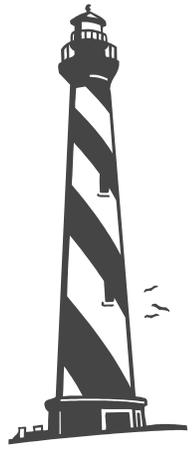


THE BEACON BEAM

May 2021



DISCERNING THE TIMES

COVID-19 ATE OUR FIG LEAVES

by Allen S. Nelson IV

Novel corona, perennial issue. That issue is, we are all headed toward death. Death is the most final state any living human can enter, though we know there is life after death for some, and eternal dying after death for others.

Our culture has forgotten our frailty. Or, it's not so much that society has *forgotten* it, so much as people have done a good job at hiding it. Like Adam and Eve, we have donned fig leaves to cover our exposure (Genesis 3:7), only to find that COVID-19 has eaten them up. And now we are scrambling for a solution.

The Emperor's New Clothes

There is the classic children's tale from Hans Christian Andersen of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. I remember when we read it in class as a child that the emperor was a lion. This made it a bit less awkward that he was walking around naked while everyone pretended that he was wearing clothes. The irony is no one wants to admit they cannot see the clothes because they don't want to appear stupid. But, how ridiculous is it to walk

around exposed all the while pretending you are covered?

Yet, this is the essence of our fig leaf life. We have all been involved in the fall of man through Adam (Romans 5:12), but pretend like everything is okay. So many pretend to be intelligent as they walk around with complicated philosophical musings about the world, humanity, and even the afterlife. What they fail to accept is that apart from Christ, they are the walking dead.[1]

You Shall Surely Die

God said Adam and Eve would surely die if they ate from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. And yet, they ate, and here they are in Genesis 3:7 throwing together fig leaves, not dead. But, as Dan Phillips writes, "Not dead? Are you sure? You don't think they died right away? I think they did. Just like that. It simply took their bodies a few centuries to catch up to the fact." [2]

The wages of sin is death. These wages first earned by Adam and Eve are still our inheritance. Death is like a trust fund that never

runs out. Every human being gets a cut. This has been the human reality for millennia.

What 21st century Westerners have gotten really good at is prolonging the inevitable. Billions of dollars are spent every year keeping people not only *from* dying, but even from the appearance of old age.

Of course, we should be grateful for the advancement of medical technology, longer life spans, low infant mortality rates, and the like. Praise God for modern medicine.

It appears, however, that medicine has become just another fig leaf we've added to our wardrobe. It has made us push the inescapable out of our minds. In our pride we modeled our beautiful dress down the runway, only to have COVID-19 destroy it.

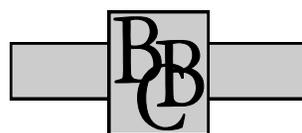
Naked and Afraid

Here we are now, naked and afraid. And it's not as though the corona virus is as deadly as the bubonic plague. It is, however, deadly enough to remind us something we already

(Continued on page 2)

Beacon Baptist Church

1622 Kirkpatrick Road
Burlington, NC 27215
(336) 226-5205
beaconbaptist.com
beaconbaptist@beaconbaptist.com



Gregory N. Barkman, *Senior Pastor*
Michael R. Karns, *Minister of Christian Education*
Robert F. LaTour, *Minister of Families*
Gregory L. Phillips, *Minister of Music*

Sunday

Morning Worship...9:30 AM
Sunday School.....11:10 AM
Evening Worship.....6:00 PM

Wednesday

Prayer Meeting.....7:00 PM
IMPACT Clubs.....7:00 PM
Teen Ministry.....7:00 PM

(Continued from page 1)

know – we are living on borrowed time and one day we will have to give an account for our loan.

I do not mean to dismiss the fact that death is a serious issue, even for the Christian. It's one of the most difficult things to go through in losing someone you love. But our great hope is beyond this life. And there is no other way to that gate to the Celestial City but through the river of death.

The world does not have this hope. And so, when something as serious as the COVID-19 pandemic comes along, it exposes their hearts and panic ensues. The world is now dealing with what they try so hard not to accept – each person's frail life is just a mist, a blip on the radar, and then it's gone, and eternity awaits.

