



The 4th Focus

“A Compelling Vision”

Unless you live in a cave, you have heard about James Cameron’s *Avatar*, a movie that will certainly surpass his previous all-time, highest-grossing (\$1.8 billion) movie, *Titanic*, back in 1997. The story of *Avatar* takes place in a far away planet called Pandora, which is inhabited by a race of 7-foot-tall, peace-loving natives known as the Na’vi. Human beings from Earth have occupied parts of the planet in search of a rare and valuable mineral, which leads to skirmishes with the Na’vi, and ultimately to war. Caught up in the middle of these machinations are Jake Sully (a marine who “drives” an artificially created alien body) and Neytiri (a Na’vi princess). Those two characters fall in love and ultimately join forces to save Pandora.

In light of my most recent sermon called “A Focused Life,” there is a fascinating connection to the response of many of the millions of *Avatar* viewers. Cameron’s fictional world has deeply impacted the perception of our own world for many of the film’s viewers. Within a week of *Avatar*’s debut, websites dedicated to the movie were filled with comments from people lamenting the fact that *Avatar*’s people and places could not be reached in any real way. In fact, an entire thread on a popular forum website was called “Ways to cope with the depression of the dream of Pandora being intangible.”

“When I woke up this morning after watching *Avatar* for the first time yesterday, the world seemed gray,” wrote one fan. “It was like my whole life, everything I’ve done and worked for, lost its meaning.”

Another wrote something similar: “The day after I saw *Avatar*, I was completely depressed. I looked at my hands and thought, *What I wouldn’t give....* Going and seeing [it] again and again makes me feel good. I love Pandora, not just a spur of the moment feeling; I legitimately love all of Pandora and ‘waking up’ afterwards is extremely hard to do.”

These comments are just a sample among thousands of posts that appeared on dozens of fan sites. Most expressed a longing to somehow transport themselves into the world of Pandora, and most expressed an accompanying sense of depression because of the impossibility of such a transfer. For others, the movie seemed to intensify a deep dissatisfaction with their everyday lives—and a desire for a fresh chance someplace new.

Responding to several fans’ plan to establish a Na’vi way of living on Earth, a forum moderator named Elequin said the following: “That’s the problem, even if you wanted to strive to be more like the Na’vi, you would be eaten alive in this world. It really hurts thinking that, you know? It really would take a complete, new fresh start somewhere uncorrupted.”

“I know!” wrote another fan in response to Elequin. “But there’s no chance of moving somewhere else—to a ‘fresh place.’ Shall we just live with the fact that we can’t begin [again]? Do we really have to deal with that?”

We do indeed live in a world that will only ever deliver dissatisfaction and despair. But thanks be to God for a fresh start and a compelling vision of his kingdom that is more beautiful than Cameron’s imagination of Pandora and one day, we will see this kingdom in all of its glory and be welcomed by our stunningly beautiful King.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, “*If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.*” We aim for heaven and we look forward with confidence to the day when, like Paul, “*we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes*” (1 Thes. 2:19). Like Jesus, this joy that is set before us (Heb. 12) can empower us to persevere through the suffering, live with integrity and love others into this glorious kingdom.

- Pastor Tim

Christian Ed Update



Sunday School Fun

Yes, those words really do belong together....How wonderful it is to share the "old, old stories" with our little ones. It's all so very fresh and new for them. It's just fun...no other word will do.

This year we have six children in the 4's and Young 5's class but there's room for more! Each Sunday morning we come together to sing, listen to God's story and work on a little craft. A common phrase you'll hear in our classroom is, "I can do it myself" so perfection is not a requirement.

Thank you, all, for your kind words of encouragement and your patience with us when we forget to use our "inside voices". Feel free to stop by and visit us any time.

