

The Visitor

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 900 S. Ennis, Bryan, TX

March 14, 2017

Habitat Volunteers!

Last Saturday several members of the CWF prepared and delivered lunches to a Habitat for Humanity work crew!



Board Meeting

Our next Board will be held after worship on Sunday, March 18. We hope that all Board members will be present. As these meetings are open to all, we cordially invite those who are interested in the workings of our Board to join us! A light lunch will be served.

The Sunday's Sermon

Title: "Snakes and the Grace of God"

Scriptures: Ephesians 2:1-10; Numbers 21:1-7; Psalm 19:9b-13

[Click Here to Listen to the Sermon](#)

Call it an exercise in frustration! That's what reading Paul's letters can be. They are complicated! I don't know about you, but sometimes I wish Paul had learned to express himself plainly. That first sentence in today's reading from Ephesians for example (in my mind it sounds more like a paragraph): *"You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient."* You got all that didn't you? When we talk about our relationship with God, why does it have to be so complicated?

You'd think Paul might have said something out in the clear, at least once in a while. Something like... *"Lord save us from the snakes!"* That's not exactly how Numbers 21:7 puts it, but it's close enough! The Israelites had been in the wilderness a long time, long enough to be mighty tired of it. And add to that the frustration created by obstacles. Edom became an obstacle because they refused passage. Then Arad not only blocked the way, they attacked and even captured some of the people. With God's help, they fought their way through. But that still didn't clear the way because Edom was still closed to them.

Those obstacles weren't the only source of frustration. Because there was never enough water, the food was bad, and there was no bread to eat. (Real bread! You can call that manna stuff whatever you want, but they knew it wasn't bread.) So, they grumbled, and not for the first time. They grumbled to God and complained about the poor leadership Moses provided. I've got a question for you. Is it a sin to gripe about national leaders? If it is, then we're all in trouble. And what about venting to God? Is that wrong? After all, the Psalms of lament seem to encourage us to do that very thing. So, why was it wrong for the people out in the wilderness to grumble at God but apparently okay for the Psalmist - Psalm 22 for instance - to complain: *"My God, why have you forsaken me?"* (22:1) For some reason our relationship with God just seems to be complicated.

In any case, things went from bad to worse for the Israelites. Their detour around Edom took them straight into a region filled with snakes. Not the harmless kind like the little grass snakes I find in my yard, but big snakes, deadly poisonous snakes. Asps! Cobras! People were dying. Well, when things got tough they had a change of heart. Straight away they turned to Moses and instead of being difficult, they said in clear language: *"We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you."* That of course was merely a set up. For their sudden change of heart came with a request attached: *"Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us."* Don't ask me why, but God's answer was a bronze snake on a pole. I suppose it's complicated.

Several years ago, I had a conversation with a friend about sin. I asked which is worse in the eyes of God, those things we do out of ignorance (call them hidden or unintentional sins) and the things we do even though we know full well that they are wrong. (Call that willful sin.) And I didn't make up those categories. They are scriptural. If you want a text look up Psalm 19:11-12: *"...who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me."* Maybe I was trying a bit too hard to parse sin, but I thought I was on solid ground. It's not all that different from discussions about the unforgiveable sin we've had in Sunday school and at the House Church recently. Truthfully, many people have expressed concern to me over that one. More than one was afraid they might accidentally commit the unforgiveable sin and be condemned to eternal conscious torment. I'm not sure what to say about that except that it's complicated, but let's back up a step. Remember that conversation about sin I mentioned a moment ago. I lost the debate when my friend came back with a simple and direct answer. Sin is sin. In other words, don't shift, categorize, or rate it. Sin is sin

Now if it sounds like I haven't clarified anything or offered the kind of clear answers I want from Paul, then you are right. I haven't simplified anything. I raised questions about that bronze snake Moses set up in the desert. I'm sure God didn't need a metal serpent on a

pole, and if God didn't need it then neither did Moses; but the people apparently needed something they could see and touch. And I didn't clarify Paul's dense language about sin or settle on a scale of sin from worst to least. But just as I'm convinced that God didn't need a snake on a stick out in the desert, the Lord most assuredly didn't require a cross and blood payment to satisfy divine wrath because God's love is simple and steadfast. Most likely the cross was necessary because we required it. We seem to be the consistent complication.

