



TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

ElderTalk

Days long, years short!

ERIC BYROM

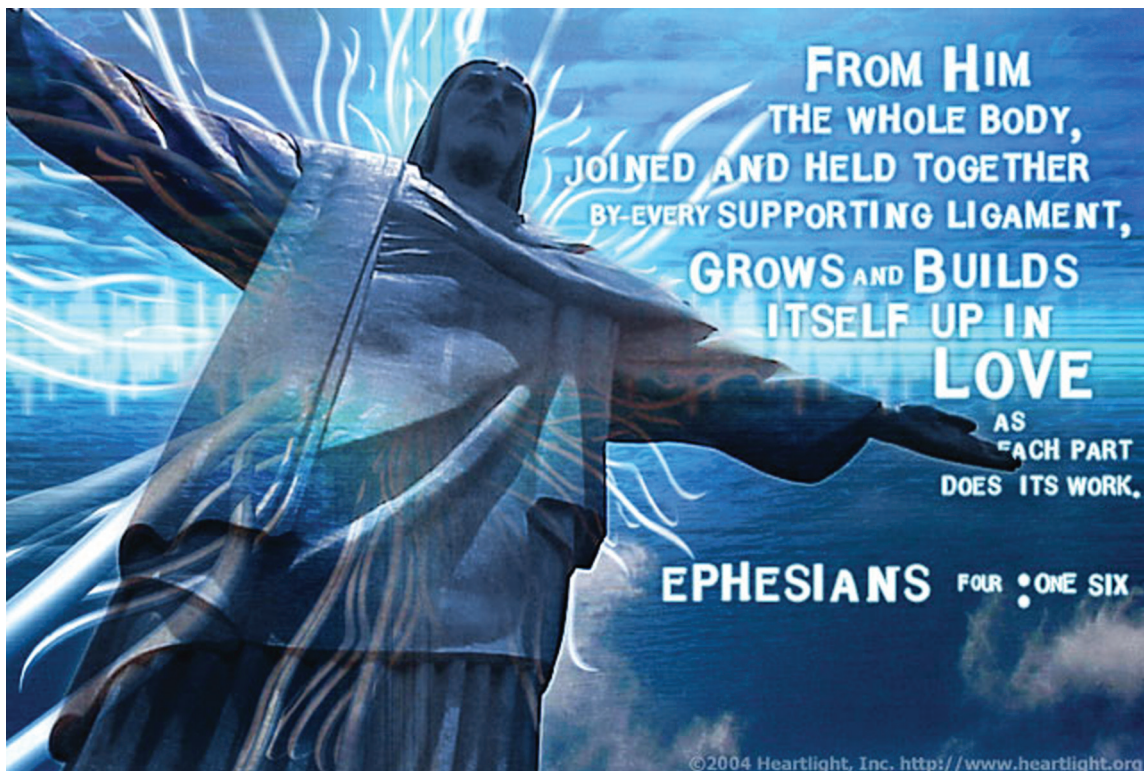
There is a phrase that I heard early on in parenting that I’ve come to see the truth of now that my kids have grown a bit. The phrase is: “*The days are long, but the years are short.*” What does that phrase mean? What I’ve come to see is that there are many demands put upon a parent, especially in the early years when children are very dependent upon us for everything. During that time, it can seem like raising young ones will never end. Then it does.

As I look back on the baby and toddler photos of my kids, I really don’t remember those times of changing diapers and cleaning up vomit. I remember the sweet smiles and the precious times together. I think, “*How did that little child grow up so fast?*” The years have really flown by! In the Christian walk of discipleship it can also be that way. When we are first growing in the Lord, and are faced by so many things in our lives that are incompatible with kingdom living, we can be a bit overwhelmed and wonder if we will ever mature.

The theme verse for this year is Ephesians 4:15 upon which I would like to add verse 16 in this article. These verses are: “*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*”



At times in our own walk with the Lord, the days can seem so long. In the same way, as we seek to intentionally help someone else look like Jesus, we can grow impatient with the slowness of the process. Let me remind us all, “*The days are long but the years are short.*” Be patient both with yourself and with those you are discipling. Discipleship is an organic, long term process and not something that happens in a week or even several years.

The discipleship process is also one that is both
(Concluded on page 2)



Artwork by Paul Wayland Lee (used by permission)

MARCH 2021

- 1-31** March of Prayer. GFC's night is March 15, 6:30 to 8 pm in the Upper Room.
- 4** Women's study in the Upper Room, 6:30 to 8 pm.
- 7** Jon Vega preaching on Mark 3:7-19.
- 11** Tabletop Game Club training, 6 to 8 pm at GFC.
- 14** Eric Byrom preaching on Mark 3:20-35.  Circle Leaders meeting on Zoom, 2 pm.
- 18** Women's study in the Upper Room, 6:30 to 8 pm.
- 20** Men's Prayer Breakfast at GFC at 9 am. Bring a sack meal.
- 21** Jad e Fox preaching on Mark 4:1-34. Mansfield Christian School's choir, *Image*, will be joining us for worship.
- 25** Tabletop Game Club training, 6 to 8 pm at GFC.
- 28** Palm Sunday. Eric Byrom preaching on Mark 4:35-5:20. 

