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## PASTOR'S MESSAGE

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Greetings in the name of our,  
"Still Speaking God."

Friends and OPUCC Family if you have seen me in the last month, you might have guessed that this is a particularly hectic time for me, with the start of a church year and the start of classes at CTS. It has been seven years since I graduated from seminary, which means it has been an equally long period of time since I have been serious about being a student.

"Lord, have mercy on my soul" is all I can think to say about these first few weeks of classes. I did manage to eek out a sermon or two this past month and several of you have asked for the text from the sermon referencing the 911 tragedy. Since many of you were still away from church in early September, this seemed a fitting place to reprint the text from that sermon so, without further ado, here it is.

I look forward to catching my breath by next month's newsletter deadline,  
In Christian Love  
Rev. Curran Reichert

9-10-06

"Ephphatha" James 2:1-10,(11-13), 14-17  
*My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that God has promised to those who love God? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? / You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

On the eve of the fifth Anniversary of the 911

tragedy, there is one resounding question on my heart. It is the question prompted by the James passage which insights us to love our neighbors as ourselves, the question I must ask five years later, is this... have we? Have we loved our neighbors as ourselves? Have we received the admonition to honor the poor, have we included the marginalized, have we fulfilled the royal law according to scripture, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*"?

In the weeks that followed the attacks five years ago, Katie and I went to a number of religious services, but one in particular stands out in my mind. It was at the courthouse in downtown San Francisco and there were voices from around the world represented on the stage that day: Clerics, Rabbi's, teachers and pastors of every religious stripe and affiliation.

But one preacher told a story I will never forget. Amos Brown was his name, a stately Baptist pastor, with a booming voice and a presence that had no trouble filling the five thousand-seat auditorium. He mounted the pulpit and began to tell his story.

*When I was a boy, my sister Suzie and I used to play. We used to play hard and we didn't always play fare. When I was a boy, I used to get into all kinds of trouble with my kid sister Suzie, and when it came time to take responsibility for whatever mishap had occurred my sister Suzie and I would race each other home to see which of us could get to Mama first.*

*There we would stand on the front porch looking up at Mama with big tears streaming down our cheeks and equally big stories about how the other had done us wrong. Now, Mama would listen patiently to our sad tales, shift from foot to foot and say, "alright, alright, I hear what you are saying, but Amos... but Amos... you are bigger and stronger than your sister Suzie, so I have to ask, what did you do to bring this situation on yourself? What did you do?"*

Rev. Amos Brown, the thundering presence, turned to the gathered audience and said into the news camera, "In light of the events of 911, and in light of the fact that we consider ourselves the leading Super Power in the world, which means we are bigger and stronger than everyone else... *America I have to ask, what did you do? America, what have we done to bring this situation on ourselves?*"

Turning back to scripture James asks, *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

As we pause to think about the events of 911, and all that has transpired in the time since, have we also stopped to look ourselves in the mirror of international relationship and ask what have we done, what are we doing? Are we treating our neighbors as ourselves? Untold numbers lost in Iraq on both sides, "world leaders (who) cannot agree on whether the killing in Darfur, Sudan amounts to genocide as defined by a 1948 convention. No matter what you call it the situation in Darfur is ghastly." Even so, labels matter: this according to a recent article in Harper's magazine, "The g-word gets by far a better response internationally; 'ethnic cleansing' is a distant second. Calling what is happening 'killing,' regardless of the numbers involved, elicits a yawn, especially when it is happening in Africa." Are we treating our neighbors as ourselves?

And what about Lebanon? The UN humanitarian chief Jan Engeland estimates that a third of the dead from the bombing in Lebanon are children. He is quoted in the August 22, (2006) edition of the Christian Century to have said, "There is something fundamentally wrong with a war where there are more dead children than armed men." One violent act begets another, and then another, and in the name of retaliation another, and another.... do we ever stop to ask what are we doing? Do we love our neighbors as ourselves?

A Syrophenician woman comes to Jesus her child desperately in need of his help and he refuses on the grounds that she is not one of the children of Israel. And we are appalled. Isn't this the very behavior James rails against in the aforementioned text? Isn't this the very kind of separation and segregation of humanity that is abhorrent to an all-inclusive, all-loving God? What are we to make of this behavior, Jesus? And yet, is it not reminiscent of our own behavior everyday? Our own behavior when we decide who gets healthcare in this country and who does not, whose children will get an education and whose will not. And the list goes on and on...

But in Jesus God took the form of humanity and so we see in Jesus in this moment, humanity as raw and judgmental as it gets.

The most notable difference between Jesus, and the rest of us perhaps, is that Jesus owns up to his mistake. The woman calls Jesus on his bigotry and he recants, he doesn't exactly apologize, but he does heal the woman's daughter. He admits, in so doing, that his refusal to heal her earlier was wrong.

