

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave
United Methodist Churches
Porterville, CA

January 2021

Looking Both Ways

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

From the earliest days of my life, I remember the voices of those in authority, “Always look both ways before you cross.” It was a simple, important piece of advice. It would have done no good to look both ways after you had crossed.

The same advice applies to 2021—look both ways! We must not forget the lessons learned, the struggles endured, the pain inflicted, the inconveniences placed upon us, and the personal choices each of us made to stay safe and help those around us remain safe.

Medical research advanced by quantum leaps, businesses pivoted to meet people’s needs, churches did a deep dive into virtual studies, meetings, and discipleship models. We prayed harder as people became sicker. We have stretched our faith to the outer limit of where we thought it could go – and we have survived. We must not forget to look back. We must remember what we learned.

However, we must look forward as well. We continue to need a way to revitalize the practice, passion, and value of evangelism in our church. We must discover and rediscover methods and urgent need to tell others about the saving love of Jesus. This comes by making connections.

But we need to look both ways when considering evangelism. People hate the word and the

images that the word conjures i.e., bullhorns, cold calls, hard sales, manipulation, etc. This is not what God calls us to. If you are Christian, you have a story. Evangelism is telling that story, the story of how God changed you and how that change allowed you to become a new person. This is a story most people would at least listen to if not want to hear.

Most evangelism is a need for us to connect to our stories and then connect other people with our story. Do you have story? You most likely do but perhaps never have articulated it or you think it sounds boring, uninteresting, uninspiring, or barely intelligible. We want to help you form your story. Commit to cooperate with us to do that this coming year.

The second thing we want to do is follow-up better, often, and habitually. So many people visit churches and are never heard from or seen again. We want and need to do a better job of getting back to our visitors. They deserve that and our church will benefit by learning to care for people better that way.

In addition, we need a clear path of discipleship. To grow in your faith

could not be more important. To start, we will continue to offer a **Zoom Bible** study every Wednesday. However, we will limit our time to one hour. Classes will begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude at 11:00 a.m. This is a modification that will, hopefully, accommodate more people as their schedule allows.

We also must continue to work with our area churches to strengthen our relationship with them. They have so much to offer us and we to them. The progress we have made thus far is encouraging and the journey offers a bright horizon.

As we look back, we are dumbfounded by the greatness of our God and the depth of which he has rescued us. We are in awe at the wonders of our God and worship

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Outdoor Worship Service - Sundays at 10:00 a.m.

Grand Ave and First meet together Sundays at 10:00 a.m. in the Courtyard of First UMC. Bring your own chair, Bible and face covering. A video of the Outdoor Service is available by Sunday evenings on www.grandavenue.org.

Youth Ministry

Happy New Year! Yes, we finally made it through 2020. For many, this past year has been a difficult one having to deal with the virus, schools going to distance learning, churches unable for a time to meet in person, businesses closing, people losing jobs, and list goes on and on. But we cannot only focus our attention on the negative. For many people 2020 brought with it blessings of answered prayers, growth in their relationship with God, better health and growing families. We were reminded of how important it is for each of us to be with our church families and how gathering each week fulfills a need we each have. We have seen family and friends make it through daunting surgeries and recover well, along with many other blessings. 2020 was rough, but God is still good all the time and I think we each need to remember that.

Now we are blessed to enter 2021 with all the fervor that a new year brings with it. Personally, I am excited to be beginning a new year. Each year offers us a sense of a new beginning or some of us may think of it as a fresh start that has endless possibilities. Many of us during this time will make resolutions and goals that we hope to bring into fruition. These goals may be related to our health or our financial status or something of that nature. Many of the youth I speak to about resolutions and goals for the new year often put their focus on being successful in school and getting jobs. These are all good goals, but unfortunately, many people, youth and adult alike, often do not include any spiritual goals in their personal goal lists.

I believe the beginning of a year is a great opportunity and the perfect time to discover a spiritual

goal and focus your attention on completing it. Maybe you would like to read the entire Bible in a year, possibly journal as you read God's word, pray more often, discover your spiritual gifts, learn to share the gospel of Jesus, or simply develop the habit of trusting God with your life. A spiritual goal is important because it allows us to focus more deeply in areas of our faith that we may have neglected for one reason or another.

