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The Beautifully Simple Gospel

I pray this season of Lent, the season of prayer, fasting, and spiritual renewal and growth, has been a blessing for you. As we study and learn, and attempt to grow in spiritual maturity, there are times we can get too complicated in our theology. I'll be the first one to admit it. I love to dive into a passage and dig out all the context clues with their cultural nuances and links to various other passages in scripture, culminating in this wonderfully intricate Biblical principle that has weaved its way throughout salvation history. These studies are very useful, and indeed necessary, for breaking down a passage to write a sermon, commentary, or a book, but I started thinking about our mission as the Church; to go and make disciples. I wondered, "How is the message of the Church perceived, or received?" To answer this question, I need to only look back on my own journey. During my childhood and church youth group years, I cannot recall a pastor or preacher who proclaimed the Gospel message. I learned about the life of Jesus. I heard lessons on how to be a good person and how to live a good life. I even learned how to snow ski with the youth group, but I was never told about **God's love and how His love saved us from our sins through Jesus Christ on the cross, and eternity with God because of the resurrection.**

I say all this to get us thinking about Easter and what kind of message we are sending as a church. The seasons of Christmas and Easter give us unique opportunities where people are more receptive to Jesus. Here comes the scary part, "What do I say?!? I'm not a theologian or history scholar." Here is the cool part. You don't have to be! Most people we encounter already know who Jesus is, and the essential historical events. There is also a good chance they will know some of His miracles. What most people need is a simple Gospel message from someone who cares. And if they have questions that you can't answer, there is the awesome response of, "I don't know. Let's find out." Don't be scared of saying, "I don't know." What you do know is of much greater importance, and that is your testimony of how **God has forgiven you and made you into a new creation with the Holy Spirit dwelling within you.**

Feeling stuck and unsure how to proceed? Scripture is always a great place to go. Here are some basic Gospel fundamentals:

1 Cor. 15:3-5 ³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," (NIV) This is a Creed Paul received from the apostles. Early creeds give short summary statements about what the early Church believed, like the Apostle's Creed we recite.

Romans 3:23-25a ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith." We are saved *By Grace Through Faith!* We need salvation because our sins have separated us from God, and we cannot earn salvation. Grace is an undeserved gift, freely given because of God's love.

Romans 10:9-10 ⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." There is no magical incantation needed to be saved. Simply believe in your heart and profess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and Savior. (Continued on page 2)

2 Cor. 5:18-19a ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.” Salvation is not hell insurance or simply a bus ticket to heaven. It is not human centric of, “What do I get out of it.” Salvation is God the Father repairing our relationship with Him and bringing His children home!

Here is the challenge. Think of at least 1 person you know who may need to hear this message of Grace, and share it by Easter! ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (Phil. 4:13, NIV).

In Christ,

~ Pastor John McCarthy



March 3 - 3rd Sunday of Lent

Sermon Title: "A Walk Through Luke", pt 7

Scriptures: Psalm 19; Luke 5:1-11

March 10 - 4th Sunday of Lent

Sermon Title: "A Walk Through Luke", pt 8

Scriptures: Numbers 21:4-9; Luke 5:12-26

March 17 - 5th Sunday of Lent

Sermon Title: "A Walk Through Luke", pt 9

Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 5:27-39

March 24 - Palm Sunday

Sermon Title: "The Triumphal Entry"

Scriptures: Psalm 118:22-29; Mark 11:1-11

March 31 - Resurrection of the Lord/Easter

Sermon Title: "He Is Risen"

Scriptures: Isaiah 25:6-9; Luke 24:1-12

April 7 - 2nd Sunday of Easter

Sermon Title: "A Walk Through Luke" pt 10

Scriptures: Exodus 20:8-11; Luke 6:1-16

Prayer List - Several of our First Pres family lost family members and/or friends: Crabtree’s son, Mark passed. Fraser Freshour family - Edmund Fraser. Nan Godbold and Mac Lacy - brother, Bill passed as well as Mac’s daughter, Lally Jennings; and Ronald Perkins passed.

Carol Foster fell, been in and out of hospital since. Kim Albert and Mark Foster are under going cancer treatment.

Dexter Gilliam had open heart surgery. Laura Edwards Morris had defibrillator heart implant. Leon Plaster— been in hospital and out, home with meds. Brittany Hazelwood - testing to determine next step for her health. Leon Plaster is home with meds; Cynthia Coleman - torn rotator cuff and other shoulder issues.

