

Advent



THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST MAKES

In a neighborhood beautifully decorated with Christmas lights, one house caught my attention. All the lights on its neighbors lined up neatly with each other. There were reindeer, sleighs, snow people, all kinds of lighted nativities. It was one of those streets you might drive down just because. Until you got to Carl and Mary's house, which seemed shrouded in darkness. Nothing but a simple wooden cross sticking up in the front lawn with a little spotlight to shine on it.

Carl and Mary were friends of mine--not exactly party poopers. It wasn't that Carl didn't have time to put the lights up this year. He just didn't see the point any more. With each passing year, the lights, sounds, symbols and smells of the holiday season grew more and more distant from the true meaning of Christmas as he understood it. He became less interested in keeping up appearances and more concerned about what it all really meant. This year, it required a different kind of energy from him to make a different kind of statement. The simple cross in his front yard was just an outward symbol of a deeper inward protest against the world around him--against the neat little lines of strung lights and houses that he, he would have to admit, had long helped to create.

I totally get it. But, unlike Carl, I am still looking forward to putting up Christmas lights this year. Mine won't be as straight as my neighbors, but we'll put up a big tree you can see from the front window and play Christmas music while we hang gaudy, sentimental ornaments on it. Nevertheless, the memory of that simple cross in front of Carl's darkened house still catches my attention, perhaps because it reminds me of the strangeness of the Gospel we have to preach this Advent season: a Gospel that begins not with cheerful music or warm holiday greetings, but with the jarring, unexpected appearance of John, the wild Baptist, and a fearful expectation of God's coming judgment. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" Though I won't exactly follow his lead, I think Carl was on to something. The Christmas we preach is not the Christmas everyone is expecting. Our call to holiness and Christlikeness makes us stick out like a sore thumb in this world.

I promise it won't bother me if you do or don't put up Christmas lights this year. If anyone says to me "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays," I won't make a big deal out of that either. But, I do intend to make as much of a fuss as I can about Jesus and our calling to be one with God in him. We who call

ourselves Christians cannot go on living as if Christ had never come. We cannot go on keeping up appearances without bearing witness to the difference Christ makes in our lives. Either Emmanuel, God-with-us, has come and the Word-made-flesh dwells within us or we have hoped and believed in God so far to no avail. If Christ has come, and the Spirit within us confirms it, what a difference this Gospel must make in our world and in our lives! How very much will we stick out like a sore thumb, in this and every season, with the wonderful strangeness of the good news that our God has come so dangerously close as Jesus.

Pastor Michael

"We who call ourselves Christians cannot go on living as if Christ had never come."

2020 VISION: BUILDING THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW

Margert Clarkson wrote one of my favorite modern hymns back in 1977, titled “Let us Build a House of Worship.” The last lines of the first verse declare,

“Not alone our bricks and mortar--
Hearts and lives to God we raise:
He will set his name forever
On such building to his praise.”

To me, these lines beautifully capture the challenge and the promise that lies before us today. God is calling us to be a building generation, like Nehemiah and his friends in the Old Testament, like the apostles themselves in the New. We have inherited a church that is very much still under construction, which means all of us are God’s coworkers. Not just because Hemet Church of the Nazarene doesn’t own a sanctuary any more, but especially because God is calling for local churches that embody all the spiritual gifts and works of mercy that bear witness to the real presence of Christ in the world.

As Clarkson’s hymn also reminds us, the challenge before us is to build a church for tomorrow: a church that not only meets our present needs, but anticipates the needs of a new generation of disciples--a church for “those who will come to believe in me through [our] message” (John 17:20). This doesn’t mean forgetting our past or doing away with important traditions. Truly, we must “build on God’s foundation--Jesus Christ, whose blood atones” (Clarkson). As a local church, we build on solid foundations when we study the scriptures and apostles’ teachings, and live according to the holy habits of forefathers: including the breaking of bread and public prayer. But, we must also take care to “build for those who live today” and “build for future generations truth that triumphs, come what may!” We can’t just keep on doing what we’ve always done. We need pioneers and local missionaries who are willing to try new things and enter new territories with our message of holiness.

