



# THE GOOD NEWS LETTER

FROM ST. JOHN'S STEVENSVILLE UNITED CHURCH

ISSUE: MAY 2021



A lot of Folks ask me what I am studying in my doctoral studies. My courses have concentrated on strategies to sustain and grow ministries, because I believe that a community of faith needs to take seriously their own spiritual growth in order to minister to others. This certainly needs to be in place before a community can attract new membership. My dissertation deals broadly with a further exploration of a link that I believe exists between the images of Jesus Christ that we are drawn towards and the type of Christology we confess. In a narrower sense I am interested in how my thesis assertion is reflected in the United Church of Canada, with the eventual goal of using the research to create a series of discipleship resources.

My biblical starting point uses a question Jesus posed that is recorded (slightly differently) in all three of the synoptic gospels, "Who do you say that I am?". This conversation is recorded in Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, and in Luke 9:18-21. This is followed by my jumping off point from John 1:39-41 where John the Baptist has identified Jesus to his disciples and the disciples are curious and engage Jesus in conversation. Jesus' basic response is to come and see.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus uses a variety of different imagery to make His point for those who are listening and watching. We come to understand the importance Jesus puts on engaging the whole of our being, inviting us to use all of our senses; look and see, those who have ears should hear, taste and see, touch that can heal the sick. And through these experiences we come to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is to us, just as the records of the gospels tell of folks who through those experiences came to a deeper understanding of who Jesus was for them. As a congregation we need to examine such questions to discern how we understand living out our ministry.

*Blessings,*

*Rev. Cheryl Wood-Thomas*

## Mercy and Grace

- Rev. Bill Thomas

*The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and the tender mercies of YHWH are all over the works of The Lord.*

(Psalm 145: 8, 9)

During a recent Bible Study the question of mercy and grace was raised. Specifically, what is the difference between the two. God is understood to be both merciful and gracious and often a prayer will begin, "God of Grace and God of Mercy, ...." But, often grace and mercy are used interchangeably. However, although grace and mercy are intimately related, they are indeed two different and unique facets of the character of God.

When, while reading scripture we come upon the word "mercy," it is usually a translation of the Greek word *eleos* which can also be translated as good will, pity or compassion. And, when we find the word "grace," it is usually a translation of the Greek word *charis* which can also be translated as favour or loving-kindness.

Willmington's Guide to the Bible differentiates between the two terms as follows: *mercy is the act of withholding deserved punishment, while grace is the act of endowing unmerited favour.* So, we can see that grace and mercy are so intimately related that they might be thought of as two sides of the same coin. And yes, that coin is God's love for us.

It is God's grace that encourages us to realize our gifts and emboldens us to use them. As God is the source of all gifts, it is through God's grace that we receive those gifts. They are unearned. It is not through our own merit that we receive them. And of course, the greatest gift is the gift of Jesus Christ AND the faith that is ours to believe. John 3:16 tells us that Jesus is sent into THE WORLD because of God's love for THE WORLD. Jesus is God's gift, given out of God's grace, unearned and, some would say undeserved. But, it is also through God's grace that we have been gifted with a faith that has opened our eyes and our hearts to this truth. And, this faith, this gift of God's grace is also unearned and given freely. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."* (Ephesians 2:8)

God's mercy is the assurance of God's love even when we failed; even when we have erred; yes, even when we have sinned. God's mercy elevates the one lost sheep; prioritizes the lost coin; and, welcomes home the lost child with loving arms. Rev Cheryl, Victoria and I have started watching a show on TV called The Chosen. It is a dramatization of the life of Jesus and an interweaving of the lives of those around him. One of the aspects of the show that stands out for me as I write this article is how none of those who are "called" to follow Jesus feel themselves worthy to do so and, the storyline points out that they are right ... they are not worthy. But, the story does not end with their unworthiness. By God's mercy, communicated through Jesus, not only do they (we) not receive the punishment they (we) believe they (we) deserve, they are in fact called into communion with Jesus to be purveyors of the Kin-dom of God.

Grace and mercy, mercy and grace ... two sides of the same coin, so intimately connected it is difficult to know which comes first. By God's mercy we are forgiven but, by God's grace we know we are forgiven. By God's grace we are gifted and emboldened to exercise those gifts in the world but, it is God's mercy that releases us from those feelings of unworthiness, freeing us from the bondage of sin and guilt. And both mercy and grace are evidence of the magnitude of God's love, a love that transcends all limitations, even those that we might try to impose on God's love for us.

