



Calvin Presbyterian Church
where faith, compassion, and authenticity meet

Calvin's News & Notes

The Standish Inkwell

March 2010

Have you seen the recent “characters welcome” ads on the USA television network? They’re sort of interesting in an odd way. The ads feature stars from the different USA television shows in quick succession saying something about themselves, such as “I’m a soon-to-be mother.” “I am a dad.” “I’m the son of a World War II veteran.” “I am half-Mexican.” “I’m an olive-skinned fella.” “I’m Irish,... and lucky.” “I’m a volunteer.” “I’m an adoptive father.” “I’m a Christian.” “I’m Jewish,... in case you couldn’t tell.” “I am spiritual.” “I believe in all paths to God...” Out of all the comments, the last one somehow sticks with me each time I hear the ads.

What do you think? Are all paths to God valid? Is the Christian path the only one? I’m often around evangelicals who are extremely confident that the only legitimate path to God is their path. And I don’t necessarily mean merely a Christian path. Many believe that only those who have precisely given their lives over to Christ in a prescribed way are saved. They would confidently say that being a Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox does not make us truly Christian. Meanwhile, I’ve met Roman Catholics who are just as confident that only Catholics will get to heaven (with a brief stop in purgatory). Of course I could find Muslims, Jews, and those from other religions who are just as confident in their own path, and just as denigrating of other paths. In contrast, I’ve met any number of more progressive Christians who confidently proclaim that everyone is saved. And I’ve met non-religious people who, like our USA Network character, proclaim that all paths to God are valid.

(Continued on page 2)

Did You Know?

“Dogs in the Bible” by Brendon Wahlberg

I asked my wife, Toni Schlemmer, what she would like me to write about in a column. Evidently combining two of the things she loves most in life (Church and her Basset Hound Toby), she replied, “How about *Dogs in the Bible*?” Perhaps she was imagining that there was a story in the Gospel of Luke about Jesus and his faithful Basset who followed him everywhere, hoping that his two dog cookies could be multiplied into enough treats to feed five thousand dogs (which he would nevertheless try to eat all by himself).

The truth is that the Bible is not kind to dogs. Our canine companions are not described as man’s best friend in the good book. I hated to tell Toni this, but dogs were viewed very differently in that long ago time and place. Here are the facts: dogs are mentioned in the Bible approximately forty times, and nearly all of those references are very negative in tone.

A large number of those negative mentions are found in one section of the Hebrew Bible, in the long narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.

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Are all paths to God valid? Is the Christian path the only valid one?

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THE STANDISH INKWELL (CONTINUED...)

I find this a difficult issue to deal with for one major reason. God doesn't consult with me on who is saved and who isn't, who is invited into the afterlife and who isn't. I know that everyone is very passionate in their beliefs, but being Presbyterian I am called to look at the issue biblically, and not necessarily passionately. Over time I've learned that the Bible is always more complex, and paradoxically simpler, than many people give it credit for. For example, if we are to be biblical about the issue of what path to God is the right one, the question we have to ask is "which path are we talking about?" Are we talking about an Old Testament one in which only Jews are chosen and saved? Are we talking about Jesus' one in which all who accept God and God's ways are saved? Are we talking about Paul's belief that only those who confess in Jesus' name or accept God's grace through faith as being saved? Being Presbyterian means resisting pat answers in order to understand the breadth of what the Bible says.

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So, back to our question: are all paths to God valid? For answers I'll go to Jeremiah, whom I've been studying because of our *Discovering the Prophets* sermon series for Lent. The Jews of his time were worshiping both God and many other gods. They were covering all their bases. How did Jeremiah respond? He reminded them that when they worship God and other gods, they are like adulterers or prostitutes who give themselves to whatever is most attractive. When things go wrong, they try to return to God, like adulterers returning to a spouse, and then wonder why God is so silent. They create a faith that pleases them, but that degrades their relationship with God. It's not that God doesn't love them anymore, it's that their relationship has been broken. For Jeremiah, the true path to God is the one that leads to a healthy life, especially a spiritually healthy life.

With this in mind, the fact is that not every belief and faith is healthy. Are all paths to God valid? To me it's like asking if all foods are healthy? Not every food is healthy. In fact, a lot of the stuff we eat tastes really, really good, but a constant diet of them would make us sick. The same is true of faiths. Some are incredibly unhealthy. For instance, I believe that fundamentalism in any form is essentially unhealthy because it is like eating nothing but red meat. It may keep us alive, but it will eventually tear out our insides. Fundamentalist beliefs may connect us to some degree with God, but it eventually tears our souls apart by being so restrictive, judgmental, and self-focused (the focus of many fundamentalists is on how *I* can be saved, rather than on caring about others). In the same way, being spiritual but not religious is like eating nothing but cake and ice cream. They're really tasty, but they aren't nutritious. In a similar way, being spiritual but not religious leads people to adopt self-created and self-congratulatory beliefs that offer little nourishing substance. Our beliefs and prayers becomes selfish and a bit infantile, and we really don't grow much spiritually, although we don't notice it because... well... we haven't spent much time learning what spiritual growth requires. Finally, there are a lot of cults and cult-like faiths out there that I don't believe lead to God because their focus is on appeasing cult leaders. These can be incredibly destructive.

