

# Community of Christ

## Fairbanks Congregation Happenings

### June 21, 2006

The theme for this Sunday is “Courage!”

Come as you are  
Offer your gifts  
Unite with one another  
Rejoice in the good news  
Accept Christ in your heart  
Go “places” you thought you would never go  
Expect God to be always with you

*“Only love empowers the leap in trust, the courage to risk everything on Jesus, the readiness to move into the darkness guided only by the pillar of fire. Trust clings to the belief that whatever happens in our lives is designed to teach us holiness.” The Ragamuffin Gospel – Brennan Manning*

#### Introduction: Christianity Isn't for Wimps

Let me tell you a story about Keefy. When Keefy was a boy, his greatest passion was football, and his favorite player was a running back for the Minnesota Vikings named Chuck Foreman.

Keefy used to spend hours each day playing football in the streets of Stowe Village, a ghetto located in Hartford, Connecticut. Two on two, four on four, morning or evening, it didn't matter to Keefy. All that mattered to him was to have the opportunity to emulate his hero while playing ball.

On Sundays, Keefy studied the running form of Chuck Foreman. He watched as Foreman used his strength to bowl over one tackler, his speed to blow past another, and whatever else it took to be the best. On Mondays (and practically every day thereafter), Keefy would practice Foreman's moves—spin away from a tackler here, lower your head and power through an opposing team player, start and stop on a dime, keeping your opponents guessing—and missing.

One day Keefy and his brother were (as usual) playing a game of street football with some of the neighborhood kids. On one play, Keefy's brother dropped back to pass while Keefy ran deep for a bomb. The ball floated up in the air and in a moment, Keefy knew it was going to be too long. Unwilling to give up, his passion kicked in. Summoning his courage, he put on a burst of speed and at the last possible second dove to catch the ball, stretching his fingertips to their farthest and never taking his eyes off the pigskin. To the amazement of all, he caught the ball, landing hard on the pavement and scraping the side of his face on the gravel surface.

After making that spectacular catch, only one thought was going through Keefy's head. “Did you see that catch?” he yelled to his friends as he jumped up in excitement. “That looked just like Chuck Foreman!”

His friends just stared, looking on in wide-eyed amazement. A few said, “Ooooh! Keefy, Keefy!”

The boy could barely contain himself. He'd done it! He'd laid it all on the line—just like Chuck Foreman—and come up the hero. “Yeah, that's right!” he said. “You saw that catch! Just like Chuck Foreman.” Raising the ball over his head in triumph, he shouted for the world to hear, “I'm Chuck Foreman!”

Still, the other players didn't move. Finally one said, “Man, look at your ear!”

That was when Keefy felt something warm and wet on the side of his face. He touched it and discovered it was blood. A friend explained, “Man, your ear's hanging off!”

Scraping the side of his face on the gravel surface had actually ripped off a chunk of the boy's ear, leaving it dangling precariously on the side of his head. But Keefy hadn't even noticed. He was so courageously passionate about being a football player just like Chuck Foreman that nothing else really mattered.

Well, little Keefy got medical attention for his ear and it healed over time. The day after his accident, he was back in the streets playing football again. And the boy grew into a man, fueling his passion for football until it eventually carried him to the NFL where he won a Super Bowl Championship with the Green Bay Packers and was named to the prestigious Pro Bowl several times for his inspired play.

Keefy—Eugene Keefe Robinson—has made his share of mistakes, to be sure. Some of them very big, and very public, ones. But his example of passionate commitment in the game of football is second to none.<sup>1[1]</sup>

Imagine for a moment what would happen if Christians displayed that same kind of courageous passion in the way they approached life. If, after studying the life and actions of Jesus on Sundays, we went out to practiced His “moves” and imitated his lifestyle the rest of the week. If we made it our overriding goal, our never-ending passion to be just like Jesus Christ.

Woohoooo! Can you see the transformation that would occur in our communities, our nation, and our world if those of us who claim to believe in Jesus had the courage to be passionate about being Christian? It'd be like a fire, an unstoppable blaze of spiritual passion sparked by thousands—no, millions—of little flames joined together as one.

