

Gardner Newsletter

Fall 2017

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The Great Lady of the Lake's 100th Birthday

By: Paul Gardner

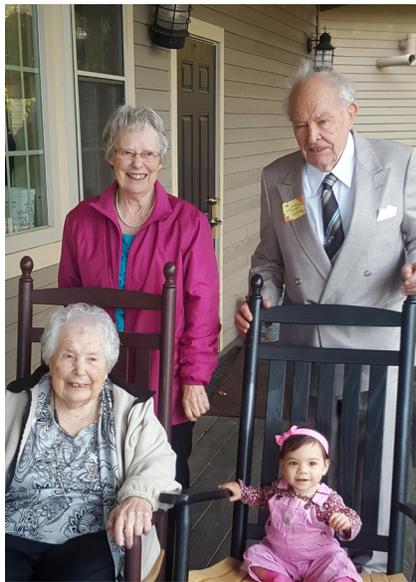
It's a perfect "ten" day on the afternoon of July 15, 2012. Aunt Lois and her niece, Teresa Vasko, are boarding the vessel, Northern Star, for a leisurely cruise around Lake Memphremagog. The Northern Star is a luxury yacht that plies the waters of Lake Memphremagog ferrying passengers from Newport, VT to the lake's distant shores in Canada and back during the summer and fall. Many times, over the years, while sitting on her deck overlooking the lake, Aunt Lois has watched the ship sail across its mirror-like surface. "Today," she said to herself, "I am going to be a passenger on the Northern Star!"

As the Northern Star sailed on its return trip from Canada, it became very dark and started to rain. All of a sudden, and without any warning, the Northern Star started to heave excessively and uncontrollably in an upward and downward motion. Astonishingly, a super squall had engulfed the Northern Star in its clutches and refused to let go. As the ship heaved up and down and the bow and stern crashed against the waves, the wind and the rain pounded the ship mercilessly moving it laterally in a port-starboard position driving the Northern Star off course. Passengers were falling, wailing and screaming.

Because of the huge storm surge, chaise lounges, deck chairs, and the ship's furniture were all crashing into each other and sliding up and down every deck actually threatening passengers' lives. It was apparent that a Titanic-like event was in progress and that the Northern Star was about to become a relic at the bottom of Lake Memphremagog. Would the Northern Star claim everyone on board?

Luckily, it was not to be; for, just as suddenly as the squall had begun, the

whole nightmare ended. Everyone was eerily quiet as they disembarked from the Northern Star after its return to Newport. All passengers were thankful that they had dodged a big bullet. Just ask Cousin Teresa when she plans to take another sailing excursion on Lake Memphremagog!



This picture represents 278 years!

Aunt Lois = 100; Aunt Beulah = 86; Uncle Raymond = 91; Adorable Katherine Nuse = 1

When Teresa and Aunt Lois were finally back on "terra firma," a passenger called out, "Lois! Lois! I want to be just like you! You were smiling the whole time!"

To me, that quote from the passenger who observed Aunt Lois during the height of the typhoon is classic "Lois Cardwell." Who else but our Aunt Lois would face sure impending doom so unperturbed with a Mona Lisa-esq smile on her face?! No one that I know of! It was

as if she *knew in advance* that everything was going to end up well.

Since Aunt Lois' house is built on the shores of Lake Memphremagog, I think it would be quite fitting if we bestowed the title of "Great Lady of the Lake" upon Aunt Lois to commemorate her triumph over the Northern Star's macabre groanings and tortuous writhings which were destined to take everyone to the bottom of the lake.

How's this for some historic irony? The *Lady of the Lake* steam excursion/ferry paddlewheeler started operating in 1867. It stopped operations in 1917, the very year Aunt Lois was born. Now, today, on Aunt Lois' 100th birthday, we have our very own "Great Lady of the Lake." She regularly sails through our hearts weaving a gold thread through the very large tapestry that is all of our lives.

Aunt Lois was born 100 years ago into a very turbulent world. Europe was in total chaos and President Woodrow Wilson had just committed thousands of American troops to France to fight and die in World War I, the Great War, the "war to end all wars." Luckily, she grew up right here in the Northeast Kingdom in East Charleston and Lyndonville in peaceful and bucolic surroundings. Here she grew up to be a fiercely independent young woman with lots of siblings.

Let's fast forward now to the time when Aunt Lois first entered my life. It's now many years past the Great War. Even World War II is over and the Korean conflict has recently ended. It's the early 1950s, and me and my sisters are living with Grandma and Grandpa Gardner, Aunt Lois' parents, in East Charleston. This living arrangement came about because my father, Earl Gardner, Lois' brother, had separated from his wife and Grandma and Grandpa agreed to take us

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in. At this point in their lives, Grandma and Grandpa were “empty nesters.” All ten of their children were married and/or living elsewhere, and Lois was no exception.

