

RIVER NEWS

MARCH 2021



FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN *~ PASTOR SARAH FLACK*

Eight or nine years ago, Wanda Collins organized a bread-making class for anyone who was interested in learning to make bread from scratch. I had never thought much about baking my own bread, but I loved to eat homemade bread, and an afternoon of baking sounded like a good way to get to know some new people. We learned how to proof yeast and knead dough, and soon the church fellowship hall was fragrant with the smell of freshly baked bread. I've been a bread maker ever since. Baking for an hour or two on Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons has become a habit I look forward to, and I've found that kneading dough gives me excellent time to pray about what has been going on during the week.

I doubt Wanda realized the long-lasting gift she gave me when she shared her knowledge of how to make bread. She just knew how to do something and took the time to show others. God has made each one of us unique, with gifts and talents and passions that make us who we are. We often take these things for granted, but have you ever considered that your gifts, talents, and passions can be a blessing to others? Taking the time to share what you have been given by God is a way of honoring Him, and it enriches the lives of those around you.

Paul's words to the church in Rome are this:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

We have each been given things that we can do by the Holy Spirit. Each gift is important and necessary for us to function as a healthy body that seeks to love God and love one another. This month be in prayer about who God has made you to be, and let us know how we can help you find a place to serve or equip you to start a ministry. This is an exciting time at The River, and I can't wait to see how God is going to work through you in the months to come!



*GRIEF MINISTRY
~ LAURA SCHAFER*

Is My Loved One In Heaven

This is a question we are asked a lot. Here are some thoughts from scripture that can help us answer that question.

First, salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot do anything to earn the love of God nor to earn eternal life. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We do not earn our way into heaven; however, out of our salvation flows a heart of love and obedience. Because of what Christ did for us we will have fruit that grows out of our relationship with God. The bible teaches us who is a child of God and who has eternal life. Some of these verses are 1 John 1:5-10, 1 John 2:1-6; and 1 John 4:7-12 to name a few.

Some of our loved ones did not live a life of obedience. They didn't love others. They practiced sin. By their behavior they did not appear to know God. We may not have talked to them about their faith. We may not have heard them profess their faith in Jesus. Based on the way they lived life we do not know if they have eternal life.

REMEMBER, only God sees man's heart. Only He knows for certain if they have eternal life. God is loving, compassionate and kind. He wishes none perish, but all have eternal life. 2 Peter 3:9

Let's look at the scene at the crucifixion. Jesus was on a cross between two criminals. Look at Luke 23:39-43.

One criminal made fun of Jesus, the other criminal turned to Jesus. He gained salvation and eternal life in the last hours of his life.

While we may not know about the salvation of our loved one, we can be certain of your salvation. You can be certain if you are going to heaven. If you have not confessed Jesus as your Savior, today is the day! Pray and tell God what you are thinking and feeling. If you have confessed Jesus but still need assurance of your eternal life, read 1 John. If you still have questions or concerns please reach out to any of us at River Community Church, we would be happy to help you find the answers to your questions in God's Word.

Greetings and salutations, as we enjoy longer days and slightly warmer temperatures, passing from February into March. An old substitute school teacher that I had, used to say to us in elementary school; March is the only month with a command in it- "March 4th"

At the end of February the Jewish people celebrate Purim. A Jewish minor feast sometimes referred to as 'festival of lots'. It's remembered for the saving of the Jewish people from total destruction. The feast is observed with fun and festivities with almost a carnival attitude. Some observe 1-3 days of a minor fast before the festival begins. When the one day festival is upon them, they dress in costumes of the main characters of the book of Esther; The King, Esther herself, or Mordecai. The children have parties and parades, they read from the book of Esther, and as they read the story, at the mention of Haman's name (the villain) the celebrants will hiss, boo, stomp their feet, or shake noisemakers to blot out the mention of Haman's name. The festivities continue with the eating of a feast meal, accompanied by the adults drinking wine or alcohol. Part of their observance is to send "portions", which are boxed gifts or baskets with fruit, candy, and confectionery treats. One of these confectioneries is known as "HAMANTASCHEN", a tri-fold cookie representing Haman's pocket. In the apocrypha, the book of 2 Maccabees 15:36, refers to this feast as "The day of Mordecai." That's your history lesson for the feast of Purim.

