

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave
United Methodist Churches
Porterville, CA

Deep Listening
by Pastor Tom Buratovich

March 2022

*Everyone should be quick
to listen, slow to speak*

James 1:19

As a shepherd of God's people, as a Christian, and as a curious human being, I have tried to listen. I have tried to understand. I have tried to take that understanding and implement something based on my newfound understanding.

The Orthodox Church calls the first Sunday of Lent "*Humility Sunday*." The lectionary text is the parable of the Pharisee in the tax collector found in Luke 18:9-14.

We wish to emulate the tax collector in that we are humble before God and realistic about our sinful shortcomings and need for God's grace in all things. However, a second equivalent emphasis Orthodox devotion includes is to not emulate the Pharisee in the form of vigilance against false humility. "*It is better not to fast and be humble, than to fast and be proud,*" wrote one Orthodox commentator.

For me, this means that I am a pastor only by calling but not because of merit or anything that would equate with being higher, better, more deserving, holy, sanctified, accepted, saintly, or any other qualitative status with God.

I am just like you - more broken than I can imagine, yet more loved than I can dream! Lent in many

ways is an announcement of a corporate quest for humility. This journey always starts with true repentance and represents the root and strength of the Lenten effort.

Let us flee the proud speech of the Pharisee and learn humility of the tax collector. "*Open to me, O Giver of life, the gates of repentance.*"

Our sermon series during Lent will examine the many faces of sin and try to answer the question, "*What is wrong with us, the human race?*" While it is sin, our attempt is to be more practical to find the balance between sanctifying humility and transforming confidence and boldness.

We can liken the journey toward **Easter** as a hike up the mountain. As we approach the summit the incline increases and the exertion intensifies. Our distance becomes shorter and anticipation greater.

We are planning some wonderful ways of gathering on this wonderful day. I am excited to revive the **Easter Sunrise Service** at the cross behind the public pool at **6:30 a.m.** We will worship the risen Christ with the rising Sun. Then at **10:00 a.m.** we will worship the Risen Christ together at First Church.

Following the service, we will have an egg hunt and coffee hour.

While it feels like returning to

normal, we know the best we can achieve is a modified new normal. We pray that Jesus meets us in that new phase of life as well. Your Church Council is prayerfully studying this challenge and asks for your prayers. The process, underway at Grand and soon to include First is a wonderful process of identifying our unique contribution.

We had a moment of discovery that led us to the following statement: ***Porterville Methodist churches in the next five years will restore the process of holy living for Christ followers through the pursuit of ancient Christian practices.*** We are
Continued on Page 2



Ash
WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday, March 2
at First UMC self-guided
"Journey to The Cross."
available 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

2:00 p.m. join us for a Centering
Prayer session in the Lobby
of First Church.

"For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him."
Psalm 62:5

During my years of elementary and junior high school, I had a good buddy by the name of Jesse. We met in kindergarten and formed a lasting relationship through our time together in school. Jesse was always kind to me and those around him. He was quick to laugh and eager to let everyone join in the fun at recess. Jesse was easy to like, and I enjoyed spending time with him.

There was one interesting thing about Jesse that occurred once a year; he would show up to school with a black marking on his forehead. Sometimes the marking looked like a small cross, other times the marking looked like a dark smudge that Jesse forgot to wash off his face. I don't recall other students in our class with that type of marking, so that made me curious as to why he had it and the rest of us didn't. So, I was determined to find out.

After a few years of witnessing Jesse show up to school with a dark mark on his forehead, I finally had the courage to ask him why he had the marking when the rest of us didn't. During recess after lunch, Jesse explained to me that he had the marking because it was Ash Wednesday. I had no idea what he was talking about. I had never heard of this special day. He went on to share with me that the mark helps him to remember the wrong he has done and all the good that God has done for him. I thought that was pretty cool. I knew about God and Jesus from a young age, and hearing Jesse talk about the mark on his forehead made me want one.

After our conversation ended and we went back to playing marbles, Jesse suddenly remembered something that he thought was very important. He shared with me that he's also not going to eat any sugar until Easter. I looked at him like he was a crazy person. He went on to explain that it was important that starting the day you get your ashes you should give something up that you really like and replace it with something that helps you get closer to God.

This simple, yet profound conversation I had with my friend at such a young age has stayed with me all these years. I believe God was using Jesse to plant seeds of faith within me, even though we were so young. As I grew older, whenever I would see a person with a dark mark on their forehead, I would be reminded about what Jesse shared with me and would recognize that person as a believer in Jesus.

I am thankful for my conversation during elementary school that created within me a desire to know more about

FORTY Days OF LENT

Christianity and the practices people of the faith participate in. Being a Christian myself, Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season has become an important time for me. I look forward to the time of introspection and self-examination, understanding that I am flawed, yet God's grace is abundant through Jesus. Each year I participate in this practice I grow closer to God, which I am grateful for.

