On a hot summer day in Florida a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house.

In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went.

He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore.

His mother, in the house, was looking out the window and saw the two as they got closer and closer together.

In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could.

Hearing her voice, the little boy made a U-turn to swim back to his mother.

It was too late. Just as the boy reached her, the alligator reached him!

From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator’s jaws closed on his legs.

Then began an incredible tug-of-war between the two.

The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was much too passionate to let go.

A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, grabbed his gun from his truck, took aim and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived.

His legs were extremely scarred by the alligator. He also had deep scars on his arms where his mother’s fingernails dug into his flesh to hold on to her beloved son.

The newspaper reporter who interviewed the boy after the incident, asked if he would show him his scars.

The boy lifted his pant legs; then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, “But let me show you my arms. True story…

That’s what love looks like when we refuse to let go of those we love…

Instead of getting mad at those who try to help you do what is right… and pull against the world, your flesh, and the devil, be thankful that there are people who love you enough not to let go.

The church is a community of believers who possess such character. Sticking together especially in times of trouble. We are family!

Ephesians 2:19-22

Let me start by saying how proud I am of all of you. Dee and I thank God daily for all of you and pray for your needs!

Has He been meeting them?

Because of your time, hard work, dedication, attendance, leadership, financial faithfulness to God (not the pastor)…

You have made it possible for New Beginnings Church of the Nazarene to exist, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of many people this past year!

You are investing in the eternal kingdom of God that will never fade.

I count it an honor and privilege to be called your Pastor and shepherd.

From the day I was elected by the congregation on December 31, 2007 there have been many successes and blessings, as well as many difficulties and struggles (we’ll call them alligators).

But we refuse to let go…

It’s part and parcel of ministry and life in general. We may have scars, but we are still here…

God is holding on to us and we are holding on to each other.

One of the most important things that I have learned in my 11 years here is that when things seem to be at their lowest point (as they were for Jesus at Golgotha)… Victory and a “New Beginning” are always just around the corner, so never give up.

Faith in God tells us to hold on and trust in Him, especially in times of crisis or when things just don’t seem to be going the way we planned or think they should…

Isaiah 55:8-9 - God’s Word instructs us that “His thoughts and His ways are higher and better than ours.”

Is there one whose thoughts and ways are better than the Lord’s that we should put our faith and trust?

Not if we hope to hear God say, “well done, thy God and faithful servant” someday.

God has a plan for His church that is based on Him knowing every detail past, present and future.

As we celebrated last Sunday on Easter, not Satan or death itself can stop the advancing plan/work of God through His Spirit and His faithful people called “the church”!

God will accomplish His mission, but His church needs to constantly and consistently be growing closer together in God’s love and unity of purpose, while growing closer to Him by faith.

God has been moving here at New Beginnings this past year! Since December of 2018 we have seen five people receive Jesus as their personal Savior and two of them have begun the discipleship process to make Jesus the Lord of their life, and one faithfully attends her Children’s Sunday School class. (Baptisms are coming soon!)

Through various ways and means, New Beginnings was able to give a record $1500 toward the making of Crisis Care Kits to benefit people in our country and around the world who are facing very difficult circumstances and great need.

Thank you for your generosity and support toward this Nazarene ministry that sends hope to the hopeless. We hope to give the same or more this year.

Our church recently had it’s first “Faith Promise” rally, where people listened to God and promised Him they would give a combine total of over $10,000 above their normal tithes in the coming fiscal year!

* One third of the Faith Promise giving will go directly to Missions.
* One third will be applied to our church mortgage (which is now below $47,000)! So that God can continue using us to accomplish His mission.
* One third will be returned to the church savings account which we have had to use to supplement our operating expenses over the past 2-3 months.

We are looking forward to the testimonies of how God greatly blesses those who have heard His call and stepped out in faith!

Your church family continues ministering outside it’s walls by serving our local seniors almost 500 home-cooked meals a year! They greatly love and appreciate our church family and all that we do!

We also have a new opportunity to minister (or share in ministering) at Tuzigoot Village in Cottonwood.

Our mission has, and will continue to be, to work together (*Koinonia - partner*) to glorify of our Father in Heaven and bless and benefit of others.

Allowing Him to accomplish His redemptive mission that He has saved us for;

*“To share the love of Jesus with our world, and to make disciples who make disciples.”*

I continue to be excited about the vision the Lord has given me for this local church in the coming year; “a growing, vibrant church”.

