

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave

United Methodist Churches

Porterville, CA

April 2021

Coming Home

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

We all possess a need to have a hub, an HQ, a central control. We want to go home, have a home, and feel the welcome of it.

Celebrating **Good Friday** is coming home. On Friday, April 2, at 12:00, noon at the Porterville Church of the Nazarene, we will ponder the mystery of the cross, the great love Jesus has for us all, His sacrifice, pain, and tragic death that bought our redemption. We will come home.

Celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus is coming home. The tomb is empty, the grave is robbed; death is defeated; our eternity is secured. We get to do that as a congregation on **Easter Sunday, April 4**. We will join in the courtyard at First for our Easter celebration at 10:00 a.m. Easter is coming home.

Coming home also represents the opportunity to go inside, to be in our buildings and worship the Lord. We have submitted updated Protocols to the Conference. Our hope is to have them approved by Easter. This approval will allow us to gather inside at 25% capacity with the same preventive measures we practiced outside i.e., masks, social distancing, and handwashing.

We get to come home. First, to their home and Grand Ave to theirs. Some may ask, "Will we ever get together again?" of course we will, perhaps sooner than we know. We will continue to work together on

youth and children's ministry, virtual ministry, VBS, and a host of other plans.

We will attempt to restart adult Sunday School. We will survey parents to discover the wishes of families. It is important that we hear from you. Please respond to any request for information. Our Wednesday Zoom Bible study will continue, as well as virtual committee meetings.

Not Normal

I feel the need to caution us that we cannot interpret moving indoors as a restoration of normal. The pre-pandemic normal is gone, down the drain, gone with the wind. What has changed? First, we have gone from one audience to three. Before the pandemic we mainly had people who attended in-person worship. If you did not attend, you watch the sermon online and maybe referred people to the online sermons to check us out as a church.

Now we have the in-person audience, the online, and the later online audience. The in-person audience are those who show up to the worship service. The online audience are faithful members of the church that primarily view the service online. The third group are people who will find us and view our services long after we have posted them. These other people will likely visit you at some time if they continue to connect with what they see. Therefore, we can no longer perform worship as if the online people are not in the room. They are, and we must engage them in every way possible.

We also must move more to a hybrid model of ministry. Before the pandemic people talked about in-person worship and online worship. They were separate entities and neither enhanced the other. This has changed. The online now enhances the in-person and the in-person the online. This

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Indoor Worship Service Begins April 18

Grand Ave • 9:30 a.m. in the Sanctuary

First UMC • 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Face coverings required.

A Worship Service video will be available by Sunday evenings on www.grandavenue.org.

Youth Ministry April

He is risen! The death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has paved a way for an eternal life for all of us who believe in God's only Son. No payment is due on our part, Christ has taken care of the cost, which was his life. Isn't that wonderful and amazing? Each one of us have fallen short of the glory of God, yet God did not abandon us in our sin. Instead, he loves us so much that he gave his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This is good news! Praise God for he is good!! I pray this Easter will be a transforming time for each one of our hearts. May God's grace touch each of us in its own special way drawing us closer to him with each breath we take as we remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

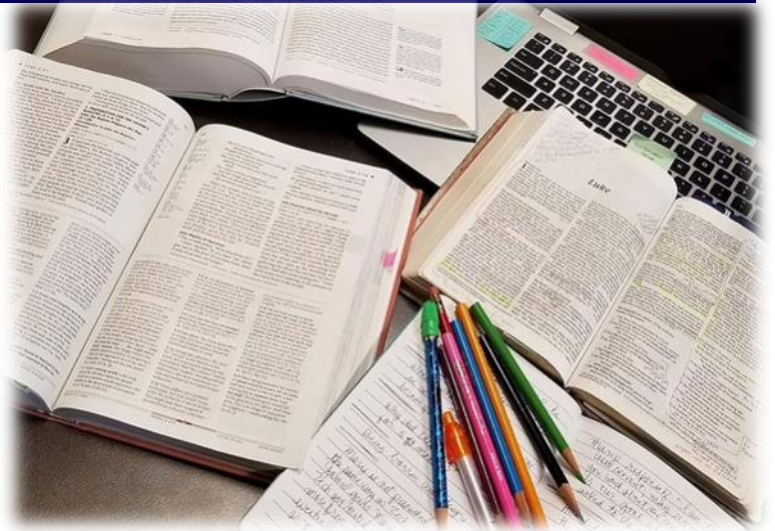
Following our Easter celebrations, the youth and I will be taking a journey through the Bible. I am excited to announce that our youth will begin a new study called, *The Bible Study*. This is a fantastic study that explores each book of the Bible and the life changing stories in each of them. Both Old Testament and New Testament will be studied so our youth will be blessed with furthering their knowledge of God and his amazing works. Through this study we will read the entire new testament while specific areas for growth will be explored in the Old Testament. The study is specifically designed for youth and is 90 days long and will guide our youth to a better understand of God's role in their lives, will help reveal how our relationship with God gives our lives meaning, and help us learn more about God's loving heart.

