

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave

United Methodist Churches

Porterville, CA

December 2021

Light In the Darkness

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

There's a lot I think I can do, if I am honest, on my own. Sometimes it's small things i.e., change a lightbulb, take out the trash, load the dishwasher-that sort of thing. However, so many times I find myself needing to confess my inability to do the work of ministry in my own power. It's not that I can't do anything. It's just that I do nothing well, memorable, or lasting by myself.

Jesus said he's the vine. This means I am not. I'm not just a branch. I am a branch of the Divine Vine, but not the vine. This is a simple concept but so hard to incorporate into my daily rhythm. I have a deep taproot that seems to be constantly taking up the sidewalk in my spiritual neighborhood. Doesn't seem to matter how many times I cut it off. It grows back faster than dandelions in the spring.

Like you, I cannot directly address my inward tendency for self-reliance. It would be nice if I could simply say, "OK Tom, we're going to knock that off, Got it?" That would be nice. But this side of heaven that is futile and unlikely. My ticket into the glory of eternity was not purchased by my right values and obedience, but by Jesus' perfect life,

substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection.

We live in a culture of self-reliance, an assumption of self-reliance, a bedrock conviction that what we need is self-reliance and that the message of Christmas can somehow be squared with us coming together and making a better world. But, that is not the message of Christmas.

Jesus came people who descended into darkness. These were people who lived in the shadows of their self-deception, the illusions of their self-reliance, and the self-delusions of their sinless nature. We needed a Savior, and we did not even know it. The coming of Jesus means light has come into the darkness, into our darkness, into our illusion of self-reliance and have shattered our self-delusion and brought us to our senses. The coming of Jesus means we know we need a Savior. We need no other program, no other social structure, no other opportunity than to receive Jesus as our Savior, full stop.

So how do we as Methodist churches in Porterville become a place that has a deep three-dimensional vision of our God-shaped horizon?

First, it means if we take the Bible seriously, we must see it as a value. Dependence on God should characterize everything we do. This value is the glue that holds us together. Part of the power of our community is depending on God together. Part of our worship service is depending on God to be present together and to be in God's presence together. It means when we clothe the naked, feed the

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Combined Worship Services

December 19

10:00 a.m. at First UMC

December 24

4:00 p.m. at First UMC

December 26

10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave

January 2

10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave

Youth Ministry

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:15

We have officially entered my favorite time of the year where we are blessed to gather with family, friends, and our congregations to celebrate together the birth of Jesus Christ and be reminded of the blessings that poured forth with his coming into the world. I honestly look forward to Christmas with much anticipation each year. I get excited to see loved ones, participate in the candlelight service, and bless people in my life with special gifts that create beautiful memories.

This year is slightly different, or hugely different, depending on how you look at it, from all the other Christmas experiences I have had. This year my daughter will get to celebrate Christmas for the very first time. I am eager to celebrate this holiday with her and her mother partaking in decorating our home and Christmas tree while listening to Christmas songs. I look forward to giving her wrapped presents and letting her open the gifts to see what's inside.

The question I have been asking myself recently is this: what do I buy a one-year-old for Christmas? Surely, I want the gift to be something she will really enjoy, something that she will hold dear and be excited to share with others when given the chance. I want the gift to be perfect. But does the perfect gift even exist?

I thought long and hard and worked diligently trying to find the perfect gift. I looked on Amazon, cruised through Target, dared the journey through Walmart, but discovered that all material goods didn't meet my requirements for the perfect gift. I sat back after the expedition in gift finding, closed my eyes, and it hit me. Yes, the perfect gift does exist. In fact, the perfect

gift has been available for over 2000 years. This gift is unique in the way it has been given. Everyone is free to have the gift and the benefits of the gift continue throughout all eternity. The perfect gift I can give to my daughter or to anyone is sharing Jesus with them in all facets. Jesus gives, blesses, loves, forgives, shows grace, heals, and laid down his own life for each of us. Yes, I believe I found the perfect gift.

