

The Christian life is a journey.

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: 'See that no one fails to receive the grace of God'

JERRY MATHIAS

'Grace is the comma instead of the period.'

What does this mean? Our sad human story could have ended with a period after these seven words:

"The wages of sin is death. Period."

We have earned death. God, however, says, *"Wait a second; the sentence isn't over!"* He added a comma instead of a period. Instead of receiving what we deserve, separation from God forever, we are given the choice of a free gift. We know what happens if we don't take the gift, and we know what's in the gift: life forever with Jesus! Grace is the gift that says, *"I know you don't deserve this, but I'm yours."*

Sharing the Grace of God

Hebrews 12:12-15:

12 "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. 14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."

All Christians learn quickly that living a life of faithfulness is not an easy task. Temptations come at us in order to hinder us from pressing forward towards the prize of heaven, set before us. Sometimes we grow weary as we run the race that Jesus Christ has set before us.

The people of God have always had to face these difficulties. Because of these realities, God's word calls us to move forward, cheered on by the faithfulness of those who have gone before us and have already crossed the finish line by dying in faith. (10:19-12:2) He tells us to recognize the loving hand of the Lord's discipline that, in the end, will make us runners who can run with vigor and holiness. (12:3-11)



Hebrews 12:14 tells us some of the ways we can prepare ourselves to finish the race. We are told: *"Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."* This is such an important exhortation because the church is often tempted to pursue peace at the expense of holiness.

However, we can see from verse 14 that this is not the right way. We are to pursue peace and holiness. If we get along but tolerate sin, then peace

(Continued on page 3)

WILL THE REAL JOHN CHRYSOSTOM PLEASE STAND UP!

JOHN KURTZ

Following my Grace Fellowship Church “re-inactment” of John Chrysostom’s Paschal Homily during Easter Sunday worship this year, I realized that there were probably only a small number of GFC folks who knew who he was, and even fewer who knew much about him, myself included.

Thanks to an amazing book, *Golden Mouth*, by J. N. D. Kelly published in 1999, it is now possible to pass on to everyone a portrait, in words anyway, of what this revered fifth-century church father was like.

Not only has British Anglican theologian and educator Kelly put together a readable biography of John Chrysostom, but Kelly had, as his principal source, the hundreds of sermons of his subject written down by “scribes” in the audience along with detailed writings of two early church historians who put together their own record of Chrysostom’s life and its challenges: Salaminius Hermias Sozomen, a Christian lawyer in Constantinople (born circa 400 AD) and Socrates Scholasticus (born circa 380 AD) in Constantinople, about whose life little else is known.

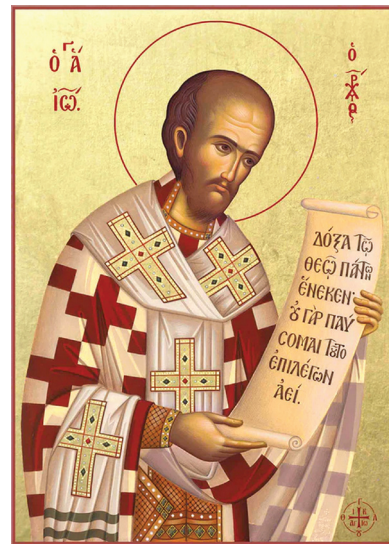
Kelly’s book does require some concentration due to his frequent references to many Greek personages of the fifth century, whose names are foreign to those unaccustomed to such names and places. Still, the story is remarkable and reveals a fifth century Christian church which was fraught with its own set of problems, heresy, and in-fighting. And we think the 21st century church has its problems! Well, John Chrysostom may have been a great preacher-orator, but he certainly had his hands full outside of the pulpit!

John Chrysostom, whose father died when he was young, was raised by his Christian mother and given a fine secular Greek oratorical education. Following his own conversion to Christ as a young man, John felt led to a life as a desert ascetic.

While important in his life, the desert years played havoc with his health and finally forced

him back to a more healthy environment. He eventually was ordained as a priest and then became the bishop of the church in Antioch, where his abilities as a preacher were recognized and beloved by those under his pastoral care.

When the death of the Bishop of Constantinople created a vacancy, the Emperor himself demanded that John be brought to that city, an event which was actually accomplished with some royal “enforcement.” John, however, settled into his new role and, as in Antioch, quickly won over the hearts of his parishioners and, for a time, the Emperor and his wife as well.



As might be expected, such a selection ruffled the feathers of those who felt slighted by the Emperor’s choice. One such was the Bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus. This man eventually led a movement within the church to overthrow John, bringing many false or distorted accusations against him. This group of anti-John Chrysostom churchmen finally convinced the Emperor and his domineering wife (whose own personal extravagance had been publicly taken to cause by John) that John was a heretic and finally had him deposed and banished. Shortly afterwards there was

(Continued on p. 3)

See that no one...

(Continued from p. 1)

does not benefit us at all. Things might be quiet, but festering sin will cause us to stumble in the race. For if we impose rules not based on Scripture, or if we split churches over peripheral matters, we will be so focused on arguing with one another that we will not run this race with vigor.

Hebrews 12:15 tells us how we strengthen ourselves in order to complete the race and receive the prize. In verse 15 we are told to make sure that no one “fails to obtain the grace of God.”

That is, we must endeavor to do all that God has commanded so that we never fall away from the hope of salvation. When God warns His elect not to fall away, He empowers them to respond. When we heed such warnings and seek after God’s grace through worship, prayer, the sacraments, Bible study, and the like, we demonstrate the reality of our election and the surety of our salvation. Moreover, as we do these things, God’s grace stimulates us to live lives of gratitude and love, enabling us to avoid the “root of bitterness” that defiles and that can disqualify us from the race. (Hebrews 12:15).