Prayers continue: Patricia Burton, Chappell family, Caroline Laughorn, Deborah Sizemore.





Season of Lent - The Lenten season is drawing to a close. Eāster is quickly approaching, but we still have several weeks of Lenten Lunches and devotionals. If you haven't joined us for any, please feel free to come listen to as many as your schedule allows.

The schedule will be as follows:

March 6 Rev. Bill Boelte - First Baptist Church

March 13 Laurie Fox - Sentara Halifax Hospice

March 20 Rev. Thad Decker - Beth Car Baptist Church

March 27 Pastor John McCarthy - First Presbyterian Church

Palm Sunday Processional - First Pres. will again participate in the annual Palm Sunday processional. Meet at the Halifax Medical Building on Main Street by 10 am. The opening devotional will begin at 10:00 am; the processional will begin at 10:10 am. concluding about 10:30. The Deacons will provide donuts and juice to all after the Processional.



Maundy Thursday - A combined worship is being planned for Maundy Thursday. First Presbyterian will host and Rev. Bill Boelte will provide the message. Join us at 7:00 pm.

Flowering of the Cross - First Pres. will again have our annual Flowering of the Cross after services on Easter. Please start watching for flowers that you can bring to help fill the cross with beautiful flowers. This is an activity that is greatly appreciated by the neighborhood.



Officers Retreat - A retreat for all officers has been scheduled for Saturday, March 9 from 9 am - 12 noon at First Pres. Please make every effort to come for this special training time.

Daylight Savings Time - The time for the changing of the clocks is quickly arriving. Please mark your calendars on March 9 to change your clocks, forward one hour as you retire for the evening. If you forget you will be late to church.



Souper Bowl of Caring - We collected \$397+ 40 canned or boxed items; the majority being soups and peanut butter. Thank you to all.

Upper Room - March/April edition of the Upper Room now available in each lobby area. Get your copy today, while the supply lasts, and get it early so you don't miss a day of the spiritual message





I recently was reminded of a book I'd read some many years ago. It is titled "Believing Christ" by Stephen Robinson. The book was eye opening to me. I appreciate the teachings of the importance of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in my life.

One story that really struck me was called the Parable of the Bicycle. In that story the author talks about his little 7-year-old daughter wanting a bicycle. He thinking that funds were low and wanting to pacify her, he says: "You save all your pennies, and pretty soon you'll have enough for a bike." With that she went away. A couple weeks later, he realized she was getting paid from mom for a job she had just completed. Then he heard "clink, clink." After asking what she was doing, his daughter came to him with a jar full of pennies and said, "You promised me that if I saved all my pennies, pretty soon I'd have enough for a bike. And, Daddy, I've saved every single one of them."

As parents I think we can all feel the pull on his heart. So, they went shopping for a bike. She found the one she wanted, and was very excited until she saw the price tag; she began to grimace. She realized she didn't have enough money to buy the bike. He asked how much she had, and she said, "Sixty-one cents." Without hesitation, he said, "if you give me everything you've got and a hug and a kiss, and the bike is yours."

He drew a message of the Atonement of Christ from this experience. He realized we all want something, though not a bicycle, we do want to return to heaven to be with God and Jesus Christ. But no matter how hard we try, we come up short. We cannot save ourselves. But because of the Atonement of Jesus, He covers the price. What we have to give is meager in comparison to the actual cost, but if we give it all with love and devotion, He will take us and make us more than we could ever be without Him. He will deliver us and accept us into heaven, because we trusted and gave all we could to Him and His mission. Christ wants our whole heart. He wants us to trust Him with complete trust. Sometimes life throws us curveballs and we can find it hard to trust Him. But especially in those tough times, if we will humble ourselves, recognize any fault that may be ours, repent, and turn to Him with faith and trust, He will see us through.

C.S. Lewis said it like this: "*Christ says 'Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You.'*"

Because of the Atonement, we have the assurance, just as Isaiah taught: "*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" *Isaiah 1:18 (KJV)*

What a beautiful and assuring message! A message of hope and promise. May we all take this time as we prepare for Easter to remember His great sacrifice. And strive harder to be more like Him and to give Him all we have, willingly and lovingly. ~ *Sherolyn*

Women's Bible Study - Meeting each Wednesday at 10:30 am.
Come join the group.

