

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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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

...what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:4-5)

Charleen and I came back from North Carolina two weeks ago after visiting with my mom who is undergoing treatment for cancer and has also had a stroke. She is presently in a nursing home in Chapel Hill while she gets her radiation and chemotherapy, but our hope is to move her out of the nursing home and into our home or the home of one of my brothers as soon as possible. (We are talking about rotating her around with each of us taking a turn for several months at a time). The nursing home is short-staffed and the attentiveness to the needs of the patients is less than adequate, and my mom, like many there, are completely at the mercy of the staff. Not only does this create a concern for their health needs, but it means a loss of dignity for the patients. Needless to say, it is heart-rending for us to see her in this predicament.

Spending time with my mom in the nursing home gave me an opportunity to reflect on this whole notion of dignity. The patients in the nursing home are from all walks of life; some had been school teachers, some truck drivers, some had been home-makers, accountants, church musicians or medical care-givers themselves, yet all of them are bound either to bed or a wheelchair and are in need of someone else's care in order to survive.

Each morning I had to be at the nursing home by 9:00 in order to ride with her in the transport van to the radiation clinic. While sitting in the waiting room I witnessed a steady stream of others undergoing radiation for various forms of cancer. Some you would never know were sick. Others showed the disfigurement of the disease or the treatment- radiation burns on the face or neck, or women with scarves to cover their hairless scalp. One day I even witnessed guards from a local penitentiary escorting two prisoners in for treatment, hands and feet in shackles and chained to the wheelchair.

I was struck by how the prisoners diverted their eyes from everyone else in shame as others in the waiting area did the same, as if to deny their presence. I felt compelled to acknowledge one of the prisoners with both a gesture and a greeting. I couldn't get over his response; his eyes lit up, he waved and smiled as if to say "thanks".

The point I'm trying to make is this, I'm afraid that we have a contrived view of dignity. We measure a person's value by their socio-economic status, educational level, ethnic background, or (God forbid) by their physique or the clarity of their skin. But is this how God measures a person's dignity? The Bible informs us that every man, woman or child is created in the image of God, and because of this has real dignity in God's eyes, yes, even those in nursing homes and prisons.

It is understandable when the world measures a person's dignity in other ways, but when we as Christians follow suit, it betrays a faulty view of the gospel on our part. What it says is that we may give lip service to our belief in grace, but that we believe that some of us don't really need grace as much as some others, or that perhaps some people don't deserve grace. Well, some people don't deserve grace. (Oops, I mean all of us) But that does not diminish the fact that we are created in the image of God and therefore have the dignity that comes with that. That's why I refuse to call the men in the jail "boys" or the women, "girls". Some may be as young as 18, but they still deserve the dignity of being referred to as "men" and "women", and perhaps by being afforded with that dignity they might recognize the responsibility that comes with that. We need to be careful not to live with a contrived view of dignity- dignity as defined by our secular culture and not by God.

Suffice it to say, all this has tremendous implications for how we do church. I'm not going to get into specifics here; I will save that for a later time (sermons). In the meantime, let us remember that we are Christians, we believe the Bible, and the name of our church is GRACE.

Pastor Tom Bridgman





GRACE CHURCH NEWS



A Special Women of Grace Fellowship

All women and teen-age young women are invited to join us as on Saturday, **May 12th**, as we wrap up the year with a focus on "Friendship". This month's meeting will have a different format and a **time change**. We will meet from **10:30 a.m.-1p.m.** for a short devotional, special music, and lunch (provided). Please R.S.V.P. by **May 6th** to Cheryl (413-528-2502) or Brenda (413-499-4784)



Third Thursdays Outreach

Our church will be manning a booth this summer during Downtown Pittsfield's "Third Thursdays". The elders welcome participation and ideas for different ways in which we can introduce ourselves to the wider community. The first "Third Thursday" is **May 17th**, beginning at 5 p.m. and going until 8 p.m. If you would like to be involved or have some ideas, please speak to one of the elders.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to meet at the church on **Saturday, May 19th** 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 for our ministry in the community and His provision for the needs of our church. A time of corporate prayer will take place on **Sunday evening, May 27th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.**, in the sanctuary.





