



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

August 2025

Editor
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God's Justice

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5:24 (RSV)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



The above verse has played a key role in the Civil Rights movement in the United States. John Perkins also used the beginning of the first line for the title of his autobiography, *Let Justice Roll Down*, first published in 1976 and still in print. I would recommend the book to everyone, but sadly, there is only one copy available in the CWMARS catalogue, it is in the Worcester Library. In my opinion, John Perkins is a national treasure. He is still alive and living in Mississippi at the age of 95.

The biblical word for justice is extremely broad. For our purposes, this extract from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* is the best short definition: "It is righteousness, rooted in God's character, which ought to be an attribute of [people – created in God's image]; it is often paired with righteousness" [as it is in the Amos verse quoted above].

Justice is a characteristic of the Covenant God, Yahweh (Psalm 119:149, 156; Isaiah 5:16; 30:18; Zephaniah 3:5). He loves justice (Psalm 37:28); and, He will make an everlasting covenant those practicing justice (Isaiah 61:8). His ways are justice (Deuteronomy 32:4). Yahweh is more pleased with righteousness and justice than with sacrificial offerings (Proverbs 21:3). He also does righteousness and justice for all oppressed people (Psalm 103:6); but, He also forbids His people to show favoritism to the poor (Exodus 23:1-3).

Just before the final Babylonian invasion destroyed the Temple and the last of the Jews were taken into exile, Jeremiah chastised one of Josiah's sons for not being just, concluding with these words from Yahweh: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing ... Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness ... He judged the

cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me?" (Jeremiah 22:1-16). This says a lot about what God expects of His leaders and His people.

Yahweh also gave Jeremiah a word saying He would raise up to David a righteous Branch, a king who would do justice and righteousness (Jeremiah 23:3-6). We now know this was fulfilled by Jesus Christ some two thousand years ago. This is a bridge passage between the Old Testament and the Gospels and New Testament.

Jesus pronounced many woes on the Pharisees. One was because they observed all the little details of God's Word but neglected what matters most to His Father: justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). In a parable, Jesus contrasted God with an unjust judge to say God will always "execute justice" (YLT) to his chosen ones in Jesus, the Savior (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus also said His judgment is just, because He always seeks to do the will of the one who sent Him (His Father, John 5:30).

Philip witnessed to an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from the suffering servant passage of the prophet Isaiah: "As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth" (Acts 8:26-38 – p.p. Isaiah 53:7-8). This is a critical passage. Even though Jesus is God, and God is perfectly just, He redeemed all who live by faith through God's grace through His suffering in justice. This is a biblical paradox!

James addresses the issue of church people participating in the oppression of the poor by favoring the wealthy, contrary to God's righteousness and justice to the poor and oppressed. He urges all who are in Jesus by God's grace and His faith to speak and act with the knowledge they will be judged under the law that gives liberty (the Gospel of Jesus Christ). Furthermore, mercy overcomes [un-just human] judgment (James 2:1-13).

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God's Justice (... continued from page #1)

This brings to mind a prophecy given through Micah (the prophet who also named the town in which Messiah Jesus would be born): "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does [Yahweh] require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). It is only through Jesus humbling Himself to death on the Cross to redeem us that anyone can have the hope of doing justice in this troubled world. All people who are IN Jesus Christ by grace through faith will be enabled to live by the Holy Spirit, and the Word that He inspired. Because of everything Jesus has done, and continues to do from His Fa-

ther's throne, God's justice will grow in this world until Jesus returns to put everything right.

It is fitting to close with the song of Moses and the Lamb from the final book of the Bible: "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, / Lord God the Almighty! // Just and true are thy ways, / King of the ages! // Who shall not fear [Thee] Lord / and glorify Thy name? // For thou alone art holy. // All nations shall come and worship thee, / for thy judgments have been revealed" (Revelation 15:3-4). ~v~

Sundays in August

We will have Communion on August 3.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes, except for August 17 (see the "Steeple Fellowship" article on page 4), for each of the Lord's Day worship services in August:

Sunday	Readings	Themes / Titles
August 3	Job 14:7-15; 19:23-27; Psalm 22:37-41	There is hope of life after death because the Redeemer lives All earth will bow down to Yahweh for what He has done
August 10	Job 31:35-37; 38:1-11; Psalm 104:1-4, 24-26	The awesome Creator answers beyond our questions By His wisdom, God's creation is majestic
August 17	Folk Mountain Gospel music worship at Steeple Fellowship, Lancaster, MA	
August 24	Job 38:25-27; 41:1-8; 42:1-6; Psalm 107:23-30	Realization of God's power over weather and great creatures results in repentance Yahweh can calm a tempest and save His people
August 31	Job 42:7-16 Psalm 85:1-4, 9-11	Those who persevere before Yahweh in humility are ultimately rewarded Yahweh will forgive and restore those who fear Him

Missions Report By Sally Camara

On May 25, we were honored to have Dave and Jean Coles come and share the work they are doing with Beyond.

