



# Vestry Voices

## The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational  
Church of Clinton

April 2021

Editor  
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### Abraham and Resurrection

Genesis 22:1-14



Rev. Gary Kiontke



Isaac was about twenty years old when Yahweh commanded Abraham to offer his son's life up to Him. After Isaac was born, Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days. (*Genesis 21:34*) And it came to pass, after these things, God proved Abraham with a test. (*Genesis 22:1*) Would Abraham obey a difficult command?

God commanded Abraham to take his only son, whom he loved, and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain about which He would speak to Abraham. A burnt offering was killed and then totally consumed with fire. (*Leviticus 1; 6:8-13*) Abraham rose up first thing the next morning and went to the place God told him. On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from far off. He said to his servants, 'Remain here while I and the lad (young man) will go and will worship and we will return to you.' So, Abraham clearly states both he and Isaac will return from their act of worship.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and put it on his son. Isaac asked Abraham his father, 'Behold: the fire and the wood. Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham said, 'My son, God Himself will see the lamb for the burnt offering.' When they came to the place God had spoken to him, Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood, bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar on the wood. Then Abraham stretched out his hand, and took his knife to sacrificially slaughter his son. Isaac had faith both in his father and Yahweh to submit to being bound by his father. It is not likely that a man of almost one hundred twenty years old would be strong enough to overpower his nearly adult son.

Then the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, and he said, 'Abraham! Abraham!' And he said, 'Behold me.' And He said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against

the lad (young man) and do not do anything to him, because now I have known you fear God and you have not withheld your only son from Me.' Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and he looked, and behold a ram, behind him, caught in a thicket by his horns. Then Abraham went and he took the ram and offered him up a burnt offering instead of his son.

And Abraham called the name of that place 'Yahweh-will-see.' Which it will be said today, 'On the mountain of Yahweh it will be seen.'

A key word in this account is 'to see.' In general it means to look at, to inspect to perceive. It is often used to describe how the words God's prophets speak for Him cause His people to see that they would be healed. (*Isaiah 6:10*) All that the Bible reveals about God leads to the conclusion that when God sees what His people need, He will provide for that need. In the paragraph that follows what the angel of Yahweh said, Yahweh Himself speaks to Abraham. Yahweh is the Covenant Name God uses to indicate His intimate relationship with His people. He is always with those who always put Him first in their lives, above everything and everyone. Because of His great love towards all who are fully His, whenever He sees a need, He will meet it in His way in His time.

But more than anything else, this account demonstrates that Abraham believed God could and would resurrect His people from the dead. Almost two thousand years after this testing on the mountain of Yahweh, the author of Hebrews said, 'Abraham offered up Isaac by faith ... reasoning God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.' (*Hebrews 11:17-19*)

Since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, all people must die. The author of Hebrews said Jesus came to deliver those being guilty slaves in the fear of death all their life. (*Hebrews 3:14-17*) Abraham's faith that God can raise the (continued on page 2 ...)

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## Abraham and Resurrection ( ... continued from page #1 )

dead overcame his fear of Isaac's death. (*1 John 4:18*) This faith caused him to say to his servants that he and the lad (young man) would return from their worship on the mountain.

One last word about Isaac: After these things, Abraham was told a granddaughter named Rebekah had been born to his brother. (*Genesis 22:20-23*) Then Sarah dies when Isaac

was thirty seven years old. (*Genesis 23:1*) Did twenty years pass between Abraham's test and his wife's death? If so, Isaac would have been seventeen years old at the time of his father's test. It seems that the time from the test to Sarah's death would not be longer than the time Abraham, Sarah and Isaac sojourned in the land of the Philistines. So Isaac was in his late teens. This is consistent with the definition of lad.

## Results of Bible Study Survey

Nine surveys were received. All wanted to be part of a Bible Study.

Six people preferred a weekly study. Five preferred in-person and the rest were for a hybrid of in-person and Zoom. So it would seem we should have a weekly Bible study in-person with the option of Zoom should any need it.