Missions Corner

Project Haiti Report

by Ian Bridgman

On April 4th, my alarm went off way too early. Somewhere around 4:15 am. I stumbled downstairs, finalized my suitcase and loaded everything into the car. By 5am, Dave Fairfield and I were on the road and headed for Logan airport. Despite unusually thick traffic, the Bridgman Airport Shuttle Service (aka Mom and Dad), deposited us on time, and our 10-day Project Haiti trip with Samaritan's Purse was underway.

This was my fifth trip to Haiti, but the first in 7 years, and the first since the massive earthquake that laid waste to so much of the country two years ago. Over the next 10 days, our team of 10 would work alongside about 70 Haitians, as well as a few Canadians, Ecuadorians and other Americans posted there on a longer-term basis. The current project is the Greta Academy and Children's Home, a newer, larger version of the Lamb Center, a school and orphanage that was destroyed in the earthquake. It was exciting and rewarding to overcome language barriers and make new friends as the project progressed.

Many people ask me if the trip was an "eye-opener", if the intense poverty was shocking or overwhelming. It wasn't. Conditions in Haiti are appalling to those who have never seen it before. But after the first time, it's not shocking; it's simply the way things are.

On this trip, however, our group was encouraged to see not just the physical conditions, but also the spiritual backdrop to the country. Haiti is hardly a "3rd-World" country; it really is a 4th World country. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been pumped in, and one leader after another has come to power with good intentions, and yet nothing seems to change. Most Christians in Haiti believe that the physical condition of their country is a result of its spiritual condition. Haiti, as a nation and a people, is committed to voodoo. Despite being statistically a "Christian" country, the vast majority of people see nothing wrong with mixing Christianized traditions with voodoo practices and beliefs. And while we usually only see references to it in movies or on TV, in Haiti, voodoo is a very real force. It exerts a control that prevents an otherwise intelligent, warm, and industrious people from constructing a successful and functioning society. Many of the attempted fixes ignore or deny the source of Haiti's problems, and in doing so, they are doomed to fail. No human leader, no matter how good their intentions, can withstand the forces arrayed against them. The U.N. and other aid organizations, while they are providing crucial help, will ultimately come up short, because billions of dollars of aid money will not fix a spiritual problem.

2 Chronicles 7:14 says "*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*" Many Christians in Haiti hold to this verse as a source of hope and encouragement, and rightly so. It is not the wishful thinking kind of hope so often found elsewhere. It is a promise, found in God's word. We should never look down at other relief agencies. They are doing good work, to the best of their ability, and it is a privilege to work alongside them. But as Christians, our hope for Haiti is based on people coming to know Jesus as their personal savior. There are many Christians in Haiti who have this real hope. So we pray with them, we work with them, and we look forward to what God will do in that country.

"lè sa a si pèp ki pote non m' lan lapriyè nan pye m', si yo soumèt devan mwen, si yo pran chache m' ankò, si yo vire do bay vye peche yo t'ap fè yo, m'ap tandè yo nan syèl kote m' ye a, m'ap padonnen peche yo, m'ap fè peyi a kanpe ankò." 2Kwonik 7v14

PeaceMeal

Food for Thought on Biblical Peacemaking

submitted by Elder Bob Kirkman

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16

It is often helpful to refer to the Bible as a source of objective truth when you have a disagreement with another Christian.

Adapted from The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict by Ken Sande, Updated Edition (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2003) p. 180.

Food for Thought

Every disagreement needs an objective voice.

Here’s a saying you may have heard: *There are two sides to every story, and the truth is somewhere in the middle.* That’s definitely a step in the right direction, but it stops short of being truly wise because it leaves “the middle” undefined. Is “the middle” a combination of what side A and side B are proposing? Is “the middle” the input of a family member, friend, or co-worker? That all still sounds very *subjective*; what a disagreement needs is something *objective*.

