

Dear Friends in the Wisconsin Dells area,

Have you ever read Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Scarlet Letter*? I did, and that's almost 50 years ago. All I remember now is that the central character, Hester Prynne, was punished by her Puritan culture for conceiving a child out of wedlock. Her punishment was being forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her clothing for the rest of her life.

Hawthorn apparently saw Puritan theology as that which describes a wrathful God who demands that we appease that wrath by some human effort, act of worship, or penance.

Most people would be repulsed by such "Scarlet Letter Theology" (my term). Yet, as I hear religious discussions and read letters to the editor that address what some might see as sins in "matters of the heart", I see a theology pretty close to "Scarlet Letter Theology". We name the broken rule (e.g. abortion, premarital sex, cohabitation, homosexual behavior, etc.). We cite the Bible verses that call it a sin, and we proclaim, "Don't do it because it's a sin." Yes, we do believe that Jesus' blood forgives sins. (We call this atonement.) Yet we put conditions on atonement, like repentance or "accepting" Jesus or meeting Jesus halfway, etc.

The problem with this for those who claim to follow Jesus is that there is nothing uniquely Christian about it. Any world religion, philosophy, or institution can adopt Scarlet Letter methods of dealing with rule-breaking - including specifying atonement conditions.

The followers of Jesus believe that Jesus is God, that he walked among humanity, and that he died to forgive the sins of every human being who has ever lived and ever will live - including *your* sins past, present, and future. We believe that he ascended to heaven and promised to be with us through the Holy Spirit. We believe that he did, and does, these things out of unconditional love for all humanity. This is in contrast to Scarlet Letter Theology, which is conditional love.

God's love is truly "out of this world". It is the only hope for mending broken hearts - not just in Heaven, but here and now, too.

I invite you to join Grace Fellowship, for **A Celebration of God's Love**. It will improve your love life. And really, isn't life *all* about love?

With hopes for more people to know the love of God.

Pastor John Torgerson

A Celebration of God's Love

When: 9:30 am Saturday February 13, the day before Valentine's Day.

Place: The Community Action Boardroom, 1000 Highway 13 in Wisconsin Dells.

Agenda:

9:00 am to 10:15

- Brief song worship
- A DVD, "Straight-laced", where the high school generation discusses their struggles in dealing with sex and gender issues. (For high school age and above.)
- Brief discussion and break.

10:30 to 11:30 (and later for those who want to stay and talk)

- Message "For God So Loved the World" by Pastor John Torgerson
- Brief closing song worship
- Questions and discussion

If you are wondering...

- about the theology behind this event, see "My Last Letter" on our church website, www.dellsgrace.org
- about whether we teach from the Bible, check out "Is the Bible a Rulebook for Living" on www.dellsgrace.org

A Celebration of God's Love is for

- people who want to know how Jesus can enter into their love life. (Life is all about love!)
- any active church member who wants to know Jesus better and be a better disciple for Jesus in his or her local church.
- pastors, teachers, parents, and other mentors who have realized that they can't make people love one another – either romantically or as brothers and sisters of Jesus.
- people who want faith to be relevant to life.
- YOU

If you are considering marriage, or already have a date set, or just want to enrich your marriage...

Pastor John Torgerson and his wife Karen are certified to facilitate Prepare/Enrich™ premarital or marital enrichment program.

It begins with the couple doing an on-line assessment that analyzes the strengths and growth areas of each participant.

The pre-marital assessment is tailor made for you – depending whether or not you are cohabitating – whether this is a first marriage or not – whether you are Protestant, Catholic, other, or no religion. And these are just a few of the factors.

After the assessment is taken, the couple gets a detailed printout of the results and the facilitator helps them talk *to each other* about the results over several sessions.

As the name Prepare/Enrich™ suggests there is also a version for enriching the marriage of an already married couple.

For more details, call the Grace Fellowship office, 608-253-2087



If you feel ...

- **joyful** about your relationships, then give Jesus the credit.
- **guilty**, then know that Jesus has declared you innocent of every infraction – past, present and future.
- **inadequate**, then remember that Jesus has never dealt with an adequate human being.
- **judged**, then be thankful that Jesus is your judge.
- **condemned**, then take heart. Jesus did not come to condemn but give you real life.
- **urgency** to help others, then help as a disciple of Jesus.

**Join Grace Fellowship for a
Pre-Valentines Day Celebration
of God's Love**

Sat Feb 13, 9:00 am

**Community Action Building
Wisconsin Dells**