One person put any weekday night as first choice and another person as second choice. Four people put Wednesday evening as the first choice and one more as second choice. Second place was a tie between Tuesday night and Thursday night, with each receiving two second choices and a third choice. Using 'golf' scores (*lowest score wins*), here are the results: Wednesday got seventeen points, Tuesday and Thursday got twenty six points. Monday evening received thirty points, Saturday morning thirty one points, Saturday afternoon thirty three points and Friday evening thirty four. Wednesday evening seems the best time for the Bible Study as it scored in the top two on seven of the nine surveys.

As to the topic of the Bible Study, the Life of Christ (looking at the Gospels in chronological order) received four first place votes, two seconds, a third, a sixth and nothing on one ballot. In second place was the Life of the Apostle Paul with one first place vote, two seconds, a fourth and nothing on five ballots. In third place was End Time Prophecy with two second place votes, two fifth and five blank ballots. Using 'golf' scores (with blank being six points): The Life of Christ got twenty three points, the Life of the Apostle Paul got thirty nine points and End Time Prophecy got forty four points. There were many good write-in selections, including: Hebrews, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Genesis and the Kingdom of God. The Life of Christ is a clear first choice. We could agree on how to go through the rest after we finish the Life of Christ.

We welcome all comments on this article before we begin the Bible Study. We especially want to know if Wednesday evenings would preclude anyone for participating.

## April Preaching Schedule

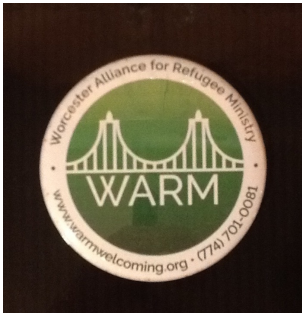
*Acts 26:19-29* is our Easter (Resurrection) Sunday text this year. This is Paul's testimony before King Agrippa before he was sent to Rome to be tried by Caesar. The key point Paul makes is that his preaching agrees with Moses and the prophets: The Messiah would suffer and, by His resurrection from the dead, would be the first to proclaim light to both the people (Jews) and the nations (*verses 22-23*).

The last three weeks of April, we will return to messages based on the Narrative Lectionary that we used from January 3 through February 14.

| Sunday                         | Readings                                 | Theme  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| April 4<br>Resurrection Sunday | Acts 26:19-29                            | Christ's resurrection proclaims light to all   |
| April 11                       | Exodus 12:1-13; 13:1-8; Luke 22:14-20    | Passover and the blood of the lamb             |
| April 18                       | Exodus 32:1-14; Luke 23:34               | The unfaithfulness of the 'golden calf' idol   |
| April 25                       | Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-9; Mark 12:28-31 | The ten commandments and the great commandment |

## WARM Update for 2020

By Sally Camara



Twenty-nine refugees arrived in Worcester. Twenty-four of them were welcomed and served by WARM. Nine apartment set-ups. Sixteen student drivers, with nine receiving licenses. Twenty-four students attended the WARM learning pod. Seventeen students were tutored. Fifty-three

new volunteers were trained at eight different training sessions. Nine events for refugees. Forty-two refugee families were befriended. A total of 245 refugees were served from eighteen countries.

It wasn't long into 2020 before COVID-19 put a damper on refugees being received into our country. Through prayer and the Lord's direction, WARM got creative with ministry opportunities. They began a learning pod for the students most in need with volunteers tutoring, doing art, gym and music projects, also. They visited families outside and did sidewalk art with the kids. They also distributed necessities and "fun" stuff at Christmastime.

Teri, Peter, Jimmy and I have been active in the apartment set-ups. One of the last apartments we did in January was for a family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I want to tell you the story of Chantal:

When we arrived at the apartment, we met an eighteen-year-old albino Congolese young lady. She was exuberant and brimming over with excitement. Come to find out, it was her brothers and sisters who were arriving the next day from a refugee camp in Uganda. There was no mention of her parents and I was afraid to ask.