I believe that many of us when we are intentional on what we desire to accomplish and we do our part in doing what needs to be done to meet these goals and we trust God through our efforts and trials, we produce within us a perseverance that continues to grow as we continue to stay on our journeys. I have sat down and written out my goals for 2021 and I did include multiple spiritual goals. I encourage each of you, along with my youth, to pray and



ISAIAH 40:31

discover an area of your spiritual journey that would benefit from you having a goal related to your relationship with Jesus. Putting more time and energy and prayer towards your spiritual journey can bless your walk with Jesus in amazing ways. I pray your goals will be met this year and your faith be unstoppable. Happy New Year to each of you!

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

Looking Both Ways ... • continued from page 1 by Pastor Tom Buratovich

him in the beauty of his Majesty. We have endured a collective chronic stress level from which we need to recover. This will mean moving slower, being patient with ourselves and others, and celebrating the steps of recovery that we take. As we look back, we also see the many ways that innovation and risk have allowed us to grow in our confidence of how God uses our courageous moments when we step out. Strengthen our feet, O God, when fear weakens them.

As we look forward, we realize that our predictive abilities are

imperfect, and on occasion, very flawed. But we serve a God who knows the future and is using every present moment to shape a future that is for our good despite the struggle, pain, and weakness we experience in the moment. God holds our future and will hold this tight as he prepares a future that prepares us to be reunited with him in glory.

Church, look both ways and then walk together with Jesus, the Head of the church, our Redeemer and Lord.

Defeat Despair With Blessings

Despair... Such an awful sounding word. Actually, the meaning is worse than the word sounds. Despair is the “complete” loss or absence of hope. Listening to that can fill you with despair and total depression. Never fear, I have a remedy for that.

*“If you’re worried and you can’t sleep
Just count your blessings,
instead of sheep
And you’ll fall asleep,
counting your blessings.”*

Very wise words to a song that Bing Crosby sang in the film *White Christmas* titled “Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)”. This song was written by Irving Berlin and used in the movie, which was released in October 1954.

Another popular hymn written by Johnson Oatman Jr. in 1897 is titled “Count Your Blessings” also. In fact, I have not been able to get this song out of my mind lately.

*“When upon life’s billows
you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged,
thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings,
name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
what the Lord hath done.
Count your blessings,
name them one by one,
Count your many blessings,
see what God hath done.”*

If we just look at these two examples, this is a span of 123 years that we have been told for to count our blessings. I think that is a pretty good indication that there is something to it. But when you are filled with despair and have completely lost hope in everything it is not the easiest thing to remember to do. It is so much easier to keep looking at the negative and keep our outlook narrow. Though if we expand our view, it becomes easier to see the blessings in life that we miss with a narrow outlook. That is

why these songs were written.

Singing helps us to remember things. Children are taught songs for days of the week, months of the year, ABC’s & 123’s. Singing makes us happy and eases our mind. So, when you sing and count your blessings, your mood gets better.

Sometimes it may feel like we don’t really have any blessings to be thankful for. Especially when we are filled with despair. But God grants us blessings every day. Below, I have listed a few.

Blessing #1- Forgiving

God continually forgives us of our sins if we come to him with a pure heart. Can you imagine how horrible it would be to never be forgiven for anything? All of the guilt we would carry around with us. I think that “forgiving” is a wonderful blessing.

Blessing #2- Healing

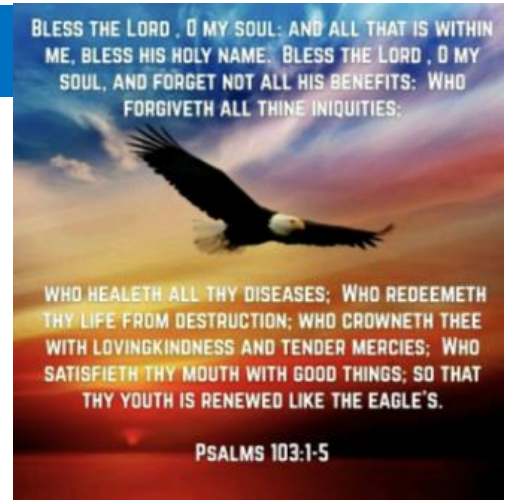
God is in charge of all healing. Healing in the body occurs through God by the means of Doctors, medicine and hospitals. Healing in the mind and soul also comes from God. He heals shame, guilt, tempers, and depression. Healing, a wonderful blessing.

Blessing #3- Protection

We are all alive today because God has protected us from danger or death. We don’t even know how many times He has saved our lives or guided our paths. He sealed the mouths of the lions in the lion’s den for Daniel. Protection, another wonderful blessing.

