

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave
United Methodist Churches
Porterville, CA

The Strength of the Few

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

April 2022

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ... On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

John 6:53-66

Everything seems to be getting smaller. "Shrinkflation" it's called. You buy your favorite product that costs the same price, but you notice the bottle is smaller, the box smaller, or the bag is less full.

There are many places in the Bible where God performs divine shrinkflation. Abraham shrinks the number of righteous people needed to spare the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The 10 plagues of Egypt shrunk the Egyptian population and the military. In the wilderness God shrunk the inhabitants of Israel so that the current generation would pass away due to unbelief.

Gideon's army was too big. God shrunk it to accomplish his purpose. Elijah thought he was the only faithful prophet, but God revealed to him there were more, but it was a shrunken total compared to the inhabitants of Israel.

Jesus, in the passage above intentionally shrunk his followers. Even the disciples thought maybe he has gone too far this time. "This is a hard teaching; you can accept it?" They might have been wondering if Jesus really wanted to have a membership reduction program. The church has not

needed such a program as our current season of life has provided it.

What if this was a necessary step for the church to realize the strength of the few and the power of our God? What if this was a way to weed out the wheat from the tares? What if the plan of God was to harness the strength of the few to do more than the church could at the height of its attendance surge?

I ultimately do not know the answer to those questions. I do know that God does prune, trim, shrink, reshape, consolidate, sort, and sift the church, and all of creation from time to time to accomplish his purpose according to his good pleasure.

We continue to be Jesus churches, an Easter people, committed to shine the Gospel at every opportunity, in every way, to anyone.

How will this reality unfold? Let me apply an image that may help. When someone wishes to tile their floor, several steps are required that must be done in order. You cannot seal the tile until you install the tile. You

cannot install the tile until you remove everything on the floor. You cannot space the tile until you lay it.

Jesus shared the good news before the particulars of the kingdom. Jesus shared the hard sayings of following him before he went to the cross. Jesus commissioned his disciples after he stepped out of the tomb.

In the same way that you must lay tile in order, so Jesus proclaimed good news, modeled the

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Holy Week

On **Good Friday, April 15**, the Porterville Christian faith community will hold a Good Friday service at **First Congregational Church** beginning at 12:00 p.m. We look forward to pondering the passion of Jesus together with our Porterville Christian family.

**Easter Sunday
April 17**

The **Community Sunrise Service** is at 6:30 a.m. at the cross behind the public pool at Murry Park at 500 E. Putnam Ave. Celebrate God's risen Son with the rising Sun.

Combined Easter Sunday Worship is at 10:00 a.m. at First UMC. Our Egg Hunt and Coffee Hour follow the Service.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3

Some of my fondest memories of childhood was Easter Sunday. I looked forward each year to seeing family, eating a delicious meal, and most importantly, the Easter egg hunt. My brother and I would eagerly wait in the house while my mom would hide the eggs that we spent so much time decorating the night before. As soon as she was done hiding the eggs and opened the door to the backyard, we would race out back and begin our searching. With passion and determination, my brother and I sought after the hidden eggs, hoping to fill our baskets to the brim.

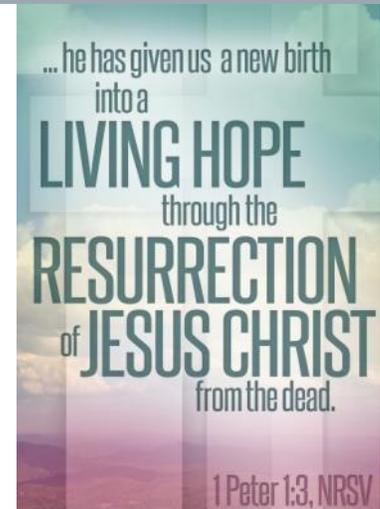
Near the end of our egg hunt, my mom would ask us to count how many eggs we had in our baskets. Almost without fail, my mom would let us know that we were missing one egg. This sent my brother and I into a frenzy of heated competition to find the elusive egg. After a short time, one of us would find the last hidden one, which was called the money egg, and we would celebrate.

Rekindling these memories brings forth realizations that many people this Easter will be searching for their own money egg. By that I mean, many people are looking for that missing part of their lives that they have been searching for diligently and widely but seem to end their search unsuccessful. The church and unchurched, rich, and poor, healthy, and ill, educated, and uneducated, we all search relentlessly in various ways and places to fill our baskets, being, our hearts. Some people search for meaning and purpose, some search for good health to prolong their lives on earth trying to avoid death, and others search for a variety of ways

of life to fulfill the longing in their heart.

