

Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church
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THE SALTSHAKER

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Thoughts and Prayers

By Rev. Sean McCann

There was recently a whirlwind of controversy in the news over the seemingly innocuous phrase: “thoughts and prayers.” What were once kind words of sympathy towards those who were suffering, “thoughts and prayers” has come under fire as a tone-deaf response to victims of tragedy and their families. *The New York Times Magazine* ran a piece entitled “Do Politicians’ ‘Thoughts and Prayers’ Mean Anything?” and *The Washington Post* – assuming the answer to the *Times* article was certainly “no, they do not” – came to our aid with an advice column: “How to Make ‘Thoughts and Prayers’ Meaningful Again.” This is one of those rare occasions when we can share a knowing glance with our atheist friends and acknowledge together that you can’t have it both ways: if God is real, then “thoughts and prayers” mean everything, but if God is not real then “thoughts and prayers” mean nothing...there really is no middle ground.

So while the culture wrestles over the role of prayer in public life, we as the church must be as clear as ever on the power, importance, and meaning of prayer. The book of Acts shows us that the first gathering of the early church after the ascension of Christ was a home prayer meeting: “all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14), and this quickly became a pattern for the early church as “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). When Peter and John were released from prison, they went to their friends and immediately gathered together for prayer (4:24). As the church began to grow the Apostles appointed the first deacons (who were set apart by prayer) because they were worried that other concerns of the church would take them away from prayer (6:1-6). Peter was imprisoned again, and after he was rescued he went

to the home of Mary where he found that “many were gathered together and were praying” (12:12). Paul himself was sent off on his first missionary journey from a prayer meeting (13:3); he was found praying with Silas and others in a Philippian prison (16:25); he prayed with the disciples at Tyre before he left for Jerusalem (21:5), and he even held a prayer meeting on a ship in the midst of a great storm (27:29). Needless to say, corporate and congregational prayer is central to the life of the church – both in the book of Acts and today.

Here at Covenant Reformed we like to refer to ourselves as an “ordinary means of grace church.” That means that as a church we seek to depend on the simple avenues of God’s grace that are marked out for us in Scripture, namely preaching, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. One of the ways we express this dependence on prayer is in our church calendar. The most important times that we gather together as a body are for worship, and our worship services are filled with prayer. We pray for God’s presence and blessing on our worship; we confess our sins and ask for pardon; we pray for the Lord’s blessing on the preaching; we have prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, and we end the service in prayer.

Another way we have traditionally emphasized this commitment to prayer has been through a mid-week prayer meeting at the church. This summer we plan to keep this same commitment to prayer, but in a different venue: individual homes. Last month the Session decided to move our Wednesday night dinner and prayer meeting into individual homes during the summer months.

Our desire for this change is to maintain the same weekly dependence on the Lord through prayer, while

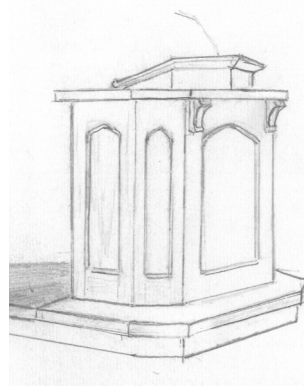
Upcoming Events

May and June		Weekly Events		
May 7	Noon	Elder Groups	Sunday Morning: Opening Exercises	9:30 am
May 14	11:00 am	The Lord’s Supper	Sunday School	9:45 am
May 14	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Morning Worship	11:00 am
May 21	Noon	Congregational Meal	Wednesday Evenings (at the church through May; at homes starting in June)	
May 23	6:00 pm	Child Protection Training	Supper	6:00 pm
			Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm
May 28	11:00 am	The Lord’s Supper	Bible Study	
May 28	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	For Men:	
June 4	Noon	Congregational Meal	Men’s Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am
			ROMEOS	8:00 am
June 11	11:00 am	The Lord’s Supper	(Retired Old Men Eating Out) at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge	
June 11	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Norm Bomer’s Home	7:00 pm
June 18	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	For Women:	
June 25	11:00 am	The Lord’s Supper	Carol Belz’s Home	9:30 am
June 25	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Fellowship Hall	10:30 am
			Debbie Cate’s Home	7:00 pm
				Every Tuesday
				Every Wednesday
				1st & 3rd Thursdays
				September to May

