

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

November 5, 2009

Nevertheless!

It's an important word in the New Testament – nevertheless or sometimes just 'but'. Writing in the closing period of his life, remembering some who once had been strong and active followers of Jesus but who now were destroying the faith of many, Paul said "Nevertheless God's solid foundation stands firm." When life is hard, when evil is strong, nevertheless God's firm foundation stands.

Although the Bible talks of Jesus as our foundation, Paul here (2 Tim. 2:19) seems to be thinking of something else: the foundation which God has established, founded: his church. Not buildings, not a denomination, but the invisible body of believing people who have trusted Christ. That body cannot be overthrown or destroyed.

So we have confidence and hope. Paul says that the Lord knows those who are his. God knows those who have done business with him, who belong to him. He knows who you are, if you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ – whoever you are, whatever your circumstances. And with this seal (Paul's word) we can put the words of Jesus: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them ... no one can snatch them out of my hand. (Jn.10:27).
Strong words! Good words!

Things to remember:

At a special meeting last Sunday evening, the congregation voted to a proposal from the Building Committee for an addition to our facilities. This would be phase one of a two phase program and would add new offices, nursery and additional lobby space, freeing up some existing rooms for Sunday School use and meeting space and library. Now there are approvals to obtain from different levels of authority, finding a contractor, etc. The hope is that building can commence in the early spring.

On December 13 the Rev. Joe Gray will be with us to preach for a call. Mr. Gray has been the Canadian Director of Chosen People Ministries. We'll be planning some special activities that weekend to enable as many as possible to meet him.

Special Christmas Concert: Saturday, Nov. 28, 7 p.m. Juno Award winner Deborah Klassen will be with us for "An Introduction to Christmas." Get your tickets now – call Cheryl at the church office or see Janice Ward. Tickets are \$20 – includes dessert during intermission.

There's just one more week to fill your shoe boxes for "Operation Christmas Child." You'll help children around the world to experience something of the love of Jesus! Contact Debbie Fernandes for more information – 905-619-3183.

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October 29, 2009

In one of his books, Chuck Swindoll talks about serving in the Marine Corps and arriving in Japan – for most of the men, their first visit to another country. Before they left the ship, their company commander had some important things to say to them. He told them that for the first time in their lives, they were foreigners. The people they would meet knew nothing about the United States except what they saw in these Marines. “Don’t blow it,” the commander said. “Act in such a way that the Japanese people will gain a good impression of your country... make us proud, not ashamed.”

As Christians, we represent the kingdom of God. Though we live in a pagan culture, our behaviour needs to demonstrate what life with God is all about. Will people around us be attracted to Jesus Christ because of who and what we are? All around us are pagan values and philosophy. May the beauty of Jesus be seen in me should be our prayer.

Exciting days at Grace!

This Sunday, November 1, 7:30 p.m. Special Congregational Meeting to seek approval for a modest addition to the building. The plan calls for about 2900 square feet of new building, which will give us some new offices, a new nursery and an enlarged entrance lobby (narthex). It will free up existing space to provide a new Sunday School room, a library and a meeting room. The proposed plan will be available for you to see on Sunday morning (as it was last Sunday also).

Preaching for a Call: The Session, at the request of the Search Committee, has invited the Rev. Joseph Gray to conduct the services at Grace on Sunday, December 13. as the candidate for a Call. You will want to mark this date on your calendar! We’ll be planning other activities on that weekend to give as many people as possible an opportunity to meet Mr. Gray and his wife Beth.

Another special event coming up: Concert – “An Introduction to Christmas” - with Juno-Award winner Deborah Klassen on Saturday, November 28, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20.00.

Membership classes have begun – Sunday afternoons at 4:30 p.m. There’s still time for you to be part of these. Please talk to Everett or Mona.

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October 22, 2009

Grace to You is different this week! We wanted to share some important news!

All of us had a special piece of mail in our mail folders last Sunday. Did you pick up yours? The Building and Expansion Committee circulated a proposal for an addition of about 2900 square feet to our building. The committee has been meeting for some seven months; it has tried to look carefully at our programmes and needs and presents this as phase one of a two-phase plan (phase 2 to be the building of a new sanctuary).

This phase 1 addition will provide –

- a minister's office
- an assistant minister's office
- a new nursery
- an administrative office
- a resources room
- enlarged narthex (lobby) and entrance - lots of room to mingle!
-

This will free up some existing space, of course. The existing offices will be converted to a library and a meeting room. For years we have talked about the need for a library. We purchased books – but had no place where they could be accessible to people. We haven't had a meeting room for a smaller group – the ladies' coffee hour committee, for example, has had to meet in the kitchen. The present nursery will become a Sunday School room.

Architectural drawings will be available for everyone to look at this Sunday and members of the committee will be on hand to answer questions. A congregational meeting is called for Sunday, November 1, at 7 p.m. to seek congregational approval. The Session and Board of Managers have already agreed to the proposal.

The cost is expected to be \$450,000 to \$490,000 (less volunteer help). Our building fund stands at over \$600,000 – so the money is on hand. Then, when the building fund is replenished we'll be able to move to phase 2, a new sanctuary.

Lots of new things have been happening at Grace. We've been pressed for space over and over. This plan will help us to move forward today and tomorrow and serve you and our community better.

Some promises to remember:

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end. Ps.48:14

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Ps.73:23-24

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. I Cor.16:13

Because of your faith, it will happen! Matt. 9:29

A reminder: the baby bottles in the Sunday School project for the Sanctity of Human Life (Pregnancy Care Centre) are due to be returned this Sunday.

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October 15, 2009

Psalm 55, ascribed to David, speaks of a difficult time in David's life. "I am distraught," he said, "horror has overwhelmed me." It was made much worse because someone who had been a close friend was at the core of the trouble. He wished he could somehow run far away.

As the psalm goes on, David tells us how he managed to survive. "I call to God ... evening, morning and noon. ... He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me." His counsel to us is clear: "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you. ... As for me, I trust in You." While others were working against him, plotting, attacking, he called upon God. Morning, noon and night he gave the matter over to God and he was sustained. God gave him peace.

We have a burden-bearing God. We are quickly approaching the season when we celebrate the coming of Jesus. It's just 72 days to Christmas – the media are beginning to tell us things like that. Jesus came to bring hope to the discouraged, comfort to those in distress, to lift those who are burdened.

David, looking ahead, could say "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you." God does that in so many different ways, but it is often through people. We need to look around us – who in our surroundings needs someone like me to come close and give support?

Life at Grace is getting busy! There are lots of things happening in the next little while. Ladies: tomorrow is Coffee with a Difference at 9:15 a.m. An inspirational speaker, a soloist, an interesting craft – all this waits for you tomorrow.

On Saturday at 8 a.m. the first men's breakfast of the season is scheduled.

We're planning a membership class – to begin on Sunday, Oct. 25, probably in the late afternoon. If you are interested, please let us know. We hope to explore what being a member of Grace means and attending the classes carries no obligation. There will be another group during these same weeks for teens with Mona as the facilitator.

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October 8, 2009

The Assurance of the Harvest

Jesus told a story about a rich man whose fields produced a good crop. Deciding to build bigger barns to store it for use in years to come, he wanted then to eat, drink and be merry. But God decided that the day in which he that decision would be the rich man's last day of life, and God said "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Jesus ended the story with a comment about being rich toward God.

This is Thanksgiving weekend; even though most of us are no longer growing any food, we use a harvest theme in our celebrations and decorations. We need to hear the assurance of the harvest: it is a mark of the faithfulness of God, who gives the harvest. It really has little to do with us; our efforts are helpful, but in the last analysis, God gives the harvest.

The assurance is: God is faithful, He knows His way, He leads His people, He keeps His word. (Remember the promise to Noah in the Old Testament? *As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.*)

God is faithful! The people of God have found Him so, down through the ages. David could write in that well-loved psalm, The Lord is my Shepherd; He takes me to quiet pastures and cool waters; even in times of dire distress He helps me by His presence.

That kind of language draws our thoughts quickly to Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd. It is in Him, Jesus, that we see most clearly the faithfulness of God. The faithfulness of God to His promises is seen supremely in the coming of Jesus Christ, in His life and death and resurrection. The time of harvest speaks to us of a faithful God who keeps His promises and who has provided a way for us to know Him as we put our trust in Christ.

Sunday morning Sunday School – called "Upstreet" is in full swing at both services. Are your children a part of it?

Next week: Ladies Coffee Hour on Friday (Oct. 16), 9:15 a.m., and Men's Breakfast on Saturday at 8 a.m. (Oct. 17).

Small group studies are in full swing. There's a group for you!

September 24, 2009

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Commands! We find lots of them in the Bible. Sometimes they ask us to do easy things, and sometimes they make demands which seem almost impossible. Sometimes we think that they are hard because we really don't want to do what they ask.

Here's another one from I Peter: *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* In the context here, it's pretty clear that the words *to one another* are referring to everyone – not just the people who are pleasant to be with, not just the ones you have known for a long time. It doesn't mean just the people in your small group, or the people who are on some committee with you. Just: *offer hospitality to one another.*

What about the folks who have newly started to attend Grace? Do you keep your eyes open for visitors, for new people? Would offering hospitality mean inviting them back to your house for coffee and a chance to get to know one another? And if your house is a mess – what about inviting them to a coffee shop? We had all kinds of visitors last Sunday – were you able to say a word of welcome to some of them?

There's that little additional word in I Peter 4:9 – do this *without grumbling!*

A preacher of an earlier generation wrote: “There is love whose measure is that of an umbrella. There is love whose inclusiveness is that of a great marquee. And there is love whose comprehension is that of the immeasurable sky. The aim of the New Testament is the conversion of the umbrella into a tent and the merging of the tent into the glorious canopy of the all-enfolding heavens. Push back the walls of family love until they include the neighbour; again push back the walls until they include the stranger; again push back the walls until they comprehend the foe.”

What's happening at Grace?

Small groups are starting – lots of them. There's one for you! Pick up a flyer at church.

Sunday School has resumed. There's an exciting new focus this fall and you'll be hearing more about it in the next two weeks.