You know, I was unfair to the Apostle Paul at the beginning of this sermon. Paul did find a way to say it clearly and out in the open. You can find it in Romans 3: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace"* (Ro. 3:23-24) Let's not unduly complicate our relationship with God. Accept God's grace. Forgive yourself after you've confessed to God. God has. And extend forgiveness to those who have wronged you. Jesus received much worse treatment and he did so.

Minister's Moment

Fellow Pilgrims:

By the time this is posted, we will be a full month into Lent. Turned around that adds up to a little over two weeks until Easter. Are you still taking the pilgrim's path through Lent or have good intentions fallen prey to distractions?

I've had my own issues with one Lenten discipline. Remember that Scripture Stone discipline we started on Ash Wednesday? Turns out that those stones are glass. Glass is pretty slippery. We've already heard that the printing rubs off pretty easily. Just like some of yours, the Word of God began to disappear after only a couple of days. That one was easy to handle because it was from Proverbs 17:17, and every Bible I own has that one inside it. But I did run into another problem. My slippery Scripture Stone managed to slip between my fingers and shatter on a hard tile floor. Fortunately, I still know the words, so the discipline continues without the stone.

Lenten disciplines are like that. Despite our best intentions, things happen. Sometimes adjustments must be made. The good news is that more than two weeks are left to prepare our hearts for Easter's empty tomb!

Your Companion on the Pilgrim's Road,

Jesse

Week of Compassion News

[2017 GRANT DISTRIBUTION AND HURRICANE RECOVERY](#)

Dear Church,

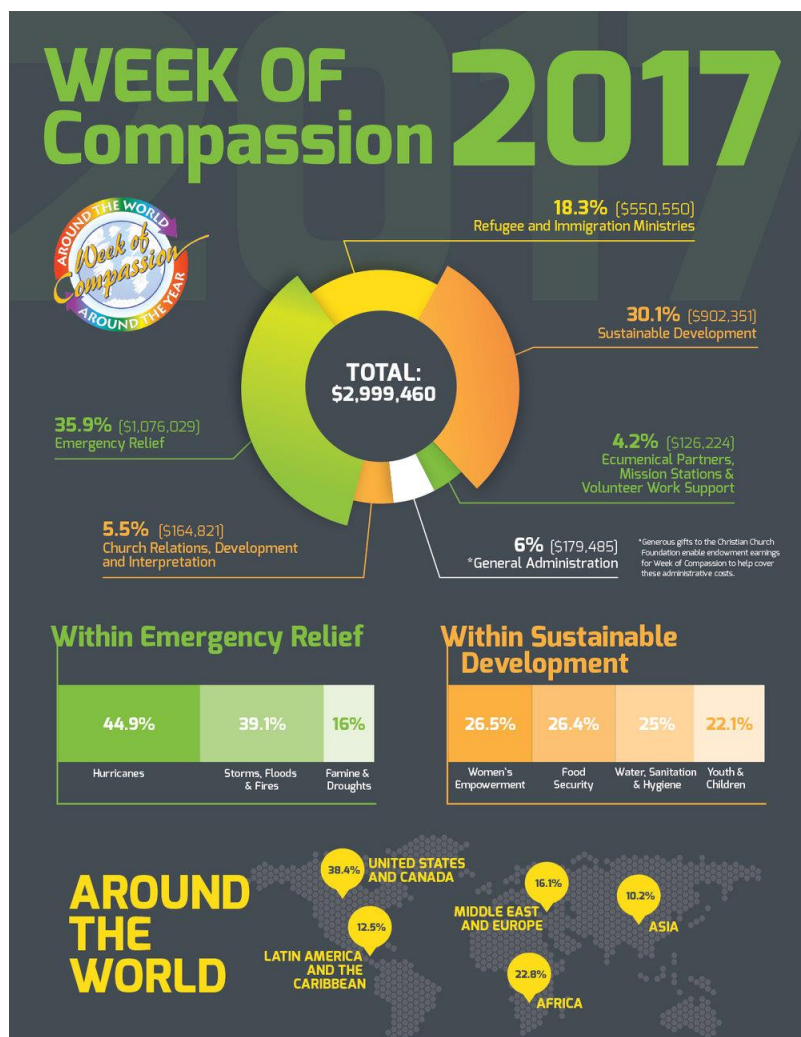
It feels like every few years extreme weather hits closer to home. Its powerful impact, whether experienced through gushing waters, ravaging winds or scorching fires, has affected our homes and churches. The news has shown us devastating images from Texas, Florida, the Caribbean, California, and the Pacific Northwest. In 2017 your Week of Compassion was able to respond at the beginning of these disasters, and now the long road of recovery begins. While the minds of many have already moved on, we continue to coordinate and accompany local communities in the rebuilding process. The work is just getting started.

