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GRACE FOR YOU

Official Newsletter of Grace Presbyterian Church

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PREACHING POLITICS

BY PASTOR JOSH

I sometimes get accused of "preaching politics." That I'm forcing politics down the congregation's throat. That I've "fallen away from the Word."

I also often get accused of *not* preaching "uplifting sermons." That I'm not making people "feel good." That I've even made people "feel bad" or "feel guilty."

But then I go back to the scriptures, and all I find is a series of stories about people and prophets making powerful political statements against their own theocratic government - warning them to turn back to God or face inevitable destruction as a result of their own actions. It's the basic message of every prophet in the Old Testament. And since the prophets were the ones who called out the people and their leaders - because they "preached politics" and didn't give "uplifting sermons" - the prophets were NOT liked much. In fact, many of them were killed by the people.

You get to Jesus, and nothing much changes. Jesus went around also "preaching politics" by proclaiming the power of the Kingdom of God over the power of the Empire of Rome. The people who followed Jesus (both during and immediately after his life) also "preached politics." And the preaching of Jesus and his followers was so politically offensive that Jesus was executed by the Romans for crimes against the state (crucifixion was reserved for political criminals) because he proclaimed that his Kingdom and his authority was greater than that of the Empire of Rome and the authority of Caesar.

But how could Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of God and love and peace and grace be seen as so political that it got him killed? Well, there's some things you should know about the culture of the Roman Empire...

The Roman Empire ruled by brute military force. The Empire viewed Caesar as a god in the flesh, proclaiming Caesar to be the "one son of god sent to bring about a universal reign of peace and prosperity" - a time known as the Pax Romana. One inscription from 9 BC even said that the date of Caesar's birth was so momentous in history that all of time would be measured by the years before and after his birth - B.C. (Before Caesar) and A.D. (Latin for "In the Year of our Lord"). Public announcements about the great accomplishments of Caesar were called "The Good News." And since church and state were united - Rome was a theocracy that forced people had to attend public worship services where they confessed "*Caesar is Lord*," called him their "Savior," and presented offerings to their god Caesar, hoping to earn his favor and grace.

And so Jesus and his early followers (both before and after his death) took all the terminology used by the Roman Empire and used it as a subversive form of protest against the violence and oppression of the Roman Empire and its god Caesar. The "Good News" that Jesus proclaimed was that the true Kingdom of God was the opposite of everything Rome and Caesar stood for: valuing weakness and forgiveness over power and revenge, and emphasizing sacrificial love towards your enemy over violent fear of your enemy. And the true King, the real "Lord and Savior" is Jesus, *not* Caesar. It was an idea that was so political that it got Jesus, and many of his followers, executed for treason.

PREACHING POLITICS

CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE

At the same time, Jesus also preached to his own people that the way they practiced their religion was all wrong. And so Jesus did all kinds of things to break the Law - gleaning fields on the Sabbath, eating with "sinners," telling parables that taught your neighbor is the person most despised by you - while simultaneously preaching to the Pharisees that their strict adherence to the Law - their legalism - was out of line with the Spirit of the Law. That they were out of touch with God's true intentions for humanity. Jesus' sermons and teachings were anything but "uplifting" - in fact they were accusatory and made people feel guilty and even angry. At least Jesus made those in the status quo feel guilty and angry.

Meanwhile, those who were on the margins of society - those who were outcast by both the state and religion because they didn't look/act/believe the same as the status quo (the "sinners," disabled, foreigners, women, etc.) - when they heard Jesus' preaching/teaching, they felt comfort and acceptance. Finally, there is a God (or at least an understanding of God) who does love them and freely offers them grace that they did not have to earn. Even if there wasn't a place for them in either the Roman Empire or the Jewish Temple, there IS ALWAYS a place for them in God's Kingdom.

