

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave

United Methodist Churches

Porterville, CA

October 2020

Figuring Things Out Alone

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

You are not alone. You are not the only one feeling like you must assemble something complicated without a manual, something never assembled before. You are not the only one who cannot Google how to fix your soul. Your frustration while justified is not unique.

Children went back to school, but many never left home; teachers went back to school. Many people go to work but never leave home. Despite our curious nature, we still grow weary of doing new things, in a new way. I personally am getting tired of hearing the word “unprecedented.” I would be completely happy with “precedented” right now.

What does this lead us to? Many long for a more relational approach to doing new things in a new way. Due to this, there are those who fall through the cracks, others get discouraged, others give up in frustration or just grind to a slow crawl in frustration. Where do we go for answers? I found it in a strange place - the playground.

If you notice children on the playground, they do not care about the purpose of the play structure. They apply ingenuity and imagination to have fun together. Their singular goal is to have fun together. That is adaptability, flexibility, creativity, ingenuity. Much of that is what we need going forward along with the spirit of God.

So let us ask some questions: **what in our world has changed since our last regular Annual Church Conference?**

There is much that has changed. Our gatherings are now metered. We must prepare by washing our hands and wearing face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting all services, taking notice of audiovisual equipment communion supplies, the distance between people, face covering, a lack of touching, shaking hands, high-fiving, backslapping, the encouraging hand on the shoulder, potlucks, coffee hours, and presently even any inside gathering.

So we think digitally, virtually, doing things at least 6 feet apart. The way we do things and what we do will change, must change, cannot remain unchanged.

However, the message has not changed. Jesus is still our Savior, Maker, Provider, Restorer, Rebuilder, Judge, Creator, and Brother. We have a message to tell to our community indeed the nations that our God reigns, Jesus loves them, has sent his son for them, that an eternal kind of life is available to them now.

The problem has not changed. People are still defaced by sin, their

divine image marred by self-worship, their methods of communication unintelligible, hostile, even insulting at times. So the way we do things, our methods, have to change. But the reason we do that, the purpose that motivates us and moves us forward has not changed and will not ever.

How have these changes affected your life and the life of your church? This question is important and deserves an answer.

Jesus used the image of pruning a vine, grapevine, to prepare it for harvest. Pruning removed inferior or defective fruit that would crowd out other fruit from growing and reaching its optimum size. Is this image an accurate image for the changes wrought by the pandemic? I think it can be. We have many on the fringe of our church who have not come back. They may never come back. This is sad to me, and maybe to you. However, the pruner does not fret over the fruit that ended up on the vineyard floor but rejoices in the fruit that is now given the environment to grow, mature, sweeten, and reach optimum capacity.

This makes me think the pandemic has given us a way to think about many things. Since we

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Outdoor Worship Service - Sundays at 8:00 a.m.

Both churches meet together Sundays at 8:00 a.m. in the Courtyard of First UMC. Bring your own lawn chair, Bible and face covering.

A video of the Outdoor Service is available by Sunday evenings on grandavenue.org.

Youth Ministry

The youth and I have continued to meet online each week on Zoom and our gatherings are a lot of fun and rewarding to our faith journeys. We have had many great conversations and have played many fun games that help us bond and keep our relationships strong. Even though our youth are having to do online schooling for hours of the day, they each show up weekly with joy and are eager to see their friends and have youth group. During our conversation, lately I have noticed deeper theological topics being discussed than we have had in the past. Another interesting thing that I have been witnessing while meeting with the youth in an online setting is how they have been more willing to open up and share more in depth about their faith and their spiritual strengths and struggles, even more than when we were meeting in person. This has been a surprise to me, but I have been enjoying their openness and desire to learn more about Jesus. This willingness to be open about our faith is refreshing and has led to many break throughs in the areas that we struggle with in our daily walks with the Lord.

I am constantly striving to find new and different ways for our youth to grow in their faith and strengthen their relationship with Jesus. With all the great conversations the youth and I have been having lately and their willingness to share about their faith, this drove me to search for a new Bible study that will help continue the growth and momentum they are experiencing. I was blessed to find a Bible study called **Canvas: A Portrait of Jesus**. Since the earliest days of Christianity, people of faith have been trying to comprehend the nature of Jesus. Many of the

earliest debates and conflicts in church history centered around Jesus being both fully human and fully divine. In this Bible study, our youth will dive into the heart of these foundational conversations to see what the early church had to say about who Jesus was. Throughout this study, the youth will explore the power of the Resurrection, Jesus' role in Creation, and why it is so important that Jesus became human and lived among us.

