



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

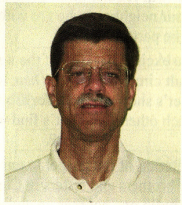
June 2020

Editor
Charles T. Tamminen

We Are to Create and Cultivate

The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it.

Genesis 2:15 (NLT)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



A universal human question is: Why am I here? Variations on this question are: What is the meaning of life? What am I supposed to do with my life?

Many people have tried to answer this question in many ways. However, when people start with themselves, from the ‘ground up,’ there will be almost as many answers as there are people.

As with all of life, the best person to ask is God. And His answers are found in His Word. The answer to this universal question is found in the first two chapters of the Bible.

People (*adam* – male and female) are created in God’s image to be His representative rulers over all of His physical creation. And, they are to be fruitful and multiply. (*Genesis 1:26-28*) More specifically, they are to tend and care for God’s creation. (*Genesis 2:15*) The words used mean literally ‘serve-work’ and ‘keep-guard.’ The first word can have the sense of forming or making as an artist or sculptor might create with clay, metal or paint. This strongly suggests creativity. The second word can mean to care for or to cultivate what has already been created.

Andy Crouch (partner at *Praxis*, an organization that promotes redemptive entrepreneurship) wrote the book, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, in 2008. His theme is that current American culture can prompt Christians to engage it in four less than productive ways: condemning, critiquing, copying, and surrendering to it by consuming it. However, he calls Christians to instead fulfill God’s original mandate of being agents of creation and cultivation in our culture.

In a 2008 Q&A with *Christianity Today*, Andy answered the critical question as to

why evangelical Christians in America are not practicing these two creation mandates of God. His answer acknowledges that Christians are now regarded as fringe players in the shaping of American culture. As Christians have been pushed off the stage, mass consumption (consumerism) has become the dominate force in America today. But worse, to be effective creators and cultivators Christians must be aware of the culture of their world and be willing to work in it, even outside the traditional church. Further, Christians need to relearn basic human skills that have been lost in a world where technology does everything. Few people grow gardens or have the time and knowledge to cook healthy and tasty food. At what point will we seek God to do what He has created and called us to do?

A good historical example of an American creator is Luther Burbank who was born in Lancaster, Massachusetts in 1849 and died in Santa Rosa, California in 1926. According to Wikipedia, over a fifty-five year career as a botanist and horticulturalist he developed more than 800 strains and varieties of fruits (including 10 varieties of apples), flowers, grains, grasses and vegetables. He did this through cross-breeding different species of plants. Ideally, the new species of plant can both produce a high yield and resist mildew and diseases. He invented the Russet Burbank potato to help Ireland after the Great Famine of 1879.

Some of us are more cultivators than creators. A good example of a cultivator would be George Fredric Handel, who has often been criticized for ‘borrowing’ from other composers. Again, according to Wikipedia, a 1985 John H. Roberts essay concluded Handel should be ‘judged not by his methods ... but solely by the effects [his music] achieved.’ Many people will testify that ‘*Messiah*’ is one of the most inspiring works of music ever composed.

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We Are to Create and Cultivate (... continued from page #1)

Bottom Line: God is calling each and every one of His adopted children, who have come to Him in humble, surrendered, obedient faith in the work of his Son, to be either creators or cultivators with Him as He grows His Kingdom on earth. We can all thank God that He has given us hundreds of

true stories in the Bible as examples we might follow. As we spend time with him in listening prayer to hear him in His Word, He will reveal to us how we can be creators and cultivators for Him to His Glory!

Our God-Given Treasure

By Cindy Nieves

The Bible is a book to not just read, but to experience. God speaks to us through the Scriptures; we can “hear” His thoughts expressed in the words, thus gaining a personal relationship with Him. It is a means to guide us in the life of faith. It is spiritual food for our souls, and God has given us a varied menu. The historic books, songs, poetry, wisdom literature, prophesy, and other parts of the Bible strengthen us when we are weak, give us wisdom and encouragement, and nourish and energize us for whatever comes our way. God’s Word helps to keep anxiety, pride, fear, and temptation out of our hearts and empowers us for a victorious journey through life. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path.” Scripture reveals, consumes, breaks, illuminates, purifies, convicts, regenerates, satisfies, and guides the believer. It is life transforming. This treasure is at our fingertips, just waiting to feed us and enrich our lives with its promises, hope, and wisdom.