Do you have an Ash Wednesday or Lenten story? If you don't, this year is a great time to begin your participation in this special time in your Christian Journey and you may even develop a special story you can share with others. I encourage each of you to allow yourself to become fully open to the work of God in your heart during the Lenten season. You will be blessed and grow in beautiful ways as you say no to self and yes to God.

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

Deep Listening continued from page 1 *by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

restoring the basics and bringing into greater clarity the trace elements of Christian living. Regular prayer, repentance, study, worship, and fasting are all pieces of the Mosaic of faith, of community, of life together. The community that has experienced the new birth, the gift of the Spirit's anointing, and the prolonged manifestation of God's presence will be our food through the wilderness.

We have tried to listen. We believe we have heard. Now the process continues to formulate a plan and to look towards our immediate future.



Treasure Hunt

As a child, I think that one of the best things to do is, go on a hunt for treasure. A good old fashioned pirate's treasure hunt comes to mind as one of the most fun. This involves a map with a big "X" marks the spot, a buried treasure chest, a pirate's hat, and possibly a very cute eye patch.



Though, treasure can be considered many different things. For example, treasure can be waking up on Christmas Day to see what Santa has brought. It can be hunting for Easter eggs on Easter, a letter from a loved one, a kiss from a grandchild, or a text or phone call when you are sad. It can be buying your first new home. Treasure can also be a piece of pizza on reward day, when you have been dieting for a week.

Most of the time we consider treasure a material thing, but treasure can also be non-material things. It can be hope, peace, love, and wisdom.

Wisdom is the most important treasure that we can have. The

Bible tells us of this in Proverbs 3:13-14 "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."

Wow! Wisdom is better than gold or silver. Then how come we go treasure hunting for these things, but we do not seek out wisdom, in the same way? The Bible says that wisdom is far better than anything else we can desire, but I never have heard of going on a treasure hunt for wisdom. Have you?

The funny thing is that God has made wisdom so easily accessible. He offers it freely and generously. He has given us a desire to seek knowledge but He does not force it upon us. We have to put forth the effort and diligently seek it. We need to give it the same dedication we give to hunting for hidden treasure.

Wisdom can bring us great rewards if we apply it. In our lives, it can be the most important treasure we have and it can unlock so many other treasures like, hope,

love, and peace. It can give us what material possessions can not give. But if we simply observe or just listen to wisdom, it will not help us.

I encourage you to intensify your efforts in seeking wisdom. To go on your own personal treasure hunt for wisdom. This can be done by reading the Bible daily and all other good books. Seeking out good teachers, and through prayer. I know that worldly things bring disappointment, but wisdom does not disappoint anyone. It brings us closer to Our Heavenly Father and keeps us walking with Him on a daily bases.

Blessings to you on your quest for treasure,

Melody Burkhart

Children's Sunday School



"Seek and you will find."
- Matthew 7:7, NIV

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.



Easter Sunday, April 17

Sunrise Service

6:30 a.m. at Murray Park

Easter Worship Service

One combined service at
First Church at 10:00 a.m.



Passing Along a Blessing

By Judy Lowery

"This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' So they (the priests) will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them." Numbers 6:24-25 NIV

Several days ago, I emailed all of the members of our small group asking about the titles of their favorite hymns or worship songs. A friend who is a gifted vocalist and pianist had offered to tape some songs to use at our zoom meetings on Saturday mornings.

Many folks responded with their favorites including familiar hymns such as "How Great Thou Art" and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." A praise song performed by Kari Jobe called "The Blessing" was also requested. Al and I had heard it sung a few times in our contemporary worship service—a powerful song with words taken from the Old Testament book of Numbers.

In Numbers 6:24-26, Moses was instructed to teach the priests this blessing and they in turn were to invoke it over the people of Israel from one generation to the next. Thus, the Israelites would identify themselves as God's people, beloved and blessed with His protection, presence, grace and peace.

Through the centuries this particular prayer of blessing became a regular part of worship, not only for the Jews but also for Christians. It is still often used today, being read or sung as a benediction at the end of the service. I'm sure that most of us would recognize the traditional melody to the words: "May the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and give you peace, and give you peace..."

Not only had I read that same passage earlier in the week, it also came up again twice on Sunday

morning in two different contemporary services. Well, that caught my attention! I had to stop and ask myself, "Okay, what is the Lord trying to tell me? Is this what He wants me to write about this week?" So, I waited, prayed and read all of the scriptures related to blessings, until I felt sure that He was guiding me in using the verses from Numbers 6.

But here is where things took an unexpected turn. While looking at an email account that Al and I seldom use, I realized that besides quarantine reports and junk mail, it contained two personal letters that had been sitting unread for almost a year.

We normally read our emails daily, but from another account. Unfortunately, the account set up in my name had been neglected. One of the email letters was written in February 2021 by a man claiming to be my third cousin who had found my name with the help of an online genealogy tracker.