We often see the Pharisees as these mean, evil, jerks just out to get Jesus. But the truth is, they were just trying to be good Jews. They were just trying to practice their faith the best way they could according to the way they've always done it. And then this Jesus guy shows up and tells them everything they've ever believed and practiced is wrong. Imagine if a pastor showed up to your church and suddenly changed everything that you've ever understood about the way you believe and practice your faith, and you'll know what it was like to be a Pharisee confronted by Jesus. The Pharisees were not bad people, they were just misguided by years of "tradition for tradition's sake" and outside cultural forces that slowly and unknowingly led them astray from their faith as God intended. Jesus tried to get them to repent - to change their life/turn their life around - so they could get back to God's intention for their life. (That's why Jesus calls himself "the way, the truth, and the life.") But we all know how people react when you ask them to change the only way they've ever known/believed for their entire lives. Someone always gets hurt - and it's often the person initiating the change. Such was the case with Jesus.

And such is the case with so many pastors in our churches today. For so long churches and Christians have become so "of the world" that they forget we are only supposed to be "in the world" because we are "holy" (which means "separate" from the world NOT "special" or "above" the world). And so when pastors prophetically preach for their congregations to conform to the ways of Christ and not the culture, to actually repent and turn their life around instead of just saying "forgive me God," and to speak up against the state when it enforces policies that do not exhibit "love of neighbor" - these pastors are not "being political." They are actually trying to be faithful to the scripture's witness and to the way of Jesus. At the same time, these pastors believe they ARE preaching "uplifting sermons" because they know a life lived according to Christ's way of self-giving love, radical hospitality, undeserved grace, risk-taking service, and extravagant generosity is much more fulfilling and "uplifting" than a life lived according to the ways of our quick-fix, consumer-driven, buy-your-happiness, all-about-me, achievement-based culture.

The first question anyone is asked when they are baptized, confirmed, or join the church is "Who is your Lord and Savior" And everyone says, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior." But then we step out of the doors of the church, and quickly forget our confession.

The real issue we neither want to admit nor confront is not "preaching politics" or not enough "uplifting sermons." The real issue is having to choose the way of God's Kingdom and to confess Jesus as Lord **over** the way of the Consumerism Empire and confessing Money as our Savior. Our culture teaches us "you can have it all." But Jesus tells us, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

To whom are you devoted? Who do you despise?

Who is your Lord and Savior? To which Kingdom do you pledge allegiance?



THE VIEW FROM THE LOFT



Dear Choristers (and those thinking about joining the choir):

I just became aware that the date I proposed for the Big, Extravagant, Highly Anticipated, Not-To-Be-Missed Choir Pot Luck and Kickoff is on the same evening as the last meeting of Pastor Josh's new book study.

I know that many of us are planning to attend Pastor Josh's series, so we need to pick a later date.

Tentatively let's say it will be on Wednesday, September 5. If there are no objections or conflicts, we'll confirm that date.

The affair will be at the Jackson Manor on Crystal Heights Road.

If you are coming, *Repondez S'il Vous Plait* (that's fancy talk for CALL US) at 636-931-5432, and we'll make sure you get directions.

May God continue to bless you with joy, love, and music!

Kirk Jackson
Chancel Choir Director

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE

Answers you've always wanted
...but were too afraid to ask

Sunday Sermon Series
07/15-09/02 @ 10:45 am
Wednesday Bible Study
07/25-08/29 @ 6:30 pm

Grace Presbyterian Church

Pentecost 2 Team:

Sue Short, Gary Stephens, Jeanne Seffens, & Mary Lucas

"Making Sense of the Bible" Class

The *Making Sense of the Bible* class is well underway. We've had over **30 people in attendance!** Everyone is talking about how interesting and exciting they find the class. They are talking about how much they have learned from both the book and from Pastor Josh's teaching. They are talking about how they understand things about the bible and their own faith that they've never understood before.

There are still four more weeks of the class left. You can still join us on Wednesdays from 6:30-8:00 pm. There are no books left, but you can order your own book through Amazon (both print and Kindle), Cokesbury, or Christian Book Distributors.