Aunt Lois migrated south to Massachusetts where she worked at several different jobs. She finally landed a good job at a bank in Malden MA and worked there for many, many years never missing a day of work and logging in an impressive longevity record. As Aunt Lois began her journey of becoming a single career woman, she would make the trip to Vermont every year to visit her parents and rent a cottage with her friends from Massachusetts on beautiful Lake Seymour. I remember how excited we were when we saw Aunt Lois' jaunty Nash Rambler pull into Grandma and Grandpa's driveway. Jean and I knew we were in for a great summer of sun, swimming, and rowing. We also got to stay with Aunt Lois in her rented cottage along with her friends. All of the Gardner Cousins have experienced how generous Aunt Lois was, and is, with her time and money.

Life and time have a way of separating family and friends, physically, at least. After reuniting with my father and his new wife, Marie, Jean, Linda, and I moved to California where I continued my schooling, right through college. It was now the 1970s and I had returned to Massachusetts to live. The 1970s were a tumultuous time. In some ways, the decade was a continuation of the 1960s. Women, African Americans, Native Americans, gays and lesbians and other marginalized people continued their fight for equality, and many Americans joined the protest against the ongoing war in Vietnam. In other ways, however, the decade was a repudiation of the 1960s. A “New Right” mobilized in defense of political conservatism and traditional family roles, and the behavior of President Richard Nixon undermined many people's faith in the good intentions of the federal government. By the end of the decade, these divisions and disappointments had set a tone for public life that many would argue is still with us today.

In 1970, Aunt Lois' life hit perhaps it's greatest high point up to that time. She met and married Brooks Cardwell. This is

where my life and hers intersected yet again. Brooks was a railroad man, extremely personable, and very compatible with Aunt Lois. They built a beautiful home next to the Ipswich River as it meandered slowly past their front door into the Atlantic Ocean. I used to love to visit Lois, Brooks, and their dog, Nikko, at their house on Little Neck Road in Ipswich. Uncle Raymond's daughters also enjoyed many visits there as well. The girls enjoyed playing in the marshlands and learning about marine flora and fauna right outside the Cardwell's doorstep. Aunt Lois' door is always open to every member of the family!



At this point in my life, I was working at the Marlboro Cooperative Bank and lived in a little house on West Hill Road in Marlboro. A few years into the 1970s, Brooks and Lois bought a huge Gulbransen theater organ. It cost well over \$10,000, and they had to break the moldings in the front door to get it into the house. My, how

I LOVED to play that organ! I had to learn how to operate the organ with its maze of electronic stops, and then I had to extend my footwork to include a full pedal keyboard, since my own little organ only had half a pedal keyboard. Both Lois and Brooks were so patient with me as I became more proficient and played songs and hymns that everyone enjoyed. To this day, I still feel gratitude towards Brooks because he never got mad or complained about how many hours I spent playing that mighty instrument (very loudly). He was the most patient of men. Because of that, he actually helped me to become a better musician.

This is when Aunt Lois came up with a plan. She decided she wanted me to give her organ lessons. She also wanted to buy a new Toyota. She gave me her old 1972 Chevy Malibu and she bought a new Toyota, a car she had for many years. Her plan was to alternate every other week. One week she would drive to Marlboro in her Toyota and I would instruct her on my little bitty organ at my tiny house. The next week, I would drive to Ipswich in the Chevy Malibu she so generously gave me, and I would give her lessons on the massive Gulbransen

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organ. That worked out so well for quite a long time. Boy, I wish I had that 1972 Chevrolet Malibu today! It's a classic and probably worth a lot of money.

Piggy-backing onto Father Time, it's now 1995 and Aunt Lois is living where she lives now on Farrant Street. Sadly, Brooks has passed and she has built this lovely new home on the shores of Lake Memphremagog. I, too, have moved on and I'm living at 28 Ninth Street, in Medford, MA, where I am living now, but in a different apartment. It is yet another death that brings Aunt Lois and I together again.

Charlotte Hall passed away in 1995. She lived in Sudbury and was one of my father's and his siblings' favorite cousins on Grandma Gardner's side of the family, the Frenchs. Charlotte's mother, Marion Spiller, was Grandma Gardner's sister. That family has strong roots in Sudbury, MA and that is where Charlotte passed away. Aunt Ruth, Aunt Lois, Aunt Nita and Dawnita came down and stayed overnight at my apartment in Medford so that we all could attend Charlotte's funeral in Sudbury. Although it was a sad time, it was also a great opportunity for renewal and memory making.

