



First Pres Challenger

WORSHIP *grow*
SERVE

Equipping the Family of God at First Presbyterian Church, Fresno

May 2006

Why We Preach

By Greg Ehlert, Youth Director

Many of you may have wondered what drives preachers to get in the pulpit week after week in front of their congregations to preach. Is it because we love to hear our own voices? Is it because we feel we've got it all together and want to show the lay folk how it's done? Is it because we can't wait to see the flattering write-ups in the newspaper each Monday about how good our sermons were? I certainly hope not, because the reasons for preaching are much more powerful than these.

Simply put, we preach so that God's story might become our story. The world is clamoring for our attention, seeking to inform or fund our imaginations so that we might live by its rules, its values and its principles. But as preachers, we believe that God has a different plan for us and is desperately trying to get our attention. This is why Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (NIV).

The Greek word for *pattern* in this text is the word we use in English for *schemes*. I believe that our minds, hearts and souls have a limited amount of space to be filled-up with ideas, principles and motivations at any given moment. The reason that advertising generates billions (if not trillions) of dollars in our country each year is because our imaginations are that impres-

sionable. We long for redemption, intimacy and salvation. We strive for security, wholeness and peace. Our souls yearn for God, yet we so often seek wellness outside of him. This is why we preach. To bring us back to God's story that we might be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Preaching reminds us of God's story in this world. It reframes reality from the perspective God wants us to understand - namely, that He's in charge, He loves us more passionately than we can know, and He desires for a broken world to be redeemed by that love. We preach because it's part of God's plan in the process of transformation. The Greek word in this verse for *transformation* is the root for our word *metamorphosis*. It literally means that the form of our thinking and being might be changed.

As we preach, we pray that our lives as preachers might have enough authenticity, clarity and consistency to match-up with God's story. We feel so inadequate each week coming before you understanding too well how we fall short of faithfully living the way Jesus showed us. Nonetheless, we trust that God will shake us free from the schemes this world lays before us so that we might be able to see His good, pleasing and perfect will.

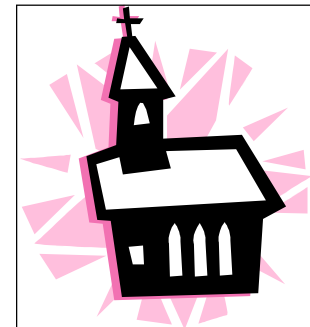
Only as we corporately remind ourselves about God's ways, His faithfulness, His precepts, His presence and His promises will we learn to collectively be transformed. We preach in obedience to God's call to fund our imaginations with His will that we might truly be free to be His, and only His.

Simple Essentials of Real Religion

By Susan Glover, Administrator

Henrietta Mears has been a great source of clarity for my personal Bible study. I wanted to share some excerpts from her book *What the Bible Is All About*.

Men and women are always trying to get back into the good graces of God with some outward religious service or some worldly rather than spiritual things. But remember, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" (Psalm 51:17, NIV)



The Old Testament gives us a definition of religion. What does God require of you? "*He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" (Micah 6:8, NIV)

To act justly means to practice good ethics in all of life. *To love mercy* means showing consideration for others when justice has not been done. *To walk humbly with your God* means to have a personal experience with God.

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Albania Greetings

Editor's Note: The following excerpts are from several recent e-mails from the Obsornes.

Shine Jesus Shine. The week of March 11-18 is our second outreach week when our three student teams go to Leskovic, Bilisht and Gramsh focusing on evangelism outreach. They will live in Albanian homes and work under the direction of the local pastor and church leadership.

Onward Christian Soldiers. Here at Udekryq Bible School the students are getting restless asking, "What does God have for me next?" For one young man the Albanian army is calling him for his mandatory year of service. For others university and graduate school is where they are headed. Some have jobs to return to and leadership in their local churches. Others are still wondering about it all. There are many different options and questions remaining, but the Lord's hand can be seen in each of their lives as they pray, ponder and plan. Please support them with your prayers as well.

So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye. Graduation is right around the corner, the 24th of March, with all the students departing in the next couple of days. We look forward to many guests arriving for the ceremonies and much laughter mixed with tears. We've grown into a wonderful community, all wanting to continue on the path of seeking Jesus step by step.

Blowing in the Wind. Many days of winter and the long dark hours have begun to fade away into sunny days that end with beautiful sunsets. We had a sneak peak of spring a few weeks ago, but that ended in another snow storm. Now the weather is fluctuating between rain, snow and sunny days. Mostly it's all beautiful and it seems that

By Bob and Linda Osborne

nothing to do with the weather ever stops anything we really want to do. We're so thankful for His calling us to this little spot in the world.

