

From the CE Coordinator and Music Director:

In the first six months of the year, we have accomplished a lot. We got new audio and video equipment installed, we started a YouTube channel and put our services on Facebook, we transitioned from Sunday school classes to a breakfast and fellowship time, we expanded Children's Worship to include fourth through sixth grades, we started having fellowship lunches again, we opened an outdoor food pantry, and we did a week of VBS! I'm sure there's more I'm forgetting, but even that list I made is crazy. Here at First Reformed we've experienced a lot of change in a short amount of time, but have we done enough? Are we moving the direction we need to and with the right motivations?

The church in America, and even the churches in our tiny town of Bluffton, have been under attack. As we've been able to grow, there have been churches not far from us that have fallen into conflict and struggle. We've all heard about pastors leaving their churches and congregations being divided. They were churches doing good things; they are churches a lot like us. So have we done enough? I think it's less important what we've done than *why* we're doing it. Determined people can accomplish lots of amazing things for as long as they are determined. However, determination eventually fails. People get tired. Conflict happens. Ultimately, the only thing that can carry us through is love. If we are a church built on the love of Christ and love for each other then we can be certain that we will be okay. But our motivation must be love! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." We have come a long way and accomplished many good things, but I hope our focus is always on the love of Christ.

With Love,
Isabella Stutzman

MISSIONS



We were blessed to have Manny and Sherry Asprec join us on June 26th. They are a couple who love people and are extremely committed to the Lord. It was humbling to hear their presentation. Sherry is the Founder and Director of Destiny's Promise Orphanage. Manny is the founder of S.E.E.D Project. They are taking a well-deserved break and staying in the states for the next year. Manny will be going back to the Philippines' 3-4 times over the next year. We ask that you hold this family in your prayers. We will continue collecting funds for this family through September.

~Missions Committee

First Reformed Church

824-3161

firstref@adamswells.com

www.firstreformedbluffton.org

Worship~10:30 a.m.

Senior Pastor-Dr. Bryson Bell

CE Coordinator & Music Director-Isabella Stutzman

Celebrating Birthday's in July

- July 2~Betty Powell
- July 2~Valerie Jackson
- July 4~Mara Jo Williams
- July 7~Carly Mittlestedt
- July 8~Emma Maxwell
- July 9~Darcie Adalynne
- July 10~Galen Gray
- July 12~Aaron Sturgeon
- July 15~Ashton Trout
- July 16~Connie Jones
- July 17~Gene Bell
- July 17~Bob Maxwell
- July 17~Makalah Tullis
- July 18~Rhys Smith
- July 18~Brinley Smith
- July 21~John Halsey
- July 22~Madeleine Morgan
- July 22~Cheryl Roller
- July 23~Gary Shaw
- July 23~Stephen Morse
- July 26~Kelly Blazier
- July 27~Grayson Schroeder
- July 29~Hailey Griner
- July 30~Mac McAvoy
- July 30~Lydia Williams
- July 30~Trent Moore
- July 31~Susan Popplewell



THANK YOU for the cards, calls and letters for my 90th, birthday! Your thoughtfulness was very much appreciated.
With much love *Mary Lou Barger*

July Volunteers

Worship Nursery:

- July 3~Connie Graham
- July 10~Linda Sturgeon
- July 17~Julia Johnson
- July 24~Angie Oman
- July 31~Twila Dubbeld

No Children's Worship for the month of July

Greeters: Jon & Angie Oman

Monthly Calendar

July 3

10:30 a.m.-Worship -**No Communion**

July 4

Office is Closed

July 10

10:30 a.m.-Worship

July 16

8:30 a.m.-Men's Fellowship Breakfast-Hoosier House Restaurant

July 17

10:30 a.m. Worship & **Communion**

July 24

10:30 a.m. Worship

6:00 p.m.-Discipleship Class-Home of the Bell's

July 31

10:30 a.m. Worship

THERE WILL BE NO EAT & GREET THIS MONTH.

THERE WILL BE NO MEETINGS THIS MONTH.

Thank you for all the notes, cards, gifts, calls and text messages. You made my 90th birthday even more special. ~*Virgil Moser*

We would like to thank everyone for the prayers, cards and calls during Jerry's ordeal. Also thank the ladies of the church for all the meals they were really appreciated and very good. Our church is fortunate to have these ladies Also want to thank Dianna for her phone calls and texts, we are fortunate to have her. Also want to thank a little boy who came to the door with his grandma to bring a meal and brought me a cake and sang Happy Birthday to me which made such a big difference in my day. ~*The Family of Jerry Crandall*

FROM THE DESK OF DR. BELL:

John 4:46-54; 14:6

Also take some time to read the entire fourth chapter of John.

I hope that you are enjoying your summertime, as we have already seen some very warm days and bright sunshine! It makes you want to get out and enjoy the blessings of summer in Indiana.

