

The Well

Newsletter editors: Greg and Jennifer Helms Jarrell

Spring 2004

The Well

Vision, Dreams, Calling, Community, Compassion, Care... The Well...

If you but return to the grace of the Image with which you were informed from the beginning, you will have all you seek in yourselves."- Gregory of Nyssa, (335-395)

"Informed"? Exactly what does that mean, God who 'informed' us from the beginning? Are you the God of information who provided us With thoughts and ideas from the get-go? Might You increase my cogency if I but return to your grace? Were thoughts of you secretly given me before I was even born? And why *in* me, far out of reach? 'Informed' with inept thought after thought, What were *you* thinking?

"Informed"? Informed, as in bearing cognitive ability to perceive and describe? Useful enough, but is all we seek located there? Or have we been informed, fashioned into a People? Formed-in, into a body of believers, knit by you, God, into life together. Formed-in spite of ourselves to finally find ourselves, returning to the grace of the Image with which we were in-formed. Formed-in you, O gracious God of creation. Amen.

Welcome Spring!!

By Greg and Helms

We are excited that Spring is here! That means that soon our backyard will be sprouting up with herbs, vegetables, and every variety of weed that you can imagine. This spring brings a busy semester of school for Greg, and a busy time of year for Helms. Greg is taking five classes at school, which is quite a load. They include Christian Ethics, Church and State, a class on creation texts in the Old Testament (in *Genesis, Psalms, Job, Isaiah*), a class called "Longing for God," which reads some of the Christian devotional classics from the second century through the present, and an independent study temporarily entitled "Jazz as Sacrament," exploring the intersections of music and theology. That last class is especially interesting, and Greg is devoting much of his time and energy to it. Helms has numerous activities planned for the spring, including an upcoming Disciple Now weekend that will require much energy and time, but should be great fun. Both of us plan on spending some time in Washington in May. Helms will be attending a week-long 'festival of homiletics' at various churches around DC. The conference features a number of great preachers and musicians, including Kyle Matthews. Greg will be taking a class at Wesley Theological Seminary at the same time called 'Faith and Public Policy.' Both are exciting opportunities for us, and Washington will be a fun place to spend a couple of weeks. Also, Helms has recently found a store in which to sell some of her crafts. She has been busy making purses, frames, and jewelry to display in a new Christian coffeehouse in Richmond, and hopefully they will sell well.

June also promises to be an important month, as Jason and Joanie are getting married! The ceremony will take place on June 12 in Roanoke, and then they will leave to spend a honeymoon in Italy! With all of this happening, the spring looks to be quite a busy time, but hopefully one of growth, both for us and for our garden. We hope to be able to see all of you sometime during the spring to tell you more about our exciting experiences, and to hear about yours!

What Gives? ~ by Jennifer Helms Jarrell

The Purpose Driven Life, Church, Home, Career, ...what next...the purpose driven car? With

the continuous rise of consumer Christianity, a Christianity built on entertainment and a tendency or desire to pick the easy way out and purchase God for a bargain, comes the newest book you can read to make your life better. A self-help book for the follower of Christ. Well, I'm not buying it! You know what else I'm not buying? I'm not buying a cross laden neck tie for my husband or a huge sculpture of praying hands for my garden. And speaking of gardening...what is it with this idea of "Church Growth and Kingdom Advance"? I have never heard of more ridiculousness! I hear left and right of church members wanting to know how we can "grow" the church. "What are we doing wrong?, What programs do other churches offer that we don't?, What music can we play or technology should we provide to make people want to come to church?" It seems to me that we are asking all the wrong questions, that we are coming at it from the wrong angle, and that we are buying into the wrong kind of theology!

Please don't hear my saying that I have all the right answers, 'cause I don't. My thoughts are not fully formed and are definitely not set in stone. I would like to suggest, though, that we think critically about what we do, say, think, and buy into. I put before you my own two cents...

I will admit, I have not read the entire book *The Purpose Driven Life*. In fact, lately all I've wanted to do with the book is distance myself from it; to run far in the other direction. The reason for my distancing is simple: I do not want to read a stranger's opinion of what my purpose in life should be! I may be crazy, but I rather like the idea of being able to communicate with God; listen to my surroundings; dive deep into my experience, tradition, community, and with the tools given to me; find for myself what my purpose may or may not be. Is it not our responsibility and our obligation to do so? Here is where the problem lies. Our lives are so filled with quick-fix-fast-food-convenient-ness that we forget to take responsibility for ourselves and our faith as individuals and in community. Instead of working to have a gourmet-melt in your mouth—let it simmer-wait until it is ready—faith, we choose the microwave in a minute-eat it on the go—pour it out of a can—buy it in a store-faith. What are we saying to the God who loves us and wants a relationship with us when we choose to consume our God rather than allow God to consume us?