Something else for the whole family: the 2nd Annual Mini Putt pot luck – on Saturday, October 3. You can create a putting hole with your family or group. The cost is minimal- \$2 per person to golf, maximum \$5 per family.

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September 17, 2009

Don't you like the old spirituals we sometimes sing? They seem to have a wonderful way of speaking simply about the things which touch us deeply.

Just this morning I came across a reference to one: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen ...". We feel that way sometimes when things are tough. The words of that spiritual, of course, go on to add "Nobody knows but Jesus." That's our conviction!

He knows about the difficulties of life. He knows about the friends who aren't there when you need them, about the problems of keeping a roof over your head (remember it is written, he had no place to lay his head). He knows about suffering. He knows about the pain and ache occasioned by the loss of a loved one (we read that he wept at the tomb of Lazarus).

He knows – and his life was spent in facing the problems of evil and sin and human misery. At every turn in his public ministry he met the needs of people who came to him. And today still, wherever people seek him, he will meet them. Sometimes, today still, they are raised up from their time of need; but always when we seek him he gives the strength and stamina to face the problem.

The word is – nobody knows, but Jesus.

We were sorry to learn of the death on Monday of Muriel Mayhew. She was one of the original members of Grace Church, and until health problems prevented it, she was a part of regular Sunday worship. To Sharon, Debbie and Michael we extend our heartfelt sympathy. The funeral is tomorrow morning at 11, at the McEachnie Funeral Home in Pickering Village (Ajax).

This Sunday, Sept. 20, we go back to our regular schedule. The traditional worship service is at 9:15 a.m. and the contemporary worship is at 10:45 a.m. Sunday School resumes too, with a new curriculum. The service in the Urdu language is at 3 in the afternoon.

Ladies: Coffee with a Difference is tomorrow morning at 9:15. Lots of interesting things are planned!

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September 6, 2009

Every day we are confronted with the changing pattern and the lack of permanence in our lives and our surroundings. Sometimes it may be some major upheaval in our circumstances, such as sudden serious sickness. At other times it may be something which has the appearance of being a minor thing, but its effect on us is not minor. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote about things which could not be shaken (12:27) and about someone who does not change (13:8): Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

Yesterday: the Lord had appeared to people; his love was not changed because of the changes in people's hearts towards God. Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations, said the psalm writer. He has been at work in our yesterdays, to prepare the plan he has for us today.

In the unknown future: we cannot see it, but whatever it is, it cannot change Christ. If we have trusted him here, we shall not love him there. His power will remain; his love will not weaken or fade away.

But today! We think that today is different. Yesterday and tomorrow often seem to lie under an enchantment; today is bare, empty, deserted. But, says the Scripture, Christ is the same today. We may not be conscious of his love and presence, but he is here and he cares today. The same – yesterday, today and tomorrow.

We have two more Sundays with one service at 10 a.m. On September 20 we go again to our usual Sunday schedule – Traditional service at 9:15 and Contemporary service at 10:45.

The congregational picnic is planned for Sunday, Sept. 13, following the service. We hope to begin at 11:45 here, on the church grounds. Hot dogs, hamburgers and beverages will be supplied; you are asked to bring salads and desserts.

Breakfast Club ends this week. It's been an amazing summer! We've had over 170 children in the program and we've welcomed over 25 volunteers! It's been a great program. If you like statistics, here are more: we've consumed over 125 litres of milk, 90 boxes of cereal (family size), 30 boxes of pancake mix, over 1400 cookies, 130 jugs of juice ... Big thanks to Jessica Lou-Hing and to Emily Scrivens, Christine Choi, Laura Stevens and Hayley Myatt, our summer staff. (More about this in Sunday's bulletin!)

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August 27, 2009

Is your God able ... ?

In the Old Testament book of Daniel we read about this young man, Daniel, a Jew carried captive to Babylon. He rose to prominence and was poised to be placed in a position of still greater honour and power. Rivals wanted to prevent this and trapped the king into a position where if he were to obey his own law he would have to throw Daniel into a den of lions. So it happened.

The next morning, after a sleepless night of worry, the king hurried to the lions' den. He called into the den, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God ... been able to rescue from the lions?"

Is your God able? This is the real question. Where we are right now, with the pressures we face, is our God able? Daniel's God had sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths – God indeed been able.

This is our conviction today also. God is able; He can give the strength and help we need. The New Testament writer, in prison and facing death, thought of the loneliness, fear and danger of it all and was nearly overwhelmed. But his God was able and so Paul could say "The Lord stood by my side and gave me strength ... and I was delivered from the lion's mouth." He was thinking back to Daniel's story and was telling his younger friend Timothy to whom he was writing that in his time of great trial and need the presence of Jesus his Lord had been real; he had been strengthened and was confident that he would continue to be strengthened.

Our God is able!

September is just days away! Fall activities will be starting up. Remember that we continue with our Sunday schedule of one service at 10 a.m. for three more Sundays, until Sept. 13. We resume the two-service schedule on September 20.

The congregational picnic is being planned for Sunday, Sept. 13. We hope to get started about 11:45 a.m., after the morning service. There'll be fun and games for all. We will supply hot dogs and hamburgers and beverages; you are invited to bring salads and desserts. Bring your own picnic chairs too.

Our deepest sympathy is extended to the Haas family. Judy's dad passed away on Tuesday, August 25 and our prayers are with the family.

Did you miss Church last Sunday? Listen to the Sermon on our Website and link to <http://www.gracewesthill.ca/Sermons.htm>

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August 20, 2009

Is life fair? You may think immediately of something which happened to you or to someone close to you – something which seemed at that time and still seems today unjust, undeserved, unfair. Perhaps a partner in a marriage decided he or she didn't want to be married any more. Maybe it was the sudden illness which ended the life of someone near to you. Life is full of difficulties, often unfair.

Chuck Swindoll quoted some words from Malcolm Muggeridge (remember him?). Hear those words: Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo-jumbo ... the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the Cross signifies. And it is the Cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.

What words! How easy to say, how hard to do. Swindoll pointed out that Peter had a word to say about this. We need to acknowledge Christ as Lord over the unfair event. After talking about trials and temptations crowding into our lives, Peter wrote "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." (I Peter 3:15) We need to say to Him, "Lord, you're not unjust. You care for me. Help me to be calm, help me to trust you, you be the Lord over this situation."

Breakfast Club continues – sometimes with as many as 50 boys and girls present. As you know, it runs from Monday to Thursday from 9 to 12 for those who have finished grades 1 to 6. We're grateful for the many young people who have come to volunteer their time to help each morning.

Youth (grades 9 to 12) are going on a retreat this weekend to the Scrivens' cottage. Pray for safe travel and for a good time of learning and fun.

Remember the service in the Urdu language this Sunday afternoon at 3. 20 adults attended the last one and some of the 'regulars' were away. We are grateful for Pastor Emmanuel Laldin who leads the services. Pray for him. Perhaps you have a Pakistani neighbour whom you can invite to the services? (Every second Sunday afternoon)

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August 6, 2009

People are watching!

We live out our faith before a watching world, someone said. That's what Peter is talking about in this passage: "I urge you ... to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Keep your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles so that ... they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." (I Peter 2:11-12)

The term 'fleshly lusts' is probably a good summary of what goes on in much of today's western world. Live a clean life, Peter says. The world is watching. People are watching you, deciding upon the truth of the Christian message by what they are seeing in your life.

Then there is that word about good deeds. Sometimes we think that we are expected to do good to those who believe and we can ignore those who do not. Paul admonished us to do good, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. But his command was first to do good to all people. If there is a need, you should help. The "Gentiles" – meaning non-Christians – are watching what we do and they will be moved by our unselfish deeds of compassion.

We are often good at talking – but the word here is 'deeds,' not words. Chuck Swindoll wrote, "When our good deeds are indisputable the unbeliever says, 'There must be something to it.' Chances are good that at that point the person will hear what we have to say."

People are watching. Our lives will give authority to what we say.

Last week's "Grace to You" went out late because we had internet problems. All week we had no internet access. Hopefully the problem has been resolved – thank you for your patience.

Breakfast Club continues, with lots of boys and girls each day, Monday to Thursday. The summer staff is doing a great job! And the volunteers – how could we manage without them? Thank you to all.

A service in the Urdu language is conducted every second Sunday at Grace. The next one is this Sunday, August 9 (3 p.m.). There were 23 adults at the last service. The Rev. Emmanuel Laldin is leading the services.

Grace to You

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July 29, 2009

John Ortberg in one of his books tells about a guy who signed up for a week-long program called Outward Bound. He went to an island off the coast of Maine; in the middle of the week he was taken to a 110 foot cliff and told to start rappelling down.

After a couple of bone-jarring encounters with ledges, the instructor reminded him that he had to lean back as far as possible, with his body at right angles to the cliff, with his weight on his feet. And it worked – until he came to a deep hole in the face of the rock and froze, paralysed with fear.

The instructor called to him. “It’s time you learned the motto of Outward Bound,” she said. “If you can’t get out of it, get into it.”

Let me give you Ortberg’s next comments. “This is your life, and these are your failures. No helicopter is going to come to whisk you away. No genie will pop out of a bottle to rescue you. No magic eraser will make things disappear. This is your life. You can’t get out of it. So get into it. Take one step toward trusting God in an area where you feel failure.”

It’s good advice for us. Take one step toward trusting God when you feel that life is demanding more than you can have to give, when your immediate needs are greater than your resources.

Ortberg gives some suggestions. You can probably think of others which are more germane to your situation.

- Make a phone call to confront a situation you’ve been avoiding.
- Open a book to begin studying for a project you have been putting off because it feels overwhelming.
- Write one letter to begin pursuing a job that would be a dream to you.
- Take one class to try to acquire a new skill that will lead to significant growth in your life.

Breakfast Club continues each morning, Monday to Thursday, for boys and girls in grades one to six. We’re grateful for the summer staff who make this happen – and we are grateful for the many young people who come as volunteers. Lots of boys and girls have been coming – we had to turn people away when we reached the number 50.