Blessing #4- Love

God is love. He surrounds us with His never-ending love every day. Everything He gives us is all out of His love. Love, again, a wonderful blessing.



Blessing #5- Strength

Many times in our lives, we have been at our wits end and filled with despair. We just know that there is no possible way for us to go on, we have truly lost all hope. But somehow, we do go on. That, again, is God showing up in our lives and blessing us with the “strength” to go on. Strength, again, a wonderful blessing.

God gives us many wonderful blessings each day. So many more than we realize. We should count as many as we can, every day. In return for the blessings He gives us, we can bless God too by remembering all that He has blessed us with and thank him for it. “Count your many blessings, name them one by one” and sing our hearts out in praise.

May God bless you abundantly in this New Year,

Melody Burkhart
Children’s Sunday School

Sunday School Online

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



**See you on
Sunday!**

The Experimental Indoor Garden

By Judy Lowery

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’” Revelation 21:3-4 NIV

Without a heated greenhouse, there is no year-round gardening here in Michigan—something Al and I really miss. That is why we decided to get an early start on next summer’s garden by starting some vegetables from seed in our sunroom. Well, it was mostly my idea. I thought we could start the seeds indoors and then transplant them outside later.

Most of the houses in our neighborhood have a sunroom at the back, usually a screened in porch or a lightly insulated room with windows on three sides. Previous owners remodeled our sunroom, putting in carpeting, better windows and insulation. However, it still tends to be cooler than the rest of the house by about ten degrees. It’s a perfect place to grow house plants and also for our two dogs to hang out.

Last summer’s success with outdoor raised garden beds prompted me to want to get an early start this year. About a month ago, we took a quick trip to a local nursery for brussels sprouts seeds. We also bought pansy and bush bean seeds along with a small “greenhouse” consisting of a covered tray containing individual pods made of coconut husks.

The pods were perfect for the tiny pansy and brussels sprouts seeds, but too small for the bigger bean seeds. So, the first two packets were divided among fifty pods. What to do with the bean seeds? They were finally planted in a cardboard egg carton, with one seed per section. It seemed

to be a good temporary ‘home’ since directions on the package said to plant them one inch deep.

The two cartons and the greenhouse tray filled one entire shelf of a plant stand in front of the east facing window. When the sun came out, there was plenty of light; however true to November and December in Michigan there were many days when it was raining or cloudy outside. A small purple light aimed at the pansies and brussels sprouts seemed to help.

Even though all of the seeds were planted at the same time, the bush beans got off to a fast start. Within a week, they had outgrown the egg carton container, necessitating another trip back to the nursery. This time we found some biodegradable pots made of cow manure.

The manure pots weren’t such a great idea. Not only did they smell like manure once they

became damp, they also attracted the attention of TJ the lab who was caught in the act of eating some of the pots, with dirt and the plants strewn on the floor of the sunroom! After that, everything got moved up to a higher shelf. Indoor gardening has its problems!

Another problem was summed up by Al’s comment: “your timing was a little off!” It looks like the beans are going to be harvested indoors, that is if they produce at all. I should have read the description on the seed package which said that they would reach maturity in two months!

The other veggies aren’t doing as well and may not make it at all. He thinks we might have to start the whole process over again in April. Oh well, it was a good experiment anyway.

Watching the different stages of the beans has been interesting: first with their seeds swelling; and then strong stalks emerging. Two cotyledons, looking like the original seed were attached to each stalk. Eventually they opened to reveal a couple of small leaves. After the cotyledons dropped off, more leaves began to grow. At the end of its life cycle, after having hopefully produced some tasty Italian Romano beans, the plant will dry up and be pulled out.

Sort of like our earthly bodies, bodies that are aging and slowing breaking down, one day to be exchanged for new ones—heavenly bodies that are immortal and eternal. Just think...no more death, sickness, mourning or aches and pains! But even better than that, we can look forward to an eternity in heaven with God—Father, Son and Spirit. Praise God for the hope we have through Jesus!



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

January 2021 Prayer Calendar

Friday, January 1 - Pray for a healthy 2021! Pray for a new year full of hope and peace!

Saturday, January 2 - Pray for the Clothing Closet at FUMC this month. This month Clothing Closet will meet by appointment only.

Sunday, January 3 - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. Please wear face covering and bring a lawn chair.

Monday, January 4 - Pray for the ones who are experiencing illness or rehabilitation. Pray for healing and strength.

Tuesday, January 5 - Psalm 29:11 *"The Lord gives strength to his people, the Lord blesses his people with peace."* Pray to remember this verse.