So, What Will We Do?

This post is more of an observation than an attempt to propose any hard and fast solutions. I do, however, have two closing applicatory thoughts.

First, we must remember we are dust and to dust we shall return. May Christians give their lives over

fully to Christ in all ways. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. May we eschew any idols we've had in our own lives, including the idol of a life unencumbered by pandemic. What we consider extraordinary as Christians in the 21st century, some of our brothers and sisters have had to deal with (and worse) for much of their lives the last 2,000 years.

Secondly, it may be that the exposure caused by COVID-19 will precipitate sinners to seek another covering. That is, instead of picking up their shredded fig leaves, perhaps they will be looking for something else to wear. And this is where we have the opportunity to preach Christ to them and offer them His robes of righteousness if they will repent of their sins and believe the gospel.

These are unique times, beloved. May we redeem the time well for our neighbors' good, and God's glory.

[1] See chapter 2 of *From Death to Life: How Salvation Works* (Free Grace Press, 2018).

[2] *The World Tilting Gospel*, p. 47

Allen S. Nelson IV is the pastor of Perryville Second Baptist Church in Perryville, AR, where he resides with his wife Stephanie, and their 5 children. Allen is the author of *From Death to Life: How Salvation Works* and *Before the Throne: Reflections on God's Holiness*. His other titles include blogger, rookie podcaster, and occasional conference speaker. Most importantly, he is a recipient of the undeserved grace of God.



The secret of a vigorous, powerful, everyday Christianity—is to be ever "Looking unto Jesus!" The glorious company of the Apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the saints who in every age and land have made their mark on mankind, and turned the world upside down, all have had one common mint-stamp upon them. They have been men who lived "Looking unto Jesus!" The expression of the text is one of those pithy golden sayings which stand out here and there on the face of the New Testament, and demand special attention. It is like "to me to live is Christ," "Christ is all and in all," "Christ, who is our life," "He is our peace," "I live by the faith of the Son of God." (Philip. 1:21 ; Colos. 3:4, 11; Ephes. 2:14; Gal. 2:20.) To each and all of these sayings, one common remark applies. They are rich in thought and food for reflection. They contain far more than a careless eye can see on the surface.

In the phrase "*looking unto Jesus*," it is useful and interesting to remember that the Greek word which, in our English Bible, we render "looking," is only found here in the New Testament. Literally translated it means "looking off," looking away from other objects to one, only one, and looking on that one with a steady, fixed, intent gaze. And the object we are to look at, you will observe, is a PERSON—not a doctrine, not an abstract theological dogma—but a living Person; and that Person is Jesus the Son of God. How much matter for thought lies there!

—J. C. Ryle

MASKS, VACCINES, AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

by Greg Barkman

No one will deny that Covid-19 has drastically altered nearly every aspect of our lives. It has caused sweeping changes in how we work, eat, recreate, worship, and most of all, how we relate to others. We did not expect this pandemic, but it came without invitation, intruding into every area of life as we knew it. Some of the most serious repercussions are the controversies caused by masks, vaccines, and other responses to this virus. People have widely differing opinions. These differences impact more than individual preferences, but also social relationships. Friendships have been strained and in some cases dissolved over masks, vaccines, and social distancing. For some, if you don't see things their way, they want nothing to do with you. This is tragic in any area, but especially when it affects churches. Divisions within Christ's body are a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. One pastor said to me, only half joking, that I should preach on "Masks or no masks, that is the question." Therefore, at the risk of offending nearly everyone, I will venture where angels fear to tread.

MASKS. Assertions and opinions multiply faster than fruit flies. How can we tell what is true and what is false? For many, the answer boils down to, "I believe the claims that I agree with, and consider false whatever contradicts my settled opinion." That's not the most scientific approach, but it certainly simplifies matters. But scientists are referenced for diametrically opposing positions. Clearly science is neither infallible nor unified. No wonder disagreements abound.

