



Calvin Presbyterian Church
where faith, compassion, and authenticity meet

Calvin's News & Notes

The Standish Inkwell

November 2009

I'm not sure why this is, but over the last few months I've been thinking a lot about parenting and Christian faith. Why? The best I can tell is that I'm just going through a period of getting back to my roots, and my roots are in parenting and families.

I've mentioned over the years that my first career was as a counselor, and that I came to ministry second. In my first career as a therapist with children and adolescents, I was heavily trained in parenting techniques, and spent time training parents on parenting. Also, my master of social work had a strong focus on marital and family dynamics. Even though I became a pastor, I never forgot my roots. But the funny thing is that I don't often write about parenting.

I think the reason I haven't written much about parenting has to do with my sensitivity to others. I'm so aware of the fact that if I preach or write about parenting, that I'm automatically cutting off anyone who isn't a parent, especially a parent of small children. I don't want non-parents to feel left out. Also, even though my training as a counselor has been strong in familial life, I've always felt that I needed to be a parent of older children to be able to speak to parents. Funny thing is that there's nothing I'd say differently now than before I had kids. I've just been aware that a person can have all the training in the world but not be taken seriously till she or he has children. I guess now I feel comfortable writing about being a parent.

So, with that, I want to share with you some thoughts on bringing children to church. Are you like most parents in that you struggle to get your children up, dressed, and out

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Did You Know?

“Wheel in the Sky Keep on Turning” by Brendon Wahlberg

When I was growing up in the 1970's, “Chariots of the Gods” was a popular book. The basic idea of this book was that ancient alien astronauts had visited Earth and influenced mankind in the distant past. Monuments like the pyramids and statues like those on Easter Island were said to be evidence of these visits. Another thing said to contain evidence of ancient aliens was the Bible. Specifically, the visions of the prophet Ezekiel were said to contain a record of a visit from flying saucers and strange alien beings. It amazes me how the Bible can be so wildly misinterpreted sometimes.

Here is the passage which supposedly describes aliens and their spacecraft. “Then I looked, and above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a throne. [...] and a cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of the Lord. The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the

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I want to share with you some thoughts on bringing children to church.

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THE STANDISH INKWELL (CONTINUED...)

the door on time for church on Sunday mornings? Do you find that the time getting to church is stressful? Do you find that your children complain about going to church, and that this complaining makes worship difficult? If so, you have a lot in common with 95% of all churchgoing parents. The struggles of getting kids to worship, and getting them to go peacefully, is a universal parental struggle. And it's not new. Parents were dealing with this 500 years ago, 1000 years ago, 2000 years ago.

The real problem, though, really isn't getting the kids to worship. The problem is our recognizing as parents that there's a value to the fight to get children to worship. The issue is whether or not we are going to steep our children in a life that recognizes God's presence everywhere in their lives. If you lose this fight, then your children, more often than not, will struggle later in life to find God's presence in their lives during time of crisis. And trust me on this: no one gets out of life alive. Everyone faces a crisis at some point. The question is whether you have given them the spiritual resources to overcome these crises.

A number of years ago I started hearing a popular sentiment that many people espoused, which is that children have a natural spirituality, and that religion crushes it down. I believe in the first part of the comment, but the second half of the comment really demonstrates a misunderstanding of childhood development. It's much like saying that children have a natural aptitude for mathematics, but that teaching them math in school crushes that aptitude. Few of us would agree with that statement, but the logic is the same as that of the statement about spirituality, religion, and children. Yes, children do have a natural spirituality, but if we do nothing to cultivate it, then all it becomes is spiritual potential. Don't take my word for it. Spend time with children who grow up with no religious upbringing. Notice what that natural spirituality becomes when the children become teens or adults and face difficulty. Generally what you find are kids who have a hard time overcoming hardships and difficulties because they don't know how to find God's guidance. They either ignore God's guidance, or they latch onto false signs or follow false paths. They get into trouble and don't know what to do.

Whatever kind of natural spirituality children have has to be nurtured. It needs to be nurtured by walks in nature, by praying with children, by telling them religious stories, and by immersing them in church. Church is not the only nurturing influence, but it is a significant one.