I am really excited about this new study that will begin on Monday, October 5 on Zoom. I believe that by our youth working together to learn from history, tradition, and the Bible, our youth will uncover a portrait of God that will be an inspirational foundation to their own faith journey. I encourage all junior high and high

school age youth to participate in this Bible study. If you are a parent of a youth in this age range and would like your child to take part in the study, please contact me and I will give you all the information needed.

I ask that our church family continue to pray for our youth who are doing their best to be successful in difficult situations with online learning and dealing with the virus and all that entails. Pray for guidance for our youth in their daily walks with the Lord and that they will each be blessed with a foundation of Christ in their hearts and thoughts that will be a strength they can depend on. Blessings to each of you.

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

Figuring ... • continued from page 1 by Pastor Tom Buratovich

cannot use our buildings does that mean we thought they were too important? Were we spending too much time trying to reach people that would always be content to be on the periphery? Are we now looking into a future of reaching people we have never met in ways we know nothing about? Yes. But, it has always been that way.

When I decided to become a pastor, I had no idea what I was supposed to do. When I decided the church needed to pursue Teach One to Lead One to work with at-risk kids, I had no idea how to work with at risk kids. I was not one growing up. I do not think I know that many, but it was clear to me that God was speaking. When I sought to become trained in Mental Health First Aid, I had one class in seminary that could loosely be classified as mental health

education. I am not a trained clinician, a mental health expert, nor licensed to do so in any way. But God called. God continues to call, call you, and me, into places where we have no idea what to do.

So, if you hear me refer to undefined mission fields that we have no earthly idea how to reach, that is why. Because the best place to receive God's grace is when you are solely dependent on that grace to get you to the next place so that you can in utter dependence of that same grace ask to be taken to the next step, and the next one, and the next.

No, you are not the only one unsure about the future. I think it is probably supposed to be that way. We simply have not lived in a time when we have felt that so unmistakably. May it bother us to the point of change, repentance, and transformation.

Getting To The Heart Of It

This summer, we decided to grow a wonderful garden. One of the things that we decided to grow was watermelons. I absolutely love watermelon, as does the rest of my family. The kids were so excited to watch the vines grow larger and see the little flowers bloom and watermelons develop and grow big, until they were ready to be picked. Finally, after waiting for what seemed like forever, the day came. A watermelon was finally ready to be picked. In the house it came. My husband cut it open, with the children waiting in excitement, to see if we had actually grown one that would taste good. I was not with them at the time.

When I came in the house, I saw a watermelon on the counter cut in half, with the heart of the watermelon cut out of both pieces. They ate the heart of the watermelon! The sweetest, the best tasting part of the watermelon. The part right in the center that has no seeds and left the rest of the watermelon. (When I cut a watermelon, I cut it in slices or in bite sized pieces, so it can be eaten later, easily) But no, they did not do what I do. They ate the best part and left the rest. So depressing. My heart sank. After all that waiting. Why did they just eat the heart? They said, "We ate the heart because if the heart is good, than you know the watermelon is good."

A very interesting statement. Proverbs 4:23 says "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Guard your heart. I wish I would have guarded the heart of the watermelon.

All joking aside, what does it mean to "guard your heart"? In this context, "guarding" means to keep or maintain ownership. I believe this Bible verse is telling us

that our hearts are the core of who we are as a person and who we are determines what we do or how we act.

In Biblical times, it was thought that our decisions, feelings, and thought processes came from the heart. The heart was thought to be a "control center" from which all of our decisions were made. So, the heart is the place where you have your will, your attitude and intentions, and is the source of your thoughts, actions and words.

With your heart you choose between good and evil. Your conscience sends out a message of whether something is right or wrong, and your heart is what drives you to choose. The heart that is connected to God is able to choose good every time. But the heart that opens itself to impure influences becomes blind and confused when is comes to being able to tell the difference between good and evil.

We are all born with clean, pure hearts. Our hearts become impure when we willfully sin, again and again. Which can be like being dishonest, envious, holding grudges, or listening or watching impure things. It happens when we don't want to stop doing these types of things, even though we are aware that the act is evil.

Just because we sin, doesn't mean that our hearts are impure though. Our reaction to our sin proves what is in our heart. If you sin and regret it, and are sorrowful and repent, then our hearts are pure and open to God and He



forgives us immediately. But if we shrug the sin off and don't care about it and don't repent, then we are hardening our hearts. Our hearts become impure. Ultimately, if this continues, we close our hearts to God.

