

Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave

United Methodist Churches

Porterville, CA

September 2021

Let Us Assume the Largest Heart

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

I desire to use the largest heart possible. When I think about our God. Come with me on a thought experiment.

Let's start this journey together by choosing to flat-out believe the most repeated verse in the Bible—that our Lord is “*a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*” (Ex. 34: 6). His personality profile is not balanced but biased—in favor of grace for the undeserving. Everything from here forward will flow from this bright certainty about who God really is. And once you've settled in your mind that you do have a future worth getting excited about, then you can help form a rebel movement—

Perhaps you have become infected with a disturbing cynicism the pandemic sowed. Perhaps you have closed your heart to people, and worse, to God. When you close your heart like this it makes sense that your heart would be hardened. That is dangerous. In this place you trust less and doubt more. You might read the Bible, but you put an asterisk beside everything because it does not apply to you anymore if it ever did. You might pray, but really feel like it is something to stay in God's good graces and not earthshaking, nor the greatest privilege in the universe. It is a dark place.

The Truth

Please understand that cynicism is a choice. Cynics are not born.

They are made. Life does not make you a cynic; you make you a cynic. The biggest pushback I might get is cynic saying that their situation is a consequences of having been burned in life. I will agree that life can be nasty, brutish, and short.

However, cynicism is not inevitable. Staying a cynic is not inevitable. There is a pathway back just as there is for the prodigal who strayed far away from home.

The Alternative

What do we do in this place? We consider a different path. Consider what Jesus did. He entered the worst mess humanity could throw at him. He was hated, abused, ridiculed, rejected, betrayed, killed. That is enough to make a cynic live through several lifetimes. But Jesus response to every twist and turn was love. Jesus responds to every stair of disapproval and hate, every sigh of despair, every tinge of guilt, every smug thought of overconfidence, every self-absorbed neglect of another, with love, for you, and me. The thrust of the gospel is that Jesus sees your hate and meets it with love and will every time.

This is an environment in which cynicism cannot survive. Hope cannot die if an empty tomb empowers it. Cynicism melts under the relentless gaze of hope. Hope is anchored in resurrection and is therefore resilient and able to outmaneuver all the hairpin turns

of cynicism and the dips of hopelessness.

Let Us Practice with Jesus

On what do you set your heart? Where do you place your hopes? On whom does your future depend? If the answer to any of these questions is other than Jesus, you are trying to find joy, brighter outcomes, peace, and transformation in things never designed to deliver those kinds of results. You are trying to play golf with a tennis racquet.

We have been in a sermon series talking about ways Christianity works. Spending time in the Scriptures, or in our heart to God in prayer, observing the work of God in our world and circumstances. Ask God for opportunities to give witness to his precious Son to those in our reach. These are basic disciplines of the faith, and we continue to repeat them because they work. It is not that they do not work, it is just they are underutilized.

So let us again assume the largest heart possible so that our great God possesses it on our behalf, always.

Sunday

Worship Services

Grand Ave • 9:30 a.m.

First UMC • 11:00 a.m.

Children's Sunday School
at Both Services

Psalm 9:9-10 "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

As I live comfortably in my nice home, surrounded by an amazing wife and beautiful daughter, two happy dog's eager to play, I leisurely sit in my rocking chair and look at the news on my smart phone. What I see and read takes me out of my state of comfort and into a place of deep concern. In fact, my heart breaks and tears form threatening to pour down my face.

California is burning. Fires rage in our beautiful state, that has been in desperate need of rain for years now. Churches, homes, schools, and businesses burned to the ground as if they never existed in the first place. Many people are left without a place to call home. Pastors are left without a church building where they may have performed marriages and baptisms and witnessed people give their hearts to Jesus. While students are without a school, firemen, front line workers and volunteers work endlessly to stop the fire and help those in need.

I continue to read the news and I learn Afghanistan is back under tyrannical rule of the ruthless mob known as the Taliban. Men are being ripped out of their homes in front of their families to face challenges we cannot imagine. Woman and young girls are forced to cover their faces again and some are not going to be able to go to school. Let's not forget the poor girls taken from the only way of life they have known and forced into a new way of life that might as well be called slavery. Women hand off babies over barbed wire fences to American and foreign military members in the hopes of saving

The Lord also will be a **refuge**
for the oppressed.
Psalm 9:9

their children they love. Christians are hiding in the mountains trying their best to avoid certain death at the hands of the new so called government rule. Door to door the Taliban roam searching for Christians and looking for any type of Christian material on phones they find. Fear ravages the land. The situation is horrendous.