So what does this say about the battles to get your children to church? Look at it much like the battle to get your children up for school. Would you be willing to let your kids win that battle and have them grow up not being educated? I suppose getting your kids up for school is mandated by law, but at the same time we all recognize that education is crucial for a child's development. Faith is similar. We all may have a natural propensity for it, but it also needs to be nurtured. When you win the battle to get kids to church, you make a difference in your child's long-term spiritual, mental, and physical health. I wrote about the impact of religion on well-being back in September. The fact is that children who grow up in church tend to be healthier in all ways than those who don't. To find evidence of this, all you have to is to google "research on religion and well-being." You'll find overwhelming evidence of the positive influence church and religion have on children and adults.

As parents all of us have one overriding responsibility: to raise our children to be as healthy and mature as possible, and hopefully to be better off than we were. We want our children to grow up to be able to have good careers, healthy relationships, to be angst- and addiction-free, and to be able to deal with the pains of life in positive rather than negative ways. Church helps with all that, but when we let our children decide about church, that means that they get to be in charge of raising themselves. They become their own parents, despite their not having the wisdom to be so.

So, let's say that you are a parent who's had a struggle in getting kids to church. What do you do? You do the same thing that the parents who have been successful at it do: You make

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church-going an expectation, much like making washing hands before dinner, brushing and flossing teeth before bed-time, doing homework after school, and cleaning their room each day. It is much like the expectation that they will get up and be ready for school in time for the bus. Your expectations teach them their expectations. Have you noticed all of those kids you see in church who don't seem to fight their parents? Why don't they fight? They do, but they are also there because in their families it is simply expected that they will be in church each week. It's not up for debate.

Obviously I'm not the one in charge of getting our kids up for church on Sundays, since I'm at church before they are finished breakfast, but I do know that there's no question about going to church in our house, and not just because I'm the pastor. Even if I wasn't around anymore, Diane would have them in church. She grew up that way and is teaching that to our children. The result is that there may be complaining, but for our kids there is an understanding that church is just something they do, much like going to school is. The result is that they have grown up in the church and love the church. They still complain about getting up early. They can still drag their fannies in getting ready. They still may fight on the way, but they also know the church well enough that they've made and see friends in church. They look forward to being with their friends. And the other thing, which is crucial, is that we are preparing them for life.

I have no crystal ball on what will happen to them in the future. They may walk away from the church at some point. Even pastor's children do that. They may have trouble. But they will have grown up in the church enough to know how to find God when they need to.

Winning the fight over going to church makes a difference in your child's long-term well-being.

Blessings to you,

The Rev. Dr. N. Graham Standish

Parenting Tips: *Are You a Parent or a Friend?*

Too often nowadays parents have become friends with their children rather than parents. In some ways this is a good thing, since many of us grew up with parents who were too busy to be involved in our lives when we were kids. The problem is that now too many of us want to be buddies with our kids, and so we're reluctant to set limits on them. We want them to grow up having the opportunities we didn't have, so we shy away from setting boundaries that limit their choices. The result is that too many of us let our kids run our families.

To be a parent means giving children opportunities to explore the world, while also setting limits on their choices and behavior. It means setting up clear and consistent consequences for their actions, rather than worrying about whether they will like us if we discipline them. If our discipline is fair, firm, and loving, our kids will love us more because they will develop structured lives. Children need structure just as much as they need choices. Here are some suggestions for being parents, not friends, with our kids:

- If your children are getting out of control, set limits on them that are firm, but fair.
- Make sure that after you set a limit, and things calm down, that you talk in a calm voice with your child about what happened, and hug the child to make sure she or he feels loved.
- If you go overboard in discipline, apologize to your child, but make sure he or she knows why you set the limit, and even why you may have overreacted.
- Don't let your child do everything, which can burn you out as a parent. Let them try different things, but not all at once. Limit their choices to those activities they can stay committed to. A burned-out parent is a poor parent.

Calling All Sunday School Teachers!

What do you do with squirming kids, the ones who can't keep their hands to themselves, the ones who can't sit still and who listen all too often to their own, somewhat disruptive, inner voice? The Youth Formation and Education Committee have assembled a panel of experts to teach the teacher. Holley Voelp, Judy Kerkovich and Karen Cramer will lead us to expand our teacher toolbox. We will learn how to have peace, without screeching, and order with grace. This panel will answer our questions and expand our capacity to teach and to love. Please make the time to learn together in Fellowship Hall on Sunday evening, **November 8th from 5:30 to 7:00 PM.**

Please RSVP by email to Connie Frierson at connie@calvinchurchzelie.org.

Food Cupboard News



The Cupboard served 90 clients in October. Our numbers are growing, as we thought they would. Likewise, are our needs!!

