

I've Been Thinking about . . . Our Journey

by Pastor Chris

A blanket of darkest darkness enshrouded the alien countryside. Weariness from the transatlantic flight consumed my body and slowed my mind, yet anticipation quickened the pace of my heart. I felt the bus labor to climb the long slope. Then at the crest, they suddenly rose, ripping apart the blanket of darkness—the walls of Jerusalem glowing in spotlights. At my first ever sight of the city where our Lord redeemed us, I thought to myself, “I’m home.”

We Christians are pilgrims progressing on a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10; 12:22; Rev 21:2). We walk up a pathway of loving God, loving one another, and loving our neighbor—a pathway that traverses a dark and alien country—as we make our pilgrimage home. In this country, we are resident aliens.

We are *resident* aliens.

In the early sixth century BC, Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the exiles who had been carried from Jerusalem to Babylon—far from home. In Jeremiah’s letter, God says to the exiles:

Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. . . . When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

—Jeremiah 29:7-10

We are like the exiles in Babylon. We will walk in this alien land for seventy years (perhaps eighty by reason of strength). So we settle down, build houses, and raise families. Let us seek good for this foreign land and pray for this alien city, since good for it is blessing to us, for we are resident here for a long time.

Yet we are resident here for a short time. “From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor 7:29-31).

Our long pilgrimage is short.

We are resident *aliens*.

“Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). We therefore confess that we are aliens and strangers on earth, looking and longing for a better country—our own heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called our God, for he has prepared a city for us (Heb. 11:13b-14, 16).

The seventeenth-century Puritan writer Thomas Watson puts it this way:

The world is but a great inn, where we are to stay a night or two, and be gone; what madness it is to set our heart upon our inn, as to forget our home. . . . We are travelers who take up our lodging here for a night; and Paul longed to be out of his inn, “. . . having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better. . . .” The apostle did not say, “Having a desire to die,” but “to depart.” What a wicked man fears, a godly man hopes for. . . . Simeon, having taken Christ in his arms, cries out, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace” (Luke 2:29). He that hath taken Christ into the arms of his faith, will sing Simeon’s song.¹

We are resident aliens on pilgrimage to our country of citizenship, our better country, our heavenly city. How then shall we live?

“God’s Amazing Grace & Faithfulness”

Associate Pastor of Ministry Advancement & Adult Ministries
Howard Lundeen

After writing an annual report and an Elder Board report in the past few days, I believe you may be encouraged to hear a few examples of just how God is showing His amazing grace and faithfulness to us. Let me share with you some things that have excited me, and I believe your heart will be encouraged as well.

Some encouraging quotes: The following are some statements that I have heard either from church attendees or from people in the community:

- Church attendee --- “I don’t know that I have ever been in a church where I have seen as much sacrificial love lived out by those engaged in church ministries.”
- Church attendee --- “It is amazing how God answered prayer this past week!”
- Community person --- “I know you are a church of prayer, please pray for...”
- Church attendee --- “I am looking forward to seeing how God is going to expand our ministry as we utilize the added space our new facility will provide.”
- Bible study participant --- “In my country there is no accepted authoritative moral guide like the Bible; this is good!”
- Community person --- “My girls love AWANA and really are excited about going each Wednesday!”
- Church attendee --- “There is nothing I would rather do than to help people come to know Christ and experience his saving grace in their lives! I’m willing to do whatever God desires of me.”

Do we serve a GREAT God? We sure do!! Psalm 95:3 says, “*The LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.*”

Helping through FCF: This past month we have had several people come to the Family Care Fund Committee seeking financial help. Some we were not able to help, but a few requests stand out in my mind. Emergency situations in their lives produced financial needs beyond their ability to meet. When I was able to deliver gifts from our FCF to help meet these needs, the gratitude, joy, and emotional relief expressed by the recipients, were extremely gratifying to experience. For those of you who have faithfully contributed to the FCF, your gifts have proven a blessing to several brothers and sisters in the Lord. Thanks!!

New Christians! As mentioned in my annual report, so far this year I personally know of two adult men who have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ; one of whom has been on our prayer list for quite a while. We cannot thank God enough for his saving grace and transforming power!

Knowing that the destiny of all men and nations is in God’s hands, we must reflect upon what an honor it is to serve a God of such amazing grace and faithfulness!

Seeking to know Him & make Him known,
Pastor Howard

Heart Thoughts for Cornerstone

By: Zach Marino

Last month we reflected on how God always desires for us to grow in hard times. The hope we receive provides a solid foundation yet a fertile soil for us to grow in. When we get really discouraged in life, like we have failed as parents, failed as students, failed in life, God hasn't given up on us. It's in those times that we need to grab God's right hand and hold on, as He carries us through. It's through Christ and His work on the cross that we have this hope, and what a wonderful, strong, tender hope that is. The rest of the poem has two lines, and they are so packed with rich wisdom that we will take the next two months to unpack them in "HTC" (Heart Thoughts for Cornerstone). The line we will look at this month is, "*He always lifts me up by His love and strength*".