So, what paths do lead to God? For an answer I look to scripture. Jesus tells us that we know whether people are of God by their fruits. He says, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.*" Similarly Paul says that "*the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" I would say that the true paths to God are the ones that lead people to form good fruit in their lives.

I'm not sure whether we can look at people around us and easily judge their faith, determining who is or isn't saved, or who is or isn't on a path to God. But I do think we can judge the fruit of their path. Does their path lead them to bear fruit that contributes to others? Does it lead people to acts of generosity, faith, love, and joy?

Personally, I long ago gave up worrying about other paths. I have learned to focus on our shared Christian path, and have focused on making sure that we at Calvin Church are providing a path for people to discover God in a personal, tangible way. Ultimately I think that's what matters. Let God take care of the end result, and let us just make sure we are walking a path that leads to love, faith, joy, and the other fruits of the Spirit. And in the same vein encourage others to choose a path that bears healthy fruit. That's what a true Christian faith does. It bears good fruit. I

So, I guess the question to ask yourself is whether your path is a healthy one, and to also ask what kind of fruit it's producing.

Blessings to you, *The Rev. Dr. N. Graham Standish*

Adult Education for Lent: *The Gospel of John*

Are you aware of how different John's Gospel is from Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's? Those three are very similar, but most of the material in the Gospel of John cannot be found in those three gospels. Why not? What's so different? During Adult Education in Lent, Dr. Standish will introduce you to the Gospel of John, reveal to you why it is so revered, and lead you to be transformed through its words. *10:00 to 10:45 a.m. each Sunday morning in Fellowship Hall.*

Parenting Tips: Does Praising Your Child Hurt Your Child?

I encourage you, if you are really interested in becoming a more effective parent, to read a new book by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman titled *Nurture Shock*. It is a wonderful book that explores how some of our commonly held beliefs may actually be hurting our children rather than helping. For instance, did you know that praising your child may actually create problems for your child? It's not so much the praising that hurts our children. It's what we praise them for. For instance, praising your child for being smart, pretty, or good may actually create anxiety in them. How? Because you are praising them for qualities they have little control over. By praising them for these qualities, you may actually lead them to worry about being seen as dumb, ugly, or bad. Praising is important, but it is really only effective when we praise tangible behaviors. For example, kids who get an A or B are better off being praised for working hard than for being smart. Researchers have discovered that kids who are praised for being smart often become worriers, worrying that their smarts will disappear. Thus, they avoid taking initiative and risks that may cause them to look dumb.

Meanwhile Kids who are praised for working hard learn that hard work is good, regardless of the results. Kids who are praised for taking good care of themselves are better off than those praised for being "pretty." Kids who are praised for doing specific good behaviors ("you did a good job of being patient") are better off than those who are praised for being "good."

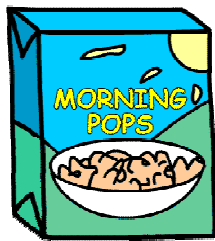
So, if you are going to praise your children, what are the best ways to do so? First, make sure you praise them for specific behaviors, rather than for general qualities. Second, make sure your praise is sincere. Kids know when you are faking it. Finally, don't over-praise them. It is important for children to learn to do things for which they won't be praised. This allows them to become inner-driven, rather than outer-driven.

Contributed by Dr. Standish

Food Cupboard News



Food Dedication is **March 8**...or any day that you remember to bring it to the church!



We are now providing food for over 100 families....I'm sure that is not a surprise, considering the state of the economy. As a result, our shelves are bare. We need everything: egg noodles, Jello and puddings, boxes of spaghetti, Helper Meals, rice, instant potatoes, ready to eat pasta meals and cereal, canned fruit, vegetables, soup, Sloppy Joe sauce, chili and stews and jars of jelly, peanut butter and spaghetti sauce. We continue to need brown grocery bags (we are now using about 210 each month) and monetary donations to pay for the cost of the \$5 and \$10 Shop & Save vouchers. You can make checks payable to Calvin Church and put "Food Cupboard" on the memo line.

