

The Good News

Newsletter— August 2017

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.

In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

The Dog Pen Church in Christ – opening prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before you this blessed day through the virtue of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as one body, one soul, one mind, and one spirit in fellowship to give you honor, praise, reverence, and glory.

We thank you for the way to heaven, for giving us the embodiment of truth, and for bestowing upon us the spiritual and eternal source of life.

We thank you that your Divine Spirit upon our mere souls does rest.

We thank you for your guiding light to bring us out of the snares of darkness.

We know that we are not perfect but we thank you for allowing us to be the best that we can be and represent all of the goodness of you.

We thank you for being tested, tried, and true.

We thank you for protecting, for providing, and for healing us with your mighty hand,

We thank you for the rain, the moon, the stars, and for the beauty of a snow topped mountain.

We thank you for the harmony of choirs and the birds that sing.

We thank you for opening our eyes to behold your beauty in all things.

We thank you for the wind that whistles,

We thank you for the grace to bear the world's thorns and thistles.

We thank you for all things near and far,

We thank you for everything you have been, everything you continue to be, and everything you are.

We thank you for each day with our praise and devotion,

We thank you for every precious moment as we give ourselves as a heart-felt token. Amen.

The Dog Pen Church in Christ – closing prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for each blessed day and the Word that was delivered during our fellowship as a church by brother Bennett.

We thank you for renewing our minds and our hearts that the Holy Spirit may continue to etch upon our hearts your wisdom, your knowledge, your instruction, and your understanding.

We thank you for ordering our every step in your word and for lighting our pathway that we maybe the guiding light to the world around us.

We pray that the lost see the light and take heed to the error of their ways and confess their convictions before you Lord that you may gave them strength to walk away from the darkness and go toward the light.

We pray that the found continue to walk in light and love and be the vessels for which your word is spread and the channels for which your blessings flow.

Let us pray for the safety of our families, our friends, our loved ones, and our enemies.

Let us pray for the prisoners, the prison staff, and the prison administration here in Parchman and all over the world.

Let us pray that your love, your grace, and your mercy be the driving force that sustains us and permeates through all the negativity that corrupts the very peace of our society.

We thank you for your goodness and for the joy in serving you humbly.

We thank you for all things in Christ Jesus name – Amen!

The Beauty of the Lord

Psalm 90:17 “– And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

It had been raining all week and we were stuck in our cells going about the business of each day. It rained earlier in the morning but it was now clear. We are now able to step on the outside for our one hour exercise time/yard call. We (The Dog Pen Church in Christ) meet together in fellowship each week to have Bible study. Today was just a continuation of the study we weren't able to finish a few days before. As we all gathered, something lay heavy on my heart and I wanted to share with my brothers in Christ. - Galatians 6:2

A very dear friend and sister passed away on February 10th, 2017. She was a Catholic nun – BVM that I have been knowing since 1994. We met when I was at the Madison County Jail facing capital murder charges for which I was convicted of and currently am appealing on Death Row. She had a gentle and loving spirit that saw pain in my eyes and in my demeanor. Knowing or sensing that, she asked me to participate in oil painting, in educational classes, and Bible study. She came to the county jail each week to help people get their G.E.D.s and teaching was her true passion. All these many years she stayed in contact by writing me faithfully, by communicating with my mother, and by being very active in my case. - Proverbs 18:24. She always encouraged me to write and to share my talents with the world. She befriended me with a divine love and a sincere care for my well-being.

I received a copy of her memorial from some of the sisters at the Mount Carmel motherhouse and I want to share it with my brothers in Christ. I not only want them to see her love for God and others but also to give us all insight on our path/journey to being devout Christians. Teary-eyed, I read through the two pages of the commitment to God at the tender age of 17 all the way to 87 years of age. I had just recently sent her a card in September 2016 for her 70th year jubilee. She entered the congregation on September 8th 1946. We were all in awe of the sacrifice, the service, the obedience, and the desire to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. It reminds me of the four blessings/beatitudes Jesus evangelized to the twelve disciples. - Luke 6:20-23. What started as a day of sullen sadness for me turned out to be a day of rejoicing as I asked a couple of prison guards to join with us as we sang a song of praise to our Almighty God. - Psalm 100. Oh, how the sun came out and the light rested upon the souls and spirits of everyone around. Even the unbelievers and these that are straddling between God and the world, were singing along as it's a catchy tune. – Psalm 84:11; Ecclesiastes 11: 1-8.

Yes, God works in mysterious ways and He definitely put His mighty hand on this moment. The beauty of the Lord is wonderful and I am elated to have shared it with my brothers in Christ Jesus. – Psalm 27:4.