Days long, years short (concluded from p. 1)

individual and corporate. There is an African proverb that says, *"If you want to go fast, go by yourself; but if you want to go far, go together."*

This really shows the truth of verse 16 of Ephesians 4 where those in the body build each other up. I don't know about you, but if I look at the two options, I would rather go *far* than *fast*. Fast sounds good, but if it doesn't get me far, I'll definitely choose the second option.

Brothers and Sisters, we are on a marathon and not a sprint. Let's be oaks. They do not grow overnight, but take many years to reach their full stature. When they do, however, they are strong trees that are not easily shaken.

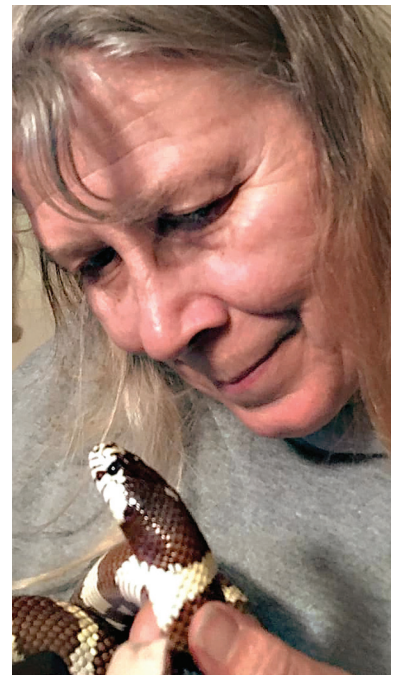
We are spending time this year focusing upon growing upwards together in Christ. This will not happen in just a year. So, let us make this a deeply held value for ourselves and others that we do this for the long haul and view it as a marathon rather than a sprint.

Let's grow together upwards in Christ!



Big news at the Parsons house... Phara the snake has emerged from hibernation !

The big Grace Fellowship Church herpetology mystery has finally been solved. Phara, Juli Parsons' 17 year old pet California King "grandsnake" has decided to return (i. e. be returned!) to its cage after a winter's hibernation in the basement of their home. Following the snake's "escape from captivity" back last October she was finally spotted on February 28 and returned to the confines of her "residence" cage. Juli is now hard at work—under naturalist son Caleb's watchful supervision of course!—resocializing and comforting the creature who just needed her kindness and a good meal. Does anyone have a spare mouse?



And we think that we've got problems!

JOHN KURTZ

History has always held a particularly fond place in my heart and mind, even though, as I always tell folks, I'm a lousy historian—I never have been able to remember dates or people's names well. (*Ed.'s note: But he can always remember their ailments!*) One of my favorite courses in college was The History of Greece and Rome. I actually enjoyed high school Latin, not so much for the linguistic values, but for the history which came alive through its study, and the fine teacher who most certainly helped that along.

During my formative years as a Christian, I picked up a few facts here and there, but mostly they were post-reformational in nature, and they pertained to my particular denomination, the Evangelical Church which eventually became part of the United Methodists.

Wow, was I in for a surprise. It was during those often hot or rainy days “*under the big top*” at Grace Haven (not yet Grace Fellowship Church) where, at the summer conference sessions, we were all introduced to in-depth church history. For most of us, it was the first time! Those talks, lectures, discussions have stuck with me ever since. They dove-tailed into my earlier knowledge of Roman history and have always made me want to learn more. Well, thanks to COVID-19, I've had timeto do just that.

It all began well over a year ago when I ran across the name of a book entitled *Constantine's Sword* by James Carroll, an ex-Roman Catholic priest and the son of a U.S. Air Force general. Believing it to be a biography of the first Christian Roman emperor, and thus something I might really want to read, I found a copy online. When my copy arrived, I found that it was over 600 pages! It was the first book I chose to read early on in the COVID isolation.

To my surprise, *Constantine's Sword* was not the biography I had hoped for, but a very detailed history of anti-semitism, going way back to Christ's crucifixion and before. It opened my eyes to a lot of Christian history that I was unaware of and which the whole Church is still trying to repent of.

My current read is a book written once again by a Catholic, but a layman and former Protestant, Rod Bennett, entitled *The Apostasy That Wasn't*. It turns out that it contains much biographical information about Constantine as far as his Christian life and dealings with the early church are concerned.