There were 23 adults and 3 children at the Urdu language service last Sunday. Some were visitors from Kingston. Please pray that others will learn about this time and come.

Some major repairs have been carried out at Grace in the last two weeks. The stucco panels on the north wall (Sunday School areas) were replaced and last week the panels on the east wall of the worship area were replaced. These last panels were 47 years old and were in terrible condition. Make sure you look at the finished work – what a difference!

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July 16, 2009

Remembering the river!

Psalm 46:4: There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

It's a strange verse, really. Didn't people in Old Testament times think of Jerusalem as the city of God? Of course, Jerusalem didn't have a river. Lots of cities did – Rome, of course. The cities of Egypt were built along the Nile River. But there was no river running through or near Jerusalem.

So this has to be part of the symbolism we find so often in the Bible. What is the river? It has to be the presence of God and the strength and life He gives to His people. Remember Jesus' words – If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. We have a river: our confidence is in God. And – one of the ways to keep that confidence strong is to remember the times, the special times, when you knew His help. The psalm writer did that; he remembered special times when people knew that God's presence was real. So he could talk about the river which made glad the city of God.

If your confidence begins to waver, then remember those special times when you knew His help. Remember what your "God-hunt" brought to you – perhaps a caring word which came from a friend when you felt down, or the way circumstances suddenly came together so that you found an answer to a problem.

What special times have you had? Are you holding on to them, in memory, so that you are encouraged to trust God today?

We'd very much like to know about your experiences on your 'God-hunt' - a call to the church office or tell us on Sunday.

Breakfast Club continues – numbers have grown. It's on Monday through Thursday mornings, 9 – 12, for boys and girls who have finished grades 1 through 6. The cost is only \$2 per day per child.

There were 19 adults at the Urdu language service last Sunday afternoon. Pastor Emmanuel Laldin (retired pastor of the Church of Pakistan) is leading the services. Next service: Sunday, July 26, 3 p.m.

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July 10, 2009

Going on a God-hunt!

Years ago, when we were involved in one of the 50-Day Spiritual Adventures, one of the things participants were asked to do was to go on a “God-hunt.” It was a very simple discipline. It simply asked people to look for evidences of God’s presence in their daily lives. His presence might be seen in a kind act someone else did for them. Perhaps it would be some unexpected word of appreciation which came ... or maybe it was that a solution to a puzzling situation was suddenly found.

It is helpful for us to recognize God’s hand at work in our lives. We sometimes don’t see the blessings he is sending because we haven’t been on the lookout for them. Perhaps it would help if you kept a little notebook with you so that you could write down the good things God sends your way. Then, at the end of the day, or the end of the week, share what you have experienced with someone else.

Perhaps it will be an answered prayer or a letter (an email?) from a friend. Maybe it will be a kind act someone does for you. It will be something which brings a quick moment of joy to your heart. Write it down – then share it with someone. Sharing it may be God’s way of showing his presence to someone else.

Perhaps even there will be an opportunity to share your experience of God’s touch with others on coming Sunday mornings.

Some things to remember:

Breakfast Club began this week. It meets on Monday to Thursday, from 9 – 12 noon. Boys and girls who have finished grades 1 through 6 can come for breakfast, games, Bible stories etc. The cost is \$2 per day per child.

This Sunday, July 12, the service in the Urdu language will be held at 3. (It happens every second Sunday.)

We had a crowd last Friday night for the closing programme of VBS. Between 575 and 600 hot dogs were cooked and served. There was a short VBS presentation and all seemed to have a good time.

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July 2, 2009

An Important Week at Grace

This is Vacation Bible School week at Grace (you probably already knew that). It seemed right to tell you a little about what has been going on. After all, this is one of the most important things we do each year here at Grace for boys and girls of our community! Planning usually begins early in the winter and becomes a frenzy of activity as the week of VBS draws near.

First of all, here are some numbers. We have about 290 boys and girls registered! Years ago we were around the 300 mark a few times, but more recently our tally has been in the 200 range. There are boys and girls everywhere and they seem to be having a great time. A parent told me on Tuesday that her little girl had gone reluctantly on Monday, but at home that afternoon was talking about little else than VBS, and singing the songs. On Tuesday morning she just wanted to go to VBS. And the staff! We have about 100 staff people making the week happen. There are lots of teens helping in so many ways. Staff people are wearing red T-shirts, by the way – making it easy to know who is who.

The theme today, Thursday, is about forgiveness: Even when I sin, Jesus forgives me and gives me a fresh start. The Bible story is about Peter, his denial of Jesus and then his forgiveness. Peter was given a fresh start and commissioned to share Christ's love with others. The Bible memory verse is Psalm 86:5: *You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.* It's a good verse for all of us to claim and to act upon.

Our special thanks go to Mona Scrivens and Nancy Varga who are co-leaders this year. They are doing an amazing job.

VBS concludes tomorrow, Friday, with a barbeque at 6 p.m. You are invited to join us for hot dogs and a brief closing program – outside on the lawn (we hope the weather will co-operate!) We'd like to see you!

Remember that our summer schedule has started: one morning service each Sunday, at 10 a.m. The worship area was full last Sunday for the first Sunday of the summer.

Breakfast Club starts on Monday (July 6). Activities run from 9 to 12 each day, Monday to Thursday and boys and girls from Grades 1-6 can attend. The cost is \$2 per child per day.

Another bit of news you should know: at the request of the Session of Grace Church, the Presbytery of Pickering at its June meeting agreed to certify Doug Paterson as a candidate for ministry. As you know Doug is our Clerk of Session and has been the principal at Sir Robert L. Borden Business and Technical Institute in West Hill for several years. He plans to retire later this year and then to complete his studies in theology, preparing for ordination to the ministry. We wish him God's blessing!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

June 25, 2009

I want to take you back to the Old Testament book of Daniel for a moment. Daniel was a young Jewish man carried off to exile by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He rose to prominence there and seemed destined for a position of great power. But along the way there were rivals who wanted to prevent this and they were able to trap the king into a position where if he were to remain true to his laws, he would have to throw Daniel into a den of lions. So it happened.

The next morning, after a sleepless night of worry, the king hurried to the lions' den. He called to Daniel – “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

Has your God been able? Is your God able? This is the real question. Today, in this situation? The Old Testament story tells us that in Daniel's situation, God had sent his angel to shut the lions' mouth, for Daniel had trusted in him.

Our witness today, I hope, is that God is able. He can give added strength. His power is sufficient where we are. The apostle Paul, in the New Testament, in prison and facing death, thought of the loneliness, fear and danger of it all and was nearly overwhelmed. But he found that his God was able. Paul wrote “But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength ... and I was delivered from the lion's mouth.” He was thinking back to Daniel's experience, and was stating that his Lord, Jesus Christ, was able to deliver him out of his fear and loneliness. Paul wrote “The Lord will rescue me ... and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

Our Lord wants to stand with us and strengthen us. Call upon him, trust him

VBS is just around the corner! It starts on Monday and runs each morning to Friday. As has been our custom for many years, there will be a closing programme on Friday evening, beginning with a barbeque at 6 o'clock to which parents and family are invited.

Lots of boys and girls are coming – the count had risen to just above 200 on Monday past. Please pray for the leaders and helpers as they make final preparations. Pray too for the boys and girls who will attend.

Also as usual there will be a group for ladies each morning. It's free – all ladies are invited.

And a reminder: this Sunday, June 28, we go to our summer schedule: one service only, at 10 a.m. See you then!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

June 18, 2009

Two weeks ago I wrote about the way Peter in the New Testament spoke of our need to love one another – sincerely, fervently, from the heart. Peter put it this way: *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. 1 Peter 1:23.*

We're all pretty different – how can we talk about a sense of oneness and support? What is it which should draw us together? Chuck Swindoll talked about four things.

1. We are children of the same Father – all born anew through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are members of the same family!
2. We take our instruction from the same source: the living and abiding Word of God. If that seed is to grow in our lives, we must hear it, embrace it, apply it. Just sitting and listening and then going away as if nothing real had happened isn't enough. We need to apply what we hear – put it to work in our lives.
3. We have the same struggles. Peter went on to say (2:1) *Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander...* That's a list of some of the things which pull us apart. No place for them now!
4. We focus on the same objectives. Swindoll asks, "What is the objective of all this? Maturity. 'Grow up,' Peter says. And our model? The Lord Himself."

We held our first service in the Urdu language last Sunday afternoon. It all developed so quickly! There were 18 adults present and 5 children. We were told that others would have been there but had made commitments before they heard about the service. Several people thanked us for making this happen. The services will take place every second week – the next date is Sunday, June 28 (3 p.m.). Pray that this venture will reach many people with the good news of the gospel.

VBS registration goes on. Our count is somewhere close to 160. Tell your neighbours – they can phone the church office or come in – space is still available. The cost is \$30 per child, with a maximum of \$75 per family. No charge for little ones in the nursery or for those attending the ladies' group.

And another reminder: on June 28 we move to our summer schedule – one service only, at 10 a.m.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

June 11, 2009

This week's "Grace To You" is a bit different. We want to tell you about a new mission approach in our life together. On Tuesday night the Session approved a plan to begin holding worship services in the Urdu language. At the moment, the hope is to hold a service every second Sunday afternoon, beginning this week, June 14.

Urdu is one of the two official languages of Pakistan (the other is English). One of our members, Asif Zafar, is from Pakistan, as is his wife who came to Canada many months ago with only a little English. Asif wanted her to be able to be in a worship service where she could understand better what is being said. It's an interesting story – his wife is learning to drive; the driving school instructor is also from Pakistan, speaking Urdu. In conversations together, Asif and he talked about wanting a service in Urdu. They were able to identify a number of people who would be interested – perhaps 40 to 50 persons. They learned about a retired pastor from Pakistan who is living in West Hill. We had some meetings together – and the recommendation went to the Session.

Please pray with us that this service will minister to many (there is no service in Urdu in the eastern part of the city) and that all the organizational details will be worked out satisfactorily. May God be honoured through this new venture!