Faith, to me, is something organic. It is growing and changing. A purpose, written in ink on paper and bound to make a book is not changing at all. It is static and dry. I wonder, too, what changes will have to be made in "The Purpose" in order to keep up with the God who acts and lives in time and space within which we live. (Continued on back)

Write the Vision...

Habakkuk 2:2-3

Recently, Jason, Joanie, Greg, and I sat down and finalized our mission statement and name. It was exciting to finally see some of our dreaming on paper! Here's what we came up with.

"Chyaets is a faith based non-profit organization covenanting to inspire, enrich, and embody community. The ministries of Chyaets include: 'Little Tree'- camp and retreat experiences, 'Shade for Sojourners'-urban partnerships, 'Seed Exchange'- connecting with congregations, 'The Arbor'- communal living guided by the traditional practices of faith, and 'The Well' a ministry newsletter" (Just in case you were wondering, the word "Chyaets" means "tree of life" in Hebrew. It is pronounced hcgghigh' eights. (you have to make that funny rumbling sound in your throat at the beginning of the word!)

As exciting as it is to be moving forward in our mission, this time is also filled with anxiety. Unanswered questions, the promise of paperwork and legalities, and the inevitability of change are just some of the things that we anticipate with angst. I am probably anticipating the brunt of the grief at this time. You see, my role in our little community tends to be the visionary, the one thinking ahead. Therefore, in this stage of our journey I am the anticipator of what is to come. Whereas the rest of our community hasn't even thought yet about what they'll eat for lunch today. Sooner or later, they'll be the ones grieving and anxious and I'll be the one looking to the next step with excitement again. For now, knowing and understanding my own quirks makes for a good chuckle! Until next time, know that we are making slow, but steady strides toward the unknown.

Passion, Calling, Desires...

By Jason Williams

Have you ever been to a Sunday morning worship service and felt disconnected from everything that was going on around you? Perhaps there was a death in the family and “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow” just did not express your feelings to God. Or maybe you just lost your job and clapping your hands to the latest praise song felt out of place. Or perhaps your mind was so cluttered with thoughts from the latest book you read that the complexity of the sermon was too much to take in. Or maybe your body was so physically tired that you could not manage to concentrate on worshipping God. Somehow your life and the practices of the worship service just did not match up. The acts of worship did not allow you the venue to express your thoughts and feelings to the One who gave you the capacity to think and feel.

Maybe you have never had such an experience, but it is my suspicion that we all can identify in some small way with what I am talking about. The dilemma that such feelings of detachment or disjointedness in worship represent in the context of worship has laid heavy on my being for some time now. What do we do with feelings of depression, anger, tiredness, anxiety, hurt, or pain in the context of worship? Do we lay them aside and resolve to sing our hymns of praise? Do we ignore them and focus only on God’s goodness? Do we pretend we do not have them and try to find a way to feel connected to the acts of worship on any given Sunday?

As I have struggled with such questions for the past few years, I have found that the Hebrew tradition of lament has much to say about these feelings and their place in worship. This past January Greg and I took a class entitled “The Spirituality of Praise and Lament.” In the class we explored the tradition of lament and its place in the spiritual life of the church. Through this study we discussed how expressions of anger, tiredness, hurt, or pain are central to the spiritual life. In fact, they are the

very basis of praise in the Psalter! Without such feelings there is no true praise!

Yet the Christian tradition seems to have lost touch with the Biblical concept of lament. One telling point made in the class was that our hymnals today contain virtually no laments. (The Baptist hymnal contains zero laments!) One is compelled to wonder why lament was so important to the life of Israel and the early church yet is mostly non-existent in Christian worship today? How can we offer true praise to God when our worship services deny us expressions of lament that are the very foundation of such praise?

I have discovered within myself a great passion for recovering the tradition of lament in the life of the local church. If the church is ever to truly become the body of Christ, then it must learn to worship God with all of its feelings and emotions just as Jesus does from the cross according to the gospel of Mark: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

A thought from St. Augustine:

Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and so new,
late have I loved you! And behold, you were within me
and I was outside, and there I sought for you, and in my
deformity I rushed headlong into the well-formed things
that you have made. You were within me, and I was not
with you. Those outer beauties held me far from you, yet if
they had not been in you they would not have existed at
all. You called and cried out to me and broke open my
deafness; you shone forth upon me and you scattered my
blindness; you breathed fragrance, and I drew in my breath
and now I pant for you; I tasted and I hunger and I thirst;
you touched me, and I burned for your peace.

from *The Confessions*

Schedule of Events and How to contact us...

April 3, May 2, May 16th– Helms Preaches at Mt. Hermon

Mid May– Festival of Homiletics and Greg’s May term class

May 29th– Joanie graduates from BTSR and JeriEllen Helms Graduates from Broughton

June 5th– Joanie’s birthday weekend!

June 12th– Jason and Joanie get married

Misc...gigs, retreats, wedding planning, showers, and so forth continue all through the spring.

