

# THE TOWER

MARCH 2012

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***Celebrating 125 Years in Service to the LORD  
1887 - 2012***

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## A NOTE FROM THE MINISTER

“Bonhoeffer on God’s Weakness and Suffering: A Lenten Reflection”



Our Bible Study group will begin reading and discussing Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* in April. Bonhoeffer was a brilliant theologian during Nazi rule in Germany who died a martyr in a concentration camp because of his resistance to the Nazi movement. One of the more intriguing ideas that Bonhoeffer wrote about in his letters from prison was God’s weakness and suffering in “the world come of age.”

A very misguided idea (there were many) that Christian theology inherited from ancient Greek philosophy was the “impassibility of God.” This means that God is incapable of suffering. God is incapable of suffering because God is incapable of change. The reason for this is because any change in God would need to be for better or worse. Since God is already perfect, God cannot be made better. That means that the only other change available would be one that makes God worse, which is likewise unacceptable, for then God would no longer be perfect, and therefore no longer be God. And so, God cannot suffer, that is, be affected by something else, because God is absolutely self-sufficient, self-determining, and independent. It all sounds very logical, doesn’t it? Sometimes, however, we shouldn’t rely on logic. Sometimes logic can deceive us. Sometimes logic can be very harmful to our faith.

Did Jesus really suffer, or did it only appear that he suffered? I cannot see how any normally functioning person living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can believe that Jesus only appeared to suffer, but didn’t really. I don’t want to turn this message into a profound theological argument that tries to reconcile Jesus’s divine nature with his real human suffering. I am simply taking it for granted that Jesus really, truly, intensely suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually. If that goes against traditional Christian theology, then it’s time to change traditional Christian theology!

Why should suffering be considered a weakness, even for God? In his Nazi prison cell, Bonhoeffer claimed that “only the suffering God can help.” A God who sits aloof in heaven, unmoved by what happens on earth, is really a rather pathetic God (pun intended!). We should feel sorry for such a God. That was not the God that Bonhoeffer knew in Jesus Christ, the God who was there beside him in his prison cell, the God who was there beside the millions of others who lost their lives in the extermination camps.

Let us during this Lenten season reflect on what Bonhoeffer says below:

And we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur* [as if God did not exist]. And this is just what we do recognize--before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.

(Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 360-361)

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Gary

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### OUR LENTEN SERIES CONTINUES

. . . with episodes from *The VICAR OF DIBLEY* and *EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND*. Following the worship service on the Sundays of March 11, 18, 25, and April 1, we will gather in the Lee Room to watch and discuss episodes from these hysterical, yet spiritual comedies. Lunch will be served first for the nominal cost of \$5.50 per person (children 13 and under eat for free) at 11:30am, then we will watch an episode (between 23 - 30 minutes), and finally discuss the religious or moral values contained in them. If you have not yet signed up, please do so on the bulletin board outside Davis Chapel, including children, or call the church office if you plan to attend. Last Sunday's attendance was great, but there is plenty of room for more!



Please remember to bring your “bits and pieces” of Park Church history to the church office as we are gathering such treasures for the preparation of the 125<sup>th</sup> Park Congregational Church Anniversary Booklet. This booklet will be debuted at the Anniversary Banquet on Sunday afternoon, September 23 (save the date!). Items that can will be scanned and returned to you safely. Thank you!

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“Focus, Benny, focus!” has been the motto for our NEADS dog, “Benny,” and that he has done! It was a joy to meet “Benny” and his friend, “Wheezy,” at worship on February 12<sup>th</sup> and share time and many “photo ops” at Fellowship. “Benny” will be graduating on Sunday, March 18, and all are invited to attend. The Graduation will be held from 2-4 PM at the Four Points Sheraton, 99 Erdman Way, Leominster, MA 01453. Follow Route 2 West to Route 12 Fitchburg (Exit 31B) and turn right at the first light (Exit 31B).

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A GIGANTIC THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED IN ANY WAY TO MAKE OUR 125<sup>TH</sup> PARK CONGREGAIONAL CHURCH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE ONE OF SPIRITUAL JOY AND EXCITEMENT! MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS YOU IN YOUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM.



## VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO

. . . all the 20 visiting clergy and 3 local politicians who attended our special Park Congregational Church 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service! The procession of clergy, invited dignitaries, and adult and children's choirs made for a stellar opening to our worship service.

. . . Minister Emeritus Martin W. Perry who shared recollections of his 33-year tenure as pastor of Park Congregational Church. Certainly many in the congregation also strolled down memory lane with the Reverend Perry as he shared his thoughts.

. . . Dee Dorsey who designed and created our Park Congregational Church 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banner! The beautiful banner with our motto, "Our Past Has Inspired Our Future," is now hanging in Davis Chapel! The banner was first revealed at our afternoon 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service. Truly, Dee's God-given talents have allowed her to add a piece to our church's history that is beyond belief! Bless you, Miss Dee!

. . . Melanie Cataldo who created and designed the logo for our Park Congregational Church 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program bulletin and bookmark! Melanie spent many hours working with the Anniversary Committee, and especially Kimberly Toney, to design this special logo. Thank you, Melanie and Kim, for expressing our motto so beautifully!

. . . Boucher's Good Book Store who donated 200 Church Anniversary bulletins that can be used at many worship services and anniversary celebrations throughout this year! Such a kind gesture from our Park Church friends!