I believe Jesus, and the life he offers, is what we are all searching for. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life”, and in this bold statement claims to be the source of both. There is no resurrection apart from Christ, and no eternal life. Jesus does more than give life to us on earth, He is life, and that’s why death has no power over Him. Jesus bestows His life on those who trust in Him, so that we can share His triumph over death. We who believe in Jesus Christ will personally experience life through Him while on earth and be blessed with resurrection. This makes me very excited. It is impossible for death to win. Let that sink into your thoughts.

The resurrection is the glorious victory for every believer. Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose the third day according to the Scriptures. And He is coming again! The dead in Christ will be raised up, and those who are alive



at His coming will be changed and receive new, glorified bodies.

I don’t know about you, but this good news fills my heart with peace and joy. If you are experiencing the difficulties of the endless search for that missing part of your life, I encourage you to examine the resurrection of Jesus this Easter and think about what that means for all those who believe in Jesus. Open your heart to the tender mercies of God, realizing that He accepted the sacrifice of His only begotten son so that you can be set free and live in eternity. Happy Easter to you and yours!

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

The Strength of the Few **continued from page 1** *by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

good news, taught of the kingdom, then proclaimed himself the Ruler of the kingdom, so we respond to the needs of our community by first getting to know the One through whom we will meet those needs.

We must crawl before we can walk and walk before we can run. We must learn numbers before fractions and before decimals. We must mature as disciples to conceive of the need in our community and respond to it in Jesus’ name.

Several conversations are taking place and will require careful planning and implementation. The discussions and prayerful waiting are building trust and community for the journey. We will move forward in the strength of the Lord and in the strength of the few.

Easter and the Dogwood Tree

This month, we look forward to some wonderful Easter fun as both churches will gather together at First Church to celebrate this holiday together. The service will be at 10:00 a.m. on **Easter Sunday**, April 17, 2022. Immediately afterwards, there will be an **Easter Egg Hunt** for the children and everyone can enjoy fellowshiping at **Coffee Hour**.

Easter is a very special time of the year. It's fun to hunt eggs and have wonderful meals of celebration, but it is also a time to ponder on the great love Jesus has for us. It is mind-boggling to think that His love for us is so strong; that He freely took on the debt of our sins. He died for us, so that we might live eternally, with Him. In Philippians 2:8 it says, "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." - Even death on a cross. Wow! I am overwhelmed and at a loss for words to even think that He willingly, did that for ME. Tears fill my eyes at the very thought of it.

Even though Easter time is a very sad time; it is also a wonderful day of celebration because the tomb is EMPTY! Jesus emerged from the grave. He was resurrected! He lives! No grave could keep the Son of God. This is what we celebrate on Easter Sunday.

With this holiday comes some



beautiful stories. Legends that surround the holiday. One of them is "The Legend of the Dogwood Tree". It is a very old story that has been handed down for many years and is popular in the South. It tells the story of how this magnificent tree became the tree we are familiar with today. Though this story is not true, it holds a wonderful reminder for anyone who looks at the tree.

The legend goes that at the time of the Crucifixion, the dogwood tree was a larger tree, much like the Mighty Oak Tree. It was very strong wood. The tree did not flower or produce fruit. It was so strong, it was perfect to use things such as a cross. On the day that Jesus was crucified, God both cursed and blessed the tree. It was cursed to lose its height and strength and was transformed to be small and its branches would be narrow and crooked. That way, its wood would never again be

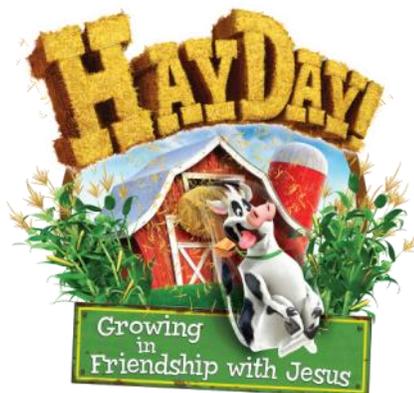
used for a cross. As a matter of fact, it would not be good wood to use to build anything.