The Port Union Waterfront Festival, at the Port Union Village Common at the foot of Port Union Road, is to take place this Saturday from 11 to 3. This is the second (annual) festival. It's estimated that 5000 attended the first one last year. Lots of things are planned: some rides for the kids, a collection of classic cars, music, food, displays. Parking is at the north lot at the GO station and at Mowat High School and shuttles will operate from both lots.

Grace Church will be there with church information and freezies for the children. Look for us!

VBS registration for the community is planned for Wednesday of next week, June 17, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. To date we have over 130 registrations. The cost is \$30 per child with a maximum of \$75 for a family. There's no charge for little ones in the nursery or for the ladies' group.

A reminder again: on Sunday, June 28, we move to our summer schedule of one morning service, at 10 o'clock. Mark it on your calendar!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

June 4, 2009

I've been reading in the letters of Peter recently and then the other day I picked up one of Chuck Swindoll's books and discovered it was about I Peter. I noticed especially some comments about I Peter 1:22-23: *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.*

Peter sees this thing of loving one another as basic. Peter uses two Greek words for love. The first is a more general kind of love for a friend or brother. Then he talks about agape love, the 'more divine kind of love' – and he emphasizes both with some descriptive words or phrases: sincere, fervently, from the heart. Swindoll asks "What kind of love and support do we need? ... do we give?" He points out that we, as did the people to whom Peter wrote, need to pull together, to support each other. "They needed a community where they could find acceptance and unity. They needed to conduct themselves as members of the family of God." Sincere – fervently – from the heart: these are words which should apply to our relationships with one another.

Swindoll points out that Peter gives us some reminders about what it is about the family of God which gives us this sense of oneness and support. That's for another week! Look at the passage and see if you can identify four of these.

Some of our usual midweek activities have stopped for the summer months. Most people are getting ready for Vacation Bible School, which will run from Monday, June 29, to Friday, July 3. Registration for the community is set for Wednesday, June 17. Lots of preparation is going on – it should again be a great week.

Grace will have a booth at the Waterfront Festival on Saturday, June 13. The Festival runs from 11 to 3; we would like helpers from 10:30 to 3:30 (set-up to take-down). You may only be able to come for an hour or you may be able to stay a bit longer. Duties are not onerous – talk to people, hand out flyers, prepare freebies for the kids. There's a sign up sheet with different time slots on the bulletin board at Grace.

And a reminder: On June 28 we go to one morning service, at 10 o'clock.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

May 28, 2009

You may remember the incident described in John's Gospel where the religious leaders of the day came to Jesus with a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. It's obvious that they weren't as concerned about the adultery as about finding a way to discredit Jesus – no matter what he said, they could twist it to get rid of him. (You can read the story in John, chapter 8.)

Down through the years, Christian people have often divided sin into two groups: sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. We get suitably agitated about sins of the flesh – like the one in which this woman was caught. There are penalties which we apply – and probably it is right to do so. We may apply the penalty with sorrow – but sometimes, unfortunately, we do it with glee.

But the sins of the spirit? Things like pride, arrogance, judgmentalism, gossip? They don't scandalize us so much. One writer said "We are most scandalized by sins of the flesh. Jesus was most scandalized by sins of the spirit." C.S.Lewis wrote once "The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing ... of power, hatred..."

Probably most of the time we don't even notice when or how we dismiss others who don't measure up to our standards.

We are called to be people who accept people – to accept those who are different, who have a different lifestyle, who have different standards, who dress differently ... and to love them into a relationship with Jesus.

VBS registration continues this Sunday between services. Make sure you get your children registered! VBS runs from Monday, June 29, to Friday, July 3.

This Sunday, May 31, is Communion Sunday. Also, at the 10:45 service, Graham and Melissa Thornton will be accepted into membership and their little girl, Katie, will be baptized.

The Search Committee will be meeting on Wednesday evening of next week (June 3) at 7:30. The committee again invites you to join them at 6:30 to pray together for God's guidance.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

May 21, 2009

Sometimes in the summer, when getting ready for a holiday trip, I've purchased a book about prayer. Often the book has turned out to be interesting, even inspiring. I'm not sure, however, that it really made a difference in my prayer habits. I suspect that lots of people could say the same thing. Is that because so much of the time, in our day-by-day activities, we are not really convinced that prayer changes things?

A theological professor once wrote – “History belongs to the intercessors – those who believe and pray the future into being.” It's a tall statement, but the Bible supports it. What the Bible teaches about prayer leads us to believe that prayer changes things. Think of Abraham asking God to spare Sodom – “There might be 50 righteous persons there – will you spare it for those fifty?” And he whittled down the number: 45, 40, 30, 20, and then 10. And God said “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.” In the end, of course, ten were not found; only Lot, his wife and his two daughters left Sodom.

There's an account in 2 Chronicles 20 about the time when king Jehoshaphat learned that a vast army was coming against him. He prayed earnestly; the next day the invading armies became disoriented and killed each other; Jehoshaphat and his men saw only dead bodies on the ground when they arrived at the battlefield.

Perhaps you feel that you haven't seen much evidence of answers to prayer. But remember; sometimes the answers are eternal – you may not see the answer until you reach the other side, but you will see it.

Our sympathy goes out to Lilian McKelvey in the death of her brother Andrew, and to Shirley Larosa in the death of her father a few days ago.

Vacation Bible School News

Registration is now going on – you can register your family this Sunday between the services - look for Jean Jackson in the lobby.

VBS workers and volunteers: there's a planning meeting on Tuesday at 7 p.m.

And for your encouragement: someone sent in a registration for her children this week and added a note: *God bless you for your service towards God's kingdom.*

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

Is your God able?

There's a story in the Old Testament about a man called Daniel. He was upright, extremely gifted and able and had been placed in a position of leadership and power.

There were many who wanted to get rid of him and eventually they were able to trap the king into the position where if he were to remain true to his laws, he would have to throw Daniel into a den of lions.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, the king hurried to the den. He called out "Daniel ... has your God been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered – God had shut the mouths of the lions and he was not hurt.

Is your God able? Today, just where you are?

The New Testament leader, Paul, was in prison facing death. He had been deserted by everyone, he wrote. Then he said "But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength ... and I was delivered from the lion's mouth." He was still in prison, still facing death, still abandoned by so many. But looking back to Daniel's experience he realized that God was with him still and that his Lord, Jesus Christ, was able to deliver him out of his fear and loneliness.

Our lions are not wild animals or the threat of execution. Probably they are not the trauma of having been abandoned by those once close to us either. But whatever they are, just where we are, Jesus Christ will stand with us, strengthen us. Our God is able.

There's an opportunity to register your children for Vacation Bible School on the next three Sundays. On May 17, 24 and 31, between services, there will be a registration table in the narthex (lobby). VBS will run from June 29 to July 3.

Coffee with a Difference is tomorrow, Friday, May 15, at 9:15 a.m. Lots of interesting things are planned, including an "Antique Road Show" with Gord and Pat Haughton. Special music, special speaker – all for you. Men are welcome too this month.

It was a wild day last Saturday! There was rain, wind and even a time of hail. Lots of people came to help with the annual plant sale and in spite of the weather we finished in good time. Thank you to everyone who helped. Thanks especially to Madelyn Reynolds who co-ordinated the sale – beginning months ago with the planning and preparations.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

May 5, 2009

Roy, a poor preacher, had a millionaire brother. One Christmas the brother visited and gave the preacher a brand-new, top of the line Packard. Roy kept it in a parking garage down the street where there was an attendant to watch it. One morning when he came to get his new car, there was a ragamuffin ghetto boy peering into the car in admiration. They talked a bit; the preacher told the boy that his brother had given it to him as a gift. The boy looked at him and began to say "I wish ... I wish ..."

The preacher was sure the boy was going to say "I wish I had a brother like that."

But he was surprised; the boy said "I wish I could be a brother like that." Roy took him for a ride; they stopped at a run-down building here the boy lived. "Mister, can you stay here just a minute? I'll be right back."

A few minutes later the boy came back, carrying a younger boy – his brother. He sat the younger boy on the curb. "See?" he said. "It's a brand new car. His brother gave it to him and someday I'm going to buy you a car just like that!"

I wish I could be a brother like that! Would it not be great if that was our prayer also? Who is there in your circle who needs your blessing today? A wise man said, "He is blessing me so that I can bless others." God satisfies your mouth with good things, said the psalmist. Not so that you can count the good things and pile them up – but is it so that you can be a blessing to others?

It's Thursday – and Saturday's coming! Plant Sale Day! We need all the help we can get. It's not difficult – making up the orders so that our trucks can deliver them to homes.

We need people at the church at 7 a.m. to unload the trucks. Then at 8 we need to start assembling orders – lots of people needed for that. There are lots of other tasks too. There's a place for you – even for just an hour or two.

Sunday is Mother's Day. Greetings and thanks to all the mothers among us.

Next week – we invite ladies to plan to attend Coffee with a Difference – Friday, May 15, at 9:15 a.m.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

May 1, 2009

“The Lord watches over you ... your coming and going, both now and forevermore.” That was what the psalmist wrote – we often read his words. “He who watches ... will neither slumber nor sleep... The sun shall not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.”

Sometimes they seem like extravagant words. When our days are dark, when bad times come, we wonder about promises like those. Is it because we aren't really sure that God is watching us?

Peter was bold one night, in a storm – he was willing to climb out of the boat and walk on the whitecaps because Jesus was there, watching, just a few feet away. But later, in the courtyard of the high priest, a chance remark from a servant girl caused him to deny any knowledge of Jesus. Then he did it again, and again – those times with oaths and cursing. He didn't know Jesus was near enough to see him – but of course he was. “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Peter was heart-broken.

But after the resurrection it was different. He preached to multitudes; he calmly informed the authorities who tried to silence him that he needed to obey God, not them. Luke (who wrote the Acts of the Apostles) tells us that the authorities saw the boldness of Peter and his friends, and realized that they had been with Jesus. After all, the promise of Christ had been and is “I am with you always.”

He was there, watching. He is here, watching. No matter how rough it is, or how difficult our circumstances. “The Lord watches over you.”