Please help if you can. We are so blessed to be in a position that allows us to serve our neighbors in need rather than be in the line at Zion Church on the 3rd. Tues. of each month for Food Cupboard distribution.

Thank you and have a blessed Lenten Season

Contributed by Arby Shenesky



Green Team Tidbits



Save your plastic Easter eggs for next year. One bag of plastic Easter eggs will last you many years if you gather them up and save them. Just add new prizes (we usually use small pieces of chocolate and money). If your kids have outgrown them, pass them along on freecycle. There's no need to repurchase them every year. <http://www.freecycle.org/>

Contributed by Tom Reiber

Presbyterian Women's News

Presbyterian Women gave \$200.00 at the Haiti Concert from the winter soup sale. An upcoming sale will give another donation towards Haiti via the Beaver Butler Presbyterian Women.

Contributed by Kathy Efaw



Morning Circle

Weather did not permit our gathering together in February. Now hopefully **Thursday, March 11th** will be a better day. Our lesson is Chapter 8, page 63. We will also be ordering our new books. Do you want regular or LARGE PRINT ????? Peg Leddon will be taking our orders and Rosemary Shirley will lead us in our discussion of Luke's Gospel.

Contributed by Flo Towers

Mission Matters

We're scheduled for an evening in March at the Ladle and the Hearth. Watch the weekly bulletin for details. Calvin Church is one of sixteen groups that serve dinner at the Ladle during the year. In 2009 those combined groups served 4231 meals to the guests at First Presbyterian Church, Ambridge. Compare that with the 950 meals served in 2005, and you can see how important that ministry is to the greater Ambridge community. As of February 13, 2010 a grand total of 13,998 meals have been served since the Ladle opened.

Thanks to all who contributed in any way to Project Hope. A total of 63 tote bags were filled during the church school hour on February 14.

During Lent the Mission Committee will be sharing information about the annual One Great Hour of Sharing offering. This offering is one that is taken in many denominations at the close of the Lenten period. Children may bring home offering banks that are not only for their use, but for the use of the whole family. If you don't have a bank, put some kind of container on your table that will remind you daily of the many blessings God has given you - and then make an offering in gratitude. This offering, part of which goes for Disaster Assistance, will be received on Palm Sunday, **March 28**.

Contributed by Agnes Peebles

Youth Formation & Education

With spring right around the corner, the Youth Formation & Education Committee is planning ahead. We are looking for both adult and teen volunteers to help with the following:

* Vacation Bible School Task Force - In July, we will be hosting a vacation bible school for the congregation and community. We need helpers to organize and coordinate this event.

* Summer Children's Program - For 12 weeks through the summer, we offer a modified children's program during the early worship service (for ages 3 - 6 years). We need helpers to lead these classes which will run from June - August. All lessons and materials will be provided.

These are 2 great opportunities to get involved with the younger youth. If you can assist, in any way, with these important ministries, please contact Karen Albert at 724-772-3898 or jalbert@zoominternet.net

Calling all graduates: If you are a high school or college graduate this year, please let us know your future plans and goals. We would love to share this and to acknowledge your accomplishments with the congregation. Please email your information to Karen Albert at jalbert@zoominternet.net by **April 15th**.

Contributed by Karen Albert

Calvin Youth Groups

Calvin Youth Group (CYG), grades 9-12 Sunday evenings, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Calvin Youth Group 2 (CYG2), grades 7-8 Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Calvin Youth Group 3 (CYG3), grades 5-6 Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:15 p.m.

Ready for God (RFG), grades 3-4 Sunday evenings, 6:00-7:15 p.m.

All Youth Groups—always check the Sunday bulletins for any changes

For further information contact Bruce Smith, Youth Director, at the church at 724-452-7560 (ext 14) or brucesmith@zoominternet.net

“Dogs in the Bible” (continued)

When David wants to tell King Saul that he, David, is insignificant and lowly, he compares himself to a dead dog (1 Samuel 24:14).

When Saul's grandson abases himself before David, claiming that he is a mere servant who is beneath anyone's notice, he also compares himself to a dead dog (2 Samuel 9:8). And, when someone curses David and throws stones, David's supporter calls the attacker a dead dog, and prepares to cut off the man's head (2 Samuel 16:9). A dead dog is about the most contemptible thing a person can be called.

But when the subject is a live dog, the situation is even worse. In Samuel and Kings, dogs are known as carnivorous scavengers who eat unburied corpses. Dogs are said to eat the followers of the enemy, Jeroboam, who die in the city (1 Kings 14:11). Dogs also eat the body of Jezebel (1 Kings 21:23), and lick up the blood of dead people such as Naboth and Ahab (1 Kings 21:19 and 1 Kings 22:38). Jeremiah 15:3 mentions dogs as destroyers who drag away bodies. The worst fate a man can have is to be eaten by dogs after death.