Coming from last month talking about God's hope through Christ, we come to this line that ties in very nicely and does a great job expounding on the previous thought. As this line is still in reference to trying times, we hear the truth that we are lifted first by God's love. Now, to try to unpack God's love in a few thoughts is impossible. Thousands of books, millions of books, could be written on "God's love" and still wouldn't have even scratched the surface because of the depth of His love for mankind. What do we know about God's love? It's sacrificial. 1 John 3:16 says this, "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us." Christ, submitting to the will of His Father, went through trying, harsh, literally deadly circumstances because His passion for you and me was deep. As the famous worship song says, "*How deep the Father's love for us; How vast beyond all measure; That He would give His only Son; to make a wretch [us] His treasure. How great the pain of searing loss, The Father turns His face away; As wounds which mar the chosen One, bring many sons to glory*" (Stuart Townend). God's love is sacrificial. God isn't about seeing us fail in miserable times. He's proved His love by sending His Son to die. Christ has proven His love for you and me by dying. When we go through trying times, we can rely on God's love. His tough, sacrificial love isn't all about "smiles and blessings" but rather rock-solid promises and tender, gracious love. You see, He wants to be with you, through the thick and thin. Never again does He want to be separated from you. That is the passion of our Heavenly Father.

From God's passionate love we gain strength. If we look at Job, a man in the Bible who was truly tested by God, he drew strength from God's promises, from God's love. "*You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit*" (Job 10:12). Steadfast love. Even though Job wasn't feeling loved, because of all this bad stuff happening to him, he knew, trusted, that God's love hadn't changed for him, it remained just as passionate. Job grabbed onto that passion to face his trials. He drew strength from God's love.

When we face trying times, we draw our strength from God's love. For God's love has been demonstrated in a sacrificial and beautiful way. It stands forever and is the source of strength for all those believe.

Pastor Zach

MAKS *(Moms And Kids)*



MAKS is a moms & kids group that meets the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of each month in the Fireside Room from 10am to noon. There is no cost to attend. Meetings are geared toward mothers with small children at home; but all are welcomed and encouraged to attend. It is a blessed time to relax, unwind and enjoy spending time working and learning together as mothers. Then, we have the benefit of a meal together while our children are well cared for and having fun.

Whether you have come in the past or are new to MAKS, be sure to put us on your calendar and relax with a little "mom time."

February 7th *"Crafty Word Books"*

Please bring pictures of your child or family to complete "Crafty Word Books".

February 21st *"Love & Logic" - Part 1*

Sheryl Stroda will share her knowledge of disciplining with Love & Logic. This is sure to be a great conversation as she has great advice on raising young children!

Come prepared to relax, laugh & meet other moms.

Our leaders this year will be Stacy Dufault, Deb Parkinson, Nina Williams, Lisa Cage, Stacy Anazagasty, Melissa Sexton & Aimee Miller. Please contact any one of us with any questions.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY

Upcoming Events

Souper Bowl Sundae

Sunday, February 5th

You do not want to miss this!!

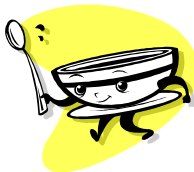
**** BIBLE STUDY ****

Jesus the One & Only

11 Week study - Book of Luke

**Beginning Monday, February 27th at 10am
& Thursday, March 1st at 7pm**

Registration and details at the Information Booth



Continued from page 1 *I've Been Thinking about . . . Our Journey*

Sometime during the second century AD, a Christian apologist wrote a defense of the faith to a high-ranking pagan named Diognetus. A portion of the Epistle to Diognetus reads:

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric lifestyle. . . . They follow local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life. Yet at the same time, they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. For instance, though they are residents in their own lands, their behavior there is more like transients. . . . They share their food but not their wives. They are “in the flesh,” but do not live “according to the flesh.” They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws. They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. They are misunderstood and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet they make many rich; they are in need of everything, yet they abound in everything. They are dishonored, yet they are glorified in their dishonor; they are slandered, yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect. When they do good, they are punished as evil-doers; when they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life. . . . Those who hate them are unable to give a reason for their hostility.²

If, then, we should suffer scorns and insults, persecutions and rejections from the citizens of Babylon as we pass through their country on our pilgrimage to the city of Jesus, “Let us, then, go to him . . . bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb 13:13-14).

