

November 2024

The Lighthouse

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is a national holiday in the United States and Canada (though we do not observe it on the same day). There are other countries with similar holidays and observances.

In the United States, Thanksgiving was celebrated by individual states from the time of the founding fathers. In 1863, President Lincoln called for Thanksgiving in all States by Presidential proclamation. In 1941 FDR signed a joint resolution of congress setting the fourth Thursday of November as the date of the national Thanksgiving holiday.

It is great that we have yearly holiday to remind us to be thankful and grateful for our blessings from God. But, for the Christian, thanksgiving and gratitude are called for 365 days a year. I like how the Heidelberg Catechism puts it in its first two questions...

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

2. Q. What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. First, how great my sins and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.

Recognizing your sin and misery and understanding that you can only be delivered by Jesus Christ are the first steps in becoming a Christian. The third thing we must know, "how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance", speaks to how we live as Christians.

Patrick Henry said it well, "Thanksgiving is good, thanks-living is better."

This is exactly what Paul talks about in Romans 12:1 and why I am preaching this Luke passage to you today. In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Paul wants us to remember the mercies of God he has been expounding in Romans 1-11 and respond appropriately. How can we show our gratitude for all that he has freely done for us and given us in Christ? Present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Isaac Watts echoes this sentiment in *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*:

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and Sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small!
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

If we know our sin and misery without Christ, and understand the great lengths to which he went to save us, we cannot help but be grateful and offer ourselves to him as servants, to do whatever he asks.

Are you having trouble living as a Christian? Are you struggling with a particular temptation? Take some time to remember Christ and the cross and how he became sin for sinners there. A hymn that I enjoy is *Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted* by Thomas Kelly. In the third stanza he writes:

“Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great
here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load;
'tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.”

Jesus suffered and died on the cross to free us from sin, not for us to wallow in it. Do we truly grasp what Christ has done for us? And are we truly grateful for it and all the blessings we receive from him?

Grace & Peace,

Tim

*Thanksgiving
Blessings
Give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good; his
love endures forever.*



Chronicles 16:34

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

Establishing a Prayer Team To Share God's Heart to Reach the Lost

God, The Great Life Giver

My name is Steve Lanier. Some of you may know me because of my association with Redeemer Church, and many more may probably know me as *'Sherry Lanier's husband'*, because of her work with MNA's Disaster Response Ministry. When I retired from the staff of Redeemer, Sherry and I knew that *'retirement'* was not going to be defined by sitting at home, isolated and focused on just ourselves and our hobbies. We knew that Sherry would continue her work with MNA, and I wanted to focus on pastor and missionary retention. In other words, we would minister to ministers and church planters, both foreign and domestic. We were invited to partner with a mission agency that focuses specifically on missionary retention, *Deeper Still Missions*, and, with their help, we are able to come alongside local pastors, and domestic and foreign missionaries and church planters, caring for, serving and encouraging them and hopefully extending their time on the field. As a part of that new call, we are spending a good bit of our lives here in Ocean Springs (OS) alongside Mark and Stephanie.

Let me also give this quick disclaimer: First, I am honored by Mark's request for me to write this update concerning the work of God here in OS. Second, I am challenged by Mark's request that I write this update since I am not nearly the writer that he is. With that said, Let's go!

I want to begin with a vision. No, it's not mine. No, it's not Mark's either. It is a vision that was given to the prophet Ezekiel concerning the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. However, when Mark asked me to write what I am seeing in OS, my mind was drawn to God's word recorded in Ezekiel 37, which is commonly known as the *'vision of the valley of dried bones'*. In that vision Ezekiel records that God carried him to a valley, and in that valley were scattered all around a large number of dried bones. They were not heaped up into piles; they were scattered. They were dried, showing that they were abandoned and left for a long period of time and had no life in them at all.



(Halloween decorations in OS)

In this vision, Ezekiel is in the valley, and he sees all of the dried, scattered bones, and God asks him, *"Son of man, can these bones live?"* The prophet responds, *"O Lord God, you know."* He recognizes that only God has the power of life and death; He is the only one who can bring life to those dried bones. So, God instructs the prophet, *"Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus, says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'"* Wow! God's answer to the problem is to enjoin Ezekiel in the work that only God can do! Ezekiel is to proclaim the words of God, and God was going to fulfill His word.

God identifies the bones as *"the whole house of Israel"*, which we know was divided into two kingdoms, North and South, and eventually each were defeated and sent into exile because of their sin. Many commentators are split on who are actually the benefactors of this prophecy – The household of God in exile only, or those to whom Ezekiel prophesied and all of the redeemed of the

Lord, the true Israel. Thankfully, I'm not going to enter into that argument here. However, I think all of us can still benefit from what we hear and see in this vision. We see scattered bones, people described by Paul this way, *"In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope"* (Eph. 2:12). They are 'cut off' and 'exiles'.