And who can forget the grand gala at The Gateway Center in Newport on October 28, 2007 for Aunt Lois' 90th birthday!? I'm sure many of you were there and remember what a huge event that was. Of course, there have been many more celebrations, parties, weddings, funerals, visits, and events over the last ten years where we have been privileged to be in Aunt Lois' company. We couldn't possibly list them all. This day, her 100th birthday, will certainly go down as one of the most memorable events celebrating the life of this "Great Lady of the Lake."

Perhaps you've noticed in this article that I used several global wars as touchstones to mark personal events in our lives. In addition to the wars mentioned here, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Korean War, there have been many other conflicts that have been waged and are still going on during Aunt Lois' long life. One could think of the Gulf War, wars in Bosnia, Somalia, unrest in the Middle East, Iran-Iraq, Afghanistan, War on Terror—the list goes



on and on. This begs the question. Has humanity really learned anything from all these horrors? Are we ever going to evolve to a higher plane where civilization will at last be at peace with itself? Right now, it appears not.

But you know what? Aunt Lois has the key on how to evolve into a better human being, how to be the best person we want to be. How? *By staying the same!* Now that might sound like a huge contradiction, but think about what Aunt Lois has done all these years. She, indeed all of her sisters have too,

lived by the adage "Make love, not war" many, many years before it was associated with the Hippies in San Francisco and the Vietnam war protestors. They have, literally and figuratively, "made love, not war." Quite simply, they plant the seed, which is love. It sprouts and grows and blossoms and evolves in so many different ways; and then it reveals itself in their families' and friends' lives which become so rich and diverse because of it. It ends up affecting all of us.

Aunt Lois' innate goodness, humility, steadfastness, and child-like faith all spring from the seeds of love that her parents sowed in her heart. I think we can do the same if we try. Let's drink a toast to the "Great Lady of the Lake" whose 100th birthday we celebrate today!

Note: Many others at Aunt Lois' 100th birthday party shared their stories about their interactions with her over the years. We will definitely try to print some more of those in our next issue. If you would please send them to me in writing, I'll get to work on that right away.

Please send your written "remembrances" to Paul Gardner, 28 Ninth Street - Apt. 404, Medford, MA 02155

Thank you.

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COUSIN LORRAINE GARDNER MARRIES STEVE SHELTON IN AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA ON NOVEMBER 25, 2017

(Reprinted from www.sheltonwedding1125.wixsite.com/ourwedding site)

Our Story...

The North meets the South.

A Miracle of Mercy

Lorraine grew up in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Steve was born in Virginia and moved to Georgia

when he was in high school. We both married and have raised families. Steve lost his beloved wife Terri of 35 years in 2014. They have two children, Ashlee and Luke. Lorraine married, and they have

three sons, Tyler, Justin, and Brendon. The marriage ended in divorce in 1999.

Steve moved to Aiken South Carolina in 2006. Lorraine came to Aiken in 2009 because of a work assignment at the Savannah River Site. We both joined Cedar Creek Church on Banks Mill Road.

We met because of the Care Ministries at Cedar Creek Church (CCC). We both participated in Celebrate Recovery, a safe place where we could start our healing from the hurts in our lives. Before we met, Lorraine and Steve sought further healing through Christian counseling with Bob Harris at CCC. Bob has blessed both of us tremendously by walking with us through the pains of our past.

Accountability was important to both of us. So, we

each selected a same-sex partner to help us establish and maintain “guardrails”. Thank you, Andy Stanley, for that study the HOMIES did on relationships. Because of this, we have been able to more easily recognize that God also holds us responsible to honor one another. Receiving God’s grace and the support of others strengthened us to maintain our commitment to purity. What an amazing journey this has been!

Lorraine sold her house in Vermont May 30, 2017. Steve took her out to celebrate selling the house

on June 1, 2017. After supper, Steve wanted to go and visit the statue at Cedar Creek Church where Jesus is washing Peter’s feet. He said that this has been the foundation of our relationship, to serve as Jesus served. He asked if I wanted to sit on the steps on this moonlit night and talk for a while. Of course, Lorraine said yes. Steve

got down on both knees in front of her and asked her “Will you be my life partner? Will you be my wife?”

And he presented her with the ring; and after a very few seconds Lorraine said, “YES, YES, YES!”

The Word of God became the source of strength that provided hope for our futures. We felt the presence of God’s Holy Spirit whenever we met with Bob. Whenever we met with Bob (independently) we felt the presence of God’s Holy Spirit right there in the room with us. God has been our ultimate healer. Bob always lifted us up in prayer at the end of every session. It was amazing because we had a sense of peace because Truth was Spoken in Love.