Now for the story behind Purim, we will present it like a play: Once upon a time in a kingdom long ago 'n far away..... The plot of our story is Hamon's plan to kill all the Jews within the Persian empire. The cast of main characters is;

- 1) Ahasuerus (aka) Artaxerxes - King of the Persian Empire.
- 2) Haman - official adviser to the king, and a descendent of Amalak, he was raised up in the Palace courts and wore the king's signet ring.
- 3) Mordecai - a saged Jew that sat within the Palace Court gates. He is a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin and a cousin to our main character, Esther.
- 4) Esther - raised by Mordecai, as his daughter, she was a cousin to him. She will be called upon to be obedient to an action that will save the Jewish people.

I'm sure you're asking why all of this for a minor Jewish feast? Well let's back up to the story within the book of Esther, We'll continue with our play setting, with a four stage breakdown - I promise it's brief and at the end there's a quiz.

Act 1: We find Haman devising ways to rise up in the politics of the empire. As he's parading through the streets of Susa, Mordecai refuses to reference or bow before him. This infuriates Hamon and he plans ways to annihilate Mordecai and begins building a gallows to hang Mordecai on.

Act 2: The kingdom is bringing all the young maidens from the province to present to the king for a new queen. Esther is gathered up, so Mordecai tells Esther to conceal her kindred as a Jew. Esther finds favor with the king. Mordecai, overhears a plot to poison the king, and the king honors Mordecai.

Act 3: Hamon, feeling very secure in his position, manages to procure a royal death decree to destroy all Jews. This now is an irrevocable law, and Hamon [cast lots] to determine the date of their total annihilation and take the spoils, blotting them out from the face of the earth.

Act 4 Esther and Mordecai, meet to exchange messages concerning the decree and we hear Mordecai's warning "don't think that you will escape this, for if you don't arise- then there shall arise one for the Jews from another place". Of course Mordecai's most famous words that we all use frequently; "who knows but you have been called for such a time as this". Esther, resolves herself and tells the Jewish people to fast and pray as she will go before the King's throne unsummoned (which normally results in death) and she will reveal herself as a Jewess to save her people.

THERE; now that you have all the basics of the story go to your Bible and read the rest of the story. Although the book of Esther never mentions God by name, it shows how God's people rely upon Him as He is our help and our expectation. We find that God works in ways that aren't always apparent. We sometimes say 'oh what a coincidence', or think 'what luck'. But in truth I believe we fail to recognize that it is the hand of our God working in our lives.

ELDER MINISTRY CONTINUED...

In conclusion then, let's plug "US" (you/me) New Covenant characters, into the Old Covenant book's story.

First we see the king of the empire, of course that is unmistakably God on His throne, and the second character that we presented to the story was Hamon, a descendent of Amalek, who has been at enmity with the Jews for generations. His desire was to utterly destroy God's chosen people. Today that character is still our age old enemy, satan, who seeks to kill and destroy all God's people. The next character is Mordecai; representing the Jewish people. Even though they were in the courts of the palace, they cannot go before the throne without being summoned. He still represents us today, God's people. Remember there's neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, we are all God's children. That brings us to the character of Esther; she through her selfless act of obedience with no regard for her own consequences, saved her people by her actions, boldly going before the throne to plead their case.

So too Jesus, in an act of obedience to the Father's will, laid aside His royal identity to redeem His people. He became our sacrificial lamb, making identity with humanity to save us. But saints, here's why our covenant is much better! Jesus, not only went boldly before the throne making intercession for us, but He made the way - through Him and Him alone - that we may boldly enter before the throne to make our request known before the throne of the King of the universe. hallelujah!! Oh what a Savior.

So at this point now you're asking; What happened to Hamon? How did the king honor Mordecai? What happens to Esther when she goes before the king? How does this all resolve and does it have a happy ending?

Now go read the rest of the book of Esther.

DEACON'S MINISTRY *~ J.D. FLACK*

Emergency Food Closet

The Deacons would like to thank you, our faithful church family, for your ongoing generosity in stocking the Emergency Food Closet here at the church. The Emergency Food Closet is available for those who find themselves short on food during the month due to unexpected expenses or who have been unable to obtain sufficient food from the Clayton or other local food pantries. We have also noticed an increased need for the Emergency Food Closet when families have to go into quarantine due to Covid-19. Pantry items such as peanut butter, pasta, canned meats and foods, and toilet paper are always appreciated.