So, how do you give a one-year-old Jesus for Christmas? I thought about this too. I believe you love them as Christ loves us, being patient as they learn new ways of life, continuously sharing Jesus with them through word and deed, reading them Bible stories and praying with them. Also, the love we give to our spouses, family, friends, neighbors, and strangers all reflect Jesus in many ways.

Growing up, I was blessed to

Thanks
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2 Corinthians
9:15

have Jesus be a gift shared with me by my parents and I will do the same with my daughter. I encourage each of you to reach out to someone in your life who needs the gift of Jesus and share him with them. Jesus is truly the perfect gift! Merry Christmas!

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

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hungry, give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, we do so not because we have extra but because we cannot be compassionate, empathetic, and passionate about sharing the Jesus life with these people unless we depend on God to share his life with us and allow his life to flow through us.

This is not a new event, a new program, a new spin or direction. It is the original true North compass heading. It is the flash of light in the darkness. That is why we ask you to give your time, money, and talent. We know you are busy and have limited amounts of each.

Knowing your limitations does not stop us because we know the limitlessness of our God. That darkness limits our vision but we serve a God with limitless vision. By ourselves we feel alone, helpless, inadequate for the great task ahead. But the God we serve is always with us, is our helper in every time of need and whose adequacy was more than enough to create our great cosmic play yard of which we are a grain of sand on the beach.

This Christmas, the incarnation is a light in our darkness, a breath of wellness amid our disease, a ray of sunshine in the bleak midwinter. Jesus truly is a light in the darkness. Please join me in worshiping Christ, the newborn King.

Christmas Perfection

Wow! It's December again. Here we are wrapping up another year. Can you believe it? This month, we will have our first ever combined **Children's Church Christmas Program on December 19 at 10:00 a.m.** at First Church. All the children, at both First and Grand Ave will be entertaining us with the story of Christmas during the Combined Worship Service. After the service, we will have a special guest visiting us, Santa. He will be giving out gifts and taking pictures with the children.

At the beginning of Advent Season, at the front of both churches, there will be a Christmas Tree with angels on it. The angels have the names of the children from that church. Anyone in the Congregation may take one or more angels and buy a gift for that child. The gift is valued at \$10-\$15. Then wrap it and bring it to church before December 12. The gifts will be taken to First Church and put under the tree, so that Santa may present them to the children. This is where the gifts for the children come from.

This Service is just one of four Combined Services that we will have, to celebrate The Christmas Season and New Year together.



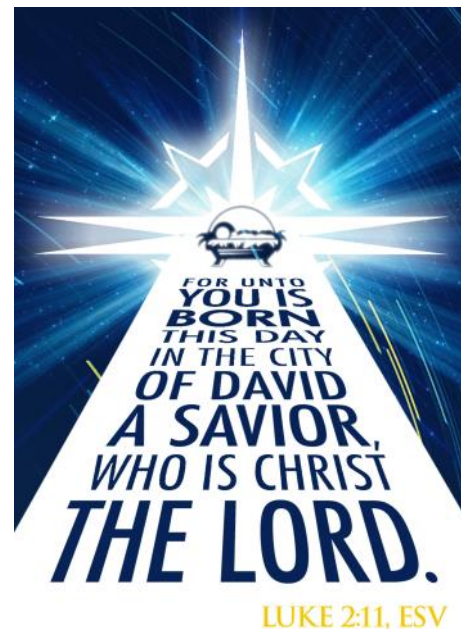
December 2021

Christmas is such a special time. It is a time for us to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a Season for family gatherings, fun family traditions, baking and lots of decorating.

It is also a time of "being busy", taking for granted that tomorrow will come, and a lot of assuming and rushing. We just are busy being busy, instead of stopping to enjoy The Christmas Season, our families, and friends.

Everyone wants to have the perfect Christmas. Perfect decorations, perfect parties, the perfect presents for their children, a Christmas Dinner cooked to perfection, a perfectly set table for dinner, and the perfect amount of Seasonal Activities to do. In our quest for perfection in Christmas, we forget that Christmas is already perfect. Because Jesus was born on the very first Christmas. There is no amount of decorations, cookies, presents or anything that can make Christmas more perfect than it is. Our Savior was born and there is nothing else that is needed to make perfection out of the Christmas Season. As we move forward though the end of the year, I pray that we will not take this Christmas for granted in our search for the perfect Christmas. I pray that we will slow down and enjoy the perfect Christmas that Our Heavenly Father has already given us.