Wednesday, January 6 - Pray for the online Bible Study from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. If you would like to participate, contact Pastor Tom.

Thursday, January 7 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse 2 Corinthians 5:7 *"For we live by faith, not by sight."*

Friday, January 8 - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Service.

Saturday, January 9 - Pray for our community of Porterville.

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

Monday, January 11 - Pray and reflect on Isaiah 26:3 *"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."*

Tuesday, January 12 - Pray for the GAUMC Finance Committee meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, January 13 - Pray for the online Bible Study from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. If you would like to participate contact Pastor Tom.

Thursday, January 14 - James 4:8 *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded."* Pray and reflect on this Bible verse today.

Friday, January 15 - Pray for the children and youth of GAUMC and FUMC.

Saturday, January 16 - Pray for the ones who are preparing for tomorrow's service.

Sunday, January 17 - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. Please wear face covering and bring a lawn chair.

Monday, January 18 - Pray and reflect on Bible verses Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Tuesday, January 19 - Pray for the ladies of Linda Circle.

Wednesday, January 20 - Pray for the online Bible Study from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. If you would like to participate contact Pastor Tom.

Thursday, January 21 - Pray that we can remember Isaiah 12:2 *"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation."*

Friday, January 22 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares and completes the sermon for this Sunday's Worship Service.



Saturday, January 23 - Pray and remember Joshua 1:5 *"No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Sunday, January 24 - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. Please wear face covering and bring a lawn chair.

Monday, January 25 - Pray as we start the week that we will know that God is with us as we encounter many different situations.

Tuesday, January 26 - Today, thank God for your many blessings.

Wednesday, January 27 - Pray for the online Bible Study from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. If you would like to participate contact Pastor Tom.

Thursday, January 28 - Please take a moment today and pray for our church families.

Friday, January 29 - Pray and reflect on Psalm 61:2 *"From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."*

Saturday, January 30 - Pray that God can teach us to forgive as He forgives us.

Sunday, January 31 - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. Please wear face covering and bring a lawn chair.

Announcements

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

www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC or

www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC



First UMC

Wayne White • January 1
Ed Farquharson • January 9
Mildred Billiou • January 18
Jean Spry • January 28

Grand Ave UMC

Larry Jasper • January 4
Mark Wright • January 9
Linda Taylor • January 12
Nancy Baird • January 24
Jack Egorov • January 30

Clothes for the Needy

Due to the high number of COVID-19 cases in Tulare County, Clothing Closet will be open by appointment only the month of January. Call 559-920-0977 to schedule an appointment.

Thank You

The Trustees would like to thank the following people for their work on bucking up and stacking the wood from the Raywood Ash trees in Grand's parking lot. Jack "Lumber Jack" Egorov, Mark "Buck 'em UP Right" Wright, and Ray "The Stacker" Rodarte (aka The Good Ray.) Blessings on my friend Vicente also for felling the trees and keeping all involved safe. Sincerely, *Ray Holdsworth*, Trustees.

Thank You

Dear church family, Thank you so much for the surprise Christmas Gift given to me on Christmas Eve. It is so wonderful to be a part of such a loving and caring congregation, and I enjoy being able to share music with you. Happy (hopefully better) New Year to you all. Gratefully, *Donita Roulsten*

Thank You

Many of our church family helped make the Advent season special this year. Thank you to all who decorated, setup on Sundays, play and sing music, clean up inside and outside. Both First and Grand Ave are blessed with wonderful people. Thank you for serving.

Wednesday Morning Zoom Bible Study

All are welcome to join Pastor Tom on Wednesday mornings 10:00 –11:00 a.m. for an online Bible study of I Corinthians. Please email Pastor Tom for the zoom link information, tburatovich@gmail.com.

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the February 2021 Messenger is **January 18**. Thank you.

...With Gratitude

Many of us have struggled that in 2020, though many of you has struggled much more than I. The support and appreciation and the love offering given by you, is a gift of love and appreciation that will remain with me always. Thank you again from the depths of my heart. *Pastor Tom*

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.

Phone: 559-784-3791

Fax: 559-784-3798

info@grandavenue.org

www.grandavenue.org

*Grand Ave United Methodist Church
776 W. Grand Ave.
Porterville, CA 93257*

First Methodist Office Hours:

Monday–Thursday
9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Phone: 559-784-4232

pvfumc@ocsnet.net

*First United Methodist Church
344 E. Morton Ave.
Porterville, CA 93257*