

Ventura

LIFE

LINK

Volume 14, Number 1

January 28, 2010

Calendar

March

- 2.....Leader Meeting
- 5.....Senior Potluck, Ojai
- 10.....Lasagna Dinner
- 14..Daylight Savings Time Starts
- 16.....Leader Meeting
- 21.....Third Sunday Sing, Ojai

April

- 2... Senior Saints Lunch, Ventura
- 4.....Easter
- 6.....Leader Meeting
- 14.....Lasagna Dinner
- 18.....3rd Sunday Sing, TBD
- 20.....Leader Meeting
- 24.....Annual Building Work Day

Birthdays

- 2/29.....Seth Mason
- 3/3.....Linda Howard
- 3/4.....Ed Hathway
- 3/8.....Virginia Orr



Life Stream

The worst recession since the Great Depression. National unemployment over 10%; wide-spread business failures; record personal bankruptcies; high foreclosure rates; damaged retirement accounts; escalating healthcare costs; an unimaginable growing national debt; and on it goes.

It's *natural* to think negatively about this situation, to be afraid for our jobs and retirement, and to be focused on holding onto our money, to protect it for our future. It's *unnatural* – irresponsible – to *not* be concerned about these things. But most of the history of the world, for most people, regardless of a nation's economy, has been to have the on-going *natural* response, just to survive.

That's what Jesus addresses in Matthew 6:19-34 and Luke 12:13-34. I urge you to re-read these familiar texts thoughtfully and prayerfully. Beyond our current economic circumstances, consider how you usually think about providing for your needs, and your thinking about preparing for your future. Is it in faith of God?

Jesus' teachings in these texts were *radical, unnatural, unwise, unrealistic* and *irresponsible* – at least by the way we *naturally* think. They called for *actual trust in God*, instead of ourselves. They called for *real* faith in place of our *professed* faith. Put another way, they called for putting our *money* where our *mouths* are.

We must not deny our economic situation today – for bad or for *good*! If 10% are unemployed, 90% are employed. If 10% have lost their homes, 90% have not. And so on. Christians must see both Satan's curses and God's *blessings*! We must grow stronger in our *trust* of Him to provide. And we must praise and thank Him for what He *has* done, and what we can *trust* Him to do in the future.

We must remember Paul's words in Rm. 8:31-32, "... If God is with us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

In Matthew 6 and Luke 12, Jesus calls His hearers people of "little faith". They say they trust *God*, but *act* as if they actually trust only *themselves*. In this part of your life, would Jesus call you a person of "little faith", or of "great faith"?

I pray that we'll grow this year in our **trust of God**, regardless of the economy.

Love, Dave

Got Any Spare Change? I need Three Dollars

submitted by Bruce Tabor

In the August, 2009 issue of **the Voice of the Martyrs**, Director Tom White responds to a reader's complaint. *"I have two small children at home who see the mail and they do not understand this...it will be difficult for me to continue to support you if this is what I can expect. ...We do not need this kind of cheap, graphic, emotionally-driven visual ploy to get us involved. ...If you do not want my support, then simply let me know you plan to continue with this kind of marketing."*

His objection? An Indian girl named Namrata was severely burned by Hindu radicals in her village who do not approve of Christians. Accompanying the terrible picture of her burns was also a picture of her restored face and her victorious story; prayers to God and **the Voice of the Martyrs** doctors restored her burned face as if it had never happened. Her scars can't be seen; they are seared in her heart, but she loves her lord even more now because of what she suffered!

Tom White shares a poem in his response to this reader. Ever since I read this poem, I cannot get it out of my head; it is disturbing. It's an excerpt from **Three Dollars Worth of God**, by Wilbur Rees.

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

I would like to buy just a little of the Lord, but not enough to take control of my life; just enough to ease some of my pain and my guilt. I would like to find love I can hide in my pocket, but not enough to change my heart. I only want enough to take to church, when I have the time. I would like to hide some for a rainy day. I don't want enough for people to see a change in me, nor enough to impose any responsibility, just enough to make folks think I am ok. I would like to purchase a pound of the eternal, but if it doesn't work, I would like to get my money back.

