

THE TOWER

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A NOTE FROM THE MINISTER

“Our Book of Faith”



October is the month that we celebrate the Protestant Reformation. Among the many accomplishments of the Reformers was to put the Bible, the Christian’s book of faith, into the hands of the layperson in her own language. The rallying cry of “sola scriptura” was close to the heart of all Protestant believers as they sought to live devoted lives.

In our Confirmation Class, we are currently studying how to read the Bible. I hand out to every class an outline entitled, “Redemptive Focus of the Bible.” This is one of the most important lessons each confirmand will learn. We cannot just open the Bible and begin reading and think that we are going to understand its message. The Bible is a unique book and must be read in a special way. We must be diligently searching for the message of any passage of the Bible, because often it will not just jump out at us. We need to know how to interpret the Bible if it is going to be meaningful for us. This interpretation involves searching for the redemptive message found in any book or passage.

The importance of discovering the redemptive message of scripture was made clear to me again while I was preparing for our Adult Bible Study on the apostle Paul’s Letter to the Colossians. The great apostle is writing this letter from prison in Rome. I was researching specifically how long he was there and what happened to him. You would think that the answers to those questions would be found in the New Testament’s history book of the early church, the Book of Acts. I knew that the answers were not found there, but I reread the last seven and a half chapters of the book--over one quarter of the entire book--that deal with Paul’s being arrested in Jerusalem and his eventual journey to Rome as a prisoner. Why does the author of this book, Luke, spend so much time on this matter of Paul’s arrest, various trials, and eventually appealing to Caesar (the tyrant Nero of all people!)?

The answer seems to be that the purpose of the Book of Acts is not to give us a historical account of the first 30 years of the church as if it were a history textbook, but rather, like every book of the New Testament, to impart and strengthen our faith as believers in Jesus Christ. If it were meant to be a history textbook, such as would

be used in a college classroom, it did a crummy job. Even its official title, “The Acts of the Apostles,” is misnamed.* The book does not cover the acts of all the apostles and does not contain all the acts of any apostle. In fact, it comprises just some of the ministries and missions of only two apostles, namely Peter and Paul. Paul, of course, was not even one of the original 12 apostles of Jesus Christ. What about the ministries and missions of the other 11 apostles? Why were they not included in Acts? A history textbook would have been much more comprehensive by including the work of the other apostles and the spread of Christianity to northern Europe, north and east of Palestine, and south and west to northern Africa. Even in regard to Peter and Paul, it would have been much more thorough in detailing their exploits. We know from Paul’s letters in the New Testament that he was involved in many more adventures than what is mentioned in Acts.

No, the book was not intended to be a history manual on the first 30 years of Christianity. And the last half of the book that deals exclusively with Paul is not meant to be his biography. If it were, why doesn’t it include his martyrdom? This has been a vexing question of biblical scholars for the past 2000 years. Some have even proposed that Luke intended to write a third volume or did write one that is now lost. The Gospel that goes by his name was the first volume by Luke. The Book of Acts is the second volume. This third volume, it is theorized, would have taken up where the second volume left off, with Paul living in Rome under house arrest where he has already been for two years. This third volume supposedly would have contained everything that happened to Paul from that point until his execution by Nero.

I don’t think that there was any such third volume. A key to understanding the intention of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts is the introduction to both. The Gospel of Luke begins, “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4). The Book of Acts begins, “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving

*The name, “The Acts of the Apostles,” is not part of the original manuscript of the book. That was a name given by the leaders of the churches in the early second century to identify the book and distinguish it from the other Christian writings that were circulating among their congregations.

instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2).

Who is this Theophilus to whom both books are addressed? The name in Greek means “beloved of God.” In our Bible Study we mentioned that Wolfgang Mozart’s middle name was Amadeus. Theophilus is the Greek equivalent of the Latin Amadeus. Both mean “beloved of God” or “loved by God.” We do not know for sure who this Theophilus was. Some scholars speculate that Theophilus was not really a person, but rather, an honorary title for anyone who loves God.

I hold to the view, held by many other scholars, that Theophilus was a Roman official of some sort. Luke refers to him as “most excellent,” a common way to address a Roman official. We see this even in the Book of Acts itself in 24:2 when Tertullus, an attorney for the Jerusalem High Priest, addresses the Roman Governor of Judea, Felix, “Your Excellency,” and in 26:25 when Paul says, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,” referring to the Roman Governor of Judea who followed Felix.

Because Luke wrote both books to a Roman official, he made sure to demonstrate that whenever Christianity was brought to the attention of the Roman authorities, its harmless character was vindicated over and over again. The burgeoning Christian movement was not a threat to Roman rule (when Luke was writing, between 85-90 AD) and never had been (not during the time of Christ, 27-30 AD, nor that of Paul, 33-66 AD).