Do masks help retard the spread of Covid? Most believe they

do, but some doubt that claim. Do masks compound matters by creating their own set of health problems? Many deny that assertion, but personal experience tends to support it. For myself, I often start coughing after wearing a mask for several minutes, and sometimes experience mild pain in my chest from mask wearing. Both

Divisions within Christ's body are a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. One pastor said to me, only half joking, that I should preach on "Masks or no masks, that is the question."

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of these symptoms disappear as soon as I lower my mask. I assume the explanation is simple oxygen deprivation. I have a-fib, a common heart condition, and interfering with my ability to breathe creates problems. Some believe that breathing into a mask for several minutes encourages the growth of bacteria in the mask, which can create more serious problems when inhaled into the lungs. Is this true? I do not know, but it appears a reasonable possibility. No wonder masks have become a bone of contention.

SOCIAL DISTANCING. Practicing "social distancing" by avoiding direct physical contact, and maintaining a reasonable distance from others is an almost universally required response to this virus. But how much is required? Six feet is standard, but I have read articles that claim that we

really need to separate from twelve to eighteen feet to be truly effective. On the other hand, the CDC recently reduced the required standard from six to three feet. So which is it? Do we need more distance, or less? If we really didn't need that old standard of six feet, how can we be sure that the new standard of three feet is truly necessary? It's no wonder that some are suspicious that all these restrictions are more about government control of people than safety. But how can we be sure? Are we willing to take the chance of getting infected and infecting others?

ISOLATION. The most extreme form of social distancing is total isolation, such as has been imposed in hospitals, rest homes, and voluntarily in private homes by many people who consider themselves to be particularly vulnerable. But whereas this may protect against infection, it clearly creates a whole different set of problems. How many elderly people have died simply because they were cut off from all social contact with family and friends? Although it is impossible to offer an exact number, observation indicates that the numbers are probably considerable. How many people isolating at home have developed depression or other emotional problems? Some are taking prescriptions for depression that bring problems of their own, and how many Christians have suffered spiritually from being cut off from the fellowship of the Saints? God knows that His people need to be with a body of believers to maintain good spiritual health. He designed the church for a reason, and unending months of isolation can take a serious toll. Electronic

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media can help, but nothing can replace personal participation with your local church.

INFECTED SURFACES. In the beginning, we were told to super clean every available surface that could possibly spread the infection. Now we know that few are infected by touching surfaces. Airborne particles are the primary source of infection, and a more relaxed approach to cleaning has resulted from this new information.

VACCINES. The USA produced several effective Covid-19 vaccines in record time during the Trump administration. These are now being distributed, and President Biden predicts that all American adults will have a vaccine available to them by the end of May, if not sooner. The question is, will everyone be willing to cooperate? Clearly, many are hesitant. Some are merely cautious, while others are militantly opposed. Questions abound. Are vaccines safe? Are they effective? What are the side effects? It doesn't help that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was suspended after a few people developed blood clots. Skeptics are wondering if the various vaccines have been sufficiently tested to certify their safety. Strong measures may very well be applied to pressure people into compliance. In the end, probably none but the most determined will remain unvaccinated. Hopefully, that will be a sufficient number to reach herd immunity and bring the virus under control.

COMMON SENSE. With all the many claims being propounded, perhaps the most reasonable approach is to stop trying to figure out who's right and who's wrong, and simply use your own mind to apply old fashioned common sense. Do masks help? I don't see how they can fail to help. Since we now know that most infections are caused by airborne particles, mask are bound to offer some

protection. They cut down on the spread of particles from your mouth to others, and also reduce the number of particles you inhale. It's just common sense. What about social distancing? Physical contact is now known to be less problematic than previously thought, but breathing air exhaled by an infected person is still dangerous. So yes, social distancing is still a reasonable safeguard. What about vaccines? I plan to get vaccinated at some point, but have delayed doing so because I was infected with Covid in December and have recovered nicely. I believe I still possess a sufficient number of antibodies to be safe for now. However, I know these antibodies will gradually recede, and I will need a vaccine eventually. I expect to get one within a few weeks. I am waiting to see what problems may or may not develop among those who are vaccinated, especially those who, like myself, have already experienced Covid. That will aid in making an informed decision as to which vaccine to take and when.