What have we done and are we willing to love our neighbor as ourselves?

One last illustration... I was struck this week by the BCR news headline that read, "Drawing a conclusion on graffiti." The article went on to explain that at Alexander Park last Thursday police found carved into the picnic tables, walls and shelters something of a tribute to young Mathew Bence, an 18 year old Princeton High School student who was killed in a high speed, alcohol induced, car accident last Sunday morning. Also included in the tribute to the deceased were a variety of "swear words" and "negative comments about the government." I looked deeper into the paper and found two

further reflections on the incident. The first was a thoughtful commentary by Donna Barker, a woman who admittedly had been faced with her own series of tragic losses, but who nonetheless expressed the view that she was disappointed that whomever had done the graphitizing had chosen to express "their sorrow and anger by marring a park shelter, by taking something beautiful that represented fun and life and making it ugly."

I wonder, were we as bothered a couple of years back when in China thousand year old Buddhist statues were being blown to smithereens by militant Guerrilla groups? Where is the indignance, that currently, places of pilgrimage, houses of worship that have stood to welcome the stranger since before the time of Christ, are being destroyed in the name of Israeli revenge on Palestinian occupied territory? We don't even seem to notice that entire cities in the Middle East are virtual shells of their former selves, like Baghdad and Tehran. Violence begets violence and do we ever stop to ask, why?

What's really going on here? Are we really so surprised that children who cut their teeth on war movies and Nintendo games, intended to simulate the most violent of conditions, that these same young people would respond to what we might easily sight as a violent death with the same said violence. Isn't there a bigger issue here than whether or not we have to sand down some picnic tables? These young people are crying out with the same violent tools they have been taught get

people's attention- they are crying out to be heard- and we are telling them they should have planted a tree instead. Why aren't we asking, what have we done to bring this situation on ourselves? What have we done? What have we done by normalizing the use of alcohol by teenagers? Trisha Jones was home last week; she came into my office after the service and said, "School is going really well, but my classmates, man they really like to drink." Here is one of our best and brightest in her first semester at college and this is what she is faced with?

In the second BCR column of interest to me, Chris Vineyard of Oswego wrote to the editor, "Friends of Mathew Bence, instead of defacing the shelter at the skate park to memorialize Mathew, or going out to get drunk to remember him, why not make his death a real lesson for your peers. Form a group and talk with your peers about the dangers of alcohol and driving. Take your group to the junior high schools in the county and tell them alcohol is not glamorous, that alcohol kills. Tell them that sporting events, posters, movies, TV shows, clothing and music that glamorize alcohol and drugs are poisoning their minds."

While these insights are all too true, the suggestions that are being made are a little like telling a hungry Ethiopian child that it's his responsibility to end world hunger. If these young people had the positive resources to deal with their grief- they would not have pounded a half a bottle of whatever, and taken to the park with carving knives. The point is that they do not have those resources. These kids, like Bence was, are busily trying to figure out how to fit into a warped universe and dealing with the fact they will probable never fit in, for reasons I suspect have a lot to do with economic class and family structure. They are crying out and our answer is to blame them, or insist they right their behavior. Perhaps we

are the ones who bear indictment; perhaps we ought to be the ones being called to examine our behavior.

You know the Bush saying, "Security, it starts at home," well y'all never thought you'd hear me say it, but on this one he may be right. Security does start at home, security starts with us, it starts within us. For who will stop the violence if not us? And what good is a faith without works?

This Homestead weekend we celebrate what is great about this town. But this town and indeed this country, is nothing, if not for courageous individuals such as yourselves who are willing to stand bravely in the face of injustice, who know the difference between right and wrong and who, above all, are willing to engage in the self reflection required to ask ourselves how we might bring about positive change our own community and in the world. Not by skirting the issues or blaming them on someone else, but by taking responsibility and making a real difference. By asking ourselves the very real and very challenging question with which we began, how will I love my neighbor in the name an all inclusive, all loving God? May God bless us with the courage and insight to look into the answers.

Amen

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## HAPPY OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

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6 Rick Zinn  
8 Joe Zearing  
21 Jocie Vaughn  
24 Ron McCutchan  
29 Danielle Hughes

*Note: if you have any additions or corrections, please let Peggy know at the church office.*

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## GREETINGS from the MISSION TEAM

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Greetings from the Mission Team,

We would like to welcome Jim Jarvis as our newest member of the Mission Team.

WELCOME JIM!