And it can start with you and me.

I've got news for you, true Christianity, courageous Christianity like what the Apostle Paul, and Peter, and thousands of other early Christians owned isn't for wimps. It's not for the faint-hearted, not for the lukewarm, moderately committed, or occasional churchgoer. It's for the passionate, the ones with the courage to say “I believe God, and I will dedicate my every waking hour to his purpose, no matter what it costs.”

Not that kind of person yet? Not to worry—I'm not either! But you and I, friend, can see that change—together. You see, we don't have to do it alone. *Can't* do it alone, in fact. But we can turn to God and ask Him daily to empower us to be those kind of people, ask Him to grant us the courage to be truly Christian.

Are you ready to take that kind of step? Willing to be molded by God's Holy Spirit into a man or woman of spiritual passion? To desire to elevate your Christian life to a higher level? Ready, by God's grace, to be made into more than you are?

Me too, friend, me too. And so I invite you to explore with me what that means through this book. Obviously, I (like you) fall short in many ways, and I don't claim to have all the answers for this journey. But I want to at least ask the questions, and maybe if we ask them together we'll discover a few of the answers—and kindle the flame of passion that can make us jump up and shout:

“Did you see that? That was just like Jesus!”

### 1. Courage to Pray

In the wardrobe of spirituality, prayer is intimate apparel. It's the place where we lay ourselves bare before God, where no mole is hidden, no “spare tire” is disguised with fabric, where nothing and no one can come between the creature and its Creator.

It's no mistake that a relationship with God most often begins with a prayer—and a humiliating prayer at that. The words of the so-called “sinner's prayer” vary from person to person, but the content is the same. In short, we come to God acknowledging that we have failed to fulfill His desires for our lives, and we beg His forgiveness—which He freely gives. And in

that prayer a new life begins, a relationship starts and our every moment from that point on is spent either growing closer to, or away from, our dearest Friend in the world.

Our trouble is we often forget the simplistic intimacy of that first prayer. We change prayer until it becomes a laundry list of our wants and needs, a lexicon of theological language put on display, something for people to hear instead of God. Oh that we could return to the passion, to the intimacy of that first prayer which introduced us to God!

We can.

You see, no matter how we try to change prayer, the truth is it remains the same from God's perspective. We are the only ones who change. So what is prayer, you ask? Let me offer this definition:

Prayer is practicing intimacy with God.

Listen to how psychologist Lloyd Thomas describes intimacy<sup>2</sup>[1]:

“Intimacy is not sexual. We often confuse the meaning of the word ‘intimacy’ to mean sexual contact. Intimacy is much more. Intimacy is the free and comfortable revealing to another who you really are. It means sharing what you genuinely feel, what you really want, your hopes and aspirations, dreams and fantasies, fears and resentments, successes and failures. It means being open and vulnerable, receptive and self-expressive within your own knowledge and integrity.

“Intimacy is the lifeblood of healthy and loving relationships...”

Does that describe your prayer life? It should.

Your prayers—and mine—are more than mere communication with God, greater than language, deeper than words. It's the time when we, like poor children who've scraped our knees on the sidewalk of life, launch ourselves through time and space right into the loving lap of our heavenly Father—all in the space of an instant, before we can even blink an eye.

Yet it takes courage to pray with reckless abandon like that. Courage which we often feel too weak to use. We feel too unsure of our Audience to speak plainly, too uncomfortable with our words to put them together with confidence, too self-reliant to admit we're desperately lost and in need of help.

It takes courage to get beneath the surface with God, to pray with intimate passion. God has already done His part. The rest now begins with us.

#### Courage to Come as You Are

I have a confession to make. There was a time in my life when I was a champion pray-er, at least by human standards. I went through this period when (it seemed like) everyone wanted me to pray aloud at group gatherings. So I would pray, choosing my words carefully to meet the situation, properly respectful yet down-to-earth as well.

