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The Shadow of the Cross

Elder Charles Moore

Let's face it. Being the humans that we are, we hear some truths that we would rather not know. How many times have you gotten a letter in the mail and looked at the return address and thought that it might be bad news: a bill that you could not afford to pay, a notice you would rather not receive, a message that you anticipated, but that you did not want to hear? What did you do? If you are like me, you probably hesitated, set it aside, hoping it would go away, and waited 'till you had the strength to face up to the thing you would rather not confront just yet.

There are truths in God's Word that are that way, too: truths that, if we had our choice we would rather avoid as long as possible. Sometimes we do avoid them. Sometimes we pretend that they do not apply to us, that our situation is different, that God has blessed us in a unique way that has exempted us from the truths that apply to everyone else.

Today we come to one of those messages of God's Word that we would rather not hear, written in the Gospel of John, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)

The simple truth here is this: the Church of Jesus Christ is always the suffering church, always the persecuted church, always sent by God into the world to endure abuse and tribulation in His name. No matter how well things are going for us here today, no matter how blessed we are, no matter how comfortable our lives, the Church of Jesus Christ always lives in the shadow of the cross.

Christ Himself has called us into the shadow of the cross. Speaking of the people of Israel, God said, "**For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute,'**" (Luke 11:49)

Just as He sent the early disciples to be persecuted and killed, so God sends us into the world and, as He sends us, into the world He says to us: **Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)**

This Word of God has been fulfilled in the life of His Church. The people of Christ

have always been persecuted. There was the first martyr, Stephen, who died for Christ. The second martyr was James and after James there came many others. Some, like Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna or the young woman known as Perpetua, became famous because their deeds and words were written down and their faithful witness treasured by the Church. But countless others suffered and died, their names unknown and their deeds unrecorded in the Church's books—their names and deeds and faithful witness treasured by God alone,

So it has been down through the ages, wherever the name of Christ was proclaimed. And so it is today. Today the shadow of the cross falls across the world once more. Today in more than 60 nations in our world it is a crime to follow Christ. In our own land we are free to meet and to proclaim Jesus as the Anointed One of God and confess Him to be our Savior and Lord without fear of government reprisals, but this is not true for many followers of Christ today. In many nations around our world those who confess Christ are deprived of the equal justice and protection of the law. In still other lands those who heed the call of God's grace risk imprisonment, torture, slavery, or death. In this enlightened and civilized 21st century more Christians have been martyred for Christ than in all the nearly two thousand years of the history of Christ's Church combined.

There are those in the world and even in the Church who

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look at the suffering of Christians and ask, "If God is truly a loving God, why does He not do something to help those who are even this day enduring imprisonment, enslavement, torture and even the pain of death in His name?" The answer is that He has done something: He has done everything. God Himself has gone to the cross to suffer and to die. The shadow of the cross does indeed lie upon the Church of our generation. For the shadow of the cross is the shadow of Christ Jesus—God Himself—stretched out upon the tree, arms extended to embrace you with the love of God ... for the shadow of the cross is not the shadow of death, but the shadow of life and the comfort of God's love.

In John 15:18-21, Jesus says that He has chosen us out of the world. By His grace, God has saved us and made us His servants. Our hope lies in the very thing that causes the persecution of the Church: the grace of God in Jesus Christ, by which God has worked salvation in us and made us His people.

As God says to us through Isaiah the prophet: **"Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, A people in whose heart is My law; Do not fear the reproach of man, Neither be dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them like a garment, and the grub will eat them like wool. But My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation to all generations." ... And I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, "You are My people." (Isaiah 51:7-8; 16)**

God has covered us with the shadow of His hand. The cross does indeed cast its shadow over our generation, but we do not fear the shadow of the cross ... we glory in it. **How precious is Thy loving kindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights. For with Thee is the fountain of life; In Thy light we see light. (Psalm 36:7-9)**



Daylight savings time has made its early entrance this March. The month of March makes true the saying, if you don't like the weather – give it a minute. On the last day of March folks were observed admiring the flowers peeking out of the ground by the new landscaping at church. By April 2 they were dotted with Styrofoam-like balls of snow. Nonetheless, the first of the snow birds (Sally Smeltzer) has arrived so spring is officially here (though she would brighten our days if she came in the dead of winter).