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doing so in a smaller and more intimate setting. In order to do this we have divided Asheville into three geographic groups, each of which contains roughly one third of our membership: a Northwest Group, a Southeast Group, and a Haw Creek Group. Each group will meet every Wednesday night in June, July, and August for a meal, devotion, and time of prayer. The primary goal of these summer home prayer groups is to continue the prayer focus of the church in a more intimate environment. We hope that smaller groups in homes will help to foster greater communication and deeper relationships within our membership.

In addition to this goal, we also hope that this ministry will be beneficial in a couple of other ways. First, we know that for some of you coming to a mid-week prayer meeting in North Asheville can be logistically challenging, and for some work schedules just not feasible. As a Session we understand these challenges and hope that by hosting these meetings closer to your neighborhood, it will make it easier for some of you to



The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann

As I've preached through Exodus this year, we've seen that the book could just as appropriately have been entitled: "The Gospel According to Moses."

The book begins with a creation story of sorts, or correctly speaking, a re-creation. Instead of creating the world, here God is creating a people for himself. He does this by blessing them to fulfill his promises from Genesis that they will "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." And yet despite this blessing from God, the people soon found themselves oppressed and enslaved to the power of a foreign ruler, the evil Pharaoh. They cried to the Lord out of their misery and he remembered his promises and set into action the great plan for their redemption.

Lest we think the Hebrews were an innocent bunch here, Moses makes clear over and over again that they have done nothing to deserve or earn this great deliverance that is about to be theirs. When they first heard the Lord's plans, they disbelieved the good news, and they are repeatedly found rejecting, ignoring, or grumbling against Moses and God.

Despite the sinful hearts of his people, the Lord takes up his sword and through the plagues, he defeats every supposed god in Egypt and breaks the will of Pharaoh. By grace he spares his people by providing a Passover lamb to protect them from his wrath. There is no greater picture of Christ in the Old Testament than the lamb sacrificed to satisfy divine justice. The night of Passover death is soon followed by a day of deliverance and resurrection as the Lord leads Israel through the Red Sea.

Can you see the good news leaping off the pages of Exodus? God looks down to a people enslaved in sin and accomplishes for them a great redemption. The Lord redeemed them from the *penalty* of sin by slaying a lamb in their place, thus showing how every one of us needs the lamb that is Jesus Christ to stand in our place before the judgment seat of God. He also redeemed them from the *power* of sin by securing their escape from Egypt and destroying the evil king's hold over them. In the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, he too has redeemed us from the power of sin by defeating death once and for all.

As the news of this great deliverance spread to the nations, some like Amalek rejected it and warred against God, while others like Jethro rejoiced and worshipped the Lord of Israel as their savior. Friends, you have heard this glorious gospel and now the question is before you: are you still at war with God, or have you turned from your sins and placed your faith in God's great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ?

attend.

We also hope that these home meetings can serve as a vehicle for outreach, since a meeting in a home is less formal and intimidating for unbelievers and visitors to attend. Experience shows that it can be easier to invite someone into a home than to invite them to get dressed up and drive across town for a church service. Strangely enough, although our culture at large seems to devalue the idea of "thoughts and prayers," individuals are often honored to know that a Christian is praying *for* them, and even desires to pray *with* them.

We are still working out the final details for this ministry and will announce them soon, but we wanted you to know of this change so you can be prepared. If you are not in the habit of coming to our Wednesday evening gatherings, we hope you will consider joining your regional group for the summer, and if you are a regular attendee, then we hope you benefit from this change as we continue to walk in dependence upon the Lord together through prayer.

The Value of Names

By Rev. Bill Clark

We have just started our new class, "I Believe In the Holy Spirit." In doing so we spent time thinking through some of the implications of that name.

