

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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A Welcoming Church

By Rev. Sean McCann

Don't you love that term, "a welcoming church"? If you are looking around for a church to visit on vacation or to recommend to a friend in another town, surely you would want them to go to a "welcoming church," right? While on the surface we all want to go to a church that welcomes us, this non-descript phrase means something today that was hardly imaginable just one generation ago. If you are not aware, some churches and denominations have begun to use this phrase to imply that those churches that hold to a biblical standard (especially when it comes to marriage and human sexuality) for membership and ordination are somehow not welcoming. So, do we really want to be a "welcoming church?" Absolutely...just so long as we understand that words have meaning, and the word *welcome* has a clear biblical use that we should aspire to.

In Romans 15, the Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The *welcome* here is a word to describe *acceptance*. The gospel tells us that Christ accepts sinners, and that by his grace he begins to transform us to look more and more like him as we learn to live in obedience to his word. Christ receives us without payment, and we who have received freely are to give freely. If we wish to obey Paul's command, we move well beyond simply speaking the word "welcome" and begin to live as men and women who accept and receive our neighbors into our homes, our lives, and our hearts.

This command is spoken to individuals, but I believe it can just as easily be spoken to the church. While we do not want to be considered a "welcoming church" in the altered sense of the phrase, we should truly aspire to be considered a welcoming church in the biblical sense of the phrase. While I was on my sabbatical this summer, I had the opportunity to worship at thirteen different churches, and I came away with many different experiences in how churches welcome visitors. With that in mind, I want to take the rest of this article to consider a

few ways we can continue to be, and hopefully grow more and more in becoming, a welcoming church.

What does it look like for us to be a welcoming church? At its most basic level, it means welcoming people who visit our church! Every Sunday we have assigned greeters to welcome and hand out bulletins. This is a wonderful ministry in which all our members serve, but to be a truly welcoming church requires each of us being ready to identify and offer a warm welcome to new faces as they come in. There were a couple Sundays on our sabbatical when we visited a church that not a single person spoke to us! If we had been looking for a church home, it would not have mattered how good the sermon was, or how beautiful the singing, or how clean the nursery, we would never have gone back. When we returned from sabbatical, our family reflected on all the churches we attended and what stood out. Do you know what my kids remembered the most? Not the preachers, not the musicians, not the architecture of the sanctuaries. They remembered most the churches where someone sought us out, asked us questions, and made us feel welcome in their fellowship. You cannot quantify the impact that these small-but-faithful interactions have on visitors.

If you are having trouble imagining how to welcome someone to church, I want you to imagine how you would welcome someone to your home. As hosts we are attentive to our house guests: we show them around, we get them what they need, we make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. Now, what would that look like if we understood our roles on Sundays are – in some part – as hosts to welcome people into the meeting house of the family of God? If our house guest takes our favorite seat at the table, do we ask them to move? If they look confused with how to eat a new dish, do we just leave them alone to figure it out by themselves? If they don't have anyone to talk to, do we ignore them and assume someone else with go speak to

November–December

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship:
November 6, 20
December 4, 18

Fellowship Meal:

December 4, following morning worship.

Shepherding Groups:

November 6, following morning worship.

Christmas Eve Service:

December 24, 5:00 pm.

Holiday Schedule:

No Sunday School on December 25 or January 1
No Evening Worship on December 25 or January 1

Weekly Events

Sunday:

Sunday School 9:30 am
Morning Worship 10:45 am
Evening Worship 6:00 pm

Except for 1st Sundays
and December 25

Wednesday Evenings:

Supper 6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

Men's Prayer Breakfast 8:00 am 2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS 8:00 am Every Thursday
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)

at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road
Norm Bomer's Home 7:00 pm 1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Carol Belz's Home 9:30 am Every Tuesday

Continued from Page 1

them? Of course not! There is no way around it: visiting a new church can be awkward and disorienting, but those things are quickly overcome when a host takes an active interest in their guest.

So, at a minimum, welcoming others means saying hello to visitors, but it means so much more. The welcome does not end once someone has attended a few times. I have a pastor friend who identifies a phenomenon he has termed the “Six Month Blues.” He explains that when someone is new to a church, they are often greeted by many people and are overwhelmed by so many warm welcomes. But as the weeks turn into months, and they become the new-but-not-so-new people at a church, things begin to change. They have been around long enough that they are no longer sought out and welcomed every Sunday, but they haven’t been around long enough to form deeper relationships within the congregation. This is a key moment, both for the visitor and for the church. The visitor or new member must press through this awkward stage to put down roots to form deeper relationships, and the membership must continue to welcome, pursue, and serve those newer to our fold. Have you already greeted the same person three times? Now it is time to invite them for Sunday lunch, get their number to set up coffee, or just seek them out for a longer conversation after the service.