The references in Psalms are no better. Psalm 59:6 reveals that dogs prowled around the city at night, howling or snarling. A group of evildoers surrounding a person is likened to a pack of such city dogs (Psalm 22:16), for the “*power of the dog*” is to threaten one with death (Psalm 22:20). So, dogs were dangerous animals, roaming in packs in the night.

How about the eating habits of dogs? Proverbs 26:11 has this disgusting wisdom to impart: “*Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly.*” Dogs eating their own vomit must have been somewhat common for this to become a proverb. Exodus 22:31 also has dogs eating what is unfit for human consumption, namely the meat of an animal mangled by wild beasts in the field – this meat is to be thrown to the dogs. The eating situation was better for dogs which lived around people, for those dogs had access to table scraps. Although it was wrong to toss the children's bread to the dogs, a dog could still eat the crumbs that fell from the Master's table (Matthew 15:26-27).

The name of “dog” was held in very low regard in biblical times. Various types of evil people were readily compared to dogs. “*Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*” (Revelation 22:15) “*Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!*” (Philippians 3:2) “*Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.*” (Matthew 7:6) “*Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough.*” (Isaiah 56:10-11) However, I did say that a few biblical dog references were not negative, and I have saved these for last.

Jesus may not have been followed around by a dog, but Tobias, in the Apocryphal book of Tobit, was. When Tobias sets out on his travels with the angel Raphael, he has a furry companion. “*So his son made the preparations for the journey. And his father said to him, "Go with this man; God who dwells in heaven will prosper your way, and may his angel attend you." So they both went out and departed, and the young man's dog was with them.*” (Tobit 5:16) The dog is still with them for the return home. “*Then Raphael said to Tobias, "Are you not aware, brother, of how you left your father? Let us run ahead of your wife and prepare the house. And take the gall of the fish with you." So they went their way, and the dog went along behind them.*” (Tobit 11:2-4) It isn't much, but at least we are free to imagine a friendly companion more like a modern dog. Another dog reference in the Bible, Job 30:1, reminds us that some dogs worked with people in helpful ways, such as the domesticated dogs that guarded the sheep.

As I said, the Bible is not kind to dogs. But this was an accurate portrait of dogs in those days. The biblical dog was probably similar to the “Canaan Dog” of today, shown in the image on the next page. These dogs were typical of “Pariah dogs”, which were socially outcast, living on the fringes of society. These dogs were wild, roaming in packs, yet they could be domesticated and trained to guard sheep or houses. They were not kept as pets. There are still Pariah dogs in modern India which would match the biblical description.



In modern America, we love our Bible, and we love our dogs. It is sad to see that they do not love each other. (Well, dogs may, or may not love the Bible. I don't know. I never see mine reading his.) But modern dogs are the result of two thousand years of breeding and shaping dogs to be what we want, and to fit into our lives. We love modern dogs because they are not the same animals that existed in biblical times. We love the dogs we have helped to create, and in this, there is a reminder of God's creative work. God has allowed us to take his creation, the wild dog, the despised outcast scavenger of the Bible, and mold it into man's best friend, in a huge variety of helpful and loving breeds. We have participated in the ongoing act of creation. God created us and loves us, and so we must love the dogs which we have helped to make the way they are. The unconditional way that dogs love us in return is another obvious lesson for us, teaching us how we must love God in return.

“Did You Know?”

All of the previous “Did You Know?” articles are now hosted on the Calvin website in the Discipleship section. Or go directly to:

<http://www.calvinchurchzelie.org/didyouknow.htm>

Entrenet Nutritionals~wave of the future

A major benefit of living in the 21st century is all the technological innovations that occur. Nowhere is this more evident than in health care related fields and medical practices. Let me share with you a couple of innovative diagnosis equipment that can greatly enhance understanding how your body is performing. One machine is officially called the *Digital Arterial Pulse Wave Circulation Profiling System*. DPA for short. Basically it is a cardiovascular screening program designed to detect potential underlying vascular disease. Another piece of equipment which is a special microscope does a live blood cell analysis. As the name implies a couple of blood droplets are analyzed from which a wealth of information can be obtained. Your personal live blood microscopy will give you an assessment of a wide variety of conditions.

If there is sufficient interest on the congregation's part, I could make these scientific marvels available and run tests on those members interested. It benefits us all to stay healthy, full of energy and maintain positive attitudes about life so we may fully use the gifts God gave us to help our fellow man. I encourage you to learn and investigate ways to increase your well being.

Contributed by Cary R. Efaw

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Calvin Presbyterian Church is a spiritual family sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and discerning God's purpose and will through sincere commitment to worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching and mission.

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