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Hampden Heights Sentinel

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For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. ~2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NIV~

The Pastor's Place

by guest writer Virginia Maldonado

Reclaiming the Gospel

Do we know what the most essential truth of Christianity really is? If we do, why then do we operate like we are under a different gospel than the gospel that *is* and *brings* "Good News"? The word "gospel" at the time of Jesus was not used as a religious word, and did not carry the religious meaning as it does today. The word in the Greek is "*euangelion.*" When it was used by Jesus and the early Christians, it was used in the singular, and the definite article was attached to it. This way it carried emphasis, and with that a different meaning.

Outside of the religious meaning, *euangelion* was the message that was brought by someone to an area where a military conflict had arisen, and victory had been achieved. A messenger was sent for the soldiers to return back to their homes because the battle had been won. In Romans 1:16 Paul calls the Gospel "The Power of God."

" For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. "
Romans 1:16 NKJV

Do we believe this to be true? Could it be that we do not quite understand the most crucial truth in our Christian walk? Could this be the reason we do not have victory over sin, that we are not free from guilt, and that we lack or do not feel the joy of being at peace with God and with other people? Do we behave like we are saved, or more like the old creature? Do we only just understand what it means to be saved, or do we live our lives like one who is truly saved?

So just what is this fundamental and essential truth? The truth is that it is by GRACE that we are saved! Yes, grace is what God in Jesus Christ has given us to bring us back to Himself.

" For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, " Ephesians 2:8 NKJV

Hallelujah, praise the Lord, you've read that correctly, the Word of God says it is a gift! There are not many that, when they win something free (book, meal, TV, etc) would turn down such good fortune. Yet, the most expensive and most valuable of all free gifts is constantly being refused. My friends, grace is free but it is not cheap, it has been made available to us at great cost. The Infinite Creator, the Owner of the universe, God, gave His only Son, and His Son laid His life down for every sinner. Yes, Jesus willingly gave His life to be offered as a sacrifice for our forgiveness and salvation. We become righteous by having faith in what Jesus alone accomplished before, at, and after the cross. It is Jesus' life, death and resurrection that gives us the opportunity to be justified, sanctified, and ultimately glorified. It is by His own doing that we can now be at peace with God the Father, that we can see our enemies and not feel hatred towards them, but we can love them to the point of wanting to offer them that same peace we are experiencing.

It just appears too simplistic. That is why so many of us have such a problem with the fact that being justified and declared righteous has nothing to do with what we can bring to the table. We reconstruct the gospel, we think that by praying more, studying the Bible more, serving more, giving more, will guarantee us more acceptance from God. Now I am not condemning all the good habits and Christ-like behavior, but they are not what guarantees acceptance by our Heavenly Father.

(continued on page 3)

RJA News Corner by Lee Stahl, Principal

RJA Christmas Program

Reading Junior Academy held its annual Christmas program on Saturday, December 2. The night began with the 5th and 6th grade chime choir playing *Silent Night, Holy Night*. Then the pre-K and kindergarten sang two songs before the Christmas musical. This year's musical was called *A Lamb's Tale*. The musical portrays a shepherd boy who had doubts about wanting to be a shepherd. Some town bullies make fun of him for being a shepherd. On the night before Jesus' birth, he loses one of his sheep when he falls asleep. However, during his efforts to find his lost sheep he is greeted by an angel that announces the birth of the King. His experience with the angel, and seeing the baby Jesus, changes his whole perspective on life and shepherding. With the help of the town bullies he finds his lost sheep. The musical is a reminder that when we experience Jesus, our lives will be changed as well!

Field Trip to Whitaker Science Center submitted by Nancy Pinter

The Whitaker Center in Harrisburg was the site of the 5th and 6th grade class Christmas celebration on Wednesday, December 20. We went sock "ice-skating" and had a puff-ball "snowball" fight. The students also completed physical challenges to see who's reflexes were fastest, who could control the movement of a ball with their brain waves, and who could burn off the calories of a pickle the fastest.

We stood in a booth to feel what hurricane force winds felt like, and made a village that we saw wash away due to soil erosion. Adding sound effects to a movie, and making a short stop-motion film were also favorite spots. Everyone felt like it was a perfect way to celebrate science and going on Christmas vacation at the same time!

Reading Junior Academy is… "Educating Today and for Eternity!"

Grace's Outpost by Ashley Richards

"The Lord appeared to him from far away. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.'" – Jeremiah 31:3, ESV.

I'm so excited for 2018.

Toward the end of this year, I found Jesus. (Or, more aptly, let me say, I let Jesus catch me.)