CHRISTIAN CONSIDERATIONS.

Is there a Biblical position in this crisis? Yes, I believe there is. First of all, Christians are commanded to obey governing authorities in all things with the exception of a government command to disobey a command of Christ. Masks, social distancing, and vaccines do not fall into this category. Too many Christians see these issues as political statements disapproving of the current presidential administration, or as a bulwark against the inroads of big government. I understand these concerns. However, my first duty is not to the United States Constitution, as important as this is, but to Christ. As a Christian, I must submit myself to God's Word, regardless of how I feel about political issues. The Bible tells me to obey, and by God's grace, I intend to do so.

But second, as Christians we are commanded to love our neighbor as our self, even putting others above

ourselves. Wearing a mask is not first about me, but others. I personally detest wearing a mask. I do not believe I am in danger of being infected or infecting others. But I wear a mask for the sake of my Christian testimony, and a statement of loving concern to others. Likewise, social distancing and vaccines are not primarily about me, but others. Let's not be guilty of loving ourselves more than our neighbor, or more than Christ, who commands us to esteem others better than ourselves. It's not all about me. It's about my Savior, His commands, and proclaiming His love to others. We should all give prayerful consideration to these things.

On The Feminine Side

Marti Barkman

Much has been written about the difficulty of life in 2020 and the focus is now turning to our hopes for better in 2021. Now here we are at May 2021, four months down with eight to go and it seems, in reference to the pandemic, that our lives have made a turn in a positive direction. Businesses are opened, traffic is heavy, stores and restaurants are once again crowded. The easing of restrictions accompanied by the gorgeous spring weather has certainly had a cheering effect! And the daily reading of the numbers connected with Covid 19 are encouraging. Here in our world, activities for the Beacon congregation are gearing up. We are two weeks into the return of Sunday School, some evening services are scheduled, and we are looking forward to worshipping together this year on Homecoming Sunday.

Until we met again two weeks ago, I hadn't realized just how much I was missing the weekly meetings with dear friends in Sunday School. Our first week back in class we revisited and finished the book we had been working through when the shut-down began and the second Sunday we talked through specifics of the past 13 months—our struggles, the significant events that took place, the hardest aspect of our very abnormal lives, our biggest attitude struggle, the truth that became the most important one to remember, the best aspects of the shutdown, and the changes in our priorities. By far, the truth that God is in control of every aspect of our lives carried over into every area. There were many good things that took place; people enjoyed staying home more, getting house and yard work done, time with family, and even one class member could report a significant weight loss! On the negative side, a business struggling to make their payroll every week, living in isolation for months

on end, inconveniences and uncertainties, not knowing whether to believe what we are told—God was faithful in every case... payroll was made, most isolation is relaxed, and uncertainties? We'll always have them, but what we really *need* to know, *we know for certain!*

May 16 we will celebrate 48 years of God's grace, worshipping, learning, and serving together at Beacon. Hasn't God been good to us! And faithful! It's been a blessing to us personally, to live in the same county for all these years, to grow up and grow old with so many of the same dear friends. Greg and I had been married not quite three years when we moved here. In those days, most pastors didn't stay long in a church, and my biggest concern was whether we would stay long enough for me to bother to make drapes for the house. Forty-eight years has been more than enough! And this month, Greg and I will celebrate our 51st year of marriage. How grateful we are to still be here and able to serve God together. May we finish well!

For the rest of our lives we'll speak of '2020' as we do '911', the reference to an event more significant than we yet know. But let's talk instead about 20/20, the number that refers to normal vision. "20/20 vision is a term used to express normal visual acuity (the clarity or sharpness of vision) measured at a distance of 20 feet. If you have 20/20 vision, you can see clearly at 20 feet what should normally be seen at that distance." How is your vision after a year of upheaval? Are you seeing clearly from a distance of a few months what transpired in your life in 2020? Or is your vision clouded by so many changes, shifted priorities, living as you've never lived before? Have we put any important elements of our lives in storage for later consideration? This is a good

time to pause and take stock. Priorities, by their very nature, require starting with #1. We surely don't have to think long and hard about that! Our relationship to God rules all the other aspects of our lives! I was struck by a statement in a commentary on King David's prayer of praise and thanksgiving in I Chronicles 16, a prayer which is a composite of four Psalms. The occasion was the return of the Ark to Jerusalem. The Ark was the primary symbol of God's presence and power, and the centerpiece of their worship. After years without its presence, its return was cause for great rejoicing and celebration. "Worship of God's presence and power, diligently undertaken, will transform and embolden us as we call upon God's strength. *Worship is transformative engagement with God.*"