When Chantal was born, her mother was encouraged to let her die as she was albino and would be an outcast, but her mother refused. She was the sixth of ten children and the first of three albino girls her parents would have. Her mother encouraged her to attend school even though she could not see the blackboard because of her poor eyesight. Her brothers would help her with notes and homework.

At the age of thirteen both her parents were killed in a massacre in her village. She and her brothers and sisters fled to a refugee camp in Uganda and it fell upon Chantal to care for her family – cooking, washing clothes, etc. An international refugee organization recognized the danger and difficulties Chantal's albinism was causing her and moved her up to priority status on the resettlement list.

At the age of sixteen she arrived in Worcester and was placed in a foster care home. It is hard to imagine leaving

your family, living with complete strangers, and adjusting to a completely different culture. Fortunately, she was fluent in English which was a help. She also speaks French and the dialect of her village.

When we met her at the apartment set-up, she was a junior in high school, but taking some college courses, also. When she found out her family was approved to come to Worcester, she wondered how would she provide for them? Where would they live? She had nothing to give them.

That's when she got connected to WARM. An apartment was secured for them and she was delighted to see so many volunteers show up to clean and move in furniture and set it all up. When the kitchen cabinets were filled with dishes, pots and pans, beds set up and made, curtains hung and pictures placed on the walls, she looked around and declared, "This looks like a home!" Chantal was so excited she could barely contain herself. Her family arrived the next day and although the pandemic arrived shortly after, they are adjusting to their new life and thriving.

Chantal has a beautiful, strong faith. She knows the Lord has a purpose for her and she is committed to fulfilling whatever He may lead her to. She is extremely grateful to WARM and their continued presence in her family's lives.

### PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Do pray for Christians and others in several African countries where terrorists are destroying villages and killing people, which is causing them to be displaced as Chantal and her family were.
- As things begin to open up, pray for WARM, as we expect to receive many more refugees this year. Especially pray for those who have been approved, but held back due to the pandemic. Their family members here are anxious to welcome them, and if too much time goes by, they have to start the process all over again.
- Also, urgently pray for the Afghani men and their families who assisted the US military as interpreters and in other capacities. With the possibility of US withdrawal, they are in grave danger from the Taliban. They need to be given refugee status and fast tracked out.

Thank you, FCC, for your financial support that helps WARM continue to minister to refugees that God sends our way.

## “Call Psalm 91-1”

By Petros

State Governors (a dozen or more) are lifting mask wearing and protocols contrary to medical opinion that more time was needed for the vaccinations to protect more of the population. The government officials are not acting out of the concerns of science and medical experts; and are actively undermining their efforts and putting the country at risk of another spike of infections. European countries that have returned back to “normal” prematurely are reverting back to prior restrictions (on in-person gatherings) due to a new variant of the coronavirus causing a return to pandemic protocols. Italy has reinstated a country wide lock down. The media has warned what happens in Europe has repeated the pattern in our country. No mask wearing will most likely allow the variant to become the dominant strain in the U.S. In the past, this “news” didn't help to prevent the same pattern to hit Americans; mainly because it is the land of the free. “Knowledgeable” officials (with personal agendas are being a voice for personal freedom) support public burning of masks and protesting of government interference and conspiracies. It has put the country in a precarious situation to vaccinate enough people (for herd immunity) or the possibility of entering another pandemic of the mutated strain of Covid-19. “Call Psalm 91-1.”

Today, polarization of people and tension are growing due to any belief one chooses can be supported by searching the Internet and web pages. People across the nation are finding “truths” to support their values and beliefs through their computers. Contacts are made with emails and text messages to the multitudes that form large groups in their pursuit for freedom and resistance. Sometimes, herd mentality develops that drives “normal people” to behave in extreme cases and become willing to fight law enforcement and causing bodily harm to strangers and innocent non-supporters. “Call Psalm 91-1.”