. . . William Ness, Minister of Music and Arts, First Baptist Church, who rehearsed and directed the Chorister Choir and presented them at our special Anniversary Service. AND, an extra special thanks to William for rehearsing the choir in a song especially dedicated to Park Church! How blessed are we to have William Ness and "Miss Pat" Czerny to lead our children in music and song!

. . . Marie's Direct Mail who donated the printing of the Anniversary program bulletin covers! The beautiful purple background was very professionally displayed and made our programs unique! Again, how lucky we are to have lovely Park Church friends!

. . . Ron and Judy Devoe who took many photographs of the Anniversary Worship Service, focusing on so many memorable moments of the day.

. . . Bob Nichols who videoed the entire Anniversary Service from the balcony of the sanctuary. We are hopeful to have DVDs of this moment in Park Church's history available for purchase in the weeks ahead! How nice it was to see the Nichols family continuing in their family tradition of service to the church.

. . . John Belanger who spent extra time to make sure that the setup in Gordon Hall for our Anniversary Collation on the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> of February was just as we wanted! As always, John, thank you for the kindness you show to us in so many ways!

. . . to all who helped me put on the Collation following the 125<sup>th</sup> Park Church Anniversary Service. Thanks to all who donated food and baked goods, and many, many thanks to all who helped clean up. . . . I could not have done it without you.

Sincerely, Daphine Spear

. . . AND SPECIAL THANKS FROM ALL TO DAPHINE FOR ORGANIZING THE COLLATION!

. . . **AND, most gratefully,** to the First Baptist Church Family for inviting us to use their beautiful main sanctuary in which to celebrate our afternoon of thankfulness to God for guiding us for 125 years (and counting) as we dedicated our past and future to the work of Jesus Christ. It was wonderful to have our two congregations join in the celebration together!



**THANK YOU, THANK YOU**

. . . to all who helped our Sunday School put together such a wonderful event with their Spaghetti Supper held on February 11<sup>th</sup>. The evening was a huge success financially and fellowship was flowing as dedicated PCC parishioners as well as FBC folk joined together to shop, cook, serve, and clean up . . . bless you all!

THE CHILDREN'S TOWER  
MARCH 2012



Dear Children,

In a recent "The Family Circus" comic strip, Dolly tells her mother, "**Billy says he doesn't hafta go to church anymore 'cause his phone has an *app* for that!!**"

Oh, there is no doubt in my mind that you children know all about your cell phones, iPods, iPads, Blackberrys, and on and on it goes. An *app* for this and an *app* for that! I wonder if Billy was correct in saying that he did not have to go to church anymore because he had an *app* for that! What do YOU think about that? Is there an *app* that replaces going to church? If God is so powerful and so very smart, He must know all about *apps*. Yes, I am sure God does know all about *apps*, as the gift of knowledge and invention comes from God. BUT, does that mean that going to church is not necessary???? **I think not!**

What if when we wanted to reach out to God in prayer, He said, "Oh, just find an *app* to hear your prayer." What if when we looked to God for guidance in making a difficult or even an easy decision, He said, "Oh, my child, you must have an *app* that will give you the help you need to make your choice." What if when you went to God to ask forgiveness for something, He said, "Oh, don't come to me . . . go to one of your *apps* for reassurance of pardon."

This is the season of Lent. It is a time for reflection. It is a time when we try to come as close as possible to Jesus and try to be like Him as He came closer and closer to God during the 40 days of Lent. We open our hearts to His voice and take time for prayer and, YES, go to church. There is NO *app* for gathering with others in prayer. There is NO *app* to replace the setting of a sanctuary or Sunday School classroom where we come together to worship. There is NO *app* that lets us feel the loving arms of God holding us close. There is NO *app* that replaces Holy Communion and the reassurance of pardon.

As we walk with Jesus on His way to the cross, let us remember that we need not have a fancy iPod, iPad, Blackberry, or *app* of any kind! God has promised us that He can be reached at any time, anywhere, by having a personal relationship with Him . . . the only *app* you will ever need.

And oh, yes, children . . . see you in church!!

*Your friend . . . Linda*



It has been a busy month for our wonderful Youth Group! The youth helped with the planning and preparation for our 125<sup>th</sup> Park Church Anniversary Celebration on the afternoon of February 26<sup>th</sup>. From the time guest clergy, invited guests, as well as parishioners and friends entered the church parking lot, they found James Rose (along with Dennis Pelkey) helping to park cars. Brittany Fisher and Jannelle Lindquist greeted and guided worshipers to the sanctuary. Josep Rose sang in the Choir. It was a busy and wonderful afternoon! Taking example from the youth were some of the Sunday School children like Samantha Proulx, who greeted guests in the narthex, and Jacob and Jessica Baronas along with Justin Rose and Joshua Lindquist who sang in the Chorister Choir. These songsters work all year long and devote every Tuesday afternoon to an hour of choir practice! Their song selections were wonderful at the Anniversary Service, and along with the youth, the promise of the future of Park Congregational Church was beaming! Younger Sunday School children sat in the congregation and witnessed their church's history being made!

Instead of their usual monthly Breakfast Meeting in March, the youth are planning a lunch meeting coupled with going to the graduation of our NEADS dog, "Benny," which will be held on March 18<sup>th</sup>. The Sunday School children will also enjoy an afternoon lunch as they, too, will be celebrating "Benny's" graduation!!



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