Chyaets has an email address! Chyaets@mindspring.com

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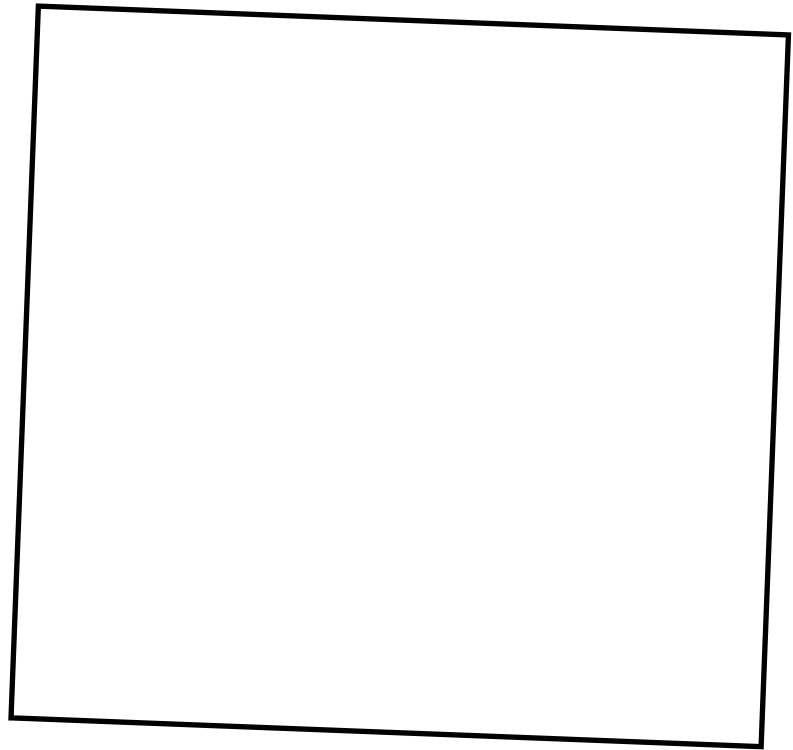
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The Well

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Vision, Dreams, Calling, Community,
Compassion, Care... The Well



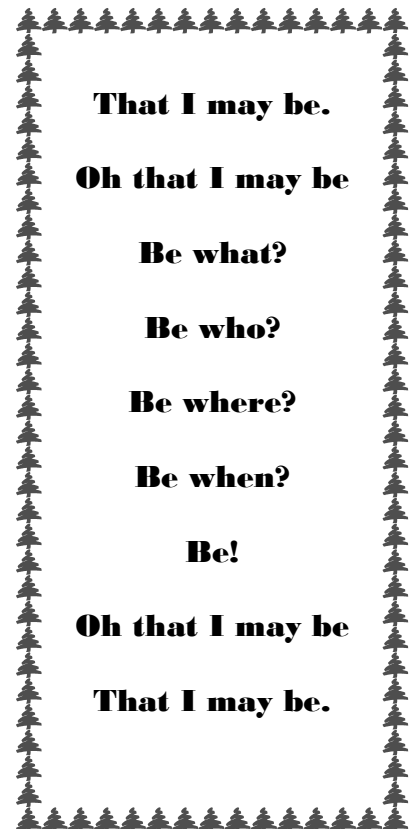
What gives?

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Moving on to the idea of church growth....

I think we've gotten all too cocky in our thinking on church growth. I'll explain with a parable of sorts.: Imagine a garden. The gardener tills the soil, plants the seed, waters the seed, and waits. The gardener, while waiting, picks the weeds, checks the soil, fertilizes, and cares for the plant. The plant begins to grow rapidly at first. Once the plant has grown to its full size, it continues to be nurtured by the gardener. The gardener prunes the plant of its dead limbs and leaves. The gardener cares for the plant in all weather conditions. The gardener collects the harvest; the flowers and the fruit. The gardener tends to any seedlings that may have been sprouted....You got the idea right? Well, first things first. Who is the gardener in the kingdom of God? Yep...that'd be God! And who is the plant? The church! I am the church, you are the church, we are the church. How is it that we have the gall to think that we can grow ourselves and that we have any say in how we grow, to what size we grow, and what we will produce? This idea of Church growth assumes that we have a role in growing the church as the gardener has a roll in growing a plant.

May I make a suggestion? It would do us all a bit of good if we would accept the fact that we are not the gardener, but that we are the plant. Then, we could begin to think with a better perspective on church growth and think more seriously about what it means to be the plant that God is growing. Suggested questions to consider: In what way does the plant act toward its own growth? How does the plant respond to the gardener? What does it mean to be pruned, weeded, and fertilized in the context of church growth and this gardening metaphor? Keep thinking....!



That I may be.

Oh that I may be

Be what?

Be who?

Be where?

Be when?

Be!

Oh that I may be

That I may be.