It was a time of spiritual growth for us. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:18-20, “... truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three gathered together in My name, there I am with them.” Bob (and his wife Kathy), are a



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wonderful blessing and mentors in our lives. We have been blessed beyond our understanding with their friendship.

Scriptures have become the cornerstone for us. For Steve, it is Romans 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship." For Lorraine, it is Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.

Steve's next step in his journey of healing was the Grief Share ministries with Lynette McDuffie and Nancy Jarvis. He followed that by going to "Transitions" with Tim Fitzgerald and Debby Chow. Then Steve was able to step back into leadership with Celebrate Recovery.

Lorraine went to Divorce Care with Nikki Ridenour and Bob Harris. Out of our greatest hurts, God uses our pain to help minister to others. Lorraine became a Stephen's Minister and her care receivers were women who were grieving the loss of their husbands. Then she began a ministry of Single and Parenting with Steve Dorey at CCC. Many friendships developed because of the connections. Those friendships led to the start of a renegade "Home Group" we call the "HOMIES". This was a safe place for single-again folks (who had been through the Care Ministries dealing with their raw pain) to develop friendships and grow

in Christ.

Well, in October 2015, Steve Shelton, was invited to join our "HOMIES" group. This is where we begin to develop a friendship and strengthen our spiritual walk with our Lord.

On Labor Day weekend 2016, the HOMIES ventured to Myrtle Beach for the weekend with the HOMIES' children (girls with girls and boys with boys). Lorraine needed to be back on Sunday to facilitate the Single and Parenting class. As a friend, Steve offered to pick Lorraine up on Friday for this weekend and bring her back so she could facilitate that class. Lorraine eventually agreed. This was a hard decision for Lorraine, so she talked with a couple of close friends, -Rose Puckett and Nikki. Lorraine was liking Steve as more than a friend; however, she did not trust herself - not wanting to fall back into old habits of past relationships prior to her walk with Christ. Rose told her that she had "New Life" in Christ and that she was not who she once was. Hallelujah.

Romans 12:1-2

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

So, Lorraine agreed to go with Steve to Myrtle Beach. With a four-hour trip to Myrtle Beach and a couple of really long beach walks and a four-hour return trip, Steve and Lorraine had a lot of time for great conversation. We spent Monday, Labor Day 2016, together and begin to really see that there have been so many God moments in our relationship. They are too numerous to count. It has been overwhelming and beyond our comprehension. We feel so, so blessed.

Steve's trust in God is so amazing; and because of his faith, he suggested that we take our friendship to the next level (that is another story in and of itself).

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Lorraine agreed.

The bottom line for both of us has been Romans 12:1-2. Steve did not like the idea of dating - it tends to start with a physical relationship in our culture. We both learned from sessions with Bob that to have a healthy relationship you must have a spiritual relationship first, friendship second, and physical only after marriage. We were both in agreement on this Biblical approach to relationships. Lorraine, who loves to research data, discovered that "courtship" is very different from "dating." Courtship is a relationship between a man and woman in which they seek to determine if it is God's will for them to marry each other. It is a choice to wait for God's best, for His glory. However, dating's purpose for the relationship is when men and women choose to date often, having no commitment to consider marrying the other person. So, by the end of September 2016 we agreed to "courtship."

We look forward to this life that God is clearly in the center of it. We have been through a book

called *Sacred Search*, by Gary Thomas. Each chapter is followed by probing questions that we would ask each other and discuss. "What if being in love isn't a good enough reason to get married? What if dating isn't about finding 'the one,' but about serving the one who loves you most?" We have discovered, as Gary Thomas challenged us, to think beyond finding, a "soul-mate", and to looking for a "sole-mate"; someone who will walk with you on your spiritual journey. After all, if you don't know why you marry, you won't know who to marry. LIFE-GIVING LOVE. Gary introduced to us the "why" of marriage, to set us up to make a wise choice about "who". A home established on Matthew 6:33 - Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you" (NKJV) - is a glorious thing. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things." Philippians 4:8.

HAPPY 23rd BIRTHDAY, MEGAN LUDGATE!

To see pictures of her party go
to Gardner News on the web
by clicking here:

[http://www.gardnernews.org/
Raymond's_page.htm](http://www.gardnernews.org/Raymond's_page.htm)



"Don't forget to mail to your editor your written "remembrances" of Aunt Lois so they can be published in the Winter 2018 issue of the newsletter!"