Ken reminds us that when disagreements arise between Christians, “the middle” needs to be the Bible, God’s Word, the source of objective truth. God’s Word is a lamp so our stubborn feet can find the way again to peace. It’s a light so our eyes filled with anger or pride can truly see what’s going on. (Remember... Scripture has as much to say to YOU as it does to the other person.) The Bible is that two-edged sword which cuts through our defenses and reveals the motives of the heart. Those God-breathed words train us to be much more than right; they train us to be righteous. The next time you have a disagreement with another Christian brother or sister, don’t just put anything in the middle. Put God’s Word in the middle.

Route 5:9 Copyright © 2012 [Peacemaker Ministries](#)



Mother's Day



LEARNING & ARRIVING: *No More Tears!*

by Doug Rose

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 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. 21:3-4)

Consider the bliss and joy of our life in the resurrection, in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, and be consoled that we will never weep again as we so often do in this valley of tears. Consider having no more crying in heartache, disappointment, suffering, and pain, and then be consoled that there will be no more bitter tears. Consider how we stand convicted of our sins in this life, how we bewail our manifold failings, and be consoled that our tears will then only be tears of joy.

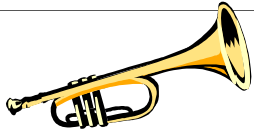
Consider Jesus's human tears and how He cried with us. *Jesus wept.* (Jn. 11:35). Our LORD, Savior, and brother wept before the tomb of His dear dead friend, Lazarus. *And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it ...* (Lk. 19:41). On the road down the Mount of Olives, Jesus wept for all His countrymen, lamenting the oncoming destruction of the city of Jerusalem in the throes of war, insurrection, siege, and terror. *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.* (Heb. 5:7). Even as He prayed in agony at Gethsemane, Jesus wept for the sinfulness of all mankind as well as for the sacrifice of His very own humanity for that sinfulness, bewailing His crucifixion and atoning death, yet in full and perfect submission to the will of His Father.

King Solomon wrote that there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven,
*a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance ...* (Eccl. 3:1, 4).

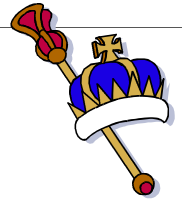
In the age to come, our inconsolable sorrows will be assuaged and it will be the time to only laugh with inutterable joy in the presence of the LORD. We will no longer weep over lost love or lost opportunity; we will no longer mourn death, decay, and destruction. We will no longer bewail our sinfulness, as we will have been forgiven in and through our brother, Jesus. In the resurrection will be the time to dance.

For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as He hears it, He answers you. (Isa. 30:19).

Amen!



Vacation Bible School 2012
The King Is Coming!
Sound the Trumpets and Prepare the Way!



What? Songs, Bible stories, daily skit, crafts, recreation, and snacks. Children will learn of God's covenant from beginning (creation) to end (Christ's return and eternal reign).

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

Dates: June 26- 30 (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 their families.

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 flyer, 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, and result in spiritual fruit.

There are still opportunities for service! There are openings for skit director and actors, classroom helpers, snack assistants, craft assistants, floaters, registrars, transportation coordinator, and cookout chefs.

For more information about these ministry opportunities, please speak to Charleen Bridgman (499-3040) at your earliest convenience.

An Encouraging Word

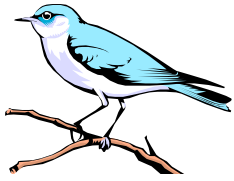
Editor's note: Much goes on behind the scenes at Grace Church. Let's not be shy about expressing appreciation, which is really a form of encouragement. A member of the congregation speaks for all of us as she writes:



Much appreciation to the ladies that take care of the outside plantings. Recently Millie DeVos and Linda Poulton have spread mulch on the beds which was much needed. It looks great! The cost of the mulch was contributed by two other ladies (who wish to remain anonymous). Appreciation also to Millie and Linda for their faithful cleaning of the church each week.



"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25



MAF 2012



<i>S</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>S</i>
		1	2	3 7:00 Addictions Victorious	4	5 Clean-up Day
6 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	7	8	9	10 7:00 Addictions Victorious	11	12 10 am-1 pm Women of Grace
13 Mothers' Day 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	14	15	16	17 7:00 Addictions Victorious	18	19 7-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
20 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	21	22	23	24 7:00 Addictions Victorious	25	26
27 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	28 Memorial Day	29	30			