- Becky Gebhart

The Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has been the topic of study for our 5th through 7th grade class this quarter. We were awed by what we learned about God the Father, our creator and sustainer. While studying the life of Christ, we challenged ourselves to read the book of John at home in four weeks. Each week we shared in class what we had read and gave thanks for the great love our Savior has for us. Our study is concluding with the Holy Spirit, learning how He calls us to Christ and then leads us in the truth as we grow in faith and share the gospel with others. A current goal for all of us in our class is to be faithful in spending time alone with God each day, reading the Bible and praying.

- Norma Boehm

Baby Shower

For Barb Cochran's daughter, Ellie Sue
Tuesday, February 9 at 7:00 PM
Fireside Lounge

Sign up today!

We spend years learning the bible stories of the Old Testament. The children in grades 2-4 know the stories and love to act them out, do a reader's theater, or just tell the story in their own words. The focus of this year is to dig deeper. The children are constantly asked to dig into the stories and apply them to their own lives. We all have a journal which we use at the end of the lesson to write or draw a picture of how the story can be applied to our own lives. Here are what some of the children have written:

Joel - I learned that God can do anything like making a really old person have a baby (Sarah). I tried out for the school play and actually made it. I prayed to God and he helped me.

Marissa - God can use me just like he used Gidion. I sat by my cousin when he didn't have anyone to sit by. This made him feel happy.

Gabriel - God used me just like he used Gidion when someone at recess didn't have anyone to play with, I played with him.

Elise - Samson messed up. We all mess up like when I ate a whole stick of butter with my BFF. I didn't get any cookies (Joel stated nobody did because the butter was gone) but my parents forgave me when I asked them to.

Sam W- Abraham had to take Isaac to kill him. When he was about to do it an angel stopped him. Believing in God can benefit your life greatly.

Avery -Adam and Eve didn't listen to God. Jesus died to make our hearts clean.

Caleb - Sometimes we just have to wait and wait for things to happen like Abraham waited. We need to trust God.

Sam T - The first thing we did today was have a Trivia game with no rules and that was really hard. The Egyptians had very strict rules for the Israelites and when God sent them free they had no rules in the desert. Moses went and got the Ten Commandments because God knew there had to be laws. We need to obey laws and rules.

- Becky Tubergen

Amazing Mission India



"Look at the nations and watch... and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Habakkuk 1:5

Would you believe the nation of India with the help of Mission India during the last 5 years has planted 42,500 worship groups, BUT has 3,860 church planters waiting for funding so they can be trained?

Would you believe that 324,223 adults have graduated from Bible-based adult literacy classes, BUT 225,660 illiterate adults are on a waiting list until funds arrive?

Would you believe a total of 19,932,713 children have attended Children's Bible Clubs, BUT 4,369,305 are eagerly waiting for funding so they can attend the 2-week, daily program?

Today, God is allowing His children to participate in something so big, so incredible it defies description. At this moment, a window of opportunity is open in India for India's Christians and for those of us who can assist them to spread the gospel of Christ in an unprecedented manner.

With the retirement of missionaries Bob and Linda Keizer, Fourth Reformed Church Consistory has given approval to adopt Mission India as one of our six mission endeavors. We are thrilled to partner with Mission India in compassion, prayer and giving to bring life transformation to the people of India. Each dollar helps reach a child in India through the Children's Bible Club.

Join with us in amazement of what God is doing in India and what He will continue to do. Give thanks that we can be a part of this gospel transformation!

- The Mission Committee

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- 1 - Luke DeBoer
- 2 - Nancy Springfield
- 2 - Caden Gleason
- 5 - Megan McDowell
- 8 - Bud Waterloo
- 8 - Patty Stillson
- 11 - Ken Coeling
- 15 - Percy Woods, Jr.
- 17 - Merribeth Fannon
- 21 - Don Coutchie
- 22 - Marcia Schuur
- 23 - Steve Gleason
- 25 - Kathy Burggraaf
- 25 - Brayden Hawkins
- 25 - Ron Schuur
- 26 - Ryan Faasse
- 27 - Ruth Meendering
- 28 - Maria Dorn



"The Other Way" Christmas Store

has wrapped up another successful year! They send their thanks for helping make the Store a success once again.