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Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Gilmore



Laura Gilmore - December 25, 2016

Dixie Spitler was married to Earl Gardner, the eldest of Will and Olive Gardner's four sons, at the time he passed away in 1985. Dixie has always had a warm spot in her heart for the Gardner family. Here is her recent touching letter to the Gardner family. Dixie's address is: Dixie Spitler, Box 194, Hudson, IN 46767-0194.

Dear Gardner Family,

This is a way too far, long overdue letter. What a wonderful family to be a part of. I'm so very thankful to have been a part of this family. I have many, many happy memories. I got to travel every year from California to the East Coast just to visit for a short time. I enjoy families that are close like you are. I am very close to mine also.

Earl always made Laura and me happy. We did so many fun things, always on the go. Laura learned all the capitals and correct spelling of every state. As we traveled all over, if Laura saw someone with sunglasses, she would go ask them for their autograph; because, if they wore sunglasses, she thought they were famous. Earl was a patient man and so kind and gentle. Laura loved him so much. He taught her a lot about life and how to live it.

My family is still growing. I now have 24 grandchildren, 37 great grandchildren, and one on the way, come January 8, 2018; also, at this time, in that same timeframe, my first great great grandchild. Isn't that just the most wonderful thing that can happen?!

This one picture of me with seven of my

children was taken a little over two years ago. Since then, I have lost the one on the far right-hand side. His name was Daniel Richard. He was born on Christmas day, 1963.

The cats are Shad-y and Rach-y. Laura had two cats named Meshach and Abednego. I told her if I ever got a boy cat, I would name him Shadrach. I got two cats, so Shad-y (boy, gray and white) and Rach-y (girl, black and white). They sure a lot of company. Since my husband, Bruce, died, they've helped me through three strokes and a broken hip.

I have 23 % of my kidneys and another stent in my heart last year at this time. Also, I had pneumonia in March. I am a mess. Ha! Ha! I turned 81 years old on October 18, 2017. I sure don't know where all this time has gone.

The other pictures are of Laura getting married on Christmas Day last year. She gave us her news on the day it happened. What a Christmas present! She is very happy. She just turned 40 last year. There were only ten people in the whole wedding!

From the newsletter pictures, everyone looks great. It's so sad the numbers keep getting smaller. I love you all very much! So long for now. If we don't see each other down here, I don't mind a trip up through the clouds.

God Bless You and Yours, Dixie

P.S. Laura lives in Waltham, MA 02451 at 87 Overland Road. Phone: 1-(617) 309-7846. She is now Mrs. Marcus Gilmore.



Kitty-Kats Shad-y and Rach-y



Left to right, back row: Randy, Laura, Rick, Suzy, Dan
Left to right, front row: Sherry, me, Diana
Photo taken Summer of 2014

PASTOR DAN WHITNEY'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE GARDNER FAMILY

(Transcribed from <http://www.mcnaz.com/sermons/?month=december-2015&view=calenda>. Pastor Dan's Sunday morning sermon on December 20, 2015 at the Manchester, CT Church of the Nazarene)

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES FORETELL OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT WITH HUMANITY

You may have heard some people say, repeat, this particular slogan this year—I've heard it a few times, seen it on Facebook, "Let's keep Christ in Christmas!" I think I know what they mean by that. There was a time, when I was younger, where we would see signs that said, "Merry Xmas." Some folks thought we shouldn't see that. We should see "Merry Christmas." We should keep "Christ" in Christmas; but you probably already know that for hundreds and hundreds of years, the Greek letter "Chi," which is "X," has always been the abbreviation for Christ. So, even when you try to say "Merry Xmas," you're still saying "Merry Christmas." It's the same thing, exactly.

Of course, whether you spell it with an "X" or you spell it with a C-H-R-I-S-T, it's easy to lose "Christ" in the middle of the hub-bub of Christmas. This morning, I'd like to, I guess, "stretch" the sentiment a little bit. I would like to pose another idea to go along with the idea of keeping Christ in Christmas. What I would propose is that, in addition to keeping Christ in Christmas, I think we need to keep Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi in Christmas.

The letters aren't there, but Jeremiah tells us that a righteous branch from David's line will appear. Isaiah tells us that the name of the branch will be "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Micah tells us that this Everlasting Father will be born in Bethlehem, and Malachi tells us that John will announce his coming; and that, when he comes, he will come as a "refiner's fire." Those are just a few of the prophecies that tell us who Jesus will be when he comes.