Food Dedication - **November 8** (the second Sunday of each month)

We DO NOT NEED CANNED VEGETABLES, FRUIT OR SOUP.

We DO NEED THE FOLLOWING: Cereal, Jelly, Pudding & Jell-O, Rice, Boxed Potatoes, Helper Meals & Mac & Cheese, Cake Mixes & Frosting, Canned Tomato Sauce, Chili, Gravy, Pineapple, Jars of Applesauce, Peanut Butter and Pasta & Spaghetti Sauce. With the Holidays approaching we will also need Stuffing Mixes.

Baby Food & Formula are NOT NEEDED, as these are supplied by the WIC Program. We are happy to get donations of Diapers & Wipes.

This Holiday season the Cupboard will be giving an additional grocery certificate to each client to purchase their choice of a Turkey, Ham or Chicken for their Thanksgiving or Christmas Dinner. We use your monetary gifts to purchase these certificates. These monetary gifts can be made payable to Calvin Church and marked for the Food Cupboard.

The Food Cupboard will again be doing the Wish Tree program which provides a Christmas Gift for the children of our clients. This program is handled by the youth at Grace Church. I will have the "Tags" with the child's gift request on **Sunday Nov. 22nd**. If you "missed-out" on this project last year and want to be included this year.....you can call me to reserve a "Tag" at 724-452-9755. There will be a reminder regarding this in the Nov. 15th & 22nd Sunday bulletins.

The Cupboard is now collecting plastic bottles (juice and laundry detergent size with lids) for a new project we are going to be trying. You can leave them at the church in the same receptacle as the food items. Please put them in a plastic grocery bag.

***Please supply only the items on this list. Most other items are hard to dispose of. Your monetary contributions are most welcome.**

Please make checks payable to **Calvin Church** and mark "**Food Cupboard**".

Contributed by Arby Shenesky

Speed Artist

The tape runs at "fast forward" but so does the artist. He is really quick! Have you seen the commercial during the Steelers' games featuring the STEELERS TV artist sketching the likeness of various players? He is Calvin Church member George Williams. His wife is Janice and their children are Courtney, Olivia and Megan.

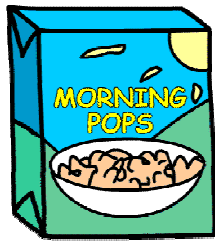
George is a Seneca Valley Middle School (7th & 8th grades) art teacher. He is also the Varsity Boys Soccer Coach. Congratulations George!

Contributed by The Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Polley

Morning Circle

Reservations have been made for the Kaufmann House luncheon - **Dec. 10th**. Please mark your calendar. Our November meeting takes place, same time at the church and Pat Strutt will lead us with another good discussion - Page 47, Lesson 6 - Luke's Gospel for the Poor. **Nov. 12th - 10 AM.**

Contributed by Flo Towers



Mission Matters

Mission opportunities in November focus around the issue of hunger. The Food Pantry has a special list of needs for Thanksgiving, so check out page 4 here and watch the Sunday bulletin as well for that information.

A new task force on Advocacy is planning an Offering of Letters on **November 22**. After each worship service materials will be available for each of us to write to our congressmen about hunger issues in this country and overseas. Sample letters will be available to help you formulate your own. Information about the particular legislation being considered in the House and Senate will be available before the 22nd, so that we are knowledgeable about the issues to be addressed.

DECEMBER ALERT!

On **December 6** you will have a unique opportunity to purchase Christmas gifts! Representatives from a number of mission agencies will be in Fellowship Hall with displays of the work they do. You may buy "gifts that matter" by making a donation to the agency or agencies you choose and receive a gift card to send to the person in whose name you are making your gift. This is a way to give twice - once in honor of a person you know and once to help someone you may never know, but whose life will be enriched by your gift. (A personal note: Every year my family members wait with anticipation to learn what animal they have helped give to the Heifer Project.)

Help Needed!

The Parament Committee is looking for a few more volunteers. We are the people who change the banners and paraments in the sanctuary seven times per year. This usually takes place on a Sunday after the second service and lasts 30-45 minutes. Please consider volunteering a little of your time and help us out. For more information contact Sue Mallen at larvalady@verizon.net or 724-452-7917.