Seeking God ignites the eternity he placed in every heart and sets

our mind on eternal things. While the world says, seek fulfillment to find life, God's word says in seeking Him, you will fulfill your life. This is what our

study will help produce in the hearts of our youth and I am eager to get started.

This new study will begin on April 12, and all youth age students are invited to attend. We will initially start our study on our Zoom calls, then we will transfer to in-person gatherings when we are able. For the students who complete the 90-day program, there will be a very special reward. If any parents are interested in having their youth age students join me for this study, please



contact the church office of Grand Avenue and I will give you all the details.

Please join me in praying for our youth as we begin this new study. May God touch each of our hearts who participate in this study and provide in us a perseverance and determination to complete the study. May we have a willingness to learn and a joy to share the good news that we have learned.

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

Coming Home ... • continued from page 1 by Pastor Tom Buratovich

is what we call a hybrid model and churches must embrace this if they are to have a future.

Outreach

As our community reopens, we will return to our "regularly scheduled programming." While it may be a while before choir restarts, schools will begin to bring kids back and parents will need training. The homeless have continued to need feeding and the Porterville Welcome Center welcomes our help as they seek to help the homeless.

All of this to say that your church is here and will continue to be here. Your pastor is available to you, our community and will continue to be. We will not survive unless we make regular attempts to give witness to the gospel, to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to let people see the love in our lives, in our words and actions. We have come home. We are home. If Jesus is your Lord, you are already home. Help others come home too. Many people have an address, but few are home. I hope you will help people find theirs.

The Donkey's Cross

All Nubian donkeys have a cross on their back. These donkeys are gray donkeys. Though, it is not uncommon for other breeds of donkeys to have a cross, also. The Nubian Donkey is the breed that is said to have carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The cross begins with their mane and goes to their tail. The top of the cross is horizontal across their shoulders. Each cross is different. No two are alike.

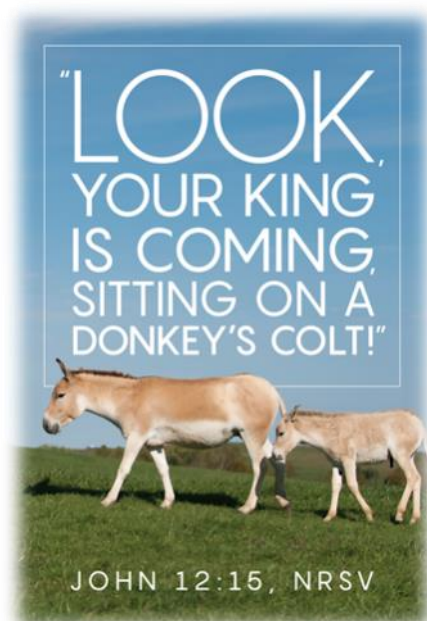
As the legend goes, which is not true, but serves a purpose in teaching a lesson.

There once was a donkey that was very smart and strong but was too small to do much work at all. The poor farmer who owned him could not afford to feed an animal that could not work. So, he told his family at the supper table that he was going to kill the donkey.

His children were so upset, for they loved the donkey. They begged him to sell the donkey rather than harm it. But the farmer could not bear to sell an animal that could not work.

His oldest daughter suggested that he tie the donkey to a tree on the way into town so whoever needed him, could just take him for free. The next morning, the father did just this.

Soon, two men approached and said that Jesus of Nazareth needed



the donkey. The farmer gave them the donkey. The men took the donkey to Jesus. Jesus stroked the grateful donkey's face and mounted it. Jesus led his followers into Jerusalem riding the back of this small donkey.

The donkey so loved his gentle master that he later followed him all the way to Calvary, wishing that he could bear the weight of the heavy cross for Jesus. Each time he tried to push toward Jesus, to help him carry the cross, he was pushed away. Though, he still continued to try and followed Jesus, till the end.

Grief-stricken by the sight of Jesus on the cross, the donkey turned his back but could not leave. As the sun moved across the sky, the shadow of the cross fell upon the shoulders and back of the donkey, branding it's coat. Thus giving the donkey his wish. To bear Jesus's cross.

There are many versions of this legend but all of them have the same outcome. A very loyal donkey stays true to his Shepherd.