Plant sale is only a week away. We need lots of bodies on Saturday, May 9. People to assemble orders, to check the orders, to go out on the trucks, to help with food – there's a place for everyone. Make sure you sign up on Sunday – or you can call Cheryl and ask her to add your name to one of the lists. This is always a great time of working together.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

April 16, 2009

In the “Today” daily devotional booklet the entry for this day reminds us of the question Jesus asked his followers: “Who do you say I am?” It says, in this question Jesus looks us straight in the eye even after Easter: “Tell me – who am I?”

It’s a big question, an important question. We’ve just celebrated Easter, when there was a note of triumph in the air: Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son, we sang. Did we mean those words?

When Jesus hung upon the cross, he called out “My God, why...?” All sorts of questions were in it. Does goodness matter? How far can slander go? How dark and discouraging can things become without any word from God? But if Calvary asked those questions, Easter answered them. Life’s last word is not a cross but an Easter morning. Someone wrote: If Life had spoken its harshest word, Life meets it fairly and squarely and answers it. ... What are scars, if at last they become radiant? What is a cross, if at the end it lifts me? Our gospel ends not in a corpse, but in a Conqueror; not in a tomb but in a triumph.

The “Today” booklets are always available in the lobby at Grace. Each one gives you daily devotional readings for three months. You can pick up your free copy next time you are in.

There’s a request from Janet Lou-Hing. On Sunday, May 3, people from Grace plan to provide lunch for some 200 women volunteers at a Habitat for Humanity site in West Hill near the Heron Park Community Centre. We need sandwiches, squares, fruit and veggie trays and drinks. There’s a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board at Grace but you can also email Janet: janetlou56@hotmail.com – thank you for helping.

The Annual Meeting is called for Monday coming, April 20, at 7:30 p.m.

Ladies: Coffee with a Difference meets tomorrow morning at 9:15. Lots of good things planned for the morning – we hope you will come. Kudos to the ladies who this week have been bringing in gently used clothing for the Scott Mission. Those items will be picked up by the Mission tomorrow morning.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

April 9, 2009

Many years ago at Easter time I visited a home where there was a little live chicken in a box in the corner. Did you know that you used to be able to buy live chicks at Easter – yellow ones, pink ones, blue ones?

Perhaps you remember decorating eggshells – carefully making a small hole in each end of the egg, blowing out the white and yolk, than colouring the shell for a table decoration.

Displays in the stores might give you the impression that Easter is about chocolate eggs and chocolate bunnies. But – Easter is about the death of Jesus Christ, and about His resurrection. You can't separate those two things.

In June, 1815, all England was anxiously awaiting news of the war with France. The Duke of Wellington was facing Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. No telephones, no internet in those days – news came slowly. Finally a message started to come through. "Wellington defeated" it said at first. Those on the receiving end were dismayed. But then the rest of the message came – "Wellington defeated ... the enemy."

Tomorrow we remember the crucifixion. Jesus defeated seemed to be its message. His enemies were delighted; at last they were rid of him. He had been defeated. Then came the first day of the week, with the resurrection. The message, in its completeness, was different. Jesus defeated the enemy! Easter Sunday follows Good Friday.

And we can rejoice!

Good Friday service is at 10 a.m. We will have time to visit together after as the choir serves us hot cross buns and coffee. Journey to Joy downstairs in "Grace Place" will be open after the service – your last chance to experience all it offers. Many people have found it to be an immensely valuable aid as they approach Easter.

Sunrise Service: On Sunday morning we invite you to join us at 7 a.m. in Colonel Danforth Park down in the Highland Creek valley. (Follow Old Kingston Road through Highland Creek and you will find us at the bottom of the hill.) Breakfast follows at 8 back at Grace, and then our two morning worship times. Breakfast is \$4 per person, or \$15 for a family – but you need to reserve today.

A couple of advance notices:

Annual Meeting – Monday, April 20, 7:30 p.m.

Search Update – the Rev. Andrew Allison, co-interim moderator leading the search process, will be with us on Saturday, April 25, from 9 – 11 a.m. Continental Breakfast will be served and there will be a chance to talk about where we are in our search for a new pastor. Andrew is anxious to meet as many as possible that morning.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

April 2, 2009

Sunday is Palm Sunday – when many remember that Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Older translations called it an ass and a great preacher of fifty years ago, when he preached on a Palm Sunday, entitled his sermon “He honours an ass!” He observed that the donkey, instead of dragging the pomp down to its level, was itself drawn up to the level of the special occasion.

No doubt any watching Roman would have found it a strange sight. There’s not much dignity with a donkey! Not much of majesty or monarchy about an ass.

But whatever, whomever, Jesus touched he dignified. That was abundantly true of people who met Jesus. Ordinary people were lifted up to become people whom Jesus used in unusual ways with unusual power. Despised persons were called to become part of a life-changing band. People without much education, people with handicaps, people with the wrong backgrounds, people without many abilities, people in obscure situations: the One who honoured the ass lifts and honours and uses people too – all kinds of people. Still today – He uses people committed to his way, excited about his person – whoever they are. He has a place for you and a purpose for you, no matter who you are, where you are.

Word came last night of the death of Frank Fenwick, long-time member of Grace and former elder. Our sympathy goes to his family – Laura, Paul and family and David and family. We expect the funeral to be held on Monday.

There are special things happening as we approach Easter. Here’s something new: Journey to Joy. Starting on Sunday after church and through to Good Friday, the downstairs hall, “Grace Place,” will be set up with stations designed to teach about faith and prayer. It will be a hands-on experience meant for children and adults. Come and spend a few minutes – everyone is welcome. Times are as follows:

Sunday – after church until 3 p.m. and 7 – 9 p.m.

Monday to Thursday – 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and 7 – 9 p.m.

Good Friday: Service at 10, with communion. Fellowship and hot cross buns will follow. Childcare for ages 7 and under will be available.

Easter Sunrise Service: 7 a.m. in Colonel Danforth Park on Old Kingston Road west of Highland Creek village, at the bottom of the hill.

Breakfast follows at 8, at the church. Please let us know if you will be with us for breakfast (\$4 or \$15 maximum for a family). Talk to Genga, John Rennicks or Cheryl in the office.

Easter Celebration services are at 9:15 and 10:45. There’ll be Easter Lilies too of course.

The Plant Sale (Saturday, May 9), is near. We need people to distribute order forms – many streets have not yet been covered. Will you help? It’s crucial that order forms get out to people.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

March 26, 2009

Some of the things Jesus said and did are hard for us to understand. One of those is probably the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) who came asking Jesus to heal her daughter. At first he didn't respond at all; then, when the disciples told him to get rid of her, that she was a bother, we have those disturbing words of Jesus: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel ... it is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to their (little) dogs.* We wonder – how could Jesus say things like that?

John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, has a whole chapter about this passage in his book “Everybody's normal till you get to know them.” He thinks the incident was really a test of the disciples, who shared Jewish abhorrence of all things and all people non-Jewish. If Jesus seemed to care little about the woman's plight, it was to teach his followers something important, to break down some of their barriers. He turned to the woman and expressed his admiration.

Some of our English translations are a little deficient here; they leave out the first word. Jesus said to her, *O woman! Great is your faith!* Ortberg says it's as if Jesus was saying “Wow! O woman ...” And that word great: the Greek word he used is a form of mega. We talk about mega-churches, mega-malls. “O woman – you have mega-faith!”

The disciples thought she was someone to ignore – much inferior to themselves. Jesus didn't see it that way. Ortberg wrote: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are determined that the circle of love they share should be ceaselessly, shamelessly inclusive ... No one is left out except those who refuse to enter.”

You are invited! Tomorrow night, Friday, Mike Gordon will be with us to tell us about his ministry work in London. He'll be joined by David Harrison, of Bus Stop Bible Studies. Dessert too! 7:30 tomorrow night.

The Wednesday morning (9:30) small group study began a study yesterday based on another of Ortberg's books: *If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat.* John Ortberg writes about things which affect us all in our daily lives – you will find this study to have meaning for you. There are five more sessions to go.

Starting next Sunday (which is Palm Sunday) “Grace Place” downstairs will be set up with stations meant for children and adults to think about faith and prayer. The set-up will be in place until Good Friday. We hope it will provide families with ideas and opportunities to walk closer with God. You can experience it on Sunday and any time through the following week, until Good Friday.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

March 19, 2009

Recently I read a story I had heard before. In the days of sailing ships, when sea travel was exceedingly dangerous, a little group of volunteers in an Atlantic town banded together to form a life-saving society. They built little huts all along the shore and watched the sea constantly. Whenever there was a shipwreck they went out to try to save lives – risking their own lives to save others. Their motto was “You have to go out. You don’t have to come back.”

In time, the Coast Guard began to do that job. Volunteers were no longer needed. They were willing to let the professionals do the life-saving. But they couldn’t bring themselves to disband. The life-saving society still exists, I’m told. The members meet every so often to have dinners – but though they meet, they are no longer in the life-saving business.

It raises the question, doesn’t it? What are we about? It’s a temptation to meet, to enjoy each other, and to forget all about this life-saving business. Do we need to think about the people around who have no relationship with Jesus Christ and who don’t even think about having one? We are having a good time with one another.

One man wrote: “People stand around you – trembling in brokenness, guilt, fear, lostness ... you see them and are not moved. You don’t even notice – you’re not in the life-saving business anymore.”

We have to go out. We don’t have to come back.

It’s just a week away! The Missions night is set for Friday, March 27, at 7:30 p.m. Our own Mike Gordon will be speaking, and also David Harrison, founder of Bus Stop Bible Studies. There will be a children’s programme provided – so you can bring them with you. Dessert too! Don’t miss this night.

Ladies: Coffee with a Difference meets tomorrow morning, Friday, at the church. Linda Martin, new pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church is the speaker. As usual, there are lots of other interesting things on the programme.

And men: Men’s breakfast is Saturday morning, at 8. Good food, good friends, a message for today – come join us.