As a Christian, these situations have broken my heart, and I'm sure many of you feel the same way. The first reaction my heart desires when reading of these horrible situations was to think of ways where I can help and make a difference. I believe Jesus has put the desire to help others that are suffering directly in the hearts of all believers. So, what can we do?

For the victims of the fires in California, you can visit umc.org and discover wonderful ways to make a positive impact in the lives of the victims of these fires. You can donate funds directly to churches or to the United Methodist Committee of Relief (UMCOR). What's really great about UMCOR is that 100% of donations go directly to where you desire your funds to help. You can also donate specific items to the United Methodist Committee on Relief's supply kits. Instructions for putting a kit together are at umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies. These are wonderful

options to make a difference in the lives of fire victims.

When it comes to physically helping those who are victims of the tragedies occurring in Afghanistan things get extremely more difficult. Most organizations at this point of my writing are not allowed into the country. This is disheartening, but, let's not forget one of the most valuable blessings God has allowed us to have access to: prayer. We need to pray continuously for our Christian brothers and sisters being hunted down and for the women and girls facing atrocities that are beyond our thinking. We need to pray for the fathers and husbands facing horrific situations that they and their families face. We also need to pray for the Afghans who risked their lives to help American and Foreign militaries attempt to put an end to the evil their homeland has had to endure.

When the world believes they are in a situation of hopelessness, we must stand firmly on the hope of the Lord that is everlasting. Please join me in doing our part in helping those in need. Whether it be financially, physically, or through prayer. We can and will make a difference when we join together to help the hurting. Blessings to you and yours.

God is Love,
Ryan Ridenour

Simply Loved Summer Lessons

Over the summer months, both First and Grand Ave's Children's Churches have been using a new curriculum called "Simply Loved". Let me be the first to tell you that everything you need to know, is all in the name. The curriculum uses Bible Stories to explain how God loves each and everyone of us. No matter what happens in our life, or in the lives of our Bible friends, God is right there simply loving us.

This curriculum uses a lot of the same types of things that we use in VBS. We have our Bible Buddies that help us with our Bible verses. Bible stories, songs and a Bible Buddy video that tells us about our Buddies and what their lives are like. Each month we have a new Bible Buddy, Bible verse, and Bible Point.

In the month of June, our Buddy was Savannah the giraffe. We learned about her life and how her long neck can help us remember how deep God's love is for us and that He always loves us. Even when sin came into the world, His love never failed Adam and Eve and their descendants.

In July, we learned about Rae a giant manta ray. Rae taught us how we can trust God and that He always keeps His promises. Even if it doesn't look like something that God said will happen, if He promises it, He will make it so. God told Abraham that he would be the Father of many nations when he had no children. He told Abraham and Sarah that a baby would be born to them, even though Sarah was very old. Even Jacob and Esau's problems got worked out because, we can trust God.

In August, Decker the decorator crab taught us that Jesus loves everyone. It doesn't matter to Jesus if you are rich or poor, popular or not popular. He loves everyone.



Jesus taught us that everyone is important. Shepherds in the fields were the first to be told of the birth of Jesus by a whole bunch of angels. Zacchaeus, who was not a very popular man in his town, was taken in and taught by Jesus, as was the woman at the well. Jesus also welcomed the children to come to him. He took time to hold them and bless them, even though the disciples thought they were bothering Jesus. Even though all of these people were considered "outsiders" Jesus included them first, in his activities. He showed us that no matter what the status of a person is, they are important. Everyone is important.

We have been having a whole lot of fun in Sunday School acting out the Bible Stories and shouting out Bible points. The kids and teachers have all been enjoying themselves as we have been approaching Bible Stories in a different way. Silliness, and seriousness, being loud and quiet, and sometimes a little craziness are all involved as Sunday School takes a look into the lives of the

wild animals. Their lives are then tied into our Bible Stories and songs. But at the nucleus of all of this is, pure love. God's love for us. Exactly as the curriculum is named "Simply Loved". The most important thing that any child can learn.

Blessings,
Melody Burkhart
Children's Sunday School

*"And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is."
Ephesians 3:18*

Maybe God is speaking to you about helping teach these young lives about Jesus, please contact me, Melody! It has never been easier to prepare! The materials are excellent and "Sunday Morning ready" for you to dig in with your class. Send me an email at mellyab@icloud.com.

Butterflies, Blossoms and Good News!