How often do we really understand or even think about what went on at those early Church Councils which led to the preservation of the tenants and “true truth” of our Christian faith today? Can we comprehend

the agony (and some ecstasy too) of what went on back then, when we recite the Nicene or Apostles' Creeds that have been passed down to us today? Perhaps, if we did, we would give considerably more thought and reverence to what we say. The beauty of the truths they contain and what they should mean for us is amazing. And at what price did those truths get established? That's pretty amazing stuff too.

We tend to take it for granted when we recall that “*The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are One,*” of the same substance, yet three different Persons. What an amazing God we have to have arranged that, and in the process, provided for the means whereby we “stray sheep,” sinners that we are, could be rescued and welcomed back into the sheepfold—at a price of course, and He paid the price too!

Are our problems over? How can we understand the Council of Nicea—where that Nicene Creed was formulated—in 325 AD? What did it look like? Remember, there were no press photographers or sketch artists back then. Here is one of the earliest depictions of the key figures, and it was not made until some time between the sixth and ninth centuries by an unknown fresco artist on the wall of the Byzantine Church of the tomb of St. Nicholas in Myra, present day Turkey. That's Constantine seated next to the Cross with the crown on his head. The attire is perhaps the most interesting .



History, yes, even Church History has been, and still is, full of problems. But it is worth studying and at least trying to understand today what occurred before us. It will help each Christian be more appreciative of that which has “*once and for all time*” been preserved for all the saints. As we 21st century believers attempt to “*walk the walk and talk the talk,*” may we spend a little more time learning what has gone on before that makes our faith today so rich and full of meaning. Give the study of Church History, especially that of the first four centuries, some time. You'll be a richer Christian because of it.

Looking toward Easter...a story to share with your family from a children's book by Elizabeth Johnson:

The Miracle of the Red Egg

Mary Magdalene had hoped and prayed that she would have a chance to meet with the Roman Emperor Tiberius [42 BC - 37 AD]. He was old and had moved to the island of Capri. Now at last she had been invited to attend a banquet at his villa. She wanted to tell him the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead!

People were afraid of the Emperor. Little things sent him into rages. If she had a chance to speak with him, what would he say? What would he do?

When she arrived at the villa, a servant led her to one of the terraces facing the sea. The table was already set for the meal. Tiberius was reclining on one of the couches. The table was laden with every delicacy imaginable. Mary began to tell the people next to her about the wonderful news of Jesus' resurrection.

Word spread from one person to another. Finally the story reached Emperor Tiberius. "So what is this I hear? One of you claims that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, has come back to life? Ridiculous!" Whenever Jesus was mentioned, people started arguing. The Emperor leaned forward. "I've heard people say Jesus rose from the dead. But it's absurd." He laughed again. "No one can just come back to life. I don't believe it!"

Mary Magdalene prayed for courage. "What you have heard is true. I went to Jesus' tomb and there I saw two angels. They told me not to be afraid. Then I turned and saw Jesus. The resurrection is true!"

Emperor Tiberius opened his mouth, but no words came. Mary Magdalene saw his face turn red and then redder. He slammed his fist down on the table so hard that the dishes rattled. "It cannot be true!" he shouted. He grabbed a white egg from the table and jumped to his feet. "Do you see this white egg?" he said.

He strode around the room shaking his fist. "I declare," he said, "that Jesus can no more have risen from the dead, than this egg..."

He gasped and his face turned white, seeing the egg was now red. There was the egg, deep, rich red for all to see. Slowly, ever so slowly, he set the egg down on the table and backed away.



Tiberius sees the red egg

He sat very still and let out a long, low moan. A red egg. A miracle. And above all, a resurrection. "Leave me," he said in a hoarse whisper.

As the people left, Mary Magdalene stayed behind. Carefully, she picked up the precious red egg and held it to her heart. "It is true," she said one last time. "Christ is risen."

Emperor Tiberius looked up at her and she wondered if maybe she saw his expression soften just a little. From that day forward Mary gave thanks to God for the courage He had given her and for the marvelous miracle of the red egg.

How to dye red eggs for Easter

Mary Magdalene became a powerful evangelist. The early Christians of Mesopotamia began the custom of Easter eggs. They dyed their eggs red for the blood of Jesus and gave them as Easter gifts and as opportunities to share about the crucifixion and resurrection of their Savior. Here's how to make red eggs.

Boil eggs for 15 minutes. Place immediately in a warm dye solution of 2 one ounce bottles of red food coloring, 1 cup vinegar and 5 cups warm water. Leave eggs in dye solution for 10 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on a cooling rack for 40 minutes. To make eggs shiny, put olive oil on a paper towel and rub the egg first with the oil and then with a clean paper towel. This recipe can be used for 2 to 3 batches.



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