Plant Sale preparations are going nicely. We need street reps – if the order forms don’t get out there won’t be a sale. Find the name of the street where you can distribute the order forms and sign up – the sheets are on the table in the narthex lobby -

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

March 12, 2009

There was a man who was brought to Jesus by four friends – the crowd was such that they could not get into the house, so they went up on the roof, broke open a hole and lowered their paralysed friend, on his mat, down in front of Jesus. The story is in Mark 2.

What a story it is! Perhaps the owner of the house wasn't excited about what was happening, but for the man and his four friends – what a day!

To be a paralytic in that day wasn't like it is today. What was life like for him? He needed help for everything. He was dependent on others all the time. But he had friends, amazing friends. How in the world did that happen? How did a little group of guys become such caring friends? It could not have been by accident – most of us are reluctant to develop intimate relationships with people who are so needy.

John Ortberg (pastor in San Francisco) reminds us that rule number one for entering into deep friendship is 'deceptively simple:' *Assign top priority to your relationships*. He tells us, the requirement for true intimacy is chunks of unhurried time. "You can't do community in a hurry," he says. "You can't listen in a hurry. You can't mourn in a hurry with those who mourn, or rejoice in a hurry with those who rejoice."

Think about that as you think about the people in your life. It's obvious that these four friends had time and concern for their friend. What about us? Priority? Time?

What's happening at Grace?

We want you to be aware of the evening of Friday, March 27. Mike Gordon will be with us that night to give an update about his ministry work in London. Also with us that night will be David Harrison, founder of Bus Stop Bible Studies – a timely ministry in view of the banners we've been hearing about which suggest that God doesn't exist. The time is 7:30 – 9 p.m.: worship, dessert and Mike and David.

Are you using the Lenten devotional booklets which we have made available? Let us know how you have used them and if they have been meaningful in your life and family.

The Plant Sale is getting nearer: May 9 is the day. But before then – we need you to get the order forms out to the neighbourhood. Sign up in the lobby today for a street. The success of the sale depends on this.

Session has set a date for the Annual General Meeting: Monday, April 20, 7:30 p.m.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

March 5, 2009

Where does my help come from? asked the psalmist (121). His answer: My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Not from the big Man in the skies, not from some vague force in nature, but from the great God of heaven and earth, the One who (as the song says) holds the whole world in his hands. A God of might and majesty and dominion and power.

Years ago in Sunday School older children were sometimes asked to memorize the Shorter Catechism. It's a collection of questions and answers about God and faith and Christian doctrine. I remember the question, Who is God? The answer was confident: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

We can say all this – but does it make God more real? Does it not really sort of push him farther away from us? The more we understand of his greatness and his holiness the less likely it becomes that we can know him.

Perhaps a question of one of the followers of Jesus is relevant. His name was Phillip; he asked Jesus. “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Do you remember Jesus’ answer? He said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” That’s what God is like – like Jesus Christ. Greatness which is filled with love, with compassion. The gospels give us a picture of Jesus as one who cares about us. He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” said a New Testament writer (King James translation of Hebrews 4:15).

He knows not only what we are like, and what we experience each day, but he cares, and will give grace and mercy to help us in our time of need.

Looking ahead: Friday, March 27, 7:30 – 9 p.m.: a Missions Night with two speakers.

- **Mike Gordon** from our own Grace family will bring an update of his work in London, Ontario and a message “Join the Movement.”
- **David Harrison**, founder of Bus Stop Bible Studies will tell us how God is using this ministry in our city and across Canada

Dessert and coffee will be served – mark this date on your calendar.

Plant Sale: It’s that time coming up. The sale date is Saturday, May 9. We’ll soon be asking for volunteers to distribute order forms to homes on your street. We need you!

Annual Reports are due. Please give them to Cheryl in the church office.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

February 26, 2009

A couple of weeks ago, I received an email from someone I didn't know, had never even heard of. His last name is the same as mine – which intrigued me enough to try to find out where he lived (Ottawa). He thought he was writing to his son (who apparently had just changed his email address to a Rogers one). In the days which followed, two other emails followed. Then came one with an invitation to dinner – it was the son's birthday. That prompted me to reply immediately – which of course I should have done after the first email message.

I told him where I came from, and told him that my great grandfather had emigrated from Jersey in the Channel Islands, coming to Canada alone as a young teen. The next day the Ottawa man replied. He explained the email address confusion and told me a bit about his ancestors. He himself was born in British Columbia and he gave me the names of his great great grandparents – who had lived in Jersey. And of course they were my great great grandparents also, so this man is a distant cousin! Now we are hoping for an opportunity to meet in the not too distant future.

No one in our family even remembered that there were distant relatives in British Columbia. I thought there were in the past, but knew nothing about them.

It's not an earthshaking event, but I'm grateful to God for this new family contact. And I'm reminded of advice which an old radio program used to give. It advised us to go on a God-hunt – to look each day for something which spoke of God's goodness. This new family contact so spoke to me. What is there in your life today which tells you that God is good, that God cares, for you?

Plant Sale time is coming! Plant Sale day is Saturday, May 9 – that's over two months away, but our preparations started some weeks ago. Last week Madelyn and I (Everett) went to the nursery to finalize the plants which will be on our order forms. The greenhouses were full of healthy growing seedlings – didn't seem like winter at all when you were inside!.

Soon the order forms will be printed, and then we'll be asking you to sign up to deliver the forms to the houses on a street in the community. This is probably the most important part of the whole process! Unless people get order forms there can be no plant sale. We need you – an evening or two on your part will do much to make this a great event.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

February 19, 2009

When I was in Sunday School, long years ago, each Sunday we were given a little piece of heavy paper, perhaps 1" by 2," with a Scripture verse on it. In those days you could buy whole sheets of these. Each Sunday this was our memory verse to be said the next Sunday. Some verses were short, some were long. A few times I was lucky – my little card had John 11:35 – “Jesus wept.” We all liked it when that verse came to us.

Jesus wept! It was at the grave of Lazarus and Mary (the sister of Lazarus) and their friends were weeping. Jesus wept, and the people standing by said “See how he loved him!”

It points us towards something very important. Where is God when we hurt? Does our pain cause God to hurt? Or is he above it all, unmoved by the problems and the pain we are going through? I’ve sometimes said to people who wonder what God is doing in their times of upset or sorrow or pain: “What is God doing? He is weeping too.”

The Bible helps us. In Genesis 6:6 we read that *The Lord was grieved ... his heart was filled with pain.* The prophet Hosea heard God saying, *All my compassion is aroused.* The gospels tell us again and again that Jesus had compassion on the people.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that we have a high priest (he was referring to Jesus) who is able to sympathize with us in our times of need. “He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all – all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.” (The Message).

Jesus wept. Be encouraged! That’s what God is doing in our time of need.

Lots of people enjoyed our Family Day event on Sunday. After skating, Grace Place downstairs was filled with people who enjoyed a terrific pot luck supper. Thanks to the Curtis families and others who arranged the event – it was a great time.

Ladies – Coffee with a Difference is tomorrow, Friday. David Smith, Director of the Scott Mission at Spadina and College, will tell you about the challenges and needs of this downtown mission.

Men’s breakfast is on Saturday at 8. Wesley Fuller from our choir is bringing a special Black history month presentation.

Wedding this Saturday: Best wishes go to Stephen Rew and Rebecca Tomlin as they exchange vows at 2:30.

Remember too: your 2008 receipts are in the mail folders. Please pick yours up.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

February 12, 2009

Jesus told several stories about tenants or servants. Each one, I think, seems to us to be far from easy. Take the story (in Matthew 25) about the nobleman who was going away for a time. He gave three of his servants some money – “Put this money to work,” he said to them, “until I come back.” You may remember the story.

Two of them made a profit with their money, and their master rewarded them. But the third servant buried his money in the ground, afraid to put it to work, afraid he might lose it. He said he was afraid of his master who was a hard man. Jesus then had the master say: I will judge you by your own words... You knew I am a hard man? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit to earn interest?

It seems to me that this story says to us: whatever you do, have a right view of God. The servant thought of his master as a demanding person, asking more than a man could give. The trouble with that – seeing God as hard, demanding, calculating, is that you want to say, Why then try? The servant lost sight of an important fact: he had been given a talent, he had been judged to have some ability and he had been entrusted with a gift and an opportunity. How do you see God?

Years ago I visited a man in hospital. When I was leaving, I asked if I could pray with him. No, he said, I'm not that sick. I think he saw God as someone to be approached only in extreme circumstances.

How do you see God? His word to us is not a rod of anger, but a cross of love. Hard and demanding? No, He is one who gives, freely, unstintingly. He has given the greatest of love-gifts: Jesus our Saviour.

Mona will be preaching again this Sunday, concluding her series on “Why Worry?”

You are invited to join us in the afternoon for our family day special event. Come to Heron Park Arena at 2:30 for family skating (free). Then hot chocolate back at Grace at about 4:15. At 5 p.m. we'll get together for an Italian-themed potluck supper. If you haven't signed up, call Cheryl at the church office to indicate that you are coming (416-284-8424). We hope to see you!

A reminder about next week: Ladies' Coffee with a Difference is on Friday morning (Feb. 20). David Smith, Executive Director of the Scott Mission, will be the speaker. And then the next morning, Saturday, Feb. 21, is men's breakfast at 8. Wesley Fuller will be the speaker.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

February 5, 2009

Remember Joseph in the Old Testament? Attacked by his brothers, sold to wandering traders, carried off to Egypt, purchased as a slave by a powerful government official. Then we read “The Lord was with Joseph.” And Joseph went on to give his best in circumstances which just seemed to get worse and worse.

Do you sometimes want to give up? Does quitting – your job, your marriage, maybe your life - look more and more attractive? Have you said something like this to yourself?

- I didn't think this job would have so little challenge. I want to do big things. I need to quit.
- My marriage is just too hard. I want out! Why try any more?

John Ortberg tells us that someone once asked a desert monk “What must I do to please God?” The first two bits of advice he received were to be expected: Always be aware of God's presence, and always obey God's Word. But there was a third answer: “Wherever you find yourself, do not easily leave.” Leaving perhaps will always look more attractive, but it has a tendency to produce people with a pattern of giving up. Do not easily leave!