We are well into the re-entry phase. Are we engaging with God yet? May God give us 20/20 vision to see a clear picture of our hearts, minds, and ways. That clarity will come as we worship, both privately and corporately. We all hope for change for the better in 2021. That change that will transform life can be found in the worship of our great God!

Gospel Help for Christian Divisions

by

Tom Ascol

Christian unity is a great blessing. It is the celebrated subject of one of David's songs (Psalm 133). It was part of our Lord's high priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus prayed to the Father that His disciples "may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21; cf. vv. 22-23). The Apostle Paul echoes our Lord's concern when he admonishes us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

No wonder, then, that disunity and divisions among Christians are so grievous. To love Christ and to love His ways necessarily means that failure to live in unity with fellow believers brings genuine sorrow. Yet, not even the apostles and those they disciples were spared the sadness of division. Paul and Barnabas experienced this heartache. They had traveled throughout Galatia making disciples and planting churches together, having been commissioned by their home church in Antioch. Barnabas had put his reputation on the line to help Paul gain credibility in the Christian community after the latter's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Yet, in a discreet and understated way, Luke informs us that between them "there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other" (Acts 15:39).

Divisions between Christians are never desirable, but sometimes they are unavoidable. Paul says that at times they are even necessary (1 Co-

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rinthians 11:18-19). When are those times? Whatever else may be said in answer to that question we must certainly put rejection of any clear teaching of God's Word that impinges on the saving gospel message at the head of the list. I cannot imagine any serious Christian disagreeing with this judgment.

But often Christian unity is fractured not by outright rejection of truth, but by neglect of it, or an unwillingness to own it with all of its implications when doing so is costly. It is then that cries for unity often ring loudest but at the same time most hollow. A verbal stand for truth in theory while refusing to stand for it in practice is no less a rejection of it than outright denial. Such spiritual jujutsu may satisfy the undiscerning but it will not pass muster with those who count the truth of God's Word precious and have paid a high price to own it. Attempted unity with such theoreticians is impossible with those determined to live practically under the authority of God's Word. As Charles Spurgeon notes, "that union which is not based upon the truth of

God is rather a conspiracy than a communion."

Still, separation from those who name the Name of Christ is never pleasant for Christians. I have often wondered, especially in the last few years, what the parting of Paul and Barnabas must have been like when they went their separate ways. Perhaps Scripture's silence on this point signals something of the depth of sorrow they both felt. Whether or not that is true, what we do know is that the gospel of our crucified, risen Lord is sufficient to help us as we try to live faithfully in the wake of unavoidable separations.

Rather than trying to score points for "our team" by making the "other side" look bad, we all have many reasons to remember Jesus Christ, and all that He bears from us each day.

John Newton offers sound counsel on this point in a letter that he wrote to John Whitford. Citing Romans 15:3, "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me," Newton reminds us that whatever reproaches we bear from others do not begin to compare with what our Lord regularly

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bears from us.

So, as we stand, unbending in our convictions, may we strive to do so with humility and genuine love for those with whom we disagree. Consider Newton's words to his friend:

