

The Sea Star

PASTOR'S PONDERINGS

Issue 9

October 2010

“That Sunday, in a strange city and church, far from home, my voice was set loose in praise of God. Losing myself in praise of God, I was found.”

I was moved by Anthony B. Robinson's reminder of how worship lifts us beyond ourselves. He writes,

“I was a stranger in an unfamiliar city, attending a conference. I was far from home and, in the words of Jesus of Martha, I was “anxious about many things.”

But it was Sunday and I went to worship in a nearby church. I was in an unfamiliar church among people I did not know. And yet, as we rose to join in the opening hymn, something happened. I was caught up in praise.

Lost, I was found. Found in the big story of God's grace and purpose. My voice was set loose in praise and a sense of wonder and gratitude was renewed in my heart.

The praise of God invites us to cease our frequent and restless preoccupation with ourselves. Praise of God challenges our natural self-centeredness and sense of accumulated grievance. Praise invites us to turn our attention to what makes life good and to the generosity we have experienced.

That Sunday, in a strange city and church, far from home, my voice was set loose in praise of God. Losing myself in praise of God, I was found.

Robinson titled his devotional “in spite of,” this telling of how he is lifted out of his burden, his loneliness. Our worship this month fit well his theme.

On October 3rd we will celebrate World Communion Sunday, singing songs from lands near and far. As we sing, in spite of trouble in the world, we proclaim a unity in Christ. We come beside the people of the nations with song.

On October 17th, we begin our covenant season asking each person of the church to prayerfully choose how they will respond to Jesus in this coming year. In spite of the world's demands, we each commit our gifts and trust that others will commit theirs allowing God to put us together in the best way possible to be church.



PASTORS PONDERINGS

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On October 31st, we remember those who have gone before us into the next life in our Remembrance Service. The chosen date is "All Saints Day," a day that is often used to remember the legacy of those we love. And, in spite of the tears that will surely be shed, the worship will lead us into the joy for "in our living and in our dying we belong to God."

In worship we are sustained, we are loved, we are freed.

And, a request that, in spite of your desire to linger a little longer at home on a Sunday morning, you decide instead to come 10 minutes early just in case John Robinson decides to show up. For we who work hard to build a steeple on the sand to invite people in would do well to be here to greet those seeking to be found. Thanks!

In Christ,
Heather



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Paige Phillips	10/1	Scarlett Hensman	10/19
Conley Kipp	10/5	Joe DiChiro	10/21
Kathy Merriman	10/5	Esther Kneeland	10/21
Hutton Grabiell	10/6	Gabriella DiChiro	10/23
Kristina Baker	10/10	Madelyn Casserly	10/24
Dave Mercer	10/12	Giuliana Haug	10/24
Leslie Kazarian	10/13	Emma Terreri	10/24
Tony Lombardo	10/13	Jim Geocaris	10/25
Brett Greenlee	10/14	Nicholas Webster	10/26
Cass Casserly	10/15	Carter Britt	10/28

How often have you heard something like that response when you’ve asked your friends about their religious beliefs or their spiritual journey? If it seems you hear it more than you used to, you’re right. In 1998, this was the response of 9% of American adults. By 2008, this figure had grown to 18% of those adults under 40 years old.* (In certain regions of the country, like ours, this figure is considerably higher.)

None of this comes as a surprise. Given the way the Christian “religion” has behaved over the past few decades, the big surprise may be that 82% still describe ourselves as religious at all. Any religion which manages to make the Transcendent trivial, the deepest mysteries shallow, honest inquiry a sin, outer conformity the norm, comfort the goal, manipulation the means, or its gospel a bludgeon deserves to lose ground.

“Spirituality,” on the other hand, carries very little baggage. To describe oneself as “spiritual” leaves plenty of room for personal interpretation. What exactly do people mean when they say “I’m spiritual?” Visiting the Grand Canyon takes my breath away? I believe in a Higher Power? I have the capacity and the right to decide right and wrong for me? I am an individualist who refuses to capitulate to the systems of others? I believe many paths lead to God? I believe that nature is sacred? I hold to certain ideals including compassion? I value other things more highly than money and profit?