People with different skin color or being a minority suffer the inhuman and injustices of “normal people” just because “they” are different. Southern plantation owners bought “people” like they paid for anything else needed to support their lifestyle and property. These commodities were once “people” having a life with their families and loved ones in their native countries. They were captured and brought to market, striped, paraded as meat and sold as slaves to the highest bidder. As a deterrent to misbehavior, a slave would be lynched and set on fire. Family portraits were taken with the hung slave in the background while parts of the body were cut off and displayed while alive and burning. These atrocities become the norm and expectations of “normal” southern plantation families of that era. How is it possible for another person or group to steal “people” from their communities, chain, beat and abuse them to submit? Not too late

to “Call Psalm 91-1,” as the media today shows more and more violence and anger.

The resulting Civil War caused families to split between the North and the South in the call for freedom. Brothers that grew up together in a “normal” family would be on opposing armies with hopes to correct injustices imposed by the other side. Both sides fought to bring their lives back to “normal.” In this case, “normal” had become a double standard that was right for both lines of thought. What is right for me ... should be right for my neighbor. Why is this happening in the United States of America – the land of the free? “Call Psalm 91-1.”

There are many opposing thoughts that are sadly being fueled by outright lies. Even worse the opposition will rarely witness the truth or facts once the emotions get involved. Tensions grow and more violent ways are used to prove a point. People are no longer safe shopping for groceries or being in school. What is right before God? “Call Psalm 91-1.”

*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence ... And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. You will not be afraid of the terror by night, ... A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you ... For you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone. “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. “He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. “With a long life I will satisfy him And let him see My salvation.” Psalm 91:1-16. This Psalm is like an answer to prayer in our times of pandemic and senseless shootings. It does come with the condition that you know of God’s love in order to personally love God. Also, the promise to Abraham – the Father of all nations; all his descendants (by birth you are) are heirs to the covenant that God looks upon us as righteous. All the time. It is a necessity to read Genesis, the first book of the Holy Bible, to see how much selfishness and evil God allowed the children and grandchildren of Abraham. All the while, every descendant is viewed by God as righteous. God’s Word (in the Holy Bible) says God’s love is like a parent who never gives up on his kid. No matter how much lying, cheating, resentment, selfishness or evil is done. In the Father's eyes there is forgiveness and*

( continued on page 5 ... )

## “Call Psalm 91-1” ( ... continued from page #4 )

hope. Our only part, just like Abraham, is to have faith in God. To believe in Him, his love for us. No matter how much lying, cheating, resentment, selfishness or evil we do. His love which includes coming to us, God came from Heaven in the flesh, as Jesus. Our sinful nature is atoned for by the sacrifice made by God the man, in Jesus. There is a penalty or price for our sinful nature and the Faith in God redeems us from our sin.

The Word of God by John states it clearly. *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another ... Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love ... We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”* 1 John 4:7-20. Psalm 91-1 is more believable once we own the fact God loves us to no end. But only if we have the faith to believe his Easter plan of salvation.

Even at the feet of Jesus we have the unfaithful who turned from faith in God. Their idea of the Messiah was not one who would submit himself for our sins. It is very unfortunate, for God can forgive a mountain or lifetime of sin. Yet, by not believing or the faith in Jesus is comparable to being separated from everyone that you love by a burning bridge over a bottomless pit. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, [God's] own purchased, special people, that you may set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him ... now you are God's people ...”* 1 Peter 2:9. A great inspiring song by Bryan J Leech, “We Are God's People,” brings home the feeling of being united as God's family. The verses, “he wills us to be one family;” it becomes clear that all people are accounted to be part of God's family. Many are chosen but few accept. We need to constantly remind ourselves we don't have to call 911, just “Call Psalm 91-1.”