Sadly, though, it is not read as often as it should be. And often, we may read it but are too distracted to fully appreciate or understand what we have read. We need to study God’s Word with uncluttered minds. We need to first pray to God for help in understanding what He is trying to teach us. This helps to clear (or unclutter) our minds so that we can focus entirely on the pages before us. Only then will we be able to read with discernment as God illuminates each step of our reading.

God’s Word calls us to not only read the words on the pages, but to live by them. It’s not enough to know the Bible; we have to obey it! James 1:22 – “Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Also, Joshua 1:8 – “Do not let this Book of the Laws depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”

The Bible has been consistently attacked, yet it stands unscathed by criticism, distortions, and outright prejudice. It was the very first book produced on the printing press when it was invented over 500 years ago. It has not only survived all these years, but it continues to be the world’s best selling book.

No other book has been copied, quoted, or used as much to inspire so many individuals. It is easily the world’s most

inspirational and motivational book. It contains the wisdom of God and is the best manual for human behavior ever written. People who chart their course according to the principles contained in the Bible enjoy peace with God, unattainable anywhere else. In times of need or guidance, more people go to the Bible for help than to any other source. God’s Word provides all the ingredients we need to thrive spiritually.

And now, a few words to anyone reading this that might have any doubts hidden away in the recesses of their minds about the authenticity of the Bible. Was it really “God breathed,” how could that be? Are the Biblical historical facts, people, and places really accurate? Did the Red Sea actually part, etc., etc., etc.? First, don’t feel guilty about having any little nagging doubts; many great men of the Bible had doubts about one thing or another. Even Jesus’ own family didn’t believe in Him at first. John 7:5 says, “For even His own brothers did not believe in Him.”

As for the authenticity of the Bible, it is a fact that no archeological discovery (which number well over 25,000 different sites and artifacts) has ever contradicted a Biblical reference. On the contrary, these findings greatly substantiate Biblical places, people, cultures, and events. I could go on and on about these amazing discoveries, but maybe I’ll write a future article about them.

The writers of the Bible had no doubts about what they were recording. They firmly believed it to be the message of God to man. They frequently wrote phrases like, “Thus saith the Lord ...” or “Hear the Word of the Lord ...” And 2 Tim. 3:16 tells us that, “all Scripture is God-breathed ...” God revealed these things to them through the Holy Spirit, His communication to all of us. It is God’s Book, about Himself, and about us, and we can be fully confident that what the Bible says is trustworthy. It equips us to lead a life of faith and guides us on this often bumpy path that leads us to ultimate glory.

Read God’s Word expectantly; realize that we are actually “meeting” God in these wondrous pages. Be open to what God is trying to teach us. And, most of all, apply these teachings to our lives.

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Our God-Given Treasure (... continued from page #2)

May you all find great joy and peace as you dig for the treasures in God's Word.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Holy Word, the Bible. Help us to digest Your Word and to use it as our spiritual guideline for our daily lives. Help us to listen to Your voice and then to obey Your instructions.

Father, we want to value the Scriptures as the treasure that it is. Help us to make this a priority – to enjoy and learn from Your Word every day of our lives. May we want this more and more, to feast on the spiritual nourishment You have provided for us.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Resurrection ... “It is Finished” ... the Work Continues

by Petros

When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “***It is Finished!***” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). His suffering was over. Jesus had made the way for us, but He is still waiting for all to come home. Last month, I felt like I concluded without emphasizing my closing point: to realize what Jesus was proclaiming when He brought for all – the Kingdom of God. I wanted my story to be an encouragement and give hope in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe if we truly know we are part of the Kingdom of God, we would be better able to handle the loss of life and the “new norm.” By abiding in Jesus, we bear fruit which shows to the world a taste of God's Kingdom. We are a reflection of God's love. The reassurance of peace and joy is maintained by the constant study of the Word, which guides us as citizens in God's Kingdom on earth – to love God and love our neighbor.

COVID-19 is considered highly infectious and the consequences are predictable. But “SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE ... FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME ...” (Hebrews 8:10-11). In a matter of days, our life that we have worked on since we earned our first pay check has been checked. News of farmers plowing under crops, and milk and flour being dumped, because we have become so efficient in their production; the food chain breaks because people are getting sick. There was always plenty of food, but it is alarming to see lines of hundreds of cars waiting to get a box of food. Our pride and greed has become the “law” that God's people are obeying.