To be “spiritual” often means to be free from the demands of commitment, creed, or community. (One cynic has observed “‘Being spiritual but not being religious’ is the perfect fit for people who don’t want to accept accountability or authority but who aren’t quite ready to say they have no soul.”) Of course each one of us is spiritual, given that we are created in the image of God. We value the sublime and the creative; the good, the beautiful, and the true. We recognize unseen dimensions beyond those we can measure with the five senses or with scientific instruments. We respect internal principles every bit as certain as the laws of Euclidean geometry.

I am no longer ashamed to describe myself as “religious.” I am religious! (“Religion” comes, etymologically, from the Latin “re” and “ligare”—“to bind” or “be bound”—of which one cognate is our word “ligament,” which binds muscle to bone.) I freely choose to bind myself—however imperfectly—to Jesus, and to His Way, and to you sisters and brothers in this faith family, and to the practice of particular disciplines and standards of ethics and service. (Have you given thought to what you have freely bound yourself?)

Philosopher Peter Kreeft has observed that our contemporary fear is not the fear of death, as it was for those in Greece or Rome in Classical antiquity. Nor do we fear hell, which was the overarching fear to Christian, Muslim, and Jewish societies during the Middle Ages. Kreeft says the fear of our age is “the fear of meaninglessness itself.” That it all means nothing; “Nobody home” in the universe; to invest or sacrifice or care deeply is all nonsense because it’s all nonsense—we’ll all be dead and gone soon enough anyway. We have to delude ourselves into

thinking anything really matters, and then sedate ourselves into acting so—even while the more sophisticated among us have already gotten smart. (Philosophers, authors, artists and poets have been wrestling primarily with this fear of meaninglessness for a century and more.)

We have a great deal to offer those who see themselves as spiritual, who fear meaninglessness. We worship the God who transcends space and time; the Creator who knows us and cares about us personally. Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Son of God, has shown us that this earthly plane is not the end and that death is not the end—He overcame death on the Cross. Our experience of Christian community and caring, however flawed is our participation in it, convinces us that our lives count for something and that every child of God is vitally and objectively important. Not just because we feel it is nice to think of everyone humanely or inclusively—but because God loves each one and Jesus has redeemed each one. Each person matters, and each life has profound, eternal meaning.

It’s true that we’re not always easy with the demands of our religion. Most of us are educated enough and independent enough, to bristle at least a bit at anyone telling us how we are to behave, or what we had best believe. It’s easy for us to justify not showing up to worship God every Sunday or not tithing or not introducing others to the love of God we have come to know in our church community. We may believe we can go straight to God without need of others. We may not choose to think of ourselves as “religious.”

So it’s with humility and gratitude that I keep trying to engage those who see themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” They may not yet recognize His voice, but the Good Shepherd keeps calling out for them. (God has allowed each of us to respond in our own way in our own timing, and God extends the same respect to others. I am no better than those who call themselves spiritual; I probably just need Jesus more.)

Paul tells us the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. I pray that God allows these spiritual attributes to color our conversations and actions with our spiritual friends. I believe Jesus would love for all of us to know the peace and the joy which follow when we freely bind ourselves to His Spirit and His Way.

God bless you,

Chip

*according to The General Social Survey

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

This month our Sunday School students (1st grade and older) will be continuing on a journey through Genesis. This month we start by following Abraham and Sarah and their family as they put their trust in God's care. Their story is a powerful one, although their family's experience is not without some bumps in the road. Are you walking with us? Here's what we're working on:

Sunday Oct. 3 – Abraham, Sarah and Lot – Genesis 12-13

Sunday Oct. 10 – The births of Ishmael and Isaac – Gen 16:1-17:22; 18:1-15;21:1-7

Sunday Oct. 17 – Hagar and Ishmael – Gen 21:8-21

Sunday Oct. 24 – Jacob and Esau fight – Gen 25:29-34; 27:1-28:9

Talking with your child about our faith throughout the week helps them learn that our relationship with God is not just for Sundays. Feel free to use the Gather 'Round calendar insert to help find easy, fun and memory making activities that you can share as a family. These activities give you a chance to talk about what they are learning in Sunday School, to hear their thoughts and to share your perspective.