We understand the events in Bethlehem because we are prepared for those events by the prophets of the Old Testament. If you want to understand what Christmas means, you need both Testaments together. Let me just highlight two of the old testament prophecies. Micah 5:2. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

"Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." The one who's coming to be born in Bethlehem, his life doesn't begin at Bethlehem. He's the "ancient of





PASTOR DAN WHITNEY'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE GARDNER FAMILY {CONTINUED}

days." That's what Micah is telling us. What did Jeremiah say, Jeremiah 31, among other things? "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The one who is coming is going to establish a new

covenant with his people. God made promises to Israel that he fulfills through the birth of Jesus Christ, and through the life of Jesus Christ. Some of those promises took many, many years to fulfill. Israel demonstrated a lack of hope that they would ever be fulfilled. But God is not slow in keeping his promises, regardless of how we measure time. I wonder, if in the midst of the chaos of our lives, we believe that he keeps the promises he makes to us.

Let me read you just a snippet, a tiny little

piece of this Christmas story from the Gospel according to Luke, First Chapter, Verse 39, just a piece of the story. This is a piece of the story where Mary has discovered that she's pregnant and she sort of goes into hiding/isolation for a few months, visiting Elizabeth. She's getting out of town for a piece, if you will.



Manchester Connecticut Church of the Nazarene

"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as

the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy," Elizabeth said. "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" God fulfills promises! The promises he made to Mary were hard to believe. "Jesus will be born to a virgin." That's tough to believe. "Jesus would live a life that was sinless." Maybe tougher to believe. But according



PASTOR DAN WHITNEY'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO THE GARDNER FAMILY {CONTINUED}

to the prophets, the sacrifice of Jesus' life would be sufficient to provide forgiveness for all the sin and evil in the world; and, through Christ, God would establish a new covenant with all of humanity. Now there's a promise that's hard to believe!

It seems impossible. If you look at the train wreck of our society, the brokenness and the pain, the evil across all of human history, are you telling me, Pastor Dan, that this child who is born is God's answer to all of the evil that exists in the world? That is the promise. That *is* the promise. Think about it with me. In creation, God gives humanity free will, the freedom to choose to do good; the freedom to choose to do evil. God's balancing act created even before he created humanity, was that he, himself, through his son, would provide forgiveness for all the evil they conceived to do.

He gave them free will knowing they would do evil. Every once in a while we scratch our heads, and say, "God, don't you think it would have been better if you'd just made us robots so that we would choose to do good all the time, because now we have to endure all this evil that we choose to do?" But in God's infinite wisdom, and out of the creativity of his heart of love, he gives us real choices to make. We can choose good, or we can choose evil; but his plan from the beginning, knowing who he would be, his solution, his "balancing act" for all of eternity was Jesus.

He knew we'd fail to do good. Jesus is God's answer to his choice to give us free will. He is the one provided to rescue us

from the evil we would choose to do. That is the promise revealed to us through Jeremiah's prophecy. This is what it means for Jesus to come into the world. This is explained to us in the book of Hebrews in the 10th chapter. Listen to these words, Hebrews 10: 5 and following:

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me'—he's speaking to his Father—with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.'"

Here's the explanation that the Hebrews author supplies. First, he said, speaking of Jesus, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings, and sin offerings, you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them, though they were offered in accordance with the law." Then he said, "Here I am. I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first—meaning, the first covenant—to establish the second—meaning the new covenant. By that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once, for all.

Verse 11: "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again, and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest—Jesus— and offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has

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made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

The Holy Spirit also testifies about this. First, he says, “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I’ll remember no more.” And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.”

The Jews had been given a system to deal with sin, so that right and wrong could be clearly identified. But identifying wrong actions was not enough, and the identification system didn’t do anything to stop the evil, to end the sinning. It was powerless to do that. But Christ came as a priest to offer one ultimate sacrifice that would provide God’s solution for evil once, and for all time.

Humans would enjoy free will and by the free choice of the creative act of God. But to counteract the effects of our choices, God provides a way; both for us to be forgiven from the guilt of our sin, but also to give us the power that we by his grace may stop sinning, stop making those bad choices. This is what God promised to do through the prophet Jeremiah and the Old Testament prophets. This is what Jesus delivers to the world by being born in Bethlehem and by following his Father’s plan for his life.

The coming of Christ into the world means this: God keeps his promises to us! The question for us, today, is: Do we believe

that God has kept this promise to us? Jesus is our priest. He is the one who has completed his work.

There was a movement in Judaism just after AD 70. AD 70 was the time that the temple in Jerusalem was crushed, demolished, wiped out; and when that happened, the sacrificial system came to an end. Sacrifices had to be made on the altar in the temple; and when there was no temple—well, you can’t offer sacrifices if there’s no temple to offer them in anymore. The sacrificial system of Judaism ended at that time.