After these little prayer performances, well-meaning people would invariably come up and say things to me like, “That was a really good prayer, Mike.” “Your prayer touched me, Mike. Thanks.” “I love to hear you pray.” “You pray so eloquently...” Blah blah blah!

At first I felt a bit proud to be such a hit as a pray-er. But soon the pressure got to me. *I can't pray here*, I'd think. *I'm not ready. What if I say something stupid? What if it's just an average prayer?* I was literally paralyzed by the expectation to pray impressively! I soon quit praying in public altogether, for fear of what my peers would (or wouldn't) say to me afterward.

I also found myself trying to mimic my public performances of prayer in my private times with God. It was during one of these times, late at night, that I heard God yawn. (OK, OK, so I didn't *literally* hear Him yawn, but the impression in my spirit was just the same.) I stopped my yammering for a moment and felt God speaking to my heart, impressing this phrase into my mind:

*Mike, exactly who are you praying for?*

I was crushed. For months I had been shaping my prayers for the human audience I'd become so accustomed to that in the process I'd forgotten I was whispering directly into the ear of God. That night in prayer, I'd been so concerned about presenting a good image I'd ignored the fact that God saw through all my spiritual window dressing and directly into my heart—which was encased in the armor of pride.

I'm ashamed to say that moment of revelation came to me only a few years ago, even though I've been a praying Christian for two decades now!

But I learned something that night, something we all need to learn. When we come to God in prayer, we must come as we are. No amount of flowery words impresses God. No religious posturing, no "attitude of prayer," no kneeling or bowing or crying or suffering in prayer makes us more worthy in God's eyes. God knows our every impulse, our lewd thoughts, our secret desires, our inner being—and He knows them better than we do.

If we would be people who passionately pursue intimacy with God in prayer, we must first and foremost have the courage to approach Him honestly, completely revealing who we are, what we've done, and how we feel each time we call His name. To do less than that is an insult to God and to the miracle of prayer He's given us.

Imagine if a wife acted that way toward her husband. As the alarm goes off in the morning, she quickly shouts, "No! Don't look at me! Stay in bed and cover your head with the pillow!" Then she quickly gets up, rushes in the bathroom, brushes her teeth, showers, blow-dries her hair, and applies her make-up. Then she runs downstairs and irons and puts on her best dinner dress, pulls on her nylons, and steps into her fancy high-heeled shoes. Finally, after draping pearls around her neck and primping one last time in the mirror, she returns to the bedroom and—fully-clothed and made-up—climbs back under the covers and proclaims, "Good morning, Darling. Now you can look at me."

It's a ludicrous image, isn't it?

Yet it's the same way many of us approach God. We feel as though we must dress up our thoughts and our words and "put on" our Sunday best in order to pray. When all God really wants is for us to turn to Him—bad breath, ruffled hair, and all—and pour ourselves into His loving arms.

It takes courage to be that honest with God, but that kind of unpretentious vulnerability is part of what it means to be truly Christian. The good news is that although God welcomes us into His presence just as we are, He never leaves us the same way. Our every encounter with God changes us—sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly—in ways that mold us more into the image of Jesus.

#### Courage to Seek God's Will, Not Your Own

Each time I read of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, I'm struck by the passion and intimacy evident in His words and actions—and disappointed by the shallowness of my own prayers in comparison. Let's revisit that scene for a moment here...

It's the night that will change the history of man, mere hours before Jesus Christ will be arrested, beaten, falsely charged and convicted, and finally executed by the cruel Roman custom of crucifixion. Tacked to a cross with spikes in His hands and feet, He will be left to suffer, mocked by the crowd that once cheered him, and He will die.

His suffering is imminent, and Jesus knows it, so He does what to Him is second nature. He prays.

Taking his closest disciples into a Garden called Gethsemane, Jesus reveals the struggle going on inside Him. "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death," he says. "Stay here and watch with me."

Then, moving a short distance away, He kneels among the flowers and plants in the soft silence of the night and cries out to God. "Father," he says, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me."