In closing, I would like to let both of my Church Families know how much I love and appreciate them. I am so thankful to belong to two wonderful Churches. Thank you very much for taking care of my family and I, after I came home from the hospital. We are so



thankful for all of the cards, texts, phone calls, the meals that were brought to us, groceries, and for the wonderful Thanksgiving Dinner that was provided for us. I can't even tell you how much we appreciate everyone helping us. We are humbled by the love and kindness that has been show to us. From the bottom of our hearts, Thank you.

May Christmas bring you peace and joy this year.

Melody Burkhart

Children's Sunday School



**Combined
Worship Services
December 19
10:00 a.m. at First UMC
Children's Program**

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“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13 NIV

We had a “sad but sweet” send-off this month for Maggie, the young woman whom Al and I have helped sponsor for many years at a children’s home in Oaxaca, Mexico. Margarita, who goes by “Maggie” doesn’t know English and we don’t know much Spanish; however, we were able to correspond through an interpreter, sending letters and cards back and forth three or four times a year.

Over time quite a bond formed between us even though we had never met. Then came an email from the person in charge of sponsorship at the home, telling us that she was leaving the program. Nothing was wrong...everything was right! She had completed the LVN program last year in Mexico and now has received her RN degree.

This was quite an accomplishment for several reasons, the first being that she managed to stick with it and finish the program in the midst of the COVID pandemic. I wanted to find out if Maggie had to stop her studies to help care of the sick in the overcrowded hospitals there. But good for her that she managed to complete the necessary requirements even if she had to study and work at the same time. Maggie is now a nurse! What a great accomplishment for her.

Maggie first came to the Foundation for His Ministry children’s home in Oaxaca in 2008, after having been abandoned by her mother. Behind in schooling for her age, Maggie had to make up for lost time. She was fourteen years old when she arrived at the mission

home, starting in the eighth grade, but by the time she got to be a sophomore, was already eighteen years old.

What did she want to do when she grew up? Attend chef school and become a chef after graduating from high school! The mission in Oaxaca gave her the opportunity to attend classes regularly, so that she eventually was able to graduate from high school.

Somewhere along the line, Maggie’s goal changed from attending chef school to enrolling in nursing school which she was able to do with the help of a team of sponsors who continued supporting and encouraging her. At twenty-seven years old, she realized her goal and became an RN.

How wonderful that this ministry not only takes in and nurtures vulnerable children but also provides support to them all of the way through school and continues to stick by them after graduation. Many of them have been and are going to universities, with high aspirations as well as a firm commitment to follow Christ. What an impact they are having and will have in the future upon their communities, shining His light wherever they go!

It has been a great blessing getting to know Maggie and watching her grow through the years—in stature and confidence as well as in her faith in Christ which she often expressed in her notes to us. She has also been extremely grateful for our support, faithfully sending thank you cards along with colorful drawings.



Knowing that she now has hope for the future, not only through her new career, but also through her relationship with Him fills my heart with joy.

A prayer and praise email from the Foundation for His ministry just arrived with this note:

“Father God... We thank you again for how you have changed Maggie’s life. How she went from almost being sold as a child bride, to her knowing you, growing with us and pursuing a career in nursing. God, you are so good!” To that prayer, I echo “Amen!”

As the advent season is about to start, may we all focus on the hope that is found in knowing Jesus Christ personally. Jesus, the One who saves us from our sins...the hope of the nations, the hope of all mankind.

“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1:20-21)

December 2021 Prayer Calendar

Wednesday, December 1 - Pray for the Online Bible Study led by Pastor Tom at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email tburatovich@gmail.com if interested in joining.

Thursday, December 2 - Pray for the ones in our church families who are ill and those who are rehabilitating. Pray for healing and strength.