One final element of a welcoming church is how we approach

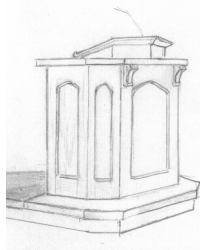
one another within the body. Consider this one question: who do you usually talk to at church? Maybe it is your friends, maybe it is those who usually sit around you, maybe it is those you share a similar interest with, or those it is just plain easy to talk to. Let me challenge you to go out of your way and move out of your comfort zone. Greet that person who has been here a year, but you have never spoken to. Go talk to that person you have met a few times, even if you still can’t remember their name. Is someone sitting alone? Warmly welcome them. Is someone struggling with their kids? Offer them help. Is an unfamiliar face looking for a seat? Scoot down your pew and make room. A community of love, service, and welcome is built and grown by small actions, taken by dozens of members, week in and week out.

This coming Sunday you will have 5-10 minutes before the worship service, and another 5-10 minutes after the service: who will you extend the welcome of Christ to? Who will you seek out to pursue and welcome? Imagine what it would look like if each of our members made it a point to intentionally speak to just one person before the service, and another one afterwards. That would add up to well over a hundred small conversations, all seasoned with prayer, all with the hopes of showing the love, grace, and welcome of Christ to one another.

Now that is a welcoming church that anyone would want to be a part of!

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



It has been great for me this month to jump back into our Sunday morning sermon series on the book of Matthew. After a wonderful time in Esther, I hope you are now back up to speed and caught up in our study. Though we have jumped from an Old Testament narrative to a New Testament gospel, one theme has remained the same: intense opposition to the Lord and to his people. We saw how Esther was a model of faith in entrusting herself to the Lord in trying situations, and we have seen now how Jesus instructs his disciples to follow him amid hardship, and even persecution. It seems that every generation will face some level of opposition to the gospel. So, if we are to look back at the last month in Matthew 10 and 11, what are some of the takeaways?

First, we have been warned. Jesus tells his disciple in 10:17 to “beware,” to be ready to be maligned (10:25), and to not fear those who will kill the body (10:28). As the old proverb goes, “forewarned is forearmed”. If we know what is coming, we can be prepared to face it and not be caught off guard or surprised.

Second, as we saw a few weeks back, sometimes the hardest opposition to face is that which comes from our own families. This is why the primary way we relate to one another in the church is not as acquaintances or as friends, but as brothers and sisters. As family members, it is our joyful duty to pursue, love, and care for our brothers and sisters. None of us can bear opposition – especially family opposition – alone, so we need to cultivate our church family to endure together the difficulties and trials that may come.

Thirdly and finally, Jesus provides rest for us as we endure the wearying challenges that come our way as we follow him. His rest goes well beyond a simple reprieve from opposition to the gospel and describe the peace of the Christian who knows forgiveness and reconciliation. The burden of the law and the power of guilt no longer presses in and wearies the soul of the believer, as we rest in Christ our souls are revived in him. When we know this kind of rest in Jesus, we have deep pools of strength to draw upon as we step out in faith. We approach the trying circumstances of our lives and the opposition to Christ that we will inevitably face with our inner man at peace and at rest in the Lord.

With Matthew as our guide to the teaching and ministry of Jesus, I pray that we as a church are being strengthened and fortified to go out as sheep in the midst of wolves, and the face the opposition that is sure to come our way for his name’s sake.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Nov. 6	Matt. 12:1-14	
Nov. 13	Matt. 12:15-21	2 Sam. 19:8-43
Nov. 20	Matt. 12:22-37	2 Sam. 20
Nov. 27	Matt. 12:38-50	2 Sam. 21
Dec. 4	Matt. 13:1-23	
Dec. 11	Matt. 13:24-43	2 Samuel 22
Dec. 18	Matt. 13:44-52	2 Samuel 23
Dec. 25	Matt. 13:53-58	

Knowledge, Grace, and Friends

By Mr. Wilson Goins

I believe that it has been rightly said, “A man’s education is never complete until he dies.” This is a principle I was recently reflecting upon with an elder brother in the faith over a hearty cheeseburger lunch. If we are healthy Christians experiencing the work of the Spirit in our lives, then we are always learning, we are always growing.

The Apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The command for Christians to increase in knowledge of our Savior, and sanctification in likeness to him, does not expire when we finish our Bible reading plan or receive deliverance from a specific sin. Rather, growth should lead us to humility as we realize the remaining deficiencies in our own imitation and knowledge of our Savior. In fact, instead of believing we have all the answers, one of the vehicles of Christian growth that God has provided is listening to the wise counsel of others. This is actually one of the main marks of biblical wisdom, and a number of the Proverbs carry this theme. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.” As well, Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” Reader, I would ask you, do you have a godly mentor? Or are you being that mentor for someone else? Do you have a Christian friend whose counsel is trustworthy?

Not only is biblical church government full of checks and balances, but so is the Christian life. We’ve just recently seen in our 2 Samuel series, when King David fell into sin, Nathan rebuked him. David didn’t shake off the criticism, thinking himself to be above it, as a man after God’s own heart. In contrast, David took it seriously. It drove him to repentance and caused him to desire to instruct others, as God had done to him through Nathan. In the same way, all of us need to cultivate these godly friendships and mentorships. Christians are like water coming down off the mountain; if we would seek to pour into others, we need to be poured into ourselves. We must be tapping into the springs God has given us. The Christian life is not a solo mission, but through Christ we have been brought into God’s family. We have brothers and sisters in the Israel of God. Why would we not take advantage of the fellowship of that body?

The Lord has graciously blessed the local body here at CRPC with a variety of people. Everyone in our midst has a different testimony, a different story, of how the one true God has worked in their lives. Think about the times when you shared with others the Lord’s work in your life, or when others have shared with you. What benefit have you taken? Do these stories propel you more towards the Lord? Do they cause you to desire more of Jesus Christ in your life? They most definitely should. No matter our age, whether a teenager, middle-aged, or a century, there is always room for increase in our knowledge and sanctification. Are you pursuing that growth? CRPC, we are a family, let’s continue to seek after growth in Christ together!

Living Well

by Rev. Jim Curtis



Dr. Guy Waters is known for his work on Presbyterianism. It was a great delight, then, to be handed his newest book, *Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government* at the most previous General Assembly in Alabama as a free resource. Being a polity nerd myself, I was all too joyous to read through it and see how Dr. Waters would handle several complex questions I am

asked regularly, such as:

Where does the Bible teach Presbyterianism? Why do we have Teaching and Ruling Elders? What is the difference between an Elder and a Deacon? Why does Church Discipline function with the Elders instead of the Congregation? Among many others!

In typical fashion, he addresses all this and more in this new volume with excellence and clarity—even if I do quibble at small points with him. He structures the book after 5 questions: (1) Why Does Church Government Matter? (2) What Makes a Church? (3) How is the Church Led? (4) But What About...? And (5) Where Do We Go From Here?

In the first 3 chapters, Dr. Waters lays out the biblical case for Presbyterian Church government, going so far as to (rightly!) say: “Presbyterian churches believe that their government is derived from Scripture alone. Our commitment to Presbyterianism is not historical, cultural, or sentimental. It is biblical.”

After laying this groundwork, he moves on to objections to the form of government in his last two chapters: why don’t we see Presbyterianism in the early church? Are non-Presbyterian churches really churches? Do we really need church membership? What about “bishops” in the New Testament?

While he does not give the fullest of answers—it is a field guide, after all—Dr Waters does concisely provide compelling answers for these questions. For example, when dealing with the question of the term “bishop,” he writes: “‘Bishop’ is one of the titles the New Testament applies to the elder (Titus 1:5, 7)... Every one of your elders is a bishop!”

During our season of training officers, I found this little book to be incredibly helpful, but for more than just our officers. As I was reading it, I shared much of it with Madeline and her father (a ruling elder at his church). Both mentioned how succinct and helpful his explanations were of these topics and more.

Have you found yourself wondering why we’re Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church? Then pick this book up and read of our commitments to the Scriptures—and therefore, to a plurality of elders organized in the Presbyterian form of government. This book isn’t just for officers of the church. It’s also for you, as *you* select your elders and deacons.