Recently, a dear sister in Christ was in tears from witnessing that God's people were not repenting of their daily

doings and aspirations. Her heart was breaking when God gave her His Word. “... let everyone who is godly pray ... in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance ... I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding ... Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, loving kindness shall surround him.” (Psalm 32:6-10). Becoming part of the Kingdom of God involves praying and seeking God before time runs out. It was killing her to see people just going on about their lives when the “flood” was immanent. Her wisdom to seek God and His Word “sheltered” her from the fears brought upon this world we live in. Her witness is a “light onto the world;” a reflection of God's grace and mercy.

Another story is about the Nigerian Pastor who was following God's Will for him and remained in the small village where Christians were being killed for their faith. He did not flee the danger and became well known. He was finally kidnapped, and his captors made a video of his demise. His calm, reassuring message to his family was that God may grant him the grace to be reunited with his family. However, as a servant to God, He would accept whatever the Lord's Will would be for him. It would be his last message of peace and hope that would endure beyond his lifetime. The ransom was collected and paid, only to be rejected. To the shock of many – he was beheaded. Yet, his family was at peace, reassured by his faith, by his calmness and preparation for wherever his faith would lead him. And instead of silencing his proclamation of God's love for the lost, his strength in God was good news around the world and gave many hope. A

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Resurrection ... "It is Finished" ... (... continued from page #3)

key point to consider is that if he had reasoned according to his will to be "safe" and reach out in the more populated cities, he would have been successful to many. But following God's Will, by His provision, the Pastor's life was one that was in the Kingdom of God. Pastor chose to seek God's Will, and God's love for this Pastor (and all His people) provides all the essentials by his Holy Spirit to have an unwavering life on earth of peace and goodwill. Despite the Enemy's many attempts to distract us with pandemic, global warming, famine, locusts and/or terrorism, there is a place where (Heaven of God that) we can find shelter in and grow to be a reflection of God's love.

I admit it is easier to share the knowledge and benefits of living in the Kingdom of God than to "be there." I'm so easily distracted by everything, and often overwhelmed because of my stubbornness. But by His Grace and Mercy, I have experienced the true "good life," or as my daughter and I would say, "good times." I am a disciple in training. I'm conscious of discipline as a key to being a follower of Jesus and the Word of God. So, "What's in your pocket?" Are there credit cards that enable you to buy the toys you "need?" Remember, the toys only bring you joy while the world around you is the way you have envisioned it. The current pandemic is an eye opener as to how quickly priorities and normality changes.

So, in closing, I will share how I felt so defeated looking at the lifeless bunch of wires behind the dishwasher door. For way too long, I had to prop a chair against our dishwasher in order for it to work. Sometime back, something heavy fell onto the door and it lost its seal and ability to latch closed. Part of learning discipline is to stop procrastinating. After taking the time to remove and replace the broken latch and hammer out the deformed sheet metal, I was excited about how great it was going to run. As I was putting on the front cover, the control panel crashed to the floor and what life the machine had was totally gone. For the next two days, I attempted to apply my knowledge and search the web for fixes. Washing dishes by hand was quickly showing my lack

of patience. So, praying for help, which I did often do, but this time "in a time when You (God) may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they (I) will not reach him." Looking at the lifeless bunch of wire, I thought of ripping them out, but that was not going to buy me anything. Then I reasoned if I could only find some life in the maze. This is where I finally gave God a chance. My meter picked up twelve volts when I used the frame for a reference. There is life, and with it, there is hope. I chased that power into the control panel and opened it up and attended to some problem areas and thought for sure I fixed it. Nope. So I unplugged everything, once again, and started plugging one connector at a time with the power on. And when I plugged the connector that was hanging after the drop, it stopped the power. The connector wasn't meant to be plugged in. When it is, the machine power is disabled.