In closing, *“I implore you ... to abstain from the sensual urges (the evil desires, the passions of the flesh, your lower nature) that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves properly (honorably, righteously) among the Gentiles, Be submissive to every human institution and authority for the sake of the Lord, ... Or to governors as sent by him to bring vengeance (punishment, justice) to those who do wrong and to encourage those who do good service. For it is God's will and intention that by doing right [your good and honest lives] should silence (muzzle, gag) the ignorant charges and ill-informed criticisms of foolish persons. [Live] as free people, [yet] without employing your freedom as a pretext for wickedness; but [live at all times] as servants of God. Show respect for all men [treat them honorably]. Love the brotherhood (the Christian fraternity of which Christ is the Head). Reverence God. [You who are] household servants, be submissive to your masters with all [proper] respect, not only to those who are kind and considerate and reasonable, but also to those who are surly (overbearing, unjust, and crooked). For one is regarded favorably (is approved, acceptable, and thankworthy) if, as in the sight of God, he endures the pain of unjust suffering. [After all] what kind of glory [is there in it] if, when you do wrong and are punished for it, you take it patiently? But if you bear patiently with suffering [which results] when you do right and that is undeserved, it is acceptable and pleasing to God. For Christ also suffered for you, leaving you [His personal] example, so that you should follow in His footsteps. He was guilty of no sin, neither was deceit (guile) ever found on His lips. When He was reviled and insulted, He did not revile or offer insult in return; [when] He was abused and suffered, He made no threats [of vengeance]; but he trusted [Himself and everything] to Him Who judges fairly. He personally bore our sins in His [own] body on the tree [as on an altar and offered Himself on it], that we might die (cease to exist) to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.* 1 Peter 2:10-24

When we are tested, remember the love of Jesus (for us) allowed Him to finish the work He came to do. Use that love of God on the cross (for us) to empower us to rise above the foolishness of man and receive the favor of God – the ultimate authority.



# APRIL 2021

| SUN   | MON | TUE | WED | THU     | FRI              | SAT |
|---|-----|-----|-----|---------|------------------|-----|
|   |     |     |     | 1 (**)  | 2<br>Good Friday | 3   |
| 4 Easter & Com-<br>munion Sunday<br>Worship (Note #1) | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8 (**)  | 9                | 10  |
| 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15 (**) | 16               | 17  |
| 18 Communion<br>Sunday (Note #2)                      | 19  | 20  | 21  | 22 (**) | 23               | 24  |
| 25  | 26  | 27  | 28  | 29 (**) | 30               |     |
|   |     |     |     |         |                  |     |

**Calendar Notes:**

#1) 4/4 — Easter and Communion Sunday Worship.

#2 4/18 — Communion Sunday Worship.

(\*\*) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

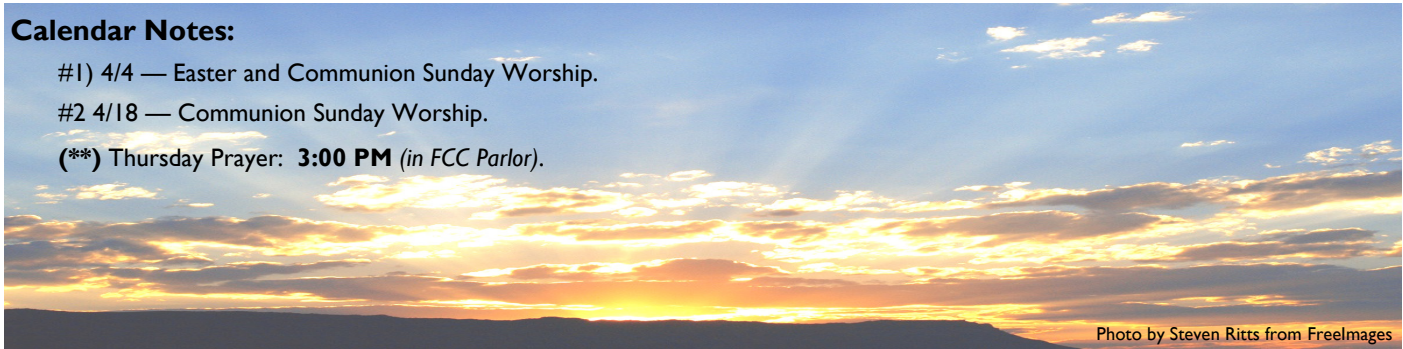


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