Donkeys are very loyal animals. Once they befriend you, they are yours for life. If a life long mate dies, they will often go and stand in the spot where the mate died for hours at a time. They will repeat this act sometimes for weeks, months or even years after the death.

The significance of Jesus riding the donkey to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was that He was coming in peace. It fulfilled a prophecy that was spoken 500 years before, that the Messiah would ride a donkey into Jerusalem. This story, or legend, is a beautiful reminder of the donkey's gift to us all. The fulfilling of a prophecy and bringing forth the Messiah.

In this legend, the donkey refused to leave his shepherd, Jesus. This sweet and humble donkey shows us what it means to be a true and loyal follower of Jesus. Are you?

Have a Blessed Easter,
Melody Burkhart
Children's Sunday School



Join Melody online for Children's Sunday School every Sunday morning at www.grandavenue.org



See you on Sunday!

The Value of a Touch

By Judy Lowery

“When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.”

Matthew 8:1-3 NIV

Monday, March 15, 2021 will always be remembered as my Hallelujah day! Al and I waited a month after getting our first COVID shot for our second appointment. I never thought I'd be so excited to get a shot!

Our initial appointments were arranged through our health care network. There were two openings at one of the affiliated hospitals in Dearborn, ten minutes apart. We eagerly signed up, not worried about the thirty-minute drive from our house, although a major storm front was moving into the area.

The first vaccine went well, nothing out of the ordinary; and the journey to Dearborn on the freeway in both directions was slow but safe. Had we signed up for the vaccine one day later, our appointment would have been cancelled due to the onslaught of the blustery snowstorm. Then Al and I didn't mind having to stay indoors, grateful for the way things had worked out prior to its arrival.

On March 15th, the weather was better. It was a quick trip to Dearborn and home again. Unlike the first experience, we both had the same appointment time and once checked in were directed together to an empty table where a nurse was waiting. She recognized Al from his first vaccination and was happy to see him back for his second.

After Al introduced me to her, the friendly nurse noticed the pendant I was wearing. She read out loud the tiny printed words, “I

will be grateful for this day,” on one side of the pendant and “Grateful,” “Give thanks,” and “Blessed” on the other.

“Well,” I explained, “I usually wear this at Thanksgiving. But this is my Hallelujah day! We are both very thankful to be getting our second vaccination!”

She smiled and nodded as she proceeded with the shots. After we were finished, she shared openly about something with which she was struggling. She was troubled and confused but said that she had prayed and asked God to show her what to do. There was an opportunity to pray with her on the spot. It felt good to say that simple prayer, knowing that it would give her support and encouragement and also by continuing to pray in coming days. How I wished that we could have given her a hug too!

That desire for physical contact is something most of us have expressed during this long pandemic. Oh, to be able to reach out and shake someone's hand, to pray holding hands, to give a spontaneous hug or a pat on the shoulder. I've decided that when it's okay to hug again, I'm going to go around to houses of friends and church family and deliver hugs! We haven't even been able to hug our daughter and son-in-law since the pandemic started.

When we were at Shanda and Chris' home recently, sharing a birthday dinner in honor of their youngest son, and bowed our

heads to say grace, someone reached over and took my hand. Glancing up, I realized it was my son-in-law.

It was the first time in over a year that we had held hands as a family. How I appreciated that gesture! Maybe I had been feeling a little like the leper who approached Jesus fearfully, asking if He would be willing to heal him of the leprosy.

Untouchable, unclean, cast out...have you felt that way during this pandemic? Or maybe even prior to the pandemic? When Jesus actually reached out and touched the man with leprosy, his heart must have been filled with hope. Yes, Jesus was willing to heal him and furthermore, Jesus didn't draw back. His touch demonstrated a love that was undeniable, accepting and transforming. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

“He Touched Me”

(Bill Gaither Trio)

*“Shackled by a heavy burden
'Neath a load of guilt and shame
Then the hand of Jesus touched me
And now I am no longer the same
He touched me, oh, He touched me
And oh, the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened,
and now I know
He touched me,
and made me whole.”*



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

April 2021 Prayer Calendar

Thursday, April 1 - On this Maundy Thursday, let us pray as we commemorate the Last Supper with Jesus and his 12 apostles. Jesus washed their feet before the meal in demonstration of serving others.

Friday, April 2 - Today is Good Friday. Join us at the Community Good Friday Service in the Parking Lot of Port Naz church at 12:00 p.m. Pray and thank God for loving us so much that He gave his only Son so that we may have eternal life.

Saturday, April 3 - Pray and reflect this Holy Saturday. Pray for the Clothing Closet at FUMC at 9:00 a.m.

Sunday, April 4 - He has Risen! Pray and praise God this Easter Sunday. Pray for the Easter Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. at FUMC.