Thinking back on that watermelon, the heart has no seeds and is sweet and beautifully pink. Clean and pure. It can be eaten easily. No picking out seeds or spitting them out. So tasty. The seeds in the rest of the watermelon are like sins. Little stumbling blocks on the way through life to make us choose right or wrong. Let's try to keep our hearts as pure as the heart of a watermelon. Fill our lives with good choices. Stay close to our Heavenly Father. After all, He knows what is in our hearts and that is getting to the heart of it.

May God bless you and be with you.

Melody Burkhart
Children's Sunday School

Inconveniences or Opportunities?

By Judy Lowery

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4:5-6 NIV

Al and I were signed up to go with our two youngest grandsons on a work day with their church youth group, but ended up having to miss it. A doctor’s appointment over the phone resulted in my having to get a test for COVID 19 on the very day of the trip.

As Winnie the Pooh would say, “Oh bother!” I would have much rather gone on the mission trip! Al was kind enough to drive me to the urgent care referred by the doctor and sat with me in the car while I waited to be tested.

It took two hours for a nurse to finally come to our car; but in the meantime, we struck up a conversation with the young man in the vehicle next to ours. He, James, was angry, because he had been the first person to arrive at the urgent care that morning and still hadn’t been able to see anyone.

James was just beginning a two-week quarantine because he had been exposed to the virus by his parents. A switch! His boss insisted that he get tested right away, worried that James had exposed the other employees, as well as others.

We had a great conversation with him and made sure that the nurse was notified of his long wait in the parking lot. What started out as an inconvenience turned out to be a blessing and an opportunity to befriend an anxious young man.

Only a few days passed before another “Oh bother!” episode happened, with an unusual online charge made to our credit card. When the “red flag” showed up on

the credit report, it was about an hour before friends would be gathering at our house for a Saturday morning worship service.

What to do? Should we just wait to contact a representative about the account or try to do it before the service? The idea of waiting was a little nerve wracking, especially since someone might continue making purchases using the information on our credit card.

I decided to call hoping that that it wouldn’t take too long. Once on the phone, I impatiently went through the taped commands twice before connecting with a real person. Whew! The minutes were ticking away.

After explaining the problem to Reiner, a company representative, he put me on hold while looking up our account. I decided not to fret, but rather to pray for him. When Reiner came back on the line a few minutes later, he reassured me that our account was okay. I didn’t question him further, just thanked him and was ready to hang up.

But then I told him that we were going to have a “Bible Study” in just a few minutes and asked if there was anything that we could pray for. Reiner’s voice got very soft as he went on to say that he had two sons whom he hadn’t been able to see for the last six months due to a breakup with their mom—his “ex-girlfriend.”

He sounded heart-broken. I told him that we would indeed pray for a resolution to his situation. Before hanging up, I thanked him...and he thanked me!

We joined our hearts together during the service that morning in praying for Reiner, who now seemed more than just a voice on the other end of the line. Rather, this was a person who was hurting and who wanted to share his story. My aggravation was gone, replaced by gratitude for the opportunity the Lord had provided.

Al ended up calling the same company later that morning just to clarify things. A different representative confirmed that our account was okay, explaining that it was from one of the purchases I had previously made. What a relief!

Recently when a tooth began to hurt, I felt the same urge to groan, “Oh bother!” It meant setting up a dental appointment—one that might be costly. Then I remembered James and Reiner, and wondered who the Lord would have me meet next!

Father, help us make the most of every opportunity to reach out to and love others. Please give us words of wisdom and grace... words that will draw them to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

For more information, please visit www.goodnewswithjudy.blogspot.com

pixiedustforcaregivers.com





October 2020 Prayer Calendar

Thursday, October 1 - Pray for the congregations of FUMC and GAUMC.

Friday, October 2 - Pray and remember Ephesians 2:10 *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Saturday, October 3 - Pray for the Clothing Closet that begins at 9:00 a.m. at FUMC.

Sunday, October 4 - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service that begins at 8:00 a.m. at FUMC. Bring a lawn chair and wear a face covering.

Monday, October 5 - On this Monday, pray for the many blessings in your life.

Tuesday, October 6 - Pray and reflect on Isaiah 43:2 *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."*

Wednesday, October 7 - Pray for the youth of our churches.

Thursday, October 8 - Pray and reflect on the Bible verse Job 33:4 *"The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."*

Friday, October 9 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for this Sunday's Worship Service.