The dogwood tree did not bloom, so it received a blessing also. Every spring, just in time for Easter, it would produce beautiful flowers. The flowers are white or pink and actually form the shape of the cross. It has 4 petals, two longer, and two shorter. The tips of the petals are indented, as if they bear a nail dent. There are spots of red on the petals which bring to mind the drops of blood that were spilled for us. In the middle of each flower is a big cluster that resembles a "crown of thorns". That way no one would forget what happened on that day.

So, when you see the blossoms, you, as well, will be reminded of all that Jesus went through for you, for me, for us.

May your Easter be filled with wonderful blessings.

Melody Burkhart



**VBS • June 16 and 17
at Grand Ave**

Sunday Program
June 19 • 10:00 a.m.
Combined Service
at Grand Ave



Ask Melody about registration information and volunteer opportunities.

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 NIV



Al and I were standing in the frozen food section of the grocery store when a man coming in the opposite direction noticed that Al was walking with a limp. Then, he pointed down to his own foot. The friendly man who was close in age to Al and me, shared that he had to walk with a cane but could lean on the cart for support when shopping.

He told us his name and said that he, Bob, had been recently in an accident and had severely sprained his ankle, resulting in a drop foot. While we stood and listened, Bob also told us about some other health issues he had.

“The seventies are the hardest years,” he said emphatically. “I can hardly wait till the eighties and nineties!” Oh? That was a new one!

Before resuming our shopping, I promised to pray for him. Bob’s willingness to talk definitely caught my attention. It certainly seemed unusual to have such a conversation in the store...at least since the outbreak of the coronavirus.

There was another nice exchange with a woman standing in front of us in line as we patiently waited to go through the self-checkout area. She commented on the beautiful display of orchids that had been strategically placed next to the aisle.

“I’d love to buy one, but I have the hardest time growing orchids,” she said.

“They don’t like to be overwatered,” Al shared. “That’s what kills them—overwatering.”

When one of the registers was empty, she pushed her cart over to

it. We happened to get a place close by; so, I continued to talk a bit with her while bagging the groceries. She too seemed very friendly and willing to converse with us.

That happened to be our first shopping trip after the mask mandate had been lifted. For the two years prior Al and I wore masks whenever we went anywhere other than our daughter’s house. Personal contacts with people had sorely been missed.

We had a regular routine for grocery shopping: putting on masks, sanitizing hands, walking up and down the aisles to find the needed items and checking them off the list, all the while trying to maintain distance from others. Using the self-checkout registers eliminated talking to the checkout clerk, unless there was a problem.

For the most part, he and I did our shopping without interacting with anyone other than ourselves. That was almost better for me anyway because I couldn’t breathe well when wearing the mask. Carrying on a conversation wasn’t easy either.

I especially missed seeing the smiles and waves of the children who seemed to turn away from my masked face. Wanting to communicate with folks in some way, I tried smiling more, hoping that my eyes were smiling too.

When finished, we’d wheel our carts out of the store, load the groceries into the car and head for home after sanitizing our hands again and pulling off our masks.

Shopping wasn’t much fun. It seemed so impersonal as did almost every “outing.”

There was definitely a sense of freedom on that first shopping trip without masks—the friendliest, happiest one in a long, long time. It was wonderful to feel somewhat normal again.

Interacting with folks at church was a great relief as well. No more walking in, sitting apart, struggling to get enough air to sing along with the worship team, then walking out after the service without stopping to visit. There was great joy expressed when we were able to see each other’s faces once more. Well, hugs had been missed too!

Although we haven’t seen God, we catch glimpses of His glory as we grow in our relationship with Jesus and experience His love in our hearts and lives. Sometimes God’s countenance is reflected in glowing faces of His children, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I can only imagine the joy that we will feel in heaven when we will stand before God and see Him face to face. Then we will know Him fully, just as He now fully knows us. In the meantime, we wait with faith and hope...and love!

May the Lord bless you and your loved ones as you celebrate Easter! A time for rejoicing!

Al and Judy Lowery

April 2022 Prayer Calendar

Friday, April 1 - Pray that as this Lenten season continues, we can experience spiritual renewal.

Saturday, April 2 - Pray for the Clothing Closet.

Sunday, April 3 - Pray for the Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. and FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, April 4 - Pray as we start a new week that we know that God is with us throughout all situations we encounter.

Tuesday, April 5 - Pray and read Bible verse Psalm 85:11
"Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from Heaven."

Wednesday, April 6 - Pray for the Wednesday Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email Pastor Tom @ tburatovich@gmail.com for the Zoom link.

Thursday, April 7 - Pray for the Praise Teams of our churches as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

Friday, April 8 - Pray for all the church committee members as they make important decisions for our churches.