Rest in peace Sister Janita Curoe & God Bless everyone!

The Beauty of the Lord

How beautiful the sound of rain pelting
against my window,
like a bedtime story being told as my head
lay gently on my pillow--

My pillow soaks up my tears for a dear
friend that's come home,
Tears of joy for the life she gave to represent
Christ's heavenly throne.

I thank Him profusely for introducing me to
such a wonderful blessing,
The beauty of the Lord is radiating and is
truly amazing.

I hear His voice peacefully rocking me to
sleep like a nursery rhyme.
And I awaken to the clouds parting to reveal
the brightness of the sunshine.

The sunshine brightens the day as I share my
tears of joy with my brothers.
We stand in awe of my dear friend's will and
desire given to help all others.

Oh, how the Lord's mighty hand works in so
many mysterious ways,
The beauty of the Lord is in the earnestness for
which she gave Him praise.

A moment of silence was due to reflect on her walk
in the light and in love,
Then our voices were lifted in a song giving
praise to our Heavenly Father above.

What a delight to hear all the voices in tune,
and out of tune.
I could see God smiling at his buds (believers)
coming into bloom.

Even the prison guards were singing hallelujah
and rejoicing in His Holy Name.
The beauty of the Lord resonates goodness through
all things and in every thing.

By Justin U.

Author and founder of the T-Net International, Bill Hull, said that love requires action to be real; otherwise it is merely good intention. Throughout my years of studying God's word and observing human nature, I find Mr. Hull's statement to be true. Jesus taught this "love in action" principle as the foundation of the kingdom ministry. We all know this to be true, but how many of us practice it? How many of us practice it selflessly?

I would like to think that I would help others if given the opportunity simply because I am a Christian. What alarms me is that I can't be sure of that. How many times have I failed to give food to the hungry, a drink to the thirsty, or welcome a stranger into my group? How many times have I clothed the naked, cared for the sick, or visited with the imprisoned? How many times have I done such things unsolicited, only because Jesus loves me?

My friend and I have been discussing what it means to be seen and to see others. This has led us to take a minute and really see the people we look at everyday. The seed of this see/be seen conversation was planted by my mother during a phone call. In hindsight, it may end up being one of the most important calls of my life. I had asked her what she had been up to that morning and was amazed by her humble response I believe humble is the best way to describe her actions because what she was doing she considered as nothing special. I am sharing two accounts from recent weeks that have encouraged me and have caused me to evaluate my actions toward others and praise God for their loving examples. (Matthew 6:2-4, 5:14-16).

I spoke to my mother and asked her what she was doing one cold, rainy Oregon morning. She said that she was on her way to the pharmacy to pick up some prescriptions. She quickly assured me that she was fine and that the medicine was for a homeless veteran named Tennessee. She also mentioned that she had just come from buying and delivering biscuits and gravy to him so that she knew he would have at least one hot meal in his stomach that cold, wet day. She has told me about Tennessee before. He has a host of problems and is compounding them by killing himself with alcohol. Here is where my mother shined. Not only did she make sure that he had a hot meal and his life saving medicine, but she never judged him. She doesn't see a homeless alcoholic when she looks at him. She sees, truly sees, a man in need of the love of Jesus and she acted on that need alone. Her actions were altruistic and pure. Thank you for the example.

My friend, with whom I am having the "look and see" conversation, is also a shining example. Let me use her words to tell you the story. "I met a man the other day. He was standing on the corner, by the traffic light as you come out of Walmart. I've seen him there before and every time I just hand him money and go through the light, never looking deeper or every really thinking again. How cold is that? How dead must my heart be to be able to just drive past this man without thinking of his needs? So instead of just handing him money, I parked in the parking lot across the street from him and ran over to talk to him. He was holding a sign that I had never taken the time to read. It said, "Homeless Veteran, Anything Will Help." What would my dad have thought of me just driving past this man? We talked for a few minutes and it was so hot outside. He didn't have water or any kind of shade. I asked him how long he had been out today. "A few hours," he said. I asked him if he was hungry. Of course he tried to brush/ laugh it off, but I could tell. I asked him if he would have lunch with me some place cool so we could talk a little more. He looked around and reluctantly said yes. As we got in my car and the air started cooling him down, he started talking to me about his family and friends. About his old days of being in the war, and of course I told him about my dad (her father is a recently passed Veteran). We didn't go far, but far enough for him to relax a little around me. We stopped at Wendy's for lunch. This sweet man who had to beg for every dollar in his pocket offered to pay for our lunch. I told him this one is on me and winked at him. I told him to pick whatever he liked and I doubled it. As we sat and talked I knew this person was one that I wouldn't forget in my lifetime. I just don't understand how I could have driven past him everyday, not seeing him or his need. We talked of his wife that had passed away, of his children and grandchildren. Getting sober and then falling back into it when you feel it's the only thing that can help. We talked about Jesus and how He has saved us both. How in God's eyes we are made clean and perfect when we accept the grace that Jesus gave us. I took him home with me that afternoon. We continued to talk and I learned the names of his children. Luckily I was able to find them on Facebook as he was taking a shower. Through messages I found out they were missing him and wanted him home. His daughter called my phone and they were able to speak. To make a very long story short, with the low cost of a bus ticket and a few snacks to keep him from getting hungry, he is now back with his family and friends. How could I have missed that? How could I have been so thoughtless and so consumed in my own life that I couldn't see the blatant need in some else's? I don't know. Have my eyes gone blind to the needs of others? Do you ever feel that way? Long winded story, I know, but just goes to show how many things you can see if you just take another look. I'm working on it."