Mark your calendars now because on October 1st at 6:30 pm Open Prairie will be hosting a free screening of the film "An Inconvenient Truth". It is a critically acclaimed documentary about global warming. We are one of 4,000 congregations that will be showing the film the first week of October. I feel rather clever that Open Prairie got in under the deadline to snabble a copy of the film. Yeeha! So come and eat popcorn and join in the discussion following the film.

We will also have the book "An Inconvenient Truth" written by Al Gore available in the church library.- be sure to check it out!

The last pickup for organic vegetables from Coneflower Farm will be October 19th. The Mission Team sponsored a box for the food pantry this year, which I hear was greatly appreciated. If you would like to help sponsor an additional box for the food pantry next year, please let Kelly or Susan know and we'll get that going.

The food pantry has requested cake and brownie mix for the month of October. Thanks to all of you who have been bringing your donations.

We would like to keep in touch with the women of New Orleans with whom Susan, Curran, and Katie forged relationships. We will keep you posted on how you can get involved.

Please remember, you are welcome to join us any time. If you are unable to join the team but would like to work on specific short term projects let us know.

Peace to you all.

Kelly

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## CHRISTIAN ED

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### Christian Ed News:

- Confirmation begins at 9:30 a.m. on October 1st. Please hold Susan and Michael in your prayers as they begin a new journey in their lives as it pertains to their faith community and development.
- All are invited to Tanners Orchard on October 22nd immediately following worship we will carpool out for fun at the orchard. This is a great family activity!
- The next Christian Education team meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 23rd at 6:30 p.m. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. We will be planning an Advent Workshop for December.
- The deadline for participation in the Biloxi Mission trip is fast approaching. Please sign-up now!!!

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## SENIOR HIGH YOUTH REPORT

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On Sunday, August 27<sup>th</sup> all the youth at Open Prairie UCC were invited on a trip to Magic Waters in Rockford. Wendy drove the white van. Everyone had a great time!

September 17<sup>th</sup> - a rainy bonfire did not keep the group from eating hot dogs, brats and brownies thanks to Hornbaker's grill. We played games and discussed future outings and topics for Round Table Talks.

Save these dates:

October 1 – Al Gore movie “An Inconvenient Truth”.

October 8 – Round Table talk in youth room led by Rev. Reichert.

October 22 – Trip to Tanners Orchard

October 29 – “Joan of Arcadia” will be shown.

November 12 – Round Table Talk in youth room led by Rev. Reichert.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

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My Dear Friends –

I want to say ... do not spend your precious finances on me...but I will also say...Thank You! The fall bouquet is a wonderful reminder of my most favorite time of the year – and an even more special reminder of the friendships we made at OPUCC! I'm doing well because of the love and warmth I feel from people like you!!

God Bless.

Lynette

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Greetings Open Prairie,

After three weeks of moving, training and running around North and South Carolina, I finally started my first day of AmeriCorps service at Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP), which is a client services organization for people living with HIV/AIDS. My job title is "Special Events Coordinator," which means that my first and biggest responsibility is organizing the huge client Christmas party. I have another AmeriCorps member at my site, and my supervisor is fantastic, so I'm feeling optimistic, although I know I'm in for a hard year.

I've already been involved with the Holy Covenant UCC here. I stayed with Rev. Nancy Allison for my first two weeks here and now I'm renting a room from Donna Collins, one of the choir members. Donna is really nice and she's so happy to have me here. I'm singing with the church choir and am looking for a group that does the Messiah at Christmas.

My address until July is:

6722 Pencade Lane

Charlotte, NC 28215

See everyone at Christmas!

Nikki Kromphardt

9-20-06

My Dear Friends,

Well, you got me this far... now for the rest of the journey! I must say the journey is so much smoother when I feel love around every corner! Just the food alone has (and will continue to be) a huge help! Bob has been a wonderful nurse, but he doesn't feel as comfortable in the kitchen – you've taken care of that part! Meals are as close as our freezer! We thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Well – it's time for my AM ritual – shower, a short walk and then a nap! I've read a lot too – in fact, I've read 14 books just this summer!

And they are thick...unlike the children's books I was used to reading!

Thank you all once again,

God Bless,

Lynette

#### **Addresses for our college students:**

Jared Jagers

Knox College

Seymour Hall, Suite 3B, Room 343

Galesburg, Il 61401

309-341-8825

[jjagers@knox.edu](mailto:jjagers@knox.edu)

Trishia Jones

Bayliss 611

720 W. University Drive

Macomb, Il 61455

Creal Zearing

Ferguson 408

1209 N. Main St.

Bloomington, Il 61701-1787

309-556-2564

[czearing@iwu.edu](mailto:czearing@iwu.edu)

*If any other college student would like their address included please let Peggy know at the church office 872-5150.*

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## **STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE**

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Friends and members of Open Prairie are invited to an Open Prairie "Family Meeting". Small groups will gather at 1:00 pm on October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 8<sup>th</sup> to enjoy informal discussion, tasty desserts and good fellowship. In addition to having an enjoyable time, you'll have an opportunity to provide input for next year's budget and share visions of Open Prairie's future.

