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ARTICLES

Using Claws

By Pastor Kevin Van Wyk

Well, big shocker... the Van Wyk's have more kittens. On top of the five from Slick, we came home from family camp at Silver Birch to four more kittens. Bubbles, their mother, seemed far more interested in us than her kittens

when we returned, but since then has been diligently caring for her kittens.



Elyssa has already named

two of them based on behavior. The lightest colored one is Oppugno, Latin for attack. The gray one is Pugno, Latin for fight back. What we have observed is Oppugno will vigilantly scratch with one paw while trying to take Pugno's position. Pugno is no pushover and claws back. It is a surprisingly vicious encounter for kittens that are only a couple days old.

These kittens illustrate much of what I

see happening in our culture, on the news, over social media, and most painfully, in the Church. Now don't get me wrong, there have been no brawls at church, but too many Christians have been using what I call "thought bombs."

If you open Facebook, you will be inundated with these thought bombs. Trumpers blast Biden and vice versa. BLM supporters bomb the blue and vice versa. Non-maskers nuke maskers and vice versa. Many on both sides seem to believe they hold **all** the truth and must profess it at every turn.

I am reminded that Jesus, when caught in a very contentious moment with accusers and a woman caught in adultery (John 8), did not add fuel to the fire. He, much like Bubbles who simply ignores her fighting kittens, wrote in the sand. Maybe he was listing the sins of the accusers as some have hypothesized, or maybe he just drew a picture. Whatever he did, it de-escalated the tension. Eventually, he called each person to acknowledge their sin and do what is right. He calmed the tension and made the accusers hold their stones, i.e. thought bombs, and ponder whether stoning the woman was the right thing to do.

In all fairness, Jesus was very blunt and confrontational on some occasions when

religious leaders were not changing their ways (See Matt. 21:12 & 23:13-39). So there is a time and place for calling people out, but we must be aware that we will be judged more strictly (James 3:1) and we must be gentle, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:2, 15).

Initially with COVID, Facebook was inundated with positive gospel messages of hope. However, our culture has become divisive and mean. **Christians, too often, have engaged in this war, launching thought bombs in the name of Jesus.** I think God has been writing in the sand. To a degree, I've been writing in the sand, hoping the conflict simply goes away.

It's not going away, but I have no desire to feed these fires. I'm going to write in the sand a bit longer, resist throwing thought bombs, reflect on my heart, and listen for God to speak truth.

If you wish to join me, I urge you to humbly reflect on Paul's advice to the believers in Rome...

16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it

depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12)

Oh Lord, forgive me for escalating tension, for thought bombing other believers, and for thinking I have all the truth. Help me to listen to those I disagree with, to hear their heart's intention through the words, and to bring harmony and peace.

What if His people prayed?

By Pastor Doug Shotsky

Psalm 102:17 - He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.

I'm reading the book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* by Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, and I will say it is inspiring! Not inspiring in the sense that this guy knew what he was doing, persevered through hardships, and established some great movement of God.

But inspiring in the sense that he had no idea what he was doing, and knew that he had to completely rely on the power of prayer, not only as the foundation to what they were beginning, but also that over the years they've known they've needed to remain desperate in their prayers to continue hearing from God and making sure that they don't stray from the source of power working in their midst.

This dying church made a commitment to gather together each week to literally cry out to God together, and God began doing amazing things in their midst. Years later they have not wavered from what God has called them to and many lives have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit working in their midst.

As a pastor, I am often at a loss as to how to lead people in the church. I ask myself almost daily, "How can I help the people of this church grow in their faith in God?" I spin my wheels trying to develop programs, think of needs that need to be met, and navigating who needs to be cared for. All of this is for naught if the power of the Holy Spirit isn't moving in our midst.

One quote from the book that really stuck out to me was (paraphrased) "You can tell how popular a church is by their Sunday morning attendance. You can tell how

popular a pastor is by their Sunday evening attendance. And, you can tell how popular God is by their prayer meeting attendance.”

My prayer is that God will move us to be a people of prayer, more desperate for Him than we've ever been. We must, now more than ever, be drawing near to Him and crying out for Him to move in our midst, because without Him, we can do nothing!

My challenge for all of us is to consider joining some of the upcoming prayer opportunities. We need God to show up in powerful ways, and half-hearted seeking leads to spiritual apathy. I'm not preaching some sort of prosperity gospel, but I am admonishing us to obey God's commands to be a people of prayer. Won't you join me in this and see what God will do?!

Equipping Children & Families Update

By Adrea Daane

Join us as we begin our fall programs here at the ARC! Bible Class will begin Wednesday, September 9th from 6:30-7:30. All 1st through 8 grade students are welcome to attend! Sunday School will start up on Sunday, September 13th from 10:45-11:30 following our morning service. Classes will be held for

preschoolers through high school.

A family letter has been emailed out with more details about these two opportunities and memory work/calendars for the year. Hard copies are also available in mailboxes, with extra copies found by the Children & Families bulletin board area across from the elevator.

Please be in prayer for our kiddos as we begin to come together as classes. Prayers for our volunteers and teachers as these programs would not be possible without them! Finally, prayers for flexibility, positive attitudes, and hearts open to what God has in store for our plans this year.