As aliens and strangers in the world, let us abstain from sinful desires, which war against our souls. Let us live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse us of doing wrong, they may see our good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Pet 2:11-12).

As *resident* aliens, let us plant our feet on this ground below, loving our neighbor, even our enemy. Let us be the salt of the earth, impeding decay and preserving good in Babylon.

As resident *aliens*, let us set our hearts on things above, not on earthly things (Col 3:1-2). Let us not lay a marble floor under our pup tent.³ For we are pilgrims through a country that is passing away. As we make our way to the better country of our citizenship, let us be the light of the world, illuminating our path with a brilliance that beckons bystanders to follow.

The toll of the years upon our bodies, and the perturbations of the immoralities of Babylon upon our minds, serve to stir our souls to homesickness for our native country. Let us take heart, for we are nearly at the crest, the blanket of this darkness shall soon be ripped away, the walls of Jerusalem soon shall gleam before us, her gates open wide. “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. . . Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. . . They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”⁴

1. Hamilton Smith, ed., *Gleanings from Thomas Watson: Extracts from the Writings of Thomas Watson* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 115-117.

2. Epistle to Diognetus 5:1-17.

3. Wess Stafford, Commencement Address at Bethel Seminary, June 2011.

4. Psalm 84:1-2, 5, 7. All Scripture quotations are from the NIV 1984 edition.

FEBRUARY 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 <u>6:00-7:30pm</u> AWANA <u>7:30-9pm</u> Youth Group	2 <u>6:00am</u> Men's Group <u>Noon</u> Men's Study <u>6:15pm</u> Worship Team <u>7:00pm</u> Women's Study	3	4
5 <u>8:00am</u> Worship <u>9:30am</u> Sunday School <u>10:45am</u> Worship <u>12:00</u> "Souper Bowl" <u>5:00pm</u> Prayer <u>6:00pm</u> 21 Laws	6 <u>10:00am</u> Women's Study <u>6:30pm</u> Precepts	7 <u>10:00am</u> MAKS <u>7:00pm</u> Cong. Care <u>7:00pm</u> Property <u>7:00pm</u> Adult Disc.	8 <u>6:00-7:30pm</u> AWANA <u>7:30-9pm</u> Youth Group	9 <u>6:00am</u> Men's Group <u>Noon</u> Men's Study <u>6:15pm</u> Worship Team <u>7:00pm</u> Women's Study	10	11
12 <u>8:00am</u> Worship <u>9:30am</u> Sunday School <u>10:45am</u> Worship <u>5:00pm</u> Prayer	13 <u>10:00am</u> Women's Study <u>6:30pm</u> Outreach <u>6:30pm</u> Precepts	14 	15 <u>6:00-7:30pm</u> AWANA <u>7:30-9pm</u> Youth Group	16 <u>6:00am</u> Men's Group <u>Noon</u> Men's Study <u>6:15pm</u> Worship Team <u>7:00pm</u> Women's Study	17	18 <u>9:00am</u> Women's Breakfast & Bible Study 
19 <u>8:00am</u> Worship <u>9:30am</u> Sunday School <u>10:45am</u> Worship <u>5:00pm</u> Prayer <u>6:00pm</u> 21 Laws	20 <u>10:00am</u> Women's Study <u>1:00pm</u> Quilt Group <u>6:30pm</u> Precepts	21 <u>10:00am</u> MAKS <u>6:00pm</u> Joint Elder & Commissioner Meeting	22 <u>6:00-7:30pm</u> AWANA <u>7:30-9pm</u> Youth Group	23 <u>6:00am</u> Men's Group <u>Noon</u> Men's Study <u>6:15pm</u> Worship Team <u>7:00pm</u> Women's Study	24	25
26 <u>8:00am</u> Worship <u>9:30am</u> Sunday School <u>10:45am</u> Worship <u>5:00pm</u> Prayer	27 <u>10:00am</u> Women's Study <u>6:30pm</u> Precepts	28 <u>6:30pm</u> Worship Comm. <u>7:00pm</u> Adult Discipleship	29 <u>12:00</u> Lenten Luncheon <u>6:00-7:30pm</u> AWANA <u>7:30-9pm</u> Youth Group			

Christ Community Church Mission Statement

As a local body of believers, we will seek to glorify God in worship, in evangelizing the unsaved and in teaching Christians to obey everything Christ commanded. To that end, prayer will be our foremost task, Scripture will be our authority, God's Holy Spirit will be our source of power and love will be our motivation.

PHONE: (507) 835-2235

FAX: (507) 833-8857

E-MAIL: ccc@ccecfca.com

Website: www.ccecfca.com

PRAYER REQUESTS:

prayer@ccecfca.com

Christ Community Church - 2200 4th Street NE - Waseca, MN 56093