Monday, April 5 - Pray as we start a new week.

Tuesday, April 6 - Please take a moment and pray for our church families today.

Wednesday, April 7 - Pray for the Online Bible Study each Wednesday 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link please email Pastor Tom - tburatovich@gmail.com.

Thursday, April 8 - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they plan lessons and activities for the children and youth of our congregations.

Friday, April 9 - Pray and reflect on Zephaniah 3:17 *"The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in His love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."*

Saturday, April 10 - Pray for all of the church committee meetings this month.

Sunday, April 11 - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at FUMC at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

Monday, April 12 - Pray for those in our church families who are struggling with health issues.

Tuesday, April 13 - Isaiah 40:31 *"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."* Pray that the Lord will renew our strength.

Wednesday, April 14 - Pray for the Online Bible Study each Wednesday 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link please email Pastor Tom - tburatovich@gmail.com.

Thursday, April 15 - Pray that we can invite someone to attend a Sunday Outdoor Worship Service.

Friday, April 16 - Pray for the ones who are grieving a loved one.

Saturday, April 17 - Pray for the ones who will be greeters at the Worship Service tomorrow.

Sunday, April 18 - Pray for the Worship Services at our churches. Indoor Worship: Grand Ave 9:30 a.m., First 11:00 a.m. Watch for more information!

Monday, April 19 - Pray that we can practice the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

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

Wednesday, April 21 - Pray for the Online Bible Study each Wednesday 10:00 - 11:00a.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link please email Pastor Tom - tburatovich@gmail.com.

Thursday, April 22 - Pray for the prayer groups at both churches.

Friday, April 23 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for the Sunday's Worship Service.

Saturday, April 24 - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for tomorrow's Worship Service.

Sunday, April 25 - Pray for the Worship Services. Check the website for up to date information.

Monday, April 26 - Pray and reflect on Colossians 1:27 *"To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

Tuesday, April 27 - Pray for our community of Porterville.

Wednesday, April 28 - Pray for the Online Bible Study each Wednesday 10:00a.m. - 11:00a.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link please email Pastor Tom - tburatovich@gmail.com.

Thursday, April 29 - Pray and thank God for His amazing grace.

Friday, April 30 - Reflect and pray on Bible verse Psalm 25:5 *"Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."*

Need Prayer?

Both churches have people who come together to pray. One prayer meeting is Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. Please call Pastor Tom or Ann White at 1:30 p.m. to be included in the prayer meeting. Maybe you have another time of the day you would like to gather a group to pray. It could be a quick meeting of 10 or 20 minutes to share prayer requests and pray for one another. Let's make 2021 the year of constant prayer!

Pastor Tom

**First United Methodist Church
Grand Ave United Methodist Church**

Weekday Meetings are via Computer Connection
**Grand Ave and First UMC will meet together for
an Outdoor Worship Service Sundays at 10:00
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



Pastor Tom Buratovich • April 18

First UMC

Jim McFarlin • April 8
Kerri Scranton • April 17
Bill Ernst • April 18
Norma Imel • April 18
Ruth Farquharson • April 25
Pam Loverin • April • April 24
Heather Thompson • April 27
Joyce Doull • April 28
Maddisyn Mae Ladrgan • April 28

Grand Ave UMC

Eva Fleming • April 8
Cindy Bartlett • April 10
Bill Means • April 13
Nellie Pearson • April 20
Sean Fleming • April 25

Announcements

Holy Week—March 28—to April 4

During Holy Week we will provide video online meditations daily during the week. Watch the website for updates—www.grandavenue.org

March 28 • Palm Sunday • 10:00 a.m. at First UMC
April 2 • Good Friday • 12:00 p.m. at Port Naz
April 4 • Easter Sunday • 10:00 a.m. at First UMC

Wednesday Online Bible Study

The Online Bible Study meets 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. each Wednesday. Contact Pastor Tom for a link to the zoom online meeting, tburatovich@gmail.com.

Clothing Closet

Clothing Closet is open on **Saturday, April 4** from 9:00 a.m. to noon for those in need of clothes. Appointments are available throughout the month by calling Ann at 559-920-0977. We are in need of boys and girls clothing sizes 6 to 12. Thank you to Irene Perez and Mildred Billiou for all their help at our last event.

Church Yard Sales

Both First and Grand Ave are planning Yard Sales. Watch for more information coming soon.

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the May 2021 Messenger is **April 19**. Thank you.

Grand Ave Staff

Senior Pastor • Rev. Tom Buratovich
Director of Youth Ministries • Ryan Ridenour
Worship Administrator • Judy Buratovich
Treasurer • Rodell 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.

Phone: 559-784-3791

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info@grandavenue.org

www.grandavenue.org

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