See you Sunday!

Jan Shea



Building children's ministries
that build young disciples

LOGOS IS STARTING on October 13th!

Logos is an all church program that invites children and adults into Christian fellowship and witness through 4 keys—recreation, worship, Bible Study and shared fun at dinner.

Program time: 4:30 - 6:30

Wednesdays: October 13 through November 10th


Please register on the patio starting in October.

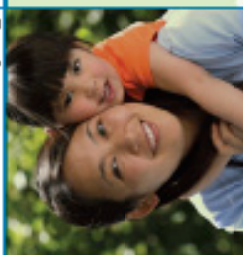
Adults and children are invited to participate.

Contact Heather if you would like to make yourself available to serve and/or your children to participate.

Talkabout God and the First Families

Gather 'Round Fall 2010 Calendar October 3 – 30, 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>3 Abram, Sarai, and Lot Genesis 12-13 God, we want to follow your way and do your will each day.</p>	<p>4 Abram and Sarai built an altar near the oaks of Mamre. Pray quietly under a nearby oak tree.</p>	<p>5 Abram built altars to worship God. Place stones around a candle as each person tells the best blessing of the day.</p>	<p>6 Read Genesis 12:1-2. As your family prays ways for the day say, "May God bless you and make you a blessing to others."</p>	<p>7 The oaks of Mamre by near an important trade route. After the time of Abraham, it became the site of an important summer trade fair.</p>	<p>8 Abram and Lot's workers quarreled over grazing land. Tell what you sometimes quarrel about.</p>	<p>9 Imagine Abram and Sarai's long journey as you take a fall walk.</p>
<p>10 The births of Ishmael and Isaac Genesis 16:1-17:22; 18:1-19; 21:1-7 God, open our eyes to the blessings that surround us each day.</p>	<p>11 Sarah made special bread for three visitors (Genesis 18). Invite a neighbor for tea and biscuits.</p>	<p>12 Isaac's name means "laughter." Describe the joy and laughter that accompanied each child's birth or adoption.</p>	<p>13 Spread a blanket to represent a tent and eat a simple meal. Say a blessing for people who grow, harvest, and prepared the food.</p>	<p>14 Read Genesis 17:15-16. Abraham and Sarai's new names had special meanings. Talk about the meaning of each person's name.</p>	<p>15 How old was Abraham when Isaac was born?</p> 	<p>16 Hold a new baby or baby animal. Say kind words of blessing for the baby.</p>
<p>17 Hagar and Ishmael Genesis 21:8-21 God, hear our cries when we are in trouble.</p>	<p>18 Hagar and Ishmael needed clean, safe drinking water. Everyone needs water. Talk about ways to use water wisely.</p>	<p>19 Women still search for water. What is the average distance that women in Asia and Africa walk to collect water?</p> <p>www.unicef.org/water</p>	<p>20 Donate money to an organization that helps provide clean drinking water around the world.</p>	<p>21 Read Genesis 21:17-19. God heard Hagar and Ishmael's cries. Tell about a time when you cried out for God's help.</p>	<p>22 Hagar and Ishmael became very thirsty. Eat a salty food and then take a big drink of water.</p>	<p>23 Hagar was caught in a sad situation. Share stories about a sad sound you have heard. Or sing a sad song.</p>
<p>24 Jacob and Esau fight Genesis 25:28-34; 27:1-28:9 Thank you, God, for protecting us in families.</p>	<p>25 Use heavy paper to make a puzzle that says, "May God, creator of heaven and earth, bless you." Everyone gets a puzzle piece.</p>	<p>26 Jacob and Esau fussed over the blessing. Bring puzzle pieces and reassemble the puzzle. Everyone shares in the blessing.</p>	<p>27 Read Genesis 25:29-30. Selfishness separates families, but many actions unite us. What makes you feel connected to your family?</p>	<p>28 The red stew Jacob cooked was likely red lentils. Lentils are an excellent source of what nutrient?</p>	<p>29 Tell about a time when saying goodbye made you sad.</p>	<p>30 Jacob and Esau didn't get along. Use two magnets to demonstrate their relationship.</p>



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Seminary for the Rest of Us

**Fall 2010 Session:
October 12th-November 16th**

“The Origins of Our Faith: Genesis and the Ancient Near East”

Seminary for the Rest of Us began last fall with an examination of some of the earliest Christian writings with our study of the Book of Galatians. In our Spring session, we moved through the Gospel represented in the four forms of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. So now that we have a grounding in the early church and the four gospels, we thought it was time to take a look back to the beginnings of our Judeo/Christian faith.

