



Prayer of Thanksgiving: that God is showing us how to be reasonable living in this world. **"4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** (Php 4:4-7 ESV)

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations Mrs. Jack and C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

Open Hand Food Bank – Moncton - is in need of grocery plastic bags to give out food to those in need. If you are interested in donating your unused grocery bags, you can bring them to church and someone will collect them and bring them over. Those who want to bring food to give to the **Open Food Bank** may do so by bringing to church and giving it to **Michael M.** of the Moncton congregation.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF December 2018

Times of worship services: **Moncton** – 10:30 AM every Sunday

In Saint John , services are cancelled on Sunday, December 23.

Communion- on the second and fourth Sunday of the month.

Address: Moncton—70 King St. —Sage building;

Saint John—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

The good news of the gospel is a message to be shared with others. Please pray that God will give us the love and wisdom to be able to share this message with others in a loving, clear and confident matter as we participate in his missional work on the earth in our generation. **"5 ¶ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."** (Col 4:5-6 ESV)

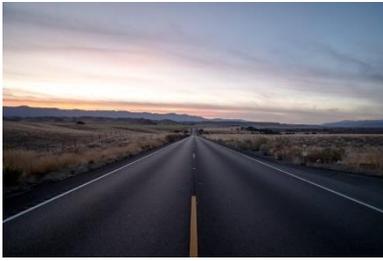
Please pray that God will put an end to the senseless violence happening in North America continent and other parts of the world.

Pray that we will see the good works that God has prepared for us in advance so that we can enthusiastically participate in the on-going work He is doing now on this earth in bringing people in relationship with him in Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Please pray, as per Jesus instructions, the disciples prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10) as our world is suffering so much and in need of complete restoration by the King of kings, Jesus. As we are his royal priesthood, let us proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, as we are instructed in 1 Peter 2.

Pray for the world and for all people: we live in a world that does not know the way to peace. Important to pray as we are instructed by the apostle Paul — **"1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,"** (1Ti 2:1–3 ESV)

Surprised by the Holy Spirit



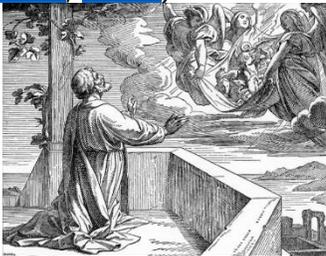
Greg and Susan Williams

Dear GCI Family:

I often recall what Jesus said to Nicodemus in comparing the Holy Spirit to wind, which “blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going” ([John 3:8](#)). Though the Spirit is always at work in the world, we often don’t recognize what he is doing until after the fact. An example is found in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit worked in new and surprising ways to lead Gentiles to Christ.

In Acts 15, Luke tells of the church council where there was “much discussion” about what should be required of these Gentile converts. I wonder how long the discussion lasted—was it over a period of days? In any case, at some point Simon Peter stood up and testified that the Gentiles had heard the gospel from his lips and that by grace, through faith (not works of the Law) they had been converted to Christ ([Acts 15:6-11](#)).

Students of the Bible know the backstory. In Acts 10, Luke tells how the Spirit had given Peter a vision (illustrated below) to convince him that God truly was including Gentiles in the body of Christ. Obedient to the message of the vision, Peter baptized the Gentile centurion Cornelius, along with a large number of people within his household ([Acts 10:27, 47-48](#)).



Acts 10 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit had moved with power to transform Peter’s thinking concerning a particularly controversial issue. He did so by cleverly, using the Old Testament custom of distinguishing between clean and unclean meats to show Peter that what God had declared clean, no person was to consider impure. To emphasize this point, the Spirit gave Peter the vision three times ([Acts 10:9-16](#)). Like us, Peter was prone to miss God’s point the first time (and maybe the second as well!).

Though what the Holy Spirit did at this foundational point in church history is in many ways unique, he has continued moving with power down the centuries to transform the church. In GCI, we’ve seen his transforming presence and power at work “up close and personal.” Just recently, the Spirit showed us that we need to make significant changes to our global denominational structure. With many of our leaders retiring and other leadership transitions occurring, we need a leadership structure that better matches our resources to the needs of our churches and pastors around the world.