The reading schedule and topics for the remaining four weeks is as follows:

August 8 - Chapters 14-18 - "Questions About the Nature of Scripture"

August 15 - Chapters 19-21 - "The Bible and Science"

August 22 - Chapters 22-26 - "Violence, Suffering, and Other Troubling Issues"

August 29 - Chapters 27-32 - "Wrestling with Issues of Sexuality and Relationships"

There is childcare available for those who need it. The kids are having a great time playing games outside with several of the men of our congregation. Nancy, our nursery worker, is also available for children under 3 years.

Hospitality & Mission

SCHOOL SUPPLIES: As of the writing of this article (before August 5) we've already got quite a bit of school supplies coming in! Keep them coming! These will be delivered to Crystal City Elementary School to help those children who don't have everything they need to start the school year on a strong foot.

On **Sunday, August 12**, we'll *show grace to our students and school employees* of all ages and grade levels by having our "**Back to School Blessing**" during our worship service, as we offer God's blessings upon them to be safe, loving, and gracious to one another as they learn, teach, and grow this school year.

On **Tuesday, August 14**, we'll *show grace to the teachers* of Crystal City Elementary School for all they do for the children of our community by providing **breakfast for the teachers & staff** during their in-service day. We could use some volunteers to help serve food that day. Please speak to Sue Short if you can *help show grace* that day.

Thursday, August 16 is the first day of school. And for parents, this is often a hectic, busy, and stressful morning, so we'll *show grace to the parents* by **providing free coffee** as they drop off their kids at school on that first day. Please speak to Sue Short if you can *help show grace* on that day.

Back to school week will be a busy week of ministry, so we could use a lot of friendly faces to help us "*show grace*" to the faculty, staff, students, and parents in our community.

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE

SERMON SERIES

- 7/15 - THE BIBLE:
ARE WE MISSING THE POINT?
- 7/22 - WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE
WORLD STOPPED TURNING?
- 7/29 - WHY ARE WE READING OTHER
PEOPLE'S OLD MAIL?
- 8/05 - INERRANT, INFALLIBLE,
INSPIRED, OR INSPIRATIONAL?
- 8/12 - HOW DID NOAH FIT THOSE
DINOSAURS ON THE ARK?
- 8/19 - WHY IS GOD PUNISHING ME AFTER
I GAVE TO THE TELEVANGELIST?
- 8/26 - WHY IS THE BIBLE SO
CONCERNED ABOUT SEX?
- 9/02 - IF IT IS THE END OF THE WORLD,
WILL I FEEL FINE?

GRACE
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

105 Bailey Rd
Crystal City
636.937.3019

For More Info Go To:
gracechurch-pcusa.com

childcare available
for children 3 & under

SUNDAYS
07/15-09/02
10:45 AM

#experiencegrace
#graceforyou
#graceforall

GRACE WEEKLY EVENTS

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

08/01/18

9:00 am - Park Work/Quilters/Handwork
9:30 am - Quilters/Handwork
11:30 am - Best Lunch in Missouri
6:30 pm - "Making Sense of the Bible" Study
Chapters 8-13

THR

08/02/18

9:00 am - Ladies Social Breakfast

FRI

08/03/18

SAT

08/04/18

GRACE WEEKLY EVENTS

SUN

08/05/18

9:30 am - Adult Bible Study
10:45 am - Worship - "Inerrant, Infallible,
Inspired or Inspirational?"
Last Day for School Supplies Collection
11:45 am - Hospitality Hour

MON

08/06/18

9:00 am - Prayerful Beginnings (Library)

TUE

08/07/18

WED

08/08/18

9:00 am - Park Work
9:30 am - Quilters/Handwork
11:30 am - Best Lunch in Missouri
6:30 pm - Making Sense of the Bible Class
Chapters 14-18: The Nature of Scripture

THR

08/09/18

FRI

08/10/18

SAT

08/11/18

GRACE WEEKLY EVENTS

SUN

08/12/18

9:30 am - Adult Bible Study
10:45 am - Worship - "How Did Noah Fit Those
Dinosaurs on the Ark?"
Back to School Blessing
11:45 am - Hospitality Hour

MON

08/13/18

9:00 am - Prayerful Beginnings (Library)
7:00 pm - Session Meeting

TUE

08/14/18

7:30-9:30 am - Breakfast for Crystal City Elementary
Teachers and Staff.