Saturday, October 10 - Pray and try to remember this Bible verse *"I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."*

Sunday, October 11 - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service beginning at 8am at FUMC. Bring a lawn chair and wear a face covering.

Monday, October 12 - Pray that we can speak more kind words to one another. Pray and reflect on this Bible verse: Proverbs 16:24 *"Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."*

Tuesday, October 13 - Pray for the GAUMC Finance Committee Meeting today.

Wednesday, October 14 - Pray and reflect on Psalm 147:4-5 *"He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."*

Thursday, October 15 - Pray for the GAUMC Trustees Meeting today.

Friday, October 16 - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Outdoor Service.

Saturday, October 17 - Pray for the health and mental wellness for our church families.

Sunday, October 18 - Pray for Sunday Outdoor Worship Service that begins at 8:00 a.m. at FUMC. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

Monday, October 19 - Pray as we start another week. Pray to God to help us through any difficult situations we come across through the week.

Tuesday, October 20 - Pray for the ladies of Linda Circle.

Wednesday, October 21 - Please take a moment to pray today for any of our church family who are experiencing illness or rehabilitation.

Thursday, October 22 - Pray for the ongoing Bible study groups.

Friday, October 23 - Think of someone at our church and pray for them today.

Saturday, October 24 - Pray for our community of Porterville.

Sunday, October 25 - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Sunday Worship Service at FUMC at 8:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and wear a face covering.

Monday, October 26 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Psalm 106:1 *"Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever."*

Tuesday, October 27 - Pray and reflect on this Bible verse: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33.

Wednesday, October 28 - Pray and reflect on Luke 6:27-28 *"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*

Thursday, October 29 - Pray that we can invite a neighbor, friend or stranger to Sunday Worship Service.

Friday, October 30 - Pray for FUMC as they prepare to hold Sunday Outdoor Worship Service.

Saturday, October 31 - As we come to the end of the month, let's pray and practice this Bible verse: *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* Ephesians 4:32.

Announcements

First United Methodist Church Grand Ave United Methodist Church

Weekday Meetings are via Computer Connection

Sundays In October

Grand Ave and First UMC will meet together for an Outdoor Worship Service Sundays at 8:00 a.m. in the Courtyard of First UMC (344 E Morton Ave)

www.grandavenue.org or

www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC or

www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC

Happy Birthday!

First UMC

Mary-Jo Goodwin • October 14

Joy Semple • October 16

Danny Burkhart • October 17

Tamara Mitchell • October 22

Marge Lowery • October 29

Ellen Lohneiss • October 29



Grand Ave UMC

Lenora Rodarte • October 5

Charles Nevels • October 7

Linda Brown • October 9

Kathy Bartlett • October 20

Mike Wait • October 20

Gordon Young • October 26

Raymond Lipumano • October 28



Clothes for the Needy

The First Methodist **Clothing Closet** is open on the first Saturday of every month. We are open October 3 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. for those in our community in need. Greeters and volunteers are welcome to help distribute and engage visitors. Donations of gently used clothes are always welcome. Social distancing and face coverings are required.

All Church Work Day

Our Church **Work Day** is Saturday, October 24 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Please save the date and come help us prepare and repair our campus for the Fall and Winter seasons. God willing, we will be able to reopen our doors soon. Social distancing and protocols will be in effect. Please feel free to contact Ray (202-9010) or Patricia (202-8130) Holdsworth with questions.

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the November 2020 Messenger is **October 18**. Thank you.

Charge Conference

Our Annual Charge Conference for both First UMC and Grand Ave UMC is Thursday, November 5 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. The meeting will be on Zoom, led by our DS Debra Brady and have sections for Staff Parish, Pastor and Ad Council members. Please watch for further information.



Outdoor Worship Service
Sundays at 8:00 a.m.



Sundays at 8:00 a.m.
In the Courtyard of First UMC

Grand Ave Staff

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*
Director of Youth Ministries • *Ryan Ridenour*
Worship Administrator • *Judy Buratovich*
Treasurer • *Rodel Lipumano*
Custodian • *The Congregation*

First Staff

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*
Counseling Center Director • *Joy Semple*
Administrative Assistant • *Melissa Sutherland*
Music Coordinator • *Christine Klippenstein*
Organist • *Donita Roulsten*
Children/Custodian • *Melody Burkhart*

Grand Ave Office Hours:

Monday–Thursday
9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

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Fax: 559-784-3798

info@grandavenue.org

www.grandavenue.org

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9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Phone: 559-784-4232

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344 E. Morton Ave.
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