Approximately 60 groups or individuals contributed donations:

- 21 local congregations
- 4 colleges
- 1 high school
- 6 businesses or organizations
- over 25 families or individuals

- They received over 2,850 gifts to stock the Store and additional financial donations to purchase high demand items

- Over 150 families were blessed by the Store

- 65 neighbors were employed to run the Store

**A PUBLICATION OF
FOURTH
REFORMED CHURCH**



1226 Union Ave. N.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Pastor Tim Meendering
Phone: 454-1561
www.fourthchurch.com

Sunday Service
9:30 AM

**Family Fellowship
Lifeline Groups**
5:00 PM

Christian Education
11:15 AM

Our Vision

Seeking to be a joyful,
welcoming
community that is
transformed by the gospel
and nurtured in God's
Word, and led by His
Spirit - to redeem the
city and beyond."

**A COMMUNITY REDEEMED TO
REDEEM OUR COMMUNITY**

Small Groups

There are nine of us who meet at church twice a month on Sunday evenings for small group. In December we completed our study of "Listening to God", which challenged us to receive His messages with an open and willing heart; and also to discern Satan's voice from God's. We celebrated the end of the book with a meal and singing, and have now started studying "Daniel: God's Control over Rulers and Nations." Our group is preparing to serve our second EMS meal, and we are working on another project. Each meeting we all sign a homemade card to send to someone in our church as an encouragement. We draw close as we pray for each other and our brothers and sisters in the church. If you are looking for a fellowship group as part of your Christian walk at Fourth, come join us - but have your work clothes handy!

- Betsy Coutchie

In the fall of 2009 a unique men's small group formed at 4th. It was unique in the sense that it is comprised of one retiree, one stay at home Dad and four men who have become unemployed in these rough economic times. Each man, as it is true for all of us, has their own struggles in life. For some it may be financial, physical, emotional or relational. But God, in His wisdom, compassion and faithfulness is turning our struggles and brokenness into a blessing - that blessing of a community of believers, of friends who are learning to deeply share with each other, trust each other, walk along side of each other, challenge, care for, and love each other. In the truest sense of the word, we are discipling each other, going through an on going process of encouraging one another to follow Christ and become more like Him in every area of our life. Currently we are studying a book entitled You Were Made For Love by Philip Carlson. This book helps us answer three main questions.

1. Where does love come from? (1 John 4:7-21)
2. What does love look like? (1 Cor. 13:1-8; Romans 12:9-21)
3. How does love grow? (Isaiah 58: 1-12)

Along with our study we also spend time sharing our past week, encouraging and challenging ourselves to dig more deeply into the Word and to a life of service and we always spend time in prayer for each other.

- Bob Scherpenisse

Our Lifeline group of nine, decided to study "Gospel Transformations" distributed by World Harvest Mission. Many of us had been through this study in years past, but it has now been revised and we felt the need to revisit the truths it teaches. Our study has led to some rich discussion and has had an impact on our lives. It is convicting, helping us see in depth our need for the gospel. One idea that evolved from our discussions and keeps resurfacing is our "besetting sin" - a sin with which we are constantly struggling.

Our group is genuinely engaged in the "one-anothers": encouraging one-another, loving one-another, praying for one-another, opening God's Word with one-another, and more. Gospel Transformations mentions that there are enemies of the Gospel, but we have enemies too and we discuss them every week. One other thing our study does is get us into the Word in a very meaningful way during the week, which is critical to our personal spiritual growth.

Further study includes: Believing the Gospel, Power of the Gospel, Fruit of the Gospel, and the Gospel in Relationship. You are invited to join us if you desire and discover with us how the Gospel transforms our lives

- Tom & Norma Boehm.