Jean gave us an update on prayer strategies for discipleship movements. Her main ministry focuses on encouraging churches into wholeness prayer, where Jesus is invited into every area of our lives. She has also assembled a teaching for Discovery Bible Studies called "Becoming Whole." Discovery Bible studies are a part of Perspectives – a discipleship course. She encouraged us to begin with Clinton ... What to be thankful for? What are the challenges? What are the strongholds?

Dave talked about the exciting things happening in Asia, Africa, and South America. New church plants are exploding! A group of believers brings others to the Lord and a new church is begun. Then that church, in turn, leads others to

Christ and another new church is planted. Disciples making disciples! They meet in homes, under trees, or storefronts, etc. Most of this growth is done by native peoples.

Dave also shared about his work co-writing and editing several books. Among them are "Cabbages in the Desert," which is about church plants in Kenya among fourteen different Muslims groups. Another book he helped with is "Living Fire," about disciple-making in the Horn of Africa. He gave an analogy of the mountainous region in this area of Africa where fires are lit to keep warm in the night. A still-burning coal is used to begin a new fire the next day, or even shared with neighbors whose coals have burned out. In the same way, we share the gospel with those who need to hear. There is also another book he co-wrote about the growing church in northern India called "Bhojpuri Breakthrough." Since the 1990's, ten million people in this area

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Mission Report (... continued from page #2)

have come to Christ! Such good news to hear! If you are interested in reading any of these books, you can find them on Amazon.

We also enjoyed a special time of fellowship with Dave and Jean, after our church service, and appreciate their taking the time to visit our small congregation. Keep them and their

work in your prayers. They are passionate about it and committed to it. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the earth as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). ~vv~

It Just Happens*... "Does It Really 'Just Happens'?"

By Petros

My covenant with God, and to reaffirm each day to follow His Holy Spirit leading, needs a lot of work. My saving grace is God accepts us as we are, but we must choose to accept what He has prepared (good works) for us to do in His Kingdom. I do try to relate how God is so understanding and wonder why He puts up with my absence. I often think of what a covenant with God entails. I see how shallow my choice to serve God and keep a covenant with God is. "It Just Happens*..." last month I shared a discovery in Joshua from my NIV study bible by Zondervan. "We are to fear and serve the Lord alone (24:14). This is based on a choice to obey him instead of following other gods (24:15). *We are incapable, however, of properly worshipping him because of our rebellion and sins.* (24:19). By choosing God as Lord, we enter a covenant with him (24:25) whereby he promises not only to forgive and love us, but also to enable by his Spirit to do His work here on earth. This covenant requires us to renounce the principles and practices of the culture around us that are hostile to God's plan (24:23). This is not to be done alone, but by binding ourselves together with others who have faith in God."

In other words, I believe God has a path for believers consisting of good works to grow the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. We can love others and forgive because we have felt the extent of God's sacrifice for us. This supports my article's title "It Just Happens*..." counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. "Happens" will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds and things just happen (according to His Will).

A few months ago, my daughter, Jessica, blessed me by her version of "It Just Happens*...". Her motto, "Things are always working out for me!" In her words, "Nothing is by chance ... It just means that you don't have to worry because you can't see what's really going on, you can only see what's in front of you. A reminder to spend less time resisting that you are worthy of God's love and the bigger picture he has for you. Be where he put you and stop rushing through each moment." A proud Dad moment had me thinking it's a wonderful spin on how God loves His creation. How His Word tells us "Don't worry ..." Living in the "Heaven on earth ..." Jesus proclaimed for all (who follow). And "abiding in His (God's perfect) timing for all things."

Last month, Pastor Gary told me he was using my "It Just Happens*..." in his 6/29/25 sermon. His introduction includes, "'Cynics say, IT happens.' Overwhelmed people say, 'Everything is happening – all at once.' And, many people have shared a good experience with a good friend by saying, 'You'll never believe what just happened to me!' ... the majority of people never stop to think, or they may not even know, The One who is behind everything that happens. In fact, The God who created, loves, and keeps everyone and everything, is ultimately behind all that happens' ... 'time and chance happen to them all' (Ecclesiastes 9:11, RSV)."