There was movement to try to re-establish the sacrificial system that God had organized. One of the reasons it failed was this. Many of the Jews who had heard of Christ, and understood what his message was, and had embraced him—and all of the early church, together, began to realize something—there wasn’t a need for sacrifices anymore, because one sacrifice had been made. One perfect, complete, a once-for-all-time sacrifice had fulfilled the whole system. Jesus was that Messiah. He has already made the perfect sacrifice.

By sitting-down at the right hand of the Father, the sitting-down metaphor is this: You know how humanity is! We do the same things wrong again and again and again. So, the priest’s job is asking for confession and forgiveness again and again and again and again and again! It’s sort of like the “revolving door of the priesthood,” in-and-out, in-and-out. People keep doing the same things. Jesus says, “Enough of that!

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Enough of that! I'm going to offer the perfect sacrifice that's going to give you the power to do something about sinning!"

By his grace, it's possible for us to be forgiven and rest in his promise. We can stop. The teaching of the Church was, "Jesus has made the perfect sacrifice, and he sat down to demonstrate he was done with sin. Sin had been judged. Evil has been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, it's just a matter of a mopping-up operation."

What did Jeremiah say? "He would sit at his Father's throne until his enemies were made his footstool," until all the scattered pieces of his victory were cleaned up. Jesus has already passed judgment on the evil of the world. He has taken into himself all the evil that exists and judged it. He has judged the forces of Satan and defeated them; and, now, to all of the members of his family, he has provided the once-for-all-time sacrifice that assures us of salvation, of forgiveness of sins, of freedom of our guilt, of release from shame—all of this, "this"—and the power by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, to stop making choices that will lead us back into evil. He's written his law in our hearts, so that we *know* it when we mess up. He's given us his Spirit, so that we can follow the law of love. He has given us birth into his family, so we can be identi-

fied as one of his. He has done everything that can be done, so that we might be rescued from ourselves; and now he waits for our response.

Lifeguards will tell you that one of the most dangerous things they have to face is rescuing someone who is panicked and thinks they're drowning, because they will fight back on the rescue process. They

will swing their arms, or do whatever they can because of the panic of being afraid of drowning. The lifeguard has got to understand, when they jump into the water, that the person they're rescuing may not say to them, "Oh, thanks for coming out here and helping me!" But

instead, might scream and yell—lifeguards have gotten punched in the face by people they're trying to rescue, have been seriously injured; because people who are in pain, thrash about a good bit! We see that in lots of settings in society.

The fact that Jesus comes is good news, to forgive us and to liberate us, doesn't mean that news is going to be accepted well everywhere. There's a whole lot of "thrashing" going on. In our pain, and fear, and panic, we lash out at those around us. We have trouble believing that God wants to rescue us, that God loves us.

But the incredibly good news today is that God loves you and is willing to forgive you for everything. There's nothing more you



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need to do—there's nothing more anyone can do—Jesus has offered a complete sacrifice for you. God has kept his promise to you. You don't have to bring peace offerings. You don't have to improve your game until you feel better about yourself. You only have to unwrap the gift that Jesus gives. That's all there is to it.

How does that gift unwrap? How do you receive this promise of God, given in Christ? Well, first of all, you must accept the gift. Accepting the gift means believing that what Jesus has supplied will actually accomplish what it says it will accomplish. If what Jesus came to bring is a new covenant, a new relationship with God, we have to believe that what we've received *is* a new relationship with God, a new of interacting, a new way of understanding who God is and how he loves us, and how he wants to use us to accomplish his mission in the world.

You believe that what God provides will accomplish what it promises to accomplish, based on your confession that God has, indeed, forgiven you. To say that you do not need to confess the evil you have done, is the same as saying you don't need the gift. That's the same as not accepting the gift, because the gift is "forgiveness"; and you accept it by admitting that you need it. Then you embrace the law that has been written on your heart. You begin to follow his ways. You begin to trust that he will keep his promises to you. You begin to believe that the Holy Spirit will give you a clue about what it means to please him, that he will lead you away from sin and towards righteousness, that he will plot a

new path in life for you, and that everything will be different.

When we receive the gift that Christ came to give, from that day on, we are new people. We're new creatures. Everything has changed. We head in a new direction. We get the invitation to sing with the angel choir. Did you know that? Did you know you have that invitation, that when you accept the gift that Christ has come to offer, this new life, you're enrolled in choir; and, whether you can carry a tune or not, the message is the same, "Peace on earth, good will to all mankind on whom his favor rests." That becomes the text of our lives. After that, we become men and women of peace. We become men and women of good will, to announce the favor of God to all humanity. That's who we become when we accept this gift.