A Few of our Favorite Things. Our position as house parents also means we host the visiting teachers for the time they're here. We've just enjoyed a wonderful 10 days with Terry Jaurena and Nancy Donat who taught Biblical Perspectives of Missions, and just last week Ralf Ketwig from Austria was here teaching Personal Evangelism. For reunions with old friends or making new ones, this is a great place for us and one we really enjoy.

Another of our favorite things is the missionary team we serve with at the Torchbearer's Bible School - the Stoscher family, the Gundy family, Cindy Arnhold, Rebekka Teska, Steve Windass and our Albanian leadership team of Doni Lilo, Monika Dokalori, and Asim Hamzai. What a privilege we have to work with these Godly servants.

The friendships we've developed over the years with townspeople, shopkeepers and café servers are another of our favorite things, and they have grown and become dearer to our hearts. The hospitality that is offered us is often overwhelming, but very loving. Our visits in their homes stretch our language skills to the maximum, but are filled with delight and bring us great joy.

And to complete our favorite things list is your ongoing relationship with us through prayers, financial support and all the ways you communicate with us. It is amazing to be on this side of your generosity, and we receive it as a gift from God. Thank you so much.

We're writing you a second April greetings as there are some developments that we need you to be praying over before we arrive back in Fresno in early May.

The first is the land dispute that we've mentioned before and asked you to be praying about. This week in an Erseke court we lost the case. Please pray that we will be "good losers" and continue to trust that all we do is in God's hands. We are continuing to pray for the man involved that he might know the living Lord and that the camp/Bible school facility remain intact. Please also pray for God to bless the children who will be attending the camps that are based here and in the mountains during the summer months.

The second is that Redi Gjoshe, who immigrated from Erseke to Fresno in 2001, will be graduating from California State University, Fresno on May 20. His parents have been granted visas to come for the graduation. This is a huge answer to our prayers and we look forward to hosting them in our Fresno home for their month-long stay. Some of the more recent teams from our church have visited in their home and we are excited that they will see friends again, as well as meeting lots of new people. We are planning to have an open house/graduation party for Redi and his parents. Pray for their travel plans, including calmness, as it's their first air travel, and that the language barriers will be minimal.



What I Love About This Church!

By Marcie York, Children's Director (K-6)

The top 10 reasons I love this church:

10. Its commitment to downtown - that "dig in the heels and not cave in to trends" spirit
9. Its people - they are fun and don't take themselves too seriously.
8. Its people are authentic in their dependence upon God.
7. Its landlocked location, a cornerstone in the plans to revitalize downtown Fresno.
6. Its gridlocked facilities, overflowing with ministry throughout the week.
5. Its future purpose, poised on the edge of a great symbiosis of community and Holy Spirit plans for the downtown area.
4. Its worship - genuine and joyous.
3. Its prayerfulness, developing ministries after listening to God's Spirit.
2. Its commitment to the accuracy and authority of Scripture.
1. Its affirmation of the next generation - celebrating, mentoring and praying for all the children, birth through college.

"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5, NIV)

Children's Ministry looks forward to the joyous ride ahead of us as we are compelled by Christ's love to reconcile this world to God (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

Continued from Page 1 (Glover)

Paul would call this the mind of Christ. *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 2:5, NIV). If our religion is only a creed, grand cathedrals and elaborate rituals, then we have nothing. All must be filled with the mind of Christ.

We must *"worship in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24, NIV) Christ wants us to have more than a beautiful creed even if it is spiritual and true. He wants this spirit of Christ to be lived out through our daily lives and to be exhibited in all our conduct, in our homes and in our businesses. Can our religion stand this test?

It is interesting that when Christ summed up the same matter in Matthew 23:23, He used the words justice, mercy and faithfulness. He thus equated *"faith with walking humbly with our God,"* an apt comparison.

Lost and Found

By Terry Jaurena, Mission Dir.

I've heard this story several ways from several sources. One of the best was Caralee Loring's e-mail asking for prayer that ended with praise because, before she could finish writing and press "send", the prayers had already been answered. This version is from Eric Gundy who was actually part of the search team for a seven-year-old boy lost in the hills of Albania. I know you'll be blessed by it!

The parables of Jesus that are recorded for us in Luke 15 became very real for us as a church family this past June. A little boy, Johan, the seven-year-old son of Niko and Kenina Note, was missing for over 20 hours on the side of Mount Gramozi.