Lately I've been reading *Prince Caspian*, by C.S. Lewis. There's a portion of the book where Lucy, the youngest of the four Pevensie siblings, sees Aslan, the Great Lion, whilst they are hiking through a forest fraught with danger from the enemy. They are seeking safe passageway to the headquarters of the true Narnian army, to fight for Prince Caspian's right to the Narnian throne. Everyone else in their party wants to go a certain way, but Lucy, who's always had a special relationship with Aslan, sees him beckoning them another way. She tries to get them to follow Aslan, but they mock her, saying she's making up tales again, and that since no one else could see Aslan, his appearance must be a figment of her imagination. She knows that she is right, but, as the youngest, feels powerless to go against their vote. Later on, when Aslan comes to her at night, when all the others are asleep, telling her to wake the others so they can go on together, Lucy asks him if the others will be able to see him. "'Certainly not at first,' said Aslan. 'Later on, it depends.'"

Lucy wakes the others, and finally gets them to agree to follow Aslan, even without being able to see him. Slowly, as time goes on, Peter and Edmund start to see Aslan's shadow, and eventually Aslan himself.

That passage has made me think. That's been my experience. For the last couple of years, anyway. God's been bringing me out of a very long night—which had started with my time of depression, years ago, but has continued well past it, through years of healing and growth. I've wanted to know Jesus, to follow Him, as He's been healing me and placing a desire for Him in my heart. But for years I just… couldn't see Him. Like Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Trumpkin with Aslan, I might've been convinced that God just wasn't there. I couldn't see Him, couldn't hold conversations with Him, couldn't feel His presence or His love. He seemed—out of reach.

And I know He wasn't, but I just didn't know how to get from where I was to where He was. I know that verse in Jeremiah—"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart"—but all my searching didn't seem to budge me an inch closer to Jesus, and I didn't know why.

Honestly, I can't even tell you what's changed. Or, more aptly, *how* it has changed. It's just… slowly, over the past couple of months, I see glimpses of Jesus. I feel His love and taste His grace, and slowly, He's teaching me to walk with Him. It's amazing.

I love that, despite the distance and a myriad of other things keeping me from Jesus, His love never wavered; His desire for me never faded. His everlasting love for me has remained steady, passionate, and tender. No matter what I did, no matter how I failed Him or failed to understand, *He* kept on loving me, loving me until I understood, until I was back to walking with Him again. He—and His amazing love—never gave up on me.

Every year, on my list of resolutions, I have a commitment to walk more closely with Jesus, but this coming year… I can barely contain my excitement. My relationship with Jesus has become tangible. I can feel His love, taste His grace, see His heart. I can carry on conversations with Him. Little things I encounter every day bring tears to my eyes as reminders of the power of His love and redemption. Knowing the way I've treated Him, it makes me weak to realize how desperately He still loves me and wants a relationship with me. I'm *His.*

So yes, I can't wait for this coming year and the adventure that awaits. I may only walk with Jesus a little, but it's only the beginning. I can't wait to see how well I'll know Jesus next December, the adventures we will have had, the people we will have helped. Walking with Jesus is the best thing, ever. I can't wait to have more and more and more.

Reclaiming the Gospel (continued from page 1)

Only our recognition of His Son's sacrifice will grant us that. Our faith has to take hold of Jesus and never let go of Him, because He alone is the bridge that connects us back to the Father. We need to reclaim the gospel, and for that this is what we can do. In Romans 10:9-10 it says:

"Because if you acknowledge and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [recognizing His power, authority, and majesty as God], and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart a person believes [in Christ as Savior] resulting in his justification [that is, being made righteous, being freed of the guilt of sin and made acceptable to God]; and with the mouth he acknowledges and confesses [his faith openly], resulting in and confirming [his] salvation. "

Romans 10:9-10 AMP

May in this new year we reclaim and find the transforming power of the Gospel of Christ, taking residence and having effect in our hearts, in our homes, in our churches and in our world. Let us believe in our hearts and confess with our words and actions that in Jesus we have found the greatest news ever given to mankind. We would not only be at peace with God and with each other, but also be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who justifies and makes righteous, and is the <u>only</u> one who saves.

Nature and Revelation Alike... A Story of God's Creation (Part 2) by Barbara Snyder

All Nature Groans and Travails

I wrote Part 1 of this with the intention of sharing the most recent experiences of the groaning and travail in my life. The basis for my increased awareness of how all of creation suffers is depicted for me in Romans 8, verses 22-26. Part 1 spoke both of how I realized in a deeper way how WW II affected all of nature, and what the World Trade Center 9-11-2001's impact was on my family and my Christian experience.