Let us quote you Ortberg's words. “Growth happens when you seek or exert control where you are rather than giving up in difficult circumstances. It happens when you decide to be wholly faithful in a situation that you do not like and cannot understand. It happens when you keep walking even though you see the wind. Then you discover that, somehow, you are not alone. As he was with Joseph, the Lord is also with you.”

We were all saddened to learn of the death of Steve Rew last Friday. The funeral was held two days ago, on Tuesday, at Jaffray Chinese Alliance Church just up at the curve on Sheppard Avenue. We knew we could not accommodate the numbers who were expected. There were about 400 at the funeral, probably half of them police officers. The reception was back at Grace. Thank you to everyone who brought food, who helped with the set up and the cleaning after. It all was a wonderful tribute to a great man.

A Moms' discussion group begins next Thursday morning at 9. It's an audio series by Gary Chapman: “The 5 Love Languages of Children and Spouses.”

Family Weekend Celebration is planned for Sunday, Feb. 15. Skating at Heron Park Arena is at 2:39 p.m., with hot chocolate back at the church at 4:15. Then at 5 we'll have an Italian-themed Pot Luck Dinner. It promises to be a great time – will you come too?

Drama practice (grades 1-6) begins next Wednesday, February 11 from 6:30 to 7:30.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

January 29, 2009

I receive a Christian quarterly magazine which has articles always speaking loudly and clearly about many current concerns. The last issue included a little insert in which the writer told of attending her daughter's elementary school musical. The printed program had this comment: This musical was written for 15 actors, but it has been adapted to accommodate our cast of 206. The writer said, "You know what kind of show this was. No-cut auditions, no performer left without something special to do. It was not a short program."

The writer went on. "The church remains the home of the no-cut audition. You have to want to get in, but once you are here, we will find a part for you to play. ... There are so many parts in this musical. It will not be a short program. It will last from generation to generation."

Jesus started this thing with only twelve disciples, but the script now has place for millions and more. The church is to be concerned about the people doing the job. We are about making disciples. We need "to offer to as many people as possible the chance to serve Christ in service and community."

You are important, just because you are you. And in the economy of God, there is something He wants you to be attempting for His glory and for the good of His church and His world.

The big event this week is the Ladies' Day Apart on Saturday. Carrie Simpson, youth leader from Kelowna, British Columbia, is the key speaker. If you haven't registered yet, do it today (you can call Cheryl at the church office). Carrie will also be bringing the message on Sunday morning at both services.

Our annual Budget meeting was held on Monday night. We elected officers and approved the budget for 2009. That budget allows for the naming of a part-time caretaker for the year – watch for more details about that. Don Bartlett will be our interim treasurer while we look for a replacement. Sincere thanks were expressed to Kevin Hurford who had to resign and who has been our very able treasurer for a number of years. Thanks were also given to Madelyn Reynolds who has been a very able Convener of the Board of Managers.

Plans are underway for a family event on Sunday afternoon, February 15. It will be a skating party at Heron Park Arena, 2:30 p.m., followed by an Italian-themed pot-luck supper at the church. Plan to be with us.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

January 22, 2009

Do you remember the film “Chariots of Fire”? It’s the story of Eric Liddell, 1924 Olympic runner. If I remember rightly, the film tells us at its ending that Eric afterward went to China (where he had been born) and died in an internment camp near the end of World War II. Now a new film, “The Flying Man,” is being planned directed by a filmmaker from China and to be partially filmed in China.

Eric’s parents were Presbyterian missionaries in China. After the Olympics Eric returned there to teach at the Anglo-Chinese College in Tianjin, about 50 miles southeast of Beijing. In 1937 Japan invaded and occupied northern China; Eric sought to help the victims of that conflict, even risking his life on occasion. In 1943 he was sent to what was the largest internment camp in Asia and continued his ministry to the needy people around him. He shared his food with those more in need, organized soccer matches, sought to help. He encouraged his fellow prisoners not to hate the Japanese but to pray for them. In 1945 he died in the camp, five months before liberation.

He has had a great impact in China. Few westerners have been as honoured by the Chinese (including the government). He is honoured as a war hero; in Tianjin his house is protected as a building of historic significance and was restored at great expense by the government. At the site of the Internment camp a stone monument has been erected in his honour. TV networks in China have produced documentaries of his life. A 24-hour movie channel purchased the rights to the Chariots of Fire film and has shown it repeatedly – the audience has been estimated at 850 million! It is expected that “The Flying Man” will be received with as much or more acclaim.

We are asked to pray for the financing, production and distribution of the film and to promote awareness of the project.

This Sunday is Communion Sunday. Mona will be preaching at both services.

Special thanks go to several who have made possible the installation of a new dishwasher. It was a big project, involving tearing out some wall at the kitchen door, installing a new electrical panel, rebuilding the wall, painting it... Thanks especially to Mike Morris, Peter Gopaul, Tom Lafond, Ron Moeser and anyone else who helped.

The annual Budget meeting is to be held on Monday evening, Jan. 26, at 7:30 p.m. at the church. We hope to approve a budget for 2009 and to elect people to the Board of Managers and other responsibilities in the congregation. We hope you will be here.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

January 15, 2009

This week I want just to share a story with you. You may already have come across it; if so, bear with me - this will be simply a refresher.

The story is about a woman who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She was told that she likely had only three months to live. She called her pastor and talked with him about the funeral service – Scripture passages to be read, the hymns to be sung, and so forth. (Some of us have done that, by the way – and it probably will make it easier for our families when that time comes.)

Before the pastor left, the woman told him that there was one more request. “This is important,” she said. “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.” The pastor was surprised – he had never had that request before. The woman explained. “In all my years of going to church functions, whenever there was food involved, my favourite part was when whoever was picking up the dishes from the main course would bend down and say, You can keep your fork. It was my favourite part, because I knew that something good was coming. It wasn’t going to be Jell-o; it was cake or pie, something with substance.”

She went on: “I want people to see me there in my casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, Why is the fork in her hand? And I want you to tell them, Something better is coming. Keep your fork.”

Something better is coming! That’s the strong hope of the person who has invited Jesus Christ into his or her life.

A couple of months ago a young friend of mine, an earnest Christian, died after many years of fighting cancer. This week his widow told me that when he died a smile appeared on his face. We both knew it meant that he saw his Lord waiting for him.

Something better is coming! That’s our hope.

Men’s Breakfast is this Saturday at 8 a.m. Dr. Sarah (Reynolds) Strano, Chiropractor, is the speaker. Sarah wants to share the wisdom she has gained through belonging to a Christian chiropractic organization with a biblical world view. She hopes to present three bible-based strategies which enable us to “do all things” (Phil. 4:13) in our personal and professional lives and which will empower us. At the end of the presentation, there will be an activity in which everyone can participate. *Don’t miss this time!*

Ladies: have you registered for the Day Apart? It happens on Saturday, Jan. 31. It’s a great day! Cost is \$30; after Jan. 25 and at the door it will be \$35 (includes lunch).

Small groups are starting up again – are you in one? There’s room for you. Pick up a brochure which lists the many options – or call the church office.

The annual Budget meeting and election of officers for the year is to take place on Monday, January 26, at 7:30 p.m.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

January 8, 2009

Living in Hope

I was reading the account of a man who went skiing in the Alps. Somehow he found himself at the top of a ski slope marked by a black diamond with skull and crossbones. The slope went downhill at a frightening angle – it looked like eighty-five degrees. His companion gave him this advice: “Don’t look down. You will be frightened by the slope and overwhelmed by the distance. Just remember one thing: don’t look down.” And the man went down the hill in the ugliest ski run that slope had ever seen. He said “I got only one thing right: I never looked down.”

There was a day when Jesus came walking on the water towards the disciples. At Jesus’ command, Peter stepped out of the boat and began to walk on the water also – toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, when he looked down, he began to sink. You can read about it in Matthew 14.

We probably need to understand something here. While Peter was looking at Jesus, he walked on the water. When he looked down and saw what the wind was doing to the water, he began to sink. Everything depended on this: was he in hope looking at Jesus or was he looking down at the storm?

Hope! What an important thing it is. Look at the many in the Bible who acted in hope and faith. Why else did David take on Goliath? Someone wrote “Hope is the fuel the human heart runs on... Hope is what prompts a young man and woman to stand before a preacher and promise ‘I do’ even though they have no guarantees. Hope is what fuels the same couple, many years later, after broken promises and broken hearts, to give their promise another try.” I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

More about this another week.

Important to remember: We go back to our usual schedule this Sunday morning – two services, at 9:15 and 10:45.

Another important notice: the annual Budget meeting, to elect officers and approve a budget for 2009, has had to be postponed for two weeks. It’s now planned for Monday, January 26, at 7:30 p.m. We didn’t have all the budget figures in time for this coming Monday.

Some small groups are resuming next week. See Sunday’s bulletin for information.

Ladies: the Day Apart preparations are in full swing. The date is January 31, the last Saturday of the month – and it’s time to register for this very special day. Do it now!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

December 31, 2008

A couple of times in the past few weeks we have sung a Christmas song. It begins with these words:
Mary did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?

As we sang, I found myself thinking that another line could be added – something like this: And did you know that your baby boy would help us walk on water too?

This fall I read John Ortberg's book, "If you want to walk on water you've got to get out of the boat." He talks about how easy it is to be "boat potatoes" – staying where it is comfortable, where no great demands are being made on us. Then he writes about hearing God's call to move out and attempt something for which He has made us and for which also He has equipped us.

Ortberg said that "the kind of assignments God gives in the Bible are always God-sized ... always beyond what people can do because he wants to demonstrate his nature, his strength, his provision and his kindness to a watching world. This is the only way the world will come to know him." He added "natural talent alone is not enough ... I will need ideas, strength, and creativity beyond my own resources to do what God asks of me. It will have to be God and me doing it together. We are not called just to work *for* God. We are called to work *with* God."

It's strong stuff! God calls people. He has a plan for our lives. It would be too, too bad to miss it. What are you doing about it?