Could I just get three dollars worth of God, please?"

How much of God do I really want? Enough to feel warm and fuzzy, or even make me feel righteously indignant about injustices, but not enough to make me do anything to change them, and change my life in the process.

Our nation has a slight case of Christianity that prevents it from ever getting the real thing. Many people don't want something that demands they pick up a cross or make major sacrifices to follow Jesus. They want something that makes them comfortable with who they already are and how they already are. They want acceptance as they are, not repentance so they can be who they ought to be.

In Tom White's response to his reader's complaint, he shared another reaction to the same picture. A mother wrote, "We received the April edition in the mail today. Our five-year-old son, Gideon, saw the little girl on the front of the magazine with her many burns...Gideon had an eventful night because of seeing it laying on our table top. He and Benjamin (our three-year-old) brought it to us and asked us what had happened to her. So I told him, 'Well, ... (big sigh) ...this little girl is 10 years old. And she loves Jesus. But where she lives in her country they don't think it is OK to love Jesus. So when the other people found out she was a "Christian" (and I told him what that means) they tried to hurt her.' She continued, saying they later prayed before bed, and her five-year-old said, "I think God wants me to be a missionary doctor because I could go help people who love him and get punished for it." She spoke of many other positive conversations brought about by seeing what another reader described as 'cheap, graphic, emotionally-driven visual ploy **to get us involved.**'

At times like this I can see why Jesus told his followers, ...(unless you) become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

What will it take to get me involved? I pray it will cost more than three dollars! Our faith does not guarantee us a pain-free world. Living in America does not guarantee we won't be persecuted; in fact, we are becoming more Godless and losing our freedoms as we demand more entitlements. Jesus told his followers they would suffer for his name sake. How much of Jesus' cross can I, no, will I carry? We can carry so much more than we realize; he is our strength! Tom White says, "three dollars worth of the cross does not include the sharp emotions of grief and pain. We can starve ourselves and our congregation if our sackful of God is too small." I think he's right and I'm ashamed!

Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." ...all things, even persecution, even my faults! ...for those who love him, I love him; how much do I love him? ...according to his purpose, not my purpose? ...his purpose! It makes my heart cry out, **"Oh, Lord, explode my soul!"**

Ventura Life Link is Going Green!

Beginning on April 29, 2010; the Ventura Life Link will start being delivered to your e-mail address! Please take a moment and send an email to donna@venturachurchofchrist.org with "Life Link" in the subject line. This will ensure that we have your correct email address on file.

We understand that not everyone has email and you will be able to continue receiving the "Life Link" in the mail. To do so, please call the church office between the hours of 9 A.M. and 1 P.M. and let Donna know that you do not have email and want to keep receiving this publication in the mail. 805-642-2343.

Youth Events

•Youth Devotionals have been scheduled through July. Be sure to add the dates and host homes to your calendar.

Feb. 28 - County wide devo, Camarillo.

Mar. 28 - George & Gigi Magana

Apr. 18 - Vern & Denette Alstot

May 2 - Bruce & Carolyn Tabor

July 18 - Shannon & Greg Warwar

For the county wide devo this Sunday, February 28; Let Jim Oliver know if you need a ride. You are asked to meet in the parking lot at 5:15 P.M. The van will leave promptly at 5:30 P.M.



Worship the
LORD in the
splendor
of his
holiness.

1 Chronicles 16:29

Pepperdine Bible Lectures

The Pepperdine Bible Lectures are May 4-7, 2010. Join with thousands of Christians from around the country and around the world as they gather to study "The Hero Story (The Book of Acts Revisited)." To get registered for the lectures, call 310-506-4270 or register online www.pepperdine.edu/biblelectures

Young Adults

The Glendale Church of Christ will host the 2nd Annual "Risen" Young Adults conference on March 5 & 6, 2010. Jonathan Stormont from Richland Hills will be the speaker. More information can be found at: www.glendalechurchofchrist.org/risen/

Nursery Care/March

7.....Shelby Warwar
.....Kacy Anderson
14.....Heather Zell
.....Briahna Plambeck
21.....Monique Vallier
.....Mike Alstot
28.....Megan Eberhardt
.....Ryan Eberhardt



•Ed Hathway began a new chemo treatment last week. He and Dee both appreciate our continued prayers.