PRAYER

Our Father, sanctified is Your Name. Your Kingdom come; Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Lift my drooping hands, strengthen my weak knees, and make straight paths for my feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint.

Amen.

WILL THE REAL JOHN CHRYSOSTOM... *(Continued from p. 2)*

a major earthquake, felt to indicate God’s displeasure. This made possible John’s return. Things were never the same, however. After a brief period back as the Bishop of Constantinople, the “anti-John faction” once again convinced the “powers that be” to banish John. This time John’s life-long poor health, the result of his early desert years as an ascetic, eventually got the best of him, and he died en route to his final place of exile.

Fortunately for the Christian Church, the sermons and writings of John Chrysostom have validated the man’s true orthodox faith and have led to his lasting place in the canon of early church fathers. He is considered a saint not only by the Eastern Churches (Orthodox) but also by the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Lutherans. He is also revered by other church bodies, his quotes appearing in devotional books used by non-liturgical Christians today. Regardless of what titles today’s Christians may bestow upon this man, there is little doubt as to his belonging among the true saints of the church and one with whose writings and sermons we would all do well to become familiar. His life story also tells us that the Church has never been “perfect” and that she lives on truly by the grace and mercy of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

If you have further questions, or just want to know even more about the real John Chrysostom, read Kelly’s book. It is still in print.

JUNE 2024

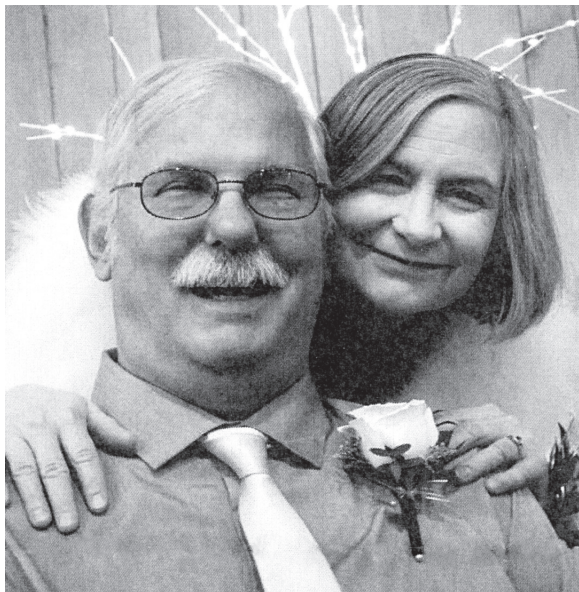
- 1 GFC work day. Games Reach Family Game Night at GFC 6:30.
 - 2 Jadaé Fox preaching: Hebrews 13:7-14. KDTS planning 12:45.
 - 9 Matt Godsil preaching: Hebrews 13:15-25. 
 - 13 Women of Grace Bible Study & Prayer in the Lion Room. 6:30-8 pm.
 - 15 Hike/Walk for girls of all ages. 9:30-11:30.
 - 16 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: Habakkuk 1:1-11.
 - 20-22 Rummage Sale (drop off items on 17-19).
 - 23 Eric Byrom preaching : Habakkuk 1:12-17. 
 - 23-29 Youth for Christ rents our building all week.
 - 30 Celebration Sunday!
- Kids DTS: July 7-13. Teen DTS: July 14-20.
Family Camping Weekend: August 9-11.
Community Celebration: August 24: 5:30-8:00.

Hello from Brian and Lori Judd!

We are full of gratitude for all of you—our family, church family and friends! We were married on a cold January day in a lovely ceremony focusing on covenant and commitment. God keeps His covenant no-matter-what to those who have received Him. What peace of mind especially when entering marriage, another covenant...

Many wore a favorite hat to our reception, which brought a lighthearted touch. Family and friends served us in so many ways to help make it a joyful wedding. We are equally thankful for the gifts, gift cards, and cash that many of you showered upon us. Thank you, everyone! We are truly blessed by your love and sharing in our joy!

We were able to get away, escaping from all the busyness by enjoying the “Reba McEntire Honeymoon Suite”—now renamed the “Judd Suite,” followed by time at the Mohican Lodge where we caught some Appalachian music and danced in the little cafe to the jukebox hit, “Hey Jude.” We finished our honeymoon getaway at Lakeside on Lake Erie. Very cold but peacefully quiet and beautiful.



God has been so faithful to provide for our needs and to give us much joy as we’ve settled into Brian’s house in Lexington. Brian’s young adult son, Jon, lives with us.



The Blessing

Kay D. Berry

May God’s blessing be upon you
As you join your hearts to His.
May His love abound within you,
May your hearts be ever His.

May God smile over you with singing,
May His love shine on your face.
May He shower you with sweet peace,
May the Lord speak His soft grace.

May God knit your hearts together
With His love and lasting joy.
May the Lord protect and bless you
As you seek His will each day.

Grace Fellowship Church

365 Straub Rd East • Mansfield, OH 44903
419-526-4699 • gracefellowship01@gmail.com

- Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor
- Jadaé Fox Elder
- Matt Godsil Elder
- Jerry Mathias Elder
- Cameron Karger Treasurer
- Kay Berry & Karen Gates Women
- Lori Judd Missions
- Andy Heininger Worship
- Judy Nichols Prayer Chain
- Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox Office
- Andy Anschutz Sound/Power Point
- John and Donna Kurtz *TrailNotes*