Christmas can be that for you, if you haven't unwrapped this gift yet. It can be the first step in a new life, a life free from judgment and condemnation, a life full of joy living in the family of Christ, embracing all of the promises he makes to us. This gift of Christ is simply one gift you simply must unwrap.

Have you opened the gift of Christ? Do you understand what he's come to bring you? Do you recognize that he's given everything, so that you can know how much he loves you? That, if you will enter into this loving relationship with him, by his Spirit, he promises to guide you? That, forgiveness and shame and guilt can be things in the past, and you can live in this new relationship with Christ where, together,

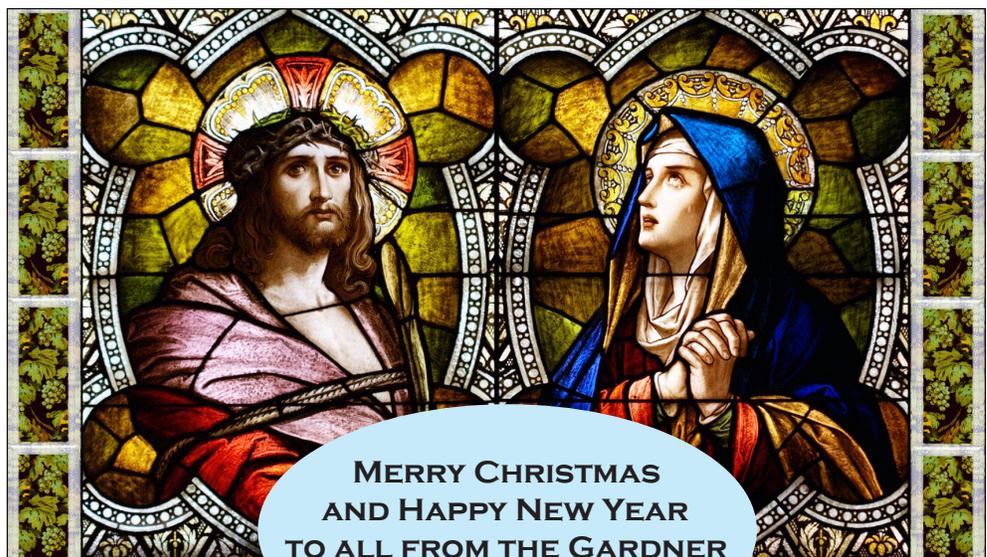
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you work out your salvation with him? It's a blessed gift!

It's been God's plan for you since before he created us. This isn't a last-minute shopping idea, and God thinking, "Oh, I need one more gift, here. What will I do?" It's not that. This has been his antidote to the problem of evil in the world forever, that through you he would proclaim peace and good will to all humanity on whom God's favor rests, and that you could live and dwell and breathe in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father forever.

It's my prayer that you will open that gift, that you will live in the fullness of the love of God for you, that you will believe that he's able to accomplish all that he promised, and that his promises include you. Let's pray together.

"Lord Jesus, in the quiet of this moment, we invite you to come and help us perceive the gifts that you bring to us again. Help us to believe the promises you make to us. Help us to believe that our sins have been accounted for in your blood. Help us to believe that your word, your law, has been written on our hearts, and that your Spirit has come to enable us to live victoriously in you. Help us to believe, Lord, even when we let you down, that your grace is sufficient for us, and that your strength is made perfect in our weakness. Help us to rejoice in the fact that we are yours. Thank you for coming as fulfillment of the promises of God, and may our holiday celebrations be filled with joy as we consider the grand way in which you keep your promises to us. We pray this in the name of Christ, Amen."



**MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL FROM THE GARDNER
NEWSLETTER**

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A few scenes from Aunt Lois' 100th birthday at the East Side Restaurant in Newport, VT on November 4, 2017



Head Table, Left to right: Katrina Jenkins, Gloria Parsons, Beulah Griffes, Lois Cardwell, Raymond Gardner, Megan Ludgate, Teresa Vasko



Left: Richard Colburn and his sister, Audrey Frizzell. Richard and Audrey are "big wigs" with the Charleston Historical Society where all the issues of the Gardner Newsletter reside for future generations.

Right: Gardner Cousins, Beautiful Ladies: Nancy Whitney, Diane Gardner, Cindy Dezotelle, Becky Beaudoin and Sharon Gardner



Left: Original Gang of Ten Members: Beulah Griffes, Lois Cardwell, Raymond Gardner

Right: Sample case of wool swatches for men's suits that Grandpa Gardner used to sell many years ago. Our own Cousin Teresa Vasko found it while sorting through some things.