Here in OS, we have encountered a number of people who fit that description perfectly. They are living their lives apart from a relationship with the source of life, God in Christ. They are basically 'dead men walking.' As the Scriptures teach, they have already been judged by God and found guilty as charged. So, they are doing what walking dead, hopeless people do: They medicate and distract themselves through entertainment and work, and they fill that sense of being 'cut off' with anything and anyone with the hope that they can give their lives some semblance of meaning. By the way, remember what God said about mankind back in Genesis? *"It is not good for man to be cut off."* Many of these folks are also continuing to isolate themselves from others. We have talked to a number of folks who work remotely and workout in their home gyms and have very few meaningful relationships. They will tell us that they've been hurt too many times by people and have very little trust in people all together. They are living and making a living, but they are like someone on a journey with a broken compass; they are lost, but their pride keeps them from actually believing they are truly lost. So, they keep on moving down the road in the wilderness, lost, scattered but now and then stopping along the way to get a drink of water from the wells that they dig for themselves. In the Scriptures Jesus describes them this way, *"But when He (Jesus) saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."* In another place we are told, *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of Living Waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water"*.

Some of the dried bones that we've met here are the man who Mark has written about who has attempted suicide, according to his own words, six times. He is a very gifted song writer and singer, but he is an alcoholic who just recently lost another marriage. He jokes about his pain and laughs, and uses people for his own pleasure, saying that he has a reputation to protect. As one of his songs says, *"I'm not looking for Jesus and I'm not looking for redemption, but I hope that God doesn't see us. I'm just looking for the real me I used to be."* And the shop owner with whom Sherry has been sharing. The other day we found her in her shop drunk on the wine that was supposed to be for her customers. She is so frightened the world is headed to its final end in her lifetime. She was shouting out loud to her customers that she is a Christian while spewing foul language and threatening them if they disagree with her political views. Sherry and I made sure that one of her employees drove her home after they closed the shop.

One business owner told me last week, "There is a lot of really good things here in Ocean Springs. We have some great people here, and lots of great culture, but the underbelly of this place is dark and it is very sad." That reminded me of the words of King David recorded in Psalm 139, *"Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence... If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You."* God is shining His light through His people.

Just like in his vision, God wanted to first show Ezekiel the problem, the ravages of sin and the hopelessness of those separated from God. Those dried, dead bones that were scattered all over the valley had no hope for life, and no man could do anything to solve that problem. But God showed Ezekiel the solution: God Himself. God instructed the prophet to speak God's Word. God was going to then bring new life out of death. The Word was proclaimed and God went to work, and all things became new. Each bone had life in itself and was moving around finding its corresponding pieces. There was so much going on that it made a huge racket and the earth shook with all that God was doing as He brought life out of death. The bodies of those whose bones that were once cut off and scattered began to grow organs, muscles, tendons, and ligaments and then He covered them with

skin. God then instructed the prophet to call out to the wind, and the breath of life, the Spirit of God, filled each corpse, and there was once again, an army of God's people. That is also happening here in OS and all across the coast.

God has opened the door for Mark to make deep, good friendships with numerous folks in the food industry in the downtown area. Mark has patiently been investing his time and as the Apostle Paul described his own work in the city of Thessalonica, *"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."* (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Just recently Mark and I were downtown talking with different people at one of the local restaurants where Mark has invested so much of his time. Sherry and I had just been contacting and connecting at another restaurant down the street and were able to pray with a gentleman who is relocating to OS. Sherry headed home and I joined Mark, and he introduced me to some of the folks that work there and then to a couple of men who were patrons of the place. After a good while of sharing and getting into their lives, Mark and I had the privilege of praying with one of those men about an issue in his life that was really concerning to him. He has since reached out to Mark with good questions concerning the person, work and teachings of Jesus Christ. Just last night, another man saw Mark sitting at the bar talking with one of the employees of a local watering hole where Mark has focused his attention. He came up to Mark and began to share his grief of losing his best friend. As usual, the question arose, *"Why would God do this to me,"* so Mark began to unpack the Gospel with that man. At the end of their time together, the man hugged Mark and said, "I saw you sitting there, and I could see God in you, and I just had to sit next to you and to talk with you. Thank you."



Just this afternoon, Sherry and I spent three hours in a great conversation with a very interesting couple we discovered are practicing Mormons. We enjoyed a meal together the other evening when we shared our table with them at a crowded restaurant. We had never seen one another before, but we all had such a great time together. Then, today we ran into them at another restaurant and picked up our conversation on Christ and the Scriptures as they continued to ask us lots of questions.

Mark and Stephanie had another great breakthrough when they invited the entire staff of a local eatery and bar to come to their home for a pool party. Sixteen members of the staff attended, and a few brought their children. Now, those folks know 'a place where someone knows their name' and is willing to be a safe place for them and for their families. It is a place of life and light, and it is also the location where our core group meets for fellowship and worship every Sunday evening at 6 PM.