WED

08/15/18

9:00 am - Park Work
9:30 am - Quilters/Handwork
11:30 am - Best Lunch in Missouri
6:30 PM - Making Sense of the Bible Class
Chapters 19-21: The Bible & Science

THR

08/16/18

7:00-8:00 am - First Day of School (Crystal City)
Free Coffee for Parents
@ Crystal City Elementary
6:00 pm - Music Jam

FRI

08/17/18

SAT

08/18/18

8:00 am- GPC Families Breakfast

GRACE WEEKLY EVENTS

SUN

08/19/18

9:30 am - Adult Bible Study
10:45 am - Worship - "Why is God Punishing Me After I Gave to the Televangelist?"
11:45 am - Hospitality Hour

MON

08/20/18

9:00 am - Prayerful Beginnings (Library)
7:00 pm - Deacon Meeting

TUE

08/21/18

WED

08/22/18

9:00 am - Park Work
9:30 am - Quilters/Handwork
11:30 am - Best Lunch in Missouri
6:30-8:00 pm - "Making Sense of the Bible" Class
Chapters 22-26: Violence, Suffering & Other Issues

THR

08/23/18

12:30-4:30 pm - Presbytery Meeting
First Pres. Edwardsville, IL
Rich Hadley is being Commissioned as Pastor to Mercy Hospital-Jefferson at the meeting.

FRI

08/24/18

5:30 pm - Scrapbooking

SAT

08/25/18

8:30 am-5:00 pm - Scrapbooking

GRACE WEEKLY EVENTS

SUN

08/26/18

9:30 am - Adult Bible Study
10:45 am - Worship - Hymn Sing
"Why is the Bible So Concerned About Sex?"
Backpack & Meal a Month Programs
11:45 am - Hospitality Hour

MON

08/27/18

9:00 am - Prayerful Beginnings (Library)

TUE

08/28/18

9:30-11:00 am - Homeless Youth Initiative Meeting
@ Disability Resource Association Building

WED

08/29/18

9:00 am - Park Work
9:30 am - Quilters/Handwork
11:30 am - Best Lunch in Missouri
6:30-8:00 pm - "Making Sense of the Bible" Class
Chapters 27-32: Sexuality & Relationships

THU

08/30/18

FRI

08/31/18

APPRECIATIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM BOB & MARCIA, KEN & MARILYN AND THE COPELAND/DENISON FAMILIES

Grace Church, Deacons and Congregation,
Thank you so very much for your outpouring of sympathy for me and my family following the passing of my Mom, Mildred Copeland. Your cards, phone calls, and attendance at the Celebration of Life Service was extremely appreciated. I know our church received many donations in her memory. Thank you all for that

FROM KATHLEEN FARNHAM DIRECTOR OF CHURCH RELATIONS AT MARYVILLE COLLEGE (TN)

It's hard to believe it's been over a month since G.A. I wouldn't be surprised if the Silva-Noah household is still recovering! I'm certainly no G.A. expert, but I have been to a bunch of them, and without a doubt this one had more energy for good in the world than any I've ever attended - demonstrations and fire-y preaching are not always our hallmark as Presbyterians.

Thank you and your congregation for all of your hospitality!

I loved coming to Grace on Sunday - what a treat!

I hope you are as happy with Grace as Grace certainly is with you.

Thank you, too, for your courage to preach a difficult sermon -

Anne McKee (Chaplain at Maryville College) would be proud!

And thank you for coming to the "Church and College Partnerships" breakfast that Maryville College sponsored.

Indeed, you are a "leader of church."

Please let us know if you're coming this way to visit!

Love to all - Kathleen



Preparing for Worship in the Park



We had so many people...



...it took TWO frames to fit them in all in the photo!
(and there's still more!)



Even though it was hot, we had plenty of shade!



These guys worked hard cooking for everyone!



Pastor Josh preaching in his "Surfing Jesus" tank-top.



Swimming to cool off!



Fellowship in the pool



It was a blessed day!
We have to do this again!