You might be asking yourself, What can I do? How can I help to build the church of tomorrow, today? Although Hemet Church of the Nazarene is certainly collecting tithes and donations that will be used to keep our church moving “onward and upward” towards our calling to be the body of Christ, an authentic expression of the Kingdom of God and the message of holiness in Hemet, California, you may have already guessed what I am going to say: building the church of tomorrow isn’t all (or even mainly) about dollars and cents, or bricks and mortar. Though money and real estate can help us in our mission to preach the gospel, it’s mostly about building “lives of grace and beauty,” which means we must raise, first and foremost, “hearts and lives to God.”

So, I want to suggest to you that the best, most important thing you and I can be doing to build the Church of the Nazarene in this valley these days is to lift our hearts and lives to God to be used in his mission to communicate the love of Christ to others. When we give our time and energy to God through small group Bible studies, or private prayer and devotions, or Christian life groups, or sharing a meal with friends, or feeding the homeless, or visiting the sick in the hospital, or taking the time to pray for a neighbor or coworker, the results may not always be obvious or tangible. But, make no mistake, these are all ways that you and I really are building the church of tomorrow, today. Or, to be more precise, these are all ways that we are inviting Christ himself to build his church in us and “bring our friends and neighbors glad good news for all our race.”

YOUTH NEWS...

Greetings friends! This has certainly been an interesting time of transition, especially for NYI. We’re always looking for new ideas to try. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don’t. But what matters is that we keep going. Philippians tells us to “press on toward the goal” for this is a marathon, not a sprint. The prize is Christ and though we may falter, we know that grace is always there to help us back up.

Right now, our youth meet up every Tuesday night for a fun activity and fellowship. Our focus is to develop a strong support group for our teens where they can express themselves and feel accepted.

Sunday mornings at 11 a.m. we have teen quizzing where the youth work in memorizing scripture and then compete against other churches in the district. If you, or anyone you know have some suggestions or ideas for NYI, let us know! Thank you for all the support you’ve given. May God bless you and keep you.

Sincerely, AJ Dixon

LOVE FEAST

**First Sunday of
every month
during the
Sunday School
hour!**

Valley Restart

by Sarah Falgout

The Valley Restart agency is a shelter for the homeless located in the valley of Hemet and San Jacinto. Linda Rodgers, the director of Valley Restart, has been a part of this agency for 16 years.

Valley Restart is the only 24/7 all year long shelter in Riverside County, housing 35 people with children. Linda said, "we have an 89% success rate in families finding permanent housing. The average stay of families is 49 days and, out of 260 people last year, 140 were children." The shelter provides beds, separate rooms, a community dining area, a playground for kids, and clothing. It seems all basic needs are met at Valley Restart. The program has firm requirements that are to be followed. When a resident acquires admission, they are committing to pass a criminal background check, to submit to random drug testing, to seek a legal source of income, to be willing to seek employment on daily basis, and to deposit 80% of their income into savings for their future housing. If you follow their requirements, you are more successful in finding permanent housing. The 11% that are not a part of their success rate are usually dropped because of failure to comply with the requirements.

The shelter has a street outreach program that focuses on the homeless that live on the streets. Valley Restart has two part time employees that work for their street outreach program. Thanks to this program, Linda states, 133 people became a part of their program and 44 people were successfully housed last year. The shelter allows approved homeless to come on campus and take a shower. Every day from 4:00 to 5:00, the showers are available. Then after a shower, a hot meal is provided. Linda expressed how hard it is to successfully get people off the street because they must want it for themselves.

One of the big services the shelter provides is food for the community. The shelter also allows any individual with a valid California State ID who submits to a background check to come in for dinner. Linda proudly exclaimed how the local LDS church grants \$1,400/year for their soup-kitchen. Every evening dinner is provided by 35 to 40 churches around the community. The soup-kitchen operates by churches buying food for up to 100 people. The church is then allotted an hour to cook the food and another 30 minutes to serve. The social worker on staff always likes to say "we do not like to waste any food here at Valley Restart. Please, only take what you can eat and do not throw away any food!" When the mealtime is over, the leftovers get put away and residents can eat the leftovers for lunch the next day. The shelter also receives overstock from Pizza Hut and four different Starbucks. The local school district will bring in food for the children. No one staying at Valley Restart should go hungry. Residents are also given refrigerator space for the groceries they buy themselves

I would recommend this agency to others because I believe Valley Restart truly is taking the homeless off the streets and teaching residents how to be more self-sufficient. With 12 employees and interns and 150 to 200 volunteers, this program is well supported. Linda is a devoted Director who takes her job seriously to help those in need who are truly seeking a new life. The shelter has resources for individuals looking to get off the street. Social workers are always available to help residents apply for government services. After school tutoring and school district busing are two resources that benefit residents as well. Referrals to other programs such as behavioral health, senior services, and veteran affairs benefit the individuals who are truly seeking help. Valley Restart will also buy bus tickets for the homeless to go where they have financial and family support. The agency provides food for the hungry every day. All these services, along with a spirited environment and committed staff, make Valley Restart a highly recommended agency with services for families and individuals in need.