When we became aware of the situation on the morning of June 30, he had been missing all night. Eight of us from the church jumped into a vehicle and drove out to the village where he had been spending the summer with his parents and grandparents.

When we arrived everybody had about given up hope and the family had started the grieving and mourning process. The police had been out all night and were feeling that the boy had probably been kidnapped and taken to Greece. We were met with a very hopeless and devastating scene.

We began to call people to pray. Kathy rounded up a group of women from the church to go to the village and pray and be with the family.

Two weeks before, I had read the story of the 10-year-old boy

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Now Say Thank You

Pastor Rodinsky had been a long-time friend of Pastor Bosch. Through the years the two of them had formed a bond closer than brothers. They spent hours upon hours discussing theological questions and solving the problems of the world, and of the churches they served.

One day Pastor Bosch was suddenly called home to be with the Lord. The widow of the deceased pastor immediately called on Pastor Rodinsky to ask him to conduct the memorial service. Since the two pastors had been so close to each other, he realized it would be a difficult assignment, but reluctantly consented.

As part of the memorial service Pastor Rodinsky, with deep emotion, shared a eulogy praising his closest friend for his faithful service to the church. It had indeed been a difficult assignment for him, but he was glad he had been

By Wes Gunther

able to perform this ministry for his friend's widow.

Weeks went by, and in the drawer of the widow's desk was a box of greeting cards. At the very top of the box was a thank you card. It had been in the box for months, perhaps even years, waiting to be picked up, signed, and sent to someone who needed a thank you note. The card not only waited to be sent. It wanted to be sent! It needed to be sent!

Every time Widow Bosch opened her desk drawer the card screamed to her, "Send me to Pastor Rodinsky. Thank him for his warm and compassionate ministry to you and your family at the time of your husband's death." Day after day the card waited with anticipation for the time it would be able to serve its purpose. Sadly, that day never came. The thank you note was never sent. Being made of paper, it ultimately disin-

tegrated, coming to an untimely end.

After hearing this story I have often asked myself, "How many times has someone ministered to me, given me a gift, or showed a kindness, and I never thought to say thank you?" At my age I should not have to be reminded like a mother reminds her child, "Now say thank you."

The Bible says, "*In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" (I Thess. 5:18, KJV). Having been so vividly reminded of my shortcoming in this regard, I have resolved to keep a supply of thank you cards handy - a daily reminder to take the time to first say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for even the smallest act of kindness, and then take a moment to send a thank you to someone who might be encouraged by a simple note.

Godly Play Preschool Program

By Corrie Sands, Children's Director (Birth-Pre-K)

In late October we initiated a new worship program for the 3 ½- to 5-year-old children called Godly Play. The goal of the program is to design a sanctuary-like experience that encourages them to learn the beat and pace of our church calendar year and all of the language that is associated with "big people" worship services, at their level. I have seen amazing results.

A typical session includes each child being personally welcomed into the worship circle where they hear and see a story presented from the Bible. There are open-ended questions designed to help them wonder and learn about the majesty of our God and the mi-

raculous life and work of Jesus. They then are invited to personally respond through art or the retelling of the story. The children then rejoin the circle to feast (have communion together), pray, review the scripture, and have a benediction.

The program has had a great impact on the retention and depth of understanding in the children.

They respond remarkably well to the structure and quiet tone of the environment and teaching. I often describe the program as having a Mister Rogers-style, as we invite the children to do serious work with the solid word of God.

The most thrilling part of all

this is that the children are getting it! These little ones, whom we often assume are too young to truly grasp some of these theological concepts, are not only doing just that, but have a much more profound understanding than some adults do. A great example happened in church this week.

Our parable story aids are all contained in a gold box because, as we tell our kids, parables are a valuable gift from God. As the teacher was beginning the parable of the Good Samaritan, she said to the kids, "Let's look at this golden box. I wonder what is inside. It looks like a present." One of the

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More on the Angel Food Ministry

Angel Food groceries will be distributed at First Presbyterian Church on Saturday, May 20. An assortment of fresh and frozen food items is available monthly for a cost of \$25. The average retail price for these same first-quality foods is approximately \$50. Angel Food offers an excellent value for anyone looking for grocery bill relief. It also affords a great opportunity to reach out to our community and connect with people at life's most basic level.

You can participate in Angel Food in any of the following ways:

1. Purchase an assortment of Angel Food groceries for your family. Anyone can buy a box of food with no qualifications. Your neighbors, friends, co-workers and family are also welcome to participate.