Since names in the Bible reveal the character and work of either God Himself or of individuals, I thought you might like to know more of the biblical names of the Holy Spirit and how they expose even further His ministry in us, the church and the world.

The Spirit of the Living God, 2 Cor. 3:3. As such, He makes God a living reality in our personal experience instead of a mere intellectual concept. Happy is the man who knows the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the living God, and who, consequently, has a real God, a God who lives today, a God upon whom he can depend today to undertake for him, a God with whom he enjoys intimate personal fellowship, a God to whom he may raise his voice in prayer and who speaks back to him.

The Spirit of Christ, Rom 8:9. He is such for at least three reasons: (1) Because He is Christ's gift; John 20:22, Jesus "breathed on them and said unto them, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.'" (2) But also, because it is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to us. In John 16:14, we read, "He (that is the Holy Spirit) shall glorify Me: for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you." (3) Perhaps most astounding of all, because it is His work to form Christ as a living presence within us. In Eph 3:16-17, the Apostle Paul prays to the Father that He would "grant to believers according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith." This then is the work of the Holy Spirit, to cause Christ to dwell in our hearts, to form the living Christ within us!

The Spirit of Truth, John 16:17. The obvious but extremely important reason for this name, is because it is the work of the Holy Spirit to communicate truth—to impart truth—to those who receive Him. All truth is from the Holy Spirit. It is only as He teaches us that we come to know the truth.

The Spirit of Knowledge and of the Fear of the LORD, Isaiah 11:2. Since some of us have just finished reading *When People are Big and God Is Small*, which counsels us to fear the Lord and not man, I thought of including this title. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to impart knowledge to us and to beget in us a reverence for the Lord. This reverence reveals itself above all in obedience to His commandments. The one who receives the Holy Spirit finds his delight in the fear of the Lord.

Well, this is not all the names for the Holy Spirit, but it is enough to encourage us all to pray for a greater work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Let us do so with faith that He will answer in all these ways and more.

When People Are Big and God is Small

by Rev. Sean McCann

One of the most debilitating and subversive sins we battle is a fear of man. The Bible talks about the fear of man in two ways. The first, and more obvious, is the fear of what other men or women will do to us to harm us. The second type of man-fearing, and the more endemic of the two, is a fear of what others will think of us. Dr. Ed Welch summarizes the fear of man: "We replace God with people. Instead of a biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others."

For those of us who battle this sin, Dr. Welch has written the most helpful book: *When People Are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*. Dr. Welch is the director of counseling and academic dean at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), as well as a faculty member at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. In these roles he has extensive experience counseling many who battle this very sin.

When People Are Big is divided into two parts, the first explores the reasons we fear others, while the second teaches how we can overcome these fears through faith in Christ. Dr. Welch has truly plumbed the depths of the human heart in search of our motivations for doing what we do. For example, here is how he describes one of the themes he explores in his book:

"To really understand the roots of the fear of man, we must begin to ask the right questions. For example, instead of 'How can I feel better about myself and not be controlled by what people think?' a better question is 'Why do I have to have someone – even Jesus – think that I am great?' These are topics we will look at from many angles throughout this book, but included in the answer is the fact that we need a way to think *less often* about ourselves."

My biggest takeaway from the book was that the more we grow in the fear of the Lord, the less we will depend on the thoughts and opinions of others. Prov 29:25 sums up this idea: "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."

Just a warning, don't read this book if you are not ready to be convicted by the Holy Spirit. As many in our Reading Challenge have attested, reading this book is like looking into our souls, and we may not like everything we see.

(In June we will meet to discuss *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer)

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
May 7	Luke 7	
May 14	Luke 19	John 6:16-24
May 21	Luke 23	
May 28	Mark 15	John 6:60-71
June 4	Exodus 19	
June 11	Exodus 20:1-2	John 7:1-13
June 18	Exodus 20:3	
June 25	Exodus 20:4-6	John 7:14-36