



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

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God's Reciprocal Love with Jesus' Disciples

For this is how God loved the world:
he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him
may not perish but may have eternal life.
For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.

John 3:16-17 (NJB)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



God's love for the people He created is an essential part of His character. He redeemed His people, Israel, out of Egypt not because they were a great people, but because He loved them and had sworn an oath to Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Genesis 15:12-21).

But His love does not guarantee redemption or a reconciled relationship with God. Jesus gave some commandments to His apostles and disciples. First, He said that if anyone is to come after Him, that person must practice self-denial, and take up his or her cross (meaning to die to sin and selfishness) every day, and he or she must follow Him (living as He lived, Luke 9:24). Later, He said they must strive to enter through the narrow door because many will seek to enter, but not be able; and, they will weep when they see the patriarchs and the prophets in God's kingdom and they are cast out (Luke 13:24-30).

Our lead passage says what God did when He loved the world and gave His only Son whom He sent into the world. His purpose was that people should not perish, but have eternal life so they are no longer condemned, but are saved by what Jesus did. The first sentence is an indicative reality; the second sentence is a subjunctive purpose. God's purpose becomes a reality for each and every person who is continually believing what the Gospels and New Testament have to say about Jesus.

Jesus told the eleven apostles in the Upper Room before He went to the Cross that just as the Father loved Him, He has loved them. If they keep His commandments, they will remain in His love. They must love one another as He loved them when He laid down His life for them, i.e., sacrificially. And, He chose them with the intention that

they should bring forth lasting fruit (John 15:9-17). God's love, demonstrated in Jesus, has a purpose, namely to bear fruit.

A good paragraph explaining what people intend to do is in the letter of the apostle Paul to the churches in Colosse in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Whatever it is people may plan to do, they must do it out of the desires of their heart, fully knowing that if they are serving Christ with their action, they will have the inheritance of sharing eternity with Him. However, those doing wrong will receive the consequences of their actions whoever they are. This is because God has no favoritism based on any person's station in life on earth. Rather, His love for all humanity causes Him to always act justly in the end, based on how each person responds to Him. (Colossians 3:23-25).

If we obey God through His gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-10) based on all His acts of love to us as outlined above, we can be redeemed into a reconciled relationship with God; and, we can enjoy His strong life-giving, life changing love (^hhesed in Hebrew, ^{agapē} in Greek). The apostle John put this well in his first letter to late first century Christians who were scattered and persecuted: We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19, RSV).

And, most importantly, we can love God without any strings attached to our love of Him because we can forever bask in the love He has lavished on us in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-8).

This article presents the highlights of much research, thinking and praying about this topic over the last month. If anyone wants to go deeper on anything presented, please feel free to contact me. I think the wholeness and wonder of God's love is a subject we can never exhaust and never master; but, the joy coming from the effort to know more of God's love is its own reward.

~vv~

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Sundays in October

We will have Communion on October 4 and 18.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes / titles for each of the worship services on the Lord's Day:

Sunday	Readings	Theme / Title
October 4	2 Samuel 3:1-21; Psalm 135:3-14	Motives matter With wonders, Yahweh gave the land to His people
October 11	2 Samuel 3:22-39; Psalm 6:7-10	Kings suffer when appointed leaders selfishly obey Yahweh will put evil workers to shame
October 18	2 Samuel 4:1-12; Psalm 45:2-7	Kings execute justice on ruthless assassins God's anointed king enforces justice on the wicked
October 25	TBA	Guest preacher: Walter Mutti

Pastor Gary will be on vacation on Sunday, October 25. See the vacation article on page 3.

Missions Announcement

By Sally Camara

Steven Sutton, with Water of Life, will be in the New England area for the next few weeks.

- He will be speaking at Hope Chapel in Sterling on October 4th at the 9:00 AM and 10:45 AM services.
- On October 18th he will be speaking at Horizon Fellowship in Fitchburg at 9:00 AM and 11:00 AM.

Steven will be updating everyone on the work he and his family do among the Khmer children in Cambodia. He is a very interesting speaker and brings inspiration and exhortation from the scriptures. If you get a chance to hear him, it will be well worth it. ~v~

It Just Happens*... "Heaven on Earth ..."

By Petros

I thought I had a great article on how Jesus brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. I was going to expand on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I searched for the material that I had in mind, and nothing was coming up. Even my bible search engine was giving me a blank stare! I resigned that I would not have an article for this month. *It Just Happens*...* somehow, I got into Galatians 5:1-26 (NASB) "Walk by the Spirit." *This is the link I used:*

https://www.smartbiblesearch.com/search_verse_results.php?p=1&lv=nasb&r=&v=ABCDEFGHI&vid=,148005001-148005999&search_text=Galatians%205&js=Y

Here, Jesus' role was to set the sinner free. He allowed His crucifixion, to free us from our fleshy bondage to temptations and sin. The apostle, Paul, gives warning on being set free, "... do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another ... "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ... by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ..." Paul points out our flesh (our nature) is opposed to the presence of God in His Holy Spirit. He continues that our life is conflicted to the point that we may not be able to love God as our mind and heart wants to. "But if you are led by the Spirit, ... the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and

things like these ..." I can relate that there are times when I find my flesh controls my thoughts and desires. Paul teaches us to remember to crucify the desires of our flesh as we have been set apart from our sins' power over us. "Jesus Paid It All," by Kim Walker-Smith, sings a moving reminder to that fact. *You can watch and listen at this link:*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymkl0t0FOcw&list=RDYmkl0t0FOcw&start_radio=1