Our Story

By Jessa Ter Beest

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

Have you ever thought of the Bible as part of your story? God's plan for this world is one big continuous story and we are a part of it. This year in youth group, we'll be

doing an overview of the Bible as a unified story of God's rescue plan for His world and us. So often we just read the Bible in individual stories or pieces, but as Doug spoke about in his sermon on Sunday, it all fits together and when we understand the beauty of that it's mind-blowing! We want scripture to be mind-blowing to our students because that's the way God meant for it to be.

My prayer that I hope you'll join me in, is that our students will be inspired by scripture each week and desire to read it more and more as they search for answers in this crazy world.

Don't forget to sign up to pray for a youth family this year! The sign up is on the information desk or you can email jessa@altoreformedchurch.org. You'll receive a picture of the students and info on what to pray for, plus their address if you'd like to send cards or letters.

Golden Lifers Update

By Roxy Schouten

EXCUSES! Some are genuinely legit. But when looking in the dictionary many of the definitions have a tone of trying to justify oneself and blame others or circumstances. Human nature never changes. Our recent study of the Book of Haggai reminds us that those words of

prophecy are as relevant today as at the time written.

As told in the Book of Ezra the ruler Cyrus gave permission and provision for the Jews to rebuild the destroyed Temple. Satan did not approve and put roadblocks for completion. WARNING – Whenever someone makes a stance for following Jesus Christ or building that relationship trouble will follow. As wise Solomon said “there is nothing new under the sun”.

The words of Haggai echo in our ears as we hear ourselves reiterate the excuses the returned captives gave:

1. The time is not right. (v 2)
2. I have needs that are basic and must be fulfilled in order for me to be useful to God. (v 4)
3. God will understand. I have to make a living and after all my hard work I deserve a little R&R. (V 6)

When God says something twice it is like “heads up, listen up” message much like when we read “Verily, Verily”. In Haggai 1:5, 7 there is a “Verily, Verily” message – “give careful thought to your ways.”

How DO we do that? Many years ago while reading some materials written by A.W. Tozer, pastor and author, he shared

some probing questions of how we can “give careful thought to your ways”. They are:

1. What do I want most? (Careful! We can mouth the “right” answer that we think God wants to hear but God knows our heart.)
2. What do I think about most?
3. How do I use “my” money?
4. How do I use “my” leisure time?
5. Whose company do I enjoy?
6. Who do I admire?
7. What/Who do I love most? (Perhaps our first thought is someone very dear to us – spouse, child, friend. Even above our most beloved on earth Jesus is looking for your top devotion to love Him most.)

OUCH!! I often don’t score very well on those. But the real point “where the rubber meets the road” is what I am going to do about it. Will I revert back to familiar excuses as previously stated? Or will the revelation put me on the right path once again?

Father God, It is both comforting and disconcerting to know You know my thoughts and action before I even think them. Please forgive my imperfect excuses and lead me into a more careful

path of service to You with my whole body, soul and spirit. In Jesus Christ name. Amen and Amen

MESSAGES

I would like to say "Thank you" to all in our Church family for their prayers, calls, cards and visits/food following my recent surgery. They all were very much appreciated! Thank you again.

-Marilyn Zeatlow

I want to thank everyone who visited, sent a card, or brought food when I broke my arm. I especially appreciate all the prayers for healing and recovery that were said on my behalf. I'm doing therapy now and hope to get as back to normal as possible.

-Val Bille

Stork Committee-

Thank you for thinking of our family as we welcome sweet baby, Ellis into our home. We appreciate the home visit, treats, Reach Out gift card, and prayers.

-Tom, Lindsey, Knox, Tate, & Ellis Bruins

The family of Carol DeGroot would like to thank everyone at Alto Reformed Church for their thoughts, prayers, cards, and visits. Special thanks to all the shepherds that visited. That meant everything and was a HUGE blessing! Thank you to

Pastor Kevin, Pastor Doug, and everyone that made the funeral so beautiful. Special thanks to Gloria Mulder and Kathy Flier for their never-ending love and support. Thank you to those who offered respite care.

Many thanks for the birthday cards I received and the good birthday wishes. It is good to belong to such a caring church family.

-Dayton Ter Beest

A grateful thank you to my Alto Church family. For all your prayers, for the delicious food, and for the beautiful prayer shawl. Thank you for the calls of pastors and friends. Thank you to elder Scott Van De List for your visits and for my family for their care, love, and concern. Thank you for the get well cards. They were the highlight of my day. Thanks for the birthday cards and birthday greetings on Facebook. It was a happy birthday - I was home.

-Beverly Kowalski

EVENTS

**MARRIAGE
NIGHT**

Saturday,
September 12
at 6-9:30pm

Cost: \$15/person, \$30/couple

Register [here!](#)



Fellowship
Fire Fridays
Sept 18 & Oct
2 at 6pm
Bonfire,
Games,
Smores, & Worship on the church hill.

SEE YOU AT THE POLE™
8/23/20



See You in
the
Sanctuary
September
23 at 7:30pm
Join us in the
sanctuary for

a time of prayer for our schools.

Every age is welcome!

A time of prayer will also occur on

Facebook live at 6:30am.

There will be no meeting at the flag pole.

NEWS

Births

8/3/20 - Knox Bennett, son of Brant &
Taylor McDowell

8/13/20 - Joellee Kay, daughter of Colton
& Courtney Loomans