*"Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God and from Jesus Christ, in truth and love."* (2 John 1: 3)

Blessed be! Amen!

## New Monthly Study

- John Bedell



Please join us (First Come First Served) as we launch a new study group that seeks to use photography to deepen our appreciation of this glorious gift of creation in which we live, using the view through our lens to deepen our connection to the Divine. We will be using the book "*Spirituality in Photography*" which participants can purchase through the church. Please note that a high-end camera is **not** a requirement. Your cell phone camera will be fine if that's what you have. The engagement and

lessons are the important things, not the equipment you use. If you are interested, or if you would like a copy of the book, please register with Rev. Cheryl.

## A Study of the Lords Prayer

Tuesdays, May 4, 11, 18, 25; June 1, 8

2:00 – 3:00

- Rev. Bill Thomas

When Rowan Williams, the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury was asked about The Lord's Prayer he said;

*"It's completely fresh, it never gets stale because what it's talking about is the human condition in the presence of God. It's about the world we live in and the world God wants us to live in, and I can't imagine anything taking its place. ... Every single bit of The Lord's Prayer is radical because it challenges our assumptions about who we are and who God is and what the world is like. And what it's praying for is the most revolutionary change you can imagine in the world we live in. a change to a situation where all the hungry are fed, to a situation where forgiveness is the first imperative, and all our relationships are transparent to God. And, as people will notice, that's not exactly like the world we inhabit at the moment – it's looking for change from the roots up."*

The Lord's Prayer has been with us for generations ... indeed it has been around for two millenia and is one of the gifts of Christianity to the world. It is a prayer at once familiar and brand new. It is radical in its content and revolutionary in its power. It is both comforting and scandalous ...at the same time!

During our recent Lenten Bible Study it was suggested that it might be time to do a study of The Lord's Prayer (found at Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11: 2-4). And so, here it is ... a six-week Bible Study of The Lord's Prayer. Starting on Tuesday, May 4th at 2:00 and lasting for six weeks we will explore together the meaning of this very familiar prayer, perhaps seeing it for the first time again. We will meet via Zoom, (link to be provided). If you are interested in participating please contact Rev Bill at [rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com](mailto:rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com) or by phone at 289-213-3153. I will provide participants with suggested readings and encourage you to share resources with each other, (and with me).

### Lord's Prayer offered by Matthew:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed  
by your name.  
Your Kingdom come,  
Your Will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts  
as we have forgiven our  
debtors.  
Do not bring us to the time of  
trial but rescue us from the evil  
one.

### Lord's Prayer offered by Luke:

Father, Hallowed by your name.  
Your Kingdom come.  
Give us each our Daily bread  
and forgive us our sins  
as we ourselves forgive  
everyone indebted to us.  
Do not bring us to the time of  
trial.

## Earth Day 2021

This year's Earth Day celebration on April 22nd featured a little surprise from mother nature. We went from warm spring weather to a bit of a snowfall. Just mother nature's way of letting us know who's in charge! This year marked the 51st anniversary of Earth Day with the theme of "restore our earth". Thank you to Jim & Susan M for sending in their snow picture.



## The Chosen: A Watch Party

- Rev. Bill Thomas

In the article on grace and mercy I mentioned a television show called The Chosen that Rev Cheryl, Victoria and I have been watching. It is a dramatization of the life of Jesus and those around him. In the introduction to the show, the producers admit to having condensed some stories while expanding others. I have found the backstories that have been created for some familiar characters to be quite intriguing. And, I have found myself asking new questions, gaining new insights and some of the scenes, that I thought were familiar, have elicited profound feelings and emotions.

One of the new realities in our lives, for many unthought of before Covid, is gathering together via Zoom. At St John's Stevensville United Church we have used Zoom for meetings and education events as well as Carolyn's Creative Spirit and a number of Bible Studies. Some churches are worshipping via Zoom and Rev Cheryl and I have been "attending" university classes in Rochester, NY and Wolfville, NS respectively for the last year and a half. Our family has been playing trivia once a week for over a year with aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings "zooming" in from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Ontario. I recently discovered that we can use Zoom to all watch the same thing at the same time and then have a conversation afterwards and so, that is what I would like to propose. At this time it is undecided as to what time or even what day of the week we would gather but I am inviting all who are interested in a weekly "WATCH PARTY" to contact me at [rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com](mailto:rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com) or 289-213-3153. I am proposing that we would meet for 1½ hours to watch an episode and then have a discussion about what we watched. There are 8 episodes in season one so, we would commit to this for eight weeks and then discuss the possibility of continuing with season two.