Things are pretty quiet around Grace this week, after all the hustle and bustle of Christmas. Remember – there's only one service this Sunday, Jan. 4 – it's at 10 a.m. There will be Sunday School also.

Looking ahead: remember the annual meeting on Monday, Jan. 12. It starts at 7:30 p.m. The meeting is to establish a budget for 2009 and elect officers for the year.

The winter sessions of small groups will be starting in January. We hope you can be a part of one of these groups. If you don't have a flyer, call the church office.

A Happy New Year to all!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

December 24, 2008

Tomorrow is Christmas! Our little ones thought it would never come; we who are older are amazed that the time has gone by so quickly. It is a privilege to send you greetings and best wishes for a very happy Christmas. I hope you have a great day filled with all manner of good things.

We'll be reading the Christmas story tonight at church. It's old and familiar yet once again tonight it will come alive and shine for many. The question is: how long will the wonder last? The Bible tells us that the shepherds spread the word about what had happened on that first Christmas night, and that all who heard were amazed. Yet it seems that after a while nothing was remembered – by most.

The Bible sets Mary apart from the general forgetfulness. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart, we are told. Perhaps the reason is that months earlier when the angel announced to her that she would have this special Son, she had replied: "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said."

In other words, Mary trusted God. When God spoke, Mary knew His word was reliable. A relationship of trust! Can we then tell ourselves that to understand and keep Christmas, there needs to be that kind of relationship? We have a God who looks for people to come to know Him and to trust Him.

Let's keep Christmas – by coming to Jesus Christ, telling Him that we cannot make it on our own, asking Him to come and live within us.

Remember: we have three services tonight!

6 p.m. (new) – a 45 minute service for families with young children.

8 p.m. – A Contemporary Christmas Eve service

11 p.m. - Traditional service of lessons and carols

Come to one – come to two – come to all – but come!

Sunday, Dec. 28: One worship service only, at 10 a.m. There will not be Sunday School on Dec. 28.

If you are unable to be at church on this last Sunday of the year and have offerings which you want receipted for the 2008 calendar year, we must receive them by December 31. Cheryl will be in the office on Wednesday morning, Dec. 31 and you may bring them in on that morning, before noon.

The annual meeting for setting a budget and electing officers is set for Monday, January 12. Mark that date in your calendar.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

December 18, 2008

There is always a mixture of the noisy and the quiet at Christmas. We have loud, mighty Christmas songs (like Hark! The herald angels sing!) and then we have quiet, reflective ones (“I wonder as I wander...” for example).

That’s not new. On the first Christmas, the mighty, majestic announcement of angels came to quiet shepherds on a quiet night in a quiet spot. Do you wonder why the announcement was made to the shepherds? After all, it was almost forgotten 30 years later when Jesus began His public ministry. Perhaps it was in part to demonstrate the simplicity of this thing which was taking place. These shepherds, simple in the eyes of their world, found themselves on the receiving end of what we see as the greatest event of history.

A little while later, some earnest seekers from the east joined them. And a few days after the birth two Spirit-filled people in the temple also joined them: Simeon and Anna praised God for what He had done in keeping His promises through the prophets.

God saw us in our confused and complex darkness, and sent His Son. As we celebrate the coming of Jesus we have the privilege of deciding to believe, of placing our trust in Him, the Saviour – the One who can forgive our past, and empower us for the future.

This is Christmas Sunday coming – we hope to see you at 9:15 or 10:45 as we join in praise, remembering the good news of Christmas.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, we have planned for three services. A new one, at 6 p.m., is designed for families with small children. It should be no more than 45 minutes in length.

At 8 p.m. the service will include the organ and also a praise team – a blended service.

At 11 p.m. is our traditional service of lessons and carols.

Sunday, Dec. 28 and Sunday, January 4: One morning service only on these two Sundays. There will be no Sunday School on December 28. There is to be a baptism – the new little daughter of David and Kelly Fenwick.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

November 28, 2008

Walking with God!

We talk about it sometimes – and we tell one another that this is what we should be trying to do. But really much of the time we're not very good at it. Perhaps we're not sure what it means?

There are lots of stories in the Bible about people whom God invited to walk with Him. Remember Abraham going with his son Isaac to Moriah – a hard walk for them both. Moses and the Israelites took a walk out of Egypt – it took 40 years but it led to freedom. Perhaps the most amazing walk was Peter's – when at the command of Jesus he stepped out of the boat and walked on the water. Probably these walks and others in the Bible are pictures of people who with God's help did things they could never have done on their own.

One writer has pointed out that there is a pattern in the Bible of what takes place in a life that God wants to use and help grow.

1. There is a call: God asks an ordinary person to get involved in an act of real trust.
2. There is always fear. Things God asks us to do are often scary!
3. There is reassurance however – the promise of God's presence and help.
4. There is a decision – always. Sometimes we say yes, and sometimes no.
5. There is always a changed life. If you say yes, you learn and grow. If you say no, you will probably be a little harder, a bit more unwilling to say yes the next time.

God may be calling to you – to walk with Him in some aspect of your life. It may take you into new territory – but He will be there, and in His own way He will put His hand on you.

Anniversary celebration – it's almost over. This coming Saturday night, 7 o'clock, is probably the last event: the concert with His Season. Tickets are \$15 – gets yours today –call Cheryl in the office.

Now we turn towards Christmas! Our "Angel Breakfast" is Saturday morning, Dec. 6. It's a real opportunity to reach out to our community. We need volunteers: adults and teens for set-up, kitchen, assistance with the children, and for take-down early Saturday afternoon.

Contact Jo-Anne van Draanen (416-287-0816). She really needs you!

Membership classes are starting this Sunday (Nov. 30). We will meet at the church at 4 in the afternoon for one hour. Let me know if you are interested. There's no obligation; you can come without coming into membership.

Lastly – but very important: thank you to everyone who served on the 50th Anniversary Committee, and to all who contributed in any way to make the several events happen. We had some good times! We are grateful to you all!

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

November 20, 2008

I've been reading again some pages in a book entitled "God Works the Night Shift." The author, talking about God, wrote "He is a Father who listens for your voice. You could be singing in the Billy Graham choir with ten thousand tongues, but He'd be listening for the sound from your voice. You could kneel and pray with a multitude of intercessors, and yet He'd be listening for your petitions... Did you know that the Lord listens for your voice? ... Think of it! God actually hears your faintest cry. He hears you when you are only thinking about calling for help. He hears you when you don't know any words to say at all, but can only groan deep within your spirit."

The psalmist was overwhelmed when he thought about it. Do you remember what he said? "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live." (116:1-2)

It's Anniversary Sunday this week-end. Our 50th! But you already know that, of course. I hope to see you at 9:15 or 10:45. Dr. Jeff Loach from the Canadian Bible Society is our guest preacher.

And – Christmas is on the horizon. There will be many special things happening – and we will be telling you about them in the next little while. Let me alert you today about Christmas Eve: we are planning for three services on Christmas Eve – 6 p.m., 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. The 6 p.m. service is new; only 45 minutes long, it will be focussed on families with young children. The 8 o'clock service will be a blended service for children and adults. At 11 p.m. we plan our traditional service of lessons and carols. As usual, there will be a service on Christmas morning at 10.

The 'Angel Breakfast' is to happen again on Saturday December 6th from 9 to 12 AM. The Angel Breakfast is a community outreach opportunity as our Sunday school children are being encouraged to invite one friend. The morning will include breakfast, music, crafts, games and stories for children between the ages of 3 - 12. We need volunteers! Volunteers to set up on Friday night – volunteers to help during the breakfast on Saturday morning – volunteers to do a take down on Saturday afternoon. This is an opportunity to do a meaningful Christmas thing for children in our community and you can make it happen! Jo-Anne says registrations are trickling in – so it will help if you get yours in quickly. Please contact Jo-Anne van Draanen at j_vandraanen@hotmail.com or 416-287-0816. To register your child, please email Jo-Anne or contact Cheryl at the church office. We are asking for a nominal fee of \$2 per child or \$5 per family to help defray our costs.

Grace to You

Passion for God - Passion for People

Discipling, Serving & Growing Together in Christ

November 6, 2008

Last week, on a short holiday in South Carolina, I was reading again the story of Joseph. You probably know the story – you find it in Genesis, chapter 37 to the end of the book. He really was a spoiled older teen: his father's favourite, he knew he was better than his brothers and didn't mind making that clear to them – I don't think you would have liked him much.

And then all kinds of bad things began to happen. His brothers sold him as a slave and he ended up in Egypt. Finally, because he would not give in to the attempts of his master's wife to seduce him, he ended up in prison. There's a surprising word about that: "the Lord was with him" we are told. That's a big story in itself. But I want you to see something else. One morning in prison Joseph noticed two men who were dejected. Read about it in Genesis 40. He had much on his own plate – but he saw the dejection of these two.

When life throws bad things at us, do we forget that other people face disappointment also? When life turns us upside down, can we minister to someone else? Joseph's troubles developed his compassion. Of course the story is much bigger than that, but this part of it is important too. Someone once observed that we live in an age of "compassion exhaustion." And who better to work at changing that than the followers of Jesus? What can you do for someone today?

- Everett

The 50th Anniversary Gala Banquet is this Sunday evening, Nov. 9. I hope you have your ticket – see you there!

This Sunday is also Remembrance Sunday – we'll have a few moments of silent remembrance in our services as we think about the many in years gone by who gave their lives for our freedom.

Here's an advance notice: Our Sunday school is planning an 'Angel Breakfast' on Saturday December 6th from 9 to 12 AM. The Angel Breakfast is a community outreach opportunity as our Sunday school children are being encouraged to invite one friend. The morning will include breakfast, music, crafts, games and stories for children between the ages of 3 - 12. Please contact Jo-Anne van Draanen at j_vandraanen@hotmail.com or 416-287-0816 if you are interested in being involved. There is also a sign up sheet in the hall for you to leave your name, number, email address on. To register your child, please email Jo-Anne or contact Cheryl at the church office. We are asking for a nominal fee of \$2 per child or \$5 per family to help defray our costs.