The lives of Jordan Begeman and Erin Gill intersected academically this month. Jordan and a fellow student of hers participated in a career day event by shadowing a professional teacher Jordan knows: Erin. Jordan truly enjoyed her day visiting Erin at Bedford High School. Chelsey Begeman has had quite a month. She got very sick from an infection related to her diabetes and was hospitalized. However, great, great news came her way this month also. She now works at LaFiesta Restaurant in LaSalle Michigan where we suspect she'll develop a following of devotees. Pat Conley is happy to be back to work at Oakwood Hospital so now our small church can boast of two Oakwood Nurses (Melinda Begeman being the second). Tim Begeman successfully moved into his new job in Toledo and we were delighted with him when he opened his first pay check to find it to be better than hoped.

Carrie Smeltzer was the guest of honor at a bridal shower thrown at the church basement by her aunts Lynn Vaughn and Kay Nevil. It was a beautiful event, with good food for the body and soul of the guests and bride to be. It's been nice seeing Carrie visiting with her fiancé, Joel DeHaan.

Dale Begeman has reached the lofty age of 76 and celebrated 'all week long' with friends and family.

Bill Welch, of New Hope Christian Church, which occupies our building on Sunday's, has become a friend to the church. Thus, we were saddened to learn that his brother had died. Vicki Velasco had an extremely difficult month. Earlier in the month, she was hospitalized for extremely low blood pressure and potassium problems. Just as she was looking forward to an Easter visit by her daughter Elizabeth and granddaughter Desiree, her father unexpectedly died. Please pray for both the Velasco and the Welch families as they continue to adjust to their loss.

Diane and Tim went to Ethel Johnson's church for a delicious vegetarian lunch feast this month. They enjoyed both the company and the chance to sample great food. Stephanie Fasbender visited from Pontiac Michigan with her son David and roommates Dave and Diane Cleveland. She went to court to resolve a matter of bills run up by someone who stole her credit card and thanks God for His mercy. Dale and Geneva Begeman & Jean Lane had a good trip visiting family and friends in Kentucky and during this month.

Faith in Action, a local ministry the church supports and one for which Nate Valentine now serves as board member, had its annual fundraising dinner. Our church was well-represented by Charlie Moore, Nate Valentine, Terrie Fedor and Jean Lane. Marshall Lawrence, Executive Director of Silent Blessings, a ministry supported by the United COLOR church, has had exciting news. Dr. Wonder's Workshop, the television series which he has been producing, writing, acting and casting . . . has been picked up by several cable networks for the Fall 2007 season. Tim and Kim Trouten will be moving their Campus Crusade for Christ work site to Western Michigan this year. They are pretty excited about the opportunity to help two friends start a new Campus Crusade outreach there.

Becka Smeltzer has had a month of mixed events. She's been down with severe unexplained leg pain. On the up side, she is one of 12 nominees for the Detroit Athletic Club's Michigan Student Athlete of the Year. Katie Begeman is starting to make her own mark on the world of athletics. She is the manager for her school's softball team and will have a variety of responsibilities in that capacity. Meanwhile her father, Jeff, continues globetrotting to exotic locales for his work – this past month to Portland, Oregon. Marcia Moore is a happy camper this month. Though still battling respiratory problems, she finally is back to walking in a regular shoe. Until you talk to her, you don't appreciate what a thrill that can be.

Aurine Moore and Don Daniels ran into each other at an event at the Frenchtown Public Library. Aurine was there to have 'tea with the ladies' while Don went to show support to his friend Phil who sang barbershop for the ladies with the Floral City Harmonizers. We had a wonderful time visiting with Hannah and Bethany Pifer, Carol Fruchey and Elizabeth Pifer (the event organizer who was roundly serenaded by the Harmonizers, to the delight of the audience). Later in the month, Bethany Pifer got to sing in the Easter program at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church. Bethany also was inducted into the Jefferson Middle School National Honor Society.

Jeff Begeman is this quarter's upstairs adult Sabbath School teacher and doing a customarily fine job engaging the class in reflecting and applying scripture. This term we're on Psalms and Proverbs. The pre-church power point pictures and quotes put together by Tim Begeman continue to help us reflect and worship and sometimes to laugh. Charlie Moore's sermons have been thought provoking. One thought from the month is "reading the word will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from reading the word." Another is, "You're going to serve somebody. You can be a slave to sin or a servant of Christ. Choose well."

Until next month, may God be with you and you with Him.