Saturday, April 9 - Pray and read John 12:13 in preparation for Palm Sunday tomorrow. *"They took Palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the King of Israel.'"*

Sunday, April 10 - Pray for Palm Sunday Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. and FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, April 11 - Pray for Melody and Ryan as they prepare activities for Children and Youth at our churches.

Tuesday, April 12 - Pray for our church families.

Wednesday, April 13 - Pray for the Wednesday Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, April 14 - Pray for Maundy Thursday.

Friday, April 15 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he participates in the Good Friday Service at First Congregational at 12:00pm.

Saturday, April 16 - Pray and reflect on Bible verses 1 Peter 1:3-5 *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*

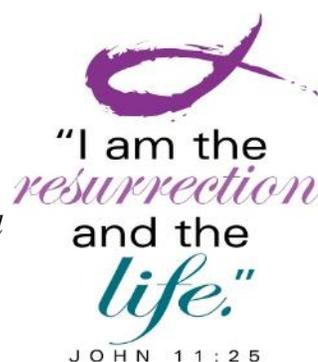
Sunday, April 17 - He has Risen! Pray for Easter Sunday Worship Services:

Sunrise Service - 6:30 am at Murry Park

Easter Sunday Combined Worship Service - 10:00 a.m. at FUMC

Monday, April 18 - Pray for the Prayer Groups of our churches.

Tuesday, April 19 - Pray and reflect on Bible verses John 11:25-26 *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"*



Wednesday, April 20 - Pray for the Wednesday Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, April 21 - Pray and read Bible verse John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Friday, April 22 - Pray for the ones of our churches who are ill or rehabilitating. Pray for strength and healing.

Saturday, April 23 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Romans 8:34 *"Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."*

Sunday, April 24 - Pray for the Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. and FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, April 25 - Pray and read Bible verse Romans 6:8 *"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."*

Tuesday, April 26 - Pray for our community of Porterville today.

Wednesday, April 27 - Pray for the Wednesday Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, April 28 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he does his "Walking Devotions".

Friday, April 29 - Pray and thank God for our many blessings.

Saturday, April 30 - Pray for the Greeters who will welcome all to Sunday Worship Services tomorrow.

Sunday, May 1 - Pray for the Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. and FUMC at 11:00 a.m.



Pastor Tom Buratovich • April 18

First UMC

- Jim McFarlin • April 8
- Ruth Leach • April 15
- Kerri Scranton • April 17
- Bill Ernst • April 18
- Pam Loverin • April 24
- Heather Thompson • April 27
- Joyce Doull • April 28
- Maddisyn Mae Ladrigan • 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

Easter Sunday • April 17

6:30 a.m.

Community Sunrise Service
at the Murry Park Cross

10:00 a.m.

Combined Easter Worship
at First UMC
Egg Hunt and
Coffee Hour Following • All are Welcome!



Grand Ave Staff

- Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*
- Director of Youth Ministries • *Ryan Ridenour*
- Children's Director • *Melody Burkhart*
- 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*
- 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*

Announcements

Clothing Closet at First UMC

Clothing Closet will be open on Saturday, April 2 at 8:30 a.m. Additional times are available by appointment. Contact Ann for further information 559-920-0977.

Moving Help

We praise God that John White will move to Sierra Hills soon. Help is needed to move some of his things. Please contact Jack Egorov or Gordon Young for more information.

Chris Bastian Memorial Service

Church friends are invited to the Memorial Service for Chris Bastian on Friday, April 8 • 2:00 p.m. at the Fair Grounds.

Grand Ave Trustee Happenings

The Trustees are currently looking for a new member to fill an open position on the committee. If you are able to help with the upkeep of our campus, have ideas as how to better manage our facilities, or just want to get your hands dirty while fellowshiping with other members, please contact Ray H, Pastor Tom, or Ryan. We currently meet via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. the 3rd Monday of the month.

Thank you to all those people who have helped with the various projects over the last two months. Whether it was fixing, cleaning, or playing in the dirt and mud, we appreciate all of your help. I especially want to thank those who helped with the new valve (twice) and our sink hole.

If you haven't been over to church during the evening hours, please check out the new LED parking lot lights. We are hoping that this will help with our vandalism and playground issues, save us some money, as well as offer a more secure environment for future activities.

Submitted by Ray H, Trustees Chari

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the May 2022 Messenger is **April 20**. Thank you.

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*