The thought of God hoping for life in His people came to mind. A little hope (a trust in God) can give a life of seeking the truth. As we continue our search, in the mist of our trials set by above, we are given more hope. The follies of wrong decisions become clearer and the Kingdom of God direction is more pronounced. We can refocus on the path God has put in our minds and heart, as if it were a lighted path in our dark world. Not to be a doomsday fanatic, but how much more can a loving God give? Once you start thanking God for things you know he had a hand on, you will come to realize He has provided for so much more than we ever thought of. How is eternal life sounding? Best to make a choice now, before the flood waters or perhaps the current pandemic ends life as we know it. When you hear the trumpets blowing it will be too late. Now is the time to reach out to God. Now is the time to share God's love in your heart with dear family and close friends. The street bus has its own agenda and never comes back. So it is with life as we want it. But there is a God-given limousine awaiting that will take you to Paradise starting as soon as you profess "Jesus loves me." Amen. And Amen. Shalom.

Against the Tide: Living for Christ in a Post-Christian America Are You a Dangerous Firebrand?

By Elin Lee

"The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused Him of being a bore – on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him 'meek and mild,' and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. To those who knew Him, however, He in no way suggested a milk-and-water person; they objected to Him as a dangerous firebrand"

— Dorothy L. Sayers, from *The Greatest Drama Ever Staged*.

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Against the Tide: ... (... continued from page #4)

Some years back, I wrote a blog called *AGAINST THE TIDE: LIVING FOR CHRIST IN A POST-CHRISTIAN AMERICA*. I don't remember how I found this quote by Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), but I wanted to use it as the dominant header on my blog. To find the source for citation, I googled her name, combed quotation pages on the internet and after a long, frustrating and empty search, I contacted the Dorothy L. Sayers Society in Essex, England and spoke with Jasmine Simone, one of the secretaries. She very kindly searched for the quote, found it and gave it to me with permission to use it.

My discovery of Dorothy Sayers herself is relatively recent. I was introduced to Lord Peter Wimsey, her brilliant aristocratic amateur sleuth, nearly fifty years ago in the BBC dramatization of five of her Wimsey mysteries (she only wrote about ten). Now I'm buying them used from Amazon. Her writing is exquisite; she never overdoes descriptions of characters or events, so it's always a delight to find a little jewel from her, such as the term *shattering personality* above, or this from *THE NINE TAILORS*, a magnificent Wimsey mystery: *The Superintendent thoughtfully decapitated a nettle*. Sayers always leaves me wanting more!

But I've only just recently discovered her *other* writings. Sayers was an Oxford scholar, novelist, playwright, essayist and poet. She was also a committed Christian and an unashamed and bold apologist for Jesus Christ. This year, I decided to buy anything I can get my hands on – within my very small budget, of course! – and used copies periodically fly across the Atlantic and wait for me in my mailbox.

The quote above – which oddly enough, describes the current moral and political climate of this country (and really, pretty much the rest of the world today) was published in England in 1938, *eighty-two years ago*. Today we're surrounded by a culture of increasing violence, religious intolerance and hatred, and efforts to curtail our freedom of speech. Many of us who were once fearless, are so no longer and to my great disappointment, I find I am in that number.

But back to my question from the title of this article: Are *you* a dangerous firebrand? The Merriam-Webster online dictionary offers two definitions of the noun Firebrand:

- 1: a piece of burning wood
- 2: one that creates unrest or strife (as in aggressively promoting a cause) : *agitator*

I must admit I've never thought of a piece of burning wood as a firebrand, just the individuals who charge at or into something they disagree with, determined to extinguish it and rebuild it in their image. I'm not sure Christians today are supposed to take on the role of agitators, but neither are we supposed to be silent about the Savior, our King, our Re-

deemer, the One who loved us enough to die on the cross for our sins.

The more I consider the piece of "burning wood," the more I like the idea of being one. And I have a little story that will probably seem just a little backwards to you, but I think you'll agree it fits ...

About seventeen years ago, Ken and I had a sizeable woodpile about forty feet from the house, made up of completely rotted logs. We had got an oil heating system a few years earlier and, because we'd enjoyed the wood stove so much, decided to burn a log or two on occasion just for "atmosphere." Only lethargy set in and we didn't, not even once. So one April he got a burn permit from the Fire Chief and with one garden hose in my hand and the other in his, he set the pile alight and we stepped back.