God is also connecting the pieces of the body here in OS for His glory. Just last week, one of our core group members introduced me to some friends of his who go to the same gym as he, and they own a local coffee shop right in downtown OS. When they asked me how I was connected to this mutual friend, I explained that I am serving on the coast helping to plant a church. They were visibly excited and proclaimed that they, too, are helping with a church plant. Mark and I were talking to a bartender who works in a really popular eatery on Government Street, downtown OS. He shared with us his testimony and that he is assisting a church out of Biloxi that is now focusing on planting in OS. At another time, Sherry and I had the privilege of meeting

a young lady whose husband is in the military. She and her family are helping yet another church

plant that focuses specifically on military families here in the area. There are so many wonderful encounters with so many people who God has called together to proclaim His Word to the scattered bones in this area. Can you hear the noise and feel the shaking of the earth as God reunites His body to become a living army of the elect ones as we reach out with His love in word and deed along the coast?

A number of years ago, I was a member of a men's Bible study, that studied, "*Experiencing God*", by Henry Blackaby. In that book, Blackaby talked about following the call of God saying, "Watch to see where God is working and join Him". Sherry and I have often rehearsed that statement with one another while we've been working alongside Mark and Stephanie and discovering just how busy God has been and still is, calling people from all walks of life and different denominational affiliations to focus attention on making disciples of Christ here on the Mississippi gulf coast and specifically in Ocean Springs. What a privilege it is to join Him in His work here on the coast!

THANK YOU to all of you who are a part of this work through your investment of your prayers and financial support and your encouraging words!

In Him,
Steve, Sherry and Mark and Stephanie

Prayer Requests:

- Please pray for the individual folks with whom we have shared the gospel, that God would accomplish his good work in bringing forth faith in their lives.
- Please pray for Mark and Stephanie as they walk with Mark's mother and brother-in-law through the last stages of their physical lives, and for Mark as he prepares to preach both funerals.
- Please pray for Stephanie's mother as she recovers from leg surgery.
- Please pray for one of the members of Hope Church as he recovers from arm surgery.
- Also, please pray for another young family as they await the birth of their new child.
- Pray that God's Spirit will move freely and powerfully to bring the dead to life and to save many in Ocean Springs – and beyond!

Would you consider being part of our financial support team:

- Use the QR code to the right, or visit <http://give.pcamna.org/to/1749>
- Checks can also be sent payable to "Mission to North America"
PO Box 890233
Charlotte, NC, 28289-02333
(Write "Mark Horn, Ocean Springs Church Plant" on the memo line)
- More information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs story can be found at our website: www.PlantHopeOS.org



And remember: The Facebook page for a livestream of our Bible studies and photos of our meetings can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/613907074215025>

Thank you, and God bless you!

A closing encouragement:

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"It is God's unmistakable purpose from all eternity to put together a people who are His very own." - Alistair Begg



BIRTHDAYS FOR NOVEMBER



Halsey Hall 3rd

Kayleiah Clark 8th

Matthew Blakeney 8th

Harrison Horn 11th

Vielsa Harding 13th



Aaron Smith 15th

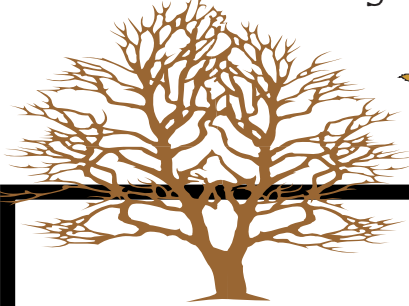
Lynne Rydbeck 16th

Sue Faircloth 20th

Kathy VanderKoooy 21st

Fran Bagby 25th

Winston Horn 28th



Dates to Remember for November

November 2 Men's Breakfast at 8:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall

November 3 Communion



November 4 Men's Bible Study at the church at 6:30 p.m. in the Parlor

November 6 Operation Christmas Child Packing Party in the Fellowship Hall at 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., food provided



November 13 Women's Leadership Team Meeting at 5:30pm in the church library

November 17 Deadline to have your Operation Christmas Child boxes at the church



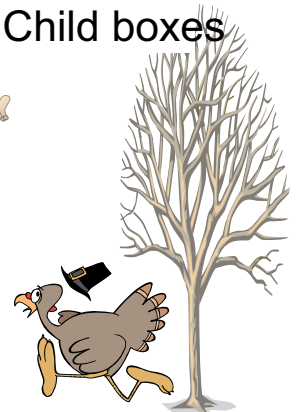
November 18 Deacon's Meeting at 5:30 p.m.



November 18 Men's Bible Study in the Parlor at 6:30 p.m.



November 19 Joint Officer Meeting at 6:00 p.m.



November 24 Annual Thanksgiving Luncheon after the morning worship service

November 27-29 Church Office will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday





**1340 Beach Boulevard
Biloxi, Mississippi 39530
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First Presbyterian Church of Biloxi is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. To learn more about the PCA, log on to pcanet.org

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Kim Clark	228-374-6880	info@firstpresbiloxi.org
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