Deacon request forms are available in the church office during church hours and are available to be e-mailed as well. A Deacon request form is not needed for the Emergency Food Closet. If you know of any emergency needs or any other needs, please text J.D. at (315) 405-0330.

Have you ever thought about becoming a deacon? If you want to be a part of helping to make a difference in the lives of your friends and neighbors through prayer, creating and delivering food boxes, checking in on those who are homebound, and other special projects, we would love to have you join us! The time commitment is flexible, and we are able to do much of the decision-making for deacon requests by phone and text. Contact J. D. at (315) 405-0330 for more information.



MEN'S MINISTRY ~ J.D. FLACK

As I am sitting here contemplating what to write for the newsletter, the word "team" keeps coming to mind. For those of you that don't know me well yet, I grew up in locker rooms and dugouts. Sports were extremely important to me (sometimes too important!).

One really neat thing I have observed since we restarted the Men's Ministry is the formation of a solid team of Christian men. We have grizzled veterans that have been involved in the game for years, mid-career guys who are starting to feel like veteran ball players, and young guys who are just getting started in the game. It has been a blessing to see the camaraderie develop as we learn from one another and become enthusiastic about what we can do for the Kingdom together.

Thank you to the members of the River Church Men's Ministry who volunteered this past Saturday morning to help one of our teammates and his family move. Even in rainy cold weather the team came through and played great, moving almost an entire household in about three hours. We are always looking for projects and fun things to do together, so suggestions are welcome! We also hope to be rolling out a men's Bible study soon--stay tuned for more information.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!

Psalm 133:1

WOMEN'S MINISTRY ~ CHAR FRESE & WENDY FALZANO

Due to much enthusiasm from our ladies in our church to begin having our Circle meetings again, we anticipate our first meeting for this year to be sometime in April. Information on the date and time will be forthcoming.



BREAKING THE CHAINS ~ KEN & MICHELLE KAVANAGH

13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." (Acts 9:13-14)

Saul had made a name for himself throughout the Christian community. It wasn't a very good name. It was one of dread because Saul, who we also know as Paul, persecuted Christians for their belief in Jesus. When Saul's name was heard, it usually meant trouble for would soon follow for the early Christians. Jesus, however, saw something in Saul that He could use to share the gospel with others and bring glory to God. When reading about Saul we may wonder "what could Jesus possibly see in this man? Saul did horrible things to Christians all in the name of God. A person like that can't change!" I'm sure the early Christians thought the same thing when they heard Saul had changed and now was a professed follower of Christ. Ananias had such a concern that he brought it up to Jesus, but Jesus reassured him. We must remember what Jesus said in Matthew 19:26: "*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" Jesus saw a man who had a zeal for God, but who applied it incorrectly because he thought his version of the truth was correct. He saw a man who was driven, allowing nothing to hinder him. Jesus knew if Saul had an encounter with Him, he would see the truth and Paul (Saul) would be a powerhouse for the kingdom in sharing the gospel.

Sometimes we view a person on their terrible past or their current state and think "they could never change", or we judge them when they try to change and think their change won't last or it's fake. We see them through human eyes and not through Christ's eyes. Sometimes we judge ourselves and think we are so bad that we can't be changed or that Jesus can't use us. Friend, there isn't anyone, no matter their past or present, who Jesus can't change and use for the glory of God. Just look at Paul!

Announcements

Assistive Listening Devices

If you are hearing impaired and find it difficult to hear the service clearly, River Church has an assistive listening device which will help you to hear the service more clearly. For more information, please call the church office or ask one of our ushers for a Sound Mate (personal listening system) to use for the service.

Can You Guess What's Coming To The River?



Ok River Church, can you guess what is coming soon? We know there has been some curiosity with what's behind the curtain (and maybe some tried to take a peek!). We would like you to take a guess and email your guess to the church office at lschafer@riverchurchnny.com or write it down along with your name and drop it in the container at the window. A name will be picked out of the correct guesses to receive a free chocolate treat!



Happy March Birthday to the following:

Laura Schafer - March 10	Micah Flack - March 16
Patricia Taylor - March 10	Katie Chapman - March 31
Nichole Kittle - March 10	Christina Schermerhorn - March 24
Gladys Ashland - March 10	
Ken Kavanagh - March 11	