Old wood burns hot and fast, and the pile burned quite nicely. But then we noticed the fire going downhill toward the raspberry patch and our neighbor's little line of fir trees, and an edge of panic flared as we started pouring water on the flames. We must have washed the site down for nearly an hour and when we were certain the fire was out, couldn't feel any heat or see smoke, we went into the house – but left our hoses connected and in place.

We checked it several times over the next hour and were convinced it was safe to pause long enough for supper. There was no more smoke, and some of the partially burned logs still glistened with water. Without any shadow of concern, we went back inside and ate.

I was elbow deep in the dishpan when I *thought* I saw some orange flame underneath what was left of the woodpile. I called Ken and we raced back outside. Enough of the outer pile had burned away that we could see beneath it, where almost level with the ground a healthy fire blazed away, sending hungry tentacles of flame out in all directions.

We did manage to extinguish it – again, and we spent much longer washing it down. I kept thinking of Smokey Bear's admonitions of forty years ago to "*Drown that campfire!*" but I didn't say anything to Ken. I didn't think he'd appreciate it.

It was dark when we went inside for what we thought was the final time. The wind was beginning to rise, but not alarmingly. We left the hoses in place, however, and when Ken wasn't looking, I got two lawn chairs and set them up by the hoses. Just in case.

About a half hour later I shouted, "Let's go!" and grabbed a few cushions for our chairs to protect against the rising damp.

Against the Tide: ... (... continued from page #5)

This time, it was a much smaller fire and we managed to get it out – again, and at last. We stayed outside for another half hour or so, leaning forward and extending our hands as much for warmth as to check for telltale heat. It was after eleven when we felt it was safe to call it quits. We went inside (but we left the hoses. Just in case.)

In a way, the piece of burning wood is a comfort to me. It is no longer safe for me or others my age to spout off and risk offending people (especially those I/we don't know) by speaking of Jesus prior to thinking of delivery. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." As I get older, I'm learning that I must consider not just my words, but also how I present my beliefs

and opinions to others. And surely, it's better to say less than to go overboard. It isn't that I'm afraid to witness to people because I'm not. Someone witnessed fearlessly to me and I'm alive today because of her. But I find myself caught in the middle between Caution and It's already too late and I'm already too old to waste any more time.

We live in a dying world and I want to win souls for Jesus. I think of the piece of wood that wouldn't quit burning one April night long ago, that kept surging back. I'd like to be like that, steadfast and not a quitter, always ready to speak for my Lord, to defend Him if necessary, to say what He's done for me and offer His living water to others.

It's a matter of prayer and obedience, and yes, I *do* want to be a dangerous firebrand.

June Preaching Schedule

We are excited that we may now gather together to worship with social distancing, masks and other precautions. Also, a video of our worship (on a one week delay) airs on **Comcast (Xfinity) Clinton channel 8** on Mondays at 8:00 PM. Or, you may listen to sermons on: **fccclintonma.org**. On the left hand side go to 'Blog Postings' and click on 'Sunday Services.' Under 'Sunday Service – Month xx, 2020' hit the prompt 'Continue Reading ->'. This will bring up PDFs of the Bulletin and Sermon Outline as well as two audios. The sermon itself is about 25 to 30 minutes long. Click on the big arrow on the left and it will start to play. Here is the June preaching schedule:

Sunday	Text	Title
June 7	<i>Philippians 1:9-11</i>	The LOVE of God gives wisdom to know what is best
June 14	<i>Philippians 1:12-18a</i>	Let's be filled with knowledge of redemption in God's Son
June 21	<i>Proverbs 20:5-9</i>	Men who live in the fullness of God's ways bless children
June 28	<i>Philippians 1:1-8</i>	Let's encourage one another to joy and progress in The Faith

Movie Night (on hold)

As soon as we are allowed to gather in larger groups we will show a movie on the fourth Friday of the month. The way things look now, we may have to wait for August.

John Polce Worship Music (on hold)

As soon as we may safely gather in larger groups, we will schedule a Saturday for John Polce to sing at FCC.

Editor's Note

We are doing it again this year! We will be publishing regular, full-length newsletters for each of the summer months. So, here is your June 2020 issue. Now, watch your mailboxes the first week of July and August, for your other two full-length summer issues!



JUNE 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21 Communion Sunday (Note #2)	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 6/07 — Communion Sunday.
- #2) 6/21 — Communion Sunday.



Photo by Aleš Čerin from Freemages