By Judy Lowery

Tucked away in a rough and tumble neighborhood of Detroit is large plot of land that has been developed into a cut flower garden, a bright spot of color and vibrant with life. Al and I rode with our daughter Shanda into the city last Saturday looking for this garden, also known as “Detroit Abloom.”

Shanda was going to play her viola in a string quartet for a community event there and we were invited to accompany her. Of course, we accepted. What a treat!

We drove past abandoned houses, junky vacant lots, blocks of well-cared for homes and other streets with neglected houses, following Shanda’s GPS until we finally saw the sign “Detroit Abloom” at the entrance of the gardens.

While she was warming up for the performance, Al and I walked around some of the flower beds, admiring the sunflowers, butterfly bushes and other flowers growing in profusion.

Monarch butterflies were especially abundant around the purple blooms of the butterfly bushes. Purple and orange...very beautiful to see. There was a butterfly nursery where butterflies and moths are raised, obviously successful with the numbers of them inhabiting the gardens.

He and I followed a path around the gazebo where the

quartet would be performing to a small raised pond covered with lily pads in bloom. It was mesmerizing to a couple of children who stood leaning over the edge looking for fish. With just a few minutes to spare, we visited the “Kids Abloom” area behind the pond with more flower gardens and places for children to explore and learn.

As the concert began, we hurried to get a couple of seats, first out in the direct sunlight but then relocating to a shady spot under a tree with low hanging branches. About fifty people gathered, some sitting on the ground on blankets, others on lawn chairs or chairs provided by the organizers.

The smell of grease filtered through the air, as Chick Pea fritters were cooked over a fire pit. It was an especially warm, humid day, which must have been miserable for the cook as he stood near the open flames. The fritters, an African dish, were complimentary for the crowd to snack on while enjoying the music.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra quartet was made up of two violinists, a cellist and Shanda on the viola. Over the course of an hour, they entertained us with a variety of music—classical, baroque, Broadway hits and a little bit of “Motown” too.

From my vantage point underneath the tree, I watched birds and butterflies flitting over the sea of colorful flowers in the garden. The afternoon at Detroit Abloom was truly a unique sensory experience.

Hearing Shanda perform with the quartet was especially sweet after her sharing some positive news with us about the journey with cancer that she’s been on since 2015. Recent brain scans showed no new growths, resulting in changing the protocol of treatments she has been following.



Monarch Butterfly

The medication prescribed by Shanda’s doctor about a month ago had worked well to reduce symptoms she had recently started experiencing, a great answer to prayer. Because it caused some negative side effects though, she was happy that the doctor said she could reduce the amount she was taking, another answer to prayer. Her ability to play the viola has not been affected by any of the treatments she has undergone—truly miraculous.

The delicate butterflies at Detroit Abloom reminded me of the transformation that happens when we put our faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. We aren’t there yet and most of us have a long road ahead with plenty of obstacles to overcome. Our bodies are fragile, vulnerable to disease. However, we have hope that through the work of the Holy Spirit we are being changed inwardly, becoming more and more like Jesus until that time when we are with Him forever.

That hope is our Good News!

“In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.’” John 3:3-6 NIV



Shonda performs with quartet

September 2021 Prayer Calendar

Wednesday, September 1 - Pray for the Bible Study today from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, September 2 - Pray for the ladies of Linda Circle.

Friday, September 3 - Pray for safe travel during the Labor Day weekend.

Saturday, September 4 - Pray for the Clothing Closet at FUMC.

Sunday, September 5 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services.

GAUMC 9:30 a.m.

FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, September 6 - Pray and praise God for his everlasting love.

Tuesday, September 7 - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship.

Wednesday, September 8 - Pray for the Bible Study today from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, September 9 - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they prepare Fall activities and lessons for the youth and children of our churches.

Friday, September 10 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Romans 12:12 *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."*

Saturday, September 11 - Pray for the ones who are grieving loved ones.

Sunday, September 12 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services.

GAUMC 9:30 a.m.

FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, September 13 - Pray and know that God is with you as you go through the week.

Tuesday, September 14 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Micah 6:8 *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

Wednesday, September 15 - Pray for the Bible Study today from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, September 16 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 46:4 *"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."*

Friday, September 17 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for Sunday Worship Services.

Saturday, September 18 - Pray for the Greeters who will welcome all to Sunday Worship Services.

Sunday, September 19 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services.

GAUMC 9:30 a.m.

FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, September 20 - Pray for all the church committee members as they make important decisions for our churches.