Contributed by Sue Mallen

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity wishes to thank everyone that helped with our Aquathlon in August. We raised over \$5000, which helped buy building materials for the house we have started on Dick Road in Connoquenessing Twp. We have completed the foundation with help from block layers working at Butler Memorial Hospital. We will be needing volunteers every Saturday, so we can frame the house before the big snows start in January. At least I hope it is January before we get any major snow here.

We finished the house on Holiday Drive and the family has now moved into their home. We appreciate all who helped with this project.

Our next fundraiser will be gift wrapping at Barnes and Noble and we will participate in the Christmas Fair at Calvin. Please stop at our table and consider making a donation in someone's honor as a Christmas gift. Also if you would like to help gift wrap, please see me or call 724 774-5746 or email at jkercovich@yahoo.com

Remember we meet the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30pm down in the Youth Room of Calvin Church.

Contributed by Judy Kercovich

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

Calvin's News & Notes

“Wheel in the Sky Keep on Turning” (continued)

outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. [...] I looked, and there were four wheels beside the cherubim, one beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like gleaming beryl. And as for their appearance, the four looked alike, something like a wheel within a wheel. When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved; but in whatever direction the front wheel faced, the others followed without veering as they moved. Their entire body, their rims, their spokes, their wings, and the wheels—the wheels of the four of them - were full of eyes all round. As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing ‘the wheel-work’. Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle.

The cherubim rose up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the river Chebar. When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise up from the earth, the wheels at their side did not veer. When they stopped, the others stopped, and when they rose up, the others rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them. Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim.” (Ezekiel 10:1-20)

U.F.O. enthusiasts took this passage to be a description of the wheel shapes of flying saucers, the physics-defying flight capabilities of those ships, and the alien faces of their pilots. Poor Ezekiel had a close encounter, and could only describe it in his primitive terms.

Of course, what is really going on in the passage is something completely different. To put it in a nutshell, God is leaving the defiled Temple in Jerusalem to go into exile with his people in Babylon, traveling on a mobile throne carried by angels, to return only in the future, when Jerusalem and the Temple are restored.

Ezekiel was probably both a Priest of the Temple and a prophet. A few dates will serve to sketch out his prophetic career (as worked out by scholars using clues within the book). In 597 BCE, Jerusalem was captured by Babylon and the first deportations of its people into exile began. Ezekiel's prophecies began about four years later in 593, in Jerusalem. Six years after that, in 587, the Temple was destroyed, and another wave of deportations began. Ezekiel's Priestly duties were over, and he went into exile himself. He continued his career as a prophet, comforting the people in exile with visions of future restoration, for another seventeen years.

So, Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile. His message had to help the people cope with the loss of their religious center. Prior to the destruction of the Temple, it was thought that God's presence dwelled within the Temple, above the Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. If the people were taken to Babylon, then they were separated from their God, right?

The passage above, far from being about aliens, is really meant to address this problem. And it does so by proposing that God has a mobile throne which can go anywhere he wants, including to Babylon. In fact, God has already left the Temple even before it gets destroyed, because of the abominations carried out there by people who think God has already deserted them. In Ezekiel 8, God explains why he must leave the Temple. The once Holy place is full of idols being worshipped. Women are weeping to the god Tammuz, and men are bowing down to a sun god.

“He said to me, ‘Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? [...] So I went in and looked; there, portrayed on the wall all round, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel. [...] Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of images? For they say, “The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.” [...] Therefore I will act in wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my hearing with a loud voice, I will not listen to them.” (Ezekiel 8:6-18)

Ezekiel describes how God exits via the east gate and leaves Jerusalem behind, his Holy presence unwilling to stay in a defiled place. *“Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of the Lord ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city. The spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen left me. And I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.” (Ezekiel 11:22-25)*

Ultimately, Ezekiel offers a vision of hope and restoration. After describing a Temple rebuilt to exacting specifications, he reveals that God will return to the sanctuary, flying in through the same gate from which he left. *“Then he brought me to the gate, the gate facing east. And there, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; the*

sound was like the sound of mighty waters; and the earth shone with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.” (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Far from being an account of a past alien encounter, the vision of Ezekiel is about an encounter with God which is ongoing and forever. *“Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them.*

Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children’s children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them for evermore.” (Ezekiel 37:21-28)

“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>

Announcements and News

To put announcements in the Sunday Bulletin, please call the office no later than the Thursday of the week you want the announcement to appear

All Newsletter material must be submitted by the 20th of each month to be included in the next month’s edition. Please send newsletter items to Nancy Mead at nancy@mead.cc. Thanks in advance!

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