Had I been Jesus, my prayer would have ended there. Take this suffering away! I would've yelled. I don't deserve it! You can't make me! But Jesus (thankfully) is not me, and without hesitation he adds the words:

"Yet I want your will, not mine."

In this quiet hour of prayer, Jesus Himself reveals the intimacy of a passionate relationship with God. He first calls to the *Father*—not El Shaddai, the Mighty God, not the Creator of the universe. In His most desperate moments, He seeks a Family member, the One who loves beyond comprehension.

Next He lays himself bare before God. "Please take this cup of suffering away from me," He says. Now, Jesus had not forgotten His purpose on this earth. He knew the reason God became man was to take the penalty for humanity's sins by dying on the cross. He knew that on the third day following His death, He would return to life once more, the gift of life held firmly in his hand. And yet, facing the brutality that awaited Him was nearly overwhelming. The gospel of Luke even reports that as He prayed blood dripped like sweat from His pores. And he pleaded, "Please take this cup away..."

Yet, in spite of His entreaty, Jesus made one other passion apparent in His prayer: The will of the Father, no matter the cost.

As I write this book, I know I will probably never have to suffer as Jesus did, but I too have known my share of suffering. For the past two and a half years I've struggled with a rare chronic stomach disease that causes me to feel some level of nausea each and every day. Many times I've prayed with passion, begging God to heal me, to release me from this chain which my body has manifested inside me. For months I was angry, then depressed, certain that God had forsaken me.

But He hasn't. He is simply teaching me to have the courage to say like Jesus, "I want Your will, not mine... Even if it means a lifetime disability. Even if it means poverty, or embarrassment, or sorrow, or sacrifice. I want Your will, not mine."

To be honest, I'm not yet to that point in my prayers, but each day (I hope) I'm grow a little bit closer, a tiny bit more passionate, a sliver more courageous to pray and ask for God to work His will. Yes, it takes courage to be Christian and to pray, and courageous faith to trust God with the consequences, no matter what.

### Courage to Approach God Often

If we are to be praying Christians, we must be willing to approach God at all times in all ways. The intimacy of prayer doesn't become comfortable in once a week intervals, nor powerful in occasional bursts. The intimacy of prayer must be practiced time and time again, when we wake in the morning, when we work through the day, when we play or rest or eat or laugh or cry or watch TV or even use the toilet!

There's a reason why the apostle Paul commanded, "Pray without ceasing" in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV). It's because our very life depends on it. If we desire to truly live, we must commune with the Creator of Life—and the more often we do it, the better!

Where is God right now as you read this book? Is He in your thoughts, your mind, your very being? Can you hear His whisper? Are you asking Him whether or not all these words Mike Nappa has written are to be believed or just a load of bunk? You should be!

We must be courageous enough to let God invade and occupy every area of our lives, and that invasion begins with prayer. Like a sprinter who trains his muscles to explode onto the track at the sound of the starter pistol, we must also exercise the "muscles" of prayer until it becomes such a habit we do it without thinking. That doesn't mean we must always speak formal words and sentences to God. We can often communicate better in feelings and images, and it's good to know God speaks the nonverbal language just as well as He speaks with words.

With that in mind, we must train ourselves to acknowledge God's presence in the mundane moments of life. We must redirect our will toward prayer at odd moments of the day—

when we're cut off in traffic, when we're worrying about the tasks of the day, when we're changing diapers and playing taxi driver to get our kids to all their after-school obligations, when we're lying in bed almost ready to drop off to sleep. You see, God is our constant companion. It's time we had the nerve to stop ignoring Him.

One last story and then we'll close this chapter. It seems there once were three people who stood at the gates of heaven ready to account for their lives. One was a banker, and she marched boldly to the door where St. Peter asked, "What have you bought with the time you spent on earth?"

The banker smiled and answered, "Why, I've bought homes and buildings and businesses. I've used money to make money, to fulfill dreams, to invest in every kind of business venture known to man."

St. Peter responded, "It's not enough" and turned to the second person. This man was a wealthy owner of a sports team. "What have you bought with your time on earth?"

