eyes, be your own person. The fact of the matter is that because of sin and the continuing sin that is in us we are helpless. We cannot keep the Beatitudes, or Sermon on Mount, or the Ten Commandments; in and of ourselves we are lost. Listen to what Paul say in regard to these things. Romans 7:21-24: "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Here is a perfect example of a man who is poor in spirit, mourning and exhibiting meekness in relation to the sin that dwells in his members. Who can deliver the Apostle Paul; who can deliver us? What is Paul's answer; what is our answer? He answers his own question with these words which should be on the heart of every born again Christian. "THANKS BE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD!"

So what is this condition that should cause us to be poor in spirit, to be mourning and exhibiting meekness? Lets look at some of the reasons as given in the scriptures:

Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness..."

Ephesians 2:1-3: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...". These scriptures show the reasons we are to be poor in spirit, to be mourning and exhibiting meekness is because we begin to understand our true condition before God. Here are some of Scriptures descriptions of us before our conversion: we are sinners, enemies of God, weak, ungodly, unrighteous, spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, and under the wrath of God. Being spiritually dead we can do nothing about that condition. We are helpless and hopeless. but, wait there is a verse 6 in these Beatitudes:

Verse 6: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*".

Remember what it said when we look at Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...". Verse 6 is saying that **now** knowing our true condition we begin to seek righteousness. Not only that, we emphatically hunger and thirst for it. We have a desire to be right with God, to be saved from his divine judgment. Jesus Christ says he knows how to do that. We begin to look to him and believe that he is speaking the truth, and He says, that if we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, "*we shall be satisfied*", in other words, we shall be saved and we shall enter the kingdom of God. But, wait a minute, if we are spiritually dead unable to do anything to save ourselves how are we to have the power to repent, to be poor in spirit, to be mourning, exhibiting meekness and hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

Here is the mystery of the ages, why the gospel of Jesus Christ is called good news. Last month we looked at

word is **GRACE**! What is **grace**? It is unmerited favor from the Sovereign, Supreme, and all-powerful Holy God of the universe. Lets go back to Ephesians 2:4; there is one of those tremendous three letter words that the scripture is full of in verse 4; and that word is BUT! But why is that but there? It is to give the truth of the most spiritual, supernatural move of God in the history of man and this earth. Listen now to what God has done. "...**but** God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by **grace** you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by **grace** you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them".

We are to grow in understanding the full meaning of these great words: mercy, great love, made alive with Christ, by grace you have been saved, raised us up with him in the heavenly places, and in Christ Jesus. That is the good news of Jesus Christ! The scriptures are saying that if God in his tender mercies toward us has made these first **four** verses of the Beatitudes a reality in our lives; then we are born again, our spirit is alive, the Holy Spirit has come to us and we have entered the kingdom of God.

Once in the kingdom of God we must not forget Paul's Lament in Romans 7:21-24, that we just look at where he showed us clearly that even though he was in the kingdom of God, he would still need to use these four tender mercies of the Beatitudes, a gift from God, for the rest of his earthly walk in order to keep growing in the knowledge of the fullness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in other words, to be taking on the image of Christ. In church terms that is called sanctification. For Paul and for us it is a life long process with ends at death when we will enter heaven and be with God through out eternity. The rest of the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount and the New Testament is the Lord giving us what this journey will look like as we walk in out. It is reasonable to see from what we have covered so far that our Lord is giving us a description of the character and disposition of the Christian person. So now that this Christian person is born again and is in the kingdom of God next month we will look at what the Lord says should be the change in the actions of a person who has committed their lives to the Lord and his kingdom. This is where the Beatitudes begin to show that change and it carries throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and New Testament. Jesus Christ says he knows how to do that. We begin to look to him and believe that he is speaking the truth, and He says, that if we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, "*we shall be satisfied*", in other words, we shall be saved and we shall enter the kingdom of God. But, wait a minute, if we are spiritually dead unable to do anything to save ourselves how are we to have the power to repent, to be poor in spirit, to be mourning, exhibiting meekness and hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

Next month we will continue our "Journey Through the Beatitudes"

Tom Ross
Elder Emeritus



*Everyone says forgiveness
is a lovely idea, until
they have something to
forgive.*

C. S. Lewis





Grace Church News



Women's Fellowship

Women of all ages are welcome to participate in the November Women's Fellowship on **Saturday November 12th from 9:30-11:00 a.m.** Join us for a look into the Scriptures, discussion, prayer and fellowship. Breakfast goodies will be served.

Ladies' Bible Class

All women are welcome to be a part of the **Tuesday afternoon** Ladies' Bible Class that meets at the church **weekly** from **1:15-2:45 p.m.** This year they are using *Glory Veiled and Unveiled, A Heart-Searching Look at Christ's Parables*, by Gerald M. Bilkes.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship **Saturday, November 19th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Enjoy a time of Bible study, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Refreshments will be served.

Prayer Gathering

Our monthly prayer vigil will be held in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, November 27th.** All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek to know Him and His direction for our part in His kingdom work.



Encouragement Needed

As the weather gets cooler, let's make opportunities for warm fellowship. Consider getting together for tea, coffee, or hot chocolate. Look around and see who could use a card or a phone call. Consider sharing what God is doing in your life, sharing His Word with one another, or memorizing Scripture together.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another... (Hebrews 10:24,25)





November 2016



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

30 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	31 7:00 Addictions Victorious	November 1 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	2	3	4	5
6 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	7 7:00 Addictions Victorious	8 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	9	10	11	12 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship 
13 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	14 7:00 Addictions Victorious	15 Operation Christmas	16 Child National	17 Collection Week	18	19 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship 
20 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	21 7:00 Addictions Victorious	22 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	23	24 Thanksgiving 	26	26
27 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	28 7:00 Addictions Victorious	29 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	30			