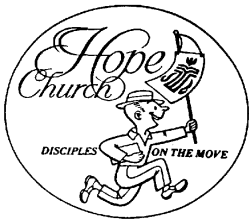


HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TINTON FALLS, NEW JERSEY



NOTES OF HOPE



A monthly publication to keep us informed.

February 2010

Edited by
Erica Andresen
Published by
Steven Buckley

Our Mission Statement

We believe that God has gathered this congregation and staff at this time and place in order to:

Introduce people to the enduring love of Jesus found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Invite them to become part of the family of God

Instruct them in the scriptures, God's word to us

Involve them in the ministry of the church, according to their gifts

Inspire them to go into the world, making disciples of others

Dear Family and Friends of Hope Church,

Over the next couple of months I want to share with you some reflections on what it means for us to truly live as God's people. Last month I shared with you some thoughts of what it means to give with God's love. Specifically I wrote about giving generously financially. Today, I would like to reflect on a different kind of generosity—**generosity of spirit**.

As most of you know we have been spending the last several weeks as a church studying the Gospel of Mark. One of the things that absolutely pops out at you when you study Jesus' life is how he exhibits a generosity of spirit; especially to those we might call "outsiders".

Truthfully, he wasn't always so generous in his words toward insiders. The insiders were the people who came from his theological neck of the woods: the people called Pharisees, scribes, and teachers of the law. They are the people in the New Testament closest to "church people" of today. He had pretty harsh words for them from time to time: he called them white-washed sepulchres, hypocrites, snakes, vipers, murderers, blind guides, false prophets, an evil generation, people who nullify the word of God for the sake of their tradition, who know the scriptures backwards and forwards but miss the point, who tithe scrupulously but ignore the weightier matters of God's Torah (justice, mercy and faithfulness), who care more about law than the healing of persons, and people from whom the kingdom of God will be taken away and given to others.

But toward "outsiders", his generosity of spirit was universal. His intimates included ordinary laborers and small business owners who were not particularly religious (Peter, James and John), someone a bit like a bookkeeper (Judas), a 1st century terrorist/revolutionary (Simon the Zealot), a collaborator with the occupying Roman forces (Matthew the tax collector), a woman who had demons (Mary Magdalene), a prostitute (another Mary), sickly men (Lazarus) and unmarried women (Mary and Martha).

The people who were attracted to him were dishonest (Zacchaeus), desperate (the woman with an issue of blood), disconnected (lepers), deaf and blind (Bartimaeus), demonized (the Gadarene demoniac), discouraged (the demon-possessed boy's father), damaged (the lame), dispensable (women), dominating enemies (the Roman centurion), doubtful (Thomas), disadvantaged (beggars), different (a Syro-Phoenician woman), the dying and downcast (a son and his mother).

The heroes of his stories included the ethnically impure, the religiously wrong, the socially marginalized, relationally isolated, economically disadvantaged, the invisible, the discounted, the deprived, the powerless, the needy, the helpless, the riff-raff, and the risk-takers. Jesus was regularly hanging out in all the wrong places with all the wrong people.

Who do we hang out with? Who do we engage with? What are our attitudes toward “outsiders” and how well do we know what it is like to live in their skin? Who are our intimates? Who do we classify as heroes? Who is attracted to us? If we are following Jesus as disciples, with wholehearted devotion, then something about the way Jesus lived with a truly generous spirit toward “outsiders” will be reflected in our lives and relationships—we, too, will exhibit a generous spirit. It is interesting that Jesus spent little time telling outsiders what was right and wrong; rather, he engaged with them where they lived and let the light of God's redemptive love shine through him into their lives to bring hope and healing. He, in fact, was an advocate on behalf of the marginalized, the poor, the needy, the sinners.

In a time in which Christians are often viewed by “outsiders” as narrow, exclusive, hypocritical and judgmental (as reported in the book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* by David Kinnaman), we would do well to learn from our Lord: to live with a generous spirit, to live as advocates for outsiders rather than adversaries, to embody the redemptive love of God in a world dying for hope. Jesus found a way to bridge the gap that existed between peoples; the chasm that separated Jews from Gentiles, the rich from the poor, the powerful from the powerless, the righteous from the sinners, and the healthy from the infirm—Paul says that in his body, Jesus himself tore down the dividing wall that kept those who were on the outside without hope and invited them in to experience the hope and healing that is found in Christ as the people of God.

It is all too easy for us to think of our Christian life as being exhibited primarily within the four walls of the “church.” But when we attend to the stories found in the Gospels, we can't help but come to see real Christianity as lived out in the world and for the world in the way that Jesus lived. The world doesn't need us to tell them what is right or wrong; it needs a living, breathing example of a new way to live as individuals and as a community. This is why it is so important for us to be studying the scriptures together... so that we might increasingly come to conform our lives to His life. As we continue in our journey through the Gospel of Mark, let us also take time to contemplate the life of Jesus so that we might be **people of a generous spirit**.

God has a plan for us as a church. It revolves around him incarnating himself in and through us just as certainly as he did in the person of his Son, Jesus. We are his body. We are his hands and feet—not just individually, but together.

It comes down to this: we must become Christ-like.

Grace and Peace to you,
Andrew

Session Retreat Synopsis

Our session's annual retreat was January 16th and 17th at Grove Hall in Ocean Grove. Each year we gather away from it all, for a day and a half, to reflect, worship, pray and plan for each year. In 2009 our focus was to Grow Hope. We had many successes and a few downfalls, but through it all, God was our center. Some of our accomplishments this past year included the following:

- Session grew spiritually in responsibilities and leadership
- A membership class was formed
- More returning visitors
- A new prayer team under the Congregational Life Commission
- A new Visitation Team Ministry under the Congregational Life Commission
- Christmas Pageant
- More efficient session meetings
- Successful Stewardship campaign

There are also ways we need to improve and this will be our focus for 2010:

- Better methods of communication– updating our website and keeping it current
- Communicating ourselves as leaders to the Congregation, Deacons, and other leadership more effectively
- Involving more people in our ministries
- Increasing our Discipleship and Bible study opportunities
- Improving the way the Nominating Committee seeks new leadership

We have much to be thankful for as a congregation and have 2010 to glorify Him more. As our leadership grows, it is our deepest desire that each member grows with us, to know God more and to share His love and compassion beyond the walls of Hope.

New Bible Study!!

Tired of being cold and cooped up in the house this winter??

Come and warm up your body and soul by participating in a lively interactive Bible study by Andrew Tibert on the Book of Revelation- the Book of Hope!

When: Wednesdays 12noon-1pm; starting Jan. 27.

Where: Hope Presbyterian Church-John Calvin Room.

What to bring: Bible; brown bag lunch; yourself, and maybe a friend!!

GAME NIGHT

SATURDAY-FEBRUARY 13

From 6:30p to 9:00p

Bingo-prizes-board games-prizes

Bring a snack or dessert to share

Liquid refreshment will be provided

Everyone is invited from

10 months to 100 years-bring your friends

Please sign up in the Narthex

Please use Pastor Andrew's cell phone number (732-832-6030) when trying to reach him, and NOT the number for the manse as listed on the back cover of the directory. The manse number is no longer a working number. We apologize for any inconvenience and misunderstanding that this has caused in the past.

Personnel Committee

February Birthdays

- 4 Evalyn Watts
- 5 Karen Escobedo
- 5 Gail McDonald
- 5 ***The Rivera's anniversary***
- 8 Leslie Eckert
- 12 Marilyn Hicken
- 19 Erica Andresen
- 19 Louise Carson
- 27 Ann Anthony
- 27 Bob Patterson
- 27 Judy McGuire