The Golden Rule appears in many places throughout ancient writings and I wonder if we Christians have become deaf to its call to service. Do you think that the poor, homeless, imprisoned, hungry, mentally and physically sick, and the lost are put in our paths as a test of the genuineness of our faith? Do we want to be truly seen instead of merely looked at, cataloged, and dismissed? Jesus said, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you," and that no doubt means really seeing people (Matthew 7:12).

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2). "Then I heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here I am; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). Yes Lord, send me. God bless you all in Jesus.

Roger Gillett
Parchman, DR

Who Do You Compare Yourselves To?

Luke 18:10-14; Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, "God, I thank the that I am not like other people; swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner!" I tell you this man went down his justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

How often do we allow our pride to make other people's sins the standard by which we measure ourselves? It's easy to look down others and say "Thank God I'm not like those people." But how often do we look at God's perfect standard in Christ Jesus and see how sinful we ourselves really are? It is our pride that keeps us from looking at Jesus. Instead of humbling ourselves and looking up at Him, We in our pride choose to look down on them In the last line of verse 14 we learn the great lesson this story "...but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." When we humble ourselves, and look to Jesus. We see how and sinful and unworthy we really are. And in His grace, love, and mercy, He takes us in our humility, and we become justified in him, or as the end of verse 14 says, exalted. The words justified and exalted in verse 14 describe our state of being in Christ Jesus. We have all heard the saying, humility builds character. This a great truth, one we all can attest to. But a great a truth s it is, there is one truth that is greater, and that is the truth of this story, humility before God builds Christ Jesus character. The place of justification and exaltation, that we find in Christ Jesus, will give us new perspective in how we see others. Instead of seeing them as inferior we see them just as Christ sees us, as sinners in need of a savior. So instead of looking down on them, from a place of pride, saying "Thank God I'm not like those people" We should looking up to Jesus, from a place of humility, saying "Thank you God for having mercy on me, teach me Lord to love like you" It is my prayer as I write this that we can look daily to Christ so we can continue to learn the attitude and perspective of our Lord Jesus Christ . Amen and Amen

Stephen Elliot Powers DPC

(The above piece was inspired by the word of God through Stephen Powers and written by a fellow brother in Christ. Stephen Powers has suffered two strokes and currently has a bleeding aneurysm in his brain)

God Is My Strength

God is so good and kind. Where would any of us be without Him? (Isaiah 65:1-5) I'm thankful for the Good News newsletter and for always sharing the Word with me. We have to not only know the Word, but to also be doers of the Word as James tells us—James 1:22. I'm trying my best to be a doer, to practice what I hear preached, and to do what I even preach to myself. I'm constantly talking to myself (to meditate or mutter) about the Word.—Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2. The battle of good and evil is real. I'm always checking myself. (Psalm 34:12-15, 1 Peter 3:10-12). I so enjoy the Word. I love how it cuts (Heb. 4:12), how it heals (Psalms 107:20), and most of all, how it loves (1 John 4:7). With God, I look forward to everything He has in store for me (Matthew 19:26).—Amen.

Fred Singleton
Flora, MS

For Us

The sun arose this morning and shined its light on me,
I gloried in all His creation that is here for us to see.

There are mountains so tall and seas that are wide,
But there's no place like where blood flowed from His side.

It is called Mount Calvary, a very holy and consecrated place,
Not featured on all worldly maps but the scene of the ultimate grace.

Love flowed down from above, blood streamed from His feet,
Not one word of hate did from His mouth He speak.

He suffered what He knew He must and was prepared for His return,
Then He will take us with Him, for our rewards we did earn.

We will be where that bright Sun shall never do us any harm,
There will be no more sorrows, just the comforting touch of His arm.

Richard G. Jordan
Death Row—MS, June 2017