Friday, December 3 - Pray for the ones who lead and who are involved in the Prayer Groups of our churches.

Saturday, December 4 - Pray for this Advent Season as we celebrate the gifts of **hope, peace, joy and love** from our Savior Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Sunday, December 5 - Pray for the Sunday Worship Service GAUMC 9:30 a.m. and FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, December 6 - Pray as we start a new week that we will remember God is with us as we go through different situations.

Tuesday, December 7 - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they plan and do activities this Christmas Season with the children of our churches.

Wednesday, December 8 - Pray for the Online Bible Study led by Pastor Tom at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, December 9 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Matthew 1:21 *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

Friday, December 10 - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Worship Services.

Saturday, December 11 - Pray for the Greeters who will welcome all to Sunday Worship Services.

Sunday, December 12 - Pray for the Sunday Worship Service GAUMC 9:30 a.m. and FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, December 13 - Pray for the ones who are involved in the committees of our churches as they help make important decisions.

Tuesday, December 14 - Please take a moment and pray for our church families.

Wednesday, December 15 - Pray for the Online Bible Study led by Pastor Tom at 10:00a.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, December 16 - Please pray for our community of Porterville.

Friday, December 17 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares his sermons for the next few Combined Worship Services.

Saturday, December 18 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*

Sunday, December 19 - Pray for the **Combined Worship Service at FUMC at 10:00 a.m.**

Monday, December 20 - Pray for safety and wellness as our church families travel during this Christmas time.

Tuesday, December 21 - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:7 *"and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."*

Wednesday, December 22 - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:8-9 *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."*



Thursday, December 23 - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:13-14 *"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"*

Friday, December 24 - Pray for the **Combined Candlelight Christmas Eve Service • 4:00 p.m. at FUMC.**

Saturday, December 25 - On this **Christmas Day**, pray and give thanks for our blessings as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ and His Love for us.

Sunday, December 26 - Pray for the **Combined Worship Service at GAUMC at 10:00 a.m.**

Monday, December 27 - Pray and reflect on John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

Tuesday, December 28 - Pray and reflect on 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."*

Wednesday, December 29 - Please pray and read Job 34:32 *"Teach me what I cannot see, if I have done wrong, I will not do so again."*

Thursday, December 30 - Pray and reflect on Colossians 3:15 *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."*

Friday, December 31 - As we end 2021, pray that 2022 will bring wellness and new beginnings. In this coming new year, may we strive to have a closer relationship with God. *May God protect all who travel this day.*

DECEMBER

Birthdays

First UMC

Robert Keck • December 4
Carly Ladrigan • December 20
Rev. Don Roulsten • December 29
Ethan Burkhart • December 29

Grand Ave UMC

Jan Geiling • December 4
Amanda Ridenour • December 5
Fernando Gutierrez • December 10
Elizabeth Gill • December 15
John White • December 31

Announcements

Clothing Closet at First UMC

Clothing Closet will be open on Saturday, December 4 at 8:30 a.m. Please contact Ann for appointments and further information 559-920-0977.

Thank You

A belated Thank You to Gordon Young and Bill Means for your help in repainting the Fireside Room at Grand Ave in October. Your willingness to always be available to help maintain our facility is a Blessing!
Sincerely, *Ray Holdsworth*

Advent Online Bible Study

The Advent Online Bible Study meets Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. December 1, 8, 15. All are welcome to join us. Contact Pastor Tom for a link to the zoom online meeting, tburatovich@gmail.com.

Next Newsletter Deadline

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

Tithes and Offering

Thank you for your continued support of the ministries of First UMC and Grand Ave UMC.

Christmas Choir

All singers are welcome to join the **Christmas Choir**. Rehearsals are Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. at First UMC on December 1, 8, 15, 22. Contact Christine Klippenstein for more information.



Walking Devotions

Each Tuesday and Thursday short 2-3 minute devotion videos are posted on each church Facebook pages.

www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC
www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC
www.grandavenue.org/walking-devotions

Sunday Sermons

Sunday Sermons are on the website www.grandavenue.org. Check it out.



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.

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