Today I want to tell you of a book I have read entitled: Beyond Words, How Animals Think and Feel. The author, Carl Safina, is an ecologist. In the book, he explores the worlds of elephants, wolves, and Orca (Killer Whales).

Dr. Safina is clearly unafraid to challenge scientific orthodoxy. He accepts as a given that animals are capable of thought and emotion, a proposition that is far from settled among animal behaviorists. He illustrates through years of observation that animals have a sense of telepathy and a way of communicating to each other—not only what is going on, but what might be going on. The stories are so profoundly illustrated by examples that I could not help but be drawn into the animals' real life situations of life, death, and betrayal. In an obvious juxtaposition, the role of man to interfere with these creatures is portrayed. The long history of hunting, killing, selling, and maliciously separating these creatures from their families and thereby from their link to survival is told.

I absolutely believe that animals think and feel. Remember I said earlier that I had the privilege of having two Pomeranians? I have looked into their eyes when they were hurt. I have held one while he was put to sleep. He wanted only me, weak as he was, he wanted my arms, not my husband's. I have held one hours a day for months while she was relegated to a crate after having a horrible encounter with a large and ferocious dog. I held her for five months while her bones healed and the external rotator could be removed from her leg. Now I see her happy again, commanding the household as usual. Why not the animals of the wild? They too have these loyal feelings toward their own families, protective of their offspring, and wild to defend them. We have abused their grazing, their watering, even their normal habits of dying. Animals grieve. They grieve like we do. Even if we cannot go to the wilds to protect them, even if we cannot lobby Washington to change traditions and laws, even when we don't have extra monies to support efforts to save the animals' lands, even then, we can at least look into our own souls and grow in compassion with Jesus, who suffers as all of creation suffers. When God told Adam to be in command of the animals and the lands, He meant it for all time. Sin changed things, but man does not have to cooperate with sin. Man has a duty to his Savior.

Do not feel that this book is a stuffy scientific study. It isn't. The animals followed by the author have names and histories. You will know who is the mother, the child, the father, the tragic facts and the funny incidents. I found it a delight to read and couldn't put it down. At the end, I had a profound appreciation for the Orca, an increased fierce love of elephants, and lonely feelings for the wolves.

I would invite you to repeatedly read carefully, then sit quietly with Romans 8:22-26. You may find that the thoughts you have are not like mine at all. You may settle on any one of these verses and wonder where it applies to you. You may find a mission. But most of all you will find a more personable, compassionate Lord than you have experienced in the past. Allow the Holy Spirit to offer prayers of groaning for you. It is His delight to make things clear to us. Amen, and Amen.

Notable Quotes selected by Bob Kondracki

Whatever possession we gain by our sword cannot be sure or lasting, but the love gained by kindness and moderation is certain and durable.
~Alexander the Great~

Many men owe the grandeur of their lives to their tremendous difficulties.
~Charles Spurgeon~

Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death.
~Thomas Paine~

Immature love says: 'I love you because I need you.' Mature love says 'I need you because I love you.'
~Erich Fromm~

Tact is the ability to describe others as they see themselves.
~Abraham Lincoln~

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest
~Benjamin Franklin~

Intuition is a suspension of logic due to impatience.
~Rita Mae Brown~

You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call 'failure' is not the falling down, but the staying down.
~Mary Pickford~

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.
~Mahatma Gandhi~

Meet a Member by Ashley Richards

This month's member is a lovely lady a lot of us have had the wonderful opportunity to get to know already, a brand-new member! Her name is Denise Johnson, and she attends faithfully every Sabbath (since the evangelistic series with Carlton Knott began) with her daughter, Jasmine, and they sit up front with Nancy Stump. (We're so excited to have them with us!)

Denise has a powerful testimony that began a little over a year ago when she had a massive stroke, although she didn't recognize it as such. She hadn't felt very well, afterward, and stayed home for three days before realizing she wasn't getting better, and she went to a local clinic. The clinic realized what a serious situation she was in, and immediately called for an ambulance. When she got to the hospital, they administered several tests to try to ascertain why she'd had the stroke at such a young age, but weren't able to find the cause. (She'd recently had a check-up, a year following the stroke, and they still can't attribute the cause of the stroke.)

They kept her in the hospital for a week. She couldn't write or speak. She couldn't walk. The whole right side of her body was paralyzed. "I should be dead," she says. "I know now that [Jesus] is the One who healed me."