The primary unit in our new global structure (to be implemented on January 1, 2019) is a group of leaders we call a *Community of Practice* (CoP). We’ll have six CoPs in order to serve the various regions around the world where we have members. Each CoP will be made up of key leaders within a region who share a common vision and meet regularly to share best practices and resources. Each CoP will be facilitated and supervised by a point person called a *Superintendent*. In future issues of *GCI Update* I’ll set out the details of the new structure, introducing the Superintendent and other members of each CoP.

In working out the details of the new structure, I found it fascinating that we were simply catching up with what the Spirit had already been doing in and among us. As noted above, we typically see his handiwork only in hindsight. The process of moving toward the new leadership structure began in January 2018 with my visit to South Africa (RSA) where I worked with our leaders there to form their national ministry team. Doing so involved an unforeseen, though meaningful caveat—RSA would come under the wider supervision of Kalengule Kaoma, who up to that point had supervised other parts of the African continent.

A companion piece to that experience was determining what would happen within our expansive Asian region, given the July 2018 retirement of Rod Matthews. The decision was made to add two Regional Directors, placing them under the direction of Eugene Guzon, who becomes Superintendent of the Asian CoP next month. My work with Rod coincided with the Australian Conference held in June. During the conference I encountered one of those transformative “Holy Spirit surprises.” One of the conference participants commented that with the restructuring, all the leaders in Asia would now be indigenous to that region. I expressed my agreement with his observation, though I thought to myself that I wished I had been smart enough and intentional enough to have designed the structure with that important goal in mind. Thank God that the Holy Spirit works through us even though we often don’t fully grasp what he is doing until after the fact.

In my musings about our newly formed African CoP, I realized that all its members are also indigenous to that region. For that I praise God! While musing, I remembered a conversation I had with one of the men who stepped into the role of Regional Director (a title held by many of the leaders who work hand-in-hand with their Superintendent). This gentleman asked why he was being considered for that position. My response was that it was due to his long-time, faithful service, and because of the high regard the other leaders in his CoP display toward him.

For me, the primary takeaway from the experiences of this past year is this: Within GCI, our amazing Triune God has been preparing and calling leaders for a time such as this. I have high hopes for how our new structure will function. I truly believe that our best days lie ahead.

Holy Spirit, we will have more please!

Greg Williams, GCI President

PS: I hope you enjoy the new look for *GCI Update*. The changes we've made align this publication with the GCI branding now being used for all our denominational websites and publications. Also, we're now sending the *GCI Update* email (that announces each new issue) to all GCI members for whom we have an email address. If you have not received the email announcing this issue, you can subscribe yourself using the "subscribe yourself" feature at right.

GERRIT SCOTT DAWSON: THE ETERNAL INCARNATION

(Excerpt from GCI You're Included video)

Drs. Feazell and Dawson discuss the significance of the fact that Jesus Christ is still human, that the incarnation continues into eternity.

JMF: Welcome to another edition of You're Included, the unique interview series devoted to practical implications of a Christ-centered Trinitarian theology in today's complex world. Our guest today is Gerrit Dawson, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge Louisiana. Dr. Dawson is author of *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation* as well as *An Introduction to Torrance Theology* and *Discovering Jesus: Awakening to God*. Dr. Dawson, we appreciate you being with us today.

GSD: It's so much fun to be talking about these things together.

JMF: In your book, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation*, what is Christ's continuing incarnation, and what was the need for such a book?

GSD: More than a decade ago, I had become fascinated with the person of Jesus Christ, partly through being reintroduced to the theology of Thomas and James Torrance, and I found myself yearning more and more to explore the bigness and the wonder of the Savior that we have. I was drawn then to try to find out which angle would be best for exploring Christ, and I realized that the ascension of Jesus provides a fresh look at the very ancient story.

The ascension of Christ is a kind of hinge on which the entire story of the mediator turns. For instance, we think of Jesus as being our Prophet, our Priest, and our King. When he was among us and in his days in Nazareth and Jerusalem, he was a prophet speaking God's word to us. It was after his ascension though, when he withdrew from us, that he became a prophet in a different way. Now by the sending of his Holy Spirit, who caused the apostles to write down the words of the New Testament, and through living in our hearts, Jesus continues to speak, but not just out of his location in Jerusalem, but from heaven to us.