Primary to preparing for our 2007 budget will be our financial commitment on Stewardship Celebration Sunday. Your pledge for 2007 will be received on **October 22**, or you can mail it if you cannot be in attendance. However, we emphasize that stewardship is more than financial gifts. It is also sharing our time (whether one project or many) and talents (musical, preparing food, teaching, phone calling – whatever).

During this time of preparation for our semi-annual congregational meeting on November 19 and visioning Open Prairie's future needs, we ask you to think about "loving God back". How can we love God back and grow in confidence of God's abundance? Perhaps when we share with one another, offering our gifts and ourselves in fellowship, joy and compassion, we brighten the world, and in doing so, we love God back.

See you in church,

Patricia Wilson

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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10/01	9:30 am	Confirmation Meeting
	10:30 am	Worship
	1:00 pm	Open Prairie "Family Meeting"
	6:30 pm	"An Inconvenient Truth"
10/04	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	"Insecurity and Security" *
10/05	5:30 pm	Organic box pick-up
	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
10/08	10:30 am	Worship
	1:00 pm	Open Prairie "Family Meeting"
	6:00 pm	Sr. Youth Group – Round Table Talk lead by Rev. Reichert
10/11	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	"Insecurity and Security" *
10/12	5:30 pm	Organic box pick-up
	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
10/15	9:30 am	Confirmation Meeting
	10:30 am	Worship
10/16	7:00 pm	Biloxi Trip Meeting
10/18	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	"Insecurity and Security" *
10/19	5:30 pm	Final organic box pick-up
	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
10/22	10:30 am	Stewardship Celebration
	12:30 pm	Tanner's Orchard Trip
10/23	6:30 pm	Christian Ed Meeting
10/25	8:00 am	Prayer Group at Autrey's
	7:00 pm	Church Council Meeting
10/26	6:30 pm	Choir at Webber's
10/29	10:30 am	All Saints Day/Memorials**
	12:00 pm	Pastoral Relations Meeting

\* "Insecurity and Security" – trusting God in fearful times.

Back by popular demand this fall and Advent will be small group ministry opportunities, which meet for three weeks in a row and focus on deepening our personal and collective spirituality. This discussion will be lead by Rev. Reichert at Open Prairie UCC.

\*\*All Saints Day / Memorials –

If you would like a deceased family member or friend remembered with their name included in the bulletin today, call Peggy at 872-5150 by Wednesday, 10-25-06.

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## WORTH REPEATING

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Dear Friends,

As some of you likely know I serve on the Board of Directors for PADS, which is the local homeless shelter with shelters in both Ottawa and Peru. PADS has recently opened up a resale boutique in Peru ("Lily Pads") and is in need of donations of like-new or gently used clothing and household items. All proceeds from the shop go to support the shelter operations. We run on grant monies and donations, both of which are harder to come by these days. The shop provides us with a means by which we can create our own revenue to support our mission. We are a tax-exempt organization and therefore any donation, is of course, tax-deductible. If you have any items you would like to donate please contact me and I'd be happy to help facilitate a collection / drop-off.

Further, we are always in need of volunteers to staff the shelters sites (OCT-APRIL) and now we will need volunteers to work in the resale shop. If you, or your students (if you have a service-learning component or extra credit assignments for community service) would like to volunteer please feel free to either contact Sue Caley-Opsal, Mary-Jo Freeman, or me. Last shelter season, Yelena, Sue and I worked as a volunteer team covering one shift a month. It would be wonderful if we could get two or three more people to join us so that we could have two or more teams covering several shifts a month.

The shelter opens in October and runs from 7pm to 7am and the volunteer shifts are: 7-11pm, 11pm-3am and 3 am-7am. Last year we worked the 3am -7am shift, as it is a good time to get some grading or reading done. The resale shop is open W-F 10-4 and Sat. 9-2. If you would like to join us or have students that could volunteer please let me know.

Thanks in advance for your generosity and assistance,

Merri Mattison



Open Prairie UCC  
25 E. Marion Street  
Princeton, IL 61356

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## CHURCH INFORMATION

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Church Office:

25 E. Marion Street  
Princeton, IL 61356  
(815)872-5150

Church Administrator: Peggy Walley

Hours - Wed. 9-5, Thurs. 11-5, Fri. 9-12

[mail@openprairie.org](mailto:mail@openprairie.org)

Rev. Curran Reichert

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[www.openprairie.org](http://www.openprairie.org)