•Laurie Dennison is having a hard time right now and appreciates our prayers.

•Christina Martinez, who has visited with us recently is currently on dialysis and hopes to be off it soon.

•Marilyn Rawlins is in the hospital undergoing some tests for kidney stones. She should be going home in a day or two.

Continue to remember:

Lois Colangelo, Caiden Call, Andrew Jensen, Jim Cornwell, Gigi Magana, Ken Stallings, Scott Harsh, Ed Hathway, Sandra Black, Virginia Bartley, David Tracy, Marvin Alstot, Vicki Sawyer, Carolin Newport, Corrine Regan, Kathy Eckel, and Brandon Bryant.

Men to Serve/March

Announcements.....J.Oliver
Sound Booth.....B.Clements
A.M.

Song Leader.....Z.Rawlins
Prayer.....B.Tabor
Scripture Reading.....J.Ewald
Communion.....D.Jones
P.Fix, W.Roberts, C.Stallings,
R.Shuster, C.Coles, P.Knouse,
M.Dupree, S.Hood

P.M.

Song Leader.....D.Fowler
Prayer.....T.Knouse
Communion.....K.Fowler

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God Is

Bible scholar and Hebrew expert Ray Vander Laan describes a time when he studied under a rabbi in a Hebrew university. As with most classes, the teacher started at the beginning of the textbook - the Bible, in this case. "In the beginning, God..." a student began to read. "STOP!" the rabbi exclaimed. "Read it again." The student again read, "In the beginning, God..." Again the rabbi yelled, "STOP!" The rabbi repeated this dialogue several times to drive home the point that if we don't understand and believe that God was in the beginning, then nothing else matters or makes sense. So, who is this God?

In the Bible, names always mean something. Knowing the name means knowing the story. God has many names, two of which are used in the beginning of Genesis and provide the foundation for the "rest of the story." The name *Elohim* is plural and means "mighty forces." It's meant to conjure up images of things like tornadoes and hurricanes. It means kingship, majesty, and justice.

Yahweh is God's personal name. It's known as the ineffable or unutterable name because it can't be described in words; and even if it could be, we wouldn't understand it. It's related to the verb "to be." In the burning bush incident when God responds to Moses with, "I AM THAT I AM," He's using His personal name. *Yahweh* denotes mercy. It also contains the idea of being the source of everything. The universe would cease to exist if *Yahweh* chose not to hold it together. The fact that Genesis 1 calls God by the names *Elohim* and *Yahweh* means that God created the universe in justice and mercy.

Once we understand that "In the beginning, God..." we can begin to understand who we are as human beings. The creation story is hierarchical, with man at the pinnacle. Unlike any of the other creatures, we are created in God's image. This doesn't mean we contain His image in a physical sense, but that He imbued us with some of His characteristics. These attributes include free will - God created because He wanted to; self-awareness (I AM); creativity, dominion, and lordship (*Elohim*); and the capacity for mercy and justice.

A vital aspect of our existence is our relationship to others. Philippians 2:3 tells us to consider others better than ourselves. Jesus tells us that the greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbors, suggesting that we can't love God without also loving others.

The creation story sets the stage not only for the rest of Scripture, but for our very lives. We exist because *God is*. We run into problems when we become self-centered and forget our place in the universe. Humans can cause great harm and damage when they exercise the gifts God gives them - creativity, wisdom, knowledge, dominion, and power - without also exercising the moral attributes of mercy and justice. Think of horrific incidents like the Holocaust. Or advancements in science for the sake of science, where some human life is considered less valuable than others. Because God also granted us free will, we get to choose how we will use His gifts. But if we are to walk with Him in obedience and trust, we must never forget that "In the beginning, God..."

I owe the content and ideas of this article to a sermon my father, James Webster, preached at the Mountainview Church of Christ in Buena Vista, CO.

Jessica Adams