In his role as a priest, Jesus fulfilled that in his death on the cross, dying to take away the sins of the world, but after his ascension, he became a priest in a new way. He appears before the throne of the Father to intercede for us and to offer his life on our behalf and to continue to prepare a place for us.

Third, as the King, when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he had conquered death, but it was with his ascension that he was truly honored as the Lord of all. So all the work of Jesus hinged on the ascension.

JMF: As individuals 2000 years later, we relate to the ascended Jesus. How is that connected with his time on earth in terms of how it affects us today?

GSD: That's where the fact of the continuing incarnation is so important. As we've mentioned, people think that God only became a human for a little while he was with us those 33 years that Jesus was here. But in fact, Scripture and traditions of all believers have taught for centuries that Jesus *remained* incarnate. He did not kind of unzip his humanity and take it off, he remained wedded to our humanity.

That's wonderful news for us because it means that the same Jesus who gathered the little children in his arms and touched them and blessed them, the same Jesus who accepted the tears of the sinful woman and pronounced forgiveness to her, the same Jesus who was willing to touch someone with a terrible disease and to heal them, that's the

same Jesus that we relate to now. He still has the memory of walking among us on this earth. He still has our flesh. He's still the Jesus that we meet in the Gospels.

JMF: How does that impact us when we're in the depths of our own humanity and we're feeling like we're not connected with God, where do we find the wherewithal to go ahead and take the step of returning to God, like the prodigal son, as opposed to the fear that most of us feel when we feel disconnected because of sin?

GSD: To know his true humanity, that he is both fully God but fully human in the way that we are human, that when the Son of God came to us, as the Torrances love to say, he penetrated into our lost and forsaken condition, or as Douglas Sparrow says, he pursued us all the way to the place of our fallenness. Not just abstractly in some philosophical sense—he did it by becoming what we are, taking up real humanity, he truly embraced us.

Because he keeps that humanity, he remains the one who knows what it's like to be tempted. He knows what it's like to have suffered. He knows what it's like to have struggled in our humanity. So we can trust him that he's no stranger to what we're feeling. But also because that redemption was real, because he truly became what we are to renew us and to save us in our real humanity (not some abstract kind of superman humanity), then we don't have to be afraid that he's so disappointed in our sin or so surprised by it that he's ready to cut us off. He knows how it is with us. What he has redeemed is what we really are.

JMF: There's a memory passage a lot of people have in Isaiah that "your sins have separated you from me." How do you relate "your sins have separated you from me" with what you're just describing in terms of our relationship with Christ through the ascension?

GSD: A helpful distinction here is between union and communion. A great theologian from the 17th century, John Owen, talked about this. Our union with Christ was established first in Christ's union with us. As we've said, he took up our humanity and joined himself to it. Our union with Christ also includes the way in which the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ so that we are united inseparably with him.

JMF: That includes every human being.

GSD: It does, and it doesn't, in the sense that Christ's union with our humanity causes him to extend to all human beings his great welcome and redemption of love. The union that we have with Christ through the Holy Spirit comes as the blessed Spirit awakens us to life, creates faith in us, and joins us to Jesus. That happens at different stages along people's lives. When you've been united to Christ in the Holy Spirit, that union is forever. We are included in all that he has done for us. Our sins are removed, we can't surprise God by our sin, we can't mar his redemption, we can't change it. But experientially speaking, we can affect our *communion* with him. Our union is untouchable. Christ has established that, in his union with us, in the great work of his redemption. It's all done. But my communion with him, it's affected if I wander into the far country knowingly and willingly, then I close off my relationship with the Father and I get miserable. When I fail to pray to him or fail to read the Scriptures or partake of the sacraments or join in the fellowship of the believers, I get lonely and miserable. It's not because my union has been affected, but my sense of communion. The way back from the far country isn't to think, I've got to get saved all over again. I'm already saved in Christ. I simply need to remember that my Father is waiting there, watching down the foreign road with arms open wide for me to return to the awareness of what he's already given me in Jesus Christ.