This fall we will be wrestling with highlights from Genesis, with our objective being to gain a contextual understanding of these foundational stories to our Christian Faith. Although we will be examining the dialogue between Genesis and the surrounding cultures of the ancient near east, the material we will be covering lends itself to less of an academic study (no way to be completely accurate that far back in time) and more to lively discussions about the meaning and ramifications of these key ideas that are presented in the opening chapters of our Old Testament.

We will, of course, be following in the same *SRU* traditions as last year--anyone and everyone is welcome, as are questions, doubt and incredulity! The only requirement is an openness and honoring of our diverse theological perspectives. You are invited to bring any of your friends to this study, particularly those who have never felt comfortable in church settings or other kinds of bible studies. All are free to try the first class and no one is obligated to attend any more classes unless they choose to do so.

We expect thought-provoking discussions as we handle some of the most controversial topics in the bible!

One other thing...the class was at room capacity for the Spring Session, so if you are intending to come, please sign up as soon as possible so we can determine whether or not we will have to find a bigger room!

Date: Tuesday evenings for six weeks, October 12-November 16, 2010

Time: 6-7:30 p.m.

Place: The Parlor at Corona del Mar Community Church

Text: The Bible (please bring yours to class if you have one)

SRU is facilitated by Laura MacKinnon, MDIV,
Fuller Theological Seminary

SIGN UP BOOK CAN BE FOUND ON THE PATIO

Please contact Laura MacKinnon (949) 514-0441 or Pamela Brown at (949) 378-7312 if you have any further questions.

MUSIC

NOTES



Ah, the first weeks of autumn...and with them some of the hottest days in L.A. history. Who says we don't have weather in Southern California.

It's good to be back into our fall schedule at church. I'm glad to be working with our Chancel Choir again, and hearing good singing from the congregation. We've been trying to mix up the styles of music a bit, and most of you are responding to that very well with your singing.

I do need to back off one planned musical event for this coming Advent season. We are forced to postpone till next year the planned 'Messiah sing along' concert slated for the afternoon of December 12th. With out going into all the details, it was just too much to prepare, with our planned major Christmas cantata the very next week. Couple that with scheduling conflicts with some of our singers for that day, and it just didn't make sense this time around. We never want to present music that is 'not quite ready', and a Messiah performance is no small undertaking. Give us one more year on that. Thanks.

We are definitely still on for our singing of 'Canite Tuba' (Sound the Trumpet) with full brass and percussion ensemble on December 19th, in the 10am morning service. Though not long in length, this is a powerhouse of a piece to celebrate the coming of the Christ. We are very excited to sing and play it for you. More on that as we near the date.

Thanks for a fine twenty-one years in your midst. I guess I'm finally legal... Looking forward to more years of making music with and for you at Community Church.

God bless,

Rodger

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sundays

8:00 am Closer to the Cross

9:00 am Adult Sunday School

10:00 am Worship with Full Choir

10:00 am Children Sunday School

PUMPKIN FESTIVAL

THE FALL FAITH TEAM INVITES EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE OCTOBER 31ST AFTER CHURCH. BRING YOUR FAVORITE HOMEMADE PUMPKIN PIE OR "FALL" PIE...OR JUST BRING YOUR APPETITE! WE'LL SUPPLY THE WHIPPED CREAM. THE CHILDREN WILL MAKE CARAMEL APPLES AND DECORATE PUMPKINS. CELEBRATE THE SEASON!

Community Church, Congregational

611 Heliotrope Avenue • Corona del Mar CA 92625



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