We need to own the suffering Jesus endured for our faults every moment we are faced with the darkness's deceptions. We can "fall off the wagon" at any time, but having acknowledged God's love through Jesus' sacrifice, we will have the leading of His Holy Spirit to lead us. Having Heaven on Earth and Eternity in the Kingdom of God far outweigh the deceptions of *momentary* gratitude, (cont. on page 3 ...)



It Just Happens*... (... continued from page #2)

pride, monetary, etc. By first loving God, even if it's to acknowledge His presence, we can overcome the desires of our sinful nature. Accepting Jesus paid it all empowers us to love as Jesus loves. God is love. His gifts of His Holy Spirit lead us to "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." By association, the fruit of God's Holy Spirit manifests in everyone who believes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness; leading to gentleness and self-control.

It *Just Happens**... my neighbor wanted to share a cup of tea. She had the thought that a few couples could have a meal together on a regular basis. I thought it's what God wants us to do and would make the time to participate, have fellowship, and show love and concern. I shared that was the thought behind the Bluegrass Gospel Barn. A place to gather with live praise and dancing to God so people would witness and be moved by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Bluegrass Gospel Barn has all the doors hung, except for the three-leaf main barn door, which will have a sliding track. The wind blew open a window and crashed a set

of double French glass doors. It *Just Happens**... no glass broke! PTL!!! Stone vinyl siding to cover the foundation is in hand. It *Just Happens**... the split, rough-cut, vinyl cedar shingles got a \$1500+ discount just before placing the order. It *Just Happens**... We are working with a plumber who will install waste and supply lines before winter. We needed this work done to vinyl and build the extension to the barn.

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. Firstly, "Just" reveals that God is behind what most people see as "just circumstances;" and secondly, "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. ~vv~



Pastor Gary's Vacation October 1 —and— October 24 through 30



Pastor Gary will take his first vacation day of the new church year on Thursday, October 1, to go to the Big E in West Springfield to see Switchfoot in concert. They were good at the SoulFest in Greenfield last summer, but it was a short concert due to the many singers and groups at the event. They recently started a big tour with the release of their new CD. Some videos of the tour are already on YouTube and are excellent. There is nothing like live music!

At the end of the month, the Kiontke family will have their annual vacation in Maine from Saturday, October 24 through Friday, October 30. Walter Mutti will lead worship and preach on October 25.

FCC Annual Meeting — Sunday, October 18 at Noon

Per the church bylaws, the Annual meeting will be in the downstairs fellowship hall after morning worship on Sunday, October 18 (the third Sunday of the month) at noon. Those who have annual reports to submit should have them on the table in the copier room by Friday, October 16.

November "Vestry Voices" Articles — Due Monday, October 19

Due to Pastor Gary's upcoming family vacation (see article, above), all articles for the November issue of the "Vestry Voices" newsletter are due on Monday, October 19. The newsletters will be copied and assembled on Tuesday, October 20. They will then be held for mailing right after October 25's Sunday service, ensuring that they are received before the November 1 Sunday service.

Roof Update

As of Monday, September 28, according to our attorney, we are "ninety-nine percent ready" to sign a contract with Northeast Home and Energy and put down a deposit to have the church roof replaced. After this last weekend, there is no doubt we need this. Charlie, Kurt and I will keep you all updated.

OCTOBER 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
27	28	29	30 (††)	1 Pastor Gary's vacation-day (Note #1)	2	3
4 Communion Sunday (Note #2)	5	6	7 (††)	8 (**)	9	10
11 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #3)	12	13	14 (††)	15 (**)	16 Annual Meeting Reports Due (Note #4)	17
18 Communion Sunday; ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING (Note #5)	19 November "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6)	20	21 (††)	22 (**)	23	24 Pastor Gary's vacation-week begins (Note #7)
25 Guest Preacher; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #8)	26	27	28	29	30 Last day of Pastor Gary's vacation-week (Note #9)	31

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 10/1 — Pastor Gary's vacation-day.
 #2) 10/4 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
 #3) 10/11 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
 #4) 10/16 — Annual Meeting reports are due (place on the table in the copier room).
 #5) 10/18 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM. ALSO: Annual Church Meeting: Noon.**
 #6) 10/19 — Articles are due for the November issue of "Vestry Voices" (based on Pastor Gary's upcoming vacation-week).
 #7) 10/24 — Pastor Gary's vacation-week begins.
 #8) 10/25 — FCC Worship with Guest Preacher Walter Mutti: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
 #9) 10/30 — Last day of Pastor Gary's vacation-week.

(††) Wednesday Bible Study (book of "Job"): **11:00 AM (but not on 10/28)** (in FCC Parlor).

(**) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM (but not on 10/1 or 10/29)** (in FCC Parlor).