We must make sure that we don’t make *our* questions *the Bible’s* questions. Yes, we would all like to know exactly what happened to Paul in his final years and when and why he was martyred. Was his martyrdom related to Nero’s persecution of Christians in general or was it an isolated event? And what about the Jewish uprising against Rome that began in 66 AD and resulted in the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem in 70 AD? Those are not the questions, however, that Luke wanted to answer. He could have included that information in his second volume, but chose not to do that. His thesis in the Book of Acts was to show that the Gospel had indeed reached “the ends of the earth,” promised by Jesus when he tells the disciples before ascending into heaven, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Rome at that time was the capital of the empire, considered the center and apex of the known world, and so, once Paul reaches Rome at the end of the book, preaching the Gospel, Christianity would have been seen symbolically to have reached all peoples.

The historical events narrated in the Book of Acts are mentioned because in some way they serve the purpose of pointing to God's redemption, the focus of every passage of scripture. The Bible is our book of faith. It is not meant to be a history textbook. It discusses history only insofar as those occurrences impart and confirm faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

Let us not ignore reading the scriptures. They are the Christian's reliable guide to a faithful life. Why not join our Bible Study on the second and fourth Thursday evenings of the month? We have a great bunch of folks who love to delve into God's Word.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Gary



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

- 3 Liz Cape
- 8 Aurora Lewis
- 9 Justin Rose
- 11 Ashley Benoit
- 13 Art Pelletier
- 14 Dan Proulx
- 16 Barbara Papazian
- 19 Jena Marando
- 27 David Pierce
- 31 Sheila Smith

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THOSE WHO RECEIVE A HARD COPY OF THE *TOWER*, PLEASE REMEMBER TO SEND IN YOUR \$10.00 ANNUAL DONATION TO OFFSET THE COST OF PRINTING AND MAILING



. . . And Jessica Baronas did just that!! Miss Jessica, along with still attending her Sunday School classes, is our newest member of the Park Church choir!

On Miss Jessica's first official morning singing with the Adult Choir, Jennifer Nodelman invited Miss Jessica to sing a duet with her. The beautiful voice of Miss Jennifer singing with the sweet young voice of Miss Jessica was truly lovely! God bless Miss Jennifer for inspiring Miss Jessica and God bless Miss Jessica for offering her young gift of voice to the choir and the LORD.



Our Park Congregational Church Youth Group is in full gear. As always, they are meeting weekly with Miss Holly for class time, Miss Holly and Miss Linda for monthly breakfast meetings, Pastor Gary in service to the Odd Fellows and serving with the senior deacons for morning worship serving Holy Communion. Serving is their main focus. When the youth heard that the Large Print *Guideposts* would no longer be available at no charge, they immediately volunteered to absorb the expense of several yearly subscriptions so that our congregation would still be able to enjoy the publication!

Plans for a Spaghetti Supper on November 2 are in the works and looking ahead to Thanksgiving, the youth are planning to carry out a project for the benefit of the Veteran's Shelter here in Worcester. As always, the young people are available to help any of our Park Church family if needed . . . just let them know!



CONGRATULATIONS to Kimberly Toney and Dennis Pelkey who were married in a beautiful ceremony on Saturday, September 28, 2013 in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church. May God bless this marriage, and guide and shower Kimberly and Dennis with love. As Pastor Gary said at the end of the wedding ceremony and his final blessing,

"I now present to you, Mr. & Mrs. Dennis and Kimberly Pelkey!"

THE CHILDREN'S TOWER

October 2013



Dear Children,

Now I am sure you think Miss Linda has gone cuckoo! She has really lost it! Winter . . . WINTER . . . **WINTER!!??!!** "Come on, Miss Linda. We just entered into the season of Autumn on September 23rd and it's only the first few days of October. What is this 'winter planning' thing? And a SNOWMAN?" Okay, okay here is my drift.

I think you all know how much I love enjoying God's wonderful Creation no matter what the season. Summer is now over (though it is 70 degrees today) and the leaves on the trees are slowly turning to glorious colors of red, orange and gold. Soon the leaves will be falling, and walking home from school, you will hear the "crunch, crunch" sound of the dry leaves beneath your feet. It is darker in the morning when you awake for school and it gets dark earlier as evening approaches. I am busy bringing in my houseplants that were "on vacation" outside during the warm weather. I am busy cutting back perennials and planting bulbs. So much to do to get ready NOW because Autumn will pass quickly and then . . . **WINTER!!** I am anxiously going from back yard to front yard; side garden to middle garden; front porch to back patio; and then, there is the screen house . . . there is so much to worry about at this time of the year. But, as always with Miss Linda, here is the famous . . . "but wait."

In all my haste and busyness, I notice one thing, no matter. The BIRDS! Don't they know winter is coming? They worry not. They sing carelessly, fly about from branch to branch, crisscross about the yard, drink slowly from the water dishes, even come close enough that I can almost touch them. Cardinals, wrens, finches, both gold and purple, mourning doves, blackcap chickadees, and always, always, the little sparrows, maybe the best reminders of all. *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry . . . look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more value than they?" (Matthew 6: 25-26, NRSV).*

Again, I think you all know how much Miss Linda enjoys God's wonderful Creation . . . only now, I think I will go back to enjoying it and remember that neither I nor YOU should waste time worrying, "but strive first for the kingdom of God." (Matthew 6:33, NRSV).

Ah, the wonder of the seasons and God's Creation and promise!

Your friend Miss Linda



MAY GRACE AND PEACE

BE YOURS IN ABUNDANCE.

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