JMF: So the continuing incarnation has many implications for us as individual believers.

GSD: Sure. One of the most important ones is to realize that God is not done with us yet or with this world. The fact that he still holds our flesh in eternal union with himself indicates that this is not a throw-away world. This is the world that he loves. We are the people that he died to redeem. This is the field where he is working.

Thinking of field, there's a wonderful passage in Jeremiah where on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem, when the Babylonians are coming to conquer the people, the Lord tells Jeremiah to purchase a field. Now talk about a bad real-estate investment, right before your country is about to be overrun, you go and buy land that's about to become worthless. But it was a sign that the Lord was still invested in Jerusalem, still invested in his people. Jeremiah bought that field against the day or in hope for the day when the people would return.

There's a sense in which Jesus bought the "field" of our flesh. He holds it now in heaven for the day when he will return and this world's redemption will be fully worked out, and the world will be made new and set right. Tertullian talked about the double pledge that the ascension gives us, and most of us who have studied the New Testament know about Ephesians 1, where the Spirit in our hearts is the guarantee or the down payment for our hope that we have of being united to Christ in heaven. Tertullian adds that the body of Jesus in heaven is the partner pledge – that because he's holding our flesh in heaven, it's the down payment that we will not live some airy spiritual existence only, but we will be embodied in a full glorified resurrection body. Jesus is the pledge of that.

JMF: We go to church and hear things like this preached, and it sounds exciting and wonderful, and yet deep inside we're feeling, yeah, but I'm pitiful and I'm still a sinner, and where does that leave me? We want to throw our hands up and say, if God's so great and all this is still wonderful, why do I feel so rotten?

GSD: Exactly. For us as preachers and theologians, the bigger a picture we paint of Jesus, then the more accountable our people hold us to say, why isn't this working in my life? Why isn't this transforming me? We have to ask, what is blocking my experience of this reality that Christ has already established? What keeps me from it, besides that fact that we're tired most of the time and we're mortal and we have all kinds of mood swings, and that's just normal. We can think about it along two lines, succinctly, ignorance and obstinance. One: I don't experience enough of God because I don't know enough of who he is, I have a distorted view. The other is: in spite of the fact that I've been redeemed and included in Christ, I still have my old will. I still have the part of me that wants to run away and try to be God myself or run away and do what I want to do like a petulant child. So between these two, of not really expanding my mind enough to see who Christ is, and then of still clinging to self-will, I tend to fall into missing the treasure that I have. So what can be done about that? It's wonderful that the Lord did not call us in abstraction or as isolated individuals. We are called the body of Christ for a reason, and we are joined to his body and we are connected to one another and we need each other. I have a guy that comes to a Bible study on Tuesday mornings. He goes to several studies, and he says, "I know that if I don't get with other Christians, I won't pray and I won't read my Bible. I'm not here because I'm so holy, I go to all these Bible studies because I'm *not* holy and I need the encouragement." The Lord left us the sacraments, particularly regular Communion, and the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, churches classically called it, a means whereby he particularly helps us experience what he's done for us. It says the bread is broken and the cup is passed that I tend to get a fuller sense of the wonder of my forgiveness. One other piece to this concerns the way in which we express the love of Christ in the world. I don't experience so much of God inside me if I'm not moving out to share his love with others through works of love and through sharing the gospel. It's like a river that gets dammed up, and if that water has no place to go, it gets stagnant. So too, Christians weren't meant to receive all these blessings just for ourselves to stop, we're meant to go on. So, often I experience spiritual growth by doing service for others.

JMF: You mentioned a distorted view of God that we can have as individuals. In your book *Jesus Ascended*, on page 91, you mention the doctrine of the ascension keeps us from collapsing our understanding of the person of Christ into any of the Christological distortions of the present age. What are some of those Christological distortions of the present age?

To read the whole transcript or to listen to the You're included video, please visit <https://www.gci.org/media/videos/gerrit-scott-dawson-the-eternal-incarnation/>

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JMF: We appreciate it. We've been talking with Dr. Gerrit Dawson, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Thanks for being with us. I'm Mike Fezell for *You're Included*.

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GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshiphim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website. *Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email—evautour47@outlook.com*