If you are interested please email me or call before Friday, May the 7th and include in your message the days and times that you are available and whether you would prefer day time or evening. I will collate your responses and then send out our first gathering time, probably during the week of May 17th, along with the link to the Zoom call. Finally, as with all things that happen at St John's Stevensville United Church, feel free, (actually you are encouraged) to share this opportunity with friends, family, neighbours, anybody you think might be interested in participating.

## UCW Information

- *Phyllis Booth*

Our theme was "Led by the Spirit". In Fall 2021, it is hoped we will be able to go ahead with the Fall Retreat at Five Oaks on October 22nd - 23rd. More information later.

### **Five Oaks Update**

As challenging and difficult as 2020 has been, at its end, we are reminded over and over how blessed we are to have been able to offer what we did this year. In 2021, Five Oaks is ready to serve those affected by Covid-19 through unique opportunities for migrant workers, seniors, youth and you, our supporters!! We hope to continue online and safe in-person programming and we look forward to the day when you can rejoin us.

Donation focus on Women for change in Zambia can be done through M&S.

### **The 60th Anniversary meeting next year in Halton.**

Our Guest speaker Beth Lorimer "*For the Love of Creation*" for Earth Day had a very nice exercise which is on the page below. One of the areas was "What brings you joy?" If we don't take care of ourselves we will get burnout. They asked that we send letters to our officials and speak of our concerns. Below are sites.

They are in need of organizers to promote *For the Love of Creation*. If and when we can have our Mission dinners I thought it would be nice to have Beth come and speak.

Links from KAIROS Presentation

<https://forthe loveofcreation.ca/resources/>

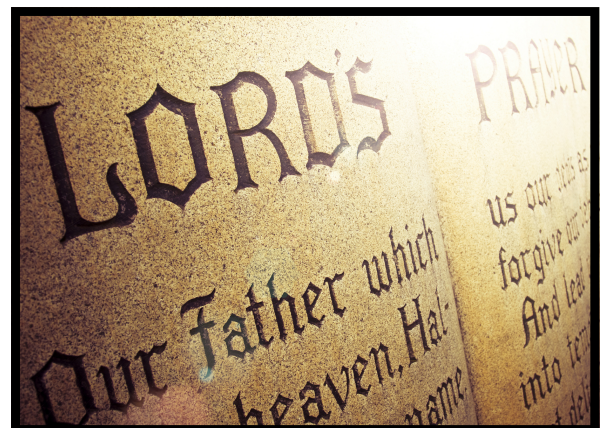
For any links or extra information, please contact Phyllis Booth and she will be happy to share.

## Sunday School Project

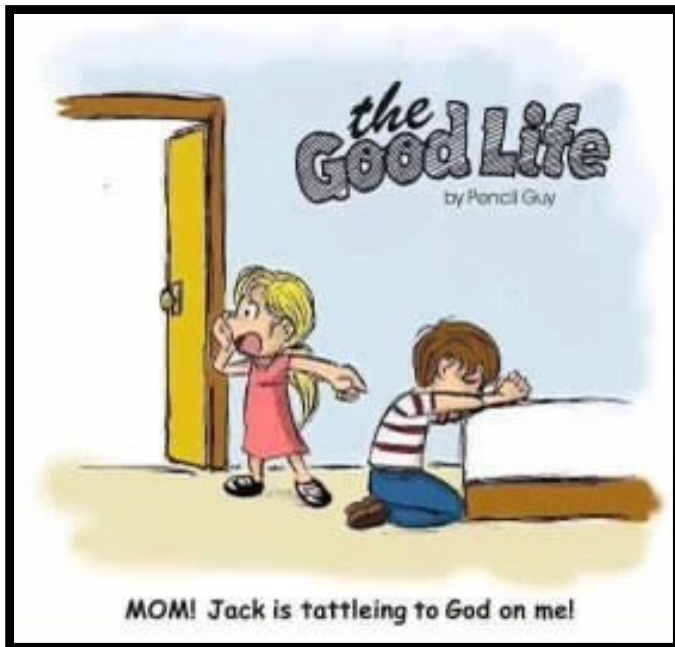
- *Victoria MacDonald*

We are getting close to the end of the year, and the Sunday School will not be operating over the summer months. However, we aren't done yet!!