Other domestic and global disasters did not make it on the news. There were floods in Arkansas and Missouri and in Peru, Colombia, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, just to name a few. There were droughts that created starvation and famine for millions of mothers and children in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, and Kenya. And of course, there are 66 million people who have been displaced globally because of conflict in their homes. Your Week of Compassion responded to calls for help across the globe. And, we continue to work with partners to alleviate the pain and loss felt in many of these communities. Your generous gifts have made all this possible...

Below you will find our distribution chart for 2017 showing the ways your financial gifts went to help people all over the world. These numbers represent rich and powerful stories, some you already know and others that we will share with you throughout the year. They are a witness that your gifts--your treasures and your hearts--are with vulnerable people who needed them most. Lives are made better by your support. Your gifts build a better world in ways **More Than We Can Imagine.**

Thank you,

Rev. Vy T. Nguyen
Executive Director



Prayer Concerns

While we believe everyone needs prayer, those named on our list have specific and ongoing needs,

Evelyn Lively
Mary Anna Franke
Liz McGee
R. J. Bozeman
Gerry Hart
Vicki Couvillin
Kevin Rodgers
David Hahn
Diane Andrews (friend of Cheryl Aufderheide)
Christopher Cravey (Jeanette Phariss's nephew)
Buddy Wilson (friend of Larry & Vicki Green)

Ellie Erin Albrecht
Julie Atterbury
D'andre Fleeks
Brad Slocum (brother of Stacy Atterbury)
Roger & Emily Nichols
Mark Stadelman
Megan Myers
Jim Conway (cousin of Bob Richards)
Jim Carter
Leatha Jeffrey (Calvin Jeffrey's mother)

Shut-Ins

Henry & Rosemary O'Neal
Nancy & Art Wright

Eleanor Kindt
Marge Shepperd

Gene Holt

Next Sunday's Message

Title: "Got Hope?"

Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-8

Starting Point: Psalm 51 is a prayer of David, one that truly came from his heart at a moment when he clearly understood his sin before God. Jeremiah, known as the Prophet of Doom, spent most of his prophetic ministry trying to open the eyes of people who were determined to remain blind to their faults. Only during one brief period did he offer a message of hope. Hope would materialize with a new covenant, one written on their hearts.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH B/CS						
MARCH 2018						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				<i>1</i>	<i>2</i> OFFICE CLOSED	<i>3</i>
<i>4</i> Fellowship Breakfast 8:30AM Morning Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM Youth Group 3:00 PM	<i>5</i> SFA Young Life 4:45 PM	<i>6</i> House Church 6:00 PM	<i>7</i> Choir 7:30 pm Elders Mtg 6:00	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i> OFFICE CLOSED	<i>10</i>
<i>11</i> Morning Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM Youth Group 3:00 PM	<i>12</i> SFA Young Life 4:45 PM	<i>13</i> House Church 6:00 PM	<i>14</i> Choir 7:30 pm Disciples Women 9:30	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i> OFFICE CLOSED	<i>17</i> St. Patrick's Day
<i>18</i> General Board Mtg (after Worship) Morning Worship 10:45AM Sunday School 9:30 AM Youth Group 3:00 PM	<i>19</i> SFA Young Life 4:45 PM	<i>20</i> House Church 6:00 PM	<i>21</i> Choir 7:30 pm	<i>22</i>	<i>23</i> OFFICE CLOSED	<i>24</i>
<i>25</i> Morning Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM Youth Group 3:00 PM Palm Sunday	<i>26</i> SFA Young Life 4:45 PM	<i>27</i> House Church 6:00 PM	<i>28</i> Choir 7:30 pm	<i>29</i> Maundy Thursday	<i>30</i> OFFICE CLOSED	<i>31</i>