The Neighborhood

by Diana Gathercole-Hagy

Fred Rogers or Mr. Rogers to most, was an ordained minister who followed the words of St. Francis of Assisi. "*Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary use words.*" It took one man to show the world what kindness can do. He never mentioned God, and as Tom Brokaw once said "...he never talked about God on his program. He didn't need to."

Mr. Rogers was always someone I looked up to. As a child I never missed an episode of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. I remember sitting in front of the TV, a bowl of cereal in hand, wondering what kind of trouble King Friday XIII would find himself in that day. What life lesson he would learn at the end of it. The impression that Mr. Rogers left on me was never about how special he said I was. I knew I was special, my mom told me all the time. It was his genuine kindness and love for people, his gentle nature that struck me most. No matter their skin color, sexual orientation or station in life. His genuine love for people was deeply rooted inside of me, but I did not know how to process it.

Fast forward my life, now as an adult. I am deep in social media culture. My life is surrounded by technology, instant information, a constant barrage of news some good mostly bad. I see the statistics of depression and suicide climb higher and higher as our need for technology grows more and more fierce. We are isolating ourselves more and more every day and we aren't even aware of it. This is the moment I finally process Mr. Rogers kindness.

I offer to sit with strangers in a café. Sometimes I'm there alone for hours wondering if this is really accomplishing anything. Then a random lost soul will walk in, look at me and sit down. I offer them a cup of coffee or tea; some buy their own some take me up on the offer. They nervously look around while I sit, smile, and wait for them to relax. We usually start off with small talk. It starts with how our day is going, what we do for a living. They slowly unwind and start sharing their life with me. Some are experiencing heartbreak, an unsecure future, loneliness, the list goes on. Yet, there's something I see at the end of our visit. A brightness in their eyes, maybe even a little ray of hope. I've done nothing except sit and listen. Smiled when I saw they needed it, comforted them when they needed to hear it. A simple gesture of kindness. It cost me \$2.95 to make someone's day a little brighter.

Dr. Mata shared a beautiful story of Fred Rogers with me the other day. He told me that as he sent me the text, it was at that moment it clicked for him, what I was doing at Starbucks. It's more than me just sitting at a table talking. I sit at a table surrounded by people who would have never crossed each other's paths if it were not for this meet up. Relationships have formed as a result, and it's been beautiful to see.

While I may not be the perfect candidate for a ministry leader, my heart is genuine, and my motives are pure. I want to reach as many people possible through kindness. I truly believe people can see Christ through simple actions, as simple as sharing a cup of coffee or tea.

*"Preach the gospel at all times;
when necessary use words ..."*

December 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 First Sunday of Advent Love Feast	2	3	4	5	6	7 Children and Teen Quizzing in Indio
8 Second Sunday of Advent	9	10	11 Andrea Bell	12 Church Board mtg. 6:30p At Nancy Smith home	13 Cameron Farrell	14
15 Third Sunday of Advent Darin Thompson	16 Valley Restart @ 5p	17 Ladies Luncheon @ 1p at Nancy Smith home	18	19	20	21 Ralph Natividad
22 Fourth Sunday of Advent Marc Chatham	23 Church Office closed-----	24 Christmas Eve -----	25 Christmas Day -----	26 -----	27 -----	28
29	30 -----	31 New Year's Eve -----		Sunday Services: 9:30 am Morning Worship 11:00 am Sunday School		

January 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 New Year's Day Church office closed	2 -----	3 Church Office OPEN	4 Epiphany
5 Love Feast	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Trish Mata	13 Patsy Pesterfield	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 Valley Restart at 5p	21 Ladies Luncheon at 1p at Nancy Smith	22	23 Church Board mtg at 6:30p	24	25 Carrie Kissack
26	27	28	29	30	31	1 February 2019
2 Love Feast	3 David Mata Caitlynn Farrell	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14 Valentine's Day	15