2. Buy a box of food for donation. In order to do this, when ordering and paying for the box, write "donation" across the form, and it will be given to a family in need.

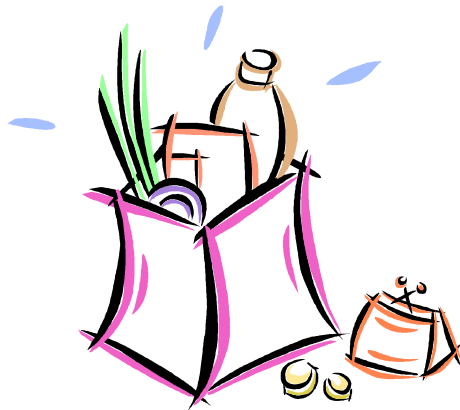
2. Tell others about this dollar-stretching benefit.

3. Volunteer on distribution day (one Saturday per month, from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.) as we serve our congregation and our community with the love of Christ as they visit our campus and pick up their orders. You can sign up to volunteer or get more information on volunteering when you

visit the order table.

The deadline to place an order this month is May 7. Look for the table on the lawn between and after services on the first two Sundays of the month or go to the church office to order during the week. You must pay for the food when you order it. You can pay by cash, money order, food stamps or credit card. (We will not have credit card acceptance until the month of June, however).

Food will be picked up on the third Saturday of the month. Just bring the stamped receipt given when you pay for your box.



Bring your own box or ice chest and our friendly crew will help you fill up your box and get it to your car. Distribution is from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Any unclaimed food will be donated that day.

The food is different each month. A menu is available one month in advance at the order table or in the church office.

Angel Food is being jointly sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church Deacons and Missions Ministry Committee. For more information, see the table on the lawn or call John Goodell (846-7008) or Michelle Cooper (266-3069).

Please pray for this new ministry, that it will help our friends and neighbors as we reach out in Christian love.

Session Report

By Scott McCallum

March 31 accounting results: Giving was 5.88 percent below budget; spending was 4 percent below budget. Cash available for operations is approximately two months of budgeted spending.

Upcoming Events:

- Men's Conference will be held May 5-7. Rev. Gordon Hess will be the speaker.
- Bob and Linda Osborne return from Albania.
- CE Promotion Sunday will be May 14.
- Ordination and installation of new church officers will be June 25.

Continued from Page 4 (Sands)

3-year-olds then replied in a hushed tone of wonderment, "It's a PAR-ABLE!" YES! That little one is getting it! Success!

Oh, that all of us "big people" could have such clear wonder about the mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I pray that these early beginnings of profound understanding will root deeply in the souls of these tiny treasures and dramatically affect them as they grow.

Continued from Page 3 (Jaurena)

who was lost for four days in Utah. He had done something which confused rescuers. He had walked uphill whereas most people who are lost naturally head downhill. Also, Niko told us that he had been talking about wanting to go up and into Greece to see Mount Olympus.

The eight of us decided to fan out and go up the side of the mountain. After almost three hours of hard climbing we were all wondering, "Would a small child have made it this far?" Soon after that, I received word that part of our group had found him and that he was okay.

Deadline Information

The deadline for the June issue of *The Challenger* is Friday, May 19 at 5 p.m. It will be mailed out June 1. Please submit articles to Daphne Saul (252-4064), daphne4926@sbcglobal.net, or leave in newsletter box in office.

The deadline for "A Place for You" is each Monday at 5 p.m. Please submit announcements to Cheryl Eaker (485-6460), via email at ceaker@fpcfresno.org.

First Pres Challenger

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For Your Information

I want to thank everyone who made the service on Easter Sunday so special.

The reception was lovely, and the music wonderful. The Maundy Thursday service was very meaningful. The Good Friday prayer time gave us a chance to pray in the quiet, candlelit sanctuary, to pray personally with a pastor and to take communion on our knees.

It was the highlight of my week and helped me really focus on Easter. Thank you to all who made that special time so meaningful!

Faithfully,
Debbie Fletcher



From the Treasure Chest

Things are hopping in the Treasure Chest. Here is a list of upcoming dates:

April 23-May 28

Sixth Grade Preparing for Adolescence Class, Patio Room, 9:40 a.m.

May 14

Christian Ed Sunday-Third Grade Bible Presentation

May 21

Celebrate Kids Luncheon and Program

June 11

Sixth Grade Promotion to Junior High

June 26-30

Vacation Bible Blast 2006 "Fiesta"

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