Cyberspace News genevabegeman@charter.net

Greetings to you all from the month of March. All of our friends keep busy as you will see.

Rox-Ann Brugman continues to have problems with her health. They cannot seem to get her medication adjusted so she can function for the children on her own and David has to spend much of his time at home taking care of the children and her. It has affected her ability to walk alone and of course three children need a lot of care at their ages. She and David are considering moving right now and we ask that you pray for wisdom in their situation. If Rox-Ann were well, it would solve their problems so pray for her health also.

Rip and Norma Ripley are still doing okay. I know spring is always a welcome sight and Virginia has gorgeous springs. Rip continues to golf and they both enjoy their grandchildren and their activities so much. Robert's oldest son Brett is due to graduate from college soon. All these young folks grow up much too fast!

David and Ruth Charles got to enjoy a visit from Kathy and Joe Smeltzer this month. Kathy reports that they had a wonderful time and she and Joe helped catch up on some outside things and paint a little for them. Most of all they vacationed every day. Mom Ruth was in her glory waiting on them hand and foot. David enjoyed their help so everyone was happy!

Carrie Smeltzer came home to the Monroe church for a wedding shower this month. Her aunts (Lynn Vaughn, Peggy Charles and Kay Nevil) and cousins did her up proud with the decorations and food. Everyone got to meet her fiancé Joel DeHaan and to wish her well in her upcoming wedding April 28th. We love you and will be praying for you, Carrie, as you enter this new phase of life.

David and Ruth Charles were expecting a cousin from New Zealand to come visit them this month and they had made lots of fun plans. The cousin had a mild heart attack and was unable to come. A year ago this same trip was postponed because the cousin's wife had to have surgery.

The Charles' went to Orlando to their time-share condo that they could not cancel and got to entertain Ethel Johnson, Sally Smith and Jane Brown for one day of their week at least. I am sure David and Ruth went home relaxed and rested. Ethel and her daughters spent a week with each other and their families down there. Sally's children, Kenny and Brad along with their wives', Jennie and Tiersa and grandchild Michala live in Florida now as does Jane's son Tim Brown. Ethel was especially happy to have a week with her two daughters. Sounds like a great trip Ethel!

Jim and Deborah Stoner spent a week on a cruise ship with some additional time just traveling in Florida to avoid the cold of March in Maryland. Deborah said they had wonderful weather and none of them fell overboard which was great news!

Kane and Jennie Begeman are doing well in Arizona these days. Kane got another promotion and is enjoying his work very much. One of our Arizonians arrived home to Monroe for all the upcoming festivities. Sally Smeltzer is always a great addition at church and she plans on enjoying her granddaughter Carrie's wedding right here!

The two other Arizona families are the Jon Lane's and Ellen Momberger. Ellen has had a good winter and enjoys the warm so much. Jon, Berty, Shealyn, and Scott keep busy with work and school. They are expecting Grandma Jean Lane this month for an extended stay.

Kevin and Heather Lane in California had a few days visit from Kevin's sister Kathy Gearhart and her husband Corky. Kathy told me they enjoyed their visit very much.

Laurie Eckles made a trip this month to Rochester N Y. for a physical check-up and a catch-up with Sonya Pease. Sister, Rachel Sottile, was supposed to go along but was unable to because of a flu bug. Laurie reports that all went well and that Sonya has a lot of quilt material out right now. That means we will have another quilt show at youth camp which is only a couple months away!

Vicki Chapman told us the news that her dad DuWaine has sold his house in Tennessee. He is currently living at an assisted living place. We are very glad for you, Dewey, as the house has been on the market awhile. Now you can come up and visit us in Michigan!

Easter is in the month of April and we wish you new life in Christ as you celebrate our risen Lord.

CHURCH OF THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

1922 LaSalle Road
Monroe, MI 48162
Church 734.242.9511
Elder Moore 734.242.7674

Editor – Jamie Vargas
Jamie.Vargas@utoledo.edu

Publisher – Diane Begeman
734.269.6098
veggie@toast.net

Church website
colornet.org

DONKEY IN A WELL

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do.

Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, so it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They each grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well.

At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw.

With every shovel full of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors

continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt.

The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone.

We can get out of the deepest wells by not stopping, never giving up! Shake the dirt off and take a step up! Remember the five simple rules to be happy:

1. Free your heart from hatred.
2. Free your mind from worries.
3. Live simply.
4. Give more.
5. Expect less.