She made a full recovery in four months, but it was a long emotional road. She explains that she is the type of person who will help anyone in any situation—she'll visit those in prison, feed the homeless, comfort the hurting—but very few people came alongside her during her recovery to offer her help. "The enemy was attacking me," she explained of that time. "I felt like nobody loved me." She was so angry when no one came to see her, and that anger started to eat her alive. Friends would come to her and apologize for not visiting or helping her, and ask for her forgiveness. She said she forgave them, but inside, she held onto that bitterness and it festered and grew. She started to feel anger toward Christians, because their love felt hypocritical. It felt like they loved God, but not everyone else, she admitted.

She started to turn away from the church. Then one day, she heard a Voice that she can only explain as sounding like many waters, saying, "Come to me. Let go of the anger, bitterness, and surrender to me." She knew it was Jesus because she felt peace. She surrendered, and she's been a totally different person since then. Jesus has changed her. "He's everything," she says.

She started attending church again, as well as praying, but knew that something within the church she'd been attending wasn't quite right.

She started praying that God would lead her to the true church, and right after, she got a flyer for the evangelistic series we held with Carlton Knott. It was "confirmation from Jesus," she said. She called Pastor Pete (which, in itself, was the hand of God. (Ask her about it sometime!) Denise and Jasmine have been with us ever since, and were baptized last month into our church.

When asked what her favorite Bible story and/or passage is, Denise answers, "The whole Bible!" Each story is so special, she explained, and it's impossible to pick a favorite. "I love them," she said.

Denise says she would love to get involved with the ministry at Hampden by becoming a deaconess, working in evangelism, and eventually becoming a board member.

Five things about Denise you might not know:

1. She was an undercover MP in the military.
2. She is a prayer warrior.
3. She used to be a protestor for human rights.
4. She received Jesus into her heart at the age of 9.
5. She is of Middle Eastern, Chinese, European, African, and Native Indian descent.

Recipe of the Month by Elizabeth Hill

I usually make these rolls for New Year's Day, but this year I made them for Christmas by request from Bob. He also requested that I put them in the newsletter. I believe I put the roll recipe in before, but this is another variation.

Orange Sweet Rolls

Dough

3/4 cup warm water
2 packages active dry yeast
4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 teasp. salt
2 eggs (room temperature)
1/2 cup butter

In bowl, dissolve yeast in water. Measure flour by dip-level-pour method or by sifting. Stir remaining ingredients except half of flour into yeast. Add rest of flour; mix until smooth. Scrape dough from sides of bowl, cover with cloth. Let rise in warm place (85 degrees) until double (about 1 1/2 hrs.). Divide into thirds. Roll each third about 1/4 inch thick. Coat with thin layer of orange icing and cut into 8 pieces. Place in greased pan. Repeat with the rest of the dough. Cover with cloth and let raise until double.

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until rich golden brown.

Remove from oven and immediately frost with remaining frosting. (We love these rolls warm, right from the oven, but they can be served at room temperature, too.)

Orange Frosting

1/4 lb. butter
1 lb. 10X or confectioner's sugar
grated rind of one orange
orange juice to thin
1/2 teasp. lemon juice

Beat butter until fluffy. Add the confectioner's sugar, orange rind and a pinch of salt. Add lemon and orange juice to make spreading consistency.

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.org

The Children's Page

by Ashley Richards

Did you know that there is nearly 100 different types of animals listed in the Bible? My two favorite animals—bunnies and zebras!—aren't in the Bible, but animals that are similar, like hares, donkeys, and horses, are. Jesus loves the animals, too, and how wonderfully different He made each one! What's your favorite animal? Is it mentioned in the Bible?

A	N	T	E	L	O	P	E	H	Y	R	L	F	X	P	S	T	B
J	R	D	E	E	R	I	A	X	F	I	S	H	O	D	T	A	M
C	A	O	J	O	D	G	G	Q	R	S	P	A	R	R	O	W	Y
Z	L	V	G	P	G	E	L	I	O	N	N	R	S	Z	R	X	Q
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A	M	B	T	Q	E	D	P	H	E	R	O	N	D	R	S	A	K

ANTELOPE
BEAR
BEE
CAMEL
COBRA
DEER
DONKEY
DOVE
EAGLE
FALCON
FISH
FOX
FROG
GAZELLE
GOAT
HARE
HERON
HORSE
HYENA
LAMB
LEOPARD
LION
PIGEON
ROOSTER
SEAGULL
SHEEP
SPARROW
SPIDER
STORK
WOLF