Men's Bible Study - Meet each Thursday at 6:30pm. Men come join their study of "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel.

New study: Evangelism Study - meet each Thursday at 1pm at The Busy Bean. Studying "They Like Jesus But Not the Church" by Dan Kimball. Come join them.



Stay Connected Please reach out to us to give us your cell phone number(s). Many times we want to reach out to members, but only have a home phone #. If you have a cell phone and you do not hear from the church on it; please consider reaching out to let us know your cell number.

MARCH

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
February 25 9:30 am - Sun Sch 10:15 am - Fellowship 11:00 am—Worship	Feb 26	February 27	February 28 10:30 am - WBS 12:00 - Lenten Lunches 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	February 29 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 pm - Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	March 1 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	March 2
3 9:30 am - Sun Sch 10:15 am - Fellowship 11:00 am Worship	4	5 10:30 am—GCM	6 10:30 am - WBS 12:00 - Lenten Lunch 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	7 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 pm—Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	8 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	9 - Officer Retreat 9 am—12 pm
10— 9:30 am - Sun Sch 10:15 am - Fellowship 11:00 am Worship 12:15 pm - Diaconate	11	12	13 10:30 - WBS 12:00 - Lenten Lunch 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	14 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 pm - Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	15 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	16 9-12 NA
17- 5 Cents a Meal collection 9:30 am - Sun Sch 10:15 am - Fellowship 11:00 am Worship 12:30 pm Session	18	19	20 10:30 am - WBS 12:00 - Lenten Lunch 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	21 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 pm - Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	22 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	23
24 10:00 - Palm Sunday Processional 11:00 am—Worship	25	26 Newsletter DEADLINE	27 10:30 am - WBS 12:00 - Lenten Lunch 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	28 - Maundy 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 Maundy Svc. 7:00 pm - Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	29 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	30
Holy Week						
31 - Easter 6 am - Sunrise Service Breakfast 11:00 am Worship 12:00 pm - Flowering of the Cross	April 1	April 2	April 3 10:30 am - WBS 12:00 - AA 6:00 pm NA 6:00 pm—Choir	April 4 6:30 pm - MBS 7:00 pm - Al-Anon 8:00 pm - AA	April 5 - Office Closed 12:00 PM AA	April 6

MARCH Birthdays

3 Don Cherry
 6 Shannon Cherry Vallia
 10 Carrington Thackston
 10 Jack Watkins
 12 Joanna Blackstock
 14 Stewart Nelson
 15 Bettie Barksdale*
 20 Frances Ann Thackston*

20 Amanda Morgan
 23 Julia Baskervill*
 24 Caroline Edmunds
 26 Jim Sizemore
 27 Peyton Wickemeyer
 27 Ray Shields
 30 Chris Lumsden



We want to recognize everyone. If we don't have your birthday listed, please call the office and let us know.

* In Memory

Since our last Newsletter, our Session on February 18, discussed:

1. Rev. Coleman opened the meeting with prayer.
2. News of the congregation was shared.
3. Minutes of the January 21st Stated Session Meeting were approved.
4. Membership Roll – We continue to reach out to inactive members on the church roll. Responses received were shared.
5. Local Missions – The results of the collection for the “Souper Bowl of Caring” were shared.
6. Property –
 - A. Several roof leaks need to be addressed.
 - B. Will get quotes for a “deep cleaning” of the sanctuary.
7. Budget & Finance – Financial reports for January 2024 were reviewed.
8. Worship –
 - A. Next communion date is Sunday, April 21, 2024.
9. The Deacons joined at the end of the meeting.
 - A. Decided to move their monthly meeting to the second Sunday after worship.
 - B. The date/time for the Officer’s Retreat was set for Saturday, March 9th from 9:00 am -12:00 noon.
10. Rev. Coleman closed the meeting with prayer.



- 5 Cents-a-Meal collection** - Sunday, March 17.
- Choir** - Each Wednesday at 6 pm.
- Deacons - New meeting date and time!** -
March 10 after worship
- Elders** - Sunday, March 17 - Elders at 12:30
- Evangelism Study** - each Thursday at 1 pm at Busy Bean.
- Greeting Card Ministry** - Tuesday, March 5 at 10:30.
- Men’s Bible Study** - each Thursday at 6:30 pm
- Women’s Bible study** - Wednesday’s at 10:30 am

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