The sports owner smiled broadly and spoke, "Why, I purchased a championship team, brought thrills and entertainment to millions, built a stadium that will stand decades after my death and made a place for myself in the annals of sports history with a plaque in the sports hall of fame!"

Again Peter shook his head and said, "It's not enough." Turning to the last woman he asked again, "How have you spent your time on earth?"

This woman had been primarily a homemaker, occasionally working as a secretary and supermarket clerk. Still, she had many things to brag about. She could tell how she'd been faithful in attending church, or how she'd made herself available to her children and invested in their lives, how she'd managed to avoid divorce and so on.

But she passed on all those things, saying only, "I spent my days and nights, every minute I could muster, trying to seek out and enjoy the presence of God."

At those words, Peter opened wide the gates of heaven saying, "Aah, so you have already been inside here before. We welcome you back again to spend eternity in the presence of Him you've known on earth."

Friend, what are you spending the riches of your life's moments on? Your greatest investment is to spend your life getting to know God. Have you the courage to do that in your prayers. From- *The Courage to be Christian* by Mike Nappa <http://www.nappaland.com/09-FreeExcerptsFiles/Excerpts/Excerpt-CourageToBeChristian.htm>

## **Announcements:**

No Potluck this month.

Ragamuffin Gospel class – 10:00 Class will discuss of Chapter Three- The Ragamuffin Gospel

**July 16<sup>th</sup>** – Potluck and Baby Shower for Tawanna Bowser immediately after the worship service.

**July 16<sup>th</sup>** – Congregational planning meeting after Potluck and shower – Come prepared to share in the planning for future events and projects and discuss current business.

**July 30<sup>th</sup> – Aug 4<sup>th</sup>** – Congregational Leaders Workshop – Lamoni, Iowa – See Mission Center or World Church webpage for details.

**Aug 20<sup>th</sup>** – Stone Soup – Mission Center event at Fairbanks – 9:00 am- 4:00 pm –

**Sept 10<sup>th</sup>** – Joint service with North Houston at North Houston church  
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Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup>– Witnessing Community seminar - Make plans now to attend this event.

**See Mission Center web page for more information**  
**See the mission center web page for camp and reunion information**

The following is a schedule of those that are currently scheduled to deliver the message for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. This is not the “official list” and is for informational purposes only. Please refer to the worship schedule in the fellowship hall for changes.

June 24<sup>th</sup> – David Watson

July 2<sup>nd</sup> – John Reimer

July 9<sup>th</sup> – Carole and Leo Caesar

July 16<sup>th</sup> – Sue Turner

July 23<sup>rd</sup> – Doug White

July 30<sup>th</sup> – Gary Chatburn

August 6<sup>th</sup>- David Romig

August 13<sup>th</sup> – Gary Chatburn – Testimony Service

August 20<sup>th</sup> – Mission Center Stone Soup

August 27<sup>th</sup> – Doug White

September 3<sup>rd</sup> – Ruth Chatburn

September 10<sup>th</sup> – Joint Service at North Houston

September 17<sup>th</sup>- Carole and Leo Caesar – Church Historian visiting

September 24<sup>th</sup> – Gary Chatburn

The nursery schedule cannot be posted in the family center for January through March 2006. Please contact Andrea if you are interested in volunteering in the nursery this quarter.

Nursery Schedule:

**We need volunteers for the nursery. Please see Andrea Watson.**

Please review the prayer list in the Sunday bulletin. If you have added someone to the list please update Leo Caesar with any new information and current status of the prayer concern. Please contact Leo Caesar if you wish to add/remove someone from the list.

**Calendar & Mission Center News:**

The Coastal Bend Mission Center is proud to announce that the Coastal Bend web site is up and running! You can visit the site at [www.coastalbendmc.org](http://www.coastalbendmc.org)

I will be sending out periodic e-mails letting everyone know what is “HAPPENING” at Fairbanks. Please let me know if your e-mail or other contact information changes.

Mark your calendars and **participate, enjoy, reach out!!!!!!**I pray that everyone have a safe and happy week.

*Martha Romig*