I am persuaded, that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ, and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our Master... Our Lord has not only taught us to expect persecution from the world, though this alone is a trial too hard for flesh and blood; but we must look for what is much more grievous to a renewed mind, to be in some respects slighted, censured, and misunderstood, even by our Christian brethren; and that, perhaps in cases where we are really striving to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, and cannot, without the reproach of our consciences, alter our conduct, however glad we should be to have their approbation. Therefore we are required, not only to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, but likewise to bear on another's burdens; which plainly intimates there will be some-

thing to be borne with on all hands; and happy indeed is he that is not offended. You may observe what unjust reports and surmises were received, even at Jerusalem, concerning the apostle Paul; and it seems he was condemned unheard, and that by many thousands too, Acts 21:20-21; but we do not find he was at all ruffled, or that he sought to retort anything upon them, though doubtless, had he been so disposed, he might have found something to have charged them with in his turn; but he calmly and willingly complied with everything in his power to soften and convince them. Let us be followers of this pattern, so far as he was a follower of Christ; for even Christ pleased not himself. How did he bear with the mistakes, weakness, intemperate zeal, and imprudent proposals of his disciples while on earth! And how does he bear with the same things from you and me, and every one of his followers now! And do we, can we, think much to bear with each other for his sake? Have we all a full remission of ten thousand talents which we owed him, and were utterly unable to pay; and do we wrangle

amongst ourselves for a few pence? God forbid!

Tom Ascol - has served as a Pastor of Grace Baptist Church since 1986. He serves as the President of Founders Ministries and has edited the Founders Journal, a quarterly theological publication of Founders Ministries, and has written hundreds of articles for various journals and magazines. He has been a regular contributor to *TableTalk*, the monthly magazine of Ligonier Ministries.

THE BEACON BROADCAST

Monday thru Friday

WTTA 1490 AM (Knoxville, TN) 9:30 a.m.
WKBA 1550 AM (Roanoke, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WKPA 1390 AM (Lynchburg, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 12:15 p.m.
WBAG 105.9 FM (Burlington, NC) 12:15 p.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 2:00 p.m.
WDZY 1290 AM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
10:00 a.m.
WDZY 103.3 FM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
10:00 a.m.
WSKY 1230 AM (Asheville, NC) 7:15 a.m.
WYYC 1250 AM (York, PA) 5:00 p.m.
WYYC 98.1 FM (York, PA) 5:00 p.m.

Sunday

WCRU 960 AM (Charlotte, NC) 9:30 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WDRU 1030 AM (Raleigh, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WLES 590 AM (Richmond, VA) 10:30 a.m.
Harbour Light of the Windwards 9:30 p.m.
1400 AM/94.5 FM (Caribbean)
WGNQ mixlr.com/wgng-radio (M-F)
8:45-9 a.m. & 4:45-5:00 p.m.
(Internet station based in Greenville/Washington, NC)

Monday thru Sunday

WXTH-LP 101.7 FM (Richwood, WV) 10:05 a.m.
10:05 p.m.

BEACON HIGHLIGHTS FOR MAY

CALENDAR

- 05 Resume People Present
Prayer Meetings
09 Mother's Day
13 Elders/Deacons Meeting
16 48th Beacon Anniversary
and Homecoming
31 Memorial Day-Office Closed

Due to COVID-19 restrictions,
our calendar is subject to change.
We encourage you to follow our
announcements on our Beacon
website: www.beaconbaptist.com

MEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 04 Becky Tow
06 Ruth Patterson
07 Bill Kephart
Zach Chavez
11 Sara Cardwell
13 Thomas Haizlip
15 Lesley Fannon
16 Anne Enoch
18 Michael Karns
19 Vickie Apple
Mary Shaw
23 Claudette Delorge
Eddie Driver
24 Melanie Lowe
25 Howard Beatty
Maddie Lowe Butcher
Nathan Phillips
27 Bernie Braley
30 Susan Mullis

MISSIONARY BIRTHDAYS

- 07 Connie Chapman
09 Jesse Green
12 Tony Honeycutt
21 Isobel Cassells

*We express our heartfelt
sympathy to the families of:*

Jeffrey Benesch
Mae Crissman
Tammy Ferguson
Darlene Gerringer
Eleanor Keating
Ronald Stinnett
Rev. Frank Thacker
Justin Weaver
Marie White
Larry Yoder

Homecoming — May 16

Our 48th Anniversary and Homecoming is Sunday, May 16. The celebration begins with Morning Worship at 9:30 a.m., followed by a presentation by Daniel Ritchie at 11:00 a.m. A Fellowship Meal will begin at 12:30 p.m.

The Beacon Beam
Beacon Baptist Church
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Alamance, NC 27201

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