As a final project, we will be starting a "Lords Prayer Montage" in the month of May which will utilize the blue screen technology that we have been having so much fun with! Keep your eyes peeled for our finished project, and if you think you know someone who might want to be involved, let me know!!



## For Fun



Can you find all of these words that relate to the services coming up?

radical hospitality  
passionate worship  
intentional faith  
risk-taking  
mission and service  
extravagant generosity  
communication  
unity  
deliberate

cultivate  
encounter  
singing  
prayer  
experience  
charity  
offerings  
stewardship  
tithes

Z	R	A	D	I	C	A	L	H	O	S	P	I	T	A	L	I	T	Y	L	J	E
P	A	S	S	I	O	N	A	T	E	W	O	R	S	H	I	P	G	X	Y	M	X
S	I	I	Q	F	I	C	D	U	T	B	A	H	J	H	X	U	J	N	S	A	T
T	R	E	V	E	L	N	E	E	Q	I	R	S	V	C	U	L	Y	Z	I	S	R
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T	O	E	Z	Y	E	Z	G	C	Y	B	Z	O	N	U	I	E	G	D	X	P	Y
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## A Grand Announcement

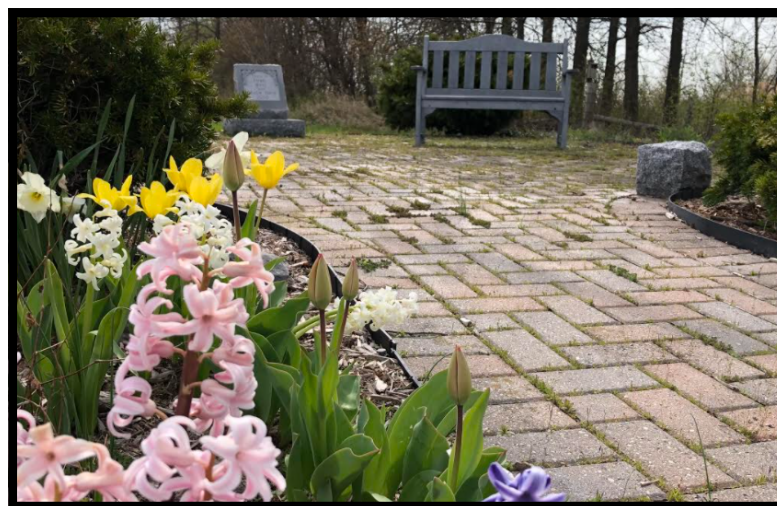


We have a new Baby at the Church... and she is Grand! This will open up new opportunities for our growing music ministry. Stay tuned.

## Cemetery Update

- Diane Hartman

A new project to begin in late spring. We are resurfacing the interlocking bricks in the Memorial Garden with a rubberized surface. So we hope there will be no more weeds growing in the walkway and patio.



## In The Paper



St Johns Stevensville has been making waves in the local papers these past few months. John Bedell was featured in the Niagara Falls Review and Rev. Bill featured in the Fort Erie Observer. With all that we are planning for the future, be sure to keep watching out for more stories!



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## Ongoing Events!

Take a look at these events, happening every week!

Sunday @ 11am - Church Services (view online at [niagaraonlineworship.com](http://niagaraonlineworship.com))

Tuesday @ 1pm - Bible Study on Zoom (hybrid information to come)

Thursday @ 1pm - Creative Spirit Zoom session

Wondering where our streamed sessions can be found? Check out the following:



[www.stjohnsstevensvilleunitedchurch.com](http://www.stjohnsstevensvilleunitedchurch.com)



St. John's Stevensville United Church



The Embrace Center



[www.niagaraonlineworship.com](http://www.niagaraonlineworship.com)

We understand that it can be hard when we are all isolated. So please keep in mind that both Rev. Bill and Rev. Cheryl are available to provide pastoral care over the phone at any time. Do not hesitate to call.

## Contact Us

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