It was amazing to stumble across his email. Third cousins? That meant we shared the same great-great grandfather! He had carefully traced the family tree from that ancestor, but was wanting stories and old photographs from my branch of the "tree."

He also wondered why my ancestors moved from the family home in Hannibal, Missouri to northern California, a question that set me on a search through the scanty records that I had obtained previously.

Since that time, third cousin



Robert and I have been corresponding back and forth. Unpacking some of the boxes of old family photos stored down in the basement has been brought back many happy memories. Even though he is a third cousin, I can definitely see a family resemblance in Robert's smiling face.

Each of the people who have come before us have made a contribution in forming us, in determining who we are today. While it is amazing to think about all of the ways the Lord has blessed us from one generation to the next, just consider the blessings He has showered upon us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Through faith in Jesus, we have become part of His family, bearing the name "Christian." Our sins have been forgiven; we have been spiritually reborn and are looking forward to the day when we will be with Him in heaven forever.

Indeed, the Lord has blessed us and has made His face shine upon us. May His blessing be passed along to future generations, so that it might become a reality in their lives as well. Amen!

March 2022 Prayer Calendar

Tuesday, March 1 - Pray and read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 *"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

Wednesday, March 2 - Pray for the self-guided **Ash Wednesday** meditations at First UMC between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. A time of Centering Prayer at 2:00 p.m. All are welcome to participate.

Thursday, March 3 - Pray for the members of church committees as they make decisions for our churches.

Friday, March 4 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Philippians 4:13 *"I can do all this through Him who gives me strength."*

Saturday, March 5 - Pray for the Greeters who will greet all who attend Sunday Worship Services tomorrow.

Sunday, March 6 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, March 7 - Pray for the Staff Parish Committee as they meet to update personnel policies and manuals.

Tuesday, March 8 - Pray and read Psalms 28:7-8 *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy and with my song I praise him."*

Wednesday, March 9 - Pray for the Online Bible Study lead by Pastor Tom via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. **For the link, email him at tburatovich@gmail.com**

Thursday, March 10 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Deuteronomy 21:6 *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ..., for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you or forsake you."*

Friday, March 11 - Pray and read Isaiah 40:29 *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."*

Saturday, March 12 - Pray for the Praise Teams as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

Sunday, March 13 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services at GAUMC 9:30 a.m. and at FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, March 14 - Pray and thank God for our many blessings.

Tuesday, March 15 - Pray for Melody and Ryan as they prepare activities for the children of our churches.

Wednesday, March 16 - Pray for the Online Bible Study lead by Pastor Tom via Zoom at 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, March 17 - Pray for our church families today.

Friday, March 18 - Pray and reflect on Isaiah 41:10 *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your god. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

Saturday, March 19 - Pray for our community of Porterville.

Sunday, March 20 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, March 21 - Pray as we go through Lent, that we may have a transforming experience.

Tuesday, March 22 - Pray and read Ephesians 2:6-7 *"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show you incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."*

Wednesday, March 23 - Pray for the Online Bible Study lead by Pastor Tom via Zoom at 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, March 24 - Pray and reflect on 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."*

Friday, March 25 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares his sermon for Sunday Worship Services.

Saturday, March 26 - Pray and read Psalm 46:1 *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."*

Sunday, March 27 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services at GAUMC at 9:30 a.m. FUMC at 11:00 a.m.

Monday, March 28 - Pray and reflect on 2 Timothy 4:17 *"But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth."*

Tuesday, March 29 - Pray for those who are ill or who are rehabilitating at this time. Pray for healing and strength.

Wednesday, March 30 - Pray for the Online Bible Study lead by Pastor Tom via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. For the link, email him at tburatovich@gmail.com

Thursday, March 31 - Pray and read Joshua 1:9 *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*





First UMC

Michael Martin • March 4
Paul Klippenstein • March 11
Patty Dumas • March 17

Grand Ave UMC

Amy Buratovich • March 1
Hope Overholt • March 4
Judy Buratovich • March 6
Briana Kehoe • March 8
Maxine Itzenhauser • March 15
Garrett Borges • March 15
Sandy Young • March 16
Liam Fleming • March 18



**Move your clocks
forward
ONE HOUR on
Saturday night
March 12.**

Easter Sunday • April 17

6:30 a.m.

Community Sunrise Service

at Murry Park

10:00 a.m.

Combined Easter Worship

at First UMC



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

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

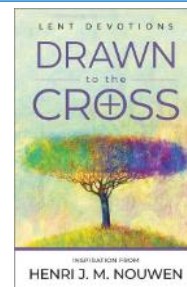
www.grandavenue.org

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

Announcements

Lenten Devotional

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 2. This season we have a Lenten devotional available for you. Pick up a Lenten Devotional booklet at either church any Sunday in February.



Clothing Closet at First UMC

Clothing Closet is open on Saturday, March 5. Contact Ann for further information 559-920-0977.

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the April 2022 Messenger is **March 21**. Thank you.

Tithes and Offering

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



First Staff

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

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*