So, why is my heading this month, "It Just Happens*... "Does It Really 'Just Happens'?" My head was reeling listening to the sermon on Job. Job loses his wealth, health, and family. His three best friends come to visit; they sit speechless for seven days. Job curses the day he was born and wished he was dead. When Eliphaz says, "God always balances the books in this life," he is inferring that Job must have sinned. But the underlying reason for Job's demise: being a righteous God-fearing, blameless man, Satan is allowed to put Job "through the ringer" to test Job's "integrity." Pastor Gary preached, "Many people need to believe God always makes things right in this life. It is this conventional wisdom that keeps them going. But, again, in a sinful world bad things happen to people that are humanly 'good'." Most of my articles have been about good things that just happen. Meanwhile, we all experience loss and disasters that also just happen. So, I propose a question for all my readers to ponder on their own: "It Just Happens*... "Does It Really 'Just Happens'?" I will share my answer next month.

"It Just Happens*... "Does It Really 'Just Happens'?" Is it God's Will for us (is happening) when disaster strikes? ICE invasions on long-time workers and breaking families apart? Floods that rise in the middle of the night above trees, taking out summer campers in bed? The current presidential administration? Homes that are no longer affordable to families and sell for over a million dollars!? Climate extreme heat, winds, rain and snow? My answer is derived from the Book of Job.

The build of the Bluegrass Gospel Barn (aka BGB) has three of the four walls on the first floor, measuring 36'x42', completed. Green grass continues to grow and be transplanted all around the ground. Five tons of design concrete blocks

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It Just Happens*... (... continued from page #3)

have been purchased for retaining walls and patio steps/borders. All the wood up to the second-floor walls has been delivered. Roof trusses have been ordered and built; and are ready once the second-floor walls are up.

PTL!!! ***“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly.” Psalm 127:1***

Author’s note: This article’s title “It Just Happens*...” counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. “It” will

stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. “Just” is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. “Happens” will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Pastor Gary’s Vacation Monday, August 11 thru Sunday, August 17

Pastor Gary is taking his third week of vacation in the church year that started October 1, 2024, from Monday, August 11 to Sunday, August 17. We do not need to fill the pulpit on August 17 because we are cancelling worship at 34 Walnut St. that Sunday for the Folk Mountain Gospel music worship at Steeple Fellowship Church. (See next article.) I am excited about this because I have eclectic music tastes. Debi and I will attend the Switchfoot concert at Soul Fest in Greenfield with Noel and Darren on Friday night. Then, less than forty-eight hours later we will worship the Lord with an entirely different genre of music.

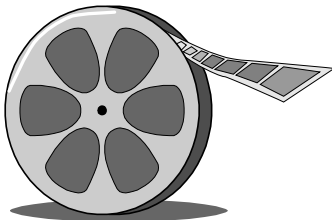
Steeple Fellowship: Folk Mountain Gospel Music Worship Sunday, August 17

First Congregational Church will not have worship at 34 Walnut St., on August 17, because most of the regular worshippers plan to attend the special worship at the Steeple Fellowship Church, at 793 Main Street in Lancaster, that Sunday at 10:30 AM.

Don and Donna Mohl, from Folk Mountain Gospel, will lead the Sunday morning worship. They have been traveling around the country since 1988 to share the love of Jesus through music. Their music is a mix of “mountain” and folk style. They play several musical instruments, including the Bowed Psaltery, Hammered Dulcimer, Mountain Dulcimer, Mandolin, Zither, Guitar, and Harmonica.

If anyone wants to attend and needs transportation, let me know and we will work something out.

Movie Night Friday, August 22 at 7:00 PM



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church’s CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish.

So, please join us for a night out at the movies!



AUGUST 2025

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	4	5	6 (††)	7 (**)	8	9
10 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	11 Pastor Gary's vacation begins (Note #3)	12	13	14	15	16
17 NO FCC WORSHIP; Steeple Fellowship @ 10:30 AM; Last day of Pastor Gary's vacation (Note #4)	18	19	20 (††)	21 (**)	22 Movie Night (Note #5)	23
24 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #6)	25 September "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #7)	26	27 (††)	28 (**)	29	30
31 FCC Worship (Note #8)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 8/3 — Communion Sunday Worship: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 8/10 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** **ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #3) 8/11 — Pastor Gary's vacation begins.
- #4) 8/17 — **NO FCC WORSHIP. INSTEAD:** Folk Mountain Gospel music worship at Steeple Fellowship, Lancaster, MA: **10:30 AM.**
ALSO: Last day of Pastor Gary's vacation.
- #5) 8/22 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #6) 8/24 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.** **ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #7) 8/25 — Articles are due for the September issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on August 26).
- #8) 8/31 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.**
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM (but not on 8/13)** (in FCC Parlor).
- (**) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM (but not on 8/14)** (in FCC Parlor).