I want to share something in this Focus article with you that is of vital importance; something regarding my teaching to you and my writing and also my preaching that is two-fold in its nature. The first reason is that I want you to be knowledgeable of the Bible, the teachings of scripture so that you may be able to properly understand His Word, His message of hope, especially in times of difficulty, so that you might establish a biblical worldview that cannot be permeated by the onslaught of the attacks of Satan; so that you may be rooted and grounded in faith in Jesus Christ as God's only Son. The reason that I share the teachings and the proclamation of His Word leads to my second reason for all this – so that we might be practitioners of our faith, practitioners of those things found in scripture. You see, you can't have one without the other, if you desire to lead a Christian life. We need to know what the scriptures say, how to interpret them, and then how to apply them to life. If I leave out the first, then I am left to just try and do good things. People of God, atheists do good things. And, if I leave out the second, then I am left only with an understanding of the Word without ever applying those things I know so that I might truly be His disciple. We need both, not one or the other. That is why I share with you His Word as best that I can and that is why I pray that you will take what you are learning from the Word and go live it out in your daily life. That should always be our "modus operandi".

Please take the time to read the scriptures that I have chosen for this article. The first passage is the story of a royal official of Herod Antipas, whose son had gotten sick and was near death. To set the scene, let's take a look back. Jesus had just come from Samaria, where He had spent two days with the people in Sychar, and now He had gone into Galilee and, specifically, to the town of Cana, where He had performed His first miracle – turning the water to wine. This royal official, who was living in Capernaum, had heard that Jesus was in Galilee and so he went to Cana, which was about 17 miles away, to ask Jesus to come and heal his son.

In short story, Jesus tells the official to go back home, that his son was healed. We also find that, on his way back home, the next day, he was told of his son's healing and he inquired as to the time his son got better. They told him and he realized that it was the same time that Jesus had spoken the word of healing to him regarding his son.

Take a look at the movement in John 4. We find the following:

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|-----------|---------|
| Verse 9 | Jew |
| Verse 11 | Sir |
| Verse 19 | Prophet |
| Verse 29 | Messiah |
| Verse 42 | Savior |
| Verses 47 | Healer |

In John 4, we see a movement from that of being addressed with politeness to being Savior and Healer. As Jesus begins to reveal Himself to others, more and more would know that He was, and still is, the Messiah. The official believed because of what Jesus had done. This is so indicative of our world today. I will do something, but only if something is done for me. I will believe if God will do this or that for me.

Years ago there was a man who came to me who was on the brink of divorce. He wanted God to put his marriage back together and was willing to do anything to help make that happen. He

was attending church on a very regular basis, was active in the Word and was, by all appearance, growing in his faith. However, after several months passed, his wife did file for a divorce and the man walked away from God, the church, as well as his faith. The reason why? He didn't get what he wanted, so he bailed on Jesus. It was very clear that he was there as long as he thought things might go his way. He thought God would put his marriage back together and we were hoping and praying for that to happen as well. But, it did not happen.

Our Christian life isn't always about getting what we want when we want it. Our life in Christ is a life of faith and, sometimes, this walk of faith is not always the easiest way. God's way is sometimes a difficult way. That will not get people signing up for the Christian life and journey, I know. Jesus is not looking for His Gospel to be pop gospel, for He is seeking those who will be avid followers, radical disciples, sold out believers who are committed to Him, no matter the cost.

Will you trust Him and believe, even when you don't see something done for you by Jesus? Some years back a very close friend of mine contracted cancer and we so wanted to see Jim healed of his sickness. In the end, Jim died from his cancer, but he died with a very strong faith, trusting in God. I was called to his home just a few minutes before he passed away and I had the opportunity to pray with him and with his daughters and to cry with them as Jim got the orders from his Commander-In-Chief and entered into eternal life. Thomas put His hands in the side of Jesus and he felt the wounds in His hands. Jesus said to Thomas, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Who was it that said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, so how can we know the way?" It was Thomas. I find it so interesting here that, based on what Jesus says, that we must recognize the totality of the work of Jesus, in that He fulfills every aspect of our lives. His answer sums up the epistemological, the axiological and the ontological issues of life. Epistemology – How do we know? Axiology – the study of value – the distinguishing of judgments based on facts and based on value - what is truth? Ontology – the nature of being – that which is – what is life?

These are the words of Jesus, not my words. What I find to be of most interest is our feeble attempts to try and answer the questions for God, or to try and put God into some kind of box, or try and excuse God from statements like this one that Jesus makes – "no one comes to the Father, except through Me."

We try, in our feeble ways, to say things like, "Well, what about those who are of a different religion?", or "What about those who doesn't know about Jesus?", or, "All roads lead to heaven", or, "There are many ways to God – it doesn't have to be through the person of Jesus." We hear these kinds of statements, and what troubles me is that we often try to make the excuses for God or even excuses for ourselves by abdicating our responsibilities to fulfill the Great Commission – to go and make disciples of all the nations – "*panta ta ethne*".

Statements like this, instead of trying to excuse them away, ought to be statements that drive us to be practitioners of His Word. **The Holy Spirit does His work in us so that He might work through us in the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.**

Prayer: Lord, let us be practitioners of Your Word, that we might be risk takers, going into our Samaria with the Good News, not to recruit, but to bring renewal; not to add, but to be ambassadors of hope. Give us grace to practice that which we have learned and that which we know. Amen.

With My Love,
Pastor Gene