Our new children’s ministry led by Tony and Donna Geyer is also generating positivity and excitement!

Students are beginning to memorize Scripture and songs! Words cannot express how blessed I am when people love God so deeply that they desire to memorize His Words to them.

Better days and New Beginnings are ahead as we serve Him together…

1. As unto the Lord. (Colossians 3:23-24)

How many believe that the Christ we follow is excellent? Everything He did, and does, is done with the greatest of care and excellence that the Holy Spirit uses to draw people to faith.

Should our service to the Father be any less? Should it be mediocre or done apathetically? Not if we want the Holy Spirit to “draw” others to faith thru our ministry.

Philippians 2:1-2NIV *– “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”*

And why shouldn’t we? He has already given us “VICTORY” in Jesus!

There are few things more encouraging to me that to see someone serving and you know they are giving it their all and doing their best not to please people or to get noticed, but because they want to please the Lord.

Why do people do self-centered ungodly things in our world? So they can make it on the news and give us something to complain about? No…

They lack a relationship with Christ!

How can they have a relationship with Jesus that will lead them to stop doing bad and begin doing good? Serving God & others above themselves?

Imagine how much better our families, our neighborhoods, our work/school, our church would be if all of us used the time that we have left here to humble ourselves, put Him first, possess the same mindset and worldview as He did (seeing the world around us as lost (like many of us once were)… and that God has sent us not to judge the world, but to help it find Grace, forgiveness & Salvation in Jesus Christ alone)…

What could God do in such a church?

Who prevents it from happening?

The Board members that you elected today to serve for the 2019/2020 fiscal year have all stated that they are committed to this mission. We pray that all of you will join us.

A major part of humbling one’s self and uniting with God and His church is also…

1. Transparency & Accountability

2 Corinthians 8:20-21 NIV - *“We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. 21For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.”*

Please open your packet to the proposed budget for the 2019/2020 fiscal year.

This is your time to ask questions and get any needed clarification before we ask you to vote and ratify the new budget that the Board has drafted.

Because of drops in giving over the last 18 month period the church has had to use its savings account (over the last 2-3 months) to help pay the weekly bills.

We have done just about all we can to decrease our monthly utility costs, which left me with little choice but to propose a decrease in my salary and get a part-time job.

All of you would likely have done the same, after cutting all that you can and still not being able to make ends meet?

Discuss & ratify the budget

1. Caring & Expectations

*“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”* Matthew 7:12 NIV

Parking – Since addressing some parking issues last year things have gotten somewhat better, but we still have some folks who are not disabled, or God has healed them and they’re not disabled anymore… who use the handicapped spaces.

Would Jesus do that?

We provide handicapped parking for those who have severe disabilities that make it necessary for them to be close to the church entrance and sidewalk.

Some of the folks with disabilities who are transported by others can use the Portico for dropping people off, and then park their vehicle in a non-handicapped space until church let’s out.

Think of it this way… If a visitor or a regular attender that genuinely needs a handicapped space drives in and doesn’t have access to one, they may choose to attend elsewhere, where their need for safety and convenience can be met.

There is plenty of parking for those of us who are more stable along the north facing sidewalk, that only requires a few extra seconds of walking. Think of it as greatly benefit others as well as yourself.

We also need to remind folks that visitor parking is for “new” visitors. Visitor parking shouldn’t be reserved parking for “non-members” who attend weekly.

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”* Colossians 3:23-24

Regarding expectations:

Ephesians 4:11-16: As your pastor, my primary “God given” command is to train the faithful followers of Jesus Christ (who seek to be His faithful servants) to do the work of the ministry.

The “works of service are what build the body of Christ and make it strong until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature…

So let me encourage you today and say, you are needed… all of you…

* If you have devoted your life to Christ and choose not to be “lukewarm”, see me. There is something we need you to do in the church.
* If you need training, we will train you.
* If God has equipped you and enabled you to unite & strengthen this local body of His, do it now! It won’t get any easier than right now.
* In the near future you will see job postings & lists of things that need to be done in and around the church. Your “as unto the Lord” attitude is needed!

Again, Dee & I love all of you, we pray for you and your families daily and we are here to help you serve Christ well in the family of God!

Lastly I would like to remind everyone that our dear Sister Susan is being ordained as a Deacon at this coming District Assembly on Sat, June 8, 10AM at the Crossroads church of the Nazarene in Chandler.

Please come and show her your love and support!

Respectfully Submitted,

Pastor Ralph Belzer