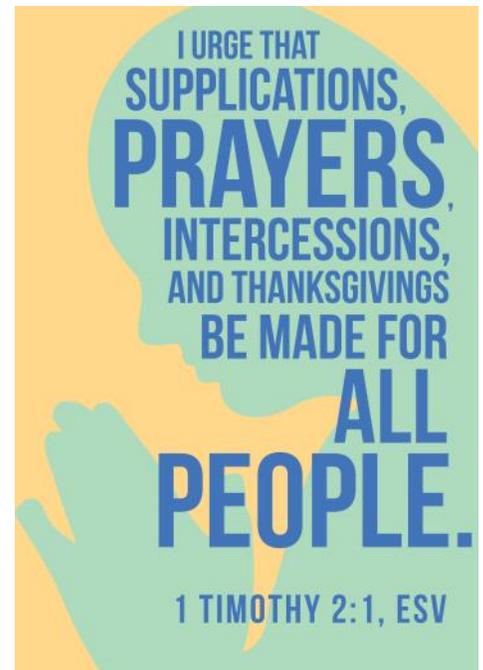
Tuesday, September 21 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Matthew 5:16 *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Wednesday, September 22 - Pray for the Bible Study today from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, September 23 - Pray for the homeless in our community of Porterville.

Friday, September 24 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 54:10 *"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet by unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor will my covenant of peace be removed." says the Lord who has compassion on you."*

Saturday, September 25 - Pray for all your many blessings.



Sunday, September 26 - Pray for Sunday Worship Services.

GAUMC 9:30 a.m.

FUMC 11:00 a.m.

Monday, September 27 - Pray and read Bible verse 2 Chronicles 15:7 *"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."*

Tuesday, September 28 - Pray for the ones in our churches who are ill and the ones who are rehabilitating. Pray for strength and healing.

Wednesday, September 29 - Pray for the Bible Study today from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Thursday, September 30 - Pray and reflect on Job 34:32 *"Teach me what I cannot see, if I have done wrong, I will not do so again."*



SEPTEMBER

Birthdays

First UMC

Jo Ann Miske • September 11
Dorothy Sandberg • September 23
Jean Edwards • September 23

Grand Ave UMC

Aprille Wait • September 7
Pat Duboski • September 8
Jackie Borges • September 15
Barbara Means • September 20
Shaughn Galloway • September 24

Charge Conference—October 14

The annual Charge Conference is **Thursday, October 14 at 5:00 p.m.** in the Fellowship Hall at Grand Ave. First UMC, Vida Nueva UMC and Grand Ave UMC will join together for this meeting led by our new District Superintendent **Rev. David L. Niu.**

Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the October 2021 Messenger is **September 20**. Thank you.

First United Methodist Church Grand Ave United Methodist Church

Weekday Meetings are via Computer Connection

www.grandavenue.org or
www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC or
www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC

View Past Worship Videos on Vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/grandavenueporterville>

Grand Ave Staff

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*
Director of Youth Ministries • *Ryan Ridenour*
Children's Director • *Melody Burkhart*
Worship Administrator • *Judy Buratovich*
Treasurer • *Rodel Lipumano*
Custodian • *The Congregation*

First Staff

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*
Counseling Center Director • *Joy Semple*
Administrative Assistant • *Melissa Sutherland*
Music Coordinator • *Christine Klippenstein*
Children/Custodian • *Melody Burkhart*

Grand Ave Office Hours:

Monday–Thursday
9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Phone: 559-784-3791

Fax: 559-784-3798

info@grandavenue.org

www.grandavenue.org

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First Methodist Office Hours:

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9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Phone: 559-784-4232

pvfumc@ocsnet.net

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344 E. Morton Ave.
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Announcements

Estate Sale at First UMC

September 9, 10, 11 • September 16, 17, 18
7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Invite friends and family to stop by the *Huge Estate Sale* at First Church and shop. There are wonderful treasures to be found including a *Free Pile*. Contact Deane and Linda Rhoadarmer for more information.

Church Planning Questions

Help us plan for future ministry! Visit our website www.grandavenue.org and click on the *Church Planning Questions* box. There are questions that will help us explore future ministry opportunities at both First and Grand Ave Churches. Please plan to fill out these questions in the next few weeks.

Tithes and Offering

Please continue to support your church through tithes and offerings as we move into the fall months. Thank you for your generosity.

Clothing Closet at First

The FUMC Clothing Closet is **open by appointment in September**. Please call Ann at 559-920-0977 for more information.

Wednesday Online Bible Study

The Online Bible Study meets 1:00 p.m. each Wednesday. All are welcome to join us. Contact Pastor Tom for a link to the zoom online meeting, tburatovich@gmail.com.